

FINDING HUMANITY

A PODCAST SHARING TRUE STORIES OF COURAGE AND PURPOSE

FINDING HUMANITY PODCAST EDUCATION TOOLKITS

Season 2: Seeking Justice on the Frontlines

EPISODE 6

Captured: Afghanistan's 'Dancing Boys' and the Hazaras | Barat Ali Batoor

[Listen to Episode](#)

Finding Humanity is a production of **Humanity Lab Foundation** and **Hueman Group Media**. This educational toolkit was created to help inspire additional learning and engagement around critical social justice and human rights topics surfaced the Finding Humanity podcast. The goal of the toolkit is to provide insight into the political, social, legal and economic systems that hinder our progress on solving complex social and political problems.

Our goal is to share our insights, research, policy analysis and key findings with hopes to inspire continued engagement and learning around the podcast episodes and the substantial content and topics unearthed in each episode.

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About the Finding Humanity Podcast | Season 2:

For some, fighting for change means risking it all, one's own life. As history has taught us, fighting grave injustice requires courage, perseverance and grit. In season 2 of Finding Humanity Podcast, we unpack the stories of people on the frontlines of change. People who put their bodies on the line to create an equitable and just world. [Learn More.](#)

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EPISODE

Main topics in Episode: Political Asylum, Dangers of Exposing Political Corruption or Abuse of Power, Hazara people, Bacha Bazi

Short Description of Episode:

This episode follows the story of Barat Ali Batoor, a freelance photographer, and his journey to seek political asylum in Australia. His experience of the process is situated in his background as a member of the persecuted Hazara ethnic minority community in Afghanistan and his documentation of the abuse and trafficking of Afghanistan's dancing boys. It was his exposure of a societal taboo, protected by existing power structures that led him to flee and seek asylum in Australia. His journey raises questions about political asylum – what it is, how difficult it is to obtain, why somebody is granted this form of asylum, and how it differs from refugees displaced by conflict.

In this episode we also talk about the dangers of exposing political corruption and abuse of power. We look at examples of people who have had to seek asylum to protect themselves when they have spoken out. What does it mean to be free to say what you want? Does the international community have a role to play in protecting those who expose abuse of power?

Seeking asylum: an overview

Every day, all over the world, people make one of the most difficult decisions in their lives: to **leave their homes in search of a safer, better life.**

There are **many reasons why people around the globe seek to rebuild their lives in a different country.** Some people leave home to get a job or an education. Others are forced to flee persecution or human rights violations such as torture. Millions flee from armed conflicts or other crises or violence. Some **no longer feel safe and might have been targeted just because of who they are or what they do or believe – for example, for their ethnicity, religion, sexuality or political opinions.**

Source/Extracted from:
Amnesty International, Key Facts, [link](#)

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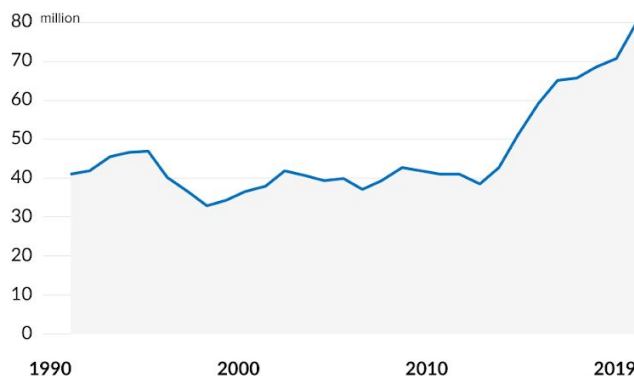


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79.5 MILLION forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019

Source: UNHCR / 18 June 2020



45.7M Internally displaced people

Source: IDMC

4.2M Asylum-seekers

3.6M Venezuelans displaced abroad



1%
of the world's
population is
displaced



80%
of the world's
displaced
people are
in countries or territories affected by
acute food insecurity and malnutrition



73%
Hosted in
neighbouring
countries *



68%
Came from just
5 countries *

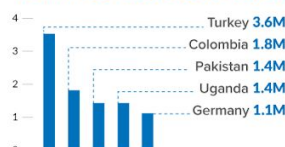


40%
of the world's
displaced people
are children



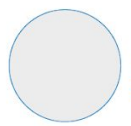
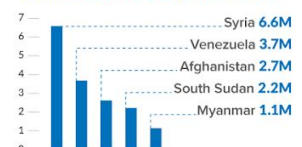
85%
Hosted in
developing
countries *

TOP HOSTING COUNTRIES



* Data includes UNHCR refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad

TOP SOURCE COUNTRIES



4.2M
Stateless people



2M
Asylum applications
(in 2019)



107,800
Resettled to 26 countries
(in 2019)



5.6M
Returnees
(in 2019)



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

employs **17,324** personnel in **135** countries
(as of 31 May 2020)

We are funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, with 86 per cent from governments and the European Union and 10 per cent from private donors

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Glossary

Asylum: The grant, by a State, of protection on its territory to persons from another State who are fleeing persecution or serious danger. Asylum encompasses a variety of elements, including non-refoulement, permission to remain on the territory of the asylum country and humane standards of treatment.

