Pakistan

FEBRUARY 2026

Over **2.95 million Afghans** have returned to Afghanistan since September 2023, including holders of PoR cards, ACC and undocumented people.

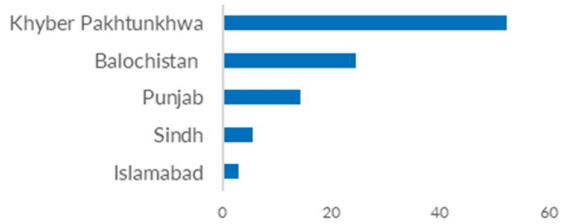
There are currently about **1.95 million** Afghans in Pakistan.

In **February**, **86,682** Afghans returned to Afghanistan, with **6,508** deported through the Chaman, Torkham, and Barabcha borders.

Over **28,157** Afghan PoR cardholders were facilitated to return through UNHCR's repatriation centres in **February.**

REGISTERED REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN PAKISTAN: 1 MILLION (99% AFGHANS, 1% OTHERS)

Per province



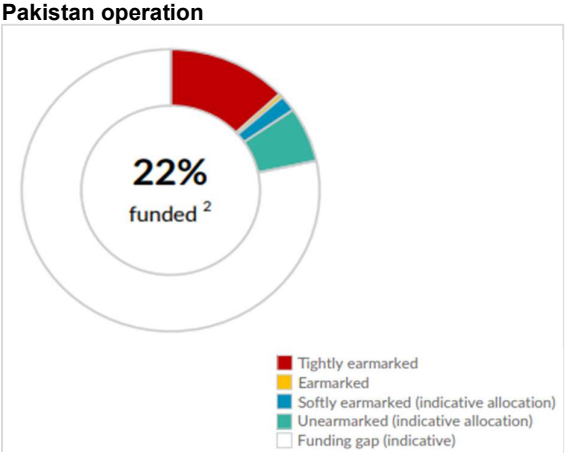
- **66%** of Afghan refugees live in urban/semi-urban localities
- **34%** reside in refugee villages

** Data source: UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Dec 2025*
https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/pak

FUNDING (AS OF 28 FEBRUARY 2026)

USD 93.8 million

Pakistan operation



Students in a Refugee Village school, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are eager to dive into their new curriculum. UNHCR / © Waseem Ahmed.

Key Highlights:

- Since 21 February, cross-border fighting between Pakistan and Afghanistan has left over 3,000 people internally displaced in Chitral, with reported casualties on both sides
- The borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan have remained closed since the start of the conflict leaving returnees stranded, with only Charman border opening only for deportations and returns.
- Fewer refugees approached the Voluntary Repatriation Centre (VRC), since the start of Ramadan on 19 February.
- Increased police raids, arrests, detentions and deportations continued to be reported in February, including cases of children being deported alone.
- Afghans expressed inability to leave their homes, work or access essential services for fear of arrest and deportation.
- Increased demand for cash assistance by Afghan families continued to be registered, as Afghans reduced their movements due to the fear of arrest,
- UNHCR continued to engage with the Government interlocutors on the proposed interim protection mechanisms that would exempt vulnerable Afghans from forced deportation under the IFRP.

Operational Context

A deteriorating security context continues to be a concern in the country, largely contributing to a challenging protection space. On 26 February, Pakistan Minister of defence referred to "open war" between Pakistan and Afghanistan. UNHCR and partners continue to deliver support to displaced people, in close coordination with the authorities. In addition, on 28 February, Israel and the United States of America attacked Iran, leading to significant displacements in Iran and around the region. UNHCR has put in place a contingency plan to support any displacements of Iranians into Pakistan.

The *Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP)* implemented since September 2023 has seen large-scale returns of Afghans holding different categories of documentation including Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACC), Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders as well as the undocumented individuals. Over two million Afghans have returned since the initiation of the Plan, with over a million in 2025. In **February 2026**, some **86,682** Afghans returned, including **6,508** deported.

UNHCR continued to advocate with the Government of Pakistan to establish a protection mechanism to prevent forced deportation of Afghans who would be at heightened risk of harm upon return to Afghanistan, including human rights defenders, journalists, artists, minorities, female-headed households at risk, and transgender individuals. In addition, advocacy for legal stay continued for Afghans with other humanitarian needs (including persons with disabilities, those with serious medical conditions), and persons with strong ties to Pakistan (those with spouses of Pakistani nationals, students in higher education). The Government has allowed some of those enrolled in universities to continue their studies, while some have been deported. In parallel, the Government has notified the students to regularize their stay by obtaining student visas.

