



AFGHANISTAN

UPDATE ON RETURN TRENDS

24 August 2016

KEY FIGURES

(as of 22 August 2016)

56,363

People already returned in 2016

- 54,602 (96.8%) from Pakistan
- 1,658 (3.0%) from Iran
- 103 (0.2%) from other countries

More than

220,000

people expected to return in total in 2016

USD 400

Repatriation cash grant per person as of 25 June 2016

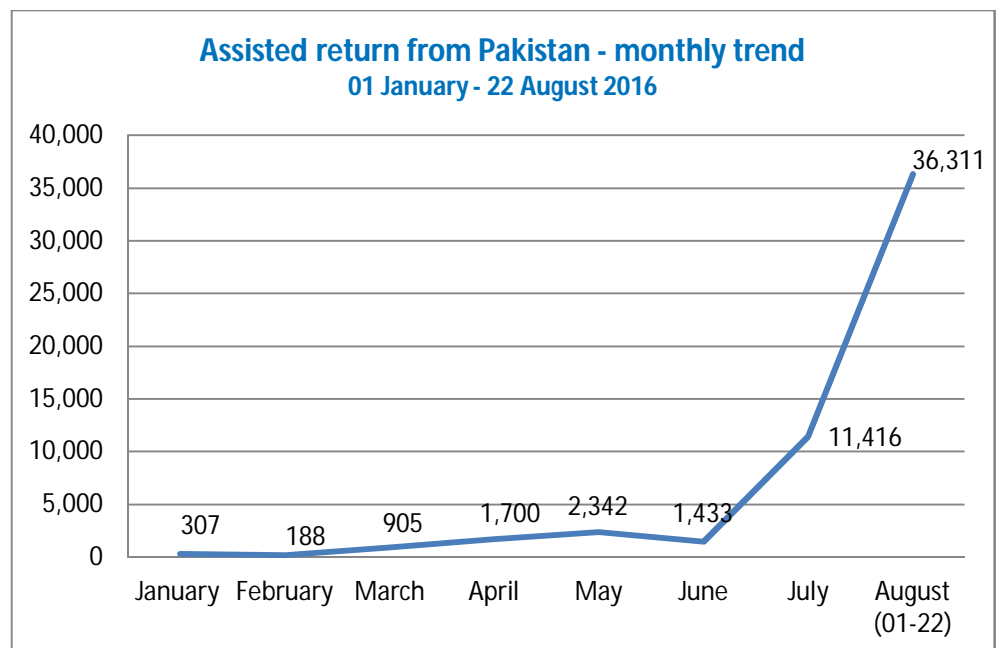
MOST URGENT FINANCIAL NEEDS

USD 90.5 million

Required to fund the repatriation cash grants (USD 415 per person incl. USD 15 service fees)

HIGHLIGHTS

- The rate of return of Afghan refugees has increased significantly since July compared to the first six months of the year, during which period only 7,804 Afghans returned. In July and August, 48,559 people returned, bringing the total number of returnees in 2016 to 56,363 as of 22 August. Given the precarious security situation and limited absorption capacity in Afghanistan this increased rate of return must be considered and explained within a wider context, as outlined below.
- In line with the June 2016 UNHCR Regional Plan: Building Resilience and Solutions for Afghan Refugees in South-West Asia, UNHCR has doubled the repatriation cash grant provided upon return to USD 400 per person. This was based on evidence from UNHCR's enhanced returnee monitoring that found the grant was insufficient to address the initial reintegration needs of families. Monitoring analysis was showing most returnees spent their cash grant within the first two months on basic requirements such as food, transportation and rent. The increased grant is intended to cover returnees' basic needs for a longer period, but also to increase their ability to make longer-term decisions and to invest in more sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- On 29 June, the Prime Minister of Pakistan extended the validity of Afghan refugees' Proof of Registration (PoR) cards until the end of 2016.



