**Repatriation of Afghans**

**The presence of large numbers of Afghan refugees and illegal nationals caused many problems in Pakistan.**

[Masud Ahmad Khan](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/masud-ahmad-khan)

November 20, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns), [Newspaper](https://www.nation.com.pk/newspaper)

Pakistan generously continues to host 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees (proof of registration card holders) and 880000 Afghan citizen card holders. It remains the second largest refugee-hosting country in the world after Turkey. Pakistan has been hosting one of the world’s largest protracted refugee populations for almost over 4 decades now. The majority of refugees (documented) reside in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Up to 70 percent of Afghan Refugees (documented) live in urban centres and therefore legally receive education, health facilities, skill training, and jobs in local labour markets. Remaining 30% live in 54 refugee villages across Pakistan.

According to the EU Asylum Agency, there are 1.7 million Afghan nationals living in Pakistan illegally for some time. According to my assessment the strength can exceed the estimated figures of the agency. In 2017 in order to identify undocumented Afghan nationals across Pakistan, the government of Pakistan decided to document them. It was also decided that the government of Afghanistan will provide passports and other documents accordingly. Despite a comprehensive media campaign 879000 Afghan nationals were documented. For documented Afghans, there is a tripartite agreement between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and UNHCR which regulates repatriation. Massive repatriation was observed in 2016 due to border regulation at Torkham and enhanced repatriation grants from 200 to 400 US dollars. The documented Afghan refugees are reluctant to go back to Afghanistan citing non conducive environments, insufficient livelihood opportunities, lack of shelter and protection concerns.

[District & sessions judge visits Kot Dhigano forest](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Nov-2023/district-sessions-judge-visits-kot-dhigano-forest)

Over a period of time the presence of large numbers of Afghan refugees and illegal nationals caused many problems in Pakistan. These include the growth of terrorism, drugs, kalshinkov culture, and polarising politics. During the Soviet invasion, mainly in the 1980s, Afghan saboteurs came to Pakistan in the guise of refugees to create problems in Pakistan by carrying out bomb blasts along with KGB and also to create tension between refugees and locals. Some political parties created goodwill and included them in their fold and later they were accused by other parties of using them as voters. During those days it was not difficult to obtain a CNIC or domicile by refugee or illegal Afghan nationals. The influx of refugees (documented/illegal) also created an ethno-demographic imbalance in the province of Balochistan. One ethnic group considered it as a threat to their majority and accused them of merging with the local population. In some areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the illegal Afghan nationals are considered a reason for sectarian tension between the two sects. In some areas due to social and socio-economic impact, the tolerance level of the host communities has reached its threshold and cannot be overstretched.

[‘Lady gang’ involved in stealing on metro bus service busted](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Nov-2023/lady-gang-involved-in-stealing-on-metro-bus-service-busted)

There is evidence of involvement and facilitation by illegal Afghan nationals in security related incidents. With the takeover of the Afghan Taliban in Kabul terrorist activities in Pakistan have increased by 60 percent. Attacks were launched by terrorists from Chitral to Pasni while operating from Afghan territory, equipped with weapons left over by the US. In a recent statement, the interim prime minister Kakar said in the last two years 2267 innocent Pakistanis lost their lives for which TTP terrorists are responsible who are using Afghan territory to launch cowardly attacks in Pakistan. During this period 15 Afghans were involved in suicide bombings and 64 Afghan citizens killed while fighting Pakistan’s law enforcement agencies. Despite Pakistan’s sincere and repeated request the Afghan government has shown their inability to control TTP operating from its territory. Probably, they wanted to use it as a pressure tactics or leverage as done in the past by the former Afghans governments. In a historic decision the government of Pakistan decided to deport all illegal foreign nationals from Pakistan and October 31, 2023, was set a deadline. Over 2 lac illegal Afghan nationals have voluntarily returned to Afghanistan. It is the sovereign right of Pakistan to take decisions in the best interest of national security and the safety of its citizens. Some so-called liberals and intellectuals are creating hue and cry on the deportation of illegal Afghan nationals but no one is talking of the increasing terrorist attacks originating from Afghanistan and martyring our soldiers and civilian population.

[KP govt decides to make universities self-sufficient](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Nov-2023/kp-govt-decides-to-make-universities-self-sufficient)

In the last three years, Iran has deported over 1.2 million Afghans and is still in the process of deporting. The Iranian authorities took some concrete steps to force Afghans to repatriate to Afghanistan which includes increasing cost of living, limited access to free education, unemployment, and restricting them to camps only. In the case of Pakistan, we welcomed Afghan refugees on Islamic brotherhood even though Pakistan is not a party to 1951 convention and 1967 protocol.

Recently the government of Balochistan had got one lac fake CNIC blocked in two districts of Balochistan alone. The Sindh government had blocked 20000 fake CNIC. The NADRA is in the process of tracking fake identity cards issued to foreign nationals. Those returning to Afghanistan are educated and have acquired skilled training who would contribute positively for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The international community and UNHCR may encourage the Afghan Government to undertake initiatives to create a conducive environment for the return of Afghan refugees and Afghan nationals.