In March 2014, a total of 1,351 Afghan refugees voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. Of this, 821 came from Iran, 524 from Pakistan and 6 from India.

During the first three months of 2014, a total of 2,346 Afghan refugees (averaging 26 individuals/day) voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. The rate of return so far this year shows a sharp decrease (56%) compared to the 5,281 Afghans who returned during the same period in 2013.

So far in 2014, return figure from Iran is higher compared to Pakistan returnee figure. The increase in returns from Iran may be largely attributed to the return of Afghan students who normally surrender their Amayesh card to obtain a VRF and voluntarily return to Afghanistan. After return they get a passport and visa to go back to Iran and continue their higher education in Iranian Universities. Reportedly Afghans who are willing to continue their education in Iran must obtain a passport and visa. In addition, it is also assumed that a number of Afghans opted for volrep from Iran, particularly during March, presumably because they wanted to take part in the election process.

However, overall return figure in 2014 is much lower (56%) compared to the total returnees during the same period in 2013. This is largely due to the extension of Proof of Registration (PoR) cards until 31 December 2015 in Pakistan, uncertain situation of Afghanistan in the lead up to elections results scheduled for April 2014 could be the primary factors of low returns in 2013 and so far in 2014. Winter season might be another reason for low return as well. Normally the return trends decline during the winter season. The peak of return season is between May and September each year.

**RETURN PROCESS**

A refugee wishing to return to Afghanistan with the assistance of UNHCR must approach UNHCR’s Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs) in the country of asylum to register for return and sign a Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF).

Repatriation from Pakistan is facilitated through two VRCs: Chamkani located in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhuwa and Baleli located in Quetta, Baluchistan. Repatriation from Iran is facilitated through Soleimankhani, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Mashhad VRCs, the Sub-Offices, or directly through the Border Crossing Station (BCS) at Dogharoun.

Upon return to Afghanistan, returnees are assisted at five encashment centres (ECs): Mohmand Dara (Nangarhar), Kabul (Kabul), Gardez (Paktiya), Jamal Mayna (Kandahar) and Herat (Herat).

At the ECs, depending on the province of origin, all Afghan returnees with VRFs received approximately US$ 200 per person (between US$30 - US$70 for transport and US$150 as a short-term assistance grant). The transportation grant varies according to the distance from the areas of asylum to the areas of origin. Returning refugees are also briefed on mine awareness and education procedures in Afghanistan at the EC. They can benefit from transit facilities for overnight stay and basic health services. All children under the age of five are vaccinated for polio and measles. Returnees are briefed also on how to access legal aid, if required.

In view of rising commodities and transportations costs in Afghanistan, UNHCR, in 2014, increased the cash grant from US$ 150 to US$ 200 per person.
Note: A total of 15,886 Afghan refugees who returned since 2002 from other countries were not included in the monthly return trends table and chart.
ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING

Between 1 January and 31 March 2014, a total of 234 interviews were conducted with returning refugees from Pakistan (120) and Iran (114). Interviewees were selected in two ways: at random (222) and from those with obvious protection concerns (12) at the first point of contact in Afghanistan, the UNHCR Transit/Encashment Centres in Kabul, Jalalabad (Mohmand Dara), Kandahar (Jamal Mayna), Gardez and Herat (GTO). This monitoring exercise helps UNHCR to identify return trends, push/pull factors and check on the level of information returnees received to make an informed choice to return home.

RETURNS FROM PAKISTAN

During Jan and Mar, a total of 120 interviews were conducted at ECs with newly arrived returnees. Among these, 65% were Male and 35% were Female, of whom:
- 2% were minors (12 to 17 years old)
- 88% between age of 18 and 59
- 10% were elderly (60+ years)

Ethnicity: 91% Pashtun, 4% Uzbek, 4% Tajik and 1% Turkmen

Years in exile:
- 77% left Afghanistan during Communist regime
- 8% during Taliban regime
- 6% stated they were born in Pakistan
- 5% during Mujahideen period
- 4% during Transitional government

Push factors

Among interviewed returnees from Pakistan, 78% cited economic factors as the primary reason for their return, followed by Afghan refugees settlement (Matani settlement closure in KPK in February) closure or relocation campaign (12%), fear of arrest and/or deportation (4%), alleged harassment by authorities (3%) and the deteriorating security conditions in the country of asylum (3%).

