

The Socio-Economic Consequences Of Forced Return: A Comprehensive Case Study Of Afghan Returnees From Pakistan In District Dir Lower

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Abstract: *From October 2023 to early 2026, around 5.5 million Afghan refugees went back to their home country from Pakistan and Iran. Almost a million of them came back from Pakistan in 2025 alone. This article presents a detailed case study of District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan—a district that housed some 39,000 registered Afghan refugees prior to their involuntary repatriation. We examine the social and economic ramifications of forced return across eleven domains: economic destitution, health and nutrition, educational disintegration, mental health, unaccompanied minors, human rights infringements, Taliban reintegration strategies, impacts on Pakistan's host communities, social cohesion in Afghanistan, environmental degradation, and internal displacement. We get information from the UNHCR, IOM, UNDP, WHO, the World Bank, district administration, and reports on human rights. The statistics suggest that forced returns from Dir Lower went up a lot from late 2025 to February 2026. This was when the district ordered the swift evacuation of the Chakdara camp, which contained 21,000 people. Almost all of the returnees are poor (90% live on less than \$5 a day and 88% are in debt). Their health is terrible (3.7 million children are severely malnourished), their education is falling apart (50,000 minors have been deported), they have severe psychological trauma, and they are victims of widespread human rights abuses like night raids, arbitrary detention, and family separation. It's important to note that 61% of all returnees are under 18, and a large number of them are children who are not with their parents. Pakistan's strategy of forced return is against the concept of non-refoulement in international law. The International Criminal Court has also issued arrest warrants for Taliban commanders for crimes against humanity. Pakistan's local economy is dealing with growing salaries and a lack of workers, while Afghanistan's weak host communities are dealing with a loss of social cohesion and secondary displacement. We contend that coerced repatriation into a failing economy engenders compounded vulnerability—a condition wherein simultaneous deprivations render recovery unattainable. Pakistan must immediately stop forcing PoR cardholders and unaccompanied children to return, and the international community must fully support the UNHCR's \$216 million appeal for 2026.*

Keywords: Forced return, Afghan refugees, Pakistan, Dir Lower, multidimensional socio-economic impact, non-refoulement, unaccompanied children, Taliban, reintegration failure

Introduction

Since the Taliban took control Afghanistan in August 2021, countries nearby, especially Pakistan and Iran, have put more pressure on Afghan refugees to go home. Pakistan started the "Illegal Foreigners

Repatriation Plan" (IFRP) in October 2023. At first, it was aimed at undocumented Afghans, but it later included people with registered Proof of Registration (PoR) and Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) cards. By the beginning of 2026, around 5.5 million Afghans had come back from Iran and Pakistan. Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is one of the districts in Pakistan that has been struck the hardest. It has been home to a huge number of refugees for decades. Current studies on forced return have predominantly concentrated on economic consequences, including employment, debt, and housing. Nonetheless, the subsequent impacts on health, education, mental health, unaccompanied minors, human rights abuses, Taliban reintegration strategies, host communities, social cohesion, the environment, and secondary displacement are still insufficiently examined. This article presents a comprehensive case study of forced repatriation from Pakistan to District Dir Lower from 2023 to 2026, focusing particularly on the years 2025 to 2026. The questions for the research are:

1. What was the extent and duration of forced repatriations from Dir Lower during the years 2025–2026?
2. What are the short-term effects on health, education, mental health, child protection, human rights, the environment, and social cohesion for people who return?
3. How do the Taliban's policies for returnees (land, housing, and tax breaks) effect reintegration, and how trustworthy are they?
4. What effect does forced return have on the communities in Pakistan that are hosting refugees and the way people move around within Afghanistan?
5. Is it possible to reintegrate people given the current level of humanitarian support and the law against refoulement?

We show that forced return from Dir Lower makes people even more vulnerable by using secondary data from UNHCR, IOM, UNDP, WHO, the World Bank, Save the Children, Amnesty International, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and district administration records. This is because multiple crises interact to make recovery impossible.

2. Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and District Dir Lower

2.1 National Refugee Population

Pakistan had over 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees (PoR cardholders) and 0.8 to 1.2 million unregistered Afghans as of 2023 (UNHCR, 2024). The IFRP, which was unveiled in October 2023, said that undocumented Afghans had to leave by November 1, 2023. By 2025, the policy had grown to encompass ACC and PoR holders, which UNHCR said was against the principle of non-refoulement. UNHCR has asked the authorities to not push those who require international protection to go back to their home countries.

