



International
Labour
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▶ Rapid assessment of child labour in waste-picking in Pakistan



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Acronyms

ARC	Asia Regional Child Labour Project
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil society organization
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
E-waste	Electronic waste
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom
FGD	Focus group discussion
GDP	Gross domestic product
HCWMS	Healthcare Waste Management System
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International non-governmental organization
Kg	Kilogrammes
KII	Key informant interview
Km	Kilometres
MOCC	Ministry of Climate Change
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PEPA	Pakistan Environmental Protection Act
PKR	Pakistani rupee
PPP	Public-private partnership
PSMs	Public service messages
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organization
ZAARA	Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Agency

Executive summary

This rapid assessment examines children's involvement in waste-picking in Pakistan. Commissioned by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Asia Regional Child Labour (ARC) Project, the assessment sheds light on the drivers of children's engagement in waste-picking, their socio-demographic backgrounds, the conditions in which they work, the hazards they face, and the impact these have on the children involved.

The findings represent a combination of secondary data derived through an intensive desk review and primary data collected

through qualitative and quantitative research methodologies from 12 sampled districts across Pakistan's four provinces and Islamabad Capital Territory. A total of 300 children (25 in each sampled district) were surveyed, and 104 children participated in focus group discussions. The research process also involved the direct observation of the children's working conditions, the collection of eight case studies, and 80 key informant interviews. Key informants included the children's parents, junkyard owners, buyers and sellers of waste, government officials representing Departments of Labour and Human Resource Development, and Social Welfare, child protection authorities, law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations.

Based on its findings, the assessment offers recommendations to assist the Government of Pakistan, UN agencies, development partners, employers and civil society organizations to develop action programmes to address children's engagement in waste-picking nationwide.

Context and key findings

Child labour is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. In developing countries like Pakistan, children are often compelled to work for their survival, especially when poor households struggle to make ends meet. In Pakistan, their exact number is unknown. The country's only Child Labour Survey was conducted in 1996 and the findings of a recent Child Labour Survey have yet to be published for all provinces and regions, with the exception of Gilgit-Baltistan and Punjab. While no up-to-date statistics are available on the number of children engaged in work, it is clear that a substantial number of children are involved in work, including hazardous work like waste-picking. **Waste-picking** refers to the sorting and collection of recyclable and reusable items found at dumpsites, roadside dustbins, waste heaps, kachra kundi (dumpsites), drains, markets, hospitals, clinics, streets, houses and residential areas for the purposes of selling these items to local junkyard owners, shops or middlemen.

Although national and provincial legislation prohibits children's engagement in hazardous work, implementation evidently remains a challenge.



As Pakistani cities generate increasing quantities of solid waste – due to high levels of population growth and rapid urbanization – municipal waste management systems struggle to keep pace. Improper waste disposal practices abound, opening up space for private stakeholders to dominate scavenging and recycling activities with little or no government oversight. Most waste-pickers in Pakistan are extremely poor, illiterate and belong to marginalized communities – including Afghan refugees, minorities and migrants. Due to high rates of poverty, members of these groups, both adults and children, take up waste-picking as their only available livelihood option. They sell what they collect – paper, cardboard, metals like tin, aluminium, copper and brass, plastic, bottles, glass and other items – to small-scale scrap dealers. They, in turn, sort through the materials and sell them to large junkyards which sell specific materials directly to waste-sourcing factories. The informal nature of waste-picking means that those involved are unregulated and risk falling through the cracks of labour and child protection laws.

There are many factors that push children into work. The findings of this assessment affirm that intergenerational poverty is a major underlying reason for children's involvement in waste-picking across Pakistan. Large family size and the low value accorded to education are also key reasons. As parents struggle to provide for large numbers of children, especially when they are illiterate themselves, they often push their children into work at an early age to supplement household income. This deprives children of the opportunity to attain an education, while exposing them to risks of violence, abuse and health problems, and reducing their future employment prospects. Children in vulnerable communities – such as Afghan refugees, ethnic or religious minorities, and those living in slums – are especially likely to be involved in waste-picking, particularly when their parents or families also collect waste.

Children usually start waste-picking at a very early age, often alongside their fathers or other family members. The vast majority are boys and most of these children have never been to school. Once they begin earning, they are unlikely to stop waste-picking. They work long hours, covering long distances on foot even in extreme weather, and sift through unhygienic, dangerous or sometimes toxic materials – exposing them to the risk of injury and health problems. They face social stigma, verbal abuse and even physical violence.

Most of the children interviewed are boys (91 per cent) between 12 to 14 years old (40 per cent) or between 15 and 17 (30 per cent). More than two-thirds (68 per cent) are of Afghan origin – reflecting Afghan refugees' high levels of involvement in waste-picking due to poverty, a lack of identity documents and limited livelihood options – followed by members of the Hindu Bagri community and Saraiki speakers originally from South Punjab. The average family size of the children surveyed is large – 70 per cent belong to families with 7 - 11 members, while just 11 per cent are from households with fewer than seven members. The vast majority (90 per cent) live with their families. Over two-thirds (68 per cent) have no formal education. A similar proportion (69 per cent) cannot read or write, although three-quarters (75 per cent) can count and add simple numbers.

Most of the children interviewed were pushed into waste-picking by their parents (usually their father) or another family member. The majority (88 per cent) began waste-picking at a very young age, usually between the ages of 5 and 10. Most collect between 5 and 15 kilogrammes of waste per day, although some collect up to 50 kilogrammes by pooling resources with others to hire trolleys or other modes of transport. On average, the children surveyed earn between 200 and 500 Pakistani rupees per day – although some outliers earn more or less – and most work six days per week. Like all children, those engaged in waste-picking also have dreams. Nearly one-third (30 per cent) want to be film actors while a similar proportion aspire to become junkyard contractors or businessmen.

Almost 90 per cent of the children interviewed receive free meals from charity organizations, restaurants and shrines, while 8 per cent eat at home. There is considerable awareness of the health risks posed by waste-picking (among 90 per cent of respondents), many of whom report suffering from cuts, burns, skin problems, eye infections and animal bites.

The majority (82 per cent) reported experiencing physical violence and abuse at work, while nearly half (49 per cent) have suffered physical violence from an adult – including co-workers or family members. Many have experienced emotional violence and verbal abuse, and expressed fear of police behaviour and social stigma. More than two-thirds of the children (67 per cent) are unaware of existing social protection programmes.

Recommendations

Pakistan requires a multi-pronged approach to improve the lives of children involved in waste-picking and to end the worst forms of child labour. To ensure that policies and practices are sustainable, all stakeholders must be involved – from government decision-makers and law enforcement, to civil society, the private sector and development partners. Based on its findings, the rapid assessment puts forth a number of recommendations which are summarized below.



- ▶ **Policy interventions:** Recognize children’s involvement in waste-picking at the policy level and foster political will to end hazardous child labour by implementing existing legislation, developing new targeted legislation and policies, and allocating resources.



- ▶ **Police sensitization and child protection:** Sensitize and build the capacities of the police officials on child rights in order to protect them from violence and exploitation. Implement the Juvenile Justice System Act of 2018 to protect children from arbitrary arrest and abuse in custody. Raise awareness of child protection mechanisms, including the Child Helpline service (1121). Ensure that local child protection authorities develop and implement comprehensive care and counselling packages.



- ▶ **Research and monitoring:** Promote collaboration between academia and development partners to research children’s involvement in waste-picking and propose solutions. Monitor child labour, particularly by collecting age- and gender-disaggregated data on children who work, including those involved in waste-picking.



- ▶ **Quality education for all:** Raise awareness on the importance of education – including both formal and technical education – as a means of breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. Implement Article 25-A of the Constitution by ensuring quality education for all children between 5 and 16 years old, and provide vocational training and skills development courses for children involved in waste-picking.



- ▶ **Awareness raising and social protection:** Ensure that the poorest and most needy persons in Pakistan can access government social protection programmes – such as the Benazir Income Support Programme and Ehsaas – including by providing them with the identity documents required to access support. The Government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should devise ways of providing social protection support to Afghan refugees and their children in order to reduce child labour.



- ▶ **Income generation opportunities for families:** Develop an incentive-driven approach to encourage families to send their children to school instead of pushing them into hazardous work like waste-picking. The Government and development partners should design programmes to facilitate children’s

enrolment in education – including non-formal education – as a viable alternative to child labour.



- ▶ Community-based waste management and recycling programmes: Develop an efficient waste management system in big cities by designing community-based waste management and recycling programmes. These, in turn, will contribute to reducing children’s involvement in waste-picking.



- ▶ Engagement with the recycling industry: Engage with junkyard owners and representatives of local recycling industries to minimize exploitation and hazards, while encouraging them to offer vocational training programmes and scholarships for children involved in waste-picking as the part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Chapter 1

Scope, methodology and limitations

1.1. Scope of this rapid assessment

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Asia Regional Child Labour (ARC) Project aims to reduce children's vulnerability to child labour and enhance their protection in six countries – including Pakistan – by assisting constituents and other stakeholders to contribute to the eradication of child labour, particularly its worst forms. The project's objectives are to:

- ▶ Build a credible knowledge base on the causes and drivers of child labour and effective interventions to address them.
- ▶ Align legislation and policies with international conventions on child labour, forced labour and trafficking in persons, and supporting their enforcement and implementation.
- ▶ Develop and apply a holistic approach to eradicating child labour, particularly its worst forms, in selected regions in each country.

To contribute to the project's first objective and support its other two objectives, the ILO ARC project commissioned this rapid assessment on child labour in waste-picking in Pakistan. Since the early 1990s, the ILO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have developed a rapid assessment methodology on child labour, with the aim of assisting countries to collect information on the situations of girls and boys who work, the work they do, the context in which it occurs, and how and why children are exploited.¹ A rapid assessment is primarily a qualitative methodology because it emphasizes the research tools of observation and interviews. Nevertheless, it frequently integrates quantitative data and can also be used to produce comparative results.²

This rapid assessment outlines the situation of children involved in waste-picking in Pakistan's four provinces and Islamabad Capital Territory – including their backgrounds, major factors that push them into collecting waste, their working conditions, earnings, the hazards and exploitative conditions they face, and their health and awareness of social protection programmes, among other issues. The findings represent a combination of secondary data derived through an intensive desk review and primary data collected through qualitative and quantitative research methodologies from 12 sampled districts across Pakistan. Based on these findings, this assessment offers recommendations to assist the Government of Pakistan, UN agencies, development partners, employers and civil society organizations to develop action programmes to address children's engagement in waste-picking nationwide.

1.2. Objectives

This rapid assessment aims to:

- ▶ Identify children engaged in waste-picking in Pakistan and provide sex-disaggregated data on the number of girls and boys interviewed.
- ▶ Assess the socio-economic, family, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of children involved in waste-picking.
- ▶ Explore the reasons for, and causes of, children's involvement in waste-picking.
- ▶ Examine the hazardous nature of waste-picking sector for boys and girls.
- ▶ Understand the working conditions of children involved in waste-picking and its impact on them.
- ▶ Identify and analyse interventions by government organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to prevent the exploitation and improve the situation of children involved in waste-picking.
- ▶ Contribute to enhanced knowledge about waste-picking sector and promote interventions in the sector by policymakers.

1.3. Methodology

The methodology used for this cross-sectional exploratory study involved triangulating secondary data derived through an extensive desk review with and primary data collected through qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The desk review examined available studies, news bulletins, official government websites, and national and sub-national reports to gather reliable information on issues related to child labour, with a focus on children's involvement in waste-picking. The review also looked at government efforts to regulate solid waste management through legislation and enforcement mechanisms, as well as efforts to uphold children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Quotes from websites, news articles, reports and books were compiled. Overall, the desk review helped to identify relevant stakeholders, existing programmes, legislation and gaps, shedding light on the magnitude of children's involvement in waste-picking.

Building on the foundation of the desk review, the primary data collection process identified boys and girls involved in waste-picking, as well as a range of key informants. The latter included the parents of these children, community leaders, shopkeepers, dumpsite owners, buyers of waste, intermediaries, factories that source waste, hospital staff and municipal workers, relevant public regulators and administration authorities – such as the police, and social welfare and child protection authorities – civil society organizations, and waste management projects, among others.

Primary data collection involved core qualitative research methods, complimented by quantitative methods. Qualitative data was gathered through focus group discussions (FGDs) with children engaged in waste-picking, direct observations and key informant interviews (KIIs). The discussions and interviews were guided by a structured questionnaire, formulated using ILO-tested tools, with the support of the research team. Anticipating the chances of false replies, both open-ended and 'closed' questions were included in the questionnaire. Questions for the in-depth interviews were also designed based on the findings of the desk review and the mapping of relevant stakeholders.

The research tools were designed in English and finalized with the technical inputs of ILO specialists. These tools were pilot tested to determine the interviews' flow, viability, estimated time and respondents' levels of comprehension. During the pilot testing process, the research team identified the need to translate the instruments into Urdu. As such, all of the research tools were translated into simple Urdu, which facilitated interviews in the field. Information collected through the focus groups, key informant interviews, direct observation and the desk review were triangulated to ensure its validity and to identify relevant systems, mechanisms, good practices and knowledge gaps related to solid waste management and children's involvement in waste-picking.

► **Table 1. Purpose of each research method used for this study**

No.	Method	Purpose
1.	Desk review	To map existing research, interventions, programmes, legislation, relevant stakeholders and gaps.
2.	Mapping	To identify the places where children are engaged in waste-picking.
3.	Structured questionnaires	To obtain quantitative data from children and key informants through detailed questionnaires.
4.	Focus group discussions	To obtain qualitative data by gathering children in one place to discuss relevant issues.
5.	Key informant interviews	To obtain relevant information about children's involvement in waste-picking by interviewing key stakeholders.
6.	Case studies	To document the journeys and daily life of children involved in waste-picking.
7.	Observations	To observe the behaviour and activities of children involved in waste-picking.
8.	Photographs	To document the working conditions of children involved in waste-picking.

1.3.1. Sampling framework, locations and mapping

The rapid assessment used multi-level sampling to target 12 districts across Pakistan:

- **Level 1:** All four of Pakistan's provinces and Islamabad Capital Territory were selected for the study.
- **Level 2:** Twelve districts were sampled (four in Sindh, three in Punjab, two each in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, and one in Islamabad Capital Territory). The selection of these districts took into account the scale of waste production, proximity to large cities, the presence of street children, the involvement of children in waste-picking, the commercial nature of the district, squatter settlements, bordering areas or cities, and the presence of relevant stakeholders.
- **Level 3:** Sites known for the presence of child waste pickers were mapped in the sampled districts to determine the availability and average number of child waste pickers
- **Level 4:** In each sampled district, 25 children engaged in waste-picking were selected for structured interviews, as were between six and ten children for focus group discussions.

In addition to children involved in waste-picking, 80 key informant interviews were conducted with the stakeholders mentioned above (also see figure 3, below).

