

AFGHANISTAN CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY REPORT TWO YEARS OF MIXED MIGRATION IN REVIEW

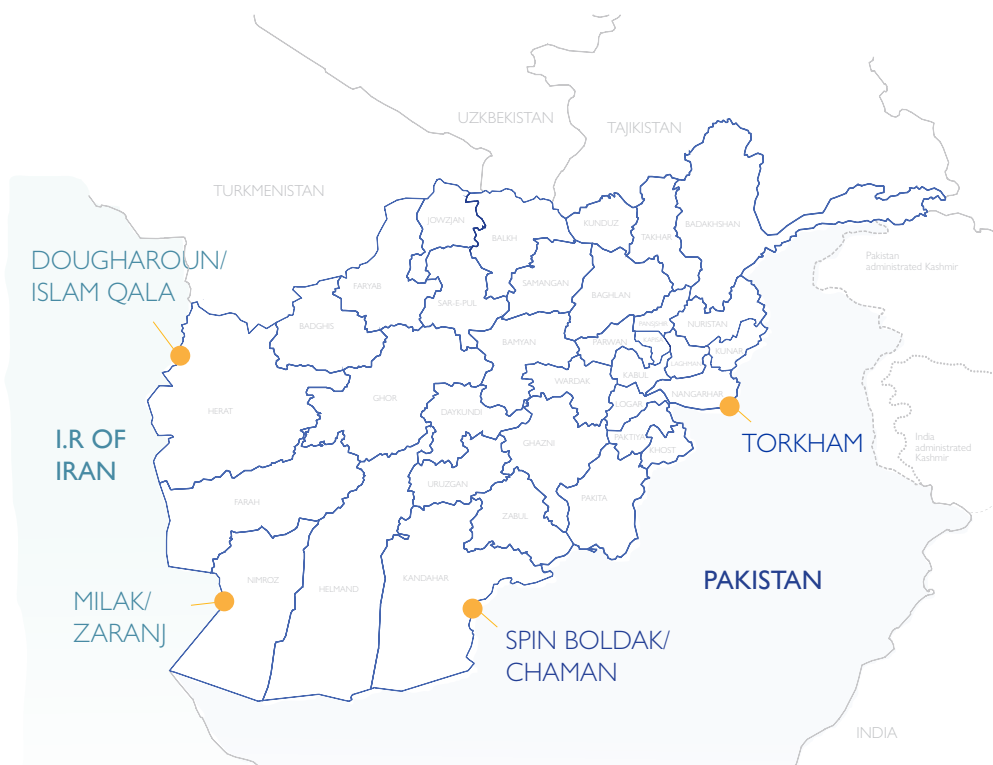
15 August 2021 - 15 August 2023



OVERVIEW

The Taliban took over Afghanistan on 15 August 2021 and set about forming the De-facto Authority (DfA). Since the DfA's rise to power, IOM, in its continued efforts to support people in need, has been collecting and disseminating relevant data on cross-border movements at four major border points between two of its neighbouring countries. Considering the history over the last four decades in which Afghan refugees and migrants have primarily found their way to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, this report presents a descriptive analysis on movements going into and out of Afghanistan with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan over a two-year period. With the aim of better informing humanitarian operations, the analysis below provides an overview of the mixed cross-border situation which has unfolded during this reporting period, covering the transition since mid-August 2021 to the lead-up of events in Pakistan post-August 2023.

Map: Afghanistan border point flows



Disclaimer: the boundaries and names shown and the designation used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM. Line of Control: dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Note: IOM Data collection exercises only report on outflows. Therefore, outflows from Afghanistan are conducted at or near zero points at the respective border crossings by IOM Afghanistan while data collection on inflows to Afghanistan are consolidated from outflow exercises undertaken respectively from country offices of departure, that is IOM Pakistan and IOM Islamic Republic of Iran. Country offices are hence not involved in recording inflows into their respective countries. Additionally, individuals crossing into the Islamic Republic of Iran from Afghanistan can vary from those reported by the UNHCR. This can be attributed to the difference in data collection processes. The UNHCR data is derived from mechanisms which record population(s) approaching the UNHCR in the Islamic Republic of Iran while IOM data relies on flow monitoring data.

FLOW CATEGORIES AND POPULATION OF CONCERN

Outflows (out-migration) to a neighbouring country

Afghan nationals who moved abroad, to Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran, regardless of the reason or duration of expatriation (including persons in need of international protection and economic migrants).

