



THE MERGER AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Human Rights in the Newly Merged Districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

An HRCP fact-finding report

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Introduction

Since its last mission to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2019, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has constantly drawn attention to delays in integrating the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with the rest of the province, following the 25th constitutional amendment in 2018. These delays have had serious implications for residents of the Newly Merged Districts (NMDs), affecting their right to security and property, education and healthcare, water and electricity, and access to justice. Additionally, HRCP has observed with considerable alarm the resurgence of militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, compounded by reports of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

Given this context, HRCP carried out a high-profile fact-finding mission to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from 13 to 18 March 2023, visiting the districts of Bannu, Peshawar, Khyber and Swat. Led by HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani, the team comprised regional vice-chair Akbar Khan, HRCP members Ijaz Khan and Jamila Gilani, and staff members Shahid Mehmood and Marrium Rauf.

The mission aimed to assess the state of human rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, focusing on:

- The progress of the merger between former FATA, the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) and the mainstream provincial framework, which includes extending governance, legal, judicial and political structures to the NMD, protecting residents' fundamental rights and ensuring their access to basic needs and social security in accordance with constitutional guarantees.¹
- The state of law and order, following the recent resurgence of militancy in the region and spillover effects in settled districts, particularly Swat.
- The incidence of enforced disappearances and the continued use of internment centres.
- The state of freedom of expression, particularly press freedom.
- The repatriation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom were displaced as a result of internal conflict, militancy and military operations in the NMD region.
- Residents' access to health, education and other infrastructure and facilities
- The situation of women and other vulnerable groups.

The mission held consultations with a range of civil society groups, including journalists, lawyers, and political and social activists as well as with government officials. The team also held meetings with the commissioner for Bannu Division, the regional police officer (RPO)

for Bannu,² the deputy inspector general (DIG) of police in Swat, the home secretary, the inspector general of police (IGP) for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the province's governor. Additionally, the team visited an IDP camp in Baka Khel (a tehsil of North Waziristan bordering Afghanistan) but were not allowed to enter; mission members then held informal conversations with residents of the camp outside its perimeters. Finally, the team met several families of victims of enforced disappearances.

2 Syed Ashfaq Anwer was the RPO overseeing the districts of Bannu, Lakki Marwat and North Waziristan at the time of the mission; he was transferred on 13 May 2023.

Development resources for the NMDs amid widespread concerns of mismanagement

Although the federal government has—under the 25th Amendment—committed to allocating 3 percent of the federal divisible pool under the National Finance Commission Award for the uplift and rapid infrastructural development of the NMDs, the mission feels that the government has failed to fulfil this commitment. The provision of this quota has also been contested by the larger provinces.

Claims that the development funds intended for the NMDs had not been issued were not uncommon, compounded by the widespread belief among respondents that the funds that were given were either mismanaged or diverted to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's settled districts. Residents of Khyber shared their dismay with the mission and said that, despite news reports and politicians' claims concerning funds approved for development schemes in the NMDs, they had yet to see such schemes materialize. For example, a village councillor in the area said that she had learnt of large funds made available for various development projects for Khyber during a seminar in Islamabad hosted by the Malala Fund. However, she had not seen any such projects being implemented.

According to a Peshawar-based journalist, the funds allotted for the NMDs' development have not been released by the federal government, even though the same party was in power at the federal as well as provincial level. Whatever funds were issued had been used in accordance with the priorities of the establishment, the journalist alleged, adding that not more than 10 percent of the issued funds had reached the local administration for development works.

Specifically, he claimed that PKR 99 billion was allocated to the NMDs for the financial year 2022/23, of which only PKR 26 billion had been released and PKR 10 billion spent. With the third quarter of the year having passed, the remaining unused funds would be recalled by the Finance Department, depriving citizens of their benefit. He also said that there were serious departmental hurdles in utilising these funds. For example, a senior army officer was required to sign off on even small expenditures, leading to serious delays. Such interference extended to the youth development and auqaf department budgets as well.

The journalist in question recounted how a directorate of transition and reforms was initially conceived to oversee the implementation and progress of the ten-year merger plan envisaged by the 2016 FATA Reforms Committee headed by former finance minister Sartaj Aziz. With the change in government in 2018, however, the plans and roadmap devised by the previous government were scrapped, derailing the implementation plan. In its first three months, the new PTI government created three new distinct committees for the NMDs—one led by the chief minister, one by the governor and one by the prime minister. The scope of their respective mandates remained unclear and, during the tenure of the PTI government, none of these committees reportedly held any consultations with the public or other stakeholders.

With respect to development work, the journalist said that the annual development

programme was replaced by accelerated implementation programmes for the NMDs, which have different oversight, accountability and transparency or audit systems. These allegedly depend on discretionary requests and proposals made collectively by the district administration, along with senior military officers in the district and representatives of the department concerned. Frequently, people inducted in this way were regularised by seeking approval from the provincial assembly or through notifications issued by the relevant government authority.

Another respondent said that 'billions of rupees' had apparently been issued to the Public Works Department for development works in Mohmand, Bajaur and Khyber, but none of these works had been implemented.³ He also said that the National Accountability Bureau was currently enquiring into the alleged mismanagement of such development funds. A further allegation was that residents of Swat and Dir had been hired against the employment quota for Khyber because the chief minister at the time was from the Malakand division (which includes Swat and Dir). The governor told the mission that barely any of the development funds allocated to the NMDs had been released: most of what had been released had been spent in settled areas.

Law and order: Resurgence of terrorism and target killings

The mission observed strong negative sentiments towards the government and state institutions across communities, ranging from distrust and disappointment to resentment – and connected primarily to the state’s failure to protect people’s right to life and security. Speaking of his experience of living in the region, a young activist in Swat, who had lost three family members in a terrorist attack, remarked, ‘Our minds are numb from the trauma and the unending struggle we’re facing... we’re young in body, but we feel like we’re 50 years old.’

