

VOLREP AND BORDER MONITORING MONTHLY UPDATE

UNHCR AFGHANISTAN

DECEMBER 2013

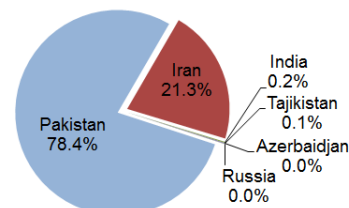
From the start of UNHCR's assisted voluntary repatriation operation in March 2002 to the end of December 2013, over 5.8 million Afghan refugees have returned home, out of which over 4.7 million repatriated with assistance from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and UNHCR. Today, about a quarter of Afghanistan's population consists of returnees.

VOLUNTARY RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN

1 – 31 December 2013: In December 2013, a total of 1,036 Afghan refugees voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. Of this, 761 came from Pakistan, 229 from Iran, 25 from Tajikistan, 14 from India and 7 from Azerbaijan.

1 January – 31 December 2013: A total of 38,766 Afghan refugees (averaging 106/day) voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. The rate of return in 2013 shows a sharp decrease (59%) compared to the 94,556 Afghans who returned in 2012.

Total returns 01 January - 31 December 2013



Year	Returns from Pakistan	Returns from Iran	Returns from Other countries	Total
2002	1,565,066	259,792	9,679	1,834,537
2003	332,183	142,280	1,176	475,639
2004	383,321	377,151	650	761,122
2005	449,391	63,559	1,140	514,090
2006	133,338	5,264	1,202	139,804
2007	357,635	7,054	721	365,410
2008	274,200	3,656	628	278,484
2009	48,320	6,028	204	54,552
2010	104,331	8,487	150	112,968
2011	48,998	18,851	113	67,962
2012	79,435	15,035	86	94,556
2013	30,388	8,247	131	38,766
Total	3,806,606	915,404	15,880	4,737,890

The lower rate of return in 2013 might be attributed to the following: Extension of the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards in Pakistan until 31 December 2015. In addition, no expansion of the "No Go Areas" in Iran, Uncertain situation of Afghanistan in the lead up to elections scheduled for April 2014 also could be other contributing factors of low returns in 2013.

Difficult economic conditions, deteriorating security conditions (in Pakistan) alleged harassment by authorities and fear of arrest and deportation constituted key push factors indicated by the returnees in the decision to return so far this year. At the same time, improved security in some parts of Afghanistan, none or reduced fear of persecution, improved employment opportunities in Afghanistan and UNHCR's assistance package were cited by many returnees as important pull factors in their decision to return.

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).

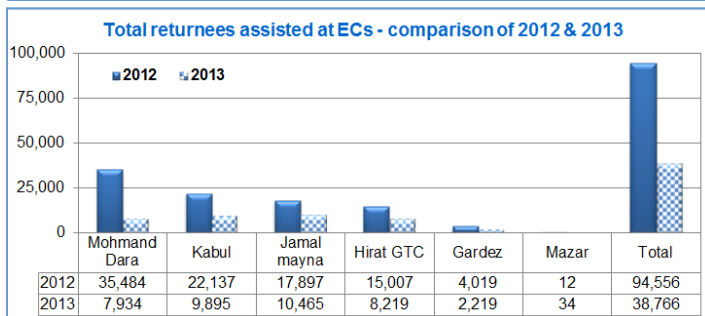
Repatriation from Pakistan is facilitated through two VRCs: Chamkani located in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baleli located in Quetta, Baluchistan. Repatriation from Iran is facilitated through Soleimankhani, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Mashhad VRCs, the Sub-Offices, or directly through the Border Crossing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

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

At the ECs, depending on the province of origin, all Afghan returnees with VRFs received approximately US\$ 150 per person (between US\$20 - US\$46 for transport and US\$117 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. Effective 01 Jan 2014, Afghan returnees with VRFs receive approximately US\$ 200 per person ((between US\$30 - US\$70 for transport and US\$150 as a short-term assistance grant).

