Society for Human Rights & Prisoners' Aid

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SERVING HUMANITY | PROTECTING RIGHTS | BUILDING PEACE



SHARP-Pakistan continued encouraging staff and volunteer contributions to share their views and insights on humanitarian issues. This month, two articles are featured on pages 12 & 13.

Frontline Protection: Responding Amid Neglect and Crisis

In March 2026, Afghan refugees and migrant communities in Pakistan continued to face acute protection risks, further compounded by widespread neglect of their plight amid ongoing war and instability in West Asia. The continued implementation of the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan has intensified localized enforcement measures, including verification checks, sporadic arrests, and growing pressure on displaced individuals and communities.

Short-term detentions and movement restrictions increased in several areas, creating heightened fear and restricting access to livelihoods, education, healthcare, and essential services. Many community members limited their mobility to avoid potential checks, worsening economic vulnerability, especially as daily wage opportunities declined and inflationary pressures, along with rising rents, strained household finances. Informal evictions and landlord pressures persisted, particularly in urban and peri-urban settlements, leaving families struggling to meet basic needs despite improved seasonal conditions.

Women and children continued to face disproportionate risks. Female-headed households experienced barriers in accessing legal aid, protection services, and livelihoods, while social restrictions and limited mobility increased isolation and psychosocial stress for women and adolescent girls. Children, particularly those out of school or engaged in labor, remained vulnerable to exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and disruption of education. Psychological distress was widespread, fueled by fear of detention, legal uncertainty, and concerns over potential return to Afghanistan, where fragile conditions and limited reintegration support persist.

In response, SHARP sustained a rights-based, dignity-centered protection approach. Free legal aid, counselling, and case management were prioritized for individuals at risk of arrest, detention, eviction, or involuntary return, including legal support at police stations and enhanced documentation counselling. Individual counselling, and referrals for specialized MHPSS services were scaled up, particularly for women, children, survivors of gender-based violence, and highly vulnerable families.

Community engagement through awareness sessions, helplines, and coordination with local networks strengthened early risk identification, safe referral pathways, and access to accurate information on legal rights. Capacity-building for law enforcement promoted protection-sensitive practices, while advocacy with local authorities facilitated humane, coordinated, and rights-based approaches. At the institutional level, SHARP coordinated with government, humanitarian partners, and service providers to ensure access to justice in line with national and international human rights standards.

Despite ongoing uncertainty, SHARP remains steadfast in delivering protection services that uphold the dignity and rights of Afghan refugees and migrant communities, drawing attention to their overlooked plight amid regional instability.

WOMEN AT THE CENTER OF CHANGE:
SHARP'S NATIONWIDE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026 CELEBRATIONS



From Islamabad to Peshawar, SHARP's nationwide celebrations of International Women's Day 2026 served as a powerful reminder that empowering women is not just a goal—it is a continuous journey. Through dialogue, action, and partnership, SHARP remains committed to advancing gender equality, strengthening protection systems, and ensuring that women and girls are at the forefront of change.

The central celebration in Islamabad brought together women from law enforcement, the legal sector, and civil society on a dynamic platform for dialogue and recognition. Moderated by Project Director Mr. Aatif Afzal, the event highlighted the critical role of women in advancing justice and humanitarian systems. Chairman SHARP-Pakistan, Mr. Syed Liaqat Banori, emphasized that empowering women—particularly in law and justice—is key to building an inclusive society. A major highlight of the event was the announcement of the “SHARP-Women” initiative, aimed at strengthening gender-responsive justice systems and enhancing the leadership and professional capacities of female lawyers nationwide. Chief Guest Ms. Pari Gul Tareen, Superintendent of Police Headquarters, Islamabad, shared her inspiring journey and encouraged women to lead with confidence and resilience. The event concluded with a collective pledge to advance women's empowerment and equality.





Extending the spirit to Lahore, SHARP brought together a diverse group of women, including police officials, refugee women, lawyers, doctors, media professionals, and human rights activists. The session focused on legal awareness and empowering young women to recognize and exercise their rights. Interactive activities, including personal resolutions and reflections, created a meaningful space for participants to share aspirations and reinforce their commitment to growth and empowerment.





