

# Pakistan

Pakistan is a lower-middle income country in central Asia with a population of over 235 million (World Bank, 2021). It faces challenges including an oversaturated education system and an out-of-school rate of 44% – the second highest rate globally (UNICEF Pakistan, n.d.). Regional political instability and conflict have given way to high levels of forced displacement, alongside internal displacement spurred by deteriorating climatic, security, and economic conditions. Recent events, including the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and flooding in 2022, have led to further refugee flows.

## Refugee context

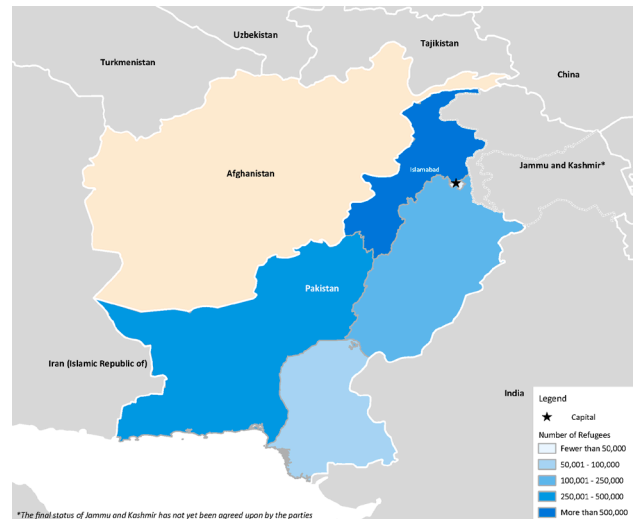
As of 2022, an estimated 3.7 million Afghans are living in Pakistan. Afghan refugees hold a variety of status types, as will be discussed in later sections.

| Documentation type                           | Number             |
|--|--------------------|
| Registered Afghan refugees (PoR cardholders) | 1,316,257          |
| Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders        | 840,000            |
| Unregistered members of registered families  | 140,872            |
| Undocumented Afghans                         | 775,000            |
| New arrivals                                 | 600,000            |
| <b>Total number of Afghans in Pakistan</b>   | <b>3.7 million</b> |

Source: Data from UNHCR, 2023a. Data for ACC holders, new arrivals and undocumented refugees are estimations only.

Afghan refugees arrived in Pakistan in several waves, starting in 1979 with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Subsequent waves followed the War on Terror (2001) and allied troops’ withdrawal in 2021, which resulted in the Taliban takeover (EUAA, 2022). Refugees are dispersed across 54 refugee villages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan, and Punjab, and in urban areas including Peshawar and Quetta, the capitals of KP and Balochistan. UNHCR and the government estimate that half of all Afghan refugees are under 18 years old (GoP & UNHCR, 2022).

Figure 1: Location of Afghan refugees in Pakistan



Sources: Population data from UNHCR, 2023b, based on data accessed in January 2023.

## Key education indicators

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| HDI ranking (2021)                         | 161 of 191 |
| Gross enrolment ratio – Pre-primary (2019) | 83%        |
| Gross enrolment ratio – Primary (2019)     | 95%        |
| Gross enrolment ratio – Secondary (2019)   | 45%        |
| Gross enrolment ratio – Tertiary (2019)    | 12%        |
| Expected years of schooling                | 9.4        |
| Learning adjusted years of schooling       | 5.1        |

### Learning outcomes

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Percentage of Grade 8 students achieving Grade 2-level competencies in literacy (2021) | 74% |
| Percentage of Grade 8 students achieving Grade 2-level competencies in numeracy (2021) | 63% |

Sources: HDI ranking from UNDP, 2022; enrolment rates from UIS, n.d.; years of schooling from World Bank, 2020; learning outcomes from ASER, 2022.

