

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1524
Land:	Afghanistan
Kilde:	ACAPS
Titel:	Afghanistan Pakistan - Forced return of Afghans from Pakistan
Udgivet:	7. december 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	21. december 2023

AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN

Forced return of Afghans from Pakistan

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

On 3 October 2023, Pakistani authorities announced that all foreigners in the country without valid documents would be forced to leave by 1 November or face arrest and deportation. Although formulated in general terms, the ultimatum primarily affected Afghans, who constituted the largest group of foreigners living in Pakistan. The scale and organisation of the returns, as well as detention and associated protection risks, caught affected Afghans off guard, including some with pending asylum claims. Undocumented Afghans in Pakistan and Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders faced the greatest risk of deportation under the repatriation plan. The Interim Taliban Authority (ITA) in Afghanistan called the move to deport undocumented Afghans “unacceptable” (UNHCR 10/11/2023; Al Jazeera 31/10/2023; BBC 01/11/2023). Some people left ahead of the deadline because of uncertainties and visits by Pakistan authorities, although mass deportation only started after the deadline passed. November alone registered a substantial increase in deportations, with 27,799 Afghans deported (IOM, UNHCR 06/12/2023). Most people forced to flee the country left behind their possessions and savings (IOM 21/11/2023).

IOM and UNHCR have documented a significant increase in returns to Afghanistan since the 3 October announcement (OHCHR 15/11/2023; UN 27/10/2023; IOM/UNHCR 15/11/2023). Between 15 September and 2 December, an estimated 438,171 Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan (IOM, UNHCR 06/12/2023). As at 22 November, the number of daily border crossings had increased to around 17,000 from 200 prior to Pakistan’s announcement (IOM 22/11/2023). While most returnees were undocumented, several thousands were registered with the Government of Pakistan, namely ACC holders. Many were forced to flee because of fear of arrest if they remained in the country (IOM/UNHCR 22/11/2023). The Pakistani Government facilitated the issuance of ACCs to unregistered Afghans in the country in 2017. Cardholders were given limited access to services and it remained difficult for them to find official employment opportunities (ADSP 20/10/2023).

Most returnees to Afghanistan passed via the Torkham border crossing in northeastern Afghanistan, connecting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan with Nangarhar province of Afghanistan, and the Chaman crossing in southeastern Afghanistan linking Balochistan province of Pakistan with Spin Boldak in Afghanistan and, more importantly, the two provincial capitals of Quetta in Pakistan with Kandahar in Afghanistan (Al Jazeera 31/10/2023; RFE/RL 08/10/2023).

Map 1. Location of crossing points between Pakistan and Afghanistan



Source: UNHCR (01/12/2023)

KEY FIGURES

+438,000
AFGHANS FORCIBLY
RETURNED FROM
PAKISTAN FROM 15
SEPTEMBER TO 2
DECEMBER 2023

1.3 million
UNDOCUMENTED
AFGHANS AT RISK OF
DEPORTATION FROM
PAKISTAN

HIGH
PROTECTION
THREATS FOR
FORCIBLY RETURNED
AFGHANS

BACKGROUND AND DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Pakistan's Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan

On 3 October 2023, the Government of Pakistan introduced the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan, ordering all undocumented foreign nationals to leave the country. It set a deadline of 1 November for the voluntary return of all undocumented Afghans in Pakistan (UN Women 14/11/2023; WHO 16/11/2023). This plan stipulates that all foreigners residing in Pakistan without valid documentation or who have overstayed their visas will be returned to their home countries. Undocumented foreigners who return to their home country voluntarily will not be arrested or detained. Ordinary citizens have been encouraged to inform the authorities about any undocumented foreigners living in their areas (MFAP 30/10/2023; DFATA accessed 07/12/2023). The plan also includes mechanisms for consolidating databases of undocumented foreigners in the country, checking the entry of new illegal entrants, and apprehending, deporting, and repatriating overstaying foreigners (IOM 22/11/2023).

