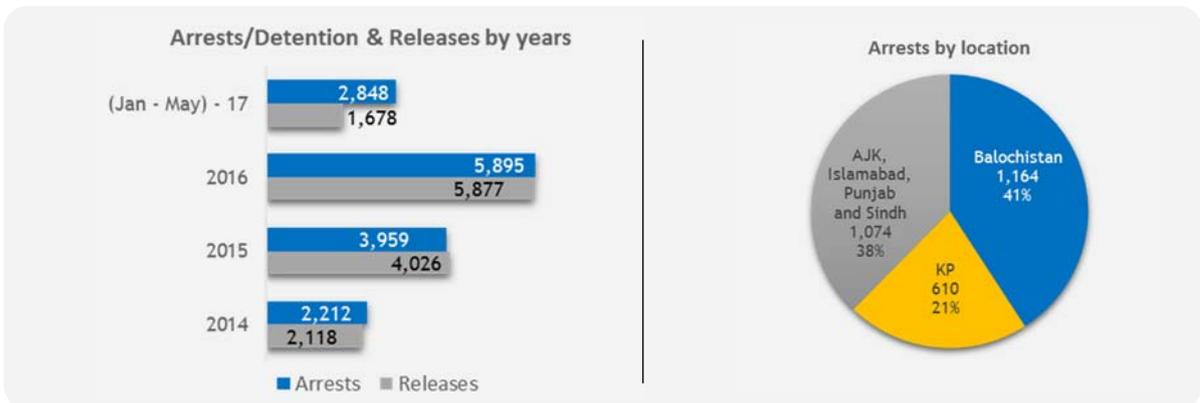
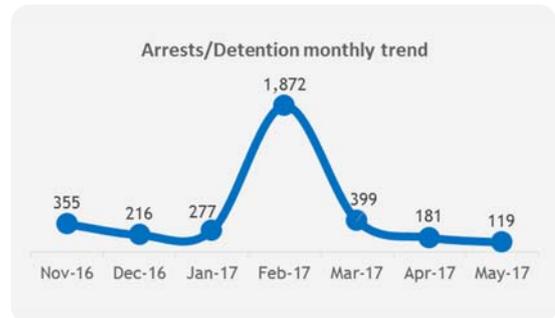


## UNHCR Pakistan Monthly Protection Trends Reporting May 2017

**R**epatriation increased dramatically in 2016 for many 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

The general protection situation for refugees remained stable in May 2017. Arrests and detentions of persons of concern is more than halved to 119 in May, compared to 181 in April. Refugees normally face increased scrutiny after a security incident and the fact that no such major security incident occurred in May could be the reason for a decrease in arrests and detentions. Voluntary repatriation continued through the Torkham border, however, the Chaman border remained closed from 5 to 27 May following an exchange of fire between Afghanistan and Pakistan forces following a border dispute. This resulted in a halt in voluntary repatriation from the Voluntary Repatriation Centre Baleli, Quetta.



### Summary of Events

#### 1. Arrests & Detention

119 persons of concern were arrested during May, compared to 181 arrested in April. The arrests of persons of concern were mainly due to ongoing law enforcement agencies' search operations. Arrests were low across the country. UNHCR provided legal assistance to registered refugees and most of those arrested were released within 24 hours.

## 2. Evictions/ Eviction Notices

The Pakistan Army issued a verbal eviction notice to approximately 300 Afghans residing in the urban areas of Upper and Lower Dir and Batkhela districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), instructing them to move to refugee villages. The Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees took up the issue with the relevant army unit. The Additional Deputy Commissioner Batkhela informed UNHCR that the administration did not receive any instructions to shift urban refugees to refugee villages and no further action was taken by the military in this regard.

