Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns from Iran and Pakistan Emergency Update #3

(1 August 2025)

Thousands of Afghans cross back into their homeland through the Islam Qala border in Herat province, following a sharp rise in mass returns from Iran. ©UNHCR/ Oxygen Empire Media Production

2.1 million
Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan in 2025

1.4 million
Afghans have returned from Iran since 1 April as of 30 July

303,300
Afghans returned from Pakistan since 1 April as of 30 July

HIGHLIGHTS

- Over 2.1 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan have returned in 2025.
- On 31 July, the Government of Pakistan announced that Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders whose cards expired on 30 June may be subject to repatriation.
- Returnees from Iran report experiencing discrimination, harassment, and wage losses.
- Upon arrival in Afghanistan, many struggle with shelter, livelihoods, and access to essential services.
- Despite high protection and basic needs, the Afghanistan situation is critically underfunded, receiving only 24% of the required $478 million for this year.

Operational Context

Afghanistan is facing a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis, driven by prolonged economic hardship, recurrent natural disasters, and limited access to critical services. The situation is being compounded by sustained large-scale returns from neighbouring Iran and Pakistan, now exceeding 2.1 million.

In Iran, the situation for Afghans has grown increasingly precarious, driven by domestic uncertainty following the expiration of Headcount Slips on 20 March and the launch of a regularization and return scheme affecting two million people. Rising regional tensions have further compounded these challenges. In Pakistan, the second phase of the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' began in April, targeting undocumented and Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders, accelerating returns following the large-scale movements of late 2023. On 31 July, Pakistan issued a Statutory Regulation Order (SRO), initiating the third phase of the plan. The SRO notes that PoR cards expired on 30 June, and their holders may now be subject to repatriation. While the implementation details remain unclear, UNHCR is actively engaging with the Government and key interlocutors to seek further information and clarity.

UNHCR continues to urge countries in the region to ensure that returns are voluntary, safe, and dignified. Yet thousands of Afghans are returning with no choice, no belongings, and no place to call home. UNHCR and partners are present at key border points to provide immediate, life-saving support. However, the scale and pace of returns are stretching already limited resources and placing enormous pressure on host communities.

UNHCR's Afghanistan situation remains critically underfunded, receiving only 24% of the required $478 million. Without immediate and sustained funding, the capacity to respond effectively to Afghans across the region will be dangerously compromised.

Operational Highlights

Iran

- **As of 30 July, some 1.4 million Afghans returned from Iran since 1 April and more than 1.76 million since the beginning of the year**. Between 24 and 30 July, daily returns averaged 11,300 people – a 28% decrease (15,700) from the previous week. For more information, please read the latest UNHCR CORE Iran-Afghanistan Update here.

- **UNHCR is supporting Iran's renewal of refugee cards to help Afghans maintain legal stay amid stricter enforcement measures.** Iran's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) has launched the two-month renewal process for *Amayesh* (now in their 18th cycle) and Hoviat cards (17th cycle). Refugees are required to visit designated centres for renewal after receiving an official SMS notification. UNHCR is assisting by sharing information widely to ensure refugees are informed and can participate. This renewal process is critical to safeguarding refugees' rights and access to services amid tighter enforcement measures against undocumented Afghans.

- **Reports of discrimination and mistreatment of Afghans persist across multiple provinces, including job losses due to employers' fears of penalties.** School enrolment remains a challenge, with some *Amayesh* card holders asked to delay registration until after Iranian students. Families with mixed documentation also face additional hurdles. UNHCR continues to engage with local authorities to address these issues.

- **UNHCR is helping refugees in Fars Province navigate legal and service barriers through targeted advocacy and legal support.** UNHCR-hired lawyers in Sub-Office Shiraz successfully secured the participation of former Headcount Slip holders in Dispute Settlement Committees. These committees help Afghan *Amayesh* card holders resolve civil disputes with both Iranians and fellow Afghans. This effort is part of UNHCR's ongoing commitment to expand legal protections and reduce everyday service barriers for Afghan refugees.

Pakistan

- **Between 1 April and 30 July, 303,300 Afghans returned**, including some 50,900 deportees (17%). Most were undocumented (66%), followed by ACC holders (16%), PoR card holders (14%) and asylum-seekers (4%). **The percentage of PoR card holders returning** increased to 23% in July compared to 6% in April.

