



**Multi-purpose
Cash and Sectoral
Outcomes**

**AFGHANISTAN
CASE
STUDY**

May 2018
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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Acronyms

CVWG Cash and Vouchers Working
Group

ERM Emergency Response
Mechanism

LAS Land Allocation Scheme

MEB Minimum Expenditure Basket

PDM Post Distribution Monitoring

SMEB Survival Minimum Expenditure
Basket



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Layout & Design: BakOS DESIGN

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Executive Summary

The repatriation cash grant has helped Afghan returnees from Pakistan to meet a number of basic needs upon return. The cash grant is used for transportation costs, to buy food and address important shelter needs, thus contributing to aspects of reintegration. At the same time, poor security of tenure and quality of shelter point to the challenges of ensuring quality of shelter outcomes with the cash grant only, in the notable absence of technical and legal support, including provision of legal assistance, and advice on Housing Land and Property (HLP) rights and property law.

Only a small minority of male returnees were found to have used the repatriation cash grant as a springboard for livelihood investments. The lack of jobs was reported by virtually all interviewees as a major challenge, also driving further migration of young males back to Pakistan and elsewhere in

search of jobs. Systematic engagement, support and coaching of potential returnees could be provided in the country of asylum to capture existing skills and explore promising livelihood opportunities in return areas. Providing part of the cash grant as start-up capital (for some) could also be explored as a more effective way to ensure livelihood outcomes.

The findings also show the limits of the repatriation cash grant in addressing systemic barriers of access to education, including entrenched gender-based norms that prevent girls' enrolment in schools and a cumbersome and expensive process that makes recognition of school certificates difficult to attain. Cash alone has not helped beneficiaries to safely return to non-conflict affected areas; many have become IDPs in a matter of weeks or months following return and in the process have



Key Findings: Sectors

Food security

Returnee monitoring reports indicate that the bulk of the repatriation cash grant is spent on food, but no additional information is provided on related food security gains.

Livelihoods

The repatriation cash grant has catalyzed investments in livelihoods for a very small minority. Scarce and poorly paid livelihood opportunities are prompting further migration of male youth to Pakistan. Despite recent focus by UNHCR on livelihood activities as a way to mitigate protection risks, and on strengthening linkages between humanitarian and development programming through partnerships, very limited support to livelihood activities was found in the areas visited.

been exposed to significant protection threats and sustained additional costs (e.g. transport, food, shelter), some of which have been covered with the grant. More substantial investments in communication campaigns in the country of asylum is one step that could be explored to minimize return to conflict-affected areas.

Developing a theory of change, unpacking and clearly stating programme objectives, and determining the value of the repatriation cash grant on the basis of MEB or SMEB calculations in coordination with other cash initiatives and actors in the country are all critical steps to improve the quality of monitoring, effectively measure progress towards more clearly defined objectives, and ensure transparency and communication to other stakeholders.

Systematic engagement, support and coaching of potential returnees could start in Pakistan to capture existing skills and discuss potential investments in small enterprises or livelihoods activities upon return, as informed by socio-economic profiling and market analysis (in development). Providing part of the cash grant as start-up capital (for some) could also be explored as a more effective way to ensure livelihood outcomes.

Shelter

The repatriation cash grant has made important contributions to shelter needs, enabling returnee beneficiaries to rent a home upon return, buy land, and/or construct houses. That said, weak security of tenure and poor quality of shelter indicate the difficulties of ensuring quality of shelter outcomes with multipurpose cash only, without complementary legal, technical or in-kind support.

Assistance and advice in legal matters, on HLP rights, property law, land tenure and occupancy certificates, and advocacy are all of critical importance to support returnees to make informed decisions when investing the repatriation cash grant in land or housing.

Energy and the Environment

Part of the repatriation cash grant has been used by beneficiaries who returned during winter months in 2016 to buy fuel for heating and warm clothes.

WASH

A small part of the repatriation cash grant has been used in some returnee households to address the specific hygiene needs of women and girls. Some females however reported asking their husbands to buy sanitary pads on their behalf, but they refused, considering purchases of Menstrual Hygiene supplies as superfluous expenses.

Health

Health was not a widespread expenditure among returnees interviewed; only a very small number reported having used the bulk of cash to address

health needs. Mechanisms to identify vulnerable returnees, including those with serious medical conditions, are in place but some may be falling through the cracks; the difficulties associated with tracking returnees and the pattern of secondary displacement may be among the reasons.

Education

Distance to public school and entrenched gender norms were found to be key barriers of access to education that the repatriation cash grant has been unable to redress. The inclusion of returnee children in the education system was also hampered by a lengthy and expensive process that made recognition of school certificates extremely difficult to attain. There may be a stronger role for UNHCR in collaboration with other actors such as UNICEF to advocate with the Ministry of Education to develop a simplified process and potentially redress supply-side barriers of access to education.

Introduction

As ample evidence of the past ten years demonstrates, cash is an important part of the humanitarian toolbox that can allow people to meet their basic needs effectively and with dignity. Little evidence however exists on how far multipurpose cash contributes to sectoral outcomes in health, WASH, shelter, food security and nutrition, education, livelihoods, energy and environment programming, and how sectoral interventions should include multipurpose cash along with accompanying support activities to best reach intended sectoral outcomes that contribute to protection.

This case study in Afghanistan is part of a review commissioned by UNHCR to investigate the contribution of multipurpose cash assistance in meeting sectoral outcomes, the activities and interventions that can best complement multipurpose cash in different sectors, and related challenges, gaps and opportunities. This case study focuses on the Voluntary Repatriation Cash Grant delivered by UNHCR to eligible documented returnees to provide the means to meet basic needs in the first phase upon return.

This case study relied on a mainly qualitative methodology and collected primary and secondary data through key informant interviews with UNHCR Afghanistan and other organizations such as UN agencies, INGOs and national NGOs. In addition, returnee monitoring data provided by UNHCR on the cash programme under analysis and other relevant studies were used, as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with beneficiaries of multipurpose cash assistance. More details on the methodology are found in the main review, and participants of key informant interviews and FGDs conducted in Afghanistan can be found in Annex 3.

Limitations

The case study in Afghanistan was faced with two main limitations. Security concerns restricted field visits to specific locations in the outskirts of Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif (Mazar), Balkh Province, that were deemed safe for the research to take place. Also, UNHCR Sub Office staff in Mazar were unable to locate returnees from Iran¹ or other countries. As a result, FGD participants only comprised Afghan returnee beneficiaries of the UNHCR repatriation cash grant who returned from Pakistan in 2016 and 2017. Therefore, this review acknowledges that FGD findings presented here relate only to a specific sub-group of beneficiaries of the UNHCR repatriation cash grant. The findings are not representative of the whole returnee beneficiary population and are not generalizable to other returnee groups (e.g. documented returnees who returned before 2016, returnees from Iran and other countries, and undocumented returnees).

¹ The number of returnees from Iran and other countries is very low. Most of those returning from Iran are individual students who return for a short period of time to obtain necessary documentation and return back to Iran to continue their education.



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Multipurpose cash in Afghanistan

Overview of the UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Cash Grant

The Voluntary Repatriation Cash Grant (repatriation cash grant) has been delivered by UNHCR since 2002 to support Afghan refugees in Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Russia, India and other countries² to address their immediate needs for food, shelter and other necessities upon return to Afghanistan. UNHCR Afghanistan (2017a: 10) defines the repatriation cash grant

as “a protection tool that provides the means to meet basic needs in the first phase upon return and the freedom of choice to determine a family’s priorities. Furthermore, it gives direction to future re-integration prospects”.

The one-off repatriation cash grant is delivered to eligible documented returnees³ at one of the four UNHCR encashment centres located in Kabul (Kabul city), Nangarhar (Samarkhail area in Jalalabad city), Kandahar (Kandahar city) and

² Returnees from India, Russia and other far off countries are provided with an air ticket, support with border formalities, and pre-departure food allowances (Altai Consulting, 2009).

³ For returnees from Pakistan and Iran: registered Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan holding a Proof of Registration (PoR) card issued by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) with an expiry date of 31 December 2015; Afghan refugees residing in Iran holding a valid Amayesh Cards issued by the Government of Iran (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017).

