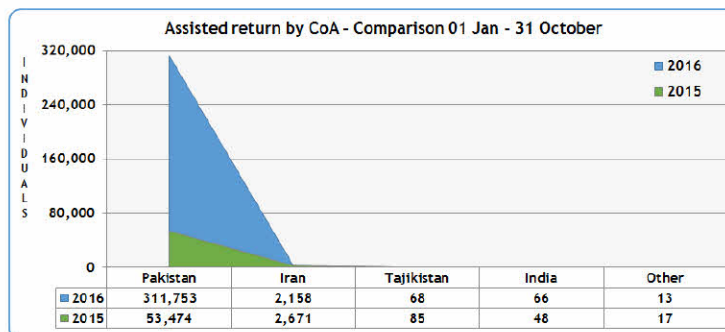


RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN

In October 2016, a total of **146,090** Afghan refugees repatriated to Afghanistan. An overwhelming majority (**145,955**) came from Pakistan, and very small numbers from Iran (**124**), Tajikistan (**8**), India (**2**) and Senegal (**1**). The figures recorded in October have already surpassed the return levels for September, the highest rate of return in a single month since 2007.

The current daily return figure is similar to the 2003 - 2005 levels, when large number of Afghans returned following the fall of the Taliban. A total of **85,000** additional returnees are expected to return up to 15 December 2016. This include up to **65,000** refugees who were scheduled by the VRCs who will return during November and a backlog of around **20,000** returnees who were processed in the last 3 months but have not yet arrived at the ECs. UNHCR anticipates a total of approximately **400,000** refugee returnees in 2016.

In the first ten months of 2016, a total of **314,058** Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan under UNHCR's facilitated assisted repatriation program, the overwhelming majority from Pakistan (**311,753** individuals).

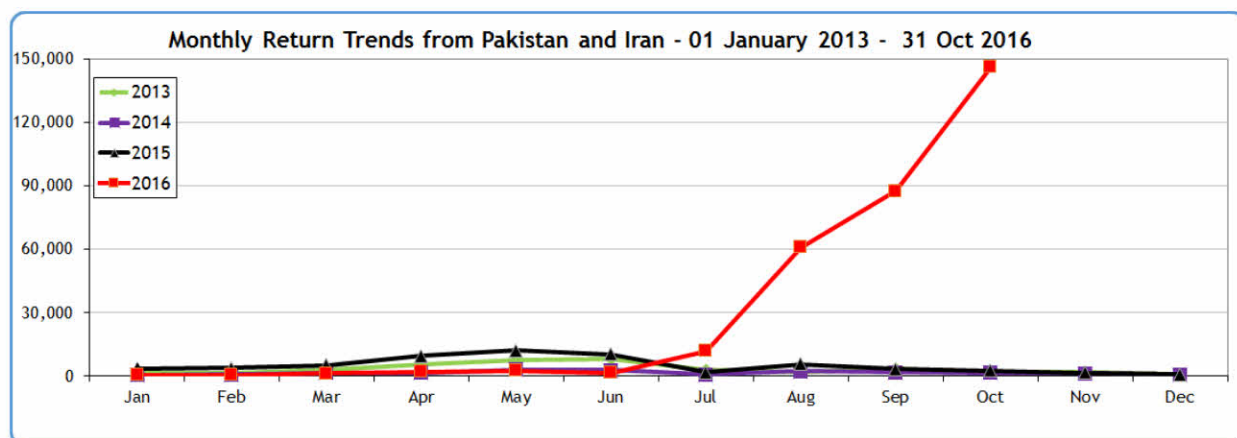


Region	No. of individuals returned - Comparison by year			
	Jan - Oct 2016		Jan - Oct 2015	
	No.	%	No.	%
East	119,089	37.9%	10,875	19.3%
Central	94,486	30.1%	17,154	30.5%
Northeast	51,299	16.3%	12,503	22.2%
Southeast	20,797	6.6%	5,137	9.1%
North	19,608	6.2%	5,921	10.5%
South	6,423	2.0%	2,238	4.0%
West	2,046	0.7%	2,161	3.8%
Central Highlands	310	0.1%	306	0.5%
Total	314,058	100.0%	56,295	100.0%

Despite deterioration of security situation and limited pull factors (mainly lack of land, shelter and economic opportunities) in Afghanistan, the return trend has significantly increased since the last week of June. The increase is due to the impact of a deteriorating environment in several areas of Pakistan, and lower acceptance and support for Afghans, including PoR card holders by the Pakistani host communities.

