

## KEY DISPLACEMENT FIGURES

 **3.22M**

Estimated internally displaced persons (IDPs) by conflict within Afghanistan as of 31 December 2023

 **546,000**

Total returns from Pakistan to Afghanistan since 15 September 2023<sup>1</sup>

 **52,160**

Refugees in Afghanistan as of 31 December 2023

 **31,600**

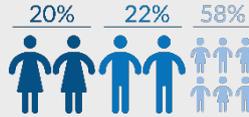
IDP returnees recorded in 2023

 **5.46M**

Refugees and asylum-seekers from Afghanistan in neighbouring countries as of 31 December 2023

 **4,900**

Refugee returns to Afghanistan in 2024<sup>2</sup>


 **1.6M**

Afghan new arrivals to neighbouring countries since August 2021<sup>3</sup>

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Over 545,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan between 15 September 2023 and 31 March 2024. In Afghanistan, UNHCR continued to biometrically process and provide cash assistance to Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders and their nuclear family members, UNHCR slip holders, asylum seeker certificate holders and other protection referrals. Since 15 September 2023, some 83,000 people, including over 45,000 PoR card holders, who returned from Pakistan received cash assistance in Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad Encashment Centres. Anxiety among Afghans of different statuses has increased in recent weeks amid growing media reports on the anticipated resumption of "Phase II" of the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP)'. For more information, please see the latest [External Update](#).
- On 28 March, the State of Qatar and the Kingdom of the Netherlands in their capacity of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Global Core Group of the [SSAR Support Platform](#) convened a meeting between its members. The meeting provided a forum for exchange on the Afghanistan situation, the inter-agency response, and an update on the [ReResolve Multi-Stakeholder Pledge for Resilience and Solutions](#). The session also discussed the SSAR Support Platform Regional Workplan intended to guide collaboration between the Global Core Group Members throughout the year. During the meeting, UNHCR Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, Ms. Hai Kyung Jun, provided some reflections on her recent visit to Kabul and Kandahar and the positive developments regarding the inclusion and presence of female staff – both within UNHCR and among partners. The Director updated on UNHCR's response inside Afghanistan and provided a brief overview of the [2024–2025 Regional Refugee Response Plan](#) and its interagency funding requirements. UNHCR expressed gratitude for previous financial pledges – including those made within the framework of the ReResolve Pledge – and stressed the importance of continued coordination and collaboration with key partners to respond to the urgent needs on the ground.
- In Iran, UNHCR continued to support families affected by the devastating earthquakes that struck Herat city in October 2023. To date, over 8,500 families in Herat city and 77 villages across the province received lifesaving core-relief items (CRIs), including family tents, blankets, kitchen sets, hygiene products, solar lamps and heaters. In addition, UNHCR and partners reached some 23,000 people in Injil, Guzara, Karukh, Ghoriyan, Koshk Rabat Sangi, Gulran, and Zindajan districts, providing information and services on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and fraud prevention. 550 awareness sessions and 78 protection desk sessions aimed at strengthening protection and access to quality services were carried out. UNHCR and partners also provided mental health and psychosocial support to around 5,000 individuals and addressed various child protection issues such as child labour and early marriage in Naib Rafi, Chahak, Mamezak, and Sarbaland villages of Zindajan district. Moreover, some 3,500 children were assisted via the three established child-friendly spaces in Zindajan district. These spaces offer activities focused on enhancing life skills, engaging in creative pursuits, participating in painting therapy, promoting good hygiene and cleanliness and fostering body awareness, and privacy. For more information, please see the recently issued [six-month impact report](#).
- Pakistan received a delegation from Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in view of its eventual support in the form of a three-year Multi-Partner Programme for Afghanistan (2024–2026) intended to act as a link between humanitarian relief and longer-term development efforts. UNHCR is collaborating with Denmark to design and plan this initiative. During their visit, the delegation met with the UNHCR Pakistan Representative, Ms. Philippa Candler, and discussed the current context and impact of the IFRP, UNHCR's priorities and its role in shaping the planning process for the proposed programme. This new programme supplements Denmark's core humanitarian contribution of \$7M annually

Publishing date: 25 April 2024 | Author: UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP).

