Pakistan

March 2026

Over **2.10 million Afghans** have returned to Afghanistan since September 2023, including holders of PoR cards, ACC and undocumented people.

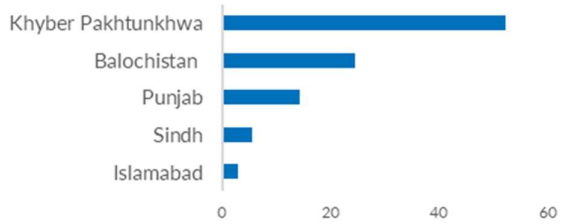
There are currently about **1.88 million** Afghans in Pakistan.

In **March**, **10,986** Afghans returned to Afghanistan, with **5,620** deported through the Chaman, Torkham, and Barabcha borders.

Over **107** Afghan PoR cardholders were facilitated to return through UNHCR's repatriation centres in **March.**

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

Per province



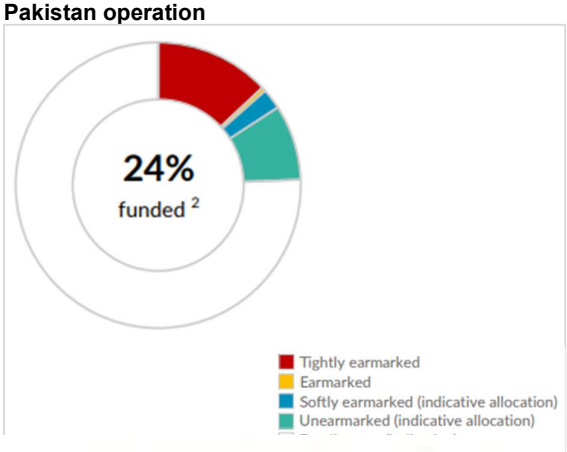
- **66%** of Afghan refugees live in urban/semi-urban localities
- **34%** reside in refugee villages

** Data source: UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Jan 2026*
https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/pak

FUNDING (AS OF 31 MARCH 2026)

USD 93.8 million

Pakistan operation



Afghan students in a KP refugee village are building their future in the classroom, even far from home. UNHCR / © Waseem Ahmed.

Key Highlights:

- Since 1 January 2026, **over a quarter million** Afghans (approx. 300,000) have returned to Afghanistan including spontaneous returns, voluntary repatriation, and deportations. **In March**, return movements were affected by the closure of the Torkham border, the Eid period, and increased cross-border hostilities.
- After 16 of 54 **refugee villages** (RVs) were vacated, services and resources are being adjusted while coordination continues to support remaining residents.
- **Key advocacy** related meetings took place for the SSAR and the Protection Working Group to brainstorm on strategy and messaging in the current protection context.
- UNHCR continued to progress discussions with the Ministry of SAFRON and CCAR's office on the **exemption of categories** of persons at heightened risk from the IFRP implementation.
- Reports from Afghan communities indicate **increasing pressure** through arrests, evictions, and heightened scrutiny, significantly constraining the protection space.
- UNHCR continued to **engage** with the government interlocutors on the proposed interim protection mechanisms that would exempt vulnerable Afghans from forced deportation under the IFRP.

Operational Context

Protection space for Afghans in Pakistan continued to contract in March, with large-scale returns (including deportations), increased arrests and movement restrictions, and growing risks for both documented and undocumented populations as a result of the continuing implementation of all three phases of the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP). Despite the challenging context, including a fluid security situation, UNHCR and partners continued to deliver much needed support to displaced people, in close coordination with the authorities where necessary.

In March 2026, **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** (KP) and **Balochistan** experienced deteriorating and highly fluid security environments, marked by periodic cross-border tensions driving localized displacement and movement restrictions. Governance in both provinces remained heavily alert while economic conditions were strained, particularly in border districts affected by trade disruptions. In **Punjab** and **Sindh (including Karachi),** the situation was comparatively stable but shaped by heightened law enforcement activity and sensitivity around the presence of Afghans, with increased arrests, documentation checks, and pressure linked to return dynamics.

