

Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #7

(28 August 2025)



Thousands of Afghans return through Islam Qala border from Iran, many with few belongings amid difficult conditions. UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

2.4 million

Afghan returnees from
Iran and Pakistan in
2025

1.62 million

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from Iran since 1 April as of
28 August

395,800

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from Pakistan since 1
April as of 28 August

HIGHLIGHTS

- **More than 2.4 million Afghans** from Iran and Pakistan have returned so far in 2025.
- **UNHCR continues its advocacy** ahead of Pakistan's 31 August deadline for the forced return of Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders under the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' (IFRP).
- **Returns from Iran continue**, with daily returns averaging 5,800 people – similar to last week's 5,600.
- **Afghan border points are under increasing pressure** due to protection concerns and limited resources.
- **The Afghanistan situation remains critically underfunded**, with only 29% of the needed \$478 million for 2025 received.

Operational Context

Afghanistan is facing a deepening humanitarian crisis fuelled by a deteriorating human rights situation, prolonged economic hardship, recurring natural disasters and limited access to critical services. The large-scale returns of 2.4 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 have further exacerbated the situation.

In Iran, conditions for Afghans have become increasingly precarious due to the expiration of Headcount Slips on 20 March and the rollout of a regularization and return scheme affecting two million Afghans. Returns from Iran are similar to last week with some 40,000 returns. Many Afghans also continue to report discrimination and harassment.

In Pakistan, the second phase of the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' (IFRP) began in April 2025, targeting undocumented Afghans and holders of Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACC). On 31 July, the Government expanded the plan to include Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders. With the one-month grace period ending on 31 August, UNHCR [continues to advocate](#) for a formal extension and safeguards for those at risk from involuntary return.

In Tajikistan, borders remain open only to those with valid passports and visas. At the same time, the Government has carried out arbitrary deportations, including of recognized refugees and asylum-seekers, generating deep anxiety and distress within the community. Recent announcements and media reports have heightened concerns about the safety and rights of those affected.

Against this backdrop, UNHCR calls on all countries in the region to ensure returns are voluntary, safe, and dignified. However, many Afghans are returning involuntarily, often arriving without belongings or the means to support themselves. UNHCR and partners are on the ground providing life-saving assistance at key border points, but the scale and pace of returns are placing significant strain on resources and host communities.

Operational Highlights

Iran

- **Since 1 April 2025, over 1.62 million Afghans have returned from Iran, with more than 1.94 million returning since the beginning of the year.** Daily returns between 21 and 27 August averaged 5,800 people – similar to last week's. *For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Iran-Afghanistan Update [here](#).*
- **Access to services and information shows mixed trends.** UNHCR findings confirm that Iran's inclusive approach to primary health care remains in place, allowing refugees and asylum-seekers to access services regardless of documentation. At the same time, communication is becoming a challenge due to a small SIM card reactivation fee (around \$1.50), which limits access for some vulnerable groups and affects their ability to obtain assistance, receive timely information, and maintain family contact. UNHCR continues to advocate for measures that reduce these barriers and support refugees' access to protection, information, and essential services.
- **Afghanistan Situation Refugee Response Plan (RRP) support at the Milak border.** Under the RRP framework and in coordination with Centre for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (CAFIA) and Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA) Sistan and Baluchestan, UNHCR finalized a shipment of core relief items (CRIs) to Milak border to support provincial authorities. The

shipment included 17,700 sleeping mats, 5,000 blankets, and two rub halls to improve shelter and basic services at the site. Other participating agencies included IOM, UNFPA, and UNICEF.

Pakistan

- **From 1 April to 28 August, 395,800 Afghans returned to Afghanistan**, including 59,200 deportees (15%). Most were undocumented (60%), followed by ACC holders (15%), PoR card holders (22%) and asylum-seekers (3%).
- **The proportion of PoR card holders among returnees rose from 6% in April to 21–23% between May and July.** This figure increased sharply in August, reaching 57% (41,100). During the current reporting period, it rose further to 69% (19,300). *For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Pakistan-Afghanistan Update [here](#).*
- **Helpline calls rise amid ongoing concerns.** During the reporting period, UNHCR Pakistan's Helpline received a record 13,599 calls with a 54% response rate, up from over 12,500 calls between 13 and 20 August. Callers reported increasing detentions, evictions, legal uncertainty, and misinformation, particularly around repatriation procedures, assistance eligibility, Voluntary Repatriation Centre (VRC) access, case closures, resettlement, and documentation. UNHCR responded through legal referrals, counselling, and targeted clarification while continuing to engage authorities and partners to ensure accurate information reaches refugees and returnees.