<sup>1</sup> An umbrella term that covers all returns, including deportations, assisted VolRep and other returns of Afghans of all statuses such as Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders, Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders, and the undocumented. The Government of Pakistan has subsequently announced that ACC and PoR cardholders are exempted. In November, the validity of PoR cards was retroactively extended to 31 December 2023. Advocacy by UNHCR is ongoing.

<sup>2</sup> This category includes all refugee returnees as well as PoR card holders who returned without passing through the established Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRC) set up in Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> In Iran, UNHCR is using an average figure according to various government estimates and continues to follow-up with authorities to receive updated and disaggregated data as well as an estimate of how many presently remain in Iran. Of the average 1 million new arrivals since August 2021, over 77,000 Afghans have approached UNHCR. Of the 600,000 new arrivals reported by the Government of Pakistan, over 323,000 have approached UNHCR. According to Government of Uzbekistan sources, some 13,020 Afghan citizens arrived in the country since January 2021. The majority arrived before 15 August 2021 with valid visas issued by the Uzbek consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif.

for 2024 and 2025 earmarked at the situation level. Following discussions in Islamabad, the Danish delegation travelled to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where they inaugurated a government girls' school and met with refugees, government officials, implementing partners and staff from UNHCR's Peshawar Sub-Office.

## AFGHANISTAN:



- UNHCR and partners reached an estimated 271,986 individuals with humanitarian assistance in 31 out of 34 provinces countrywide in March 2024. Among those reached, 167,470 received cash assistance while 119,857 benefitted from in-kind and other individual assistance, including protection, CRIs, shelter and seasonal support. Additionally, assessments were carried out for 166,164 people to determine their specific needs.

## REGIONAL

- On 7 March, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan convened a high-level meeting, bringing together several Core Group+ members, including representatives from Canada, Denmark, EU/ECHO, France, Germany, Switzerland, the UK, the USA, and the World Bank, with IOM participating as observers. During the briefing, UNHCR Pakistan Representative gave an update on the situation on the ground, highlighting the potential resumption of the IFRP. This was followed by a discussion on a vision document put forward by Pakistan's Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees a.i. on a screening framework for Afghans with various legal statuses. The Group also deliberated on the feasibility of a Pakistan Compact aimed at securing international support and ensuring continued engagement with the Government of Pakistan.
- On 19 March, UNHCR Pakistan Representative hosted an iftar dinner attended by officials from the Government of Pakistan, refugees, members of the diplomatic corps, and UNHCR partners. Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghanistan Affairs, Mr. Asif Durrani, was the guest of honour. Other attendees included DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholars, outreach volunteers, members of the Somali refugee community, and a refugee advisory group. Informal discussions touched on the IFRP, Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, and the concerning situation along the border areas. Highlighting Pakistan's longstanding tradition of hospitality to refugees, and in the spirit of Ramadan, the Representative urged ongoing collaboration to support those with international protection needs and the communities hosting them.
- Ahead of the 9<sup>th</sup> Pakistan Super League, UNHCR has announced its [partnership with Peshawar Zalmi](#), a cricket team participating in the tournament to highlight refugee issues through cricket in Pakistan. Peshawar Zalmi will display the UNHCR emblem on their jerseys to [amplify their commitment](#) to the refugee cause. Peshawar Zalmi's Chief Operating Officer, along with a well-known cricketer, presented the team's official jersey to the UNHCR Pakistan Representative. As part of the partnership, Peshawar Zalmi and UNHCR will work together to spotlight refugee issues during one of the most popular cricketing events and engage refugee children in their activities. This collaboration seeks to foster social cohesion during a particularly challenging time in Pakistan. The response from Peshawar Zalmi fans has been overwhelmingly positive, encouraging to UNHCR explore other opportunities for collaboration.
- On 2 February, UNHCR, in partnership with Citizens Archives Pakistan – a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to cultural and historical preservation – and with the support of the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees inaugurated an exhibition called 'Conversations Through Stitch & Stone' in Islamabad aimed at spotlighting Afghan culture and stories of Afghan refugees and host communities. The event offered an immersive experience, highlighting the experiences of refugees and those involved in the response to the Afghan situation over four decades. Over the course of five days, the exhibition brought together key government officials, members of the diplomatic community, representatives from UN and partner agencies as well as the public and refugee community representatives.

