

# **The Continuum of Insecurity & Violence: Voices of Afghan Women in Pakistan**

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Women's Regional Network

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Cover photo: Individual Community Conversation with Hazara woman, Quetta , Balochistan, Pakistan

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## Acronyms/Glossary

ACC	Afghan Citizenship Card
CC	Community Conversation
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
IFRP	Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
Mahram	Male guardian who is a family member, required for any movement of a women in Afghanistan under the new PVPV law
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
PoR	Proof of Registration (Card)
PVPV	Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice law implemented in Afghanistan by the Taliban
SEHER	Society for Empowering Human Resource
SHARP	Society for Human Rights and Rehabilitation of Prisoners
Tazkira	Afghan National Identity Card
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHH	Women Headed Household
WHRD	Woman Human Rights Defender
WRN	Women's Regional Network

*"We protected ourselves from the rain but are sitting under the train."*

A Dari proverb used by Afghans in Pakistan (Suraya Mosavi).

Civil Society globally is pushing for Gender Apartheid to be included in the draft Crimes against Humanity Treaty.

## **Gender Apartheid:**

*Gender Apartheid is a system of governance that enforces systematic segregation between women and men based on laws and/or policies, often resulting in the exclusion of women from public spaces and spheres. This system infringes upon the fundamental principles of international law by codifying the subordination of women, denying them equal rights to enjoy all human rights as recognized under international statutes. Similar to racial apartheid's violation against principles prohibiting race discrimination, gender apartheid contravenes the foundational norms of international law, including all the human rights obligations of Afghanistan and the UN Charter itself.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Timeline of Select Key Events in the last year for Afghans in Pakistan**

**October 2023** Pakistan's national Apex Committee endorsement of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) to repatriate over a million foreigners without valid documents, largely Afghans, requiring them to leave the country by the 1st of November.

**November 1st 2023** deadline for those without valid documents to leave the country.

**Since September 2023- November 2024** 761,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan and 23,000 in the last two months.

**April 2024** Despite "Phase 1" only targeting undocumented Afghans, Pakistan expands those targeted for deportation to include those holding ACC and PoR cards as well.

**July 2024** The Government of Pakistan formally announced a further extension of the validity of the PoR card, until 30 June 2025 following the official visit of Filippo Grandi head of UNHCR.<sup>2</sup>

**Aug 2024- December 2024** Deportations continue of undocumented and documented Afghans alike.

**November 2024** - Interior Minister of Pakistan Mohsin Naqvi calls for removing all undocumented Afghans from the Capital (Islamabad) by the end of the year (2024). They have until December 31st to Obtain a No Objection Certificate. This call is condemned by civil society for being xenophobic and adding undue strain on the Afghan community. As this report is going to print, arrests and detentions are being reported of both documented and undocumented Afghans in Islamabad.

<sup>1</sup> Karima Bennouna. (2023). The international obligation to counter gender apartheid in Afghanistan (Issue 54.1, pp.24) in WRN's Afghan Women's Struggles Under the Taliban, Yalda Royan 2023 Report [eded72\\_338a21ee625d49d192cc0ac0d4bb120d.pdf](https://www.wrn.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-12/54.1%20Issue%2054.1%20WRN%20Report%202023.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [All data from:Country - Pakistan \(Islamic Republic of\)](#)

## **About the Women's Regional Network**

Established in 2010, the Women's Regional Network (WRN) is committed to amplifying the voices of marginalized women, often overlooked in the discourse surrounding peace, militarization, forced displacements, security, justice, and governance in the South Asian region and beyond. WRN's dedication to addressing these complex and interconnected challenges extends across countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka as well as the East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania where women often confront obstacles related to economic and socio-political inclusion, discrimination within the justice system, and varying levels of security affecting their lives. Guided by an unwavering commitment to human security and a gender-focused approach, WRN acknowledges that non-traditional crises and threats constitute "conflict" for women. These encompass scenarios where women's lives, safety, and peace are jeopardized, particularly for those experiencing displacement, trapped in armed conflicts, or subjected to exclusionary, divisive, and aggressive politics.

## **Mission**

The Women's Regional Network is committed to a collaborative network to both strengthen the security of women and to enhance women's leadership to initiate and take action in preventing conflict, developing solutions to eradicate corruption and work collectively towards building peace across the region.

## **Vision**

A network of women working within and beyond borders to ensure the enshrinement and protection of human rights; sustainable development and women's full participation in equitable growth to ensure a more peaceful and just world.

## Community Conversation

### Process

As the world tilts towards right wing politics in both the global South and North, support for and budgets for those fleeing conflict have drastically decreased. UNHCR is raising the alarm that they are dangerously short of funds to carry out their activities; the funds available cover only 35% of its budget.<sup>3</sup> Afghans now form the second largest refugee population globally while Pakistan hosts the largest number of Afghans at 3.2 million. However, of the global UNHCR budget for 2025 Asia and the Pacific will receive only 10% which is less than Europe and less than the Middle East/North Africa.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, international organizations have revealed shocking data on resettlements for Afghan nationals. As an example, it is estimated that almost 273,955 Afghans were in need of resettlement in 2023 from Pakistan and Iran alone, yet in 2022 only 271 Afghans were resettled in Europe and only 4,592 have been resettled in Europe in the last 12 years.<sup>5</sup> Afghan women are now at even further extreme risk with the formal adoption of the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice law (PVPV) under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. The PVPV law published on the 31st of July 2024 by the Taliban in Afghanistan, severely violates Afghan women's rights to mobility, freedom of expression, freedom of religion essentially eviscerating them from public life. They are prohibited from moving in public without a male family member, from work, from accessing education, from wearing what they choose or even singing by the Taliban de facto authorities. The Taliban government also places restrictions on men and violates the basic rights of minorities, giving arbitrary power to

“enforcers” to execute punishments at their discretion.

What are the solutions for Afghan women who remain at risk even within Pakistan and who will face severe threats if they are deported? In a dangerous limbo in Pakistan, undocumented Afghan women fight for survival with a continuum of internal and external security concerns, without legal status, few livelihood options, without basic health care or education for their children and the ultimate fear of deportation to face a harrowing fate back in Afghanistan. Victims of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and victims of Pakistani government's ad hoc decisions highlight how their own state, their hosting state and most of all the international community who made lofty promises in 2021 to support them, have failed to protect them.

The perspective of WRN's Community Conversations (CCs) on peace, security and justice is people-centric, non-statist and informed by feminist sensitivities. In centering women's stories, CCs embody the feminist ethics of care and consciousness that considers emotions a crucial part of feminist research methodology. Deploying gender as a category of analysis, Community Conversations are particularly attentive to the intersectional play of power hierarchies and exclusions. The WRN has been conducting “Community Conversations” , its signature qualitative research for over 10 years.

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<sup>3</sup> [Underfunding | Global Focus](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Budget and Expenditure | Global Focus](#)

<sup>5</sup> [P&A2305\\_Safe pathways for Afghans\\_Report Final\\_web.pdf](#)

## Introduction:

### Report Objective and Overview:

This report is a short brief which serves to document the severe and dire deterioration of the situation of Afghan women in Pakistan since WRN's last Community Conversation conducted in 2023 and since the roll out of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP). The previous WRN report entitled *In the Shadow of the Taliban: Community Conversations with Afghan Refugee Women in Pakistan* documented in detail the history of waves of Afghans fleeing to Pakistan since 1979, while focusing on the situation since the fall of Kabul in August 2021. However, that data was collected prior to the Pakistani government's announcement in October 2023 that all undocumented Afghans must return by the end of the month. A massive deportation drive, starting November 1st 2023, coupled with dwindling resources of Afghans and a more precarious return situation for women with the Taliban's new PVPV Law<sup>6</sup> in Afghanistan, have culminated in a disastrous situation for women. This report thus serves as an update on the worsening situation of Afghan women in Pakistan due to the deportation drive and the increasing infringement on women's rights inside Afghanistan that makes return even abhorrent.

The report briefly highlights the experiences and views of a few select newly arrived women on the PVPV law, then looks at the intersectional experiences of women, specifically ethnic and religious minorities, the LGBTQI+ community, Women Headed Households (WHHs), victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation and WHRDs. Emerging themes include violence, addiction and financial strain, continuing insecurity, police detention, harassment and deportation, family separation, mental health concerns and out of school children.

The report is focused on highlighting the voices of women and direct quotes form the majority of the report to showcase the narratives. The emerging themes were based on what women themselves highlighted.

Furthermore, this report is intended to buttress WRN's advocacy efforts for Afghan women. During WRN's high-level meetings at the Human Rights Council in June of this year as well as key meetings with the UN, documentation was identified as a key need. Therefore, this time WRN's CC process was accompanied by a humanitarian referral mechanism whereby cases identified through the CC process or referred by our Network members were referred to the needed services including, but not limited to, legal aid, shelter, medical support including mental health, psychosocial support and community mediation.

As noted in the UN Regional Refugee Response Plan 2024-2025 "Outreach to women and girls through the protection hotline and other community mechanisms remains very low."<sup>7</sup>

## Methodology

The capturing of voices is not intended to provide a statistically relevant sample but to highlight more in-depth narratives from communities that are less heard from, whose voices need amplification. Communities were identified by those on the ground as voices that are less documented and whose concerns need to be highlighted. Locations included Islamabad, Quetta and Peshawar where larger concentrations of newly arrived (post 2021) Afghan women are located. Most women are those who came to Pakistan since the fall of Kabul in 2021, some since the implementation of the PVPV law (published the 31st of July 2024), as well as stories of some people who faced deportation and whose families are separated. In addition, a

<sup>6</sup> [Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf \(afghanistan-analysts.org\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Document - Regional Refugee Response Plan 2024-2025 - Afghanistan Situation \(unhcr.org\)](#)



CC was held with Afghans who were deported or fled Iran and Tajikistan due to the extreme restrictions and conditions in these countries. The data collection took place between October and November 2024.

A parallel Community Conversation with women is also being carried out in Afghanistan through WRN's seed initiative 'Canada's Feminist Forum for Afghanistan' which will document the implementation of the new PVPV law on women in Afghanistan. Although that project is ongoing, linkages have been drawn where possible for regional analysis and to understand the trajectory of flight and the continuum of violence and insecurity of Afghan women when they arrive in Pakistan.

Where there is an\* Names have been changed for Security reasons

on the street without accommodation. They reported increased financial strain with limited ability to work even informally due to fear of leaving the house and police crackdowns on even informal work such as selling bread. Without a stable source of livelihood women were not able to buy basic medicine, get needed medical treatment or buy nutritious food.

### Security

Multiple displacements were reported with women attempting to flee to Iran only to be deported and then attempting to go to Pakistan or entering Pakistan, being deported, and trying to re-enter. This has led to numerous dangerous and expensive attempts of women seeking safety, who undertake multiple day long border journeys facing harassment, discrimination and extortion.

Women bear the brunt of displacement with direct and indirect threats from the Taliban, the host community, their own communities and family members. In this report women recount the direct threats they face from the Taliban for their work or their identity, and how those threats continue in a very tangible way to Pakistan. Some faced forced marriages to Taliban members and fled to

## Brief Summary of Findings

### Livelihoods

Overall women reported increased levels of fear since the IFRP rollout resulting in shelter concerns such as forced eviction and nights



Community Conversations, Quetta, Balochistan

Pakistan and they are still being threatened. Even when women who are under threat due to their work with international organizations are eligible for relocation support from their employers, husbands prevent this. Husbands commit violence with impunity and take women's children away from them or women are left behind to fend for themselves in the wake of threatened male family members who depart for third countries without them. Women face threats from the host community as WHHs or simply for being Afghan women and as well as from their own community and family members. Minority communities face additional layers of discriminatory threats. Husbands can be killed, leave their families, be disappeared or lost in the chaos of flight leaving women to support households without a legal basis to work, healthcare, housing or education.

While almost all of the participants interviewed are fearful and at extreme risk of return to Afghanistan due to their identity or work, women reported harassment, detention and extortion by Pakistani authorities as undocumented persons. Deportations were reported of both documented and undocumented persons alike including separation of children from their parents.

### Health

Women reported severe medical concerns including chronic and acute diseases that they did not treat due to a lack of funds for medicine or operations, instances of medical malpractice leaving them disfigured, in debt and without recourse as well as severe mental health concerns left unaddressed.

### Education

Almost all women interviewed had children out of school- while girls cannot study in Afghanistan they have also not been studying in Pakistan, deserving the same outrage from the international community on this issue.