Based on returnee monitoring findings with newly arrived returnees in 2016, economic hardship in Pakistan (linked to loss of access to job markets due to a deteriorated freedom of movement), harassment and intimidation, arbitrary arrest, night raids on the house of Afghans, extortions and bribery are influencing refugees' decision to return. On the positive side, the perceived improvement in the security situation in some parts of Afghanistan, a reduced fear of persecution, Government land allocation scheme, UNHCR's assistance package, the hope in employment opportunities and the desire to reunite with families/relatives are reported as the main pull factors in determining the decision to return.

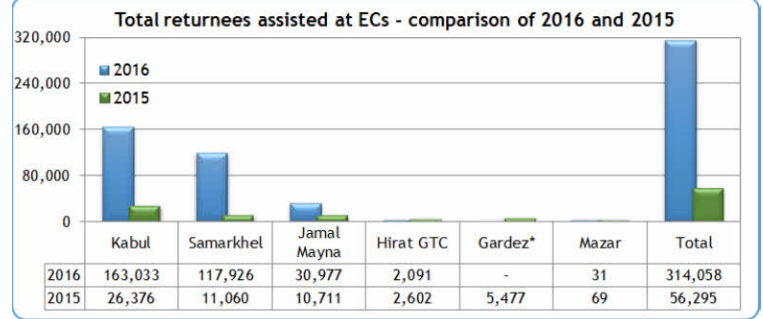
Amongst the returnees repatriated from Pakistan in 2016, **81%** returned from KPK and **10%** from Punjab, while the rest returned from Baluchistan, Sindh and Islamabad. **73%** of returnees from Iran returned from Tehran, Khorasan and Esfahan. **232,040** (**74%** of total returnees) returned to Nangarhar, Kabul, Baghlan, Kunduz and Laghman provinces. Kabul, Nangarhar and Kunduz rank within the top 5 provinces of destination in Afghanistan since 2002.



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

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

Repatriation from Iran is facilitated through all UNHCR Offices, including the VRC in Soleimankhani and the UNHCR Office at Dogharoun.



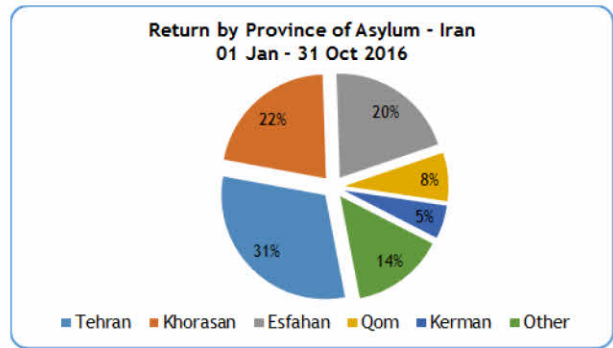
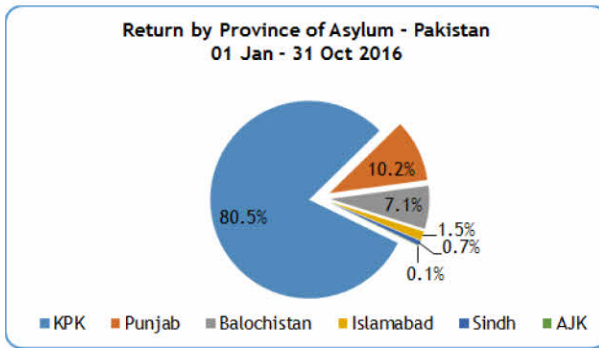
Upon return to Afghanistan, returnees are assisted at four Encashment Centers (ECs): Kabul, Samarkhel (Nangarhar), Jamal Mayna (Kandahar) and Herat.

According to the province of origin, at the ECs all Afghan returnees with a valid VRFs receive a grant of approximately **US\$ 400 per person** consisting of two components: between **US\$30 - US\$70** for transport and **US\$350** as an initial reintegration grant. The transportation grant varies according to the distance from the areas of residence in the country of asylum to the areas of origin in Afghanistan as reported in the VRF. At the EC, returning refugees can benefit from transit facilities for overnight stay and basic health services. All children under the age of five are vaccinated against polio and measles. Returnees are also briefed on mine awareness and access to education in Afghanistan.

