

OPERATIONAL UPDATE

Afghanistan

March 2025

Between 15 September 2023 and 31 March 2025 UNHCR has assisted over **120,500** Afghan returnees from Pakistan, including **77,028** Proof of Registration (PoR) Card holders. Approximately **50 percent** of the assisted individuals are women and girls, and **3.1 percent** of the total assisted beneficiaries have disabilities.

Between 15 September 2023 and 31 March 2025, over **891,200** Afghans returned from Pakistan. Of households assisted, at least one in four are headed by women, and approximately **33 percent** of returnees intend to return to five provincial capitals (Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Kunduz, and Mazar-i-Sharif).

Out of **891,200**, over **50,800** returned in 2025, out of which some **1,000** were deported in January, 1,417 in February and 694 in March.

KEY INDICATORS FOR 2025

11,507

Individuals directly supported by UNHCR, receiving protection, cash, and in-kind assistance.

53 percent

of all individuals assisted in 2025 are women and girls.

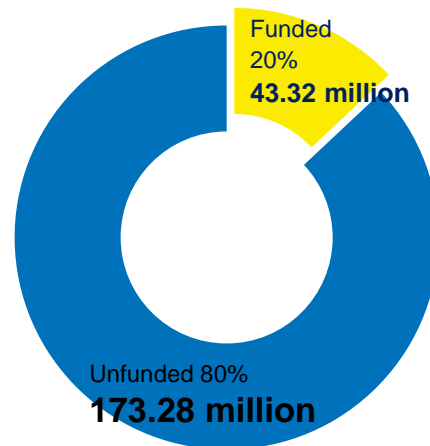
10,236

Individuals participated in assessments and monitoring exercises meant to understand gaps and inform targeted assistance.

FUNDING (As of 28 February 2025)

USD 216.6 million

requested for Afghanistan



Women working in a wool spinning center, established by a UNHCR livelihood grant beneficiary in western Herat province, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

Update on Achievements

Operational Context

Afghanistan has an estimated **3.22 million conflict-induced** internally displaced persons (IDPs), **1.65 million IDP returnees**, and hosts around **20,900 refugees**¹, requiring immediate protection and humanitarian assistance, as well as medium to long-term support². By end March, UNHCR has assisted **2,228** people in refugee or refugee-like situations who returned (from Pakistan, Iran and other countries) in 2025.

In the first quarter of 2025, UNHCR has worked to scale up response capacities at border crossing points and encashment centers to provide protection assistance for the anticipated large-scale returns and deportations from Pakistan as part of the second phase of the Government of Pakistan's Illegal Foreign Repatriation Plan (IFRP). There are **2.8 million Afghans**³ living in Pakistan, including refugees and those in refugee-like situations, with the implementation of IFRP Phase Two likely to result in more than **1.4 million Afghans (undocumented, refugees, and those in refugee-like situations)** returning to Afghanistan. UNHCR is working closely with the Border Consortium to ensure adequate response capacity at the borders and at the encashment centres to address the immediate needs of returnees.

In parallel, response capacities at the border with Iran have been strengthened, ensuring for the delivery of protection services to Afghan returnees and deportees including refugees and those in refugee-like situations. UNHCR is continuing advocacy efforts with the Government of Iran and Government of Pakistan, calling on all countries to ensure voluntary, safe and dignified return.

Achievements



UNHCR Assistance to Returnees: UNHCR assisted a total of 708 individuals (318 females and 390 males) in refugee or refugee-like situations who returned to Afghanistan in March 2025, assisting a total of 2,228 individuals including 998 females during the first quarter of 2025. The assistance provided included cash and protection services, basic health care, vaccination, mine risk awareness, access to child friendly spaces, overnight accommodation for transit, awareness raising on civil documentation, and protection counselling. These services were provided following verification and biometric registration processes in the encashment centers.

Those assisted include Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) holders, PoR card holders, Amayesh card holders, Gorizah/refugee card holders (Tajikistan), UNHCR slip holders, UNHCR certificate holders, and undocumented family members, with the majority returning from Pakistan.

