UNHCR REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

AFGHANISTAN SITUATION UPDATE

August 2026

KEY FIGURES

3.1 million[1]
Afghan refugees and others in need of international protection in the sub-region

1.2 million[2]
Afghan returns in 2026 from Iran and Pakistan, of which 40% were deported

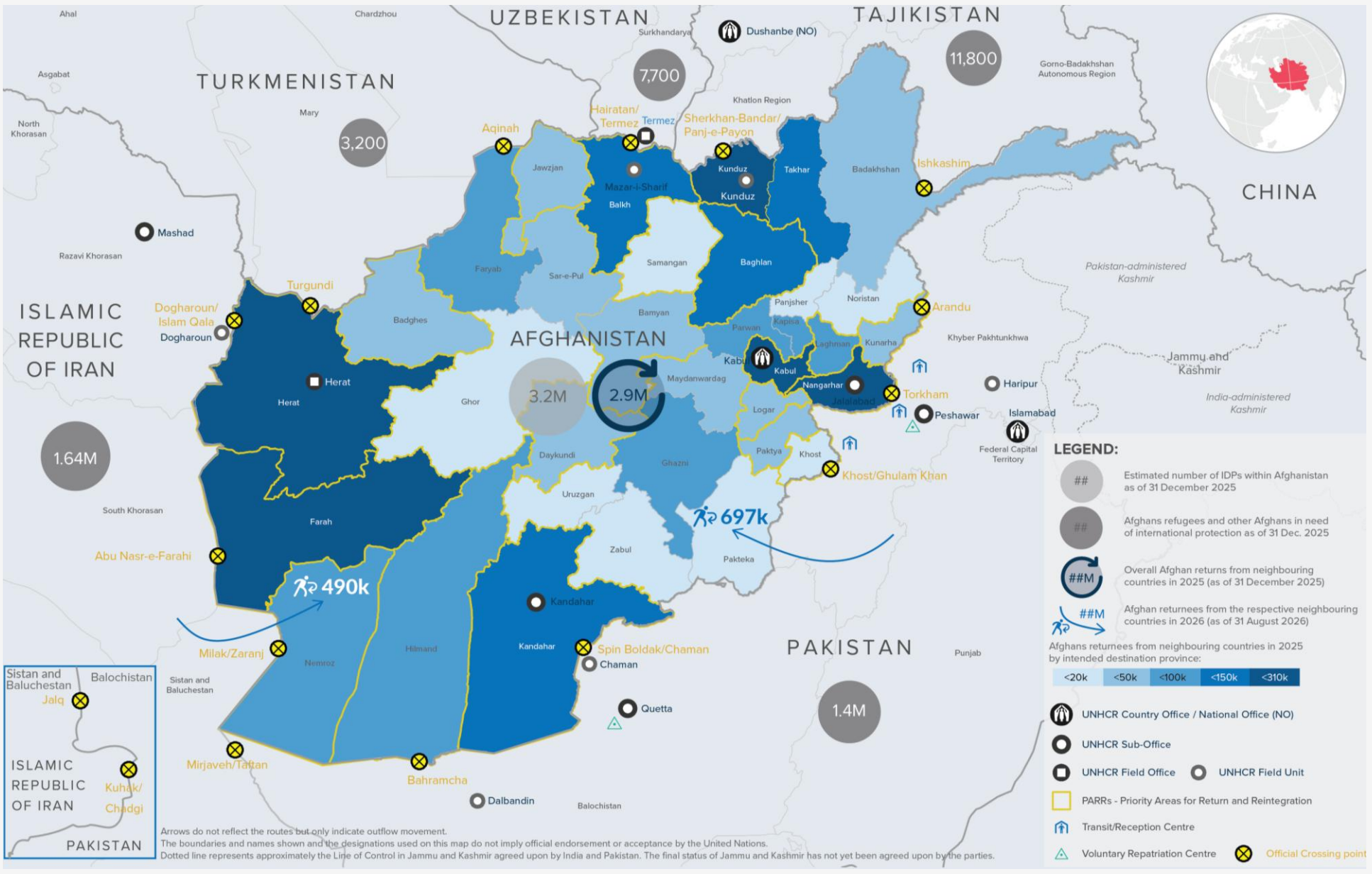
3.2 million[3]
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan and **71k** new IDPs in 2026