Herat (Herat city) in Afghanistan. After arrival at the encashment centre, the repatriation cash grant is disbursed as cash in hand to the head of the household in USD, through a Money Service Provider (MSP) using the hawala system (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017). A range of complementary services and awareness-raising activities are provided free of charge to returnees at encashment centres by UNHCR and other actors, including basic health care, polio and measles vaccinations for children (Ministry of Public Health supported by WHO and UNICEF), mine-risk briefings (Coordinated by UNMAS, carried-out by Danish Demining Group/DDG), a 'back to school' campaign (UNICEF/Ministry of Education), and identification of Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs) (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017a).

At the time of writing, in March 2018, the cash grant value was set at an average of 200 USD per person. As indicated by UNHCR respondents, according to the Voluntary Repatriation Forms database, the average Afghan returnee family is six individuals and as such the total grant value a household typically receives is around 1,200 USD. The cash grant is calculated to account for two main components: transport, of an average of 50 USD per person,⁴ and an initial reintegration component of 150 USD per person to address immediate needs.

As explained by UNHCR staff, the value of the cash grant has been gradually increased over the years to adjust to changes in commodity prices and inflation rates, on the basis of in-house market assessments. At the end of June 2016 until 03 April 2017, the cash grant was doubled from an average of 200 to 400 USD per person. This coincided with the deterioration of bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2016 and the consequent reduced protection environment for all Afghans, including registered refugees in several areas of Pakistan. Escalating protection threats at the time included decreased acceptance by hosting communities, police harassment and arbitrary detentions, loss of self-

reliance opportunities, and uncertainty regarding renewal of Proof of Registration cards. Other confluent factors included the introduction of a border management regime affecting the traditional irregular cross-border movements of Afghans, and a campaign by the Government of Afghanistan to encourage all refugees to return. The number of returnees from Pakistan spiked during the second half of 2016 to nearly 370,000 (363,227), compared to nearly 7,000 in the second half of 2017 (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2016b).

Other multipurpose cash programmes in Afghanistan

The 2018–2021 Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan includes a section on multipurpose cash assistance, as part of operational response plans. This reflects the growing use of multipurpose cash by different humanitarian actors in the country as a key response modality “to help shock-affected people [mainly IDPs] meet their basic needs in a manner that upholds their dignity” (HRP, 2018: 40). The main coordination mechanism is the Cash and Voucher Working Group (CVWG), co-chaired by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and World Food Programme Council (WFP) and of which UNHCR is part.

Since 2011, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) has been funding a rapid-response mechanism implemented by seven INGOs⁵ to meet the emergency food, shelter/NFIs, protection and WASH needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by conflict or natural disasters across Afghanistan (CaLP, 2017). The multipurpose cash transfer is distributed to targeted IDP households in two instalments across consecutive months and its value has not been fixed across Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) partners (HRP, 2017). However, ERM partners in coordination with the CVWG and on the basis of existing cluster standards (e.g. food, NFI) have recently developed

⁴ The exact value of the transportation component depends on the travel distance from returnees' place of residence in the country of asylum and place of origin in Afghanistan.

⁵ NRC, DRC, PIN, ACF, Solidarities International, DACAAR and ACTED.

a Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB), which is expected to provide guidance in the determination of the cash value. The total SMEB is 30,000 AFN (435 USD) and split across two monthly instalments: 18,000 AFN (260 USD) during the first month and 12,000 AFN (175 USD) during the second month.

IOM supports undocumented returnees⁶ from Pakistan and Iran with cash assistance aiming at meeting cross-sectoral needs. The cash transfer is also a one-off unrestricted lump sum, calculated and delivered per household to the household head at four border crossings, and consisting of two components: a transportation component of an average of 25–50 USD per individual (depending on final destination in Afghanistan) and 100 USD per household for non-food items. In addition, complementary services are provided at the centres, including meals, overnight accommodation, special transportation for persons with specific needs, provision of medical services and TB screening.

Value of the UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Cash Grant

The majority of UNHCR staff interviewed stressed that the objective of the repatriation cash grant is to meet immediate, basic needs of returnees upon return and not to support sustainable reintegration (see also Altai Consulting, 2009).

To be able to effectively measure results against the set objective of the programme, critical terms such as “protection tool”, “future re-integration prospects”, “basic needs” as per the definition of the repatriation cash grant, would greatly benefit from being unpacked, defined and clarified to plainly state what the repatriation cash grant is aiming to achieve in this context. Developing a theory of change that sets out the strategy underpinning the repatriation cash grant seems to be particularly useful. This exercise can help UNHCR to lay out thinking and assumptions on how the cash grant is expected to meet basic

needs (and exactly which basic needs) and to give “direction to future re-integration prospects” (Ibid.). In turn it would help clearly spell out which outcomes in each sector might be possible to achieve. Some of the questions at the heart of this exercise are:

- What does “re-integration” in the context of Afghanistan mean?
- What are the key aspects, components and underlying assumptions of re-integration?
- Which specific basic needs are expected to be met with the cash grant?

In the absence of such theory of change, understanding how the repatriation cash grant is meeting outcomes across different sectors, which is the purpose of this review, is clearly difficult.

The articulation of a theory of change would also serve as the basis for explicitly linking the objective of meeting basic needs with a cash value, which is currently missing. The value of any cash transfer – whether multipurpose, cash for sector-specific interventions, conditional, etc. – should be tied to the objectives of the programme. For a cash programme that seeks to address basic needs, such as the repatriation grant, the value should be determined on the basis of how much a household requires in order to meet a set of basic needs. The MEB or SMEB serves exactly this scope (CaLP, 2015).

Key informant interviews with UNHCR staff indicated that the cash grant value has been determined on the basis of two market assessments conducted in 2012 and 2016. An examination of the findings of these assessments shows the inclusion of the results of in-house market surveys focused on food and non-food commodity prices (broken down by costs/categories), including transportation costs, and of secondary macroeconomic data such as GDP growth and inflation rate. (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2012 and 2016). However, the breakdown of costs of food and non-food items (see Annex 2 below)

⁶ Returnees are considered undocumented if they did not hold valid refugee or other residence documents in the country of asylum.

does not include services (e.g. health or education) or communication (e.g. telephone) or other costs that are typically included in multisectoral market assessments and used to develop the MEB or SMEB (see CaLP 2015). There is therefore no explicit correlation between the findings of the in-house market survey and the determination of the value of the repatriation cash grant. Indeed, the development of a MEB following the in-market survey seems to be the missing link here.

More explicitly linking programme objectives with the cash value through the development of a MEB would also go a long way to improving transparency in this context. The doubling of the transfer to an average of 400 USD per individual in the second half of 2016 was explained by UNHCR staff (and available documents) as seeking to address the initial multiple reintegration challenges, identified in 2015 during the returnee monitoring, including accessing basic services, securing land tenure, adequate shelter and job opportunities linked to limited absorption capacity in return areas (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2016a). Discussions with a range of non-UNHCR respondents however revealed a general lack of understanding on how UNHCR was calculating the repatriation cash grant value and the rationale behind adjustments over the years – in 2016 particularly, when doubling the amount took place in concomitance with the deteriorating protection environment in Pakistan and other factors. A number of respondents were under the impression that rather than being based on specific calculations, again like the MEB, the repatriation cash value was driven by funding availability and broad political considerations (see also HRW, 2017).

Lastly, since the start of the cash component of the repatriation programme in early 2000, there have been significant changes in the cash landscape, and in line with global trends, multipurpose cash-based responses have been scaled up. ERM partners have recently developed a SMEB to guide calculations of multipurpose cash assistance to IDPs under the CVWG umbrella, ensuring the method is aligned with a number of Cluster Standards (e.g. food, shelter and NFI). UNHCR provided inputs into this exercise. The redefinition of the repatriation cash grant value and a clear

strategy for its future adaptations as discussed above, would greatly benefit from collaboration and coordination with these actors and IOM.

Monitoring of the Repatriation Cash Grant

The repatriation cash grant is monitored through returnee monitoring exercises organized in two phases. The first consists of face-to-face interviews conducted with returnees at Voluntary Repatriation Centres in the country of asylum and at encashment centres upon arrival. The second part consists of telephone call surveys conducted with returnees, one to three months after return, to explore cash expenditures and people's situation upon return in relation to aspects such as access to basic services, livelihood opportunities and relationship with the community (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2015 and 2017a). In July 2017, UNHCR contracted a research organization (Orange Door Research & VIAMO) to carry out the second phase of monitoring with returnees, and included IDPs and the general population in the phone surveys (UNHCR, Orange Door and VIAMO, 2017).

