UNHCR REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

AFGHANISTAN SITUATION UPDATE

July 2026

KEY FIGURES

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

1.08 million[2]
Afghan returns in 2026 from Iran and Pakistan, of which 38% were deported

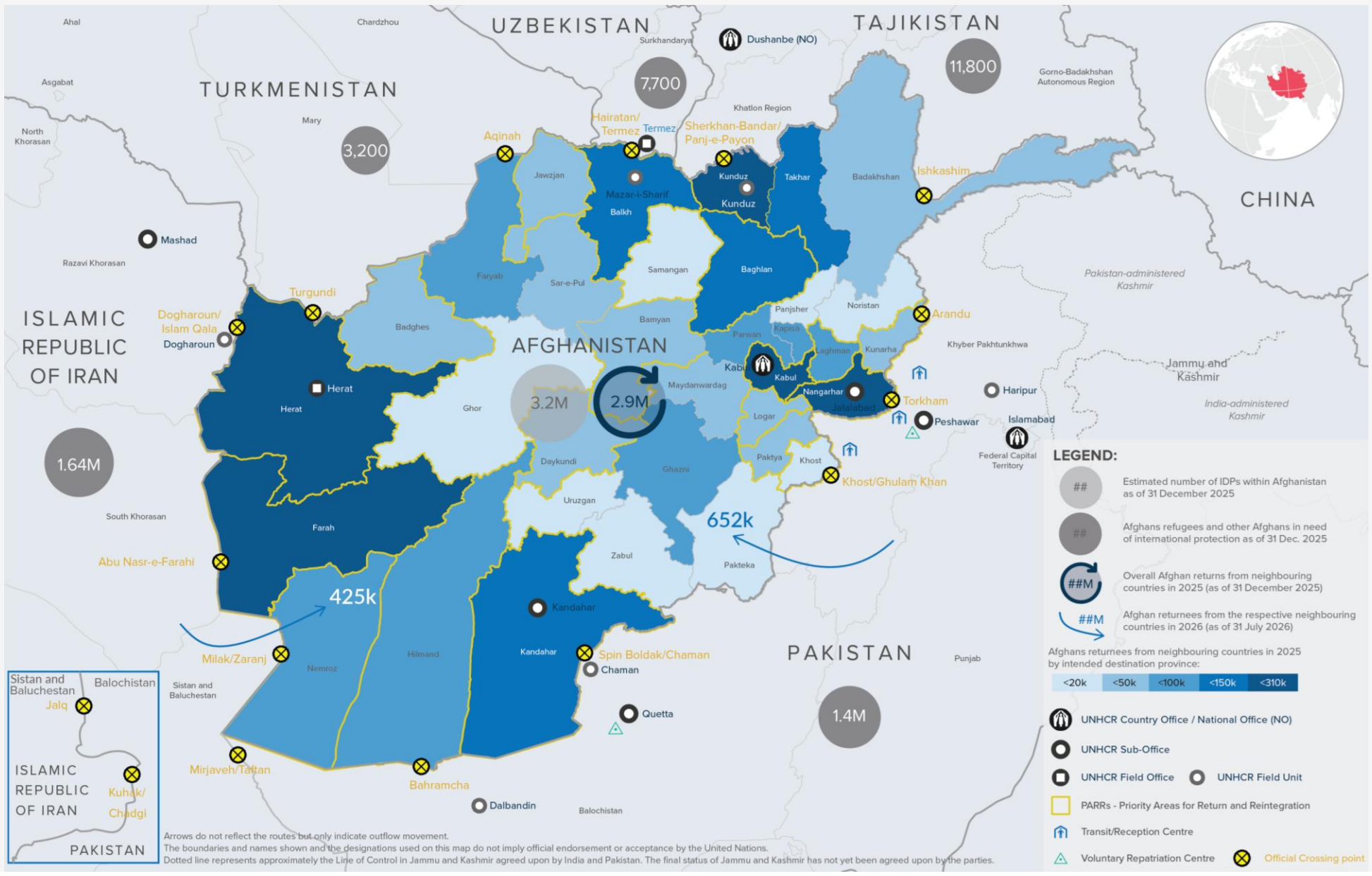
3.2 million[3]
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan and **69k** new IDPs in 2026

