Pakistan

January 2026

Over **2 million Afghans** have returned to Afghanistan since September 2023, including holders of PoR cards, ACC and undocumented people.

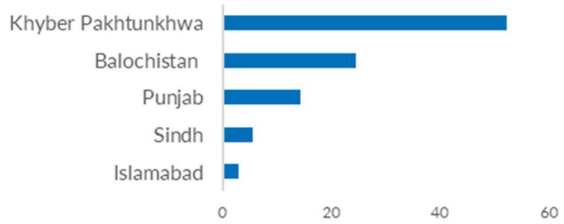
There are currently about **1.98 million** Afghans in Pakistan.

In **January**, **77,304** Afghans returned to Afghanistan, with **6,873** deported through the Chaman, Torkham, and Barabcha borders.

Over **26,938** Afghan PoR card holders were facilitated to return through UNHCR's repatriation centres in **January.**

REGISTERED REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN PAKISTAN: 1 MILLION (99% AFGHANS, 1% OTHERS)

Per province



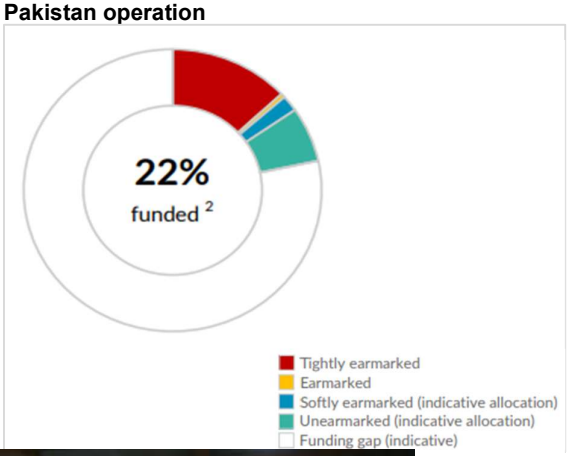
- **66%** of Afghan refugees live in urban/semi-urban localities
- **34%** reside in refugee villages

** Data source: UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Dec 2025*
https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/pak

FUNDING (AS OF 31 JANUARY 2026)

USD 93.8 million

Pakistan operation



Students at a refugee village share a smile while exploring their new English textbooks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. UNHCR / © Waseem Ahmed.

Key Highlights:

- More than **two million** Afghans have returned to Afghanistan since the start of IFRP in 2023, with over a million last year. More than 77,000 returned in January 2026.
- On 31 January, armed attacks across multiple locations in Balochistan resulted in casualties, service shutdowns and ongoing security operations. The borders with Afghanistan remain closed since October 2025, (except for Afghan return movements), affecting both movement of people and goods, to the overall detriment of the economy.
- Increased pressure on Afghans to return including in the capital city and in Khyber Pakhtunkwa (KP) has led to high numbers of people choosing to return through UNHCR's repatriation centre in Azakhel, KP. The situation is reversed in Balochistan, partly due to harsher weather conditions.
- UNHCR inaugurated 48 solarized public facilities including the Bolan Medical Complex Hospital in Balochistan. The ceremony was presided over by the Chief Minister and attended by heads of UNHCR, IOM, United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC) and provincial representatives.

Operational Context

A deteriorating security context continues to be a concern in the country, largely contributing to a challenging protection space. However, UNHCR and partners continue to deliver support to displaced people, in close coordination with the authorities.

The *Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP)* implemented since September 2023 has seen large-scale returns of Afghans holding different categories of documentation including Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACC), Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders as well as the undocumented individuals. Over two million Afghans have returned since the initiation of the Plan, with over a million in 2025. In January 2026, some 77,304 Afghans returned, including 6,873 deported.

UNHCR continued to advocate with the Government of Pakistan to strengthen protection mechanisms for Afghans at heightened risk of persecution including human rights defenders, journalists, artists, minorities, female-headed households at risk, and transgender individuals. In addition, certain categories of vulnerable Afghans and persons with strong ties to Pakistan, such as spouses of Pakistani nationals and students in higher education are being advocated for as well. The Government has allowed those enrolled in universities to continue their studies although some have been deported. In parallel, the Government has notified the students to regularize their stay by obtaining student visas.

Pakistan–Afghanistan relations remained strained, with prolonged restrictions at the Torkham border which was only open for returnees and deportees to Afghanistan throughout January but remaining officially closed since 12 October for regular cross-border movements, including passport/visa holders, medical access, and trade. Only empty trucks that transported repatriating families were allowed back into Pakistan. The border closure has continued to impact on economic operations especially in border districts and contributing to localized grievances.

