

## **Afghan Children Forced into Hard Labour**

**Author:** [IWPR](#)

Poverty and conservative traditions keep many youngsters out of school.

Participants in a series of IWPR-organised debates said that many Afghan children are forced into hard physical labour in order to support their families, and miss out on education as a result.

The discussion events held in Nangarhar, Paktia and Helmand provinces heard that children's basic rights were often ignored.

Omid Omid of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission's southeastern office, said that six million of the nearly 16 million minors in the country faced serious deprivation.

"Some 31 per cent of the country's children are illegally employed in heavy labour as family breadwinners, and 43 per cent of girls get married when they are underage," Omid told a debate held in Paktia in southeast Afghanistan.

Qari Mohammad Qasim Rahmani, deputy head of Islamic education in Paktia's provincial government, blamed parents for failing to raise their children properly. This doomed them to a life of unemployment, he said.

"The lack of security has also had a negative impact on their lives," he added. "Children need to be raised in the light of Islam."

A member of Paktia's provincial council, Allah Mir Bahram, said it was the Afghan state, civil society organisations and other agencies were failing the younger generation.

"All members of society should consider it their responsibility to try to solve children's problems, both in the family and in society as a whole, so that these young people do not become a burden on society in the future," he said.

Ali Mohammad Khan, representing the provincial department for labour and social affairs in the southern Helmand province, said that extreme poverty was forcing children into hard physical labour.

"Hundreds of families lack breadwinners or are headed by people with disabilities," he said. "The children have to earn their family's entire income. Overall, 30 per cent of children in Helmand are able to go to school. Between 15 and 20 per cent of children do heavy labour due to poverty or vulnerability – some are orphans or have disabled or drug-addicted parents."

Jamila Niazi, the head of the women's affairs department in Helmand, noted that tradition forced families to send children out to work.

"The women in families which have lost their male breadwinners cannot go out to work due to cultural restrictions," she said. "They have to send their children out to work, and the children's rights are ignored."

Marzia Khugyani, head teacher at a girls' high school in Helmand, noted that conservative traditions also affected her pupils.

"I know many students whose elders have stopped them from coming to school for reasons of culture," she said.

In Nangarhar, AIHRC representative Imran Aziz said poverty was curtailing the education of many children.

"If you go to the brick factories in Torkham and Sorkhrod districts, you will see that children and adolescents are given hard labour that even adults find hard to do," he said. (IWPR reported on bonded child labour at Nangarhar's brick factories in 2012: **"I Was Not Born a Slave"** .)

Mohammad Asif Shinwari, spokesman for Nangarhar's education department, agreed that some young people were forced to drop out of school.

"Around 150,000 school-age children in Nangarhar are missing out on their education due to poverty and other problems," he said.

Fazel Hadi Fazelzai, from Nangarhar's department of labour and social affairs, acknowledged that many children were engaged in manual work, but said his office was trying to address the problem.

A survey carried out in Nangarhar last year indicated that more than 2,000 children there were doing tough physical jobs, but Fazelzai said the numbers had fallen considerably.

“Previously, children were forced to work shifts of more than eight hours, night and day, but now government agencies are subsidizing these families so the children can go to school instead,” he said.

Fazelzai’s department had helped more than 2,700 children from impoverished backgrounds go back to school at nine special education centres, and 2,200 of them were receiving monthly grants worth 32 US dollars.

Debate participant Karima said that she knew of many children who were missing out on an education but had received no assistance.

“If someone lets us know about their economic problems, we help them and we ask others to assist, too,” Fazelzai said. “But we do it discreetly.”

*This report is based on an ongoing series of debates conducted as part of IWPR’s **Afghan Youth and Elections** programme.*

**Location:** Afghanistan

**Topic:** Economy  
Children

**Focus:** Youth and Elections, Afghanistan

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghan-children-forced-hard-labour>