

A woman with a green headscarf and a young child are the central focus of the image. The woman has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the left. The child, with curly brown hair, is looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. They are both wearing colorful, patterned clothing. The background is a blurred, outdoor setting.

ONE YEAR RECAP

2025 AFGHAN RETURNS



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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Supported by UNHCR,
the UN Refugee Agency

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Cover photo

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TIMELINE



29 January 2025

PAKISTAN: Government issues a directive requiring ACC holders and undocumented, to return to Afghanistan or risk deportation. In addition, starting late December 2024 and continuing in 2025, the Government of Pakistan directed Afghans regardless of status or documents to relocate out of the capital cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.



7 March 2025

PAKISTAN: IFRP Phase 2 announced, covering all ACC holders and introducing a grace period (31 March) prior to deportations.



20 March 2025

IRAN: Headcount slips issued by the Government expire, affecting over 2 million Afghans who must undergo Government assessments to determine whether they are allowed to remain.



1 April 2025

PAKISTAN: IFRP Phase 2 enforcement actions commence.



12 June 2025

IRAN: 12-day conflict between Iran and Israel commences until a ceasefire on 24 June.



4 July 2025

IRAN: Some 40,000 Afghans returned from Iran in a single day. During July, total returns from Iran reached approximately 585,000.



30 June 2025

PAKISTAN: Proof of Registration (PoR) cards for Afghans refugees expire, affecting the legal stay of registered Afghan populations.



31 July 2025

PAKISTAN: IFRP Phase 3 was launched, designating all PoR card holders (1.4 million) as “illegal foreigners” and requiring their repatriation. On 4 August, the Ministry of Interior announced a one-month grace period.



1 September 2025

PAKISTAN: IFRP Phase 3 enforcement actions commence.



15 October 2025

PAKISTAN: Over 15,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan in a single-day. In October, total returns from Pakistan reached approximately 155,000.

CONTEXT

Afghanistan experienced large-scale return movements in 2025, with an estimated 2.9 million Afghan returns. These movements reflected a shift in the profile of returnees, many of whom had lived in Iran and Pakistan for prolonged periods while some born in those countries and returned under duress and adverse conditions. Policy changes, tightening documentation regimes, misinformation, disinformation, and deteriorating socio-economic and protection conditions for Afghans in neighbouring countries, particularly Iran and Pakistan, were key drivers. Returns frequently involved abrupt departures, limited time to prepare, abandoned assets, family separation, inhuman detention conditions and difficult journeys back to Afghanistan, heightening protection risks on arrival and straining reception and reintegration capacities in areas of return.

In Pakistan, the Government announced the resumption of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) on 7 March 2025, initially targeting Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders, who were instructed to leave voluntarily by 31 March or face deportation from 1 April. On 31 July, the policy was expanded to include Afghan refugees holding Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, with a one-month grace period ending on 31 August. Since April, some 1 million Afghans returned from Pakistan, many facing uncertainty about their legal status, limited assets and capacity to subsist, and constrained access to basic services upon return.

The implementation of the IFRP has contributed to a deteriorating protection environment in Pakistan, marked by increases in child labour, forced and early marriage, gender-based violence, harassment, and exploitation. Mental health and psychosocial support needs have risen sharply, with refugees reporting widespread stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma driven by fears of arrest, deportation, and worsening financial hardship. Furthermore, the lack of valid documentation has reportedly resulted in denial of access to essential services, including healthcare and education, as well as restricted access to lawful employment and adequate housing.

In Iran, returns and deportations intensified from mid-2025 as border enforcement tightened and the authorities' increased deportations against the backdrop of the conflict with Israel, a spike in misinformation and disinformation, worsening socio-economic and protection conditions for Afghans and the expiry of temporary stay permits held by hundreds of thousands of people since March 2025. Daily returns exceeded 40,000 in July, illustrating the scale and speed of return/deportation movements. Combined returns/deportations from Iran and Pakistan reached unprecedented levels over the year, placing significant pressure on already stretched border reception, transit facilities and community-level absorption capacity in Afghanistan.

UNHCR reiterates concern that many Afghans—regardless of documentation status—face serious protection risks in Afghanistan due to the current human rights situation, especially women and girls, in line with its updated [UNHCR's Guidance Note on Afghanistan – Update II \(September 2025\)](#) on Afghanistan.

