Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #16

(26 November 2025)

Afghan returnees from Pakistan arrive 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

2.6 million
Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan in 2025

1.6 million
Afghans have returned from Iran since 1 April as of 22 November

819,000
Afghans have returned from Pakistan since 1 April as of 22 November

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Almost 2.6 million Afghans** from Iran and Pakistan have returned so far in 2025.
- **UN and partners are supporting communities** impacted by 3 November earthquake.
- **UN and partner activities at the Islam Qala border remain suspended** after national female staff barred, limiting critical support for female returnees.
- **Afghans are in a precarious situation in Pakistan** following the end of the grace period for Proof of Registration (PoR) cards on 31 August.
- **The Afghanistan situation remains critically underfunded**, with only 36% 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 almost 2.6 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 have further strained resources.

The humanitarian situation has been compounded by recent earthquakes, leaving many at heightened risk and in urgent need of assistance. On 3 November, an earthquake struck Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan. Details are still being gathered, but preliminary reports indicate more than 20 casualties and 600 injured. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation and coordinating with partners to assess needs and respond rapidly. Earlier, the 31 August earthquake in eastern Afghanistan left an estimated 498,800 people in need of humanitarian assistance. UNHCR and partners are responding through the OCHA-led multi-sectoral Eastern Region Earthquake Response Plan, 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 between September and December 2025. UNHCR's priorities include 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 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

- **Since 1 April 2025, some 1.6 million Afghans have returned from Iran, with more than 1.8 million returning since the beginning of the year.**

Pakistan

- **From 1 April to 22 November, 819,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan**, including 70,000 deportees (9%). Most were undocumented (55%), followed by PoR card holders (42%) and asylum-seekers (3%).

- **UNHCR continues to monitor a challenging protection environment for Afghans in Pakistan, with reports of increasing vulnerability across several districts.** Nearly 5,000 calls with documented Afghans, including Proof of Registration (PoR) and Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders, were recorded during the reporting period. Most calls concerned evictions, intimidation, and enforcement actions across the country. Many families report loss of livelihoods, limited access to basic services, or delays at border points, which are affecting their ability to meet essential needs. UNHCR and partners are providing counselling, legal support, and referrals to urgent protection and humanitarian services, with particular attention to women and children.

Afghanistan

UNHCR and partners aim to maintain a presence at key border entry points – 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.

- **UNHCR and partners are providing ongoing emergency aid in wake of the most recent earthquake.** Following the 6.3 magnitude earthquake that struck northern Afghanistan on 3 November, humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR, are continuing to provide emergency shelter, blankets, food, and medical assistance. However, harsh winter conditions continue to heighten needs and more support is needed to scale up the humanitarian response.

Nearly 1,000 families in Kabul received targeted assistance ahead of winter. © UNHCR/Samand Ibrahimi

- **Humanitarian operations at Islam Qala (Herat) remain suspended since 4 November.** This follows additional restrictions preventing female national UN and partner staff from operating at the border, impacting the delivery of essential services. During the reporting period, authorities imposed strict burqa requirements that further limit women's access to public institutions and exacerbate the ban on female staff. Over 60% of returnees at Islam Qala are women and children, including female-headed households and single female returnees. The UN continues to engage with the de facto authorities, advocating for the removal of these restrictions to ensure the delivery of critical support in a culturally sensitive and principled manner.

- **Returnees are experiencing disruptions in cash and protection assistance, prompting a mobile response and scale-up at border centres.** Following the de facto authorities' directive preventing Afghan female staff from working, UNHCR closed the Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad Encashment Centres. Following this, return processing and cash distribution have been expanded at Omari (Torkham) and Takhtapul (Spin

UNHCR assists returnees, mostly women and children, including female-headed households and gender-based violence survivors. © UNHCR/Samand Ibrahimi

Boldak) Reception Centres, operating two shifts daily, where female staff are able to work.

- **UNHCR is working 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 more than 1,400 refugees and asylum-seekers, among them close to 600 women and 400 children) have been deported. Since 1 September, 144 Afghan nationals have been deported, including around 127 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 **36% 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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