Asylum seeker: An asylum-seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum-seeker.

Migration: The movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.

Migrant: At the international level, there is no universally accepted definition of the term “migrant”. Migrants may remain in the home country or host country (“settlers”), move on to another country (“transit migrants”), or move back and forth between countries (“circular migrants” such as seasonal workers).

Refugee: A person who, owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

Displaced Person: Persons who, for different reasons or circumstances, have been compelled to leave their homes. They may or may not reside in their country of origin.

Non-refoulement: The prohibition for states to extradite, deport, expel or otherwise return a person to a country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened, or where there are substantial grounds for believing that he or she would risk being subjected to torture or

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other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, or would be in danger of being subjected to enforced disappearance, or of suffering another irreparable harm

Hazaras: The third-largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, native to the mountainous region of Hazarajat. They are considered to be one of the most oppressed groups in Afghanistan.

Bacha bāzi (dancing boys): A slang term in some parts of Afghanistan for a custom involving child sexual abuse between older men and young adolescent males or boys, who are called dancing boys.

Sources/ Extracted from:

UNHCR, Glossary, [link](#)

IOM, Key migration terms, [link](#)

Quick Facts & Data

Asylum:

- Seeking asylum is not only legal - in fact, it is a basic human right. [1]
- There are currently 4.2 million asylum-seekers around the world. [2]
- At least 79.5 people around the world have been forced to flee their homes - among them nearly 26 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18. [2]
- While about 20 developed nations, including Australia, participate formally in the UNHCR's refugee resettlement program, the vast majority of asylum seekers and refugees are actually hosted in developing countries. [3]
- 2.7 million refugees come from Afghanistan. [2]

Australia:

- Australia has a long history of accepting refugees for resettlement and over 800,000 refugees and displaced persons have settled in Australia since 1945. [3]
- Although those who come to Australia by boat seeking Australia's protection are classified by Australian law to be 'unlawful non-citizens', they have a right to seek asylum under international law and not be penalised for their mode of entry. [3]

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- Although the numbers fluctuate, usually only a small proportion of asylum applicants in Australia arrive by boat—most arrive by air with a valid visa and then go on to pursue asylum claims. [3]

Afghanistan:

Hazara:

- The exact number of Hazara is unknown, but likely exceeds several million. [4]
- The Western Hazara are Sunni Muslims and speak dialects of Persians. The Eastern Hazara speak an eastern variety of Persian called Hazaragi and most of them are Shi'a Muslims of the Twelver faith. [4]
- The Hazara were largely autonomous until the 1890s, when they were forcefully and brutally integrated into the Afghan state. Since then they have faced significant marginalization, persecution and displacement. [4]
- The Shi'a Hazaras are historically the most discriminated ethnic minority group in the state. [4]

Bacha bazi:

- Bacha bazi was common for hundreds of years, before being outlawed by the Taliban government in the 1990s. [5]
- According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) victims are often beaten, with injuries including internal haemorrhaging, protrusion of intestines, throat injuries, heavy internal bleeding, broken limbs, fractures, broken teeth, strangulation, and in some cases, death. [5]
- In some parts of the country, a number of individuals keep with them one or more boys typically aging between 10-18 years for the purpose of bacha bazi. [6]
- 87% bacha bazi victims have stated that they have not been willingly trapped. 81% want to quit this job. [6]
- 25% of bacha bazi perpetrators were aged between 21-30, 28% aged 31-40, 56% aged 41-50. [6]
- Bacha bazi does not have a direct link with the individuals' marital status: only 22% are unmarried. 18% of the married ones have more than one wife. [6]
- 69.5% perpetrators stated that their motive is recreation, lust and personal interest. [6]
- 89% of the perpetrators have stated that they have not been prosecuted for their act. [6]

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- The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan increased the prevalence of bacha bazi. [5]

Sources/ Extracted from:

[1] Human Rights Australia, Asylum seekers and refugees, [link](#)

[2] UNHCR, Figures at a Glance, [link](#)

[3] APH, Asylum seekers: facts, [link](#)

[4] Britannica, Hazara, [link](#)

[5] HR, Bacha bazi: Afghanistan's darkest secrets, [link](#)

[6] AIHRC, Causes and Consequences of Bacha Bazi in Afghanistan, [link](#)

Topical Background Information & Context

WHY PEOPLE LEAVE THEIR COUNTRIES?

There are many reasons why it might be too difficult or dangerous for people to stay in their own countries. For example, children, women and men flee from violence, war, hunger, extreme poverty, because of their sexual or gender orientation, or from the consequences of climate change or other natural disasters. Often people will face a combination of these difficult circumstances.

People who leave their countries are not always fleeing danger. They might believe they have a better chance of finding work in another country because they have the education or capital to seek opportunities elsewhere. Others might want to join relatives or friends who are already living abroad. Or they might seek to start or finish their education in another country. There are lots of different reasons for people to start a journey to build a life in a new country.

