International Labour Organization

Final report

Rapid assessment of hazardous work for children in carpet weaving, painting metal and wooden products, and spraying, mixing or selling insecticides in Balkh Province

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As acknowledged by the appendices and project literature provided in this report, the entire assessment process described here consists of the child labour issues ascertained in the three target industries within the province of Balkh and the pathways available to eliminate child labour withing these sectors. The assessment team affirms that the primary quantitative and qualitative data collected throughout the evaluation process will remain the property of ILO. In conducting this assessment, the team took every did its best to ensure the confidentiality of the source material and the safety of the respondents. The team also provides their reassurance that the information gathered, and the data collected during the review are to be used for assessment purposes only and will not be disseminated.

Abbreviations

AACS	Adroit Association Consulting Services
FGD	focus group discussion
IDI	in-depth interview
OSH	occupational safety and health
SMEs	small- and medium-sized enterprises
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Executive summary

The social and political context of Afghanistan has changed significantly after the Taliban retook control of the country in 2021. Living circumstances, employment opportunities, and income have all been stifled. In this context, The Afghanistan Crisis Response: Safety and Health of Workers and Child Labour Elimination in Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) Project was supported by the ILO (International Labour Organization) Afghanistan through the ILO/Japan Fund for Building Social Safety Nets in Asia and the Pacific (SSN Fund). By eliminating child labour, securing the sustainability of the business, and ensuring that all workers stay on the job for the next six months, this project aided20 SMEs in recovering rapidly. This was achieved by combining OSH training, vocational training, and education on child labour.

The project concentrates on the city of Mazar-e-Sharif and the industries of carpet weaving, painting of metal/wooden objects and mixing/selling/spraying of insecticides in the province of Balkh. In light of this, this report presents a quick assessment of the risks associated with child labour within the aforementioned industries in the region. The assignment also assessed the Occupational Safety and Health in the region and in the specified industries to find the best practices, which could be used to provide insights on how such industries can be made hazard free for children between the ages of 15-17(as this is the legal age for child employment in Afghanistan.

This assessment uses ILO's Manual on Child Labour Rapid Assessment Methodology and undertakes a mixed methods approach to ascertain the current situation of child labour in hazardous industries in the province of Balkh. In chapters five through seven of this report, specific hazardous industries have been discussed in detail with descriptive information and photographs regarding hazardous activities. We have also provided statistics regarding the level of child labour, the child labour challenges prevalent in these industries, as well as specific recommendations to eliminate child labour from specific hazardous industries.

1 Introduction

According to the Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2016), close to a quarter of Afghan children between the ages 5 and 14 work to earn their livelihood or to help their families (Afghanistan, CSO 2016, 125). Many of these children are engaged in economic activities that can result in illnesses, injury or even death due to hazardous working conditions and poor enforcement of safety and health standards (ICF Macro 2008). A review of existing literature shows that children in Afghanistan generally work long hours with little or no pay. They work in the home-based carpet industry, as labourers in brick kilns, in the metalworking and black smithing industry, as tinsmiths and welders, in mines, on farms, and on the streets as vendors, shoe shiners and beggars. Working forces children to shoulder the burdens of both the job and their education, which forces many working children to drop out of school. Only about 50 per cent of children in Afghanistan attend school (Afghanistan, CSO 2016).

This report addresses child labour in Afghanistan's Balkh Province, specifically with regard to children working in the following three industries:

- carpet weaving;
- the painting of metal and wooden objects; and
- the mixing, selling and spraying of insecticides.

Carpet weaving is one of Afghanistan's biggest cottage industries, with looms commonly placed inside homes where children work long hours. Because of the home-based nature of the work, the carpet industry has a particularly high percentage of girls (58 per cent girls compared to 41 per cent boys). Since the carpet industry is not seen as physically demanding, it has the highest rate of child participation, with 93 per cent of child workers in the carpet sector being between the ages of 5 and 11 years (Altai Consulting 2008, 17). As far as children working in the metalworking and carpentry industries are concerned, they are employed as apprentices in making items such as gates, doors, water tanks and windows. The work involves cutting sheets of metal, welding, lifting heavy items, and using dangerous items such as hammers, anvils, chisels and blow torches (Altai Consulting 2008, 26). As per a report by Human Rights Watch (2016), children in the metalworking industry below the age of 10 perform mostly "support" roles that involve fetching water, holding metal bars together for welding, making tea, or light lifting and hammering. These children also paint the metal products. Older children are involved in more difficult and hazardous work.

1.1. Overview of child labour in Balkh

Previous studies have examined the child labour situation in Balkh Province, but have generally taken a broader view of the subject rather than examining specific sectors. A study conducted by the ILO in Balkh Province in 2015 found that 15.3 per cent of children aged 5–17 years had engaged in some form of work in the week before the day of observation. The proportion of working boys was found to be significantly higher than the proportion of working girls. This study, however, did not identify the carpet industry as a sector in which children were working. The sectors in which children were identified to be engaged were agriculture, retail, street vending, small business (workshops, garages, blacksmith, tailoring, and so on), food production, construction, mining, transport, domestic work, non-state security, or gangs. Further, a 2008 study conducted by ICF Macro in Balkh across four sectors – agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and selling – found that 31.4 per cent of children were involved in wholesale/retail trade and repair of motor vehicles; 30.8 per cent in manufacturing and agriculture; and 21.2 per cent were involved in hunting and forestry. The study did not mention children involved in the carpet industry, painting of metal and wooden products, and working in spraying, mixing or selling insecticides. Therefore, it can be assumed that children involved in these sectors could have been counted as working in the manufacturing, wholesale/retail trade or other industries. A study conducted by the US Department of Labor (2019), however, does mention children in production sector work in carpet weaving, working in metal workshops (including production of doors, windows and water tanks), and working as tin smiths and welders. However, this study also does not mention anything about children engaged in spraying, mixing, or selling insecticides.

In general, a review of documents and literature at the inception stage of this research indicated that there is a significant research gap when it comes to studying children in the carpet weaving industry; children engaged in painting metal and wooden objects; and children involved in spraying, mixing or selling insecticides in the context of Balkh Province. Therefore, this research is critical to giving in-depth insight into the lives of these children.

1.2. Purpose and objectives of the research

This research on child labour in Balkh Province had the following objectives:

- To identify hazardous activities pertaining to carpet and kilim weaving, painting of metal and wooden objects, and mixing, spraying and selling of insecticides.
- To make a quick assessment of the situation of children engaged in hazardous work within the aforementioned areas based on visits to identified SMEs or businesses.
- To identify push and pull factors at the family, community and industry/business levels.
- To identify present local (and national efforts) to address child labour in the aforementioned sectors.
- To recommend effective pathways to eliminate child labour engagement in hazardous activities in the aforementioned areas.

2 Concepts and definitions

For the purposes of this study and within the context of child labour in Afghanistan, particularly in Balkh Province, the focus of this study is on assessing the hazardous activities in which children between the ages of 15 and 17 may be involved in at their workplaces. The study, therefore, does not focus on children ages 14 and below, as children in this age range are entirely prohibited from working as per national and international laws. Nor does the study concern itself with industries that are not hazardous to children between the ages of 15 and 17.

It is important to note that some of these workplaces are family owned and operated. In most cases both the family and the children have no other option but to engage in the activities that they are undertaking. Similarly, due to economic and social hardships, some children cannot afford to not be working. In both cases, the elimination of child labour regardless of the age of the child becomes difficult. Nevertheless, the assessment also looks at how hazardous workplaces can be made non-hazardous for children.

The following definitions have been taken from literature produced by the ILO tailored towards the specific goals of this quick assessment:

Occupational safety and health (OSH) – The ILO Constitution sets forth the principle that workers must be protected from illnesses and injury arising from their employment. Occupational safety and health (OSH) concerns the prevention of work-related injuries and diseases as well as the protection and promotion of workers' health.[1] Its aim is the improvement of working conditions and the working environment. In the context of this assessment, OSH deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace and has a strong focus on the abolishing of hazards. The goal is to prevent work-related accidents and to prevent any harm from befalling workers.

Child labour – Not all work done by children should be classified as child labour. According to the ILO, child labour refers to work that deprives children (any person under 18) of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, or is harmful to their physical and/or mental development. It refers to work that is mentally or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and/or that interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely, and/or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and difficult working hours. In its most extreme forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities – often at a very early age. Whether or not a particular form of "work" can be called "child labour" depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed, and the laws of individual countries (ILO, n.d.-a). Under Afghanistan's Labour Law, 15 is the minimum age for employment and 18 is the minimum age for hazardous work. Children between the ages of 15 and 17 are allowed to work only if the work is not hazardous, requires less than 35 hours a week, and is a form of vocational training. Under Afghan law, children under the age of 15 are not allowed to work in any shape or form.

1 ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155).

Hazardous Industries – Hazardous child labour is defined by Article 3(d) of the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) as "work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children". More specifically, hazardous child labour is work undertaken in dangerous or unhealthy conditions that could result in a child being killed, injured or made ill as a consequence of poor safety and health standards as well as bad working arrangements. It can result in permanent disability, ill health and psychological damage (ILO, n.d.-b). Therefore, for the purposes of this assessment, any industry that employs children (above the age of 14) in work that could potentially result in hazardous child labour as described above, can be termed as a hazardous industry.

Worker – It is difficult to cover the word "worker" under a single definition. Some Conventions propose a definition that is intended to meet their specific requirements. The word "worker(s)" is sometimes qualified by terms such as "part-time worker"; "full-time workers affected by partial unemployment"; "comparable full-time worker"; "night worker"; "the workers concerned"; "migrant worker"; or "rural workers". The practice of the ILO has been to give the broadest possible meaning to the term "worker(s)" (ILO 2004, paras 124–125). On many occasions, it has been emphasized that if the subject matter of a given instrument is not limited only to employed workers, or the instrument does not provide for any specific exclusion in respect of one or more categories of workers, then the term "worker" is understood to cover all workers. This is the reason why the term worker has been chosen over the term "employee" in the context of this quick assessment.

