

VOLREP AND BORDER MONITORING MONTHLY UPDATE



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UNHCR AFGHANISTAN

JULY 2013

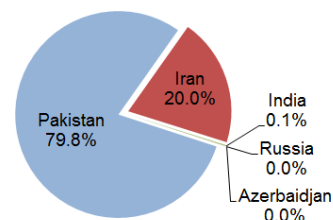
From the start of UNHCR's assisted voluntary repatriation operation in March 2002 to the end of July 2013, over 5.8 million Afghan refugees have returned home, out of which over 4.7 million repatriated with assistance from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and UNHCR. Today, about a quarter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

VOLUNTARY RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN

1 – 31 July 2013: In July 2013, a total of 2,768 Afghan refugees voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. Of this, 1,960 came from Pakistan, 802 from Iran and 6 from India.

1 January – 31 July 2013: During the first seven months of 2013, a total of 28,792 Afghan refugees (averaging 136/day) voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. The rate of return so far this year is lower (41%) compared to the 48,997 Afghans who returned during the same period in 2012.

Total returns 01 January - 31 July 2013



Year	Returns from Pakistan	Returns from Iran	Returns from Other countries	Total
2002	1,565,066	259,792	9,679	1,834,537
2003	332,183	142,280	1,176	475,639
2004	383,321	377,151	650	761,122
2005	449,391	63,559	1,140	514,090
2006	133,338	5,264	1,202	139,804
2007	357,635	7,054	721	365,410
2008	274,200	3,656	628	278,484
2009	48,320	6,028	204	54,552
2010	104,331	8,487	150	112,968
2011	48,998	18,851	113	67,962
2012	79,435	15,035	86	94,556
2013	22,980	5,764	48	28,792
Total	3,799,198	912,921	15,797	4,727,916

The lower rate of return so far this year might be attributed to the following: Expectations among refugees (in Pakistan) that the PoR cards will be extended for another period, no expansion of the "No Go Areas" in Iran and the uncertain situation of Afghanistan in the lead up to elections scheduled for April 2014. In addition to that, the return trends normally decrease during the month of Ramadan during which most Afghan refugees avoid traveling and those who opt for return postpone their travel until the end of Eid holidays. It is expected that the trend may reverse in the coming months due to increased push factors in Pakistan and Iran.

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

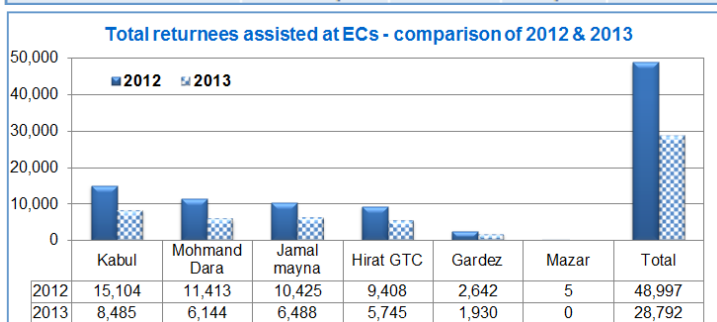
A refugee wishing to return to Afghanistan with the assistance of UNHCR must approach UNHCR's Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs) in the country of asylum to register for return and sign a Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF).

Repatriation from Pakistan is facilitated through two VRCs located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Chamkani (Peshawar) and Timergara (Dir) and Baleli (Quetta) VRC in 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 in Afghanistan, returnees were assisted at five encashment centres (ECs): Mohmand Dara (Nangarhar), Kabul (Kabul), Gardez (Paktia), Jamal Mayna (Kandahar) and Herat (Herat).

At the ECs, depending on the province of origin, all Afghan returnees with VRFs receive approximately US\$ 150 per person (between US\$20 - US\$46 for transport and US\$117 as a short-term assistance grant). The transportation grant varies according to the distance from the areas of asylum to the areas of origin. Returning refugees are also briefed on mine awareness and education procedures in Afghanistan at the EC. They can benefit from transit facilities for overnight stay and basic health services. All children under the age of five are vaccinated for polio and measles. Returnees are briefed also on how to access legal aid, if required.

Assisted returns by region of destination in Afghanistan 2013 & 2012				
Region	No. of individuals returned - Comparison by year			
	Jan - Jul 2013		Jan - Jul 2012	
	No.	%	No.	%
Central	8,918	31.0%	14,892	30.4%
East	5,888	20.5%	10,505	21.4%
Northeast	5,010	17.4%	8,939	18.2%
South	2,655	9.2%	3,545	7.2%
North	2,318	8.1%	4,415	9.0%
West	1,986	6.9%	3,780	7.7%
Southeast	1,887	6.6%	2,687	5.5%
Central Highlands	130	0.5%	234	0.5%
Total	28,792	100.0%	48,997	100.0%



