



UNHCR's staff meeting with the Afghan refugees in H-11 Refugee settlement, Islamabad

Summary of Key Events

On 19 April, the Prime Minister's Office issued a notification of the appointment of Mr. Shehryar Khan Afridi as the Minister of State for the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON). Mr. Afridi had earlier served as the Minister of State for Interior and his appointment is significant in that the office of SAFRON Minister had remained vacant for a year.

The 6th Quadripartite Steering Committee and the 30th Tripartite Commission meetings were convened in Islamabad on the 17th and 18th June respectively. The main conclusions include:

1. A reaffirmation to the voluntary return of Afghan refugees in safety and dignity;
2. The extension of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) until December 2021;
3. Continued efforts to utilize international platforms (including the Global Refugee Forum) and potentially a GRF Support Platform for the Afghan situation to galvanize political intent and greater burden-sharing by the international community in the implementation of the SSAR;
4. Welcomed the renewed efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR to target development interventions such as the fifteen "Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration" (PARR) and called on increased international support to ensure sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan.

On 27 June, the Federal Cabinet approved the extension of the PoR Cards as well as the Tripartite Agreement until 30 June 2020 and formal notification has been issued.

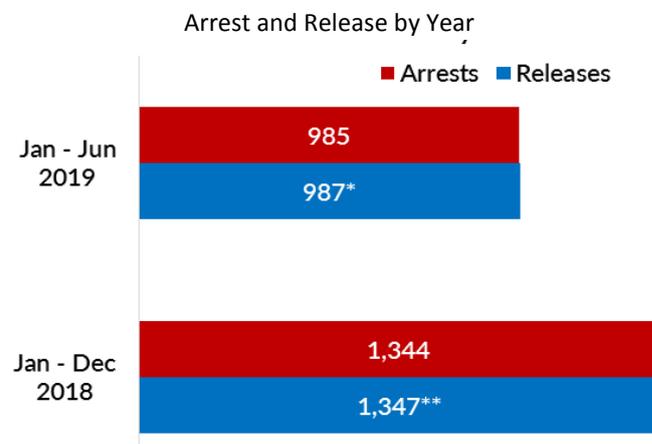
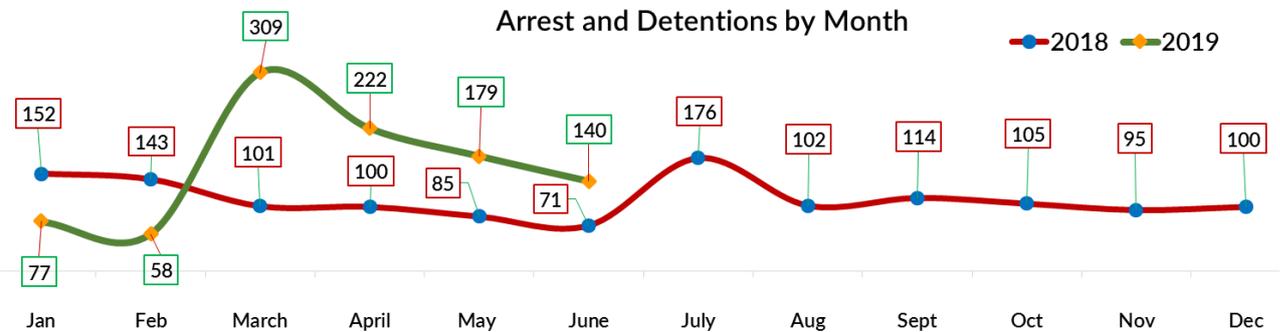
The President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, accompanied by a high-level delegation, visited Pakistan on June 27, on the invitation of Prime Minister Imran Khan. During his two-day visit, President Ghani held meetings with the PM, the President of Pakistan and some opposition leaders. The wide-ranging talks focussed on strengthening bilateral cooperation in diverse areas and included discussion on trade, economy, security, peace and reconciliation, education. President Ghani also visited Lahore, where he participated in a business forum attended by business representatives from both countries.

The Government of Pakistan / Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) will hold an International Conference on the "40 Years of the Afghan Refugee Situation" in Islamabad on 26-27 of August. High Commissioner, Mr. Filippo Grandi, will join high-level country officials and international dignitaries at this important conference. UNHCR is supporting MoFA in preparations for the event.

NADRA and the Commissioner for Refugees (CAR) continue to distribute the Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACC) at the PoR Card Modification Centres (PCM) in Peshawar and Quetta since the exercise resumed on 6 February 2019. As of 27 June, 2019, an additional 178,708 ACCs have been distributed (102,377 in Peshawar and 76,331 in Quetta), bringing the total number of ACCs so far distributed - since February 2018 - to 506,372. It is expected that the distribution of the remaining 140,628 will be completed in the following month. The Federal Cabinet on the 27 June extended the validity of the ACCs until 31 October 2019. UNHCR is monitoring the exercise to ensure that the PCM's core activities for PoR Cardholders are not affected.

1. Advice and Legal Aid Centres (ALAC)

From 1 April until 27 June, 541 PoR cardholders were detained by the security authorities, as compared to 256 during the same period in 2018. This figure represents a 111% increase from the previous year and, in part, may be attributed to the arrest of 192 individuals in Kohat (related to the political tensions between Pakistan and India). Sixty three percent of the refugees detained from 01 April to 27 June were released without being formally charged, 14% were charged and detained under the Foreigners Act for being on the territory illegally, while 23% of the refugees detained were charged under Preventive Laws.



