



Pakistan 

# Still at risk

Internally displaced children's rights  
in north-west Pakistan

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Summary and recommendations

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**Cover photo:** Internally displaced boys queuing outside a child-friendly space at a camp in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North-West Frontier Province), September 2009. (*Photo: Mohammed Imtiaz Ahmed/SPARC*)

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Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre  
Norwegian Refugee Council  
Chemin de Balxert 7-9  
1219 Geneva, Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 799 0700 / Fax: +41 22 799 0701  
[www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

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Map of north-west Pakistan



Map courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.  
Note: North-West Frontier Province was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in April 2010.



## Executive summary

Approximately two million children have fled their homes during the current emergency in north-west Pakistan. Starting in 2008 and continuing in mid-2010, fighting between Pakistan's armed forces and militant groups has led to the internal displacement of more than 3.3 million people. The displacement has taken place amid continuing insecurity that has prevented humanitarian access to much of the affected region. While these two million children and their families received assistance from host communities, aid organisations, and internally displaced people (IDPs) themselves, displaced children nonetheless faced difficulties in accessing basic necessities and education, and remained vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. As many as two-thirds of these children have returned to home areas, but they and their families find themselves without basic services or substantial assistance.

The speed and scale of the Pakistani displacement – the largest in the world in recent years – led to an outpouring of assistance and support. Host communities in areas of displacement took in millions of displaced people and provided some form of shelter. The Pakistani government, assisted by international organisations, NGOs, and community members, mounted a vast assistance operation, establishing hubs to distribute food and non-food items, providing shelter and sanitation, strengthening medical facilities, and protecting vulnerable IDPs.

Despite the extensive aid operation, Pakistan's internally displaced children have been subjected to many human rights violations associated with their displacement. Children were injured and killed in conflict and flight; children experienced mental trauma; children were separated from their families. While children had some access to shelter, food, and healthcare, the shelters they lived in were often overcrowded, and girls were unable to get medical treatment in areas lacking female health professionals. Millions of displaced children and others from host communities missed months of schooling. There are strong indications that rates of domestic violence and corporal punishment, child labour, and forced marriage increased during the displacement period. Yet crucially monitoring of many of these issues was insufficient, and consequently responses lagged behind or were not targeted for the specific needs of displaced children.

In this massive displacement, children were dispersed through rural areas, towns, cities, and camps, and were

frequently out of the reach of aid providers. Inadequate funding for child protection and education, as well as security limitations on humanitarian access, resulted in problems monitoring and responding to displaced children's needs. Comprehensive protection monitoring in all affected areas, including host communities and return areas, lays the foundation for the delivery of effective support and enables the community, government, and other aid providers to formulate culturally-appropriate responses to the needs of the most vulnerable internally displaced children. Both returnee and displaced children need stronger protection to ensure their well-being. Humanitarian and development actors must work together, as the situation shifts between emergency and recovery phases in various areas, to ensure appropriate responses to displaced children's needs.

Pakistan's emergency provides good lessons for responding to displaced children in other complex emergencies, especially those with sizeable populations outside camps. Internally displaced children, by virtue of their displacement and increased poverty, are often among the most vulnerable people in society. While it can be harder to monitor children's needs outside of camps, it is a crucial step to ensuring their protection. While it can be harder to provide an education outside of camps, displaced children nonetheless have the right to education at all stages of an emergency. Relying on lessons learned in Pakistan, aid providers can develop more effective ways of promoting the rights of internally displaced children in emergencies.

### Key findings

*Displaced children are particularly at risk of abuse, exploitation, and neglect.*

In the massive, rapid displacement in north-west Pakistan, children were particularly affected by being uprooted from their homes. Displacement can have a devastating effect on childhood: Pakistan's internally displaced children became increasingly vulnerable to threats to their enjoyment of their rights, including increased risk of forced labour, forced marriage, and increased rates of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. The majority of these children came from underdeveloped areas; displacement exacerbated their families' poverty and left children further at risk.

*Internally displaced children were left without comprehensive protection monitoring and effective responses to their situations in many areas of displacement.*

Aid providers, including the government and community members, have lacked funding and capacity to conduct effective protection monitoring, and humanitarian access has been extremely limited in many areas affected by displacement. Consequently, there is insufficient data on many issues, including child labour, forced marriage, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation, and as a result, effective interventions have been hard to develop. Comprehensive protection monitoring in all areas affected by displacement, including host communities, camps, and return areas, is critical for developing responses to issues faced by these exceptionally vulnerable children.

*Internally displaced children in host communities lived a more normal life than those in camps, but were less visible to aid providers, leaving them particularly vulnerable to protection issues.*

Around 85 or 90 per cent of internally displaced children lived in host communities rather than in camps during their displacement. In host communities, children were often able to live a more normal life, interacting with the community, experiencing greater freedom of movement and access to the infrastructure of the host community. However, many of them remained out of the reach of international, national and local aid providers: monitoring and responding to the needs of children sheltered within insular communities in regions with little humanitarian access remained particularly difficult. Efforts must be increased to respond to the protection needs of these displaced children outside camps.