Border conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan led to the closure of the Torkham crossing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (**KP)** for returns on 26 February. The conflict also impacted Arandu, Kharlachi in Chitral district and Ghulam Khan crossings in KP. However, before the outbreak of the conflict, spontaneous returns were noted to have increased, likely due to the growing pressure on Afghan refugees in several districts of KP, including Haripur, Mansehra, Lower Dir, Nowshera, and Peshawar.

In **Balochistan,** the political and security environment remained challenging throughout the month, following the coordinated militia attack at the end of January and the cross-border conflict.

The ongoing insurgency, targeted incidents, and intensified law enforcement operations contributed to public anxiety and movement restrictions in some areas. Besides the implementation of Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP), increased security deployments were observed linked to Pakistan–Afghanistan border tensions, affecting border districts and local economic activity.

On 12 February, the Refugee Protection Working Group (RPWG) and Protection Sector Thematic Working Group Meetings (PSWGM) were convened to review the evolving protection context in KP, as well as internal displacement concerns in Kurram and Tirah valleys. Uncertainties and implications of the denotification on RVs for Afghan communities was also discussed. So far, in KP, eight RVs have been completely vacated while 35 still have population living there.

Sector responses

PROTECTION

Through February, Afghans in Pakistan continued to face a deteriorating protection environment, including increased police raids, arrests, harassment, detentions, exploitation, and deportations as well as local announcements urging refugees to leave the country. Afghans expressed inability to leave their homes, work or access essential services for fear of arrest and deportation, coupled with the fear of harm upon forced to return to Afghanistan.

Refugees experienced worsening financial hardships, restricted access to services, blocked Sim cards and bank accounts, as well as lack of valid documentation. in addition, limited access to jobs and livelihoods, rising economic hardships and inflation, and severe winter conditions continued to cause distress and anxiety.

Some refugees and asylum-seekers with valid visas were arrested and detained for days pending verification of their visa validity. Concerns were raised relating to visa extension challenges, detention of students, reduced Voluntary Repatriation cash grants. The cross-border conflict that broke out towards the end of February compounded the situation with some returnees stranded at border points and unable to return despite warnings from authorities to depart.

Requests for cash assistance and resettlement were the highest requests made by callers to UNHCR's centralised protection helpline.

Amid the deteriorating protection environment, inter-agency collaboration was strengthened to operationalize the route-based approach, enhance the provision of protection and assistance, and mitigate refoulement risks for both the in-country Afghan population and those seeking to enter or transit Pakistani territory in search of safety. Interagency discussions related to capacity building of border officials to improve protection-sensitive identification and referral of vulnerable individuals, data-sharing and interagency referral SOPs, provision of provision of GBV and Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) services and distribution of Dignity kits in VRCs.

In KP, the situation for Afghan refugees deteriorated in February as police and local authorities increased arrests and detentions. Refugees in de-notified RVs and urban areas were urged to return voluntarily with warnings of possible forced return, while mass arrests were reported in several districts, increasing risks to access livelihoods, housing, freedom of movement, and protection were noted.

Monitoring in KP indicated varying repatriation trends across RVs, with some locations reporting limited movement while others saw gradual departures of families, partly influenced by increased

security presence and movement checks affecting mobility and livelihoods. Communities continued to express concerns about the situation of women and girls upon return to Afghanistan.

UNHCR maintained close coordination with provincial and district authorities, including the KP Home Department, district administrations, police, and CAR security teams, to support staff safety and operational continuity amid a volatile security environment. Engagement focused on timely information-sharing, movement facilitation, and route security updates, particularly in southern KP and merged districts affected by ongoing counter-terrorism operations. Advocacy also addressed border access constraints at Torkham border and increased unpredictability considering the conflict. Local authorities remained generally supportive, although increased checkpoints and verification measures resulted in longer movement lead-times.

Repatriation update: In February 2026, a total of 6,831 families (28,157 individuals) were supported for Voluntary Repatriation through the Azakhel (KP) and Baleli (Balochistan) Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs). The total number from 1 January 2026 to 28 February 2026 was 13,059 families, comprising 55,095 individuals. The number of individuals assisted in February 2026 compared to January 2026, represents a 5% increase in Voluntary Repatriation processing. In addition, in February 2026, 19,688 Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders returned spontaneously to Afghanistan without passing through the VRC process.

Legal Assistance: In February, UNHCR and legal partners, SHARP, SEHER and IMKAAN Welfare Organization (IWO) continued to provide protection and legal aid to refugees and asylum-seekers across the country. Legal aid, awareness, documentation support, and access to justice services were extended to vulnerable Afghans amid heightened enforcement of repatriation and deportation. Legal support was provided in instances of arrests/detentions to avert refoulment.

During February, the number of Afghans arrested and detained across the country was 324 individuals, similar to the January 2026, when 316 arrests were recorded. UNHCR and the legal assistance partners intervened in 60 cases of registered refugees and asylum-seekers who were arrested by Law Enforcement Agencies in Islamabad, Azad Jammu, Kashmir, Punjab, and Sindh, with 12 successful releases. In January, the teams intervened in 39 cases, representing a significant increase in February.