Overall the roll out of the IFRP in Pakistan has caused an environment of extreme fear resulting in rights violations of women who are already at extreme risk and who require protection not to forcibly be returned to Afghanistan, a gender apartheid state where they risk facing persecution.

### Future Advocacy

The findings of this report shall be at the center of associated ongoing advocacy efforts with various stakeholders, including media, international organizations and the government. This data collected will serve to advise Pakistani policymakers on the response to Afghans in Pakistan and pilot

Pakistan's first Humanitarian Observatory (HO). The Humanitarian Observatories are spaces that bring together different actors involved in the humanitarian field to discuss humanitarian governance and how actors can work together through learning, exchange, strategic thinking and action and influence. There are 12 active Observatories with 3 more in South Asia (based in India and with a chapter in Bangladesh), the Philippines and Namibia.<sup>8</sup> The HO pilot project associated with this qualitative research report consists of a wide array of civil society representatives and is led by the University of Peshawar Migration Research Cell (Department of Political Science) and is supported by the Co-Author of this report's organization - Crossroads Advisory. This observatory is guided by a core advisory committee whose members have grounded knowledge of forced migration and represent different types of expertise ranging from law to health, to research and media. They will amplify the voices of marginalized refugees and displaced populations especially women and undertake advocacy through meetings with humanitarian actors and through the observatory meetings.<sup>9</sup> This will be how the findings of this report will be utilized for future advocacy efforts to create a better legal and humanitarian environment for Afghan women. In addition, the Humanitarian Observatory is creating an interactive

digital archive based on gray literature including interviews with Afghan women as well as other unpublished reports and data from government and UN organizations, that students at the university will manage. The platform will allow the selection of a theme and will display different quotations from interviews, reports or photographs for students to interact with. This will constitute a continuous process of advocacy and promote understanding and empathy for forcibly displaced persons including refugees at the university.



**"Humanitarian Observatory Inauguration signing, Dr Saba Gul Kattak of Crossroads Advisory and Vice Chancellor Dr. Muhammad Naeem Qazi, University of Peshawar"**

## Context

The protracted conflict in Afghanistan began in 1980. Since then, there have been five major waves of Afghan refugees, corresponding with regime change in Afghanistan. Pakistan is not party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees/the 1967 Protocol and has displayed no interest in signing any internal or regional convention on refugees and neither has it enacted any domestic legislation for refugees.<sup>10</sup> However, Pakistan under its constitution must protect many basic rights of all of those “persons” within its jurisdiction regardless of nationality as well as abide by its existing ratified commitments under IHL. Previously in Pakistan, refugees were welcomed, they were provided registration en masse, in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement. However, after the Taliban took power in August 2021, Pakistan closed its borders and refused to grant any kind of registration to the approximately 600,000 Afghans who fled Afghanistan. Those who were unregistered and lacked visas, were declared “illegal migrants.” They have no permission to work or access livelihood and face additional challenges to even working illegally in the informal sector such as language barriers, cultural barriers and extreme labour exploitation resulting in a dire situation. The population of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has soared since the fall of Kabul in August 2021 with Pakistan now hosting 3.2 million Afghans (76% women and children).<sup>11</sup> Women and girls are at most risk and bear the brunt of the displacement to Pakistan.

<sup>8</sup> [\\_Humanitarian Observatories Humanitarian Studies Centre](#) for more information.

<sup>9</sup> For more information about the HO here: <http://www.marakahumanitarianobservatory.com/>

<sup>10</sup> [eded72\\_30d14eaa307e40d69e383f874870ecb8.pdf \(womensregionalnetwork.org\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Document - Regional Refugee Response Plan 2024-2025 - Afghanistan Situation \(unhcr.org\)](#)

## Documentation Issues and The Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan

The only form of valid registration for Afghans in Pakistan is a PoR Card or an ACC card (a form of registration card issued only between 2017-2018), however, neither of these were issued to the refugees who fled Afghanistan after the fall of Kabul in August of 2021. Afghans may also be in Pakistan for a certain time duration with a valid visa in a valid passport. Extensions of visas are complicated and expensive.

All those who do not possess a valid visa, the PoR Card or the ACC Card are considered “unregistered” and therefore, “undocumented and illegal.” This includes those with SHARP and SEHER registration slips showing preliminary registration to have interviews with UNHCR and UNHCR asylum certificates (which were issued for a short period of time by UNHCR and are no longer issued). Undocumented persons constitute almost all post-2021 arrivals and in general as of November of last year -2023 were estimated at 1.3 million of the population who are at extreme risk of harassment and extortion and eventual deportation.<sup>12</sup> Often these people – including many women in this report – do not even have valid identity documents such as passports or national cards (Tazkira) as they may have been lost, confiscated, robbed or they are unable to renew them in Pakistan. In UNHCR's late September 2024 flash update it is reported that 94% of the people deported are undocumented.<sup>13</sup> Almost all of the women whose voices are in this report are undocumented and crossed with smugglers through the Chaman-Spin Boldak border in Balochistan.

Currently ACC holders as well as undocumented persons are not entitled to access formal employment, public services such as education, they may not open a bank account, formally rent a property or register for a SIM card. This situation has worsened with the roll out of the IFRP, especially for women. Refugee women report difficulty even with informal work, experiencing evictions, with the situation drastically deteriorating since November 1st 2023, the deadline given to undocumented Afghans to leave Pakistan.<sup>14</sup>

On the 3rd of October 2023, Pakistan's national Apex Committee endorsed a plan entitled the “Foreigners Repatriation Plan” (FRP) to repatriate over a million foreigners without valid documents. This group was mainly composed of Afghans and they had until November 1st 2023 as a drop date to leave the country. “Since the 15th of September 2023 until the 5th of November 2024 over 761,200 Afghans have returned to Afghanistan and 23,000 in the past two months (September and October 2024). Of these, 36,100 were deported and 7,100 arrested or detained this year while there were 800 arrests/detentions in October of this year (2024) alone.”<sup>15</sup> Although there is an overall slowdown of deportations since last year, this shows the ongoing deportations and arrests have not halted and a dire situation remains with major implications for the safety and security of women and girls.

The Pakistani government noted that at the end of June 2024 it would conduct another deportation drive however after a high profile visit of Filippo Grande the High Commissioner for Refugees in July 2024, there was a widely reported statement by the High commissioner that the deportation drive was suspended for 1 year with 1.45 million refugees having their stay extended for 1 year;<sup>16</sup> however, later the Pakistani government reacted to this statement and

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND PACIFIC (RBAP) EMERGENCY UPDATE #1: PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN RETURNS RESPONSE As of 9 November 2023

<sup>13</sup> [Document - UNHCR-IOM Pakistan Flash update # 29 on Arrest and Detention/Flow Monitoring, 15 Sep 2023 to 21 Sep 2024](#)

<sup>14</sup> Inter-agency GBV needs assessment- Impact of IFRP on Afghan Women and Girls Report on Findings June 2024

<sup>15</sup> [Pakistan-Afghanistan: Returns Emergency Response \(as of 5 November 2024\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Pakistan says 1.45 million Afghans can stay for another year following UN refugee chief's visit | AP News](#)

restated its position on deportation. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, the spokesperson for Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said the FRP was still in place and being "implemented in an orderly and phased manner."<sup>17</sup> However, this extension did not apply to those the government considers 'undocumented,' many who arrived after 2021, also referred to as "aliens".<sup>18 19</sup>

U.N. agencies have decried the forced expulsion of Afghans from Pakistan, saying it could lead to severe human rights violations — including the separation of families and deportation of minors.<sup>20</sup> UNHCR has issued a non-return advisory which in WRN's high level UN advocacy meetings was noted to be a global advisory, still in full force and to be respected.<sup>21</sup> On 1 February, 2023, the UNHCR updated its Guidance Note to include that "UNHCR considers Afghan women and girls are likely to be in need of international protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention."<sup>22</sup> This means that Afghan women and girls should not be sent back to Afghanistan as it is deemed they will face persecution based on their gender.<sup>23</sup> Recently the legal guidance note was updated to include the treatment states should provide to those seeking asylum who cross irregularly and highlights that states are prohibited "from penalizing asylum-seekers and refugees merely because they have entered a country irregularly."<sup>24</sup> Human Rights groups have condemned the lack of accountability, transparency as well as the unlawful

detentions and deportations of Afghans.<sup>25</sup> "Pakistan's 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' is in violation of refugee and international human rights law, and puts the lives of all Afghan refugees at risk."<sup>26</sup>

## Undocumented Persons

UNHCR/IOM Arrest and Detention Flow Monitoring Report from 8-21 of September 2024 showed that ACC and undocumented Afghans formed 91% of the total rates of arrests and detentions (although the majority are undocumented Afghans). Since October of 2023 arrests and detentions are the highest in Balochistan and in September of 2024 87% of them occurred in Balochistan where there is the highest level of irregular migration while 94% of the people deported in this time were undocumented.<sup>27</sup>

As almost all of the women who shared their voices in this report arrived after 2021 and thus do not have any documentation and this has caused them to be extremely vulnerable.

A study on Afghans in Peshawar showed that 89% of participants faced challenges in social services access such as health care and education due to insufficient documents which was echoed in our report. 62% did not seek out required services such as medical due to fears over deportation which was also echoed in our report where participants noted how they stayed home without leaving unless absolutely necessary.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>17</sup>[Pakistan deports over 32,000 Afghan refugees in past month - Khaama Press](#)

<sup>18</sup>[Why is Pakistan deporting over a million undocumented Afghan immigrants? | Reuters](#)

<sup>19</sup>[As Pakistan begins second phase of deportation, Afghan women fear what lies ahead - Pakistan - DAWN.COM](#)

<sup>20</sup>[Pakistan says 1.45 million Afghans can stay for another year following UN refugee chief's visit | AP News](#)

<sup>21</sup>[UNHCR Position on Returns to Afghanistan | Refworld](#)

<sup>22</sup>UNHCR, Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan – Update I, February 2023, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/63e0cb714.pdf> and WRN Community Conversation Women Seeking Security, Asserting Agency India Afghan Community Conversations 2023. [eded72\\_4dd1c8749ccf4abebe15b61d7c19f8e0.pdf](#) [\(womensregionalnetwork.org\)](#)

<sup>23</sup>[Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan \(Update I\) | Refworld](#)

<sup>24</sup>[Guidelines on International Protection No. 14: Non-penalization of refugees on account of their irregular entry or presence and restrictions on their movements in accordance with Article 31 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees | Refworld](#)

<sup>25</sup>[Pakistan: Government must stop ignoring global calls to halt unlawful deportation of Afghan refugees \(amnesty.ca\)](#)

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>[Document - UNHCR-IOM Pakistan Flash update # 29 on Arrest and Detention/Flow Monitoring, 15 Sep 2023 to 21 Sep 2024](#)

<sup>28</sup>[\(PDF\) A challenge in access to social services of undocumented Afghan immigrants in host society of Peshawar, Pakistan](#)

"We don't have any documents—no PoR card, visa, or passport. I've never been to UNHCR, although many people have told me to go, but I don't know how to go to UNHCR." - Jamila\*, from Logar, a widow and mother of four sons and three daughters (Peshawar CC).

"The police do not acknowledge UNHCR documents or the tokens issued by the SHARP office, and they continually harass Afghans, especially those without proper documentation. Though we've managed to stay in Pakistan with the help of relatives who are in Pakistan and moving from one location to another, the fear of deportation looms over us. The police have already come for our neighbors and many of them have been deported to Afghanistan." -Zarina\* and Freshta\* former NGO workers, WHH sisters, originally from Nangarhar (Peshawar CC).

"Crossing the Spin Boldak border without documentation was a significant challenge. It took nearly six days, with both sides strictly enforcing entry restrictions for those without documents. We were fearful and had to pay smugglers to help us cross. The journey involved long distances on foot, with limited access to drinking water, which was costly when available. Despite these hardships, we managed to cross." -Hooriyah,\* Young woman from Kabul, university graduate (Peshawar CC).

"My transgender friend reached out, suggesting we escape by attending her cousin's wedding in Kabul as a cover to leave the community undetected. Using this opportunity, we left Afghanistan, crossing into Pakistan through Quetta via the Balochistan border, without passports or visas. Our route first took us through Iran, requiring us to cross treacherous mountains. The journey took nearly eight days and

nights, leaving us exhausted and physically impacted for weeks." - Gul\*, Transgender woman from Nangarhar (Peshawar CC).

"We have already expressed our concerns to UNHCR about our difficulties in finding a house or even a room to live in, especially without a properly registered case or an identity card." -Amina\*, Transgender woman from Nangarhar (Peshawar CC).

In an interagency GBV assessment conducted in June 2024, "95% of participants expressed [that] Afghans in their community are in fear of returning to Afghanistan."<sup>29</sup> This illustrates the prevalent fear of return which is due to multiple reasons. In this assessment Afghan women reported the many impacts of the IFRP including marrying daughters to protect them from deportation.

## ■ Non-Refoulement

Forcible returning of persons who are at risk of persecution and torture violates the principle of non-refoulement<sup>30</sup> and is an egregious breach of international humanitarian law regardless of the fact that Pakistan is not signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Furthermore, within its constitution Pakistan differentiates between "citizens" and "persons" and the right to life, right to not be unlawfully detained and other fundamental rights apply to all "persons" within Pakistan's jurisdiction regardless of nationality. Therefore it is also the State's constitutional obligation to uphold these rights for Afghans.<sup>31</sup>

In 2024 up until September 2024, UNHCR has assisted over 48,300 returns, (98.5% from Pakistan) double the returns in the same time from last year. UNHCR notes " it is still clear a considerable shift exists in the reasons related to return since the implementation of the

<sup>29</sup> [European Court Of Justice: Gender And Nationality Sufficient To Grant Afghan Women Asylum \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)

<sup>30</sup> [Procedure File: 2024/2803\(RSP\) | Legislative Observatory | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

UNHCR presentation, Thursday Nov 7 2024 Islamabad

[Joint statement regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(international.gc.ca\)](https://www.international.gc.ca)

<sup>31</sup> [Four Countries Take Taliban to the International Court of Justice Over Gender Apartheid - Feminist Majority Foundation](https://www.feministmajorityfoundation.org)

<sup>32</sup> [Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf \(afghanistan-analysts.org\)](https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org)

Government of Pakistan's Repatriation Plan, such as: fear of arrest/deportation, abuse by police or state authorities, uncertainty related to the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards extension in Pakistan, no added protection value of the PoR card and night raids.<sup>32</sup>

The European Court of Justice on October 4th 2024 ruled that in the case of Afghan women, "the competent national authorities are entitled to consider that it is currently unnecessary to establish, in the individual assessment of the situation of an application for international protection, that there is a risk that she will actually and specifically be subject to acts of persecution if she returns to her country of origin, where the factors relating to her individual status, such as her nationality or gender, are established."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, gender and nationality alone are enough to grant Afghan women asylum in European countries. This was following an EU Parliament's resolution in September 2024 which highlighted the "deteriorating situation of women in Afghanistan due to the recent adoption of the law on the "Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV)." It calls for among other actions, for the Taliban to be held accountable, for women's meaningful participation in negotiations, it condemns countries for normalization of relations with the Taliban and calls for the recognition of Gender Apartheid as a Crime Against Humanity.<sup>34</sup> More international support is building in support of Afghan women and that no Afghan woman should be forcibly returned to Afghanistan. However, the number of resettled cases of Afghans who reside in Pakistan remains abysmally low with approximately only 9000 of these cases submitted to resettlement countries and only 3000 departed since 2022.<sup>35</sup>

## CEDAW Case

Four countries including the Netherlands, Canada, Germany and Australia under article 29 of CEDAW have formally brought a case forward against Afghanistan for its violations of CEDAW.<sup>36</sup> This is the first time in history that any country has taken another country to the International Court of Justice for violations of CEDAW. Although this may not lead to immediate changes for women and girls it is a "legal and symbolic victory and sets a critical precedent for holding oppressive regimes accountable for gender-based persecution. By taking Afghanistan under the Taliban regime to the Court, it may also deter future governments or groups from normalizing relations or engaging diplomatically with the Taliban."<sup>37</sup>

The Afghan experience for women is not singular, intersectionality through experience and identity is key to the way in which Afghan women have struggled with additional challenges to navigate the conditions they face. Women from ethnic minorities, women headed households (WHHs), the LGBTQI+ community, WHRDs and women who are victims of trafficking face additional layers of marginalization and their stories are not often shared, yet they represent communities of women facing similar challenges.

They reveal harrowing narratives of how their financial situation and mental well being have deteriorated in the last year when the deportations began, and how the implementation of the new PVPV law has added to their fear of return to Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

In their own words, they tell their stories of the continuum of violence, humiliation, separation from their families and myriad human rights violations day-by-day, highlighting their most pressing concerns.

<sup>33</sup> [European Court Of Justice: Gender And Nationality Sufficient To Grant Afghan Women Asylum \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)

<sup>34</sup> [Procedure File: 2024/2803\(RSP\) | Legislative Observatory | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

<sup>35</sup> UNHCR presentation, Thursday Nov 7 2024 Islamabad

<sup>36</sup> [Joint statement regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(international.gc.ca\)](https://www.international.gc.ca)

<sup>37</sup> [Four Countries Take Taliban to the International Court of Justice Over Gender Apartheid - Feminist Majority Foundation](https://www.feministmajority.org)

<sup>38</sup> [Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf \(afghanistan-analysts.org\)](https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org)

Almost every one of them has specific legitimate threats to their life to return to Afghanistan.

In women's own voices: these are their experiences.

## CASE STUDY

### HUMA\*

#### **Displacement, Violence and Family Separation**

I am a 40-year-old WHRD from Paktia but I lived in Uruzgan in one of the most dangerous provinces of Afghanistan. I was subject to an arranged underage marriage at 15 years old. I am the mother of seven children- six sons and one daughter. Due to my husband's drug addiction and the need to be a breadwinner in my family, I started working with women and children for an international organization. Due to my work in remote and dangerous areas, which was unusual for women, I was the target of many threats from community members. The threats became more severe and my car was attacked, leaving my second son injured with a head injury and my husband unable to walk for four years. After my husband's recovery his cruelty did not change and till date he refuses to work, expecting me and my children to support the family.

Due to security concerns our family moved to Kabul and in August 2021 when Kabul fell, my international organization offered to evacuate us but my husband refused to leave Afghanistan or to let me communicate with my previous supervisors. Finally, after continuing to receive threats we made the heartbreaking decision to leave Kabul over two years ago. We crossed into Pakistan through the Spin Boldak border, as it was the only way Afghans could enter without passports or visas, relying on smugglers to help us. I only have a Tazkira (national identity card) but my husband has since taken it. The journey was incredibly difficult for all of us, and along the way, all my children fell ill. We were stranded for two to three days before finally reaching Peshawar. We heard about the harsh treatment Afghans faced at the hands of Iranian police. We never expected that Pakistan would soon begin deporting Afghans as well. Such is the unfortunate luck of our people.

In Pakistan being the sole breadwinner, my husband forced me to work small labour jobs but often I failed to get work, and begged on the street. He refused to use the money to buy clothes for our sons and one of my sons only had one traditional pair of clothes which could not be washed often. He went with wet clothes to the bazaar to beg and my husband said cruelly "your clothes will dry on the way."

My husband abused me, hitting me a lot and the situation escalated when I refused to let him bring in young boys for his own pleasure. I was also concerned for my own children who were old enough to understand what was happening in our home. We were evicted from our home without notice by our landlord who was acting on the police's orders because we have no documentation. We told the police that we were registered with UNHCR and I even gave them my token number, but unfortunately, it was not accepted. We were allowed to stay in the house for that night only, but by morning, we rushed to the SHARP office for help. Thankfully, they provided us with a letter to protect us from forced deportation. For one night, we slept in a tent, and with the support of a kind neighbor, who is a PoR card holder, we were able to rent another house.



As I was desperate, I asked for a legal separation from my husband and I went to the court in Peshawar to file for divorce but they asked for money for this and I had none left. My husband began threatening to kill me and insisting there was no need for a divorce. Despite being summoned he refused to come to the court. He withdrew our children from school and sent them to beg on the streets. Now, none of my children are receiving an education, their future is stolen from them. Now I live in a shelter and I am grateful for this as my case for divorce is still being processed by the court. The shelter also facilitated an ear surgery I needed due to a severe injury inflicted by my husband. This is the third time we've had to rebuild our lives from scratch, and each time, we've lost everything.

After arriving in Pakistan, a new challenge arose that led to my separation from my family. I came here to protect my children, but instead, I've been forced apart from them. It has now been almost three months since I last saw my children, and I don't even know what is happening to them. My brothers keep telling me, "We are Pashtoon; you must keep your family together and be patient." I tried my best for 20 years, enduring as much as I could, but there is no more room for tolerance now. I've been taken away from my home and separated from my children—all of whom are still underage. My youngest son is only three and a half years old. My deepest desire is to reunite with my children and provide them with a better life, where they can receive an education rather than being forced to beg on the streets.



Community Conversation , Quetta

## Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Law

The introduction of the PVPV law has strengthened the case that Afghan women should not be returned to Afghanistan and some newly arrived Afghan women speak about their experiences and impressions of the law.

"Regarding the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women and girls, the situation has worsened dramatically. Women's lives are now filled with unbearable restrictions, especially for those without male guardians, like me. I have three daughters, and as a young woman, I feared being forced into marriage with a Taliban member. Women in Afghanistan today cannot move freely without a male guardian, and even female doctors have been prohibited from interacting with male visitors or caretakers in some hospitals. The Taliban's Promotion of Virtue law, issued in August 2024, dictates that every part of a woman's body, face, and even her voice is considered "awrah" (intimate parts), which must be concealed. Recently, the Taliban's Minister of Promotion of Virtue also declared that women are not allowed to recite or perform the Takbir (a religious chant) in front of other women. These extreme measures, combined with the closure of schools for girls beyond the 6th grade, has made life unbearable under the Taliban regime, driving many families to flee the country." - Nasrin\*, newly arrived young Hazara woman from Kabul, a former midwife (Peshawar CC).

"As a family with an educational background—my mother being a teacher and myself a university graduate—we no longer felt safe. The Taliban's view is that women who work or pursue education are morally corrupt or have bad intentions. When they discovered that my mother was teaching boys, they repeatedly threatened us, enforcing their strict interpretations of the "Virtue and Vice" laws, which prohibit

interaction between men and women for any purpose. While schools for boys and girls under sixth grade technically remain open, female teachers face severe intimidation and social stigma, making it dangerous for them to continue working. Many, including my mother, were forced to leave their jobs and stay home for safety. Every day, new rules are imposed, further restricting public life, especially for women and girls. These restrictions began with mandates for full body coverings (hijab) and have expanded to ban women from working in media, taking jobs, or even leaving their homes alone without a male family member (mahram)."- Hooriyah\*, young woman from Kabul, university graduate (Peshawar CC).

"In Afghanistan, the new laws under the Vice and Virtue Ministry have stripped basic freedoms from Afghan citizens, particularly women and girls. Recently, this group introduced extreme restrictions, including banning women and girls from owning touchscreen phones and requiring them to wear hijabs. These measures instilled constant fear in me, so I stayed out of public spaces and avoided confrontations with authorities."- Perveen\*, Tajik woman, newly arrived from Kabul (Islamabad CC).

"Living under Taliban rule is incredibly distressing. I vividly recall one day when I was in a taxi with my brother, and we were stopped by the "Vice and Virtue" team. They separated us and questioned us individually, asking our father's name, our home address, our relationship, and more, all to verify that we were family. It was humiliating and invasive to go through such an ordeal in public. Experiences like these have created a constant sense of shame and fear, making everyday life feel oppressive."- Farahnoush\*, 22 year old former university student whose education was ended by the PVPV law (Islamabad CC).

## Intersectional Discrimination and Marginalization

### Ethnic and Religious Minorities

The persecution of Hazara women is well documented but since the Taliban takeover in 2021 the situation has deteriorated with numerous targeted attacks by both the Taliban and the Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K).<sup>39</sup> Details of the treatment of Hazara women by the Taliban including activists who protest, include frequent use of ethnic slurs and depicts the additional layer of discrimination.<sup>40</sup> There is also a disproportionate arbitrary detention of Hazara women for their attire and not wearing their head scarf properly.<sup>41</sup> Under the new PVPV law the directives are clear in their discrimination against minorities. "The combination of their

gender, ethnicity, and religious identity amplifies the discrimination Hazara women face, shaping the nature and severity of abuses inflicted upon them."<sup>42</sup>

"Living under the Taliban regime was filled with constant fear. I vividly remember the Taliban forces were inspecting women under their abayas or long dresses to ensure they weren't wearing leggings or tight clothing. The streets were blocked off, and the Vice and Virtue teams would check every woman's attire, whipping those whose clothing they deemed inappropriate. This was especially common in areas where the majority of the Hazara community lives." -Lina,\* newly arrived Hazara woman from Maidan Wardak, former tailor (Peshawar CC).