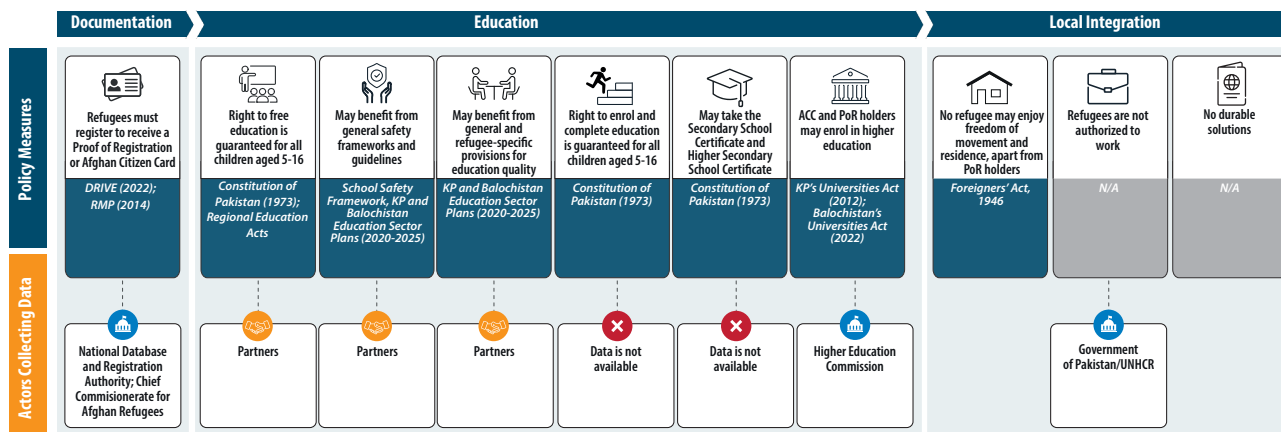
## Inclusion of refugees in the national education system

### Normative framework

Pakistan has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, nor has it implemented national refugee legislation. Refugees are thus treated as provided by the **Foreigners Act (1946)**. The Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) is responsible for managing refugee affairs, with the Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CCAR), established in 1979, responsible for affairs related to Afghan refugees and coordination of provincial CARs (CCAR, n.d). In 2012, Pakistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Afghanistan and UNHCR adopted the **Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)**, which aims to guarantee equitable responsibility sharing across countries and coordinate regional and national policy responses. In 2017, Pakistan adopted the **Comprehensive Repatriation and Management Policy of Afghan Nationals (RMP)**. While the national response is primarily based on support for voluntary repatriation, the government has committed to strengthening access to social services, including health care and education (UNHCR, 2022b).

### Overview: Policy pathway for refugee education

While refugees are granted access to education in Pakistan, limited data is available to monitor their progression, and options for local integration are restricted.



### Documentation

In 2006, the government and UNHCR conducted a joint biometric campaign to issue cost-free Proof of Registration (PoR) biometric cards issued by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) (GoP and UNHCR, 2022). Cards were renewed in 2010–2012 and 2014–2015, with validity extended until 2020. In 2022, a Documentation Renewal and Information Verification Exercise (DRIVE) was conducted to issue new PoR cards, valid until 30 June 2023, to former cardholders (UNHCR, n.d.b). Children of PoR cardholders may receive their own at the age of 5 (UNHCR, n.d.c). PoR holders enjoy the right to remain in Pakistan, freedom of movement, and exemption from Foreigners Act regulations. Under the National Action Plan (2014), Afghans entering Pakistan must follow regular visa regulations, and may seek asylum with UNHCR upon arrival (UNHCR, 2022b). In 2017, 840,000 Afghans received an Afghan Citizen Card (ACC), which regularized their stay but provided less protection than the PoR (EUAA, 2022). Afghans without a PoR or ACC are undocumented.



**For PoR holders, data are collected by the government and UNHCR through DRIVE.** DRIVE data include breakdowns by age, gender, arrival dates, province of origin in Afghanistan, ethnicity, location, and specific needs. UNHCR also documents refugee arrivals through its operational data portal, including breakdowns by protection status (PoR, ACC, undocumented refugees, and undocumented family members of registered refugees).

Number of Afghan children holding a PoR (2022): **661,161 (51.5% of PoR cardholders)**

Sources: GoP and UNHCR, 2022.