The Torkham crossing was closed on 22 February following the commencement of military post construction at the zero point by the DfA, a project contested by Pakistani authorities. Despite the closure of Torkham, 1,417 Afghans were deported from Pakistan in February (through Torkham and Spin Boldak crossings). This marked a 44 percent increase compared to January, which saw close to 1,000 deportees. February's deportation numbers represent the highest since the IFRP peak in November and December 2023. The increase in deportations during February 2025 can be attributed to intensified search operations and the arrest of Afghans in Islamabad Capital Territory and Rawalpindi, which began in January 2025. On 7 March, the Government of Pakistan publicly announced the resumption of IFRP to include all Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders. The holders of ACC are required to voluntarily return to Afghanistan by 31 March 2025 or face

¹ [Afghanistan Operational Data Portal](#)

² These figures are expected to increase retroactively with ongoing assessments and considered indicative rather than overall statistical data of IDP returnees in Afghanistan.

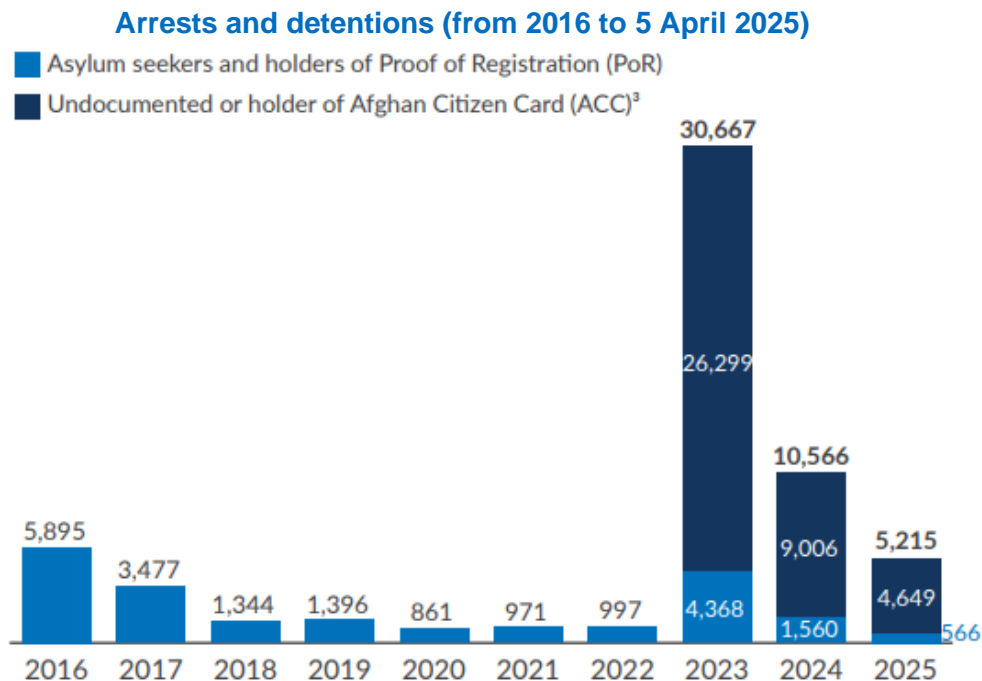
³ [Afghanistan Situation Operational Data Portal](#)

deportation starting on 1 April 2025. Despite this announcement, the deportation numbers declined in March, with 694 Afghans being deported. The lower deportation rate observed in March may be linked to the Ramadan and Eid festive season. However, it is expected that the return and deportation trends from Pakistan will rise again in April, as the Government of Pakistan launches the nationwide operation to expel undocumented and ACC holders.

