

Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #12

(3 October 2025)



Thousands of Afghans return from Iran through Islam Qala border, many arriving with few belongings amid rising mass returns. UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

HIGHLIGHTS

- As of end of September, **over 2 million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan in 2025.**
- **Operational constraints in Afghanistan, including a recent 48-hour nationwide internet shutdown and restrictions on female Afghan staff,** are significantly affecting UNHCR's ability to deliver returnee assistance.
- **Afghans remain in a precarious situation in Pakistan** following the end of the grace period for Proof of Registration (PoR) cards 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 over 2 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 has further strained resources.

The recent earthquakes in eastern Afghanistan have compounded vulnerabilities, leaving an estimated 498,800 people 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. The plan appeals for \$139.6 million to deliver life-saving assistance over 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 end of the grace period has heightened uncertainty and fears among Afghans, as returns continue despite the protection risks. Alongside the returns crisis, floods in September in Pakistan have affected communities in Shangla and Swat districts. UNHCR, through the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, has already provided core relief items (CRIs) and shelter kits to flood-affected families, including Refugee Housing Units to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority.

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 2 million Afghans. 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 continues to carry 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, and in line with its [updated Guidance Note on Afghanistan](#), UNHCR urges States to exercise caution when considering forced returns to Afghanistan of people found not to be in need of international protection, given the ongoing large-scale humanitarian crisis and the potentially destabilising impact that such returns could have on the country’s fragile situation.

Operational Highlights

Iran

- **Returns from Iran via Dogharoun Crossing remain steady.** During the reporting period, over 270 buses carried an estimated 10,840 returnees, alongside nearly 30 people returning voluntarily under UNHCR’s Voluntary Repatriation programme. UNHCR continues to monitor return trends and support returnees at the border.

Pakistan

- **UNHCR continues to engage with Afghan communities in Pakistan to support planning, protection, and safe returns.** Following the de-notification of refugee camps in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – ending formal recognition of camps and winding down UNHCR services – local

officials informed communities about return procedures, while UNHCR advocated for dignified returns and addressed community concerns. In Balochistan, authorities issued public notices urging voluntary return, and UNHCR met with community representatives to provide guidance, ensure protection considerations, and support planning. In line with its [updated Guidance Note on Afghanistan](#), UNHCR calls on all countries to uphold the right to seek asylum and respect the principle of non-refoulement.

- **UNHCR helpline continues to provide guidance and support to Afghan refugees in Pakistan.** Calls received related to protection concerns, including arrests, detention, displacement, and safety. UNHCR provided guidance on case processing and procedures and offered advice and support on health, psychosocial wellbeing, and protection, including gender-based violence. The helpline remains a key channel for refugees to access information, guidance, and referral services.

Afghanistan

- **UNHCR and partners maintain a presence at key border entry points** – Islam Qala (Herat) and Milak (Nimroz) on the Afghanistan–Iran border, and Torkham (Nangarhar) and Spin Boldak (Kandahar) on the Afghanistan–Pakistan border – while navigating a highly volatile operational environment. Teams are providing life-saving assistance, support protection, coordination, and preparedness, while also adapting rapidly to shifting return trends and evolving restrictions.



UNHCR assists returnees, mostly women and children, including female-headed households and gender-based violence survivors at the Islam Qala border in Herat. © UNHCR/Samand Ibrahimi

- **Operational constraints impact UNHCR's ability to deliver critical assistance despite nationwide restoration of internet and telecommunications services.** Restrictions on staff movement, including limitations affecting female staff, alongside the recent 48-hour communications black out, have significantly disrupted operations. These challenges have affected the delivery of returnee assistance, including cash support, road missions, and other critical activities. With services now resumed, UNHCR is adapting by reviewing contingency plans, expanding in-person coordination, and monitoring developments to ensure essential support and protection for returnees and communities in need.
- **At Milak (Nimroz), protection interviews highlight ongoing challenges faced by Afghan nationals in Iran and returnees.** Women and children make up around 70% of returnees, with nearly half of those assisted being female-headed families. Many female returnees, including those without male guardians, report delays in registration at the reception centre, contributing to fear and uncertainty. Gender-based violence survivors are identified through protection screening and provided with referrals and support. Limited livelihood opportunities and restrictions on women working outside the home are heightening vulnerabilities. UNHCR continues to monitor the situation closely and provide support through guidance, protection services, and reintegration assistance to help vulnerable families navigate these challenges safely.

- **UNHCR maintains active inter-agency coordination at key border points to support returnee operations.** In Islam Qala (Herat), coordination with de facto authorities, IOM-led border coordination forums, and Protection Coordination Working Groups continued to ensure alignment on operational and protection priorities. At Milak (Nimroz), inter-agency meetings reviewed return flows, resource allocation, water, sanitation and hygiene, and health support, and transition plans to new reception facilities. In Torkham (Nangarhar), UNHCR explored cash assistance for documented returnees with WFP, and in Spin Boldak (Kandahar), coordination enabled the introduction of two processing shifts at Takhtapul Reception Centre to address backlogs. Across all locations, UNHCR engagement strengthened operational planning, service delivery, and preparedness for potential increases in returnees.

Tajikistan

- **Forced returns from Tajikistan continue despite protection concerns.** Since January, over 1,600 Afghans (including nearly 1,400 refugees and asylum-seekers, among them close to 600 women and 400 children) have been deported. Since 1 September, 78 Afghan nationals have been deported, including around 70 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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