## Education and training

### Access to early childhood, primary and secondary education

The [Constitution of Pakistan](#) (18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Art. 25, 2010) guarantees free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 5 and 16, to be provided by provincial authorities. Afghan refugees may enrol in school upon presenting a valid birth certificate<sup>33</sup> or a PoR or ACC card (Hervé, 2018). Education laws in refugee-hosting provinces have reaffirmed the universal right to education, including the [Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act \(2017\)](#) in KP, the [Compulsory Education Act \(2014\)](#) in Balochistan, and the [Free and Compulsory Education Act \(2014\)](#) in Punjab. Provincial ESPs, including the [KP ESP 2020/21 – 2024/25](#) and the [Balochistan ESP 2020-2025](#), have included measures to improve access to education for refugees.



**KP's ESP provides for the inclusion of refugees in Annual School Censuses, but public reports do not include disaggregated refugee data.** No other provincial or national education data sources disaggregate enrolment by refugee status. UNHCR disseminates data on refugee enrolment in quarterly updates, but covers PoR holders only. In 2018, UNHCR conducted a Mapping of Education Facilities and Refugee Enrolment in Main Refugee Hosting Areas and Refugee Villages in Pakistan, providing disaggregated enrolment figures for refugees in 25 high-density Afghan refugee population districts and 45 refugee villages.

Total enrolment of Afghan refugees (and enrolment rate) (2017): **119,403 (22%)**

Children supported with access to primary education (2022 Q4): **80,609**

Children supported with access to secondary education (2022 Q4): **12,239**

Children supported with access to non-formal education (2022 Q4): **18,463**

Sources: 2017 enrolment data from [UNHCR, 2018](#); 2022 data from [UNHCR, 2022a](#).

### Safe learning environment

The [Pakistan School Safety Framework \(PSSF\)](#), developed in 2017 by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) with support from UNICEF, provides for the implementation of a School Safety Plan and establishes guidelines for the MoE to incorporate safety and DRR measures in schools, including through safety sensitization and trainings. KP and Balochistan's ESPs include measures to improve WASH facilities, although no refugee-specific provisions are included.



**National EMIS and KP's ASC provide data on WASH facilities in government schools (such as latrine or drinking water access) but do not provide information specific to refugee access to such facilities.** A UNHCR report mapping Afghan education included an overview of WASH facilities shortages in refugee village schools.

Proportion of urban schools identifying toilets as missing facilities (2018): **29%**

Proportion of schools in refugee villages identifying toilets as missing facilities (2018): **28%**

Source: Data from [UNHCR, 2017](#).

### Quality learning conditions

KP and Balochistan's ESPs both establish plans for the phased implementation of the Minimum National Standards for Quality Education (2016), which include measures related to teacher training, facilities, examinations, and textbooks. In Balochistan, the ESP included the provision of textbooks in Pashto and Dari in its strategy. KP provides for the implementation of the Single National Curriculum to improve education quality, including in refugee schools.

<sup>33</sup> This applies for the 20% of the refugee population that are not registered. Given low levels of birth registration in Pakistan (~40% in 2018), it is likely that many Afghan refugees are excluded as a result (UNICEF, 2023).



**Data related to educational quality for Afghan refugees are limited.** The national EMIS and KP's ASC provide literacy rates and pupil-to-classroom and pupil-to-teacher ratios at all levels of education. However, while Afghan refugees are included in the reports, the data are not disaggregated. Likewise, ASER Reports do not disaggregate by protection status or nationality. In the absence of national data, UNHCR's one-time report mapping Afghan education provides some data on infrastructure shortages.

Proportion of urban schools missing classroom facilities: **29%**

Proportion of schools in refugee villages missing classroom facilities: **28%**

Proportion of primary schools in refugee villages missing classroom furniture: **95%**

Source: Data from UNHCR, 2017.

## Access to transitions

The Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) regulates two exams for learners in Pakistan: the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) in Grade 10 and the Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) in Grade 12. Students must pay fees to sit SSC exams (FBISE, n.d.). Afghan refugees may sit for the SSC and progress to higher secondary education upon receiving a passing grade (provided they met the documentation requirements for enrolment).



National EMIS provides data on transition rates every year, but the data are not disaggregated by nationality or by refugee status. The FBISE does not publish exam results, nor are results published by UNHCR.