"Life for the Hazara community has become severely restricted under the Taliban, and



Community Conversation, Quetta, Balochistan

<sup>39</sup> [Issue Update: Freedom of Religion or Belief and Womens Rights in Afghanistan \(uscifr.gov\)](https://www.uscifr.gov/)

<sup>40</sup> [Bolaq-Report-Situation-of-Hazaras-During-Second-Year-of-Taliban-Rule.pdf](#)

<sup>41</sup> [Under the Veil of Oppression: The Agonizing Plight of Afghanistans Hazara Women | Wilson Center](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Hazara Women: How Gender and Ethnicity Intersect in the Talibans Repression \(justsecurity.org\)](#)

while the entire Shia community faces difficulties, the Hazara people, in particular, are facing even greater hardships. The Taliban's restrictions on women, combined with their specific threats against the Hazara community, the lack of a clear future in Afghanistan, and lack of employment forced us to leave the country." -Zahra\*, newly arrived Hazara woman, former teacher from Kabul (Peshawar CC).

"Throughout the journey, we constantly feared Taliban punishment because we are from the Hazara community. Life under the Taliban regime is especially harsh for Hazara and Shia communities, whom the Taliban refuse to accept as equal members of society. We covered our faces to avoid being recognized and were fortunate to enter Pakistan, though it came with numerous challenges. The behavior of the border police on both sides was harsh, as they often hit people with electric cables or ropes and tasers, pushing them back. My son was severely tasered and beaten by the Pakistani police while crossing the border, leaving him in shock." -Sima,\* Hazara woman from Maidan Wardak (Islamabad CC).

"A few years ago, a man from the Pashtun community proposed to me. Due to cultural differences, my parents rejected his proposal. He approached again, but when my parents refused a second time, he burned our home. My parents and I suffered severe burns from the waist down and continue to face ongoing health issues. Due to my civil society work with girls, I organized numerous events for girls. However, after the fall of Kabul, when the Taliban began entering homes, they would abduct single women or unmarried girls, particularly targeting those from the Hazara community. No one dared to ask where they were taking the girls. At the Pakistani border, I faced extreme brutality, discrimination, and hatred. Upon arriving in Quetta, I encountered further challenges when the government announced plans to deport refugees. Our landlord demanded we leave immediately, citing the absence of PoR cards and claiming that hosting us put him in danger. One night, we had to stay on the

streets until a family with PoR cards allowed us to stay in a single room. Sometimes, when my daughter sees fresh fruit, vegetables, or meat at the market, she asks, 'Can we eat these things again?' It makes me cry."-Habiba\*, young Hazara woman, former head of a girls' empowerment organization in Balkh (Quetta CC).

## CASE STUDY

### Dr. Fauzia\*

"As a surgeon in Mazar-i-Sharif, I faced significant challenges after the Taliban took over. While performing my duties, the Taliban forbade me from treating male patients, claiming that Islam does not allow women to treat men. They also criticized me for speaking Farsi and ordered me not to go to the hospital without a mahram. When the Taliban discovered that my husband was a senior electrician in an American company, they came to arrest him. However, he managed to hide, and in December 2022 our entire family entered Quetta Pakistan through Spin Boldak border to escape life-threatening persecution. We have no documents and are living in Pakistan illegally. We were brutally beaten at the border because we are Hazaras. Smugglers instructed us to cover our child's face, as Hazaras are easily recognizable. We changed our clothing to conceal our identity, covering our faces, and with great difficulty, managed to cross the border. We are easy targets and I was recently robbed. When I go outside [In Quetta], I face discrimination due to my dress, accent, and undocumented status. In Afghanistan, we cannot practice our religion freely anymore, the Taliban have closed our mosques and imposed their version of Islam, Wahhabism, on everyone." (Quetta CC).

## Christian Hazara Women

Adding an additional layer of discrimination, religious minorities particularly Christians have faced extreme challenges in Afghanistan. During the first Taliban rule, Christians were sentenced to death for their beliefs under the crime of "apostasy." Under the 2004 Constitution apostasy was still a punishable offence. Christian churches and its followers were attacked causing many Christians to start seeking asylum. In the WRN's CCs with Christian Afghan women in India it was noted that "Women in particular admitted that they preferred to remain discreet about their religious identity when among the Afghan community and would wear a headscarf to blend in."<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, fleeing to Pakistan did not provide the security they require, as Pakistan's blasphemy laws have become a tool for people to level charges to settle personal scores. Many high profile cases of individuals seen as wrongly accused exist. Before the government can act, frenzied mobs attack and kill. Religious minorities especially Ahmedis, Christians and Hindus are at greater risk as their homes, places of worship and graveyards are also attacked.<sup>44</sup> Some women did not even reveal their identities as Christians in this data collection until later in the conversation due to the extreme insecurity and threats they face as a religious minority.

"In addition to facing many challenges and discrimination, the deportation policy has been a significant issue. We were searching for homes previously rented to refugees with PoR cards, as no one was willing to rent a room to us undocumented persons. Being an actress and a Christian made my situation even more difficult, as the area where we sought shelter was largely dominated by conservative, male-oriented, and religious mindsets. I also face threats from my community to leave "show

business"; change my faith, and conform to a more "modest" lifestyle like other girls. My sister who is with us receives harassing phone calls telling her to change her religion."- Zeba\*, young Hazara Christian actress from Ghazni (Quetta CC).

"One day, the Taliban raided my home to arrest my husband. Fortunately, he wasn't home at the time and stayed away for several days. Then, about two weeks later, I received a call from an unknown number. It was my husband. He only said, 'I am going.' After that, the number was disconnected, and I could never reach him again. After eight months of waiting with no news of my husband, I decided to seek refuge in Pakistan."- Binazir\*, Hazara (undercover Christian) WHRD from Kabul (Quetta CC).

"While crossing the border, smugglers noticed that my daughter wasn't wearing a burqa. They said, 'She must wear a burqa,' but I told them she's only seven years old. The smugglers took my daughter and instructed her to act sick, wear a burqa to cover her face, and remain silent. Pretending I was Pashtun, the smugglers managed to bring me and my daughter in through a different route."-Binazir\*, Hazara (undercover Christian) WHRD from Kabul (Quetta CC).



Community Conversation , Islamabad

<sup>43</sup> [eded72\\_4dd1c8749ccf4abebe15b61d7c19f8e0.pdf](#)

<sup>44</sup> [Issue Update: Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan](#)

## Women Headed Households:

At heightened risk of returning to Afghanistan are women who have worked for non governmental organizations as WHRDs or were or are associated with government employees or the military during the previous government. Afghan women without male family members are at an additional heightened risk of return as

they are required by Taliban law to move with a male family member (Mahram). Women report husbands, sons and brothers killed, missing, leaving, disappeared, without any knowledge where they are and being left behind by male family members- abandoned to "fend for themselves." Living alone or as WHHs in Pakistan they continue to face precarious security situations and threats from the far reaching arms of the Taliban whose networks run deep , the host community and their own communities alike.



Community Conversation, Islamabad

## CASE STUDY

### Zarina\* and Freshta\*- Sisters Left Behind

I worked at NGOs both in Paktia province as well as in Kabul, my brother previously worked with the Karzai government and was later a legal advisor to the United States Army, this put our family at grave risk when Kabul fell to the Taliban. My brother evacuated to the USA with his family leaving my sister and I to fend for ourselves. Both of my parents passed away. Due to the threats we had no choice but to leave for Pakistan and travel through the Spin Boldak border as we had no passports or visas as the expense and the wait were both too long.

We registered with UNHCR and received a case number, but we don't have valid visas or passports. The police do not acknowledge UNHCR documents or the tokens issued by the SHARP office, and they continually harass Afghans, especially those without proper documentation. Though we've managed to stay in Pakistan we live with the fear of deportation. The police have already come for our neighbors and many of them have been deported to Afghanistan. As two young women alone, we face a bad security situation, we receive disturbing phone calls, threats, and messages from unknown numbers, asking for our home address. We've had to move multiple times because of these threats, but with no legal status, we struggle to find landlords willing to rent to Afghan refugees. The current economic crisis, with soaring inflation, has made it impossible for us to afford basic necessities like housing, utilities, and food. Our lives have been sacrificed in these wars by different warlords, and we have been left behind in our education. Our only fault is being Afghan girls. I belong to Kama, Nangarhar, an insecure province. If someone dies there, nobody asks questions. Previously, there was little police presence, and now the Taliban do not consider women to be human. We feel abandoned—two women alone, with no protection or future. Every day is a battle for survival, and we live in constant fear, struggling to make it through. We need help, not just for our livelihood, but for our very existence. (Peshawar CC)

"Tragically, my father passed away from COVID-19 in 2020. My mother later went to Canada on a visitor visa through a sponsorship program, but she has now overstayed and remains there without legal status. Once she regularizes her stay or gains residency, she hopes to sponsor us as well. Here, I look after my younger siblings. Although I miss my mother deeply, I do my best to take on the responsibilities at home. Sometimes, people ask my younger siblings about our parents, and they say our mother is away in Quetta to avoid awkward questions."- Ferhana\* a young woman alone, working and caring for her 3 younger siblings. (Islamabad CC).

"I had two more sons who went missing when the Taliban arrived. No one tells us if

they are dead, imprisoned, or what happened to them. Their father became paralyzed due to the stress and passed away." Jamila\*, from Logar, a widow and mother of four sons and three daughters (Peshawar CC).

"I was alone here with only my husband, but he has recently disappeared. I have no information about his whereabouts—whether he returned to Kabul with his family or went elsewhere." - Arezo\*, former teacher and principal, from Kabul (Peshawar CC).

"I don't know where my husband is or if he is even alive. He left Afghanistan during the change of regime and the evacuation efforts, and since then, I have had no contact with him. Before he left, I was in the

early stages of pregnancy, though neither of us knew at the time. After his departure, I learned of my pregnancy, and now my daughter is two and a half years old. During the Taliban takeover, he was evacuated from Kabul Airport, but I have no idea where he ended up-whether it was Germany, the United States, or somewhere else. Since 2022, I have been living here in Pakistan with my family, hoping for any news of my husband's whereabouts."- Gulrang\*, a young Afghan woman, born in Pakistan due to displacement, returned to Afghanistan and fled back in 2022 to Pakistan due to Taliban takeover in 2021 (Islamabad CC).

"When the threats became unbearable and the Taliban restricted passports, leaving us no chance to obtain one, I fled to Pakistan with my close family, including my son-in-law and daughter-in-law, through the Spin Boldak border. We crossed without documents, as obtaining legal passage was nearly impossible; many people were using local guides to help them cross for a fee. However, the journey was very risky, and many spent days and nights waiting for a chance to cross safely. Unfortunately, my husband was unable to cross and was sent back to the border. Since then, I have lost contact with him and have no idea of his current whereabouts in Afghanistan. After crossing, we lived in Quetta for about six months, where the threats from the Taliban persisted. For our safety, we relocated to Islamabad, where we remain today."- Noor\*, Hazara woman activist from Daikundi (Islamabad CC).

"Many families have no male members, and with the new rules, women are not allowed to go outside without a male guardian, which is deeply unfair and unrealistic. The restrictions are extreme, women and girls are even being forced to have their clothing inspected under their burqas to ensure they are not wearing tight clothes or leggings. The Taliban's "Vice and Virtue" teams, who are supposed to enforce these rules, have no

right to check women's clothing, especially since they are not mahrams. This invasive and unjust behavior only adds to the suffering of women and girls in Afghanistan."- Sima\*, Hazara woman from Maidan Wardak (Islamabad CC).

"My eldest daughter is 27 years old, and my second and third daughters are 20 years old and 18 years old. The Taliban's harsh restrictions on women and girls have completely changed our lives. My husband was killed, my son was imprisoned, my daughter nearly forced into marriage with a Taliban member, and my daughters' education and my work as a teacher was brought to an abrupt halt. In every way, the Taliban takeover destroyed our lives, leaving us homeless, struggling for survival, and without hope in our own country. One day, while applying for a passport, I received a call from my daughter, saying that the Taliban had detained her father. I rushed home, then to the police station, but the Taliban denied having him in custody. I searched everywhere I could think of, frantic and terrified. Later that day, a neighbor from his shop called to tell me my husband had been dropped in front of the shop, barely conscious. He was badly beaten and bleeding. With the help of neighbors, we took him to the hospital, where he passed away that night due to the severity of his injuries. After his death, the Taliban began visiting our home frequently, searching the house and questioning us. They found an empty bullet shell that the U.S. Army had once given my husband as a memento, and they demanded we return any weapons associated with it. I explained that it was just an empty shell and that any weapons we had were turned over during the regime change, but they didn't believe us. They tried to detain my son, but I fought to protect him, with support from our neighbors."- Shahezad\* Former teacher, WHH, from Kabul, (Islamabad CC).



