UNHCR REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

AFGHANISTAN SITUATION UPDATE

April 2026

KEY FIGURES

3.1 million[1]
Afghan refugees and others in need of international protection in the sub-region

619,200[2]
Afghan returns in 2026 from Iran and Pakistan, out of which 41% were deported

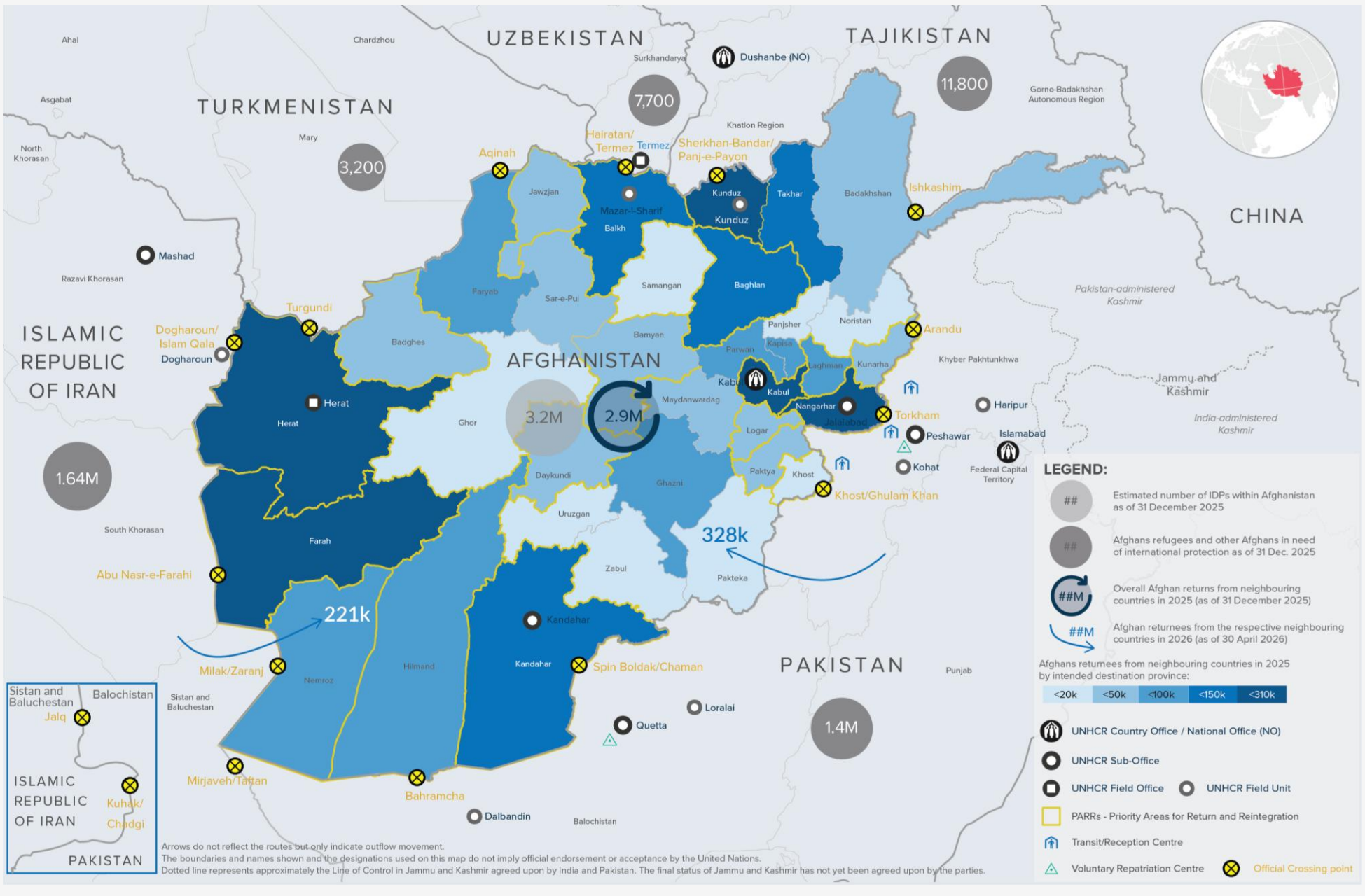
3.2 million[3]
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan and **104.4k** new IDPs in 2026 in Afghanistan and Pakistan