Inflows (or returns) to Afghanistan

Spontaneous returns involve individuals crossing the border to Afghanistan willingly and without being forced or coerced. These individuals can be documented or undocumented. Other types of returns involve Afghan nationals who are either pushed-back at the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran, repatriated from Pakistan, or any individual who may qualify as having faced deportation back to Afghanistan.

DOCUMENTATION TYPE

Undocumented or Irregular migrants

An individual of Afghan origin in Pakistan or Islamic Republic of Iran who does not have valid documents and thus who have an irregular status.

Valid documentation

In order to remain/ stay in Pakistan, a valid Proof of Registration (PoR) card issued by the Government of Pakistan, an Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) or a valid Pakistan visa is required. In order to remain/ stay in the Islamic Republic of Iran, an Amayesh card or a valid Iranian visa is required.

KEY MOBILITY TRENDS SNAPSHOT

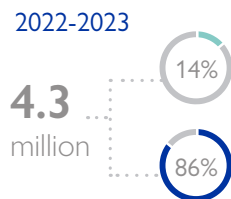
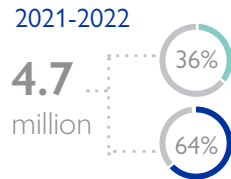
Outflows: In the first year that followed the DfA take over (15 Aug 2021 – 15 Aug 2022), an estimated 4.7 million individuals migrated out of Afghanistan, with 64 per cent having left for Pakistan and 36 per cent for the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the second year (16 Aug 2022 – 15 Aug 2023) diminished flows are recorded: during this year a total of 4.3 million individuals crossed out of Afghanistan, with 86 per cent of outflows moving to Pakistan and 14 per cent to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Inflows: An estimated 3.6 million of Afghan nationals crossed over to Afghanistan in the first year while 4.3 million individuals crossed over during the second year of the DfA takeover. This represents an increment of 16 per cent in inflows between year one and year two of the reporting period. Across the two years, Afghan nationals primarily came from Pakistan and with an increasing share: 73 per cent of inflows came from Pakistan during the first year while 81 per cent of inflows are reported for the second year.



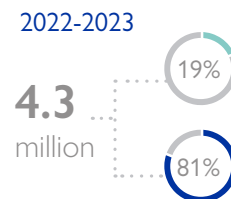
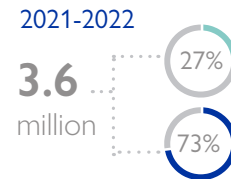
8.99M
total outflows