Complaints of police harassment/arrests in Pakistan is also reported by returnees as a concern. However, it is expected that the level of harassment/arrests would decrease as a result of the extension of PoR cards by the Government of Pakistan until 31 December 2015. The renewal process of PoR cards for Afghan refugees in Pakistan has been started in February and will be concluded in June 2014. It is expected that some 1.34 million Afghan Refugees (PoR card holders) will be issued with new PoR cards. The remaining 280,000 Afghans who are below 5 years of age will be registered and their details will be recorded on the back of their parents PoR cards. The expiry-date (31 December 2015) will be reflected in the new PoR cards.

Pull factors

27% of interviewed returnees cited improvement of the security situation* in some parts of Afghanistan as the primary reason influencing their decision to return, followed by the UNHCR’s assistance package (26%), land allocation scheme and/or UNHCR shelter program (20%), better employment opportunities in Afghanistan (19%), Improvement in health and education facilities (3%), reunion with the family/relatives in Afghanistan (3%) and none or reduced fear of persecution (2%).

Information on the Voluntary Repatriation Program

All of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan said that they had received adequate information to make an informed decision to return. Information on place of origin was mainly obtained through visits to Afghanistan (46%), from the Afghan community (30%), from UNHCR (16%) and other sources (8%). Among those who mentioned that they obtained information through visits to Afghanistan, all of them stated they travelled to Afghanistan by their own; 48% said they had visited Afghanistan few months ago, 37% said they had visited Afghanistan one year ago, 11% said two years ago and 4% said three years ago. When they were asked about the purpose of their visit, 48% said they came to Afghanistan to visit their relatives, 22% said they visited Afghanistan in order to assess the situation to make an informed decision prior to the return, 19% said they participated in a ceremony and 11% said they visited Afghanistan for business purpose.

Similarly, 43% of the interviewed returnees said that they obtained information about UNHCR’s repatriation operation directly from UNHCR. 42% said that they had been informed by the members of the Afghan community, 13% stated that they learned about volpae when they visited Afghanistan and 2% said they obtained information from other sources.

Alleged arrests/detentions and intimidations in Pakistan

Nearly 2% of the interviewed returnees alleged that they had been arrested and/or detained during their stay in Pakistan due to unknown reasons e.g. expiration of PoR cards etc. Money extortion/bribery, by the Pakistani police, was a challenge for returnees in the past has been decreased (over 70% compared to 2013) since September 2013 when UNHCR Offices/VRCs in Pakistan started issuing complaint collection form. Returning families are provided with a form and hotline number to report any problem (bribery, transportation tax, theft cases on the road, losing belonging, traffic incident and, etc.) to the UNHCR border monitors based at Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points. However, it is still remains a concern. Some 13% of interviewed returnees stated that they faced problems (e.g. extortion by police) while traveling from the VRC to Torkham border point. In addition, one family reported in March that they paid bribe to border police (Pakistani side) based in Spin Boldak in order to cross the border. This is new as this problem was not reported in the past by those returnees came via Spin Boldak. Most of those faced problems alleged that they were asked by the Police to pay bribes because they were carrying livestock, construction material (used beams), or to avoid a search of the trucks.

*Of those who cited the improvement of security situation in some parts of Afghanistan as primary pull factor of their return, some 53% returned to relatively secure provinces such as Kabul, Takhar, Balkh and Sari Pul. While 47% returned to insecure provinces such as Kandahar (mainly Kandahar city), Helmand (mainly Lashkargah), Baghlan (mainly to provincial capital Pul Khumri) Farah (Farah city), Faryab (Maimana), Logar and Wardak.