On 27 January, the Refugee Protection Working Group (RPWG) met and discussed CCAR proposed exemption categories to prevent forced deportations. Participants cited concerns over continued arrests affecting vulnerable individuals and families and agreed to form a sub-group to develop a strengthened advocacy strategy for refugee protection.

UNHCR and IOM discussed strengthening inter-agency collaboration to operationalize the route-based approach (RBA). IOM expressed interest in establishing presence at the new Azakhel Multipurpose Hub, with priority actions including a data-sharing agreement and clear inter-agency referral procedures

Sector responses

PROTECTION

Afghans in Pakistan continue to face worsening protection risks, including raids, deportations, detentions, harassment, exploitation, and financial hardship amid rising border tensions. Restricted access to services, blocked Sim cards and bank accounts, as well as lack of valid documentation have compounded the situation. Limited access to jobs and livelihoods, rising economic hardships and inflation, and severe winter conditions are causing stress. Refugees and asylum-seekers with visas that are nearing expiry are closely monitored by law enforcement and instructed to extend their stay or repatriate to avoid arrest.

There has been a surge in requests for Emergency Cash Assistance (ECA), driven by these compounded pressures. Mental Health needs are on the rise, with other negative coping mechanisms also reported.

CCAR is developing a draft concept note for an interim, profile-based protection mechanism that will be presented to the SAFRON ministry for further discussions with the Inter-Ministerial Committee. The concept note, if implemented, would allow the Government to identify, register and exempt Afghans at imminent risk of harm from forced deportation.

The Government reportedly opened the Kharlachi border crossing in Kurram, KP and a NADRA de-registration center at Thall to facilitate returnees from southern KP districts; however, no returns have taken place through this border yet.

Repatriation update: In January 2026, a total of 6,228 families (26,938 individuals) were assisted through UNHCR facilitated Repatriation Centres (VRC) at Azakhel (KP) and Baleli (Balochistan). This represents a 12% increase in repatriation compared to December 2025 when 99% individuals were processed through Azakhel VRC and 1% through Baleli VRC. Of the 2 million Afghans who have returned since the inception of the IFRP, 10% were deportations, while 13% were processed through VRCs.

In January 2026, at least 96% of the returns processed through Azakhel came from KP, with 62% from the refugee villages, reflecting a growing pressure in KP province for Afghans to return. In addition, 14,269 PoR cardholders returned spontaneously in January 2026 without passing through the VRC bringing the total number of POR returns to 41,207. Reduced returns through VRC in Balochistan as compared to KP, is partly attributed to the harsh winter conditions and lesser pressure now than in KP for Afghans to return.

Legal Assistance: In January, UNHCR and legal partners, SHARP, SEHER and IMKAAN Welfare Organization (IWO) continued to provide protection and legal aid to refugees and asylum-seekers across the country. Legal aid, awareness, documentation support, and access to justice services were extended to vulnerable Afghans amid heightened enforcement of repatriation and deportation. Legal support was provided in instances of arrests/detentions to avert refoulment.

Generally, arrests declined compared to December, though some individuals were still deported or remained in detention despite legal interventions. Legal partners expanded counselling, training of peacekeepers, and outreach through helplines and radio to support protection and voluntary repatriation awareness.

In KP, authorities issued notices and announcements in de-notified RVs and urban areas urging voluntary return and warning of possible forced deportations. Legal partners reported mass arrests in several areas, sealing of Afghan-owned shops, demolition of refugee houses and enforcement actions in RVs. Although electricity was restored in some RVs, the overall situation continues to be characterized by heightened pressure on Afghan refugees to repatriate.

Community-based Protection: Afghans in urban areas including in Peshawar, Quetta, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Attock reported receiving eviction notices from landlords, due to their inability to obtain visas. Landlords cited heavy fines imposed by authorities for housing Afghan nationals. The evictions disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including women and children, heightening their safety. Others displayed reluctance to return due to concerns over the limited cash grants provided in Afghanistan, transportation costs and the logistical challenges associated with winter conditions.

Refugees and asylum-seekers are facing difficulty in accessing public hospitals due to the fear of arrest and denial of services. Economic distress remains acute and frequent requests for financial and medical assistance indicate persistent economic vulnerability.