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Afghanistan's operating environment in July remained fluid, as large-scale returns from Pakistan and Iran continued alongside heightened regional tensions and insecurity in several parts of the country. Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions escalated during the first half of the month amid reported armed clashes, shelling and airspace violations along the border. Although major cross-border incidents eventually subsided, bilateral relations remained tense. Increased armed opposition activity, including clashes in Badakhshan and elsewhere, also raised concerns over further internal displacement. Administrative and operational constraints affected access and programme delivery, including changes to the delivery of women-focused activities in Herat that resulted in the temporary pause of some programmes.

In **Iran**, increased deportations and returns of Afghan nationals continued alongside intensified enforcement against undocumented Afghans, documentation renewal challenges and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions. Military strikes and damage to transport and logistics infrastructure also disrupted access, supply chains and commercial activity. In Kerman, Sistan and Baluchestan, reinforced border security measures and risks along irregular routes heightened protection concerns, including for those attempting to cross under dangerous circumstances. Despite the volatile environment, UNHCR maintained its operational presence across Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, Kerman and the Dogharoun border, supporting protection monitoring, documentation and assistance.

In **Pakistan**, enforcement against Afghan nationals without valid visas intensified from 10 July following a Government directive to accelerate implementation of the existing 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' (IFRP). Arrests, detention, raids and deportations were reported while landlord pressure and evictions added to uncertainty among Afghan communities. Fear of these measures remained a key factor influencing decisions to leave. Afghan students with Proof of Registration cards were also reportedly arrested and deported despite advocacy. Enforcement by authorities was particularly pronounced in Balochistan and Sindh and concerns over possible removal persisted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad/Rawalpindi where enforcement was less uniform. Security measures at Torkham and ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan at the border also impacted cross-border movement and humanitarian access.



[1] *As of end-December 2025*
[2] *As of 31 July 2026*
[3] *3.2 million IDPs as of 2025, and 69,000 new IDPs in 2026 from areas reached with assessments.*
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**, access to territory and essential rights and services remained constrained, particularly in contexts where refugee protection was closely linked to national security considerations. In Tajikistan, forced returns of Afghans increased again in July following a temporary stabilization earlier in the summer. More than 180 Afghan nationals were deported, bringing the total deported since January to more than 1,250. Reports indicate that some returns occurred without adequate access to due process, legal assistance or appeal mechanisms. UNHCR coordinated cross-border efforts to verify cases and provide protection and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan while supporting vulnerable families remaining in Tajikistan and advocating with authorities to prevent further forced returns without due process.

KEY PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS ISSUES

Protection monitoring in **Afghanistan** identified persistent risks for returnees and those undertaking onward movement. Poverty, lack of documentation, land disputes, loss of livelihoods and assets, as well as family separation continued to undermine sustainable reintegration and contribute to harmful coping mechanisms. At Spin Boldak, returnees were reportedly subject to screening by the de facto authorities before they could access UNHCR and partner services. The process, involving the authorities' Gender Directorate and Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue (GDI/PVPV), raised concerns over restricted access and delays in identifying people with heightened protection needs. Female-headed households and single women were reportedly held at a PVPV facility and required to contact a male relative to accompany them onward. Similar procedures were reported at Torkham although implementation appeared smoother. Onward movement was also shaped by deteriorating protection, legal status, access to services and livelihood opportunities while recent deportations from Iran and Pakistan further heightened insecurity for some Afghans. Increased irregular movement towards Iran also exposed Afghans to grave risks, including death, exploitation, abuse and trafficking. The recovery of the bodies of 14 Afghans who went missing while attempting to cross from Nimroz into Iran – after five bodies were recovered in late June – underscored the severity of these risks and the persistent protection and human rights concerns driving onward movement.