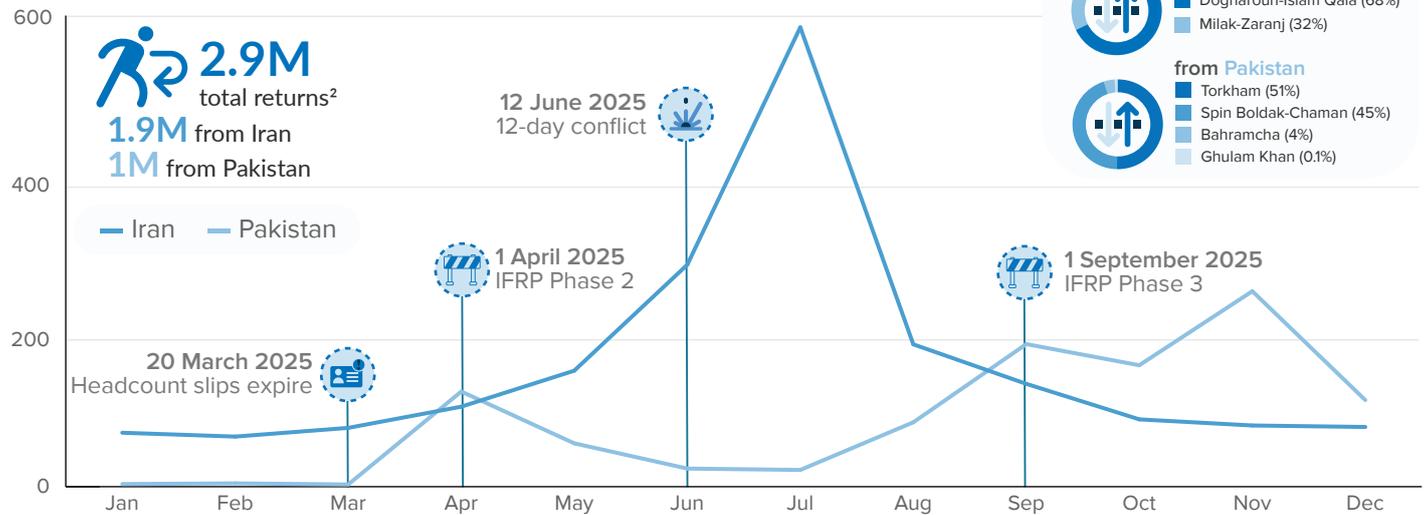
Deportations from Tajikistan also contributed to overall return figures in 2025. A total of 1,953 Afghans were deported over the course of the year, with relatively low numbers recorded in the first half, followed by a sharp spike in July (955 deportations) and fluctuating returns through the remainder of the year. While comparatively limited in scale, these movements nonetheless add pressure on reintegration capacities in Afghanistan.

Authorities in Türkiye also reported enforcement actions affecting Afghans in 2025, with approximately 44,200 Afghan nationals “captured” during the year as part of migration control operations.¹ While not all those apprehended were necessarily returned to Afghanistan thousands have been deported by air.

¹ Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>

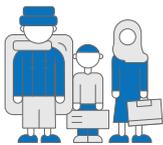
2025 AT A GLANCE

Figures are presented in thousands and include deportations



PROFILES OF RETURNING AFGHANS

Afghan returns from Iran



45% are women & children
47% are single travelers
21% are children

Documentation type

total returns



- Undocumented (54%)
- Headcount slip holder (46%)
- Amayesh Card holder (0.1%)

Ethnicity



- Hazara (11%)
- Pashtoon (26%)
- Tajik (46%)
- Uzbek (8%)
- Others (9%)

Education levels

head of household



- No education (67%)
- Primary school (Grades 1-6) (12%)
- Secondary school (Grades 7-14) (19%)
- University degree (1%)
- Madrasa (1%)

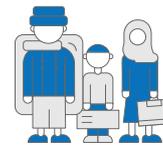
Occupational skills

head of household



- No skills (53%)
- Unskilled daily wage labour (20%)
- Masonry (semi-skilled) (13%)
- Agriculture (10%)
- Tailoring (4%)

Afghan returns from Pakistan



49% are women & girls
57% are children
79% are women & children

Documentation type

total returns



- Undocumented (54%)
- PoR cardholder (44%)
- Asylum-seekers (2%)

