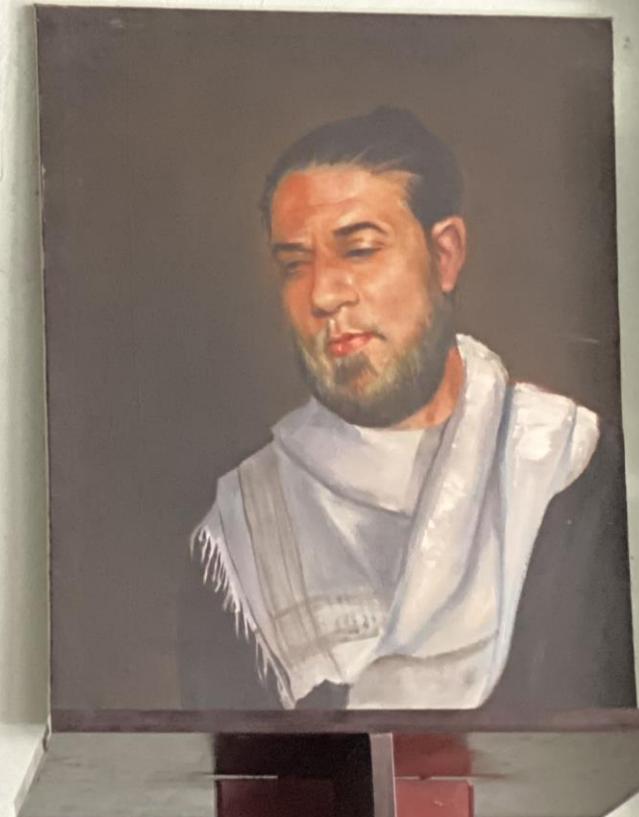




**‘TREAT US LIKE  
HUMAN BEINGS’**

AFGHANS IN PAKISTAN AT  
RISK OF UNLAWFUL DEPORTATION



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**Cover photo:** *An ache to belong: An Afghan refugee's temporary accommodation, covered by artwork depicting Afghan people and their stories.*

© Jamaima Afridi for Amnesty International

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# INTRODUCTION

For over four decades, Pakistan has been home to a large refugee population, including more than a million Afghan nationals who began arriving in 1979, in the months leading up to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Many of them recently fled to Pakistan for fear of persecution following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.

Afghan refugees represent one of the world's largest refugee populations. Over the past four decades, many have been forced from their homelands, their lives repeatedly upended by a fresh eruption of conflict and violence. There are refugee camps in Pakistan where successive Afghan generations have lived, long forming part of the local fabric of society, and yet they have been denied their rights, demonized and constantly threatened with deportation.

Over the years, successive Pakistan governments have repeatedly imposed arbitrary deadlines on Afghans to leave Pakistan, only to be followed by erratic extensions. In October 2023, the caretaker government announced an 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' to initiate what might be one of the largest forcible returns of refugees in modern history.<sup>1</sup> The Plan imposed arbitrary and unfeasible 30-day deadline for "undocumented" Afghan nationals, including refugees and

asylum seekers, to leave the country or be subjected to deportation, putting millions at risk.

Since then, Amnesty International has documented a complete lack of transparency, due process and accountability in the unlawful arrests, detentions and deportations of Afghan nationals in Pakistan, which is exacerbated by increased harassment and hostility towards them. Since the 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' came into operation, UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) has reported over 750,556 Afghan nationals have been forcibly deported to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan – leaving behind their homes, properties and community in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

Afghan nationals hold five types of documentation status in Pakistan:

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued Proof of Registration (PoR) cards;
- Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) issued by the Government of Pakistan (80,000 were issued by 2019);

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Afghan refugees still languish in limbo," 21 August 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/afghan-refugees-lives-in-limbo>

<sup>2</sup> UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), "UNCHR-IOM FLASH UPDATE #36," 7 March 2025, <https://pakistan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11121/files/documents/2025-03/unhcr-iom-flash-update-36-v2.pdf>, p. 2

- Visas to Pakistan, mostly by Afghans who migrated after the 2021 Taliban takeover (many of these visas have expired by now);
- Asylum seekers with guarantees of repatriation to third countries;
- Undocumented.

On 10 July 2024, the Pakistan government announced a welcome relief in the repatriation plan, extending the validity of 'PoR holders' stay by one year. However, these pauses in deportation are short-lived as Afghan nationals become the scapegoats of domestic politics, deteriorating security or Pakistan-Afghanistan political tensions. Afghan nationals face fresh waves of harassment and reprisals whenever an attack by an armed group in Pakistan is linked by the Pakistani authorities to Afghanistan.

A surge in violent attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan province<sup>3</sup> in August 2024 led the Interior Minister of Pakistan, Mohsin Naqvi, to announce the **'second phase'** of illegal deportation of Afghan refugees, stating that the banned militant group Tehreek-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP) was responsible for the recent violent attacks.<sup>4</sup> The Pakistan government claimed that Afghan nationals took part<sup>5</sup> in the 26 November 2024 protests led by opposition party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in Islamabad, where unlawful force was used against protesters.<sup>6</sup> Using the protests as a pretext, the Interior Ministry then announced that Afghan nationals would not be allowed to stay in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) without obtaining a No Objection Certificate.<sup>7</sup> In December 2024, the capital city police started reportedly racially profiling ethnic Pashtuns resulting in the arbitrary detention and harassment of Afghan nationals given the shared ethnic identity.<sup>8</sup>

The Joint Action Committee for Refugees (JAC-R) has reported that over 800 Afghans were detained in Islamabad in early January 2025. This included those in possession of valid documents and visas.<sup>9</sup> According to members of JAC-R, the authorities may have renewed the crackdown with the aim of exerting pressure on the de facto Taliban authorities following the recent border clashes between both countries. Refugees have in the past been used as political pawns for leverage whenever tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan escalate.<sup>7</sup>

In February 2025, the Pakistani government announced that Afghan refugees were required to vacate Islamabad and Rawalpindi by 31 March, with forcible expulsions set to commence on 1 April.<sup>10</sup> Pakistan's plan to expel refugees from the capital will create additional barriers for their access to embassies and missions of countries where many have applied for immigration and asylum, further increasing their precarity. The two-page directive, a copy of which has been obtained and reviewed by Amnesty International, applies indiscriminately to both refugees with Afghan Citizen Cards and those without official documentation. The policy grants the military's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency enhanced authority to identify and monitor Afghan nationals, raising concerns about potential abuses of power and violations of privacy. Since the policy's implementation, there have been numerous reports of raids targeting Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, resulting in the detention of individuals regardless of their documentation status. According to IOM, since January 2025, 18,000 Afghans have been forcibly returned,<sup>11</sup> and 20% of Afghans deported from these cities held UN Refugee Agency documents,<sup>12</sup> underscoring the arbitrary nature of these expulsions.

<sup>3</sup> Dawn, "Terrorist attacks surge to 59 in August from 38 in July", 3 September 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1856563/terrorist-attacks-surge-to-59-in-august-from-38-in-july>

<sup>4</sup> Dawn, "Second phase of Afghan refugees' repatriation soon," 29 August 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1855424>

<sup>5</sup> Express Tribune, "Foreign nationals including Afghan citizens participating in PTI protest: Interior Minister," 24 November 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2511625/foreign-nationals-including-afghan-citizens-participating-in-pti-protest-interior-minister>

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Urgent and transparent investigation needed into deadly crackdown on opposition protesters," 27 November 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/11/urgent-and-transparent-investigation-needed-into-deadly-crackdown-on-opposition-protesters>

<sup>7</sup> Dawn, "Afghans will need NOC to stay in capital beyond 2024," 28 November 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1875256>

<sup>8</sup> Dawn, "CM Gandapur raises 'arbitrary rounding up, filing of cases' against Pakhtuns with PM Shehbaz," 4 December 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1876701>

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Renewed arrests, detention and harassment of Afghan refugees must stop," 8 January 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/01/pakistan-renewed-arrests-detention-and-harassment-of-afghan-refugees-must-stop>

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Opaque 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' targeting Afghan refugees must be withdrawn," 26 March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/opaque-illegal-foreigners-repatriation-plan-targeting-afghan-refugees-must-be-withdrawn>

<sup>11</sup> Dawn, "IOM reports uptick in repatriation of Afghan refugees from capital," 19 February 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1892849>

<sup>12</sup> BBC, "Afghans hiding in Pakistan live in fear of forced deportation," 3 March 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgl00lerOrno>

Pakistan's decision to expel Afghan refugees from its capital and neighboring city comes shortly after US President Donald Trump's administration implemented sweeping immigration policy changes, including aggressive deportation measures and restrictions on refugee admissions. On 22 February, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Ishaq Dar announced that while Pakistan was open to negotiations with the US on the matter, refugees whose resettlement is denied would face deportation from Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> These US policy shifts have also heightened concerns among Afghan refugees in Pakistan, as they face diminishing prospects for resettlement in third countries. The convergence of Pakistan's deportation plans and the US's tightened immigration policies leaves Afghan refugees in an increasingly precarious situation, with limited options for safe refuge and resettlement. Many other Western countries such as Canada, European nations, Australia, and the United Kingdom have protracted immigration processes. Over the past three years, these lengthy procedures have left many Afghans in a state of uncertainty, unable to secure resettlement or permanent legal status.