The commissioner of the Bannu division⁴ informed the mission that, of the seven divisions, the situation in Bannu was undoubtedly the worst, with its constituent district of North Waziristan remaining a hotspot for militant attacks (distinct from general crime), including suicide attacks and other attacks against law enforcement personnel. He claimed that North Waziristan was the province’s worst affected district: according to his information, there had been 28 militant attacks in the district of Bannu in 2022 and 33 in district Lakki Marwat, but even more in North Waziristan. He also explained that it was often difficult for law enforcement agencies to determine whether an incident was one of general crime or militancy.

When asked about the resurgence in militancy, the home secretary alleged that, following the US exit from Afghanistan, many Taliban militants had come to Pakistan and revived their sleeper cells. He claimed that many NMDs had been completely cleared of militants and that the government had resumed tourism in areas such as Kurram. After the resurgence of terrorism in mid-2022, the state had cleared Swat of militants’ presence, while some areas, such as Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Bannu and Lakki Marwat, remained problematic. His view was that the instability could be attributed to groups that opposed the merger of the NMDs with the province, adding that such incidents peaked in 2022, but had now been resolved.

The home secretary explained the government’s counter-terrorism strategies to the mission, stating that a new tech-based system had been set up at the Home Department that integrated data-sharing between federal and provincial law enforcement agencies, and with other organisations such as the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). According to him, the state apparatus was working in a ‘coordinated and unified manner’ towards counter-terrorism.

Other respondents did not share this view. A Peshawar-based journalist said that the security situation in the NMDs, especially Waziristan, had become destabilised once again in the last two or three years; he cited a recent alleged ‘drone attack’ in Waziristan that had killed two small children. Various sources, including journalists, lawyers, and members of civil society, reported a rise in target killings in the region, especially in North Waziristan.

A resident of North Waziristan refuted the authorities’ claims and said that target killings had resumed in the NMDs since February 2018. According to him, such incidents had become increasingly shocking. He also said that attacks on security forces and the police occurred

more frequently but remained underreported. The sense of insecurity in the region had also affected economic activity and discouraged investment, even with the return of IDPs. Those who could afford to, chose to settle in Peshawar permanently rather than return to their homes, he said.

The RPO for Bannu told the mission candidly that there had been a resurgence in militancy in the NMDs since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. Speaking of recent attacks against police officials and establishments, he said, 'We are in a pitched battle right now because they [militants] are targeting the police,' adding that, at one point, the police had come under attack every night in this region. However, the government was trying to strengthen the police, especially the Counter-Terrorism Department, by providing them with technological resources; such measures had helped prevent attacks.

Almost all the government officials whom the mission interviewed felt there had been a shift in the state's policy towards the Taliban, whereby there was now zero tolerance and sympathy for them. The mission was also informed that all government agencies were working together to eradicate militants from the country. According to local journalists, there were almost no civilian casualties during recent military operations against militants; such operations had become more targeted, they said.

This perspective did not match what various civil society groups had to say – that multiple militant groups continued to operate in Bannu (even in the city's residential areas) and that, despite the fact that the police were aware of this, they tended to look the other way. Indeed, most such respondents expressed deep distrust and confusion over the government's approach towards militants, believing that the latter still enjoyed state patronage as a result of vested interests.

The mission also learnt that two protests in 2021, spurred by incidents of civilians killed



Meeting with civil society representatives in Swat

by the TTP, had faced police crackdowns. The protests had ended after an agreement was reached between the protestors and the government, which included demands such as an investigation into the killings and proceedings against the police officers under whose jurisdiction the incidents had occurred.

The killing of seven young men in the town of Jani Khel outside Bannu in March 2021 was commonly cited as having alienated local residents from the state. Bannu residents held a sit-in after the Jani Khel incident to demand swift accountability and justice, and alleged that certain militant groups involved in killing human rights defenders were being treated mildly by the law enforcement authorities.

The mission also received disturbing reports of an increase in extortion by militants. Allegedly, even the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister and his brother had paid money to militants in exchange for protection, while a group of provincial assembly members had met the chief minister to raise this issue as they too were receiving demands for extortion.⁵ According to the home secretary, one of the challenges in tackling extortion was that victims under duress were compelled to comply with militants' demands and the crime would go unreported. Police officials said that there was now a specialised police unit working on curbing terror financing.

While public mistrust of the state's attitude towards militants persists, the mission was pleased to receive reports from diverse groups that, in the wake of this resurgence, local residents—and especially youth—had mobilised politically to demonstrate resistance and hold the state accountable for taking concrete action to protect their rights and fight militancy. This grassroots movement, termed by some as *ulasi pasoon* or the 'people's rising', was initiated in Swat and had swept across the province in 2022/23. These protests are a clear indication that, unlike before, there remains little to no sympathy for militants among the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. At the same time, it sends a strong message to the government to stop tolerating militancy and perpetuating the narrative of 'good' Taliban versus 'bad' Taliban.

5 Reported by a journalist in Peshawar, who claimed that a provincial assembly member from Swat, Sardar Khan, had told the chief minister that the militants in question were no longer asking for one-off payments, but now demanding monthly payments. He had lodged an FIR with the police.

Enforced disappearances

The HRCP fact-finding mission met a number of families in Bannu, whose relatives had allegedly been disappeared forcibly as recently as 2022; some cases went as far back as 2009. According to a journalist in Peshawar, this practice reportedly continues in North Waziristan and Khyber. While enforced disappearances were not reported in Swat, the legal community there said that the threat of disappearances still loomed large in people's minds.

When asked to comment on the incidence of enforced disappearances, the RPO for Bannu claimed the police did not have any missing persons in their custody. According to him, the police operated strictly by the book and did not resort to such violent tactics. He said there was a standing order for the police to lodge an FIR in every such case. Protocol dictated that a joint investigative team comprising members of different security agencies be set up, he added, who could work together to present a report to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED).



Mission meeting with families of victims of enforced disappearances in Bannu

Lawyers in Peshawar felt that there had been very little progress in cases relating to enforced disappearances since 2020, when Justice Waqar Seth, then chief justice of the Peshawar High Court, had passed away. Respondents also pointed out that the official disposal rate of such cases was misleading: they claimed that most cases were marked as having been 'disposed of' even if the investigation report submitted to the court stated that the location of the victim was unknown. The high rate of disposal in these cases did not therefore reflect the recovery of missing persons. This practice had also led to disillusionment among families who hoped their missing relatives might be recovered while the case was pending in court (see also Box 1).

