

Pakistan: Protection Trends January - March 2020



Sixth Quadripartite Meeting held in Islamabad

Summary of Key Events

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (GoP) developed a National Action Plan, which has included Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) as a vital component. The RCCE is a continuous process providing a holistic approach through both proactive and responsive actions. UNHCR is participating in the RCCE Taskforce led by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination with support from WHO and UNICEF. The GOP has developed a RCCE Strategy and plans with support from the RCCE taskforce. The aim is to simply, safely and effectively outreach to communities and disseminate GoP approved COVID-19 messaging to the general public. UNHCR's Action Plan is aligned and uses methodologies as guided by the GoP, WHO and UNICEF and has focused its dissemination efforts to the refugee communities in the 54 Refugee Villages (RVs) and urban areas. UNHCR disseminates the GoP approved messaging which currently focusses on the need to maintain social distancing, avoid groups of any size and maintain proper personal and public hygiene. The approach capitalizes on the existing WhatsApp networks to the UNHCR Outreach Volunteers, community focal points, shura members, key influencers and social media platforms to create a 'snowball effect' in information-sharing on awareness-raising. Together with the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) UNHCR is also working with the federal and provincial health authorities to disseminate information education communication (IEC) material and will be delivering health and wash interventions in 54 refugee villages (RVs).

To help reduce the spread of the virus, the PoR Card Modification (PCM) centres were closed on 17 March and will remain closed until the situation allows. Communities are being informed and press releases issued to that effect. Mobile registration van (MRV) activities were also suspended. UNHCR Partners have also received guidance on modalities to deliver assistance while observing preventative measures. Protection Partners have implemented a work from home approach and, where necessary, activities have been suspended to comply with the public health directives. UNHCR also activated its Business Continuity Plan (BCP) on 24 March with only critical staff attending the office, while the rest of the teams work from home.

To avoid the spread of the virus and to comply with GoP directives, UNHCR also suspended all non-essential community meetings, including Shuras. Individual meetings and home visits for urgent individual cases have continued. Counselling for persons of concern has been switched to telephone counselling, except for urgent cases. Renewal of refugee certificates was temporarily suspended to reduce refugees' exposure to risks and to ensure compliance with GoP rules.

On 14 February 2020, UNHCR Sub-Office, Partners and the Provincial Government of Baluchistan hosted the visit of the High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi, to Quetta. The HC was accompanied by Indrika Ratwatte, Director Regional Bureau for the Asia and the Pacific, and Ruvendrini Menikdiwela, Pakistan Country Representative. The mission met with the Governor of Baluchistan, following which the HC interacted with Afghan refugee community members, where he was briefed on their protection situation and challenges in Pakistan. He witnessed the exhibition of products made by refugees participating in the 'Safe from Start' and the NAMA skills training projects. He also visited the Women's Technical Training Centre (WTTTC) and interacted with both Afghan female refugees and Pakistani female nationals who are taking part in skills training projects to enhance their livelihoods potential and social cohesion.

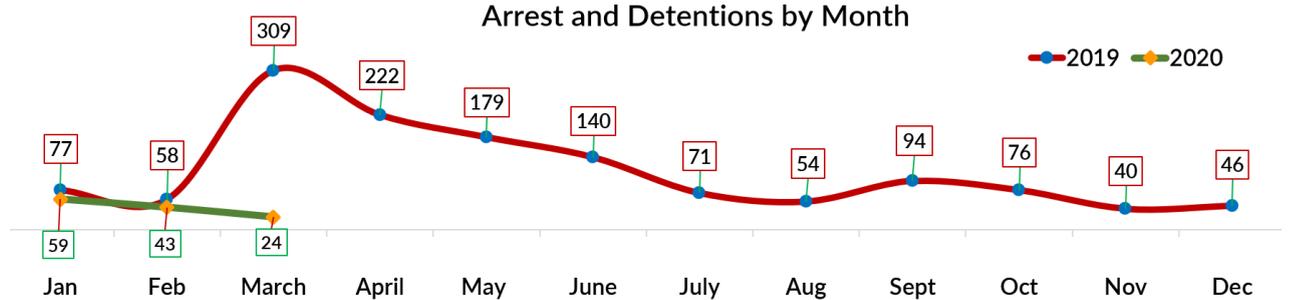
The International Conference (Refugee Summit) on Forty Years of Hosting Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: A New Partnership for Solidarity took place on 17-18 February 2020 in Islamabad, Pakistan. The Conference was convened by the Government of Pakistan with UNHCR, to mark forty years of the Afghan refugee displacement, to demonstrate solidarity with Afghan refugees and the countries and communities that have so generously hosted them, and to renew commitment to finding solutions and to galvanize more equitable and predictable burden and responsibility sharing in the context of one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world. The Conference was attended by more than 500 participants, including the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the UN Secretary General, the UNHCR High Commissioner, the Second Vice President of Afghanistan, Ministers and other high-ranking representatives of Governments, international organizations, humanitarian and development agencies, international financial institutions, civil society, private sector, academia, media, as well as by refugees. While the conference provided a unique opportunity to reflect on the achievements, challenges and lessons learned over the past forty years, it also stressed the urgent need to move away from the *status quo*, toward a renewed partnership for solidarity, building on the outcomes of the Global Compact on Refugees and the first Global Refugee Forum. The participants applauded the unparalleled solidarity and hospitality of the governments and people of Pakistan and Iran, despite facing their own security and socio-economic challenges and commended their inclusive policies towards Afghan refugees.