DEFINITIONS: WHO'S WHO

The terms "refugee", "asylum-seeker" and "migrant" are used to describe people who are on the move, who have left their countries and have crossed borders. The terms "migrant" and "refugee" are often used interchangeably but it is important to distinguish between them as there is a legal difference.

MIGRANTS

Some migrants leave their country because they want to work, study or join family, for

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example. Others feel they must leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters or other serious circumstances that exist there.

Lots of people don't fit the legal definition of a refugee but could nevertheless be in danger if they went home. It is important to understand that, just because migrants do not flee persecution, they are still entitled to have all their human rights protected and respected, regardless of the status they have in the country they moved to.

ASYLUM SEEKER v REFUGEE

A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection. On the other hand, an asylum-seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

In other words, an asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualised procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. **Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker.**

There is a great deal of confusion about the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee and often the terms are used interchangeably or incorrectly. **An asylum seeker is someone who is seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined.** In contrast, a refugee is someone who has been recognised under the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees to be a refugee. The Convention defines a 'refugee' as any person who:

... owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of

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that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it...

The definition of 'refugee' does not cover other individuals or groups of people who leave their country only because of war or other civil disturbance, famine, natural disasters or in order to seek a better life. As the UNHCR explains:

Refugees flee because of the threat of persecution and cannot return safely to their homes in the prevailing circumstances. An economic migrant normally leaves a country voluntarily to seek a better life. Should they elect to return home, they would continue to receive the protection of their government.

INTERNATIONAL NORMS ON REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Throughout the 20th century, the international community steadily assembled a set of guidelines, laws and conventions to ensure the adequate treatment of refugees and protect their human rights. The process began under the League of Nations in 1921.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 14 grants **the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution**. This right, in addition to the right to leave one's own country (Article 13), and the right to nationality (Article 15), can be traced directly to events of the Holocaust. Many countries whose drafters worked on the UDHR were acutely aware that they had turned away Jewish refugees, likely condemning them to death. In addition, many Jews, Roma and others hunted by the Nazis had been unable to leave Germany to save their lives. Under the umbrella of Article 14, more fully articulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention, over the decades millions of people have been given life-saving protection as refugees, been able to rebuild their lives and often have gone home again once the danger has passed.

In July 1951, a diplomatic conference in Geneva adopted the **Convention relating to the Status of Refugees ('1951 Convention')**, which was later amended by **the 1967 Protocol**. These documents clearly spell out who is a refugee and the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights a refugee is entitled to receive. It also defines a refugee's obligations to host countries and specifies certain categories of people, such as war criminals, who do not qualify for refugee status. Initially, the 1951 Convention was more or less limited to protecting European refugees in the aftermath of World War II, but the 1967 Protocol expanded its scope as the problem of displacement spread around the world.

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The cornerstone of the 1951 Convention is **the principle of non-refoulement contained in Article 33**. According to this principle, a refugee should not be returned to a country where he or she faces serious threats to his or her life or freedom.

The 1951 Convention does not define how States parties are to determine whether an individual meets the definition of a refugee. Instead, the establishment of asylum proceedings and refugee status determinations are left to each State party to develop. This has resulted in disparities among different States as governments craft asylum laws based on their different resources, national security concerns, and histories with forced migration movements. Despite differences at the national and regional levels, the overarching goal of the modern refugee regime is to provide protection to individuals forced to flee their homes because their countries are unwilling or unable to protect them.

HUMAN SMUGGLING

The smuggling of migrants, as defined in Article 3(a) of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, involves the **facilitation of a person's illegal entry into a State, for a financial or other material benefit**. Although it is a crime against a State, smugglers can also violate the human rights of those they smuggle, ranging from physical abuse to withholding food and water.

Human smuggling is a type of illegal immigration. It is the act of concealing a person to cross a border illegally. In most cases, an individual voluntarily pays someone (a smuggler) to facilitate their transportation into another country. He or she is choosing of their own will to cross the border. There are many reasons a person may be compelled to illegally cross a border. Often, they are looking for a better life, or are seeking to be reunited with loved ones who are already on the other side of the border. Whatever the reason, it is important to understand that human smuggling always begins as a voluntary exchange – without the key elements that would make it trafficking (force, fraud, coercion or exploitation of a minor.)

Given increasing obstacles to access safety, however, refugees, asylum-seekers and other persons in need of international protection are often compelled to use smugglers as their only means to flee persecution, conflict and violence.