Box 1: Troubling numbers

According to data from the COIED, 3,465 people have been forcibly disappeared in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since 2011, of which 1,327 have still not been accounted for, as of September 2023. Of these, 827 have been traced to internment centres – more than in any other province, while in 77 cases, the victims’ bodies were found. HRCP had continually held that these figures are likely an underestimate, given that they only account for people whose families are willing to report such cases despite fears of reprisal by security agencies.

Another lawyer in Swat admitted to having recently seen a deleted cause list that contained almost all current cases of enforced disappearances in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, implying that judges were either reluctant to hear such cases or avoided handing down decisions, thereby prolonging such cases. Even lawyers themselves discouraged families from taking legal recourse because of the risks involved, he said, while families continued to fear reprisals and other negative consequences.

Perhaps most alarming was the case of political worker Gul Bahadur, whom the mission met in Bannu. His son Salman Bahadur went missing in 2016. After two years, he was discovered to have died in custody at an internment centre. Salman was nominated in an FIR, along with 19 other people, for his alleged involvement in a bomb blast that took place on 11 November 2014. The FIR was filed by one Lieutenant Faisal.

According to Gul Bahadur, Salman was initially detained in an internment centre in Lakki Marwat where the family was allowed to visit him every two or three months. The family noticed that Salman was always accompanied by people and was not allowed to meet his family alone. In 2019, he was taken to an internment centre in Kohat via helicopter. The family visited him there as well, but ten days after one of their visits, Gul Bahadur received a call from Kohat Jail, telling him that Salman had died and the family should retrieve the body. The case that had ensued from the aforementioned FIR had been stayed by the Supreme Court at the time of Salman’s death.⁶

Operation of internment centres

As the case of Salman Bahadur above shows, linked to the problem of enforced disappearances is the continued and troubling operation of internment centres in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which exist in violation of most legal and human rights standards. The current legal status of internment centres is unclear and controversial. According to some lawyers, the state continues to benefit from this legal ambiguity (see Box 2).

Box 2: The legal ambiguity surrounding internment centres

After the NMDs were merged with the rest of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the existence of internment centres drew their validity from the Actions in Aid of Civil Power Ordinance 2019 issued by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor in August of that year.⁷ On 17 October 2019, a division bench of the Peshawar High Court declared the ordinance null and void for violating the Constitution and the internment centres set up under it as illegal and unconstitutional. The court directed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa home secretary to notify all internment centres as sub-jails and ruled that cases involving interned people should be transferred to ordinary courts.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government immediately challenged the order in the Supreme Court, which, on 25 October 2019, suspended the 17 October order of the Peshawar High Court until the apex court had reached a final decision. It is worth noting that if the ordinance had not been challenged before a court, it would have been repealed automatically by the end of 2019. The matter is still pending before the Supreme Court, which last heard the case on 4 December 2019 under a bench led by the then chief justice, Asif Saeed Khosa.⁸

In the last four years, two chief justices have come and gone, but not a single hearing of the case has been conducted. Meanwhile, owing to the suspension order of the Supreme Court, the status and validity of the 2019 ordinance remains ambiguous and internment centres continue to operate under it. Meanwhile, four members of civil society – former senators Farhatullah Babar and Afrasiab Khattak and civil society activists Rubina Saigol and Bushra Gohar – have impleaded in this case and repeatedly requested the apex court for an early hearing but to no avail.

The legal community in Swat reported that one internment centre continued to operate near the district. The home secretary claimed that every inmate in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's internment centres was accounted for and that a record was available with law enforcement agencies and associated authorities. Expressing his scepticism regarding the authenticity of every reported case of enforced disappearance, he assured the mission that the issue

was being pursued actively by the government. He also claimed that the department had dedicated officers that looked into cases of missing persons.⁹

On speaking to the commissioner in Bannu, the mission was told that he heads a committee that oversees the internment centre in that division; he assured HRCP that conditions at



Mission members meeting Home Secretary Khushal Khan at the Peshawar Secretariat.

the centre were 'decent'. The committee assigns two days of the week for families to meet inmates and notifies the COIED and Home Department of every inmate who is detained at this interment centre.

⁹ At the Home Department, the HRCP team was introduced to Qayyum Siddique who works as the deputy secretary for judicial matters and oversees cases of enforced disappearances.

The situation of women's rights

Property rights

According to local journalists in Bannu, not a single woman has been named in any NMD's land settlement record, which means either that women are completely deprived of their right to property—mostly accruing to them as inheritance—or that their entitlement is not documented on the pretext of 'honour'. The women to whom the mission spoke in Waziristan also acknowledged that they were denied any share in their inheritance. However, a positive development that emerged was that these women have gone to court as litigants, asserting their right to inheritance. The legal community in Swat pointed out, however, that the implementation of women's right to inheritance remained weak, with little compliance with the legally prescribed timeframe for deciding such cases.

In this context, an important achievement towards ensuring women's access to justice has been the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act 2019. This allows for quicker trials and dispensation of cases related to women's right to own property, with the assistance of the ombudsperson during the trial. Given the missteps that occur in regular judicial proceedings, the presence of the ombudsperson is a step in the right direction for upholding women's rights in the province.

Women as litigants and lawyers

Women lawyers in Peshawar shared an encouraging development, saying that more and more women from the NMDs were resorting to the courts to enforce their right to maintenance, child custody and even property ownership. They also said that it had become more common for female litigants to receive support from male family members when pursuing legal battles. However, the presence of women lawyers in bar councils or associations in the NMDs remains sparse: the mission was told that there was only one women member of the bar association in Mohmand, two or three in Khyber and none in Bajaur. Respondents in Peshawar pointed out that bar rooms were not equipped to facilitate women lawyers or litigants, with no separate toilets or consultation rooms. According to one respondent, the biggest hurdle that women faced in this regard was a lack of funds. Respondents welcomed the suggestion that bar councils, particularly the Pakistan Bar Council, should be requested to arrange funds to provide basic facilities for women in the courts and bar rooms in the NMDs.