Sector responses

PROTECTION

Through March, Afghan populations in Pakistan faced increasing pressure to return, with many leaving areas such as Mianwali (Punjab) for other urban centers or returning to Afghanistan. Evictions in Rawalpindi and Islamabad contributed to rising homelessness, while border closures and stricter movement controls made travel more hazardous and daily life more constrained. At the same time, Afghans were also reported to be entering Pakistan through informal routes, often incurring high costs due to limited legal entry pathways and lack of livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan. Worsening poverty, limited income sources, and the inability to meet basic needs in the country of origin continued to drive risky onward movement and unplanned returns.

Afghan communities experienced heightened law enforcement scrutiny, including increased documentation checks, alongside reports of discrimination and psychosocial stress, particularly in major urban centers such as Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore. These conditions have increased exposure to exploitation and fraud, underscoring the need for strengthened community awareness and access to reliable information. Financial vulnerability deepened, with many

Afghans facing restricted access to services, blocked SIM cards and bank accounts, and challenges linked to documentation. Rising inflation, limited employment opportunities, and seasonal hardships further exacerbated distress.

UNHCR maintained close coordination with provincial and district authorities, to support staff safety and operational continuity, with a focus on information sharing, movement facilitation, and access negotiations—particularly in southern KP and newly merged districts where restrictions persist. While authorities remained broadly supportive, administrative requirements and increased checkpoints continued to affect access and mission timelines in higher-risk areas.

Since late February 2026, border closures at Torkham and other crossings in KP have largely suspended voluntary repatriation, leaving over 1,200 Afghans stranded, with UNHCR providing emergency assistance to affected families. Although the border briefly reopened for deportations, overall movement remained restricted in March. Similarly, the Chaman crossing in Balochistan has stayed mostly closed, allowing only limited returnee and deportee movements. Despite these constraints and ongoing security challenges, humanitarian assistance has continued, including relief distributions and medical support for vulnerable individuals, with over 550 Afghan patients treated in Chaman.

Repatriation update: In March 2026, a total of 27 families (107 individuals) were assisted with Voluntary Repatriation through the Baleli (Balochistan) Voluntary Repatriation Centre (VRCs). The VRC Azakhel suspended the repatriation activities due to the closure of the Torkham border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The cumulative total of those assisted from 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026 stands at 13,086 families, comprising 55,202 individuals. Compared to February 2026, the number of individuals assisted in March 2026 represents a 100% decrease in Voluntary Repatriation processing due to the Holy month of Ramadan, celebration of Eid, and the Torkham border closure. In addition, in March 2026, 407 PoR cardholders returned spontaneously to Afghanistan without passing through the VRC process.

Legal Assistance: In March, the protection environment for Afghan refugees deteriorated across Pakistan, particularly in KP, where increased arrests and detentions were reported in districts such as Peshawar, Mardan, and Abbottabad, alongside growing pressure for return. In Balochistan, deportations and voluntary returns continued through the Chaman border, while legal partners intervened to support releases and provide assistance at holding sites. Outreach efforts, including radio programmes in Quetta and Loralai, improved awareness of legal aid and return processes. Across Islamabad, Pakistan Administrated Kashmir, Punjab, and Sindh, UNHCR and partners significantly scaled up legal interventions in response to rising arrests, providing legal representation, counselling, and helpline support. While some individuals were released, deportations and detentions continued, reflecting increased protection risks nationwide. Capacity-building with law enforcement in Punjab also strengthened understanding of refugee protection and legal frameworks, contributing to improved engagement with authorities.

