Key Figures (from 15 Sept to date)

428,400 Total Returns [2]

19,100 Assisted VolRep

25,700 Deportations

UNHCR Funding Requirements

$43.48M for Afghanistan from November 2023 to July 2024

$8.43M for Pakistan from November to December 2023

The quoted figures are currently under revision.

Timeline of Key Events

26 SEP — "**Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan**" issued internally by Pakistan's Ministry of Interior (MoI), outlining the "repatriation" of Afghan nationals in three phases, starting with undocumented Afghan nationals, followed by ACC holders, and PoR cardholders.

3 OCT — MoI makes formal announcement that 1 November 2023 is the deadline for **all "illegal foreigners" to leave Pakistan**.

7 OCT — Joint statement issued by UNHCR and IOM urging the Government of Pakistan to maintain the protection space for Afghan nationals in need of safety.

10 OCT — Government-wide circular by the Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees under the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions, stating that **PoR and ACC holders can only be repatriated on a voluntary basis**.

9&16 OCT — **Provincial-wide circular** issued by the Home Departments of Balochistan and Sindh, stating that **PoR and ACC holders** can only be repatriated on a voluntary basis.

17&27 OCT — Press release issued by UN Special Rapporteurs and statement made by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), urging the Government of Pakistan to stop planned mass deportation of Afghan nationals in Pakistan.

30 OCT — Notification issued by the MoI instructing all relevant authorities to enact the "**Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan**" from 1 November 2023.

3 NOV — Joint press release issued by UNHCR, IOM, and UNICEF calling for the protection of children and families seeking safety in Pakistan.

10 NOV — SAFRON issues notification that the **validity of PoR cards has been extended** to 31 December 2023

15 NOV — Press release issued by UN Human Rights Chief, Volker Türk, appealing to suspend deportations until procedures and safeguards required by international law are in place.

Source: UNHCR-IOM Joint Update #7

Background

On 3 October 2023, the Government of Pakistan announced plans to repatriate "illegal foreigners".[1] In view of the ongoing humanitarian and human rights concerns for Afghans, particularly for women and girls, UNHCR and IOM issued a joint statement urging Pakistan to maintain the protection space for Afghans in need of safety. This was followed by a joint statement by UNHCR, IOM, and UNICEF which appealed for the protection of children and families seeking safety in Pakistan. On 10 November, UNHCR declared an internal Level 2 emergency for Pakistan and Afghanistan for six months to scale up the humanitarian response in light of the rapidly evolving situation.

Population trends during the reporting period indicated that most returns were voluntary although deportations through Torkham and Spin Boldak border crossing points were also recorded. People arriving at the border are exhausted and require urgent assistance as well as psychosocial support. Arrivals back to Afghanistan are also adding to the worsening humanitarian crisis, as winter temperatures start to dip to -4°C in some locations. Many Afghan returnees are vulnerable, including women and children who could lose their lives in a harsh winter if left without adequate shelter.

1.3 million undocumented Afghans are estimated to reside in Pakistan. Approximately 720,000 undocumented individuals and 50,000 assisted voluntary repatriations (Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders) are expected to require support at border points from now through July 2024. The sudden surge in returns in recent weeks is putting pressure on already strained resources, including shelter and basic services. Additional support is urgently required. UNHCR and partners in Pakistan and Afghanistan are currently working together to ensure a harmonized and coordinated cross-border response to this new emergency. To support these efforts, an inter-agency Border Consortium Appeal was launched on 8 November. In addition, UNHCR and partners are also stepping up their presence in and around Torkham and Chaman border crossing points and accelerating efforts to ensure protection-sensitive mechanisms are in place via regular border monitoring visits and protection screenings to identify and assist people with heightened vulnerabilities and needs.

UNHCR maintains a non-return advisory for Afghanistan, which has been in place since August 2021, and continues to call for a bar on forced returns of Afghan nationals to a country still impacted by recurrent conflict, instability and climate-induced disasters. UNHCR continues to appeal to the Government of Pakistan to maintain the protection space for Afghan nationals in need of safety and that any returns must be voluntary, safe and dignified with full respect for rights and protection of those in need.

Key Highlights

There continues to be a progressive decline in the number of returnees entering **Afghanistan** from **Pakistan**. While deportation figures increased considerably in November, the average for the past week has come down to 395. In view of the slowing returns, UNHCR and partners are redoubling their efforts to scale up assistance and support in the areas of destination and origin, where thousands of returnees have travelled, and where access to basic services such as clean water, health, education, shelter, and land is needed, As winter sets in, more support will be required to provide insulated shelters, warm clothing and fuel for having to survive the bitter cold.

[1] *The Government of Pakistan has subsequently announced that Afghan Citizen Cardholders and Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders are exempted. The validity of POR cards was retroactively extended to the end of the year.*
[2] *An umbrella term that includes all returns including deportations, assisted VolRep and other returns of Afghans of all statuses such as PoR cardholders, ACC holders, and the undocumented.*

- While the number of returnees crossing Pakistan to Afghanistan via the Torkham and Spin Boldak border has declined, deportation figures from **Pakistan** continued to fluctuate from day to day. Police operations against Afghans persist following reports of evictions and arrests of both documented and undocumented individuals, including holders of PoR cards, Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) and reception slips. In 2023, 26,099 Afghan nationals have been arrested thus far, a figure exceeding any previous year since data collection on the arrest and detention of Afghan nationals began. Advocacy with authorities at all levels is ongoing.

> "We are dealing with many competing humanitarian needs and now huge numbers of arrivals, many without any family support or coping mechanisms in Afghanistan"
>
> UNHCR Representative in Afghanistan, Leonard Zulu

> "We have been reiterating our call that any return to Afghanistan should be voluntary, safe, and dignified, irrespective of legal status in Pakistan"
>
> UNHCR Representative in Pakistan, Philippa Candler

- In **Pakistan**, UNHCR met with community representatives to discuss new arrivals' concerns in light of the government's repatriation exercise and to identify any potential community-based solutions to challenges they might be facing. UNHCR provided an update on its advocacy efforts and humanitarian response and underscored the importance of reporting fraud and referring individual cases with specific needs for assistance, including cash support and child protection and gender-based violence case management. The meeting concluded with a commitment to transparent communication and continued collaboration in order to enhance the ongoing response.

- In **Afghanistan**, a UNHCR protection team, which included national female staff, undertook a one-day visit to Spin Boldak to conduct screening and protection interviews. Eight protection interviews were conducted with female new arrivals. A similar visit was also carried out by UNHCR female protection monitors to the tented residential area near the Reception Centre in Torkham, where they conducted protection interviews with returnees. UNHCR is actively responding to the needs on the ground by providing counselling services and making referrals to other agencies.

- In **Afghanistan**, UNHCR continued to biometrically process and provide cash assistance to PoR card holders and their nuclear family members (with or without documentation), UNHCR slip holders, Asylum seeker certificate holders and other Protection referrals. In 2023, over 53,000 individuals have been provided with cash assistance, including some 38,000 PoR cardholders.

UNHCR steps up its presence at official border crossings as tens of thousands of Afghans arrive from Pakistan
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- **More funding** is urgently needed to bolster UNHCR's and the inter-agency response to this new and unfolding emergency, with significant resource requirements identified in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Needs are continuing to rise due to a confluence of insecurity, instability, and environmental disasters as well as economic and geopolitical crosswinds. To support the response, UNHCR's ask under the inter-agency appeal is $43.48 million for Afghanistan from November 2023 to July 2024 and $8.43 million for Pakistan from November to December 2023. These figures are currently under revision in light of developments.