

UNHCR Pakistan Monthly Protection Trends Reporting Concerning Afghan Refugees | August 2017

Repatriation had increased dramatically in 2016 for several reasons, including positive pull and negative push factors. In order to more systematically monitor these factors and provide an analysis of the situation, UNHCR Pakistan compiles a monthly note to inform key stakeholders of emerging trends and to raise formally and consistently any protection concerns that may arise.

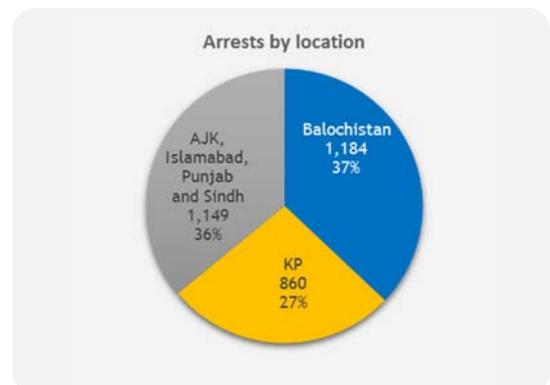
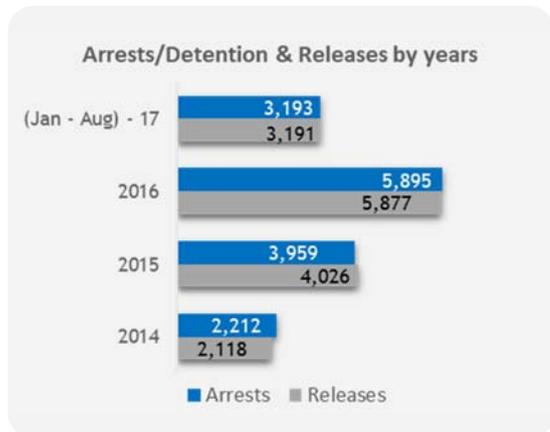
Trends

Voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees continues. In August, 4,904 Afghan refugees (1,179 families) returned compared to 8,987 refugees (2,096 families) in July. Since 3 April 2017, when repatriation started after the winter break, 11,556 families (48,267 individuals) have returned to Afghanistan. According to IOM, 83,893 undocumented Afghans have also returned to Afghanistan since the start of the year.

A Registration exercise for undocumented Afghans living in Pakistan started on 16 August. A pilot registration exercise was conducted at two locations (Islamabad and Peshawar) in July. According to National Database Registration Authority NADRA, so far 55,726 individuals have been processed for Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACCs) at 21 locations across the country. NADRA staff, representatives from IOM, Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation Government of Afghanistan (MoRR) and Commissionerate Afghan Refugees.

The new US government policy on Afghanistan noted that Pakistan continues to harbor terrorist elements active in Afghanistan. Pakistan responded strongly with official statements and a national assembly resolution. Among others, the national assembly resolution demanded the Pakistan government draw up a blueprint for the return of all Afghan refugees in a dignified manner and within a specified time frame. The situation is being monitored closely, however, no impact on Afghans living in Pakistan has been reported to date.

The overall protection situation remained calm in August with no significant incidents.



Summary of Events

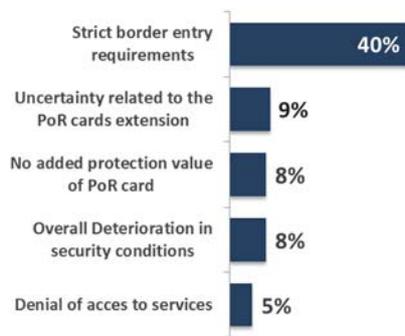
1. Reports from Exit Interviews/Encashment Centre Reporting

In exit interviews conducted at the Chamkhani and Baleli VRCs, returnees cited “strict border entry requirements” as the major push factor influencing their return (40 percent), followed by uncertainty related to the PoR cards extension (9 percent) and No added protection value of PoR card (8 percent)

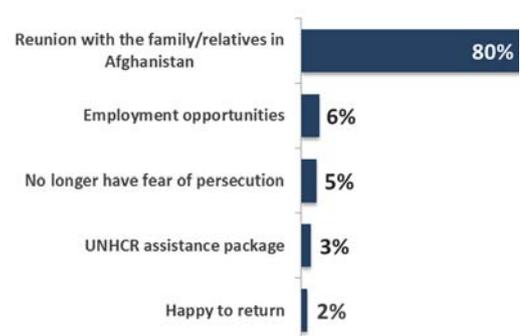
According to IOM interviews conducted with the returning undocumented Afghans, 60 per cent cited fear of deportation as the major factor, while economic factors and lack of documentation were the other factors influencing the decision to return.

