12 MARCH 2026

UNHCR-IOM FLASH UPDATE #85

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | IOM UN MIGRATION

ARREST AND DETENTION | FLOW MONITORING (15 September 2023 – 7 March 2026)

INTRODUCTION

In response to the Ministry of Interior's (MoI) decision of 26 September 2023 to enact an "Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan", UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency and IOM, the UN Migration Agency, have collated their data on the arrest, detention, and deportation of Proof of Registration (PoR) holders, Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders, and undocumented Afghan nationals as well as on the outflows of Afghan nationals at the Torkham, Ghulam Khan, Chaman, Badini and Bahramcha border crossing points, to better understand the protection environment and movements of Afghan nationals returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan.

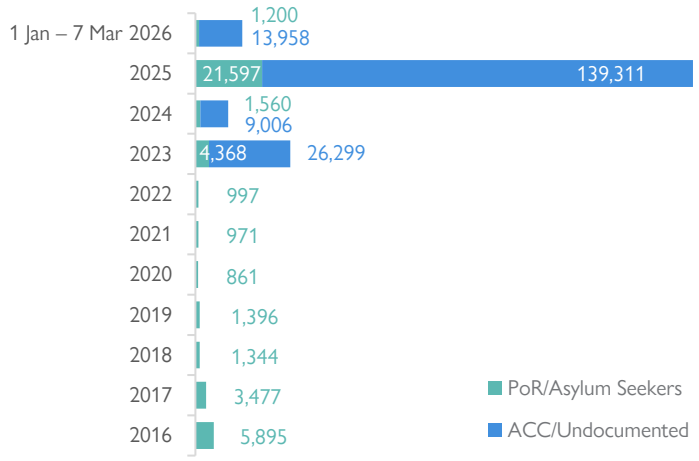
In 2025, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) issued several directives impacting Afghan nationals. In January, the GoP announced that Afghan nationals should relocate from Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and Rawalpindi, or else face deportation. In April, further announcements indicated the implementation of the second phase of the "IFRP", targeting ACC holders, in addition to undocumented Afghans. In July, the GoP issued a Statutory Regulation Order (SRO) directing the repatriation/deportation of PoR card holders following the expiry of PoR card validity on 30 June. The GoP later indicated a deadline of 1 September for PoR holders to leave Pakistan, before the start of the repatriation/deportation process. UNHCR issued a press briefing expressing concern regarding the decision and urging the GoP to exempt Afghans with international protection needs, as well as those with particular circumstances or vulnerabilities, from involuntary return.

KEY FINDINGS AND LIMITATIONS

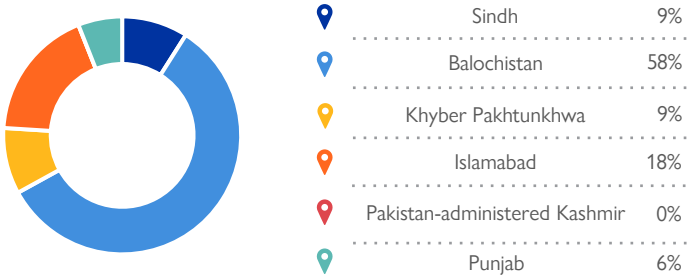
Prior to 2023, there was no data collected on the arrest and detention of ACC holders or undocumented Afghan nationals. Since January 2023, IOM has started to collect this data. The figures, particularly of undocumented Afghan nationals, should be considered underreported.

- During the reporting period (1 – 7 March) a total of 1,653 Afghan nationals were arrested and detained, marking a 75% increase compared to the previous week.
- Out of all arrests and detentions during the reporting period (1 – 7 March), ACC holders and undocumented Afghans represented 88% of the total rate of arrest and detentions, and PoR holders represented 12%.
- During the reporting period (1 – 7 March), 64% of the total reported arrests and detentions took place in Balochistan, 27% in Sindh, and 9% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- Across Pakistan, the top three districts for arrest and detention between 1 January and 7 March 2026 are Chaghi (Balochistan), Islamabad (ICT), and Karachi (Sindh).