Pakistani authorities stated that their decision to expel hundreds of thousands of undocumented Afghans was a reaction to the ITA in Afghanistan's reluctance to take action against militants attacking Pakistan, particularly suicide bombers. Afghans have carried out several suicide bombings in recent months, and dozens of Afghans have been killed in clashes with Pakistani security forces. Another contributing factor to the heightened tensions is Pakistan's escalating dispute with Afghanistan over the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, a militant group also known as the Pakistani Taliban that swears allegiance to the Taliban in Kabul (Reuters 08/11/2023; ICG 13/11/2023).

Pakistan's economic barriers

Pakistan is currently experiencing an economic downturn, straining the country's capacity to support refugees. In September, the year-on-year inflation rate increased to 31.4% from 27.4% in August (Reuters 02/10/2023). The provinces hosting the majority of the existing Afghan refugees in Pakistan as at 30 June 2023, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (701,358), Balochistan (321,677), and Punjab (191,053), have reported the highest multidimensional poverty levels over the years (UNICEF 24/04/2023; UNHCR accessed 28/11/2023). The devastating floods that hit Pakistan in November 2022 had also affected the country's economic situation. The flooding affected approximately 33 million people and caused USD 40 billion in damage to the country (BBC 01/11/2023 and 04/01/2023; Forbes accessed 15/11/2023; Malteser International accessed 15/11/2023).

Displacement from Afghanistan to Pakistan

The repatriation plan has constrained UNHCR's response to register and process the claims of hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers in Pakistan. Consequently, only a limited number of Afghans have been able to seek protection from the UN agency, leaving the majority without legal status. Afghans who want to stay in Pakistan must have a Proof of Registration (PoR) card, which the Pakistani Government issues in collaboration with UNHCR, but Pakistan has not issued any new PoR cards since 2007. In 2017, the Pakistani Government started issuing its own ACC, but this also stopped in 2018 (TNH 30/10/2023).

According to UNHCR, Pakistan is among the countries hosting the most refugees in the world, ranking fifth in 2022 with approximately 2.2 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations. Nearly 1.3 million were without valid documents, the vast majority of whom were Afghans (UNHCR accessed 30/11/2023; UNHCR 14/06/2023 and 01/12/2023). The total Afghan population in Pakistan was estimated to be between 3.5–3.7 million as at 8 October 2023, with a large proportion of Afghan nationals seeking refuge in Pakistan over the last four decades following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Pakistan, however, claims that this figure is as high as 4.4 million (UNHCR 16/03/2023; RFE/RL 08/10/2023 RFE/RL 08/10/2023). The most recent influx of Afghan refugees to Pakistan and other neighbouring countries started in 2021, when the ITA regained power in Afghanistan. According to Pakistani officials, 600,000–800,000 Afghans have since fled to the country (UNHCR 16/03/2023; Al Jazeera 31/10/2023; UN 07/10/2023).

The Priority 1 and Priority 2 resettlement programs between the US and Pakistan have been at a standstill since 2021, as the Pakistani Government will not allow the establishment of a Resettlement Support Centre in the country given concerns that this would encourage more Afghans to enter Pakistan (RI 06/07/2023).

The current repatriation plan is reminiscent of a similar forced return process in 2016, when a combination of deportation threats and police abuses pushed out nearly 365,000 registered Afghan refugees and over 200,000 undocumented Afghans (HRW 13/02/2017).

Historic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan have a long and complex relationship that predates the arrival of the Taliban in the Afghan political scene. Pakistan has long seen Afghanistan to be of strategic interest (ICG 30/06/2021). At the same time, Pakistan was a crucial country for the Mujahideen resistance during the war against the then-communist Afghan Government (1978–1982), with the UN and many NGOs operating out of Pakistan during that time (International Alert 02/2002). Pakistan was also one of the few countries that formally recognised the first Taliban

Emirate in the 1990s; then-Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan claimed that the emirate was “breaking the chains of slavery” (BBC 03/09/2021). In August 2021, Pakistan did not close its embassy in Kabul even when many others did (AFIntl 12/03/2022 AFIntl 12/03/2022). The two countries also have long economic relations, and Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees for four decades.