*Children affected by displacement – both displaced children and children in host communities – lost many months of education, both damaging their development and diminishing their capacity to respond to protection crises they face.*

More than 4,500 schools were closed for all or some period of the crisis, leading to the disruption in education of a million children. All children have the right to education so that they can develop their human potential. IDP children and other children affected by conflict can find a measure of normal routine in schools, rebuilding a sense of security. Yet hundreds of schools, and girls' schools in particular, were directly affected by the conflict, either by militant attacks or government use of the buildings as military bases. Thousands more schools were used as IDP shelter. Attempts to establish supplementary educational programming (such as temporary classrooms) were hampered by security concerns, funding issues, and problems recruiting female teachers. Robust and rapid educational programming is needed to protect internally displaced children and to equip them for future challenges.



# Recommendations

## To the Government of Pakistan

Pass legislation on children's rights that brings Pakistan's laws in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and ensure that legislation adequately provides for the needs of internally displaced children. Promptly adopt all pending legislation, including the Charter of the Rights of the Child Bill, the Child Protection (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, and the National Commission on the Rights of Children (NCRC) Bill. Ensure that legislation covers, among other issues:

- The prohibition of violence against children;
- The prohibition of sexual exploitation;
- The prohibition of forced marriage (any marriage under the age of 18);
- The prohibition of child labour and forced and bonded labour, and the harmonisation of labour laws to establish minimum age for employment in accordance with international standards.

Ensure the existence of legislation and policies on displacement that respond effectively to internally displaced children's needs, including:

- The right to education at all stages of displacement;
- The right to documentation.

Ensure that domestic laws on children's rights are recognised and enjoyed by all children including internally displaced children, in all regions of Pakistan.

Establish an independent and effective monitoring mechanism and data collection system on children's rights that has sufficient human and financial resources to evaluate and document children's rights issues in a comprehensive manner, and to monitor children who are particularly vulnerable due to situations such as forced internal displacement.

Negotiate to ensure humanitarian access throughout conflict-affected zones. Ensure that all impartial aid providers have access to all displaced people.

Conduct effective and comprehensive campaigns to raise the awareness of displaced and host communities on children's welfare and rights; ensure that men, women, and children have the opportunity to participate.

Take all possible measures to prevent and prohibit the recruitment of children for armed conflict, including by:

- Ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;

- Conducting awareness campaigns among internally displaced populations to raise awareness of risks of child recruitment.

## To provincial and district governments

Pass legislation on children's rights that brings provincial laws in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Ensure the existence of legislation and policies on displacement that respond effectively to displaced children's needs, including:

- The right to education in all stages of displacement, from onset to return;
- The right to documentation.

Ensure that children's rights recognised by domestic law are enjoyed by all children, including internally displaced children.

Establish an independent and effective monitoring mechanism, such as a provincial Ombudsperson, that has sufficient human and financial resources to evaluate and document children's enjoyment of rights in a comprehensive manner, and has the capacity to monitor children in particularly vulnerable situations such as displacement.

- Ensure that government agencies and personnel responding to displaced people's needs are trained in children's rights.

Ensure that children, especially orphaned children and girls, can inherit land and property from their parents and that their land and property rights are protected until they can meaningfully exercise those rights.

Conduct effective and comprehensive campaigns to raise the awareness of displaced and host communities on children's welfare and rights; ensure that men, women, and children have the opportunity to participate.

- Conduct campaigns among internally displaced populations to raise their awareness of risks of child recruitment.

## To militant groups

Provide humanitarian access throughout conflict-affected zones under your control. Ensure that all impartial aid providers have access to all displaced people.

Take all possible measures to prevent and prohibit recruitment of children for armed conflict and terrorist activities, including suicide attacks, in areas under your control.

### **To donor governments and agencies (including development funders such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank)**

Ensure that funding for the protection of children's rights is prioritised at every stage of an emergency, from emergency response to longer-term recovery, so that the impact of the crisis on children is minimised.

Commit to long-term funding of recovery projects in Pakistan – including in education, protection monitoring, and reduction of forced marriage, forced labour, and other forms of exploitation – so that children's potential can be realised wherever they find a durable solution to displacement.

- Fund programmes that link humanitarian assistance and development in addressing some of the most severe issues faced by displaced children and others, including provision of education and health care in return areas.

Support the establishment of an independent and effective mechanism in Pakistan to monitor and collect data on children's enjoyment of rights that has sufficient human and financial resources to evaluate and document children's rights issues in a comprehensive manner.

- Require and fund systematic, robust evaluation of programming involving children.

Prioritise funding for quality education for all, including displaced children; ensure programming to provide primary education to all boys and girls.

### **To the Humanitarian Country Team (including cluster leads)**

Prioritise the establishment of a comprehensive, effective monitoring system to assess children's needs and enjoyment of rights in all areas of displacement including in host communities, and in areas of return.