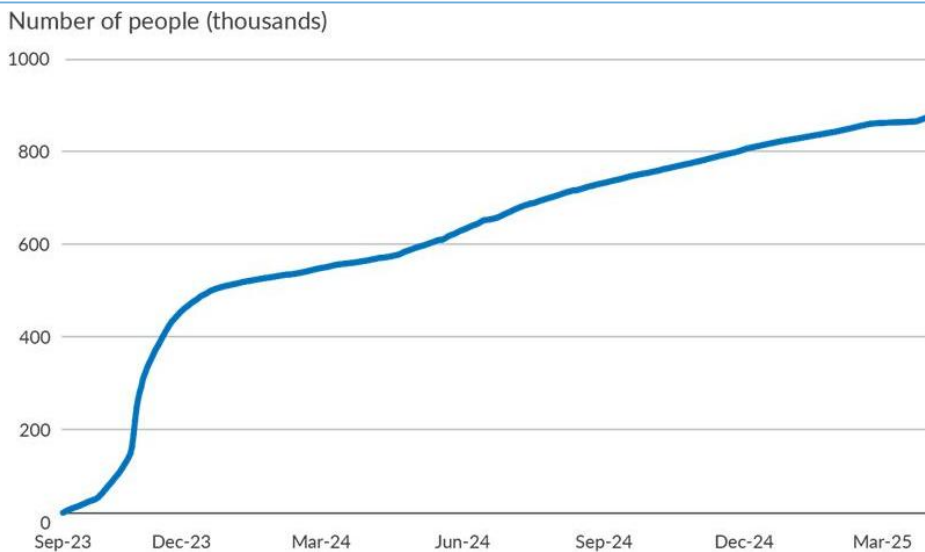
In the period of January to March 2025, the return figures from Iran (390 returns), and Tajikistan (137 returns) are significantly higher, compared to the 112 refugee returnees from Iran and 11 refugee returnees from Tajikistan recorded in the same period of 2024. The increase in return figures from Iran is linked to the rising anti-Afghan sentiment and increased push factors (increased police raids, harassment and arrest targeting Afghans) reported since June and July 2024. In Tajikistan, based on information provided by the local UNHCR Office and by UNHCR Afghanistan's border monitoring partner, the Government of Tajikistan has intensified the arrest of Afghans, including refugees, since early December 2024.

In 2024, UNHCR recorded the deportation of 79 Afghans from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, including refugees and those in refugee-like situations in December 2024 and a total of three deportees in November 2024. So far in 2025, 57 Afghans have been deported from Tajikistan.

As of end March 2025, a total of 271 interviews (148 males, 123 females) were conducted, including 82 interviews in March, by UNHCR protection teams with newly arrived returnees from Iran, Pakistan and other countries as part of return and protection monitoring activities. Based on the returnee monitoring findings, the primary reasons of return continue to be linked to protection concerns, including fear of arrest and or deportation, alleged abuse by police or state authorities, and strict border entry requirements, which limits the ability to commute to Afghanistan for temporary reasons.



Total Returns from Pakistan since September 2023



Border Monitoring: In the period of January to March 2025, UNHCR border monitoring teams conducted 29,954 household and individual-level protection border monitoring interviews (inflow and outflow) with Afghans at seven official crossing points with Iran, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Out of the 29,954 interviews conducted in 2025, 9,793 interviews were conducted in March alone. During the same period, a total of 216 Key Informant Interviews, including 84 Key Informant interviews in March, were conducted at unofficial crossing points.

UNHCR's border monitoring seeks to assess people's access to the right to return and map potential protection risks and human rights violations faced across official crossing points. UNHCR conducts inflow and outflow monitoring interviews at both individual and household levels across all eight official crossing points, including Afghanistan's borders with Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

In the first quarter of 2025, an estimated 244,600 Afghan passport holders departed for Iran via Islam Qala, Zaranj and Abo Nasri Farahi, including 57,500 in March. In the same period, an estimated 341,100 individuals, including 107,700 in March, crossed to Pakistan via the Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points, and an estimated 351,000 returned, including 117,800 in March. In recent years, the majority of the inflow and outflow movements were reported via the Spin Boldak crossing. Angor Ada crossing point in Paktika province remains closed, while Dand-Aw-Patan crossing point in Paktia province, and Ghulam Khan crossing point in Khost province, are only open for commercial movements (trucks transporting goods).