Ethnicity



- Hazara (2%)
- Pashtoon (92%)
- Tajik (4%)
- Uzbek (1%)
- Others (1%)

Education levels

head of household



- No education (70%)
- Primary school (Grades 1-6) (8%)
- Secondary school (Grades 7-14) (18%)
- University degree (2%)
- Madrasa (2%)

Occupational skills

head of household



- No skills (53%)
- Unskilled daily wage labour (15%)
- Agriculture (14%)
- Shopkeeping (12%)
- Livestock herders (6%)

The UN in Afghanistan, including UNHCR, has adopted a harmonized approach to reporting returnee figures, using consolidated data and country-of-arrival figures. The change in UNHCR figures reflects this joint methodology, effective October 2025.

² An umbrella term that includes all returns including deportations, assisted Voluntary Repatriation and other returns of Afghans of all statuses, excluding passport holders.

The pattern of returns has shifted in recent years, with 2025 return data showing a notable increase in families among returnees, particularly Afghans who have lived in Iran and Pakistan for extended periods. Many have lived abroad for decades, and a significant number of children and youth were born and raised in the host countries. As a result, they often have weaker social and economic ties to their areas of origin and limited social networks in Afghanistan. This increases the complexity of reintegration, as returnees may face greater challenges in accessing livelihoods, services, civil documentation, and integrating into communities where they may no longer have strong ties, heightening their need for sustained protection and assistance.³

Compared to 2023 and 2024, the 2025 return data indicates a more pronounced pattern of “negative self-selection,” with individuals who have lower levels of education returning first. This trend is particularly evident among returnees from Iran and Pakistan and is likely to intensify competition for limited resources among the poorest and most vulnerable communities in districts of origin/intended destinations in Afghanistan. The proportion of refugee returnees with no formal education is higher than among refugees who remain in host countries, suggesting that those who return are, on average, more vulnerable.⁴

A majority of Afghan returnees reported that they had no choice in their decision to return. Among those returning from Pakistan, 61 per cent indicated that their return was not voluntary, while this proportion was even higher for returnees from Iran, at 73 per cent. This suggests that a significant share of returns is driven by external pressures rather than personal preference, underscoring the constrained circumstances under which many households are moving. Such conditions have important implications for protection and reintegration, as families who feel compelled to return may arrive with fewer resources, limited preparation, and heightened vulnerability, and may negatively impact on the sustainability and durability of returns.⁵

Reintegration remained difficult due to limited services and lack of services. Post return monitoring showed severe socioeconomic strain: 88% in debt, 65% food insecure, 57% reliant on daily labour, 14% earning less than AFN 1,500, and 45% of children out of school, alongside continued human rights restrictions and risks of arbitrary arrest and intimidation. Six per cent of returnees indicated their intention to leave their current location, either through internal movement to another province (2 per cent) or renewed cross-border flow (4 per cent), while 11 per cent of returnees from Pakistan, reported that some relatives or community members had already returned to Pakistan.⁶



© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production. Afghan returnees make their way through Torkham border.

³ Source: UNHCR Afghanistan Inflow Border Monitoring interviews.

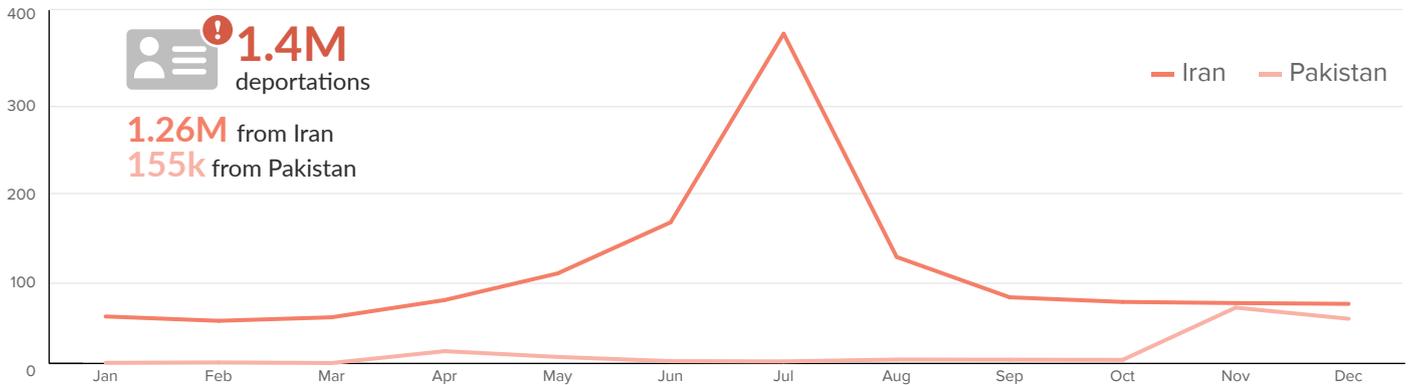
⁴ Source: [World Bank Afghanistan Development Update](#) based on UNHCR Border Monitoring, [Iran Labour Force Survey 2023](#) and [UNHCR Pakistan Forced Displacement Survey](#).

