

1.4. Treatment of persons returning from abroad

1.4.1. General conditions

For decades⁴⁴⁶ 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 phase would be initiated, in which also recognised refugees (Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders) would be repatriated⁴⁶¹ 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 years⁴⁶⁵ 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 or 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 prospects⁴⁹⁸ or no job prospects at all.⁴⁹⁹ They struggle to secure an income⁵⁰⁰ 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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