Reports from multiple refugee villages across KP indicate growing pressure on Afghan refugees to repatriate, with some planning collective returns after Eid-ul-Fitr. Authorities have issued eviction and repatriation notices, carried out demolitions, sealed shops, and conducted enforcement operations in several locations, leading to full vacating of some sites. At the same time, electricity outages persist in Barakai RV, and limited voluntary support continues as communication increasingly shifts to community-based structures.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): UNHCR and partners provided comprehensive GBV prevention, response, and awareness services to Afghan communities and their hosts across Pakistan. Community consultations and helpline reports indicate mounting protection concerns for Afghans, including arrests, harassment, evictions, and widespread misinformation.

Resettlement: In January, 2 cases / 6 refugees were submitted to resettlement countries. Submissions were limited as 2026 allocated quotas for Australia and Canada had not been finalized. There were no departures to resettlement countries. For Complementary Pathways, the consultant for the Digital Innovation Fund project was onboarded, and several introductory meetings were held with UNHCR Pakistan steering committee, DLA Piper, the Bureau and HQs, with particular focus on initiating mapping of stakeholders and organization of community-based consultations and elaboration of related tools. The project aims to create a digital platform that helps Afghans easily find and navigate safe education, work, family reunification, and other complementary pathway opportunities.

Coordination: January saw continued strengthening of interagency collaboration around the operationalization of the route-based approach with a strong focus on ensuring complementary, non-duplicative service provision. Seeking to ensure that people on the move are treated with dignity and that their rights are respected, in line with the December 2025 recommendations of the communities, and in light of the constrained protection context, priority services include cash, legal support, child protection, GBV, and MHPSS, with increased reliance upon UNHCR's centralized protection helpline, remote counselling, and roving mobile/outreach teams. Priority interagency collaboration included the work on a UNHCR-IOM data-sharing agreement and interagency referral SOPs. Discussions with UNFPA related to GBV and SRH service-provision and distribution of dignity kits and cash vouchers to refugees.

EDUCATION

Education was disrupted in refugee village schools due to the denotification. UNHCR continued monitoring and coordinated with authorities and partners to help maintain education services amid disruptions. Engagements with the Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) confirmed the reopening of schools that had been sealed in coordination with the Home Department, and a joint meeting with GIZ and the ESE Foundation focused on informal education, including Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) centres, community learning centres, and distance learning. In addition, 255 ALP learners completed Package E and 61 of 96 schools are currently operational with remaining schools closed due to winter break and

gradually reopening with support from the ESE Department. 23 ALP Primary centers are open. The average student attendance across schools is 55%.

HEALTH

The ongoing IFRP implementation has increased the demand for health services as many Afghan families are seeking care before departure to Afghanistan. In Balochistan, the vaccination program prioritized routine immunizations for children under one year, with an emphasis on reaching vulnerable populations and ensuring timely vaccine administration. A total of 111 vaccine doses has been administered, with 91 children receiving the Penta-III vaccine (five-in-one childhood vaccine), completing their full immunization schedule.

In KP, UNHCR partners provided medical services to 1,170 individuals, mainly women, including outpatient care, maternal health services, and safe deliveries. A total of 104 safe births were supported, with 774 women receiving antenatal care and 154 postnatal care, alongside referrals and management of complicated obstetric cases. Health education and community outreach reached over 1,600 women, while Mental Health and Psychosocial Support services assisted 59 individuals through counseling and Psychological First Aid.

LIVELIHOODS AND SELF RELIANCE

Across Balochistan and KP, livelihood initiatives focused on skills development, entrepreneurship, and climate-resilient income generation for Afghan refugees and host communities. In Balochistan, the livelihood training activities at the Urban Cohesion Hub were successfully completed. Following community consultations in Balochistan, 290 individuals were enrolled in livelihoods programmes across livestock, vocational, and agriculture sectors, alongside skills training for 190 women. Health, hygiene, and financial literacy sessions were conducted, and two interns were placed for three months at Quetta Serena hotel to gain work experience.

Financial Information – as of 31 January 2026

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to this operation as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds.

Australia | Belgium | Canada | Denmark | European Union | Germany | Ireland | Japan | Netherlands | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | Private donors

For more information, please contact:

Joyce Wayua Munyao-Mbithi, Senior External Relations Officer: munyao@unhcr.org
Uzma Irum, External Relations Associate: irum@unhcr.org

LINKS

Click following links to access
UNHCR Pakistan Website
UNHCR Pakistan X
UNHCR Pakistan Facebook
UNHCR Pakistan Instagram
UNHCR Data Portal