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

The operational environment in **Afghanistan** remained volatile in April, amid continued returns from Iran and Pakistan, cross-border tensions, flooding and movement restrictions. Reception capacity at key border points remained strained, while shelling, drone activity and unexploded ordnance incidents along eastern and southern border areas disrupted civilian life. Damage to civilian infrastructure further complicated humanitarian access and assistance delivery in some areas. Restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities, including measures affecting national female staff access to United Nations premises and certain field locations, continued to hamper protection-sensitive programming.

In **Iran**, regional tensions and insecurity heightened protection risks for refugees and host communities. Although a ceasefire was reached on 8 April following weeks of conflict, the situation remained volatile, with sporadic security incidents and strikes on infrastructure affecting movements and access in some areas. Despite operational constraints, UNHCR maintained presence in Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Kerman, and at the Dogharoun border, enabling critical monitoring, documentation, protection and assistance.

In **Pakistan**, deportation pressures, stricter residency enforcement and increased security monitoring continued to shape the operational environment for Afghans, regardless of status. While all 54 refugee villages have now been de-notified (formally closed), 21 have been vacated, further underscoring the shrinking protection space. Authorities continued to prioritize voluntary repatriation and facilitate returns under the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP). In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, raids, search operations and document verification campaigns were reported across multiple districts, alongside sustained deportation pressure despite no significant increase in arrests. Similar verification drives continued in Islamabad and Punjab, where documented Afghans also increasingly face scrutiny. In Sindh, arrests and detentions continued although the environment was comparatively calmer with fewer household raids reported. In Balochistan, pressure remained relatively lower overall although deportation risks and monitoring persisted, particularly along border areas and routes towards Iran.



[1] *As of end-December 2025*
[2] *As of 9 May 2026*
[3] *3.2 million IDPs as of 2025*
For the latest figures and updates on UNHCR's broader response in sub-region, visit the Afghanistan Situation page on UNHCR's Operational Data Portal. For any queries, please contact: RBAPEXT@unhcr.org

Across **Central Asia**, the operational environment continued to be shaped by mixed movements, statelessness and evolving legal and policy frameworks affecting refugees and asylum-seekers. In the Kyrgyz Republic, draft amendments to refugee travel document procedures were submitted for public consultation, proposing a "one-stop shop" model under a single authority responsible for population registration. The reform aims to streamline processing and improve accessibility and transparency. With UNHCR technical support, a framework for Convention Travel Documents is being developed and is expected to facilitate lawful travel for education, family reunification and other purposes, reducing reliance on irregular pathways.

KEY PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS ISSUES

Returns continued to place significant pressure on already fragile communities and overstretched local services in **Afghanistan**, complicating safe and sustainable reintegration. Many returnees arrived with limited resources and faced difficulties accessing shelter, livelihoods, documentation, health care and education, increasing risks of secondary displacement and negative coping mechanisms. Women, children and undocumented families remained particularly vulnerable to exclusion from assistance and basic services. In response, UNHCR and partners scaled up protection monitoring, legal assistance, family tracing and targeted financial assistance, while expanding area-based reintegration efforts to strengthen local services, support livelihoods and ease pressure on host communities.

In **Iran**, insecurity, economic pressures and disruptions to services heightened protection risks for refugees and host communities while limited access to livelihoods, health care, education and psychosocial support compounded vulnerabilities. Refugees also reported difficulties accessing documentation. These pressures persisted following the easing of hostilities on 8 April and were increasingly compounded by broader socioeconomic and legal constraints. In April, the Centre for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (CAFIA) announced a new *Amayesh* refugee registration renewal scheme introducing additional administrative requirements related to legal stay, health insurance and housing registration alongside updated service fees.

