

# AFGHANISTAN

## Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA) has undertaken steps to rebuild the country's education system and address child soldiering, particularly within the context of the reconstruction of Afghanistan initiated in 2002.<sup>42</sup> In 2000, with technical assistance from the Central Statistics Office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, UNICEF conducted a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey on the situation of children in East Afghanistan, of which child labor and education were essential components.<sup>43</sup> Following the war in Afghanistan, the ILO re-opened its former office in Kabul in 2002 and has dedicated over USD 1.2 million in capacity building efforts, particularly for the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.<sup>44</sup> ILO-IPEC has also assisted the government in the preparation of educational materials in Pashto.<sup>45</sup> TISA is implementing a USD 15 million World Bank project that, among other activities, aims to promote learning and skills development among disadvantaged girls and former combatants.<sup>46</sup> In April 2003, the government established a commission to combat human trafficking and to recommend strategies for prevention and protection.<sup>47</sup>

The Japanese government funded a USD 4 million project to provide literacy and vocational training to street children and former child combatants.<sup>48</sup> In addition, USAID has supported IOM's Afghan Transition Initiative with funding of USD 2.3 million. The initiative supports a number of projects including capacity building of government ministries in the education sector and a project designed to rehabilitate former combatants.<sup>49</sup> USDOL funded a USD 3 million, 4-year project with UNICEF to rehabilitate former child soldiers in 2003. The project will provide psychosocial, rehabilitative, and non-formal education services for up to 10,000 children.<sup>50</sup> In August 2003, IOM launched a USD 330,500 anti-trafficking project aimed to increase the capacity of the Afghan government to effectively address trafficking in the country through technical assistance and awareness-raising activities.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The UN Appeal for the Afghan Interim and Transitional Assistance Programme estimated a need of USD 99 million for education and vocational training for 2002. A number of major donors are funding projects to support the Ministry of Education in its effort to fulfill the demand for education in Afghanistan. Among the most prominent donors are the World Bank, ADB, the Islamic Development Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, UNHCR, USAID, USDOL, numerous NGOs, and foreign governments, including Japan and Germany. See UNESCO, *Educational Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Transitional Support Strategy 2002-2004*, UNESCO, Paris, July 2002, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Afghanistan MICS2 Steering Committee, *2000 Afghanistan Multiple Cluster Survey (MICS2): Situation Analysis of Children and Women in the East of Afghanistan*, UNICEF, Kabul, September 2001; available from <http://childinfo.org/MICS2/newreports/afghanistan/Afghanistan1.PDF>.

<sup>44</sup> ILO, *ILO Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program Develops Very Rapidly in Afghanistan*, Kabul, 2003; available from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/recon/crisis/download/kabul.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> ILO-IPEC reports that the Afghan Minister of Commerce is committed to the campaign to eliminate child labor for both humanitarian and development reasons. See ILO-IPEC, *International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour: Ratification Campaign*, [online] 2003 [cited October 15, 2003]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/textonly/ratification/map/viewall.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> World Bank, *Emergency Education, Rehabilitation and Development Project*, in World Bank Project Database, [online database] 2003 [cited October 14, 2003]; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=104231&piPK=73230&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=228424&Projectid=P077896>.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Afghanistan*, Washington, D.C., June 2003; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/21262>.

<sup>48</sup> ADB, *Signing Ceremony for Education and Road Projects in Afghanistan*, ADB, [online] 2002 [cited May 12, 2003]; available from [www.adb.org/Documents/News/2002/nr2002183.asp](http://www.adb.org/Documents/News/2002/nr2002183.asp).

<sup>49</sup> IOM, *IOM-Afghanistan: Mission Activities 2002*, IOM, [IOM online] 2002 [cited May 12 2003]; available from <http://www.iom.int/en/pdf%5Ffiles/other/afghan%5Factivities%202002%5Fenglish.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> UNICEF, *Afghanistan - Country in Crisis: Measures to Help Victims of War*, 2003 [cited August 28, 2003]; available from [http://www.unicef.org/emerg/afghanistan/index\\_9028.html](http://www.unicef.org/emerg/afghanistan/index_9028.html). UNICEF has completed a field assessment on the situation of child soldiers and plans are underway for a demobilization and reintegration program aimed directly at children. The project will be implemented in collaboration with the Afghanistan New Beginnings program. See UNICEF, *UNICEF Humanitarian Action: Afghanistan Donor Update 23*, in ReliefWeb, [online] September 23, 2003 [cited October 14, 2003]; available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/R/wb.nsf/0/8fa0690d36b0ab6ac1256daa003a3099?OpenDocument>.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Embassy- Kabul, *unclassified telegram no. 228379*, August 6, 2003, 1.