The second part of monitoring exercises was of particular interest for this review since it captures cash expenditures and aspects of integration. A key finding in this regard is that there is no consistency across returnee monitoring reports on data collected and presentation of findings. Also, cash expenditure categories that are largely unrelated are often grouped together, and analysis of expenditures and outcomes in particular is limited. For example, UNHCR Afghanistan (2017a: 10) presents findings on employment of returnees, but no analysis is actually provided on investments that returnees have made in livelihood activities or assets using the repatriation grant as a springboard. The report simply mentions that "20% said they used the money to build shelter, pay off debts and invest in livelihoods". Another report does include "investments in sustainable livelihoods" as a cash expenditure, but this is only captured in one graph without further details or analysis (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2016b).

While attention is increasingly being paid to a comparative analysis of different population groups – returnees, IDPs and host populations, as described above – the monitoring of grant expenditure and sectoral outcomes needs stronger focus to enhance understanding on the use of repatriation cash and its actual contribution to different aspects of returnees’ lives. The development of a theory of change and articulation of clearer objectives of what the repatriation cash grant intends to achieve in this context are important first steps.

When discussing monitoring, UNHCR staff frequently highlighted the difficulties in tracing returnees scattered across the country, particularly in urban/peri-urban areas and regions outside of government control; several staff estimated the capacity to trace only around half of them. IOM reported similar challenges in tracking undocumented returnees. One reason was linked to returnees’ lack of access to SIM cards upon arrival in Afghanistan, since the main established modality to reach out to returnees is through phone calls.

UNHCR staff pointed to two main steps that have been taken in this regard. Up to recently, the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) required a national identification card, or *tazkira*, for returnees to be able to obtain a SIM card. Having lived for years or decades in exile however, not all returnees possess one. Sustained advocacy by UNHCR since 2016 has resulted in an agreement with the GoA where returnees can obtain a SIM card using the Voluntary Repatriation Form instead of the *tazkira*. Starting from March 2018, UNHCR will facilitate the distribution of SIM cards to returnees at encashment centres, which include 2 USD monthly credit for a period of 3 months to better ensure that SIM cards remain active.⁷

In addition, an Inter-Agency Information Centre (Inter-Agency Information Centre) was being established at the time of writing as a joint initiative supported by UNHCR and WFP and implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). The Inter-Agency Information Centre is a toll-free humanitarian helpline aiming to provide two-way communication between agencies and beneficiaries / host communities. As the Inter-Agency Information Centre is expected to provide a platform for agencies to carry out rapid surveys or awareness campaigns by placing calls to beneficiaries, several UNHCR staff felt that once operative it could be used to improve reach out to returnees, following SIM card distributions as above.

At the same time however, the limits of relying on phone surveys as the predominant mode of contacting returnees need to be better acknowledged and addressed. Experience elsewhere has shown the shortcomings of similar modalities, which unlike verbal and face-to-face mechanisms, such as meetings with individuals, are found to be poorly understood, not trusted and not preferred by beneficiaries. Investing in complementing ongoing phone surveys with face-to-face FGDs and home visits in areas where this is feasible, for example with returnees who return as a group and settle together in an area (as the communities visited for this review), would contribute to strengthening the evidence base.

⁷ As explained by a UNHCR staff member, SIM cards will be distributed by telecom companies and UNHCR will only facilitate office space at the encashment centers. UNHCR will provide 2 USD per SIM card to encourage returnees to maintain SIM cards active, so that they can be used for monitoring purposes.

Multipurpose cash and protection

One protection aspect explored in returnee monitoring reports is intra-community relations and attitudes towards returnees. The findings point to generally positive attitudes towards returnees who are largely welcomed by host communities (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2015 and 2016b). UNHCR, Orange Door and VIAMO (2017) also found a more positive view of returnees (47%) than IDPs (31%) among host communities.

In some FGDs, returnees' relationships with local communities were investigated. In line with monitoring data, the findings point to harmonious relationships between returnees and other community members and no one reported intra-community tensions in the areas visited as a result of the repatriation cash grant. Returnees often referred to neighbours as sympathetic and showing understanding of their displacement experiences. In Noor Khoda for example female returnees of Pashtun ethnicity described the good relationship they have developed with their Hazara female neighbours, their welcoming attitudes when they first returned and settled in the neighbourhood, and how they were "good friends" today. Relationships and interactions with host community members were significantly more pronounced among returnees who lived in peri-urban neighbourhoods together with other urban residents, such as Noor Khoda and Dashti Noor in Mazar. By contrast, in areas such as Kabul PD21, Cheil Dokhtaran and Qalan Bafan, which were fully inhabited by hundreds or thousands of returnees clustered together, there were limited mentions of interactions with other community members, particularly among women who were more likely to remain at home than men.

In addition, discussions with male and female returnees also focused on gaining insights on intra-household decision-making processes around cash expenditures and on protection risks that may have arisen from the sudden acquisition of a large sum of cash. As indicated above, at encashment centres the repatriation grant is delivered to the head of

household, typically the husband, and the amount (around 1,200 USD per household) is quite high, particularly in the context of Afghanistan.

In terms of the cash amount, PDM reports and key informant interviews with UNHCR staff do not point to specific protection risks. One female returnee in Kabul stated that her husband was tricked by people to make an investment with some of the repatriation grant and lost the money; she had no further knowledge on this matter. Except for this case, no one else reported similar issues during FGDs. This however seems to be an aspect that warrants more attention in monitoring and evaluation.

As discussed in the Shelter section, many returnees interviewed reported buying parcels of land with the repatriation cash grant. These decisions were found to be overwhelmingly in the hands of husbands and only in Kabul did some female returnees state that they had been consulted; some added that their husbands had taken them to see the plot of land before finalizing purchase. When asked, some females added that even if the cash had been delivered to them they would have handed it over to their husbands, as they would not know how to manage such a large sum. Limited decision-making power of women in this context emerged also during discussions related to rent. In Noor Khoda female returnees said they did not know why they returned to Mazar as this had been decided by their husbands; nor did they know the monthly rent costs covered with the repatriation grant. Indeed, this finding indicates that cash alone can hardly change entrenched power dynamics and gender based norms.

The 2015 return monitoring report also discusses perceptions of security and finds that returnees "felt free" in Afghanistan and no longer feared arrest or harassment as they did in exile by virtue of their nationality (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2015). This strongly resonates with the findings of this review. In FGDs, all returnees stated that they felt safe and

secure in Kabul and Mazar, and juxtaposed their lives in Pakistan: increasing harassment by police, requests for bribes, arrests, and unwelcoming attitudes of the general population were all commonly described. Feelings of belonging and homecoming were frequently mentioned.

It is important to note that returnees interviewed felt safe and secure in Kabul and Mazar where they were residing at the time of FGDs conducted for this study. Not all however had returned from Pakistan directly to the neighbourhoods of Kabul or Mazar. In several locations returnees explained that after they collected the repatriation cash grant at encashment centres they went to villages in their rural areas of origin with the intention of settling, but they fled one to three months after because of rampant insecurity, clashes among warring parties, and coercion and extortionary practices by Anti-Government Elements (Anti-Government Elements).

For example, returnees in Qalan Bafan, Mazar, explained that they had previously returned to their village of origin in a rural area in the Sholgara district, in the southern part of the Balkh Province. Soon they started to receive regular visits, often at night, by “the Taliban”.⁸ As recounted by a male returnee:

“*The Taliban would come at night and tell us that we should join the jihad and fight against the government. We were not interested and we tried to negotiate with them; we explained that we had just returned and that we wanted to buy a home, settle down and work. But they would not leave us alone. They started to demand cooked meals every night, which they would take back to their base. We decided to leave after two months and we came to Mazar.*”

There were also costs involved in this process, some of them covered with the repatriation grant. In Qalan Bafan returnees estimated the costs of renting houses in the village in Sholgara district,

along with food and other necessities, at 150 USD per month. The double costs of transport (from the encashment centre to the village and then to Mazar) were reported at around 200 USD per family.⁹ Similar costs were mentioned by returnees interviewed in Cheil Dokhtaran.

This pattern of return and displacement has been the focus of several recent studies and was already recognized in 2015 by UNHCR Afghanistan (2015: 12) as “secondary displacement of returnees in conflict affected areas”. The same terminology has been used in a 2016 policy brief issued by the World Bank and UNHCR (2016: 2), where the “progressive increase in secondary displacement among returnees” was noted. More recently, Samuel Hall et al. (2018: 16) defined those cases as “returnee-IDPs” and found that 72% of the total study sample had been displaced twice and 27% displaced three times (see also Oxfam, 2018).