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In **Afghanistan**, pressure on reception and reintegration services remained high in August, despite lower return numbers than in July. Nearly a year after the nationwide ban on national female UN staff accessing UN premises was introduced, the restriction remained in place, while tighter restrictions in Herat disrupted protection and community activities. At Torkham, customs checks delayed the movement of families' belongings until the suspension was lifted on 24 August. Renewed border tensions on 28 August prompted humanitarian teams to temporarily relocate to Omari camp, with operations resuming the following day. These restrictions and disruptions constrained humanitarian access and required sustained engagement with the de facto authorities to maintain support for people in need.

In **Iran**, renewed conflict and heightened security measures in August raised concerns over wider regional escalation. Economic pressures, including disrupted trade, currency depreciation and rising food prices, further reduced household purchasing power and livelihoods. UNHCR and partners continued to monitor emerging protection and assistance needs and adapt responses as required.

In **Pakistan**, insecurity, access restrictions and monsoon-related flooding affected operations in August, particularly in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, alongside continued Afghan returns. Conditions varied across the country, with security constraints and localized disruptions affecting access and requiring operational flexibility. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, localized disruptions affected movement and access in some areas. In Islamabad and Punjab, refugees and asylum-seekers continued to face protection concerns, including mobility restrictions, arrest and detention, police harassment, extortion, limited access to livelihoods and basic services and landlord evictions. In Sindh, reported arrests and deportations of Afghan nationals decreased although enforcement actions against undocumented Afghans continued. In Balochistan, security and movement restrictions also continued to limit humanitarian access to the former Mohammad Khail refugee village and refugee settlements in Chaghi.



[1] *As of end-December 2025*
[2] *As of 31 August 2026*
[3] *3.2 million IDPs as of 2025, and 69,000 new IDPs in 2026 from areas reached with assessments.*
For the latest figures and updates on UNHCR's broader response in sub-region, visit the Afghanistan Situation page on UNHCR's Operational Data Portal. For any queries, please contact: RBAPEXT@unhcr.org

Across **Central Asia**, national security considerations continued to affect refugee protection and access to territory. In Tajikistan, forced returns of Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum-seekers, remained a significant protection concern following reports of returns taking place without due process, legal assistance or opportunities to appeal. In Turkmenistan, preparations were initiated to implement the UN General Assembly resolution proclaiming 2028 the Year of International Law, including through the development of a National Action Plan and a National Concept on International Law and Permanent Neutrality.

