



To ensure an efficient and effective response, International Medical Corps staff members perform an assessment of returnee needs in the eastern region of Afghanistan.

In response to recent announcements by Pakistan, a large portion of the 1.7 million Afghan refugees living in that country are returning to Afghanistan. Most are Afghan nationals who sought refuge in Pakistan over the last four decades due to conflict and insecurity in their home country. Many of them have no place to return to, as Afghanistan is facing a humanitarian crisis that has been exacerbated by drought and economic turmoil. According to UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 261,240 Afghans have returned since September 15¹ through the Torkham and Chaman transit points, which border Pakistan in the eastern and southern regions. The most recent data shows the estimated number of returnees to Afghanistan from Pakistan is between 9,000 and 10,000 people per day.²

The return of millions of Afghan refugees and migrants from Pakistan will likely worsen the already dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and expose the returnees to serious protection risks. Returnees are facing immense and urgent humanitarian needs, as they typically are arriving empty-handed at the onset of winter. Priority needs include healthcare, shelter, psychological first aid (PFA), protection, food, non-food items (NFIs), nutrition, winterization and livelihoods assistance, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

International Medical Corps Response

In response to the large-scale return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), International Medical Corps is collaborating with other humanitarian actors—including UN agencies, NGOs and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation—to ensure a coordinated and effective humanitarian response. International Medical Corps is also tracking the movement and destination of the returnees in the eastern region, where it operates static health centers that provide health, protection and nutrition services to the newly arrived returnees. We have so far provided 200 returnees with lifesaving primary healthcare, including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services to 57 returnees, through our static health centers in the eastern region, where most of the returnees have resettled. We are also co-leading the health cluster in the eastern region, helping to ensure that a coordinated health response is provided by humanitarian partners. International Medical Corps also is working with our teams in Pakistan at the border to ensure a coordinated response.

FAST FACTS

- According to IOM and UNHCR, 261,240 refugees have returned to Afghanistan since September 15 through the Torkham and Chaman transit points, which border Pakistan in the eastern and southern regions.

OUR FOOTPRINT

- International Medical Corps has been operating in Afghanistan since 1984. Our main activities include providing primary and secondary healthcare, training, health education, emergency response, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), nutrition services, protection services, community empowerment, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.

OUR RESPONSE

- International Medical Corps has so far provided 200 outpatient consultations, including 57 mental health consultations to returnees.
- We have deployed an assessment team to the border to provide support and coordination for an expansion of our response.
- To support returnees, we have donated a tent and two delivery beds to health facilities in Torkham.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/unhcr-iom-pakistan-flash-update-4-arrest-and-detentionflow-monitoring-15-september-04-november-2023>

² <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/afghans-returning-pakistan-after-expulsion-order-have-nowhere-go-warn-aid-agencies>

We are implementing all necessary measures to protect the safety and well-being of our staff and partners on the ground while providing lifesaving assistance to those in need.

Health and MHPSS

International Medical Corps is exploring the establishment of a mobile health team from our existing health facilities in Nangarhar that would be deployed at a temporary settlement at the border to provide primary healthcare services, including MHPSS services. The Provincial Health Director for Nangarhar has supported the activation of health services at the settlement. Other needs include PFA, as returnees are traumatized and seeking mental health support, and an ambulance service that would facilitate patient referrals and staff movement between Torkham, Jalalabad and existing health facilities.

WASH

At the border, there is a lack of coordination between government agencies and humanitarian organizations, complicating the response. Because returnees require information on hygiene awareness, available services and referrals, International Medical Corps plans to send out hygiene promoters with educational materials to assist returnees at the transitional settlement in Torkham. Water trucking also is an acute need at the border in Torkham, as the existing system cannot support the returnees.

Further Needs

During our assessment of the needs of the returnees, our teams confirmed that returnees require emergency shelter and insulated tents, as some do not have access to shelter for themselves or their families. The returnees, who mostly arrive with few belongings, urgently require winterization and NFI kits, such as stoves, either at the temporary settlement at the border or at their place of destination. According to a report by RFE/ RL's Radio Azadi, the Afghan returnees are only allowed to bring \$175 of their own money with them.³

International Medical Corps is examining all options to expand its response to this crisis and will share further updates over the coming weeks.

³ <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-pakistan-returnee-refugee-torkham-border-taliban-camp-sanitation-water/32676554.html>