
PAKISTAN HOSTING WORLD'S LARGEST REFUGEE POPULATION

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It is pertinent to mention that at a time when many countries were closing doors on refugees Iran and Pakistan are still hosting millions of Afghan refugees.

According to a report by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Pakistan is hosting 1.45 million registered Afghan refugees. There are also large numbers of undocumented Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees for past three decades and is trying to provide facilities to these affected people.

Similarly, the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan to their own country was also the largest in the world.

Since March 2002, UNHCR has facilitated the return of approximately 4.1 million registered Afghans from Pakistan.

Pakistan has set June 30, 2018 as the deadline for the stay of Afghan refugees in the country.

The influx of the first wave of Afghan refugees to Pakistan began during the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the late 1970s. By the end of 2001, there were over four million. Most have returned to Afghanistan since 2002.

Most of the registered Afghan refugees are living in Pakistans northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Under the National Action Plan, Pakistani government provided Afghan Citizens Cards to about 0.9 million Afghans.

Pakistani government says more than 90 percent of terrorist attacks in Pakistan are traced to Afghan refugee camps and several Afghan nationals have been arrested for involvement in the attacks.

According to the UNHCR, around 0.4 million Afghans living in Pakistan are still without any legal documents.

The UNHCR Representative for Pakistan, Ruvendrini Menikdiwela, acknowledging the Government of Pakistan for having hosted and cared for Afghan refugees for almost four decades, said that while voluntary repatriation is a preferred solution for the majority of Afghan refugees, it needs to

be undertaken in a phased manner.

Afghan refugees also sometimes have to face many problems during stay inside Pakistan. Many of them lack basic health and education facilities. Earlier they had to stay inside camps and still large numbers of refugees are living inside camps.

Afghan refugees have cooperated with the government of Pakistan for the security of the host nation, their difficulties have been highlighted by the world Human Rights Watch report 2017 stating that the Afghan refugees have been occasionally harassed and subjected to other abuses.

After the December 2014 Peshawar school massacre, the deadliest terrorist incident in Pakistan's history (in which two Afghan militants were involved), Pakistani authorities cracked down on Afghan refugee settlements to apprehend illegal immigrants.

Another problem the Afghan refugees are facing is that due to their prolonged stay in Pakistan their younger children who are born here are facing insecure future. Pakistan is asking them to leave whereas these children have no connection with Afghanistan as they are born here.

Some of them have also married to local population and for them Pakistan is their bread and basket.

At least 71 percent of registered Afghans had no formal education, and only 20 percent were in the labour market. Despite economic hardships and challenges in Pakistan, many Afghans are unwilling to return in the near future and cite security concerns and the lack of housing and jobs in Afghanistan.

Cricket in Afghanistan has been promoted by repatriated Afghans, who were influenced by the game while they lived in Pakistan; most players on the Afghanistan national cricket team are former refugees.

Smuggling became a major business and is now controlled by a large organized-crime network on both sides of the border. Major items smuggled from Afghanistan into Pakistan are opium, hashish, heroin, lumber, precious stones, copper, automobiles and electronics.

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