YEAR IN REVIEW



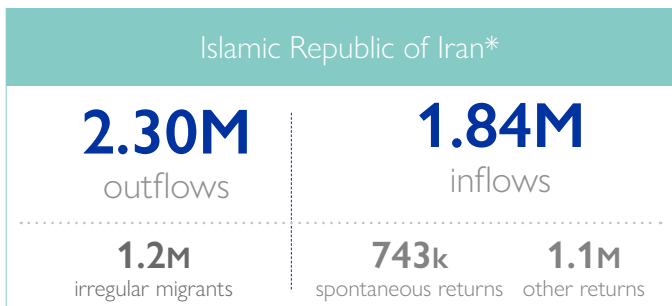
7.97M
total inflows

YEAR IN REVIEW

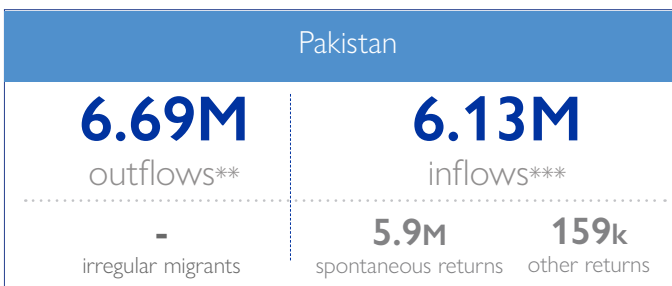


■ Islamic Republic of Iran ■ Pakistan

Graph 1: Total Outflows from, and Inflows to, Afghanistan



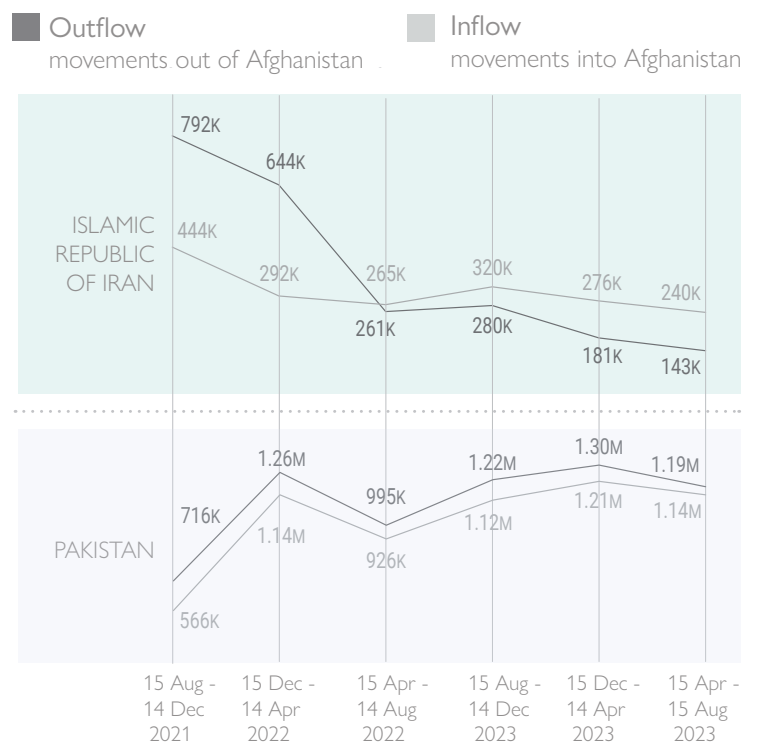
* Since January 2023, health, education, tourism, and market-related movements are included in the overall numbers. According to the average daily crossings of these flows, one out of five are circular in nature.



