

1.4. Treatment of persons returning from abroad

1.4.1. General conditions

For decades[446] Afghans have been fleeing their homeland, primarily to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran,[447] and in periods, significant portions of the Afghan population have lived as refugees abroad.[448] Each powershift in Afghanistan has triggered new emigration waves, as well as voluntary and forced returns from neighbouring states.[449]

Following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, both Pakistan and Iran initiated repatriation plans leading to 'large numbers of forced and coerced returns'[450] of Afghans residing on their territory.[451] As of September 2025, nearly 6 million people had returned from Pakistan and Iran since the Taliban takeover.[452] In 2025 alone (as of November) almost 2.7 million Afghans returned from these countries, according to UNHCR.[453] Sources noted that many Afghans have been forced or felt compelled to return 'because of threats, harassment and intimidation',[454] 'abusive tactics' and other pressure.[455]

Pakistan began their three-phase 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' in October 2023. The first phase targeted undocumented Afghans,[456] and led to the return of over 468 000 people in October–December 2023.[457] The second phase included registered individuals (Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders),[458] who were to leave voluntarily by 31 March 2025 or face deportation as of 1 April 2025.[459] According to UNHCR, more than 483 700 Afghans returned in the period 1 April–September 2025.[460] Amid the plan's resumption in April 2025, Pakistan announced that the third face would be initiated, in which also recognised refugees (Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders) would be repatriated[461] as of 1 September 2025.[462] According to IOM and UNHCR, over 1.6 million people had returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan since the initiation of the repatriation scheme as of 18 October 2025, including over 8 000 recognised refugees (PoR card holders) being deported.[463] Amid armed cross-border clashes between de facto and Pakistani security forces, Pakistan intensified efforts to repatriate Afghans, including 'escalating police raids'.[464]

Iran has also been repatriating Afghans in recent years[465] and scaled up the intensity of deportations in 2025 (particular in June–July following Israeli attacks against Iran).[466] This coincided with an exit deadline for unregistered Afghans. According to an IOM representative, an unmanageable number of 30 000–40 000 people crossed the border to Afghanistan from Iran every day in July 2025.[467] Returning Afghans indicated that they were feeling 'unsafe' in Iran, [468] and there were reports of increased harassment by Iranian authorities accusing Afghans of

collaborating with Israel469 and a general hostility pushing Afghans to leave.470 According to UNCHR, 1.8 million people returned from Iran in 2025, as of 29 November.471

The Afghan de facto authorities have previously called on Afghans to stay in the country,472 and have called on Afghans residing abroad to return to Afghanistan.473 As the US issued an entry ban on Afghan citizens in June 2025, the Afghan de facto Prime Minister reiterated the general amnesty issued after the Taliban takeover,474 and stated that all who fled amid the collapse of the former government were free to return under safe conditions.475 The de facto authorities have responded to the large-scale returns by providing returnees with registration and national identity cards, medical care, cash grants,476 shelter, SIM cards, and transport to their destinations.477 According to an anonymous source interviewed by ACCORD in September 2024, some returnees have faced physical violence at the border by the de facto authorities, in particular women and children.478 Sources interviewed by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), on the contrary, did not indicate that the de facto authorities were conducting arrests or abusing returnees at air or land border crossings. Instead, most sources indicated returnees were generally treated well and were not subjected to abuse solely on the basis of being returnees.479 Two surveys on the situation of returnees in Afghanistan, carried out by the UNCHR and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), respectively, found that 98 % of respondents had not 'experienced physical security issues in their communities/villages',480 and 80 % felt safe and secure.481 There was a gender discrepancy in MCC's survey, however, where only 15 % of women indicated that there were no specific risks making them feel unsafe of insecure, in contrast to 66 % among men. In MCC's survey 9 % among male respondents and 6 % among female respondents feared human rights violations and abuses in Afghanistan, and the MMC stressed that their aggregated data may conceal individuals belonging to vulnerable groups.482 In UNHCR's survey, 1.6 % indicated that they had been feeling unsafe, and cited issues such as disputes of land, property, and water as well as kidnapping and an 'unwelcoming attitudes in the community'.483 UNAMA identified several profiles exposed to human rights violations upon being involuntarily returned to Afghanistan return, including women and girls, former government officials, civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists and musicians.484 More information on these profiles is provided in chapter 4. Treatment of certain profiles and groups of the population and section 1.2.7(e) Music.

The significant influx of returnees has put additional strain on the precarious humanitarian situation in Afghanistan,485 already facing limited resources,486 lack of basic services, and recurring climate shocks.487 Most returnees arrive with no assets,488 and many have never set foot in Afghanistan,489 as they have been living abroad for generations.490 These people tend to lack a social network in Afghanistan,491 while having a social network is of great importance in Afghan society492 in the absence of a social welfare state.493 Having a network is vital for returnees to reintegrate,494 and to secure a job.495 MMC reported that returnees lacking a network may be perceived as foreigners, and that individuals returning from the region as well as from Europe may face discrimination and struggle to fit in, due to deviating accents, clothing, and behaviour.496 Sharan also described how returnees without a network face significant exclusion and lack of safety, including those settling in urban areas instead of their areas of origin. He also noted that some families could struggle to readapt due to their way of dressing and having more liberal attitudes.497

Amid a major continuing humanitarian crisis in the country, returnees in general face very limited job prospects[498] or no job prospects at all.[499] They struggle to secure an income[500] and permanent housing and shelter.[501] Many do not return to their areas of origin since they lack property or land,[502] and due to limited job opportunities and basic services.[503] Instead, they tend to settle in cities.[504] Some returnees may be facing disputes over land and property in their area of origin,[505] since other families may have been living in their houses for generations or their land may have been confiscated.[506] Women-headed households are particularly vulnerable, facing limitations in accessing housing and shelter, which exposes them to gender-based violence and exploitation.[507] Another key issue faced by returnees is insufficient aid.[508] Host communities struggle to support returnees due to limited resources, leaving returnee populations struggling economically.[509] The general cuts to funding in the humanitarian sector have also adversely impacted the support to returnees.[510] More information on this topic is available in section 3. Humanitarian situation.

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