---

UNICEF, USAID, and other bilateral donors are sponsoring the Back-to-School Program, which provides training and materials to primary and secondary schools.<sup>52</sup> Although 3.2 million children attended school in 2002, the demand far outweighed the program's capacity. UNICEF has provided logistical support to improve the Ministry of Education's capacity to distribute materials for 2003. Moreover, UNICEF has provided 4 million primary school aged children with 9.9 million textbooks and other essential school materials in 2003.<sup>53</sup> In collaboration with the Government of Germany and the Afghan government, UNESCO financed a project to upgrade textbooks and the curriculum for some 3 million children in 2002.<sup>54</sup> The ADB and the Islamic Development Bank are funding the construction of new schools as well as the repair of existing schools.<sup>55</sup> UNICEF and the United Nations Office of Project Services are also collaborating on a USD 8.4 million project for school rehabilitation and construction, with a special focus on regions of high refugee return such as Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Kandahar.<sup>56</sup>

UNESCO is supporting the Ministry of Education through three projects totaling approximately USD 17 million. These projects focus on strengthening the capacity of the national system of education, technical and vocational education, and non-formal education.<sup>57</sup> The Japanese government provided an initial USD 500,000 to UNESCO and the Afghan government to launch the Literacy and Non-formal Education Development in Afghanistan project in 2003. This project will focus on promoting literacy for girls and women.<sup>58</sup> In an effort to promote girls' education, UNICEF is repairing some 200 damaged school buildings.<sup>59</sup> BRAC, formerly known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, implemented a UNICEF-funded, 3-month Winter Break program to provide accelerated basic math and Dari (language) classes to approximately 15,000 girls in Kabul.<sup>60</sup>

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2001, the ILO estimated that 24 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Afghanistan were working.<sup>61</sup> Child workers are reported to be numerous in agriculture and the informal sector, including animal herding, collecting

---

<sup>52</sup> World Bank, *Afghanistan-Emergency Education, Rehabilitation, and Development Project*, Project Document, World Bank, Kabul, June 6, 2002; available from [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2002/04/19/000094946\\_02041804135557/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2002/04/19/000094946_02041804135557/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf). Japan had initially given \$28 million to the Back-to-School Program. See UNICEF, *Japan Gives Major Boost to Education in Afghanistan*, press release, Geneva, July 24, 2003; available from [http://www.unicef.org/newsline/02pr49japan\\_printer.htm](http://www.unicef.org/newsline/02pr49japan_printer.htm).

<sup>53</sup> UNICEF, *Afghan School Supply Operation Moves into Top Gear*, press release, Kabul, March 9, 2003; available from <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/2003/03nn12afghaneducation.htm>. See UNICEF, *Afghanistan Donor Update*.

<sup>54</sup> The German government provided USD 450,000 for the project. See UNESCO, *New Text Books and Curriculum for Afghan Children*, UNESCO, [press release] 2003 [cited April 5, 2003]; available from <http://www.unesco.org/bpi/eng/unescopress/2002/02-74e.shtml>.

<sup>55</sup> World Bank, *Emergency Education-Project Document*. Approximately 538 schools were built or repaired in 2002,<sup>55</sup> and the Ministry of Education planned to build or repair an estimated 2,500 in 2003. See also UNICEF, *Afghan School Supply*.

<sup>56</sup> As of September 2003, 9 schools had been fully rehabilitated and another 51 are in progress. See UNICEF, *Afghanistan Donor Update*. Funding for the project has been provided through the Japanese government's Ogata Initiative. See Child Rights Information Network (CRIN), "Afghanistan: School Rehabilitation Programme to Increase Learning Spaces across Afghanistan," *CRINMAIL* 452 (March 4, 2003); available from <http://uk.domeus.com/message/read.jsp;jsessionid=EFB97ECC7C708CD32B1EDE72FE5C89EA;dom01?scroll=true&mid=25094486>.

<sup>57</sup> UNESCO, *Educational Reconstruction*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO and the Government of Afghanistan Launch Nationwide Literacy Project*, press release, Paris, January 28, 2003; available from [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php@URL\\_ID=9031&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php@URL_ID=9031&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

<sup>59</sup> UNICEF, *Afghanistan One Year Later: Overshadowed and challenged*, press release, Geneva, March 19, 2003; available from [http://www.unicef.org/newsline/2003/03pr15afghaneducation\\_printer.htm](http://www.unicef.org/newsline/2003/03pr15afghaneducation_printer.htm).