In **Iran**, economic pressures increased protection and socioeconomic vulnerabilities among refugees and host communities, as many households struggle to meet rising costs for housing, food, healthcare, education and documentation. Against this backdrop, administrative developments provided potential avenues to strengthen legal status. Iranian authorities announced a phased renewal process for Family Passport visas for those who missed renewal between 21 March 2021 and 20 March 2026, running from 23 July to 22 September 2026. Separately, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance enabled eligible foreign nationals to apply for business licenses through the National Licensing Portal after identity verification issues were resolved and the requirement to provide an employment certificate was lifted.

In **Pakistan**, livelihood losses and financial hardship increased protection and assistance needs, including emergency cash support for essential medical treatment. Flooding in Gujrat also damaged homes and displaced Afghan families. UNHCR's 2026 Participatory Assessment identified several priority protection risks and service gaps through consultations with diverse refugee and host community groups, including women at risk, persons with disabilities, minorities and older persons. Findings highlighted challenges related to access to services, outreach under the IFRP, refugee–host community relations and cross-border movements. The findings were consistent with sustained demand for UNHCR services, with the helpline receiving over 39,000 calls in July for information, assistance and legal support. UNHCR and partners strengthened coordination to address identified protection, assistance and access-to-services gaps, including for Afghan and Palestinian medical students and trainees.

Across **Central Asia**, gaps in refugees' access to national systems continued to limit effective inclusion, particularly in social protection, healthcare and other essential services. In the Kyrgyz Republic, the Government adopted the National Action Plan for implementation of the Universal Periodic Review Recommendations for 2026–2030, incorporating key UNHCR recommendations to strengthen refugees' access to national social protection systems. The Action Plan provides an important opportunity to translate existing legal provisions into more effective access to rights and services and advance refugee inclusion in national systems.

UNHCR RESPONSE

In **Afghanistan**, UNHCR maintained protection and assistance at key points of entry and reception centres, prioritizing returnees with heightened vulnerabilities. Protection screening enabled the identification and referral of unaccompanied and separated children, female-headed households, persons with disabilities and others requiring specialized support while cash assistance helped vulnerable families meet immediate needs on arrival. Hot-meal assistance continued at Torkham and resumed at Takhtapul and Bahramcha on 27 July, providing food support to newly arriving returnees and deportees. In July, around 5,600 households received cash assistance, bringing the 2026 total to approximately 40,800 households. Alongside this support, UNHCR linked immediate assistance with sustainable reintegration, connecting returning households with legal, mental health and psychosocial support as well as other specialized services while supporting skills development, small businesses and women's economic participation in areas of return.

In **Iran**, demand for UNHCR protection and assistance increased amid ongoing insecurity and economic pressures. The Helpline received nearly 22,900 calls in July – up from 18,700 in June – while nearly 235,000 Afghan refugees have received support since the onset of the crisis through helplines, in-person counselling, registration and targeted assistance. UNHCR provided counselling, legal aid, psychosocial support and financial assistance, and identified and referred people with heightened protection risks for specialized follow-up. The volume and nature of calls highlight growing demand for information, legal support and assistance, with financial assistance and resettlement among the main reasons for approaching UNHCR.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR strengthened protection monitoring and assistance across Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in response to intensified enforcement under the IFRP against Afghan nationals without valid visas. Through partners, this included legal assistance such as counselling, police interventions, court representation and detention follow-up. Protection services supported gender-based violence survivors and at-risk children through case management, referrals, safe accommodation and Best Interests Procedures, alongside community outreach and monitoring. UNHCR also worked with provincial and district authorities and partners to strengthen health, child protection, referral and operational access, including through support to child friendly spaces. Partners supported undocumented and stateless communities to obtain and regularize identity documentation, helping address barriers to banking, employment, social protection and other essential services.