Dak unofficial crossing point in Nimroz province remains closed since 18 January, to ensure the implementation of the [decree](#) issued by the DfA Supreme Leader to prevent illegal movement and trafficking of Afghans abroad facilitated by smugglers. According to border monitors, the DfA has fully sealed the crossing point to prevent irregular pedestrian outflow movements. However, the crossing point remained open for the movement of commercial goods.

UNHCR has continued to biometrically process and provide cash assistance, reaching a total of 444 families composed of 1,105 Afghans in refugee and refugee-like situations returning or facing deportation from Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan in 2025 (including 130 families and 375 individuals in March). The categories include PoR card holders and their nuclear family members, UNHCR slip holders, asylum-seeker certificate holders, Amayesh card holders (from Iran), Gorizah/refugee card holders (from Tajikistan) and other protection referrals.

Mixed-gender UNHCR teams are stationed at Spin Boldak and Torkham border crossing points, conducting protection interviews with the newly arrived Afghans from Pakistan, including women. Help desks are available to identify people with sensitive protection profiles and to conduct referrals to available services, including to the UNHCR protection team for further assessment of protection concerns and needs. Shelter, livelihood, health, water, sanitation, and hygiene were identified as the most critical needs during this period. The same procedure has been established

in the borders with Iran to assess and assist deported refugees (Amayesh card holders) and persons with protection profiles.

Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFM): In March 2025, UNHCR and partners received a total of 1,950 questions, feedback, suggestions, and complaints through various Complaint and Feedback Mechanism channels. The gender breakdown remained similar to the previous month, with 25 percent of queries originating from women and girls in March, compared to 28 percent in February.

As in the previous month, returnees remained the most frequent users of the CFM, accounting for 72 percent of the total queries. This was followed by host community members at 15 percent, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) at 5 percent.

Email was the preferred communication channel in March 2025 (70 percent of all queries), with 1,469 email queries received. This was followed by hotlines, which accounted for 355 calls, which is 18 percent of the queries.

The queries included requests for assistance or intervention on issues such as Persons with Specific Needs (PSN), multi-purpose cash, CARE, shelter, livelihood, food, and health. Other common queries involved requests for information on assistance, employment, partnership, follow-up on individual cases, as well as general feedback and complaints.

In response to these queries, a total of 435 referrals were made to relevant UNHCR offices and partners for tailored follow-up. Notably, around 76 percent of the queries recorded in March have already been closed.

Child Protection: UNHCR has delivered capacity building trainings for partner staff to support strengthening of technical skills and knowledge, underpinning the provision of child protection services. To support the roll-out of the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS+) across all regions, UNHCR received a Training of Trainers (ToT) facilitated by the CPIMS Task Force, focusing on the newly introduced roles in the global CPIMS system: agency-specific system administrator and case management coordinator. As a result, UNHCR's child protection partners will now be able to independently create CPIMS credentials for CP case workers, which eliminates the need for the lengthy process of user creation through the Task Force and facilitates the implementation of case management activities.

UNHCR is also coordinating with UNICEF as well as UNHCR Pakistan to finalize the Inter-Agency Child Protection Case Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Unaccompanied and Separated and Children (UASC), which will guide the eligibility and prioritization of cases, case management process, and information management for children moving across the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This effort has been prioritized given the increased in forcible returns of Afghan nationals, including UASC, from Pakistan.

Women Protection: UNHCR has conducted trainings for all new women protection partner staff and finalized the revised Standard Operating Procedures for the Women Protection Program, as well as all relevant annexes to support quality program implementation and monitoring. At the same time, UNHCR is actively engaged in the preparations for the return emergency at the Pakistan and Iran borders, including proactive coordination with the GBV AoR and Operations in Iran and Pakistan. Strong collaborative efforts aim to ensure safe referral and linkages of cases with response services in Afghanistan, as well as the strengthening of respective procedures at the border areas.