## Women Human Rights Defenders

"The Taliban accused me of misleading women and girls and claimed that my work was against Islam, as they believe that education and women working outside the home are forbidden. On one occasion, I received three calls in a single day, with threats that they would kill me and my sons if I did not immediately stop my work and close my office. Living in Pakistan brings constant challenges and risks for Afghans like myself. There is always the fear of the Taliban reaching targeted individuals here in Pakistan."- Noor\*, Hazara woman activist from Daikundi (Islamabad CC).

"I am an Afghan woman with experience working for international organizations, media, and even leading my own organization in Kabul. For the past two and a half years, I have been living in Pakistan with my parents and five siblings. After the Taliban takeover of Kabul, media freedom was severely restricted, forcing many Afghan journalists to leave the country due to the Taliban's stance on media workers. Each month, more print, radio, and TV outlets are being forced to close, largely due to pressures imposed by Afghanistan's current regime." -Nadira\*, WHRD/journalist from Kabul (Islamabad CC).

"When the Taliban raided my center, they interrogated me and issued orders to the subordinates accompanying them, instructing that no Hazara women should hold any positions in this center." -Habiba\*, young Hazara woman, former head of a girls' empowerment organization from Balkh (Quetta CC).

"In Afghanistan, I organized numerous exhibitions to promote women artisans, but after the Taliban's takeover, they condemned my efforts, accusing me of violating religious and cultural norms by creating spaces for women. Faced with threats, anti-women

laws, anti-Hazara policies, and severe restrictions, my family and I fled to Quetta. Life in Quetta has brought its own challenges. With no legal documents and living in constant fear of deportation, hiding with five children -all the doors are closed. We have no legal status, no job, no food, and no money for our children's education. Sometimes, our children eat stale bread picked from garbage bins. We are desperate and need support in any form."- Zainab\*, Hazara WHRD from Kabul (Quetta CC).

"After the Taliban takeover, I joined a group of women protesting for the rights to education, work, and freedom. Over time, members of the group were arrested, beaten, and later released. Eventually, the group disbanded as its members fled to different locations to protect themselves and their families." - \*Binazir, Hazara (undercover Christian) WHRD from Kabul (Quetta CC).

## LGBTQI+ Community

LGBTQI+ relationships were already criminalized prior to the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban but the situation further deteriorated when the Taliban took over in August of 2021 while many LGBTQI+ persons fled at that time. However, the laws in neighboring Iran and Pakistan also criminalize same sex relationships, though not transgender identity. Due to various barriers such as requiring a Mahram, fearing obtaining identity documents or having a gender identity that does not match identity documents many people were not able to leave.<sup>45</sup> While the implementation of the new PVPV law specifically prohibits "anal sex" and "lesbianism."<sup>46</sup> Myriad reports of human rights violations have been reported in regard to those remaining in Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup> Community members that managed to escape to Pakistan entered (albeit to a comparatively more tolerant environment for LGBTQI+ community members than in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan) an environment

<sup>45</sup> [Afghanistan HRW Updated2023.pdf \(outrightinternational.org\)](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf \(afghanistan-analysts.org\)](#)

<sup>47</sup> [Afghanistan Report\\_OurrightInternational\\_8.pdf](#)

where same-sex sexual activity is prohibited and there is a continuum of harassment and violence. Few of the women spoken to are in contact with their families and some have faced harassment and violence from them. Within the Afghan community, there is resentment against Afghans belonging to sexual minorities as they receive preference for resettlement cases whereas some of those who do not belong to these groups feel that their situation is more dire. Many Afghans advise other Afghans to pretend to be a sexual or religious minority so their resettlement cases can be fast tracked.

### **Violence from Family, Community and Authorities**

Without a passport or visa, Amina\* (a transgender woman) traveled to Pakistan through the Quetta, Balochistan border, a journey that took 12 challenging days. Many complete this journey in just 2 to 3 days, but Amina\* and her companions were held back at various points along the way by individuals who were demanding and were often harsh and discriminatory. Traveling as a group of four, Amina\* recalls this as one of the hardest experiences, marked by fear of the Taliban, lack of proper documentation, unreliable smugglers, and hostile border police. Financial hardship added another layer of challenge, as food was scarce, and they often survived on just bread and water. This journey, filled with discrimination and uncertainty, is one that Amina\* and her companions will never forget.

"Previously [prior to 2021 Taliban rule] in Kabul, I would sometimes attend parties, and although some situations could be risky, we faced fewer threats from the government—our main challenges came from family concerns. Occasionally, gatherings included rough or unfriendly guests. One time I was even shot in the head during a party, though I survived. In Afghanistan now, our community faces severe discrimination from the Taliban. For instance, we were detained if found at parties, forced to sign pledges, threatened with death, and sometimes even beaten. The

persecution extended to the detention centers, where we heard horrifying stories from others in custody. One of our friends, released from detention, experienced severe mistreatment, including having their hair shaved before release and sexual assault. The unlivable conditions, along with a lack of community acceptance and financial insecurity, forced us to leave Afghanistan."- Amina\*, transgender woman from Nangarhar province Afghanistan (Peshawar CC).

"My family has known about my transgender identity since my childhood, and I have faced violence from them as a result. My father treated me poorly, and I was often subjected to mistreatment that set me apart from my siblings. At times, they resorted to physical violence, expressing their disapproval of my identity."-Mahnaz\*, Tajik transgender woman, from Kabul (Peshawar CC).

"I was detained by the Taliban in Afghanistan for 4 months, and it was my mother who came to secure my release. While a mother's love is universal, the behavior of my father and brothers— typically the male figures in my family has been harsh and restrictive towards me as a transgender individual. They have made my life incredibly difficult, often expressing shame at having me in their family. This shame drives them to impose strict restrictions, and they actively try to conceal my existence from the public, fearing the judgment and stigma that come with it." - Larmina\*, transgender woman from Nangarhar province (Peshawar CC).

"We are called *Ezak*, the word in Dari for trans and it is very disrespectful and it is used to show someone inferior. We never revealed our identity in Kabul like this as now (in Pakistan) we dress like girls on the streets and wear scarves as Afghan girls wear. They [The Taliban] would have stoned us or killed us. This hatred begins from child to elders." - Mahnaz\*, Tajik transgender woman, originally from Kabul, (Peshawar CC).

## Continuum of Insecurity

*"Moreover, our sense of security is precarious here in Pakistan as well. We continue to receive threats from the local community, and a recent tragic incident in which a transgender individual was killed has profoundly affected us. This violence has created an atmosphere of fear and anxiety, leaving us feeling vulnerable and isolated. Neither Pakistani trans persons nor Afghan trans persons are safe."-Gul\*, Transgender woman from Nangarhar (Peshawar CC).*

In the implementation of the IFRP the Pakistani government must take into better account the multiple levels of marginalization and vulnerability of women with various minority identities as well as women-headed households which render them at even more extreme risk of return to

Afghanistan. Forcibly returning them or putting them under such pressure that they feel there is no other choice, violates the principle of non-refoulement and violates international law. UNHCR must flag all such cases of intersectional marginalization and discrimination in order to facilitate returns which are "dignified, secure and voluntary" as they are mandated.



Community Conversation, Peshawar

## CASE STUDY

### Sajia\*

The case of Sajia shows the confluence of an artist who, losing her profession, became a victim of sex trafficking.

I used to be a singer in Afghanistan but when the Taliban came to power, I could not sing anymore. I came to Pakistan with my five children, I don't know if my husband is dead or alive. I don't have a husband. Unfortunately, I have been forcibly involved in drug use and am often pressured into attending night parties. At these gatherings, I am given drugs, and once I lose consciousness, I am at the mercy of others, unable to protect myself from what they might do. The people who run these gatherings are a powerful mafia group. As refugees, we feel completely helpless and threatened, unable to speak up or resist. Many Afghan girls are also present—some willingly, but many of us are there against our will. We have no way out. They promise us payment, but we are often dropped off at home unconscious and empty-handed, despite the initial promises. We lack any form of safety, and many Afghan girls have ended up pregnant with no one taking responsibility. The police have frequently come by, insulting us and threatening to evict us from our apartments. People in the community know us as “prostitutes” and speak out against us, yet the person running this operation is powerful and pays off the police. You can ask any Afghan or shopkeeper in our area—they all know about this. All of my kids know what I am doing as my eldest is 17 years old and I leave them with a woman who is from the mafia group I stay in when I do duty at night. My kids don't go to school and I don't have food for eating. In this situation how to enroll the kids in school?- Sajia\* former artist (singer), victim of sex trafficking (Peshawar CC).

## Themes Emerging from the Ccs

### CASE STUDY

#### Extreme violence

There are increasing cases of Afghan women who are married to Pakistani men and are facing disconnection from their families and total isolation along with severe abuse.

#### Mina\*

In a recent incident, my husband brutally hit me on the head, causing serious injuries to both my face and head. He then forced me and my children out of the house, allowing them to leave with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, refusing to let them take even an extra piece of clothing. One day, he beat me so severely that I miscarried. He told me he would only allow me to stay if I agreed not to use a mobile phone or have contact with anyone. At that time, my family was in Afghanistan. I accepted all his conditions. I was locked at the house and had no permission to leave.

Now there is no possibility of reconciliation, and with the support of a Pakistani judge, I am pursuing a divorce and have filed a case in court to reclaim my rights and belongings. Thankfully, I have access to the legal system, but the lack of proper documentation and some financial support remains a significant issue since my husband has kept all our papers and refuses to give them to me and even I have no money to commute to the court for proceeding of my case. Despite this, my case remains open, and I am determined to fight for my rights until the very end. I entered this marriage with the hope of building a family and living peacefully in Pakistan, but the violence and abuse I have experienced were beyond anything I could have anticipated. My younger son says to me that “I wish we were not born so at least you had a better life now you are suffering all these problems because of us.”

I am a diabetic patient and need regular check-ups, but I can't even afford to go to a

government hospital, which has lower fees, nor can I pay for a rickshaw ride. My husband has thrown my oldest son out of the house, and I don't know what he's doing now. My husband isn't paying the children's school fees, and I don't even have enough money to buy basic items like potatoes and onions to cook a meal. (Peshawar CC).

## Drug Addiction

Many women shared how their lives have been devastated by male family members with drug addiction to heroin and what is called "tablet k" a mixture of methamphetamines and opioids. This includes husbands and young sons who used what little funds were available for their addiction.

"My addicted son is 20 years old, and I cannot afford his treatment. I am drowning in debt, and every day the doctors call, asking us to take him home if we cannot pay."- Jamila\*, from Logar, a widow and mother of four sons and three daughters (Peshawar CC).

"Due to my husband's drug addiction I needed to be a breadwinner in my family."- Huma\*, civil society activist, from Paktia (Peshawar CC).

## Increasing Financial Strain and Debts

Almost all women discussed the dire financial situation they were in after selling all of their belongings as well as gold and how deep in debt they have become. A combination of the reported lack of support from UNHCR, implementing partners or NGOs for many of them along with a dire work and livelihood situation after over three years of the protracted crisis in Afghanistan their situation is deteriorating. Furthermore, since the roll out of the IFRP police have cracked down on even informal livelihood options such as selling food items on the street.

Since the November 1st deadline for undocumented Afghans to leave Pakistan women reported myriad exploitations such as evictions, paying higher rents than normal citizens and not receiving accommodation deposits back when leaving an accommodation. The Interagency GBV needs assessment highlights the concerns within the specific context of the IFRP that since the November 1st deadline there has been a rise in child marriage, loss of income, more difficulty than previously to access healthcare services and lack of knowledge of services for example to support GBV victims. Women are surviving as daily wage labourers, in the agricultural sector or in home-based jobs such as tailoring. However, Afghans have reported at least a 50% loss of income due to the IFRP. This is due to issues such as losing clients, harassment and extortion by police for small traders and fear and inability to go out due to potential deportation threats.<sup>48</sup>

"I am currently burdened with a debt of PKR 500,000, borrowed from various people and relatives to cover my husband's medical expenses and our daily living costs. We are struggling in severe financial hardship, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to make ends meet."- Samira\*, a Hazara woman from Maidan Wardak (Islamabad CC).

"Regarding our stay in Pakistan, we were forcibly evicted from our home without any prior notice. The landlord, acting under police orders, forced us out because we lacked proper documentation. We had no passport or visa, as we had crossed the Spin Boldak border without them. One day, the police surrounded the entire street where we lived, checking documents of Afghan families and deporting those without proper papers. We told the police that we were registered with UNHCR and I even gave them my token number, but unfortunately, it was not accepted."- Huma\*, a civil society activist from Paktia (Peshawar CC).