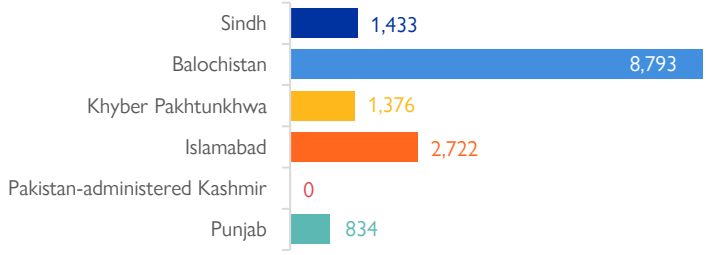
ARREST AND DETENTION BY YEARS



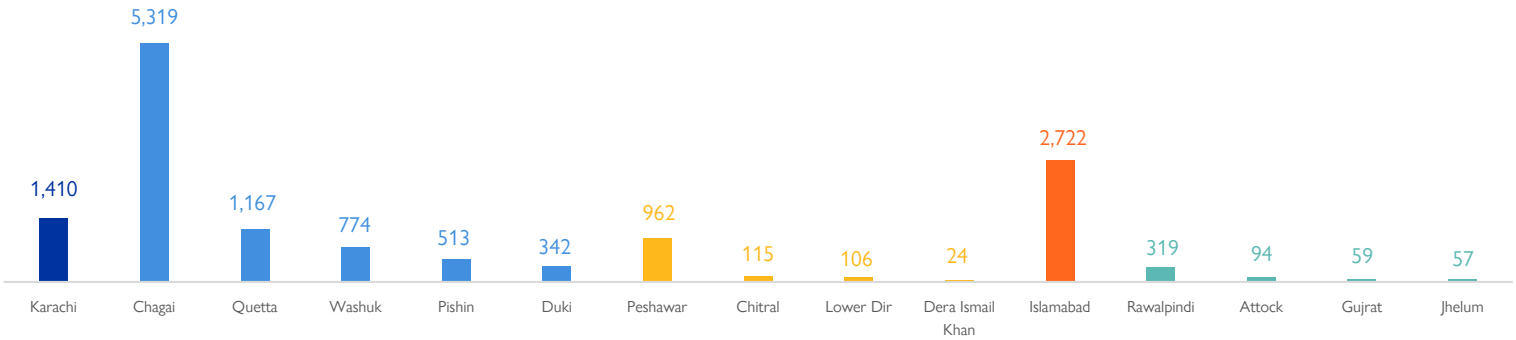
% OF ARRESTS BY LOCATION (1 January – 7 March 2026)



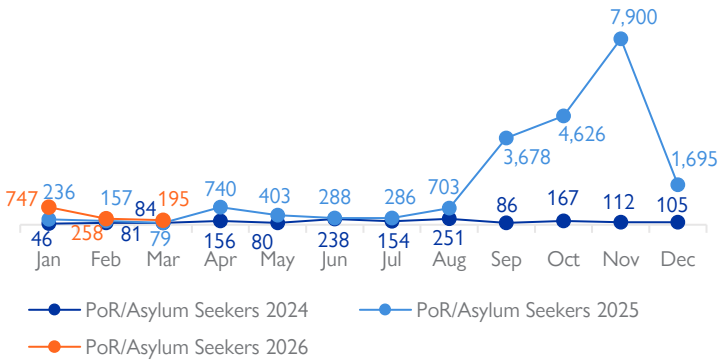
NO. OF ARRESTS BY PROVINCE (1 January – 7 March 2026)



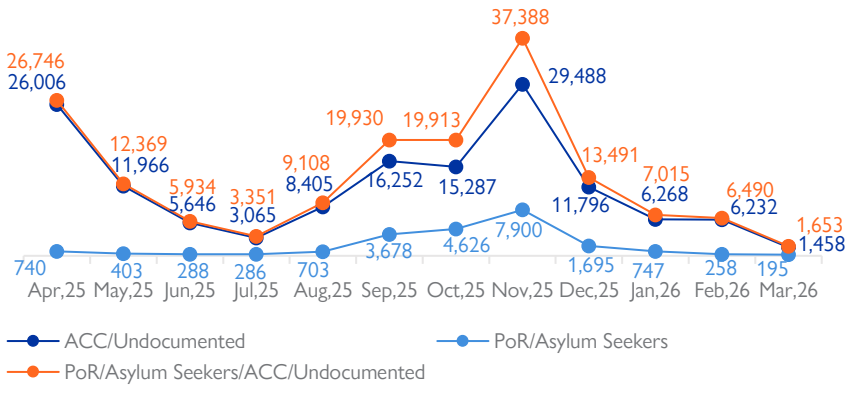
NO. OF ARRESTS – TOP 15 DISTRICTS (1 January – 7 March 2026)



