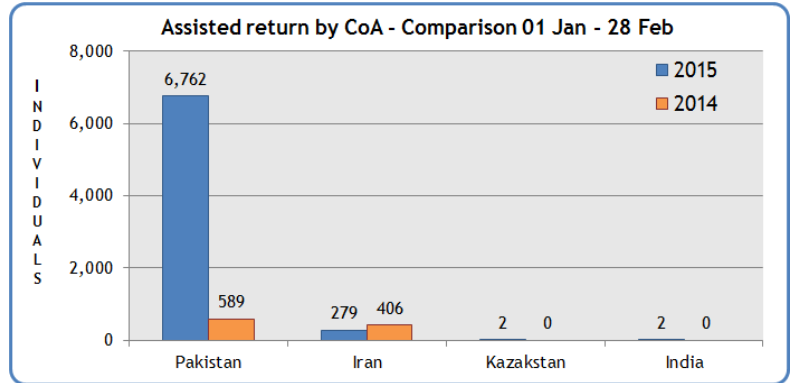


VOLUNTARY RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN

In February 2015, a total of 3,728 Afghan refugees voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. 3,608 came from Pakistan and 120 from Iran. This figure is nearly six times higher compared to the same period in February 2014, and is also 12% higher compared to 3,317 returnees in January 2015.

In the first two months of 2015, a total of 7,045 Afghan refugees (1,259 families) returned to Afghanistan under UNHCR's assisted return program.



The majority (6,762) came from Pakistan and 279 from Iran. The return trend this year represents a substantial increase compared to 995 Afghan refugees returned during the same period in 2014. Normally the return trend is very low during the winter season and peak return occurs between mid-April and October.

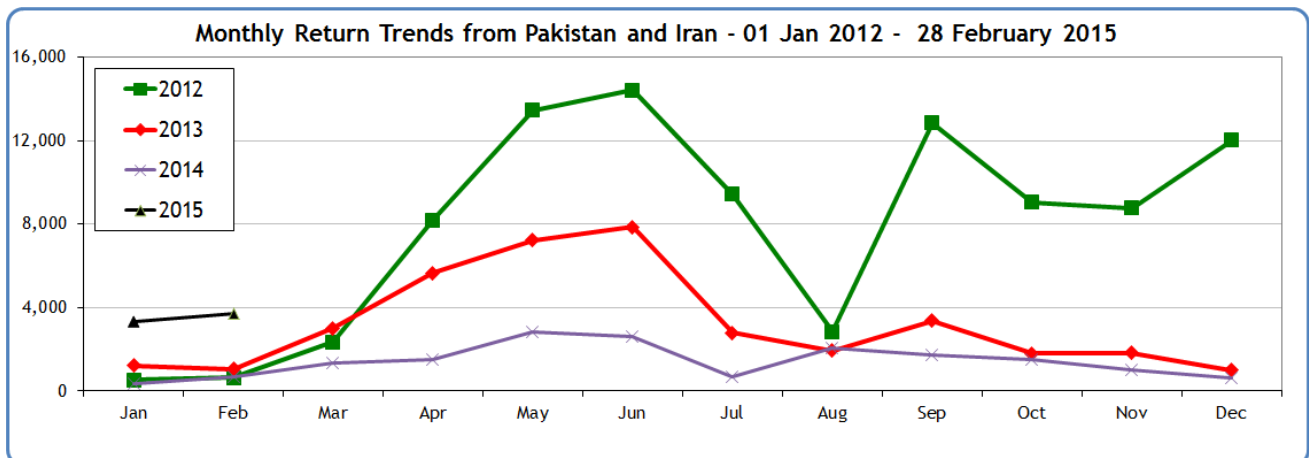
However, since January 2015, the return trend from Pakistan has suddenly increased due to the recent security measures implemented by the Pakistani authorities following the December terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar, KPK. Many returnees have reported arrests, detention, extortion, and harassment by local authorities, which have created pressure to return to Afghanistan. The most seriously impacted areas are Haripur (KPK) and Mithrpur (AJK).