Sources/ Extracted from:

Amnesty, Difference between asylum seekers and refugees, [link](#)

UNHCR, The 1951 Convention, [link](#)

Amnesty International, Key Facts, [link](#)

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	Trafficking	Smuggling	Immigration	Migration	Refugees	Asylum Seekers	IDPs
Voluntary Movement or Action	✗	✓	✓	✓ or ✗	✗	✗	✗
Involuntary Movement or Action	✓	✗	✗	✓ or ✗	✓	✓	✓
Border Crossing Required	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
No Border Crossing Required	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Legal Avenue Exists	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A
International Aid Available	✗	✗	✗	✓ or ✗	✓	Once Granted	✗

Engage together, World Choice, [link](#)
 International Justice Resource Center, Asylum, [link](#)
 Standup4humanrights, Asylum, [link](#)

ASYLUM POLICIES AROUND THE WORLD

Cross-border displacement – including migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees – has become hugely controversial around the world in recent years. In order to exercise the right articulated in Article 14 of the UDHR, people have to actually enter another country, and **today countries all over the world are slamming the doors shut, keeping out refugees and other migrants with barbed-wire fences, walls and armies.**

EUROPEAN UNION

Advocates say people flee – and will continue to flee – because of the dangers behind them, regardless of the dangers and obstacles that lie ahead. Despite efforts to erect a “Fortress

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Europe,” refugees and migrants continue to risk their lives in unseaworthy boats, trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. **Since 2014, every year at least 3,000 have lost their lives in this way, and in 2016 nearly 5,000 people died at sea. Many others perish during overland journeys.**

Between 2013 and 2017, the EU recorded over 4 million asylum applications — over three times more than in the five previous years (2008-2012). This situation resulted in growing tensions between Member States and an increase in non-cooperative behaviors in the Union, with some countries going as far as to release themselves from their obligations and duties to European law and to their partners. Above all, this situation justifies a growing concern over the Europeans’ ability to fulfill their international commitments and the humanist values that are the foundation of their historic project.

The Geneva Convention, which constitutes the legal foundation on which the European systems for protecting refugees have been built since 1951, is unequally interpreted and unevenly applied by the EU Member States, although all of them ratified it. These disparities – or even these circumventions – produce numerous wrongs, which are sometimes tragic, for those who legitimately request protection on our soil. They also result in significant disturbances for European societies: unauthorized camps, increase in foreigners deprived of legal existence (“neither deportable nor regularizable”), security problems in the Mediterranean, the rise of populism, etc.

AUSTRALIA

Australia, as a party to the Refugees Convention, **has obligations to protect the human rights of all asylum seekers and refugees who arrive in Australia, regardless of how or where they arrive and whether they arrive with or without a visa.**

Australia has been a leader in bringing some of the most vulnerable refugees in the world from overseas, and supporting them to settle in Australia. However, Australia’s treatment of refugees who come to Australia seeking protection is now leading the world in the opposite direction: to the most punitive policies aimed to deter vulnerable people from seeking safety.

Australia is stopping people seeking asylum from coming (by boat or plane). If any do come by boat, they are sent to **Nauru or Papua New Guinea** to be ‘processed’ for years, and are being left to languish there with little prospect of living safely and supporting themselves.

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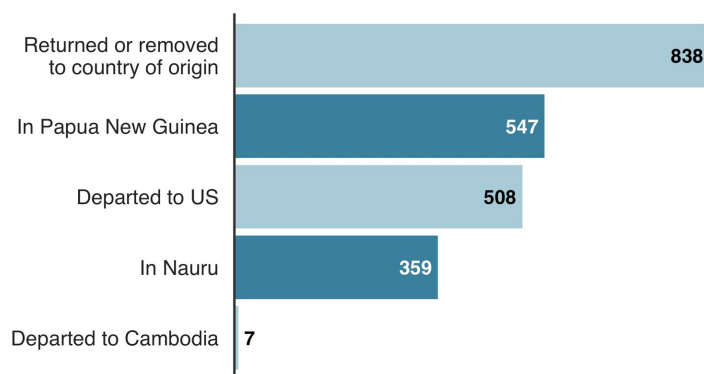


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What happens to asylum seekers?

People subject to offshore processing, early 2019



Data as of 28 March 2019. Removals and returns figures as of 28 Feb.

Source: Refugee Council of Australia

BBC

Those who enter Australia without getting permission (a 'visa') are, by law, required to be detained. There is no time limit to their detention. There is no independent review of whether they should be detained. People are held despite committing no crime. Those now in administrative detention have been there on average for more than a year, with some detained now for nine years.

There are currently thousands of asylum seekers as well as some recognised refugees, being held in immigration detention around

Australia. Several hundred asylum seekers who arrived in Australia are now also being detained in Nauru and on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea under third country processing arrangements.

Immigration detention in Australia is indefinite – there is no limit in law or policy to the length of time for which a person may be detained. Some asylum seekers and refugees spend long periods of time in immigration detention waiting for their refugee claim to be assessed; waiting for the completion of health, identity and security checks; or awaiting removal from Australia if they have been found not to be a refugee nor to otherwise be owed protection.

Sources/ Extracted from:

Standup4humanrights, Asylum, [link](#)

Institut Montaigne, Saving the right to asylum, [link](#)

Australian Refugee Council, Australia's asylum policies, [link](#)

Human Rights Australia, Asylum seekers and refugees, [link](#)

BBC, Manus islands, [link](#)

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Afghanistan issues: related to the episode

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan, officially the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is a mountainous, landlocked country in South-Central Asia at an important geopolitical location, it connects the Middle East with Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Afghanistan has a population of 26.5 million people (in 2015), capital and largest city is Kabul.