Assisted returns by region of destination in Afghanistan 2013 & 2012				
Region	No. of individuals returned - Comparison by year			
	Jan - Dec 2013		Jan - Dec 2012	
	No.	%	No.	%
Central	10,689	27.6%	20,620	21.8%
East	7,665	19.8%	33,917	35.9%
Northeast	6,718	17.3%	15,421	16.3%
South	4,801	12.4%	6,922	7.3%
North	3,598	9.3%	7,755	8.2%
West	2,978	7.7%	5,590	5.9%
Southeast	2,154	5.6%	4,001	4.2%
Central Highlands	163	0.4%	330	0.3%
Total	38,766	100.0%	94,556	100.0%



Assisted return by area of residence in Country of Asylum (CoA) - 2013		
CoA	Province	%
PAKISTAN	KPK	53.5%
	Balochistan	29.5%
	Punjab	9.3%
	Sindh	6.5%
	Islamabad	0.7%
	AJK	0.5%
	Unknown	0.0%
IRAN	Tehran	33.5%
	Esfahan	14.0%
	Khorasan	10.2%
	Fars	9.5%
	Qom	8.1%
	Kerman	7.5%
	Yazd	4.5%
	Markazi	4.0%
	Hormozgan	2.5%
	Semnan	1.9%
	Qazvin	1.4%
	Bushehr	1.1%
	Golestan	0.6%
	Khuzestan	0.4%
	Mazandaran	0.3%
	Kordestan	0.0%
	Lorestan	0.0%
	Sistan va Baluchestan	0.0%
	Kohgiluyeh va Boyerahmad	0.0%
	Unknown	0.4%

GO AND SEE VISIT

Between 28 Dec 13 and 2nd Jan 14, UNHCR Sub Office Peshawar in close coordination with UNHCR Afghanistan organized a "Go and See" visit to Dawlatabad district of Balkh provinces, Afghanistan. A team composed of 20 refugee elders (10 male & 10 female currently living in Nowshera district of Khaibarpakhtun Khaw, Pakistan), UNHCR staff from both countries visited return areas in the above mentioned district. The aim of the go and see visit were: a) To get an insight of the overall situation in the areas of return, including the ongoing projects/reintegration activities for returnees, b) meetings with all concerned UNHCR, DoRR and other relevant Afghan government officials as well as returnees to exchange information and to develop key messages to be disseminated amongst refugees so that they could take an informed decision if they are willing to voluntarily return to Afghanistan in the near future. In 2013, there have been 3 go and see visits to Afghanistan (covering Balkh, Kunduz, Sari Pul and Laghman provinces) facilitated by UNHCR to enable refugees in Pakistan to make an informed decision.

ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING

Between 1 January and 31 December 2013, a total of 2,713 interviews (represent 40% of total returnee families) were conducted with returning refugees from Pakistan (2,504) and Iran (209). Interviewees were selected in two ways: at random (2,425) and from those with obvious protection concerns (288) at the first point of contact in Afghanistan, the UNHCR Transit/Encashment Centres in Kabul, Jalalabad (Mohmand Dara), Kandahar (Jamal Mayna), Gardez and Herat (GTC). 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

Push factors

Among returnees from Pakistan, 72% cited economic factors as the primary reason for their return followed by "the deteriorating security conditions in the country" (12%), alleged harassment by authorities (10%), fear of arrest and/or deportation (2%), lack of school and health facilities (1%), and other reasons (3%): mainly eviction notices by land owners and lack of sufficient water and electricity in the settlements.