Region	No. of individuals returned - Comparison by year			
	Jan - Feb 2015		Jan - Feb 2014	
	No.	%	No.	%
East	2,924	41.5%	364	36.6%
Central	1,981	28.1%	223	22.4%
Northeast	704	10.0%	45	4.5%
North	670	9.5%	54	5.4%
Southeast	393	5.6%	3	0.3%
South	209	3.0%	141	14.2%
West	144	2.0%	149	15.0%
Central Highlands	20	0.3%	16	1.6%
Total	7,045	100.0%	995	100.0%

A Tripartite Commission Meeting (Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as UNHCR) will be held in Islamabad on 11 March 2015. This meeting will examine the current context for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and identify measures to support gradual, voluntary return to Afghanistan in conditions of safety and dignity.

Eviction notices by the authorities are cited as the primary push factor that influenced Afghan refugees to return from Pakistan. Discrimination, harassment, economic factors, settlement closure and fear of arrest or deportation are mentioned as additional reasons for return from Pakistan in 2015.

The return trend from Iran is 31% lower compared to 406 returnees during January and February 2014.



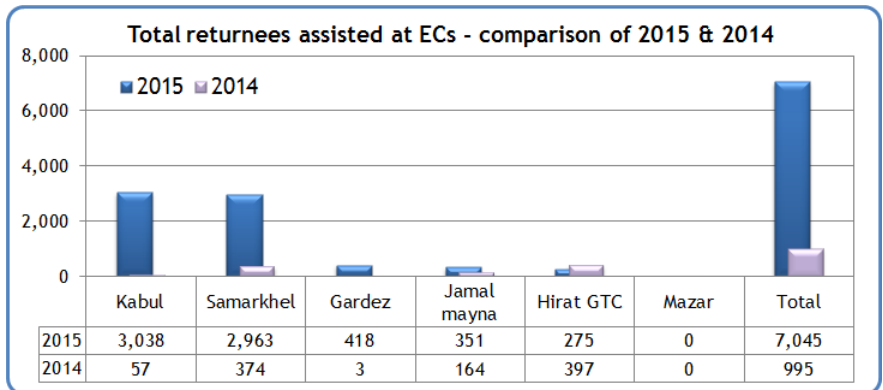
RETURN PROCESS

UNHCR’s Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs) are processing refugees in the country of asylum willing to return to Afghanistan and issuing a Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) for each family.

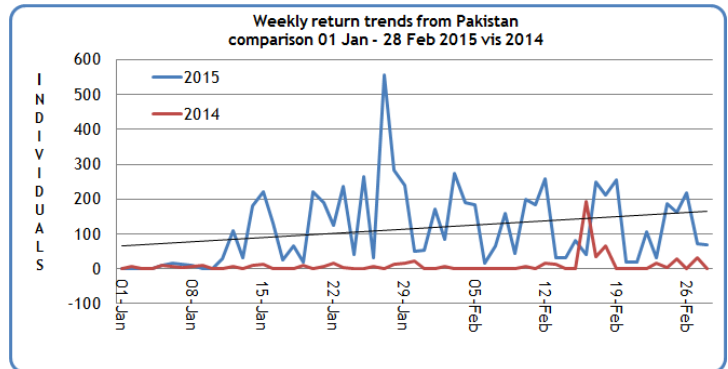
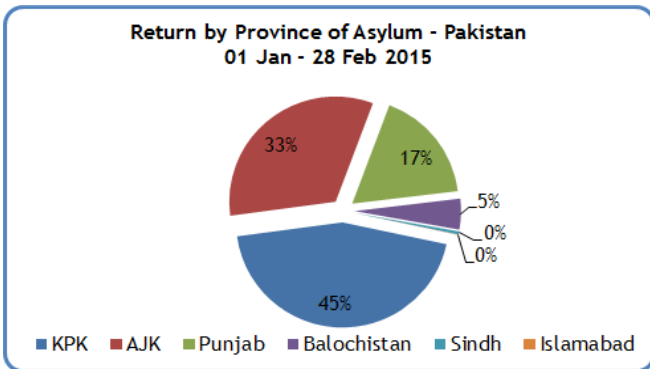
Two VRCs are in Pakistan: Chamkani in Peshawar (KPK) and Baleli Quetta, Baluchistan.

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.