⁵ Source: [Afghan returns - experiences, challenges and prospects of reintegration](#). MMC Research Report, August 2025

⁶ Source: [UNHCR Afghanistan Post-Return Monitoring Report](#)

DEPORTATIONS

Figures are presented in thousands



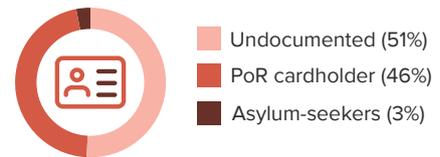
Afghan returns from **Iran**

Documentation type deportees



Afghan returns from **Pakistan**

Documentation type deportees



Deportations constituted a substantial share of movements in 2025, with around 1.42 million people, nearly half of the 2.9 million total returns. Of these, approximately 1.26 million (67 per cent) were deported from Iran and 155,000 (15 per cent) from Pakistan. Deportations from Iran rose steadily from early in the year and spiked sharply in June and July, after the 12-day conflict, before declining but remaining high through December. Deportations from Pakistan stayed comparatively lower until a marked surge in November and December, consistent with the phased implementation and enforcement of the Illegal Foreigners’ Repatriation Plan. Notably, 42 per cent of those deported from Iran were headcount slip holders, and among those deported from Pakistan, 46 per cent were PoR cardholders while 3 per cent were asylum-seekers, underscoring the erosion of protection space for documented Afghans.