3 Methodology

3.1. Pre-field phase

3.1.1. Literature review

We reviewed all the relevant documents that were made available by the ILO to get a comprehensive understanding of the context around past and current child labour-related issues. Further, publicly available academic and organizational literature was scoped and reviewed. This review helped us to finalize the assessment design and in development of the tools.

3.1.2. Sampling plan

Initially, we conducted household surveys using a listing tool to gather data about the number of working children in each district in Balkh Province. This data was then used to generate our sampling frame and we proceeded to sample a specified number of households, based on the findings of the listing phase. We triangulated seven districts which had high concentrations of households that doubled up as worksites as well as SMEs that operate in the industries of interest. The seven Balkh Province districts chosen for the study are:

- Mazar-e-Sharif
- Balkh
- Charbolak
- Dawlat Abad
- Dehdadi
- Khulm
- Sholgara.

We used both purposive and snowball sampling techniques for this assessment. Phase 1 data collection was conducted using purposive sampling because a stakeholder list had already been shared by the ILO team. Whereas the snowball sampling strategy was used for the phase 2 data collection. We mapped the areas where carpet industries, painting metal and wooden products industries, and selling, mixing and spraying insecticides industries were most prevalent. The number of observations/surveys have been calculated based on a confidence level of 95 per cent and a 5 per cent margin of error. The sampling framework is outlined below

▶ Table 1. Sampling framework for the quick assessment

Phase	Stakeholder group	Online interviews	Physical interviews (by district)							Total
			Mazar-e-Sharif	Balkh	Dehdadi	Dawlat Abad	Charbolak	Khulm	Sholgara	
Phase 1	**In-depth Interviews – 22**									
	Representatives in chambers in Balkh	–	3	–	–	–	–	–	–	3
	Trade union representatives	3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3
	Civil society organizations	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
	SME owners trained in OSH	–	11	–	–	–	–	–	–	11
	ILO staff	3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3
	Observations – 11									
	SMEs trained in OSH	–	11	–	–	–	–	–	–	11
Phase 2	**In-depth Interviews – 66**									
	Owners of SMEs not trained in OSH	–	7	7	6	6	6	7	6	45
	Community leaders	–	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
	Parents	–	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
	Representatives in the Department of Education	–	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
	Focus group discussions – 14									
	FGDs with parents	–	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	63
	FGDs with children (ages 15–17)	–	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	63
	Observations – 303									
	Observations of SMEs not trained in OSH	–	7	7	6	6	6	7	6	45
	Observations at households that doubled as work sites	–	43	16	21	28	16	27	22	173
	Observations of children working in a household	–	2	8	4	6	2	5	7	34
	Observations of children working in an SME	–	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	51
	Listing Surveys – 81									
	Households listing surveys	–	21	10	10	10	10	10	10	81
Total		6	113	75	71	71	71	73	71	551

– = nil.

In-depth Interviews – A total of 88 in-depth interviews were conducted across the two phases with stakeholders of the types listed in the sampling framework in table 1 above.

Focus groups – A total of 14 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted. These included one FGD with children aged 15–17 years and one FGD with parents of working children aged 15–17 years in each of the seven districts of Balkh Province selected for this study. Each FGD had 9 participants, for a total of 63 child and 63 parent participants.

Participant and non-participant observation – Observations were undertaken as part of this research. In those SMEs or businesses where children were found to work, the enumerator spent time with the child and observed the child working as a non-participating observer working with a pre-determined checklist. The enumerator also with the children engaged as a participant observer, directly engaging with the child and undertaking an unstructured interview. This was done with 100 children: 49 working in households and 51 working in SMEs.

Non-participant observations using a checklist were also conducted in 173 houses that double up as work sites for carpet weaving; painting metal or wooden objects; and mixing, spraying, and selling insecticides. In addition, non-participant observations were conducted in 11 SMEs that had received OSH training as well as in 45 SMEs that had not received any OSH training.

Consultative workshop with key stakeholders – At the end of data collection, a consultative workshop was conducted by AACS Consulting to share the preliminary findings and to collect recommendations from the stakeholders through a consultative process.

3.1.3. Training of monitoring and evaluation field officers

The tools were developed by AACS Consulting and approved by the ILO technical team. Online training was conducted for the monitoring and evaluation field officers, and the training focused on, but was not limited to, assessment objectives and methodology, and also touched on the following topics:

- briefing on the purpose of the study, assessment objectives, assessment design, and sampling procedures;
- clarification of meanings and terms;
- drills on the procedure for conducting quantitative and qualitative studies;
- mock interviews and role-plays;
- review of interviewing approach; and
- review of data handling & submission procedures.

3.2. Field phase

Qualitative data collection – Overall, 14 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 88 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted under this assignment. The participants for the phase 1 data collection were selected using a purposive sampling strategy based on a number of principles of diversity and the representativeness of the relevant target groups. These included representatives of Balkh chambers of commerce, trade and investment, trade union representatives, SMEs owners trained in OSH, and ILO staff – all of whom participated in in-depth interviews (IDIs). Participants for IDIs in phase 2 data were selected using a snowball sampling technique, and included parents, community leaders, representatives of the Department of Education, and SME owners. In addition, 100 children were interviewed as part of the observation process, as noted above.

Quantitative data collection (observations) – Overall, 303 observations were conducted using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The observations were administered using an electronic mobile data collection system called Kobo Collect. The data collection commenced on 22 August 2022 and ended on 12 September 2022.

3.2.1. Ethical considerations during the field phase

Informed consent was obtained verbally from adults before participation. For research activities involving minors (aged 15–17), informed consent of the parent/legal guardian was sought, followed by the agreement (consent) of the individual. Ethical procedures were followed in line with Do No Harm principles, and confidentiality was ensured in tools administration.

3.3. Analysis and reporting phase

3.3.1. Data analysis

Quantitative analysis – The data collected through the Kobo Collect application was saved on the KoBo Toolbox platform. The data was then extracted into a spreadsheet. This file was translated, cleaned and coded. The coded file was converted into an SPSS file, which was used to create frequency, cross tables and descriptive summaries of the data. Data for nominal-level and ordinal-level variables are interpreted using pie charts and bar charts. Interval-level and ratio-level variables were interpreted using histograms and summary statistics.

Qualitative analysis – The recordings from in-depth interviews and FGDs were transcribed, translated, free-listed, coded and analysed using ATLAS.ti (ver. 7.5.16).

3.3.2. Report writing

The final product is this assessment report which outlines information on children working in the carpet weaving, painting metal and wooden products, and selling, mixing and spraying insecticides industries. In addition, the initial findings were presented to the ILO team through a draft report presentation and their feedback was incorporated into the final assessment report.

3.4. Quality control

Quality control is at the core of every assignment, which is why we were very careful to assure and control the quality before, during and after the data collection phases. We did a desk review to get a comprehensive understanding of the assignment, which we then used to develop the necessary tools. We then proceeded to translate the tools using an expert translator to avoid language errors, and then transcribed the observation tools in the KoBo Toolbox. We assigned the supervisors to oversee the field teams during the data collection phases to ensure the quality of the observations and in-person interviews. We received the notes and data from the field and have run a few tests to make sure the data is consistent and is free of any duplication. Lastly, we generated the final report as per ILO requirements and expectations.

3.5. Limitation of the Study

Sampling – Since the respondents of the study were hidden and hard to reach (enterprises which employed children and households with children working in the aforementioned three areas), different methods were used to reach the sample size. These methods included reach out to different stakeholders, such as Balkh Chamber of Commerce, to identify locations and clusters with enterprises employing children and communities with working children. Snowball sampling was also used to reach the sample numbers. As a network-based convenience form of sampling, it may be viewed negatively for not producing samples that meet the criteria of random samples in the statistical sense (i.e., it departs from probability-based sampling approaches) (see Parker, Scott and Geddes, 2019)[2].

2 Parker, C, Scott, S and Geddes, A (2019) Snowball Sampling. SAGE Research Methods Foundations.

4 Community profiling

As noted in Chapter 3 above, household surveys were initially conducted using a listing tool to gather data about the number of working children in each district. This data was used to generate our sampling frame and we proceeded to sample 81 households in the seven target districts chosen for the study: Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh, Charbolak, Dawlat Abad, Dehdadi, Khulm and Sholgara. This chapter presents findings from those surveys, as well as select findings from the observations of working children to present a general profile of the communities in which these children live and work.

4.1. Income sources and community resources

The survey findings show that 29.6 per cent of the surveyed household heads were engaged in farming their own or others' land, and some (14.8 per cent) were engaged in non-agriculture wage labour. However, the majority (55 per cent) of household heads were engaged in the carpet weaving, carpentry or tailoring businesses.

Further, households were asked if they have any debts in any form, and 53.1 per cent responded in the affirmative. In addition, more than 70 per cent of the households who reported to be in debt, shared that they pay their debts and/or expenses in part by sending their children to work, including through the use of the children's income. Plus, 86.4 per cent of the surveyed households lived in mud houses, and 61.7 per cent of surveyed households possessed no land for agricultural purposes.