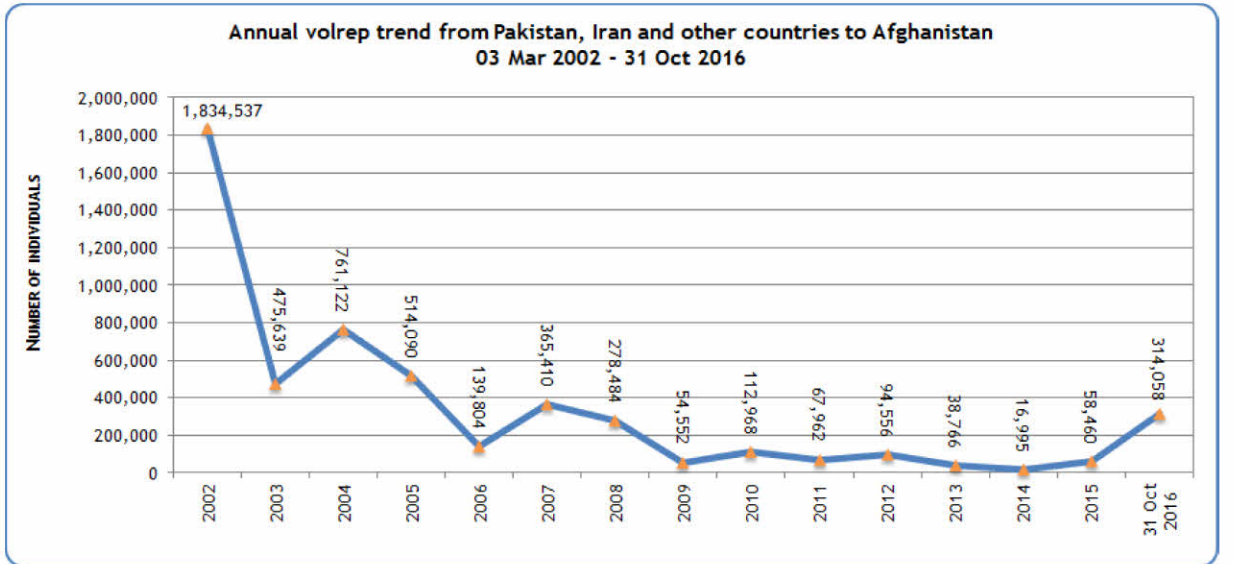
Effective 23 June 2016, UNHCR has increased the reintegration cash grant to **350 USD per person** for all registered refugees who wish to return under UNHCR's facilitated voluntarily repatriation program to Afghanistan. There have been no changes to the existing transportation grant (**between USD 30 - 70 based on areas of origin**) portion of the assistance package as prices have remained relatively constant. The additional funds are provided to assist returning families in the initial phases of reintegration, based on challenges identified in UNHCR's enhanced return monitoring.

* Gardez EC ceased its activities at the end of 2015 due to budgetary constraints and refugees returning to the South-eastern Region will be referred to Kabul and Samarkhel ECs.

** There is no EC in Mazar, returnees from Tajikistan and other central Asian countries receive their repatriation assistance at UNHCR Office in Mazar or in Kunduz.



From the start of UNHCR assisted voluntary repatriation operation in March 2002 to the end of October 2016, over 6 million Afghan refugees have returned home, of whom over 5.1 million repatriated with assistance from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and UNHCR. It is estimated that returnees comprise 20% of the Afghanistan population.