**Source: IOM Afghanistan and wherein irregular movements to Pakistan are not collected.

***Source: IOM Pakistan

Graph 2: Bi-Annual Outflows from, and Inflows to, Afghanistan

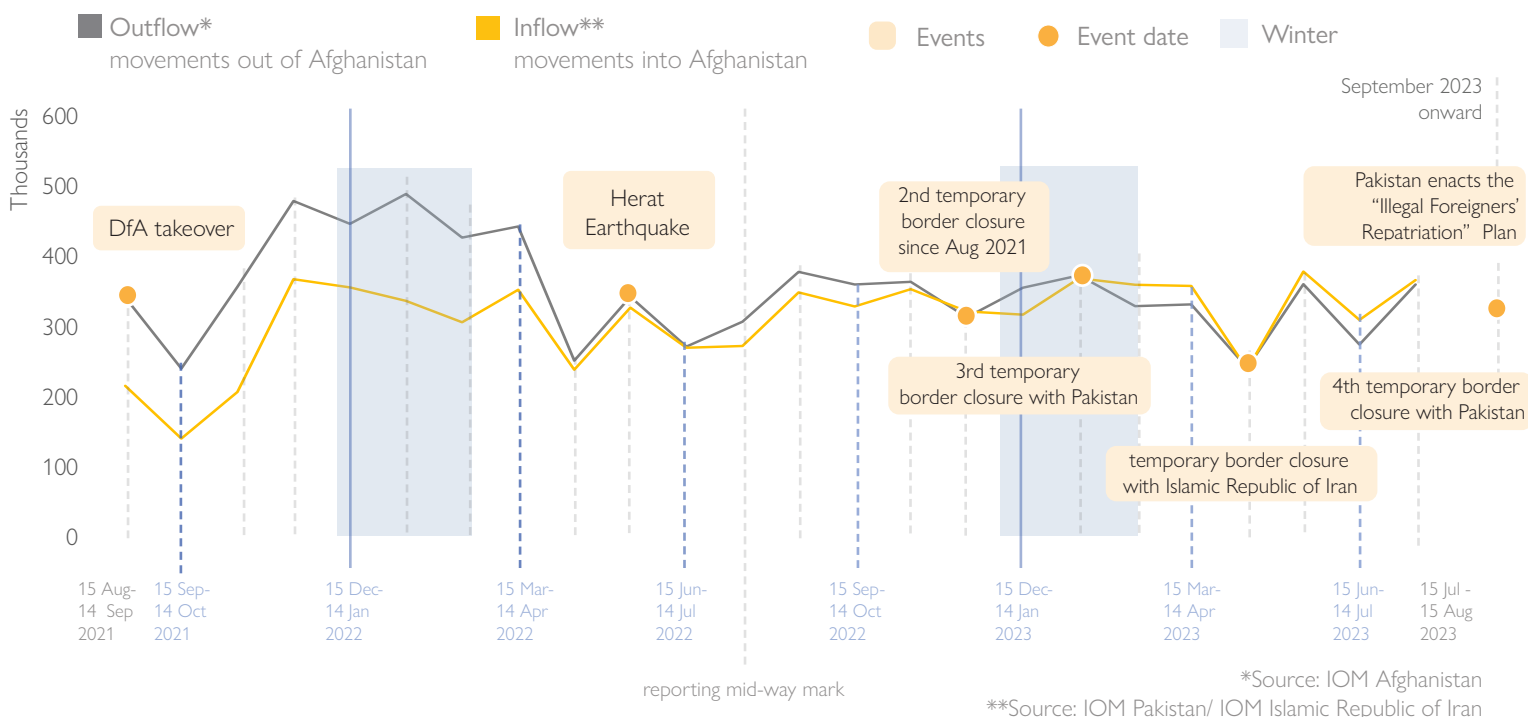


SUMMARY

From when the reporting period started to where it ends, (15 August 2021 to 15 August 2023), the gap between total outflows and inflows has dwindled between Afghanistan and two of its neighbouring countries, that is the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. By the second half of the reporting period, cross-border movements reached close to a 1-to-1 ratio between outflows (4,307,755) and inflows

(4,314,442). Changes in these flows across this two-year period may be more generally attributed to the combination of tighter governmental controls on border crossings, temporary border closures, and fear of deportations of Afghan nationals living abroad. The following sections point to notable peaks and downturns in mobility flows to help put into perspective the timeline and context in which IOM operates in.

Graph 3: Border-flows reported on a monthly basis to and from Afghanistan between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2023