▶ Table 2. Distribution of households based on debt status

District	Does not have debt		Has debt	
	Percentage	N	Percentage	N
Balkh	20.0%	2	80.0%	8
Chahar Bolak	90.0%	9	10.0%	1
Dawlat Abad	50.0%	5	50.0%	5
Dehdadi		0	100.0%	10
Khulm	10.0%	1	90.0%	9
Mazar-e-Sharif	100.0%	21		0
Sholgara	50.0%	5	50.0%	5
Total	53.1%	43	46.9%	38

▶ Table 3. District-wise distribution of surveyed households by housing type, house and land ownership

Indicators	Balkh		Chahar Bolak		Dawlat Abad		Dehdadi		Khulm		Mazar-e-Sharif		Sholgara		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Mud/Kaccha	100.0%	10	100.0%	10	100.0%	10	80.0%	8	40.0%	4	85.7%	18	100.0%	10	86.4%	70
Pucca							10.0%	1	10.0%	1	4.8%	1			3.7%	3
Semi-pucca							10.0%	1	50.0%	5	9.5%	2			9.9%	8
On rent							10.0%	1			23.8%	5			7.4%	6
Owned by present family residing in the household	100.0%	10	100.0%	10	100.0%	10	80.0%	8	100.0%	#	76.2%	16	100.0%	10	91.4%	74
Provided free by owner							10.0%	1							1.2%	1
No land	30.0%	3	10.0%	1	100.0%	10	70.0%	7	20.0%	2	100.0%	21	60.0%	6	61.7%	50
<1 jerib			20.0%	2			30.0%	3	70.0%	7			10.0%	1	16.0%	13
1-2 jerib	20.0%	2	50.0%	5					10.0%	1			20.0%	2	12.3%	10
3-4 jerib	20.0%	2	20.0%	2							w				4.9%	4
<4 jerib	30.0%	3											10.0%	1	4.9%	4

4.2. Working children

Findings from the household surveys indicate that all households are presently engaging their children in economic activities. However, this number was quite low two years ago, when only 29.6 per cent of households had children engaged in economic activities. On average, one male child and one female child from each household are presently engaged in economic activities.

▶ Table 4. District-wise distribution of surveyed households in terms of labour engagement

District	Child not engaged in labour		Child engaged in labour	
	%	N	%	N
Balkh	90.0%	9	10.0%	1
Chahar Bolak	40.0%	4	60.0%	6
Dawlat Abad	100.0%	10	0.0%	0
Dehdadi	70.0%	7	30.0%	3
Khulm	60.0%	6	40.0%	4
Mazar-e-Sharif	52.4%	11	47.6%	10
Sholgara	100.0%	10	0.0%	0
Total	70.4%	57	29.6%	24

Heads of household were asked about the types of economic activities their children were engaged in – 38.3 per cent of households reported carpet weaving, 22.2 per cent of households reported shops or industries involved in painting metal and wooden items; and 21 per cent of households reported that their children were engaged in mixing, selling or spraying insecticide products and in 51.9% households children were engaged in other economic activities (agriculture, mechanic apprentice, car wash, shop keeping, sewing & embroidery, tailoring, construction work, street peddling and packaging) . Similarly, many of the trade union representatives interviewed for the study stated that children from 8 to 17 years in Balkh Province are mostly engaged in handicrafts, carpet weaving, and the selling, spraying and mixing insecticides industries.[3]

▶ Table 5. District-wise distribution of child labour by industry (surveyed households)

District	Carpet Weaving		Painting of metal or wooden items		Mixing, Selling or spraying of insecticide		Other	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	90.0%	9	100.0%	10
Chahar Bolak	20.0%	2	0.0%	0	10.0%	1	100.0%	10
Dawlat Abad	100.0%	10	0.0%	0		0		0
Dehdadi	40.0%	4	70.0%	7	30.0%	3	20.0%	2
Khulm	50.0%	5	100.0%	10	40.0%	4		0
Mazar-e-Sharif		0	4.8%	1		0	95.2%	20
Sholgara	100.0%	10	0.0%	0		0		0
Total	38.3%	31	22.2%	18	21.0%	17	51.9%	42

3 IDIs with trade union representatives.

4.3. Children's aspirations and decision-making processes

Findings from the children's observations (based on 34 valid responses) indicate that 35.3 per cent of children reported that they plan to continue working as they are now, and 50 per cent of children reported that wished to start a similar business. However, 11.8 per cent of children reported that they planned to study further and/or get a government or private job. Based on our qualitative findings, most working children believe that they should be studying instead of working, but they are forced to forgo studying in favour of work due to economic and financial difficulties. These children say that they have to work in order to survive.[4]

▶ **Table 6. Distribution of children based on their aspirations[1]**

District	Continue working at present		Start business similar to the one currently working in		Study further and get a government/ private job		Other	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	12.5%	1	75.0%	6		0	12.5%	1
Charbolak	50.0%	1	50.0%	1		0		0
Dawlatabad	66.7%	4	16.7%	1	16.7%	1		0
Dehdadi	25.0%	1		0	75.0%	3		0
Khulm	80.0%	4	20.0%	1		0		0
Mazar-e-Sharif	50.0%	1	50.0%	1		0		0
Sholgara		0	100.0%	7		0		0
Total	35.3%	12	50.0%	17	11.8%	4	2.9%	1

When considering the observed children's responses by district, most of the children from Charbolak reported that they would continue working as at present. In addition, most of the children from Sholgara reported that they would start a similar business. Further, most of the children from Dehdadi reported that they would like study further in order to get a government or private job. Our qualitative findings show that many of the children who are currently working wish to carry on working in their current industry. They expressed a desire to not only carry on their family business but to also improve it by developing their skills and practices so that they can work safely and more efficiently.[5]

Below are some of the quotes received from the children interviewed during the assessment regarding their goals and aspirations, as well as how they feel about their current work.

4 FGD with children in Khulm.
5 FGDs with children in all districts covered in the study.

▶ Children's aspirations and goals

> Children need to study, but our families are forced to send us to workshops so that we can learn a trade. We cannot both work and study with the time we have and therefore we must choose between the two. We choose work because we cannot survive without the additional income.
>
> **▶ FGD with children, Khulm**

> My dream is to become a teacher. I believe that, through hard work, each one of us can achieve their dreams. The only things we need is for society to support us and for our families to believe in us.
>
> **▶ FGD with children, Khulm**

> My dream is to become a carpenter and carry on my family business. My biggest wish is for my community to help and support me in achieving this dream.
>
> **▶ FGD with children, Khulm**

> There are many reasons for why these children work, but the main reason is their economic problems or economic hardship. These problems have caused families to send their children to work. They don't even attend school because they are busy with their work.
>
> **▶ IDI with Department of Education, Khulm**

5 Children working in the carpet weaving industry

5.1. Hazardous activities in carpet weaving

The assessment observed 103 children at households while they were busy with carpet weaving activities in five districts of Balkh Province: Charbolak, Dawlat Abad, Dehdadi, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Sholgara. During the observations, children revealed that they undertake some hazardous activities related to carpet weaving, such as: (i) moving the heddle; (ii) threading; (iii) combing; (iv) moving heavy equipment; and (v) weaving.

The children were also asked if there were certain tasks that they found difficult to do, but that they were forced to undertake by their employers or household heads – 20.4 per cent children involved in carpet weaving, responded in the affirmative.

▶ Table 7. Share of children forced to perform challenging tasks in the carpet weaving industry, by district[1]

District	Not forced to perform challenging tasks		Forced to perform challenging tasks	
	%	N	%	N
Balkh	41.2%	7	58.8%	10
Charbolak	100.0%	14	0.0%	0
Dawlatabad	69.2%	9	30.8%	4
Dehdadi	71.4%	10	28.6%	4
Khulm	100.0%	7	0.0%	0
Mazar-e-Sharif	95.7%	22	4.3%	1
Sholgara	86.7%	13	13.3%	2
Total	79.6%	82	20.4%	21

The children were asked if they experienced any injuries throughout their time in the carpet weaving industry. Most of the children from Dehdadi reported experiencing finger injuries, whereas children from Charbolak reported injuries to the fingers as well as other parts of the body. Children from the district of Dawlat Abad complained about persistent headaches and backaches, as well as experiencing difficulties in seeing. The qualitative findings show that many children[6] and SME owners[7] are aware of children who have been injured while working. We have, however, found no evidence suggesting that a child had lost their life as a direct or indirect result of working in carpet weaving.[8]

▶ **Table 8. Share of children who experienced various injuries and/or health issues while working in the carpet weaving industry, by district[1]**

District	Did not experience injury		Experienced injury	
	%	N	%	N
Balkh	35.3%	6	64.7%	11
Charbolak	21.4%	3	78.6%	11
Dawlatabad	61.5%	8	38.5%	5
Dehdadi	28.6%	4	71.4%	10
Khulm	14.3%	1	85.7%	6
Mazar-e-Sharif	34.8%	8	65.2%	15
Sholgara	53.3%	8	46.7%	7
Total	36.9%	38	63.1%	65

Findings from the observations of children in the carpet weaving industry indicate that most of the children were exposed to dust, a noisy environment, and extreme temperatures, in addition to having to carry heavy loads, which are conditions that can lead to the contraction of various occupational diseases in the future. Also, it observed whether SMEs were properly labelling hazardous chemicals and placing them in their appropriate locations. Unfortunately, it was found that none of the observed SMEs had appropriate and suitable storage spaces for dangerous chemicals, nor were these hazardous chemicals properly labelled. If such a trend continues at the SME level, then many children will contract diseases or develop health issues that could have serious consequences to their wellbeing, including potentially fatal consequences.

One important point that was observed in the SMEs and confirmed by the children during observation is that children working in carpet weaving SMEs are treated like adults – that is, there is no special treatment for children whether they were performing hazardous or simple activities. SME owners generally assume that children have the same strength and capability as adults, which is an improper assumption on their part. SME owners should assign only simple activities to children and all hazardous activities should be left to adult workers.

6 FGDs with children in all the districts covered in the study.
7 IDIs with SME owners in Mazar-e-Sharif, Dehdadi, and Dawlat Abad.
8 IDIs with SME owners, and FGDs with parents and children in all districts covered in the study.

▶ **Table 9. Share of children who faced various potential hazards in the carpet weaving industry, by district[1]**

District	Dust		Fumes		Gas (Oxygen, H2S, Ammonia, any other)		Extreme temperatures		Noisy Environment		Chemicals		Dangerous Tools		Insufficient Lighting		Carrying Heavy Loads	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	5.9%	1		0		0	5.9%	1		0		0		0		0		0
Charbolak	35.7%	5		0		0	50.0%	7	50.0%	7		0	7.1%	1	7.1%	1	7.1%	1
Dawlatabad	30.8%	4		0		0	15.4%	2	7.7%	1		0	7.7%	1	15.4%	2	23.1%	3
Dehdadi	78.6%	11	28.6%	4	21.4%	3	14.3%	2	21.4%	3	14.3%	2	28.6%	4		0	21.4%	3
Khulm	28.6%	2		0		0	42.9%	3	28.6%	2	28.6%	2	71.4%	5		0	14.3%	1
Mazar-e-Sharif	43.5%	10		0		0	26.1%	6	34.8%	8	4.3%	1	13.0%	3	4.3%	1	4.3%	1
Sholgara		0		0		0	6.7%	1		0		0		0		0	6.7%	1
Total	32.0%	33	3.9%	4	2.9%	3	21.4%	22	20.4%	21	4.9%	5	13.6%	14	3.9%	4	9.7%	10

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100% due to non-responses (none of the above). The total number of children observed for carpet weaving was 103.