<sup>60</sup> The program takes advantage of the winter break to help older girls to regain basic math and language skills lost while not attending school during the Taliban era. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Afghan Women Flock to Catch Up on Lost Education*, in ReliefWeb, [press release] January 26, 2003 2003 [cited April 25, 2003]; available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3c12564f6004c8ad5/2255e16dfdfa33b049256cbb000dfad2?OpenDocument>.

<sup>61</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2003.

---

paper and firewood, shining shoes, begging, or rummaging for scrap metal in the streets.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the years of conflict leading up to the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghan children were used as combatants by both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance to clean and store weapons, guard compounds, and enforce Shariah (Islamic law) under the Taliban. In addition, children cooked, did laundry, and cleaned barracks. It is reported that some children were sexually abused by their commanders under the Taliban.<sup>63</sup> While the Afghan National Army has set the limit for recruitment at 22 years of age,<sup>64</sup> evidence suggests that insurgent groups continue to exploit child soldiers in attacks against government and coalition forces.<sup>65</sup> Afghanistan is believed to be a country of origin and transit for children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and labor.<sup>66</sup> Under Taliban rule, the trafficking of children was common, particularly to the Gulf States.<sup>67</sup> Since the Interim Authority came to power, reports of child trafficking within Afghanistan and externally to Pakistan and the Middle East for the purposes of bonded labor and sexual exploitation have persisted.<sup>68</sup> Since early 2003, reports have indicated a series of abductions of children as young as four years old in northern Afghanistan, for the apparent purpose of trafficking to neighboring countries.<sup>69</sup> It is also reported that impoverished Afghan families have sold their children into forced sexual exploitation, marriage, and labor.<sup>70</sup>

While the new Constitution provides for state-sponsored education for children,<sup>71</sup> war and political turmoil over the past several decades in Afghanistan have seriously hampered educational development.<sup>72</sup> In 2001, the gross primary enrollment rate was 15 percent, down from 32 percent in 1999.<sup>73</sup> In 2000, the gross primary enrollment rate for girls was under one percent, compared to 28.7 percent for boys.<sup>74</sup> The educational system was effectively dismantled under the Taliban. Most male students were enrolled in religious schools, if at all, and schools for women were closed or destroyed by order of the Taliban regime.<sup>75</sup> After the Afghan Interim Authority was

---

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2002: Afghanistan*, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2003, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18308.htm>. Updated statistics on child labor since the Taliban was unseated are not yet available.

<sup>63</sup> Peter W. Singer, *Caution: Children at War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, forthcoming). See also UNICEF, *Demobilization, Social and Economic Reintegration of Child Soldiers/Minors Associated with the Fighting Forces in Afghanistan*, project document [hard copy on file], Kabul, May 2003, 7. See also Dr. Lisa Alfredson, "Sexual Exploitation of Child Soldiers: An Exploration and Analysis of Global Dimensions and Trends", [working paper], 2002, 13; available from <http://www.child-soldiers.org/cs/childsoldiers.nsf/6be02e73d9f9cb8980256ad4005580ff/36fdc21ed10c9b1380256b27003bdaa1?OpenDocument>.

<sup>64</sup> UNICEF, *UNICEF Praises Afghan Child-Soldier Innovation*, press release, Geneva, September 23, 2003; available from [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_14758.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_14758.html).

<sup>65</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Afghanistan," in *1379 Country Reports* London, 2002; available from <http://www.child-soldiers.org/cs/childsoldiers.nsf>.

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Afghanistan*.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2002*, Washington, D.C., 2002; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2002/10679.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> In provinces outside Kabul, warlords are reportedly involved in trafficking. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Afghanistan*, Introduction, Special Cases. See also The Protection Project, "Afghanistan," in *Human Rights Country Report- Afghanistan*, Washington, D.C., 2002.

<sup>69</sup> UNICEF, *UNICEF Alarmed by Afghanistan Child Trafficking Reports*, [online] September 25, 2003 [cited October 2, 2003]; available from [http://www.unicef.org.uk/press/news\\_detail.asp?news\\_id=183](http://www.unicef.org.uk/press/news_detail.asp?news_id=183).

<sup>70</sup> See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Afghanistan*, Introduction, Special Cases. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Afghanistan*, Section 6f.

<sup>71</sup> A new constitution was adopted in January 2004, and nationwide elections for a permanent Afghan government are planned for June 2004. See U.S. Department of State official, electronic communication to USDOL official, March 30, 2004.

<sup>72</sup> Saif R. Samady, *Education and Afghan Society in the Twentieth Century*, UNESCO, Paris, November 2001, 7, 11; available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2002/unesco-afg-nov01.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> UNESCO, *Education Statistical Tables*, [online] 2003 [cited August 26, 2003]; available from [http://portal.unesco.org/uis/TEMPLATE/html/HTMLTables/education/gerner\\_primary.htm](http://portal.unesco.org/uis/TEMPLATE/html/HTMLTables/education/gerner_primary.htm).