The mission was, however, encouraged to see a far stronger women's presence in Swat's legal community, with women lawyers contesting district bar elections and a woman lawyer serving as the additional advocate general. Lawyers also reported an increase in the number of women judges in the district courts—a phenomenon that appears to be gaining acceptance in society. However, the district bar association in Swat did not have a committee for protection against workplace harassment.

Women's shelters

Another concern highlighted by lawyers in Peshawar was the absence of *dar-ul-amans* (government-run women's shelters) in the NMDs, particularly in North Waziristan and South Waziristan, which would have catered to the adjoining districts. At present, female survivors of abuse or violence are forced to travel all the way to Peshawar to obtain access to a shelter; the time, financial cost and logistics this incurs often deters women from leaving abusive environments.

The mission also spoke to Nusrat Iqbal, who oversees the women's shelter in Swat, which currently houses 50 women. The welcome establishment of women's shelters in Chitral and Dir in 2021 has relieved the burden on the shelter in Swat, which, as Ms Iqbal explained, had hosted approximately 130 women prior to the establishment of shelters in Chitral and Dir.¹⁰ She suggested that there should be at least one women's shelter for every one or two districts in the province.

The mission learnt that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa did not have a law regulating *dar-ul-amans* and there was currently no monitoring or oversight mechanism for existing shelters. Although a writ petition calling for legislation in this regard had been filed, according to a lawyer in Swat, no progress had been made in the matter in the last year.

Women's access to healthcare, education and public spaces

Multiple groups in Bannu underscored the need for more female doctors, particularly in departments other than antenatal healthcare, given that the local population was not comfortable with male doctors tending to female patients. Similarly, there were reservations towards male staff working in girls' schools. According to members of civil society in Bannu, there was a pressing need for more facilities for women catering to their social rights, such as parks and open spaces. The mission was pleased to learn that the Aurat March in Bannu in 2023 had drawn a larger crowd than the year before.

Women in local government

While most respondents lauded the inclusion of women in local government, a few were sceptical, claiming that the progress was merely cosmetic and that women were not given any real decision-making power. Several respondents in Swat also mentioned that progress in terms of women's rights was limited to urban households from higher socioeconomic classes, whereas the needs of rural women needed greater attention.

Violence against women

The mission noted that human rights violations rooted in traditional notions of 'honour' continued to have a stronghold in Swat's society, affecting both women and men. While many men in Swat are still not allowed to marry partners of their own choosing and cannot express their opinions in such matters, the situation is far worse for women. The reported incidence of honour killings is disproportionately concentrated in Swat compared to the

10 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1612537>; <https://pakobserver.net/Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa-govt-to-establish-first-ever-darul-aman-in-lower-dir/>

rest of the province. According to local respondents, the number of honour killings was underreported and, in some cases, disguised as suicide. Forced marriage and underage marriage was also reportedly common. The legal community in Swat also pointed out that the district protection committee envisaged under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence Against Women (Prevention and Protection) Act 2021 had still not been constituted.

Access to education, healthcare and other amenities

Respondents in Khyber district expressed a strong desire for better access to education, including for girls. According to the principal of the local government college for girls as well as a councillor, the female literacy rate in the district was extremely low: even girls who had attended school for years could barely write their name.

Other respondents pointed out that, while the infrastructure for schools and colleges had been built in recent years, the premises still lacked facilities such as water and electricity. The principal of the local government college for girls told the mission that this lack of facilities was also responsible for demotivating children enrolled in school, leading many to drop out.

Teacher and staff absenteeism was reported as a common problem, compounded by a serious lack of accountability on the part of the authorities. The mission observed that the education system in Khyber district suffered greatly from the lack of teachers, especially female teachers. The principal of the local government college for girls reported, for example, that there was only one science teacher in the local higher secondary school. The long and expensive daily commute for teachers based outside the district (for example, in Charsadda or Nowshera) also discouraged many of them from continuing to work.



Mission members meeting Home Secretary Khushal Khan at the Peshawar Secretariat.

Reportedly, a government degree college for girls in the Landi Kotal subdivision was approved in September 2022. However, there is only one higher secondary school for girls in Landi Kotal, which is also not accessible for all children. A political activist from Khyber also reported that the polytechnic institute of Kam Shalman in Landi Kotal, which was established two decades ago, is still dysfunctional.¹¹

11 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/417775-dysfunctional-college-in-khyber-to-be-made-functional>. This advertisement from 2020 suggests that it was still not fully functional at this time: <https://internships.KhyberPakhtunkhwa.gov.pk/view-internship/60>.

Local residents in Khyber reported having had high expectations of the ten-year merger plan in terms of economic development and provision of healthcare and education in the NMDs. However, the lack of implementation in this context drew sharp criticism. The mission learnt that, in the past five years, the annual development plan for the province had included the construction of three primary schools for girls in Landi Kotal at a total estimated cost of PKR 20 million for each school. However, so far only PKR 1 million had been released in each case. At this pace, the date of completion for this project seemed uncertain, especially given the rising inflation rate, respondents said.

Civil society members in Swat expressed deep dissatisfaction with the provision of education and health facilities in the district. The mission learnt that all schools and colleges in the district had now been vacated by the armed forces, except in Pithom.¹² However, according to a political activist, formerly of the ANP and now with the PML-N, there had been no recent investment by the state on education and healthcare, and the government tended to spend the funds allocated to these areas on serving legislators' personal agendas. Respondents also voiced strong concern over the large debts that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had incurred, seemingly without any benefits accruing to ordinary citizens, from the surplus budgets obtained by the provincial government to facilitate the merger of the NMDs with the rest of the province.

According to the Bannu commissioner, a critical problem for residents of the NMDs was the provision of electricity. Prior to 2018, the entire tribal belt received free electricity from the federal government and there were no meters. However, due to lack of funds and restrictions on subsidies imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the government can no longer provide free electricity or set up the infrastructure necessary to provide electricity. Consequently, the commissioner said, the entire division received electricity for only one to four hours per day.