Renewed wave of arrests, detention, harassment and deportation following the government's announcement means the fate of all remaining Afghan nationals in Pakistan, hangs in uncertainty. Returning to Afghanistan is a dangerous option – especially for Afghan women and girls, journalists, human rights defenders, women protestors, artists, and former Afghan government and security officials who are at risk of reprisals and other serious human rights violations from the Taliban de-facto authorities.

Under the Taliban's current rule, Amnesty International has documented extrajudicial executions,<sup>14</sup> arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances of dissenting voices,<sup>15</sup> journalists,<sup>16</sup> human rights defenders,<sup>17</sup> artists,<sup>18</sup> and former government employees, among others. Taliban have imposed more than 70 draconian edicts intensifying restrictions on women and girls, attempting to erase them from public life. The draconian restrictions on the rights of Afghanistan's women and girls, together with the use of imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment, amounts to the crime against humanity of gender persecution under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>19</sup> Civilians face attacks across Afghanistan as mass extrajudicial executions and collective punishments on civilians continue with impunity.

Forcibly repatriating Afghan nationals, particularly refugees and asylum seekers at risk, from Pakistan would be a clear breach of the **principle of non-refoulement**: the right not to be sent back to a country where one might be at real risk of serious human rights violations. As a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture 1984, Pakistan has obligations to respect the absolute prohibition to return anyone including Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, to a country where they would be at real risk of being subjected to torture or other serious human rights violations.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Dawn, "Afghans denied US resettlement to be deported," 23 February 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1893690>

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Amnesty International condemns public execution by the Taliban," 7 December 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/afghanistan-amnesty-international-condemns-public-execution-by-the-taliban>

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Stop punishing women protesters" (Index: ASA 11/7509/2023), 7 December 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/7509/2023/en>

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Release journalist convicted of propaganda: Mahdi Ansari" (Index: ASA 11/8988/2025), 4 February 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/8988/2025/en>

<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Human rights defenders under attack" (Index: ASA 11/2680/2020), 10 July 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/7663/2024/en>

<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Filmmaker arbitrarily detained: Sayed Rahim Saidi" (Index: ASA 11/8970/2025), 24 January 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/8970/2025/en>

<sup>19</sup> Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: Taliban's treatment of women and girls should be investigated as the crime against humanity of gender persecution," 26 May 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/afghanistan-talibans-treatment-of-women-and-girls-should-be-investigated-as-the-crime-against-humanity-of-gender-persecution>

<sup>20</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee 142nd session, 14 October – 8 November 2024" (Index: ASA 33/8576/2024), 23 September 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/8576/2024/en>

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Pakistani authorities have increasingly cited security concerns, blaming the growing Afghan refugee population for rising crime rates and violent attacks in Pakistan. This has resulted in stricter border controls, more stringent visa renewal requirements, a surge in deportation orders, and heightened police harassment of Afghan refugees.<sup>21</sup> Pakistan also lacks a formal national asylum system, leaving refugees without a clear legal pathway to regularize their status. The absence of a structured asylum process further exacerbates the vulnerability of refugees and asylum seekers, exposing them to exploitation, detention and forced repatriation without due process.

International actors, particularly the UNHCR, have consistently urged Pakistan to establish a national refugee law. However, no comprehensive refugee policy reform has taken place, due in part to lack of political will but also Pakistan's mounting political and economic challenges. While some refugees, particularly those with documented status, can benefit from limited protections, the majority of Afghans – especially undocumented or recently arrived individuals – remain in a state of legal uncertainty. The international community, particularly wealthier countries, must step up efforts to share responsibility and expedite the resettlement process. At the same time, Pakistan must undertake comprehensive legal reforms to align its policies with international human rights law and standards.

© → Pulling away lifelines: Trucks loaded with the luggage of Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers, move towards the Torkham border to Afghanistan. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International

<sup>21</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Halt mass detentions and deportations of Afghan refugees," 10 November 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/pakistan-halt-mass-detentions-and-deportations-of-afghan-refugees>

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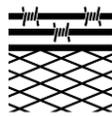


# WHAT IS PAKISTAN'S 'ILLEGAL FOREIGNERS' REPATRIATION PLAN'?

On 26 September 2023, following a spate of bombings in the country, Pakistan's caretaker Ministry of Interior announced plans to enact the "Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan" (IFRP) to initiate a nationwide operation to deport 'illegal' foreigners residing in the country, most of whom are Afghans. The Pakistani authorities cite security concerns, claiming that Afghan nationals are involved in violent attacks on the country that Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) takes responsibility for.<sup>22</sup>



**2.1 MILLION**  
Refugees at risk of  
deportation



**733,000<sup>23</sup>**  
Refugees who have  
returned to Afghanistan  
since Sept 2023

## ILLEGAL FOREIGNERS REPATRIATION PLAN AT A GLANCE: ISSUED ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2023

Three Phases of IFRP:

- PHASE 1** Deportation of undocumented Afghan nationals and foreign residents living in Pakistan without any identity documents **[over 750,000]**
- PHASE 2** Deportation of Afghan nationals who hold the Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) **[80,000]<sup>1</sup>**
- PHASE 3** Deportation of Afghan nationals who held the UNHCR-issued Proof of Registration (PoR) cards **[1.3 Million]<sup>1</sup>**

### PAKISTAN'S SHIFTING POLICIES ON AFGHAN REFUGEES: A TIMELINE

26 SEPT 2023	1 NOV 2023	10 NOV 2023	26 APR 2024	10 JUL 2024	28 AUG 2024	27 NOV 2024	1-10 JAN 2025	29 JAN 2025	22 FEB 2025	31 MAR 2025	30 JUN 2025
The Ministry of Interior issues the <i>Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan</i> .	Deadline for all illegal immigrants to leave voluntarily.	The State and Frontier Regions Division (SAFRON) extends the validity of Proof of Registration (PoR) cards to 31 December 2023	The Federal Cabinet approves an extension of PoR card validity for Afghan refugees until 30 June	Government of Pakistan agrees to a one-year extension to Afghan refugees holding PoR cards in the country.	In a meeting with UN Special Representative for Afghanistan, Interior Minister, Mohsin Naqvi states that the second phase of repatriation will begin soon. <sup>24</sup>	Blaming Afghans for participating in opposition party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) protest in Islamabad, the Interior Minister announces that after 31 December, Afghan nationals would need a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to stay in the capital city. <sup>25</sup>	Law enforcement agencies in Islamabad begin conducting night raids on Afghan settlements in the city, arbitrarily detaining and harassing Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers. <sup>26</sup>	Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif orders that all Afghan nationals be expelled from the capital, Islamabad, and neighboring Rawalpindi city by 31 March 2025. <sup>27</sup>	Following US President Donald Trump's suspension of refugee programs, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar announces that Afghan refugees and asylum seekers who are not accepted for resettlement by the United States would be treated as illegal immigrants and deported from Pakistan. <sup>28</sup>	Deadline for Afghan nationals to leave the Islamabad Capital Territory and Rawalpindi	Expiry of the extension on the validity of PoR card holders

<sup>22</sup> Dawn, "Asif terms Afghanistan 'source of terror'," 28 March 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1824215>

<sup>23</sup> IOM, "Pakistan-Afghanistan - Returns Emergency Response #23," 1 October 2024, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111500>

<sup>24</sup> The News, "TTP using Afghan soil for attacks inside Pakistan: Naqvi", 29 August 2024, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1224911-ttp-using-afghan-soil-for-attacks-inside-pakistan-naqvi>

<sup>25</sup> The Express Tribune, "Afghan citizens without NOC won't be allowed in Islamabad from 2025: Mohsin Naqvi", 27 November 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2512284/afghan-citizens-without-noc-wont-be-allowed-in-islamabad-from-2025-mohsin-naqvi>

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Renewed arrests, detention and harassment of Afghan refugees must stop," 8 January 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/01/pakistan-renewed-arrests-detention-and-harassment-of-afghan-refugees-must-stop/>

<sup>27</sup> Dawn, "Afghans being quietly moved out of capital," 4 February 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1889634>

<sup>28</sup> Dawn, "Afghans denied US resettlement to be deported," 23 February 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1893690>