FIGURE 1

Distribution of the children engaged in waste-picking interviewed for this study, by province and district

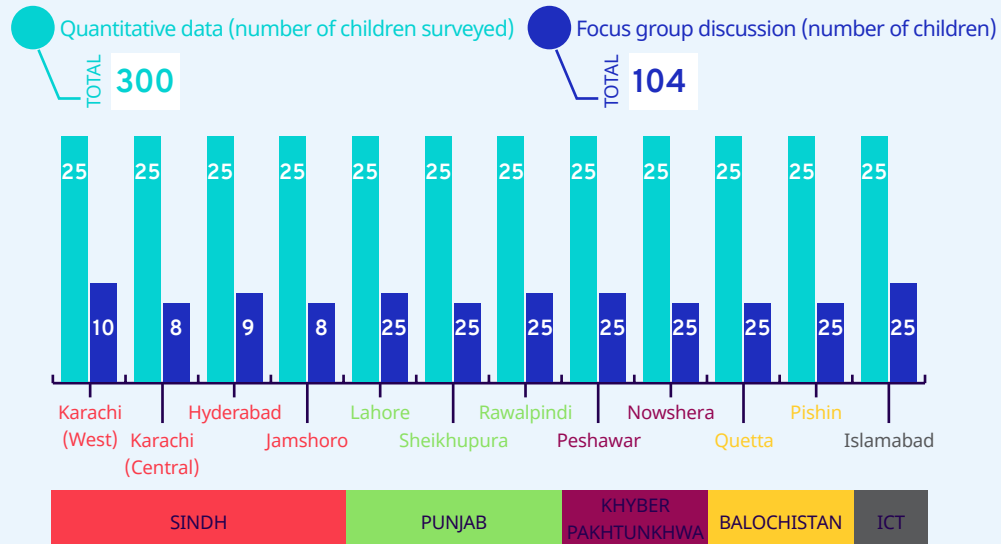


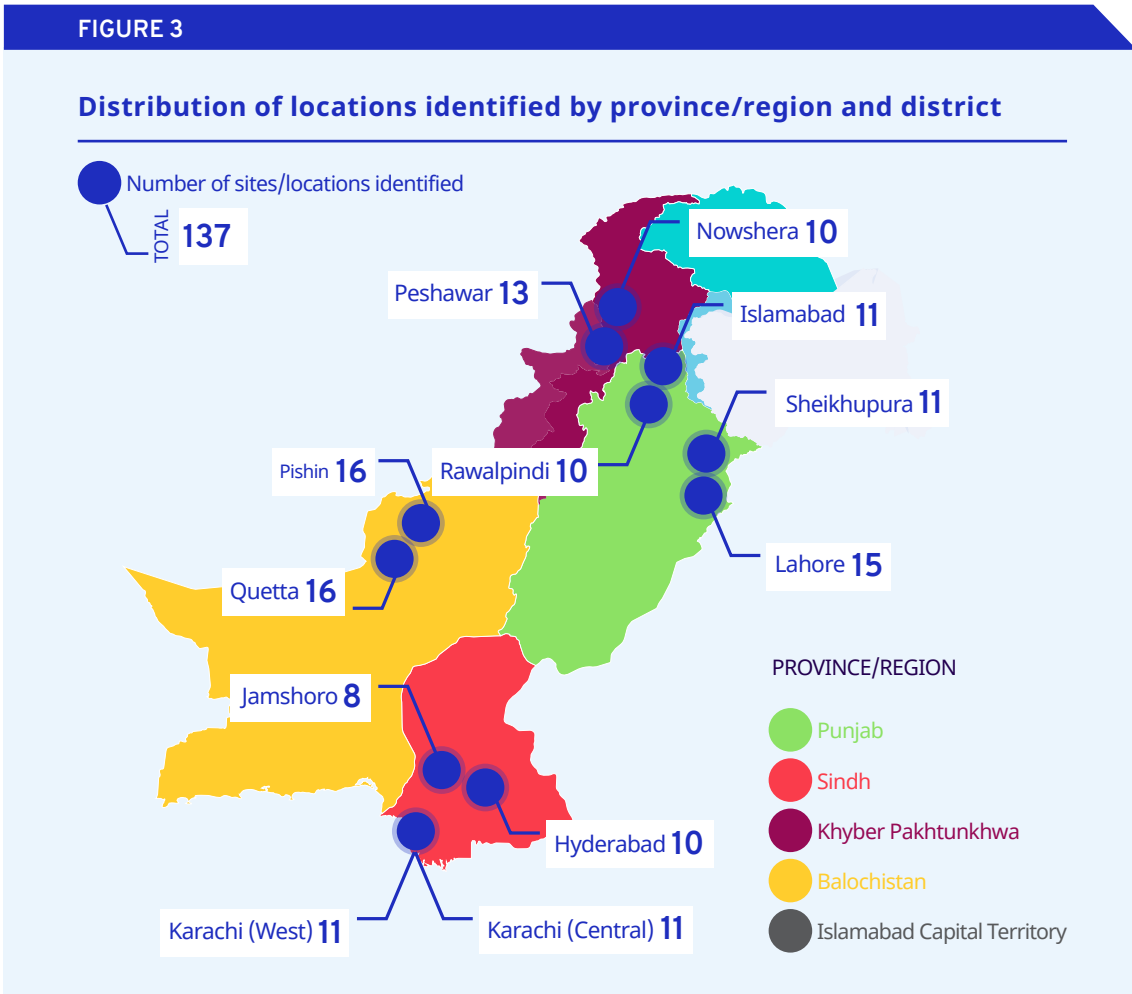
FIGURE 2

Distribution of key informants interviewed by department/profession



The research team identified locations where waste-pickers work by visiting landfill sites, dumpsites, waste transfer stations, kachra kundi (dumpsites/junkyards), kabaria (scrap dealer) shops, residential areas and markets. The team also visited locations where waste-pickers reside, including camps of Afghan refugees or migrants, basti (low quality housing) and squatter settlements. In some housing societies, waste-pickers – either in groups or with their families – provide waste-picking and cleaning facilities.

Additional locations were identified with the help of waste-pickers, private sweepers, municipal workers and local scrap dealers.



1.3.2. Inclusion criteria

The study targeted children – defined as a person under the age of 18 according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – involved in waste-picking, including both girls and boys. Relevant stakeholders were also targeted, including representatives of government bodies, the private sector and others. Conscious efforts were made to involve a diverse group of respondents of different age groups, genders, ethnicities, geographical regions, linguistic backgrounds, resident status (migrants or refugees), and persons involved in formal and informal work.

1.3.3. Data management and analysis

Once primary data was collected, the research team edited, checked and cleaned the questionnaires manually with a view to ensuring consistency and completeness. Where necessary, the team referred back to respondents for clarification. Computerized checks were used to identify errors at the data entry stage. Relevant numerical techniques were used to eliminate erroneous data caused by coding mistakes. Records were further edited and corrected through a series of computer processing stages. Statistical software was used to manage the data throughout the process of analysis and report writing. Findings were cross-checked with qualitative data, which was also carefully documented. Qualitative data obtained from the focus group discussions and key informant interviews was transcribed and coded manually into themes to inform this assessment’s conclusions.

1.3.4. Ethical and safety considerations

This assessment adheres to the ILO's ethical guidelines on conducting research on children engaged in the worst forms of child labour. The research team followed the highest level of ethical standards when interviewing respondents, including when introducing the study, recording responses, collecting information and taking photographs with the explicit informed consent of each participant. Respondents were free to leave the interview at any time without negative consequences. The confidentiality of all personal data was ensured. To ensure the safety of respondents, the research team continuously reviewed the field environment. All focus group discussions were conducted in locations where children were involved in waste-picking. The children involved were not transported to other locations.

As a relatively low number of COVID-19 cases were recorded in Pakistan during the research process, public attitudes to precautionary measures were fairly relaxed and children involved in waste-picking were not interested in observing safety measures. Nevertheless, the research team observed all public health-related guidelines, including the provision of hand sanitizer, face masks and physical distancing during interactions with the children interviewed. All members of the research team were vaccinated against COVID-19 and had valid vaccination certificates.

1.3.5. Selecting and training the research teams

The nature of the assessment required well-educated, child-sensitive and committed team members. All researchers were very carefully scrutinized before they were hired, taking into account their knowledge of child rights, their command of local languages, their knowledge about the selected sites and motivation. A conscious effort was made to hire researchers with strong contacts with relevant government departments and civil society organizations. Six teams were deployed to cover the 12 sampled districts. Each team comprised two team members – one responsible for qualitative tools and one to employ quantitative tools. The researchers participated in orientation sessions that briefed them on the assessment's scope, objectives, mapping methodology, ethical considerations, the child safeguarding approach, how to build rapport with children during interviews, qualitative and quantitative tools, and interview techniques.

1.4. Limitations of this assessment

This cross-sectional exploratory rapid assessment highlights major trends, working conditions, hazards, challenges, feelings, experiences, aspirations and recommendations based on the sampled population. Therefore, these findings cannot be generalized or extrapolated. No comprehensive reliable data exists on the prevalence of children's involvement in waste-picking in Pakistan. Available data is based on assumptions or estimates, some of which are derived from news reports or statements by NGOs.

While waste-picking is a visible and hazardous form of child labour, many key informants do not consider it to be hazardous. Poverty, inflation and unemployment shape attitudes towards child labour in Pakistani society. Thus, sending children to work is often regarded as acceptable. Respondents frequently asked the research team, *"What can a family do to make a living if they don't send their children to work?"* These attitudes made it difficult for the researchers to elicit discussion on children's involvement in waste-picking.

Government officials' limited availability for interviews was a major challenge. To address this challenge, the team adopted a multi-pronged strategy, including multiple follow-ups through email, WhatsApp and direct calls. Researchers also faced challenges at some dumpsites, waste transfer stations and junkyards, as parents did not allow their children to participate in the assessment. At landfill sites and waste transfer stations, some children left during their interviews if a waste-filled truck or trolley arrived. As such, the team had to repeat the interview with another child.

Chapter 2

Solid waste management in Pakistan

2.1. Solid waste

Solid waste refers to the range of waste materials that are discarded as unwanted and useless. Solid waste is generated as a result of industrial, residential and commercial activities in a given area and may be handled in a variety of ways. Waste can be categorized based on material, such as plastic, paper, glass, metal and organic waste. Categorization may also be based on hazard potential, including radioactive, flammable, infectious, toxic or non-toxic forms of waste.³ Solid waste is intimately linked to municipal management – in terms of controlling, storing, collecting and disposing of waste – as well as to public health considerations and environmental reviews.

2.1.1. Types of solid waste in Pakistan

Municipal solid waste

Municipal solid waste is generated by households, offices, hotels, shops, schools and other institutions. Its major components include food waste, paper, plastic, metal and glass. However, demolition and construction debris are often included in collected municipal solid waste, as are small quantities of hazardous waste, such as electric light bulbs, batteries, automotive parts, and discarded medicines and chemicals.

Industrial waste

Industrial waste includes all of the materials (scrap/effluent) that are left behind or disposed of in activities such as mining, construction, the trade of wholesale goods, the demolition of concrete material, and manufacturing. It also includes paper waste, packaging materials, waste from food processing, oils, solvents, resins, paints, glass, ceramics, stones, metals, plastics, rubber, leather, wood, cloth and straw, among other materials.

Agricultural waste

As Pakistan's economy depends heavily on agriculture, a significant amount of agricultural waste is generated from the production of different crops – such as cotton, rice and sugarcane – as well as from the livestock sector.

Electronic waste

Electrical and electronic waste (e-waste) is the fastest growing domestic waste stream in the world.

³ Rick Leblanc, "An Introduction to Solid Waste Management", *LiveAboutDotCom Blog*, 27 October 2020.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Pakistan produced 433,000 metric tonnes of e-waste in 2020, and is among 15 countries where the dismantling and recycling of e-waste is poses a major health hazard.⁴

Healthcare waste

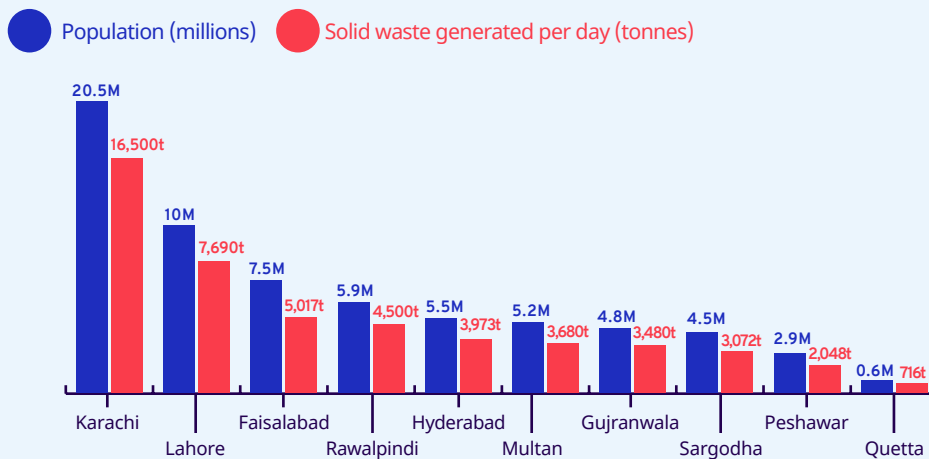
Healthcare waste encompasses all types of refuse from healthcare establishments and service providers. According to a study by Ali, Wang and Chaudhry (2016), overall waste generation from hospitals and small health facilities in Pakistan amounts to 0.667 kilogrammes per hospital bed per day. Hashmi and Verma (2019) estimate that between 10 and 25 per cent of this waste is infectious and precarious. There is no uniformity in the Healthcare Waste Management System (HCWMS) across hospitals, clinics, maternity centres, dispensaries and blood banks in Pakistan. Some facilities have well-maintained waste management systems, while others do not.

2.1.2. Solid waste in Pakistan’s major cities

No definitive data exists on the exact quantity of solid waste generated in Pakistan. As a result, this assessment relies on estimates drawn from different sources, presented in the figure below. Overall, an estimated 49.6 million tonnes of solid waste is generated in Pakistan per year, which has been increasing at a rate of more than 2.4 per cent per year.⁵

FIGURE 4

Estimates of solid waste generation in Pakistani cities per day, based on the size of their populations



Source: ITA, “Pakistan – Country Commercial Guide: Waste Management”, 2022.

⁴ WHO, *Children and Digital Dumpsites: E-Waste Exposure and Child Health*, 2021.

⁵ ITA, “Pakistan – Country Commercial Guide: Waste Management”, 2022.

► **Table 2. Estimated waste generation by different types of human settlements in Pakistan, 2020**

Type of human settlement	Population (millions)	Waste generated per day		Waste generated per year (million tonnes)
		Total amount generated (tonnes)	Amount generated per capita (kilogrammes)	
Large cities (11)	52	28,600	0.55	9.44
Medium-sized and small cities	32	13,440	0.42	4.44
Rural areas	126	41,580	0.33	13.72
Total	210	83,620		27.58

Source: Global Change Impact Studies Centre Pakistan. Quoted in: Nasir Javed and Melanie Hobson, “Waste Sector Inclusion in the Revised Nationally Determined Contributions of Pakistan”, Asian Development Bank (ADB) Briefs, No. 209, 2022.

2.2. Solid waste management

2.2.1. Responsibility for solid waste management in Pakistan

Pakistan’s Ministry of Climate Change (MOCC) is responsible for solid waste management in urban areas. At the provincial level, waste management is handled by Local Government Departments. Following institutional reforms in the past decade, responsibility for managing solid waste in large cities has been delegated to public sector waste management companies – Metropolitan Corporations, District Municipal Corporations or private companies designated by public authorities.

In the province of Punjab, for example, solid waste management function is the purview of eight waste management companies, while in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, seven water and sanitation service companies manage waste on behalf of local governments. The Sindh Solid Waste Management Board has been created to increase technical and professional capacities for waste management in the province of Sindh.⁶

2.2.2. Legislation and policies on solid waste management

Legislative and policy frameworks that are relevant for solid waste management at the federal and provincial levels include:

- Pakistan Environmental Protection Act (PEPA), 1997;
- National Environment Quality Standards, 2000;
- Punjab Local Government Ordinance, 2001;
- Hazardous Substance Rules, 2003;
- Health Care Waste Management Rules, 2005;
- Lahore Solid Waste Management By-Laws, 2005;
- Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Policy, 2007;

⁶ Nasir Javed and Melanie Hobson, “Waste Sector Inclusion in the Revised Nationally Determined Contributions of Pakistan”, Asian Development Bank (ADB) Briefs No. 209.

- ▶ Public-Private Partnership Act, 2010; and
- ▶ Sindh Solid Waste Management Act, 2021.

2.2.3. Waste collection and disposal

Improper waste disposal practices are widespread across Pakistan – practices that pollute the environment and pose health hazards. At present, no city in the country has a comprehensive solid waste management system that runs the gamut from collection to proper disposal. Although local authorities (municipal and district governments) are investing in solid waste management, current systems and management procedures for solid waste require significant improvement at the municipal level. Municipal boards are increasingly seeking to contract private companies to regulate the process of waste collection, transportation and disposal. Solid waste is usually collected, dumped or burned by local service providers working for municipal boards and private companies. Teams hired by municipal boards collect waste in large trucks or lorries, typically on a daily basis in larger cities, or more infrequently in areas with smaller populations.

According to interviews with key informants, municipal companies collect approximately 51 to 69 per cent of the solid waste generated in cities, while between 31 and 49 per cent of waste materials are left uncollected on roadsides, dumped into pits in residential areas, dumped on open ground or heaped in remote areas. No estimates are available on the amounts of waste burned, or the precise amounts collected by waste-pickers. Although big cities have landfill sites, these tend to be poorly managed due to a lack of adequate infrastructure, technical expertise and trained human resources. As patterns of consumption continue to grow, improving solid waste management is an increasingly pressing challenge for urban areas. Addressing this challenge is further complicated by waste management authorities' lack of financial sources and the shortage of technical facilities.⁷

2.2.4. Private waste collection and recycling system

A gulf exists between the amounts of solid waste generated and the amounts that reach disposal sites in Pakistan's major cities. Due to the limited capacity of the public waste management system, a private system of waste collection and recycling has developed. Most waste never reaches official disposal sites because it is collected by waste-pickers – both adults and children – including those hired to scavenge waste. Collecting waste from houses and markets, waste-pickers then take this waste to unauthorized sites in big cities.