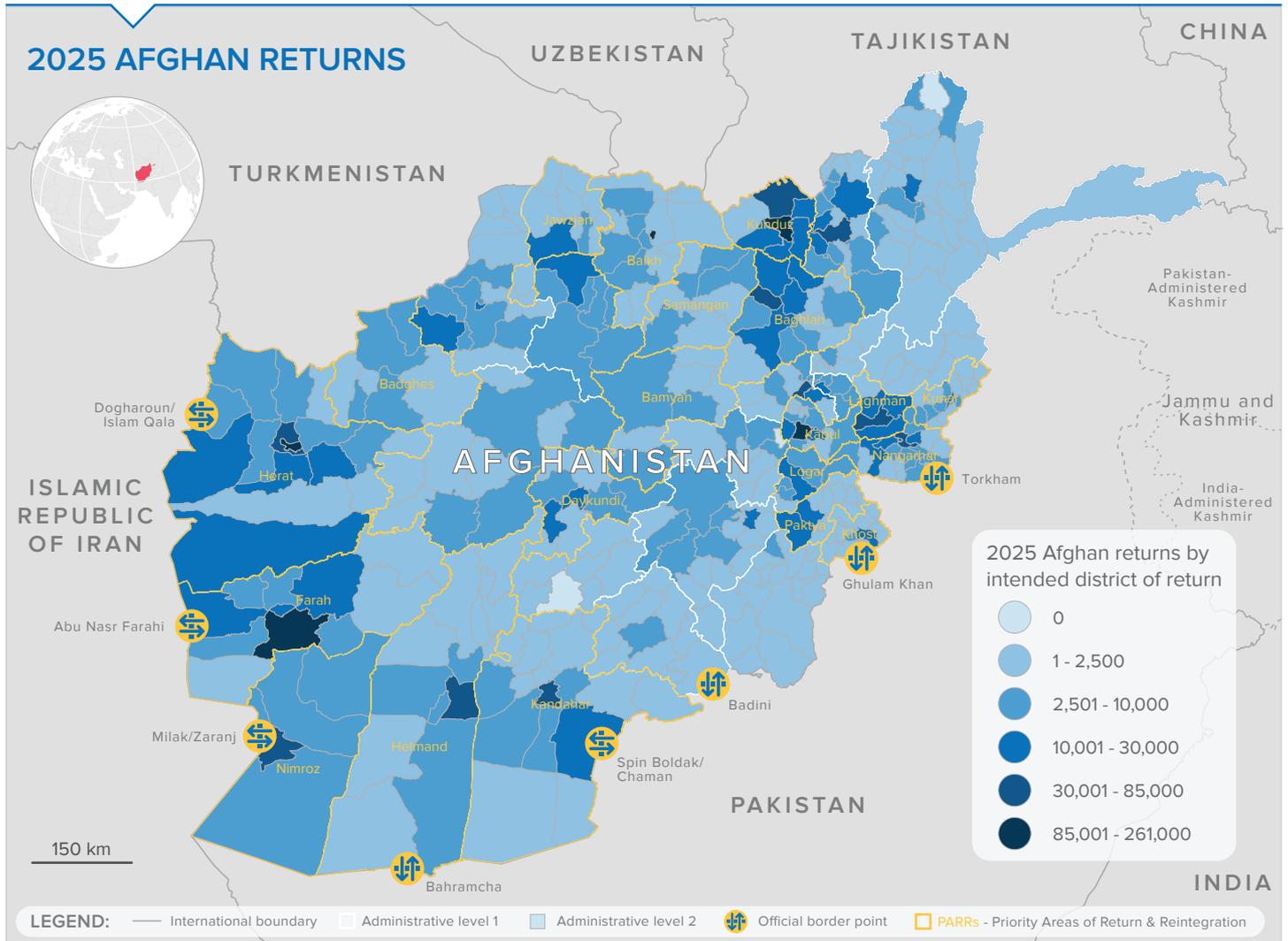
Deportations are frequently preceded by detention, harassment and rights violations. In a recent Mixed Migration Center report⁷, more than one in five respondents had been held in detention, with men and returnees from Iran most affected. Many described being apprehended and removed with little or no opportunity to prepare, and among forcibly returned respondents half said they were “not prepared at all” for return and a further 20 per cent “only slightly prepared”. There were also reports of coercion, including cases where people under detention were pressured to sign documents they could not read. Findings highlight that those detained and then summarily expelled face heightened risks of abuse, confiscation of assets and mistreatment at the border, with forced returnees more likely to report that their income is insufficient to meet basic needs after arrival.

Arrests and detentions of Afghans in Pakistan reached record levels in 2025, with an estimated 152,000 people arrested or detained over the year, including nearly 21,000 PoR card holders and around 131,000 ACC holders and undocumented Afghans.⁸

Deportees arrive with acute and often protracted vulnerabilities. Those forcibly returned are more likely to report that their income is insufficient and that their employment situation has deteriorated since return, with high levels of worry about food and substantial indebtedness.

⁷ Source: [Afghan returns - experiences, challenges and prospects of reintegration. MMC Research Report, August 2025](#)

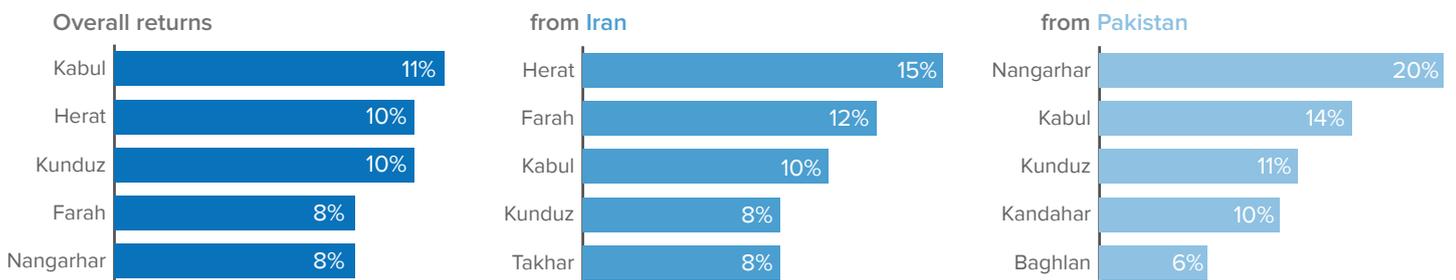
⁸ Source: [UNHCR-IOM Pakistan Flash update #76 on Arrest and Detention/Flow Monitoring](#)