Rights of vulnerable groups and access to citizenship

The mission was concerned to learn that the committee set up under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Human Rights Act was largely ineffective: it had not received any resources and still lacked rules of business under which to carry out its functions. A mechanism for complaints resolution was also still lacking. Moreover, while special courts under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act 2010 were created in 2019, a local human rights lawyer pointed out that the recent amendment to the Pakistan Penal Code pertaining to the offences of rape and sodomy, had made the act redundant to a certain extent and could lead to legal ambiguities. These concerns have clear implications for the rights of vulnerable groups and communities, including women and children, and their access to justice.

The legal community in Swat reported that quotas for persons with disabilities were not being implemented. A local from Khyber who runs an association for the rights of persons with disabilities reiterated this concern, adding that their rights and needs were not incorporated into policy and development. He demanded better access to healthcare and education facilities for persons with disabilities, along with special consideration for those living at the Torkham border.

Another concern raised by residents of Khyber was the distance that people have to travel to have national identity cards made, without which it is difficult to access public services. One resident, for example, said he had had to travel 40 kilometres to obtain a national identity card and the whole endeavour had cost him around PKR 10,000.

Policing and police reforms

Most of the police and civil administration officers interviewed claimed that significant progress had been made in building the capacity and resources of the provincial police force as well as towards integrating the former levies and *khasadar* forces with the regular police force. Recruitment to the police was carried out on merit through the Education Testing Agency.

The RPO for Bannu informed the mission that a special training school had been established for the levies and *khasadar* forces in Khyber, with training materials developed in Pashto. He pointed out that the *khasadars* were previously a tribal force and thus trained to work in a very different context: while they fared well in weapons-use training, they lacked training in practical police work, including an understanding of legal issues and documentation and procedural protocols. He said that the first batch of students had completed their basic training, yielding positive results. Additionally, the best among them had also been sent to train with the Elite Police Training Centre in Nowshera.

The RPO admitted that there were not enough police stations in the Bannu division and they were too far from one another. However, he explained that the location of police stations was determined by factors such as population, incidence of crime, law-and-order situation and economic activity. He counted nine police stations in North Waziristan, three in Bannu and three in Lakki Marwat.



Mission members Hina Jilani and Akbar Khan meeting the DIG for the Bannu Division

Another positive development reported by the DIG for police concerned initiatives to facilitate women's recruitment in the force. He said that 285 women officers had been hired so far during the ongoing recruitment drive, which was a significant improvement from the previous drive, under which only 25 women officers were recruited.

According to the home secretary, a development scheme worth PKR19.7 billion was planned for the next three years to strengthen the police. This would also include welfare packages and fortification enhancements such as arms and bomb-proof cars. The DIG for Swat reported that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa now had a small forensics laboratory, but it was still not at par with laboratories in Punjab. Thus, DNA samples from crime scenes were sent to Punjab for analysis, which delayed investigations and criminal trials.

The police officials to whom the mission spoke said that, in addition to capacity building, the government had also invested resources in improving the technical capacity of the police to enable them to counter the 'new wave of terrorism' in the region. Reportedly, militants use state-of-the-art equipment, which gives them a tactical advantage. Respondents claimed that providing the police with modern equipment had reduced their vulnerability to attacks and allowed them to prevent attacks and capture targets more effectively.

The mission also received disturbing reports from Khyber residents indicating that the government's investment in the police department may not be trickling down to more remote areas such as Khyber. A local respondent claimed that police personnel in Khyber were not being given uniforms and were forced to purchase these out of their own pockets. Additionally, according to a journalist, approximately 68 percent of officers carried personal guns, and the total strength of approximately 3,500 officers in Khyber had received only 120 bullet-proof jackets and 20 riot guns. They had undergone training only recently.

Unfortunately, Malakand district, which was given the status of a 'settled district' in 2000, remains under the district administration whereby the levies force is authorised to ensure law and order, despite the fact that the NMDs have, officially, been brought under police control. In North Waziristan and other former FATA areas, law and order is enforced jointly by the police, administration and security forces, according to the Bannu DIG and commissioner. The levies force, on the other hand, is under the operational command of the deputy commissioner and the concentration of both executive and policing powers have caused law and order in Malakand to deteriorate. This has also resulted in the poor allocation of resources to the levies force. Furthermore, the levies are no match for the regular police force when it comes to sophisticated policing techniques, such as investigation, counter-terrorism and crime control.

The judicial system

Location of courts, legal aid and legal awareness

Under the merger plan, the court system has been extended to each NMD. However, for three out of seven districts – South Waziristan, North Waziristan and Orakzai – the district courts are situated in the adjacent districts of Bannu, Tank and Hangu, respectively. This has impeded access to justice for residents of these districts for whom traveling to attend a court hearing is expensive and difficult. According to one lawyer, this deters potential litigants from approaching the courts. The president of the North Waziristan District Bar also remarked that litigants from North Waziristan who came to Bannu to attend court hearings did so at great risk to their lives: such people had been attacked en route and some had even been killed.

Members of the Peshawar High Court Bar Association acknowledged the logistical and infrastructural issues pertaining to the judicial system in NMDs. They reported positive developments with respect to ongoing initiatives to foster legal awareness and provide legal aid to NMD residents. According to one lawyer who was leading this initiative, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council collaborated with the Pakistan Bar Council after the merger to implement a UNDP-sponsored programme in the NMDs.¹³

According to her, the project had engaged more than 6,000 people through awareness-raising activities, while many had been provided legal aid. She also said that a legal aid unit that had been set up under the programme was still operational. However, there was a pressing need to build capacity and train lawyers in the NMDs, she added, as the lawyers who had begun practicing there was mostly young and lacked experience. A journalist in Peshawar reported that citizens in the NMDs were exploited financially by local lawyers who took advantage of their unfamiliarity with the legal system.

Pace of court cases

Although the district courts for Khyber were initially situated in Peshawar after the merger, they had now been shifted to the district in Landi Kotal, Jamrod and Barra. The mission was told that most cases in these courts pertained to land disputes. However, residents of Khyber expressed deep dissatisfaction with the slow pace of, and expenses associated with, pursuing cases in the district courts, stating that judges kept putting matters off to the next hearing without reaching a resolution. To make matters worse, judges were transferred every six months, causing additional delays.

