Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #5

(15 August 2025)

Nazira Salihi returned to Afghanistan with her family after her husband's deportation, facing an uncertain future amid growing restrictions on women.© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

2.26 million
Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan in 2025

1.54 million
Afghans have returned from Iran since 1 April as of 13 August

329,400
Afghans returned from Pakistan since 1 April as of 13 August

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Over 2.26 million Afghans** from Iran and Pakistan have returned in 2025.
- **UNHCR continues advocacy following plans to forcibly return Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders** under the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' (IFRP) in Pakistan.
- Returns from Iran continue, with many returnees reporting **discrimination, harassment, and lost wages.**
- **Border points in Afghanistan face increasing needs** due to rising returns, protection concerns and limited resources.
- Despite high protection and basic needs requirements, the **Afghanistan situation remains critically underfunded**, with only 29% of the needed $478 million for 2025 received.

Operational Context

Afghanistan is facing a deepening humanitarian crisis fuelled by a deteriorating human rights situation, prolonged economic hardship, recurring natural disasters and limited access to critical services. The large-scale returns of over 2.26 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 have further exacerbated the situation.

In Iran, conditions for Afghans have become increasingly precarious due to domestic uncertainty following the expiration of Headcount Slips on 20 March and the rollout of a regularization and return scheme affecting two million Afghans. Rising regional tensions have added to the challenges.

In Pakistan, the second phase of the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' (IFRP) began in April 2025, targeting undocumented Afghans and holders of Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACC). On 31 July, the Government extended the plan to include Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders. While a one-month grace period was granted, UNHCR continues to advocate for a formal extension and safeguards for people with international protection needs, such as those at risk of persecution or serious harm from involuntary return.

In Tajikistan, borders remain open only to those with valid passports and visas. At the same time, the Government has carried out arbitrary deportations, including of recognized refugees and asylum-seekers, generating deep anxiety and distress within the community. Recent announcements and media reports in July 2025 have heightened concerns about the safety and rights of those affected.

Against this backdrop, UNHCR calls on all countries in the region to ensure returns are voluntary, safe, and dignified. However, many Afghans are returning involuntarily, often arriving without belongings. UNHCR and partners are on the ground providing life-saving assistance at key border points, but the scale and pace of returns are placing significant strain on resources and host communities.

Operational Highlights

Iran

- **Since 1 April 2025, over 1.58 million Afghans have returned from Iran, with more than 1.86 million returning since the beginning of the year.** Between 6 and 13 August, daily returns averaged 6,300 people – down 44% from the previous week's 7,800. *For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Iran-Afghanistan Update here.*

- **Afghans continue to face challenges accessing services, education, and livelihoods.** Families with different types of documentation face difficulties opening bank accounts, enrolling children in school, and obtaining SIM cards, while some households are affected by deportations. Reports highlight unequal treatment in schools, with certain documents prioritised for enrolment and some students charged higher fees than local peers. Access to the labour market is also increasingly constrained, even for documented Afghans, amid misconceptions about work rights. UNHCR continues its advocacy to promote equitable access to education, services, and livelihoods.

- **UNHCR and Afghanistan Situation Refugee Response Plan (RRP) partners continue to coordinate on protection and border support.** On 7 August, around 20 donors were briefed on recent activities at the Dogharoun and Milak border crossings, covering operational updates, border management measures, and protection interventions for arriving Afghan returnees. Partners highlighted efforts to strengthen coordination across government authorities, UN agencies, and

NGOs, ensure access to basic services, and monitor protection risks. A joint mission to Torbat-e-Jaam settlement and Dogharoun in Khorasan Razavi province is planned for September to further assess needs, improve service delivery, and identify opportunities for enhanced inter-agency cooperation.

Pakistan

- **From 1 April to 13 August, 329,400 Afghans returned to Afghanistan**, including 55,400 deportees (17%). Most were undocumented (65%), followed by ACC holders (16%), PoR card holders (14%) and asylum-seekers (3%).

- **The percentage of PoR card holders returning rose sharply from 6% in April to 23% in July.** This trend continued in the second week of August, with the total number of PoR card holders more than doubling compared to the last week of July.

- **UNHCR continues to monitor protection risks for Afghan refugees in Pakistan.** Arrests and repatriation measures affecting Afghan nationals, including PoR card holders, have been reported across Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Some detainees have been released after receiving legal support or paying informal fines, while others face deportation. Authorities are reportedly collecting data on Afghans across documentation categories, including information on bank accounts and mobile SIMs, while coordinating with local elders and noting special considerations for women and children. UNHCR is closely monitoring these developments and actively engaging with authorities and partners to promote protection-sensitive approaches, call for an end to arbitrary arrests, and advocate for the rights and needs of vulnerable groups, including women, children, and families.

- **UNHCR Helpline provides critical information to Afghan returnees and refugees.** Between 7 and 12 August, more than 11,500 calls were received. Most inquiries were related to the voluntary repatriation process, arrests, fears of deportation, police harassment, extortion, and SIM card blockages. UNHCR continues to engage with authorities and partners to support access to accurate information, helping counter misinformation and protect the rights of vulnerable groups.

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

Returnees receive various forms of assistance, including cash-based interventions, core relief items, and referrals to appropriate services. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

discrimination. These frontline services are critical to ensuring that returnees receive timely protection support and can access basic assistance after often difficult journeys.

- **Spin Boldak (Kandahar): Returns from Pakistan show rising numbers and ongoing protection concerns.** Between 7 and 11 August, around 2,500 people returned through Spin Boldak, a 10% increase from the previous week, while 500 were deported, including 100 PoR card holders (down 15%). Cases of family separations and unaccompanied children continue, with close to 30 recorded in just one week. UNHCR continues to advocate with the authorities to prevent family separations, protect PoR card holders, and support access to essential services.

- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Iran were documentation and legal assistance (67%), family reunification support (34%), and information on services and assistance (17%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (89%), housing or accommodation (82%) and financial support (80%).

- **The top three protection services requested upon arrival** by Afghan returnees from Pakistan were documentation and legal assistance (83%), information on services and assistance (43%), and protection services for children (28%). The top three needs upon arrival were food (85%), housing (81%), and financial support (79%).

Tajikistan

- **Forced returns of Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers are ongoing.** Since 1 April 2025, at least 1,300 Afghan nationals, including more than 1,200 refugees and asylum-seekers, have been forcibly returned to Afghanistan, with over 1,040 in the last two months alone. Entire families are being deported without due process, access to legal assistance, or the opportunity to appeal. UNHCR is coordinating on both sides of the border to verify information, provide protection interventions and humanitarian assistance upon return, and, together with partners, offer consultations, legal support, and emergency assistance to the most vulnerable families. UNHCR continues to advocate with authorities for a halt to forced returns and for asylum-seekers and refugees to have access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, including the right to legal representation and appeal, in line with national legislation and international obligations.

Financial Information

UNHCR's Afghanistan situation this year is only funded at **29% 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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