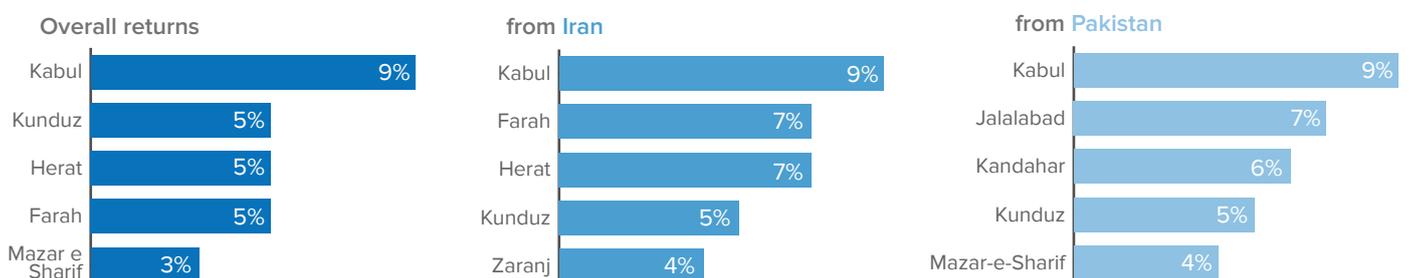
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not been agreed upon by the parties.

TOP 5 - INTENDED PROVINCE OF RETURN

2025 UNHCR Inflow Border Monitoring Interviews



TOP 5 - INTENDED DISTRICT OF RETURN



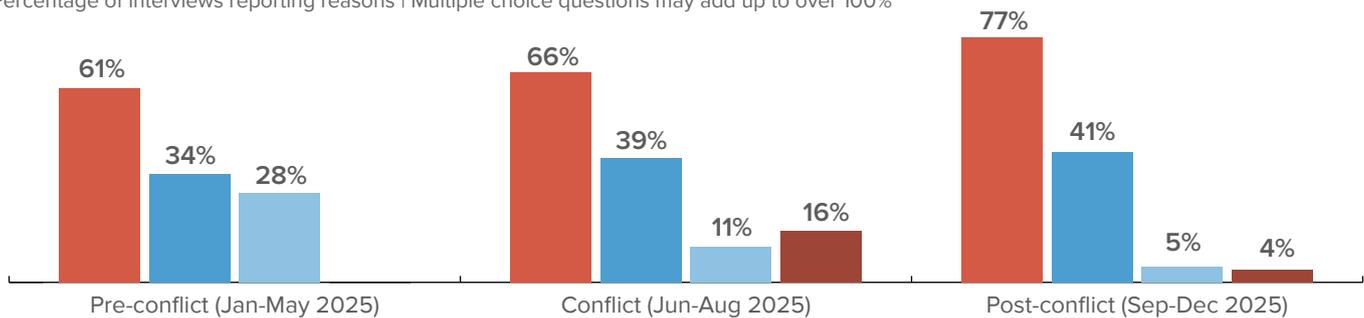
Based on UNHCR Border Monitoring Interviews, around two thirds of returnees (66 per cent) of all returns are concentrated in 9 provinces, with 50 per cent distributed across 19 districts. Close to one-third of all returnees choose Kabul, Herat and Kunduz as their intended provinces of return, while Kabul is the top district where most Afghan returns intend to return.