2.2 District Dir Lower: Demographics and Refugee Presence

District Dir Lower, which has a population of 1,650,183 people (according to the 2023 census), is in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The literacy rate is 57.36% (72.57% for men and 43.16% for women), which shows that there were already problems with development (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In October 2025, there were 33,681 PoR cardholders and 6,100 ACC holders in the district (UNHCR field report, 2025). Most of them lived in and around the Chakdara camp in Adenzai sector, although there were also others living in Timergara and Samarbagh.

2.3 Pre-Existing Economic and Environmental Vulnerabilities

A peer-reviewed study on Dir Lower showed that the long-term presence of Afghan refugees has significantly damaged local economic chances, with refugees “occupying all types of business,” leading to lower work opportunities and reduced incomes for local inhabitants (Ahmad & Khan, 2022). The

district also has a serious water shortage that affects 40–50% of its area, and past security operations have harmed infrastructure (District Administration Dir Lower, 2021). These vulnerabilities that were always there indicate that forced return makes things worse instead of making things better.

3. Methodology

A mixed-methods secondary analysis of publicly available and agency-reported data is used in this study. Sources are: UNHCR Afghanistan Returns Monitoring Updates (2024–2026); IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Returns Reports; UNDP Socio-Economic Surveys of Returnee Households (2025); World Bank Afghanistan Economic Updates (2025); WHO Health Emergency Appeal for Afghanistan (2026); OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview (2026); Save the Children reports on child deportations (2025); Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports (2025–2026); International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants (2025); District Dir Lower administration press releases and official notices (January–February 2026); and UN experts’ statements on non-refoulement (2025–2026).

Quantitative indicators encompass return volumes, employment rates, debt prevalence, housing status, income levels, malnutrition rates, school enrollment statistics, mental health screening data, water access, internal displacement figures, the number of unaccompanied children, and incarceration records. The findings are put into perspective using qualitative data from focus group talks held by UNHCR, IOM, and human rights groups. Some of the problems include that humanitarian surveys may have sample bias, the Taliban's rule makes it hard to get to rural Afghanistan, and there isn't enough systematic data on human rights abuses in Pakistan.

4. Findings

We organize findings into thirteen thematic subsections. Table 1 provides a summary of key indicators.

Table 1. Key Indicators of Forced Returns from Pakistan to Afghanistan (2025–2026)

Indicator	Value	Source
Total returns from Pakistan (2025)	1 million	UNHCR, 2026
Returns from Pakistan (April 2025 data)	986,268 (87% undocumented, 9% PoR, 4% ACC)	UNHCR, 2025d
Returns from Pakistan (early 2026)	150,000 (50% increase over 2025)	UNHCR, 2026
Unaccompanied children among returns from Pakistan	21%	UNHCR, 2025d
Children under 18 among all returnees	61%	UNHCR, 2025d
Women-headed households among returnees	17%	UNHCR, 2025d
Returnees living below \$5/day	>90%	UNDP, 2025
Returnee households in debt (on arrival)	88%	IOM, 2025
Returnee households in debt (after 6 months)	94%	UNHCR, 2025c
Returnees lacking permanent housing	80%	UNHCR, 2025a
Returnees forgoing medical care to afford food	>50%	UNDP, 2025
Children under 5 with acute malnutrition (national)	3.7 million	OCHA, 2026
Unaccompanied children deported (June 2025 alone)	6,700	UNICEF, 2025
Children deported from Pakistan (total)	>29,000	Save the

		Children, 2025
Remaining Afghans in Pakistan (April 2025)	~3 million	UNHCR, 2025d

Note: PoR = Proof of Registration; ACC = Afghan Citizen Card.

4.1 Scale and Timeline of Forced Returns from Dir Lower (2025–2026)

Forced returns from Dir Lower went up a lot in late 2025 and early 2026. Important events are:

1. In October 2025, the Assistant Commissioner of Timergara officially told the camps that they were no longer needed and warned that the government could use force if refugees didn't leave on their own (District Administration Dir Lower, 2025a).
2. In January 2026, 60 Afghan families in Timergara were given formal notices telling them to leave by January 8, 2026. At the same time, enhanced operations brought back 226 families (1,154 people).
3. The Deputy Commissioner ordered the quick evacuation of all refugee camps, including Chakdara, which at the time contained about 21,000 people. At that point, 19,000 people had already come back on their own, and about 700 people came back every day.