## 3. Public Pressure

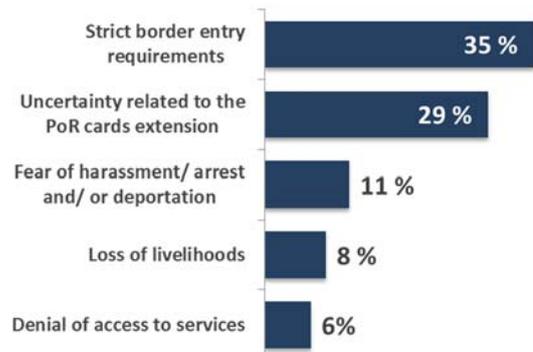
On 28 May, an anti-Afghan protest was held in Kohat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reportedly organized by local business community. The protestors demanded refugees' evictions from refugee villages in Kohat to reclaim their lands stating the commercial value of the land has increased manifold since the time the land was provided to Afghan refugees. Historically, such protests have not gained any momentum and in this case the situation gradually returned to normal and no eviction took place.

Afghan officials stopped vehicles carrying goods at the Torkham border on account of refusing to pay 30,000 Afghanis (420 USD) per vehicle for their entry to Pakistan. According to the Political Administration of Torkham and custom officials, Afghan officials are demanding 30,000 Afghanis from each vehicle. About 8,000 containers were stranded on both sides of the Torkham border over the payment issue.

## 4. 2017—Exit Interviews / Encashment Centres Report Findings

“Strict border entry requirements” (35 percent) and “Uncertainty related to the PoR cards extension” (29 per cent) were the top reasons for repatriation, according to the 965 exit interviews conducted at the Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs) in Chamkani, Peshawar and Baleli, Quetta in May. Some 11 percent of respondents cited “Fear of harassment/arrest and/or deportation” as a push factor for repatriation.

Protection interviews with returnees at the Encashment Center Samarkhail indicated that some returnees have been asked for bribes, and some women faced harassment during search operations by law enforcement authorities, and restricted movement between the districts for business owners in Punjab and AJK, Pakistan. Returnees from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported extortion/bribery at Prang Sam and Wach Khwarr (Dry-Ditch) area en route to Torkham, during luggage/commodity checks by authorities.



Among the undocumented repatriating Afghans, “fear of deportation”, “lack of documentation” and “economic factors” remain the highest push factors as assessed by IOM.<sup>1</sup>

In the interviews conducted at the Torkham border, the spontaneous returning families informed that police harassment and maltreatment led them to return. The other main reason cited was the new border management regime, as now it is very difficult to come to Pakistan from Afghanistan via the Torkham border without a valid visa. They further informed that obtaining an Afghan passport and Pakistani visa is difficult and cumbersome so they decided to return and settle in Afghanistan.

<sup>1</sup> Data Source: Flow monitoring of undocumented Afghan returnees from Pakistan (IOM Update | May 2017)

## 5. Media/ Public Statements of Political or Government Officials

### Impact Level for Refugees & Asylum Seekers



Low

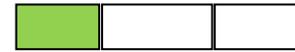


Medium



High

*Deputy Assistant Secretary of US Department of State for the Bureau of Population Refugees met with Minister SAFRON on 1 June. The Minister briefed the Deputy Assistant Secretary about the current status of Afghan refugees and Temporary Displaced Persons (TDPs) in Pakistan. The Minister said that Ministry of SAFRON has worked closely with UNHCR and other donor agencies to make sure the successful repatriation of over 0.6 million Afghan refugees in the past two years. The Minister categorically said that Pakistan has lost thousands of lives due to terrorism and Pakistan will never be part of any support to terrorists. He said that Pakistan feels the hardship and suffering of Afghans and wants a conducive political and economic environment in which Afghan refugees would repatriate with dignity and peace. [Pakistan Press Information Department Press Release - http://www.pid.gov.pk/?p=41093](http://www.pid.gov.pk/?p=41093)*