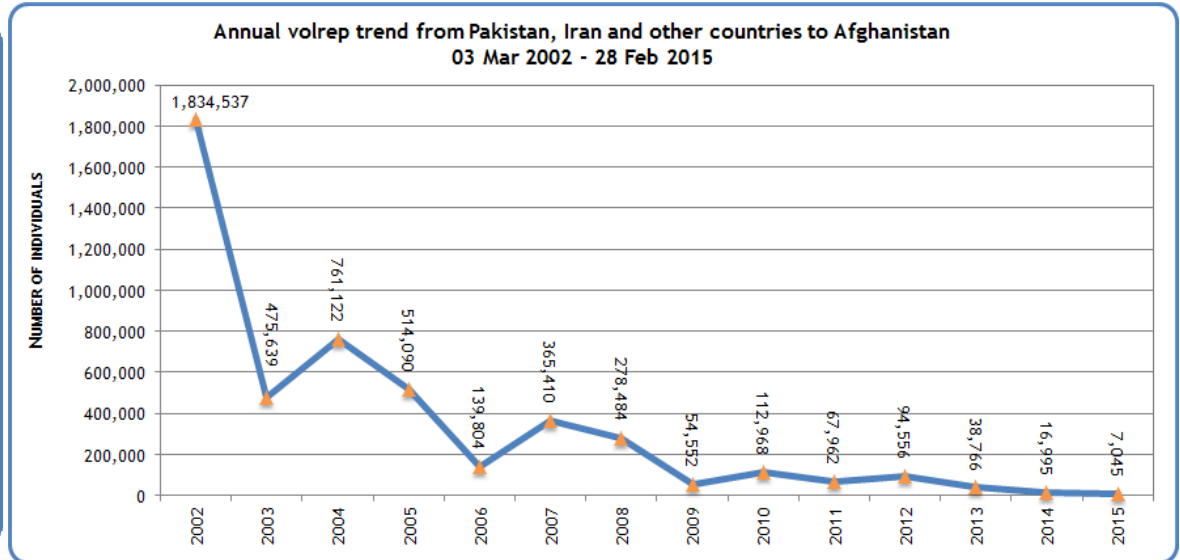
Upon return to Afghanistan, returnees are assisted at five Encashment Centers (ECs): Samarkhel (Nangarhar), Kabul (Kabul), Gardez (Paktya), Jamal Mayna (Kandahar) and Herat (Herat).



At the ECs, depending on the province of origin, all Afghan returnees with VRFs received approximately US\$ 200 per person (between US\$30 - US\$70 for transport and US\$150 as a short-term integration 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.