BORDER PROTECTION MONITORING

2025 UNHCR Inflow Border Monitoring Interviews

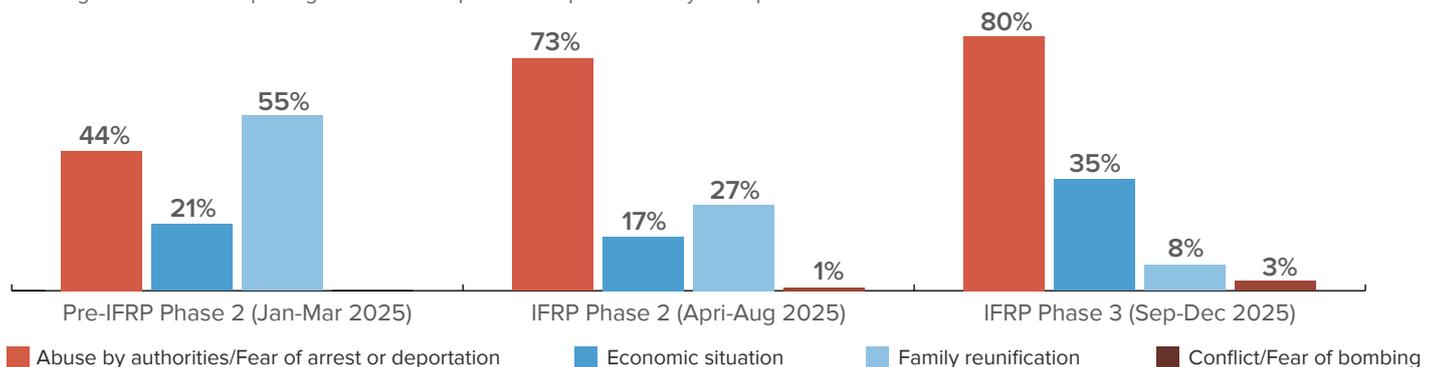
Reasons for leaving Iran

Percentage of interviews reporting reasons | Multiple choice questions may add up to over 100%



Reasons for leaving Pakistan

Percentage of interviews reporting reasons | Multiple choice questions may add up to over 100%



Returnees from Pakistan and Iran consistently reported protection concerns that significantly influenced their decision to return. Those returning from Pakistan described heightened insecurity, including harassment, arrests, extortion and police raids, which compelled many families to depart abruptly, often leaving behind assets and livelihoods. Similarly, returnees from Iran reported pervasive anti-Afghan sentiment, serious protection risks and instances of forced deportation. Vulnerable groups — including women, children, unaccompanied and separated children, and older persons — were disproportionately affected, resulting in elevated protection and assistance needs upon return. Ongoing pressure from authorities in both countries points to a shrinking protection space and increasing coercive dynamics that are driving returns under unsafe conditions, heightening risks of family separation and deepening vulnerability. [UNHCR's Guidance Note on Afghanistan – Update II \(September 2025\)](#) further underscores that Afghans, irrespective of legal status, continue to face serious protection risks in Afghanistan amid the prevailing human rights situation, particularly women and girls.

While large-scale conflict remains limited and overall physical security incidents are relatively low, returnees — particularly women and girls — continue to face serious protection concerns, including discrimination, restrictions on freedom of movement, and risks arising from restrictive laws and their enforcement at the community level.

NEEDS UPON ARRIVAL

2025 UNHCR Inflow Border Monitoring Interviews

Top 3 Needs upon arrival from **Iran**

Percentage of interviews

Multiple choice questions may add up to over 100%



89% Food



83% Housing/Accommodation



82% Financial support

Top 3 Protection services requested in Afghanistan upon arrival from **Iran**

Percentage of interviews | Multiple choice questions may add up to over 100%



66% Documentation / Legal assistance



28% Support with family reunification



14% Information on services and assistance

Top 3 Needs upon arrival from **Pakistan**

Percentage of interviews

Multiple choice questions may add up to over 100%



85% Housing Accommodation



83% Food



78% Financial support

Top 3 Protection services requested in Afghanistan upon arrival from **Pakistan**