The celebrations culminated in Peshawar, where SHARP–IOM hosted a vibrant and engaging event bringing together representatives from civil society, government, and humanitarian organizations. In her remarks, Project Director Ms. Memoona Batool Khan highlighted SHARP's ongoing initiatives for women's empowerment and protection. The Chief Guest, Ms. Rukhshanda Naz, Legal Analyst and Peace Activist, delivered an insightful address on women's rights, challenges, and the need for a more inclusive and equitable society. The event featured interactive activities and a Q&A session, encouraging meaningful participation and dialogue among attendees.





In Karachi, SHARP organized community-focused sessions at the Aghakhani Refugee Community Centre, where women from refugee communities engaged in discussions on human rights awareness and digital empowerment, gaining knowledge and confidence to navigate today's interconnected world. The Protection Team also commemorated International Women's Day, highlighting women's contributions while raising awareness on women's rights and broader human rights protections.

Built on strong coordination, mutual trust, and consistent cooperation, SHARP and Ms. Philippa Candler, Country Representative UNHCR Pakistan, shared a deeply impactful partnership marked by shared commitment to protecting vulnerable communities across Pakistan.

Mr. Liaqat Banori, Chairman SHARP, and Mr. Mudassar Javed, CEO, met with Ms. Candler to bid her a heartfelt farewell as she concludes her tenure. The meeting reflected sincere appreciation for her exceptional leadership, close collaboration, and unwavering support throughout her time in Pakistan. SHARP leadership acknowledged her valuable guidance in strengthening humanitarian response systems and enhancing protection for vulnerable and destitute communities.

As she concludes this meaningful chapter, Ms. Candler leaves behind a legacy of partnership, trust, and impactful collaboration that will continue to guide future efforts. SHARP extends its warmest wishes for her continued success and future endeavors.







SHARP continues to strengthen partnerships advancing human rights and access to justice. In this regard, CEO SHARP Mr. Mudassar Javed met with Mr. Ehsan Mahsud, Registrar, Ministry of Law & Justice, to explore enhanced collaboration on key initiatives.

The meeting highlighted SHARP's EU-funded Access to Justice project and the German-supported Women Lawyers initiative, along with its legal aid and protection services for refugees, women, prisoners, migrants, and other vulnerable groups.

Both sides emphasized stronger synergy between civil society and government institutions to improve justice delivery and uphold fundamental rights in Pakistan.



SHARP CEO Mr. Mudassar Javed convened a high-level coordination meeting with the project management team, including PD-KP Ms. Memoona Batool, PD-ICT Mr. Aatif Afzal, Project Manager Ms. Huma Aziz, Team Lead Peshawar Mr. Shabir Shinwari, Manager Legal Mr. Manzoor Ahmed, AHRM Ms. Anila Kanwal, and Finance Manager Mr. Irfan Shujrah, to ensure uninterrupted service delivery amid the ongoing fuel crisis.

The meeting focused on strengthening operational efficiency through smart planning of field activities, prioritizing essential engagements, and strategic deployment of staff to maintain continuity of protection and legal assistance services. Emphasis was placed on adaptive planning and coordinated decision-making to minimize disruptions and ensure effective outreach to vulnerable communities.

Strengthening its presence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, SHARP CEO Mr. Mudassar Javed visited the newly established SHARP office in Peshawar to review progress of the EU-supported “Access to Justice” project and engage with the project team. The initiative aims to improve justice mechanisms for vulnerable populations, including prisoners, through engagement with prison authorities, judicial consultations, and targeted capacity-building to enhance institutional effectiveness and ensure fair and accessible justice systems.

During the visit, Mr. Mudassar met with Project Director KP Ms. Memoona Batool Khan, Legal Manager Mr. Manzoor Ali, and Project Manager Mr. Javed Safi to discuss key priorities and further strengthen SHARP's efforts toward promoting inclusive and effective justice systems in the province.





Advancing rights-based policing and institutional awareness, SHARP ALAC-1 team conducted a one-day training on Human Rights & Refugee Rights for police officials in Attock, engaging 26 participants (19 male, 7 female).

The session was opened by Project Director Mr. Aatif Afzal, who welcomed participants and highlighted the importance of police in safeguarding human rights and promoting ethical, people-centered policing. The training was moderated by Ms. Seemab, while Mr. Ahmad Ali Rana introduced SHARP's mandate and protection work. Ms. Ghazala Mirza (UNHCR Representative) delivered a session on refugee rights under UNHCR's mandate, followed by Mr. Taufiq Ahmed, Team Lead, who led an interactive session on human rights and their practical application in policing. Muhammad Rafiq, In-charge Police Lines Attock, attended as Chief Guest and appreciated SHARP's efforts in strengthening institutional capacity, emphasizing the value of such initiatives in promoting professional and humane policing. Certificates were awarded to participants, and a shield of appreciation was presented to the Chief Guest as a gesture of recognition.



