

# Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #10

(19 September 2025)



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Afghan returnees from  
Iran and Pakistan in  
2025

**1.8 million**  
Afghans have returned  
from Iran since 1 April as of  
18 September

**614,600**  
Afghans have returned  
from Pakistan since 1  
April as of 18 September

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **More than 2.7 million Afghans** from Iran and Pakistan have returned so far in 2025, with the 31 August earthquake in Afghanistan exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.
- **Activities are on hold at Encashment Centres** across Afghanistan due to restrictions on Afghan female staff. UNHCR is [strongly advocating](#) for their full access.
- **Afghans remain in a precarious situation in Pakistan** following the expiry of Proof of Registration (PoR) cards' grace period on 31 August, putting many at risk of arrest and deportation.
- **The Afghanistan situation remains critically underfunded**, with only 32% of the required \$478 million for 2025 received. Additional support is needed to scale up the response to multiple emergencies. UNHCR's [updated regional returns appeal](#) calls for \$258.6 million.

## 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 return of 2.7 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 have further strained resources.

The catastrophic earthquake in eastern Afghanistan on 31 August has compounded vulnerabilities. An estimated 498,800 people are in need of humanitarian assistance. In response, the OCHA-led multi-sectoral [Eastern Region Earthquake Response Plan](#) was launched, targeting around 456,000 people in high-intensity impact areas, particularly those whose homes were severely damaged or destroyed. \$139.6 million is required to deliver life-saving assistance over the next four months (September–December 2025). As part of the inter-agency response, UNHCR has [prioritized three key areas](#) based on identified needs: needs assessments to guide interventions, emergency shelter and essential items, and protection support for the most vulnerable, including recent returnees.

In Pakistan, the second phase of the ‘Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan’ (IFRP) began in April 2025, targeting undocumented Afghans and holders of Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC). On 31 July, the Government expanded the plan to include Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders. The expiry of the PoR grace period on 31 August triggered a sharp rise in returns, including some 143,200 in August and around 165,600 so far in September. The end of the grace period has heightened uncertainty and fears among Afghans, as returns continue despite the protection risks. Alongside the returns crisis, recent floods in Pakistan have affected communities in Shangla and Swat districts. UNHCR, through the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, has provided core relief items (CRIs) and shelter kits to flood-affected families, with discussions ongoing on further support.

In Iran, conditions for Afghans have become increasingly precarious following the expiration of Headcount Slips on 20 March and the rollout of a regularization and return scheme affecting over two million Afghans. Daily average returns from Iran were lower this week, with approximately 4,300 returns (compared with 7,400 last week). Many Afghans also continue to report discrimination and harassment.

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 Afghan 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 1.8 million Afghans have returned from Iran, with more than 2 million returning since the beginning of the year.** Daily returns between 11 and 17 September averaged 4,300 people, down from 7,400 the previous week. *For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Iran-Afghanistan Update [here](#).*

- **Return movements at Dogharoun border remain below July levels.** During the reporting period, around 425 buses carrying an estimated 17,000 returnees were recorded, alongside about 20 people returning voluntarily under the Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) programme. Field reports indicate a continued reduction in return movements in August and September compared with July although a slight increase was noted in the second week of September.
- **Afghans continue to face challenges accessing services, education, and livelihoods.** Families with different types of documentation face difficulties opening bank accounts, enrolling children in school, and obtaining SIM cards. Access to the labour market remains increasingly constrained, even for documented Afghans, amid misconceptions about work rights. UNHCR continues to advocate for equitable access to education, services, and livelihoods to support the protection and well-being of Afghan communities.