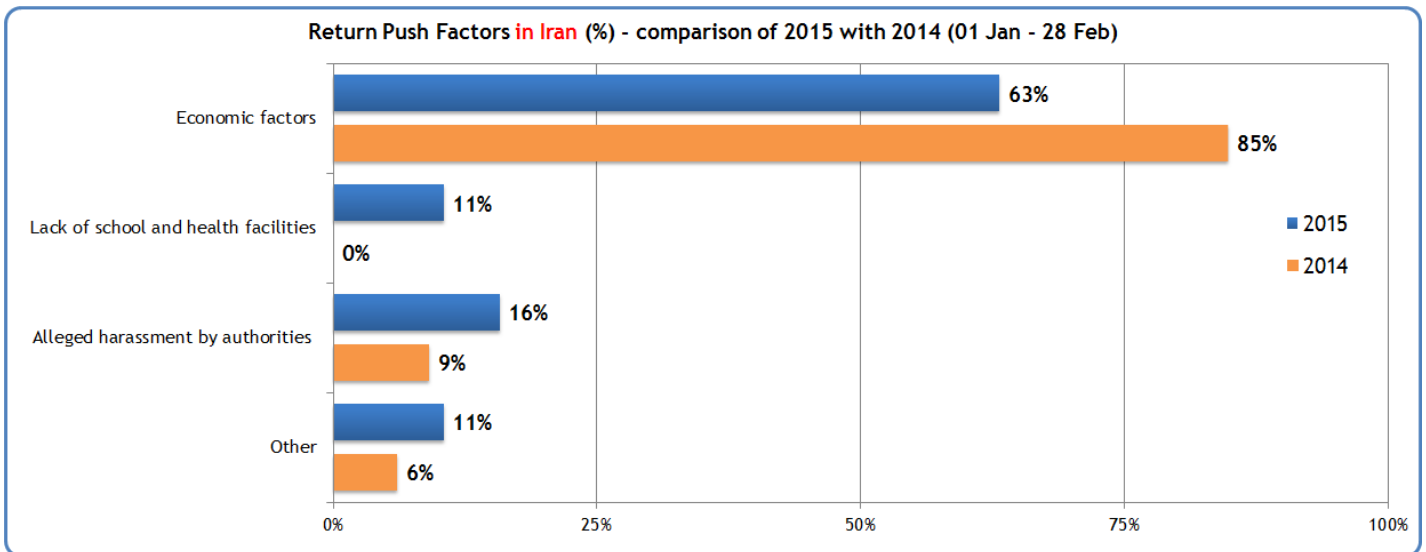
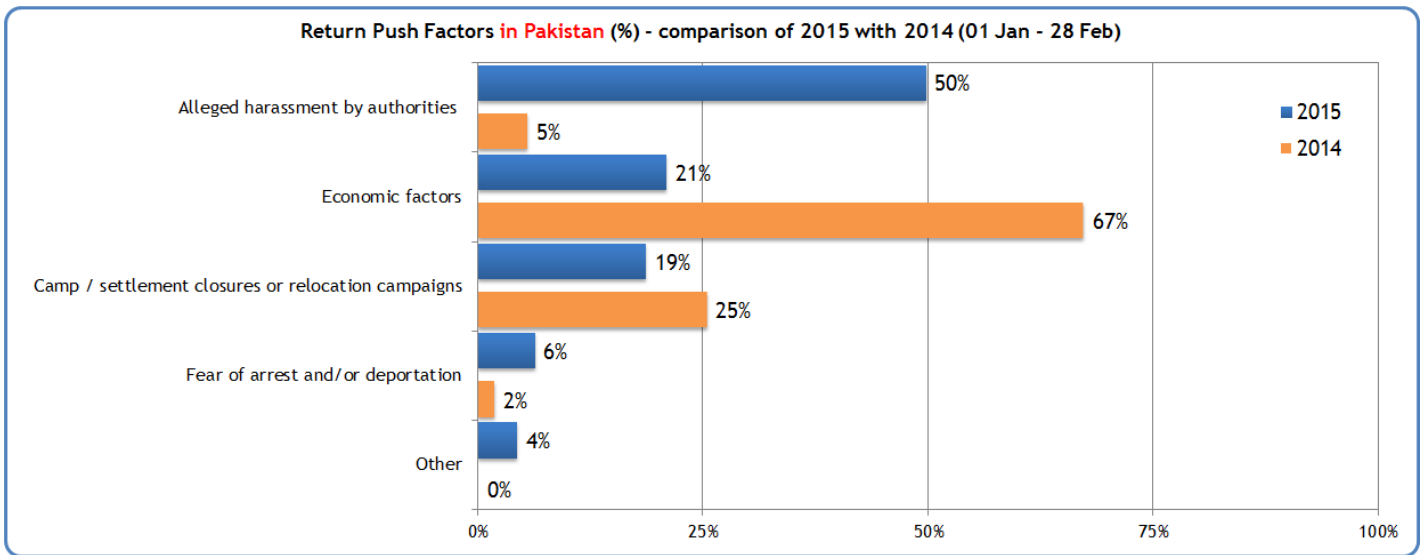
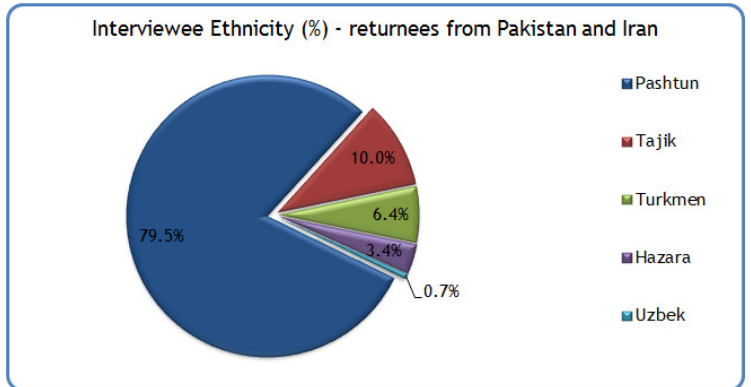
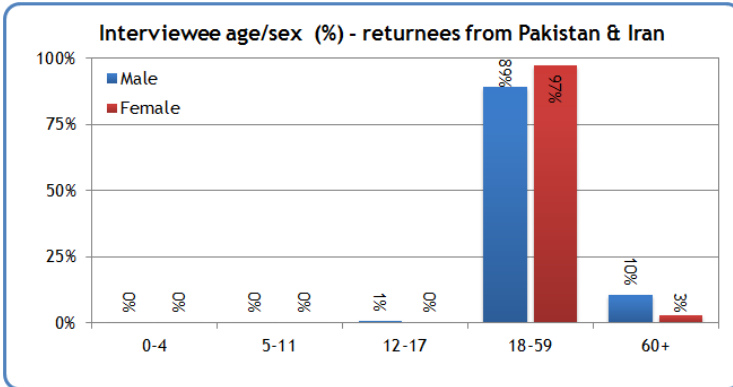