CONTEXT

- The current trends and UNHCR's expectation of a continued high level of return are based on the complex dynamics in the region. The increased repatriation cash grant is a significant contributing factor, and refugees interviewed upon arrival in Afghanistan confirm the importance of this support for their initial reintegration efforts. The spike in returns has also coincided with the introduction of enhanced border management at the Torkham border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan, requiring every Afghan to be in possession of a valid national e-passport and Pakistani visa. While the validity of PoR cards has been provisionally extended, refugees are increasingly anxious about what may happen at the end of the year.
- Returning refugees from Pakistan also report incidents of harassment, leading to closing of their small businesses and evictions, and intimidation in certain areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to some extent in Punjab and Sindh, as well as en route to Afghanistan. They also report decreased acceptance by hosting communities and local authorities, resulting in a general feeling of no longer being welcome in Pakistan.
- In response to terrorist attacks in Pakistan, an increased level of security operations against undocumented foreigners, including Afghans, has also impacted refugees' decision-making, despite the assurances by the authorities that PoR card holders should not be subjected to arrest and deportation.
- Deportations and spontaneous returns of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan have also increased substantially since July compared to the first six months of the year. As reported by the Ministry for Refugees and Repatriation of Afghanistan and by IOM, numbers are increasing significantly. There were more than 29,000 spontaneous returns and deportations from Pakistan in July, and 35,000 in the first two weeks of August alone.
- These trends have immediate repercussions on sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan, and compound the challenges faced by returnees in accessing basic services, secure land tenure, adequate shelter and jobs, particularly for the youth. The conclusions of the 27th Tripartite Commission meeting between the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan and UNHCR in July reaffirmed the commitment to the principle of voluntary repatriation and the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, which remains the main framework to identify and implement solutions for refugees in the region. It also stressed the need to create an environment conducive for voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan, particularly by integrating returnee needs within national development planning processes across responsible line Ministries.
- Additionally, in a specially convened Afghan elders' *jirga* in connection with the Tripartite Commission meeting, the refugee communities were consulted as to their views, underscoring the importance of continued cooperation between UNHCR and the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan towards sustainable voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity.

RESPONSE

- Based on the recent trends and subject to review, UNHCR is anticipating there will be a total of more than 220,000 returnees in 2016. As a consequence, USD 90.5 million are urgently required. These funds are critical so as to provide the full range of services that will enable sustained and dignified return. This includes smooth processing at voluntary repatriation centres in Pakistan (VRCs), providing cash grants to returnees, maintaining the encashment facilities and scaling up services in the encashment centres, including vaccinations for children, emergency medical services, mine risk education and protection monitoring.
- Anticipating greater returns, in Afghanistan UNHCR has increased the processing capacity at encashment centres, and enhanced interviews with returnees to identify protection concerns. It is also conducting focus group discussions with returnees by groups (men/women, boys/girls), the results of which will help inform UNHCR's monitoring activities in Pakistan. All returning PoR card holders undergo biometric verification during the de-registration process in Pakistan.

- In Pakistan, UNHCR is conducting a mass information and media campaign regarding the modalities for voluntary repatriation. It has increased the capacity of VRCs by extending operational hours to six days a week and adding a second shift, and plans to open a new centre. These activities are being complemented by ten telephone hotlines (increased from two) and the establishment of information/grievance desks at the VRCs that can immediately provide refugees with information on repatriation.
- UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan continue to seek to prevent the harassment and intimidation of PoR card holders by local authorities and the police, and to monitor and follow up on reports of such. The Ministry of States and Frontier Regions, responsible for refugee matters, has continuously intervened with the provincial police, reminding them of the status and rights of PoR card holders as refugees. The police in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa set up free hotlines for refugees to call in case of incidents, complementing UNHCR's ten hotlines. UNHCR and its partner ALAC have also intervened on behalf of individual refugees wrongfully detained, advocating for their release and securing documentation for them.
- With support of UNHCR, an Afghan refugee *jirga*, composed of some 150 people, is scheduled to visit Kabul and meet with President Ghani in the coming days in order to discuss concerns of returning refugees and their inclusion in relevant government plans.
- UNHCR and IOM have initiated discussions with the Afghanistan Humanitarian Country Team about applying to the Central Emergency Response Fund for a grant under its rapid response window to address the sudden increase and corresponding humanitarian needs of registered and undocumented returnees.

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