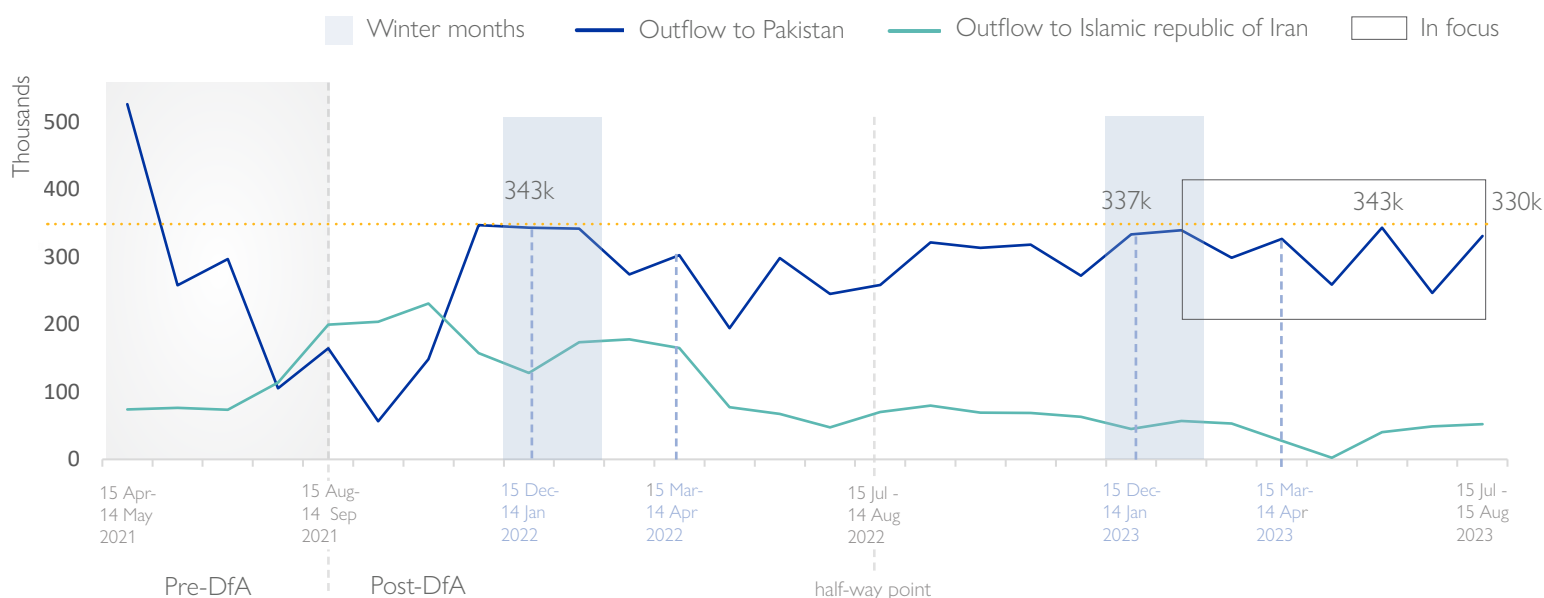
CHANGE IN OUTFLOWS OVER TWO YEARS

According to IOM Afghanistan data, during the two-year reporting period, 6.68 million or 74 per cent of Afghans have crossed out of Afghanistan to Pakistan since the DfA assumed power. With the majority of outflows from Afghanistan being carried by movements going into Pakistan, notably through the Spin Boldak border-post as it captures 79 per cent of the crossings into Pakistan, many similarities are observed between the overall outflows from Afghanistan and specific outflows to Pakistan. In this respect, it is worth noting that since January 2023, fluctuations in movements have become periodic and the difference between peaks and dips more extreme. That is to say, diminished outflows have consistently been followed by an upsurge.

This pattern can be seen more clearly over the course of the last six months (since mid-february 2023). Ultimately, there has recently been a trajectory of lower lows and steeper rises that are punctuated by temporary border closures (Graph 3 & Graph 4 boxed portion).

Meanwhile, different border dynamics are drawn between overall outflow trends and those going into Pakistan. From the first half (15 Aug 2021 – 15 Aug 2022) to the second half (16 Aug 2022 – 15 Aug 2023) of the reporting period, total outflows decreased by a little over nine per cent. Inversely, outflows to Pakistan have correspondingly increased by 124 per cent, from 2.97 million to 3.7 million. Crossings to the Islamic Republic of Iran from Afghanistan dropped by

Graph 4: Outflows from Afghanistan according to country of destination



Source: IOM Afghanistan

64 per cent from year one to year two (or 1.7 million individuals to 605 thousand individuals respectively).

From a biannual view of Afghanistan’s outflows, the increase of crossings to Pakistan is clear (Graph 2). On the other hand, when analysed on a monthly-basis, outflow figures to Pakistan also showcase how these flows have remained relatively high since December 2021 (Graph 4). Interestingly, on both ends of the reporting period, similar volumes of outflows from Afghanistan into Pakistan have been re-established in the lapse of a year (mid-December 2021 to mid-December 2022). While crossings into Pakistan reached 337 thousand individuals in mid-December 2021, in mid-May 2023 and in mid-August 2023, similar or greater figures (343 thousand individuals and 330 thousand individuals respectively) are more recently reported. This can be attributed to the transition period in political power as flows settle in the first year, but also points to a newly emerging trend in the second year. As it will be described in the sections below, this influx can be better understood in relation to reduced mobility outflows occurring in other parts of Afghanistan as well as by looking at the return scenario (Graph 6).

During times of thinning outflows from Afghanistan, reduced mobility is reported to both neighbouring

countries (Graph 4). In April 2022 and again in May 2023 outward flows were severely reduced, however on both occasions, movements into the Islamic Republic of Iran have more strikingly diminished in proportion to those going into Pakistan. In the first instance, outflows were cut in half for the Islamic Republic of Iran (from 164,895 to 77,252 individuals) and cut by one third (from 302,578 to 194,501 individuals) for those leaving for Pakistan. In the second instance, flows had contracted to an even greater extent: outflows during this month reduced by 87 per cent and 79 per cent for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan respectively with outflows to the Islamic Republic of Iran having come to a near halt for some weeks between mid-April to mid-May 2023 during one of the temporary border closures at the Melak/ Zaranj border post following border skirmishes. As such, the magnitude of outflows in May 2023 can also be read in conjunction with, and in reaction to, suppressed flows in April 2023 and the circumstances that have led to these events.

The above helps expand the knowledge-base surrounding the dynamic fluctuations observed in outflows, however there are other contributing factors to consider. The continuous dip in outflows into the Islamic Republic of Iran since April 2022 is particularly of note. With irregular migration composing over half

(64% or 1.2 million) of the total outflows to the Islamic Republic of Iran during the two-year reporting period, the lack of access to civil registration, due to DfA closure of offices, lack of staff, and limited financial and material resources to meet higher demands (IOM/Samuel Hall, 2023), have considerably constrained migrants' ability to hold the required documents needed to use official border crossings. This affects young males who compose the majority (69%) of outflows to the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as families who more often leave to Pakistan due to historical ties with the country.