Afghanistan has suffered from such chronic instability and conflict during its modern history that its economy and infrastructure are in ruins, and many of its people are refugees. The Taliban, who imposed strict Islamic rule following a devastating civil war, were ousted by a US-led invasion in 2001 but have recently been making a comeback.

HAZARA

Ḥazāra, people, possibly of Mongol descent, who at the beginning of the 21st century dwelled primarily in the mountainous region of central Afghanistan, with smaller numbers in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. The exact number of Ḥazāra is unknown—estimates vary wildly—but likely exceeds several million. The origins of Hazara community are much debated, the word Hazara means ‘thousand’ in Persian but given the Hazaras’ typical physical features, current theory supports their descent from Mongol soldiers left behind by Genghis Khan in the 13th century.

Systematic discrimination, as well as often repeated targeted violence and resulting displacement, has led the Hazara community to lose much of their standing in the social hierarchy of modern Afghanistan. Their engagement in unskilled labour has resulted in further stigmatization, with a clear indicator of this being the low rate of inter-ethnic marriages with Hazaras. Perhaps as a consequence of this, Hazaras have been relatively isolated from other cultural influences, and their identity has remained relatively static.

While President Karzai did appoint six Hazaras to his cabinet, there appears to be no reduction in the discrimination facing the majority of the Hazara population of Afghanistan. Forced to migrate to Kabul in the second half of the 20th century due to persecution, their

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low socio-economic status has created a class as well as an ethnic division between them and the rest of urban Afghan society.

Economic pressures and social and political repression have resulted in Hazaras combining with other Shi'a minority groups during the 1960s and 1970s and playing a prominent role in the prolonged civil war for the past two decades. During the resistance in the mid-1980s, Hazaras maintained their own resistance group, some of which had ties with Iran.

As an ethnic group, Hazaras have always lived on the edge of economic survival in Afghanistan. The recent persecution of Hazaras was not instigated by the Taliban but had existed for centuries – during which Hazaras were driven out of their lands, sold as slaves and lacked access to the essential services otherwise available to the majority of the population. One of the main factors in Hazaras' continued persecution is their Shi'a religious faith, their distinctive ethnic origins, as well as their having separate economic and political roots.

After the Taliban seized power in 1996, they declared Jihad on the Shi'a Hazaras. In the years that followed, Hazaras faced particularly severe repression and persecution, including a series of mass killings in northern Afghanistan, where thousands of Hazaras lost their lives or were forced to flee their homes. Consequently, Hazaras formed part of the Northern Alliance forces that opposed the Taliban and took power after the Taliban fell in 2001.

Since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, the situation of Hazaras in Afghanistan has improved considerably. Hazaras are one of the national ethnic minorities recognized in the new Afghan Constitution and have been given full right to Afghan citizenship. Only two Hazaras gained seats in President Hamid Karzai's initial cabinet, and the only representative of their main political party, Hizb-e Wahdat gained the position of vice president. But in the most recent parliamentary election Hazaras (who make up around 9 per cent of the population) gained 25% of seats. However, Hazaras still face persistent discrimination in many areas of the country.

A key issue for the Hazara community is the general climate of impunity, whereby those who committed atrocities – both past and present – to evade justice. Hazaras also remain concerned about the resurgence of the Taliban, who they feel pose a direct threat to their community. There have also been increasing ethnic tensions and incidents of violent clashes between Hazaras and nomadic Kuchis over access to land in recent years. Due to the severity of their persecution under the Taliban, Hazara leaders have insisted,

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along with leaders of other minority groups, to be included in all negotiations with the Taliban.

With the increasing presence of foreign Islamist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), active in the country for a number of years, attacks against religious minorities have been on the increase. Being Shi'a and therefore both a religious and a visible ethnic minority, Hazaras are particularly vulnerable.

Sources/ Extracted from:

Britannica, Hazara, [link](#)

Minority rights, Hazara Profile, [link](#)

Nationsonline, Afghanistan, [link](#)

BBC, Afghanistan country profile, [link](#)

BACHA BAZI

Bacha bazi is an under-reported human rights problem that is causing huge, and increasing, suffering to the most vulnerable children in Afghanistan. This phenomenon presents a system of gender reversal in Afghanistan. Whereas rural Pashtun culture remains largely misogynistic and male-dominated due to deeply-ingrained Islamic values, teenage boys have become the objects of lustful attraction and romance for some of the most powerful men in the Afghan countryside.