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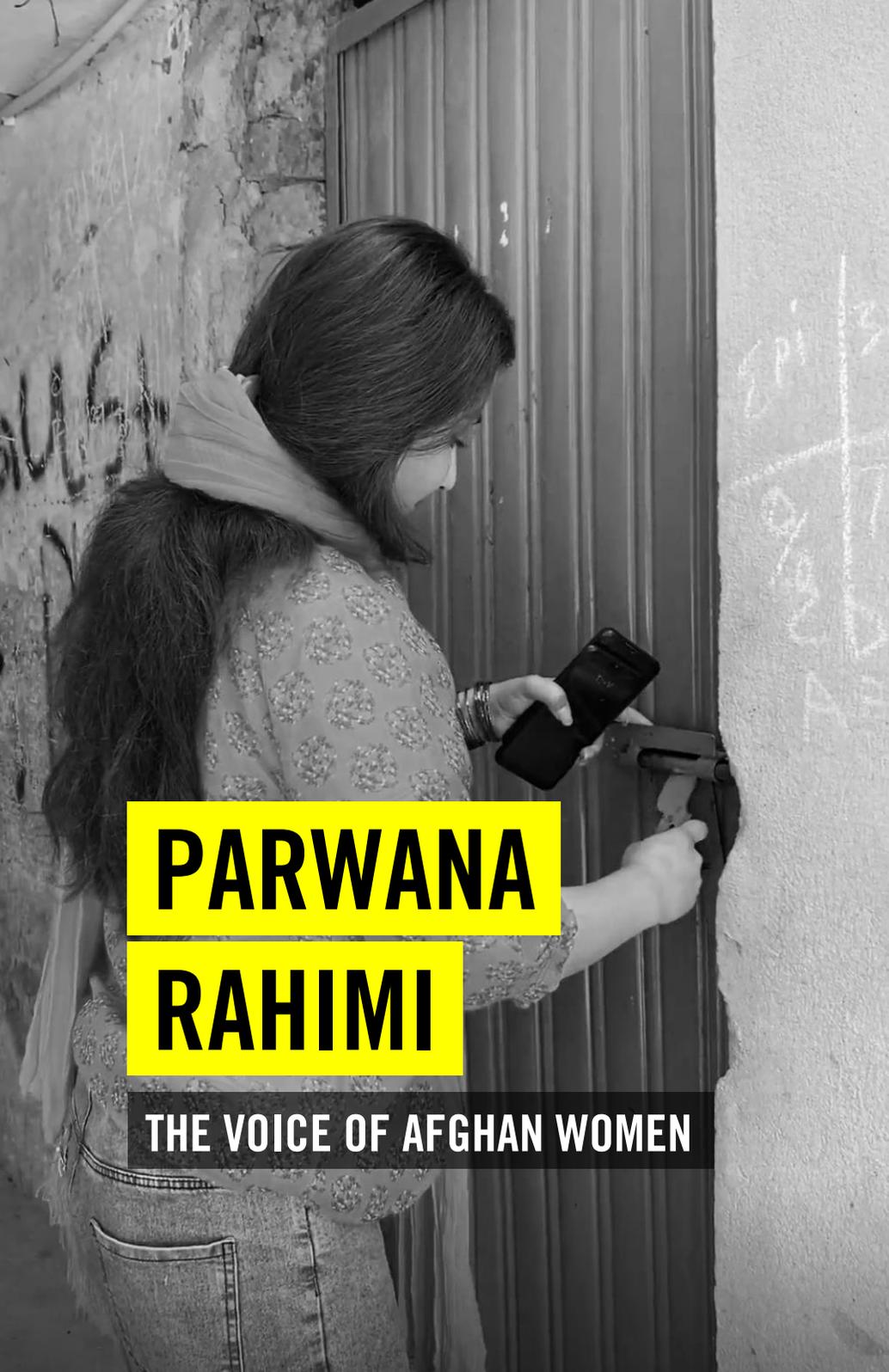
# ENDLESS DISPLACEMENT: THE PLIGHT OF AFGHAN REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN PAKISTAN

The stories of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers living in Pakistan carry common themes of hardship, uncertainty, fear and resilience. Many Afghans are second and third generation of immigrants and have been pushed into protracted displacement because of the crackdown, arrests and demolition of Afghan settlements by the Pakistani authorities through the years.

**Disclaimer:** Names have been changed to protect the identities of Afghan nationals to ensure their safety.

 Packing up lives: Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers, carrying their belongings in a cart. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International





**PARWANA**

**RAHIMI**

**THE VOICE OF AFGHAN WOMEN**

## **A JOURNALIST IN THE FACE OF DANGER**

In Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, Parwana Rahimi, a 27-year-old journalist from Laghman, Afghanistan, is navigating a life far removed from the one she built back home. Parwana had been working as a journalist in Afghanistan since 2014, including in prominent media outlets. Much of her work focused on women's issues, aiming to raise awareness about the socio-economic challenges faced by Afghan women. "The main purpose of my programs was to spread awareness and educate people, especially men, about the positive impact of women's progress," she recalled.

"Women who discuss national development and progress become a danger to those opposed to change," she explained. Her passion for speaking about women's progress in Afghanistan put her in the crosshairs of the Taliban. Parwana started getting death threats but her resolve to speak out against injustices in Afghanistan remained strong.

Since 2021 there have been several restrictions on women journalists, including a ban on appearing with male colleagues,<sup>29</sup> a strict dress code which includes a mandatory face covering,<sup>30</sup> and restriction on entry to interview officials without a male colleague present.<sup>31</sup>

**"I am not afraid of death, but I fear that, as an educated person, I won't be able to do anything for my country."**

<sup>29</sup> United States Institute of Peace, "Tracking the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women,"

<https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-mistreatment-women>

<sup>30</sup> Al Jazeera, "Taliban enforces order for Afghan women TV anchors to cover faces," 22 May 2022,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/22/afghan-women-tv-anchors-forced-to-cover-faces-under-taliban-order>

<sup>31</sup> IJNET, "Women journalists face dire situation in Afghanistan under Taliban rule," 10 July 2023,

<https://ijnet.org/en/story/women-journalists-face-dire-situation-afghanistan-under-taliban-rule>

← © Parwana locks her door. Afghan nationals in Islamabad live in constant fear of raids and harassment by the authorities. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International

## SEEKING REFUGE IN PAKISTAN: A NEW SET OF CHALLENGES

Parwana's decision to leave Afghanistan was one of survival, but life as a refugee in Pakistan is a new battle. Even with her visa and legal documentation, the recent deportation orders have left many Afghan refugees, including Parwana, in a state of panic. "When a woman moves to another country alone, she faces many problems," she said. During a routine visa check, she experienced harassment, with officials questioning the legitimacy of her visa and making veiled threats of deportation. "They spoke to me in an inappropriate manner and threatened to deport me back to Afghanistan," she shared.

As someone who volunteers to assist fellow Afghan refugees with their UNHCR cases, Parwana has seen the toll of this fear on her community. "Many of these people were journalists, activists, and others who, if they returned, would face conflict with the [Taliban de-facto authorities]. They could be beaten, imprisoned, or even killed," she said. The lack of identification cards from UNHCR exacerbates the problem, as refugees are unable to prove their status to avoid arrest. This uncertainty weighs heavily on Parwana, who, despite her own fears, continues to offer hope and support to others in the refugee community. However, the psychological toll is undeniable. "Many have developed mental health issues because of the constant fear of deportation. Whenever I see them, I try to give them hope and encourage them to speak out about their problems," she said.

## A PLEA FOR HUMANITY

Parwana's message to the Pakistan government and the international community is clear: "Show us humanity." Drawing comparisons to the global response to the Ukraine war, she emphasizes that Afghan refugees should be treated with the same compassion. "When there was a war in Ukraine, neighboring countries opened their borders without requiring visas or documents. Everyone tried to show humanity and support," she recalled.

**"I request the Pakistan government to see us as human beings, not just refugees, and to extend their support to Afghan refugees facing genuine difficulties."**

Her plea extends to the international community as well, urging agencies such as UNHCR to expedite their process to relocate refugees to safer countries, as the uncertainty and challenges in Pakistan continue to mount.

“

“The international community, particularly Western nations and neighboring states have a moral obligation to share responsibility for refugee protection and resettlement. Unfortunately, as cases highlighted by Parwana Rahimi show, the resettlement process is painfully slow, leaving vulnerable individuals in perilous situations. There is an urgent need for global community to increase their commitment to refugee resettlement quotas, expedite processing times, and increase more substantial funding to UNCHR and other refugee aid organizations. Without this support and intervention, the plight of Afghan refugees will continue to worsen.”





**SAHAR**

**A TRANSGENDER WOMAN'S  
STRUGGLE FOR SAFETY**

Sahar, a 20-year-old transgender woman from Laghman, Afghanistan, told Amnesty how remaining in the country became harder every day, following Taliban's return to power in 2021.

Sahar used to work as a secretary for a local hospital in Afghanistan. Societal pressures and discrimination forced her to suppress the expression of her gender identity. A talented artist, Sahar's home in Pakistan is adorned with paintings that depict transgender persons.

"I was unable to express my feelings to my society and family," she recalled. As a minority, her basic rights were systematically denied under a regime that does not recognize the existence, let alone the rights, of transgender individuals. Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women face severe threats, including torture, sexual violence, forced marriage, and death.<sup>32</sup>

"Women don't have their rights, including education, job opportunities, and other basic human rights," Sahar explained. "For transgender individuals, it's even more difficult under the Taliban's rule, which does not recognize such rights."

With this realization and the increasing hostility around her, Sahar and her family made the painful decision to leave Afghanistan in search of safety.