3
Reasons for not returning to place of origin
Out of a total of 120 respondents, 49 returnees stated that they do not intend to repatriate to their place of origin due to the following reasons: lack of housing (33%), lack of land (22%), lack of public services (16%), insecurity (12%), lack of income generation opportunities (10%) and other reasons (7%).

On accommodation, 58% of interviewed returnees from Pakistan said that they plan to stay with relatives, 31% indicated that they will rent accommodation, and 11% said that they own a house in Afghanistan.

When asked “Do you have any concerns about your return to Afghanistan?” 92% of the interviewed returnees said “Yes”. 62% of the concerns related to not having land to start agricultural activities while 27% related to having land but no shelter. 10% indicated lack of job opportunities and only 1% noted security as a concern. The primary obstacles discouraging Afghan refugees to make a decision for return have been lack of shelter and land.

RETURNS FROM IRAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Jan and Mar, a total of 114 interviews were conducted at Herat EC with newly arrived returnees from Iran. Among these, 78% were Male and 22% Female, of whom:</th>
<th>Years in exile:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 96% between age of 18 and 59</td>
<td>• 46% left Afghanistan during communist regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 4% were elderly (60+ years)</td>
<td>• 34% during Taliban regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: 53 Tajik, 31% Hazara, 13% Pashtun and 3% Uzbek</td>
<td>• 17% stated they were born in Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2% during Transitional government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1% during Mujahedding period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Push factors
Among the 114 interviewed returnees from Iran, 83% stated economic factors in Iran as the primary reason for return, followed by fear of arrest and/or deportation (9%), alleged harassment by the authorities (5%), lack of school and health facilities (2%) and other reasons (1%).

Pull factors
74% on interviewed returnees from Iran indicated the Government land allocation scheme and/or UNHCR shelter program as the primary reason influencing their decision to return, followed by improvements of the security situation in some parts of Afghanistan (24%), none or reduced fear of persecution (1%) and UNHCR’s assistance package (1%).

Information on the Voluntary Repatriation Program
All of the interviewed returnees from Iran said that they had received adequate information to make an informed decision to return. Information on place of origin was mainly obtained from the Afghan community (78%) and through visits to Afghanistan (22%). Among those who mentioned that they obtained information through visits to Afghanistan, all of them stated they travelled to Afghanistan by their own; 80% said they had visited Afghanistan five years ago, 13% said they had visited Afghanistan three years ago and 7% said they had visited Afghanistan more than five years ago. When they were asked about the purpose of their visit; 60% said they came to Afghanistan to visit their relatives, 20% said they visited Afghanistan in order to assess the situation to make an informed decision prior to the return, 13% said they participated in a ceremony and 7% said they visited Afghanistan for business purpose.

It is been noted that returnees from Iran, compared to returnees from Pakistan, did not have the chance or opportunity to visit their places of origin recently. Majority of the returnees from Iran mentioned that they had visited Afghanistan five years ago. While majority (over 80%) of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan mentioned they had visited Afghanistan recently. This might be the case with returnees from Iran mainly due strict border control, long distance and probably changes in the security situation in Afghanistan.

Similarly, 79% of the interviewed returnees said that they obtained information about UNHCR’s repatriation operation from the members of the Afghan community, 20% stated that they learned about volrep when they visited Afghanistan and 1% said they obtained information from the media (TV).

Reasons for not returning to place of origin
Out of a total of 114 respondents, 42 returnees stated that they do not intend to repatriate to their area of origin due to the following reasons: lack of housing (48%), lack of public services (26%), lack of income generation opportunities (24%) and insecurity (2%).

On accommodation, 80% of those who returned from Iran said that they will stay with relatives, 16% indicated that they will rent accommodation and 4% said that they own a house.

