



**DIALOGUE
HUB** FOR
COMMON
GROUND

Policy Paper – Policy Brief

From Testimony to Action

**Protection Concerns and Urgent Needs of Afghan Human Rights Defenders,
Women Protesters, Journalists, Former Military Personnel, Artists, and
LGBTQ+ Individuals in Pakistan**

Dialogue Webinar Series

Organized by: Dialogue Hub for Common Ground & Women's Justice Movement

Date: 29 March 2026

Format: Online Advocacy Dialogue

From Testimony to Action

Advocacy for Afghan HRDs, Women Protesters, and Vulnerable Groups in Pakistan

 Ahmad Kohdamani Former military commander	 Darya Neshat Women's Rights Activist	 Zakia Kawyan Journalist	 Ada Barez LGBTQ+ Rights Advocate	 Asadullah Mirzad Theatre Artist	 Farzana Rezai Founder of the Movement of Afghanistan women in Exile and Human Rights Activist	 Shahla Arefi Women's Rights and Political Activist	 Moderator Nasrin Hamidi Journalist and women's rights activist
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 Sunday, 29 March 2026

 5:00 PM (CET)
8:00 PM (Pakistan Time - PKT)
6:30 PM (Afghanistan Time - AFT)

Organized by:
Dialogue hub for common ground and women's justice movement

 Online via Zoom

Join us to amplify voices and push for international accountability.

1. Executive Summary

This policy paper is based on an online dialogue organized by Dialogue Hub for Common Ground and the Women's Justice Movement, bringing together Afghan human rights defenders, women protesters, journalists, former military personnel, artists, and LGBTQ+ advocates currently residing in Pakistan.

The discussion highlighted the increasingly precarious situation faced by Afghan refugees and at-risk activists in Pakistan following the political transition in Afghanistan in 2021. Participants described a deteriorating protection environment characterized by fear of deportation, arbitrary detention, police harassment, economic insecurity, restricted access to healthcare, and prolonged uncertainty regarding relocation pathways.

The testimonies revealed that many Afghan refugees, including individuals holding valid visas, residency documents, or pending resettlement cases for third countries, continue to face detention, intimidation, and forced displacement inside Pakistan. Participants also reported widespread discrimination in access to housing, employment, healthcare, and legal protection.

Particularly vulnerable groups, including women protesters, journalists, LGBTQ+ individuals, artists, and former military personnel, face heightened risks due to their visibility, activism, or previous affiliations in Afghanistan. Many participants emphasized the severe psychological burden caused by prolonged insecurity, fear of forced return, family separation, and uncertainty about the future.

The discussion further highlighted that the absence of coordinated international protection mechanisms has left many at-risk Afghans trapped in legal limbo, with limited access to humanitarian assistance or durable solutions.

The central finding is clear:

The current situation is not only a humanitarian crisis, but also a protection and human rights emergency requiring urgent international action.

2. Key Findings

2.1 Fear of Deportation and Forced Return

Participants repeatedly expressed fear of deportation to Afghanistan, where many face credible risks of persecution, retaliation, arbitrary detention, torture, or violence.

The fear is particularly acute among:

- Women protesters and women's rights activists
- Journalists and media workers
- Former military and security personnel
- LGBTQ+ individuals
- Human rights defenders and civil society activists

Participants stressed that even rumors of deportation raids create widespread panic and force many individuals into hiding.

2.2 Arbitrary Arrests, Harassment, and Police Violence

Multiple testimonies documented:

- Arbitrary detention of Afghan refugees
- Harassment during police checks
- Physical violence and intimidation
- Extortion and threats
- Targeting of undocumented and documented Afghans alike

Participants noted that possession of valid visas or pending resettlement documentation does not consistently guarantee protection from detention or harassment.

2.3 Housing Discrimination and Hidden Living Conditions

Many participants reported severe discrimination in accessing housing.

Challenges include:

- Refusal by landlords to rent homes to Afghan refugees
- Fear among property owners of legal consequences
- Increased rental exploitation and informal payments
- Frequent forced relocations

As a result, many activists and vulnerable individuals are forced to live in isolation, overcrowded apartments, or hidden conditions to avoid visibility and arrest.

2.4 Economic Hardship and Livelihood Insecurity

Participants emphasized widespread financial instability caused by:

- Lack of legal work opportunities
- Exhaustion of personal savings
- Restrictions on mobility
- Limited humanitarian assistance
- Rising living costs

Many Afghan refugees and activists are unable to meet basic needs, including food, rent, transportation, and healthcare expenses.