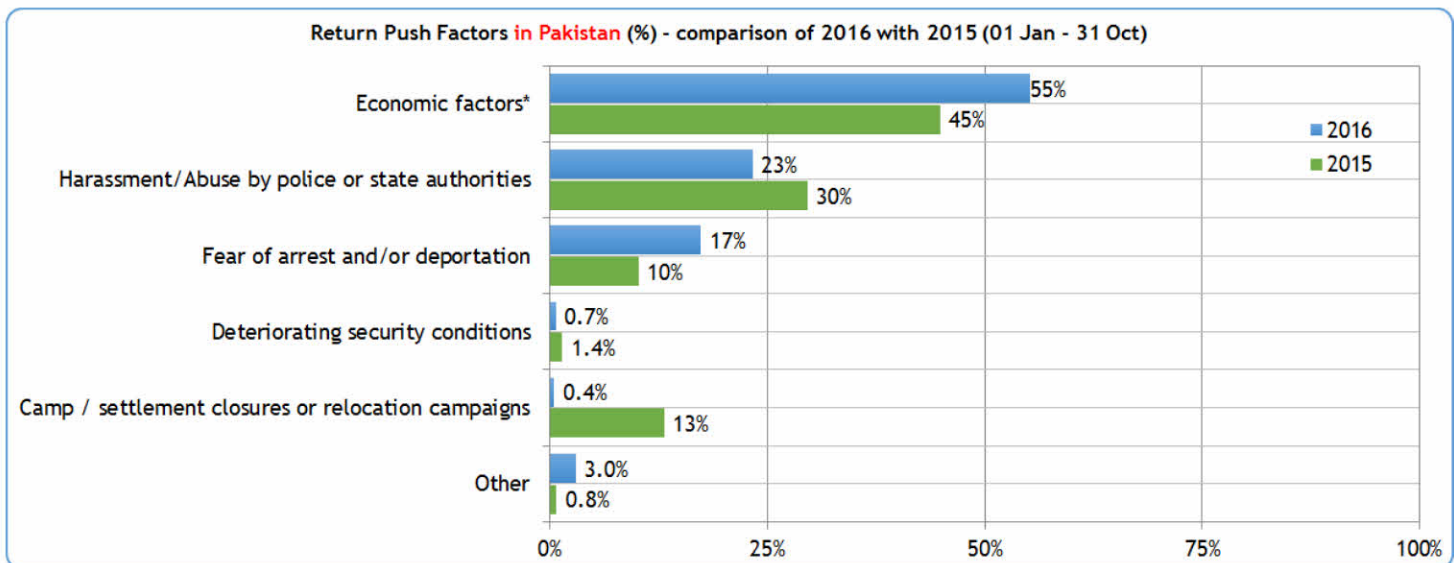
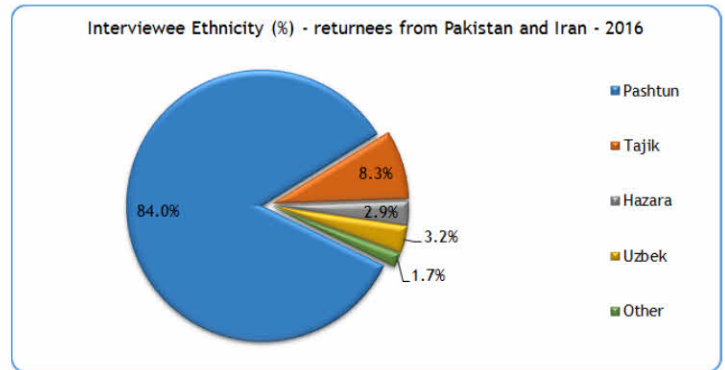
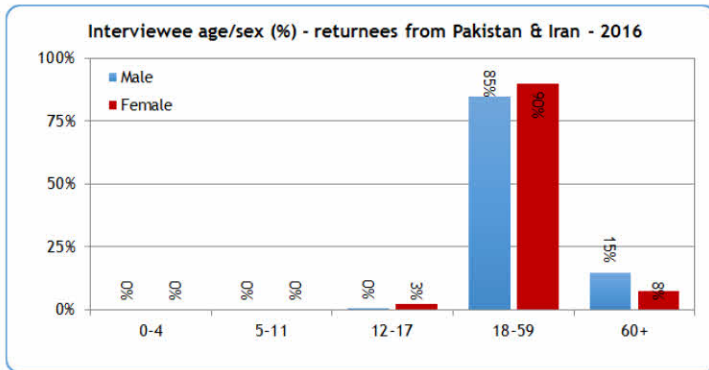


ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING

Between 1 January and 31 October 2016, a total of **3,704 HHs interviews** (representing 7% of total returnee families) were conducted with returning refugees from Pakistan (**3,556**) and Iran (**148**) at the various ECs managed by UNHCR/MoRR. Interviewees were selected in two ways: randomly from the returning families (3,364) and purposively from returnees reporting some protection concerns (340) at the first point of contact in Afghanistan, i.e. the ECs. This regular monitoring exercise helps UNHCR to identify return trends, push/pull factors and to assess the level of information that returnees received in countries of asylum in order to make a well-informed choice to return home. It also helps to detect episodes of harassment and violations that UNHCR then brings to the attention of the allegedly responsible authorities.