▶ **Table 10. Share of children engaged in various hazardous activities in the carpet weaving industry**[1]

District	Weaving		Moving the Dam		Threading		Combing		Moving Equipment	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh										
Charbolak			28.6%	4			50.0%	7	35.7%	5
Dawlatabad	37.5%	3							12.5%	1
Dehdadi			14.3%	2					14.3%	2
Khulm										
Mazar-e-Sharif	17.4%	4	30.4%	7	4.3%	1	17.4%	4	30.4%	7
Sholgara										
Total	7.4%	7	13.7%	13	1.1%	1	11.6%	11	15.8%	15

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100% due to non-responses (none of the above). The total number of children observed for carpet weaving was 103.

5.2. Distribution of children aged 15–17 based on hazardous activities and location of work

The quantitative findings indicate that one of the hazardous activities reported by the children, and observed by the field officers is moving the heddle9. Among the observed children, 13.7 per cent reported that moving the heddle is part of their daily work and that it is one of the tasks that frequently injures them. Specifically, moving the heddle has been found to cause wrist and back pain in the long run. In addition, 11.6 per cent of the observed children reported combing as a hazardous activity in which they often injure their fingers. A few of the children reported cleaning and threading as hazardous activities in carpet weaving. They stated that the dust and particles thrown up into the air during cleaning sometimes enters their lungs and makes it difficult to breathe. Prolonged exposure to these airborne particles can lead to the development of respiratory issues.

The findings from the qualitative data show that most SME owners[10] and children[11] have identified moving the heddle as a hazardous and challenging activity in the carpet weaving process. The SME owners stated that combing is a relatively easy task, yet the observed children in the study stated that combing is a difficult task that leads to injury.

The findings by district indicate that all observed children in Dawlat Abad reported weaving as a hazardous activity, and all the children in Dehdadi reported moving the heddle as a hazardous activity. A number of children in Charbolak and Mazar-e-Sharif also viewed moving the heddle as hazardous, and viewed combing as a hazardous activity as well.

Findings from the observation of 103 households regarding injury while carpet weaving show that overall 33% (N=34) children reported to injure their fingers while working.

9 A heddle is an integral part of a carpet weaving loom. It is a looped wire or cord with an eye in the centre through which a warp yarn is passed in a loom before going through the reed to control its movement and divide the threads.
10 IDIs with the SME owners in Dawlat Abad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Charbolak and Khulm.
11 FGD with children in Mazar-e-Sharif.

▶ **Table 11. Share of children who recently suffered injuries while working in the carpet weaving industry, by district**

District	Injury to finger		Injury to eyes		Injury to face and other parts of the body		Persistent cough		Dizziness		Difficulty in seeing		Persistent Backache		Persistent Headache		Prolonged Weakness		Swollen finger joints		Weakness in limbs (upper or lower or both)	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	5.9%	1	0.0%	0	5.9%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Charbolak	57.1%	8	0.0%	0	50.0%	7	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	14.3%	2	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Dawlatabad	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	15.4%	2	7.7%	1	0.0%	0	30.8%	4	30.8%	4	30.8%	4	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Dehdadi	50.0%	7	35.7%	5	7.1%	1	14.3%	2	35.7%	5	7.1%	1	14.3%	2	0.0%	0	14.3%	2	7.1%	1	7.1%	1
Khulm	71.4%	5	14.3%	1	57.1%	4	0.0%	0	28.6%	2	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	14.3%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Mazar-e-Sharif	60.9%	14	0.0%	0	30.4%	7	4.3%	1	4.3%	1	0.0%	0	4.3%	1	4.3%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Sholgara	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	13.3%	2	6.7%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Total	33.0%	34	5.8%	6	20.4%	21	3.9%	4	8.7%	9	4.9%	5	11.7%	12	6.8%	7	1.9%	2	1.0%	1	1.0%	1

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100% due to non-responses (none of the above). The total number of children observed for carpet weaving was 103.

Meanwhile, it was observed that there were no first aid boxes on the premises of the working areas in carpet weaving households in Mazar-e-Sharif, Charbolak and Sholgara. First aid boxes were available in all the observed houses in Dehdadi, however, and in 16.7 per cent of houses in Dawlat Abad. Houses which had no first aid boxes might find it difficult to provide support to the children in the event of injury or any other incident.

▶ **Table 12. Share of children who had access to first aid box within carpet weaving households, by district**[1]

District	No access to first aid box		Access to first aid box	
	%	N	%	N
Char bolak	100.0%	2		
Dawlat Abad	66.7%	2	33.3%	1
Dehdadi			100.0%	2
Mazar-e-Sharif	100.0%	7		
Sholgara	100.0%	3		
Total	82.4%	14	17.6%	3

[1] Based on observations of 17 SMEs

Findings from the observations of households that double up as carpet weaving workspaces indicate that generally there was no safety equipment available for the children to use while doing simple or hazardous activities. The business owners were asked about why there was no safety equipment, but they simply responded that the children are familiar with the way they are working now.

5.3. Description of work-related challenges faced by children

Most of the time, children are forced by circumstances to work and become a breadwinner for the family. In addition, the family head and SME employers are often not concerned about whether these children are doing hazardous or challenging work in their industries.

The findings indicate that children in Dehdadi mentioned weaving, framing and cutting as challenging activities that take most of their time, and sometimes they face mild to moderate injuries as a result of performing these activities. In addition, children in Dawlat Abad reported weaving and housework as challenging activities, and children in Sholgara reported weaving, threading, and graphing as challenging activities.

A child working in carpet sector captured during the field assessment, Afghanistan, 08/2022. © AACS/ILO

▶ **Table 13. Share of children that found various carpet weaving industry activities to be challenging[1]**

District	Weaving		Preparing the loom		Cutting		Moving the Dam		Threading		Combing		Moving Equipment	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh					5.9%	1						0	0.0%	0
Charbolak							7.1%	1			14.3%	2	7.1%	1
Dawlatabad	30.8%	4									0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Dehdadi	14.3%	2			21.4%	3					0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Khulm											0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Mazar-e-Sharif			4.3%	1			17.4%	4	4.3%	1	0.0%	0	17.4%	4
Sholgara	6.7%	1							6.7%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Total	6.8%	7	1.0%	1	3.9%	4	4.9%	5	1.9%	2	1.9%	2	4.9%	5

Furthermore, the during the observations of 34 carpet weaving SMEs that employ children aged 15–17 it was found that the SMEs in Dawlat Abad and Mazar-e-Sharif had no appropriate tools and equipment for children to undertake their work. However, the children in these SMEs did not have any complaints about their tools and equipment. However, some children in observed SMEs in Sholgara district did complain about their tools and were asking their employers to provide them with modern tools for their work.

▶ **Table 14. Share of children that received appropriate tools in carpet weaving SMEs, by district**

District	Did not receive appropriate tools		Received appropriate tools	
	%	N	%	N
Char bolak			100.0%	2
Dawlat Abad	33.3%	1	66.7%	2
Dehdadi			100.0%	2
Mazar-e-Sharif	28.6%	2	71.4%	5
Sholgara			100.0%	3
Total	17.6%	3	82.4%	14

In addition, during observations of these carpet weaving SMEs' work environments, it was found that all the SMEs in Charbolak and Dawlat Abad, as well as 33.3 per cent of SMEs in Sholgara, had no chairs or benches of proper height with sturdy backrests. In addition, 17.6 per cent of SMEs in Charbolak, Mazar-e-Sharif and Sholgara did not have sufficient heating or cooling provisions for their workers.

▶ **Table 15. Share of carpet weaving SMEs employing children that had heating/cooling, by district**

District	No heating/cooling facilities		Heating/cooling facilities available	
	%	N	%	N
Char bolak	50.0%	1	50.0%	1
Dawlat Abad	0.0%	0	100.0%	3
Dehdadi	0.0%	0	100.0%	2
Mazar-e-Sharif	14.3%	1	85.7%	6
Sholgara	33.3%	1	66.7%	2
Total	17.6%	3	82.4%	14

Children working in carpet sector captured during the field assessment, Afghanistan, 08/2022. © AACS/ILO

We also observed and checked the toilets and washing facilities in each SME to understand whether they have separate and proper toilets and washing facilities for male and female children. The children's resting and dining areas were also examined. All the observed SMEs in Dehdadi and 14.3 per cent in Mazar-e-Sharif did not have separate toilets and washing facilities for male and female children. In addition, 50 per cent of SMEs in Dehdadi did not have sufficient areas for rest or hygienic places for eating meals.

▶ **Table 16. Share of carpet weaving SMEs employing children that had toilets, washing facilities, and resting areas, by district**

District	Separate toilets and washing facilities for men and women		Sufficient rest areas and a separate hygienic place for eating meals	
	%	N	%	N
Char bolak	100.0%	2	100.0%	2
Dawlat Abad	100.0%	3	100.0%	3
Dehdadi	0.0%	0	50.0%	1
Mazar-e-Sharif	85.7%	6	100.0%	7
Sholgara	100.0%	3	100.0%	3
Total	82.4%	14	94.1%	16

5.4. Pathways to eliminate hazardous activities for children in carpet weaving

Carpet weaving is a traditional and ancient industry in Afghanistan in which the bulk of the workforce comprises women and children. Most of the households and SMEs involved in carpet weaving have been in business for generations, and it has become a part of their family heritage. Most carpet weaving happens inside homes, and therefore it is difficult to monitor and supervise the activities undertaken by children without infringing on the family's right to privacy. It is possible, however, to incentivize these families to take into consideration the health and safety of the children involved in these tasks through a voluntary mechanism through which their activities would be regularly inspected by the relevant government bodies or international organizations, and they would be awarded with certification that will better enable them to sell their carpets in larger markets and possibly at a premium. This will, however, require a substantial amount of effort on behalf of the Afghan Government, international organizations and carpet traders.