Afghanistan

- **UNHCR and partners maintain a presence across key border entry points** – Islam Qala (Herat), Milak (Nimroz), Torkham (Nangarhar), Spin Boldak (Kandahar), as well as at the Encashment Centre in Kabul – scaling up protection, coordination, and preparedness in response to evolving return trends. Border monitoring continues to highlight significant protection challenges faced by Afghan returnees from Iran, including limited access to essential services and instances



of discrimination. With Iran reportedly extending the return deadline for Afghans to 6 September 2025, inter-agency coordination platforms, including the Border Coordination Forum, Protection Coordination Working Groups, and Site Management Committees, are working with partners to prepare for potential increased flows thereafter, focusing on protection, winterization support, CRIs, transport, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) assistance.

- **UNHCR continues to work closely with UN agencies and other partners to support returnees and promote sustainable reintegration.** Using an area-based approach, UNHCR targets 20 province-level Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs), selected based on several factors, including the ratio of returnees to host communities, previous UNHCR and UN investments, and findings from a Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment that measured household vulnerability and district-level absorption capacity. This approach focuses on high-return areas as models for

predictable interventions, which enhance host communities' absorption capacity and enable the delivery of assistance and services to those in need.

- **Protection and support at Islam Qala (Herat):** Around 169,000 returnees were screened, including female-headed households and unaccompanied girls. Assistance included hot meals, transport, safe spaces, information desks, and mobility support. While staffing remains sufficient, capacity may be stretched as arrivals are expected to increase in the coming weeks. UNHCR continues to coordinate with partners to ensure preparedness and adequate resources to protect vulnerable returnees during this critical period.
- **Returnee support at Milak (Nimroz):** UNHCR and partners are supporting returnees with infrastructure, mobility, luggage assistance, and referrals to health, protection, WASH, and food services. Legal awareness sessions reached over 3,000 returnees this week, with 101 receiving individual counselling. UNHCR continues to urge authorities to uphold the rights and protection of all returnees, ensuring safe and dignified reception.
- **Returnee assistance at Torkham:** Assistance is ongoing at the Samarkhel Encashment Centre, while upgrades at Omari Camp are underway, including expanded processing capacity through the relocation of the Biometric Identity Management System and recruitment of additional staff and outreach volunteers. Returnees report crackdowns on PoR card holders in Pakistan, including blocked cards, with similar measures potentially spreading to other areas.
- **Support for returnees at Spin Boldak (Kandahar):** New arrivals report trauma, family separation, extortion, confiscation of documents, poor detention conditions, and limited access to services in Pakistan. Upon arrival, urgent needs include shelter, CRIs, land, education for women and girls, and livelihood support. UNHCR continues to urge authorities to uphold returnees' rights and ensure safe, dignified reception and reintegration.
- **Support for returnees in Kabul:** The Encashment Centre has processed nearly half of all assisted returns in 2025, reaching around 40,000 returnees to date, including 20,000 in August alone. Resources have been scaled up to prevent overcrowding and ensure timely assistance. Cash assistance remains vital for reintegration, helping returnees meet immediate needs, access critical services, and rebuild their lives in Afghanistan.
- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Iran were documentation and legal assistance (67%), family reunification support (34%), and information on services and assistance (17%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (89%), housing or accommodation (82%) and financial support (80%).
- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Pakistan were documentation and legal assistance (76%), information on services and assistance (36%), and protection services for children (34%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (82%), housing (81%), and financial support (80%).

Tajikistan

- **Forced returns from Tajikistan continue despite protection concerns.** Since 1 April, around 1,450 Afghans (including some 550 women and 330 children) have been deported, with most occurring in the past two months. Families are being removed without due process, legal assistance, or the chance to appeal. UNHCR is coordinating on both sides of the border to verify cases, provide protection interventions and humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, and support vulnerable families left behind in Tajikistan. Advocacy with the Government continues to halt forced returns and ensure fair asylum procedures in line with national and international obligations.

Financial Information

UNHCR's Afghanistan situation this year is only funded at **29% against the required \$478 million**. UNHCR calls on the international community to urgently and substantially increase funding.

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