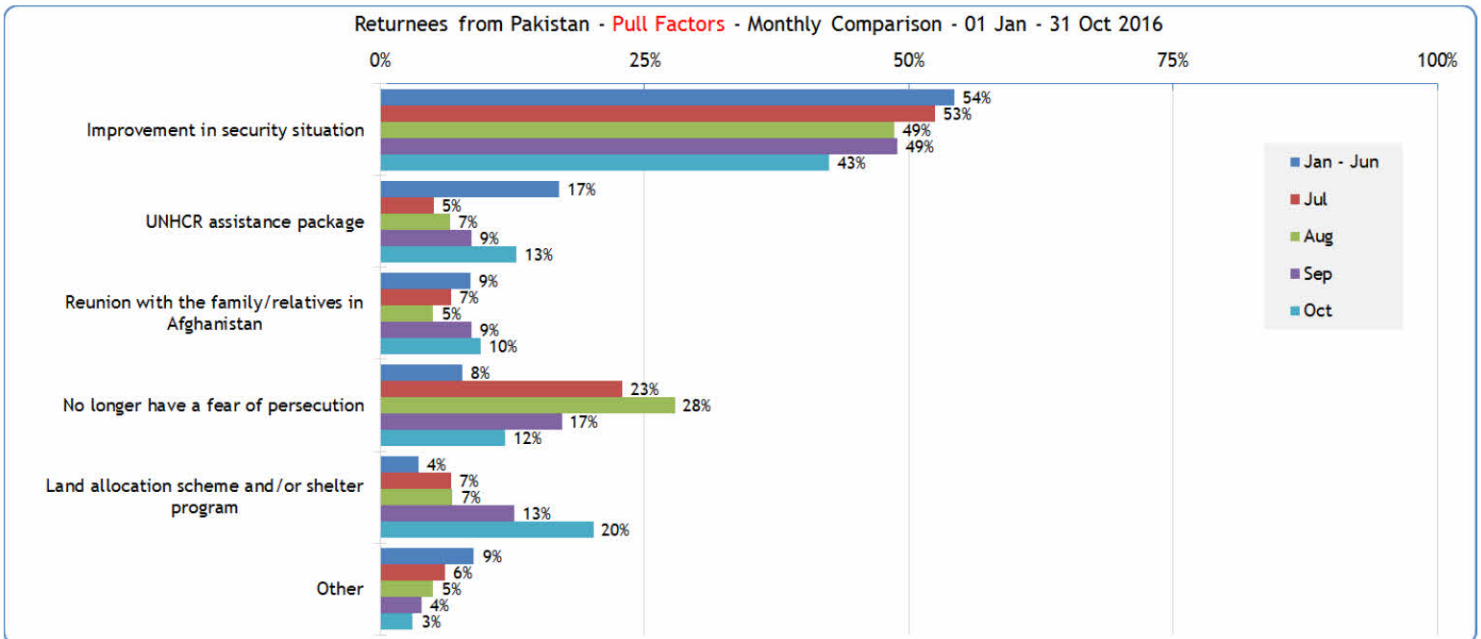
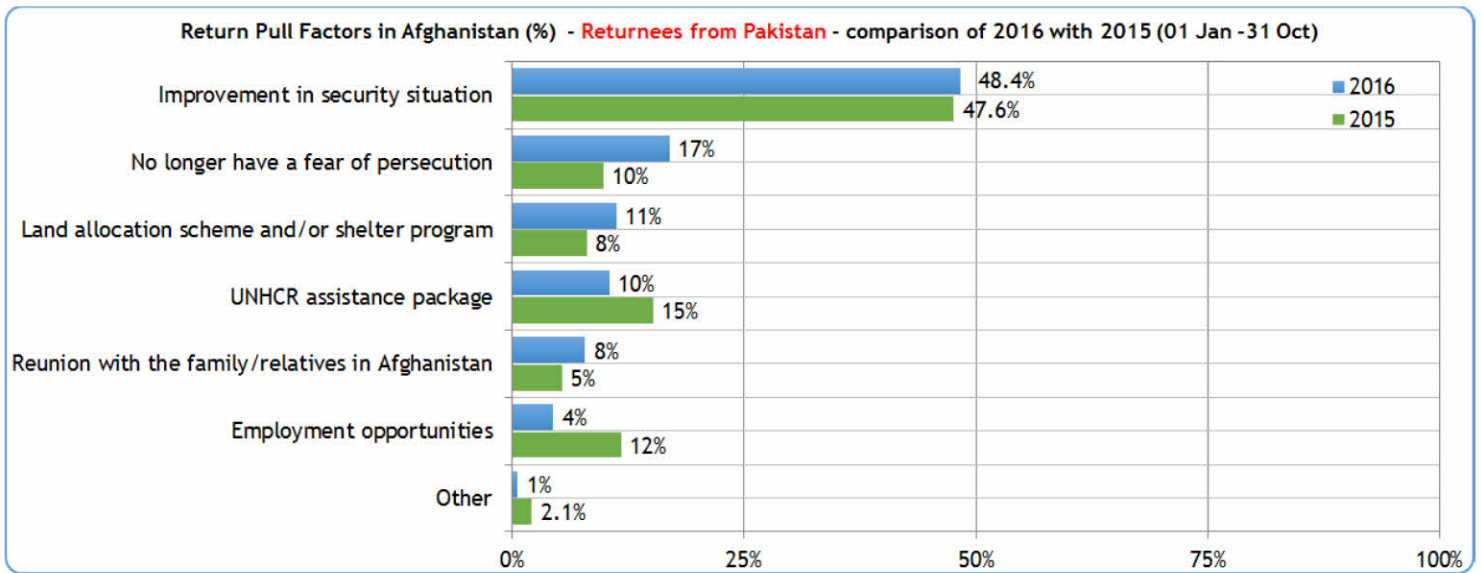
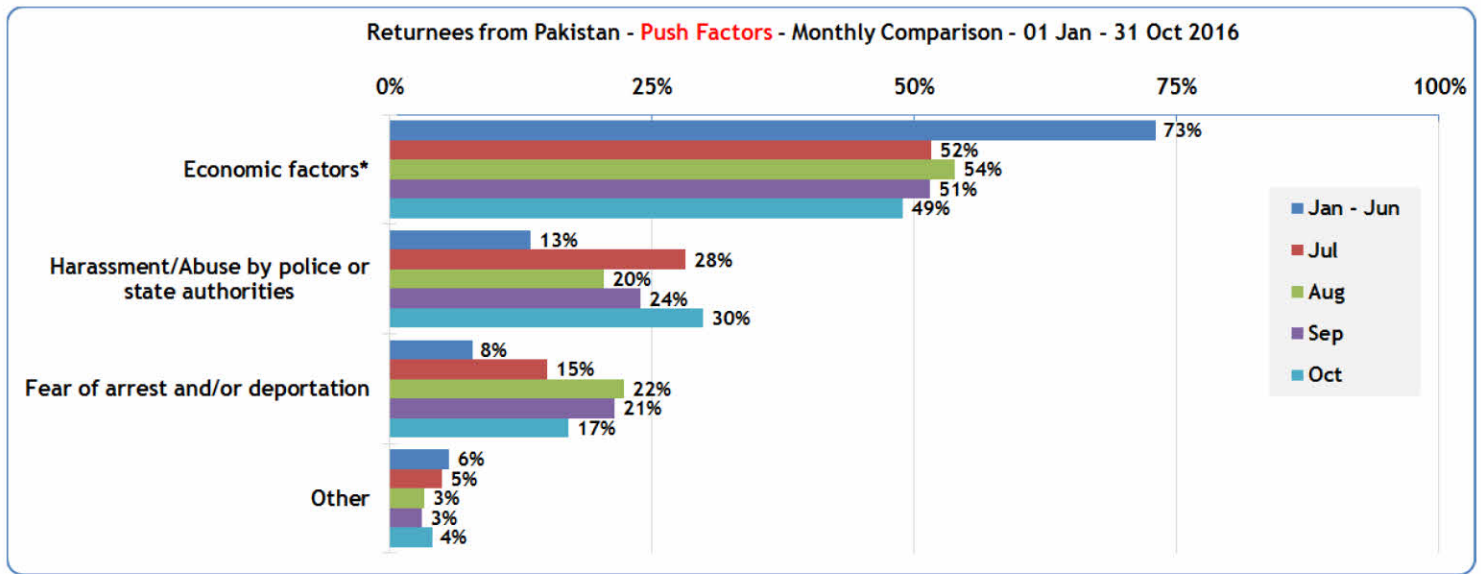
The small sample size among returnees from Iran is due to lower number of returnees from Iran among whom the majority are single individual students.