Enhancing the role of legal professionals in protecting vulnerable communities, SHARP, in collaboration with IOM Pakistan, organized a one-day sensitization workshop for female lawyers from the Islamabad Bar Council. The session began with remarks by Project Director SHARP Mr. Aatif Afzal, who highlighted SHARP's nationwide presence, commitment to legal protection and empowerment, and the contributions of its 150+ female staff members.

Ms. Shandana, Senior Legal Protection Expert, delivered a session on human rights and protection laws, followed by Ms. Gul-e-Khuban, Protection Paralegal, who presented on international legal frameworks related to deportation, repatriation, and relocation. The workshop also included interactive discussions and experience sharing. Mr. Raja Muhammad Aleem Khan Abbasi, Member Islamabad Bar Council, attended as Chief Guest and appreciated SHARP's efforts in empowering women in the legal sector and strengthening access to justice. In recognition of contributions, Project Manager Ms. Huma Aziz presented a shield to the Chief Guest, while Mr. Aatif Afzal presented a souvenir to Ms. Irum Rasheed, Vice President of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association, acknowledging her efforts in mobilizing female lawyers.



Under its protection project in Attock, SHARP conducted two capacity-building workshops for police officials focused on human rights, migrants' rights, and ethical, people-centered policing. A total of 87 police officials participated in interactive sessions designed to enhance practical understanding and application of rights-based policing.

The workshops were opened by Project Director Mr. Aatif Afzal, who welcomed participants and highlighted SHARP's humanitarian mandate and its collaboration with law enforcement to promote justice, human dignity, and rights-based policing. Sessions were led by Mr. Aimal Khan and Ms. Soharwardia, Protection Lawyers, focusing on national and international human rights frameworks, ethical policing principles, and practical case-based learning. Mr. Khurram Shahzad (DSP Attock) and Police Line Officer Muhammad Rafique distributed certificates and appreciated SHARP's efforts in strengthening rights-focused policing. Shields of recognition were also presented in acknowledgment of their support. Facilitated by Mr. Inkisar and Ms. Irum Gul, the workshops reaffirmed the importance of collaboration between civil society and law enforcement in promoting justice and community-centered protection mechanisms.



Empowering women in the legal profession to advance human rights, SHARP organized a capacity-building training in Lahore under its protection project, engaging 22 female lawyers from the Lahore Bar Association. The session focused on strengthening understanding of national and international human rights frameworks and enhancing advocacy for vulnerable and marginalized communities.

The session was facilitated by Ms. Huma (Project Manager) and Mr. Zohrab Ahmed (Project Officer), who introduced SHARP's mandate and protection work. Mr. Azeem (Senior Protection and Legal Expert), Ms. Mahdia, and Mr. Usman (Protection Lawyers) delivered technical sessions on key human rights principles, legal instruments, and their practical application in national and international contexts. Mr. Irfan Hayat Bajwa, President, Lahore Bar Association, attended as Chief Guest and appreciated the initiative aimed at strengthening the capacity of female lawyers. Mr. Usman Ghani, Director Legal, Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR), also joined the session and highlighted the importance of legal awareness and capacity building in addressing human rights challenges. The training concluded with interactive discussions, where participants acknowledged the value of strengthening their legal knowledge to support access to justice.





In Attock, SHARP's Protection and Legal Teams strengthened human rights promotion through strategic engagement with district administration. In a constructive meeting with Additional Deputy Commissioner General Attock, Mr. Aneel Saeed, the team discussed enhanced coordination for advancing human rights. He appreciated SHARP's commitment to protecting dignity and supporting vulnerable and displaced communities, while the team acknowledged his supportive approach and presented a souvenir as a token of appreciation.

In a related engagement, the Legal Team also met with Assistant Commissioner Attock, Mr. Muhammad Arif Qureshi, to further strengthen collaboration and reaffirm a shared commitment to promoting human rights and access to justice.







SHARP carried out a series of Community-Based Committee (CBC) formation and engagement activities in Lahore, Chakwal, Attock, and Karachi under its ongoing protection initiatives, aiming to strengthen community participation, protection awareness, and access to legal support.