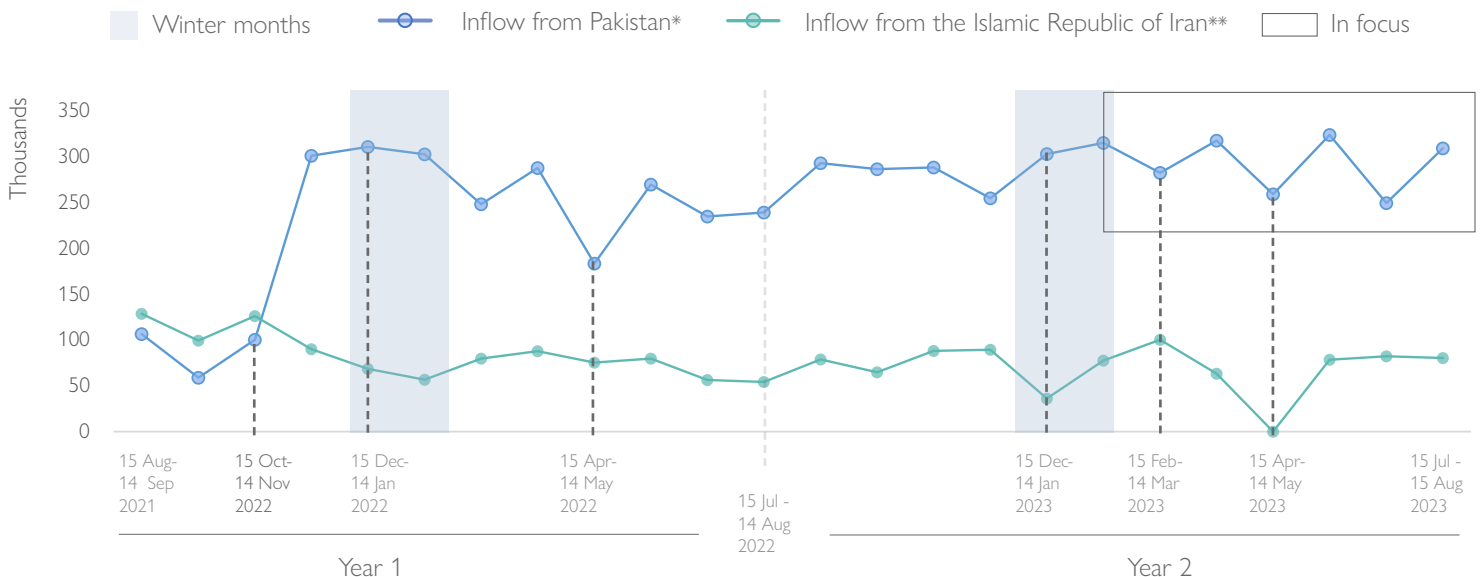
With reported outflows to the Islamic Republic of Iran largely composed of males, this gender disparity is also telling and a point for further concern as women and members of ethnic minority groups are reportedly more likely to be undocumented as many have never obtained documents in the first place as part of the socio-cultural norm (IOM/Samuel Hall, 2023). In part due to the above, but also with further consideration that monitoring of irregular flows to the Islamic Republic of Iran ceased after May 2022, the full range of mobility impacts remains severely underreported. Low regular outflows are hence likely to have been supplanted by irregular movements. This is all the more likely amid worsening economic conditions in Afghanistan. In this way, migrants continue to face substantial protection risks.

UPSURGE IN INFLOWS TO AFGHANISTAN

Over the two-year reporting period, 7.9 million Afghan inflows are reported, of whom three-quarters (or 6.13 million Afghans) came from Pakistan (Graph 1 & Graph 5). Taking this period as a whole, this averages out to 2,290 daily inflows from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 9,527 daily inflows from Pakistan, and during which over half of these inflows (57%) take place in the second year. In addition, since February 2023, it should be noted that the total number of returns overtook the number of outflows. As of mid-August 2023, there were close to 382 thousand outflows and 389 thousand inflows. Correspondingly, this represents an increase of 65 thousand outflows and 71 thousand inflows compared to the previous month (July 2023) (Graph 1). In the last month of this reporting period, inflows and outflows are both increasing, although inflows are increasing at a faster rate than outflows (Graph 3).