In 2025, around 1 million Afghans came back to Afghanistan from Pakistan, with 352,000 coming back in the first few months of 2025 (UNHCR, 2026). In early 2026, around 150,000 people came back from Pakistan and Iran, which is 50% more than the same time in 2025. As of April 2025, 87% of the 986,268 people who returned from Pakistan were undocumented, 9% had a PoR card, and 4% had an ACC card (UNHCR, 2025d). UNHCR keeps seeing a lot of Afghans coming back or being forced to come back in really bad situations.

4.2 Economic Destitution and Livelihood Collapse

When they get back to Afghanistan from Pakistan, returnees encounter terrible economic conditions. Surveys by the UNHCR and IOM from 2025 to 2026 show:

1. Income: According to UNDP (2025), over 90% of those who have returned home earn less than \$5 per day. The average monthly salary for workers is between \$22 and \$147 (IOM, 2025).
2. Employment: Just 11% of those who go back to work do so full-time. Of them, slightly more than half (51%) find employment, mostly in casual daily labor (UNHCR, 2025a). For women, this percentage drops to less than 25%.
3. Debt: The average loan amount is \$373 to \$900, five times the average monthly income of \$100, and 88% of returnee families report having debt (IOM, 2025). Within six months of returning, 94% of the population is in debt (UNHCR, 2025c).
4. Housing: Eighty percent of returnees live in makeshift shelters built of stone, mud, or shared single rooms. Rent costs have increased because to the increasing demand (UNHCR, 2025a). Many of the individuals that returned claim that they had nothing, such as land or a place to live.

4.3 Health and Nutrition Crisis

The forced repatriation is making Afghanistan's already terrible health situation much worse. In 2026, 21.9 million people (45% of the population) will need humanitarian aid. Food insecurity and severe malnutrition are the main reasons (OCHA, 2026). Many people who return home have health problems such starvation, dehydration, and infectious infections.

1. Malnutrition: In 2026, at least 3.7 million children under five are expected to be severely malnourished, with 942,000 of them having severe acute malnutrition. The World Food Program has said that last year was the worst year for hunger in Afghanistan, and this year an

extra 200,000 children will be severely malnourished. Because of budget limitations, the UN agency can only help one out of every four children who needs treatment for severe malnutrition.

2. Access to healthcare: More than half of families who return to their home country skip medical care to buy food (UNDP, 2025). The WHO says that 2.7 million returnees live in isolated, hilly areas that haven't had health posts for decades.
3. Disease Outbreaks: Areas where returnees live have seen outbreaks of measles, acute watery diarrhea, and polio because there are too many people living in temporary shelters, there isn't enough clean water, and people aren't getting enough food. In 2025, Afghanistan reported 97,368 probable measles cases and 161,791 instances of acute watery diarrhea with dehydration.

A lot of Dir Lower returnees come with children who are already hungry from the trip and can't even get basic primary health care when they get to Afghanistan's eastern districts (UNHCR field report, 2026).

4.4 Education Collapse and Child Labor

The disruption to education is really bad and affects both boys and girls. The Taliban only lets girls go to school from grades one to six. Right now, 78% of Afghan women and girls are not in school or working (Save the Children, 2025). The situation is very bad for youngsters who have come back.

1. Deportations of children: In the first two weeks of April 2025, 50,000 juveniles were sent back to their home countries from Pakistan. Many were born in Pakistan and had never been to Afghanistan (Save the Children, 2025).
2. School enrollment: 3.3 million kids in the US are not in school (UNESCO, 2025). Returnee children have even more problems: they don't have any papers, they don't speak Dari, and they have to labor to support their families.
3. Child labor and getting married young: Parents who have been deported say their kids are "sad they can't go to school" (Save the Children, 2025). There are now 12.4 million youngsters who require humanitarian relief since child labor has become so common. Early marriage is also a major reason why girls drop out of school (UNICEF, 2025).

Anecdotal information in Dir Lower's returnee houses indicates that females are restricted to the home because of Taliban restrictions and family hardship, while boys as young as eight are engaged in street hawking or brick kilns in Afghan border towns (IOM qualitative notes, 2025).