MONTHLY ARRESTS AND DETENTION TRENDS 2024 – 2026 (PoR HOLDERS)



MONTHLY ARRESTS AND DETENTION ANALYSIS 2025 – 2026



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ARREST AND DETENTION | FLOW MONITORING (15 September 2023 – 7 March 2026)

IOM border monitor conducting an interview at Torkham border. [IOM Pakistan 2026]

KEY FINDINGS

- Cumulatively, from 15 September 2023 to 28 February 2026, 2,098,425 individuals have returned.
- During the period 1 – 7 March 2026, UNHCR and IOM estimate 2,502 Afghans returned through the Torkham, Ghulam Khan (located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Chaman, Badini and Bahramcha (located in Balochistan) border crossing points to Afghanistan.
- Between 1 – 7 March 2026, the number of returns decreased by 80% while deportations increased by 82% — compared to the previous week of 22 – 28 February 2026 (12,543 returns including 947 deportations). During 1 – 7 March 2026, a total of 2,502 returns were reported, including 1,726 deportations. Returns decreased due to security incidents that led to the closure of the Torkham border crossing on 27 February, reducing cross-border movements. Deportations increased due to intensified arrest operations and the reopening of the Barabcha border on 6 March after its closure from 1–5 March due to cross-border clashes.
- For the returns from 1 – 7 March 2026, most of the returnees were undocumented (91%) followed by PoR (2%) and ACC holders (7%). Majority of the POR returns were processed by UNHCR through the Voluntary Repatriation Centers (VRCs).
- For the deportees from 1 – 7 March 2026, most were undocumented (98%) followed by ACC holders (2%).
- Since 1 April 2025, 1,244,392 Afghan nationals returned, of which 166,673 (13%) were deported. During the period, fear of arrest remained the main reason for return among undocumented individuals and ACC holders (95%) while strict border entry requirements were the primary driver for PoR holders (56%).
- During the same time period, returnees were most likely to return from Quetta (19%), Haripur (11%) and Attock (9%) in Pakistan and intend to go to Nangarhar (25%), Kabul (21%) and Kunduz (16%) in Afghanistan.

CUMULATIVE | 2023 – 2026

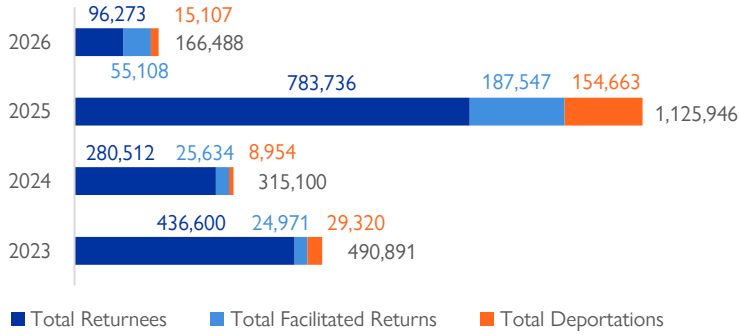
2,098,425 (100%)* TOTAL NUMBER OF RETURNS

1,597,121 (76%) TOTAL RETURNEES

293,260 (14%)** TOTAL FACILITATED PoR RETURNEES

208,044 (10%) TOTAL DEPORTATIONS

Period	Total Number of Returns	Total Returnees	Total Facilitated Returnees	Total Deportees
15 Sep – 31 Dec 2023	490,891	436,600	24,971	29,320
1 Jan – 31 Dec 2024	315,100	280,512	25,634	8,954
1 Jan – 31 Dec 2025	1,125,946	783,736	187,547	154,663
1 Jan – 7 Mar 2026	166,488	96,273	55,108	15,107
Total	**2,098,425**	**1,597,121**	**293,260**	**208,044**