History of Bacha Bazi

Bacha bazi has antecedents in ancient cultures throughout central Asia. However, the practice appeared in its modern form in the 19th century. It typically involves wealthy Afghans, often Pashtuns, who acquire young men or boys for the purposes of sexual entertainment and exploitation. Women are prohibited from working as dancers or entertainers in many parts of Afghanistan, and young boys are used instead. These boys, known as bacha bareesh, or 'beardless boys', are generally between ten and eighteen years old, and tend to come from poor backgrounds. Parents are persuaded to hand over their sons for financial reimbursement, with the promise that they will be given work and an education. Ostensibly, the young men work as dancers at private parties, however many are coerced into having sexual relationships with their masters. Boys who refuse to do so are often raped, and, in some reported cases, murdered if they manage to escape. The boys are

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also generally deprived of education, ruining their life prospects when they are eventually discarded after having become too old.

During the Afghan civil war, the Taliban made bacha bazi illegal as it was regarded as un-Islamic and incompatible with Sharia law. From 1993, until the US invasion of 2001, the practice was punishable by death. Then, the Taliban's harsh punishments for those accused of participating in the practice were no longer enforced due to the vacuum of power left by the war. Although child abuse remained illegal, the practice of bacha bazi itself did not, which provided cover for sexual abuse. Government complicity in the practice also quickly became a problem. **Many high-ranking officials reportedly engage in bacha bazi and are rarely prosecuted by their peers.** A 2014 report by the AIHRC assessed that most people who engage in bacha bazi paid bribes to, or had relationships with, law enforcement, prosecutors, or judges that effectively exempted them from prosecution.

Throughout the period of US occupation, US commanders also made little effort to stamp out the practice. Lance Corporal Buckley was reportedly told to "look the other way because it's their culture". The US armed forces had a policy of ignoring child abuse committed by allied Afghan militias in order keep them on side during the fight against the Taliban.

The practice underwent a resurgence after the overthrow of the Taliban by US forces in 2001, and whilst efforts have been made over subsequent years to stamp out the practice, they have been **largely unsuccessful due to government corruption and the reluctance of the US to involve themselves in domestic Afghan affairs.** In January 2017, the Afghan government belatedly moved to criminalise bacha bazi, and is finally beginning to act to prevent abuse and protect victims, with mixed success thus far.

International condemnation regarding the lack of action on bacha bazi has grown in recent years. In 2014, the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, told the General Assembly that "laws should be passed, campaigns must be waged and perpetrators should be held accountable and punished".

A recent report by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) also strongly criticised Afghan government officials for active complicity in "the sexual exploitation and recruitment of children by Afghan security forces". However, it is generally accepted that the problem is not getting any better.

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Impacts of Bacha Bazi

These boys are often unable to run away due to fear of violence or even death. Once they reach adulthood, their psychological trauma makes it very difficult for these boys to readjust to society. Many of today's adolescent victims will likely become powerful warlords or *Bacha Baz* (boy lovers), and in this way the cycle of abuse will be perpetuated. Social stigma makes it difficult for former dancing boys to reestablish a male identity. They fail to find a decent work or profession so many of them turn to drugs or alcohol as coping mechanisms. They have fear that their identity (beardless) will be discovered by the community because of the shame associated with it. Most of these boys are deeply stressed; they have trust issues, pessimistic feelings, and a desire for revenge that makes it difficult for them to readjust to society. Victims thus often end up socially isolated, both during and after their release. The victims of *Bacha Bazi* suffer from serious psychological harm and the victim's psychological harm remains for a long time, even if they quit. These children have low levels of self-esteem and self-respect.

Challenges of fighting the practice

The perpetrators are not being held responsible for crimes they commit, therefore impunity and gender inequality contributed to the spread of the practice. The factors such as a lack of legislative implementation, inadequate rule of law, **a weak justice system, a corrupt judicial system, illiteracy, poverty, powerful militias groups involved in the practice, and instability, have also contributed to the spread of the practice.** According to military experts in Afghanistan, the lawlessness that followed the deposing of the Taliban's in rural Pashtun and northern Afghanistan gave rise to violent expressions of pedophilia. The Pashtun rural culture is mostly male dominated and misogynistic, which gives rise to a system of gender reversal. Factors such as chronic instability, gender inequality, displacement, inadequate services, access constraints and discriminatory practices fueled the underreporting of conflict-related sexual violence across Afghanistan, contributing to the rise of Bacha Bazi.

In Afghanistan, the pride of a family and having a good reputation and status in society is more important than anything else. That is why many victims and their families chose to be silent. People most often hear the perpetrator voices rather than the victims. Mostly the perpetrators are having a good social status in the society and respected in the community. For example, *Mullah* (religious leader), community elders, or even in the worst case scenario the teachers and school principals are involved in Bacha Bazi, such as the Logar case.

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It is taboo to talk about such incidents because people do not trust the legal system, and because of the shame associated with the practice. Powerful men can skip the law by paying huge amounts of money. The numbers of Bacha Bazi cases are more than what is reported because of cultural and traditional issues and concerns for the family and its victims. The interesting thing is the perpetrators remain the most influential people in this dynamic, respected and credible in a society where no one ever believes these people can commit such types of crimes.

Sources/ Extracted from:

HR, Bacha bazi: Afghanistan's darkest secrets, [link](#)

AIHRC, Causes and Consequences of Bacha Bazi in Afghanistan, [link](#)

Foreign policy, Bacha bazi: An Afghan Tragedy, [link](#)

Geopolitical Monitor, Bacha bazi, [link](#)

Proposed Discussion Questions

- Why should governments welcome refugees, asylum seekers and migrants?
- In your opinion, who should be allowed to seek asylum in your country? Why, why not? What are the biggest challenges to this process?
- How might/will the COVID-19 pandemic affect the situation of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants?
- How can the international community respectfully support the Hazara people in their quest to equality and non-discrimination?
- Why has the international community and national government failed to tackle the practice of Bacha Bazi?
- How do you hold people in positions of power accountable when the consequences of speaking out are sometimes so high and can result in death?
- How can we create more accountability among those who abuse power?
- Is there a safe way to expose corruption? How?
- What are some creative ways we can create space to expose corruption without exposing activists to danger?

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Additional Reading & Follow up

Learn more about our expert guests:

Barat Ali Batoor:

- Barat Ali Batoor at TEDx, [link](#) (transcript: [link](#))
- Article, Radicate, [link](#)
- In conversation with Barat for Refugee week, [link](#)
- Interview with Barat, [link](#)

Dr. Niamatullah Ibrahimi:

- Profile, La Trobe, [link](#)

James Hathaway:

- Profile, Michigan Law, [link](#)

Charu Lata Hogg:

- All Survivors Project, [link](#)
- Chathamhouse, [link](#)

Ways to support asylum seekers and refugees:

- Refugees International, [link](#)
- Dynamic Reinforcement of European Adaptation of Migrants, [link](#)
- ORAM, supporting LBTIQ asylum seekers and refugees globally, [link](#)
- Asylum in Europe, [link](#)
- Refugee Council USA, [link](#)

Episode Speaker Biographies

[Main Story Biography] Barat Ali Batoor | Multi-Award-Winning Photographer & Freelance Photojournalist

Barat Ali Batoor is a multi award-winning photographer. Batoor started photography in 2002 and launched his first solo exhibition in 2007. His photographs were exhibited in the U.S., Europe, Asia and

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Australia. His works have been published in The Washington Post, Newsweek, Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, Stern, India Today, Risk Magazine, The Global Mail, The Daily Mail, The West Australian, Strategic Review and others. He participated in "Lahore Artist Residency" by VASL in Lahore, Pakistan and was the 2009 recipient of a photography grant from New York's Open Society Institute for the project "The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan." He is the winner of Nikon-Walkleys Photo of the Year 2013 award as well as a winner in the Photo Essay category. He was also awarded "Communication for Social Change Award" by the University of Queensland. He was a speaker at the TEDxSydney in 2014. Batoor currently works as a freelance photographer and teaches photojournalism at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia.

Twitter: @BaratBatoor

[Expert Biography] Dr. Niamatullah Ibrahim | Lecturer, La Trobe University

Dr. Niamatullah Ibrahim is a Lecturer in International Relations at La Trobe University in Melbourne. He completed his PhD at the Australian National University and has published extensively on Afghanistan's politics and history. He is the author of, 'The Hazaras and the Afghan State: Rebellion, Exclusion and Struggle for Recognition' (London: Hurst & Co. 2017), and co-author (with Professor William Maley) of 'Afghanistan: Politics and Economics in a Globalising State' (London: Routledge, 2020). Twitter: @IbrahimNiamat, @latrobe

[Expert Biography] James Hathaway | Professor of Law and Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law at University of Michigan Law School

James C. Hathaway is the James E. and Sarah A. Degan Professor of Law and Director of the Program in Refugee and Asylum Law at the University of Michigan. He is also Distinguished Visiting Professor of International Refugee Law at the University of Amsterdam. Hathaway earned law degrees from the Osgoode Hall Law School (Toronto) (LL.B. Honours) and Columbia (LL.M., J.S.D.), and has received doctoral degrees honoris causa from the Université catholique de Louvain (2009) and University of Amsterdam (2017). From 2008 until 2010 Hathaway was on leave from the University of Michigan to serve as the Dean of Law and William Hearn Professor of Law at the University of Melbourne, where he established Australia's first all-graduate legal education program. He previously held positions as Professor of Law and Associate Dean of the Osgoode Hall Law School, Canada (1984-1998), Counsel on Special Legal Assistance for the Disadvantaged to the Government of Canada (1983-1984), and Professeur adjoint de droit at the Université de Moncton, Canada (1980-1983). He has been appointed a visiting professor at the American University in Cairo, and at the Universities of California, Macerata, San Francisco, Stanford, Tokyo, and Toronto. Hathaway's publications include more than one hundred journal articles, book chapters, and studies; a leading treatise on the refugee definition (The Law of Refugee Status, second edition 2014 with M. Foster; first edition 1991, republished in both Russian in 2007 and Japanese in 2008); an interdisciplinary study of models for refugee law reform (Reconceiving International Refugee Law, 1997); and The Rights of Refugees under International Law (2005, republished in Japanese in 2014 and Chinese 2017), the first comprehensive analysis of the human