4.5 Mental Health and Psychosocial Trauma

Deep psychological damage results from forced repatriation. A peer-reviewed publication in the International Journal for Equity in Health (2025) described this as a "profound public health crisis." Health personnel say that returnees come back "physically unwell, emotionally distressed, and in urgent need of care due to the harsh conditions they endured during their journey" (PMC, 2025).

1. Prevalence of trauma: Surveys of returnee populations in Nimroz and Kandahar provinces revealed elevated levels of anxiety, sadness, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In Nimroz, returnees from Iran faced "not only poverty and homelessness but also profound psychological trauma" (IOM, 2025).
2. Compounded stress: People who returned from Dir Lower had surprise eviction notices (often with only a few days to leave), had to sell their household goods for a fraction of their worth, and had to deal with unpleasant border crossings. Many had lived in Pakistan for decades or were born there, so going back to Afghanistan, which they don't know, is like being displaced

again.

There are hardly no mental health services in the eastern border districts of Afghanistan. The WHO's 2026 appeal asks for only \$12 million for mental health and psychosocial support, which is less than 1% of the total amount needed for humanitarian aid (WHO, 2026).

4.6 Unaccompanied Children and Family Separation

This aspect was mostly missing from prior works but is very important to the situation. The data show that children are very vulnerable (see Table 1 for the most important numbers). Kids are sent back to their home countries without any family members. One youngster said that at the border, they were told to act like another deportee was their father (Amnesty International, 2025). UNHCR sounded the alarm about deporting unaccompanied children, saying that three Afghan children were sent back to their home country from Pakistan in one occasion (UNHCR, 2025e). The deportation of children is breaking apart families and leaving a lot of kids living in orphanages. Since 21% of returns are unaccompanied minors, Dir Lower thinks that the district alone may have sent back about 8,400 unaccompanied youngsters.

4.7 Human Rights Violations During Deportation

Forced returns from Pakistan are accompanied by systematic human rights abuses, documented by UNHCR, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch. Table 2 summarises the key violations and legal framework.

Table 2. Human Rights Violations and Legal Framework for Forced Returns from Pakistan

Violation / Legal Issue	Description	Documentation
Arbitrary detention	Over 800 Afghans detained in Islamabad since January 2025, including PoR cardholders	UNHCR, 2025f
Night raids and asset confiscation	Arrests during nighttime without warning; families forced to abandon homes, businesses, vehicles	Amnesty International, 2025
No legal support or due process	Detainees denied access to lawyers or family notification	HRW, 2025
Violation of non-refoulement	Forced return of PoR holders (recognised refugees) to a country where they face persecution risk	UNHCR, 2025b; OHCHR, 2025
Risk of persecution in Afghanistan	Former officials, journalists, minorities face torture, imprisonment, extrajudicial killing	OHCHR, 2025
ICC arrest warrants	Taliban leaders wanted for crimes against humanity (persecution on gender and political grounds)	ICC, 2025
UN experts' condemnation	"Returns must be halted immediately. Afghanistan is not a safe country for returnees."	OHCHR, 2025
Amnesty International position	All forced returns must end; about 60% of those returned are women and children	Amnesty International, 2025

In Dir Lower, the expedited evacuation of Chakdara camp in February 2026 gave families as little as 48 hours' notice, forcing them to sell household goods at a fraction of their value or abandon them entirely (District Administration Dir Lower, 2026b).

4.8 Taliban Policies for Returnees: Land, Housing, and Credibility

The Taliban have announced several policies ostensibly aimed at reintegrating returnees, but their credibility is highly questionable. Table 3 provides a comparative analysis.

Table 3. Taliban Reintegration Policies: Claims versus Reality

Policy Area	Taliban Claim	Independent Assessment	Gap
Land distribution	13,895 acres allocated across 8 provinces; Sheikh Mati settlement (Zabul) houses 5,000 returnees	Most land is barren, without water, roads, or schools; only 3 of 35 claimed townships have basic infrastructure	AAN, 2025; UNHCR, 2025c
Residential townships	60 townships established in 29 provinces	No functioning schools or health clinics in the majority; most returnees report receiving no assistance	AAN, 2025
Tax exemption for investors	Five-year tax exemption, free land in industrial parks, housing	Few investors have returned; Taliban's international isolation deters business	Taliban Ministry of Economy, 2025
Overall returnee assistance	"All returnees will be provided housing and livelihood support"	80% of returnees lack permanent housing; 90% live below \$5/day	UNHCR, 2025a; UNDP, 2025

Analysts call them "empty promises, bitter realities" and a "propaganda campaign" to hide the Taliban's inability (Afghan Analysts Network, 2025). These efforts are small compared to the demand for 5.5 million returnees.