Complaints of police harassment/arrests were recorded as one of the key concerns during interviews from April through December 2013. 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 is expected to start in February 2014 and will be completed at the end of April 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

42% of returnees cited improvement of the security situation* in some parts of Afghanistan as the primary reason influencing their decision to return followed by UNHCR's assistance package (21%), better employment opportunities in Afghanistan (15%), the land allocation scheme and/or UNHCR shelter program (11%), none or reduced fear of persecution (8%), improvements in health and education facilities (2%) and improved weather conditions for agricultural activities (1%).

*Of those who cited the improvement of security situation in some parts of Afghanistan as primary pull factor of their return, 49% returned to relatively secure provinces such as Kabul, Jawzjan, Balkh, Takhar, Nangarhar, Parwan, Sari Pul, Samangan, Herat, Panjshir, Laghman and Badakhshan. 51% returned to

Information on the Voluntary Repatriation Program

97% 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 the Afghan community (41%), visits to Afghanistan (31%), from UNHCR (13%), through the media (2%), and from other sources (10%). Sixty percent of the interviewed returnees said that they had been informed about UNHCR's repatriation operation by members of the Afghan community, 26% obtained information directly from UNHCR, 8% stated that they had visited Afghanistan and 5% were informed through the media (TV, radio and newspapers).

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. Some 19% of interviewed returnees stated that they faced problems (e.g. extortion by police) while traveling from the VRC to Torkham border point (mainly between Karkhano to Torkham). In addition, complaints were also noted concerning extortions made by police mobile teams. Among those interviewed, 92% alleged that they had paid bribes (500 – 5,000 Pakistani rupees) because they were carrying livestock, construction material (used beams), or to avoid a search of the trucks. As a result of continued efforts by UNHCR offices in Pakistan the number of incidents have decreased in comparison to last year.

Since September 2013 UNHCR Sub Office Peshawar introduced a complain collection form along with hotline numbers. Returning families are provided with this 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.

Reasons for not returning to place of origin

Out of a total of 2,504 respondents, 788 returnees stated that they do not intend to repatriate to their place of origin due to the following reasons: lack of housing (42%), lack of land (20%), insecurity (18%), lack of livelihood/income generation opportunities (13%), lack of public services (3%), personal disputes (1%) and other reasons (3%).

On accommodation, 49% of those who returned from Pakistan said that they plan to stay with relatives, 37% indicated that they will rent accommodation, and 12% said that they own a house in Afghanistan.

When asked “Do you have any concerns about your return to Afghanistan?” nearly 87% of the interviewed returnees said “Yes”. 55% of the concerns related to not having land to start agricultural activities while 33% related to having land but no shelter. 8% indicated lack of job opportunities and only 4% 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

Push factors

Among the 209 returnees from Iran interviewed, 88% stated economic factors in Iran as the primary reason for return followed by alleged harassment by the authorities (4%), fear of arrest and/or deportation (3%) and other reasons (5%).

Pull factors

53% indicated 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 (31%), none or reduced fear of persecution (4%), improvement in health and education facilities (2%), UNHCR's assistance package (1%), better employment opportunities in Afghanistan (1%), and other reasons (8%).

Information on the Voluntary Repatriation Program

93% of the interviewed returnees from Iran reported that they had received adequate information to make an informed decision to return. Information on place of origin was mainly obtained through the Afghan community (90%), from UNHCR (1%), through the media (1%), visits to Afghanistan (1%) and other sources (3%). Eighty seven percent of the interviewed returnees said that they had been informed about UNHCR's repatriation operation by members of the Afghan community, 3% said that they obtained information directly from UNHCR and 4% said that they obtained information through the media.

Reasons for not returning to place of origin

Out of a total of 209 respondents, 49 returnees stated that they do not intend to repatriate to their area of origin due to the following reasons: lack of public services (29%), lack of housing (27%), lack of income generation opportunities (20%), insecurity (14%), lack of land (2%) and other reasons (8%).

On accommodation, 57% of those who returned from Iran said that they will stay with relatives, 40% indicated that they will rent accommodation and 2% said that they own a house.