Community-based Protection: Afghans in urban areas including in Peshawar, Quetta, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Attock reported receiving eviction notices from landlords, due to the lack of valid visas. Landlords cited heavy fines imposed by authorities for housing Afghan nationals. The evictions disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including women and children, heightening their safety. Others displayed reluctance to return due to concerns over the limited cash grants provided in Afghanistan, transportation costs and the logistical challenges associated with winter conditions.

Community-based protection activities continued in Balochistan and KP through outreach, awareness sessions, counselling, and monitoring aimed at strengthening protection, access to services, and community resilience among refugee and host communities. Partners conducted discussions on protection risks, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and referral pathways, while education and engagement activities continued at the Urban Cohesion Hub in Quetta.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Inter-agency collaboration, in particular between UNHCR, IOM, and UNFPA, focused on expanding engagement in KP and Balochistan, initiating GBV/SRH services in Multi-Purpose Hubs / VRCs, improving cross-border referrals and aligning service models for Azakhel and Baleli. Other activities included finalizing GBV referral pathways, enhancing MHPSS linkages and helpline support, and addressing gaps in shelter access for Afghan women. UNHCR and partners provided case management support for GBV survivors,

as well as comprehensive GBV prevention, response, and awareness services to Afghan communities and their hosts across Pakistan.

Child Protection (CP): Amid reports of deportations of refugee children resulting in family separation, UNHCR strengthened inter-agency and cross-border coordination to support vulnerable children, including unaccompanied and separated minors, through Best Interests Procedures, family link verification, and Child Friendly Space activities.

Resettlement: In February, 18 cases / 58 refugees were submitted to resettlement countries. In February, 16 refugees departed to three resettlement countries. For 2026, a total of 17 refugees departed on resettlement. For Complementary Pathways in 2026, there have been 4 humanitarian pathway departures to France. UNHCR Pakistan continues to support Australia's Community Sponsorship Programme through the best interest process for children and completed 5 BIPs for 12 children for a total 66 cases / 365 individuals being process to date resulting in 51 cases / 284 individuals being granted Australian visas.

EDUCATION

In Balochistan, an enrolment campaign was launched across several districts to promote inclusive access to education in UNHCR-supported schools, with outreach activities focusing particularly on increasing girls' enrolment and attendance. In the context of IFRP Phase 3, schools in de-notified RVs were assessed to ensure continuity of education services, while Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) outreach in urban areas continued to identify and support out-of-school children. A coordination meeting with provincial education authorities also discussed the transition of UNHCR-supported schools to the government, with a joint assessment planned. Despite some schools becoming non-functional due to population movements, education services continue through operational schools in de-notified RVs and urban ALP initiatives.

In KP, education was disrupted in refugee village schools due to the denotification. Remote monitoring of Community Schools, Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) centres, and RV schools continued in February. All 23 Primary ALP centres remained operational, serving 560 learners. Of the 96 schools across several districts, 17 RV schools were closed due to winter vacations, 51 were converted into community schools with 2,600 students enrolled, while 25 RV schools remained functional with around 4,000 students. Three RV schools were closed due to the demolition of camps.

HEALTH

The ongoing IFRP implementation has increased the demand for health services as many Afghan families are seeking care before departure to Afghanistan. In Balochistan, UNHCR continued supporting Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) services in RVs and communities for routine vaccination. During the reporting period, 2,357 vaccine doses were administered to children aged 0–11 months and 1,360 doses to children aged 12–23 months. UNHCR Peshawar continued supporting health services through facilities managed by the Provincial Department of Health and International Medical Corps. Following staff discontinuation by the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR), provincial department supported facilities were closed, while services continued through public health facilities. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) activities also continued through case management, awareness sessions, and partner coordination.

LIVELIHOODS AND SELF RELIANCE

Across Balochistan and KP, livelihood initiatives focused on skills development, entrepreneurship, and climate-resilient income generation for Afghan refugees and host communities. In Balochistan, following community mobilization and enrolment of 250 Afghans

including host community members, vocational and livelihood training activities continued across several RVs and the Quetta Urban Cohesion Hub, including trainees in vocational skills, livestock activities, and in green sector initiatives. Women's skills development programmes continue across three Safe from the Start (SFS) centres, providing training in areas such as tailoring, handicrafts, computer skills, and English language to support self-reliance.

Financial Information – as of 28 February 2026

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For more information, please contact:

Joyce Wayua Munyao-Mbithi, Senior External Relations Officer: munyao@unhcr.org
Uzma Irum, External Relations Associate: irum@unhcr.org

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