More recently, however, the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan’s resurgence in Afghanistan and Pakistan’s perception of a lack of action by the ITA have strained relations between the two countries (USIP 19/01/2022). Clashes along Afghanistan’s disputed border with Pakistan have become a recurring problem. The frequency of such clashes has increased since the ITA took over Afghanistan in August 2021. Pakistan has called for a diplomatic solution to the problem, but the issue of unrest in Pakistan’s Pashtun belt has become too large to be ignored (Middle East Institute 02/12/2022; ICG 13/11/2023).

For further contextual information, please read the following ACAPS reports:

- Continued Risk of Forced Eviction Due to Complex Land Rights and Tenure (In)security
- Coping With the Crisis: Conversations with Afghan Households in Kabul Province
- Taliban Directives and Decrees Affecting Human Rights and Humanitarian Actors.

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

In Pakistan

- During the current Phase 1 of the repatriation plan, Pakistan has been targeting undocumented Afghans. The Pakistani authorities have indicated that they may target ACC holders in Phase 2 and Afghans holding PoR cards in Phase 3 (ICG 13/11/2023). The current PoR cards expired in June 2023, and it remains unclear whether Pakistan, Afghanistan, and UNHCR will renew the cardholders’ statuses (VOA 27/07/2023).

In Afghanistan

- The mass return of Afghans from Pakistan will add to the existing 6.6 million internally displaced Afghans as at December 2022 and the around 173,000 newly displaced by the series of earthquakes in Herat province in October 2023 (IDMC accessed 07/12/2023; UN 27/10/2023). This will aggravate the country’s already dire humanitarian situation and add to the existing competition for scarce resources in Afghanistan, including housing, employment, and access to health services (UNHCR 21/11/2023). This issue compounds a large deficiency in terms of humanitarian funding in the country (PBS 06/09/2023; OCHA accessed 28/11/2023).

- Human rights organisations are concerned that rushed and forced returns from Pakistan could leave many Afghans at risk of protection threats (TNH 30/10/2023). There is serious concern about human rights violations by the ITA towards Afghans who worked for the Afghan National Security Forces, those who joined civil society activities, and journalists, among others (HRW accessed 01/12/2023; UN 27/10/2023).
- Winter, which usually starts in December and lasts until the end of March, is expected to worsen the impact of existing issues, such as insufficient access to shelter, food, healthcare, WASH, and protection (OCHA 21/11/2023).
- Returnees to Afghanistan will have to adapt to a society that has changed since they left, with much tighter social control on the population and limited access to education and employment for women.

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

In Pakistan

- A UN appeal for support to Asian countries hosting Afghan refugees (announced before the deportation policy came into effect) was less than 19% funded as at November (ICG 13/11/2023; OCHA accessed 21/11/2023).
- A general obstacle for INGOs operating in Pakistan is that their activities must be registered for a specific area of operation after consultation with national authorities.
- Humanitarian responders, including UNHCR, face constraints from Pakistani authorities when assisting undocumented Afghans, which excludes new arrivals and other Afghans who lack documentation (RI 06/07/2023).
- Humanitarian organisations in Pakistan have no access to Afghans awaiting deportation in holding centres (AI 10/11/2023). As at 7 December, it was unclear whether the International Committee of the Red Cross had been granted access to respond to the needs of those in detention centres.

In Afghanistan

- Afghanistan is already struggling to provide relief to the thousands of people displaced by the series of devastating earthquakes in October, as global aid budget cuts have reduced international assistance (TNH 30/10/2023). Only 36% of the USD 3.2 billion appeal to assist over 29 million people nationwide had been funded as at November 2023 (NRC 02/11/2023; OCHA accessed 21/11/2023).