The growing evidence of returnees becoming internally displaced soon after return is a sad reflection of the pervasive insecurity that continues to grip the country. Particularly in 2016, return was for many an escape and avoidance response to escalating protection threats in Pakistan. But for many, return to unsafe areas of origin has essentially meant continued exposure to protection threats, albeit of a different nature (conflict and insecurity) and by different perpetrators (e.g. Anti-Government Elements). In this context, the limits of cash in contributing to protection outcomes are evident; while the grant may have other protection dividends – starting with food security and shelter, at least immediately upon return – the repatriation cash grant alone is not helping returnees to avoid risks and ensure a safe return in non-conflict affected areas.

Complementarity with other programmes

The first part of returnee monitoring conducted at the encashment centre seeks to capture “the level of information returnees had to make an

⁸ Threats that returnees are exposed to in this area were also mentioned during key informant interviews.

⁹ Including transport for family members and the many household items (blankets, mattresses, cooking utensils, etc.) that they had brought with them from Pakistan.

informed decision, push/pull factors and problems faced during the repatriation process” (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2015). Monitoring findings suggest that the great majority¹⁰ claim to have sufficient information to make an informed decision prior to return (Ibid.).

During FGDs, both male and female returnees frequently indicated that their expectations in relation to life in Afghanistan upon return had not been met. Many appeared to conflate information provided by UNHCR (e.g. at Voluntary Repatriation Centres in Pakistan and at encashment centres) and the GoA. Mention was often made of messages broadcasted on radio depicting a buoyant economic situation in Afghanistan and the widespread availability of land for returnees. Most likely they referred to the “Khpal Watan, Gul Watan” (My country, my beautiful country) campaign launched by the GoA in July 2016 in Pakistan to encourage Afghans to return home, and to the Land Allocation Scheme (LAS) (see Shelter section). In light of their current situation, and mainly in relation to lack of livelihood opportunities, many were visibly disappointed and often spoke of “failed promises”.

FGD participants were asked why they had decided to return to their (often unsafe) areas of origin. However, no one recalled having received information about either the general security situation or conflict and insecurity hotspots in Afghanistan. Some returnees were under the impression they could settle in rural areas of origin (where costs of living were thought to be cheap), buy land and work in the agricultural sector, making the decision without, it seemed, much consideration of whether this was actually viable. Among 2016 returnees, a large number appeared to have returned in haste with limited time to prepare; this could also have been a contributing factor for selecting their areas of origin as the first choice of return, where they had familial and kinship ties.

The findings point to the need to deepen understanding of the reasons underpinning

return to unsafe areas, since having “adequate information” to make informed decisions, as indicated in returnee monitoring, says little about the sources and information returnees actually refer to.

Ongoing, sustained advocacy, particularly in Pakistan, to improve the protection space of refugees in countries of asylum is of paramount importance. The findings also point to the need to invest more substantially in communication campaigns in the country of asylum to ensure that potential returnees receive accurate and timely security information. Some respondents suggested that returnees should be provided transport to safe areas in-kind, rather than left to meet transport costs through the repatriation grant. Clearly such a shift, whether at all feasible, would need to be premised on a robust analysis of many aspects, including the capacity of areas to where transport is provided to absorb returnees.

¹⁰ The UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation to Afghanistan (2015) report states, “Over 96% of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan and Iran said that they had received adequate information to make an informed decision to return” (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2015).



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Multipurpose cash and sectoral outcomes: key findings

Food Security

Food security sector outcomes and the contribution of cash

UNHCR staff stated that the bulk of the repatriation cash grant is spent on food and transportation, and this is confirmed by available monitoring and evaluation evidence. According to UNHCR, Orange Door and VIAMO (October 2017), the most common use of the repatriation grant is food (65%), followed by rent/shelter (38%) and transportation (31%). No additional information is provided on associated food security gains, however. A survey of returnee households in the 2009 evaluation of the repatriation cash grant also found the majority (94%) having spent the grant primarily on food and transportation, and around a third to rehabilitate houses (Altai Consulting, 2009). The evaluation was concerned with the short-term nature of the repatriation grant, since it was typically spent quickly, with over half the families spending their

grant within the first month, and 88% of families spending the money within three months. Returnee monitoring from 2017 suggests similar spending timeframes, with 97% of returnees interviewed spending the money over one to two months, and all within three months (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017a).

During FGDs conducted for this review, it was difficult to gain an accurate understanding of what proportion of the grant returnees had used for food, and also to understand outcomes, since many simply stated that they bought food for the family. In part this was because many struggled to remember the amount. Several respondents, both males and females, also mentioned they had savings that they took with them from Pakistan. For those, the cash grant was often pooled along with household savings and used to purchase food and address other needs during the first months of return.

Livelihoods

Livelihood sector outcomes and the contribution of cash

There is limited available data in returnee monitoring reports about use of the repatriation cash grant to support livelihood opportunities upon return. UNHCR Afghanistan (2016b) finds that only 15% of returnees surveyed made investments in “sustainable livelihoods”. By contrast, the 2009 evaluation of the repatriation cash grant found that the majority, over 75%, were able to use part of the cash grant to start small businesses, from as little as \$20 to as much as \$1,400 (Altai Consulting, 2009). The same evaluation however already observed far lower “levels of entrepreneurship” in the returnees’ sample (2007 and 2008 returnees) compared to that of the 2005 evaluation (Altai Consulting, 2005, in Altai Consulting, 2009). One possible explanation suggested was the worsening macro-economic context: “opportunities to create new businesses were higher in the initial years of development, since the country was missing mostly everything, including many small shops and services. Seven years later, it has become more difficult to identify niches and create new businesses” (Altai Consulting, 2009: 23).

The worsening economy in a context of escalating conflict and chronic political impasse (Samuel Hall et al., 2018; Afghanistan, 2016b), as well as the influx of nearly 370,000 returnees from Pakistan in 2016 alone, are among the contributing factors of an increasingly contracted labour market. Thus for the thousands of Afghan refugees who returned in 2016, finding a job or setting up a small business through the cash grant appears more challenging than it was a few years ago. The upcoming evaluation of the repatriation cash grant commissioned by UNHCR at the end of 2017 may usefully shed light on this trend and allow comparisons of different returnee cohorts surveyed since 2005.

The findings of FGDs likewise indicate that the repatriation cash grant has catalyzed livelihood investments for a very small minority. Only in Noor Khoda area, Mazar, were investments in economic activities reported, by a handful of male returnees.

Examples included buying a vending cart and the initial stock of fruits and vegetables for a total of 150 USD, renting a small grocery shop for 30 USD a month, and covering rent costs for the first three months with the repatriation grant.

An accurate explanation as to why this group was able to make livelihood investments with the cash grant is difficult and many contributing factors could be at play. The fact that this group of returnees all reported having received a cash grant of 400 USD per person, may have meant that they simply had more cash available to invest than their counterparts who received 200 USD. Another explanation could be linked to the fact that they all reported having returned from Pakistan directly to Mazar and therefore had not ‘wasted’ the repatriation grant in double transportation other costs as a result of displacement as discussed above.

A recurring theme of FGDs in all locations was the lack of job opportunities and the lower wages in Afghanistan in comparison to Pakistan. Virtually all male returnees said they had been working in Pakistan and in a wide variety of casual jobs, such as in grocery stores, selling fruits and vegetables, or as construction labourers, and the great majority of female returnees reported home-based economic activities in Pakistan, including wool yarn spinning, kilim rug weaving, embroidery and clothes-making.

Scarce and poorly paid livelihood opportunities were often indicated as having prompted further migration. In FGDs both in Kabul and Mazar, returnees explained that several male youth, married and unmarried, in their community had decided to return to Pakistan soon after return because of extremely limited job opportunities. One male returnee in Kabul estimated that around 60% of male youth had returned to Pakistan. Other FGD participants added that they had male relatives who were currently in Pakistan but “were trying to go to Iran and even Europe”. In parallel, the great majority of returnees stated that they were receiving regular remittances from relatives abroad, including males that had returned to Pakistan. This phenomenon is also captured in the returnee monitoring report of November 2017. Due to lack of livelihood opportunities, 8% of the sample

surveyed confirmed that a family member either left for another location within the country or moved back to the country of asylum (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017a).