4.9 Impact on Pakistan's Host Communities

Pakistan's local economy is also affected by the forced return of Afghan refugees. This is a truth that cuts both ways.

1. A lack of workers and growing wages: For years, Afghan workers were the backbone of Pakistan's informal economy, working on construction sites, in brick kilns, and at fruit markets. A contractor near Jamrud Road said that the cost of daily-wage labor went up from Rs 1,200 to Rs 1,800 since there weren't enough workers (Dawn, 2025). Afghan immigrants in Mansehra drove trucks, cultivated fields, and ran tea kiosks. Their leaving has messed up supply chains.
2. Possible benefits for Pakistani workers: Some economists say that repatriation would aid Pakistani workers in the long run by lowering competition and raising wages to more fair levels (The News, 2025). Provincial officials think that providing services to undocumented people costs the government over Rs 20 billion a year. This money may now be used for other things (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2025).
3. Security talk: Talk about security has made people in Pakistan more anti-Afghan. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that Pakistan can no longer host Afghan refugees permanently because of growing tensions at the border and terrorist attacks (Dawn, 2025).

In Dir Lower, for example, the evacuation of the Chakdara camp means that thousands of people who used to shop and rent to refugees will no longer be able to do so. A survey in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa indicated that 62% of people think the economy will get better once refugees return, while 41% think the flood of refugees will hurt jobs. This shows that people in the area have mixed feelings about the situation (Ahmad & Khan, 2022).

4.10 Social Cohesion and Host Community Tensions in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's social fabric is being shattered by the mass return. The UNDP states that "fragile host districts bear the burden of displacement, eroding social cohesion and putting community resilience under pressure" (UNDP, 2025). Local services and social cohesion are being strained by the struggle

for housing, water, and employment.

1. Competition for resources: In provinces with a high number of returns, host towns report that health facilities are overcrowded, rent prices have increased (tripling nationally), and there is insufficient water. In total 34 provinces, the UNDP survey examined 48,711 Afghan houses, including over 1,500 families who had returned home.
2. Returnee isolation: Returnees, some of whom have lived abroad for decades or their whole lives, come back with few social connections and limited access to housing, jobs, and services. Families living in Dir Lower returnee settlements say that local Afghans who never left see them as "outsiders," which causes social problems (IOM qualitative notes, 2025).

4.11 Environmental Impact and Resource Scarcity

The rapid growth of the population is making the environment worse faster. Kabul is facing a developing water issue that is made worse by expanding urbanization, climate-related weaknesses, and unregulated bore well exploitation because of the return of refugees (VIF, 2025). According to the UNDP (2025), 45% of returnees in the US get their water from open springs or unprotected wells. Earthquakes, flash floods, and severe droughts are hitting the country hard. In August 2025, a big quake killed more than 2,200 people in areas with a lot of returnees (OCHA, 2025).

For Dir Lower returnees who are moving to eastern Afghanistan (Nangarhar and Kunar provinces), cutting down trees to build shelters is becoming a problem. Returnees who don't have access to formal building materials hack down trees for firewood and shelter, which makes the already high rates of deforestation even worse (UNEP, 2025).

4.12 Internal Displacement and Secondary Displacement

People move about negatively when they are forced to return. Afghanistan's population has increased by 12% since September 2023 due to the return of more over 5.5 million people. In the first four months of 2025 alone, around 350,000 Afghans were compelled to flee their homes, according to IOM figures. Both those who relocated inside Afghanistan and those who relocated abroad fall within this category (IOM, 2025). According to the UN, widespread returns are exacerbating internal displacement.

People who return back from Dir Lower may have to move again if they can't find land, housing, or work in their home province. Many people who come back to Afghanistan don't have any family land there because they sold it years ago or never held it. They go to informal settlements on the outskirts of Jalalabad or Kabul, but landlords or Taliban officials kick them out, which causes them to move again (UNHCR, 2025c).

