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COI QUERY RESPONSE

PAKISTAN - AFGHANS

A report published in November 2023 by the *International Crisis Group* states that: “On 3 October, Pakistan’s caretaker government announced it would carry out mass deportations – known under domestic law as an Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan – asking all concerned to leave the country before 1 November. Although the plan purported to apply to all foreigners residing in the country illegally, it appears designed to target Afghans, millions of whom have sought refuge in Pakistan over the years. Pakistan hosts an estimated three to four million Afghan refugees and migrants, including at least 600,000 who have crossed the border since August 2021, when the Taliban seized power for a second time in Afghanistan. Of these, 1.3 million are registered as legal refugees, holding Proof of Registration cards, while an additional 850,000 have received Afghan Citizen Cards from the Pakistani authorities, giving them some protections but not all of those afforded to registered refugees. Some 1.7 million more Afghans are believed to be residing in the country without any documentation at all.”¹

The *New Humanitarian* in April 2024 comments on: “...six months after Pakistan said it would deport “all illegal foreigners”. That push resulted in more than 515,000 Afghans returning to the Taliban controlled country, either through deportations carried out by Pakistani officials or on their own to avoid being detained and eventually forced to leave.”²

This document also states that: “Aid workers who have assisted returnee families say those who have been away for decades, often spending their entire lives in Pakistan, are facing the greatest difficulty in rebuilding their lives in Afghanistan.”³

¹ International Crisis Group (13 November 2023) Pakistan’s Mass Deportation of Afghans Poses Risks to Regional Stability, p.1)

² New Humanitarian (10 April 2024) Pakistan threatens new wave of Afghan deportations, p.1

³ *ibid*, p.1

A report issued by the *New Humanitarian* in May 2024 notes that: “Life has become unstable and full of fear for Afghans like Usman since Pakistan first announced it would deport “all illegal foreigners” last October. Expulsions have since become commonplace, along with people returning on their own to avoid being rounded up by Pakistani authorities and forced out. An estimated 3.5 million Afghans live in Pakistan. The exact total is unknown because many are undocumented, and the number has fluctuated in the decades since the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s first forced people to leave en masse. Between the middle of September and the beginning of May, more than 575,000 Afghans were deported or returned to Afghanistan, according to the UN’s migration agency IOM.”⁴

In May 2024 the *European Union Agency for Asylum* states that: “Since the Taliban takeover and as of 31 January 2023, the Government of Pakistan estimated that about 600 000 Afghans arrived in Pakistan. The so-called ‘Illegal Foreigners’ Repatriation Plan’ (IFRP) launched on 3 October 2023 by the Pakistan’s interim government urged all ‘illegal immigrants’ to return to their countries of origin by 1 November 2023 to avoid being repatriated by Pakistani authorities. It is estimated that thousands of Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan before the end of the above deadline. The fact that the country was facing one of ‘world’s largest humanitarian crises’ did not allow the de facto authorities to support these returnees as promised. Some also reported that the Taliban mistreated them and ‘took away cash and mobile phones from their relatives’. The situation of women and girls arriving in Afghanistan was particularly vulnerable.”⁵

Amnesty International in July 2024 states that: “In October 2023, the Government of Pakistan announced the ‘Illegal Foreigners’ Repatriation Plan’. Since then, Amnesty International has documented a complete lack of transparency, due process and accountability in the detentions and unlawful forcible returns of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, which were exacerbated by increased harassment and hostility towards them. Since September 2023, the UNHCR reports over 639,000 Afghan refugees have left Pakistan to return to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.”⁶

In August 2024 the *United Nations* states that: “Since September 2023, there has been a surge in the number of returnees to Afghanistan. Between September 2023 and July 2024, more than 645,000 people returned from neighbouring Pakistan after the Government of Pakistan began implementing its “illegal foreigners repatriation plan”. Under the plan, foreigners without valid identity documents – a significant proportion of whom are Afghans – were given 28 days to “voluntarily” leave the country, or face deportation. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the recent decision by the Government of Pakistan to extend the validity of proof of registration cards for one year, until 30 June 2025.”⁷

This document also states that: “Those who return to Afghanistan face a range of challenges, including lack of shelter and housing, limited livelihood opportunities and restricted access to basic services, including education and health care.”⁸

⁴ New Humanitarian (22 May 2024) Afghans fear life on both sides of Durand Line, p.1

⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum (23 May 2024) Country Guidance: Afghanistan, pp.94-95

