

Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #14

(27 October 2025)



Afghan returnees from Pakistan arrive at Torkham border, tired and exhausted, facing an uncertain journey ahead. UNHCR provides assistance, guidance, and essential services to help them navigate their return. UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

2.3 million
Afghan returnees from
Iran and Pakistan in
2025

1.5 million
Afghans have returned
from Iran since 1 April as of
25 October

578,000
Afghans have returned
from Pakistan since 1
April as of 25 October

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Almost 2.3 million Afghans** from Iran and Pakistan have returned so far in 2025.
- **Recent clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan have disrupted border crossings**, delaying returns and heightening risks for Afghan returnees.
- **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 2.3 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 have further strained resources.

The recent earthquakes in eastern Afghanistan have 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 end of the grace period on 31 August has heightened uncertainty and fears among Afghans, as returns and deportations continue despite the protection risks. Alongside the returns crisis, 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.

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. 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 UNHCR’s [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

- **Since 1 April 2025, some 1.5 million Afghans have returned from Iran, with more than 1.7 million returning since the beginning of the year.** For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Iran-Afghanistan Update [here](#).
- **Returns to Afghanistan continue at Dogharoun, with early biometric enrolment underway:** During the reporting week, nearly 120 buses carrying an estimated 4,700 returnees crossed the border, alongside 18 voluntary returns under the Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) programme.

Pakistan

- **From 1 April to 25 October, 578,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan**, including 44,800 deportees (8%). Most were undocumented (59%), followed PoR card holders (38%) and asylum-seekers (3%). For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Pakistan-Afghanistan Update [here](#).
- **Afghan refugees in Pakistan are facing increasing risks amid border restrictions and pressure to return.** All 54 refugee villages have been denotified: 43 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 10 in Balochistan and 1 in Punjab, raising concerns about possible forced returns. In Balochistan, Chaman border authorities have tightened security and relocated around 1,000 returnee families following the recent clashes. Provincial authorities have also introduced measures such as temporary business closures and deadlines for Afghans to leave certain districts. Refugee communities report limited access to services, few livelihoods, along with uncertainty at the border although some flexibility is granted for vulnerable cases identified by UNHCR. UNHCR [continues to call](#) on the Government of Pakistan to ensure returns are organized, phased, and voluntary, and that a protection mechanism is set up to exempt those with ongoing international protection needs from involuntary return.
- **Helpline reports highlight protection challenges for Afghan refugees across Pakistan.** Callers from Quetta, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Karachi reported concerns over arrests, harassment, and potential deportation, with some families facing evictions or difficulties accessing legal documents. Many also sought guidance on border movements, Voluntary Repatriation Centres, cash grants, and verification processes. The helpline remains a vital lifeline, enabling refugees to access accurate information and make informed decisions about their protection and rights. Through community-based feedback and casework, UNHCR provided counselling, legal referrals, and protection support, reinforcing accountability to affected communities and ensuring that complaints and concerns were addressed.

Afghanistan

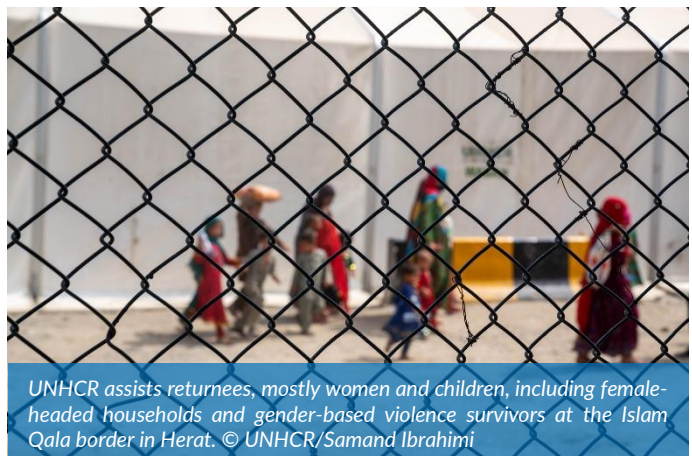
UNHCR and partners aim to maintain a presence at key border entry points – Islam Qala (Herat) and Milak (Nimroz) on the Afghanistan–Iran border, and Torkham (Nangarhar) and Spin Boldak (Kandahar) on the Afghanistan–Pakistan border – while navigating a highly volatile operational environment.

- **Cross-border movement at Torkham and Spin Boldak remains disrupted following deadly clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan.** Initial peace talks took place in Doha on 18 October, brokered by Qatar and Türkiye, followed by a ceasefire agreement on 19 October. To build on these discussions, delegations from both countries met again in Istanbul on 25 October to address the issues in greater detail. The clashes have effectively closed the borders, severely affecting returnee processing, trade, and civilian movement. UNHCR continues to provide essential support for returnees on the Afghanistan side at the Omari Reception Centre near Torkham and the Takhtapul Reception Centre near Spin Boldak, ensuring access to assistance, including cash, protection, health and WASH services.
- **Restrictions on female national staff continue to limit participation across UN operations in Afghanistan.** The nationwide ban on female staff at UN premises has now entered its seventh week, affecting engagement, programme delivery, and operational continuity. Despite ongoing advocacy with the de facto authorities, progress remains limited. Female staff remain an essential

part of UN programming, and their continued exclusion poses challenges to delivering inclusive and effective assistance. UNHCR continues to advocate for the full and safe participation of female staff across all UN operations.

- **At Torkham (Nangarhar), returnees face heightened risks amid border closures while intensified law enforcement in Pakistan increases challenges for Afghan refugees.** The Torkham border closed on 11 October for vehicles and 12 October for pedestrians, with all agencies, including UNHCR partners, instructed to vacate the area for security reasons, temporarily disrupting services. Despite these constraints, UNHCR continues to provide cash assistance at the Omari Reception Centre, along with other essential services for incoming returnees. Meanwhile, returnees report intensified law enforcement in Punjab (including Rawalpindi) and Islamabad, including raids on refugee homes, eviction pressures, and notices to vacate camps by the end of the year. At the same time, UNHCR continues to advocate at all levels with authorities to support safe, voluntary, and dignified returns.
- **Similarly, at Spin Boldak (Kandahar), returnees from multiple Pakistani cities report facing harsh conditions.** These include raids, extortion, short eviction notices, and limited access to basic necessities. The border was closed on 15 and 16 October for all crossings due to clashes, reopening on 17 October for returnee movements only, while other pedestrian and commercial traffic remained suspended. UNHCR and partners have delivered and installed two Rub Halls at the Takhtapul Reception Centre and continue to monitor the situation. Advocacy efforts remain focused on ensuring safe, predictable, and unhindered cross-border access for returnees.

- **At Islam Qala (Herat), UNHCR continues to provide protection and support to returnees, with a focus on women and female-headed households.** Returnees receive legal assistance, including counselling, case referrals, and awareness sessions on family law, housing, land and property, and civil documentation. Distributions of CRIs and clothing continue to support basic needs. Many female returnees, including those without male guardians, report delays in registration,



contributing to fear and uncertainty. Women and children make up around 70% of returnees, with nearly half from female-headed households. Limited livelihood opportunities and restrictions on women working outside the home continue to heighten vulnerabilities. More funding is urgently needed to expand reception centre services, strengthen protection support, and ensure timely assistance for the growing returnee population.

- **UNHCR works 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.

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 **35% 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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