Formal avenues for recycling waste are few and far between in Pakistan, even in large cities. In their absence, a dynamic informal private sector of waste recycling has emerged, consisting of a variety of street and landfill scavengers/waste-pickers and professional buyers, such as *raddiwala* or *pheriwala* (waste collectors). The recyclable items collected are sold to local *kabaria* (scrap dealers), who sort and clean the materials before selling them to junkyard owners, contractors or factories.

2.3. How inadequate solid waste management contributes to waste-picking

Solid waste management is a growing challenge in Pakistani cities due to rapid urbanization, infrastructure and capacity gaps, and the low priority accorded to waste management by public authorities. Pakistan has the highest rate of urbanization in South Asia.⁸ According to the 2017 Population Census, 36.4 per cent of the population lives in urban areas.

⁷ Shaista Alam and Ambreen Fatima, "Prospects for the Development of Solid Waste Management System: A Case Study of Metropolitan City Karachi", Research for Social Transformation & Advancement, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (RASTA) Conference Islamabad, 2022.

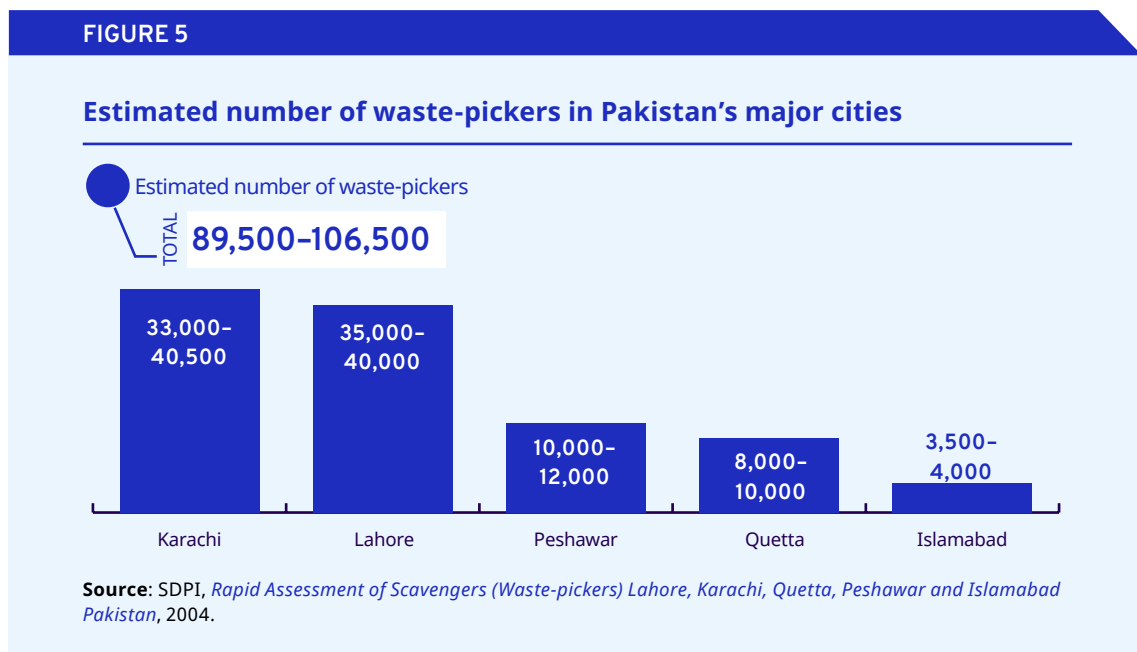
⁸ UNDP, "Urbanization in Pakistan", 2019.

Other estimates based on a modified definition of urban settlements suggest that the proportion of the population who live in urban areas could be 40.5 per cent or more.

As cities’ populations grow rapidly, so does the amount of waste they generate. A lack of infrastructure and capacity, insufficient human and financial resources, and corruption also contribute to poor waste management. The workforce involved in solid waste management, even in large cities, lack the modern facilities and funds needed to manage waste efficiently. For instance, municipalities lack sufficient sweepers and sanitary workers. According to the key informants interviewed for this study, a lack of motivation among existing sanitary workers is also a challenge, linked to corrupt recruitment and work practices. Other major hurdles include the fact that collection and safe disposal of domestic, commercial and industrial waste remains a low priority for policy-makers, as well as public attitudes to waste management – whereby a lack of civic sense results in improper waste disposal and heaps of waste littering Pakistan’s streets. Limited resources, capacities, skills and knowledge of local municipalities in terms of managing solid waste lays the groundwork for informal waste-picking.

2.3.1. Waste picking as an option for earning a livelihood

Waste-picking is defined as the sorting and collection of recyclable and reusable items found at dumpsites, roadside dustbins, waste heaps, kachra kundi (dumpsites), drains, markets, hospitals, clinics, streets, houses and residential areas for the purposes of selling these items to local junkyard owners, shops or middle men. In Pakistan, men, women and children – both girls and boys – are involved in waste-picking. Worldwide, an estimated 20 million people work in the informal sector as waste-pickers.⁹ However, accurate data on the magnitude of waste-picking is not available due to the informality and fluid nature of this work.



⁹ Kristin Hughes, “Waste pickers are slipping through the cracks. Here’s how we can support these essential workers during the COVID-19 crisis”, *World Economic Forum SDI2020*, 18 September 2020.

Waste-pickers in Pakistan are among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in the country. Most are extremely poor, illiterate, uneducated and begin picking waste at a very young age – usually between 5 and 8 years old.

Waste-picking is considered the most menial form of work, performed by people who have no other option. While Pakistan has made progress in reducing poverty, rates remain high – 29.5 per cent of the population live below the national poverty line, indicating high rates of income poverty,¹⁰ while 38.8 per cent of Pakistanis are multidimensionally poor and 12.9 per cent are vulnerable to multidimensional poverty.^{11, 12}

Involvement of Afghan refugees in waste collection and disposal

Pakistan has hosted Afghan refugees for more than 40 years, since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan forced millions of people to flee their homes. As of 30 June 2022, there were nearly 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan – the largest protracted refugee population in the world.¹³ Scores more are undocumented migrants, which limits their employment options.

Since the 1980s, poverty and their refugee or undocumented status has obliged many Afghans to work as daily wage labourers. Gradually, a number of Afghans have turned to waste-picking as a source of livelihood in Pakistan. The limited availability or unavailability of sweepers, sanitary workers and waste collectors has created space for Afghans to provide such services at cheaper rates. While adults operate small cabins, shops or junkyards – where they purchase salvaged materials such as paper, cardboard, tin, plastics, bottles, aluminium, brass and copper, among others, from waste-pickers – their children are often involved in waste-picking.

¹⁰ World Bank, “South Asia: Poverty & Equity Brief”, 2022.

¹¹ UNDP, “Briefing note for countries on the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index: Pakistan”, 2022.

¹² The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) – developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) – assesses acute multidimensional poverty by measuring overlapping deprivations across 10 indicators in three equally weighted dimensions: health (nutrition and child mortality) education (years of schooling and school attendance) and living standards (cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, and assets).

¹³ According to UNHCR, there were 1,285,754 registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan as of 30 June 2022.

Chapter 3

Children's involvement in waste-picking in Pakistan

Child labour is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.¹⁴ In developing countries, children are often compelled to work for their survival, especially when poor households struggle to make ends meet. Although there has been progress in reducing child labour in many countries, the problem persists – including in Pakistan.



The latest global estimates indicate that 160 million are engaged in child labour worldwide – an increase of 8.4 million children since 2016. An estimated 63 million girls and 97 million boys were engaged in child labour at the beginning of 2020, accounting for almost 1 in 10 of all children in the world.¹⁵ Global progress to end child labour has stalled for the first time in 20 years. The number of children between 5 and 17 years old who are engaged in hazardous work – defined as work that is likely to harm their health, safety or morals – has risen by 6.5 million since 2016, reaching 79 million in 2020.

3.1.1. Data on child labour

Pakistan's only official Child Labour Survey, conducted in 1996, found that 3.3 million children between 5 and 14 years old were engaged in work – including 2.4 million boys (73 per cent) and 0.9 million girls (27 per cent). A new Child Labour Survey process, undertaken by Pakistan's federal and provincial governments with the support of UNICEF, remains ongoing. To date, only Gilgit-Baltistan's and Punjab's Child Labour Surveys have been published. The former finds that 13.1 per cent of children between 5 and 17 years old are engaged in child labour in Gilgit-Baltistan.¹⁶ According to Punjab's survey, 13.4 per cent of children between 5 and 14 years old in the province are involved in child labour. The combined figure for children and adolescents aged 5 to 17 shows that 19.9 per cent are involved in child labour. Around 47.8 per cent of children aged 10 to 14 years old work in hazardous conditions.¹⁷

The absence of up-to-date official data on child labour across Pakistan is a major barrier to evidence-based planning to address the phenomenon, including children's involvement in waste-picking.

¹⁴ ILO, "What is child labour".

¹⁵ ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward*, 2021.

¹⁶ Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, *Gilgit-Baltistan Child Labour Survey 2018–19 Report*, 2021.

¹⁷ Government of Punjab, *Punjab Child Labour Survey 2019–20 Report*, 2021.

Until all provincial and regional findings of the country's ongoing Child Labour Survey are published, the Labour Force Survey is the only official source that sheds light on children's engagement in work. The Labour Force Survey 2020–21¹⁸ is the 36th labour survey conducted to date. It has certain characteristics that make it unique – for instance, it is the first survey by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) conducted at the district level. Its results indicate that the size of Pakistan's labour force grew from 68.75 million in 2018–19 to 71.76 million in 2020–21, reflecting an increase of 1.51 million workers. Within the survey, the category of 'elementary occupations'¹⁹ is the most relevant for assessing children's involvement in 'rag-picking', which may be taken as a proxy for waste-picking. Elementary occupations are the second largest occupational group in Pakistan, employing 17.4 per cent of the labour force, while agricultural, forestry and fisheries-related work is the largest occupational category, employing 33.2 per cent of the workforce.

3.1.2. Root causes of child labour

Using the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2007–08, Awan et al. (2011) identified financial necessity as a root cause of child labour among families in which parents are uneducated.²⁰ The study concluded that when parents have no or low levels of education, they tend to send their children out to work, rather than investing in their education or skills training.

Other causes of child labour include parents' unemployment and lack of education, poverty, difficulty in meeting basic survival needs such as food and shelter, overpopulation and poor healthcare facilities.²¹ Ahmad (2017) concludes that children sent to work by their families tend to be between 10 and 14 years, with parents prioritizing earnings over children's education. A study by Ali et al. (2021) also identifies gender-based discrimination, discrimination against children, strict parenting, and parental negligence in urban and rural regions as drivers of child labour.²²

3.2. Child labour in waste-picking

This rapid assessment finds that growing amounts of solid waste in large cities, driven by rapid urbanization and population growth, has contributed to children's involvement in waste-picking. The number of children involved waste-picking in Pakistan's cities remains known. The stakeholders consulted frequently cited the numbers presented by the Rapid assessment of scavengers (waste-pickers) in Lahore, Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar and Islamabad (2004) – which estimated that there were between 89,500 and 106,500 waste-pickers (both adults and children) in all five cities. However, this figure is an estimate based on guess work, calculations and anecdotal evidence.

Children tend to be engaged in waste-picking because it requires little or no skill, and because their families have no other options for earning a livelihood. A study by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in 2003 concluded that most waste-pickers are Afghans and their children become involved in waste-picking to meet their household's basic needs.²³

¹⁸ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Labour Force Statistics: Detail of Tables (2020–21)".

¹⁹ According to the *International Standard Classification of Occupations*, "tasks performed by workers in elementary occupations usually include: selling goods in streets and public places, or from door to door; providing various street services; cleaning, washing, pressing; taking care of apartment houses, hotels, offices and other buildings; washing windows and other glass surfaces of buildings; delivering messages or goods; carrying luggage; door keeping and property watching; stocking vending machines or reading and emptying meters; collecting waste; sweeping streets and similar places; performing various simple farming, fishing, hunting or trapping tasks performing simple tasks connected with mining, construction and manufacturing including product-sorting and simple hand-assembling of components; packing by hand; freight handling; pedalling or hand-guiding vehicles to transport passengers and goods; driving animal-drawn vehicles or machinery."

²⁰ Masood Sarwar Awan, Muhammad Waqas, and Muhammad Amir Aslam, "Why Do Parents Make Their Children Work? Evidence from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey", *International Journal of Academic Research* 3, No. 2 (2011), 545–549.

²¹ Ayaz Ahmad, "Poverty, Education and Child Labour in Aligarh City, India", *Studies on Home and Community Science* 6, No. 3 (2017), 165–172.

²² Barkat Ali, Shaikat Hussain Bhatti, and Fazli Dayan, "Child Labour in Pakistan: Way Out Analyzing Constitutional Mandate", *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies* 7, No. 1 (2021), 201–208.

²³ SPDI, *Rapid Assessment of Scavengers (Waste-pickers) Lahore, Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar and Islamabad Pakistan*, 2004.

The root causes of child labour also apply to children's involvement in waste-picking – including parents' employment status and lack of education, financial constraints and migration status.

3.2.1. Waste-picking as a form of hazardous work

As noted above, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) defines hazardous work 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.” Pakistan has ratified this fundamental convention, which defines a child as a person under 18 years of age and requires ratifying states to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, to provide necessary and appropriate direct assistance for the removal of children from these forms of child labour, and for their rehabilitation, social integration, education and vocational training. Pakistan has also ratified the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), which sets a minimum age of 15 for admission to employment, or 13 years old for light work. According to this fundamental convention, developing countries may temporarily lower this minimum age requirement to 14 years old, and 12 years old for light work. It establishes that the minimum age for hazardous work is 18 years old – or 16 years under certain strict conditions.²⁴

While waste-picking is considered ‘unskilled’ work, it is intensive manual labour which is hazardous to children's physical and mental health.²⁵ Children scour heaps of trash in search of anything that can be repaired, recycled or resold. They collect paper, cardboard, bottles, syringes, broken glass, cutlery, metal scrap, plastic, wood, shoes, clothes and remnants of food for personal consumption – placing their finds in plastic or jute sacks slung over their shoulders. They work in all seasons, regardless of heavy rain or extreme heat.²⁶ They suffer from health problems as result of sifting through waste without protective equipment. Physical injuries are common - including cuts, wounds and bruises as children handle broken glass and metal. Many develop cysts and blisters as a result of untreated open wounds. They are at higher risk of contracting diseases or infections due to their exposure to unhygienic and often hazardous environments – including radioactive materials – raising the risks of transmissible diseases such as tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS.²⁷ Most of children involved in waste-picking do not wear shoes and walk several kilometres per day.²⁸ They also face risks of physical, psychological and sexual abuse, alongside exploitation, psycho-social and emotional trauma, and malnutrition.²⁹

3.3. Relevant legislative and institutional frameworks in Pakistan

In addition to the international conventions that Pakistan has ratified, as discussed above, child rights are enshrined in national and provincial legislative frameworks. The Constitution prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 and affirms the right to free, compulsory education for all children between 5 and 16 years old. After the 18th Amendment to the Constitution in 2010 devolved responsibility for several sectors – including labour and child protection – to the provincial level, Pakistan's provinces have introduced frameworks to address child labour and child protection (see Annex 2 for more information on relevant constitutional provisions, international commitments, and national and provincial laws).

²⁴ ILO, “International Labour Standards on Child Labour”.

²⁵ Aamir Abbas et al., “A Socioeconomic Characteristics and Health Problems of Trash Picking Children in Karachi”, *American Academic Scientific Research Journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences* 43, No. 1 (2018), 143–158.

²⁶ Manoti Barki and Sarika Manhas, “Working Conditions of Ragpicker Children in Jammu City”, *Zenith International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 3, No. 2 (2013), 149–157.