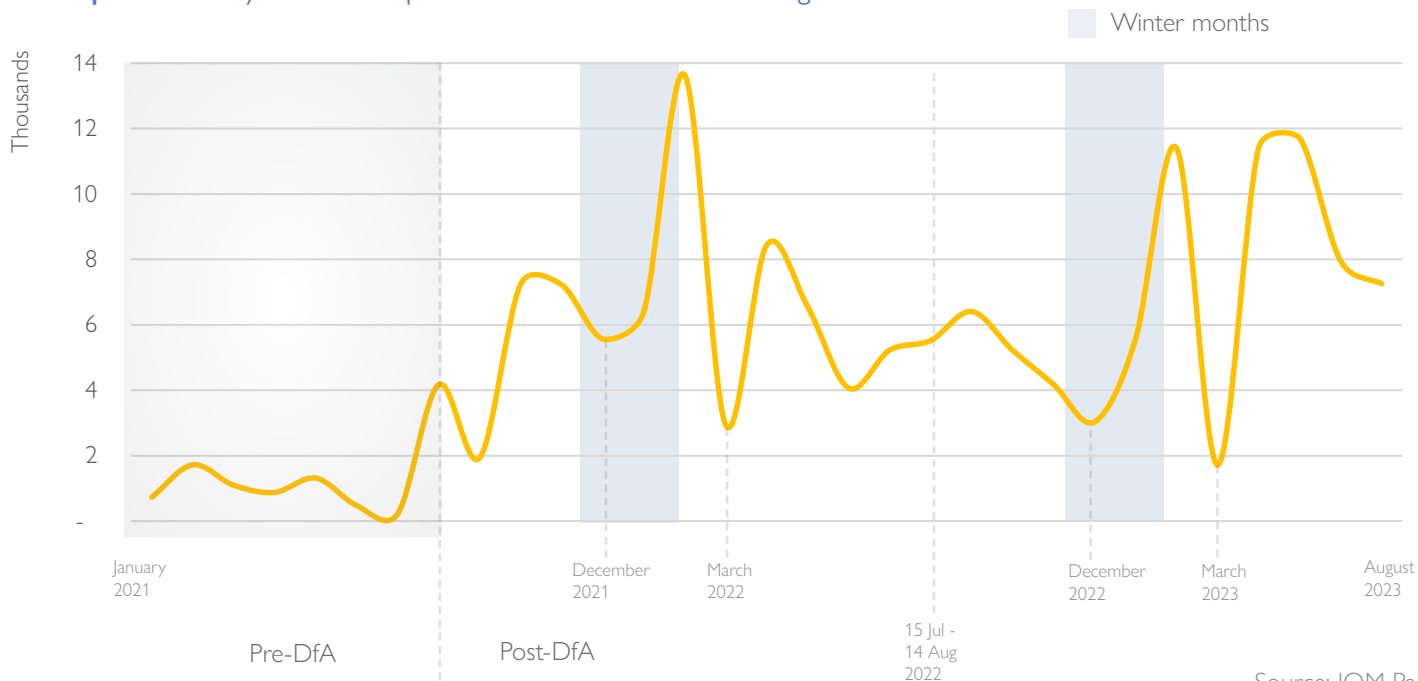
Since mid-October 2021 inflows to Afghanistan from Pakistan, have eclipsed those from the Islamic republic of Iran and continue to be on the rise (Graph 5). Likewise, in summarizing mobility flows from Pakistan into Afghanistan, inflows were by a large majority coming through the Chaman border (76%) while over a quarter passed through the Torkham border (26%).

Graph 5: Monthly inflows by country of departure



*Source: IOM Pakistan
 **Source: IOM Islamic Republic of Iran

Graph 6: Monthly inflow of deportations and undocumented migrants from Pakistan



Crossings from the Islamic Republic of Iran into Afghanistan however reported a decline from year one to year two of the reporting period (1 million individuals against 838 thousand individuals) though the share of flows by border point remain relatively comparable (55% through Melak against 45% through Islam Qala) (Graph 5).