When asked “Do you have any concerns about your return to Afghanistan?” nearly 80% of the interviewed returnees said “Yes”. Among them, 44% cited insecurity as a concern and 42% cited the lack of job opportunities as a concern. Only 6% of concerns related to not having land to start agricultural activities (which is very low compared to returnees from Pakistan) and 8% mentioned other reasons (mainly lack of shelter).

*Of those who cited the improvement of security situation in some parts of Afghanistan as the primary pull factor of their return, 78% returned to relatively secure provinces such as Kabul, Herat, Takhar and Balkh. While 22% returned to insecure provinces; Farah, Ghazni, Kunduz and Logar.
COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Between September and November 2013, UNHCR conducted a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) in order to gather information on critical gaps in services, as well as protection risks faced by UNHCR’s population of concern. The Department of Refugees and Repatriation, as well as other humanitarian actors, participated with UNHCR in numerous assessments, forming part of multi-functional teams in the field.

In total, interviews and focus group discussions were held in 21 Provinces, 46 districts, and 110 locations hosting high number of returnees and IDPs. Approximately 10,000 returned refugees and IDPs participated in either interviews or focus group discussions.

Summary findings of the CNA:
The findings of participatory assessments including focus group discussions show that the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities are the main obstacles in the process of sustainable return and reintegration, and can lead to other protection concerns. At the same time gaps in security, infrastructure, water, education, contribute to limited livelihood opportunities.

IDPs and returnees’ needs differ a lot from one province to the next, and often from one district to the next. This may be a reflection of differences in wealth between provinces, level of displacement and absorption capacity of the host community. Equally, it may also reflect the length of time a person has been experiencing displacement.

Generally, and acknowledging exceptions, the CNA indicated that the longer the return, the greater the chance of better living conditions. Across the country, IDPs face greater discrimination in accessing local services and resources compared to returnees. Returnees are generally better integrated into the social structure of the community than IDPs, although there are always exceptions, which is may be a credit to the repatriation efforts of UNHCR.

Across the country, the top 3 reported needs were shelter, water, and livelihoods:
• Almost half of all locations reported shelter as a first priority need. Furthermore, 75% of respondents reported that they have less access to shelter than the host population.
• More than a quarter of locations reporting water as a first priority need. Almost half reported that they have less access to water than the host population.
• Lack of livelihoods came up repeatedly not only in its own category, but also linked to numerous other categories. For instance, people highlighted the impact on livelihoods due to lack of land; insufficient water for farming; being located far from urban centres; poverty of the host community; and challenges due to being an outsider.

Most of the respondents have specific concerns. Women are usually afraid to report any legal dispute and domestic violence, especially to the police. Their participation in civil society and decision-making is low, partially due to the lack of forums for them to meet and discuss community issues. Often women’s perspectives are not represented in the Shura or Community Development Councils. One of the major concerns reported in the Needs Assessment pertains to education, which is a key factor in the effort towards peaceful co-existence within the community and is also a core component for durable peace, stability and socio-economic development. Children reported issues regarding access to education, low enrolment numbers, high drop-out rate, as well as the long distance to school in some locations, which resulted in girls being prevented from going to school by their families. Most girls are traditionally not allowed to attend school after the 8th grade which child labour especially affects boys and prevents regular school attendance. Inability to pay school fees, lack of transportation to school and a lack of female teachers are common challenges.

In summary the needs and gaps are high and reintegrations of refugee returnees cannot be viewed solely as a result of humanitarian interventions. Humanitarian assistance must be complemented with development interventions to ensure sustainability of interventions. Therefore, in order to ensure sustainable return and reintegration and addressing these obstacles, a comprehensive and holistic solutions with participation from various actors, particularly development actors, is strongly required. Requirements for sustainable reintegration and peaceful coexistence include: providing access to basic services, rehabilitation of infrastructure and building the local community councils’ capacity. Therefore building partnerships with development actors is a key priority for UNHCR Operation in Afghanistan.