A respondent in Peshawar felt that the delivery of justice in the NMD courts may be slow, but was still a step in the right direction. He gave the example of the courts in Bajaur, which had seen a rise in cases of inheritance and divorce filed by female litigants, which he felt reflected increased access to justice.

Perceptions of alternative dispute resolution and judicial independence

There was a mixed response to the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system, with strong criticism emanating from the legal community.¹⁴ While some respondents welcomed ADR as a positive replacement for arbitrary jirgas, which make decisions based on antiquated customs, most lawyers criticised the setup of a parallel judicial mechanism under the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act 2020, which gives judicial authority to the executive. Such a system calls into question the spirit of a free and impartial judiciary.

They also viewed ADR as redundant in the presence of a functional court system, and some questioned the eligibility of those appointed to conduct ADR, claiming that they were usually retired mid-level police and military officials or bureaucrats. Lawyers in Peshawar further expressed concern over the fact that the Peshawar High Court had upheld the validity of the ADR system.

The judiciary's independence was another concern echoed at the mission's meeting with the legal community, with members lamenting that judicial independence had been affected by the political situation as well as the media.

FATA Tribunal

Members of the Peshawar High Court Bar members expressed concern over the high court's decision to notify the defunct FATA Tribunal to hear certain categories of cases under the repealed Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). They contended that the tribunal might not meet standards of justice and expressed reservations over the credentials of members of the tribunal. They also feared that the tribunal might decide cases for purposes of expediency rather than to comply with the spirit of the rule of law and due process.¹⁵ Despite these concerns, the tribunal was formally revived in August 2023 to hear 11 pending cases.¹⁶

Additionally, a senior lawyer in Peshawar pointed to the high number of pending cases under the FCR, both in the district courts and the high court, and criticized the high court's delayed response. People who had been convicted and had appeals pending were incarcerated only to find that a high court judgment had referred criminal matters related to the FCR to the FATA Tribunal and remanded civil disputes back to the district courts.¹⁷

14 While the president of the North Waziristan District Bar favoured ADR, Bannu-based lawyer Iftikhar Durrani referred to it as 'absolutely redundant'. The Bannu commissioner was also in favour of ADR.

15 The Peshawar High Court ordered that various appeals related to former FATA be sent to the 'relevant forum' on the grounds that cases that arose during the FCR should be dealt with by the relevant forums under the same procedure. Ordinary courts would have the right to hear or decide these appeals. See <https://www.dawn.com/news/1740607> and <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2404623/fcr-empowered-to-hear-fata-related-cases>

16 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1771251>

17 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1788814>

Freedom of expression

In general, the mission found that people’s freedom of expression was restricted – primarily by state actors – in terms of the media’s ability to access certain areas or report on certain themes. While security has improved since 2017 (after the North Waziristan operation ended), journalists are still prevented by law enforcement authorities from reporting on certain issues, especially pertaining to North Waziristan. A journalist in Bannu said that the police often barred press access to crime scenes.



Mission members with journalists at the Bannu Press Club

Journalists are also denied access to the IDP camp in Baka Khel, according to a Bannu-based correspondent for Radio Free Europe. Other local journalists in Bannu said they were barred from entering areas in North Waziristan where copper was mined or from sharing any information in this regard. Additionally, journalists in Khyber said they were often denied access to official meetings or to certain areas for reporting purposes. However, in a positive development, a local journalist in Bannu said that the press was no longer prevented from entering the NMDs and was even allowed to carry cameras without seeking permission from the authorities.

The mission noted that self-censorship – common in much of Pakistan – persists in the province. Several journalists in Bannu and Khyber said they had received indirect threats warning them against reporting on certain issues, adding that, in some cases, they were compelled to have their reports ‘vetted’ by the state [read military] authorities before filing stories, including posts on social media platforms. Even the legal community in Bannu said they felt pressure to self-censor and remained wary of possible informants.

Reporting from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains a distinct challenge, with journalists in Bannu saying they felt especially vulnerable when covering terrorist attacks and bomb blasts. Compounding their vulnerability is the allegation from journalists in Bannu that their employers do not pay salaries on time.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

The mission noted with concern that civic spaces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had continued to shrink. The legal community in Swat, for example, reported facing curbs on their right to peaceful assembly, with several respondents saying that multiple first information reports (FIRs) had been filed under Section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code against political activists and other protestors who participated in protests led by the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) in Swat in September 2022 against the resurgence of militancy in the region.

Members of the Peshawar High Court Bar Association expressed similar concerns regarding Section 124-A and its stifling effect on political freedom. Respondents claimed that political dissidents, intellectuals and critics of the state were targeted on charges of ‘conspiring’ against the state, calling for ‘mutiny’ or ‘defaming’ state institutions. They also expressed concern over the case of Idris Khattak, a human rights defender who was forcibly disappeared in 2019, resurfaced in 2020 in military custody and was tried and sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment on charges of espionage by a military court in 2021.



Mission members meeting lawyers at the Peshawar High Court

The lawyers to whom the mission spoke said that organizers of the *aman* [peace] marches—civil society-led protests against terrorism that took place across the province between September 2022 and February 2023—had faced a backlash from state authorities in the form of FIRs under Section 124-A in various cities, including Khyber, Mohmand, Buner and Swat. In some cases, participants and speakers had also faced similar FIRs. The legal community called for a revival of dialogue and advocacy aimed at amending or removing Section 124-A and similar provisions related to sedition.

The home secretary, however, said that claims of such clampdowns on political dissent or protests were a misconception. He alleged that there were ‘pseudo-political elements’ at play (referring specifically to the PTM and Pashtun nationalists), which ‘disguised’ themselves as political forces but whose underlying agenda was to spread ‘hate’ against the state.

Sociopolitical alienation, freedom of movement and border problems

The mission was deeply concerned to observe that respondents at more than one meeting in Bannu expressed a sense of being 'othered' by the state.¹⁸ They recounted instances of being stopped at multiple security check-posts by the police, some even experiencing harassment. There was widespread resentment against these check-posts since military officials or motorcades were allowed to pass through freely; this was perceived as an injustice, according to the president of the Bannu District Bar.