## Certification of learning

The 18th Amendment of the Constitution (Art. 25) guarantees education provision to refugees, thereby ensuring access to exams. As such, Afghan refugees can sit the HSSC at the end of Grade 12 upon paying fees, and obtain certification of learning upon receiving a passing grade.



Data on HSSC results and certification of learning is not made publicly available. Just as with the SSC, results are not disseminated by the FBISE or UNHCR.

## Access to technical, vocational and tertiary education

Tertiary education is regulated by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). The **HEC Vision 2025**<sup>34</sup> aims to increase tertiary enrolment, including for disadvantaged students and girls. The **KP Universities Act (2012)** provides that education shall be 'open to all' and grants institutions autonomy in admissions. Similar provisions are made under the **Balochistan Universities Act (2022)**. Public sector universities have allocated quotas for refugees (UNHCR, 2021). However, refugees are required to present a valid ID and visa to enrol in higher education, which in practice hinders access. HEC provides scholarships for Afghan refugees, including the Afghanistan Scholarship Programme (ASP) at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)-Lahore and the Allama Muhammad Iqbal Scholarships for Afghan Nationals, with recipients selected jointly by HEC and the Embassy of Pakistan in Kabul (HEC, 2017; *ibid.*, 2020). Afghans may also apply for Scholarships for Nationals of Least Developed Countries of OIC (HEC, 2021). UNHCR provides DAFI scholarships to refugees in Pakistan.

34. While the HEC Vision 2025 is not available online, a summary of the policy by Universities UK International is available [here](#).



**The HEC publishes data on tertiary enrolment of foreign students, but does not disaggregate by nationality or refugee status.** However, it disseminates data on Afghan nationals receiving scholarships in its **Annual Reports**, available from 2003/04 to 2020/21. UNHCR's 2021 DAFI report provides data on the number of refugees obtaining scholarships to study in Pakistan, as well as on their country of origin and field of study. Almost all recipients were from Afghanistan. Country-specific DAFI reports are not published on a regular basis.

Afghan nationals receiving HEC scholarships (2021): **2,789**

Afghan refugees receiving the DAFI scholarship in Pakistan (2021, male): **492**

Afghan refugees receiving the DAFI scholarship in Pakistan (2021, female): **149**

Sources: Data on HEC scholarships from [HEC, 2021](#); data on DAFI scholarships from [UNHCR, 2021](#).

## Local integration

Per the Foreigners Act of 1946, undocumented refugees may not work. Likewise, PoR holders do not have the right to work in Pakistan (EUAA, 2022). Thus, 2.8 million Afghans do not have access to the formal labour market and are confined to work primarily in the informal sector. Access to legal status beyond the PoR is limited for most Afghans.



**The 2022 DRIVE report included data on income source and levels, employment type, and employment sectors for PoR cardholders.** It did not cover ACC holders or undocumented refugees.

Number (percentage) of refugees employed in daily wages labour (2021): **120,727 (17.2%)**

Number (percentage) of refugees with a self-owned business (2021): **49,026 (7%)**