- Consider establishing a working group on children affected by armed conflict to address more effectively the concerns of internally displaced children, and to cooperate with other agencies monitoring children affected by armed conflict, including child protection agencies working on cross-border issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Advocate for adequate security and humanitarian access to conflict-affected regions so that appropriate monitoring can be carried out.

- Ensure that protection monitoring and needs assessments are conducted in direct consultation with internally displaced women and children as well as men.

Continue and extend coordination mechanisms such as the cluster system to ensure effective monitoring of – and responses to – children's needs, including by:

- Continue support of the Child Protection Working Group, the Education Cluster, and other clusters that deal with children's concerns.
- Ensure coordination between clusters that monitor and respond to children's issues.
- Where gaps in response are identified, OCHA should lead inter-cluster monitoring and advocate for action via cluster coordinators.

Ensure that aid is extended to return areas, and that it includes the rapid rebuilding of schools and the ongoing provision of psychosocial care.

### **To international, national and local aid providers involved in IDP registration and distribution of assistance**

Ensure that registration takes into account the particular situations of the most vulnerable, including separated children and children in child- and female-headed households.

Ensure that distributions are conducted in a manner that responds to the needs of the most vulnerable. Consult with women and girls to determine their needs, both in terms of the goods they need and the method of their distribution. Consider the use of mobile distribution units to ensure that women and children who lack freedom of movement can access the necessary goods.

### **To international, national and local aid providers in the education sector (including Education Cluster members)**

Prioritise the immediate re-establishment of education throughout conflict-affected areas (in displacement and return), including by:

- Rapid rebuilding of schools damaged during conflict or by use as IDP camps;
- Construction of temporary schools in areas with high IDP concentrations;
- Recruitment of sufficient teaching staff, including female teachers; use of female paraprofessionals if female teachers cannot be found;
- Training of all new and existing teachers, including in techniques for responding to children's psychosocial needs;



- Capacity building of national and local educational sector personnel on how to provide education in displacement in a timely manner;
- Establishment of community boards to oversee schools and promote primary enrolment, especially among girls;
- Use of non-formal education programs to facilitate re-entry/entry of school-age children in the formal school system;
- Establishment of safe water and sanitation facilities in schools to promote attendance by girls;
- Establishment of a monitoring system to identify and reduce risks of sexual violence or exploitation.

Advocate to ensure that children, especially orphaned children and girls, can inherit land and property from their parents and that their land and property rights are protected until they can meaningfully exercise those rights.

Continue efforts to increase rates of birth registration throughout Pakistan, and particularly in conflict-affected areas.

Continue efforts to ensure safe shelter for internally displaced children, including through culturally appropriate facilities and weather-resistant shelter.

### **To international, national, local aid providers in the child protection sector (including Child Protection Working Group members)**

Prioritise the establishment of a comprehensive, effective monitoring system to assess internally displaced children's rights and needs in all areas of displacement, including in host communities and in areas of return.

- Consider establishing a working group on children affected by armed conflict to address more effectively the concerns of internally displaced children, and to cooperate with other agencies monitoring children affected by armed conflict, including child protection agencies working on cross-border issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan;
- Develop and support community-based child protection groups and national child protection systems, and embed child protection support within wider community development processes.

Extend the scope of protection monitoring by:

- Developing and disseminating user-friendly, child-focused tools that facilitate systematic evaluation and promote genuine child participation;
- Ensuring that protection monitors consult directly with internally displaced women and children, not just men;
- Considering expanded use of schools and child-friendly spaces to increase protection monitoring and screening;
- Ensuring that health workers in emergencies are trained to identify and respond to sensitive issues such as domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and early marriage.

Improve conditions for protection monitors by:

- Providing protection monitors with expanded training on child protection, particularly on sensitive issues such as gender-based violence and forced marriage;
- Advocating for increased security to minimise personal threats;
- Ensuring that protection monitors have relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge to communicate with affected populations.



## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1998, upon the request of the United Nations, to set up a global database on internal displacement. A decade later, IDMC remains the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement caused by conflict and violence worldwide.

IDMC aims to support better international and national responses to situations of internal displacement and respect for the rights of internally displaced people (IDPs), who are often among the world's most vulnerable people. It also aims to promote durable solutions for IDPs, through return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country.

IDMC's main activities include:

- Monitoring and reporting on internal displacement caused by conflict, generalised violence and violations of human rights;
- Researching, analysing and advocating for the rights of IDPs;
- Training and strengthening capacities on the protection of IDPs;
- Contributing to the development of standards and guidance on protecting and assisting IDPs.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

For more information, contact:

**Kate Halff**

Head of IDMC

Tel.: +41 22 799 0703

Mobile: +41 79 551 8257

Email: [kate.halff@nrc.ch](mailto:kate.halff@nrc.ch)

**Alice Farmer**

Child Rights Advisor

Tel: +41 22 795 0737

Email: [alice.farmer@nrc.ch](mailto:alice.farmer@nrc.ch)

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre  
Norwegian Refugee Council  
Chemin de Balxert 7-9  
1219 Genève, Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 799 0700, Fax: +41 22 799 0701  
[www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)