Some residents in Bannu said that it was difficult to enter cantonment areas, which house many government offices to which civilians often need access, including the post office, the high court and civil administration offices. Reportedly, people have to line up at the entry barrier in the morning and it takes several hours before they can pass through. Additionally, the military hospital is in the cantonment, which becomes impossible to access in emergencies.

Nowhere was this sense of otherness felt as strongly as in Khyber. Serious concerns regarding human rights violations at the Torkham border were raised by residents, who also identified multiple perpetrators in such cases. For the past two or three years, said respondents, vehicles from Pakistan had not been allowed to cross into Afghanistan since Afghan officials demanded reciprocal facilities for their vehicles and citizens, especially for those needing medical treatment. However, vehicles from Afghanistan were reportedly barred from entering Pakistan or mistreated at the border. A respondent in Peshawar also reported that women crossing the border were harassed by Pakistani officials from NADRA and the Federal Investigation Agency.

Additionally, there were long, slow-moving queues of people at the border with barely any medical services or facilities for those in line who were sick. There had also been reports of a recent uptick in human trafficking at the Torkham border. Other respondents said that border closures and obstacles had not only divided communities and families that lived on either side, but also diminished economic opportunities for locals who relied on the Afghan market to earn their livelihoods. At times, residents of Khyber would have to procure even necessities such as wheat from across the border when the Pakistani government failed to ensure a sufficient supply of grain to the area. There were also reports of rampant corruption and mismanagement at the border, where people were allowed to cross without any documentation in exchange for hefty bribes.

Land settlement

All seven NMDs, as well as Upper and Lower Dir, the Kalam area of Swat and a portion of Chitral, have no proper records of land settlement. From 2021 onwards, the process of recording land settlements was begun in these districts, but remains at the initial stage of information collection. The absence of land settlements and land registration in these areas has caused social unrest and even violent clashes triggered by land disputes.

According to residents of Khyber, the dominant category of disputes before the district courts is that of land disputes. There are no land records for the area. Although the government has reportedly initiated the process of land settlement for the region, the pace of work has been slow, with designated government officials still in the process of gathering information, according to locals.

Lawyers in Swat reported that, as far as their district was concerned, the first stage of the process of land settlement had been completed and the exercise was now underway in Kalam and Chitral. However, land records remained patchy for some parts of Upper Dir. The legal community suggested that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's laws governing the division of property should be similar to those in Punjab, especially those laws pertaining to women. They also demanded laws for the protection of *shamilaat* [collectively owned] land in the province along the lines of Punjab's laws. According to a lawyer in Swat, the unregulated allotment of 'crown land' to government servants and former state officers, especially in Upper Dir, was cause for concern.

Internally displaced persons at Baka Khel camp

Camps for IDPs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were established for citizens who had fled their ancestral lands to avoid getting caught in the crossfire during security operations against militants and clashes between the two sides. In the process, many IDPs lost their lands, crops, businesses and livestock, but were hopeful of receiving better treatment in the camps established by the state. The conditions in such camps were, however, far from ideal.

On 13 March 2023, the mission visited the Baka Khel campsite, situated 18 kilometres south of Bannu. Established in 2014, it houses approximately 2,000 displaced families from North Waziristan.¹⁹ However, the team was not permitted to enter: they were told by the army officials in charge to seek written permission from the district administration, although these officials could not cite any law or executive or legal notification restricting entry to the camp or prescribing a requirement for the district administration's permission.

The team was able to speak informally to two staff members of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) outside the camp. They also interviewed several camp residents (Box 3) and, on various occasions during the mission, spoke to the Bannu Commissioner as well as journalists who have written extensively on IDPs.

According to PDMA staff members, the camp was purportedly equipped with a range of facilities, including five tube-wells, electricity and two markets consisting of 70–80 small shops. Male residents of the camp did not face any restrictions on their mobility and were allowed to leave the area during the day for work. Additionally, the PDMA has a permanent office inside the camp and oversees the maintenance and repair of these facilities.

When asked about the belief some residents had expressed that nongovernment organisations (NGOs) were no longer allowed to operate inside the camps, the PDMA said that two NGOs—the Prime Foundation and Sarhad Rural Support Programme—were currently providing healthcare services to women and carrying out other development-related work inside the camp. When the team met the Bannu commissioner, he reaffirmed that the Baka Khel camp was equipped with basic facilities, including schools for children, and said there was sufficient funding available for the camp's maintenance.

Some respondents at the mission's consultations believed that IDPs were reluctant to return home because the relatively urban lifestyle in the settled districts appealed to them more than their lifestyle in the NMDs. Their reluctance was rooted in a sense of injustice and discrimination over this disparity. IDPs emphasised that they only wanted to be treated as equal citizens and wondered why ordinary people such as them should suffer the consequences of the state's inability to curb terrorism. On the recent mainstreaming of the levies forces into the police force and the election of local government bodies in the NMDs, participants at the mission's consultations said that they welcomed the presence of the police in their area, but felt it was as powerless as local government representatives and could not resolve systemic problems unless the police were given the resources and authority needed to operate more effectively.

Box 3: Surviving from day to day

Residents of Baka Khel camp told a different story.

They said that the monthly stipend of PKR 20,000 issued to each IDP family by the government was no longer sufficient to meet their needs. They also reported a recent delay in receiving the stipend, with a few claiming to have not received their stipend for the past two or three years. According to them, the government's restriction on NGOs had exacerbated their difficulties as these NGOs had previously provided some relief in the form of food rations and educational services.

While most residents said there were schools for boys and girls inside the camp, some people pointed out that these schools were barely functional and at times had no more than a single teacher for the entire school. Most residents reported getting barely any electricity supply, while there were mixed responses about the existence of medical facilities. One woman stated that, although there was a hospital in the camp, there was a shortage of medicines.

According to women residents, their biggest challenge was surviving the heat that built up in the camp tents in summer, often causing great distress to their children. When the mission shared this concern with the Bannu commissioner, he assured them that, while conditions were indeed difficult in the summer, the tents were up to a similar standard to those provided by UNHCR. He added that the government could not allow IDPs to build permanent structures since it wanted them to eventually vacate the camps, and such structures might encourage IDPs to settle there in the long term.