In Lahore, two CBC meetings under the LAP project engaged male and female participants separately, focusing on protection concerns, rights awareness, community responsibilities, and collective action. In addition, another community engagement session brought together 54 participants (26 male, 28 female) to initiate the formation of a CBC, enhancing community representation and communication.

In Chakwal, the mobilization team conducted CBC formation meetings with displaced Afghan nationals to strengthen community coordination and increase awareness of SHARP's free legal aid services.





In Attock and Karachi, SHARP strengthened community-based protection through targeted engagement with Community Outreach Volunteers (COVs). In Attock, two CBC formation sessions under the Protection Project introduced participants to SHARP's mandate and the role of COVs under IFRP-III, with discussions focusing on community vulnerabilities, referral mechanisms, and access to support and legal aid services. Complementing this, in Karachi, a coordination meeting with female COVs was conducted under the UN-IOM supported project to further enhance their role and responsiveness in the evolving protection context.



SHARP continued its protection interventions in Attock, Lahore, and Sialkot through a series of Legal Camps and community engagement activities aimed at strengthening legal awareness, access to justice, and support for vulnerable populations, including displaced communities.

In Attock, four legal camps were organized under the Legal Aid Project (LAP), engaging participants on issues related to legal rights, protection concerns, and documentation challenges. The sessions provided a safe and supportive platform where individuals could openly share their concerns and receive practical legal guidance.

In Lahore, legal camps focused on documentation needs, protection issues, and referral mechanisms, ensuring targeted support to both men and women through structured legal counselling and awareness sessions.

In Sialkot, a legal camp provided legal awareness, counselling, and guidance on rights, documentation, and available legal remedies, helping participants better understand available protection pathways.

TOGETHER FOR NOWRUZ & EID:
CELEBRATING CULTURE; HEALING THE COMMUNITY



SHARP-Afghanistan brought the spirit of Nowruz and Eid to life through two vibrant and heartwarming celebrations, filled with colours, traditional cuisine, shared laughter, and meaningful social connections—each moment contributing to collective healing and renewed hope.

Organized under the AMNA-supported Healing Oasis of Peace and Empathy (HOPE) initiative, these gatherings created safe, inclusive spaces where women and children—particularly returnees, internally displaced families –could reconnect with their cultural identity while gently navigating their healing journeys. Our Psychosocial Counsellors facilitated these sessions with care, ensuring that each interaction nurtured trust, expression, and emotional well-being.

Rooted in SHARP's commitment to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), the celebrations went beyond festivity. Through interactive activities, storytelling, and cultural exchange, participants were facilitated to share their experiences, build peer support networks, and rediscover resilience within a community setting. These moments of togetherness are especially vital for women and girls facing increasing restrictions, as well as for families grappling with the layered trauma of displacement and reintegration.

Aligned with the HOPE initiative's vision of cultivating community-led healing ecosystems, both events reinforced the importance of culturally grounded, gender-responsive approaches to psychosocial care. They not only promoted well-being and inclusion but also strengthen social bonds, restored a sense of belonging, and improved dignity among participants.

By celebrating heritage and spirituality with enthusiasm and joy, participants transformed these occasions into powerful expressions of resilience—making the Nowruz and Eid festivities not only vibrant and memorable, but also deeply healing.

DISMANTLING THE NETWORK, ADDRESSING THE ROOT:

Pakistan's Evolving Fight Against Human Trafficking



Muhammad Hamza
Protection Community Mobilizer- Sialkot
SHARP-Pakistan

Pakistan is at a crossroads in handling irregular migration and human trafficking. High-profile Mediterranean boat disasters have claimed hundreds of Pakistani lives, exposing ruthless smuggling networks. The government has responded with legislative reforms and aggressive crackdowns, but we must also address the socio-economic pressures that make traffickers' promises so tempting.

The state's resolve is clear. In February 2025, the Senate unanimously passed amendments to anti-trafficking laws. Human smugglers now face up to 10 years in prison and fines up to 10 million rupees. The Federal Investigation Agency has also stepped up operations, arresting over 400 smugglers and freezing their assets.

Yet legislation and arrests alone are not enough. The deeper cause is a jobs crisis. World Bank President Ajay Banga recently warned Pakistan must create 30 million jobs over the next decade or face a surge in illegal migration. Already, nearly 4,000 doctors left in 2025 alone, showing how even skilled professionals are pushed abroad.