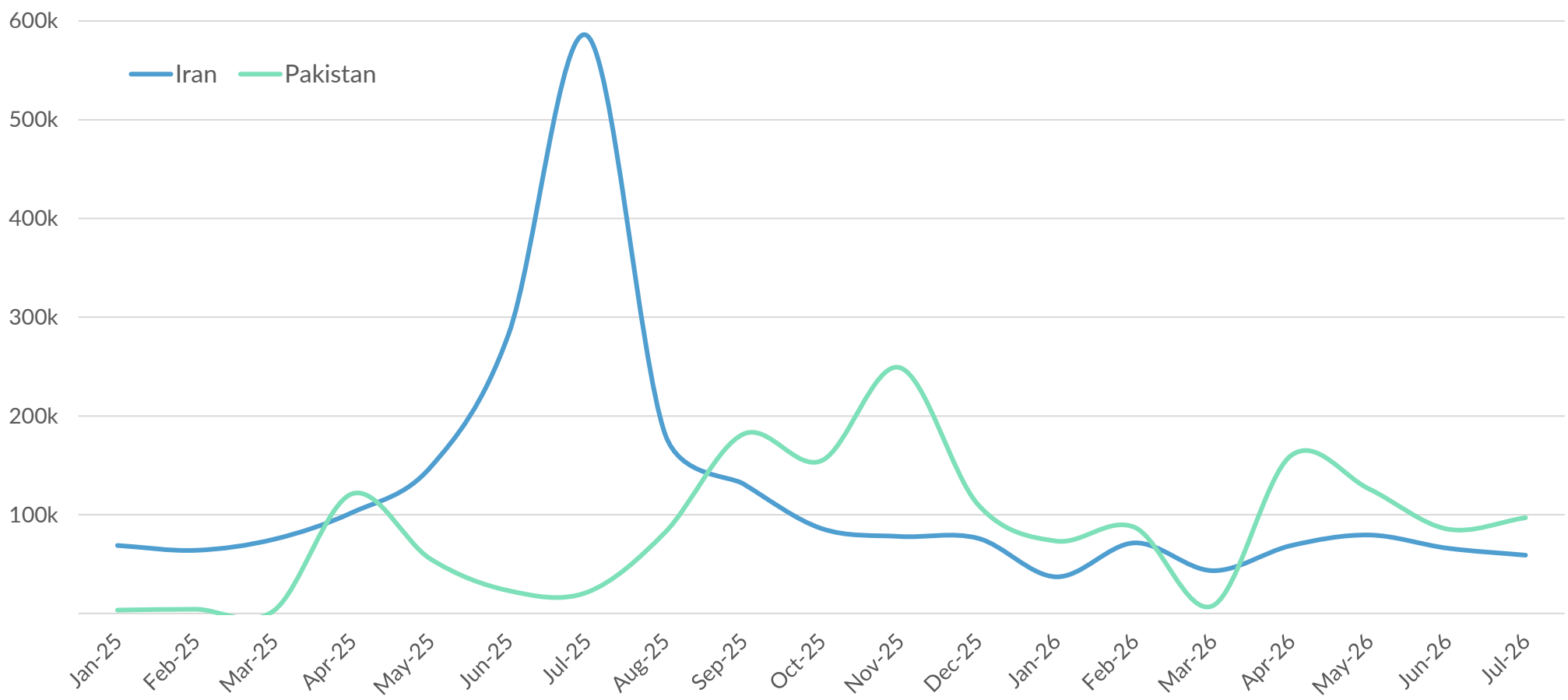
Across **Central Asia**, UNHCR provided protection and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers while bolstering access to asylum and protection, refugee inclusion and responses to statelessness and forced displacement. In July, this included counselling, cash assistance, legal aid and representation in asylum and refugee status determination appeals. Dedicated email and telephone hotlines across the five countries also provided access to information, counselling and referrals. In the Kyrgyz Republic, UNHCR supported the launch of the Digital Border mobile application, developed by the State Border Service, the State Institution "Ukuk" and UN agencies. A dedicated section on asylum procedures and referral mechanisms provides accessible information to border officials and potential asylum-seekers, strengthening referral pathways and more protection-sensitive border management.

AFGHAN RETURNS

Some 1.08 million Afghans returned from **Iran** (425,000) and **Pakistan** (652,400) in 2026 amid a shrinking protection environment and heightened regional instability. From Pakistan, around 60,000 returnees were deported while more than 70,200 Afghans were arrested and/or detained during the year, reflecting continued enforcement pressure under the IFRP. From Iran, around 350,100 returnees, or 82% of the total, were deportations, including approximately 53,000 in July. Conflict also remained significant drivers of departures from Iran, cited by around 50% of returnees in recent monitoring. The scale and predominantly adverse nature of returns continued to generate significant protection and reintegration needs in Afghanistan.