In **Pakistan**, deportations, arrests, documentation challenges and shrinking protection space contributed to growing uncertainty among Afghan communities. Women, children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups faced heightened risks, psychosocial distress and reduced access to services. To address growing needs, UNHCR and partners strengthened protection monitoring, outreach, legal assistance, case management and psychosocial support. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, arrests, detentions and door-to-door enforcement operations intensified, particularly in Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan, Mardan and Swabi. Refugees and asylum-seekers reported harassment, deportation threats and anxiety linked to suspended individual basic registration and enhanced individual basic registration processes as well as expired documentation. UNHCR continued advocacy with the Government on a protection mechanism for some 250,000 vulnerable Afghans at risk of deportation or other IFRP-related measures. During the reporting period, UNHCR's Helpline received some 40,000 calls, with most concerns relating to arrests, evictions, police raids, alongside growing humanitarian distress marked by food insecurity, urgent shelter needs and concerns over family separation upon return.

Refugees and asylum-seekers in parts of **Central Asia** continued to face challenges related to livelihoods, documentation and access to protection services despite ongoing efforts to strengthen inclusion and legal safeguards. In Kazakhstan, refugees have the right to work without a permit, however, short documentation validity periods remained a barrier to formal employment. Limited employer awareness, exclusion from social protection schemes and reported discrimination further constrained opportunities. UNHCR continues to work with local authorities and employment actors to promote refugee inclusion, including piloting access to employment platforms for vulnerable groups. In Tajikistan, the return of Afghan nationals under adverse circumstances remained a serious protection concern despite sustained UNHCR advocacy.

UNHCR RESPONSE

UNHCR scaled up assistance at key border and reception points in Afghanistan as returnees from Pakistan and Iran placed additional pressure on reception capacity. More than 43,000 returnees received financial assistance to meet immediate needs, including transport, food and shelter. Emergency shelter support reached affected families through the distribution of around 920 tents in Kunar, Helmand and Kandahar, 500 pre-positioned tents in Zabul, Kandahar, Ghazni and Khost, alongside shelter assistance and repairs in Nurgal District. Reintegration support continued in areas of return through microfinance support (which reached over 700 people), around 70 greenhouse projects and digital skills training for approximately 750 students.

In **Iran**, rising humanitarian and protection needs amid continued insecurity and economic strain were reflected in increased demand on UNHCR's Helpline, which received nearly 38,000 calls between 8 April and 8 May – up from 26,000 in March. UNHCR provided counselling, legal aid, psychosocial support and financial assistance while people with heightened protection risks were identified and referred for specialised follow-up.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR maintained a protection-centred response for Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers through legal aid, counselling, case management, emergency financial assistance, mental health and psychosocial support and community outreach. Capacity-building sessions with police and local stakeholders reinforced understanding of refugee protection principles and referral mechanisms. UNHCR also assisted vulnerable flood-affected host communities in Punjab through core relief items delivered via UNFPA. Items included family tents, refugee housing units, blankets, jerry cans, kitchen sets, plastic tarpaulins and sleeping mats. Assistance reached affected households in Multan, Rahim Yar Khan, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur, complementing ongoing health, protection and mental health and psychosocial support.

Across **Central Asia**, UNHCR supported efforts to strengthen asylum systems, advance local integration, address statelessness and bolster emergency preparedness. In the Kyrgyz Republic, UNHCR provided comments on proposed amendments to the Law on Education, highlighting the importance of equitable access to higher education for ethnic Kyrgyz abroad, refugees, foreign citizens and stateless persons, including through harmonized tuition fees in line with Global Compact on Refugees commitments. In Tajikistan, UNHCR and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency signed a cooperation agreement to support refugee-led initiatives, including the Ariana Learning Centre and a Youth Centre in Vahdat, aimed at strengthening women's vocational skills, expanding access to education and promoting youth development through social and sports activities.

AFGHAN RETURNS

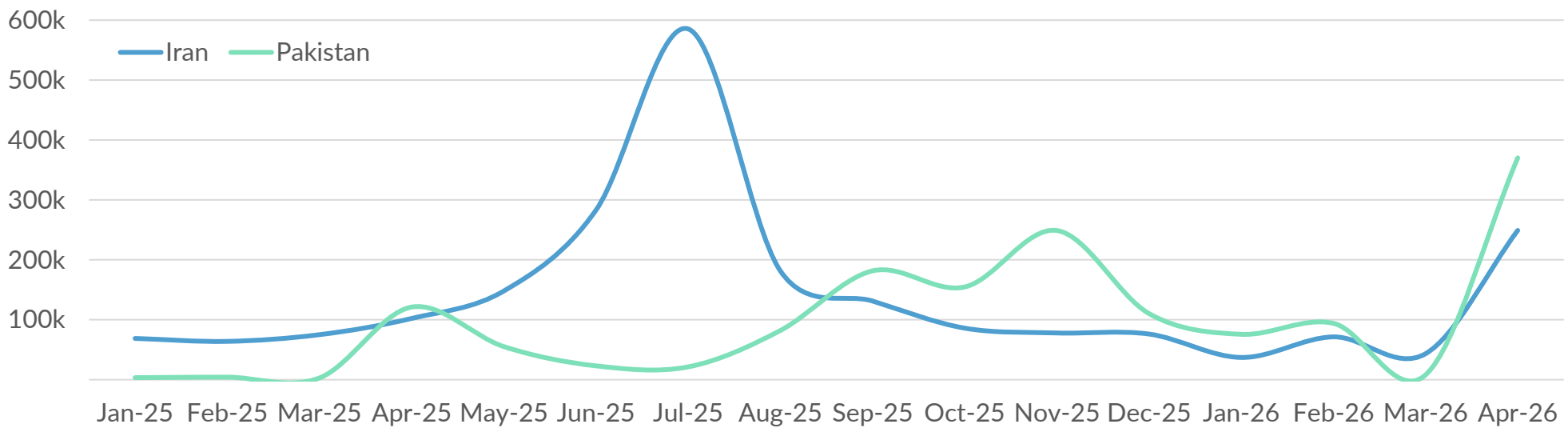
Afghan returns continued in April, including voluntary and spontaneous movements as well as returns taking place under adverse conditions, largely driven by fear of arrest, enforcement measures, and deteriorating protection conditions. Since the start of the year, around 619,200 Afghans have returned from Iran (249,100) and Pakistan (370,100) as of 9 May.

68,700 people returned from **Iran**, including over 50,100 deportations. Returns remained elevated amid continued uncertainty and limited livelihood opportunities. Returnees reported arrest during documentation checks, detention, ill-treatment, extortion, restricted access to services, family separation and limited legal safeguards. CAFIA also reported continued irregular crossings from Afghanistan into Iran, underscoring the persistence of informal movement despite the fragile security environment and ongoing risks of onward movement across the region.

Returns from **Pakistan** rose sharply to 159,800 people, compared to 7,700 in March, driven by protection concerns linked to documentation status and pressure to leave. Returnees reported arrest, eviction threats, extortion, confiscation of documents, blocked SIM cards, family separation, detention in poor conditions prior to return, as well as delays in retrieving belongings.

In **Tajikistan**, 272 Afghans have been returned since January 2026, including 203 refugees and asylum-seekers, among them 95 women and 76 children. Reports indicate that some families were returned without access to due process, legal assistance or opportunities to appeal. UNHCR continues to coordinate across both sides of the border to verify cases, provide protection and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, and support vulnerable families remaining in Tajikistan while also advocating with the Government on access to fair asylum procedures in line with national and international obligations.

AFGHAN RETURNS FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN



OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

With private sector support, UNHCR implemented livelihoods and environment protection programmes in Uzbekistan, engaging forcibly displaced Afghans and vulnerable members of the host community in tree-planting activities through cash-for-work. © UNHCR/ Elyor Nemat

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Farid* and Basira – a former parliamentarian and a teacher – found themselves working side by side in the sun-filled fields of Termez, in Uzbekistan's Surkhandarya region. Once leaders and educators in Afghanistan, they were brought together by forced displacement and united by a shared determination to rebuild their lives through work, hope, and community.