Protection Case Management: UNHCR has initiated the roll-out of its revised protection case management program, strengthening procedures for the identification, protection risk assessment and follow-up on individuals facing immediate risks, including those newly returned from Pakistan and Iran. Protection case management partners have received in-depth four days trainings on the new SOPs and tools, which will be reflected in UNHCR's case management database. Protection case management has been integrated as a central part of the longer-term response to the unfolding return emergency. **Legal assistance and civil documentation:** UNHCR initiated the

training of new legal assistance partners, with an initial induction focusing on legal assistance and civil documentation needs and gaps, including based on 2024's Community-Based Protection Monitoring, and the Standard Operating Procedure for legal assistance services in Afghanistan. The recruitment of field legal staff is underway.

Community Engagement: UNHCR's community engagement partners are in the process of finalizing the recruitment and training of community outreach focal points and Community Outreach Volunteers (COVs), who will be closely engaged in the unfolding return emergency response, facilitating access to complaints and feedback channels and the identification of returnees at heightened protection risk. To this end, revised community messaging has been developed which is being shared at border points and throughout the return journey.

Community-Based Protection Monitoring: CBPM partners have been trained on the revised inter-agency protection monitoring tools, developed jointly by the Protection Cluster and with UNHCR's active support. CBPM activities have been initiated in the central region, while CBPM partners in the south are supporting protection monitoring at the encashment centers to make best use of available resources to support the return movements. In the meantime, UNHCR's online CBPM dashboards are being updated to reflect the new CBPM tools, allowing for swift analysis of the data received.



Cash Based Interventions (CBI)

UNHCR delivered cash assistance to 2,704 individuals (1,460 females and 1,244 males) in March 2025, through various CBI programs, including FARE, VolRep, cash for basic needs, cash for seasonal support, cash for permanent shelter and CARE for refugee returnees. The assistance, which covered a wide range of services, has also supported families in reintegrating, addressing protection and other lifesaving concerns, and contributing to durable solutions. UNHCR continues to provide cash assistance to refugees and persons in refugee-like situations to assist families in meeting basic needs and contributing to sustainable reintegration processes.



LIVELIHOODS

UNHCR and JICA, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, signed a new agreement worth USD 6 million (JPY 929 million) for a project aimed at creating vital livelihood opportunities for refugee returnees, displaced Afghans, and their host communities. The project under this partnership will focus on various activities, including but not limited to the construction and operation of cold storage facilities to support fresh vegetable farming, greenhouses, a silk weaving production facility, and business and market centers. Additionally, the interventions will include training and capacity-building, such as the establishment and support of local cooperatives.

These initiatives are designed to provide sustainable income opportunities and support self-reliance, with a particular emphasis on women. Furthermore, they catalyze collaboration and partnership with development partners, in line with the HDP Nexus framework, particularly in UNHCR-designated Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs), which are home to a high number of returnees and displaced persons.

**SHELTER**

Shelter assistance needs remain widely reported throughout Afghanistan, driven by a high number of returns, natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, and worsened by rising poverty and unemployment. Additionally, access to adequate housing plays a crucial role in achieving positive protection outcomes, as shelter assistance helps alleviate stress and anxiety while reducing dependence on harmful coping mechanisms. Moreover, proper housing supports dignity, safety, and privacy for families.

As of the end of March 2025, a total of 615 permanent shelters carried over from 2024 to 2025 are currently under implementation. Of these, 604 shelters (258 in Nangarhar, 209 in Laghman, 38 in Kunar, 10 in Farah, 03 in Badghis and 86 in Herat) have been completed, while 11 shelters in Nangarhar are still undergoing minor finishing works.

In addition, 158 earthquake-resilient shelters in Herat have reached approximately 70% completion.

Moreover, 400 permanent shelters, have been allocated to various field offices nationwide. Separately, 58 permanent shelters are under construction in the Eastern Region.

Acknowledgements

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External Relations

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LINKS

Data portal – X (Twitter) - Facebook – Website