On the margins of the Islamabad Refugee Summit, UNHCR organized a meeting with the representatives of the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and discussed operationalization of the new SSAR Support Platform introduced during the Global Refugee Forum. In addition, UNHCR Pakistan facilitated the UN Secretary General's (SG) and the HC's interaction with the refugees who had a chance to narrate their stories and some of the key concerns, such as those related to education, access livelihoods and other services. Both the SG and the HC interacted with the refugee children and youth throughout the summit.

UNHCR Pakistan introduced her Highness, Sheikha Jawaher Al Qasimi, UNHCR's Eminent Advocate, to the Islamabad Women Welfare Development Centre (WWDC), an affiliate of the National Vocational Technical Training Centre (NAVTTTC). Her Highness was on a six-day official visit to Pakistan, where she also attended the Refugee Summit. UNHCR briefed on its partnership with NAVTTTC and the WWDC, explaining that another 33 skills and livelihoods building centres across the country have been providing similar services to some 3,500 refugees and Pakistani nationals. Her Highness had a chance to interact with refugee and Pakistani trainees at the WWDC and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to witness the resilience, potential and determination of young Afghan refugee women. Her Highness pledged support to the NAVTTTC and WWDC in the form of establishment of an education fund. Earlier she attended a ceremony formalizing her support for a livelihood project in Pakistan during which an agreement was signed by the UNHCR Representative in Pakistan, Ms. Ruvendrini Menikdiwela, and the Director of the NAMA Women Advancement Establishment, her Excellency Ms. Reem Bint Karam. The livelihood project will benefit 100 Afghan and Pakistani women residing in Quetta, Baluchistan.

1. Advice and Legal Aid Centres (ALAC)

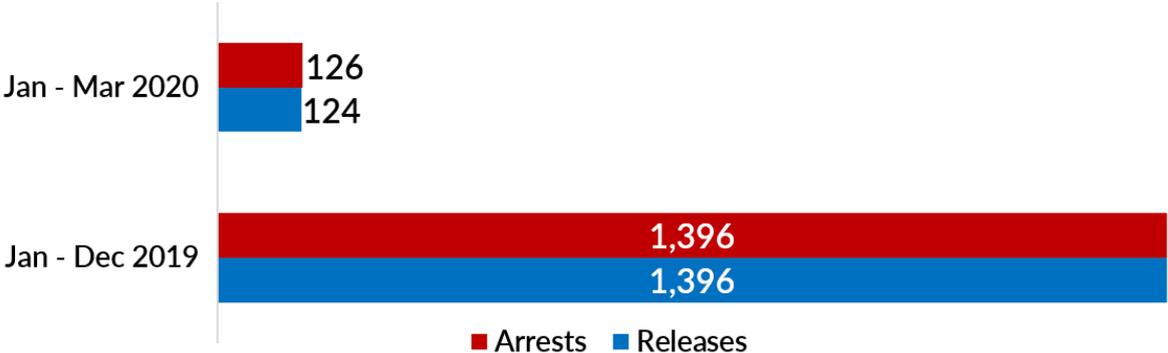
From 1 January until 31 March, 126 PoR cardholders were detained by the security authorities, as compared to 444 during the same period in 2019. This figure represents a 72% decrease from the previous year and, in part, may be attributed to the lockdowns enforced by GoP in different parts of the country in the wake of the COVID-19. Eighty two percent of the refugees detained were released without being formally charged, 10% were charged and detained under the Foreigners Act for being on the territory illegally, while 8% of the refugees detained were charged under Preventive Laws.