Percentage of interviews | Multiple choice questions may add up to over 100%



92% Documentation / Legal assistance



35% Information on services and assistance



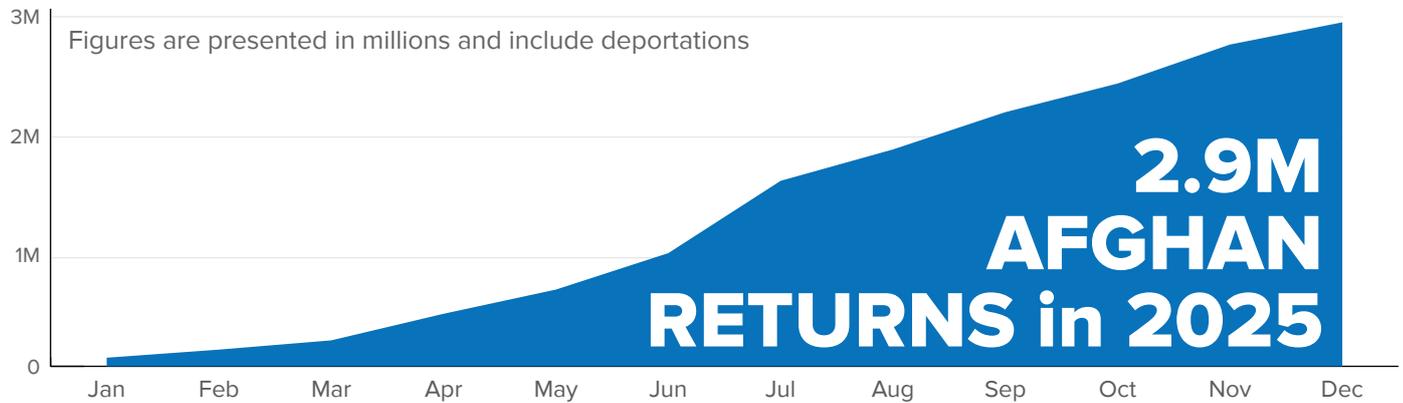
27% Protection services for children

The economic situation of returnee households remains extremely fragile. An estimated 92 per cent of households surveyed earn less than US\$ 147 per month, while 88 per cent are in debt, with almost all reporting debt levels that exceed their monthly income. Alarming, 90 per cent state that their debt increased after return. Borrowing is primarily used to meet essential survival needs — notably food (72 per cent), healthcare (64 per cent) and rent (31 per cent) — underscoring the extent to which many households rely on debt as a coping mechanism. Returnees from Pakistan generally face deeper economic strain and carry higher debt burdens than those returning from Iran.⁹

Food insecurity remains widespread: 63 per cent of households report inadequate access to food, with many resorting to harmful coping strategies such as reducing or skipping meals and borrowing to cover basic needs. Persistent documentation gaps further compound vulnerability. Over half of households have at least one member without a Tazkira, restricting access to education, housing and healthcare and limiting opportunities for sustainable reintegration. Women and girls face heightened risks in this context, as movement restrictions, lower access to mobile phones and limited economic opportunities interact with these structural barriers, leaving many excluded from assistance and public life.⁹

⁹ Source: [UNHCR Afghanistan Post-Return Monitoring Report](#)

The 2025 large return movements are driven by incremental restrictive policies and deteriorating conditions in host countries and often under adverse circumstances, involving abrupt departures and arduous journeys.



Many respondents reported limited awareness on risks of irregular migration, 47 per cent from Iran and 79 per cent from Pakistan said they had no information on such risks. Protection-related stress was widespread: 41 per cent of those returning from Iran and 14 per cent from Pakistan having reported it, linked to economic hardship, uncertainty about the future, food insecurity, health problems, family separation and lack of education for girls. Overall, the findings depict a return environment characterized by large-scale deportations, high levels of irregular movement, and significant protection concerns, particularly for women, girls and persons with heightened protection risks.¹⁰

UNHCR RESPONSE in AFGHANISTAN

In response to the large-scale return of Afghans in 2025, UNHCR has scaled up protection response and reintegration support to address immediate protection risks and humanitarian needs at border crossings and in areas of return. Assistance focuses on lifesaving protection services, including cash grant, and access to basic services, while prioritizing vulnerable groups such as women, children, older persons and people with disabilities. The following infographics provide an overview of UNHCR’s operational response, key areas of assistance, and the reach of support provided to returnees across Afghanistan.

 <p>1.9 million benefited from activities in PARRs</p>	 <p>692,300 Afghan returns received Protection assistance</p>
 <p>494,400 Afghan returns received cash assistance</p>	 <p>228,830 Afghan returns supported with Core Relief Items</p>
 <p>109,500 Border monitoring interviews conducted to Afghan returns</p>	 <p>31,400 Afghan returns assisted with transportation</p>

¹⁰ Source: [UNHCR Afghanistan Border Monitoring Report 2025](#)



© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production.
At the border crossing point in Torkham, UNHCR receives and assists Afghans being returned from Pakistan.

ONE YEAR RECAP

2025 AFGHAN RETURNS



UNHCR REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
DATA IDENTITY MANAGEMENT & ANALYSIS UNIT