- Bureaucratic and administrative impediments are the most common constraints reported for humanitarian organisations (OCHA 28/12/2022). As at October 2023, 147 related incidents were reported in Afghanistan (OCHA 27/11/2023).
- Violence against humanitarian personnel has also affected the response, with 25 humanitarian staff arrested and detained in 2023. There were also 15 incidents of the movement of organisations, personnel, and goods being restricted in October (OCHA 27/11/2023).
- The ban on female humanitarian staff in Afghanistan has significantly affected the operational capabilities of INGOs to respond to the humanitarian needs of women and girls (OCHA 22/06/2023). The presence of female staff is reported to be extremely low at the Spin Boldak/Chaman crossing point between Afghanistan and Pakistan, through which 33% of the returns were reported to be crossing as at 24 November (UNHCR 01/12/2023). In particular, the low number of female employees raises the risk of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment in a context where women returnees may not be aware of reporting channels and may be unable to interact directly with female employees to report violations (UN Women 14/11/2023).

INFORMATION GAPS

- The majority of the available information about the humanitarian situation of Afghans in Pakistan does not systematically distinguish between documented and undocumented Afghans, limiting the understanding of how the crisis affects population groups differently.
- There is minimal or no humanitarian reporting on the needs of undocumented Afghans in Pakistan.
- There is limited information about where returnees will be able to settle in Afghanistan, as many have lived in Pakistan for extended periods. Housing, land, and property disputes are high in Afghanistan, with many possibly returning to legal uncertainties (NRC 22/06/2023).
- There is limited information on whether and how the new policy in Pakistan has affected documented Afghans.
- There is a lack of understanding about how undocumented Afghans who were born and have spent their entire lives in Pakistan are affected by forcible displacement to Afghanistan.

CRISIS IMPACTS IN PAKISTAN

Protection

Pakistani authorities have announced constructing large holding facilities to accommodate foreigners awaiting deportation, but since the deadline for voluntary returns expired on 1 November, they have taken many detained Afghans straight to the main border crossings in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces and forced them through the border to Afghanistan (ICG 13/11/2023).

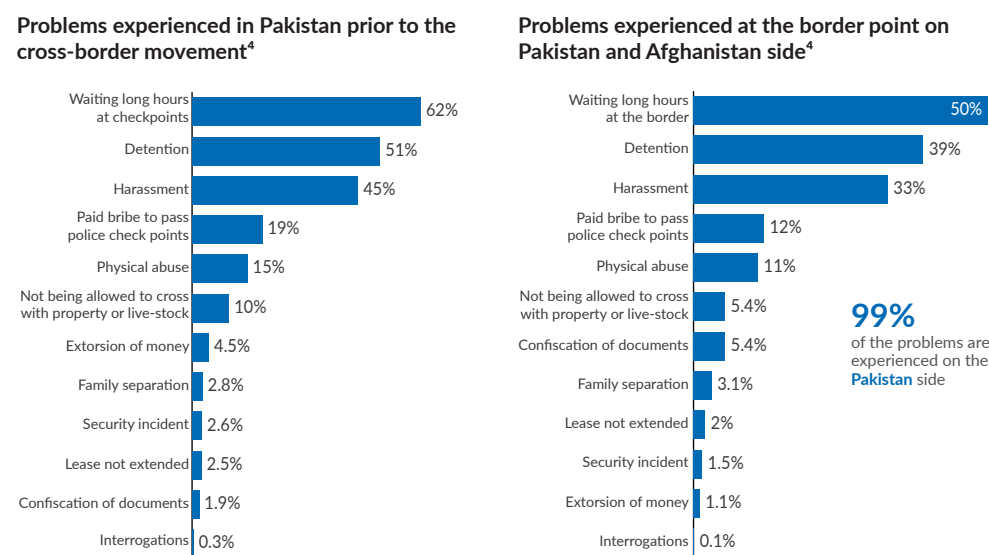
When the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan came into force on 1 November, the Pakistani police gave undocumented Afghans only a few hours to gather their belongings and leave their homes. As soon as they left, bulldozers demolished their houses (OHCHR 15/11/2023). Pakistani authorities have announced that they will confiscate the money and other assets of illegal foreigners before they are deported (ICG 13/11/2023).