Qualitative findings from the study show that almost all of the parents of children involved in carpet weaving would prefer that their children focus on education above all else, but they need their children to work to support the family.[12] These children can be allowed to focus on their education by providing their families with conditional aid and benefits based on whether their child attends school and on whether the child dedicates a specified number of hours per day to studying.

12 IDIs with parents of children involved in the carpet industry.

To summarize, the carpet weaving industry is very complicated, as it is very closely tied to the culture and heritage of the households involved. Based on our findings, we suggest the following points for eliminating child labour in this industry:

- Increase access to education by building schools in areas with a high concentration of working children.
- Raise awareness among parents and SME owners about the importance of education and the dangers of child labour.
- Create incentive schemes for the families involved in carpet weaving so that they prioritize their children's health, safety and future above all else.

The table below summarizes the hazardous tasks/activities in the carpet weaving industry, their associated impact and risk factors, as well as suggested measures for mitigation of these specified risk factors in case children cannot be fully removed from the industry.

▶ **Table 17. Risk factors, impacts and mitigation pathways for hazardous activities in the carpet weaving industry**

Activity/Task	Risk factor	Impacts	Suggested mitigation measures/ alternatives
Loading and unloading	Carrying heavy loads	Frequent back pain	▶ Impose limit on weight that children can carry. ▶ Break big loads into smaller loads within acceptable limits.
Moving the heddle	Moving heavy loads and exerting oneself too much	Frequent back and hand pain	▶ Moving the heddle should be left to the adults.
Combing	Spending an extended amount of time in a bad posture	Back and wrist pain/ deformities	▶ Standing looms with proper seating should be provided.
Cleaning	Inhaling unsafe particles	Coughing, sneezing, respiratory issues	▶ Masks, gloves and goggles should be worn at all times within the premises – especially when cleaning.
Cutting	Working with sharp tools	Injuring hands and other body parts	▶ Cutting tools with safety mechanisms should be provided. ▶ The cutting process should ideally be left to the adults
General workplace conditions	Dreary, unsafe and unhygienic work environment	Can have negative effects on child's mental health	▶ Work sites should be made more conducive to children's growth and development.
Meals and resting	Unhygienic location/no location	Infections, disease, food poisoning	▶ Allocate specific place for meals. ▶ Provide safe drinking water.

▶ **Key quote from SME owners involved in carpet weaving**

> The hazardous activities involved in our work are lifting the Dam [heddle] and Boards because these objects are very heavy and can cause injury. The activities that are not dangerous are combing, filling.
>
> ▶ **IDI with SME owner, Mazar-e-Sharif**

> No, I have not participated in any training programs like these. I think this training would be very beneficial for us. I would like to learn about health and safety-relat-ed issues such as the proper use of gloves and masks.
>
> ▶ **Response from the owner of a carpet weaving SME when asked about being trained in OSH, IDI with SME owner, Mazar-e-Sharif**

> They work from 6 in the morning till 6 in the evening. They prepare the threads, raise, and lower the Dam [heddle], and weave carpets.
>
> ▶ **IDI with SME owner, Mazar-e-Sharif**

A child working in carpet sector captured during the field assessment, Afghanistan, 08/2022. © AACS/ILO

A child working in carpet sector captured during the field assessment, Afghanistan, 08/2022. © AACS/ILO

6 Children involved in painting metal and wooden products

6.1. Hazardous activities in painting metal and wooden products

We observed 52 children at households and SMEs while they were engaged in painting metal and wooden products in seven districts: Balkh, Charbolak, Dawlat Abad, Dehdadi, Khulm, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Sholgara. During the observations, children revealed that they partake in many hazardous activities, such as moving heavy equipment and materials, welding, using a circular saw, cutting, sawing, drilling and chiselling.

The children were asked if there were certain tasks that they found difficult to do but were forced to do by their employers or household head – 28.8 per cent of children responded in the affirmative, and these children all from Balkh, Dawlat Abad or Dehdadi. However, all of the observed children in Charbolak, Khulm, Mazar-e-Sharif and Sholgara appeared to be willingly doing this challenging work with the intention of becoming skilled workers.

▶ **Table 18. Share of children forced to perform challenging activities in the metal/wood painting industry, by district[1]**

District	Not forced to undertake challenging activities		Forced to undertake challenging activities	
	%	N	%	N
Balkh	41.2%	7	58.8%	10
Charbolak	100.0%	2		0
Dawlatabad	57.1%	4	42.9%	3
Dehdadi	77.8%	7	22.2%	2
Khulm	100.0%	7		0
Mazar-e-Sharif	100.0%	3		0
Sholgara	100.0%	7		0
Total	71.2%	37	28.8%	15

[1] Based on observations of 52 children in metal/wood painting households and SMEs.

Based on the qualitative findings, it was found that the children mostly worked under the supervision of an adult mentor. They would go with their mentor to worksites across the district and would also spend most of the day inside the workshop making various types of objects and instruments. This severely hinders the children's ability to attend school, as their work takes up most of their day.[13]

Children were asked if they experienced any injuries throughout their time in the painting metal and wooden items industries. All of the observed children in Khulm had experienced injuries to their fingers, and most (80 per cent) had suffered injuries to other parts of their bodies. Observed children in Dehdadi reported the greatest variety of injuries and health issues, including injuries to fingers and eyes, dizziness, persistent backache, weakness, swollen finger joints, and difficulty in hearing. Some observed children from Dawlat Abad complained of backaches and difficulty in seeing.

The observation of metal/wood painting children indicated that many are exposed to dust, carrying heavy loads, noisy equipment, extreme temperatures, and working with dangerous tools. These hazards may potential cause severe injury and may increase the risk of working children contracting diseases.

I was also observed whether the SMEs labelled hazardous chemicals or placed them appropriately within the worksite. Unfortunately, it was found that none of the observed SMEs had appropriate places to store hazardous chemicals, nor had any of them properly labelled their hazardous chemicals.

13 IDIs with SME owners in Dawlat Abad.

A child working in carpentry captured during the field assessment, Afghanistan, 08/2022. © AACS/ILO

▶ Table 19. Share of children who experienced various injuries and/or health issues while working in the metal/wood painting industry, by district[1]

District	Injury to finger		Injury to eyes		Injury to face and other parts of the body		Persistent Cough		Dizziness		Difficulty in seeing		Persistent backache		Persistent headache		Prolonged weakness		Swollen finger joints		Weakness in limbs (upper or lower or both)		Difficulty in hearing		Difficulty in breathing	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	5.9%	1	0.0%	0	5.9%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Charbolak	50.0%	1	0.0%	0	50.0%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Dawlatabad	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	28.6%	2	14.3%	1	0.0%	0	14.3%	1	28.6%	2	14.3%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Dehdadi	22.2%	2	55.6%	5	0.0%	0	22.2%	2	55.6%	5	11.1%	1	22.2%	2	0.0%	0	22.2%	2	11.1%	1	11.1%	1	22.2%	2	11.1%	1
Khulm	71.4%	5	14.3%	1	57.1%	4	0.0%	0	28.6%	2	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	14.3%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Mazar-e-Sharif	33.3%	1	0.0%	0	33.3%	1	0.0%	0	33.3%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Sholgara	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Total	17.3%	9	11.5%	6	15.4%	8	5.8%	3	17.3%	9	3.8%	2	9.6%	5	3.8%	2	3.8%	2	1.9%	1	1.9%	1	3.8%	2	1.9%	1

– = nil.[1] Based on observations of 52 children in metal/wood painting households and SMEs.

▶ Table 20. Share of children who faced various potential hazards in the metal/wood painting industry, by district[1]

District	Dust		Fumes		Gas (Oxygen, H2S, Ammonia, any other)		Extreme temperatures		Noisy environment		Chemicals		Dangerous tools		Insufficient lighting		Carrying heavy loads	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	5.9%	1		0		0	5.9%	1		0		0		0		0		0
Charbolak		0		0		0	50.0%	1	50.0%	1		0	50.0%	1		0		0
Dawlatabad	57.1%	4		0		0	14.3%	1	14.3%	1		0	14.3%	1	28.6%	2	28.6%	2
Dehdadi	66.7%	6	33.3%	3	33.3%	3	22.2%	2	11.1%	1	22.2%	2	44.4%	4		0	22.2%	2
Khulm	28.6%	2		0		0	42.9%	3	28.6%	2	28.6%	2	71.4%	5		0	14.3%	1
Mazar-e-Sharif	33.3%	1		0		0		0	33.3%	1	33.3%	1	33.3%	1		0	33.3%	1
Sholgara		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0
Total	26.9%	14	5.8%	3	5.8%	3	15.4%	8	11.5%	6	9.6%	5	23.1%	12	3.8%	2	11.5%	6

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 52 children in metal/wood painting households and SMEs.

▶ Table 21. Share of children engaged in various hazardous activities in the metal/wood painting industry, by district[1]

District	Chiseling		Circular Saw		Cutting		Drilling		Moving Heavy Objects		Sawing		Welding	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh			29.4%	5	5.9%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Charbolak			50.0%	1	0.0%	0	50.0%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Dawlatabad			14.3%	1	14.3%	1	0.0%	0	14.3%	1	0.0%	0	14.3%	1
Dehdadi			22.2%	2	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	11.1%	1
Khulm			14.3%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	14.3%	1	14.3%	1
Mazar-e-Sharif			33.3%	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	33.3%	1	0.0%	0
Sholgara	14.3%	1	28.6%	2	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	57.1%	4	0.0%	0
Total	1.9%	1	25.0%	13	3.8%	2	1.9%	1	1.9%	1	11.5%	6	5.8%	3

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 52 children in metal/wood painting households and SMEs.