Complementarity with other programmes

Lack of economic opportunity was widely recognized by respondents as a major obstacle of reintegration. As explained by a number of UNHCR staff, the geographical targeting of the Reintegration Programme has long been focused on areas of high return and displacement. Until 2016 the main analytical base underpinning targeting, and assistance was the UNHCR Comprehensive Needs Assessment Survey. In 2017, UNHCR Afghanistan began replacing this with socio-economic profiling and market analysis to identify the livelihood zones and markets in areas of high return and displacement. Profiling and analysis were still ongoing at the time of writing.

This new approach has stemmed from the realization that livelihood activities had been largely designed to address the short-term needs of returnees and IDPs, with limited attention to community dynamics and sustainability of interventions. Also, vocational trainings were largely built around traditional activities and informal sectors, rather than informed by a sound market analysis (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017c).

Together with returnee monitoring, the findings are expected to provide the basis for Community-based Protection Measures (Community-based Protection Measures). As explained by one staff member, the idea is to ensure that livelihoods activities mitigate protection risks at individual and community levels while at the same time “fostering linkages with development partners for a continuum to long-term development and sustainability” (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017d: 1). Community-based Protection Measures activities include Asset-Based Community Development to increase communities’ access to services and productive assets, enhancing peaceful co-existence and self-reliance; and Employability, Employment and Entrepreneurship which seeks to promote self-reliance through small business development and job placement in partnership with the private sector

(*ibid.*). A key focus of Community-based Protection Measures is strengthening the linkages between humanitarian and development actors, including the private sector. Efforts are being stepped up to consolidate and strengthen a range of partnerships with UNDP, ILO, FAO and others under a Partnership Strategy, which was in development at the time of writing.

The focus on livelihoods activities as a way to mitigate protection risks and on strengthening humanitarian-development linkages is no doubt positive and much needed. Indeed, a key finding in the areas visited was the very limited support to livelihood activities, by UNHCR or other actors. The only area where beneficiaries mentioned having received livelihoods support was in PD21 in Kabul. One UNHCR staff member explained that 30 small enterprises were established for female returnees and 20 for males, focusing on skills such as tailoring, grocery shopping, butchery, shoes shop, welding, wool spinning, soap making etc. Beneficiaries were also provided business development training and cash as start-up capital. During FGD discussions in PD21, two women mentioned having received training for wool spinning but complained of the difficulties they faced in selling their product. The challenge in linking beneficiaries to the market was also recognized by UNHCR staff. Limited funding available to support livelihood interventions in the highly constrained labour market was also an issue.

The study sample was no doubt too small to capture other areas where UNHCR has provided livelihood support. Even so, it is clear there are huge challenges in reaching returnees and supporting them with sustainable livelihood opportunities. As outlined above, UNHCR is currently only able to track around 50% of returnees, particularly when hundreds of households – such as in PD21 or Qalan Bafan – settle in one area.

A more comprehensive and integrated approach to livelihood support complemented with the establishment of strategic partnerships as described above seems to be a positive step forward. In addition, systematic engagement, support and coaching of potential returnees could

start in Pakistan to capture existing skills and discuss potential investments in small enterprises or livelihoods activities upon return, according to socio-economic profiling and market analysis. Provision of part of the cash grant as start-up capital could also be explored as a more effective way to ensure livelihood outcomes.

Shelter

Shelter sector outcomes and the contribution of cash

According to UNHCR monitoring reports, a relatively small part of the repatriation cash grant is spent on shelter. In 2016, 12% of the grant was spent on rental accommodation and 11% on “sustainable shelter construction” (UNHCR Afghanistan 2016b). Figures from 2017 suggest that 6% of returnees built shelter with the cash grant and 1% bought a plot of land (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017a). UNHCR, Orange Door and VIAMO (2017) research shows shelter as the third largest expenditure among returnees and IDPs surveyed, following food and transport, though with land (presumably purchase of land) the seventh out of nine expenditures.

However, FGDs with male and female returnees in the locations visited for this review, in Kabul and Mazar, indicated that for many shelter was a pronounced cash expenditure, which they covered all or in part with the repatriation cash grant, to buy a piece of land, construct a home or rent a house.

A minority of returnees explained that while still in Pakistan they bought the parcels of land where they were currently living in Kabul or Mazar (usually male family members travelled from Pakistan to Afghanistan to carry out the transaction). Purchases were reported as having been made either with own savings or through money borrowed from relatives. While some said that they had settled their debts immediately upon receipt of the

repatriation grant, others reported having been unable to do so (in some cases because of lack of livelihood opportunities), and this was source of worry.

The majority of those who invested in land – in Kabul PD21 and Mazar, in Cheil Dokhtaran and Qalan Bafan – did so a few months after receipt of the repatriation cash grant and after having been displaced from their areas of origin where they first returned. While many had pooled the cash transfer with other cash resources, such as savings and/or remittances, to cover the cost of land, some stated that they purposefully set aside or saved the repatriation grant to buy land. One female in Kabul recalled that her husband had decided to invest the cash grant in land when they first heard about it in Pakistan in 2016, and that “400 USD per person offered a once in a life opportunity to return and buy land”. She explained that all expenses incurred since return, including first returning to Kunduz and then fleeing to Kabul, had all been covered through family savings “without touching the cash grant”.

However, lacking the financial means to construct a house, many returnees were still living in temporary shelters, such as tents, erected on their land plots. During FGDs with males in Kabul, one community leader, also a returnee, estimated that around half of returnee households in the area were living in tents, and up to 75% in Cheil Dokhtaran.

Size of land parcels purchased ranged between 100 and 300 m². In Kabul PD21 the price of land was indicated at around 12 USD¹¹ per m², in Cheil Dokhtaran at around 14 USD per m² and in Qalan Bafan at around 12 USD per m², and was attained through the government’s Land Allocation Scheme (LAS).¹²

The repatriation cash grant was also found as having been used to cover rental costs upon return, again either in full or in part for those who had household savings. For example, a few male respondents in Kabul explained that they

¹¹ Different FGD participants mentioned prices with slight variations, so the land prices reported here are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the exact price per m² paid by returnees.

¹² In 2005, Presidential Decree 104 established the Land Allocation Scheme (LAS) for the distribution of uncultivated government land to eligible landless returnees and IDPs (UNAMA, 2015).



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rented houses or rooms in the vicinity of PD21 (for approximately 70 USD a month) while their home construction was underway. In Mazar – Dashti Shor and Noor Khoda – the cash grant had helped returnees cover initial rent costs of the houses where they were still living at the time of field visits for this review. Rent prices were indicated at around 30–50 USD per month, plus utility bills. In Noor Khoda, where all returnees interviewed had benefited from the cash value of 400 USD per individual, some stated that the cash grant was used to cover up to six months of rent. Among returnees that had been displaced, some used the cash grant for 1–3 months to rent homes before fleeing (others stayed with relatives for free).

Investments in land were overwhelmingly perceived by beneficiaries as positive, fulfilling decades-long dreams of owning land in their home country. FGD findings indicate that for some, the repatriation cash grant has made an important contribution to shelter needs, enabling beneficiaries to rent a home upon return and/or to buy land, and for some to construct houses. However, a number of issues related to security of tenure and quality of shelter also emerged during FGDs, pointing to the challenges of ensuring quality of shelter outcomes with

multipurpose cash only, without complementary legal, technical or in-kind support.

In Cheil Dokhtaran in Mazar, returnees explained that land parcels had been bought from one individual, who they described as “a rich man that buys and sells land”, through an arrangement regulated by a private contract, where returnees covered the initial deposit using the repatriation cash grant. Land plots were reported as having been sub-divided among 20–30 households, which were all part of the same contractual arrangement. The remainder of the cost of land was being paid in monthly instalments of approximately 130 USD (higher than the average monthly rent in the area, at around 70 USD). Returnees explained that they expected to receive the land title once all returnee families who were part of the agreement completed their payments. Many were finding settling their monthly instalments challenging and payments in arrears were reported as common. At the time of fieldwork no one had completed payment and no one had received a land title.