In Pakistan, the Government has set up 49 holding centres in four provinces, namely Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh. According to Amnesty International, at least seven detention centres do not provide detainees with legal rights, such as communication with family members or even the right to counsel. Such facilities infringe on the right to liberty and a fair trial (Amnesty 10/11/2023; VOA 24/10/2023; Arab News 01/11/2023).

Affected Afghans reported experiencing police threats and beatings; arbitrary confiscation of houses, jewellery, savings, and other possessions; the destruction of identification documents; and other forms of harassment in Pakistan (UN Women 14/11/2023). There have also been isolated reports of police soliciting sexual favours from Afghan women in exchange for avoiding detention (ICG 13/11/2023). Pakistani authorities have issued a government-wide circular stating that individuals in possession of PoR cards or ACCs could only be repatriated on a voluntary basis at this time, but this has been disregarded in some cases (OHCHR 15/11/2023). There have been Afghans with valid documentation who have been detained at police stations, with the police requiring a fee of USD 36–144 for their release (HRW 31/10/2023).

Displaced Afghan women and girls typically face barriers in obtaining documentation because their countries of displacement often prioritise assisting those who have contributed to their military efforts, i.e. largely men (HRW 31/10/2023). Security risks for women are worsened by the conditions of forced returns, with women facing threats and intimidation, including asset seizure by Pakistani authorities. Pakistani women without access to Computerised National Identity Cards because of societal gender disparities and who are married to Afghan men have also been reported to be at risk of deportation (UN Women 14/11/2023). Other Afghans, even those with valid documents, have fled Pakistan because of police harassment (ICG 13/11/2023).

Figure 1. Challenges reported by affected Afghans in Pakistan and at the border crossing, as at November 2023



Note: responses were taken from multiple choice questions; hence, percentages may add up to over 100%.
Source: UNHCR (24/11/2023)

Health

Because of a lack of a formal healthcare policy for Afghans living in Pakistan, receiving treatment in government hospitals frequently depends on the location and the right connections. Eligibility for free medical care depends on registration status. PoR card and ACC holders technically have the same access to healthcare services as citizens of Pakistan (HRW accessed 01/12/2023; UN 27/10/2023). Registered refugees are included in government health programmes, which include immunisation campaigns, tuberculosis control, and human immunodeficiency virus prevention and treatment (The Nation 05/12/2022; RI 06/07/2023). Many Afghan patients, however, have reported being unable to receive services, such as medicine and medical supplies (DW 15/08/2023; IPS 15/08/2022). As the Pakistani authorities have encouraged community members to report any undocumented foreigners, undocumented and, in some cases, even documented Afghans may fear seeking essential services, such as health.

CRISIS IMPACTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Displacement

Between 3 October and 30 November, an estimated 428,400 Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan (UNHCR 01/12/2023). Nearly 80% of the people returning to Afghanistan are women and children, with one in every four returnees being children under the age of five and more than 60% being children aged 17 or under (STC 17/11/2023).

According to the most recent data, the number of daily border crossings from Pakistan to Afghanistan has increased to around 17,000 from 200 prior to Pakistan's announcement. Because of the influx of the returning population, delays take place in processing times for registration procedures on the Afghan side of the border (IOM 22/11/2023; UN Women 14/11/2023; UNHCR 21/11/2023). The ITA has established a camp in nearby Lalpoor district of Nangarhar province to accommodate newly arrived Afghans as well as a special committee to look at how to assist returnees more broadly (TNH 30/10/2023).

Shelter and NFIs

Many returnee families do not have anywhere to live and no money for food and have returned to live in deteriorating basic shelters (STC 17/11/2023). These shelters are located in Lalpoor Desert in Nangarhar province, close to the Pakistani border (EFE 05/10/2023). Thousands of returnees are sleeping in the open air or overcrowded shelters, enduring harsh weather conditions such as extreme heat during the day and freezing temperatures at night. In some locations, the minimum temperature is already reaching -4°C (UN Women 14/11/2023; IMC 14/11/2023; UNHCR 21/11/2023). As winter approaches, returnees urgently need emergency shelter and insulated tents as well as winterisation and NFI kits, such as stoves, either at the temporary settlement at the border or at their destination (IMC 14/11/2023).

