

Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #15

(4 November 2025)



Afghan returnees from Pakistan arrive tired and exhausted, facing an uncertain journey ahead. UNHCR provides assistance, guidance, and essential services to help them navigate their return. UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

2.4 million

Afghan returnees from
Iran and Pakistan in
2025

1.5 million

Afghans have returned
from Iran since 1 April as of
1 November

651,000

Afghans have returned
from Pakistan since 1
April as of 1 November

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Almost 2.4 million Afghans** from Iran and Pakistan have returned so far in 2025.
- **On 3 November, an earthquake struck Mazar-i-Sharif**, causing casualties and damages.
- **UN and partner activities at the Islam Qala border have been temporarily suspended** after national female staff barred, limiting critical support for female returnees.
- **Afghans remain in a precarious situation in Pakistan** following the end of the grace period for Proof of Registration (PoR) cards on 31 August.
- **The Afghanistan situation remains critically underfunded**, with only 32% 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 2.4 million Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 have further strained resources.

The humanitarian situation has been compounded by recent earthquakes, leaving many at heightened risk and in urgent need of assistance. On 3 November, an earthquake struck Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan. Details are still being gathered, but preliminary reports indicate more than 20 casualties and hundreds of injuries. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation and coordinating with partners to assess needs and respond rapidly. Earlier, the 31 August earthquake in eastern Afghanistan left an estimated 498,800 people in need of humanitarian assistance. UNHCR and partners are responding through the OCHA-led multi-sectoral [Eastern Region Earthquake Response Plan](#), targeting around 456,000 people in high-intensity impact areas, particularly those whose homes were severely damaged or destroyed. \$139.6 million is required to deliver life-saving assistance between September and December 2025. [UNHCR's priorities](#) include 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 on 31 August has heightened uncertainty and fears among Afghans, as returns and deportations continue despite the protection risks. Alongside the returns crisis, floods in Pakistan have affected communities in Shangla and Swat districts. UNHCR, through the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, has provided core relief items (CRIs) and shelter kits to flood-affected families.

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 two 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, some 1.5 million Afghans have returned from Iran, with more than 1.7 million returning since the beginning of the year.** For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Iran-Afghanistan Update [here](#).
- **Returns to Afghanistan continue at Dogharoun, with early biometric enrolment underway:** During the reporting week, nearly 120 buses carrying an estimated 4,700 returnees crossed the border, alongside 18 voluntary returns under the Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) programme.

Pakistan

- **From 1 April to 1 November, 651,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan**, including 47,700 deportees (7%). Most were undocumented (56%), followed by PoR card holders (41%) and asylum-seekers (2%). For more details, see the latest UNHCR CORE Pakistan-Afghanistan Update [here](#).
- **Pakistan has partially reopened the Torkham border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, allowing thousands of stranded Afghan refugees to return home, while trade remains suspended.** The crossing, closed since 11–12 October following tensions and clashes, had left refugees and hundreds of trucks stranded. Thousands of returnees were accommodated in temporary camps, UNHCR Rubb Halls, and near the Azakhel Voluntary Repatriation Centre in Peshawar, while others waited along the roadside to cross. No new exchanges of fire were reported along the 2,611-km Durand Line during the reporting period. Returnees are experiencing disruptions in cash and protection assistance, prompting an enhanced response at border centres.
- **UNHCR continues to monitor a challenging protection environment for Afghans in Pakistan, with reports of increasing vulnerability across several districts.** Documented Afghans, including Proof of Registration (PoR) and Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders, report evictions, intimidation, and enforcement actions across the country. Many families are experiencing loss of livelihoods, limited access to basic services, or delays at border points, affecting their ability to meet essential needs. UNHCR and partners are providing counselling, legal support, and referrals to urgent protection and humanitarian services, with particular attention to women and children.

Afghanistan

UNHCR and partners aim to maintain a presence at key border entry points – Milak (Nimroz) on the Afghanistan–Iran border and Torkham (Nangarhar) and Spin Boldak (Kandahar) on the Afghanistan–Pakistan border – while navigating a highly volatile operational environment.

- **The UN and partners have temporarily suspended humanitarian operations at the Islam Qala (Herat) border between Afghanistan and Iran.** This follows additional restrictions preventing female national UN and partner staff from operating at the border and affects essential services, including health, registration, and protection. Over 60% of returnees at Islam Qala are women and children, including female-headed households and single female returnees. The UN is engaging with the de facto authorities and continues to call for the lifting of these restrictions to ensure the delivery of critical support in a culturally sensitive and principled manner.
- **The Torkham border (Nangarhar) reopened on 1 November, triggering a surge of returnees and their trucks throughout the day and night.** Many returnees arrived with personal belongings and shelter materials. UNHCR and partners are providing cash assistance at the Omari Reception Centre and have scaled up services in response to ongoing returns from Pakistan following the closure of 43 refugee villages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similar surges are expected until all stranded returnees have crossed into Afghanistan.

- **Returnees are experiencing disruptions in cash and protection assistance, prompting a mobile response and scale-up at border centres.** Following the de facto authorities' directive preventing Afghan female staff from working, UNHCR closed the Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad Encashment Centres. In response, return processing and cash distribution have been expanded at Omari (Torkham) and Takhtapul (Spin Boldak) Reception Centres, operating two shifts daily, where female staff are able to work.



UNHCR assists returnees, mostly women and children, including female-headed households and gender-based violence survivors. © UNHCR/Samand Ibrahim

- **UNHCR continues to work closely with UN agencies and other partners to support returnees and promote sustainable reintegration.** Using an area-based approach, UNHCR targets 20 province-level Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs). These areas are selected based on several factors, including the ratio of returnees to host communities, previous UNHCR and UN investments, and findings from assessments. The approach focuses on high-return areas as models for predictable interventions, which enhance host communities' absorption capacity and enable the delivery of assistance and services to those in need.

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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