The qualitative findings indicate that the SMEs involved in painting metal/wooden objects also perform general tasks related to metalworking and carpentry. These activities include welding, cutting objects with circular saws, drilling, and chiselling. The SME owners interviewed stated that all activities undertaken in their line of work can be considered hazardous.[14]

By district, half of the observed children in Charbolak district reported welding, cutting, drilling, and sawing as hazardous activities that they undertake; while children in Balkh reported spraying insecticides, cutting, and welding as hazardous activities that they perform. Further, children from Sholgara reported circular sawing, chiselling, sawing, and welding as hazardous activities.

Findings from the observations of households that double up as metal/wood painting worksites indicate that the children working in them had no signs of recent or old injuries. In addition, first aid boxes were available to provide support in the event of mild injuries. In addition, we observed children using rudimentary safety equipment, such as gloves, scarves for their faces and sunglasses. In Balkh District, however, children were not provided with safety equipment for work. The qualitative findings show that the most dangerous activities undertaken by children in metal/wood painting SMEs are welding and using a circular saw.[15]

6.2. Description of work-related challenges faced by children

Using a circular saw was the most commonly cited challenge among observed children in metal and wooden products businesses, with 50 per cent of the interviewed children making note of it. In addition, 21.4 per cent of children reported that another challenge for them in their work is welding metal items, which creates sparks that can lead to burns. Only 12.5 per cent of children in Balkh reported the spraying of insecticides as a challenging task that they perform.

▶ **Table 22. Share of children engaged in metal/wood painting activities that they found to be challenging, by district[1]**

District	Circular Saw		Welding		Sawing	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	23.5%	4	5.9%	1		
Charbolak	50.0%	1				
Dawlatabad	14.3%	1	28.6%	2	28.6%	2
Dehdadi	22.2%	2	11.1%	1		
Khulm	28.6%	2	28.6%	2	28.6%	2
Mazar-e-Sharif	66.7%	2				
Sholgara	28.6%	2				
Total	26.9%	14	11.5%	6	7.7%	4

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 52 children in metal/wood painting households and SMEs.

14 IDIs with owners of metal/wood painting SMEs.
15 IDIs with owners of metal/wood painting SMEs.

During the observations of SMEs, it was found out that half of the children in Mazar-e-Sharif district have no appropriate tools and equipment to undertake their work. However, these children had no complaints about their tools and equipment. However, 33.3 per cent of children in Balkh and Sholgara districts complained about their tools and were requesting their employers to provide them with modern tools for their work. Our qualitative analysis revealed that the children working in this industry worked with mostly rudimentary safety gear and equipment. They did not have proper masks and helmets to protect themselves while working and used alternatives such as sunglasses and scarves to protect themselves. [16] In addition, the qualitative findings also revealed that despite the dangerous tools involved in undertaking these activities, there had not been any cases where a working child had lost their life.[17]

▶ **Table 23. Share of children that received appropriate tools in metal/wood painting industry SMEs, by district[1]**

District	Appropriate tools and equipment		Child complaining about tools		Appropriate tools to work so that he can work safely.	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	100.0%	3	33.3%	1	100.0%	3
Char bolak	100.0%	3			100.0%	3
Dawlat Abad	100.0%	2			100.0%	2
Dehdadi	100.0%	2			100.0%	2
Khulm	100.0%	2			50.0%	2
Mazar-e-Sharif	50.0%	1			50.0%	2
Sholgara	100.0%	3	33.3%	1	100.0%	3
Total	94.1%	16	11.8%	2	88.2%	17

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 17 metal/wood painting SMEs.

We observed whether SMEs labelled hazardous chemicals and stored them appropriately. The findings indicate that almost none of the SMEs had appropriate storage spaces for hazardous chemicals and the majority of them did not label the chemicals either. The findings indicate that all of the SMEs have inappropriate chairs and benches, and a number of the SMEs in Balkh, Charbolak, Dawlat Abad, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Sholgara did not have sufficient heating or cooling provisions for their workers. Fortunately, all of the SMEs in Dehdadi and Khulm provided sufficient heating or cooling.

16 IDIs with owners of metal/wood painting SMEs in Mazar-e-Sharif and Khulm.
17 IDIs with owners of metal/wood painting SMEs.

▶ Table 24. Share of metal/wood painting SMEs employing children that had heating/cooling and seating facilities, by district[1]

District	Sufficient heating or cooling provisions for people working in the unit		Work to be performed while sitting		Work to be performed standing up		Child is working on the ground, is he/she working in a comfortable manner (has a seat and is able to work comfortably, safely and efficiently)	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	66.7%	2	33.3%	1	66.7%	2		
Char bolak	33.3%	1	33.3%	1	66.7%	2	100.0%	1
Dawlat Abad	50.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%	1		
Dehdadi	100.0%	2			100.0%	2		
Khulm	100.0%	2			100.0%	2		
Mazar-e-Sharif			50.0%	1	50.0%	1		
Sholgara	66.7%	2	33.3%	1	66.7%	2	100.0%	1
Total	58.8%	10	29.4%	5	70.6%	12	40.0%	2

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 17 metal/wood painting SMEs.

In addition, we observed and checked the toilets and washing facilities in each SME to see whether the SMEs have separate and proper toilets and washing facilities for male and female children. We also observed the children's resting and dining areas. All the SMEs in Dehdadi and 50 per cent or more of the SMEs in Balkh, Dawlat Abad, and Mazar-e-Sharif did not have separate toilets and washing facilities for male and female children. In addition, all the observed SMEs in Dehdadi and Khulm did not have sufficient areas for rest or hygienic places for eating meals. Further, half of the SMEs in Dawlat Abad and Mazar-e-Sharif did not have sufficient areas for rest, including a hygienic place for eating meals.

▶ Table 25. Share of metal/wood painting SMEs employing children that had toilets, washing facilities, and resting areas, by district[1]

District	Separate toilets and washing facilities for men and women		Sufficient rest areas and a separate hygienic place for eating meals	
	%	N	%	N
Balkh	33.3%	1	66.7%	2
Char bolak	66.7%	2	33.3%	1
Dawlat Abad	50.0%	1	50.0%	1
Dehdadi	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Khulm	100.0%	2	0.0%	0
Mazar-e-Sharif	50.0%	1	50.0%	1
Sholgara	66.7%	2	100.0%	3
Total	52.9%	9	47.1%	8

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 17 metal/wood painting SMEs.

6.3. Pathways to eliminate hazardous activities for children in the painting of metal and wooden objects

The painting of metal and wooden objects industry does not exist by itself in Afghanistan but is part of the bigger metalworking and carpentry industry. This industry is laden with risks, even for adults, let alone children. These businesses mostly hire children who are looking for work as helping hands. These children perform a variety of tasks, from basics like cleaning the shop to dangerous activities such as welding and cutting objects with electrical saws. These activities are mostly done in SMEs and are, therefore, visible to the Government and to the public at large. Routine assessment and inspection rounds can be organized and undertaken by the relevant government bodies to ensure that no children are working in these SMEs or, at the very least, they are not engaged in any hazardous activities.

Our general recommendations for the elimination of children from hazardous activities in this industry are similar to our recommendations in the previous chapter. We suggest the following points for the elimination of child labour in this industry:

- Increase access to education by building schools in areas with a high concentration of working children.
- Raise awareness among parents and SME owners about the importance of education and the dangers of child labour.

The table below summarizes the hazardous tasks/activities, their associated impacts and risk factors, as well as suggested measures for mitigation of specified risk factors in case children cannot be fully removed from the metal/wooden item painting industry.

▶ **Table 26. Risk factors, impacts and mitigation pathways for hazardous activities in the metal/wood painting industry**

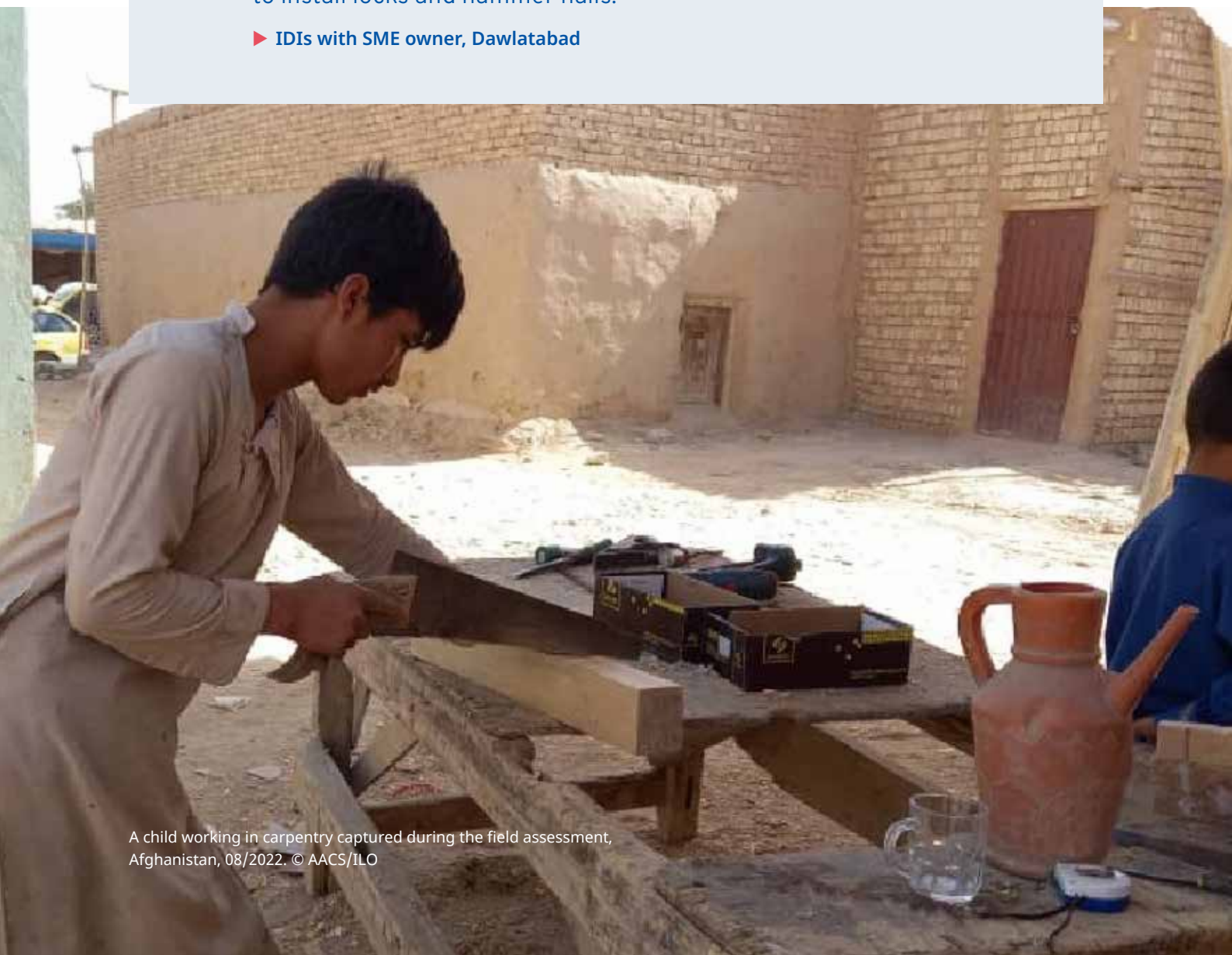
Activity/Task	Risk factor	Impacts	Suggested mitigation measures/ alternatives
Welding	Extreme heat, high voltages, and bright light	▶ Severe burns ▶ Electrocution ▶ Damage to eyesight	This task should under no circumstances be undertaken by a child and should be left to adults.
Using a circular/ electric saw	Sharp blade moving at an extremely high velocity	▶ Amputation ▶ Loss of life	This task should under no circumstances be undertaken by a child and should be left to adults.
Spray painting	Hazardous fumes and chemicals	▶ Respiratory issues ▶ Illnesses ▶ Damage to eyes	Children should ideally only paint using brushes, and if they need to use the paint sprayer then they should do so under adult supervision and while wearing proper safety gear.
Cutting, drilling and chiselling	▶ Sharp tools ▶ Performing the same action for an extended period, which increases the probability of mishaps	Damage to fingers and possibly amputation	▶ Should be performed under adult supervision. Alternative/safer tools should be provided. ▶ Proper safety equipment should be provided. ▶ The work should not be performed for extend periods of time.