²⁷ Shaheda Niloufer, A. V. V. S. Swamy, and K. Syamala Devi, “Waste Collection by Rag Pickers in the Cities – A Brief Report”, *PARIPEX Indian Journal of Research* 2, No. 4 (2013), 211–214; Abdus Salam, “Living and Educational Conditions of Child Rag Pickers on Base of Solid Waste of Guwahati City in Assam”, *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, No. 2 (2013), 185–189.

²⁸ Aamir Abbas, Subhash Guriro, Muhammad Azeem, Mazhar Abbas, Saqib Mahmood and Muhammad Imran, “A Socioeconomic Characteristics and Health Problems of Trash Picking Children in Karachi”, *American Academic Scientific Research Journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences* 43, No. 1 (2018), 143–158.

²⁹ Zahira Batool and Faiza Anjum, “A Sociological Study of Trash Picker Children in Faisalabad City, Punjab, Pakistan”, *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences* 14, No. 1 (2016), 33–37.

3.3.1. Labour laws

Lack of legal coverage of 'waste-picking' in labour laws

Pakistan's Employment of Children Act (ECA) of 1991 establishes 14 as the minimum age for employment in the country. While children's involvement in waste-picking is a visible form of hazardous child labour in large cities, often involving children as young as 4 or 5 years old, waste-picking is not explicitly addressed by most labour laws. Scavenging is mentioned as a form of hazardous work in the schedule of the Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act of 2017,³⁰ which speaks of "any occupation or work connected with – (23) all scavenging including hospital waste." This issue is also addressed by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Labour Policy of 2018,³¹ which calls for the immediate withdrawal of children from the worst forms of child labour and their sustained rehabilitation. It recommends collaboration with local communities, including community monitoring, to restrict children's involvement in hazardous work that does not come under the ambit of the Labour Department, such as waste-picking, home-based work, domestic work and labour in the rural economy.

Available literature on waste-picking in Pakistan does not focus on whether this form of work is covered by labour laws. Key informants interviewed for this study explained how waste-pickers are considered independent sellers of waste materials – this renders them virtually 'invisible' in the context of labour inspection. As they are not employees of shops or junkyards, they are rarely viewed as 'child labourers'. Moreover, since they are technically free to move around, they are not classified as bonded labourers. These interviews demonstrate how children involved in waste-picking are falling through the cracks – gaps in labour laws mean that the factors that push them into work, and the hazardous nature of the work they perform, remain largely unaddressed. Key informants suggest using occupational safety and health (OSH) laws to address the hazards faced by children involved in waste-picking, such as the Punjab Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2019.



There is no employer-employee relationship between the junkyard owner and waste-pickers. Therefore, these two are considered separate entities who do business with each other. One is the seller and the other is the buyer; such a relationship is common in business settings.”

– Key informant interview



Waste-pickers are visible due to their huge presence on the streets. During labour inspections, waste-pickers are found sitting outside kabaria shops or junkyards. Since they are not employees of the shops or junkyards, it is not possible to classify them under child labour.”

– Key informant interview

³⁰ Government of Sindh, *Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act*, 2017.

³¹ Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Labour Policy*, 2018.

3.3.2. Child protection laws

Coverage of waste-picking in child protection laws

Waste-picking is explicitly mentioned in one provincial child protection law – the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act of 2004 (amended in 2017). Section 36B of the act states:

“Inciting child for rag picking – If a person employs or incites a child for rag picking, he shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years but which shall not be less than three months and with fine which may extend to one hundred thousand rupees but which shall not be less than ten thousand rupees.”

The Sindh Child Protection Authority (Amendment) Act of 2021, clause (c), addresses “*child[ren] in need of special protection measures*”, including “*street children*” in sub-section (vii). This is tangentially related to waste-picking, as many ‘street children’ are involved in collecting and sorting through waste.

3.3.3. Child protection system

Pakistan’s federal and provincial governments – including the Punjab Home Department, and the Social Welfare Departments of Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan – are working to create of an effective child protection system with the support of UNICEF. The system’s legislative framework includes key provincial/sub-national laws:

- ▶ Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act, 2018;
- ▶ Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act, 2004 (amended in 2017);
- ▶ Sindh Child Protection Authority Act, 2011 (amended in 2021);
- ▶ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2010;
- ▶ Balochistan Child Protection Act, 2016;
- ▶ Azad Jammu and Kashmir Child Rights (Care and Protection) Act, 2016; and
- ▶ Gilgit Baltistan Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2013.

Child Protection Units

The institutional framework for child protection encompasses entities responsible for protecting children at the provincial, district and union council levels. These include the Child Protection Bureau of Punjab, and Child Protection Units (CPUs) in different districts of Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), these entities are responsible for identifying and registering cases of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children, as well as for case management, assessment and referral to other social services or institutions.



Waste-pickers are visible due to their huge presence on the streets. During labour inspections, waste-pickers are found sitting outside kabaria shops or junkyards. Since they are not employees of the shops or junkyards, it is not possible to classify them under child labour.”

– Key informant interview

Complaint registration mechanism

The public can directly contact Child Protection Bureaus or Child Protection Units to register complaints related to child protection – including through the dedicated helpline number 1121 nationwide. These service providers either provide services directly or connect survivors with specialist services. A functional referral system exists encompassing the external evaluation of child protection services and the technical capacity of child protection staff. Child Protection Committees and District Coordination Committees have been established to ensure child protection, drawing together stakeholders from governmental and non-governmental institutions.

The protection system's approach to children involved in waste-picking

Pakistan's child protection system recognizes the plight of children living on the street. Child Protection and Welfare Bureaus have rescued children involved in waste-picking. However, child protection authorities rarely take action to rehabilitate children engaged in waste-picking, not do they address the specific risks, hazards, abuse and violence experienced by these children. During the interviews conducted for this assessment, key informants representing child protection authorities highlighted how important the income earned by children through waste-picking is for poor families. As child protection laws and institutions do not focus on children involved in waste-picking, their specific protection issues remain invisible and unaddressed.

3.4. Efforts by national and international NGOs

A number of national and international NGOs are involved in the field of child rights, child protection and child welfare in Pakistan – delivering services, engaging in advocacy, building capacities and undertaking research. The enactment of the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act of 2000, and the establishment the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Agency (ZARRA), are two important steps taken by the Government with the involvement of civil society. Notable organizations working on child protection include Sahil, Group Development Pakistan (GDP), Daneesh, SEHAR, KONPAL, the Legal Rights Forum, the Roshni Helpline, the Citizens Foundation, GOODH, the Al-Khidmat Foundation, Edhi Child Centres, SOS Villages, Saylani Welfare Trust, the Akhuwat Foundation, Alamgir Welfare Trust, JDC Welfare Organization and Chhipa Welfare Trust.

International organizations involved in promoting child rights in Pakistan include UNICEF, ILO, Save the Children, Right to Play, and the International Rescue Committee. UNICEF provides technical and financial support to the Government and NGOs to advance child rights and child protection, while the ILO supports efforts to end child labour, particularly the worst forms of child labour. While a number of NGO projects support street children, and some initiatives encourage recycling by engaging young people – such as Saaf Suthra Sheher in Islamabad and Chandi Ghar in Karachi³² – interviews with key informants did not identify any initiatives that focus specifically on helping children involved in waste-picking.

³² "HBFC to Promote Chandi Ghar", in *Dawn*, 15 December 2006; Saaf Sheher, "Home".

Chapter 4

Primary data collection: Key findings

This rapid assessment interviewed 300 children involved in waste-picking through a survey, 104 of whom provided further insights by participating in focus group discussions (FGDs) in 12 sampled districts. The interviews reveal that children are an integral part of the supply chain for waste collection, sorting, transportation and sale. However, they are not involved in the sale of recyclable materials to the owners of large junkyards or factories (see the table below).

► **Table 3. Activities of stakeholders involved in waste collection and recycling in Pakistan**

Activity	Stakeholders involved	
	Adults	Children
Waste-picking/scavenging	✓ (Staff of municipal authorities/governments, private contractors and adult waste-pickers)	✓
Transportation	✓ (Staff of municipal authorities/governments, private contractors and adult waste-pickers)	✓
Sorting at <i>kachra kundi</i> (dumpsites)	✓ (Staff of municipal authorities/governments, private contractors and adult waste-pickers)	✓
Sorting at waste transfer stations	✓ (Private contractors and adult waste-pickers)	✓
Sorting at landfill sites	✓ (Private contractors and adult waste-pickers)	✓
Selling recyclables to local <i>kabaria</i> shops	✓ (Adult waste-pickers)	✓
Final sorting of recyclables at <i>kabaria</i> shops or small junkyards	✓ (Adult waste-pickers)	✓
Selling recyclables to large junkyards	✓ (Adult waste-pickers)	–
Final sorting of recyclables at large junkyards	✓ (Adult waste-pickers)	✓
Selling recyclables to factories that source waste	✓ (Adult waste-pickers)	–

4.1. Demographic information

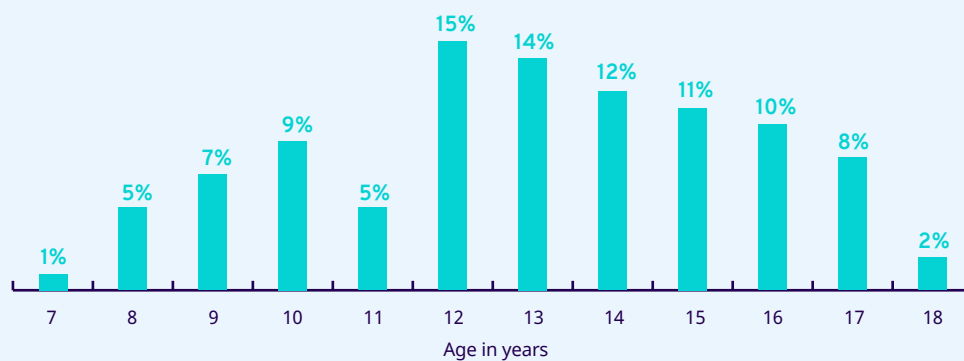
Of the 300 children interviewed, 91 per cent are boys and 9 per cent are girls. No transgender children were found to be engaged in waste-picking, possible due to fear of violence, including sexual violence. Girls engaged in waste-picking work with their families, usually collecting waste from housing societies or sorting waste at relatively safe sites like junkyards or stores. Girls in Pakistan tend to work in the private sphere – particularly as domestic workers – rather than on the streets. When they are seen working on the streets, they tend to be part of a family group selling flowers, cleaning windshields or begging.

Age

The children interviewed are between 7 and 17 years old. Nearly half (40 per cent) are between the ages of 12 and 14, while 30 per cent are between 15 and 17 years old, and 21 per cent are 9 to 11 years old. According to the interviewees, children tend to become involved in waste-picking at an early age and the vast majority are between 10 and 14 years old. After spending years scavenging, many children move on to sorting, or collecting waste from housing societies and markets.

FIGURE 6

Ages of the children interviewed



Ethnic, linguistic and religious background

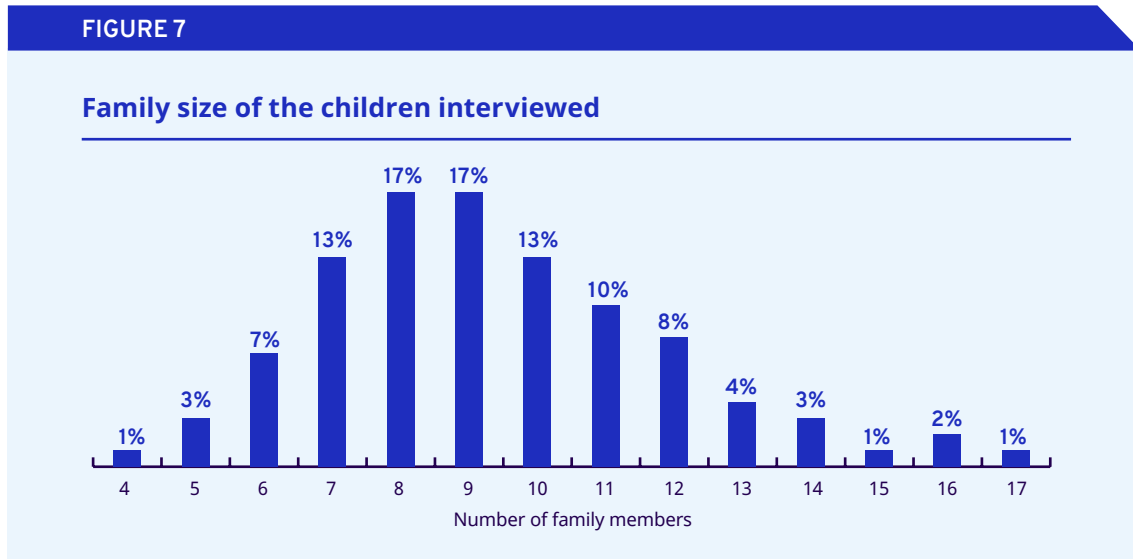
In all 12 sampled districts, most waste-pickers, local kabaria and junkyard owners are of Afghan origin. Among the children interviewed, over two-thirds are of Afghan origin (68 per cent) and speak Pashto. Approximately 7 per cent of the respondents are Pashtu speakers of Pakistani origin, while 8 per cent of the children speak Saraiki and 17 per cent are Sindhi speakers. It is important to note that Pakistan is a multi-ethnic country where people tend to identify with the language they speak at home.

Children involved in waste-picking appear to be from the most impoverished and marginalized groups in the country. For instance, in the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad, Sindhi children are engaged in waste-picking, most of whom belong to the Hindu (Bagri) community.

The community is extremely marginalized – forced to migrate to urban centres from the interior of Sindh due to natural disasters, including major floods and prolonged drought. Saraiki speakers – originally from impoverished South Punjab, whose families migrated to large cities in Sindh in search of work – are also notable among waste-pickers in Karachi and Hyderabad.

Family size

Pakistan is the world’s fifth-most populous country, with an estimated population of 229.5 million in 2022.³³ High levels of population growth contribute to high levels of poverty across the country. Almost 70 per cent of the children surveyed have an average family size of between 7 and 11 members. A minority (11 per cent) belong to families with fewer than seven members.



During the focus group discussions, children unanimously and repeatedly identified poverty as the driving force behind their involvement in waste-picking. They highlighted large family size as a major factor preventing parents from investing in children’s education, nutrition and development. Many children reported that their parents lack the resources to feed their children, obliging them to send their children out to work. Participants also identified large families as a cause of early marriage and child marriage in many communities.

Almost 46 per cent of the children surveyed reported that their siblings are also engaged in work. A small proportion (3 per cent) work to support the household due to the death or illness of their fathers. The interviews reveal that children are often pushed into work because their (usually male) head of household is unemployed or unable to work.

Children living or working on the street are assumed not to have a connection with their families. This assessment’s findings negate this myth, as 90 per cent of the children interviewed live with their families. A small proportion (10 per cent) live with a junkyard owner, contractor or acquaintance.

4.2. Migration patterns

Over 60 per cent of children interviewed were born in the city where they now work, while 35 per cent were born elsewhere and migrated to their current place of residence. Almost 80 per cent of the children of Afghan origin interviewed have lived in Pakistan since they were born. A small proportion (19 per cent) travelled to Pakistan in the past year due to insecurity in Afghanistan.

Most of the children surveyed were not aware of the reasons why their families migrated. Older children identified poverty, a lack of food and a lack of employment opportunities as major push factors for migration. Some pointed to a lack of peace and security in Afghanistan as a factor.

³³ UNFPA, “World Population Dashboard: Pakistan”.

4.3. Education

Around 69 per cent of the children interviewed are unable to read or write, while 29 per cent can read and write at a basic level. Approximately 75 per cent can count and add simple numbers, while all of the children surveyed understand the denomination of currency notes. This indicates that children involved in waste-picking tend to have basic numeracy skills.