From the start of UNHCR’s assisted voluntary repatriation operation in March 2002 to the end of February 2015, over 5.8 million Afghan refugees have returned home, out of which over 4.7 million repatriated with assistance from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and UNHCR. In total, returnees comprise 20% of the Afghanistan’s population.

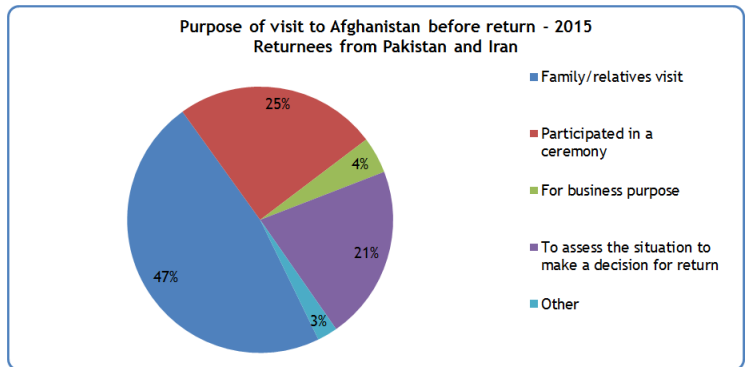
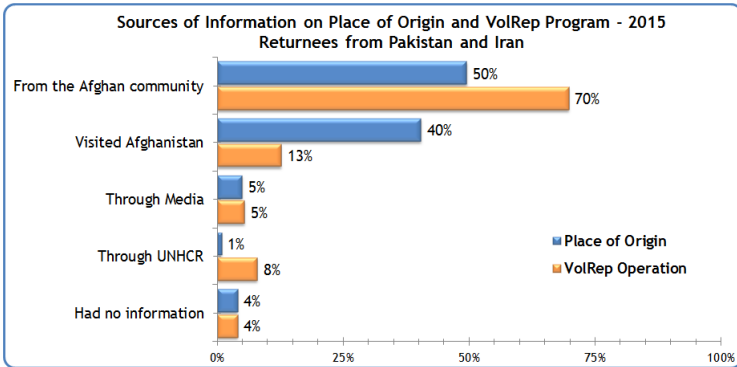
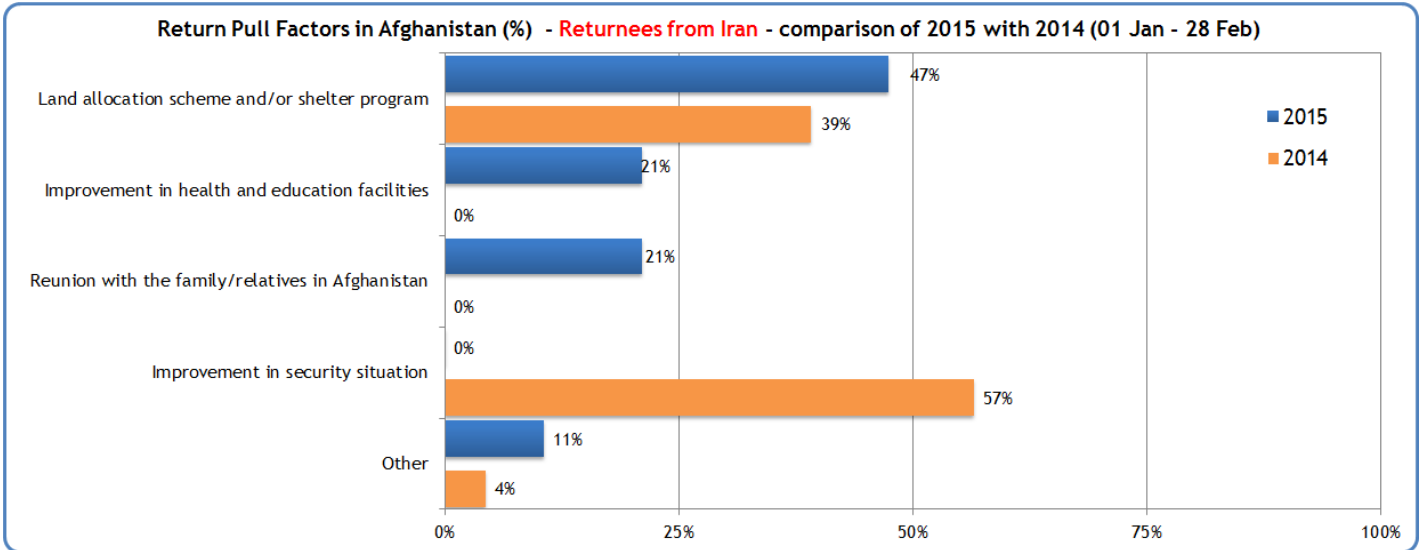
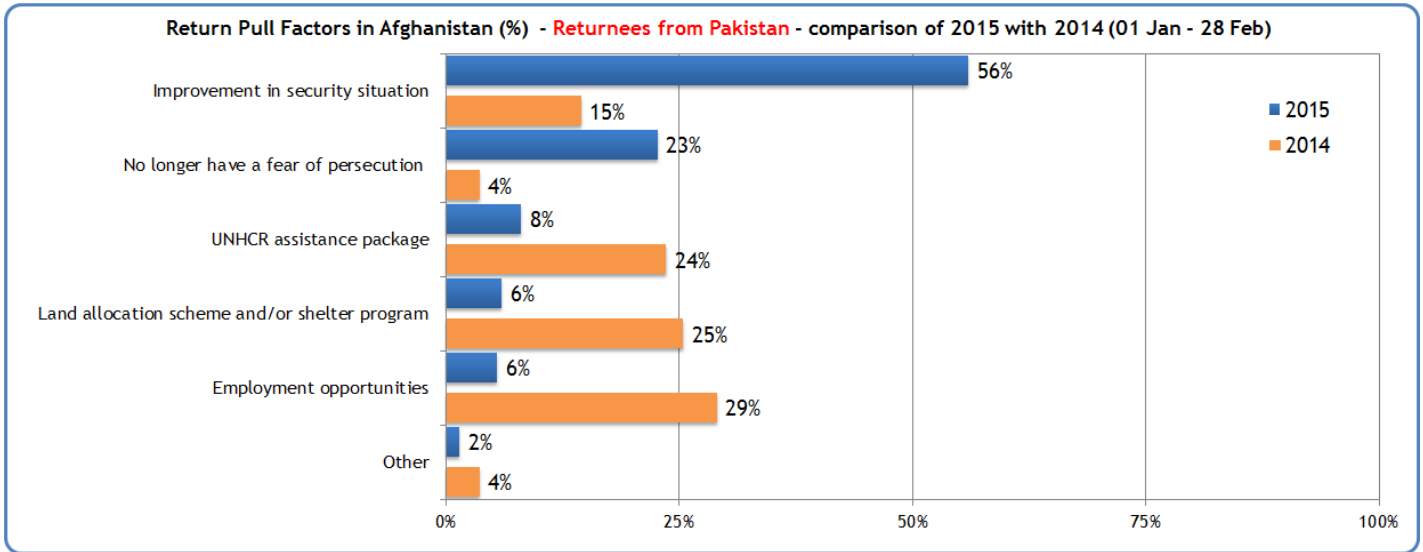


ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING

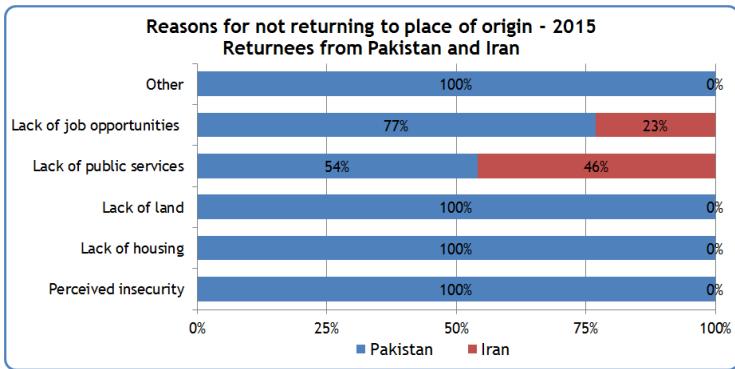
Between 1 January–28 February 2015, a total of 440 interviews were conducted with returning refugees from Pakistan (421) and Iran (19). Interviewees were selected in two ways: at random (256) and from those with protection concerns (184) at the first point of contact in Afghanistan, the UNHCR Transit/Encashment Centres in Kabul, Jalalabad (Samarkhel), 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.



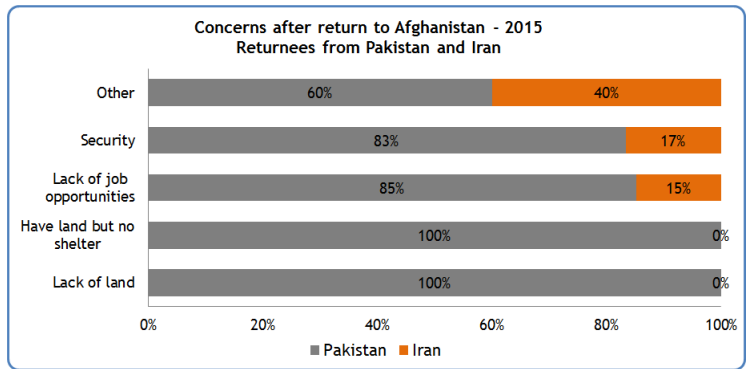
ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING



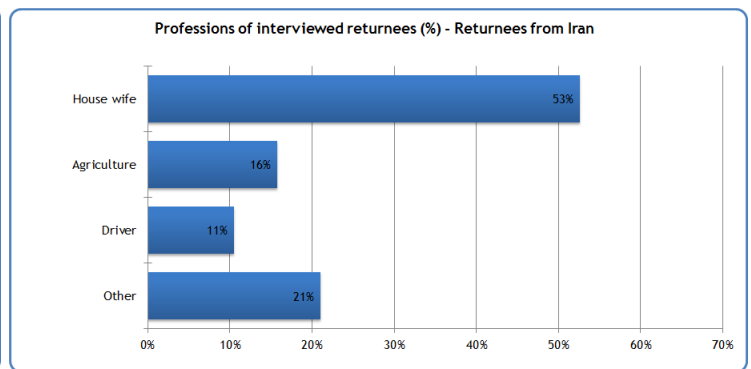
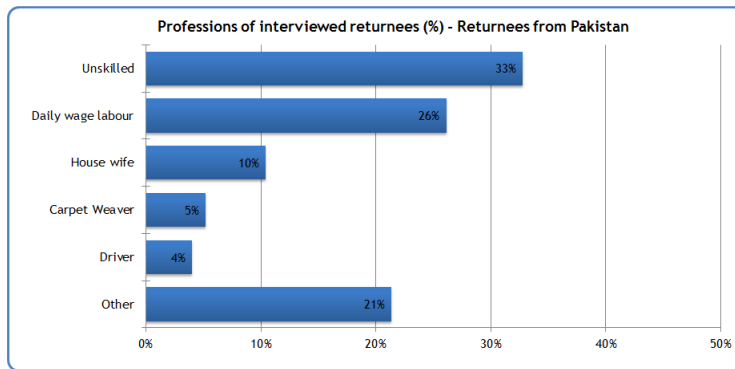
* Most of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan mentioned that they had visited Afghanistan within the past few months, while a majority of the returnees from Iran mentioned that they had visited Afghanistan five or more years ago. The reason for this discrepancy could include strict border control by Iran and longer distances.



Out of a total of 440 respondents, 209 returnees stated that they do not intend to repatriate to their place of origin



The primary obstacles discouraging Afghan refugees from returning have been lack of land, employment and shelter.



Credit: UNHCR/ M. Haroon

Alleged extortion in Pakistan

In addition to the reported harassment by authorities, interviewed returnees also made complaints about extortion and bribery on the road from UNHCR VRC (Chamkani) up to Torkham crossing point. Police check points located in Karkhano up to Torkham, Charikas, Attock and Gujjar Khan districts of Punjab province were mentioned as problematic areas.

BORDER MONITORING

DEPORTATION OF UNDOCUMENTED AFGHAN NATIONALS (NON-REFUGEES)

Undocumented 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 - 28 February 2015: A total of 18,899 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported (via Zaranj: 58% and Islam Qala: 42% border points) from Iran. This figure is 35% higher compared to 13,949 deportees in January 2015.

1 Jan–28 Feb 2015: A total of 32,848 undocumented Afghans were deported from Iran. This is 66% higher compared to 19,769 Afghans were deported during the same period in 2014.

A total number of 206,149 Afghans were deported from Iran in 2014.

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 vulnerable deported undocumented Afghans (non-refugees).

IOM provides vulnerable cases 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	Total Individuals
		Families	Individuals			Male		Female			
			M	F	Total	Adult	UAM	Adult	UAM		
01 - 28 Feb 2015	Zaranj	244	423	498	921	9,998	28	0	0	10,026	10,947
	Islam Qala	14	25	35	60	7,812	80	0	0	7,892	7,952
Total		258	448	533	981	17,810	108	0	0	17,918	18,899
01 Jan -28 Feb 2015	Zaranj	468	858	988	1,846	15,751	28	0	0	15,779	17,625
	Islam Qala	37	69	79	148	14,900	175	0	0	15,075	15,223
Total		505	927	1,067	1,994	30,651	203	0	0	30,854	32,848

PAKISTAN:

1 - 28 February 2015: A total of 1,810 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham (1,575) and Spin Boldak (235) border points. This figure reflect 23% increase compared to 1,472 deportees in January 2015.

1 January - 28 February 2014: A total of 3,047 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham Border. This figure is almost 10 times higher compared to 281 deportees during same period in 2014.

Recent measures taken by the Pakistani authorities following a terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar, KPK seems to be driving the high number of deportees in 2015.

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

In addition, 235 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Spin Boldak (SB) between 22-28 Feb 2015.

A total number of 3,800 Afghans were deported from Pakistan via Torkham in 2014.

Deportations from Pakistan											
Reporting Period	Entry Point	Family Groups				Single				Total	Total Individuals
		Families	Individuals			Male		Female			
			M	F	Total	Adult	UAM	Adult	UAM		
01 - 28 Feb 2015	Torkham	0	0	0	0	1,575	0	0	0	1,575	1,575
	Spin Boldak*	0	0	0	0	235	0	0	0	235	235
Total		0	0	0	0	1,810	0	0	0	1,810	1,810
01 Jan -28 Feb 2015	Torkham	0	0	0	0	3,047	0	0	0	3,047	3,047
	Spin Boldak	0	0	0	0	235	0	0	0	235	235
Total		0	0	0	0	3,282	0	0	0	3,282	3,282

* Border monitoring activities were resumed in Spin Boldak on 21 February 2015.

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

Assisted Voluntary Repatriation to Afghanistan

Return by Province of Destination - 03 March 2002- 28 February 2015