<sup>32</sup> Amnesty International and others, "Afghanistan: Joint Statement: From Shadows to Spotlight: Afghan Women Amid Taliban Oppression | International Women's Day Manifesto 2024" (Index: ASA 11/7801/2024), 8 March 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/7801/2024/en/>

← © Sahar tells stories through her art. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International

## PAKISTAN – A FRAGILE SANCTUARY

Sahar came to Pakistan in 2023 after obtaining complete documentation and registered herself and her family with the UNHCR, as they await opportunities for resettlement in a third country. However, due to the volume of cases, she's been told to wait for an indefinite time.

When the Pakistan government announced its intention to restart a fresh wave of deportations in April 2024,<sup>33</sup> Sahar and a group of others filed a petition in Peshawar High Court urging the authorities to not forcefully repatriate refugees from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Afghanistan, unless they are willing to go back. Sahar requested that they be allowed to stay in Pakistan until their resettlement to third countries is finalized. After granting a stay order in June 2024,<sup>34</sup> the court directed the Pakistani authorities in January 2025 to determine asylum cases of artists and transgender individuals under the international law principle of non-refoulement. It also directed that no asylum seekers be deported until a decision is taken.<sup>35</sup> The fear of deportation is more than just a fear of relocation; for Sahar it could be a risk to life. "If we are deported, we face the risk of death because the Taliban does not recognize transgender rights."

**"A transgender person is unsafe at any place without a home."**

Meanwhile, Sahar faces discrimination in Pakistan too. "The environment here is the same as in Afghanistan, which makes me feel very scared," Sahar said. A recent visit to Kohat left her shaken, as the offensive language and rejection she faced served as a stark reminder of her marginalized status. "People were not accepting me," she said. "They used very offensive language towards me, which I don't want to repeat."

## A PLEA FOR RECOGNITION: MORE THAN JUST REFUGEES

Sahar's appeal to the international community is that through the UNHCR their relocation to a safer country is expedited – and her plea to the Pakistani authorities is that Afghan refugees and asylum seekers be allowed to wait until their immigration to destination countries is processed. She hopes that Pakistan government grants protection and rights to transgender persons, both Afghan and Pakistani.

**"I request that the Pakistan government sees us as human beings - not migrants, not as male, female or transgender."**

<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Government must stop ignoring global calls to halt unlawful deportation of Afghan refugees," 4 April 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/pakistan-government-must-halt-deportation-of-afghan-refugees>

<sup>34</sup> Dawn, "PHC stays deportation of Afghan artists, transgender persons," 21 June 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1840910>

<sup>35</sup> Dawn, "Govt directed to decide Afghan asylum cases under non-refoulement principle," 11 January 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1884350/govt-directed-to-decide-afghan-asylum-cases-under-non-refoulement-principle>



**HIKMATULLAH**

**AHMADI**

**A HAZARA JOURNALIST STRUGGLING  
FOR SURVIVAL IN EXILE**

## **AN INTERSECTION OF THREATS**

Hikmatullah Ahmadi, a 37-year-old Hazara journalist from Ghazni province, left Afghanistan for Pakistan in September 2022, after Taliban’s return to power. The Taliban rule is especially dangerous for people like Hikmatullah both because of his ethnic background and his profession as a journalist. **“Before the Taliban, the challenges we faced were typical of any third-world country, but after their takeover, any journalist working for foreign media was branded an enemy or a spy,”** he recalled. For ethnically Hazara individuals, the risk was doubled:

**“They would target us simply because of our ethnic features, assuming we were working against the Taliban.”**

Hazaras, a predominantly Shia minority, have historically been victims of sectarian violence, and their situation has worsened under the Taliban’s regime. In June 2022, the Taliban attacked the home of a Hazara family in Ghor province, killing multiple family members, including a woman who had been providing healthcare to the community. Three other men who had been staying at the house were detained and later executed.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, large-scale forced evictions of Hazara families have taken place across various provinces such as Balkh, Daikundi, Uruzgan and Helmand – with Taliban forces and their allies forcibly displacing thousands of Hazara families and seizing their land unlawfully.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Amnesty International, “Afghanistan: Taliban torture and execute Hazaras in targeted attack – new investigation,” 15 September 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/afghanistan-taliban-torture-and-execute-hazaras-in-targeted-attack-new-investigation/>

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan: Taliban Forcibly Evict Minority Shia,” 22 October 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/22/afghanistan-taliban-forcibly-evict-minority-shia>

← © *Moving in shadows: Hikmatullah walking through the entrance of his residential complex.*  
Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International

## ISOLATION AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP IN PAKISTAN

Hikmatullah's stay in Pakistan has been marked by extreme economic hardship and emotional duress. **"It has been 10 months since I last worked, and it brings me immense pain,"** he shared. His inability to work as a journalist and the subsequent economic difficulties his family is facing has left him feeling hopeless and stripped of purpose.

**"What tortures me is that I can't be a real journalist anymore. Instead, I feel like a disposable one."**

For Hikmatullah, journalism was not just a profession but a means to contribute to society, raise awareness and hold accountable those in power. Now in exile he finds himself unable to continue the work he dedicated his life to. Despite repeated efforts to seek help from organizations such as UNHCR, Hikmatullah has been turned back. "Every time we contact them, they say, *'we will contact you'*. They cannot contact us as our SIM cards change after every two months because refugees in Pakistan cannot get a permanent SIM card." Without stable phone access, Hikmatullah's attempts to meaningfully follow-up with these organizations is often futile, deepening the sense of isolation that him and his family feel.

## FEAR OF DEPORTATION

Since Hikmatullah entered the country with a valid visa and passport, has not personally faced harassment from Pakistani authorities yet. However, the recent announcement to restart deportation has made him anxious about his future. "When I hear about deportations, I feel a deep sense of dread," he said. Amnesty International found that at least 64 journalists were detained by the Taliban for varying periods between August 2021 and August 2023.<sup>38</sup> More than 80% of women journalists stopped working between August 2021 and August 2023 because of increasing restrictions.

<sup>38</sup> Amnesty International, "Afghanistan 2023," <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/afghanistan/report-afghanistan/>

**"I have read about people who were deported back to Afghanistan, only to be shot or killed by the Taliban or other unknown groups."**

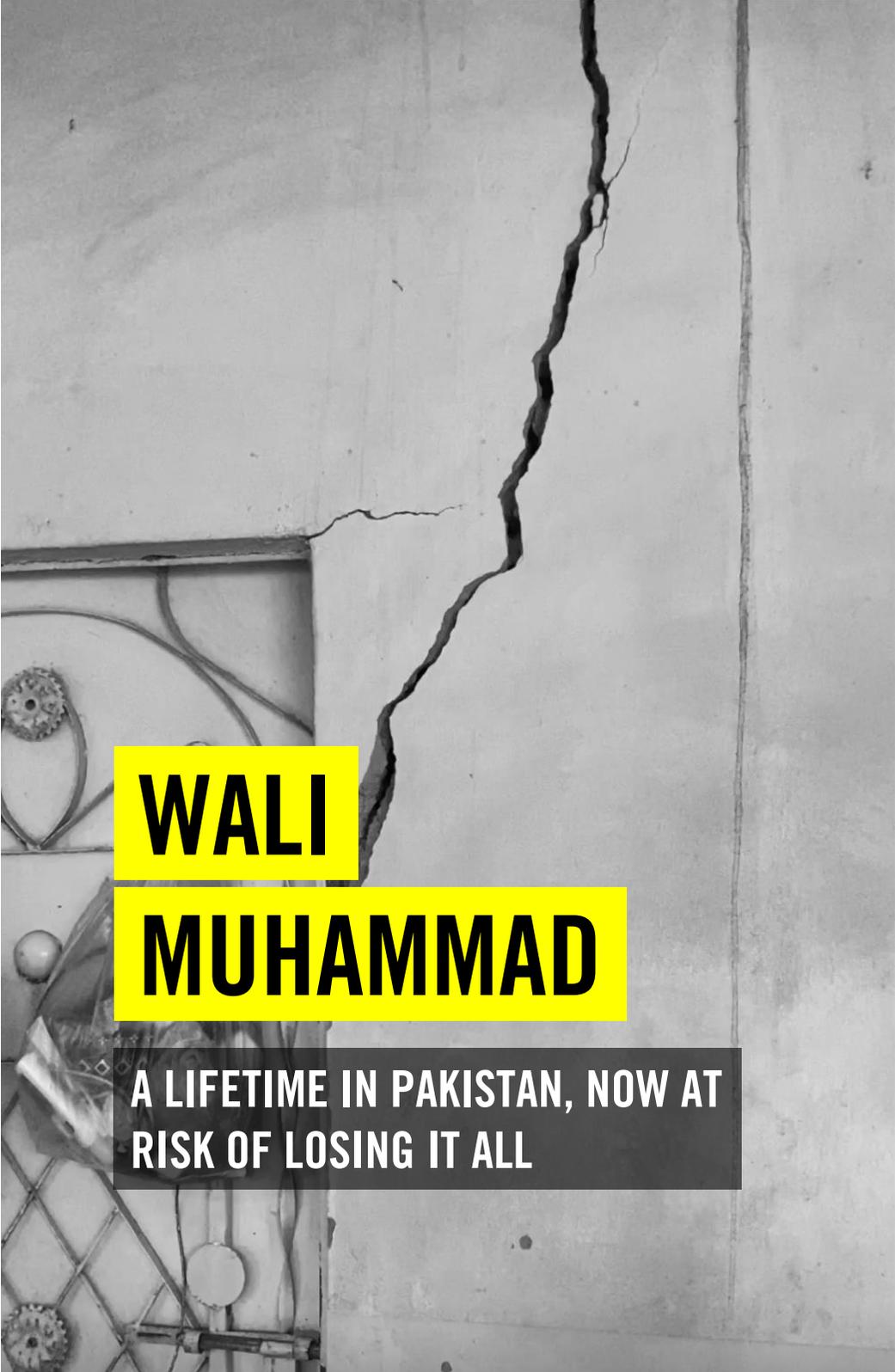
Hikmatullah explained that the Taliban needs to spread fear to maintain control and deported people can easily become targets – this is a real fear for many exiled Hazaras.