An in-depth examination of land purchase arrangements and titling in Cheil Dokhtaran was beyond the scope of this review. But these

dynamics are a reason for concern. For some time now, media, government and international agency reports have extensively documented patterns of illegally obtained state land in Afghanistan (UNAMA, 2015; Samuel Hall et al., 2018¹³). The lack of an overarching and integrated national policy on state land distribution, and material deficiencies in the land distribution legal framework and regulatory scheme are among the drivers underpinning land grabbing, land usurpation and corruption in the country (UNAMA, 2015). Indeed, the problems associated with land, security of tenure and corruption were frequently highlighted by key informants. Against this background, there are concerns that without the necessary legal support, land investments made through the repatriation cash grant might put returnees in a risky and uncertain position, opening the door for a variety of claims and troubling disputes over land ownership and establishment of informal settlements.

The quality of land purchased in Qalan Bafan was a problem. The area was a rather isolated plateau, located at around 30 km from Mazar city centre and quite far from the main paved road. As noted above, land plots had been purchased by returnees after being displaced and through the government's LAS, also with the support of UNHCR and NRC. Several key informants confirmed that one of the challenges of the LAS in providing a sustainable shelter solution to returnees is the quality of allocated land, which is often situated in remote areas, with limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities (HLP, 2017). This is one reason why many returnees do not take advantage of this scheme and decide to settle in the outskirts of cities and towns instead.

The quality of shelter is also a concern in relation to those who have bought parcels of land but, lacking the financial means to construct houses (or finalize construction), continue to live in tents erected on their land plots. During the harsh winter season in both Mazar and Kabul, lack of permanent shelter puts these families in a highly vulnerable position. One interesting community-support mechanism was found in Kabul. Some returnees who have

managed to construct houses move during the winter season to Jalalabad where the weather is milder to save money on heating and look for jobs. Returnees who are still in tents move temporarily into their homes for free, in exchange for "looking after their houses". As findings show, however, this support mechanism might help some but certainly not all who continue to live in precarious conditions, since returnees who have managed to finalize construction appeared to be a minority and most likely not all of them will relocate to Jalalabad for the winter.

Complementarity with other programmes

As acknowledged by many respondents, landlessness is a major obstacle to returnees' adequate access to shelter, and land and property issues are key drivers of conflict and internal displacement and continue to challenge sustainability of return, reintegration and reconciliation (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2015; UNHCR, Orange Door and VIAMO, 2017; Altai Consulting, 2009; HLP, 2017; Oxfam, 2018). The technical complexities and political sensitivities surrounding land in this context were frequently indicated by UNHCR and other humanitarian actors as requiring long-term comprehensive solutions that pay attention to returnees, IDPs, and host communities, developed through joined-up collaboration. A number of initiatives were found in this regard.

The Housing Land and Property Task Force chaired by UN-Habitat together with UNHCR and NRC, focuses on facilitating a systematic approach to housing, land and property rights protection of displaced populations and other persons at risk, including returnees. In light of the implementation challenges surrounding the LAS, a key strategic priority is to work with the GoA to establish more effective land allocation procedures. Among these is the development of technical procedures that focus on the identification of suitable land for allocation – for example with ease of access to basic services and access roads, not mined, and with good soil quality for housing construction. (HLP, 2017).

¹³ <https://bit.ly/2MEXpsY>

As explained by key informants, to further support this strategic priority, UN HABITAT was about to launch the Sustainable Human Settlements in Urban Areas to Support Reintegration in Afghanistan (SHURA), again in collaboration with UNHCR. This new initiative seeks to identify land to returnees and IDPs in urban areas in proximity to livelihood opportunities and services for eventual allocation by the GoA. This work also builds on the technical support that UN HABITAT has been providing to the GoA on the issuance of occupancy certificates to gradually upgrade the land and property rights of urban households and improve security of tenure.¹⁴ As indicated by a key informant, the new SHURA programme has been conceived as a precursor to the establishment of a “pro-poor housing scheme in urban areas of the country”, precisely in light of population movement trends that see IDPs and returnees increasingly taking up residence in the towns and cities of Afghanistan.

The above are some of the high level inter-agency efforts taking place in the country. They reflect growing understanding of the importance of a concerted effort to tackle the needs of IDPs and returnees. On the ground however, this review found limited, *ad hoc* attention on how to best support the contribution the repatriation grant was making to shelter needs.

An exception was found in Qalan Bafan. There the UNHCR Sub-Office in Mazar had worked jointly with the Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) team of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to support a group of returnees who had been displaced from their area of origin in the Sholgara district (referred to above). Agencies worked together to support returnees to access land in Qalan Bafan under the LAS, for example by providing assistance to processing the application and collating required documents, as well as putting pressure on the GoA and municipality to speed up the process. Subsequently, NRC implemented a shelter project in the area to construct the houses where returnees who were interviewed for this study were still living.

This initiative is an interesting example of how, through collaboration, the cash repatriation grant can be complemented with other shelter support, both legal support and shelter construction. In light of findings so far, assistance and advice in legal matters, on HLP rights, property law, land tenure and occupancy certificates, and advocacy are all of critical importance to support returnees to make informed decisions when investing the repatriation cash grant in land. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that in Qalan Bafan, while immediate shelter needs have been addressed, long-term reintegration opportunities for returnees appear to be challenged by the poor quality of land allocated under the LAS and limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities in the area.

Energy and the Environment

Sectoral outcomes and multipurpose cash contribution

Returnee monitoring reports do not show cash grant expenditures on energy needs. Fuel for household heating was however widely reported, both in FGDs and key informants interviews, as a substantial seasonal cash expenditure for returnees and other population groups in the many high-altitude areas of Afghanistan where winter is harsh.

Indeed, as fieldwork for this study took place during the month of February, and therefore during the cold winter season, heating was frequently indicated as a priority by returnees interviewed. A variety of heating methods were commonly used, including a traditional domestic heating system, in Dari called *sandali*,¹⁵ gas portable heaters, and wood or charcoal burning stoves. During FGDs some estimated the cost of heating in winter at approximately 100 USD per month per household. In both Kabul and Mazar, several FGD participants also mentioned that they were burning plastic items and trash, usually collected by children in nearby dumping sites, as they were unable to regularly afford fuel materials.

¹⁴ <https://bit.ly/2M7TfbM>

¹⁵ This heating method consists of a low table or pyramidal wooden structure with a clay container of charcoal underneath – typically what is left of firewood used for cooking – and covered by a blanket.

Among 2016 returnees, many appeared to have returned in haste with limited time to prepare, arriving in the second part of the year at the onset or during winter. There were indications that part of the repatriation cash grant had been used to buy fuel for heating purposes and to buy winter jackets and warm clothes for family members.¹⁶ Some mentioned that in areas where they had been living in Pakistan, such as Quetta, the weather was hot all year round and they did not own warm winter clothes, and that the repatriation cash grant had enabled them to cover those needs.

Complementarity with other programmes

Since 2015 UNHCR has been providing winterization support in the form of a one-off unconditional cash grant using a vulnerability-based approach to targeting. Areas hosting large numbers of IDPs or recent returnees, particularly where other actors are not present or cannot sufficiently cover existing needs, are prioritized and 10% of vulnerable host community members in the area are also targeted. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) developed by UNHCR Afghanistan¹⁷ are aligned with the Shelter Cluster standards. In late 2017 UNHCR distributed unconditional cash winter assistance of 200 USD to targeted households (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2017e). Findings from post-distribution monitoring of this winterization cash assistance were not available at the time of writing.

WASH

WASH sector outcomes and the contribution of cash

Returnee monitoring reports do not capture whether returnees have used any of the repatriation cash grant to cover WASH needs. UNHCR Afghanistan (2015) only captures access to drinking water in the areas of return, finding that the great majority of returnees were able to access safe potable water. According to UNHCR, Orange Door and VIAMO (2017), 64% of returnees and 56%

of IDPs report that they have the same access to water as the host community.

In peri-urban areas in Mazar, such as Noor Khoda and Dashti Shoor, bimonthly water and electricity bills were indicated by male respondents as amounting to approximately 20–30 USD and were covered initially with the repatriation cash grant, in part or fully (depending on household savings), together with rent costs. However in locations such as Kabul and Cheil Dokhtaran, houses were not connected to the electricity grid and residents accessed free water for domestic use through a local water pump.