All but one of the refugees were released with the assistance of ALAC interventions. UNHCR continues to work proactively against any harassment of persons of concern through continued visits and interventions of the ALAC teams to the checkpoints and police stations in the refugee-hosting areas. The majority of arrests and detentions (76 %) took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KP), followed by Punjab and the Islamabad Capital Territory, Azad Jammu, Kashmir and Sindh (23%).

*Two persons were arrested in 2018 but were released in 2019. ** Three persons were arrested in 2017 but were released in 2018

2. Evictions/ Eviction Notices

On 11 April, the Divisional Commissioner (DC) of Hazara Division, KP, held a meeting with the CAR for KP, UNHCR and the 11th Corps of Pakistan Army to discuss the longstanding planned relocation of refugees from Ichrian and Berari Refugee Villages (RV) to either Khaki RV, urban areas or voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan. The planned relocation is due to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project in the area and had a deadline of 10 June. The DC established a committee to oversee and facilitate the relocation process, headed by the Assistant Commissioner (AC) Mansehra district and includes the CAR for KP, the District Police and UNHCR. The committee held several meetings with a commitment from the AC Mansehra to ensure that the relocation exercise will be carried out in a peaceful manner. The AC Mansehra also held meetings with the refugee elders from both RVs, informing them of Government's reason for and position on the relocation.

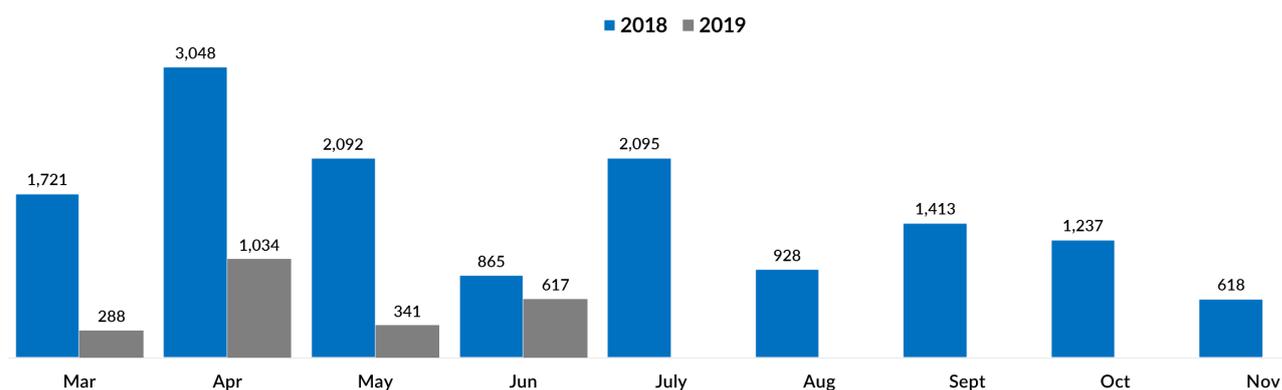
Through a series of meetings, UNHCR field teams requested refugee elders in both RVs to reach out to their communities and to share with UNHCR by 24 June complete lists of families and their intentions in regard to relocation in order to plan for an appropriate response. The refugee elders reiterated their request for material assistance to rebuild their houses after the relocation. Since the beginning of 2019, two families/six individuals repatriated from Ichrian RV, thus bringing the total to 83 families/358 individuals who have repatriated to Afghanistan from both the RVs since the beginning of 2017.

Still in KP in mid-June, the police served notices on 56 Afghan refugee households (123 families/430 individuals), requiring them to relocate from Khwaja Abad urban cluster within one week. UNHCR's field team, along with CAR, KP, coordinated with relevant police officials who responded that the issue is currently "on hold" and that the refugees would not be asked to vacate the area in the near future. UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation closely.

3. Voluntary Repatriation (VOLREP)

On 1 March, 2019, UNHCR resumed the facilitated voluntary repatriation of Afghan PoR cardholders after the winter closure. As of 28 June, 596 families/2,280 individuals were facilitated through the voluntary repatriation centers (VRCs) in Azakhel, KP, Baleli and Balochistan. This figure represents a 70% decrease in voluntary returns from the same period in 2018, when 7519 Afghan refugees voluntarily returned. The lower return rate appears due to the ongoing volatile security situation in Afghanistan and uncertainty surrounding Afghanistan's political environment. The social economic situation is also a factor in any decision to return home. Afghan refugees have also stated that the increasingly strict border entry requirements were another factor. The main Afghan provinces of return were Kabul (18%), Saripul (15%) and Nangarhar (15%).

VOLREP Monthly Trends Comparison 2018 & 2019



4. UNHCR's Interventions and Capacity Building Activities

The Advice and Legal Assistance Centre (ALAC) teams continued to visit police stations and courts across the country in order to represent refugees in legal cases, update law enforcement agencies (LEAs) on the Government of Pakistan's extension of PoR card validity and other refugee-related matters. From 1 April to 27 June, UNHCR and ALAC staff organized 165 legal outreach and *shura* meetings, reaching out to 3,339 participants (44% of whom were women). Fifty one percent of these sessions were held in RVs and the rest were held in urban areas, allowing refugees to share various issues affecting their communities.

During the period April to June, UNHCR and ALAC teams also organized eleven capacity building sessions with LEAs on refugee protection and refugee status in Pakistan. In total, 226 LEA personnel, 20 border and immigration officials and 20 persons from the civil society participated in these capacity building sessions.