When asked about returning to their homes, the IDPs interviewed said that they were still fearful and not completely convinced that law and order had been restored in the NMDs. Landmine explosions in North Waziristan were still reported, they said, contrary to the government's claims that the area was otherwise clear. Moreover, there were reports of increased target killings in the Waziristan region, with civilians purportedly being targeted as well. According to a camp resident from North Waziristan, the area—especially Data Khel tehsil—was still vulnerable to militant attacks and free movement was not possible there.

One resident alleged that North Waziristan was still under the army's control, and that if an IDP family wished to visit their home in Waziristan, the army's permission was required. This would usually be given in instances such as the family needing to bury a deceased relative in their ancestral lands, but rarely in other instances. However, according to the camp resident, the military had recently denied permission for any type of visit.

Another hurdle in returning to their home districts was that of the insufficient funds being offered by the government to reconstruct IDPs' homes. According to one respondent, their houses had been destroyed during the security operation and they could not build even a single room with the PKR 400,000 being offered by the government.

A camp resident from North Waziristan, who now works with the PDMA, pointed out that the schedule of repatriation for IDPs from North Waziristan was not within the control of the PDMA or the provincial and local authorities. Rather, it was decided entirely by the army on the basis of security clearance and provision of facilities such as water and educational institutions. He also reported that approximately 11,000 families from Data Khel tehsil, who were displaced and moved to Afghanistan during the Zarb-e-Azab operation, had started returning to Pakistan during December 2021 and in 2022.

Conclusion and recommendations

Undoubtedly, the post-25th Amendment merger of former FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has led to a certain degree of progress through the establishment of district courts in the NMDs, local government elections, representation in the provincial assembly, and increased resources for and capacity of the police force. However, the implementation of the merger plan has been slow and the state has a long way to go before the promise of equality, equal protection under the law and equitable development—as envisaged in the merger—is fulfilled. The discontentment of residents of the NMDs, who saw in the merger a possibility for sorely needed development and political freedom, must be taken seriously.

During the mission, HRCP learnt that both infrastructure and peace and security were still lacking in the Waziristan region, preventing IDPs from returning to their homes. Moreover, the continued presence of the armed forces in the region not only hinders a return to normalcy, but also shrinks the space needed for the police to establish law and order. There is evidence that the practice of enforced disappearances continues, while previous cases remain unresolved.

The situation of freedom of expression and access to information in the NMDs is a matter of concern. Journalists and activists in the NMDs as well as the settled districts continue to face threats from state and nonstate actors, resulting in increased self-censorship and distrust among the community.



Press conference at the Swat Press Club on concluding the mission

The mission was pleased to observe greater political mobilisation and participation among citizens from the NMDs, to which the local government elections also contributed. However, the efficacy of the local government system has been undermined by lack of resources and capacity.

The law-and-order situation across the province, particularly in the Bannu division and especially North Waziristan, remains dire. Incidents of terrorism have resurged, although they have also galvanised a widespread grassroots political movement of resistance against militancy.

While there have been commendable efforts towards establishing a proper judicial system in the NMDs, reports reveal that it has been minimally effective. The mission also noted that citizens expressed significant apprehension over the alleged mishandling and misuse of funds intended for development work in the NMDs. The mission also received reports of grave human rights violations at the Torkham border.

The mission found that very little had been done in terms of ensuring better access to education and healthcare facilities in the NMDs. Many of the citizens the team spoke to expressed an immense need for employment opportunities and economic development for youth.

In light of the above, the mission recommends the following:

- The provincial government must take concrete steps to ensure the complete implementation of the merger plan in a transparent manner that also reflects the needs and priorities of local residents.
- Of special concern is the state of law and order in the province. The police must be empowered, equipped and trained to deal with the resurgence in militancy, including provision for forensics labs in the province. Military forces must also cede space to the police where possible.
- The Supreme Court must, as a matter of priority, fix for hearing the appeal against the Peshawar High Court order that declared the Actions in Aid of Civil Power Ordinance 2019 case null and void, in order to remove the ambiguity surrounding the legality of internment centres and cases of enforced disappearances.
- The state must take concerted measures to ensure that the families of victims of enforced disappearance are protected from reprisals. Incidents involving deaths or torture in custody at internment centres so long as they continue to function must be investigated and the perpetrators held accountable.
- The government must speedily investigate allegations of corruption and misuse of funds dedicated for development work in the NMDs and ensure accountability and complete transparency in the use of such development funds.
- The government must fulfil its promise to allocate annual funds from the NFC for the NMDs, lack of which has fostered resentment and a sense of injustice among citizens.
- The government must release all funds and resources due to allow the local government system to function.

- The state must provide adequate healthcare and education facilities to the citizens of the province, with particular provision for girls, women and persons with disabilities.
- District courts should be moved within the geographic limits of the districts of South Waziristan, North Waziristan and Orakzai. Innovative technical solutions must also be instituted to increase access to courts, currently hindered by long distances and poor security.
- The restored FATA tribunal should be disbanded and the cases currently in its purview heard by the competent courts instead.
- The government should set up *dar-ul-amans* in North or South Waziristan that can cater to two or three districts each to facilitate vulnerable women's access to shelter.²⁰
- Grave human rights violations at the Torkham border must be investigated and addressed, including instances of extortion and corruption.
- While the government should ensure that IDPs are repatriated to their home districts, it is equally necessary to ensure that residents of IDP camps such as the Baka Khel camp have access to necessities such as healthcare, schools, potable water and electricity. IDPs who are elderly, sick or pregnant should be allowed access to local transport that can enter the camps.
- Media houses must ensure that reporters covering sensitive beats are trained in digital and physical security and provided protective gear where necessary. All media workers must be paid reasonable salaries and on time.
- The government must ensure that all citizens' right to freedom of peaceful assembly is protected and upheld, whether protestors' demands reflect state narratives or dissenting views.
- The government should consider enacting legislation to protect collectively owned land in the province.

²⁰ According to HRCP's research, even with a large recent increase in the number of *dar-ul-amans* and crisis centres for women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, coverage seems to be concentrated in the eastern districts of the province. There are no *dar-ul-amans* close to or in the former FATA districts, which poses a multitude of challenges for vulnerable women and their families.