## IN SEARCH OF SAFETY

Hikmatullah's message to the Pakistan government is a request to provide refuge because returning to Afghanistan would mean almost certain death for many refugees and asylum seekers, particularly those from persecuted groups like the Hazara community. **"If we are deported, we will be shot, killed, or tortured,"** he warns. **"We left everything behind — our homes, our families — in search of safety."**

Hikmatullah calls upon the international community and international organizations to step up and provide real solutions for Afghan refugees. **"Either give us job opportunities or accelerate the process of third-country resettlement."**

For Hikmatullah, resettlement is not just about physical safety – it is about reclaiming his sense of purpose and dignity, which was stripped away the moment he was forced to flee his home. **"I just want to work again, to live without fear,"** he said, emphasizing the need for both immediate support and long-term solutions for Afghan nationals in Pakistan. Living in a cramped apartment in Islamabad, Hikmatullah's future remains uncertain. But his resolve to advocate for other vulnerable groups remains strong as he continues to be a point of contact for vulnerable groups amongst the Afghan refugee community in the city.

A black and white photograph of a wall with a prominent vertical crack. The wall appears to be made of concrete or plaster. In the lower-left corner, there is a window with a metal grille. A yellow rectangular text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**WALI**

**MUHAMMAD**

**A LIFETIME IN PAKISTAN, NOW AT  
RISK OF LOSING IT ALL**

For nearly 45 years, 63-year-old Wali Muhammad has called Pakistan home. Originally from Kandus province of Afghanistan, Wali has lived through four decades of conflict, displacement, and hard labor, first arriving in Pakistan with nothing but hope. Wali and his family spent 10 years in Peshawar and then moved to Karachi where they have worked tirelessly to build a life from the ground up, constructing small clay houses and working in various informal industries to support themselves. Wali and his family also worked in the recycling industry (also known as '*kabar*' work), collecting and processing garbage to sell. In his community, people have found their own ways to survive and support their families, with some working in hotels, others managing shops, and some taking care of livestock. Now, all of that is under threat as the possibility of deportation looms large over Afghan nationals.

**“If we are forcefully deported, it will be like reliving the time we first came to Pakistan as refugees from Afghanistan during the war [in the 1980s]. We would return to Afghanistan empty-handed again, just as we arrived in Pakistan with nothing.”**

← © Cracked wall of an Afghan refugee family's home. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International

The fear of losing everything they have worked for over the years is palpable, especially given the uncertainty of what awaits them if they are forced to return to Afghanistan.

However, this fear of being deported is not new. He recalled a time when the Pakistani authorities regularly raided their homes, instilling a deep sense of fear in the Afghan community. “The [security] forces would come into our homes, search through our belongings, and even take our money,” he said. The harassment was relentless, with police demanding bribes of 20,000 to 30,000 Pakistani rupees (USD\$72 to 108), an amount that was impossible for many to afford. “Even though I had a valid card, the fear of being arrested or having to pay more money kept me confined to my home,” Wali added. With the Pakistani authorities threatening to start a fresh wave of deportation, Wali reflects on what is to come. “We are grateful that the government is not disturbing us like before, but we are still uncertain. We don’t know if the harassment will start again, if we’ll be arrested, or if we’ll face more suffering,” Wali shared.

For Wali and many others, the threat of deportation goes beyond losing their homes — it means losing their livelihoods. Many Afghans have built small businesses or work in various trades to support their families. If they are deported suddenly, they risk leaving behind everything they have worked for, including their property, money, and the debts they are owed by others. “Many Pakistanis who owe us money are now refusing to repay, giving false promises because they believe we will leave soon,” Wali explained. Additionally, Afghan nationals face unique challenges when it comes to property ownership. Since they are not legally allowed to own property in Pakistan, many have registered their homes and businesses under the names of Pakistani friends. If suddenly deported, they would lose everything without a chance to reclaim their possessions or settle their affairs.

Despite the hardships, Wali remains hopeful that the Pakistan government will show compassion and recognize the contributions that Afghan refugees have made over the past 40 years.

**“We have lived our entire lives here, our children were born and raised here, and some have even married Pakistanis.”**

Wali’s own son is married to a Pakistani woman, yet even he has been unable to obtain Pakistani nationality. Wali’s plea to the Pakistani authorities is to give Afghans the choice to stay or leave, or at the very least grant a period of 2-3 years to wrap up affairs before they are asked to leave.

**“We have property here, and if forced to leave abruptly, we will lose everything. For example, a property worth 10,000,000 [PKR] won’t even sell for 50,000 [PKR] in a rush.”**



# MALIK JAVED AND FAISAL BARAKZAI

BEING A PARENT REFUGEE — A FIGHT  
TO SECURE THEIR DAUGHTERS' FUTURE

## TWO STORIES, SAME FATE

For over four decades, Malik Javed and Faisal Barakzai have called Pakistan home. Both men, born or raised in the country after fleeing war-torn Afghanistan, have built their lives and families here. Yet, despite years of contributing to Pakistan's economy and society, the looming threat of deportation haunts them. For them, the uncertainty of their own futures is overshadowed by an even greater fear: their daughters' education and futures will be stolen from them if they are forced to return to Afghanistan, where girls' education is banned.

Malik Javed, who migrated to Pakistan in 1984, has lived in the country for 41 years. He has raised his children here, including two daughters, aged nine and seven, who are deeply invested in their schooling.

**“When the rumors of deportation spread, my daughters were heartbroken, crying at the thought of losing their education.”**

← © Afghan fathers for their daughters: Malik Javed teaches a class of Afghan girls in Islamabad, Pakistan. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International

The prospect of leaving Pakistan, where they have been born and raised, is devastating. For Javed, the threat of deportation means more than just losing his home — it means robbing his daughters of the opportunity to learn and grow.

Faisal Barakzai was born in Kohat after his family migrated from Afghanistan in 1978. He faces similar fears. With Pakistan's recent decision to deport Afghan refugees, his family's future will be in jeopardy.

"If we are deported, my daughters' education will be disrupted," he said.

**"Girls' education is banned in Afghanistan, and I worry about what kind of future they will have if we are forced to leave."**

For Malik Javed and Faisal Barakzai, deportation threatens not only their families' safety and stability but also their livelihoods. "There are Afghans working in different parts of Pakistan, and their businesses are worth crores [tens of millions of Rupees]," Javed explained. "We pay taxes here, we contribute to the economy, yet we live in fear of being forced to leave with nothing." Many in their community face unresolved financial obligations, with creditors refusing to repay loans to Afghans as the threat of deportation intensifies.

Faisal Barakzai also describes the precarious experience of being an Afghan national in Pakistan.

"We still live in clay houses built 40 years ago, which have weakened over time. During rain, we stay outside, fearing the houses might collapse. We are not allowed to rebuild."