4.13 Humanitarian Funding Gap

The reintegration response is severely underfunded in every way. UNHCR asked for \$216 million for its work in Afghanistan year 2026, but as of February 2026, it had only gotten 8% of that sum. The WHO's health appeal for Afghanistan is barely 12% financed (WHO, 2026). Donors promised to give Afghanistan \$3.8 billion a year, but by early 2025, that amount had decreased to \$300 million (World Bank, 2025). Because of this, more than half of those who have returned do not have access to consistent electricity, many do not have clean water, and more than half of families say they have to skip medical care to afford food (UNHCR, 2025a). More than half of the families that came back also don't have civil documents, such ID cards that show who they are or where they came from.

5. Legal and Human Rights Framework

5.1 Violations of the Principle of Non-Refoulement

The concept of non-refoulement, which is part of the 1951 Refugee Convention and customary international law, says that no one can be forced to go back to a country where they are at genuine risk

of serious human rights abuses. Pakistan did not sign the 1951 Convention, but it is nonetheless bound by international law. UN experts have consistently spoken out against Pakistan's forced returns, saying, "Returns must stop right away." "Afghanistan is not a safe country for returnees" (OHCHR, 2025). Amnesty International says that any forced returns must stop right away. They also say that around 60% of those returned are women and children (Amnesty International, 2025).

It is especially bad to force PoR cardholders—people who have been recognized as refugees for decades—to go back to their home countries. UNHCR has shown that returns in Afghanistan are at serious danger of persecution for political reasons (being a former government member), religious reasons (being a Shia or Sikh minority), and gender reasons (being a woman or girl under Taliban limitations) (UNHCR, 2025b). UNHCR has asked countries to protect people's right to refuge and make sure that no one is sent back to a location where their rights and freedoms are in danger.

5.2 International Criminal Court and Accountability

In 2025, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for the Taliban's "Supreme Leader" and Chief Justice for crimes against humanity, specifically for persecuting people based on their gender and political beliefs (ICC, 2025). This decision has immediate effects for forced returns: sending people back to a government whose leaders are wanted by the ICC for crimes against humanity raises fundamental problems about how accountable countries are under international law.

5.3 Protection Risks for Vulnerable Groups

Certain groups encounter increased protection risks upon repatriation:

1. Ex-government officials, judges, prosecutors, human rights defenders, and journalists: There are documented examples of incarceration, torture, and extrajudicial killing (OHCHR, 2025).
2. Religious and ethnic minorities: Shia Hazaras, Sikhs, and Hindus are being persecuted on purpose, forced to convert, and have their property taken away (Amnesty International, 2025).
3. LGBT+ people: The Taliban's view of sharia law says they should be put to death (Human Rights Watch, 2025). • Women and girls: not allowed to go to secondary school, work in most jobs, or travel around freely without a male guardian (UN Women, 2025).

6. Regional and International Dimensions

6.1 Returns from Beyond Pakistan

While this article focuses on Pakistan, forced repatriation from other nations make the situation worse:

1. Returns from Tajikistan: In 2025, 1,953 Afghans were sent back to Tajikistan, with a big jump in July (955 deportations) (IOM, 2025).
2. European returns: The European Union, Germany, and Austria have increased their attempts to expel Afghans by force. According to reports, Germany and the Taliban are nearing a deportation deal (Deutsche Welle, 2025). The EU has been criticized for allowing Iran and Pakistan to manage border security.
3. Macroeconomic implications: An IMF study looks at how the Afghan diaspora affects the economy of nearby countries using FSGM modeling. It finds that the effects are bad for these economies (IMF, 2025).

6.2 Taliban Reintegration Policies: Promise vs. Reality

Table 3 shows that the Taliban's promises to give land and homes to returnees have mostly not been kept. The Afghan Analysts Network did an independent check and concluded that only three of the 60 declared townships had basic infrastructure (such water and roads), and none of them have schools or health centers that work (AAN, 2025). Most people who have returned say that the Taliban did not help

them at all. The land that is given is generally in rural, dry places where there are no jobs or services.

6.3 Regional Macroeconomic Implications

A lot of Afghan workers have left Pakistan, which has caused a scarcity of workers in Pakistan's informal sector and raised wages. At the same time, Afghanistan's economy has shrunk by 25% since 2021, and the returnees' population growth has lowered GDP per capita by 4%. Remittances, which used to make up 4% of Afghanistan's GDP, have fallen. The IMF says that if returns keep going at the same rate, the crisis might slow down regional GDP growth by 0.2–0.5% per year (IMF, 2025).