In **Tajikistan**, deportations of Afghans increased again in July following a temporary stabilization in June, with more than 180 Afghan nationals deported, including 53 refugees and asylum-seekers. This brought the number deported since January to more than 1,250, including 660 refugees and asylum-seekers. Reports indicate that some families were deported without adequate access to due process, legal assistance or appeal mechanisms, raising concerns over refoulement. UNHCR continued cross-border coordination to verify cases and provide protection and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan while supporting vulnerable families remaining in Tajikistan and advocating with authorities to prevent further deportations.

AFGHAN RETURNS FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN



OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

UNDP Administrator Alexander De Croo (centre left) and UNHCR chief Barham Salih (centre right) visit a carpet weaving centre in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan that helps women earn a living. © UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

From 5–8 July, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and UNDP Administrator undertook a joint visit to Afghanistan focused on durable solutions and stronger humanitarian-development cooperation. The visit included consultations with returnees, visits to UNHCR- and UNDP-supported programmes, and engagement with development partners and the diplomatic community to expand support for livelihoods, basic services and other priorities in high-return areas. It strengthened collaboration with development actors to link immediate protection and assistance with longer-term reintegration and recovery. The visit came amid an unprecedented scale of returns, with more than 1 million Afghans having returned since the start of 2026. The two UN chiefs highlighted the importance of legal identity documentation, essential services, livelihoods and community support to help returnees rebuild their lives and contribute to local recovery. Read more

COORDINATION, COLLABORATION AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

In **Afghanistan**, UNHCR coordinated with IOM and other partners on harmonizing return data and operational planning. In the south, coordination discussions on 30 July reviewed findings from the Joint (Re)Integration Needs Assessment, discussed potential interventions in five priority districts and advanced service mapping under the new aid coordination architecture. Inter-cluster mechanisms also monitored access constraints affecting humanitarian operations, including through the Humanitarian Access Working Group and a visit by the Inter-Cluster Coordination Team to the Western Region.

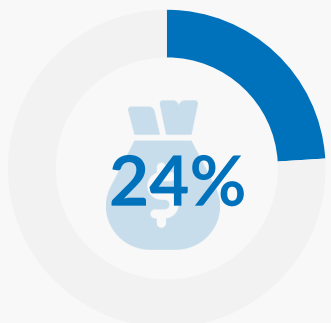
In **Iran**, UNHCR worked with Government counterparts, UN agencies, and partners to support information sharing and coordinated responses. Coordination with UNHCR offices in Afghanistan supported cross-border monitoring of return movements and alignment of assistance on both sides of the border while inter-agency mechanisms facilitated joint planning and operational coherence as the situation evolved.

In **Pakistan**, the Refugee Protection Working Group and Protection Sector Thematic Working Group met on 30 July to review the evolving protection situation for Afghan refugees and host communities, including uncertainty around repatriation under the IFRP. Partners also reviewed monsoon preparedness and available emergency stocks to support a potential response while UNHCR and partners discussed health and protection service gaps at Voluntary Repatriation Centres, including the need for primary healthcare. The meetings brought together UNHCR, Government counterparts, UN agencies and humanitarian partners to strengthen information sharing and coordination around emerging protection and operational needs.

Across **Central Asia**, UNHCR engaged with government, border and judicial authorities, ombudsperson institutions and inter-agency bodies, while expanding cooperation with development partners, academia and civil society to advance protection and strengthen legal and institutional frameworks. UNHCR also initiated cooperation with the Center for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction and pursued joint programming opportunities with UNDP under the UNHCR–UNDP Joint Collaboration Framework 2026–2030. In Turkmenistan, UNHCR worked with the UN Resident Coordinator, UN agencies and Government counterparts on contingency planning and preparedness in light of developments in Iran and the wider Middle East, including through joint training and preparedness exercises.

FUNDING SITUATION

In 2026, UNHCR requires **USD 454.2 million** to support the response to the Afghanistan situation; to date, only **24%** 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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