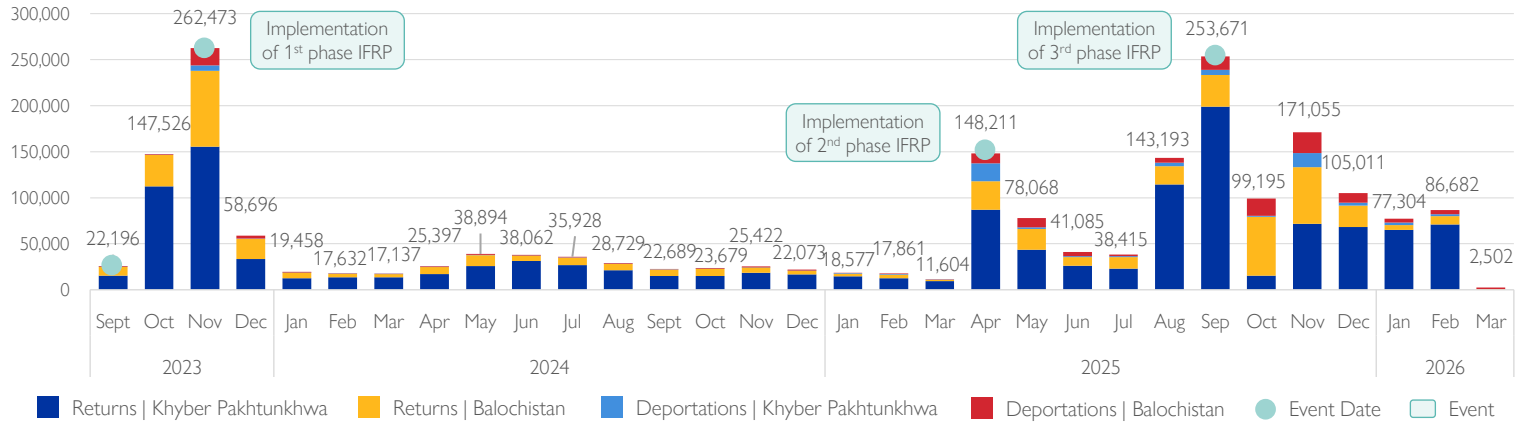
DOCUMENTATION – TOTAL NUMBER OF RETURNEES (EXCLUDING DEPORTEES)

Undocumented ***	1,277,344 (68%)
ACC holders	114,881 (6%)
PoR holders ****	498,156 (26%)

DOCUMENTATION – TOTAL DEPORTEES

ACC/Undocumented (15 Sep 2023 – 31 Mar 2025)	39,333
Undocumented (1 Apr 2025 – 7 Mar 2026)	134,377
ACC holders (1 Apr 2025 – 7 Mar 2026)	19,178
PoR holders ***** (15 Sep 2023 – 7 Mar 2026)	15,156

TOTAL RETURNS AND DEPORTATIONS | 15 SEPTEMBER 2023 – 7 MARCH 2026



* This number includes returnees who received post-arrival assistance by the IOM-led Border Consortium in Afghanistan at Torkham and Spin Boldak border crossing points.
** The number refers to facilitated PoR returns through VRCs who crossed the border during the reporting period.
*** Includes 50,388 Afghans who were registered with UNHCR.
**** Refers to all groups of undocumented Afghans, including of holders of expired PoR cards who did not renew their PoR cards during the latest verification exercise conducted by the GoP in 2021 (DRIVE).
***** This figure refers to PoR holders based on interviews conducted with returnees in Afghanistan.