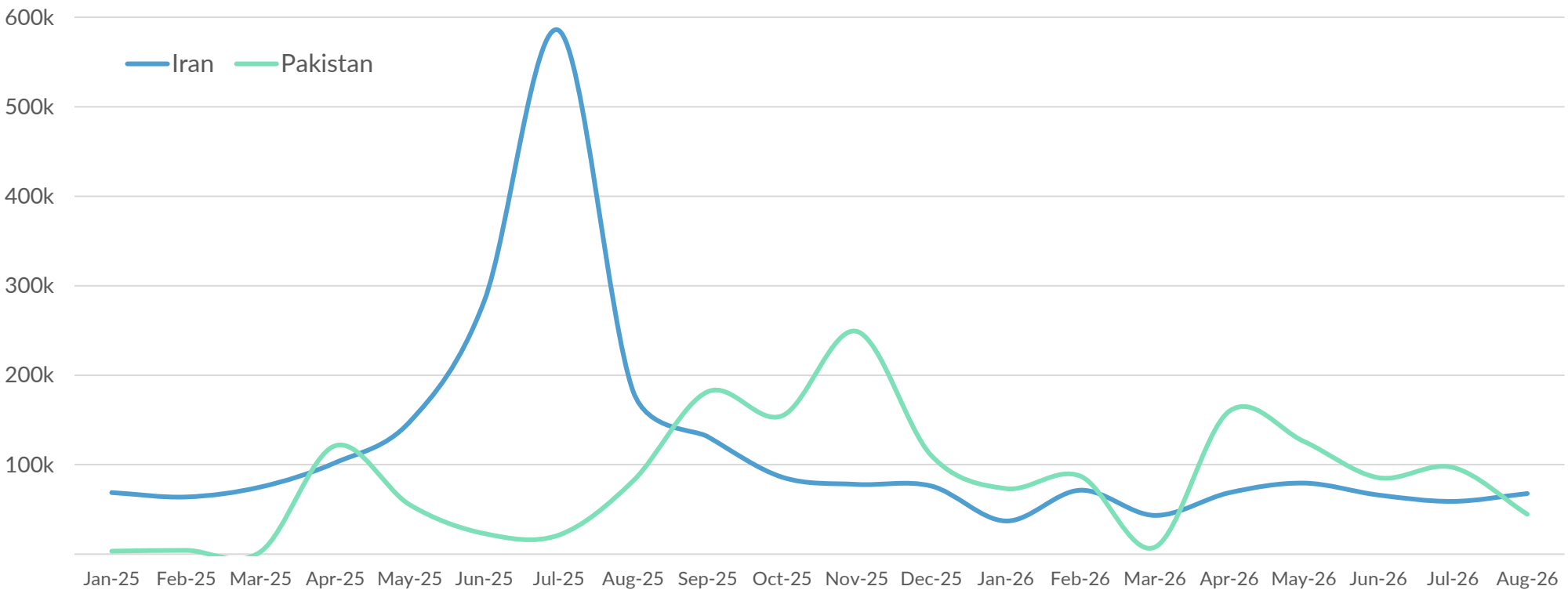
AFGHAN RETURNS

Some 1.2 million Afghans returned from **Iran** (489,700) and **Pakistan** (697,000) in 2026 amid a shrinking protection environment and heightened regional instability. From Pakistan, around 66,100 returnees were deported while more than 80,900 Afghans were arrested and/or detained during the year, reflecting continued enforcement pressure under the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. From Iran, around 489,700 returnees, or 83% of the total, were deportations, including approximately 64,700 in August. Returnees from Pakistan reported detention, ill-treatment and loss of livelihoods, with many arriving abruptly and with limited savings or support networks. Conflict remained a significant driver of departures from Iran, cited by around 42% of returnees in recent monitoring. The scale and conditions of returns generated substantial protection and reintegration needs in Afghanistan.

In **Tajikistan**, forced returns of Afghans remained a significant protection concern. Since January, more than 1,260 Afghan nationals, including 680 refugees and asylum-seekers, have reportedly been returned to Afghanistan, among them 229 children and 295 women. Reports indicate that some families were returned without access to due process, legal assistance or opportunities to appeal. UNHCR coordinated across both sides of the border to verify cases, provide protection and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and support vulnerable families remaining in Tajikistan.

Against this backdrop, UNHCR continues to stress the importance of respecting the principle of non-refoulement and protecting Afghans from forced return where they may face protection risks, in line with its Guidance Note on International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan.

AFGHAN RETURNS FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN



KEY PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS ISSUES

During the reporting period, returnees in Afghanistan faced several protection challenges following return from Iran and Pakistan. Border monitoring documented arrests, detention, extortion and family separation among returnees, including cases involving people holding valid documentation. Unaccompanied and separated children continued to require identification and referral for appropriate support. In areas of return, inadequate shelter, missing civil documentation and limited livelihood opportunities continued to hinder reintegration. Community monitoring in southern provinces also identified child labour, school exclusion and early marriage, alongside limited access to water, healthcare and education, highlighting the continued challenges facing returnees and host communities.