- **Community concerns over PoR card expiry are growing, as call volumes surge.** Between 24 and 30 July, UNHCR's helpline received over 8,600 calls. Most (84%) were requests for information on resettlement or registration. Although slightly lower than the previous week's 9,400 calls, this remains more than double the 3,900 recorded in mid-July, underscoring ongoing fears linked to arrests, deportations, harassment, and uncertainty around PoR extensions. The helpline remains a vital resource, offering refugees access to timely and reliable information.

- **Refugees face mounting pressures amid stricter enforcement measures.** Reports of harassment, extortion, and arrests by law enforcement persist, fueling fear of deportation and prompting some families to return. UNHCR has received multiple reports of detention, extortion, coercion and demands for refugees to leave in Karachi, Attock, Islamabad, and Taxila. UNHCR is advocating at all levels to protect refugees' rights and promote their safety amid these growing challenges.

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. Border monitoring in Afghanistan continues to reveal significant protection challenges faced by Afghan returnees while in Iran, including difficulties in obtaining essential services and instances of discrimination.

Thousands of Afghans cross back into their homeland through the Islam Qala border in Herat province, following a sharp rise in mass returns from Iran. ©UNHCR/ Oxygen Empire Media Production

- **At Islam Qala, returning Afghans, particularly women and female-headed households, face heightened protection risks and uncertainty**. Many women without male guardians voice concerns about their future, underscoring the specific vulnerabilities of widows, separated women, and unaccompanied females. Returnees also report extortion, abuse, humiliation, and family separations in Iran, often linked to mixed marriages, arrests, and growing anti-Afghan sentiment. Protection screenings continue to identify survivors of gender-based violence who are referred for support. However, despite the presence of humanitarian actors at the border, risks of trafficking and exploitation remain high.

- **At Torkham, returnees and deportees continue to face significant protection risks, with targeted support provided at key reception points.** Between 26 and 30 July, protection screenings identified several high-risk cases, including survivors of gender-based violence, all of whom were referred for follow-up support. Families received cash assistance through the Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) and Forcibly Returned Afghans Enrolment (FARE) programmes, both of which use biometric verification. In addition, mine risk education was offered to help safeguard new arrivals.

- **UNHCR is supporting returnees at Nimroz (Milak), focusing on protection, legal aid, and access to essential services**. Returnees face critical protection risks and urgent needs, with scaled-up support reaching the most vulnerable. Between 23 and 30 July, 552 households (3,008 people) were referred for essential services, including health, protection, WASH, and food, supported by increased staffing. Legal awareness sessions on civil documentation reached over 400 returnees, while 65 protection cases (including people with disabilities, single parents, and female-headed households) were identified.

- **In Spin Boldak (Kandahar), UNHCR continues critical protection support and referrals for returnees.** Between 23 and 30 July, UNHCR and partners referred over 260 households for health, WASH, food, telecommunications, and protection services. Legal awareness sessions on civil documentation reached over 100 women, 21 of whom received individual counselling. Returnees reported extortion, family separations, harassment, and restricted access to services in Iran.

- **In Kabul, UNHCR continues to provide cash assistance through its VolRep and FARE programmes** to support cash-based interventions for returning Afghan refugees. This assistance helps returning Afghans meet their immediate needs upon arrival and facilitates a more dignified and sustainable reintegration process. It is complemented by healthcare, mental health and psychosocial support, legal aid, and mine risk awareness.

- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Iran were documentation and legal assistance (66%), family reunification support (37%), and information on services and assistance (18%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (88%), housing or accommodation (80%) and financial support (78%).

- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Pakistan were documentation and legal assistance (74%), protection services for children (36%), and information on services and assistance (36%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (82%), housing (81%), and financial support (80%).

Financial Information

UNHCR's Afghanistan situation this year is only funded at **24% against the required $478 million**. UNHCR calls on the international community to urgently and substantially increase funding.

UNHCR appreciates the generosity of donors who have stepped up to support the Afghanistan situation response with earmarked, softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions, ensuring life-saving assistance reaches those most in need:

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