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<sup>48</sup> Inter-agency GBV needs assessment- Impact of IFRP on Afghan Women and Girls Report on Findings June 2024

"Since my arrival here, I have exhausted all my savings, and I have been solely responsible for covering our daily expenses. Unfortunately, I have not received any financial support during this period. I am struggling to pay the rent for my current accommodation, yet I continue to manage somehow, choosing to survive here rather than return to Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, where there is no freedom. I have approached UNHCR many times, but I have not received proper feedback. I requested assistance for shelter and support for resettlement programs, but the process has been incredibly difficult, and it feels like proper support is not accessible to those in need."- Arezo\*, a former teacher from Kabul (Peshawar CC).

"My entire savings have been exhausted, and I've even had to sell my gold earrings and rings. Now, with worsening health and no income, I am battling depression, diabetes, and high blood pressure. I desperately need mental health support, but I cannot afford any more treatments. Since arriving in Pakistan, my family and I have faced numerous hardships. Two of my sons tried selling bolani and fries from a cart in Islamabad, but the police prevented them from working. They have since left to try to survive in other cities like Peshawar, but they barely make enough to support themselves, let alone help me. Adding to our burden, I pay PKR 19,500 each month in rent, which has become increasingly difficult to manage." -Noor\*, a Hazara women activist from Daikundi (Islamabad CC).

Women also reported being exploited by doctors for medical services and paying high prices for operations that resulted in medical malpractice which left them disfigured and emptied their pockets with no chance of reparations or justice.

"I've spent a large amount of money on medical treatments, including ear and back surgeries, but these were unsuccessful. As

a result, I am now in debt. The ear surgery, in particular, went wrong. I now have a disfigured jaw and it is difficult to talk, but I was unable to file a complaint against the doctor. I've also heard that, as Afghans, we don't have access to the same legal rights as Pakistanis and cannot rely on the courts or police for support."- Sima\*, a Hazara woman from Maidan Wardak (Islamabad CC).

## Continuing Insecurity

Many women report the continuum of insecurity they face despite their relocation to Pakistan. Given the increasing militancy and re-emergence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) close to the border areas, Afghan women face greater threats. After the harrowing journey into Pakistan, their insecurity continues.

"However, while I was in the hospital for my surgery, I noticed a girl following me. Out of fear of my husband and the threats that loomed over me, I felt compelled to escape from her presence. I remember my husband threatening to throw acid on my face, and I was terrified of the situation."- Huma\*, civil society activist, from Paktia (Peshawar CC).

"Our biggest fear is that if we are deported back to Afghanistan, we will face severe risks, especially as educated women are not accepted under the Taliban's restrictive views. This ongoing uncertainty and fear of deportation are incredibly challenging, impacting both our mental health and our ability to live even a semblance of a normal life."- Hooriyah\*, Young woman from Kabul, university graduate (Peshawar CC).

"The constant risk of kidnapping and the high visibility of our family as former associates of U.S. organizations made us vulnerable to Taliban retaliation, just as it did to my brother. Our life as immigrants has been fraught with challenges in every country we've lived." -Wazhma\*, a woman from Kabul (Islamabad CC).

"One of my daughters was forcibly married to a Turkman man, and later we discovered that

he had connections with the Taliban. Fearing for her safety, we managed to escape and bring her with us to Pakistan, while her husband remained in Kabul, still searching for her. She has no children yet. Recently, her husband found our contact information in Pakistan and has been sending us threatening messages. We are now living in constant fear, both here in Pakistan and if we were to return to Afghanistan." -Samira\*, a Hazara woman from Maidan Wardak (Islamabad CC).

"My son went to help my sister with her sick husband, but he disappeared. I searched relentlessly, reaching out to UN offices and other organizations. Eventually, a Taliban member we knew from my children's university days approached me, saying he could help me find my son — but only if I agreed to let him marry my younger daughter. Desperate, I agreed to this marriage, and my son was released that same day. Later, we learned that he had been imprisoned in a basement near our old neighborhood, a place we had unknowingly passed daily. Terrified for her safety and unable to endure this new life, I arranged an emergency visa for Iran, and we fled, leaving everything behind. Our visa expired, and my son was detained by Iranian police. They confiscated our original documents, recorded our biometrics, and gave us a 15-day ultimatum to leave Iran. With no choice, we obtained Pakistani visas and came here. I am here now with my son and daughter, struggling to rebuild our lives away from the constant threats and violence we faced in Afghanistan. The Taliban became aware of my location in Pakistan, contacting my sister and pressuring her to reach out to me. The Taliban member who previously forced me to agree to his marriage with my second daughter also started contacting my sister, threatening me and our family over our escape and what he saw as deceit. I reported this situation to UNHCR after unknown people began following my daughter, fearing for her safety. We moved to another neighbourhood, but just days

later, a neighbor was killed, which forced us to relocate once more." -Shaherzad\*, a former teacher, WHH, from Kabul, (Islamabad CC).

"What can I say? My husband is like a psycho; he doesn't even acknowledge us. I go days without food in this house, but I have no other option. When a Pashtun girl marries, her husband's house becomes her entire world. I can't go back to my parents' house, or people will call me a bad woman. But here, we live in a very difficult situation."-Fatima\*, a married 15-year old girl, mother of a 2.5 year old daughter (Peshawar CC).

### **Police Harassment, Detentions and Deportation**

Women report an environment of intense fear, while crossing the border to their current lives in Pakistan where they are faced with harassment, discrimination, bribery and extortion. They try to hide themselves to avoid detention and ultimately deportation while documented or undocumented they remain at risk.

"A policewoman came and told us that we can't stay in Pakistan without proper documents. I told her, 'You might as well take us out of here or kill us, as we have no other options left. If you want to hit us, go ahead. I can't live with my daughters in Kabul while my sons are missing, and many people are after me.' In this current situation, how can a woman live alone under Taliban rule? I'm terrified that the Taliban might force my daughters into marriage. Seeing the terrible conditions we were living in, with all the girls by my side, the policewoman just left and didn't come back or say anything further. Later the police arrested my uncle for two nights and questioned him about why he was keeping us in his house. He told them I was helpless and shared our story with them. My uncle is so cruel; he charges us for water, the fan, and everything else. Every day he says 'leave the house!' and I don't know where to go. He says to pay 10,000 PKR per month, but where am I supposed to get that

amount? With what I earn, I don't know whether to use it to treat my son's medical condition, pay for the house, or feed my children." -Jamila\*, from Logar, a widow and mother of four sons and three daughters (Peshawar CC).

"However, living in Pakistan has not brought us complete safety either, as we constantly fear deportation. I recall when the police were conducting house-to-house searches for Afghans, checking their documentation. We had to keep moving from place to place to avoid being caught. Thankfully, my husband has a PoR card, but the rest of our family is undocumented, which adds to our uncertainty. Although we haven't been deported yet, the threat looms over us every day, and we don't know how much longer we can evade police checks and remain in Pakistan. One of my brothers-in-law was arrested by the police for deportation but was released after spending a night in the police station. The constant fear and uncertainty continue to haunt us."- Nooria\*, Hazara woman and former health worker (Peshawar CC).

"Now that we are in Pakistan, we live with the constant fear of deportation. My son who is 18 years old was once detained by the Pakistani police, and although he was released after we paid a bribe, we were fortunate that he wasn't deported back to Afghanistan. Since that incident, my son has been unusually quiet, rarely speaking to us about what he went through. It seems as though he is trying to protect us from the pain of knowing what he endured in the police station. We do not feel safe in Pakistan. I was also detained by the police in the Bazaar. The police officer demanded money, threatening to put me in jail. In an attempt to free myself, I offered PKR 500, but he refused. He forcefully tried to take me to the police station, and in my fear, I ended up giving him all the PKR 2,000 I had. Only then was I released. Since that incident, we have been living in fear and limit our trips outside the house to only those that are

absolutely necessary."- Lina\*, newly arrived Hazara woman, former tailor (Peshawar CC).

"Here in Pakistan, while the police treat Afghan refugees poorly, often threatening deportation or extorting money from us, the general public behaves kindly toward us." - Zahra\*, newly arrived Hazara woman, teacher from Kabul (Peshawar CC).

"Here in Pakistan, the police frequently visited Afghan households, including ours. It was a frightening experience, seeing the fear in the eyes of the refugees as the police threatened them. The police also visited the homes of my son and daughter, who live separately. They were released after paying PKR 5000 each, and both of them shared how harsh the police were and how the threat of deportation created fear and chaos amongst the Afghan community."- Noor\*, a Hazara woman activist from Daikundi (Islamabad CC).

"The cruelty of the Taliban is one part of our struggle, but we're also facing intense pressure from Pakistani authorities, who don't recognize our status as refugees. My son has been detained by the Pakistani police three times. The first time, we paid for his release, and the next two times, we managed to secure his freedom through community elder interventions. Each release came with a requirement for us to complete our documents and visas, with the threat of deportation if we failed to do so. When the police were actively pursuing us for deportation, I reached out to the UNHCR office, hoping they could help. Unfortunately, the UNHCR's only advice was to stay hidden, which felt dismissive and unrealistic."- Selay\*, a women from Logar, mother of 5 children with a husband with disability, former employee of an international organization and at risk of return (Islamabad CC).

"Police arrested my elder son to deport him, but after taking the bribe, he was released." - Sultana\*, an Uzbek woman carpet weaver from Kunduz (Quetta CC).



"The deportation policy is another challenge, as the government officials visited and raided our homes off and on. All those who could not bribe the money to the authorities were deported back. Even those having PoR cards were also deported, if they could not pay the bribe. I was hidden in the home and my husband was temporarily relocated/hidden somewhere else."- Malalai\*, an Uzbek woman, former teacher from Takhar (Quetta CC).

## Deportation

Deportations of Afghans have been ongoing in the first "Phase" of the IFRP where undocumented foreigners are deported. The Plan has "Phase 2" which will deport the ACC card holders and "Phase 3" which will ultimately deport all PoR card holders. However, since April of 2024 the group of deported persons has already expanded unofficially to include ACC and PoR card holders and there are reports of documented people deported as well.<sup>49</sup>

Widespread rights violations as discussed above and documented by rights groups include but are not limited to arbitrary detention, physical assault, sexual harassment, extortion, confiscation of livestock, personal items, destruction of identity and registration documents and these actions are ongoing albeit with less intensity than previously.<sup>50</sup> Understanding this, Afghans face a continuum of fear whether they have registration documents or not as PoR card holders and ACC card holders have already been deported, while the next phases of the IFRP are yet to come.

"My husband worked for the National Security Department of Afghanistan's former government. We fled the country after the Taliban takeover, facing serious risks due to his military background, as the Taliban targets former government security personnel. Despite seeking refuge, my husband was detained by Pakistani police with the intent to deport him. However, thanks to support from the SHARP team and



Community Conversation, Quetta, Balochistan

<sup>49</sup>[Pakistan: Government must stop ignoring global calls to halt unlawful deportation of Afghan refugees \(amnesty.ca\)](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/pakistan-government-must-stop-ignoring-global-calls-to-halt-unlawful-deportation-of-afghan-refugees/)

<sup>50</sup>[Pakistan: Widespread Abuses Force Afghans to Leave | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/11/pakistan-abuses-force-afghans-leave)

Afghan community elders here, he was released. Our Afghan community here does what it can to support those in need. While he was detained, he reported poor treatment, lack of food, and inadequate drinking water—a particular hardship for families with young children at the police stations.”- Perveen\*, a Tajik woman, newly arrived from Kabul (Islamabad CC).

## Family Separation

Women report on deportations leading to family separation including separation of children from a parent. “The right to family life and family unity are fundamental human rights. These rights are protected by International Human Rights Law, international immigration and refugee law, and International Humanitarian Law.”<sup>51</sup> Specifically separating children from a parent contravenes IHL.<sup>52</sup>

“My husband was deported to Afghanistan in early 2024. The police detained him and others from our neighborhood, forcing them to spend a night at the police station. The conditions and treatment were reportedly harsh, and the next day, they were sent back to Afghanistan. Left alone with the children, I tried unsuccessfully to arrange a visa for him to return legally. Eventually, he made it back through the Spin Boldak border with the help of smugglers, after spending two and a half months in Kabul with his sister. Now, he lives in constant fear of being detained again and avoids going out entirely.” -Shandana\*, housewife from Kabul (Islamabad CC).

