Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #13

(14 October 2025)

Thousands of Afghans return from Pakistan through Torkham border, many arriving with few belongings amid rising mass returns. UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

2.2 million
Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan in 2025

1.4 million
Afghans have returned from Iran since 1 April as of 4 October

472,000
Afghans have returned from Pakistan since 1 April as of 4 October

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Clashes in border areas led to a temporary pause in returns during closure of border points,** with UNHCR's High Commissioner calling for rapid de-escalation for the sake of those impacted.
- As of 4 October, **over 2.2 million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan in 2025.** On 2 October 2025, the UN in Afghanistan, including UNHCR, has adopted a new, harmonized approach for reporting on returnee figures from Afghanistan. The aim is to ensure consistency across agencies by using consolidated data sets and relying on country of arrival figures.
- **Afghans remain in a precarious situation in Pakistan** following the end of the grace period for Proof of Registration (PoR) cards on 31 August, putting many at risk of arrest and deportation.

- **The Afghanistan situation remains critically underfunded**, with only 35% of the required $478 million for 2025 received. Additional support is needed to scale up the response to multiple emergencies. UNHCR's updated regional returns appeal calls for $258.6 million.

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 return of over 2 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 has further strained resources.

The recent earthquakes in eastern Afghanistan have compounded vulnerabilities, leaving an estimated 498,800 people in need of humanitarian assistance. In response, the OCHA-led multi-sectoral Eastern Region Earthquake Response Plan was launched, targeting around 456,000 people in high-intensity impact areas, particularly those whose homes were severely damaged or destroyed. The plan appeals for $139.6 million to deliver life-saving assistance over four months (September–December 2025). As part of the inter-agency response, UNHCR has prioritized three key areas based on identified needs: needs assessments to guide interventions, emergency shelter and essential items, and protection support for the most vulnerable, including recent returnees.

In Pakistan, the second phase of the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' (IFRP) began in April 2025, targeting undocumented Afghans and holders of Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC). On 31 July, the Government expanded the plan to include Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders. The end of the grace period at the end of August has heightened uncertainty and fears among Afghans, as returns continue despite the protection risks. Alongside the returns crisis, floods in September in Pakistan have affected communities in Shangla and Swat districts. UNHCR, through the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, has already provided core relief items (CRIs) and shelter kits to flood-affected families, including Refugee Housing Units to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority.

In Iran, conditions for Afghans have become increasingly precarious following the expiration of Headcount Slips on 20 March and the rollout of a regularization and return scheme affecting over 2 million Afghans. Many Afghans also continue to report discrimination and harassment.

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

Against this backdrop, and in line with its updated Guidance Note on Afghanistan, UNHCR urges States to exercise caution when considering forced returns to Afghanistan of people found not to be in need of international protection, given the ongoing large-scale humanitarian crisis and the potentially destabilising impact that such returns could have on the country's fragile situation.

Operational Highlights

Iran

- **Since 1 April 2025, over 1.4 million Afghans have returned from Iran, with more than 1.65 million returning since the beginning of the year.**

- **Returns from Iran via Dogharoun Crossing decreased moderately while there was a sharp increase in irregular entries in border areas.** During the reporting period, over 180 buses carried

an estimated 7,360 returnees, alongside around 35 people returning voluntarily under UNHCR's Voluntary Repatriation programme. UNHCR continues to monitor return trends and support returnees at the border. While returns to Afghanistan were around 30% less than field reports of the previous week, local authorities reported more than double the number of irregular crossings and arrests in the past year have now exceeded 100,000 foreign nationals.

- **Afghans continue face challenges accessing services including education.** Afghan families are facing heightened feels, enrolment barriers and in-person attendance barriers to education. In Coordination with partners and other UN agencies, UNHCR continues to visit affected areas and maintain open dialogue with authorities and advocate for equitable access to education, services and livelihoods to support the protection and well-being of Afghan communities.

Pakistan

- **From 1 April to 4 October 472,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan**, including 36,800 deportees (8%).

- **Afghan communities in Pakistan continue to face pressure and uncertainty amid transition.** Following the de-notification of refugee camps – ending formal recognition of camps and winding down services – UNHCR remains engaged in supporting continuity where possible. In Balochistan, authorities increased pressure on all Afghans, including refugees, encouraging them to close businesses and return to Afghanistan within days. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, essential services such as health, education and water remained operational during while repatriations continue among livelihoods concerns such as departure before crop harvesting. UNHCR continues to engage with authorities and partners to support planning, protection and safe returns.

- **UNHCR continues to monitor protection risks for Afghan communities.** During the reporting period, UNHCR's helpline received over 5,100 calls, with reports received of protection concerns including arrests, detention, financial hardship and food insecurity, as well as difficulty accessing health and education services. UNHCR continues to provide advice and support to callers on health, psychosocial wellbeing and protection, including gender-based violence. The helpline remains a key channel for refugees to access information, guidance and referral services.

Afghanistan

- **Safety and security concerns are impacting assistance delivery at some border entry points.** UNHCR and partners maintain a presence at key border entry points on the Afghanistan–Pakistan border while navigating a highly volatile operational environment. Activities were temporarily paused at Spin Boldak and Torkham following escalation of military clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan in border areas. UNHCR and partners are continuing to provide life-saving assistance and supporting protection at the Takhtapul and Omari

reception centres while monitoring the latest developments in regard to safety of beneficiary communities, staff and partners.

- **UNHCR continues advocacy to lift restrictions on Afghan female staff and is operating flexibly amid temporary border closures.** Restrictions on staff movement, including limitations affecting female staff, alongside general security concerns have affected the delivery of returnee assistance, including cash support, road missions and other critical activities. Where returns have temporarily paused, UNHCR is addressing case backlogs. UNHCR is also exploring delivering cash assistance flexibly across locations and utilizing mobile teams to ensure essential support and protection for returnees and communities in need.

- **At Islam Qala (Herat), UNHCR is providing basic assistance to families in need.** During the reporting period, around 475 families received packages containing blankets, kitchen sets, cooking gas, jerry cans and clothes to support them on arrival and transition toward reintegration.

- **At Spin Boldak (Kandahar), protection interviews highlight mental health, child protection and health risks during returns.** During protection interviews, returnees reported insufficient time and resources to transfer their families and belongings back to Afghanistan in a dignified manner, financial burden during the journey, as well as instances of delay and lack of food, water and medical care prior to departure highlighting mental health, child protection and health risks during returns. UNHCR continued to facilitate referrals for over 3,500 vulverable households to service providers to ensure access to essential support and assistance including health, protection, water and sanitation and food.

- **At Milak (Nimroz), UNHCR continues to provide legal support and reach people with disabilities.** Legal awareness sessions on civil documentation were provided to over 2,000 men and women, as well as legal counselling to around 80 individuals helping to ease their transition and safeguard rights. Wheelchair assistance was provided to around 90 people with limited mobility and UNHCR provided additional assistance to suport returnees to transport their belongings.

Tajikistan

- **Forced returns from Tajikistan continue despite protection concerns.** Since January, over 1,600 Afghans (including nearly 1,400 refugees and asylum-seekers, among them close to 600 women and 400 children) have been deported. Since 1 September, 78 Afghan nationals have been deported, including around 70 refugees and asylum-seekers. Families are being removed without due process, legal assistance, or the chance to appeal. UNHCR is coordinating on both sides of the border to verify cases, provide protection interventions and humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, and support vulnerable families left behind in Tajikistan. Advocacy with the Government continues to halt forced returns and ensure fair asylum procedures in line with national and international obligations.

Financial Information

The Afghanistan situation this year is only funded at **35% against the required $478 million**. 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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