Some male and female returnees also recalled having used part of the repatriation cash grant to meet basic household hygiene needs, such as soap and shampoo. FGDs with female participants indicated that, for a minority, a small part of the cash transfer was used to address the specific hygiene needs of women and girls. Some female respondents explained that in rural Afghanistan women typically use a menstrual cloth pad, which they wash and dry out of sight for reuse. In Pakistan however they had become accustomed to disposable sanitary pads, which were considered a more practical solution to menstrual hygiene management than reusable clothes. In Pakistan they were regularly buying sanitary pads themselves from the local market, since the market was very close to their houses, and they were working and had money available to cover such costs.

Upon return to Afghanistan and receipt of the cash grant, some asked their husbands to buy sanitary pads (1 USD for 24 pieces) on their behalf because they did not know their way around the area and the cash grant was in their husbands' hands. Some husbands refused as they considered such items as superfluous expenses. In Qalan Bafan however, some females reportedly succeeded in convincing their husbands: "the cash grant was for each member of the family and so it was also for us. It was our right to ask and use some of it for our needs".

¹⁶ FGD participants struggled to recall exact cash expenditures for these items.

¹⁷ First developed in 2016 and revised in September 2017

Health

Health sector outcomes and the contribution of cash

Returnee monitoring reports do not capture whether returnees have used any of the repatriation cash grant to cover health needs. UNHCR Afghanistan (2015) only captures access to health services (in the areas of return), and finds that access for returnees is similar to the general population: the majority of returnees use public health facilities and only 20% private health facilities. The quality and quantity of medicine available in health centres, and the lack of female personnel or equipment, were indicated as barriers of access. UNHCR, Orange Door and VIAMO (2017) find that 65% of returnees and 51% of IDPs are unable to access healthcare, but no further elaboration is provided on barriers of access for either.

FGD findings do not point to health being a widespread expenditure among returnees interviewed. Only a very small number reported having used the bulk of cash to address health needs. For example, one male returnee in Dashti Shor, Mazar, stated that the bulk of the repatriation cash grant had been used to cover health costs for one disabled child and for childbirth delivery complications. His particularly dire situation was confirmed by other participants during the FGD who stressed that he was struggling to make ends meet and was living in a small rented room together with his five children and wife.

In line with health seeking behaviours noted during discussions with returnees for this review, a health expert respondent stated that among the Afghan population, including returnees and IDPs, household health expenditures are either very low or very high. Either households do not use any cash for health (and these are the majority, as cash is not typically used for minor illnesses), or a lot of cash is used where there is a serious health problem that requires expensive treatment. In turn, the 60 USD per household per month allocated for health expenditures in the SMEB calculation (developed under the CWG, as noted above), was described by the same respondent as largely artificial and not

reflecting the huge variation of health expenditure on the ground. This could be something useful to reflect upon as part of the development of the MEB or SMEB.

Complementarity with other programmes

As a number of UNHCR staff explained, there are mechanisms in place to identify vulnerable returnees, both at encashment centres (through interviews) as well as through the ongoing protection monitoring UNHCR carries out in the country to identify violations of rights and protection risks for people of concern. Persons with Specific Needs identified at encashment centres are referred for follow up and potential assistance in the locations of (intended) return. As the example above indicates however, some returnees may be falling through the cracks. It was beyond the scope of this review to understand why, but the difficulties associated with tracking returnees and the pattern of secondary displacement may be among the reasons.

Education

Education sector outcomes and the contribution of cash

As with WASH and health, returnee monitoring reports do not capture whether returnees have used any of the repatriation cash grant to cover education-related costs. UNHCR Afghanistan (2015) only captures returnee access to education and notes that primary and secondary education is free for all Afghan citizens. However, rates of enrolment among returnees are low and there are disparities between boys and girls. Research by UNHCR, Orange Door and VIAMO (2017) also finds low rates of enrolment and gender disparities among returnee children: only 49% of boys and a mere 27% of girls are in school.

FGDs with returnees pointed to distance to public school and entrenched gender norms as barriers of access to education. In Kabul and in Cheil Dokhtaran, Mazar, children (boys and girls) were not enrolled in school. Distance to the nearest public schools, located approximately 30–40 minutes'

walk away, was unanimously reported as the main reason. However, distance did not seem to be the only reason for girls not being in school. In both Dashti Shor and Noor Khoda areas returnees said that a public school was located very close to their houses, but in both locations only boys were enrolled. When asked, some returnees in Cheil Dokhtaran stated that even if there was a public school nearby they would not enrol their daughters. They added that when they lived in refugee camps in Pakistan, primary education and learning classes for adults were offered free of charge; even then, only boys and men attended.

During an FGD in Noor Khoda, some females said they intended to convince their husbands to enrol daughters in school, as families of other ethnicities in the area were doing. As one young woman explained:

“

I will speak to my husband and make sure that my daughters are enrolled in school. They also have the right to a better future. Why do our girls have to continue to be kept in the dark and our boys in the light?

Interestingly, the same respondents also described the good relationship and friendship they had developed with their Hazara neighbours (as discussed above). This may be an indication that returnee integration among other ethnic groups is engendering positive changes around gender norms and expectations, in contrast with returnees who cluster in areas predominantly inhabited by other returnees. This is an issue that could be further investigated.

Only in Noor Khoda was part of the cash reported as having been used by returnee households to send boys to primary school. Beneficiaries indicated that when they returned in November 2016 there were only two months left to the end of the academic year, and therefore they waited until March 2017¹⁸ to enrol boys. Textbooks were provided by the school, but they bought uniforms

for around 2 USD per child and stationary. They estimated that the monthly school cost per child, including food, is approximately 12 USD, which they covered with the repatriation grant. Review findings confirm that that cash alone is simply unable to redress patterns of inequalities, in this case gender-based inequalities.

Complementarity with other programmes

Information about the importance of education is provided at encashment centres through the provision of leaflets and brief discussions with parents and children, as part of the “back to school” campaign. However not all FGD participants remembered having been provided with education-related information, and as the findings above demonstrate, the service has done little to redress barriers of access to education. This is not surprising, since redressing gender-based norms and practices requires tackling values, norms and social institutions that maintain and reinforce inequalities – something that one-off messages can hardly achieve. In Noor Khoda for example, male beneficiaries remembered seeing leaflets distributed at the encashment centre and recalled that UNHCR staff had talked to them about the importance of sending both boys and girls to school. One male beneficiary candidly stated that to be polite he nodded and “accepted”, but already knew he would not send his daughters to school upon return in Mazar.

Some key informants mentioned that returnee inclusion in the education system in Afghanistan was being hampered by a lengthy bureaucratic process which requires school certificates to be stamped at the Afghan Embassy/Consulate in the country of asylum, as well as at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education at provincial level upon return to Afghanistan. It is not difficult to see how many may be faced with enormous challenges when it comes to recognition of school certificates upon return. For example, the thousands who returned rather suddenly in 2016

¹⁸ The academic year in Afghanistan consists of two semesters and runs from March to January.



would have hardly had the time to start this process in Pakistan; many returnees may be simply unaware of this requirement and/or may not have the financial means to pay for this process, including travel to the consulates in countries of origin and provincial capitals in Afghanistan (UNHCR Afghanistan, 2015).

There may be a stronger role for UNHCR in collaboration with other actors, such as UNICEF, to advocate to and support the Ministry of Education to develop a simplified process. Successful advocacy UNHCR has carried out to waive the *tazikra* requirement for acquiring a SIM card should serve as encouragement for advocacy work in this context, to redress supply-side barriers of access to education.

Conclusions

The repatriation cash grant has helped Afghan returnees to meet a number of basic needs across several sectors. Shelter needs were found to be prioritized by many, with the cash grant having been used to buy land or rent or construct homes, therefore positively contributing to a key aspect of reintegration. At the same time, issues related to security of tenure and quality of shelter have pointed to the challenges of ensuring quality of shelter outcomes with multipurpose cash only, in the notable absence of technical and legal support, including provision of legal assistance, and advice on HLP rights and property law.

Only a small minority of male returnees were found to have used the repatriation cash grant as a springboard for livelihood investments, and the lack of jobs was reported virtually by all as a major challenge, also driving further migration of young males in search of jobs. Systematic engagement, support and coaching of potential returnees could be provided in Pakistan to capture existing skills and explore livelihood opportunities and investments, as informed by socio-economic profiling and market analysis in return regions. Providing part of the cash grant as start-up capital (for some) could also be explored as a more effective way to ensure livelihood outcomes.