Protection

Women returnees face increased security risks at border crossings and in relocation areas. They face protection challenges throughout the registration and relocation processes (UN Women 14/11/2023).

Women also face increased social control upon their return to Afghanistan, where they are banned from accessing secondary and higher education and face mobility and employment restrictions. Importantly, they are not allowed to travel without a male guardian (Mahram),

which will be difficult for women forced to cross the border without their husbands or other male family members (BBC 30/01/2023). Many have been separated from their extended family and the social networks that offered them protection.

Many people are likely to face arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and cruel and other inhumane treatment as they are forced to leave Pakistan. In Afghanistan, civil society activists, journalists, human rights defenders, former government officials, and former security force members are at particular risk of facing human rights violations (HRW accessed 01/12/2023; UN 27/10/2023).

There is a high need for mental health and psychosocial support, since the returnee population has experienced multiple traumatic events, such as expulsion threats, detention prior to deportation without legal rights, and uncertain resettlement conditions, which may have caused trauma and shock (UN Women 14/11/2023).

Livelihoods

The repatriation of Afghans will have consequences for their livelihoods upon returning to Afghanistan. Because the country's economy does not offer sufficient employment opportunities for the current Afghan population, it will be challenging for arriving returnees to make a living. Many returnees lack the necessary networks to support them during a time of transition and to assist them in integrating into a changed society and labour market. Finding employment will be particularly difficult for many of the women forced to return without their husbands or wider family support networks given the ITA-imposed mobility and employment restrictions in the country (UNICEF 14/08/2022; VOA 04/04/2023).

In April 2022, the ITA prohibited opium cultivation and production. Consequently, the countrywide opium cultivation area decreased by 86%, from 219,744 hectares in June 2022 to 31,088 hectares in June 2023. Such measures have affected the Afghan economy, reducing income access for millions of people at a time when the rest of the economy is also struggling – with the GDP declining by 20.7% in 2021 and 6.2% in 2022 (AAN 14/04/2022, 15/06/2023, and 07/11/2023; Alcis 02/11/2023; WB 03/10/2023).

Food security and nutrition

In a November survey, 83% of returnees stated having less than two meals per day (IR 19/11/2023). According to Save the Children, many Afghan returnees do not have enough money to buy food upon crossing the border, as Pakistan has imposed restrictions on what returnees can bring with them, including livestock and cash in excess of PKR 50,000 (roughly USD 175) (STC 01/11/2023; ICG 13/11/2023).

15.3 million people in Afghanistan are currently living in severe food insecurity, 3.4 million of whom depend on sustained humanitarian assistance (WFP accessed 29/11/2023). Currently, four million people in Afghanistan are acutely malnourished, including 3.2 million children under the age of five (WFP 20/11/2023).

Because of a massive funding shortfall, WFP has already been forced to cut funding for humanitarian activities in the country. In total, ten million people have been cut off from WFP assistance in 2023 (WFP 05/09/2023).

Health

Thousands of the Afghan refugees who have crossed into Afghanistan from Pakistan in recent weeks are suffering from a range of serious illnesses, some of which are life-threatening (STC 17/11/2023). The massive influx of returnees and related factors have raised serious public health concerns, especially with the Afghan health system already struggling because of lack of funding, with some health facilities reported as near collapsing (WHO 18/08/2023; RFE/RL 03/11/2023). This will heighten the risk of outbreaks of diseases at various border crossing points, including acute watery diarrhoea, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, tuberculosis, coronavirus disease 2019, polio, and dengue (WHO 16/11/2023).

During the winter, cold and/or dry air may cause people with low immunity and children to contract pneumonia and other winter-related illnesses (TOI 12/11/2023). Returnees being held in camps may also be exposed to the risk of tick-borne diseases. Insufficient health intervention during the season will aggravate the situation for people with vulnerable health and contribute to increased morbidity and mortality (WHO 16/11/2023).