## CASE STUDY

### A Family Torn Apart-Ahmad\* and Gul\*

On August 1st 2024 Ahmad's family including his wife and 5 children were taken to the police station and detained in a

women's police ward and later moved to a men's ward while he was working outside the home. He was given no information as to their whereabouts. Despite his efforts to intervene they were deported before he could do so. Ahmad is under severe threat and risk of persecution due to being a former military personnel in the previous Afghan government. His wife due to association with him is also at grave risk.

**Ahmad:** The situation was dire. The police did not allow my family to properly dress or put on shoes, and they roughly woke the children from their sleep. Their treatment was inhumane; the officers confiscated all phones and stopped my family from taking any personal belongings. Until 10 a.m., I had no idea where my family had been taken or which police station they were in. Eventually, a contact informed me that they were held at a particular police station. Being undocumented, I feared going to the station myself, as the risk of arrest or deportation was high. Desperate, I attempted to reach out to representatives from UNHCR and SHARP, but it was noon before I could make contact. UNHCR assured me that they would send someone to assist, and I remained in touch with their representative. Yet by the time their team arrived at the station, it was late, and they informed me that they couldn't take any action as office hours had ended. They promised to look into it the next day. That night, I was overcome with anxiety, unable to sleep, reaching out to anyone who might help. Sadly, no one could intervene. By morning, I learned that the police had completed the family's biometric processing and had begun deporting them to Afghanistan. I felt utterly abandoned by UNHCR. Despite being registered and having a token number, I had hoped that UNHCR would provide protection and act on our behalf. But no support came, and my family was ultimately deported.

<sup>51</sup>[-Family Separation in Immigration & Refugee Policies University of Cincinnati Law Review Blog \(uclawreview.org\)](#)

<sup>52</sup>Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 9(1) “States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will...” [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

My family was forcibly deported and is now in Afghanistan, staying with my sister. All their clothes and belongings were left behind in Pakistan, and they are now living in terrible conditions. My sister is also struggling financially and cannot provide much support. Without a man in the family, they are unable to rent a house, as the Taliban do not permit women to secure housing or engage in work outside the home.

I am terrified. I am undocumented here in Pakistan, with a sensitive case registered at UNHCR. If I am deported, the consequences would be unbearable. The dangers for former Afghan government employees are present not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan, where we've seen the recent deaths of five ex-government workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Every day, we hear of Taliban threats against those who once worked for the government, especially former army personnel in Kabul and other provinces.

The toll this has taken on my mental health is immense. I feel lost, having lost my life in Afghanistan and now my stability in Pakistan. I have no place to live, and landlords won't rent to undocumented immigrants. I am forced to spend nights in markets, without shelter or family. My family in Afghanistan faces the same hardships—my young children, including my three-year-old son, cry for me. They lack basic things, like a secure place to live, three meals a day, and clothes. Life is unbearable, separated from my family.

I often feel like giving up, as I am exhausted by this existence. I have visited the UNHCR and SHARP offices and other organizations countless times, but I have received no support, and my pleas have gone unheard. My deepest hope is to be reunited with my family here in Pakistan, where we could at least face our future together. Unfortunately, obtaining Afghan passports and Pakistani visas for them is extremely difficult and

costly, making it nearly impossible for us. (Peshawar CC).

**Gul\*:** During the forced deportation, I sought assistance from the UNHCR office at the Torkham border. Sadly, not only was I unable to receive support, but the UNHCR presented me with a difficult choice: I could either withdraw my active UNHCR case in exchange for transportation support to Kabul, where my relatives reside or, I could keep my UNHCR case open, but without receiving any assistance, even for basic transportation. With no other viable option, I chose to keep my UNHCR case active, but this meant that my family had to rely on the kindness of another traveler to pay for my and my children's journey to Kabul. The situation was made worse by the fact that my husband had served in the Afghan military. Consequently, the Taliban seized our home in Kabul, locking it and forbidding any family members from entering until he returned in person—a demand that is impossible for us to fulfill. This and the fact that we are still under threat forced us to relocate immediately, moving to Ghazni Province to stay with my sister-in-law's family. We were left with no personal belongings or clothing for the children, as everything remains in Pakistan. We had to make do with a few used items donated by neighbors. I am asking again to help me reunite my husband as I am financially zero (remote telephone CC Ghazni, Afghanistan).

## Travel to Iran, Stories of Multiple Displacements

Women mentioned the reasons why they selected Pakistan to come to rather than Iran and some had previously been to Iran and been deported or initially arrived in Iran only to complete an arduous journey to Pakistan. The multiple attempts by women to escape highlight the severe toll security-wise, physically, mentally and financially that is undertaken in these multiple attempts to reach safety.

"I faced harsh treatment from the Iranian police, who confiscated my passport and other documents, ultimately deporting me back to Afghanistan without returning my belongings. After a few months in Kabul, I managed to make my way to Pakistan via the Chaman-Spin Boldak border, but crossing was extremely difficult without a visa. It took us two days and a great deal of struggle to finally enter Pakistan without the proper travel documents."- Arezo\*, a former teacher and principal from Kabul (Peshawar CC).

"One of the main reasons we left Afghanistan was a forced marriage proposal from a Taliban member, which made it impossible for me to stay. My family and I fled to Iran, where we later faced deportation and eventually arrived in Pakistan. Returning to Afghanistan under Taliban rule is simply not an option for us."- Ferhana\*, a young woman alone, working and caring for her 3 younger siblings (Islamabad CC).

## Mental Health

Almost all women discussed the deteriorating mental health situation they and their

family members faced with a lack of psychosocial support and expensive medicine; in most cases they did not seek any treatment or support. After the announcement of the IFRP, "96% participants reported the community has aggravated stress and trauma, resulting in increased psychosocial stress and physical symptoms."<sup>53</sup>

"I've visited a mental health doctor three times and am currently on medication to help manage my depression. The emotional burden of this situation continues to weigh heavily on me, and it's difficult to feel like I am fulfilling my potential." -Wazhma\*, a Tajik woman, mother of five children from Kabul (Islamabad CC).

"This constant need to flee has deeply affected my daughter, who now suffers from severe anxiety and depression. She has developed white patches on her skin, and her mental health requires ongoing care. Currently, she is receiving treatment in Islamabad, but whenever stress levels rise, she experiences severe mood swings, often yelling and breaking down in tears."- Shaherzad\*, a former teacher, WHH, from Kabul, (Islamabad CC).



Community Conversation, Peshawar

<sup>53</sup> Inter-agency GBV needs assessment- Impact of IFRP on Afghan Women and Girls Report on Findings June 2024

"All of us struggle with our mental health given our position in society. One of our transgender friends is so unwell that she can no longer manage her life like others do." -Larmina\*, a transgender woman from Nangarhar province (Peshawar CC).

"I had always been terrified of the Taliban, hearing stories from others and witnessing the impact of their regime on our people in Afghanistan. However, the day they chased me left me deeply traumatized. For months after that incident, I constantly felt as if the Taliban were following me. The experience gave me nightmares that I still can't shake, and I've struggled with sleeplessness ever since. Unfortunately, I've had no financial means or access to counseling to help me cope with this trauma."- Zahra\*, newly arrived Hazara woman, former teacher from Kabul (Peshawar CC).

## Out of School Children

The Pakistani government has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child which guarantees education in article 28. The right to education is further guaranteed in the Pakistani Constitution in Article 25A as well as the Compulsory Education Act which commits to providing education for all children regardless of nationality. However, education in the context of Pakistan remains a complicated issue. Pakistan ranks 2nd for the highest population of out of school children in the world, currently numbering 22.8 million.<sup>54</sup> One of the key outrages of the international community of the Taliban regime has been that girls are denied access to education in a draconian edict implemented by the Taliban in September of 2021 shortly after their takeover. Numerous international

campaigns and advocacy have been organized on this issue.<sup>55</sup> However, girls can still not attend school now that they have arrived in Pakistan- so whether in Afghanistan or Pakistan, they are denied the right to study and many have been out of school since 2021. Although UNHCR schools operate with some reach (10% of enrolled children),<sup>56</sup> to attend a public school Afghans must hold a PoR card and in some cases an ACC card is accepted alongside identity documents which many Afghans do not possess. 80% of Afghan refugee children are out of school while the remaining 20% attend private or public schools.<sup>57</sup> For Afghan children that manage to enroll in school they face language barriers, discrimination and bullying.<sup>58</sup> Among the 20% of refugee children that attend school, Afghan girls' gross enrollment is at 34% as compared to 87% for boys.<sup>59</sup> In addition to the above mentioned concerns, girls face myriad additional barriers to their education such as cultural barriers, the lack of female teachers and co-education schools which parents don't approve of for girls.<sup>60</sup> Almost none of the women spoken to had children in school, with most citing this is due to the lack of documents although sometimes associated fees are also a problem for private and informal schools. Removing the documentation barrier would be a large and first step in supporting Afghan children to enjoy their right to education.

"It has been nearly three years since my children have been able to attend school, and it deeply hurts me. I have approached several schools, but they refuse to enroll Afghan students in government schools, and we cannot afford private schools."- Zarqa\*, a Hazara woman from Kabul (Islamabad CC).

<sup>54</sup> [Barrier-to-Education-for-Afghan-Refugees-Long-Report.pdf](#)

<sup>55</sup> [#AfghanGirlsVoices | Education Cannot Wait: A call for immediate return to school for all girls and women in Afghanistan! - Global Campaign for Education](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Briefing+Note+2+-+Girls+Access+to+Education+in+Afghanistan+Iran+and+Pakistan\\_Final\\_131223\\_EJNMCE.pdf](#)

<sup>57</sup> [Barrier-to-Education-for-Afghan-Refugees-Long-Report.pdf](#)

<sup>58</sup> [A challenge in access to social services of undocumented Afghan immigrants in host society of Peshawar, Pakistan | Discover Global Society](#)

<sup>59</sup> [Briefing+Note+2+-+Girls+Access+to+Education+in+Afghanistan+Iran+and+Pakistan\\_Final\\_131223\\_EJNMCE.pdf](#)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

"My children don't go to school; I don't have enough food for them to eat. How can I enrol them in school?" - Sajia\*, a former artist (singer), victim of trafficking (Peshawar CC)

"During the internal conflict in Afghanistan, my eldest daughter was severely injured by a rocket that landed in our yard. A fragment of the rocket lodged in her head; while we managed to remove it, she has not fully recovered and has been unable to attend school, both in Kabul and here in Pakistan. Before the Taliban takeover, my other daughters were enrolled in school, but we cannot afford the school fees here due to our poor financial situation. Currently, only two of my daughters attend a local course with nominal fees." - Samira\*, a Hazara woman from Maidan Wardak (Islamabad CC).

"Due to our financial difficulties, we have been unable to afford private schooling for our 3 children. Afghan families are not permitted to enroll their children in government schools here, and while there was one Afghan school that welcomed Afghan students with reasonable fees, it sadly closed last year, further limiting our children's access to education." - Perveen\* Tajik woman, newly arrived from Kabul (Islamabad CC).

"I have a dream that my children could get education and live a respectable life but unfortunately, none of my children could go to school, and all are working as laborers." - \*Sultana, Uzbek woman carpet weaver from Kunduz (Quetta CC).

## Conclusion

The report underscores the deteriorating situation of Afghan women, particularly undocumented women and their families who, over the last year, have faced harassment, extortion and for many ultimately deportation leading to separation of families and returning women to a Gender Apartheid state. It documents the issues

around multiple insecurities that women confront in women's own voices that convey the structural barriers they confront due to lack of a clear refugee law and policy in neighboring states, the double and triple journeys they undertake for safety only to find no place to be safe. It also documents the economic, social, cultural (especially language and dressing) barriers as well as discrimination on the basis of nationality, ethnicity and religion that they bear.

The introduction and implementation of IFRP in Pakistan and PVPV in Afghanistan have further worsened the precariousness of women's basic rights to livelihood, shelter, education and healthcare services. The effect of constant fear, hiding, violence, continuing threats from family, community and the Taliban in combination with financial stress, unclear legal status and uncertain future in Pakistan has left women with dire untreated mental health conditions. Most Afghan children are out of school which should provoke the same international outrage in terms of the continuity of lack of education opportunities for Afghan girls.

Afghan women remain in a dire limbo unable to return to Afghanistan but also unable to have any rights fulfilled in Pakistan, living with a continuum of threats and rights violations. They remain political pawns who are scapegoated and subjected to reactionary policies whenever security breaches occur in Pakistan from the Border areas to Islamabad. Pakistan is urged to abide by its own constitution in terms of basic rights for Afghans as well as its international commitments under IHL. The third countries who had agreed to resettle Afghans have broken their commitment to the Pakistan government, which originally agreed to be a "transit" country for many Afghans. Those whose applications were accepted are undergoing such a prolonged process and waiting time for resettlement that many are losing the hope to live a dignified life. Despite everything, women continue to be resilient to find innovative

solutions to address their challenges.