⁶ Amnesty International (11 July 2024) Pakistan: One-year extension of UN-registered Afghan refugees a welcome first step, lifeline must extend to all

⁷ United Nations (30 August 2024) Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, p.17

⁸ *ibid*, p.17

In September 2024 the *United Nations Security Council* states that: “Between 15 September 2023 and 31 August 2024, humanitarian partners assisted more than 686,703 undocumented Afghan returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in International Organization for Migration reception centres. As at the end of August, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had provided protection support to over 41,000 Afghan returnees, 49 per cent of whom were women and girls. Returnees interviewed by UNHCR raised concerns about the lack of shelter, food, livelihoods, documentation and access to basic services in return areas.”⁹

In September 2024 *Amnesty International* states that: “The Pakistani authorities announced...on 3 October 2023 that all ‘undocumented’ refugees will be deported from the country after 1 November 2023 under the ‘Illegal Foreigners’ Repatriation Plan’ in violation of the principle of non-refoulement, particularly given the threats that women, girls, human rights defenders, journalists, female protestors, artists, and former government officials face under the de facto Taliban government. In the lead up to the deadline, refugees were subject to arbitrary detention, arrests, evictions and harassment at the hands of the authorities. 49 detention centers (also referred to as “holding” or “transit” centers) were set up and detainees were deprived of the right to a lawyer or communication with family members in violation of right to liberty and a fair trial...Despite a legal challenge at the Supreme Court...more than 694,184 refugees have returned to Afghanistan, many in violation of the principle of non-refoulement... In April 2024, the government announced plans to start deporting ACC holders as part of phase two of its Plan...Deportations have not yet commenced, but refugees live in constant fear.”¹⁰

A report issued in September 2024 by the *Afghanistan Analysts Network* points out that: “Housing and accommodation is a major problem for Afghan returnees.”¹¹

A report published in September 2024 by the *United States Agency for International Development* notes that: “Returnees from Pakistan face challenges in accessing food, health, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. Returnees also have limited access to civil documentation and safe and secure shelter in Afghanistan, increasing their vulnerability to forced eviction and other protection risks...”¹²

The *UNHCR* in October 2024 states that: “...Pakistan’s “Illegal Foreigners’ Repatriation Plan” (IFRP), with a focus on the repatriation of undocumented individuals, has driven return movements in 2023 and 2024. However, status and documentation in Pakistan are not representative of peoples’ international protection needs given that access to registration is restricted and many Afghans never had an opportunity to apply for asylum and formally seek protection, including those that fled Afghanistan after the events in 2021. The majority of those returning cited the use of police force and harassment in Pakistan as one of the drivers to return. As a result, some 712,000 Afghans have returned since the start of the IFRP in mid-September 2023 and 31 August 2024, including 23,658

⁹ United Nations Security Council (9 September 2024) The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, pp.11-12

¹⁰ Amnesty International (23 September 2024) Pakistan: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee 142nd session, 14 October – 8 November 2024, p.15).

¹¹ Afghanistan Analysts Network (29 September 2024) Returning from Pakistan: How are Afghan returnees coping back in their homeland?, p.5

¹² United States Agency for International Development (30 September 2024) Afghanistan - Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #4, Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, p.3

Registration (PoR) card holders. The number of deportations has been progressively increasing during that period, with nearly 34,400 deportations recorded. Documentation/legal assistance, protection services for children, and protection services for girls and women are the top three protection services required by returnees. Loss of social support networks, assets and property and the need to restart lives and livelihoods in unfamiliar locations with few resources present additional challenges for returnees.”¹³

A report issued in October 2024 by the *UNHCR* states that: “These returns took place in a complex humanitarian and human rights context in Afghanistan which has significantly deteriorated since the political change in August 2021. The worsened protection environment in the country has a negative impact on the lives of returning Afghans, including refugee returnees. Challenges remain in relation to human rights violations, lack of access to basic services, adequate shelter and livelihood opportunities.”¹⁴

A report published in November 2024 by the *European Union Agency for Asylum* states that: “Forced repatriation of Afghans further impacted the economy...and put a strain on host communities with already limited resources...”¹⁵

This document also states that: “Returnees from Pakistan have also faced a lack of shelter...”¹⁶

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¹³ UNHCR (17 October 2024) Protection and Solutions Strategy; UNHCR Afghanistan 2025 – 2027, p.6).

¹⁴ UNHCR (30 October 2024) Post-Return Monitoring Report; October - December 2023, p.6

¹⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum (November 2024) Afghanistan – Country Focus, p.69

¹⁶ *ibid*, p.76

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