In 2025, they were among the hundreds of forcibly displaced Afghan nationals and Uzbek host community members in vulnerable situations participating in a joint initiative by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and LONGi Green Energy Technology Co., Ltd. The project formed a part of a broader climate action partnership aimed at promoting practical and sustainable solutions that support both forcibly displaced and host communities. By combining environmental protection with income-generating opportunities, the initiative contributed to strengthening resilience and self-reliance in one of Uzbekistan's most climate-affected regions, which also hosts the largest number of Afghan citizens in the country.

Farid, who once held senior government positions – including serving as a general and later a member of parliament – worked outdoors as a participant in an afforestation project.

"Even though we used to be generals, governors, and members of parliament, today we're holding shovels in our hands, working as farmers, living as refugees," he says. He speaks openly about the challenges of starting over. "People had no jobs, no food, no place to sleep. They would come and do this work. All of them are very grateful. This support has been a great help to us."

Basira, a teacher for over 20 years, fled Afghanistan with her daughters after restrictions on girls' education were introduced. For her, beyond safety, access to education remains critical to rebuilding a future. "We are very grateful to the Uzbek people," she says. "Right now, our daughters and sons attend school for free, without any discrimination, alongside Uzbek children."

She adds that the project also helped her regain a sense of purpose. "We participated in this project and, as you know, tree planting is beneficial – it's good for the environment, for the conditions, and also health-wise – and we received financial help." Read more.

** Name changed for the privacy of the individual.*

COORDINATION, COLLABORATION AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

UNHCR strengthened coordination on returns, protection and reintegration in **Afghanistan** through border and inter-agency mechanisms. At the Pakistan border, UNHCR participated in high-level coordination at Omari Camp with de facto authorities and several partners. including IOM, UNICEF and WFP, to address rising arrivals, reception pressure and processing bottlenecks. In the south, the Border Consortium meeting in Spin Boldak focused on data alignment, service gaps and reducing duplication. Together with protection partners, UNHCR advanced the Protection Coordination Group, structured around five workstreams – gender-based violence, child protection, mine action, legal assistance, and return and reintegration – to strengthen joint analysis, referrals and protection-sensitive response planning.

In **Iran**, UNHCR continued close engagement with government counterparts, UN agencies, and partners. Coordination with UNHCR offices in Afghanistan supported cross-border information sharing, monitoring of return movements, and alignment of assistance on both sides of the border. Inter-agency mechanisms continued to facilitate joint planning and operational coherence in a fluid and evolving context.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR strengthened coordination with government authorities, UN agencies and partners amid rising operational and protection pressures. Authorities continued to support humanitarian operations despite movement restrictions, which included checkpoints and border closures. Funding shortfalls linked to the IFRP led to the closure of GiZ-supported Urban Cohesion Hubs in Quetta and Chaman, raising concerns over continuity of critical services. In Islamabad, the Refugee Protection Working Group advanced advocacy on preventing refoulement, improving repatriation modalities and ensuring access to services. UNHCR also expanded inter-agency collaboration on border management, financial assistance coordination and anti-trafficking efforts.

Across **Central Asia**, UNHCR maintained engagement with government counterparts, including ministries, border and judicial authorities, ombudsperson institutions, and parliamentary and inter-agency bodies, to advance protection and solutions for refugees and stateless persons. These partnerships supported efforts to strengthen asylum systems, promote inclusion in national services and align legislation with international standards. UNHCR also collaborated with UN agencies, development partners, academia and NGOs across the sub-region to implement protection activities and support stronger legal and institutional frameworks.

FUNDING SITUATION

In 2026, UNHCR requires **USD 454.2 million** to support the response to the Afghanistan situation; to date, only **21%** has been received.

UNHCR is grateful to the following donors who have stepped forward with funding, enabling life-saving assistance and protection to reach those most in need:

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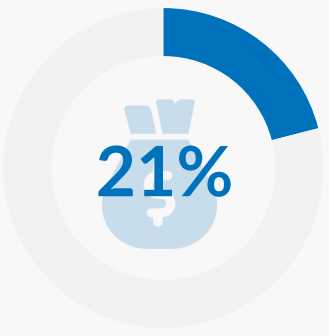
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