### **PLEA FOR DIGNITY AND THEIR DAUGHTERS' RIGHT TO LEARN**

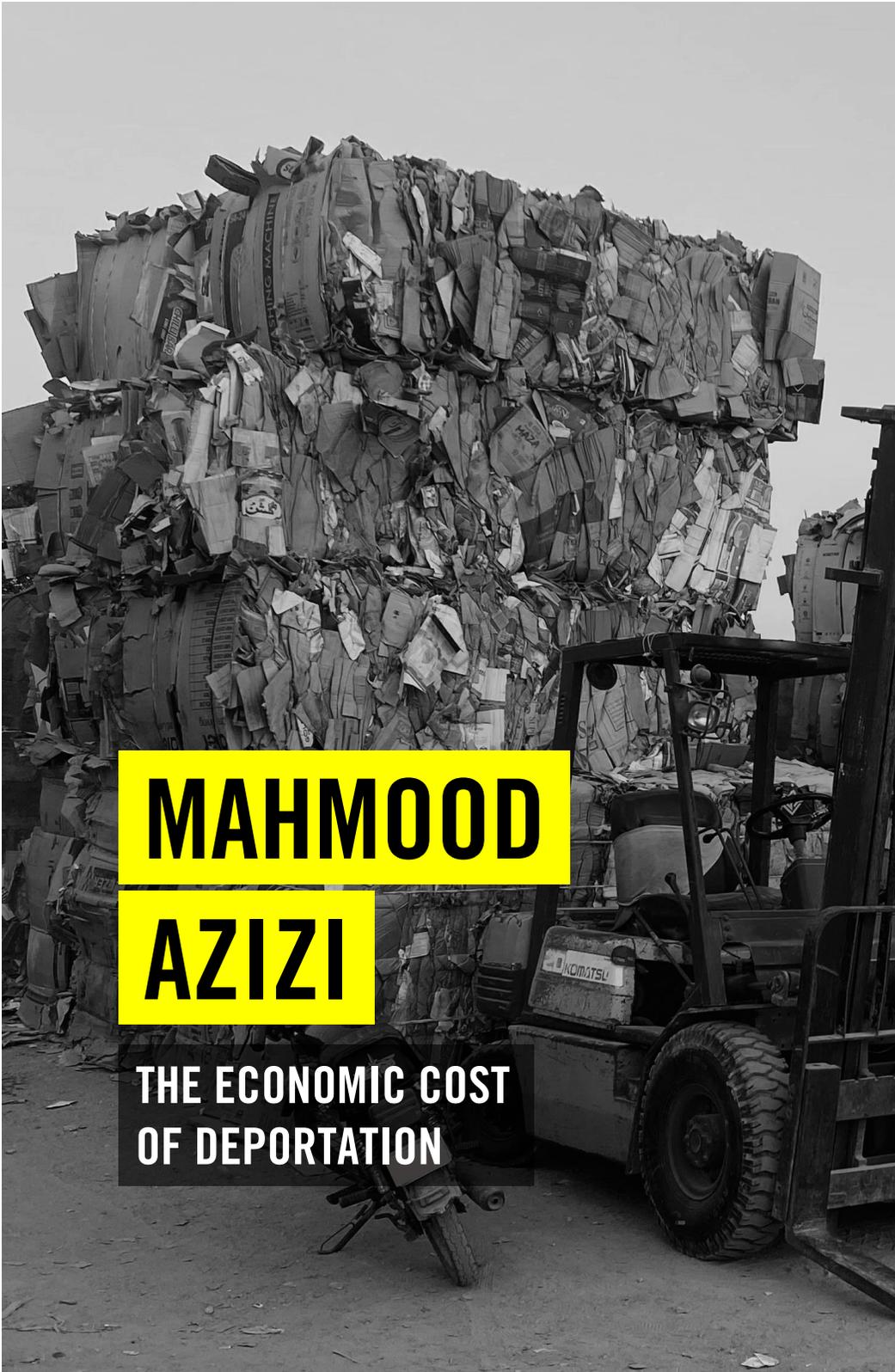
At the heart of both these stories is a common hope for Pakistan to treat them with compassion.

Javed, who is married to a Pakistani, shared the complexities of their legal status — with half the family members holding refugee cards, and others, Pakistani

citizenship. Deportation could cause families to be torn apart. "We've spent generations here," Javed said. "Our children and grandchildren were born here. Afghans are not a burden on Pakistan — we work hard and contribute to the economy."

Faisal Barakzai echoed the same. "We need laws for us, either Pakistani or international humanitarian law," he said. "We just want to live dignified lives, contribute to society, and secure our daughters' education."

Faisal Barakzai and Malik Javed also call on the international community to recognize the contributions of Afghan nationals in the country and to help secure a future where their daughters can learn, thrive, and one day contribute to the world without fear of being denied that opportunity.



**MAHMOOD**

**AZIZI**

**THE ECONOMIC COST  
OF DEPORTATION**

Mahmood Azizi, a 43-year-old businessman from Baghlan, Afghanistan has lived in Pakistan for the last 40 years. His family migrated to escape the Afghan War and after years of hard labor, Mahmood built a successful cardboard business in Karachi.

**“For 20 years, we did labor work, and after that, we started our own business.”**

Mahmood’s cardboard business has provided livelihood for many people in his community. **“People collect cardboard from garbage or buy it from shops and bring it to us. We weigh the cardboard and purchase it from them. Then, we press it and transport it to Korangi, Multan, and Lahore for further processing,”** he explained. The business not only supports his family but also employs many people, including Pakistani nationals.

← © Mahmood Azizi’s cardboard business will soon topple. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International

## POLICE HARASSMENT AND LOSS OF BUSINESS

This past year has been incredibly difficult for Mahmood Azizi and other Afghan nationals. Police harassment became a regular occurrence, with officers allegedly confiscating identification and demanding bribes – as much as PKR10,000-20,000 (USD\$36-37).

**“They would come and restrict our business, telling us to leave because the country was no longer for us. When we showed them our cards, they didn’t accept them, so we had to give them money.”**

The situation took a toll on his business. “In the past nine months, I have lost between 1 to 2 crore rupees [USD\$35,700 – 91,400]. For two months, our work was completely halted,” he shared, adding that without Afghan workers, the supply chain for the cardboard industry in bigger cities like Lahore and Karachi has been disrupted. He also laments that despite being a taxpayer, he has been harassed and has been forced to pay bribes to the police even after showing them valid documentation.

“People often say that all the businesses are run by Afghans. Whenever there’s an issue in business, they blame us,” he said. Yet his business continues to employ Pakistani laborers and provides income to families across the city.

## THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF DEPORTATION

Mahmood Azizi fears that deportation would be disastrous, not only for his family but also for the many people who depend on his business. **“We have 30 family members, and six to seven laborers work with us. Nearly 100 people’s livelihoods depend on us,”** he said. The deportation policy has also led to exploitation with buyers offering unfairly low prices for the assets that Mahmood’s family owns and are trying to sell. “I had a vehicle worth 50 lakh rupees [USD \$178,498], but I had to sell it for 17 lakh rupees [USD\$60,690],” he explained. The creditors who owe them money are also backing out from payments.

If forced to return to Afghanistan, Mahmood’s family would lose everything.

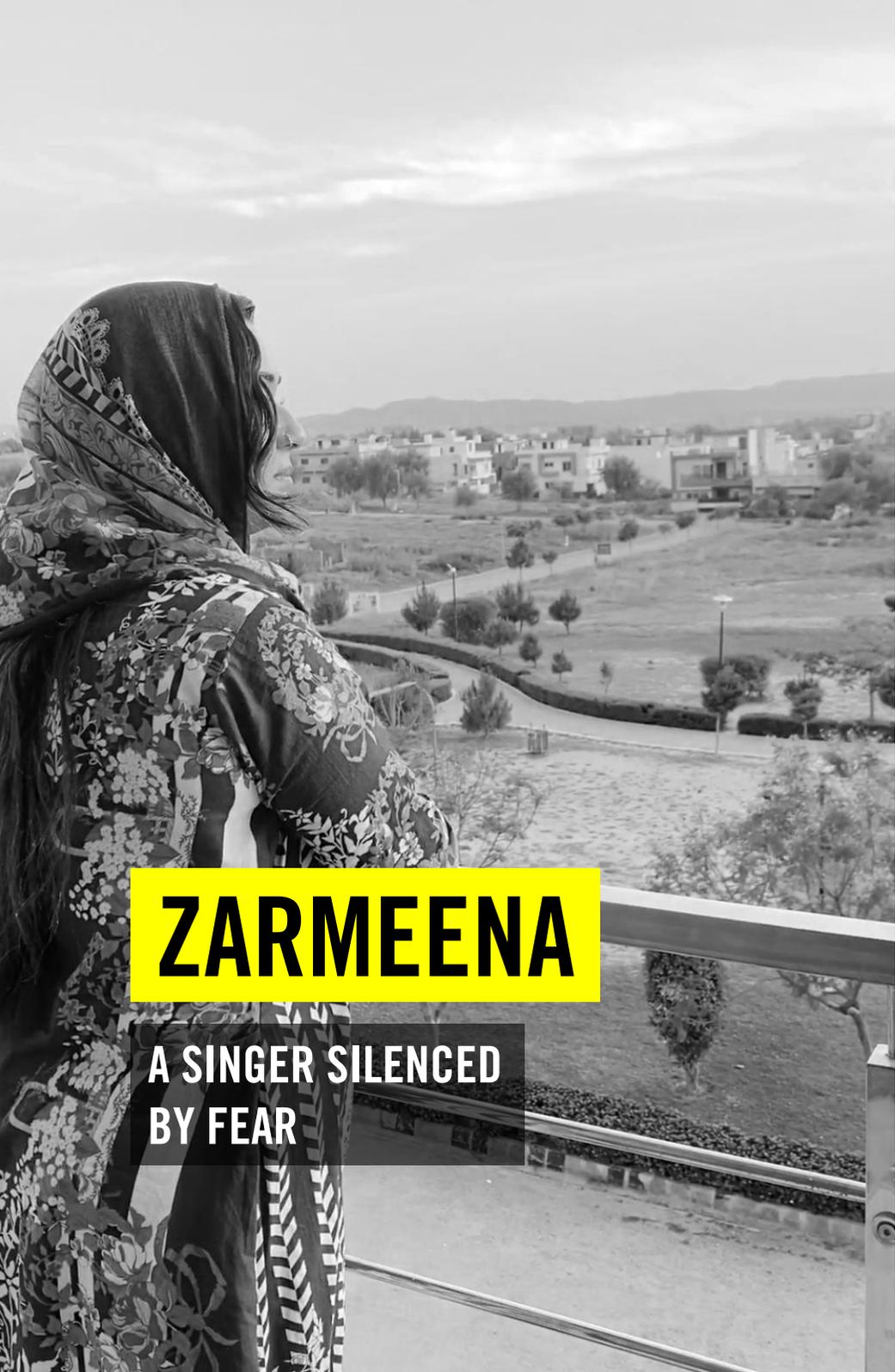
**“We have nothing in Afghanistan.”**

Mahmood recalls the harrowing ordeal he faced during a visit to Afghanistan in 2014. **“I was pulled out of vehicles 17 times. Whenever they saw my clothes and shoes, they called me Pakistani. I was even locked up for two to three hours until a relative managed to get me released.”**

