

UNHCR Pakistan Monthly Protection Trends Reporting March 2017

Repatriation increased dramatically in 2016 for a myriad of reasons, including positive pull factors and some negative push factors which led to questions related to the voluntariness of return. In order to more systematically monitor these factors and provide a clear objective analysis of the situation, UNHCR Pakistan is compiling this monthly note to be shared with the Government of Pakistan and the international community in order to inform key stakeholders of emerging trends and to raise formally and consistently any protection concerns that may arise.

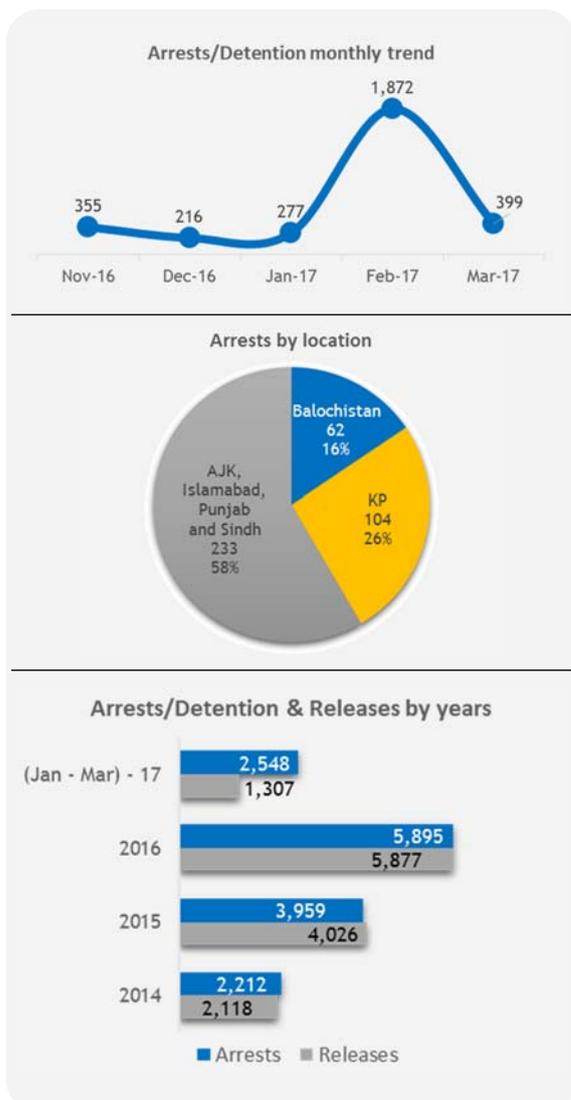
Analysis of Trends

A countrywide security operation, “Rad ul Fasad,” headed by the Pakistan Rangers with support of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), Special Branch of Police and District Police has begun and the borders remain closed. In an unprecedented manner, arrests also took place from homes and included women and children. Pakistan police authorities are implementing security operations under the National Action Plan against Terrorism (NAP) in all provinces affecting non-nationals and Pakistanis. UNHCR/ALAC teams are monitoring the situation and making interventions. Countrywide, UNHCR is taking a wide range of actions to intervene quickly and effectively, to monitor the situation closely and to remind the LEAs and authorities of the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees in Pakistan. However, it should be noted that this crackdown is a direct response to a series of high impact terrorist incidents around the country. Accordingly, UNHCR’s ability to effectively temper the effect on asylum-seekers and refugees may remain palliative at best.

On a more positive note and with the hopes that it continues, arrests and detentions have reduced significantly around the country from the previous month.

After a closure of 32 days, the Pak-Afghan border was re-opened on 20 March on the order of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as a gesture of goodwill and on humanitarian grounds. Accordingly, the MI Campaign on VolRep commenced on 22 March and preparations are ongoing for the resumption of VolRep on 3 April. As of 20 March, 2,696 families consisting of 15,714 individuals are scheduled to return from VRC Chamkani (KP) in the month of April (373 families/2,070 individuals scheduled in May; and 1 family/5 individuals scheduled for June).

