

One million Afghans returned from Pakistan at risk if unsupported



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The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) and its members DRC, IRC and NRC call for support to aid sustainable integration of returnees. Durable solutions are key to prevent another crisis.

Since Pakistan first announced its “Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan” in September 2023, more than one million Afghans have now returned—the majority of which were forced to—into a country already strained by economic collapse, widespread poverty, and protection challenges. Moreover, an estimated 600,000 additional returnees are anticipated in 2025. These returns come on top of about a million Afghans who were forced to return from Iran in 2024 alone.

Afghanistan, having already witnessed Asia’s largest internal displacement crisis, is now facing one of the most significant and rapid population shifts the country has seen in recent years. With [two thirds of its population already in need of humanitarian support](#), the country has little to offer to those returning. The lack of employment opportunities, in particular, severely impacts returning Afghans’ ability to take steps towards supporting their families and integrating into communities, especially for female-headed households. Afghani women returnees are also experiencing unique challenges, restrictions on mobility, protection risks and limited livelihood prospects in the communities where they eventually must reside and find ways to integrate.

As most returnees arrive with [very little belongings or savings](#), no land or shelter to go back to, and having often lost connections to their communities, they face immense barriers to safe and dignified reintegration. The humanitarian community has mobilized quickly, including through its newly launched [Integrated Response Plan for Afghan Returnees](#), to provide life-saving assistance at the border and in areas of destination. But without dedicated investment in durable solutions—such as access to land, livelihoods, education, legal documentation, and inclusive local services—there is a serious risk that returnees will fall into protracted or secondary displacement, adding to the humanitarian caseload and undermining longer-term stability.

Many Afghans returning - whether by choice or under pressure - are determined to rebuild their lives and call Afghanistan their home again. But determination alone is not enough. They need support. Such is Manzar, an Afghan returnee who along with his wife and six children came back with nothing. He had built a shop for himself in Pakistan, repairing solar panels. "I am hoping to restart my business and use my skills here in Afghanistan. Education for my children is my first priority." He wants his sons and daughters to have a better life than he could, though girls will face a more uncertain future as they still cannot access education beyond grade 6. Thousands of Afghans came back with skills, and the hope to use them. But with no land or shelter to start with, they are lacking the means.

ADSP is calling on all actors to uphold the principles of voluntary, safe, and dignified return, and work towards a coordinated regional response that respects the rights and choices of Afghan refugees and returnees. ADSP and its members also call on donors, national authorities, and development partners to treat these returns not as a temporary crisis, but as a structural shift in return policies. The return of millions of Afghans is not just a test of emergency capacity—it is a test of political resolve to deliver sustainable outcomes, protect human dignity, and invest in Afghans' future.

Editor's Notes:

- On 26 September 2023, the Ministry of the Interior of the Government of Pakistan issued the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. This Plan outlines the proposed return / deportation procedures for non-citizens who reside in Pakistan and do not hold a valid visa in three phases, starting with undocumented Afghan nationals, followed by Afghanistan Citizen Card (ACC) holders, and Proof of Registration (PoR) holders. Read more here: [ADSP Briefing Note: Deported to what? Afghans in Pakistan - October 2023](#); and here: [Solutions for Afghan nationals ordered to return from Pakistan](#) (May 2024)
- UNHCR has issued a non-return advisory to Afghanistan in August 2021. It was [renewed in February 2023 and calls for a bar on forced returns of Afghan nationals](#), including asylum seekers who have had their claims rejected.
- In November and December 2023, NGOs, including ADSP members, had issued two statements on returns from Pakistan: [Afghans returning from Pakistan after expulsion order have nowhere to go, warn aid agencies](#) and [Almost 500,000 returning Afghans in desperate need of food, shelter and employment to survive winter](#).
- The [Asia Displacement Solutions Platform](#) (ADSP) is a joint initiative of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). ADSP aims to contribute to the development of solutions for populations affected by displacement in Asia, with a specific focus on the Afghanistan displacement situation and the Myanmar displacement situation. Additional ADSP publications include: [Land Allocation Schemes for the Displaced in Afghanistan](#) (June 2024) and [Durable Solutions Analysis, Jalalabad/Nangarhar](#) (August 2024)