## A CALL FOR SUPPORT AND STABILITY

Mahmood Azizi’s plea to the Pakistan government is clear **“We want to request an extension of our cards for five years or at least two years.”** He stresses that sudden deportation would cause massive financial losses, not just for Afghans but also for Pakistanis.

**“We pay taxes, we follow the rules, and we contribute to this country. The Pakistan government should recognize our contributions and support us, not force us out.”**



# ZARMEENA

## A SINGER SILENCED BY FEAR

Zarmeena, a singer from Kabul, Afghanistan, fled to Pakistan three years ago, just days after the Taliban's resurgence. For Zarmeena, a woman in a profession the Taliban vehemently oppose, staying in Afghanistan was no longer an option.

**“If I had continued my singing, it would have been dangerous for me and my family. I might have been killed.”**

The Taliban's return to power marked the start of a dark era for Afghan women, especially for artists. Public expressions of female voices, including singing, have been banned under their regime, which views such acts as “immoral and un-Islamic.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> The Guardian, “‘Frightening’ Taliban law bans women from speaking in public,” 26 August 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/aug/26/taliban-bar-on-afghan-women-speaking-in-public-un-afghanistan>

←  *Wondering about her future, Zarmeena gazes out into the street. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International*

This prohibition is part of a broader crackdown on women's participation in public life. Since their return to power, the Taliban prohibited any meaningful form of public or political participation by women and girls. Women are prevented from moving freely and dressing as they choose; they are banned from education beyond primary school; they are excluded from a wide range of professions, including from working with NGOs and the UN office in Afghanistan, and they are not granted political appointments or public positions.<sup>40</sup>

**"I was a singer — a woman singer, which is even worse,"** Zarmeena added, highlighting the perilous position of women in Afghanistan.

### **FLEEING WITHOUT PAPERS**

Crossing the border without a visa or passport on the fifth day of the Taliban's takeover, Zarmeena and her family faced immense challenges. **"It was very difficult,"** she said, describing their journey from Quetta to Islamabad. But relative safety in Pakistan came with its own set of struggles. **"If you don't have a valid visa, you face many worries — money, jobs, and security."** With the high cost of applying for and renewing visas, finding stability has been nearly impossible.

### **HARASSMENT AND SURVIVAL IN ISLAMABAD**

Life in Pakistan has been far from easy for Zarmeena. **"When I go out to buy something, people ask if I'm Afghan. If I say yes, they demand payment in dollars,"** she explained.

Her brothers, unable to leave their home freely due to fear of police harassment, have also struggled to find work. **"They are scared every time they step outside,"** she added.

Zarmeena has been deeply disappointed by the lack of support from authorities and organizations. **"We submitted our case to UNHCR three years ago. They never called back, and when we visit their office, they told us [the application process was] not done yet."**

### **A SILENCED VOICE**

Forced to abandon her singing career, Zarmeena's sense of identity and purpose has been stifled. **"I live in fear here too,"** she shared. Without documentation, work opportunities are nonexistent. **"Employers ask for Pakistani identity cards, and when they find out we are Afghans, they refuse to hire us."** Her family has depleted their savings and now relies on loans to survive. **"Three years of our lives have been wasted,"** she lamented.

### **A PLEA FOR HELP**

The constant threat of deportation has left Zarmeena and her family in a state of anxiety. **"We cannot go back to Afghanistan. If staying was an option, would anyone leave their country?"** she asked. Zarmeena urges the government of Pakistan to stop harassing undocumented Afghan refugees. **"Please let us wait it out until we can leave for another country and rebuild our lives,"** she pleaded.

Zarmeena also calls on the international community to expedite their support. **"Our children's education is on hold. Our lives are on pause. Help us leave Pakistan and start again."**

For Zarmeena and thousands like her, the dream of safety and stability remains elusive. Each passing day is a reminder of the sacrifices they have made and the freedoms they have lost under the shadow of a repressive regime.

<sup>40</sup> Amnesty International, "Afghanistan: The Taliban's war on women: The crime against humanity of gender persecution in Afghanistan" (Index: ASA 11/6789/2023), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/6789/2023/en/>



# SAFI NOOR

NEITHER VALID CITIZEN  
NOR INVALID REFUGEE

Safi Noor, a 60-year-old refugee from Faryab province, Afghanistan, has spent the last 35 years in Pakistan with his wife and seven children.

**“No one leaves their country without a reason.”**

Safi Noor left Afghanistan because of the ongoing war and instability in the country. His family had high hopes for their lives in Pakistan. **“We decided to migrate to Pakistan. Since it’s a Muslim brother country.”** Now living in Karachi, his family has endured years of struggle, surviving on a daily wage earned through physical labor.

←  *Safi Noor moves through the crowded neighborhood of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Karachi. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International*

## DETAINED DESPITE LEGAL DOCUMENTATION

Safi Noor and his family have lived in Pakistan for decades and have valid Proof of Registration (PoR) cards but this still does not save them from harassment from the authorities. He was once arrested in Shirin Colony, Karachi, where he went to for a medical check-up for a kidney problem. Despite holding valid identity card and documents, he was still detained by the police for nearly a month before being released. Shah Gul fears another arbitrary arrest.

**“We told them that these are the cards given by the government and not something we made ourselves. If I have this proof, then it’s injustice to take me to jail.”**

## FEAR OF DEPORTATION AND UNCERTAINTY

As the Pakistan government sets new deportation deadlines for each phase of its ‘Illegal Foreigners’ Repatriation Plan’, it sets panic into Afghan communities like the one Safi Noor and his family are part of. **“We’ve been here for almost 35 years, but if they decide to deport us, we have no choice. We just ask for time,”** he said. Returning to Afghanistan where they have no properties or resources would be devastating, as would be to sever the ties they have established over 35 years in Pakistan.

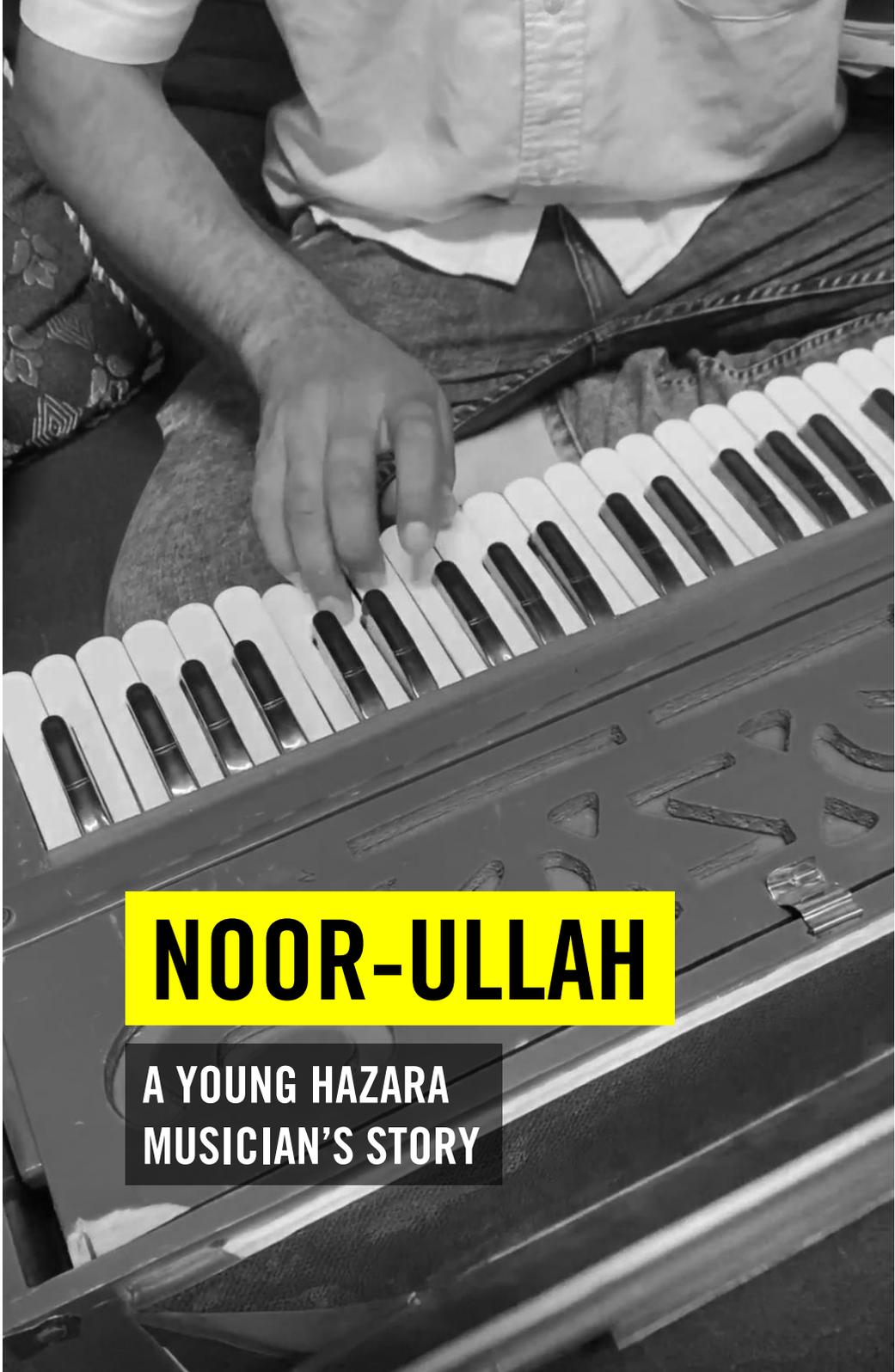
**“Everything we had in Afghanistan is gone, taken by others.”**

