

Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns from Iran and Pakistan Emergency Update #4

(8 August 2025)



Ahmad, 15, and his younger brother Sahil, 12, are waiting at the Torkham border between Pakistan and Afghanistan with their family, after returning from Pakistan. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

2.1 million

Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan in 2025

1.5 million

Afghans have returned from Iran since 1 April as of 6 August

314,500

Afghans returned from Pakistan since 1 April as of 6 August

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Over 2.1 million Afghans** from Iran and Pakistan have returned in 2025.
- **On 31 July, Pakistan confirmed plans to forcibly return Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders** under the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' (IFRP), with a one-month grace period.
- Returns from Iran continued, with returnees reporting **discrimination, harassment, and wage losses**.
- **Needs at border points in Afghanistan are growing** amid rising returns, protection risks, and limited resources.
- Despite high protection and basic needs, the **Afghanistan situation is critically underfunded**, receiving only 29% of the required \$478 million for this year.

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 over 2.1 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 have further exacerbated the situation.

In Iran, conditions for Afghans have become increasingly precarious due to domestic uncertainty following the expiration of Headcount Slips on 20 March and the rollout of a regularization and return scheme affecting two million Afghans. Rising regional tensions have added to the challenges.

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 extended the plan to include Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders. While a [one-month grace period](#) has since been granted, UNHCR continues to advocate for a formal extension and safeguards for people with international protection needs, such as those at risk of persecution or serious harm from involuntary return.

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. 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 1.5 million Afghans have returned from Iran, with more than 1.8 million returning since the beginning of the year.** Between 31 July and 6 August, daily returns averaged 7,800 people – down 31% from the previous week's 11,300. *For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Iran-Afghanistan Update [here](#).*
- **Iran's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) has launched a two-month renewal process for Amayesh cards (for Afghan refugees) and Hoviat cards (for Iraqi refugees) to help maintain legal status amid stricter enforcement.** Refugees are required to visit designated centres for renewal after receiving an official SMS notification. To safeguard refugees' rights and access to services amid tighter enforcement measures against undocumented Afghans, UNHCR is [sharing information](#) widely to ensure refugees know about the process.

Pakistan

- **From 1 April to 6 August, 314,500 Afghans returned to Afghanistan**, including 54,000 deportees (17%). Most were undocumented (66%), followed by ACC holders (16%), PoR card holders (15%) and asylum-seekers (3%).
- **The percentage of PoR card holders returning rose sharply from 6% in April to 23% in July.** This trend continued in the first week of August, with the total number of PoR card holders more than doubling compared to the last week of July. *For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Update [here](#).*

- **UNHCR is engaging Pakistani authorities at national and provincial levels to promote a protection-sensitive and coordinated approach to the IFRP.** On 4 August, the UNHCR Pakistan Representative met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which agreed to a one-month grace period. In parallel, UNHCR continues to engage with provincial officials to stress the importance of a phased approach, grace periods, and joint registration to protect vulnerable groups. Meanwhile, refugees express concern over the short timeframe and possible restrictions, citing arrests, deportations, and potential suspension of SIM cards and bank accounts that threaten access to financial services, communication, and other essential platforms.
- **High call volumes to the UNHCR Helpline reflect growing anxiety among refugees.** In July 2025, UNHCR received a record 31,200 calls (mainly linked to the 30 June PoR card deadline) with most inquiries focused on case updates and cash assistance. Over two-thirds of callers held UNHCR registration slips. On 6 August alone, more than 1,250 calls were received, with many reporting mass arrests, police harassment, and extortion, particularly in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Quetta. Relevant cases were referred to legal partners. Queries on voluntary repatriation, especially from PoR card holders, are also increasing. Information sharing and coordination with partners remain ongoing to ensure timely support and response.

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 – providing life-saving assistance and scaling up protection, coordination, and preparedness in response to evolving return trends. Border monitoring in Afghanistan continues to reveal significant protection challenges faced by Afghan returnees while in Iran, including difficulties in obtaining essential services and instances of discrimination. These frontline services are critical to ensuring that returnees receive timely protection support and can access basic assistance after often difficult journeys.



- **Islam Qala (Herat): UNHCR and partners are providing protection screening, referrals, and direct assistance, including 2,000–2,500 hot meals and daily transport for 240 returnees.** Services also include safe spaces, information desks, and wheelchairs. Over 19,800 families have received core relief items (CRIs). While staffing gaps remain, overnight stays by male national staff and shift-based scheduling are helping to improve coverage.
- **At Torkham (Nangarhar):** Limited staffing is affecting the response to increasing late afternoon and evening deportee arrivals, typically between 16:00 and 19:30. Partner staff are working extended hours, while rising reports of PoR card confiscation among deportees and spontaneous returnees

are leading to more referrals to protection desks at Zero Point and the Encashment Centre, delaying access to assistance.

- **Nimroz (Milak): UNHCR conducted a safety audit to inform protection and programming responses.** Focus group discussions and key informant interviews with close to 30 people assessed infrastructure, service access, and risks, particularly for women, children, and people with specific needs. Findings will guide targeted improvements in protection and assistance at the border, helping ensure a safer and more dignified return for vulnerable Afghans. UNHCR also provided CRIs to nearly 680 households, comprising 3,307 returnees at Zaranj Zero Point, bringing the total assisted since 14 July to more than 4,200 households.
- **Spin Boldak (Kandahar): Cash assistance rose alongside an increase in deportations of PoR card holders.** Over 1,000 people received support at the Encashment Centre, an uptick linked to Pakistan's recent deportation announcement. Cash support plays a vital role in helping returnees meet immediate needs and reduce the risk of negative coping strategies. UNHCR also conducted workshops to strengthen protection: over 40 partner staff received gender-based violence identification referral training to better support survivors confidentially and more than 10 partner staff working at Zero Point and the Reception Centre were trained on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, enhancing their capacity to prevent misconduct, promote accountability and support a safer environment for returnees.
- **Kabul: The Encashment Centre continues to support a high number of returnees, mostly from Pakistan.** Although not located at a border crossing, the centre has assisted over 21,000 people so far in 2025 – nearly 45% of all assisted returns across the operation. The centre provides essential services, including counselling, cash assistance, and referrals, helping people begin the reintegration process with greater stability and support.
- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Iran were documentation and legal assistance (66%), family reunification support (35%), and information on services and assistance (17%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (88%), housing or accommodation (81%) and financial support (79%).
- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Pakistan were documentation and legal assistance (76%), protection services for children (35%), and information on services and assistance (35%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (82%), housing (82%), and financial support (80%).

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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