UNHCR and partners continue to follow-up on the July findings of the Encashment Centres interviews with repatriating Afghans, including reported extortion en route to VRC and Torkham border in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkwa provinces.

Push Factors



Pull Factors



2. Arrests & Detention

There were fewer arrests and detentions in August (101) compared to July (160). Most of the PoR cardholders arrested were released without being formally charged through timely Advice and Legal Aid Centre (ALAC) interventions while the refugees who were charged under Section 107/151 of the Criminal Procedures Code and were released through court interventions by ALAC legal teams.

Most of the arrests and detentions are linked to strict identity checks conducted by security forces on 13 and 14 August in Khyber Pakhtunkwa province. All individuals who were found without a valid identity document, irrespective of their nationality, were arrested.

3. Negative Media/Public Statements

Impact Level for Refugees & Asylum Seekers ■ Low ■ Medium ■ High

The National Assembly on 31 August called on the government to consider suspending cooperation with the United States and to draw up a blueprint for the return of Afghan refugees to their home country in a dignified manner, but within a specified timeframe. *Pakistan today 30 August:*



<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/08/30/na-resolution-calls-on-qovt-to-suspend-cooperation-with-us-repatriate-afghan-refugees/>

Each year the number of newborns in Afghan refugee families in Pakistan is outnumbering the figures of those returning to Afghanistan under the UN-supported voluntary repatriation programme. (DAWN - 28 August)

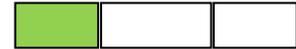
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1354412/newborns-outnumber-returning-afghans>



The Afghan refugees in Punjab are hopeful of being registered after the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) opened its centres on Wednesday. (Dawn - 18 August)

Note: The documentation exercise does not apply to PoR card-holders so this article is conflating issues.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1352248/new-registration-campaign-afghan-refugees-hope-for-a-better-tomorrow>



Summary of significant Advocacy Actions and Interventions

A joint committee meeting was held on the closure/relocation of refugee villages of Mansehra district due to its close proximity to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) highway. The meeting was chaired by the Commissioner Hazara Division and attended by representatives from CAR, UNHCR, MORR, Home Department, military, police and local administration of Abbottabad and Mansehra. UNHCR and CAR urged the government authorities to allow Afghan refugees to stay in the refugee villages until 31 December until alternative relocation option is found. In the interim, UNHCR and CAR would continue to engage the refugees for a resolution of the issue. It was also agreed to conduct a snap population survey of refugee villages expected to be affected by the road project which would help planning for the relocation options in Pakistan.

The housing registration with police station for Afghan refugee tenants remains a problematic issue in some districts of Punjab province as it prevents the owners to conclude/ extend lease agreements. On the issue of non-extension of lease agreement, the owner reserves the rights not to rent out his property. SHARP ALAC teams continue to monitor the situation and intervene where needed.

In response to the returnees' complaints about extortion by police at Torkham check point, Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) and Assistant Political Agent (APA) continue to instruct their deployed staff to facilitate returning refugees and coordinate with other agencies (e.g. police, an anti-narcotics check-point). In addition, Afghan PoR card holders are being informed by UNHCR and partners through Shura meetings about the need to obtain a permission to transport of any vehicle, including motor bikes from the concerned departments (e.g. customs and exercise & taxation department etc.)

ALAC Mianwali carried out ongoing sensitization with police station in Talagang on the rights of Afghan refugees. In addition ALAC teams sensitize Police in the Districts of Chakwal, Layyah, D.G. Khan and Mianwali on the decrees issued by the District Police Officer (DPO) earlier this year. The main purpose of the decrees, issued to all concerned police stations is to stop harassment and arbitrary arrest of PoR card holders.