When disaggregated by population group across the two years, the largest inflows (5.8 million individuals) are composed by spontaneous returns (86% of the total inflows). Alternatively, this entails that from the total inflows into Afghanistan, one in six migrants (or 16%) were returned to Afghanistan through other means (over 1.2 million individuals were pushbacks, repatriations, or deportations, and close to 155 thousand individuals were undocumented migrant returnees) amid growing fears of deportation as what could be, a preventative measure to avoid reprisals. This population is not negligible. While solely looking at other types of return which are non-voluntary in nature, the highest figures across this category are the 63 thousand and 62 thousand inflows which correspond to inflows from April 2022 and March 2023 and are closely followed by those of August 2023, with close to 58 thousand inflows.

Additionally, across the two-year period, over half of the inflows from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Afghanistan (60% or 1.1 million inflows) were composed of other types of return. Meanwhile, returns of this nature correspond to 3 per cent (or 158 thousand) of inflows from Pakistan. As such, inflows from the Islamic Republic of Iran continue to be high, with an average of 47 thousand Afghans being returned at the border monthly. While figures from Pakistan may seem small in comparison, an increase of 15 per cent in total is noted from the first year to the second year of the reporting period in deportations and undocumented returns (Graph 6).

It is important to consider that since September 2023, the announcement of the Illegal Foreigner Repatriation Plan had serious impacts on Afghans from Pakistan and thus needs to be taken into account when analysing this data ([IOM Flash Report, 2023](#)). Additionally, with the Afghan economy having been disrupted and contracting since 2020 to a cumulative 27 per cent during this reporting period ([UNDP, 2023](#)), the needs of the return population are dire. Afghanistan is undergoing a complex humanitarian crisis that involve protection risks, lack of access to resources in health, education, food, employment, shelter and which are heightened

by human rights challenges. It is also a country that is facing the impacts of environmental change and an impending harsh winter ahead.

The current situation highlights the urgent need for sustainable and comprehensive durable solutions that enable the safe and dignified return of Afghan migrants and refugees to their country of origin. However, it is important to recognize that the challenges facing Afghan nationals do not end upon their return. The reintegration of migrants and refugees into Afghan society remains a challenging process. The lack of access to basic services, such as education and health care, and limited economic opportunities are significant challenges, making it difficult for them to rebuild their lives and support their families. Against this backdrop, the continuous and accrued number of returns by Afghan refugees and migrants are of central concern as such circumstances are ripe for future emigration or re-emigration to occur.

RETURNS POST-AUGUST 2023

In response to the IFRP which was announced on 26 September and enacted on 1 November 2023, the UN Refugee Agency and IOM have collated their data on the outflows of Afghan nationals from mid-September until early December 2023 ([Flash Report, 2023](#)). During this period, 490,89 individuals have returned. Eighty-eight per cent of the annual returns in 2023 have occurred since the announcement of the IFRP on 15 September 2023. Most of the returnees were undocumented Afghans (93%), followed by PoR holders (5%) and ACC holders (2%). Two per cent of the overall flow could be considered vulnerable persons. Fear of arrest (89%) remains the most common reason to return to Afghanistan among returnees.

BEYOND 15 AUGUST 2023: RETURN FLOWS FROM PAKISTAN

- Over 6.13 million movements have occurred from Pakistan to Afghanistan, in addition to the over 500,000 Afghan individuals who have returned since 15-September 2023 in the context of the IFRP, as well as over 1.84 million movements from the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- As many of these movements are not forced in nature, Afghans continue to cross borders for trade, seasonal employment, the visiting of relatives, and to celebrate special events and holidays.
- However, with the existing dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, including the recent earthquakes and onset of winter, this surge in involuntary returns, especially from Pakistan in the context of the IFRP, has further exacerbated humanitarian needs in Afghanistan.

- Involuntary returns to Afghanistan will likely continue to feed cycles of re-migration, as Afghan nationals remain in search of access to livelihoods, protection, and access to services.

IOM appreciates Pakistan's generous hospitality towards Afghan nationals for over four decades, despite challenges, and repeats the call for all returns to be voluntary, safe and dignified. With a longstanding and strong collaboration with the various countries hosting Afghan nationals, IOM stand ready to provide support through the provision of services and protection assistance.

Flow Monitoring (FM): Under DTM's REMAP, FM quantifies population inflows and outflows, as well as Ademographics, travel intentions, origins, destinations and needs of migrants, returnees and other cross-border, mobile populations on the borders with Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.



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TRACKING MATRIX

This report is funded by:

