
Press Release

Children displaced in north-west Pakistan missing school and facing forced marriage and labour – report

GENEVA, 15 June 2010 – Children displaced within Pakistan face difficulties in accessing school and risk being exploited, according to a new report by the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

Since August 2008, more than two million children have been forced from their homes in north-western regions of the country by fighting between government forces and militants of the Pakistani Taliban. Around 800,000 children are still displaced in mid-2010. Over a million have returned to their home areas, but they still face hardship because of the extensive destruction of homes, schools and other infrastructure, and risk being forced into early marriage or child labour as their families face destitution.

“Displaced children are among the most vulnerable people in society,” said NRC Secretary General Elisabeth Rasmusson. “Following the offensives in north-west Pakistan, millions of children in the region lost the security and support of intact communities, and saw the poverty of their families worsen.”

Forced marriage has increased among internally displaced girls, the report *Still at risk: Internally displaced children's rights in north-west Pakistan* finds. Displaced girls aged between 13 and 16 are particularly at risk, and so face greater related risks of maternal mortality and termination of education.

Likewise, displaced children are particularly at risk of being forced into exploitative labour, as adult members of their families lost their livelihoods when they were displaced. The report found displaced girls and boys engaged in domestic work, and boys working in brick kilns, begging, and working in hotels and restaurants.

More than a million children lost months of school during their displacement. 4,500 schools were used to shelter IDPs, and 600 schools were attacked; many are still not functional, and recruiting teachers has proved particularly difficult. The children affected are not going to regain lost ground or recover from the impact of their displacement unless the government prioritises urgent investment in their education.

According to Rasmusson, “Continued international funding is desperately needed to ensure that children who have returned or who are still displaced have access to basic necessities and are protected from exploitation. The internally displaced population remains among the biggest in the world, yet funding to support their ongoing education and protection is insufficient.”

Notes for Editors:

The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), established by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring internal displacement worldwide. For more information contact Kate Half, Head of IDMC, on +41 22 799 0703 / +41 795 518 257 or at kate.half@nrc.ch.

Full and summary versions of the report, entitled *Still at risk: Internally displaced children's rights in north-west Pakistan*, can be downloaded at www.internal-displacement.org.