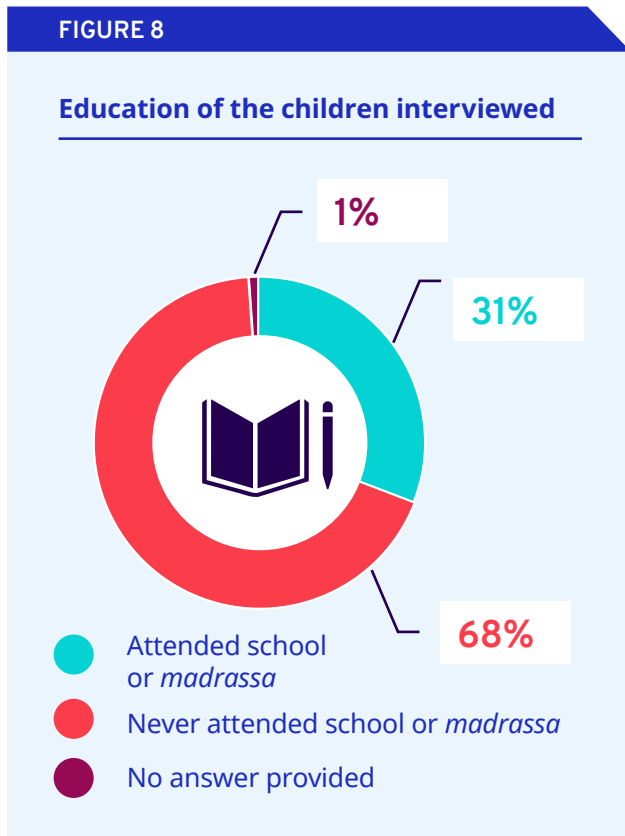
Fewer than one-third (31 per cent) of the children interviewed have ever attended a school or madrasa (religious seminary), while most (68 per cent) have no formal education. Some 73 per cent of respondents reported that they do not currently go to school, 8 per cent tentatively responded that they do, and 18 per cent gave no response. Among the children who are or have been enrolled in some form of education, 84 per cent attended primary school while 3 per cent went to a *madrasa*.

These responses demonstrate that children involved in waste-picking have few opportunities for education, ostensibly because they begin working at a very young age. Many children involved in waste-picking, particularly those of Afghan origin, lack valid identity cards which limits their prospects for admission to schools and decent employment.

Reasons cited for not attending school by the children surveyed include being expected to work and earn money for their families (27 per cent), the low value accorded to education by their family and/or parents sending them out to work (17 per cent), and their own lack of interest in studying (36 per cent). These responses indicate that families prefer the short-term monetary benefits of sending their children to work rather than to school.

Focus group participants were reluctant to talk about their education and tried to offer socially acceptable answers to the questions posed.

Reasons for dropping out of education include the need to earn money and supplement their households' income (42 per cent), corporal punishment at school (12 per cent) and a lack of interest in education (8 per cent). Approximately one-third (33 per cent) of the children interviewed provided no response when asked why they dropped out of school.

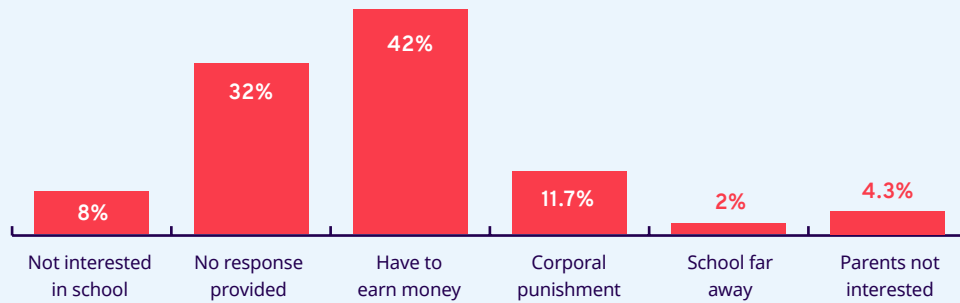


►► Poor parents should send their children to government schools, where education is free. Many students at government schools have had remarkable success in education and later in [their] professional lives.”

– Key informant representing a Social Welfare Department

FIGURE 9

Reasons for dropping out of education among the children interviewed



Over half of the children interviewed (53 per cent) do not want to go back to school, 31 per cent did not reply and 16 per cent expressed a willingness to continue their education if the opportunity arises. When asked why they do not wish to return to school, 30 per cent cited their family’s inability to afford education-related expenses, 24 per cent expressed a lack of interest in education, and 18 per cent (most of whom are of Afghan origin) pointed to their lack of legal status in Pakistan as a barrier to education. Children who wish to return to school are held back by parents who do not understand the value of education, ‘unfriendly’ schoolteachers, fixed timings and tuition fees.

4.4. Work

The majority (88 per cent) of the children interviewed began waste-picking at a very young age, between the ages of 5 and 10. The number of children entering this form of work declines with age. Once children start earning, they tend to continue waste-picking and only change path if they have the opportunity to earn more.

Almost all focus group participants began waste-picking because their parents or community members are involved in waste collection. Most are unaware of alternative livelihood options, have learned ‘tricks of the trade’ from elders or co-workers and have connections with buyers of waste materials. Therefore, particularly in the absence of formal education, the children interviewed regard waste-picking as a good source of earnings.

Parents, usually fathers, decided that the children interviewed should begin waste-picking (37 per cent). While 18 per cent indicated that this was a decision jointly taken by their parents and themselves, 33 per cent reporting that they themselves decided to begin waste-picking. This may be because young children who are obliged to work resort to waste-picking when other children in the same area are involved in the sector. A small number of respondents, most of whom are orphans, reported that their relatives decided to engage them in waste-picking.

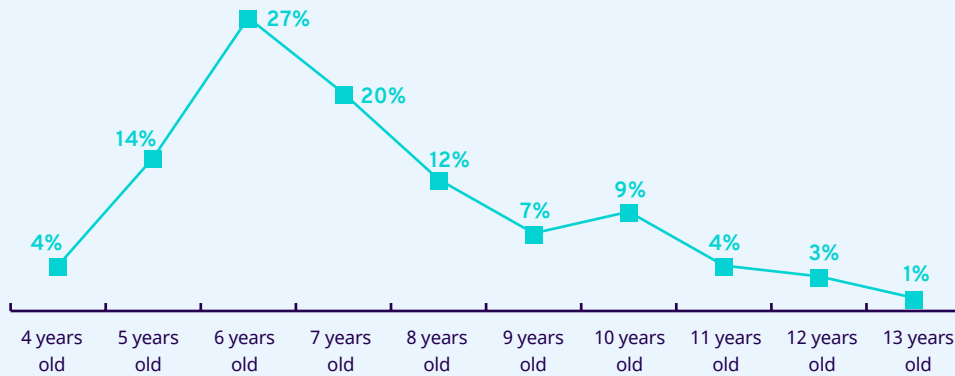


Most parents send their children to schools and colleges so that they can secure employment after completing their education. If families see that even after completing education their children cannot get a job, they prefer to send their children to work instead of to school.”

– Key informant interview

FIGURE 10

Age when the children interviewed started waste-picking



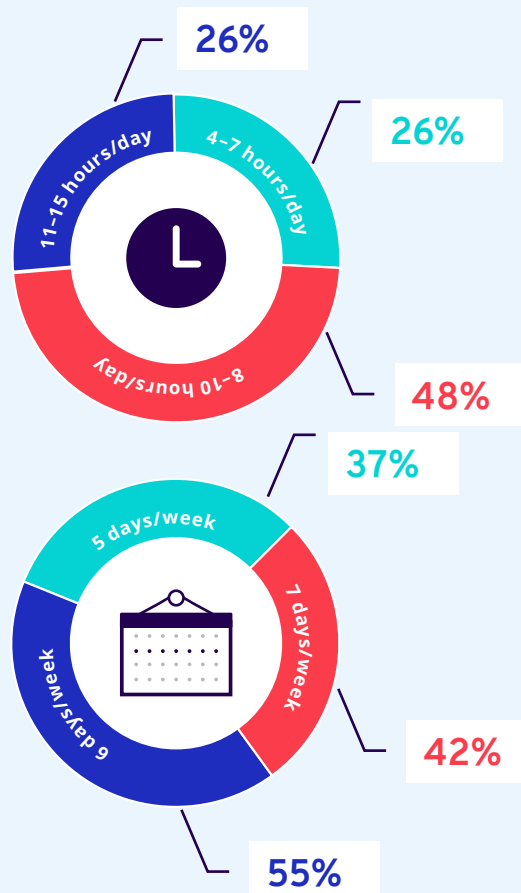
The focus group discussions reveal that children involved in waste-picking work long hours, are left with little energy after walking all day, toil in extreme weather, and have little or no time to rest, play or learn – which negatively affects the healthy development of their minds and bodies. In terms of their daily routines, 74 per cent of the children surveyed work for 8 hours or more per day, while 26 per cent work for 12 hours or more per day. Approximately 42 per cent of the children interviewed work all week with no holidays, while 55 per cent take one day off each week.

While 23 per cent of the children interviewed work in the morning, 32 per cent work in both the morning and the evening. Some children reported collecting waste at night or early in the morning so that they can clean waste bins on street corners or in markets before the arrival of municipal waste management staff. Key informants representing municipalities reported that waste-pickers scatter waste on streets as they sift through bins, creating additional work for municipal workers.

Some of the children interviewed reported having to pay municipal staff to be allowed to sift through waste bins or trucks. Relatively few children reported collecting waste at night, when they may be exposed to additional risks.

FIGURE 11

Working hours per day and working days per week of the children interviewed



Relatively few children reported collecting waste at night, when they may be exposed to additional risks.



Police make their rounds at night. If they find you, it will be a bad time.”

– Boy interviewed



I often paid them 100 rupees to allow me to collect stuff from the waste.”

– Boy interviewed

During the key informant interviews, one police officer indicated that children involved in waste-picking are sometimes involved in petty crime. Other key informants also reported that waste-pickers, both adults and children, are sometimes involved in theft and petty crime.

Over half of the children surveyed (52 per cent) collect waste from roads, sidewalks, kachra kundi (dumpsites) and markets. Another 19 per cent also collect waste in residential areas and housing societies, while 10 per cent solely collect waste at markets, in residential areas and along roads.

About 16 percent limit their activities to main roads and markets, while 3 per cent visit larger landfill sites. It appears that site selection depends on personal/group preference and the likelihood of findings items of higher value.

4.4.1. Mobility for work

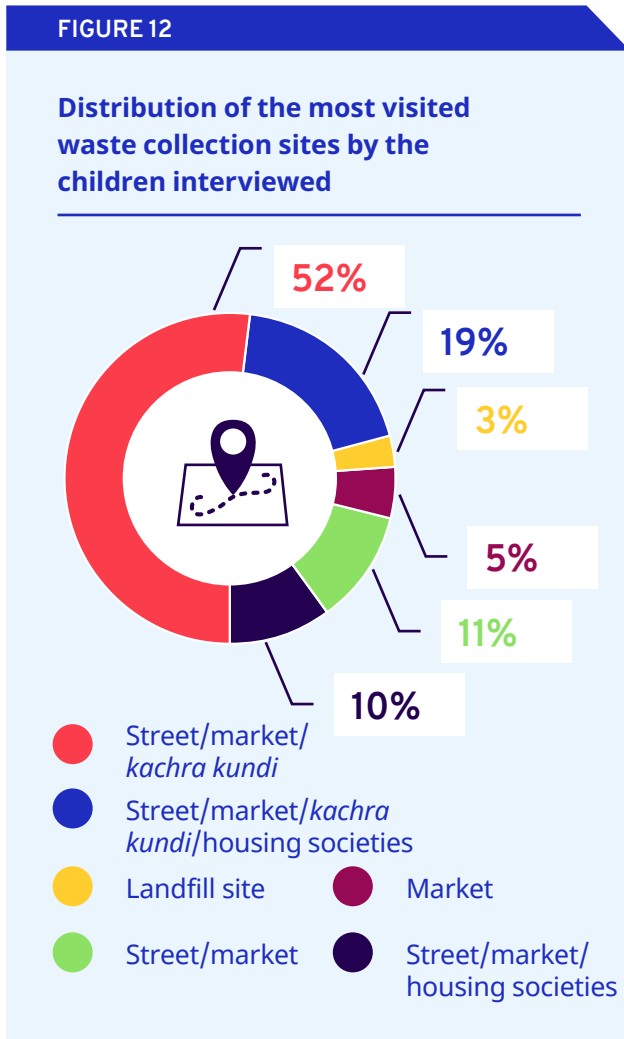
Half of the surveyed children move in groups, 41 per cent walk alone, and 6 per cent have no fixed pattern of movement.

Group movements are usually guided by

a senior waste-picker, based on experience of what material to collect or knowledge of areas where they are likely to find sellable items. Moving in groups gives children – especially young children – a sense of safety. The focus groups reveal that, even when children move in groups, they tend to collect waste independently. If they have to transport heavy bags, children often pool money together to hire motorcycle trolleys.

4.4.2. Types of waste collected

Some 46 per cent of the children interviewed collect paper, cardboard, plastic and metal items, 28 per cent collect the same types of materials but look for glass instead of metal, and 23 per cent search for all kinds of recyclables. The type of waste collected depends on its value at junkyards, or on the directions given to children by buyers.



Motorcycle trolleys give us the opportunity to collect much [more] and then reach our destinations without much effort.”

– 12-year-old boy interviewed

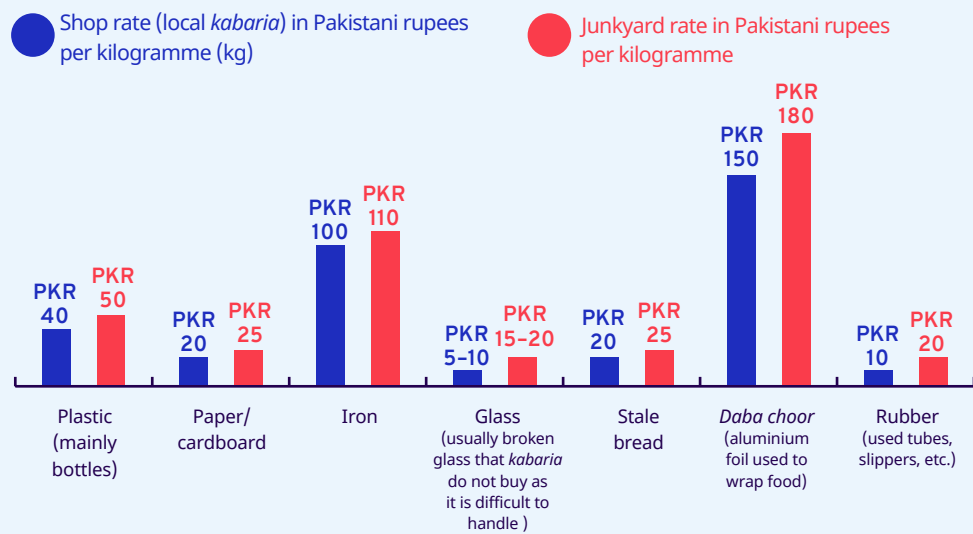
We walk in groups, but when it comes to the collection of waste, it’s a matter of survival. All of us try to collect as much waste as possible because for us it is not waste, it is money scattered on the road.”

– Boy interviewed (of Afghan origin)

To collect one kilogramme of plastic, a child must collect between 20 to 24 large empty water or soda bottles, or over 40 small bottles. Many children complain of backpain as a result of the strain.

FIGURE 13

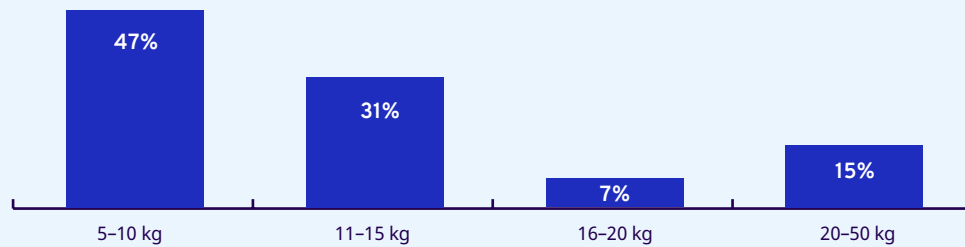
Rates of different waste materials collected by waste-pickers



Approximately 78 per cent of the children interviewed collect between 5 and 15 kilogrammes (kg) of waste per day, with loads that usually range between 5 and 10 kg. The rest collect far more – 7 per cent collect between 16 and 20 kg, while 15 per cent collect between 20 and 50 kg. Those who collect heavy loads use bicycles, donkey carts or motorcycle trolleys to transport their finds. Most of the respondents sell their finds to local scrap dealers or sometimes to middlemen, while 10 per cent sell directly to shopkeepers or street vendors.

FIGURE 14

Average amount of daily waste collected by the children surveyed



According to the key informants interviewed for this assessment, the flow of waste from the street to waste-sourcing factories involves:

- ▶ children collecting waste from different sites;
- ▶ children selling waste materials to local kabaria, street vendors or junk dealers;
- ▶ buyers sorting the materials and selling them to junkyards;
- ▶ small junkyards selling the materials to large junkyards; and
- ▶ large junkyards selling all collected items to waste-sourcing factories.