Assisted return by area of residence in Country of Asylum (CoA) - 2013		
CoA	Province	%
PAKISTAN	KPK	58.5%
	Balochistan	22.5%
	Punjab	10.3%
	Sindh	7.1%
	Islamabad	0.8%
	AJK	0.6%
	Unknown	0.0%
IRAN	Tehran	31.5%
	Esfahan	13.4%
	Khorasan	11.0%
	Fars	9.4%
	Qom	9.0%
	Kerman	8.4%
	Yazd	4.9%
	Markazi	3.9%
	Hormozgan	3.0%
	Semnan	1.9%
	Qazvin	1.1%
	Bushehr	0.8%
	Golestan	0.5%
	Khuzestan	0.5%
	Mazandaran	0.4%
	Sistan va Baluchestan	0.0%
	Kohgiluyeh va Boyerahmad	0.0%
Unknown	0.3%	

TRIPARTITE COMMISSION MEETING

A Tripartite Commission Meeting on Afghan refugees was held in Kabul on 28 June 2013 between the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan together with UNHCR. The Parties underlined the importance of the need for extension of the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards for Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the Tripartite Agreement on Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) until 31 December 2015. The parties also reaffirmed their commitment to the principle of VolRep gradually, in safety and dignity as the best solution to end the protracted Afghan refugee situation and urged that all efforts should be undertaken to enhance VolRep and make returns sustainable.

The Cabinet of the Government of Pakistan, on 25 July 2013, formally endorsed the new policy on Afghan refugees in Pakistan, including an extension of PoR cards and volrep until 31 December 2015.

ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING

Between 1 January and 31 July 2013, a total of 1,847 interviews were conducted with returning refugees from Pakistan (1,765) and Iran (82). Interviewees were selected in two ways: at random (1,599) and from those with obvious protection concerns (248) at the first point of contact in Afghanistan, the UNHCR Transit/Encashment Centres in Kabul, Jalalabad (Mohmand Dara), Kandahar (Jamal Mayna), Gardez and Herat (GTC). This monitoring exercise helps UNHCR identify return trends, push/pull factors and check on the level of information returnees received to make an informed choice to return home.

RETURNS FROM PAKISTAN

Push factors

Among returnees from Pakistan, 68% cited economic factors as a primary reason for their return followed by "the deteriorating security conditions in the country" (13%), alleged harassment by authorities (12%), fear of arrest and/or deportation (2%), settlement closures (1%), lack of school and health facilities (1%), and other reasons (3%): mainly eviction notices by land owners, Afghan national army employees, possible expiration of PoR cards and lack of sufficient water and electricity in the settlements.

Complaints of police harassment/arrests were recorded as one of the key concerns during interviews in April through July. The expiration of the PoR cards has made Afghan refugees more vulnerable to police harassment and arrests since January 2013. However, it is expected that the level of harassment/arrests will decrease as a result of extension of PoR cards by the Government of Pakistan until 31 December 2015.

Pull factors

42% of returnees cited improvement of the security situation* in some parts of Afghanistan as the primary reason influencing their decision to return followed by better employment opportunities in Afghanistan (18%), UNHCR's assistance package (17%), the land allocation scheme and/or UNHCR shelter program (11%), none or reduced fear of persecution (9%), improvements in health and education facilities (2%) and improved weather conditions for agricultural activities (1%).

*Of those who cited the improvement of security situation in some parts of Afghanistan as primary pull factor of their return, 51% returned to relatively secure provinces such as Kabul, Parwan, Balkh, Takhar, Jawzjan, Sari Pul, Nangarhar, Herat, Samangan and Badakhshan. 49% returned to insecure provinces; Kunduz, Baghlan, Logar, Kandahar, Helmand, Wardak, Ghazni, Faryab, Zabul and Kunar.

Information on the Voluntary Repatriation Program

97% of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan said that they had received adequate information to make an informed decision to return. Information on place of origin was mainly obtained through the Afghan community (47%), visits to Afghanistan (27%), from UNHCR (10%), through the media (3%), and from other sources (10%). Sixty three percent of the interviewed returnees said that they had been informed about UNHCR's repatriation operation by members of the Afghan community, 21% obtained information directly from UNHCR, 8% stated that they had visited Afghanistan and 6% were informed through the media (TV, radio and newspapers).

Alleged arrests/detentions and intimidations in Pakistan

Some 1% of the interviewed returnees alleged that they had been arrested and/or detained during their stay in Pakistan. Some 22% of interviewed returnees stated that they faced problems while traveling from the VRC to Torkham border point (mainly between Karkhano to Torkham). Though the number of incidents have decreased in comparison to last year, yet some of the check points are problematic. In addition, complaints were also noted concerning extortions made by police mobile teams. Among those interviewed, 93% alleged that they had paid bribes (500 – 15,000 Pakistani rupees) because they were carrying livestock, construction material (used beams), or to avoid a search of the trucks. UNHCR Afghanistan is in touch with UNHCR Peshawar in sharing these findings for necessary follow-up with government officials in KPK.