*The government will start documentation of nearly one million undocumented Afghan refugees, a federal minister said on Thursday. Pakistan still hosts around three million Afghan refugees including 1.4 million registered, who hold Proof of Registration (PoR) cards to stay in Pakistan till December 31 2017, according to the UN refugee agency. The Minister for States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), who also deals with the Afghan refugees, signed an agreement with the country's National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). - <http://nation.com.pk/national/11-May-2017/pakistan-to-register-nearly-1-million-undocumented-afghans-minister>*



### Summary of significant actions to counter push factors

To build momentum on UNHCR's advocacy strategy for the government's policy on the management of Afghans, UNHCR is finalising a list of an Eminent Persons Group comprising influential figures with political and social weight who have demonstrated some level of compassion and interest in refugee and social justice issues. The group will be engaged in future discussions and advocacy efforts to improve protection environment for refugees in Pakistan.

UNHCR in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, along with government counterparts and implementing partners visited police stations of Mardan and Swabi to strengthen the legal support to Afghan refugees in cases of arrests and detention. UNHCR's efforts to create a direct link between refugee villages and local police stations has yielded positive and favourable responses from refugees as well as the police.

In follow-up to the Encashment Centre Returnee Monitoring Reports received in April and May, UNHCR further increased visits to locations in Punjab where harassment and extortion incidents are reported by returnees (e.g. areas in Attock districts, Charikas check point) as well as protection monitoring of police registration of lease agreements between property owners and refugee tenants.

UNHCR and Advise & Legal Aid Centre (ALAC) team visits continue to the hot spots in Punjab in Tarlai (Rawalpindi), Kotli district (Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK)) Hassan Abdal, Attock Chawk Azam (Punjab), Layyah district, Kot Chandna refugee village, Mianwali district, Phool Nagar, Kasur district, Jari-kas (Punjab) Babu Sabu entry post (Lahore). The harassment of women during search operation was taken up with a high-level police official, who assured to follow up on the issue. In district Attock, UNHCR/ALAC helpline numbers have been displayed on bill boards (in local languages) for reporting protection concerns.

Regarding harassment at check posts, it was observed that there are different check points en-route to VRC Chamkani managed by different authorities. For example, returnees from Hazara division in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa pass through a forest check point, an anti-narcotics/vehicle-theft check point, Pakistan customs, and a police checkpoint at both the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa sides of the provincial border. The officers on duty have an obligation to search any suspect vehicle/person. In the case of Afghan returnees, while travelling on trucks loaded with goods (livestock such as cows or sheep), the police search the truck at these points for contraband items. Some officials try to extort and exploit refugees as well as Pakistani citizens and this remains a systemic challenge.

In addition to meetings with district police officers of Mardan, Swabi and Buner in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, SHARP Advise & Legal Aid Centre (ALAC) teams and UNHCR field staff visited 96 police stations in the month of May 2017 where they provided information to the police officials on the rights of Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders in Pakistan and also took up complaints of refugees with station house officers

where there were reports of harassment of Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders.

Refugee-police liaison committees were formed in the districts of Mardan, Swabi, Buner and Malakand in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after successful implementation in the districts of Charsadda, Peshawar and Nowshera, so that refugees can directly approach police officials whenever they need to.

56 legal awareness sessions were conducted by UNHCR partner Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid (SHARP) which were attended by 1,068 PoR cardholders (850 males and 758 females); of the 56 sessions, 42 were conducted in refugee villages (with participation of 1,140 PoR cardholders – 627 males and 513 females) and 14 sessions in urban context (with participation 468 Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders - 223 males and 245 females).

In month of May 2017, 3 sessions/workshops with 80 police officials were conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Of these 3 sessions, 2 sessions were conducted directly under UNHCR funded Advise & Legal Aid Centre (ALAC) programme once each in Mardan and Kohat districts and 1 session was conducted by Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid (SHARP) in Charsada. *Lawyers Trainings*: 3 sessions with 106 participants for lawyers were also conducted by Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid (SHARP) in Charsada, Lower Dir and Chitral under ECHO/ICMC funding.