Key informants believe that the private waste management and recycling industry generates millions of rupees in profits and employs a large number of workers. While waste-sourcing factories do not work directly with children involved in waste-picking, they buy huge quantities of waste materials from large junkyards. These factories, both big and small, are located in many parts of Pakistan, including in the cities of Karachi, Kotri, Lahore and Kasur. According to the informants, recycling facilities try to ensure that children are not involved in their supply chains, but this depends on junkyard owners. Some factories are also involved in charity work, especially in the month of Ramadan, although their efforts are not cohesive.

Medical waste that is not properly disposed of is especially hazardous, and may cause injuries or infections to children engaged in waste-picking. Key informants note that hospitals have adopted guidelines to dispose of healthcare waste safely – including general debris, x-ray sheets, sharp objects and contaminated material, among others. Hospitals have installed bins in different colours to differentiate between different kinds of waste. However, according to the informants, most hospitals do not have mechanisms in place to measure or record the types of waste they dispose of.



We have contracts with big junkyard owners who regularly supply raw material. Most factories in Pakistan are not formal recycling facilities but small industrial units which reduce materials to their composite forms, which can then be used to produce new products.”

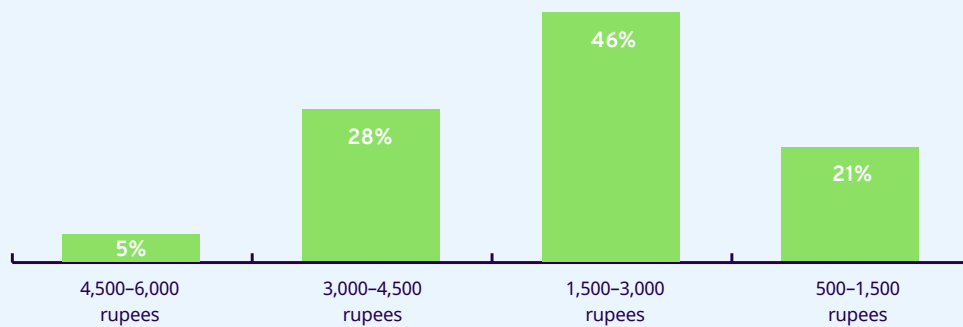
–Key informant interview with the owner of a waste-sourcing factoryb

4.4.3. Average earnings

On average, the children interviewed earn 450 Pakistani rupees per day, with earnings ranging between 250 and 500 rupees in general, and some outliers earning less or more. Waste collection and recycling is cash-based. Children are paid accordingly, except in situations when parents borrow money from an agent as an advance and a child’s daily wage is adjusted to pay back that debt.

FIGURE 15

Average weekly earnings of the children interviewed



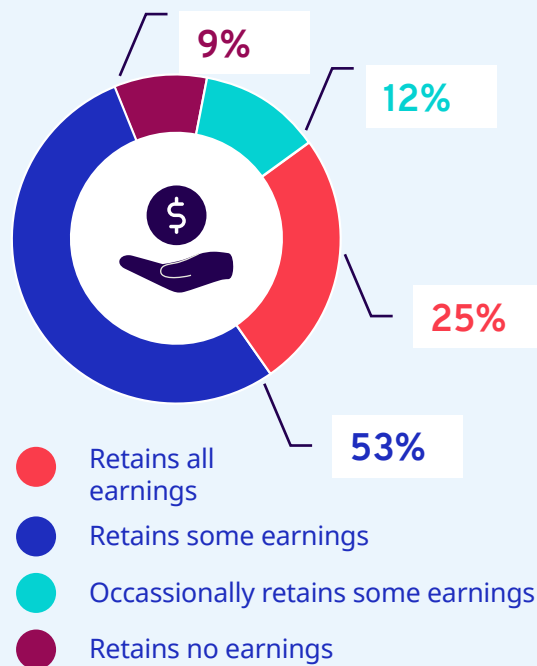
4.4.4. Control over earnings

Almost 90 per cent of the children interviewed have access to the money they earn, with 53 per cent retaining some money for themselves, and 25 per cent retaining all of their earnings and deciding how much to give to their families. Some children (12 per cent) hand over all of their earnings to their parents and occasionally keep some money for personal use, while 9 per cent have all of their earnings taken by their parents.

For 74 per cent of the children surveyed, collecting and selling waste is their only source of income. A small proportion are involved in other forms of work as well, including daily wage labour, washing cars or running small ‘tuck shops’.

FIGURE 16

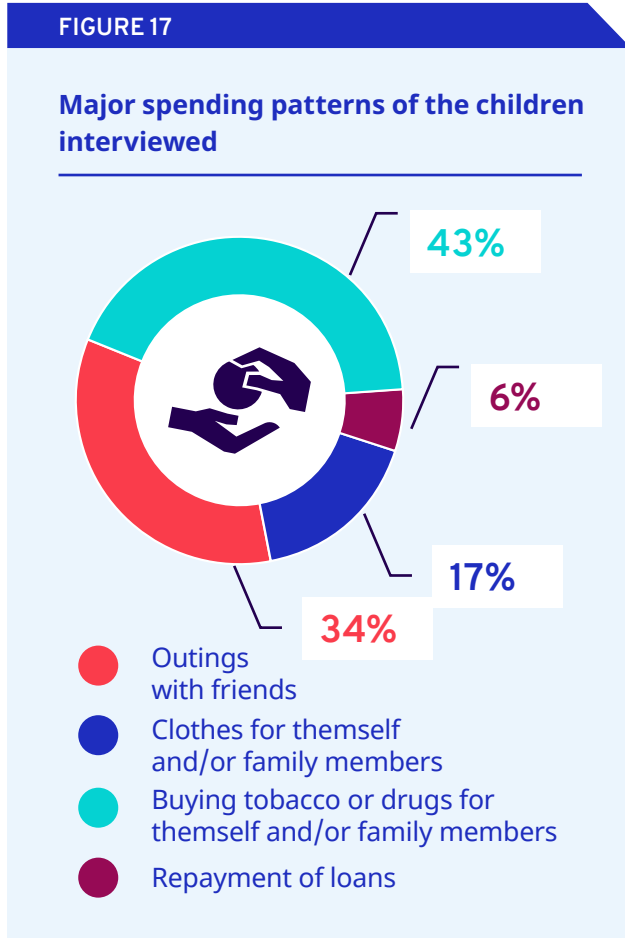
Interviewed children’s control over their earnings



4.4.5. Spending patterns

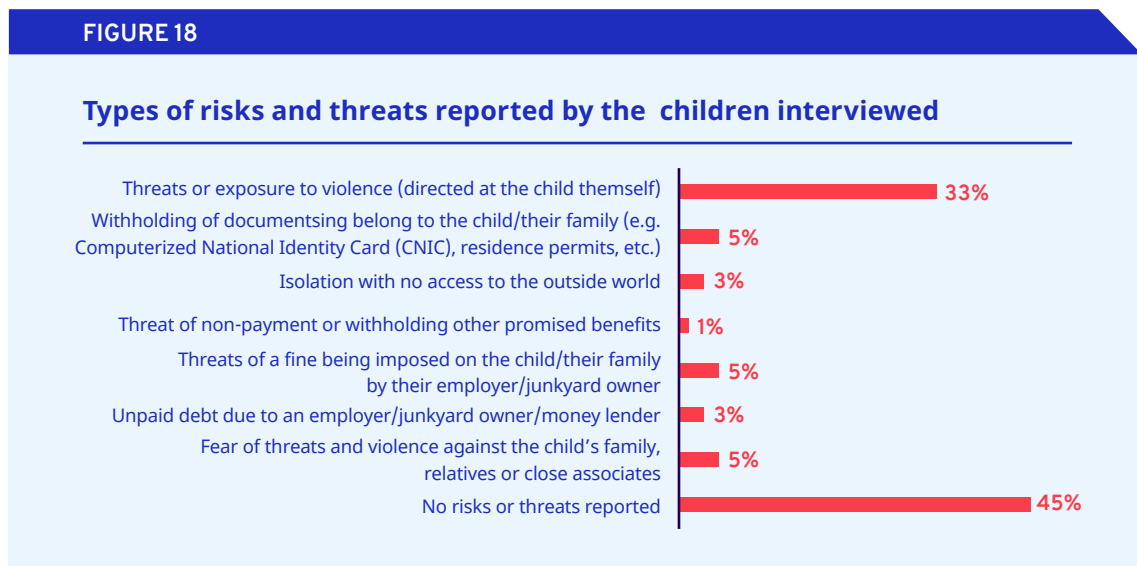
The vast majority of the children interviewed give substantial part of their earnings to their families. Those who retain partial earnings, spend it on tobacco, cigarettes or drugs for themselves or family members (43 per cent). Drug use is reported to be common among waste-pickers, including children, exposing them to health risks and other hazards. Some 34 per cent of the respondents spend money on going out with friends and on food, 17 per cent buy clothes for themselves or family members, and 4 per cent have used their earnings to repay loans.

When asked how they spend their leisure time, 28 per cent of the children interviewed watch television or take care of younger siblings, 29 per cent play with friends and take care of younger children, and 9 per cent perform extra work, usually to repay loans. These replies highlight that children involved in waste-picking are, obviously, just children who want to play and spend time with friends.



4.4.6. Working environment

Children who work or live on the streets are vulnerable to risks, including violence. However, nearly half of the children interviewed (45 per cent) reported that they are not exposed to risk and threats while waste-picking. This may reflect a sense of safety when children work in groups or work for junkyard owners with whom they are acquainted.



Children of Afghan origin (55 per cent) reported that Pakistani host communities are not friendly towards them and often act violently. Roughly 7 per cent of the children interviewed regard police violence as a major threat, while 18 per cent consider parental violence as a key risk. This rapid assessment finds that violence is the norm, rather than the exception, for children involved in waste-picking.

The children surveyed are usually affiliated with a single middle man, local *kabaria* or small junkyard owner – 76 per cent reported working with a single junk dealer, while 22 per cent work with different dealers, and 2 per cent provided no response. When asked why they prefer working with a single dealer, 41 per cent cited the ease of doing business and fair rates, while 33 per cent explained that they are able to borrow money when they need it. Families often borrow money for marriages and funerals. In many cases, inviting the entire community to such occasions and serving a meal is considered an obligation. This obliges families to borrow money, which children help to repay.

Most of the children interviewed (81 per cent) feel that they cannot stop waste-picking. This is either because their family's survival depends on their earnings (48 per cent), or because they lack other skills, are uneducated, or do not have legal documents that would allow them to work in Pakistan (38 per cent). Some children cited the burden of family debt as the main reason for their continued involvement. They regard waste-picking as a viable option, particularly because competition is minimal, as others are reluctant to enter into the sector. Only 9 per cent of respondents indicated an interest in learning a new trade if the opportunity arises, while 10 per cent provided no response. Over 70 per cent are dissatisfied with their work. While some have discussed their unhappiness with friends, most of these friends are also involved in waste-picking and struggle to identify solutions.

4.4.7. Work-related hazards

The children interviewed are not unaware of the risks posed by waste-picking. Around 88 per cent recognize that waste-picking involves hazards – they highlighted long working hours in scorching heat as a major health hazard, as well as the unhygienic and often dangerous nature of sifting through waste full of sharp objects and toxic products. More than half (60 per cent) of the children surveyed do not feel safe.

As waste is frequently burned in Pakistan, children involved in waste-picking are exposed to harmful smoke that can damage their respiratory systems, skin and eyes. Many develop eye or ear infections as they touch these sensitive areas with dirty hands in dusty and smoky environments. Over 50 per cent of the children interviewed reported injuries and health problems, including cuts and burns, upset stomach, broken bones and animal bites.



Children of local families prefer to work at mechanic shops because of career development. Children start working for 50 rupees per day, but within a few years they receive between 500 and 800 rupees per day.”

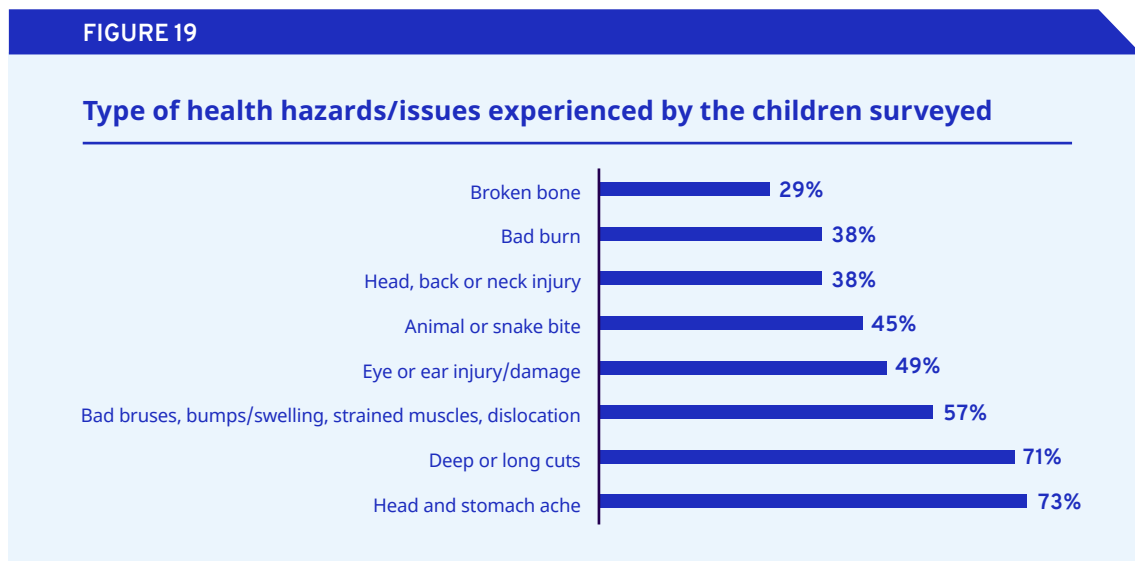
– Key informant interview with a local *kabaria* (scrap dealer)



Last year, a dog bit me at the garbage heap. [...] Afterwards, I was taken to the local hospital, but an anti-rabies vaccine was not available. Later, my mother put red chillies on the wound and bandaged it with a cloth.”

– 9-year-old boy interviewed

Being bitten by stray dogs may expose children to rabies, while insect, snake and reptile bites may be lethal.



4.5. Violence, fears and aspirations

4.5.1. Violence and abuse

In addition to the hazards discussed above, children involved in waste-picking are often exposed to physical violence at the hands of junkyard owners or family members. Among the children interviewed, 82 per cent reported experiencing physical violence and abuse at work, 16 per cent reported never experiencing violence at work, and 2 per cent provided no response. Furthermore, 49 per cent of respondents reported experiencing physical violence from an adult, 33 per cent have faced violence from a child or adolescent, and 18 per cent provided no response.

While physical violence is visible, emotional violence is also common. Around 84 per cent of the children interviewed have experienced verbal abuse from adults, while 70 per cent have suffered emotional abuse – including threats and insults – from adults or children.

4.5.2. Fears

Children whose families have migrated from other areas and those of Afghan origin feel vulnerable due to their lack of identity cards, and live in fear of law enforcement and the security services. Isolation and social stigma are also concerns for children involved in waste-picking, who feel that they are not accepted by society and are viewed with suspicion.

At a local market, the guards beat me severely because they suspected that I had put some cloth in my jute bag. After searching me, they didn't find anything. They didn't even say sorry to me."

– Boy interviewed

It is not only physical violence but verbal and emotional violence. People use such bad words that I cannot repeat."

– Boy interviewed

Therefore, they tend to stick together and return home after work.

Fear of the police and being arrested is the most common fear cited by the children interviewed (74 per cent), followed by the fear of starvation if they are unable to earn an income, animal bites and fears of accessing, or being unable to access, health facilities. The remaining 16 per cent of children claim that they are not afraid of anything.

4.5.3. Aspirations

When asked about their aspirations, over 30 per cent of the children surveyed want to become actors or a hero in films when they grow up. Others aspire to join the army or police, or to become junkyard contractors or businessmen. A small number want to be doctors and one girl – among the children who showed an interest in education – wants to be a teacher. Children appear to want to join the police because they regard police officers as powerful, while those who want to become junkyard dealers consider it a form of promotion from waste-picking. The responses reflect how these children dream like any other child, and aspire to improve their living standards.