### Pakistan

- **From 1 April to 18 September, 614,600 Afghans returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan,** including 71,100 deportees (12%). Most were undocumented (53%), followed by ACC holders (10%), PoR card holders (35%) and asylum-seekers (2%).
- 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 61% (87,200), while in September PoR card holders have so far accounted for 55% (101,000) of all returns.** For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Pakistan-Afghanistan Update [here](#).
- **Afghan communities in Pakistan face continued uncertainty.** In Balochistan, authorities increased pressure on Afghan refugees, issuing short repatriation warnings and closing some schools, health facilities, and local markets. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, authorities continue to encourage voluntary returns. Many PoR card holders remain willing to return but face challenges such as limited transport, high travel costs, and the recent closure of Encashment Centres in Afghanistan. UNHCR continues to engage with authorities and partners to prevent forced returns, support access to education, and provide mental health and psychosocial support.
- **UNHCR continues to monitor protection concerns in Pakistan.** Reports of arrests, detentions, harassment, evictions, and deportation threats affecting Afghan families, including PoR card and Reception Slip holders, continued to be received. Concerns raised also included health, documentation and safety if returned to Afghanistan. UNHCR continues to provide support and advocate for the safety and rights of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

### Afghanistan

- **UNHCR and partners maintain a presence at key border entry points** – Islam Qala (Herat), Milak (Nimroz), Torkham (Nangarhar), Spin Boldak (Kandahar) – scaling up protection, coordination, and preparedness in response to evolving return trends.
- **UNHCR activities continue to be disrupted by restrictions on female staff.** On 9 September, following instructions from de facto authorities preventing UN Afghan female staff from working, UNHCR was forced to suspend activities at Encashment Centres across the country, including in

Kabul. These centres provide cash, protection, and other support to aid returnees' initial reintegration. In recent days, international female staff were deployed in Kabul to assist women and female-headed households. This was a limited and exceptional measure to address urgent humanitarian needs, including children waiting for days for assistance. UNHCR continues constructive discussions with the de facto authorities to restore full operations.

- **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). These areas are selected based on several factors, including the ratio of returnees to host communities, previous UNHCR and UN investments, and findings from assessments. The 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.

- **At Islam Qala (Herat), returnees face significant protection risks.**

Male returnees report abuse, arbitrary arrests, and detention in Iran, often resulting in trauma and limited recourse. Returnees also reported instances where rental refund requests triggered the deportation of undocumented or Headcount Slip holders. Women, especially female-headed households or those without male guardians, expressed fear, uncertainty, and gaps in



*Naser Ahmad, a returnee from Iran, receiving cash assistance from UNHCR at the Islam Qala border in Herat. © UNHCR/Samand Ibrahim*

registration at the reception centre. Gender-based violence survivors continue to be identified for support and referral. Women and children make up at least 70% of returnees, with nearly half from female-headed households, facing limited livelihoods and restrictions on working outside the home. UNHCR continues to provide assistance, protection, and referrals to address urgent needs.

- **At Torkham (Nangarhar), UNHCR assisted returnees ahead of the Encashment Centre's closure.** UNHCR reached around 26,400 returnees between 1 August and 17 September, including around 9,400 under the Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) and 17,000 under the Forcibly Returned Afghans Enrolment (FARE) cash assistance programmes. Between 11 and 17 September, about 4,600 returnees were assisted, down nearly 30% from the previous week due to the suspension of Samarkhel Encashment Centre on 9 September. Registration data shows an average of 2,300 arrivals per day, two-thirds documented returns. Truck shortages in Pakistan and the Encashment Centre's suspension were cited as key factors limiting returns.
- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Iran were documentation and legal assistance (66%), family reunification support (28%), and information on services and assistance (14%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (89%), housing or accommodation (83%) and financial support (82%).

- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Pakistan were documentation and legal assistance (92%), information on services and assistance (35%), and protection services for children (27%). The top three needs upon arrival were housing (85%), food (83%), and financial support (78%).

## Tajikistan

- **Forced returns from Tajikistan continue despite protection concerns.** Since January, around 1,600 Afghans (including close to 600 women and nearly 400 children) have been deported. Since September, 45 Afghan nationals have been deported, including around 40 refugees and asylum-seekers. 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

The Afghanistan situation this year is only funded at **32% against the required \$478 million**. UNHCR appreciates the generosity of donors who have stepped up to support the Afghanistan situation response with earmarked, softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions, ensuring life-saving assistance reaches those most in need:

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## Contact

UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific: [rbapext@unhcr.org](mailto:rbapext@unhcr.org)

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