For over 25 years, SHARP-Pakistan has been working on the ground to combat human trafficking. SHARP provides free legal aid to victims and their families, helping them navigate the justice system. Through awareness sessions in cities like Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Attock, Mianwali, Lahore, Sialkot, Karachi and KP region. SHARP educates vulnerable communities about the dangers of trafficking and how to spot fake job offers. SHARP also trains police officials, prosecutors, and lawyers on human rights and migrant protection, strengthening the justice system from within.

A positive step in the new legal framework is its victim-centered approach. Trafficking victims will not be held criminally liable for offenses committed as a result of force or coercion by their traffickers. This is a welcome change, but it must be backed by strong enforcement.

Safe and legal migration channels also need strengthening. Despite formal labor agreements with countries like Japan, Pakistan's market penetration remains low due to language barriers and skills gaps.

To truly turn the tide, Pakistan must pursue a dual-track strategy. First, ensure swift prosecution of traffickers and dismantle transnational networks. Second, address the root causes by investing in job creation, skills training, and economic empowerment. The fight against human trafficking will not be won in courts or at borders alone, but in building a Pakistan where its citizens no longer feel forced to risk their lives for a better future.

Disclaimer: The content reflects the personal views of the author and does not necessarily represent SHARP-Pakistan's official position.

HONOUR THAT SILENCES

Ahmad Shuja Gondal
Volunteer
SHARP-Pakistan

For many women, silence is not a choice but a form of survival. Across Pakistan, many female victims of abuse remain silent instead of reporting the abuse they have suffered. This silence is driven by social pressure, cultural expectations, and a lack of trust in the systems meant to protect victims. Pakistan is widely considered a patriarchal society, where men often hold greater power in politics, religion, and social life. Laws do exist to safeguard women's rights; however, many activists argue that these laws are not consistently enforced, as enforcers themselves have, on many occasions, been responsible for abuse against women.

"Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always,"-Khaled Hosseini (A Thousand Splendid Suns)

The idea of a “good girl” is frequently associated with being quiet and tolerant, even in the face of hardship. Those who speak openly about abuse are criticised and openly have their character blamed for the injustice they suffer; societal expectations reinforce silence, as women are expected to dress modestly, remain obedient, and prioritise their families above all else. If they dare to speak up, they are labelled honourless, and rather than the abuser being held accountable, the fault is passed onto the woman. “What was she wearing?” “Why was she there?” The concept of family honour, commonly referred to as “izzat,” is a leading factor in silence, as a woman's actions are closely tied to the family's reputation. In rural areas, especially, women fear for their lives when speaking out, not from society judging them, but rather that they might be a victim of honour killings if they speak up, because “Who would marry a ruined woman?”

Victims may therefore feel pressured by relatives to stay silent to avoid bringing perceived shame upon their families. The question is: The reality remains that abuse is treated as a stain on a woman's honour, never a man's. Does the man have any honour to stain? Concerns about the justice system also discourage victims from coming forward. Some women fear they will not be taken seriously by authorities, while others worry they may be blamed for the abuse itself.

Experts highlight that support services, such as shelters and rehabilitation centres, remain limited, leaving victims with few safe options if they choose to report. Additionally, at times, media coverage gives more attention to the victim's identity or personal life than to the crime itself. Our women simply aren't supported. They are thrown into a pit and forced to rely on someone to save them. But how are they expected to scream for help when they've been taught to whisper all their lives? How can they claw themselves out when they've never been taught to climb? Certain groups face even greater vulnerability.

Refugee women and girls, for example, are often at higher risk of exploitation and gender-based violence, including forced or underage marriages. Cultural barriers, unemployment, and strict family control can further limit their ability to seek protection or justice. Despite these challenges, change is slowly underway. The humanitarian sector continues to promote women's empowerment and awareness, although they often face operational restrictions, they have created a base for improvement. At the same time, younger generations are becoming increasingly aware of issues such as gender equality and women's rights. Growing discussions in media and education are beginning to challenge long-standing taboos; however, real change will depend not just on awareness, but on whether institutions are willing to act and whether society is ready to listen. How much longer will our women consider silence as survival? When will they stand up to their abusers and hold them accountable for their actions? You cannot improve something without first acknowledging and admitting the fault. Pakistan has gone on long enough without admitting its injustices against its women. It's time for a change.

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