<sup>74</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*.

<sup>75</sup> Torpekai Sultani, *The Current Situation of Basic Education in Afghanistan*, Kibou no Gakko, Kabul, September 2002, 3; available from [http://www.human.tsukuba.ac.jp/~criced/pdf/04\\_Afghanistan\\_Sultani.pdf](http://www.human.tsukuba.ac.jp/~criced/pdf/04_Afghanistan_Sultani.pdf).

---

inaugurated in December 2001, government schools re-opened their doors to girls and female teachers.<sup>76</sup> According to UNICEF, more than 3.8 million children were enrolled in school in 2003 and girls' enrollment from ages 7 to 13 increased from 30 percent in 2002 to 37 percent in 2003.<sup>77</sup> UNICEF and the Afghan Ministry of Education have set a goal to increase girls' enrollment by a further 500,000 by March 2005.<sup>78</sup> In some regions, the participation rate of girls is as low as three percent.<sup>79</sup> Access to education is exacerbated by a resurgence in fundamentalist attacks on schools, teachers, and students. From August 2002 to September 2003, there have been more than 35 attacks in which schools have been burned or bombed.<sup>80</sup> Refugee children who have returned from neighboring countries, particularly Iran and Pakistan, are reported to have very limited access to education, often because their labor is needed to supplement the meager incomes of their families.<sup>81</sup> Attendance rates are unavailable for Afghanistan. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.<sup>82</sup>

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 15 years.<sup>83</sup> The Constitution prohibits forced labor, and specifically prohibits forced labor for children.<sup>84</sup> However, in 2002 there was no evidence that child labor laws were enforced in the country.<sup>85</sup> The interim government has condemned trafficking, and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has provided redress for some victims, but there is generally no legal protection provided to victims of trafficking.<sup>86</sup> The Government of Afghanistan has not ratified either ILO Convention 138 or ILO Convention 182.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> UNICEF, *Girls' Education in Afghanistan*, New York, 2002; available from <http://www.unicef.org/Afghanistanfinal.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> UNICEF, *Afghanistan Donor Update*.

<sup>78</sup> Their efforts will focus on the 12 provinces where girls' school enrollment is the lowest. The project aims to increase the number of qualified female teachers, and provide support to home-based schools by linking them into the formal education system. See UNICEF, *Afghanistan - Country in Crisis: "Back to School" for Afghan Children*, 2003 [cited August 28, 2003]; available from [http://www.unicef.org/emerg/afghanistan/index\\_8178.html](http://www.unicef.org/emerg/afghanistan/index_8178.html).

<sup>79</sup> Due to long distances, a lack of schools, a shortage of female teachers (Islamic law discourages girls and women from interacting with adult male non-relatives), and the large influx of returning refugees, girls' access to education is particularly limited in the eastern region of Afghanistan. See Human Rights Watch (HRW), *"Killing You is a Very Easy Thing For Us": Human Rights Abuses in Southeast Afghanistan*, New York, July 2003, 76-78; available from <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/afghanistan0703/>.

<sup>80</sup> The attacks have generally been preceded by anonymous leaflet campaigns warning parents against sending girls to school. In the last year, schools in the provinces of Ghazni, Jawzjan, Kabul, Kandahar, Laghman, Logar, Masa'i, Sar-e Pul, Wardak, and Zabul have been the targets of such attacks. *Ibid.*, 82-83. See also Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Afghanistan: Serious Attack on Girl's School", IRINnews.org, [online], 2003 [cited August 25, 2003]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=36181>. In other areas, resistance to education for girls has remained so pervasive as to have prevented schools from being built at all. See Ahmad Hanayesh and Mustafa Basharat, "Girls Still Standing Outside the Classroom Door", ReliefWeb, [online], April 4, 2003 [cited October 15, 2003]; available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/6e6e6e0df5c0daffc1256d010052b8a7?OpenDocument>.

<sup>81</sup> Ironically, refugees' families returning to Afghanistan cite a desire to ensure education of their children as a primary reason for their return. See Amnesty International, *Afghanistan- Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Fate of the Afghan Returnees*, ASA 11/014/2003, London, June 23, 2003; available from <http://www.web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa110142003>.

<sup>82</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

<sup>83</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Afghanistan*.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 6c. See U.S. Department of State, *Background Note: Afghanistan*, [online] September 2003 [cited October 14, 2003]; available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Afghanistan*, Section 6d.

<sup>86</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Afghanistan*, Introduction, Special Cases.

<sup>87</sup> ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [cited September 3, 2003]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm>.