All but two of the detained refugees were released with ALAC interventions. UNHCR continues to work

proactively against any harassment of persons of concern, through continued visits and interventions of the ALAC teams to police checkpoints and stations in the refugee-hosting areas. The majority of arrest/detention incidences (54%) took place in KP, followed by Punjab and the Islamabad Capital Territory, Pakistan Administered Kashmir and Sindh (46%).

Arrest and Releases by Year



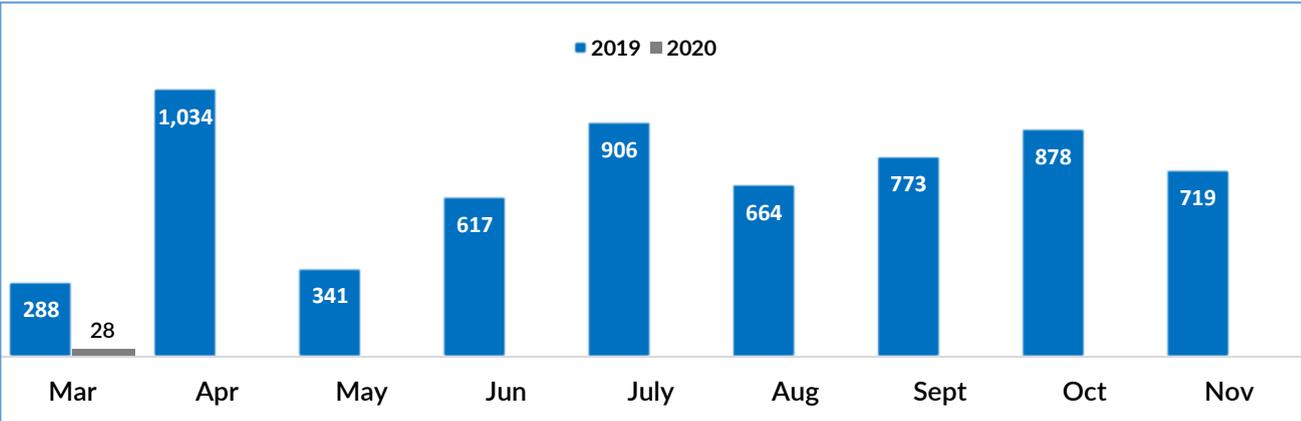
2. Evictions / Eviction Notices

The Mansehra District Administration decided on enforcement of the eviction orders starting 20th February under the direct supervision of District Police Officer (DPO) Mansehra. The Commissionerate Afghan Refugees for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (CAR-KP) was asked to inform the communities about the decision and ensure compliance so that the affected communities can be relocated with dignity to Khaki and the Panian RV. A total of about 1,274 families/7,644 individuals would be affected. There is also an ongoing court case against the eviction orders, which has delayed the commencement date of the exercise. The stay order issued by the court remains in place. Enforcement on the eviction order has been stalled due to the engagement of the district administration in countering the COVID-19 spread.

3. Voluntary Repatriation (VOLREP)

UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation operation resumed on 1 March 2020 after the winter break. However, on 2 March the Chaman border was closed by the GoP to curb the spread of the COVID-19. The Torkham border was then closed on 16 March and all voluntary repatriation was suspended since that date. From 1 to 13 March, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 28 individuals (9 families) via the voluntary repatriation center Azakhel, KP. The main Afghan provinces of return were Laghman (28%), Nangarhar (22 %) and Parwan (17 %). Voluntary repatriation will remain suspended until the border crossings are re-opened.

VOLREP Monthly Trends Comparison 2019 & 2020



4. UNHCR's Interventions and Capacity Building Activities

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 and update law enforcement agencies (LEAs) on the GoP's extension of PoR card validity and other refugee related matters. During the period, UNHCR and ALAC staff organized 124 legal outreach and *shura* meetings, reaching out to 2,591 participants (49% of whom were women). Fifty one percent of these sessions were held in RVs and the rest were held in urban areas. The meetings gave a forum for refugees to voice their concerns about various issues affecting their communities.

During the period, UNHCR and ALAC teams also organized one capacity-building sessions with LEAs on refugee protection and refugee status in Pakistan, in which 28 LEA personnel participated. UNHCR also facilitated four sessions at the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), sensitizing 60 military officials who are deployed as part of UN peacekeeping and observer missions internationally.