▶ Key quotes from SME owners involved in painting of metal and wood

> Activities such as using the circular saw, welding (both gas and electrical), drilling, and hammering are all hazardous for children. These are activities in which serious injuries and loss of life can occur if proper safety gear is not used or if the work is done with negligence.
>
> **▶ IDIs with SME owner, Dawlatabad**

> We advise them to wear safety goggles and use safety gear while working and to wash their hands with soap before and after eating so that they are safe from most of the risk involved in metalworking.
>
> **▶ IDIs with SME owner, Dawlatabad**

> Sawing, chiselling and even painting gates and plasterboards are dangerous for them if they are not careful. It is relatively easy and simple to install locks and hammer nails.
>
> **▶ IDIs with SME owner, Dawlatabad**



A child working in carpentry captured during the field assessment, Afghanistan, 08/2022. © AACS/ILO

A child working in metalwork captured during the field assessment, Afghanistan, 08/2022. © AACS/ILO

7

Children involved in selling, mixing and spraying insecticides

7.1. Hazardous activities in mixing, spraying and selling insecticides

We observed 18 children at the household and SME level while they were engaged in selling, mixing and spraying insecticides in five districts of Balkh Province: Balkh, Dawlat Abad, Dehdadi, Khulm, and Mazar-e-Sharif. During the observations, the children revealed that they are faced with a number of hazardous activities, such as: (i) mixing insecticides; (ii) packaging; (iii) spraying insecticides; and (iv) producing insecticides.

We asked children if there were certain tasks that they found difficult to do, but were forced to do by their employers or household head – 50 per cent of the children responded in the affirmative, and these were from Balkh, Dawlat Abad and Dehdadi.

▶ Table 27. Share of children forced to perform challenging activities in the insecticide industry, by district[1]

District	Not forced to undertake challenging activities		Forced to undertake challenging activities	
	%	N	%	N
Balkh	22.2%	2	77.8%	7
Dawlatabad		0	100.0%	1
Dehdadi	80.0%	4	20.0%	1
Khulm	100.0%	2		0
Mazar-e-Sharif	100.0%	1		0
Total	50.0%	9	50.0%	9

[1] Based on observations of 18 children in insecticide households and SMEs.

Children were asked if they experienced any injuries throughout their time selling, mixing and spraying insecticides. All of the children from Dawlat Abad reported experiencing persistent coughs and headaches. In addition, children in Khulm reported that they experienced dizziness and persistent headaches. Further, children in Dehdadi reported injury to the eyes, persistent cough and headaches, difficulty in seeing, prolonged weakness, and difficulty in breathing.

▶ Table 28. Share of children who experienced various injuries and/or health issues while working in the insecticide industry, by district[1]

District	Persistent cough		Dizziness		Difficulty in seeing		Persistent backache		Persistent headache		Prolonged weakness		Weakness in limbs (upper or lower or both)		Difficulty in breathing	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh				0			11.1%	1								
Dawlatabad	100.0%	1		0					100.0%	1						
Dehdadi	40.0%	2	60.0%	3	20.0%	1					20.0%	1	20.0%	1	20.0%	1
Khulm			100.0%	2					50.0%	1						
Mazar-e-Sharif			100.0%	1												
Total	16.7%	3	33.3%	6	5.6%	1	5.6%	1	11.1%	2	5.6%	1	5.6%	1	5.6%	1

[1] Based on observations of 18 children in insecticide households and SMEs.

▶ Table 29. Share of children who faced various potential hazards situations in the insecticide industry, by district[1]

District	Dust		Fumes		Gas (Oxygen, H2S, Ammonia, any other)		Extreme temperatures		Chemicals		Dangerous tools	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh							11.1%	1				
Dawlatabad												
Dehdadi	40.0%	2	60.0%	3	60.0%	3	20.0%	1	40.0%	2	20.0%	1
Khulm									100.0%	2		
Mazar-e-Sharif									100.0%	1		
Total	11.1%	2	16.7%	3	16.7%	3	11.1%	2	27.8%	5	5.6%	1

[1] Based on observations of 18 children in insecticide households and SMEs.

Findings from the children's observation indicate that all the children in Mazar-e-Sharif and Khulm had been exposed to hazardous chemicals. Further, children in Dehdadi reported that they were exposed to various types of hazards such as dust, fumes, gas, extreme temperatures, chemicals, and dangerous tools. In addition, a few of the children in Balkh district reported that they were exposed to extreme temperatures. Based on the findings from the qualitative data, it appears that the biggest risk involved in the mixing/spraying of insecticides is the possibility of inhaling dangerous fumes and chemicals.[18] The results of the qualitative interviews indicate that quite a few of the SMEs involved in spraying/mixing use proper safety gear and equipment, but overall, most SMEs use either rudimentary safety equipment or no safety equipment at all.[19]

We observed whether SMEs labelled hazardous chemicals or placed them appropriately – Unfortunately, most of the SMEs in Charbolak didn't label any hazardous chemicals in the working areas where children had easy access to them. Children were asked about how they are generally treated in their workplaces – Children responded that they are treated like adults, and they are sometimes given difficult or hazardous work which they can't refuse, and that if they refused to do it, then they would be terminated from work.

7.2. Distribution of children aged 15–17 based on hazardous activities and location of work

Findings from the observations of children indicate that 5.6 per cent of the observed children reported that mixing and producing insecticides was part of their daily work – this is work that can cause several health issues. In addition, 11.1 per cent of the children reported routinely spraying insecticides. This might affect the child's lungs or could lead to the development of several allergies.

▶ **Table 30. Share of children engaged in various hazardous activities in the insecticide industry, by district[1]**

District	Mixing Insecticides		Producing Insecticide		Producing Insecticide, Mixing Insecticides		Producing Insecticides		Spraying Insecticides	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	11.1%	1							22.2%	2
Dawlatabad	100.0%	1								
Dehdadi	20.0%	1	40.0%	2	20.0%	1	20.0%	1		
Khulm										
Mazar-e-Sharif										
Total	16.7%	3	11.1%	2	5.6%	1	5.6%	1	11.1%	2

Children workers may face multiple hazardous activities. [1] Based on observations of 18 children in insecticide households and SMEs.

18 IDIs with owners of SMEs involved in the insecticide industry.
19 IDIs with owners of SMEs involved in the insecticide industry.

The district-wise findings indicate that all the children in the district of Khulm reported packaging as a hazardous activity. Children in Dehdadi reported producing insecticides as a hazardous activity. Children in Dawlat Abad reported mixing insecticides as a hazardous activity whereas children in Balkh reported that mixing, producing, and spraying, packaging insecticides, and framing are the most hazardous activities for them. Based on the findings from the qualitative data, the only safe activity involving insecticides appears to be the selling of insecticides, and all other activities involving insecticides are hazardous, especially when no safety gear or equipment is used.[20]

Findings from the observations of households that double up as work sites for children indicate that 50 per cent of children in Dawlat Abad, and 7.1 per cent of children in Balkh had allergies, and back and leg injuries. The reasons for these injuries were prolonged exposure to hazardous chemicals and over exertion while lifting heavy loads/ equipment.

▶ **Table 31. Share of children who had recently suffered injuries while working in the insecticides industry, by district[1]**

District	Injury to eyes		Persistent cough		Dizziness		Difficulty in seeing		Persistent backache		Persistent headache		Prolonged Weakness		Weakness in limbs (upper or lower or both)		Difficulty in breathing	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh									11.1%	1								
Dawlatabad			100.0%	1							100.0%	1						
Dehdadi	60.0%	3	40.0%	2	60.0%	3	20.0%	1					20.0%	1	20.0%	1	20.0%	1
Khulm					100.0%	2					50.0%	1						
Mazar-e-Sharif					100.0%	1												
Total	16.7%	3	16.7%	3	33.3%	6	5.6%	1	5.6%	1	11.1%	2	5.6%	1	5.6%	1	5.6%	1

[1] Based on observations of 18 children in insecticide households and SMEs.