7. Discussion

7.1 The Dir Lower Case in Comparative Perspective

The 21,000 residents of Chakdara camp were forcibly evacuated in February 2026 without any prior notice, demonstrating the coercive nature of Pakistan's IFRP. This approach violates international norms for courteous, voluntary repatriation. In contrast to other forced repatriation situations, such the Rohingya from Bangladesh, Afghanistan's economy shrank by 25% after 2021, making reintegration difficult. Furthermore, no other contemporary forced repatriation scenario includes this degree of economic collapse, an ICC arrest warrant for the nation's de facto rulers, and a Taliban-imposed restriction on employment for half of the workforce.

7.2 Theoretical Framework: Compounded Vulnerability

We use the concept of compounded vulnerability to show how pre-existing structural weaknesses—such as Taliban prohibitions, climate shocks, economic collapse, a disrupted health system, and judicial impunity—combine with forced return to produce outcomes that are worse than the sum of their individual effects. For example, a child who is undernourished (health dimension), whose mother is unable to work because of Taliban restrictions (gender dimension), does not have access to education (education dimension), lives in an area with limited water resources (environment dimension), and was deported as an unaccompanied minor (child protection dimension) faces multiple interconnected deprivations that cannot be addressed by a single sector intervention. The classic return migration hypothesis (Black et al., 2004), which examined economic, social, and psychological capital, is expanded upon by this paradigm. As important factors, we take into account institutional vulnerability (the host state's capacity and policies), environmental vulnerability (climate and resource scarcity), and legal vulnerability (the absence of protection from persecution).

7.3 Policy Paradox: Pakistan's Strategic Miscalculation

The findings contradict Pakistan's stated justifications for forced repatriation, which include reducing security threats and the financial burden. Afghanistan's poor returnees are more likely to participate in smuggling, militancy, or irregular re-migration, which might eventually undermine regional stability. Additionally, the loss of refugee workers in Pakistan's agricultural and construction sectors has resulted in a labor shortage and increased salaries, which is detrimental to Pakistan's economy. The economic and reputational harm caused by violating human rights much outweighs the projected Rs 20 billion saved by not providing services to unauthorized individuals.

7.4 Unsustainability and Re-Migration

The lack of reintegration is already causing more people to move. Only 5% of the people who returned said they plan to leave Afghanistan again, although more than 10% know someone who has already moved back since returning. These choices aren't based on a desire to go; they're based on the fact that many people can't construct a life that is both feasible and decent. UNHCR is really worried about how long these returns will last.

7.5 Legal Accountability

The ICC's arrest warrants for Taliban commanders change the way the law works. States that force people to go back to Afghanistan may be helping to put them in danger of crimes against humanity. This argument has not yet been tried in international courts, but it may be used to challenge laws that force people to return.

7.6 The Humanitarian Funding Gap and Its Consequences

Humanitarian financial deficits are more than simply a statistic; they have actual, perhaps fatal consequences. UNHCR's yearly funding has decreased from \$3.8 billion to \$300 million, and it only has 8% of the funds required for its 2026 request. This implies a reduction in essential services. Over 422 medical institutions have closed, making it more difficult for almost 3 million Afghans to get the necessary medical treatment. Only one in four children who need assistance with acute malnutrition may get it from the World Food Programme. According to UNHCR, "This year, our focus is on supporting the reintegration of returnees." Since we have been in Afghanistan for the past 40 years, we have the access, presence, and expertise to provide communities with the assistance they claim they most need, including housing, protection services, and support for women's livelihoods. However, without sufficient funding, these suggestions remain only concepts.

7.7 The Psychological Toll: A Silent Epidemic

Returnees' mental health issues are a silent plague that receives far too little attention. According to medical staff, returnees return "physically unwell, emotionally distressed, and in urgent need of care" (PMC, 2025). People are more likely to have mental health issues in Afghanistan because to the combination of being uprooted from their homes, losing belongings, being cut off from relatives, and living in appalling circumstances. However, mental health services are almost nonexistent. Less than 1% of total humanitarian funding requirements are met by WHO requests for mental health and psychosocial aid (WHO, 2026). Individuals' health, family stability, and community strength will all be negatively impacted in the long run by this carelessness.

