**Current Situation of Afghan Refugee Artists in Pakistan**

**Source: Pashtomusic.org/report**

The current circumstances of Afghan singers in Pakistan are highly complex, riddled with numerous challenges in every aspect of their lives. Many singers, fearing the sensitivity of their situation, avoid approaching the UNHCR office or giving interviews to the media. During the preparation of this report, we requested singers to share detailed information about their condition. Initially, they hesitated, and even after persistent efforts, none of them agreed to have their names published, citing fears for their families residing in Afghanistan.

Afghan singers face unprecedented difficulties in the refugee environment, which are briefly outlined below:

**Economic Challenges**

In Pakistan, Afghan singers do not have limited economic opportunities. There is no viable market for concerts or performances, and they lack sufficient support in this area. They cannot afford to produce or distribute their creative works. Local media outlets rarely support them by broadcasting their music. As a result, many are forced to take up alternative jobs to meet their basic needs, though even these jobs are hard to find.

A 44-year-old Afghan singer, now selling fruits in Peshawar, shared:
*"I borrowed money to buy a small handcart. I can't afford to rent a shop, and the police harass me constantly. Last Friday, they arrested me near the mosque. Luckily, the worshippers intervened to get me released. Music has completely disappeared from my life."*

Local singers in Pakistan also face economic difficulties, making it impossible for them to extend support to Afghan artists.

There is no financial or institutional support for both local and immigrant singers in Pakistan. Humanitarian aid is unavailable, and there are no platforms to organize programs and earn a livelihood.

**Security Issues**

Security is a significant challenge for Afghan singers in Pakistan. They face threats, violence, and sometimes even attacks. Some reported extremists leaving warning letters at their doorsteps, demanding they return to Afghanistan and live under a "Shariah-compliant" system.

A 49-year-old singer narrated:
*"A while back, I attended a gathering organized by the Awami National Party to honor Pashtun cultural figures. I was asked to perform, but shortly after leaving the event, I received a death threat from an unknown number accusing me of being a spy for Pakistan’s intelligence. They warned me that I would not survive if I were caught."*

**Social and Cultural Challenges**

Recent political changes in Afghanistan have significantly influenced cultural perceptions in Pakistan, especially in Pashtun regions. While music has historically faced cultural resistance among Pashtuns, the government-imposed ban on music in Afghanistan has encouraged conservative factions in Pakistan to advocate similar restrictions.

In many tribal areas, people are reluctant to play music even during weddings and celebrations.

**Political and Legal Challenges**

Legal issues, such as obtaining visas, residence permits, or passports, hinder Afghan artists’ work. Additionally, strained political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan exacerbate their plight. Some locals in Pakistan blame Afghan refugees, including artists, for security issues in the region.

An anonymous clarinet player shared:
*"After Afghanistan won a cricket match against Pakistan last year, my children were beaten by locals in the neighborhood. When I confronted them, they hurled abuses at me and refused to engage in a civil conversation. This hostility has become a part of our lives."*

Also, local TV and radio channels prioritize local and international artists, leaving Afghan singers marginalized.

**Recommendations for Improvement**

Experts propose the following measures to improve the situation of Afghan refugee artists:

1. **Immediate Humanitarian Assistance**
Establish charitable organizations to identify and provide urgent aid to displaced artists, ensuring they can continue their artistic endeavors without financial pressure.
2. **Creating a Safe Environment**
Provide Afghan singers with a secure environment to practice their art and issue them official travel documents to prevent police harassment.
3. **International Support**
Engage international cultural organizations and institutions to collaborate with local experts in addressing the challenges faced by refugee artists and enhancing their capabilities.
4. **Raising Public Awareness**
Organize advocacy campaigns to highlight the importance of art and music. Schools, colleges, and universities should encourage students to participate in these initiatives to build public understanding and appreciation for art.

This report underscores the urgent need for action to support Afghan refugee artists in Pakistan, who are struggling to preserve their art amidst economic, security, and social challenges.