Reasons for not returning to place of origin

Out of a total of 1,765 respondents, 556 returnees stated that they do not intend to repatriate to their place of origin due to the following reasons: lack of housing (45%), lack of land (18%), insecurity (17%), lack of livelihood/income generation opportunities (14%), lack of public services (3%), personal disputes (1%) and other reasons (2%).

On accommodation, 49% of those who returned from Pakistan said that they plan to stay with relatives, 37% indicated that they will rent accommodation, and 13% said that they own a house in Afghanistan.

When asked "Do you have any concerns about your return to Afghanistan?" nearly 83% of the interviewed returnees said "Yes". 53% of the concerns related to not having land to start agricultural activities while 34% related to having land but no shelter. 9% indicated lack of job opportunities and only 3% noted security as a concern.

RETURNS FROM IRAN

Push factors

Among the 82 returnees from Iran interviewed, 95% stated economic factors in Iran as the primary reason for return followed by alleged harassment by the authorities (4%) and other reasons (1%).

Pull factors

74% indicated improvements of the security situation* in some parts of Afghanistan as the primary reason influencing their decision to return, followed by land allocation scheme and/or UNHCR shelter program (20%), none or reduced fear of persecution (1%), improvement in health and education facilities (1%) and other reasons (4%).

Information on the Voluntary Repatriation Program

85% of the interviewed returnees from Iran reported that they had received adequate information to make an informed decision to return. Information on place of origin was mainly obtained through the Afghan community (83%), from UNHCR (2%), through the media (1%) and other sources (7%). Seventy seven percent of the interviewed returnees said that they had been informed about UNHCR's repatriation operation by members of the Afghan community, 5% said that they obtained information directly from UNHCR and 5% said that they obtained information through the media.

Reasons for not returning to place of origin

Out of a total of 82 respondents, 25 returnees stated that they do not intend to repatriate to their area of origin due to the following reasons: lack of public services (48%), lack of housing (32%), lack of income generation opportunities (8%), insecurity (8%) and other reasons (4%).

On accommodation, 57% of those who returned from Iran said that they will rent accommodation, 39% indicated that they will stay with relatives and 4% said that they own a house.

When asked "Do you have any concerns about your return to Afghanistan?" nearly 93% of the interviewed returnees said "Yes". 70% cited the lack of job opportunities as a concern, 25% cited insecurity as a concern and 1% said that the lack of education facilities is a concern.

*Of those who cited the improvement of security situation in some parts of Afghanistan as the primary pull factor of their return, 64% returned to relatively secure provinces such as Kabul, Herat, Takhar, Parwan, Samangan, Balkh, Sari Pul, Bamyan, Panjshir and Nangarhar. While 36% returned to insecure provinces; Farah, Ghazni, Baghlan, Kunduz, Faryab, Wardak and Kandahar.

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

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

IRAN:

1 - 31 July* 2013: A total of 4,738 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported (via Zaranj border points) from Iran.

1 January - 31 July 2013: The total number of deportees during the first seven months of 2013, via Zaranj, is 28,787 individuals which is 42% lower compared to the same period last year when 49,983 Afghans were deported (via Zaranj) from Iran. Total deportees so far this year stands at 66,693. This includes 37,906 Afghans deported between 01 January and 31 March 2013.

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

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

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

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

Deportations from Iran											
Reporting Period	Entry Point	Family Groups				Single				Total	Total Individuals
		Families	Individuals			Male		Female			
			M	F	Total	Adult	UAM	Adult	UAM		
01 -31 Jul 2013	Zaranj	133	283	333	616	4,115	7	0	0	4,122	4,738
	Islam Qala*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		133	283	333	616	4,115	7	0	0	4,122	4,738
01 Jan - 31 Jul 2013	Zaranj	923	2,126	2,353	4,479	24,165	143	0	0	24,308	28,787
01 Jan - 31 Mar 2013	Islam Qala	365	766	542	1,308	35,398	1,197	2	1	36,598	37,906
Total		1,288	2,892	2,895	5,787	59,563	1,340	2	1	60,906	66,693

PAKISTAN:

1 - 31 July 2013: A total of 488 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham (118) and Spin Boldak (370) border points. This figure reflect a sharp increase crease compared to 255 deportees in June 2013.

1 January - 31 July 2013: During the first seven months of 2013, a total of 1,418 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham Border. This figure reflects an increase compared to 1,031 deportees during the same period in 2012.

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

In addition, 3,172 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Spin Boldak (SB). This figure is 12% lower compared to the 3,552 deportees during the same period in 2012.

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 -31 Jul 2013	Torkham	0	0	0	0	116	0	2	0	118	118
	Spin Boldak	0	0	0	0	370	0	0	0	370	370
Total		0	0	0	0	486	0	2	0	488	488
01 Jan - 31 Jul 2013	Torkham	0	0	0	0	1,416	0	2	0	1,418	1,418
	Spin Boldak	7	10	12	22	3,150	0	0	0	3,150	3,172
Total		7	10	12	22	4,566	0	2	0	4,568	4,590

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

*Data on deportation via Islam Qala is not available for April - July 2013.