What should and can be done under the current circumstances? Below concrete steps, both urgent/immediate term and medium term, are outlined below which can markedly improve the situation of Afghan women in Pakistan. Civil society groups, humanitarian organizations and governments can utilize these recommendations as they are grounded in the voices and experience of Afghan women and gleaned from meetings with CSOs addressing Afghan refugee issues.<sup>61</sup>

The struggle to support Afghan women continues.

## General Recommendations:

**The overall Recommendation which would solve many of the additional issues is a potential “Temporary Asylum” status**

- **Temporary Asylum:** provide a Temporary Asylum card to all at-risk Afghan persons such as women headed households, minorities and women human rights defenders so they have access to all required services such as medical care, education, ability to work and operate a bank account, communications needs and housing without concern. This asylum can be provided for a duration of time such as 5 years upon which the situation can be re-assessed. This Temporary Asylum Card should be a physical card provided to all eligible without delay.
- **Scaling Budgets:** the revival and scaling of budgets for humanitarian actors and its fair distribution is critical for any meaningful support to Afghan refugees. This means restoring and increasing the budgets of humanitarian organizations

such as UNHCR and IOM. For this, the international community must rally together; negative measures like slowing down the pace of resettlement to avoid addressing the issues of forcibly displaced populations must be stopped immediately.

- **Justice in the Humanitarian Governance System:** It is not enough to increase budgets for humanitarian organizations; it is equally important to ensure fair distribution of budgets for all refugees and displaced persons. At present, the UNHCR global budget reflects a low priority for Afghans compared to other refugees from Ukraine and in the Middle East. Though painful, the situation requires course correction in a manner that no refugee suffers. A holistic approach with principles of inclusion and justice must be adopted by all actors.
- **Promoting International Responsibility and Stemming the Politicization of Refugee Recognition and Humanitarian Aid:** The fallout of regional conflicts and global wars (like the “War on Terror”) should be shouldered by regional and international actors who stoke these conflicts. Moreover, countries view refugees as tools for their foreign policy, deciding when they should be welcomed or shunned. Furthermore, humanitarian aid flows must not be politicized by any government. Even right wing governments expressly against migrants and refugees must be convinced that the inflow of illegal migrants and forcibly displaced persons can only be stemmed if political pressure is exerted on governments to have policies that do not force people to flee.

<sup>61</sup> We are grateful to UNHCR for sharing a summary of the recommendations made by CSOs at the Civil Society Roundtable entitled, “*Resilience and Renewal: Long-Term Solutions for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan.*” held at the UNHCR office in Islamabad on Nov 7, 2024.

## **To the Pakistani State**

### **Immediate term:**

- Urgently consider the option of a temporary asylum card that can address the concerns of those waiting in limbo. This will not only provide the Pakistan government with more robust mechanisms for ensuring security but also bring it economic advantages of funds transfers through banking systems. Data from 2023 indicated that Afghans received over 1 billion rupees from abroad through banking channels. This amount can increase substantially if all Afghans are allowed to have bank accounts.
- Reconsider the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan and its impact on vulnerable Afghans at risk.
- Remove the “exit fees” for Afghans who are trying to leave the country with alternate humanitarian channels.
- Adhering to the principle of non-refoulement, halt the indiscriminate deportation of Afghan persons, particularly those at extreme risk such as activists, minorities and women which violates both the Pakistani Constitution as well as Pakistan's international Human Rights obligations.
- Halt the human rights violation under international law of separation of families through deportations of one or more family members, separation of children from parents and take all possible measures to ensure families are not separated.
- Adhere to the international UNHCR global guidelines and growing international precedents that Afghan women should not be returned to Afghanistan for risk of persecution based on their gender.
- Cease the police clearance required by

landlords and messaging related to the risk of renting accommodations to Afghans, ensuring safe housing is available and not at inflated prices.

- Remove requirements for PoR and ACC cards for Pakistani schools mandating that education is necessary for all Afghan children as per the Pakistani Constitution and IHL.
- The government should consider issuing work permits and introducing specialized work visas, particularly for skilled and professionally trained Afghan citizens, to allow them to contribute more effectively to the country's economy and fill gaps in the labour market that require specialized talent. The process for degree equivalence should be made easy and accessible for everyone. Allowing qualified Afghans to enter the job market will support the Pakistani economy and also specialized job markets.

### **Medium Term:**

- Ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and develop a national level protection framework.
- Announce a clearly enunciated and comprehensive refugee law and policy. This means mobilizing more parliamentarians to take action for developing a legal framework for refugees in the short, medium and longer terms that includes refugee protection and economic inclusion.
- Revitalize discussions on amending the Pakistan Citizenship Act (1951) to, a) enable children born in Pakistan to be citizens and, b) for any Pakistani woman's foreign husband and children born from such unions to be eligible for Pakistani nationality.
- Halt the restrictions on local and international civil society organizations from supporting Afghans, ensuring the organizations that have the expertise to



provide services such as psycho social support, legal aid and livelihoods training can do so without conditions, restrictions and limitations.

- Set up a platform, much like the government's independent commissions, exclusively for refugees that can undertake advocacy for refugees and act as a link between the government and refugees for constructive dialogue. Direct engagement between the government and refugee representatives can dissipate many misperceptions on both sides.

## **To UNHCR and IOM**

### **Immediate term**

- A one-window consolidated process should be established for the resettlement procedures with all relevant stakeholders to ensure streamlined processing of cases.
- Information sharing for resettlement cases should be improved. UNHCR should provide ongoing and clear instructions about cases with honest and factual information. Decisions on cases should be expedited particularly for at-risk return cases. If there are reasons for delays or cases that will not be accepted, UNHCR should communicate this information in a timely and accurate manner so Afghans can make informed decisions about their future. In addition, UNHCR should consider offering alternative options to refugees within the limited financial and policy space within which it works in different countries.
- IOM must push for the continuation of negotiations on the ACC 2 process whereby 1.5 million Afghan nationals will either have their ACC cards re-validated

or undocumented persons will get registered.<sup>63</sup>

- Increase the number of resettlements to reflect the need, negotiating and ensuring third party countries fulfill their promises.
- Urge the Pakistani state to respect UNHCR documents such as asylum certificates and registration slips and appeal to them not to destroy these documents.
- Ensure returns adhere to UNHCR's policy of safe, dignified and voluntary return.
- Strengthen monitoring of human rights violations at the borders through its partner organizations including harassment, extortions, increasing the provision of capacity building and training where possible on gender sensitivity and rights of asylum seekers. Although many arrangements are in place for refugee reception, the actual experience of border crossing remains a difficult terrain that requires innovative solutions beyond the standardized procedures that are in place with transparent oversight.
- Improve referral mechanisms for those that need support, ensure Afghans in need are being linked to the correct supportive services.
- Scale up advocacy on Afghan children who cannot attend school due to their parents' unclear legal status, urging the Pakistani government to remove documentation barriers for Afghan children to study. Also scale up on UN provided schooling in order to meet the immediate needs of Afghan children, taking into account the specific barriers for Afghan girls to study.
- Liaise with Pakistan's first Humanitarian Observatory ensuring information sharing and using the data from ground research reports taking into account

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<sup>62</sup> [iom-pakistan-rrp-2024.pdf](#)

recommendations from the Observatory to incorporate into programs.

- Increased advocacy with Afghanistan's neighbors for a more tolerant approach towards refugees. Afghans fleeing from Iran and Tajikistan to Pakistan, making multiple journeys in search of security are bearing the brunt of the anti-refugee policies of these governments. UNHCR must undertake advocacy on this and push the cases of women who are not only fleeing Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan but also threats of incarceration in Iran and Tajikistan.
- Coordination within the UN: All UN agencies operating in Pakistan should adopt a unified, consistent policy regarding Afghan refugees, ensuring that refugees receive standardized support and services across different agencies and regions. This will generate trust among refugees regarding the assistance they receive.

### Medium Term

- Continue to push for the adoption of the 1951 refugee convention and 1967 Protocol in South and Central Asia; the promulgation of refugee laws in different countries accompanied by refugee policies. The adoption and implementation of laws and policies is of utmost importance and can potentially address the politicization of refugees and humanitarian aid.
- Identification of skilled workers and professionals: among the new arrivals are doctors, dentists, engineers, nurses, teachers, NGO workers, bankers, computer scientists, journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, architects and draughtsmen, musicians, scholars and other skilled and semi skilled workers. These Afghans should be identified and given work permits for their respective professions. UNHCR, IOM and even UNDP can facilitate their integration into specific sectors where skilled labor is in demand.

## To Civil Society and International Organizations working on the Ground

- Scale up to address the gap in mental health services by including accessible online or discreet mental health services to Afghans in their local languages. Employ Afghan psychologists or translators where appropriate.
- Work on substance abuse support programs to address the drug abuse crisis including providing supported rehabilitation programs and access to subsidized or free medication.
- Provide training and capacity building on access to livelihoods issues addressing issues of debts.
- Take particular note of the many women headed households in which husbands are missing, disappeared or deported and ensure services and humanitarian aid reaches them. Understand their diverse and additional security concerns as women headed households.
- Advocacy for AAC Card holders: To ensure that negotiations between GoP, UNHCR and IOM continue and reach a favourable decision regarding the revalidation of 1.5 million Afghans' ACC cards, international and national CSOs, especially human rights organizations, must actively advocate for the three sides to look at the matter with a humanitarian lens. All parties must finalize negotiations and implement the ACC Card 2 process whereby 1.5 million Afghan nationals will either have their ACC Cards re-validated or undocumented persons will get registered.<sup>63</sup> These negotiations have been halted due to lack of sufficient funds as well as the Pakistan government's resolve to pursue the deportation process.
- Pakistan's first Humanitarian Obser-

vatory must ensure information sharing and use the data from ground research reports for advocacy with the government and humanitarian actors. CSOs should liaise with Pakistan's first Humanitarian Observatory ensuring information sharing and identifying key concerns for the HO to be aware of as well as advocacy gaps and needs of the community.

- Independent media in Pakistan and abroad should have/adopt a refugee sensitive media policy that promotes an understanding of refugee issues by highlighting their contributions in multiple ways whether by enriching local culture or through their unrecognized economic contributions. Pakistani media should also refrain from spreading unverified rumours that associate Afghan refugees with cross-border terrorism and blaming them for crimes and in fact undertake investigative reporting and analysis of social media trends in cyber space to understand how narratives are promoted on different platforms. Negative media portrayals promote xenophobia and intolerance.

## **To the International Community**

- The resettlement quotas should be increased for Afghans. Refugees should be treated equally by resettlement countries in terms of quotas.
- Resettlement countries should urgently fulfill previous agreements for resettlement for Afghans in Pakistan recognizing the disproportionate burden the largest number of Afghan refugees has on the Pakistani state. They must expedite departures.

- Expedite processes by pushing for processing centers within Pakistan to expedite resettlement and ensure adherence to the existing commitments made to Afghan refugees.
- Prioritize in particular cases where Afghans are still under threat from non-state actors, community and family due to their identity as minorities or their work.
- Ensure global contributions to the Afghanistan crisis reflect the scale and nature of the protracted situation.
- Improve support mechanisms for Afghans in Pakistan - for example International organizations can provide online hotlines for Afghans with severe mental health concerns, these can be provided from abroad with licensed mental health professionals who themselves are Afghan or with the support of interpreters who are Afghan and all trained in refugee trauma.
- Support the recognition of Gender Apartheid as a Crime Against Humanity in the Draft Crimes Against Humanity Treaty.
- Support the States of the Netherlands, Canada, Germany and Australia in their case brought forward against Afghanistan in its violation of CEDAW provisions as an accountability mechanism and symbolic case to deter normalization of the Taliban.
- Liaise with Pakistan's first Humanitarian Observatory ensuring information sharing and using the data from ground research reports taking into account key flagged concerns, recommendations, proposed solutions and highlighting best practices- engaging in sustained dialogue for advocacy to support Afghans in Pakistan.

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<sup>63</sup> [iom-pakistan-rrp-2024.pdf](#)

*"It is not possible to live without any identity for years and years. Besides, there is neither any resettlement program, nor can we return to the land of the Taliban. It seems that we have ceased to exist."- Sultana\*, Uzbek woman carpet weaver from Kunduz (Quetta CC).*



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