Safi Noor’s plea for the Pakistani authorities is simple: **“We’ve been part of this country for decades, contributing through labor. All we ask for is time to adjust, before we are forced to leave.”**

Much like the rest of the Afghan community in Pakistan, Safi Noor and his family are also facing a fresh wave of xenophobia triggered by Pakistan’s stereotyping of all Afghans living here as ‘criminals and terrorists’.<sup>41</sup> Despite these challenges, Safi wants to move forward:

**“Whatever happened to us is in the past now, and there’s nothing we can do about it. I have regarded this country as my own, and whatever their treatment was, good or bad, that is in the past.”**

<sup>41</sup> Dawn, “No country to call home: Afghan refugees bear brunt of Pakistan’s (in)security,” 19 September 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1776555>



# NOOR-ULLAH

## A YOUNG HAZARA MUSICIAN'S STORY

Noor-ullah, a 20-year-old from Bamyan province, Afghanistan, migrated to Pakistan two years ago with his family, seeking safety and a future after the Taliban took over in 2021. “I had completed my 12<sup>th</sup> class when the Taliban took over, and I couldn’t get my 12th grade diploma. When they came, everything was closed — schools, workplaces,” he recalled. “I was a cashier in a restaurant, but I had to leave.” Like many other Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, Noor-ullah’s dream of completing his education stands unfinished.

When Noor-ullah and his family arrived in Pakistan, they started living in Karachi. Following the government’s announcement of the deportation plans, Noor-ullah and his family have had to pay large sums of money to the police to avoid arrests and deportation. “A month ago, my uncle was taken by the police, and they demanded 20,000 rupees [USD\$72] per person,” Noor-ullah recounted.

← © *Refuge for his art: Noorullah will not be able to play music if deported to Afghanistan where the Taliban have imposed a music ban. Photo: Jamaima Afridi/ Amnesty International*

Even though Noor said the people of Karachi city have treated him and his family with kindness, the fear of being harassed by the police is a constant burden – to avoid the police he takes different routes and always hurries to get home, avoiding unnecessary stops or socializing.

**“It is difficult for me. When I go home, I keep thinking about what will happen to me in Karachi. What if the police take money from me? How will I reach home safely?”**

### **A PASSION FOR MUSIC AMID UNCERTAINTY**

Noor-ullah had always found solace in music. He taught himself guitar at a young age and when he moved to Pakistan, he enrolled with a music teacher. Now Noor-ullah can proudly play three instruments: guitar, darbuka and harmonium. Music has been a lifeline for him, giving him a sense of joy and purpose as he transitioned from life in Afghanistan to life in Pakistan.

**“Now I can sing as well.”**

Noor-ullah faces an uncertain future as he does not have proper documentation or a clear path forward in terms of resettlement. **“When we came here, we sold all our houses, and right now, we use that money for our expenses,”** he explained. But without the ability to work, his family’s savings are rapidly depleting.

### **UNDOCUMENTED LIVING**

Noor-ullah’s biggest challenge is that he does not have documentation; “I don’t have any passport. I only have an electronic *Tazkira*<sup>42</sup>, and I don’t have any case for [relocation to] a foreign country,” he explained. This puts him at an increased risk of deportation – a reality he tries to avoid by lying low. This is difficult because Noor-ullah’s ethnicity is Hazara. Hazaras are easily identifiable by their distinct features and their Shia Muslim faith, and therefore more likely to be targeted in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

### **A BETTER LIFE HERE**

Noor-ullah’s plea to the Government of Pakistan is to stop the police raids and harassment and allow Afghan refugees and asylum seekers to find work on the basis of a *Tazkira*. Noor-ullah’s plea also extends to locals, especially in Karachi, who he has found to be kind.

**“I want communities to stop the police from disturbing Afghan refugees – let us expand our skills and allow us to enroll in schools to continue our education so we can have a better life here in Karachi.”**

For now, Noor-ullah’s only solace is the music class. **“I just go to music class and do nothing else,”** he said.

<sup>42</sup> Online Afghan National Identity Card

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Amnesty International calls on the Government of Pakistan to:

- Immediately stop the arbitrary arrests, detentions and harassment of Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers, and reverse the decision to forcibly return all Afghan nationals to Afghanistan.
- Reverse its latest decision to expel Afghan nationals from Islamabad and Rawalpindi by 31 March 2025.
- Formally suspend the 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' in line with Pakistan's international legal obligations including the principle of non-refoulement.
- Create well-resourced and accessible pathways for the registration of refugees and asylum seekers, taking proactive measures to expedite their registration particularly of those at risk, including but not limited to women and girls, journalists, and those belonging to minority and ethnic communities, and those facing barriers due to gender, disability, professional background, language, among others.
- Fulfil Pakistan's international human rights obligations including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture 1984 by respecting the absolute prohibition to return anyone, including Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, to a country where they would be at real risk of being subjected to torture or other serious human rights violations.
- Ratify the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocol.
- Pass legislation specifically addressing the rights and protection of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Develop a comprehensive national legal framework for asylum and other forms of international protection in line with international refugee law and amend the Foreigners Act, 1946 to prevent penalization of refugees and asylum seekers entering Pakistan without documentation.

## Amnesty International calls on the international community to:

- Immediately expedite and expand resettlement quotas that should include Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, particularly for those at risk of persecution such as women and girls, journalists, and those belonging to minority and ethnic communities, and those facing barriers due to gender, disability, professional background, language, among others.
- Ensure safe and legal passage for Afghan refugees and asylum seekers fleeing persecution and work collectively to secure routes for refugees to resettle in third countries safely. Countries must provide Afghan refugees and asylum seekers with a clear and accessible path to refugee and asylum status, ensuring their protection under international law.
- Support integration plans in countries accepting Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, including through language training, cultural orientation, and employment support to help them adapt.
- Address the Afghan refugee crisis in multilateral settings such as the United Nations to develop a coordinated response that prioritizes protection and human dignity.
- Increase humanitarian assistance for Afghan nationals in Pakistan, including through funding for emergency aid, food, shelter and basic needs to prevent further deterioration of living conditions. Support host countries such as Pakistan by providing adequate technical and financial support to manage its refugee population. This includes funding for housing, healthcare, education, and infrastructure to assist both refugees and host countries.
- Monitor Pakistan's treatment of Afghan nationals through independent, impartial, international organizations, and sustain evidence-based advocacy with the Pakistani authorities to ensure compliance with human rights obligations, including by encouraging ratification of the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.  
WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS  
TO ONE PERSON, IT  
MATTERS TO US ALL.**

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# 'TREAT US LIKE HUMAN BEINGS'

## AFGHANS IN PAKISTAN AT RISK OF UNLAWFUL DEPORTATION

After Pakistan's decision in September 2023 to begin a phased deportation of Afghan nationals under its 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan,' Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers, live in a constant state of fear of harassment, arbitrary detention and deportation. Faced with life under de-facto Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Afghans in Pakistan are running out of options as they face deportation in violation of Pakistan's obligations under international human rights law, particularly the principle of non-refoulement. This campaign digest documents the distinct impact of these deportations on the lives of Afghans inside Pakistan.

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