WASH

People have limited access to safe drinking and washing water (STC 17/11/2023). A lack of water points and WASH facilities at border points could cause significant problems, particularly for women and girls. Because of a lack of WASH facilities, women and girls must use the toilets and bathe outside reception centres, which can make women feel unsafe and expose them to protection risks, such as gender-based violence (UN Women 14/11/2023).

Returning women and girls may face heightened impacts as women in Afghanistan already experience barriers to healthcare and WASH service access, including mobility restrictions (MSF 06/02/2023; USIP 13/01/2016).

Education

90% of returnees indicated that their children lacked access to education and learning materials and tools as at 19 November (IR 19/11/2023). Overall, Afghanistan has an estimated 3.7 million out-of-school children, 60% of whom are girls. ITA leaders have banned girls from attending secondary schools, making Afghanistan the only country in the world to do so. As a result, the number of girls dropping out of secondary school has nearly doubled. The main reasons for low female enrolment prior to the ban were insecurity and traditional norms and practices concerning girls' and women's roles in Afghan society (Malala Fund 21/03/2022; UNICEF accessed 20/11/2023). The ITA's restriction of girls from attending secondary and university education has been driving the displacement of Afghans to Pakistan since 2021, with many Afghans fleeing their country for their daughters to obtain an education (France 24 08/03/2023; UN Women 14/11/2023).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Political and economic situations in Afghanistan

Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, the ITA has imposed a harsh interpretation of Islamic law, despite initial promises to respect the rights of women and religious and ethnic minority communities. This has caused another wave of displacement out of the country, adding to the many in Afghanistan's history since the 1980s. Besides those directly evacuated in the first two weeks of August 2021, nearly 3.6 million Afghans have since left the country amid a growing humanitarian crisis, the vast majority of whom have fled to neighbouring Iran and Pakistan (Al Jazeera 16/08/2023; UNHCR accessed 16/11/2023; UN Women 14/11/2023).

Immediately following the Taliban takeover, most international diplomatic missions closed in Afghanistan, with only a few mostly Muslim countries reopening them at a later stage (TWP 14/08/2021). The EU reopened its physical mission in January 2022, and Japan followed later in the year (Reuters 21/01/2022). Most of the international community has refused to recognise and maintain diplomatic relations with the ITA, and refers to Afghanistan as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The UNGA has also postponed a vote on who will represent Afghanistan at the UN for an indefinite period (CFR 19/01/2023; TOLONews 22/10/2022; The Siasat Daily 01/12/2021; Daily Pakistan 22/11/2021).

According to the World Bank, the estimated population of Afghanistan in 2022 was 41 million (WB accessed 05/12/2023). Approximately 19 million Afghans lived below the poverty line in 2020. By the end of 2022, UNDP estimated that the number had grown to 34 million (UNDP

18/04/2023; WB accessed 16/11/2023). The Afghan economy is stuck in a low-level equilibrium, leaving the majority of Afghans poor, hungry, and in need of humanitarian assistance (WB 03/10/2023; USIP 10/08/2023). The economic situation is deteriorating. Positive coping mechanisms are wearing thin, with Afghans employing strategies with long-term negative consequences.

Inability of IDPs to return to areas of origin in Afghanistan

Many of the current IDPs are also previous returnees who have settled in informal urban settlements because of their inability to return to their areas of origin (IDMC 31/12/2017; REACH 19/02/2022). It is likely that some of the more recent returnees may have already attempted to return to Afghanistan but failed to integrate and instead left again. Multiple experiences of displacement are very common in Afghanistan, and Afghans often move between Afghanistan and Pakistan in search of security and livelihoods. Many in urban informal settlements have also faced evictions or are at threat of being evicted, as the de facto Taliban authorities are working on reshaping urban areas and the use of state land (OHCHR accessed 01/12/2023; NRC 15/12/2022). Similar attempts to create new villages or towns have failed in the past (NYT 08/00/2011).