<sup>4</sup> The total number of persons supported may include multiple counting of beneficiaries receiving assistance through more than one activity during the reporting period.

<sup>5</sup> Provinces not yet covered (Bamyan, Nimroz & Nuristan).

- In Iran, the issuance of Unified Smart ID cards commenced for some headcount slip holders in Fars, Tehran and Khorasan Razavi provinces. In Khorasan Razavi province, these cards were issued to family passport holders and pupils possessing headcount slips. This marks a milestone for the scheme, as it expands its coverage to include additional categories beyond *Amayesh* card holders and university students.
- In Iran, severe floods have affected Sistan and Balochistan provinces in recent weeks, impacting some 110,000 people residing in the area. Among those affected, around 52,000 people required immediate assistance, including Afghan nationals. In response, UNHCR worked closely with the National Organization for Migration (NOM) of the Ministry of Interior – UNHCR Iran's main operational government counterpart – as well as the UN Disaster Management team and other partners to coordinate the distribution of CRIs from UNHCR's local stock. These efforts provided support to around 4,000 flood-affected host community and refugee households (approximately 22,000 people) across 36 villages. The assistance included 4,000 family hygiene kits, 4,000 plastic tarpaulins and 1,000 kitchen sets.
- In Iran, three shelter-related projects were completed and officially launched in Torbat-e-Jam, Bardsir and Saveh settlements. These initiatives are aimed at providing dignified housing to some 1,270 people, including recent arrivals who sought refuge in Iran following the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021.
- In March, UNHCR Pakistan submitted 42 cases (182 individuals) for resettlement to Canada, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. To date, 149 cases (602 individuals) were submitted to seven resettlement countries. 428 people departed during the reporting period. So far, 634 people have departed to six resettlement countries since the start of the year: Australia (180), Canada (24), New Zealand (94), Norway (6), United Kingdom (255) and the United States (75). 14 people also departed via complementary pathways. Meanwhile, in Iran, UNHCR submitted 15 cases (53 individuals) for resettlement while three cases (seven individuals) departed in March. 56 cases (210 individuals) departed for Australia, Finland, Italy, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Norway during the reporting period. 241 cases (890 individuals) departed to resettlement countries in the first quarter of 2024. Resettlement continues to be an invaluable responsibility-sharing mechanism as well as a durable solution and protection tool for refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health, or fundamental human rights are at risk.



Zarmina, 40, and her children are refugee returnees from Pakistan. UNHCR and BRAC provided Zarmina with one cow and five chickens. From the milk and eggs they produce, Zarmina has managed to provide for her family and save money to send her youngest son to a private school © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

## CROSS BORDER SITUATION

- Over 1.46 million IDPs returned to their places of origin between 2021 and 2024. The source of these figures are the 416,000 household-level rapid assessments conducted by UNHCR and partners from 10 October 2021 to March 2024. These figures are subject to retroactive adjustments due to ongoing assessments. As such, they are considered indicative rather than the overall statistical data of IDP returnees in Afghanistan. Figures may also be underestimated due to the recent reduction in assessments carried out in 2023.
- In the first quarter of 2024, 175,000 deportations from Iran were reported. This is in addition to some 691,000 Afghans were deported from Iran in 2023, according to data gathered by UNHCR Afghanistan. In Pakistan, some 30,256 have been deported since 15 September 2023. For more information, please see the latest [UNHCR-IOM Flash Update](#). UNHCR's [advisory against forced returns](#) to Afghanistan – initially issued in August 2021 and re-affirmed in February 2023 – remains in effect until the security, rule of law and human rights conditions improve sufficiently to allow for safe and dignified return.

## DONOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

UNHCR is grateful to the following [donors](#) who have supported UNHCR programmes as part of the [Afghanistan situation](#) with earmarked and softly earmarked contributions:

Australia | European Union | Denmark | Germany | Ireland | Japan | Republic of Korea | Luxembourg | The Netherlands | Norway | Saudi Arabia | Switzerland | United States of America | Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan

UNHCR is also grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funds which allow us to respond in an agile manner where the needs are greatest:

Australia | Belgium | Denmark | Ireland | Republic of Korea | The Netherlands | Norway | Private donors Italy | Private donors Japan | Private donors Republic of Korea | Private donors Spain | Private donors United Kingdom | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom

