



Human Rights  
Commission of Pakistan

# IMPACT OF CLOSURE OF COAL MINES ON LIVELIHOODS IN DUKI, BALOCHISTAN



An HRCP fact-finding report

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March 2025



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## Introduction

Duki, a mineral-rich region in the heart of Balochistan, hosts one of Asia's largest coal reserves, extracting 18,000 tonnes of coal annually.<sup>1</sup> However, coal miners face significant risks—not only from accidents typical of mining but also from abductions and attacks by militants. In October 2024, a devastating militant attack in the mines area of Duki resulted in the deaths of at least 21 coal miners, including three Afghan nationals, and left six others injured.<sup>2</sup> In response, coal miners went on strike, leading to the closure of many mines due to safety concerns.

Historically, the Duki coal fields have provided vital employment and economic activity. However, recent mine closures and the precarious situation of workers have raised serious concerns about the welfare of local communities. Accordingly, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) decided to send a fact-finding mission to the area to assess the situation on the ground. The mission included Kashif Kakar Panezai (HRCP vice-chair for Balochistan), Abdul Hakeem (HRCP member), Musa Jan (lawyer), Umer Hayat (secretary general, National Labour Federation [NLF]) and Fareed Ahmed (staff member). The mission took place on 30–31 January 2025, meeting with workers, government officials and other stakeholders.

The mission's terms of reference were to:

- Determine the scale of mine closures and the number of affected workers.
- Ascertain the causes for mine closures.
- Evaluate the impact of these closures on local communities, particularly women and children.
- Assess the government's actions to address challenges arising from mine closures.
- Document the concerns of mine owners regarding these closures.

## Meeting with labour union representatives and mine workers

The mission learned that prior to the October 2024 attack, three workers were abducted in January 2024, and seven others kidnapped on 23 March 2024, later rescued after 73 days. Additionally, two workers died in a landmine explosion on 2 May 2024. Despite these incidents, the government failed to implement adequate security measures. This negligence culminated in the shooting of 21 miners by militants, during which gunfire lasted for three to four hours without any response from security forces. The workers themselves had to transport the injured and deceased to the nearest hospital.

Following these events, nearly all mines were shut down, and many workers, primarily migrants, returned home. According to labour unions, out of the 40,000 individuals reportedly employed in Duki's coal mines, 15,000 to 20,000 have left. The provincial government pledged PKR1.5 million in compensation to the families of the deceased miners, according to the NLF, which has since been disbursed.

The mission learned that in the past, employees worked in three shifts; currently, only one shift is operational, leading to significant losses for mine owners and contractors. Respondents claimed that over 40 percent of the mines in Duki are now closed, as neither the mine owners nor the contractors are willing to invest financially due to the prevailing security situation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://voicepk.net/2024/09/accidents-and-deaths-a-harsh-reality-in-duki-coalmines/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1864679>

Before the recent attacks, each mine employed 20 to 25 workers per shift. This number has now dwindled to just seven to eight workers. One worker expressed an urgent need for a proper hospital and trauma centre in Duki, as most accidents result in injuries that require transporting victims to Loralai or Quetta, located 60 and 200 km away, respectively.

The mission noted that most mine workers were migrants from regions such as Dir and Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as Chaman and Qila Saifullah in Balochistan; many now also come from Afghanistan. Most mines have been shut down since the incident in October. Previously, three to four trucks of coal were loaded daily. Now, that number has decreased to just two trucks per week. Mines that have hired private security are operational, while workers in unsecured mines tend to leave early, before sunset.

A mining contractor reported that fear has deterred people from working in the mines. Frequent gunfire near their homes has caused panic among women and children. However, several workers told the mission that they continued to work under these conditions to provide for their families. Previously, they had feared mine collapses; now, they were more afraid of potential attacks on their lives.

## **Meeting with deputy commissioner and police official**

The deputy commissioner informed the mission that a rescue centre (1122) had been established specifically for mine workers. He expressed concerns about the lack of resources available to ensure workers' security, particularly the insufficient number of police personnel, with only 350 levies available in the entire district. He noted that the borders of Duki with Kohlu and Barkhan were particularly dangerous due to the presence of militant groups.

He explained that mine owners were responsible for the security of their mining sites, while the administration was responsible for the broader geographical area. A recent decision mandates that mine owners provide CCTV cameras, lighting and walls around each mine, and that they must share complete data on their workers (including Afghan employees) with the local authorities. The Frontier Corps, said the deputy commissioner, also provided security, supplemented by private security personnel. Despite this, he indicated that many of the 2,000 mines in Duki were currently closed.

The mission also spoke to a subdistrict police officer, who confirmed that law and order had been compromised by the lack of police officials in the province. He said, however, that an additional 450 constable positions had been announced by the government, adding that this was a positive step and would improve the police force's efficiency.

## **Meeting with mine owners and transporter representatives**

During his interview with the mission, a mine owner and chairman of the municipal committee of Duki alleged that ten mines and associated machinery had been destroyed in recent attacks by militants. He said that he and several other mine owners had also received threats from militants. Following the attack on mines in October 2024, hundreds of mine workers had gathered to transport the victims' bodies to Bacha Khan Chowk in Duki, where they had held a protest against the killings. The mine owner stated that on learning of the attack, he had promptly alerted the police and security personnel. However, by the time they arrived, the attackers had already fled.

The mine owners also told the mission that the local administration was pressuring foreign workers, specifically Afghans, to leave Pakistan, which they believed was unfair. They suggested that identification cards should be issued to allow Afghan miners to re-enter the country after returning home. They also said that mine owners pay taxes to the government, which should therefore ensure their security. The owners claim they have incurred losses amounting to billions

of rupees as a result of poor law and order. The taxes paid, such as PKR 860 per tonne of coal to the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), should be allocated to workers' welfare, they added, but expressed their frustration with continued burdensome regulations. The Mines and Minerals Development Department, for example, collects an additional local tax of PKR 130 per tonne.

They reported that daily landmine explosions and attacks on vehicles had made drivers hesitant to transport coal from Duki. To address this, they urged the government to construct a railway track from Duki to Harnai, which would reduce transportation costs and generate more revenue for the government.

Representatives of goods transporters confirmed the slowdown in mining activity highlighted by the labour unions and mine owners. They informed the mission that over 1,000 non-local workers load coal onto trucks from more than 1,200 coal mines around Duki. Typically, they manage to load 150–200 trucks daily for transport to Sindh, Punjab and other regions. However, due to the recent violence, they are now delivering only five to seven trucks per week, as drivers are reluctant to come to Duki.

## Observations

The mission notes that the mining sector in Duki has been severely undermined by security threats, leading to the exodus of workers and a significant decline in economic activity. Violent incidents, including kidnappings, explosions and attacks by militants, have led an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 workers to leave, reducing the workforce from over approximately 40,000. This labour shortage has resulted in decreased productivity, with many mines now operating only one shift instead of three. Heightened security risks have also discouraged workers from living near the mines, forcing them to commute daily, which further affects efficiency. Meanwhile, mine owners and contractors have suffered substantial financial losses, with nearly 40 percent of mines closing. Investor confidence has declined sharply due to ongoing security concerns and the lack of government intervention, stifling economic activity and deterring reinvestment in the sector.

Security failures and the absence of emergency response services have worsened the crisis, leaving workers vulnerable to attacks without immediate law enforcement assistance. Reports indicate that during the recent attack in October 2024, gunfire persisted for hours without intervention, forcing workers to transport the dead and injured themselves. The lack of functional hospitals nearby, rescue services and adequate healthcare facilities has exacerbated conditions, compelling injured workers to rely on poorly equipped private clinics run by unqualified practitioners.

Rising labour costs, driven by a severe workforce shortage, have further strained mining operations, leading to significant increases in daily wages. The sector has become increasingly dependent on Afghan workers, who often lack legal documentation and are subjected to exploitative working conditions. Despite the risks, many workers remain in this hazardous environment out of financial necessity, living under constant fear of workplace accidents and external violence.

Without substantial government intervention to improve security, health, education, and infrastructure, the future of Duki's mining industry remains highly uncertain.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, the mission proposes the following recommendations, primarily directed at the government and its allied departments, but also applicable to mine owners:

1. Implement mandatory security measures, such as CCTV, fencing, and adequate lighting around all mines.

2. Increase the deployment of security forces in high-risk areas, especially during nighttime.
3. Offer financial incentives and enhance working conditions to attract local workers back to the mines.
4. Gradually reintroduce multiple shifts to enhance productivity while ensuring workers' safety.
5. Supply personal protective equipment and emergency training for all miners.
6. Consider further increases in law enforcement personnel and expedite the hiring of 450 new constables.
7. Create quick-response security teams specifically for mine-related incidents.
8. Strengthen communication between mine owners, security forces, and local administration for efficient crisis response.
9. Build healthcare centres near mining areas staffed with qualified doctors, including female medical professionals.
10. Ensure the newly established rescue centre (1122) is fully equipped and operational 24/7.
11. Enforce strict guidelines requiring first aid kits and safety training for all miners.
12. Develop a compensation system for injuries, disabilities, and fatalities occurring in mining operations.
13. Provide counselling services for workers and families affected by violence-induced trauma.
14. Create a welfare fund to provide support for families of deceased or injured workers.
15. Offer scholarships or financial aid programs for the children of miners to reduce long-term financial dependency.
16. Investigate job diversification programs for miners to lessen reliance on hazardous mining jobs.
17. Introduce wage regulations to ensure fair compensation and enhance living conditions for workers.
18. Establish regulations to guarantee proper documentation and legal status for all workers, including Afghan workers, to prevent exploitation.
19. Ensure all mine workers are registered with the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution and social security.