I think it is good that some children discuss their dreams, which shows their thinking capacity and desire to move from one step to another on the social ladder.”

– Key informant interview



Children involved in waste-picking are already vulnerable because of a lack of identity documents and their marginalized status. They don't have a strong support mechanism [...] Being poor and socially excluded, these children are exposed to all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.”

– Key informant interview with a child rights expert



I want to become Shahid Afridi [a famous Pakistani cricketer]. I love to play cricket and I am sure one day I will play in a big stadium.”

– Boy interviewed

4.6. Nutrition, health and social support

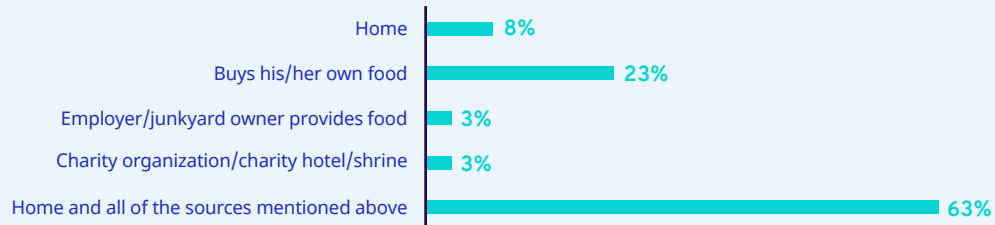
4.6.1. Meals

The majority of the children interviewed receive free meals from charity organizations, restaurants and shrines (see the figure below). The Saylani Welfare Trust is among many charitable institutions that offers free food to the poor and needy people through 100 centres (Dastar-Khawan), as do several restaurants. The children surveyed value these meals highly, which enable them to start their day with breakfast and end their day with lunch or dinner.

Approximately 8 per cent of respondents eat at home and do not seek free meals elsewhere, while 23 per cent buy food from restaurants.

FIGURE 20

Sources from which children involved in waste-picking obtain daily meals



At our restaurant many customers give us money to provide free breakfasts, chai and parathas [tea and flatbread] to needy people, especially children.”

- Key informant interview with a restaurant owner



They are usually quiet children and don’t make any noise while sitting outside; they eat and leave the place. Sometimes they sit and talk for quite some time.”

- Key informant interview with a restaurant owner



I love both *korma* [meat curry] and *biryani* [rice cooked with meat]. It is nice that I get my favourite food at these places.”

- Key informant interview with a restaurant owner

Almost all of the children interviewed (99 per cent) have at least two meals per day, while 50 per cent have three meals a day. While respondents did not report begging for food or gathering discarded food, the research team observed children taking food out of dustbins at markets.

4.6.2. Health-seeking behaviour

While children involved in waste-picking are exposed to multiple health hazards, most rely on home remedies or wait for conditions to resolve themselves. This appears to be due to a lack of awareness and limited access to adequate healthcare facilities – gaps which can lead to long-term health problems and lifelong disabilities.

In terms of health-seeking behaviours, 62 per cent of the children interviewed rely on self-medication, a quacks or religious scholars, or seek medicine from a pharmacy or co-worker. Just 6 per cent consult private doctors, while 30 per cent seek treatment from government hospitals or charitable institutions.

More than half (52 per cent) of the children surveyed cited the high costs of medical treatment as the primary reason why they do not consult qualified doctors. Other reasons include long distances to medical facilities, health workers' 'unfriendly' attitudes, the aggressive behaviour of security guards, and the children's lack of identity cards.



I don't think we need masks or gloves to protect ourselves. I know how to protect myself. The only thing I need is a good pair of shoes."

-Boy interviewed

4.6.3. Awareness of available social and welfare support

More than two-thirds of the children interviewed (67 per cent) are unaware of existing social protection schemes, while the rest (33 per cent) have heard of social protection initiatives, most notably the Benazir Income Support Programme and the Ehsaas programme.

Once more, a lack of identity documents – particularly but not exclusively among persons of Afghan origin – prevent them from accessing government social protection programmes or assistance from national and international aid organizations. Only 16 per cent of the children interviewed reported that their families have received support from government entities, charitable organizations (with comparatively more reporting assistance from charities), or local philanthropists.



Are you talking about Benazir or Imran Khan?"

-Boy interviewed (when asked about social protection services)

4.7. Case studies



Case study 1. Suffering verbal abuse from local guards

Twelve-year-old Rashid (not his real name) came to Pakistan with his family, seeking to escape hunger, poverty and violence in Afghanistan. Every day, he collects more than 25kg of waste from different locations, covering long distances on foot, and sells his finds to a local kabaria (scrap dealer). He usually works in the morning and afternoon, but often visits markets to collect waste late in the evening. Rashid's mother works as a seamstress, while his father has been sick for many years.

"I don't know [what] the illness of my father [is], but he stopped working many years ago and now spends all the time watching television at a hotel near our house," he says. "My mother and all three of my brothers work hard and [we] hand over all of our earnings to my father."

"Waste picking is a difficult and dirty work. Sometimes the kachra kundi are so filthy that one cannot stand there even for five minutes," he explains.

“Once I was caught by police while I was collecting waste from a local market. The policemen searched my bag and threw away everything I collected. The local guards also use abusive words with all the waste-pickers.”

Last year, Rashid’s younger brother was seriously injured while collecting waste from a construction site. The family spent a large sum on his treatment, taking out a loan from the owner of a local junkyard. Now, Rashid is working to repay the loan.

Despite his tender age, he smokes cigarettes and occasionally uses naswar (a moistened, smokeless tobacco product), which some of his friends use regularly. *“Smoking cigarettes and using naswar is quite common among waste-pickers,”* he reports. *“It gives us some enjoyment.”*



Case study 2. Wearing different shoes on each foot

Thirteen-year-old Ahsan (not his real name) lives with his parents in a brick house plastered with mud. The family migrated to Karachi from Buner, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s district of Swat, in 2013. As the eldest of five siblings, he began working at a very early age to supplement the income of his father, the family’s sole breadwinner.

Ahsan is on the move all day – rushing from one market to another in search of waste materials which he sells to a local shop. He treats each day like a prolonged game, smiling as he bustles about with other children picking waste in the same markets.

Despite his positive outlook, Ahsan looks weak. Clad in shabby clothes, he wears a different kind of shoe on each foot. *“I never had proper shoes,”* he explains with a laugh. *“Once while picking waste, I found one black shoe in my size. I keep it for two months until I found another one very recently. I am happy that I now have shoes.”*

He is fascinated by the school children he sees, in their pristine uniforms carrying school bags laden with books – just like his large jute bag filled with plastic and waste. He hopes to study one day, if he ever has sufficient resources. Day after day, he hands over all of his earnings to his mother, whom he fondly calls Gul Jan. Ahsan longs for his life to change, but he has no desire to leave his family, especially his mother.



Case study 3. Trolleys ease waste transportation

Rahim (not his real name) was orphaned when he was 6 years old. Now just 16, he is the head of a seven-member household. Having migrated from Afghanistan with his mother and siblings and mother, he is happy that his family is now safe in Pakistan.

Rahim says he began waste-picking by choice. He is eager to work – collecting waste from markets and *kachra kundi* (dumpsites), and selling what he finds to a *kabaria* shop. When he started waste-picking, he recalls, local *kabaria* cheated him out of the sums he was due. After years of work, however, he now knows the trade very well.

“The collection of waste is a difficult and tiring job. If I get any other option, I will leave the profession without any hesitation,” he says. But he admits that, one day, he hopes to be a junkyard owner.

To ease their work, Rahim and other waste-pickers pool money together to hire a scooter trolley to transport their finds. While this has made their lives easier, they still face enmity from local shopkeepers, guards, strangers and the police. According to Rahim, people treat children involved in waste-picking like thieves. These perceptions make it difficult to collect waste in some commercial areas. *“In such places,”* he explains, *“we always visit early in the morning to collect waste, before the local sweeper or municipality workers arrive.”*



Case study 4. Looking forward to running his father’s *kabaria* shop

Eleven-year-old Kareem (not his real name) lives in Jamali Goth, the largest and most crowded residential area of Afghan refugees in the city of Karachi. He began waste-picking at the age of seven, helping his father and four brothers. He has never been to school – both because schools are ‘far away’ and because of his family’s attitudes to education.

When he was younger, Kareem collected plastic bottles, cardboard and paper from residential areas alongside his father. Now, he leads his brothers farther afield in search of waste materials. Every day he wakes up early to search for recyclables, walking between 25 and 30 kilometres and carrying a bag laden with more than 15kg of waste. His favourite pastime is a free lunch at Saylani Dastar Khawan, where he loves to eat biryani.

Kareem’s father recently set up a small *kabaria* shop in their area. *“In summer, it is bit difficult to do all this work because of the extremely hot weather, but we have no other option,”* says Kareem. *“Now my father has established a small shop and in the future I will be responsible for running the business.”*

Afraid that waste-burning on street corners or in *kachra kundi* will destroy valuable items, Kareem prefers to collect waste early in the morning. He dismisses the idea of taking precautionary measures, like wearing gloves. *“It is difficult to collect waste while wearing gloves,”* he says, *“you can sort the waste easily with your bare hands.”*



Case study 5. Love for education

Fourteen-year-old Meena (not her real name) has been collecting waste for the past five years. Waste-picking is common among members of the nomadic Changar community to which she belongs. Her mother and father are both sweepers; as they work, Meena and her sisters help them by collecting waste from houses. Working for an average of 8 hours per day, the family receives a monthly income from each house in the vicinity.

Meena loves to learn, and her parents have encouraged her education. She is enrolled in a non-formal school set up by an NGO in their squatter settlement which she attends every afternoon. Now able to read and write, Meena is eager to join a formal school as soon as her family has sufficient resources.

Sometimes, she faces harassment while working alone on deserted streets. *“The residents of housing societies are very polite to us. They often offer leftover to us,”* she reports. *“But sometimes passersby use very bad words about me. I don’t like such people.”* Not using gloves or a mask has exposed her to hazards in the past; she once narrowly escaped a snake bite while sorting waste near home.



Case study 6. Following in his father’s footsteps

Mahesh (not his real name) and his family live in a slum with other members of the Hindu Bagri community. The family have worked in waste management for generations; both his father and grandfather were sweepers. He prefers to identify as a waste-picker, rather than a sweeper.

“I am doing what my father and grandfather did to earn their livelihood,” he explains. The work is hard and they are routinely subjected to verbal abuse. *“Our work is quite dirty, but I have been doing this since I was 6 years old. Now I am 14 and trying to earn as much money as possible.”*

Mahesh began by helping his father, before starting to work independently for money. On average, he earns 500 rupees per day by selling the waste he collects. Every day, 200 rupees of his earnings are handed over to a money lender that his family owe money to.

“I was enrolled in a local government school, but I could not manage school and work together. Later, I left the school and started working full time,” says Mahesh. *“My family needs the income I am earning, and I am happy to support my family. I wish one day [to] buy a gold necklace for my mother. [...] I am sure that, one day, I will be the owner of a small kabaria shop in this area.”*



Case study 7. Saving up to start a business

Farman (not his real name) belongs to a financially stable, but illiterate family that does not see the value of education. Neither he, nor any of his six siblings, have been to school. Two of Farman's brothers work with their father at his mechanic's shop.

"I started waste-picking when I was 10 years old. It was my own decision as I wanted to earn on my own," he recalls. "My family did not object to my choice of work. Initially, I spent all my earnings, but later I started saving some money."

Although he suffers from a long-running allergic reaction that affects his hands, Farman enjoys the independence that comes with his work, and eating out at free food stalls. "Once a fight started at the charity restaurant and the police were called. I was among those arrested," he explains. "A local community leader took 10,000 rupees from my father to secure my release from custody. I don't know how much money he gave to the police. I spent six days in a lock-up and the police didn't [make me appear] before a court."

For the past year, Farman has been helping out a local kabaria, sorting through scavenged materials. He believes that children work more than adults, and do not complain as much. After learning of the recycling business, he plans to leave waste-picking behind.



Case study 8. Seeking solace in social media

Sikandar (not his real name) has been waste-picking for the last eight years, since he was just 6 years old. Now, he regularly works at a waste transfer station. "In these heaps of waste, it is difficult to collect the desired material, especially when 20 other children are searching for the same stuff," he points out. "You have to be quick and agile when collecting waste in a crowd, otherwise you miss good stuff."

Sikandar and his friends often hire donkey carts or motorcycle trolleys to transport the waste they collect. He earns more than 700 rupees per day, which he hands over – in full – to his father.

"Last year, I bought an android mobile phone," he says. "I make videos and post them on different social media platforms. I enjoy making funny videos. I never make videos about my work because it is dirty work and no one would like to watch them."

With over 1,000 subscribers on TikTok, Sikandar wants to buy a video camera and a laptop for editing. One day, he hopes to join a skills training programme to learn more about video-making.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

There is a paucity of information on children's involvement in waste-picking in available literature on child labour in Pakistan. This rapid assessment addresses this gap – shedding light on the drivers of children's engagement in waste-picking, their backgrounds, the conditions in which they work, the hazards they face, and the impact these have on the children involved.

Pakistan's only national Child Labour Survey was conducted in 1996 and the findings of a new Child Labour Survey have yet to be published for all provinces and regions, with the exception of Gilgit-Baltistan. As such, no up-to-date statistics are available on the number of children engaged in work, including in waste-picking. Although national and provincial legislation prohibits children's engagement in hazardous work, implementation evidently remains a challenge. Thus, scores of children are involved in waste-picking, which is considered a form of hazardous work.

There are many factors that push children into work. The findings of this assessment affirm that intergenerational poverty is a major underlying reason for children's involvement in waste-picking across Pakistan. Large family size and the low value accorded to education are also key reasons. As parents struggle to provide for large numbers of children, especially when they are illiterate themselves, they often push their children into work at an early age to supplement household income. This deprives children of the opportunity to attain an education, while exposing them to risks of violence, abuse and health problems, and reducing their future employment prospects. Children in vulnerable communities – such as Afghan refugees, ethnic or religious minorities, and those living in slums – are especially likely to be involved in waste-picking, particularly when their parents or families also collect waste.

While Pakistani cities generate increasing quantities of solid waste – due to high levels of population growth and rapid urbanization – municipal waste management system struggle to keep pace. No city in the country has a comprehensive solid waste management system that runs the gamut from collection to proper disposal. Improper waste disposal practices abound, opening up space for private stakeholders to dominate scavenging and recycling activities with little or no government oversight. Due to Pakistan's high rates of poverty, marginalized communities – including children – take up waste-picking as their only available livelihood option.

Children usually start waste-picking at a very early age, often alongside their fathers or other family members. Once they begin earning, they are unlikely to stop waste-picking. They work long hours, covering long distances on foot even in extreme weather, and sift through unhygienic, dangerous or sometimes toxic materials – exposing them to the risk of injury and health problems. They face social stigma, verbal abuse and even physical violence.

5.2. Recommendations

Pakistan requires a multi-pronged approach to improve the lives of children involved in waste-picking and end the worst forms of child labour. To ensure that policies and practices are sustainable, all stakeholders must be involved – from government decision-makers and law enforcement, to civil society, the private sector and development partners.

Based on its findings, this rapid assessment puts forth the following recommendations.

5.2.1. Recommendations on child labour



End child labour, particularly the worst forms of child labour

► Renew commitments to the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child – both of which Pakistan has ratified – by implementing the measures proposed by the Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour,³⁴ including:

(2) Ensuring safe and healthy working conditions, which are fundamental to decent work, and the protection of young persons from hazardous work.

(23) Improving data collection and knowledge generation on child labour in agriculture, mining, domestic work, the larger service sector and in manufacturing, in order to inform tailored responses.

(24) Fostering systemic behavioural changes at community level, particularly in rural areas, and raising awareness, using participatory methods, of the right to education and the need for immediate action to abandon child labour practices.

(27) Ending child labour in supply chains by promoting and supporting transparency, due diligence and remediation in private and public supply chains and procurement policies.

(32) Providing adequate and relevant training, skills development and vocational education for girls and boys above the minimum age for employment, including quality apprenticeships, particularly in rural areas to improve employability and increase attractiveness of jobs in agriculture; building foundational skills, especially among young women and girls, children from minority groups, and children with disabilities; and matching labour market needs and opportunities.

(35) Progressively extending access to comprehensive, adequate, sustainable, gender- and age responsive, disability-inclusive social protection, including through the establishment of national social protection floors.