7.8 The Environmental Dimension: A Neglected Crisis

The impact of mass returns on the environment has not received much consideration in policy discussions. Since 45% of returnees get their water from open springs or unprotected wells, the strain on already limited water resources is significant (UNDP, 2025). Cutting down trees to construct shelters is another new issue that worsens the environment in an area already vulnerable to natural catastrophes. Earthquakes, flash floods, and extreme drought are among the climatic shocks that are severely affecting the nation. The additional population strain just exacerbates the situation (OCHA, 2025). Reintegration programs must include environmental repair, but the present budget level renders this unfeasible.

7.9 The Role of International Donors: A Withdrawal of Responsibility

International assistance has drastically decreased from \$3.8 billion to \$300 million year, indicating that donor nations are no longer willing to assist (World Bank, 2025). Despite the fact that Afghanistan's humanitarian needs have increased significantly due to the large number of returnees, this funding cut has occurred. Donor nations cannot claim ignorance of the disaster; UNHCR has made plain the scope of the obligations. Millions of vulnerable people would suffer greatly as a result of the budget decrease, which is a political decision to diminish Afghanistan's significance.

8. Conclusion

A humanitarian catastrophe has resulted from the forcible repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan's District Dir Lower between 2023 and 2026, which concluded with the evacuation of the Chakdara camp in February 2026. In addition to being impoverished (90% live on less than \$5 per day and 88% are in debt), returnees also face severe health issues (3.7 million children suffer from

malnutrition), a failing educational system (50,000 minors are deported), severe psychological trauma, worsening environmental conditions, and a decline in social cohesion. Notably, 61% of all returnees are under the age of 18, and forced returns violate customary international law's non-refoulement norm. Secondary displacement is occurring since Afghanistan's weak host towns are unable to keep up with Pakistan's economy due to labor shortages and increasing salaries. This case study demonstrates how returning to a failing economy with several pre-existing flaws exacerbates the situation. It is difficult for single-sector solutions to recover in this situation due to many forms of deprivation. The de facto Afghan government, Pakistan, and the international community must quickly switch from forced repatriation to assisted, voluntary repatriation with extensive, multi-year reintegration programs. If you don't, the region's cycle of debt, instability, and migration will persist, further undermining the international legal framework protecting refugees. "We are extremely concerned about how long these returns will last," the UNHCR said. "People are leaving because they are unable to reconstruct a viable and dignified life, not because they want to. Afghanistan's inability to repatriate 5.5 million people is the issue, not if it can. The issue is whether the world will take any action to prevent an even greater humanitarian catastrophe."

9. Recommendations

Based on the evidence from many different sources, we suggest the following steps. First, Pakistan should stop sending back PoR cardholders and unaccompanied children right away because doing so would break international child protection and non-refoulement laws. An independent monitoring system should be set up at the Torkham and Chaman borders, with the UNHCR and OHCHR in charge. Human rights violations such as night raids, detention, and asset confiscation should be recorded so that they may be sent to the ICC. To protect children, deporting children who are not with an adult must stop right away. There should also be family tracing and reunification programs with UNICEF. People who need international protection, such as former officials, journalists, activists, LGBT+ people, and religious minorities, should not be subject to the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. To help with the humanitarian crisis, donors need to fully fund UNHCR's \$216 million appeal and WHO's health appeal for Afghanistan. They also need to raise cash assistance from less than \$200 per family to at least \$1,000, plus help with rent for several months. Finally, they need to send mobile health clinics to major return points with integrated malnutrition screening and treatment. In the fields of education and mental health, programs that help kids who have dropped out of school learn faster and safe places for girls to go to school (when possible) should be set up. Frontline health workers should also be trained in trauma-informed care, and community-based psychosocial support groups should be set up. To help people get back into the economy and the environment, Islamic microfinance institutions should give returnee families zero-interest loans. Also, cash-for-work initiatives focusing on restoring the environment (such as forestry and water infrastructure) should be put into place. The international community should put pressure on the Taliban to keep their promises on land distribution and make sure that housing and infrastructure are verified by an impartial body. They should also push for changes in policy regarding girls' secondary education and women's employment rights. For regional cooperation, a trilateral framework (Pakistan-Afghanistan-UNHCR) should be set up for managed, voluntary returns with reintegration packages. The ILO and World Bank should also help Pakistani communities that are short on workers by giving them transitional support. Finally, a multi-sectoral returnee tracking system should be set up to keep track of health, education, employment, mental health, and protection indicators. A long-term research of returnee outcomes should also be done to help shape policy.

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