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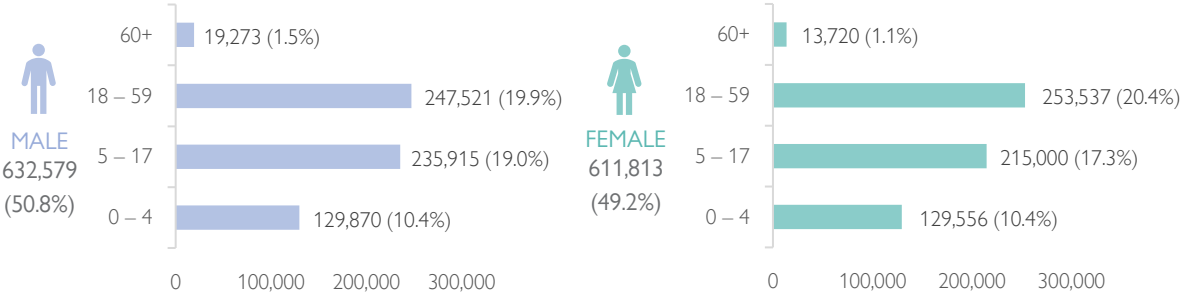
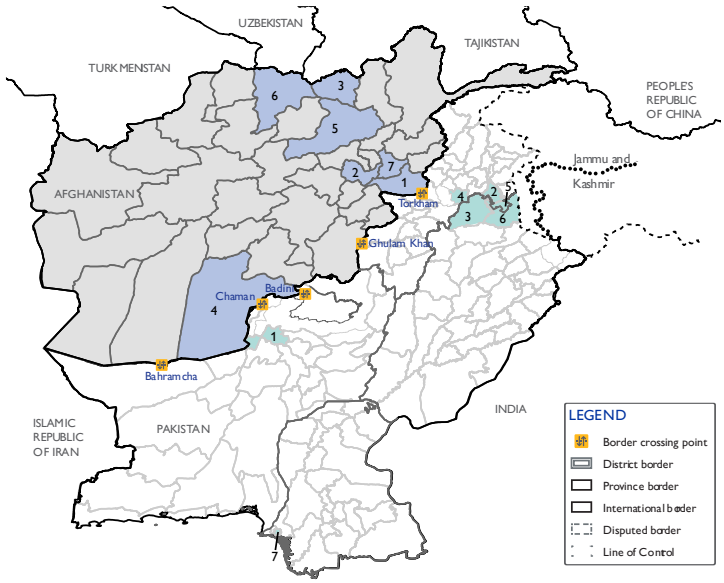
AGE AND GENDER******

1,244,392
TOTAL NUMBER OF RETURNS SINCE 1 APRIL 2025



DISTRICT OF ORIGIN IN PAKISTAN AND PROVINCE OF DESTINATION IN AFGHANISTAN*******



DISTRICT OF ORIGIN (TOP 7)

1 .Quetta	19%
2. Haripur	11%
3. Attock	9%
4. Nowshera	9%
5. Islamabad	7%
6. Rawalpindi	7%
7. Karachi East	7%

PROVINCE OF DESTINATION (TOP 7)

1. Nangarhar	25%
2. Kabul	21%
3. Kunduz	16%
4. Kandahar	9%
5. Baghlan	8%
6. Balkh	8%
7. Laghman	5%

This section only applies to ACC holders and undocumented Afghans

TYPE OF VULNERABILITY

(Expressed as a percentage of the total numbers of vulnerable persons)

- 12,835 (48%) Serious Medical Conditions
- 8,202 (31%) Elderly (60+)
- 2,783 (10%) Female Widows
- 1,254 (5%) Pregnant Women
- 801 (3%) Persons with Disabilities (PwD)
- 787 (3%) Other

TOP 5 REASONS FOR LEAVING PAKISTAN

(Multiple answers can exceed 100%, N = 46,856)

Fear of arrest	95%
Financial debt	35%
Family member deported	12%
No employment	6%
Communal pressure to return	4%

This section only applies to PoR holders

TYPE OF VULNERABILITY

(Expressed as a percentage of the total numbers of vulnerable persons)

- 7,307 (52%) Serious Medical Conditions
- 3,594 (25%) Elderly (60+)
- 1,649 (12%) Women at Risk
- 1,554 (11%) Persons with Disabilities (PwD)
- 0 (0%) Other

TOP 5 REASONS FOR LEAVING PAKISTAN

(Multiple answers can exceed 100%, N = 3,677)

Strict border entry requirements	56%
Fear of arrest	13%
Loss/Lack of livelihood	10%
Overall deterioration in security conditions	10%
Uncertainty related to the PoR cards extension	7%

****** The figures shown in this visual are based on gender and age aggregated figures from UNHCR and IOM, which were available for 48 per cent (594,416 individuals) of the total returns and then applied to the total return figure since 1 April 2025. For the remaining 52 per cent, no age/gender disaggregated data is available.

******* Disclaimer: Dotted line represents approximately the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM or United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. This document was produced jointly by IOM and UNHCR. The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM or UNHCR. The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

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