Meanwhile, we observed that there were first aid boxes available on the premises of the working areas at the household level in Balkh, Dawlat Abad, Dehdadi, Khulm, and Mazar-e-Sharif. They were using the first aid boxes to treat minor to moderate injuries occurring on the worksites. In addition, findings indicate that there was no safety equipment available for the children to wear during simple or hazardous activities in the district of Balkh. Children were found to be using gloves and make-shift goggles in the rest of the districts. We asked the business owners in the district of Balkh about the reason for not using any safety equipment to which they simply responded that they are planning to buy those types of equipment and provide them to their workers soon.

20 IDIs with owners of SMEs in the insecticide industry.

7.3. Description of work-related challenges faced by children

Findings from the observations of the children in the insecticide industry indicate that farming and producing insecticides are the most challenging activities for them, however the children also indicated that they are trying their best to learn these activities and become skilled at them. Children also indicated that cleaning and selling insecticides are the simplest activities they do in their line of work.

▶ Table 32. Share of children engaged in various challenging activities in the insecticide industry, by district[1]

District	Mixing insecticides		Producing insecticide		Spraying insecticides	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	22.2%	2			22.2%	2
Dawlatabad						
Dehdadi	20.0%	1	80.0%	4		
Khulm						
Mazar-e-Sharif						
Total	16.7%	3	22.2%	4	11.1%	2

[1] Based on observations of 18 children in insecticide households and SMEs.

During the observation of insecticide SMEs, it was found that 50 per cent of the observed SMEs in Dawlat Abad, and 25 per cent of the SMEs in Dehdadi did not have appropriate tools and equipment to undertake their work. However, none of the children in these SMEs had any complaints about the lack of appropriate tools or equipment.

▶ Table 33. Share of children that received appropriate tools in insecticide industry SMEs, by district[1]

District	Did not receive appropriate tools		Received appropriate tools	
	%	N	%	N
Balkh			100.0%	2
Char bolak			100.0%	3
Dawlat Abad	50.0%	1	50.0%	1
Dehdadi	25.0%	1	75.0%	3
Khulm			100.0%	1
Mazar-e-Sharif			100.0%	2
Total	14.3%	2	85.7%	12

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 16 insecticide SMEs.

Also, we observed whether the SMEs had appropriate chairs with backrests for their workers to use. Although the bulk of the work related to spraying insecticides happens outside in the fields, some activities such as mixing and packaging do take place indoors and require proper seats/chairs. The findings indicate that most of the SMEs in Balkh and Dawlat Abad districts do not have appropriate chairs and benches. This lack of proper seating can lead to the workers (both adults and children) developing back pain in the long-run.

▶ **Table 34. Share of insecticide SMEs employing children that had heating/cooling and seating facilities, by district[1]**

District	Sufficient heating or cooling provisions for people working in the unit		Work supposed to be performed by Sitting down		Work supposed to be performed by Standing up	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Balkh	50.0%	1			100.0%	2
Char bolak	66.7%	2			100.0%	3
Dawlat Abad	50.0%	1			100.0%	2
Dehdadi	100.0%	4	25.0%	1	75.0%	3
Khulm	100.0%	1			100.0%	1
Mazar-e-Sharif	100.0%	2	50.0%	1	50.0%	1
Sholgara		0			100.0%	2
Total	68.8%	11	12.5%	2	87.5%	14

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 16 insecticide SMEs.

We observed and checked the toilets and washing facilities in each of the observed SME to see whether the SMEs had separate and proper toilets and washing facilities for both male and female workers. We also observed the resting and dining areas. Based on these observations, at least half of the insecticide SMEs in Balkh, Charbolak, Dawlat Abad, Dehdadi, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Sholgara did not have separate toilets and washing facilities for male and female workers. In addition, most of the SMEs in Charbolak district did not have sufficient areas for rest and a hygienic place for eating meals. Further, half of the observed SMEs in Dawlat Abad and Mazar-e-Sharif did not have sufficient areas for rest including a hygienic place for eating meals.

▶ **Table 35. Share of insecticide SMEs employing children that had toilets, washing facilities, and resting areas, by district[1]**

District	Separate toilets and washing facilities for men and women		Sufficient rest areas and a separate hygienic place for eating meals	
	%	N	%	N
Balkh	50.0%	1	100.0%	2
Char bolak	33.3%	1	33.3%	1
Dawlat Abad	50.0%	1	50.0%	1
Dehdadi	50.0%	2	75.0%	3
Khulm	100.0%	1	100.0%	1
Mazar-e-Sharif	50.0%	1	50.0%	1
Sholgara	50.0%	1	100.0%	2
Total	50.0%	8	68.8%	11

– = nil. [1] Based on observations of 16 insecticide SMEs.

7.4. Pathways to eliminate hazardous activities for children in mixing, spraying, and selling insecticides

The spraying/mixing/selling of insecticides is an industry that is prevalent in all the districts of Balkh, as it is a necessary part of the farming process. Most of the children involved in this business spray and mix insecticides on their farms, and the rest travel from village to village to provide spraying services to other farms. These children often work without any safety equipment such as gloves, masks or goggles.

To eliminate children from hazardous activities in this industry, farmers need to be taught not to hire children to spray their fields.

Item 20 of the "Hazardous Work List" issued by the Afghan Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled states that children are entirely forbidden from working in the spraying, mixing, or selling of insecticides. Therefore, the only recommendation that can be made here is that children be removed entirely from this area of work and be redirected towards other, safer work or be redirected towards education or vocational training.

▶ **Key quotes from SME owners involved in mixing/selling/spraying insecticides**

> In our line of work, working too much can cause serious health issues, especially if they are not careful. Spending too much time mixing and spraying insecticides without wearing proper gear can cause serious respiratory issues.
>
> ▶ **IDI with SME owner, Dehdadi**

> In the previous government, there were some institutions and organizations that advised us about the importance of wearing gloves, masks, and glasses so as not to be poisoned by the insecticides. We have not, however, been formally trained on this topic.
>
> ▶ **IDI with SME owner, Dehdadi**

> There have been times when children have been careless in their work. Some children accidentally spilled insecticides on themselves and, as a result, got allergic reactions. This kind of thing happens sometimes.
>
> ▶ **IDI with SME owner, Dehdadi**

A child working in agriculture sector captured during the field assessment, Afghanistan, 08/2022. © AACS/ILO

▶ **Stories from the field**

I am working as a carpenter. I am 16 years old. I am very poor and, unfortunately, my father is disabled, and he is not able to work these days. We are facing difficulties and our situation is dire. I want to learn and study but I am not able to because I am the breadwinner of the family. I face many hazards because my work is not suited for children my age and at any time I may lose my fingers, eyes, and other limbs. I often move heavy objects and it often hurts my back.

▶ **Dawlat abad District, Balkh province**

I am from the province of Balkh. I work as an insecticide sprayer. I am 15 years old. I work for a very low-paying shop, and it is very difficult for me to support my family. My father is disabled so the responsibility for supporting the family has fallen on me. While working with insecticides, I could contract many diseases and get many health issues due to the dangerous chemicals present in Insecticides. I am in a difficult situation. I want to do easier work because I do not want to become Injure myself.

▶ **Khulm district, Balkh province**

I am from the Balkh province. I am working as a carpet weaver. I am 15 years old and unfortunately, I do not attend school because I am the breadwinner for my family. My father is in Iran and cannot solve our financial problems. I am the head of my family now. I must work to put food on the table. I fear that, God forbid, I will develop back problems. I am not satisfied with my job because I cannot have a bright future in this industry. I want to study.

▶ **Dehdadi district, Balkh province**

8 Conclusion

One of the greatest challenges facing Afghan youth already dealing with overwhelming adversity is child labour. Children who participate in hazardous activities frequently sustain injuries, yet children are used as a source of inexpensive labour by employers and heads of households in exchange for meagre pay or stipends. In the households observed in this study there were typically two child breadwinners – one male and one female – who spend most of their time working to financially support their families.

Most of the children observed in this assessment were content with the job they were doing at the time, which suggests that many – if not all – are unaware of the opportunities they may be passing up by choosing to keep working as they are. While some of the observed children complained about getting headaches and back pain from working, others were observed to have signs of recent and old injuries on their hands and other areas of their bodies.

The observed children also mentioned that they find many of their tasks challenging but are compelled to perform them out of fear of losing their employment. Children also revealed information about the difficulties they face at work and the hazardous activities they engage in. They also mentioned the need for appropriate safety gear and tools to protect them from the hazards associated with their line of work.

Additionally, many of the observed SMEs and houses that double as work sites lacked adequate heating and cooling systems as well as separate restrooms and washrooms for male and female workers. Most of the observed SMEs and homes had outdated equipment that is not properly maintained. This exacerbates the already abysmal work environment these children spend their days in.

Based on the insights of this assessment, it is recommended that the ILO undertake measures to enhance access to school and raise awareness among parents and SME owners about the value of education and the risks of child labour. It is also advised that the ILO keep providing OSH training, safety gear and equipment for the protection of children working in SMEs or in households.

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Rapid assessment of hazardous work for children in carpet weaving, painting on metal and wooden products, and working in spraying, mixing, or selling insecticides in Balkh

This report describes the state of child labour in Balkh, Afghanistan. The report identifies three specific sectors in which child labour is prevalent: Carpet Weaving, Painting of Metal and Wooden Objects, and Spraying/Mixing/Selling of Insecticides. To gain insight into the challenges children and SMEs face in dealing with child labour, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, which consisted of surveys of households and SMEs, Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions. The assessment covered seven districts across Balkh. The assessment identified key risks children face while undertaking work in these three sectors and provided recommendations on best practices for the elimination or—at the very least—mitigation of these risks. The assessment also provided information on which districts have the highest rates of child labour, broken down by sector. The content of this report can be used to plan future policies and establish a baseline for future anti-child labour interventions.

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