According to IOM update on undocumented Afghan returnees from Pakistan, the main push factors were, lack of documentation, fear of deportation and lack of economic opportunities.¹



¹ Data Source: Flow monitoring of undocumented Afghan returnees from Pakistan (IOM Update | March 2017)

Summary of Events

1. Arrests & Detention

In March only 399 arrests and detentions were witnessed as compared to 1,872 people arrested or detained in February. March 2017 saw a significant decrease in the number of arrests and detentions countrywide. This could be influenced by the widespread dissemination of the official notification issued by the Ministry of SAFRON on 24 February regarding the Federal Cabinet's decision to extend the validity of the PoR cards providing proof of legal stay for registered Afghan refugees until the end of 2017. UNHCR have also taken proactive steps to mitigate the risk of detention including enhanced advocacy and pre-emptively intervening at police stations to prevent arrests.

2. Media/ Public Statements of Political or Government Officials

Impact Level for Refugees & Asylum Seekers



Low

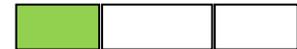


Medium



High

Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah said that police are conducting search operations where there is population of Pashtuns and Afghan migrants in the province. In an interview to foreign news agency about targeting members of specific nations, he said that residents of tribal areas were involved in worst extremist incidents in Lahore. (Pakistan today, 4 March) - <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/03/04/operation-radd-ul-fasaad-punjab-police-focusing-on-pashtuns-afghans/>



Thousands of Afghan citizens stranded in Pakistan owing to the closure of the border for the last 18 days crossed over to Afghanistan on Tuesday when Pakistani authorities reopened the Torkham and Chaman borders, officials said. At Torkham as many as 6,000 Afghan citizens entered Afghanistan. (The News, 8 March) - <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/190951-Thousands-of-stranded-Afghans-cross-border>



Summary of significant actions to counter push factors

UNHCR sent a formal letter to Minister SAFRON regarding the high number of arrests/detentions of refugees in February 2017 as a result of the countrywide Radd-ul-Fasaad security operation (following a series of terrorist attacks), with a request for enhanced efforts from SAFRON at federal/provincial levels and urgent advocacy/interventions with relevant authorities.

The first Federal Steering Committee meeting on the Implementation of the Comprehensive Policy on Voluntary Repatriation and Management of Afghan Refugees (approved by the Cabinet on 7 February 2017) was convened by the Chief Commissioner of Afghan Refugees (CCAR) on 16 March and attended by CCAR and all provincial CARs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights and UNHCR. Following UNHCR's request, the KP Home Department the Afghan Management and Repatriation Strategy Cell (AMRS) cell shared the notification on the extension of PoR cards (until 31 December 2017) with KP Provincial Police Officer, Additional Chief Secretary FATA, Registrar Peshawar High Court, Inspector Frontier Corps Peshawar, all Divisional Commissioners Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Headquarters 11 Corps, Peshawar.

Field teams remained involved with CAR District Administrators (DA) for establishment of security committees/liasion committee in the RVs of Kohat, Mardan, Haripur and Peshawar districts. The refugee community nominated three elders from each RV of Peshawar, Kohat, Haripur and Mardan districts. The process was led by the DAs in coordination with CDU community mobilizers and the refugee community. On 7 and 9 March, a joint team of UNHCR, CAR, CDU and SHARP staff visited the District Police Officer (DPO) of Nowshera and Charsadda districts. The team shared the copy of the PoR extension notification and informed the DPOs of the constitution of the committees at the RV level in each district for easy facilitation and improved coordination re cases of harassment or wrongful arrest and detention in the respective RV. The DPO directed all the relevant officials of concerned police stations to take note of these committee members for mitigating issues pertaining to refugees in the RVs as well as during their livelihood related movements outside the refugee villages. The same process will be replicated in the coming week for the RVs in other districts.