The findings also show the limits of multipurpose cash assistance in addressing systemic barriers of access to education. These include national policies that complicate the integration of returnees into the national education system, and for girls specifically, entrenched gender-based norms, which are also manifest in relation to women and intra-household decision making power around cash expenditure. Cash alone was not helping returnees avoid risks and achieve safe return to non-conflict affected areas, and several returnees interviewed had become IDPs in a matter of weeks or months following return. A regional approach to increase investment in communication campaigns in the country of asylum is one step suggested, but there is a need to more thoroughly understand how to tackle this pattern.

Developing a theory of change, unpacking and clearly stating programme objectives, and determining the value of the repatriation cash grant on the basis of MEB or SMEB calculations in coordination with other cash initiatives and actors in the country are all critical steps to improve the quality of monitoring, effectively measure progress towards more clearly defined objectives, as well as ensuring transparency and communication to other stakeholders.

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Annex 1:

Overview of the cost of basic commodities for 2016

No.	Item	Unit	Price in 2014		Price in 2015		Price in 2016		Difference between 2016 and 2015	
			USD	Afs.*	USD	Afs.	USD	Afs.	G (E-C)	H (G/C)
			A	B	C	D	E	F		
I. Basic Food Stuff – Price in USD										
1	Flour	Kg	\$ 0.51	27.8	\$ 0.45	28.2	\$ 0.43	29.2	\$ (0.03)	-6%
2	Rice	Kg	\$ 1.12	61.4	\$ 1.01	62.9	\$ 0.97	66.4	\$ (0.04)	-4%
3	Oil	Kg	\$ 1.33	73.0	\$ 1.29	80.1	\$ 1.17	80.4	\$ (0.12)	-9%
4	Tea	Kg	\$ 3.93	216.1	\$ 3.87	240.2	\$ 3.76	257.6	\$ (0.11)	-3%
5	Sugar	Kg	\$ 0.76	41.8	\$ 0.74	46.0	\$ 0.72	49.2	\$ (0.02)	-3%
6	Salt	Kg	\$ 0.28	15.2	\$ 0.27	16.8	\$ 0.28	19.1	\$ 0.01	3%
7	Beans	Kg	\$ 1.30	71.5	\$ 1.17	72.8	\$ 1.12	76.8	\$ (0.05)	-5%
8	Food (Normal Price/portion)	Portion	\$ 2.78	152.7	\$ 2.87	178.1	\$ 3.03	207.6	\$ 0.16	5%
Average I										-3%
II. Non-Food Items – Price in USD										
1	Petrol	Lit	\$ 0.99	54.7	\$ 0.83	51.2	\$ 0.61	41.5	\$ (0.22)	-27%
2	Diesel	Lit	\$ 0.87	47.6	\$ 0.74	46.2	\$ 0.53	36.3	\$ (0.21)	-29%
3	Gas	Kg	\$ 1.21	66.4	\$ 0.99	61.7	\$ 0.63	43.4	\$ (0.36)	-36%
4	Fire Wood	560 kg	\$125.08	6,879.1	\$111.31	6,901.0	\$ 99.39	6,807.9	\$ (11.92)	-11%
5	Match boxes	Box	\$ 0.45	24.6	\$ 0.44	27.5	\$ 0.45	30.5	\$ 0.00	0%
6	Jerry Can	Piece	\$ 2.43	133.9	\$ 2.26	140.2	\$ 2.30	157.8	\$ 0.04	2%
7	Soap Bath	Piece	\$ 0.53	29.1	\$ 0.53	33.0	\$ 0.49	33.9	\$ (0.04)	-7%
8	Soap Laundry	Piece	\$ 0.32	17.5	\$ 0.32	19.8	\$ 0.29	19.5	\$ (0.03)	-11%
9	Kettle/tea pot	Piece	\$ 6.76	371.6	\$ 6.59	408.6	\$ 6.15	421.3	\$ (0.44)	-7%
10	Pressure Cooker	Piece	\$ 15.45	849.6	\$ 14.85	920.7	\$ 13.74	941.1	\$ (1.11)	-7%
11	Blanket	Piece	\$ 25.34	1,393.7	\$ 24.50	1,518.9	\$ 23.15	1,585.8	\$ (1.35)	-6%
12	Tarpaulin (Chaines)	Piece	\$ 9.67	531.9	\$ 9.65	598.5	\$ 9.76	668.6	\$ 0.11	1%
13	Gas Bottle	Piece	\$ 12.92	710.6	\$ 12.45	772.1	\$ 12.22	837.3	\$ (0.23)	-2%
14	Mattress	Piece	\$ 22.41	1,232.3	\$ 22.67	1,405.5	\$ 19.38	1,327.5	\$ (3.29)	-15%
15	Bag Cloth Hygiene kit	Piece	\$ 5.41	297.8	\$ 5.28	327.6	\$ 5.21	356.6	\$ (0.08)	-1%
Average II										-10%
III. Others – Price in USD										
1	Taxi Fare	Km	\$ 0.97	53.2	\$ 0.76	47.4	\$ 0.79	54.0	\$ 0.02	3%
2	Buss Fare	Stop	\$ 0.22	12.3	\$ 0.20	12.3	\$ 0.22	15.3	\$ 0.02	12%
3	Standard Hotel Room	Room	\$ 39.60	2,178.1	\$ 37.70	2,337.4	\$ 34.39	2,355.7	\$ (3.31)	-9%
4	House Rent	Room	\$108.46	5,965.2	\$ 97.93	6,071.7	\$ 96.23	6,591.6	\$ (1.70)	-2%
5	Minimum labour cost	Daily	\$ 5.69	313.2	\$ 5.21	323.1	\$ 5.18	355.2	\$ (0.03)	0%
6	Food for livestock	1MT	\$109.97	6,048.1	\$107.41	6,659.7	\$108.24	7,414.2	\$ 0.82	1%
Average III										1%
Overall Average (I, II, III)										-4%

Annex 2:

List of key informants and FGDs conducted in Afghanistan

Organization	Name and surname	Title
UNHCR	Sergio Molinari	CBI Officer
UNHCR	Aneeta Ghotge	Senior Protection Officer
UNHCR	Mohammed Haroon	Assistant Repatriation Officer
UNHCR	Stephen Gherman	Protection Cluster Coordinator
UNHCR	Anna Law	CWG Coordinator and NRC Cash Advisor
UNHCR	Martha Kow-Donkor	NFI/Shelter Cluster Coordinator
UNHCR	Nanduri Sateesh	Senior Livelihoods Officer/Senior Programme Officer
DRC	Gul Rahman	ERM Manager
DRC	Naser Shawkat Haider	Emergency Coordinator
WFP	Amarullah Hasid	Head of VAM
WFP	Mohammed Sheikh	Programme Policy Officer
WFP	Saddiq Amin	Emergency Programme officer
WFP	Saleem Hakimzada	Programme assistant CBT
FAO	Ulfatullah Malangyar	Food Security Cluster Coordinator
OCHA	Toma Dursina	Humanitarian Officer
ECHO	Marco Menestrina	Humanitarian Adviser
IOM	Haruka Ueda	Shelter and Cash Based Initiatives Officer
Afghanistan Holding Group	Abuzar Royesh	Senior Research Associate and Evaluation Manager of UNHCR Independent Evaluation of the Repatriation Cash Grant
United States Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)	Said Ebad Hashemi	Refugee Affairs Specialist
UN HABITAT	David Dominic Maliro	Chief Technical Adviser – Program Manager (SHURA)
People In Need (Mazar)	Ahmad Zahir Samim	Emergency Response Mechanism Team Leader
NRC (Mazar)	Patoney Frogth	Emergency Coordinator Programme

FGDs with documented returnee beneficiaries of the UNHCR cash grant

Total number of FGDs	FGD participants	Fieldwork sites in Kabul and Mazar
2	Females, married with children	Kabul, PD21
2	Males, married with children	Kabul PD21
2	Females, married with children	Mazar, Cheil Dokhtaran (Dehdadi district)
2	Males, married with children	Mazar, Cheil Dokhtaran (Dehdadi district)
1	Males, married with children	Mazar, Qaleen Bafan (Nahr e Shahi district)
1	Females, married with children	Mazar, Qaleen Bafan (Nahr e Shahi district)
1	Males, married with children	Mazar, Dashti Shor (PD8)
1	Females, married with children	Mazar, Dashti Shor (PD8)
1	Males, married with children	Mazar, Noor Khoda (PD8)
1	Females, married with children	Mazar, Noor Khoda (PD8)
14		



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