2.5 Mental Health and Psychosocial Impact

The discussion highlighted a severe mental health crisis among Afghan refugees and activists in Pakistan.

Participants described:

- Chronic stress and anxiety
- Trauma linked to displacement and persecution
- Fear of Taliban retaliation
- Depression and social isolation
- Psychological exhaustion caused by uncertainty and prolonged waiting processes

Women activists and LGBTQ+ individuals reported particularly high levels of emotional distress due to isolation and insecurity.

2.6 Barriers to Healthcare Access

Participants reported serious obstacles in accessing healthcare services, including:

- Lack of affordable treatment
- Limited access to emergency medical care
- Inability to afford medication
- Fear of approaching institutions due to documentation concerns
- Lack of psychosocial support services

The absence of accessible healthcare has significantly worsened both physical and mental health conditions among refugees.

2.7 Uncertainty Around Resettlement and International Protection

A major concern raised during the dialogue was the prolonged uncertainty surrounding relocation and asylum pathways.

Participants described:

- Delays in processing resettlement cases
- Lack of communication from international programs
- Inconsistent relocation criteria
- Suspension or slowdown of humanitarian pathways
- Fear of being forgotten by the international community

This prolonged uncertainty has created a growing sense of hopelessness and insecurity among vulnerable Afghan populations.

3. International Human Rights Concerns

The situation discussed during the webinar raises serious concerns under international human rights and refugee protection frameworks, including:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- Convention Against Torture (CAT)
- Principle of non-refoulement under international refugee law
- International protections related to arbitrary detention and discrimination

Participants emphasized that forced return of at-risk Afghan individuals may expose them to serious human rights violations.

4. Policy Recommendations

4.1 To the Government of Pakistan

- Halt deportations of Afghan refugees and at-risk individuals
- Ensure protection from arbitrary detention and police harassment
- Respect the principle of non-refoulement
- Improve access to legal documentation and residency procedures

- Facilitate safe access to healthcare, housing, and basic services

4.2 To the United Nations and International Community

- Expand emergency relocation and humanitarian visa programs
- Accelerate processing of pending resettlement cases
- Establish dedicated protection pathways for high-risk groups
- Increase financial and humanitarian assistance for Afghan refugees in Pakistan
- Strengthen monitoring of protection violations and deportation risks
- Facilitate a high-level international delegation, including UN agencies and relevant human rights mechanisms, to engage with Pakistani authorities and assess the protection situation of Afghan refugees and vulnerable groups on the ground

4.3 Protection of Vulnerable Groups

International actors should establish targeted protection mechanisms for:

- Women protesters and women human rights defenders
- Journalists and media workers
- Former military personnel
- LGBTQ+ individuals
- Artists and cultural figures
- Civil society activists at immediate risk

Protection measures should include emergency shelter, legal aid, psychosocial support, and confidential case management.

4.4 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

- Expand trauma-informed mental health services for Afghan refugees
- Support community-based psychosocial programs
- Provide confidential counseling services in local languages
- Prioritize support for women activists and survivors of violence

4.5 Long-Term International Responsibility Sharing

Participants stressed that responsibility for protecting at-risk Afghans should not fall solely on neighboring countries.

The international community should:

- Increase refugee resettlement quotas
- Expand scholarship and humanitarian admission programs
- Strengthen international coordination on Afghan protection responses
- Ensure sustainable and dignified long-term solutions for displaced Afghans

5. Strategic Outlook

The situation facing Afghan refugees and activists in Pakistan reflects a broader regional protection crisis.

Without coordinated international engagement, vulnerable Afghan communities will continue to face growing insecurity, invisibility, and human rights risks.

The discussion emphasized that protection must move beyond symbolic statements toward practical, timely, and rights-based action.

6. Conclusion

The webinar “From Testimony to Action” highlighted the urgent realities faced by Afghan human rights defenders, women protesters, journalists, former military personnel, artists, and LGBTQ+ individuals living in Pakistan.

Participants made clear that many Afghan refugees are living in conditions defined by fear, uncertainty, and systemic vulnerability.

The international community must recognize that delayed action carries serious human consequences. Protecting vulnerable Afghans is not only a humanitarian obligation, but a responsibility grounded in international human rights principles and global solidarity.