Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns from Iran and Pakistan Emergency Update #1

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Afghans who recently arrived from Iran gather at the Islam Qala border crossing. ©UNHCR/Faramarz Barzin

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Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan in 2025

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Afghans returned from Pakistan since 1 April

As of 16 July, some 1.25 million Afghans have returned from Iran since 1 April, with over 1.57 million returning since the start of the year. Between 10 and 16 July, daily average returns from Iran exceeded 29,600. From Pakistan, some 335,664 Afghans have returned since January, including 287,622 since 1 April following the announcement of Phase II of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. Combined returns from Iran and Pakistan have surpassed 1.9 million in 2025.

Operational Context

Afghanistan continues to face a deepening humanitarian crisis, driven by prolonged economic hardship, natural disasters, and limited access to basic services. The situation is further compounded by sustained large-scale returns from Iran and Pakistan – now exceeding 1.9 million in 2025. In Iran, heightened domestic uncertainty and regional tensions have contributed to a more precarious environment for Afghan refugees and migrants. In Pakistan, the start of Phase II of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan — targeting undocumented and Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders — in April has accelerated returns, building on the large-scale movements that began in late 2023. The sustained scale of returns is straining already limited services and increasing pressure on host communities and humanitarian actors. Many returnees arrive in vulnerable conditions and require urgent humanitarian assistance.

UNHCR continues to urge countries in the region to ensure that returns to Afghanistan are voluntary, safe, and dignified. Forcing or pressuring Afghans to return risks further instability in the region, and onward movement towards Europe.

Country Updates

Iran

- **As of 16 July, some 1.25 million Afghans returned from Iran since 1 April and more than 1.57 million since the beginning of the year**. Between 10 and 16 July, daily average returns exceeded 29,600 people. *For more information, please read the latest UNHCR CORE Iran-Afghanistan Update here*.

- **Dogharoun border crossing overwhelmed by mass returns**. Between 6 and 15 July, over 2,300 buses transported an estimated 96,000 Afghans through this border crossing. Daily bus movements observed peaked at nearly 400. The Government of Iran provided humanitarian assistance and coordinated logistics with the de facto authorities in Afghanistan. UNHCR maintains a continuous monitoring presence.

- ***Amayesh* card holders – Afghan refugees who have been granted temporary stay and access to basic services in Iran – are increasingly seek resettlement and financial support, citing worsening treatment**. While Headcount Slip holders – undocumented Afghans who participated in the Iranian government's Headcount exercise and received a temporary document as proof of registration – remain the primary group approaching UNHCR, their proportion temporarily declined, likely due to perceptions that UNHCR is unable to assist undocumented people. At the same time, UNHCR offices report a surge in resettlement inquiries from *Amayesh* card holders, with Sub-Office Shiraz recording a 145% increase in the number of people seeking support in July and Sub-Office Kerman attributing rising resettlement interest to false rumours. Awareness raising efforts are ongoing.

- **UNHCR and Refugee Response Plan (RRP) partners are working together to enhance the border response**. A joint Risk Analysis on border support is underway, alongside efforts across all eight RRP sectors to develop a unified messaging paper, highlighting urgent needs on the ground.

Pakistan

- **Between 1 April and 16 July, 287,622 Afghans returned**, including over 49,688 deportees (17%). Most were undocumented (69%), followed by Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders (17%) and Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders (14%).

- **The percentage of PoR card holders returning** increased to 28% in the first 12 days of July compared to 6% in April.

- **Community concerns centered on PoR expiry continue.** Protection helplines received over 3,900 calls between 1 and 16 July. Most callers were UNHCR slip holders (73%), followed by SHARP/SEHER (UNHCR partner) slip holders (13%) and PoR card holders (5%). Since the temporary government notification instructing that PoR card holders should not be arrested or harassed and be allowed to maintain bank accounts and continue their education, refugees have expressed relief and remain hopeful for a future extension.

Afghanistan

- **UNHCR and partners maintain a presence across key border entry points** – Islam Qala (Herat), Milak (Nimroz), Torkham (Nangarhar), Spin Boldak (Kandahar), as well as at the Encashment Centre in Kabul – providing life-saving assistance and scaling up protection, coordination, and preparedness in response to evolving return trends.

- **At Islam Qala, UNHCR is providing cash assistance to *Amayesh* card holders and heightened protection risk cases**, along with core relief items (CRIs), dignity kits, hot meals, and onward transport to Herat and Kabul. In Milak/Zaranj, CRIs are being distributed and infrastructure improvements, including a shade structure and water reservoir at Zero Point, are underway. UNHCR and WADAN are also enhancing reception conditions with a rub hall, coolers, and shaded areas. In Spin Boldak, a similar shade structure is being constructed to support returnees queuing for services. Mobility support such as wheelbarrows and wheelchairs are being provided at high-traffic sites.

- **UNHCR is providing cash or transportation support to single (undocumented) deportees and returnees**, some of whom have reported challenges during their journey, including loss of belongings. An estimated 200 people are currently in Zaranj city, awaiting means to continue their journey. In addition, nearly 500 returnees without sufficient financial resources have been waiting for transport for several days. The de facto authorities are providing support where possible, although their capacity remains limited. Most returnees are from Kabul, Herat, and Kunduz. UNHCR is engaging with the de facto authorities' transport committee to explore additional transportation solutions for those in need.

- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Iran were documentation and legal assistance (62%), family reunification support (43%), and information on services and assistance (20%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (89%), housing or accommodation (75%) and financial support (73%).

- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Pakistan were documentation and legal assistance (74%), protection services for children (37%), and information

on services and assistance (36%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (82%), housing (81%), and financial support (80%).

- **Milak border (Iran-Afghanistan) crossing experienced a sharp rise in Afghan returnees**. Humanitarian needs remain urgent, especially for drinking water, food, and hygiene supplies with NGOs and volunteers providing partial support.

- **Border reception and processing are facing critical gaps**. Accommodation and cooling facilities are insufficient amid extreme temperatures, while delays persist due to limited processing capacity. Vulnerable returnees, particularly women and children, must travel long distances for essential services, though efforts are underway to establish a local support centre. Transportation options remain inadequate, causing congestion and slowing returnee movement.

Financial Information

UNHCR's Afghanistan situation this year is only funded at **24% against the required $478 million**. Without urgent and sustained support, the ability to provide protection, assistance, and solutions for Afghans across the region will be severely compromised.

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