When asked “Do you have any concerns about your return to Afghanistan?” nearly 83% of the interviewed returnees said “Yes”. 55% cited the lack of job opportunities as a concern, 31% cited insecurity as a concern, 2% of concerns related to not having land to start agricultural activities, 2% related to having land but no shelter, 1% said that the lack of education facilities is a concern and 9% mentioned other reasons.

**Of those who cited the improvement of security situation in some parts of Afghanistan as the primary pull factor of their return, 65% returned to relatively secure provinces such as Kabul, Herat, Takhar, Parwan, Sari Pul, Samangan, Balkh, Bamyan, Panjshir, Laghman and Nangarhar. While 35% returned to insecure provinces: Farah, Ghazni, Baghlan, Kunduz, Faryab, Wardak and Kandahar.*

BORDER MONITORING DEPORTATION OF UNDOCUMENTED AFGHAN NATIONALS (NON-REFUGEES)

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 co-ordination with other protection actors monitors their protection situation to ascertain that registered refugees are not deported.

IRAN:

1 - 31 December* 2013: A total of 7,375 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported (via Zaranj border point) from Iran. In addition, *between 1st and 21st December 2013*, a total of 10,312 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported (via Islam Qala border point) from Iran.

1 January - 31 December 2013: The total number of deportees during 2013, via Zaranj, is 69,510 individuals which is 12% lower compared to the figure for 2012 (79,253 deportees). The overall figure for 2013 stands at 222,710 individuals which includes 153,200 Afghans who were deported via Islam Qala between *01 January and 21 December 2013*. Figures on deportees through Islam Qala were only received recently filling a gap that started in April 2013.

A total number of 258,146 Afghans were deported from Iran in 2012, averaging 705 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.

Deportations from Iran											
Reporting Period	Entry Point	Family Groups				Single				Total Individuals	
		Families	Individuals			Male		Female			Total
			M	F	Total	Adult	UAM	Adult	UAM		
01 -31 Dec 2013	Zaranj	92	166	197	363	7,002	10	0	0	7,012	7,375
01 - 21 Dec	Islam Qala	75	N/A	N/A	201	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10,111	10,312
Total		167	166	197	564	7,002	10	0	0	17,123	17,687
01 Jan - 31 Dec 2013	Zaranj	1,780	3,967	4,458	8,425	60,803	282	0	0	61,085	69,510
01 Jan - 21 Dec 2013	Islam Qala*	1,595	N/A	N/A	5,906	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	147,294	153,200
Total		3,375	3,967	4,458	14,331	60,803	282	0	0	208,379	222,710

PAKISTAN:

1 - 31 December 2013: A total of 917 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham (220) and Spin Boldak (697) border points. This figure shows a decrease compared to 1,719 deportees in November 2013.

1 January - 31 December 2013: During 2013, a total of 2,228 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham Border. This figure reflects an increase (12%) compared to 1,950 deportees during 2012.

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, 8,178 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Spin Boldak (SB). This figure is 30% higher compared to the 5,734 deportees during 2012.

Deportations from Pakistan											
Reporting Period	Entry Point	Family Groups				Single					Total Individuals
		Families	Individuals			Male		Female		Total	
			M	F	Total	Adult	UAM	Adult	UAM		
01 -31 Dec 2013	Torkham	0	0	0	0	220	0	0	0	220	220
	Spin Boldak	0	0	0	0	697	0	0	0	697	697
Total		0	0	0	0	917	0	0	0	917	917
01 Jan - 31 Dec 2013	Torkham	0	0	0	0	2,226	0	2	0	2,228	2,228
	Spin Boldak	7	10	12	22	8,156	0	0	0	8,156	8,178
Total		7	10	12	22	10,382	0	2	0	10,384	10,406

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

*Figures on deportees through Islam Qala were only received recently filling a gap that started in April 2013. The deportation figures via Islam Qala only reflect 01 Jan - 21 Dec 13.