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rights of refugees set by the UN Refugee Convention and the International Bill of Rights. He is the founding Editor of Cambridge Asylum and Migration Studies and Senior Advisor to Asylum Access, a non-profit organization committed to delivering innovative legal aid to refugees in the global South. Hathaway regularly advises and provides training on refugee law to academic, non-governmental, and official audiences around the world. [Twitter](#): @JC_Hathaway, @UMichLaw

[Expert Biography] Charu Lata Hogg | Executive Director, All Survivors Project and Associate Fellow, Chatham House

Charu Lata Hogg is Executive Director of All Survivors Project. She is an Associate Fellow in the Asia Program at Chatham House since 2004 where she covers political and human rights developments in South and SouthEast Asia. She is the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice. She worked as the South Asia researcher for Human Rights Watch until 2009 and documented violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Nepal and Sri Lanka. Before joining Chatham House, she was an international journalist based in India, Sri Lanka and London writing for among others, Far Eastern Economic Review, the BBC-South Asia Regional Unit, India Today and The Times of India. Charu has conducted in-depth research on sexual violence in Sri Lanka, and provided expert evidence to the UK Upper Tribunal Country Guidance case on Sri Lanka in 2013. She received a Bachelor of Arts in History from Hindu College, University of Delhi and an MSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science. [Twitter](#): @AllSurvivorsPro

[The Elders Special Segment Guest Biography] Ban Ki-moon | Former United Nations Secretary-General and Deputy Chair of The Elders

Deputy Chair of The Elders, an independent group of global leaders founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007, who work together for peace, justice and human rights. Ban Ki-moon was the UN Secretary-General from 2007-2016. He mobilised world leaders around a new set of challenges and sought to give voice to the world's poorest and vulnerable people. He put Sustainable Development Goals, climate change, and equality for girls and women at the top of the UN agenda; creating UN Women and securing the Paris Agreement. He is a former South-Korean Foreign Minister and diplomat. He is the Chair of the [Global Green Growth Institute](#), Chairman of the [Boao Forum for Asia](#), Commissioner of [The Global Commission on Adaptation](#), and Co-Chair of the [Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens](#).

[Host Biography] HAZAMI BARMADA | Founder & CEO, Humanity Lab Foundation; co-Executive Producer & Host, Finding Humanity Podcast

Hazami is a social entrepreneur, thought leader, and public affairs and social impact expert recognized by Forbes as an "inspirational agent of change." She has consulted for many leading global brands including the United Nations, United Nations Foundation, Aspen Institute, and the Royal Court

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of the Sultanate of Oman. Among her posts at the United Nations, she served as the Coordinator for the United Nations Secretary General's World Humanitarian Summit, an Advisor to the first-ever United Nations Secretary-General's Youth Envoy, as a member of the United Nations SDG Strategy Hub for the launch of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Hazami has a Masters from Harvard University where she was an Edward S. Mason Fellow in Public Policy and Management. She studied social and public policy at Georgetown University and has a BA in Anthropology and Sociology. Twitter: @hazamibarmada

PODCAST PRODUCTION ORGANIZATIONS & TEAM

Humanity Lab Foundation is a disruptive empathy-driven movement at the intersection of public policy and people power. As a collective of enablers, the Humanity Lab facilitates public engagement and social innovation to drive progress on human development and create an equitable and just world. Through a diverse portfolio of programs and initiatives, the Humanity Lab enhances global development systems by convening, connecting and collaborating with everyday people to solve complex challenges and drive social change. The Humanity Lab aims to: unlock human potential, break down barriers, provoke thought-leadership and knowledge sharing, facilitate partnerships, catalyze action, and democratize access to the power that shapes the world. The Humanity Lab has collaborated with a large array of partners including the Office of the President of the United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Office of Partnerships, United Nations, Qualcomm, The Elders, Warner Music, MTV and the Washington Diplomat.

Hueman Group Media ("HGM") is an award-winning podcast company for social change. HGM produces impactful and high-caliber podcasts for leading nonprofit organizations, purpose-driven companies and thought leaders, amplifying conversations around today's most important causes and issues — including gender inequality, climate change, racial injustice, and mental health. HGM podcasts cater to diverse, socially conscious, and deeply curious audiences. With the power of storytelling and expert-driven conversations, HGM activates listeners to take action and make a positive impact in their communities. HGM has worked with notable organizations including UN Women, The Elders, SAP, GoDaddy, CORE Response, and MIT Solve.

Podcast Production Team:

Ayesha Amin, Fact-Checking, Policy, Research
Maverick Aquino, Mixing, Editing, Music
Hazami Barmada, Co-Executive Producer & Host
Diana Galbraith, Assistant Producer & Research

Camille Laurente, Co-Executive Producer
Karolina Mendecka, Fact-Checking, Policy, Research
Fernanda Uriegas, Associate Producer

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