Community-based Protection: Across Pakistan, Afghan communities report evictions, arrests, and limited livelihood opportunities as well as border closures, leading to displacement, unsafe movements, and rising vulnerability in KP, Punjab, Sindh, Islamabad, and Balochistan. Discrimination, exploitation, and misinformation further compounded challenges, highlighting the need for stronger community engagement. In response, protection activities were scaled up, particularly in Balochistan and KP, through community awareness sessions, trainings, coordination meetings, and counselling support. These efforts strengthened community structures, referral systems, and communication, helping communities better respond to protection risks and access support services.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): UNHCR continued to strengthen gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response through coordinated interventions, enhanced service delivery, and community-based engagement across the country. On 30–31 March, UNHCR engaged in key

coordination forums in Sindh on budget advocacy, child-centered public financing, and joined the GBV sub-working group meeting co-chaired by the Women Development Department and UNFPA. Discussions focused on strengthening parliamentary engagement, reviewing provincial data and joint planning, and improving GBV response through service mapping, coordination, and addressing gaps and challenges in service delivery. In KP, GBV survivors were provided continued support, improved coordination in Peshawar, Kohat, and Mardan, and updated service mapping. The GBV case management role was successfully handed over to UNHCR partner SPADO (from April 2026), which also led awareness sessions in Peshawar and Nowshera and established community support groups to improve early reporting and response. At Mera Ghar/NET Shelter, integrated activities were launched, including the Girl Shine programme, education, psychosocial support, and GBV awareness. Trainings, community consultations, and coordination among partners further improved referral systems and helped identify gaps to strengthen overall GBV response.

Child Protection (CP): Regular cross-border coordination between Pakistan and Afghanistan strengthened family reunification and child protection, with a focus on clear community messaging on missing or detained children, improved counselling services, and enhanced coordination through sub-sector meetings in Quetta. In Balochistan, interventions further strengthened case management, referrals, and psychosocial support for vulnerable and unaccompanied children, improving protection responses and community awareness. Across Attock (Punjab), Lahore (Punjab), and Karachi (Sindh), child protection activities including awareness sessions, a child club in Attock, and a Child Protection Committee in Lahore enhanced community capacity to identify and respond to risks, promote child rights, and support vulnerable cases. In KP, close coordination with authorities ensured operational continuity despite access challenges, though border closures, NOC requirements, and checkpoints continued to delay movement in southern and merged districts.

Resettlement: UNHCR continues to work with resettlement countries on adapting procedural modalities due to the current protection environment. In March, 20 refugees departed to two resettlement countries, bringing the total departures this year to 37 refugees.

EDUCATION

In Balochistan, education activities showed progress, with 1,278 students appearing in annual exams and a 97.5% pass rate, while 6,003 students were enrolled for the new academic session, including 1,128 new KG students. Despite temporary school closures in March, enrolment campaigns continued, ensuring sustained engagement, with schools set to reopen from 1 April. In KP, out of 96 RV schools, 94 remain functional (30 in original buildings and 64 in alternative spaces), while two remain closed due to demolished facilities. In March, teacher incentives were fully disbursed. Data collection on out-of-school children and enrolments continues. Staff received protection-related trainings, and parent discussions highlighted challenges such as RV de-notification and expired PoR cards affecting access to education and student morale.

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, UNHCR strengthened vaccination services in refugee villages and host communities, addressing gaps in access. During the reporting period, 99 children completed their primary immunization, while over 1,800 vaccine doses were administered to children under two, improving disease prevention and child health outcomes. UNHCR's partner in Peshawar, International Medical Corps (IMC) recruited health staff supporting the voluntary repatriation centre. IMC teams will start Outpatient Department and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services from April.

LIVELIHOODS AND SELF RELIANCE

In Balochistan, livelihoods and empowerment activities continued. In Quetta, 190 women received vocational training and 250 individuals enrolled in multi-sector livelihood programmes. Awareness was strengthened through health, hygiene, and financial literacy sessions, alongside community engagement initiatives promoting women's empowerment and supporting sustainable income opportunities. In KP, UNHCR partner, SRSP is training 60 participants in technical and digital skills, while Hashoo Foundation is providing vocational training to 50 Afghan women in crafts in Peshawar. Furthermore, 340 Afghans were identified for various skills training and climate-resilient livelihood programmes and are in UNHCR validation process.

Financial Information – as of 31 March 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.

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