In **Iran**, rising food and other living costs, currency depreciation and disrupted livelihoods reduced access to basic needs and services for both refugee and host communities. Protection monitoring indicated increasing socioeconomic vulnerabilities among refugee households, while access to documentation and other administrative requirements remained a concern. Returns and deportations of foreign nationals also continued at significant scale. On 18 August, the Centre for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (CAFIA) reported that more than 200,000 unauthorized foreign nationals had been deported since 20 March (the beginning of the Iranian year), while noting that some long-staying unauthorized people faced unresolved legal and administrative issues before departure. UNHCR continues to engage with CAFIA and relevant authorities on protection risks affecting refugees.

In **Pakistan**, enforcement pressure continued to affect Afghan communities and prompted some families to relocate to safer areas. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, fears of arrest and deportation, together with expired or missing documentation, restricted movement and access to registration and voluntary return procedures. Family separation following deportations also increased vulnerabilities for some women and children. In Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Attock, the situation was comparatively calmer although security checks, uncertainty over legal status and deportation fears caused anxiety and psychosocial distress. In Balochistan, the shrinking Afghan population and phase-out of the Refugee Villages required continued monitoring. Across Pakistan, 2,088 Afghans, including registered refugees and asylum-seekers, were reported arrested or detained, including those with valid documentation. UNHCR and legal partners intervened in these cases, securing 101 releases and providing legal assistance and counselling to over 2,900 refugees and asylum-seekers.

Across **Central Asia**, refugee protection remained affected by security considerations although efforts to strengthen inclusion in national systems advanced. In the Kyrgyz Republic, UNHCR contributed to consultations on the draft 2030 Poverty Reduction and Employment Plan, providing recommendations to promote inclusive employment and social protection policies for asylum-seekers, forcibly displaced and stateless populations.

UNHCR RESPONSE

UNHCR and partners maintained protection screening, vulnerability-based cash assistance and referrals at border and reception facilities in **Afghanistan**. In August, around 2,800 households (11,400 people) received return cash assistance, bringing the total supported since January to 43,600 households (nearly 198,000 people). Hot meal distributions resumed at Milak, while the rehabilitation of screening and waiting facilities at Torkham improved reception conditions. In areas of return, protection case management, legal assistance, psychosocial support, business grants and skills training supported immediate needs and longer-term reintegration. In Herat, restrictions by de facto authorities required some protection and community engagement activities to shift to remote delivery, allowing UNHCR and partners to maintain support to affected communities.

In **Iran**, demand for UNHCR support increased amid insecurity and economic pressures. The Helpline received nearly 38,800 calls in August, reflecting the continued high demand for assistance. UNHCR provided counselling, legal aid, psychosocial support and financial assistance, while people with heightened protection needs were identified and referred for specialised follow-up. Since the onset of the crisis, UNHCR has assisted nearly 295,100 Afghan refugees through helplines, in-person counselling, registration and targeted support. Most people sought support for severe economic hardship, including difficulties covering food, rent, healthcare, documentation renewal and mandatory health insurance fees. Housing instability, unemployment and rising living costs further increased household vulnerabilities, contributing to harmful coping strategies such as selling belongings and increasing the risk of dangerous onward movements.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR strengthened engagement with Government and other stakeholders to advance protection and inclusion. In Karachi, UNHCR met with the Commissioner for Afghan Refugees and local partners to discuss collaboration on statelessness, legal aid and support to vulnerable communities. UNHCR also supported the launch of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2026, which recognises refugees and asylum-seekers as vulnerable populations and provides for their inclusion in early warning, risk assessments, social protection and disaster planning. The policy creates a stronger framework for refugee-inclusive disaster preparedness and resilience.

Across **Central Asia**, UNHCR continued to bolster access to protection and support local integration through counselling, cash assistance, legal aid and representation in asylum and refugee status determination proceedings. Dedicated hotlines across the five countries also provided refugees and asylum-seekers with information, counselling and referral services. In the Kyrgyz Republic, a UNHCR partnership with the private sector enabled asylum-seeker women to complete a three-month language course, supporting access to essential services and greater independence. In Tajikistan, more than 50 refugee women completed tailoring and hairdressing courses in Vahdat, strengthening vocational skills, self-reliance and pathways to economic inclusion for refugee and host-community women.

OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS



Refugee, asylum-seeker and host-community youth take part in UNHCR's four-day Empowerment Summer Camp in Kazakhstan, building leadership, digital, entrepreneurship, communication and career skills while strengthening connections with their peers. © UNHCR / Diana Assenova

In **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR, in partnership with the Kazakh-American International School and other community and academic partners, supported refugee and asylum-seeker youth to build skills, confidence and pathways to self-reliance. A four-day 'Empowerment Summer Camp' brought together young people from different communities to develop leadership, digital, entrepreneurship, communication and career skills.

Complementing the camp, partnerships with academic institutions enabled skilled refugees to access International English Language Testing System (IELTS) preparation to strengthen their opportunities for further education and employment. This builds on UNHCR's provision of IELTS test vouchers to refugees through its global partnership with IDP Education.

Together, these initiatives support UNHCR's 50 by 35 vision by investing in young people's skills and opportunities for self-reliance, helping them build more sustainable futures and reduce longer-term reliance on humanitarian assistance. Watch the video here.

COORDINATION, COLLABORATION AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

UNHCR strengthened coordination on returns, protection and reintegration in **Afghanistan** through border and inter-agency mechanisms. At the Pakistan border, UNHCR participated in high-level coordination at Omari Camp with de facto authorities and several partners, including IOM, UNICEF and WFP, to address Afghan arrivals, reception pressure and processing bottlenecks. In the south, the Border Consortium meeting in Spin Boldak focused on data alignment, service gaps and reducing duplication. Together with protection partners, UNHCR advanced the Protection Coordination Group, structured around five workstreams – gender-based violence, child protection, mine action, legal assistance and return and reintegration – to strengthen joint analysis, referrals and protection-sensitive response planning.

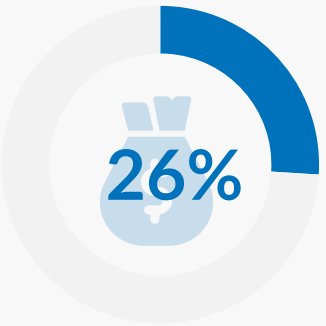
In **Iran**, UNHCR continued engaging with Government counterparts, UN agencies and partners. Close coordination with UNHCR offices in Afghanistan supported cross-border information sharing, monitoring of return movements, and assistance alignment on both sides of the border. Inter-agency mechanisms continued, facilitating joint planning and operational coherence in a fluid and evolving context.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR strengthened coordination with Government authorities, UN agencies and partners amid rising operational and protection pressures. Authorities supported the humanitarian response despite movement restrictions, checkpoints and border closures. Funding shortfalls linked to the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan led to the closure of Urban Cohesion Hubs in Quetta and Chaman, raising concerns over continuity of critical services. In Islamabad, the Refugee Protection Working Group advanced advocacy on preventing refoulement, improving repatriation modalities and ensuring access to services, while UNHCR also expanded inter-agency collaboration on border management, financial assistance coordination and anti-trafficking efforts.

Across **Central Asia**, UNHCR maintained engagement with government counterparts, including ministries, border and judicial authorities, ombudsperson institutions, as well as parliamentary and inter-agency bodies, to advance protection and solutions for refugees and stateless people. These partnerships supported efforts to strengthen asylum systems, promote inclusion in national services and align legislation with international standards. UNHCR also collaborated with UN agencies, development partners, academia and NGOs across the sub-region to implement protection activities and support stronger legal and institutional frameworks.

FUNDING SITUATION

In 2026, UNHCR requires **USD 447.2 million** to support the response to the Afghanistan situation; to date, only **26%** has been received.



UNHCR is grateful to the following donors who have stepped forward with funding, enabling life-saving assistance and protection to reach those most in need:

Australia | Austria | Belgium | Denmark | European Union | Germany | Ireland | Japan | the Netherlands (Kingdom of) | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan | United Kingdom

With thanks to the following private donors from:

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