UNHCR’s primary focus will continue to be the implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees in cooperation with the Afghan government. UNHCR will seek to ensure that return is informed, voluntary in safety and dignity and will continue to provide assistance to refugee returnees at all stages of the return process, including providing information for the concerned stakeholders including development actors/stakeholders in the country as well as in the countries of asylum. UNHCR will also play a catalytic role which is aimed to ensure returnees can access services and assistance on an equal basis and their needs are incorporated in the national priority programs as well as other development programs.

Interventions by UNHCR Afghanistan will include assistance to returning refugees upon arrival, ensuring access to civil documentation, identifying and assisting persons with specific needs, providing legal assistance through Information Counselling and Legal Assistance, reducing the risk of SGBV, and promoting peaceful coexistence between returnees and local communities.

Throughout all interventions with returnees, UNHCR Afghanistan will work closely with MoRR and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to ensure that they are increasingly assuming responsibility for reintegration of refugee returnees.

Another CNA will be conducted by UNHCR in cooperation with government counterparts, implementing partners, national and international NGOs, UN agencies, and returnee and IDP communities in 2015. The CNA will build on lessons learnt from the 2013 assessment, and will serve as an effective tool for identification of gaps in services, advocacy, and targeted interventions to inform and share information throughout 2015.

*Details of CAN is available upon request.
Afghan nationals returning from Iran or Pakistan due to eviction, conflict, military operations, natural disasters, or other reasons do not fall under UNHCR’s mandate, and all international response to their needs will be led by IOM. However, UNHCR in coordination with other protection actors monitors their protection situation to ascertain that registered refugees are not deported.

IRAN:

1 - 31 March 2014: A total of 18,484 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported (via Islam Qala: 62% and Zaranj: 38% border points) from Iran. This figure is 17% higher compared to 15,159 deportees in February 2014.

1 January - 31 March 2014: The total number of deportees during the three months of 2014 is 47,452 individuals which is 5% lower compared to the same period last year when 49,700 Afghans were deported (via Zaranj) from Iran.

A total number of 222,710 Afghans were deported from Iran in 2013, averaging 610 persons per day.

The vast majority of deportees (98%) were single males who entered Iran illegally, to look for work.

Since April 2009, IOM has been present in Islam Qala and Zaranj border crossing points and has procedures in place to screen and identify Persons with Special Needs (PSNs) among the deported undocumented Afghans (non-refugees).

IOM provides PSNs with transportation, transit and health services at the border and assists with their transportation costs from the cities of Herat and Zaranj to their final destinations.

PAKISTAN:

1 - 31 March 2014: A total of 1,023 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham (328) and Spin Boldak (695) border points. This figure reflects a 39% increase compared to 627 deportees in February 2014.

1 January - 31 March 2014: During the three months of 2014, a total of 609 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham Border. This figure is 22% lower compared to 785 deportees during the same period in 2013.

Since November 2012, IOM has established a transit centre in Torkham to screen, identify and assist PSNs among deported undocumented Afghans (non-refugees). IOM provides PSNs with NFIs and free transportation from Torkham to their final destination.

In addition, 1,398 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Spin Boldak (SB). This figure is 9% higher compared to the 1,273 deportees during the same period in 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting Period</th>
<th>Entry Point</th>
<th>Deportations from Pakistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 - 31 Mar 2014</td>
<td>Torkham</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 328 0 0 0 328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spin Boldak</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 695 0 0 0 695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 1,023 0 0 0 1,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01 Jan - 31 Mar 2014</td>
<td>Torkham</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 609 0 0 0 609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spin Boldak</td>
<td>1 4 4 8 1,390 0 0 0 1,390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNHCR would like to extend its deep appreciation for the continuing support and generous contributions of donors to its operation in Afghanistan.
Number of Individuals by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>385,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>616,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>288,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>196,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>1,171,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>284,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>1,741,256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Highland</td>
<td>44,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>21,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,740,236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

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