(38) Expanding child labour monitoring systems, linked to the provision of social protection services.

► Accelerate multi-stakeholder efforts to prevent and eliminate child labour, particularly the worst forms of child labour, by making decent work a reality for adults and young persons above the minimum age for employment. Implement existing labour laws effectively, while discouraging child labour in the formal and informal economy – including in waste-picking.

► Create synergies to end child labour by ensuring policy coherence between the Government's social, trade-related, agricultural, financial, labour-related, economic, education and training,

³⁴ The Durban Call to Action is a document that emphasizes the need for urgent action to end child labour. It was adopted by Delegates at the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour on 20 May 2022. 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, "What is the Durban Call to Action?".

and environmental policies. This would contribute to a human-centred approach to the future of work which is free of child labour and forced labour. Strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation to mainstream the elimination of child labour across different areas – such as poverty reduction, decent work, gender equality, food security and nutrition, water and sanitation, overcoming inequalities, climate change, environmental protection, clean energy, digitalization, peace-building, migration and youth empowerment.



Effectively implement national laws

- ▶ Implement national laws, regulations and policies on child labour and forced labour nationwide. This should involve strengthening the capacity of law enforcement, labour inspectors, agricultural extension services, child protection and education services, and other relevant authorities to investigate, prevent and address child and forced labour, modern slavery and trafficking in persons.



Monitor child labour

- ▶ Strengthen Pakistan's child labour monitoring mechanism, including by linking social protection services to child labour monitoring systems at the local and provincial levels.
- ▶ Collect data on the informal economy – which includes waste-picking – disaggregated by sex, age and other factors, and strengthen data collection and management systems to inform evidence-based policies and programmes on child labour and forced labour.
- ▶ Promote collaboration between academia and the development sector to conduct research on child labour – including children's involvement in waste-picking – and propose solutions.



Change mindsets

- ▶ Conduct awareness raising sessions – led by child protection authorities and NGOs – to change mindsets and attitudes that treat child labour as a socially and culturally acceptable phenomenon. Sensitize communities about the unacceptability of child labour, the fact that poverty should not be accepted as an excuse for child labour, the urgent need to end the phenomenon, its links to intergenerational poverty, the hazards that children face when they are involved in waste-picking, and the importance of education.



Foster political will to address children's involvement in waste-picking

- ▶ Foment dialogue on children's involvement in waste-picking – led by civil society organizations and the media – to bring the matter to the attention of decision-makers and parliamentarians. Improved understandings of the challenges involved will encourage the development of relevant legislation and the allocation of resources.



Promote human rights due diligence in the private sector

- ▶ Require businesses to carry out human rights due diligence processes in their supply chains to identify, prevent and address the presence of child labour. Companies in all sectors should take action to end child labour in their operations and supply chains, including by sensitizing their staff on child safeguarding and safeguarding children at the operational level.



Respect fundamental principles and rights at work

- ▶ Promote, respect and realize all fundamental principles and rights at work, recognizing their inseparable, interrelated and mutually reinforcing character – including safe and healthy working conditions, the minimum wage, and the protection of young persons from hazardous work, as suggested above.

5.2.2. Recommendations on child protection



Strengthen police capacities on child protection

- ▶ Deliver capacity building and training programmes for the police on child-friendly policing. Build on past programmes to sensitize law enforcement officers on child rights, devising more focused programmes on how to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation, including when they come into conflict with the law.
- ▶ Implement the Juvenile Justice System Act of 2018 to safeguard the rights of children involved in criminal proceedings, with a view to protecting them from arbitrary arrest, violence and abuse in custody.



Enhance child protection

- ▶ Display the Child Helpline number (1121) at strategic locations across cities to raise awareness of this 24/7 toll-free line. Ensure that local child protection authorities have referral partners in place, alongside sufficient human and financial resources to support children in need of protection. Create effective child protection mechanisms where these do not exist, and enhance existing mechanisms. Provide safe homes or shelters for children, including care and counselling packages.

5.2.3. Recommendations on poverty reduction and social protection



Reduce poverty

- ▶ Reduce poverty by promoting education and vocational training, expanding access to healthcare, and creating avenues for needy people to earn an income and improve their lives. This is essential to address poverty as a driver of children's involvement in waste-picking.



Expand access to social protection

- ▶ Expand access to comprehensive, sustainable, gender-responsive, age-sensitive and disability-inclusive social protection by establishing a national social protection floor.
- ▶ Develop innovative approaches to ensure that the poorest and most needy people in Pakistan have access to social protection programmes, including by providing them with the identity documents required to access these programmes. Raise awareness of existing initiatives – such as the Benazir Income Support Programme and Ehsaas – among communities involved in waste-picking. Government authorities should also work with international organizations, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to devise strategies to support vulnerable Afghan refugees' education and vocational training, in order to enable their children to secure decent work.



Offer universal child benefit payments

- ▶ Offer universal government child benefit payments – such as cash transfers and allowances for dependent children in social welfare payments. This would foster basic income security for all households, including those living in extreme poverty, increase their resilience to shocks, reduce the risks of child labour and encourage the removal of children from child labour.

5.2.4. Recommendations on education



Provide quality education for all

- ▶ Implement Article 25-A of the Constitution, which affirms the state's responsibility to provide free and compulsory education for all children between 5 and 16 years old. Improve the quality of education to engage children and prepare them to secure decent work in the labour market, including through skills development, and technical and vocational education and training (TVET).
- ▶ Eliminate direct and indirect barriers to quality education for girls and boys – such as long distances between schools and communities, fees and costs, safety and security challenges, and gender- and disability-related barriers. Ensuring that no one is left behind and excluded from quality education by taking into account the particular needs of children in the vulnerable situations.
- ▶ Make schools child-friendly, including by providing scholarships and school meals to those in need. Recruit sufficient numbers of qualified teachers and ensure good work conditions for them. Teach children foundational skills to improve literacy in marginalized communities.
- ▶ Increase spending on education to enhance student learning outcomes, raising it to at least 4 to 6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and/or at least 15 to 20 per cent of public expenditure, as recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Education 2030 Framework.

5.2.5. Recommendations on solid waste management



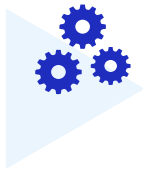
Improve solid waste management

- ▶ Design and develop community-based waste management and recycling programmes with the involvement of all stakeholders to effectively and safely manage solid waste, in order to reduce children's engagement in waste-picking. Create green jobs
- ▶ Develop public-private partnerships to create green jobs for persons involved in all stages of solid waste management. Follow the lead of local governments worldwide which have devised innovative solid waste management programmes, including by building infrastructure and incorporating modern technologies to increase recycling rates and transform waste to energy without relying on incineration. Leverage the human and technical expertise, and financial resources, of waste and recycling companies in Pakistan to this end. Offer special internships for waste-pickers willing to join these programmes.



Foster dialogue with the recycling industry

- ▶ Initiate dialogue between the Government, recycling industry – including employers, workers and junkyard owners – community leaders and civil society organizations to explore possibilities for reducing solid waste through environmentally-friendly packages that minimize disposable waste. As part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, encourage the recycling industry to offer vocational training programmes and scholarships for children involved in waste-picking. Conduct mass awareness raising activities on reducing solid waste and promoting the development and use of environmentally-friendly materials.



Formalize the waste management sector and create economic opportunities

- ▶ Formalize the waste management sector by employing adults and building their skills, while removing children from the sector and supporting their rehabilitation through education and vocational training. Ensure the proper regulation and management of junkyards. Introduce an incentive-driven approach to create income generation opportunities for marginalized communities, including safe, risk-free decent work opportunities for all adults and children above the legally established minimum age for work. Formalizing the sector has the added benefit of enabling its supervision by labour inspectors.
- ▶ Raise awareness of proper waste disposal and a clean environment, including the importance of reducing, reusing, recycling, sorting and segregating wet and dry waste. Disseminate information through public service messages (PSMs), social media platforms, the electronic and print media, as well as through awareness raising sessions at schools and in communities.

Chapter 6

Stakeholders' validation workshop and the way forward

After the rapid assessment was completed, a stakeholder validation workshop was held on 8 September 2022 at the Avari Towers hotel in Karachi. The event drew together a diverse group of 34 participants, representing the government, civil society organizations, academia, labour unions/employees' unions, the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and ILO. Participants validated the assessment's key findings and recommendations, and worked to develop an action plan for the recommendations' implementation. Participants were divided into four working groups, based on their organizations, type of work experience and mandate. Each group was assigned key areas and set of questions for brainstorming and discussion. All four groups deliberated on the key areas and recommended following.

▶ **Table 4. Group A: Awareness raising on proper waste disposal and a clean environment**

Key areas	Suggested activities
Slogans and public service messages (PSMs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Use slogans like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ My waste, my responsibility ▶ Give waste and earn bounties ▶ Let's come together to make Pakistan waste-free ▶ Reduce, reuse and recycle ▶ Raise awareness of the segregation of waste
Mediums for awareness raising	▶ Social media platforms (including Facebook, TikTok and Snapchat) as well as the electronic and print media
Segregating waste at source	▶ Use four distinct types of waste containers or waste bags for: (1) sharp objects, (2) paper, (3) recyclables, and (4) wet/kitchen waste

Key areas	Suggested activities
Mobilizing children and communities to sort and dispose of dry and wet waste at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Deliver awareness raising sessions at school on proper waste disposal methods. ► Involve and train teachers to deliver awareness raising sessions about waste disposal at schools ► Encourage schools to organize co-curricular activities to raise children’s awareness of health, hygiene and waste disposal ► Involve local communities, associations and religious institutions to advocate for proper waste disposal
The role of public-private partnerships in waste management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Formalize the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders involved in waste-picking, buying and waste management ► Encourage public and private actors involved in waste collection to collaborate with each other through public private-partnerships ► Advocate and engage with businesses’ CSR programmes to develop mechanisms for the management of recyclable materials ► Introduce new legislation requiring private sector companies to reserve a percentage of their revenues to support waste management work by the Government/municipalities. ► Develop community-based models for, and raise communities’ awareness of, proper waste disposal in junkyards or rubbish bins

► **Table 5. Group B: Measures to make waste-picking free from exploitation**

Key areas	Suggested activities
Advocacy on smart identity cards for Afghan refugees, provided by the Government of Pakistan with the support of UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Register the refugee population to decrease their social vulnerability; however, it is important to note that the influx of more refugees may increase socio-economic and security challenges ► Ensure that local municipalities or waste management authorities address all matters related to the collection and disposal of waste ► Register waste-pickers with the Tasdeeq app (TAPP) through the local police and Citizens’ Police Liaison Committees ► Ensure that waste-pickers are identifiable and authenticated to maintain the safety of neighbourhoods
Feasibility of the issuance of registration/ identity cards for waste-pickers over the age of 18 by union councils or other relevant public authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Ensure that the staff of waste management authorities undertake waste disposal; therefore, there is no need to issue ‘authorized waste-picker cards’ ► Implement existing laws on decent work and child labour ► Identify and register waste-pickers to improve regulation and tracking ► Do not issue children below the legal minimum age for employment any authorization to collect waste

Key areas	Suggested activities
Formalizing waste-picking through legislative reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Empower local solid waste management authorities ► Ensure coordination between the ILO and municipal authorities to discourage waste-picking by children ► Devise a system for the segregation and collection of waste at source, and raise consumers' awareness
Providing basic education by enrolling registered waste-pickers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Provide basic education through informal schools/non-formal education centres near children's homes

► **Table 6. Group C: Steps to minimize health hazards and improve mental, physical, emotional and social well-being**

Key areas	Suggested activities
Reducing children's exposure to hazardous waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Ensure the proper waste disposal by waste management authorities, including by ensuring that their staff have personal protective equipment ► Create green and non-hazardous jobs for eligible workers ► Encourage waste-pickers to register for health examinations to detect diseases they may be suffering from ► Raise awareness of child protection and related issues through child protection authorities and NGOs
Preventing health hazards and promoting the effective role of health authorities in ensuring safe waste disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Develop and implement Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to prevent littering and ensure proper waste disposal ► Strictly implement laws on the disposal of hazardous waste ► Develop authorized, supervised junkyards where staff use personal protective equipment ► Raise awareness of cleanliness by mobilizing students at all levels to create a 'Clean and Green Pakistan'
Improving junkyard management and barring children's entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Identify, prevent and stop the engagement of children in the waste management supply chain ► Provide alternative livelihood options to the families of children involved in waste-picking and engage their family members in green jobs

▶ **Table 7. Group D: Enterprise development for waste pickers**

Key areas	Suggested activities
Solutions for reducing waste, and reusing and recycling resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Raise awareness of the importance of reducing, reusing, recycling and segregating wet and dry waste ▶ Educate the public education to improve understands of waste management and the importance of recycling
Methods for sorting waste and using recyclable bags in homes/ institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide waste collection bags that facilitate the segregation of waste at households' doorsteps; then waste management companies can collect waste that has already been sorted ▶ Develop and disseminate public service messages about the segregation of waste at source
Designing a community-based waste management and recycling programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Promote collaboration between locals and councils to develop community-based waste disposal management programmes ▶ Implement 'cleanliness drives' at the community level with the active involvement of children and adults
Involving the private sector as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Link CSR programmes with neighbourhood waste disposal initiatives ▶ Provide waste disposal bags to local residents and personal protective equipment to waste collectors/waste-pickers ▶ Involve CSR programmes in raising awareness of waste management among households, families and factories through the media ▶ Ensure that children are not part of the supply chains of companies and manufacturers which purchase waste materials for recycling ▶ Engage waste-pickers in less hazardous work, such as packaging in factories

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Annex. International commitments, and national and sub-national laws

International commitments

Some of the international frameworks related to child rights that Pakistan has committed include:

- ▶ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- ▶ CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict
- ▶ CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
- ▶ ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), 1973
- ▶ ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (C.182)
- ▶ South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution
- ▶ Sustainable Development Goal target 8.7 – *“Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.”*

National and sub-national laws related to child labour

National

- ▶ Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018
- ▶ Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act, 2018
- ▶ Children (Pledging of Labour) Act, 1933
- ▶ Children (Pledging of Labour) (Amendment) Bill, 2022

Punjab

- ▶ Punjab Shops and Establishments (Amendment) Act, 2014
- ▶ Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2018
- ▶ Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Ordinance, 2016
- ▶ Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016
- ▶ Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act, 2004 (Amended 2017)

- ▶ Punjab Factories (Amendment) Act, 2012

Sindh

- ▶ Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act, 2017
- ▶ Sindh Factories Act, 2015
- ▶ Sindh Shops and Commercial Establishment Act, 2015
- ▶ Sindh Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Bill, 2015
- ▶ Sindh Child Protection Authority Act, 2011 (Amended in 2021)
- ▶ Sindh Street Children Shelter Home Act, 2018
- ▶ Sindh Minimum Wages Act, 2015
- ▶ Sindh Employees Social Security Act, 2016

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

- ▶ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection And Welfare Act, 2010
- ▶ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Labour Policy 2018
- ▶ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prohibition of Employment of Children Act, 2015
- ▶ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 2015
- ▶ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shops and Establishments Act, 2015
- ▶ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Factories Act, 2013

Balochistan

- ▶ Balochistan Minimum Wages Act, 2021
- ▶ Balochistan Employment of Children (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 2021
- ▶ Balochistan Factories Act 2021
- ▶ Balochistan Child Protection Act, 2016

Islamabad Capital Territory

- ▶ Employment of Children Act, 1991
- ▶ Employment of Children Rules, 1995
- ▶ Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act, 2018
- ▶ West Pakistan Shops and Establishments Ordinance, 1969
- ▶ Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act ,2020
- ▶ Provincial Employees Social Security Ordinance, 1965
- ▶ Amendment to the Child Employment Act, 2020 (Statutory Notifications (SRO) of the Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Human Rights, which bans child domestic labour and some other occupations)

Rapid assessment of child labour in waste-picking in Pakistan

This rapid assessment examines children's involvement in waste-picking in Pakistan. Commissioned by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Asia Regional Child Labour (ARC) Project, the assessment sheds light on the drivers of children's engagement in waste-picking, their socio-demographic backgrounds, the conditions in which they work, the hazards they face, and the impact these have on the children involved. Based on its findings, the assessment offers recommendations to assist the Government of Pakistan, UN agencies, development partners, employers and civil society organizations to develop action programmes to address children's engagement in waste-picking nationwide.

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