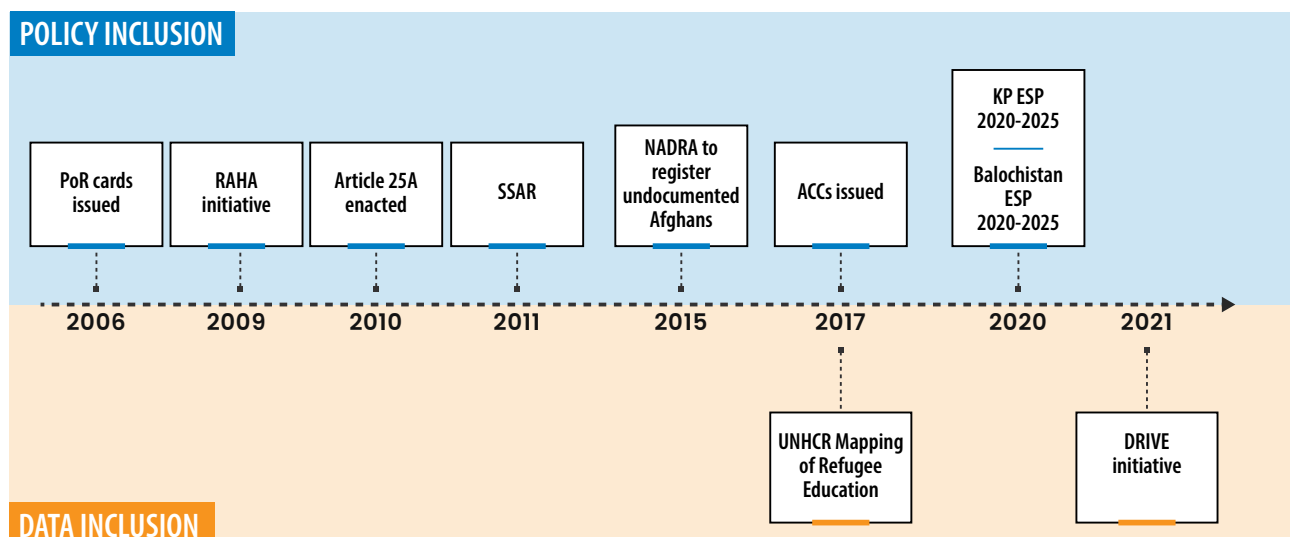
Number (percentage) of refugees with permanent/salary-based employment (2021): **10,303 (1.5%)**





Number (percentage) of refugees with no income source (2021): **430,915 (61.3%)**

Source: Data from [GoP and UNHCR, 2022](#).

## Trajectory of inclusion of refugees in policy and data

Pakistan has followed a positive trajectory for the inclusion of refugees in education policy. Progress on data is less clear: while KP and Balochistan provide for further refugee data inclusion in EMIS, initiatives at the national level remain limited. Enablers and barriers to further policy and data reform are outlined below.



| Enabling factors  | Constraining factors   |
|---|--|
| <p> <b>At the provincial level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, there are clear signs of political will to include refugees in education from a policy lens.</b> Both KP and Balochistan’s ESPs for 2020-2025 included provisions to facilitate access to education for refugees, as well as for enhanced quality of learning. ESPs also provide for improved M&amp;E systems, thereby paving the way towards greater inclusion of refugees in data systems.</p> | <p> <b>A major barrier to the tracking of refugee learners is the lack of documentation for refugees.</b> UNHCR estimates that 775,000 refugees are undocumented in Pakistan. This hinders Afghan refugees’ access to higher education institutions, where a valid passport and visa are required to enrol. From a data perspective, undocumented refugees are not reflected in national data systems, including in EMIS. The 840,000 ACC holders are also not reflected in data collection, including DRIVE.</p>             |
| <p> <b>Collaboration with UNHCR and other data partners will help pave the way towards refugee inclusion in data systems.</b> The 2022 DRIVE Report, which provided substantial data on refugee needs, employment, and educational attainment, sets a positive precedent for data on refugee education. Similar joint data collection efforts could provide crucial insights to policy-makers in the future.</p>   | <p> <b>A lack of resources and capacity for national and provincial EMIS impedes data collection, processing, and dissemination processes.</b> KP and Balochistan’s recent ESPs acknowledge a lack of resources and efforts to improve M&amp;E processes. KP’s ESP notes difficulties in engaging technical specialists in relevant M&amp;E institutions. Balochistan similarly notes that efforts to standardize data collection across all school types and digitize data for public access have thus far been limited.</p> |

## Recommendations

### To the government:

- Establish systematic exchanges of information between central and local levels to favour multilevel learning. Provincial policies and practices, such as KP’s integration of disaggregated refugee data in its ASC, can help inform federal policy-making for the inclusion of refugees in education policy and data systems.
- Integrate variables on refugee educational attainment and school safety in national EMIS to improve evidence-based interventions.

### To the international community:

- Direct funding and capacity-building efforts towards enhanced data collection and dissemination efforts.
- Systematize collaboration with the Government of Pakistan in conducting reviews of refugee populations’ needs. UNHCR should support the expansion and systematization of DRIVE going forward.



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## Country profile–Pakistan

Paving pathways for inclusion: Towards evidence-based policy-making for refugee education

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