Breakdown of returnee families and total HHs interviews carried out - by region 01 January - 31 Oct 2016			
Region	Total returnee families	Total HHs interviews	Per centage
East	20,860	1,159	6%
Central	16,943	679	4%
Northeast	9,026	768	9%
Southeast	3,841	216	6%
North	3,428	555	16%
South	967	242	25%
West	297	59	20%
Central Highlands	36	26	72%
Total	55,398	3,704	7%



***Note: Economic factors:** The changing dynamic in asylum has immediate negative repercussions on income and economic opportunities for Afghan refugees. The self-imposed restriction of movement to avoid harassment and intimidation hinders access to job markets, essential for Afghan refugees who mainly rely on daily labor. Economic hardship linked to loss of access to job markets and the protection situation is regularly cited as the first factor influencing decision for return.

ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING



Reported challenges for refugees in Pakistan

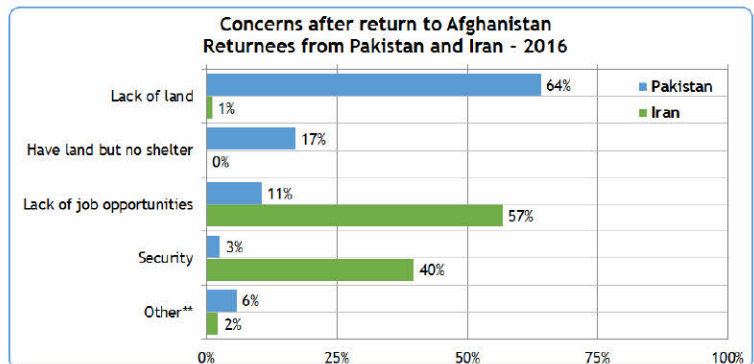
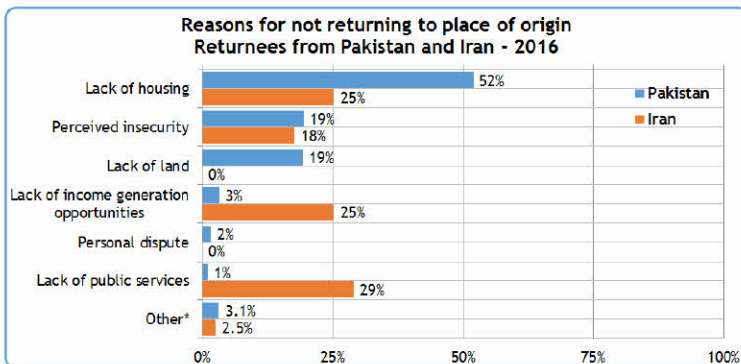
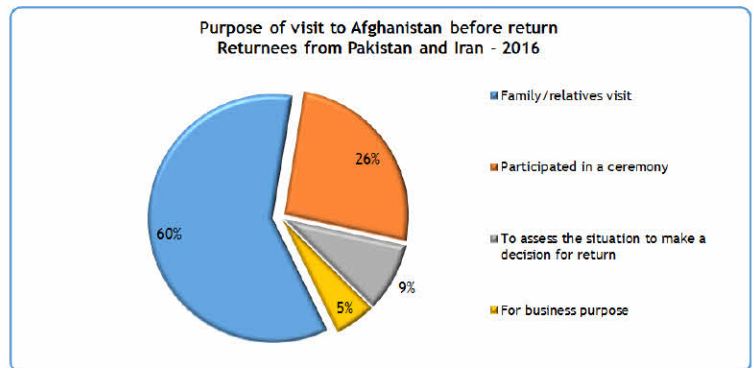
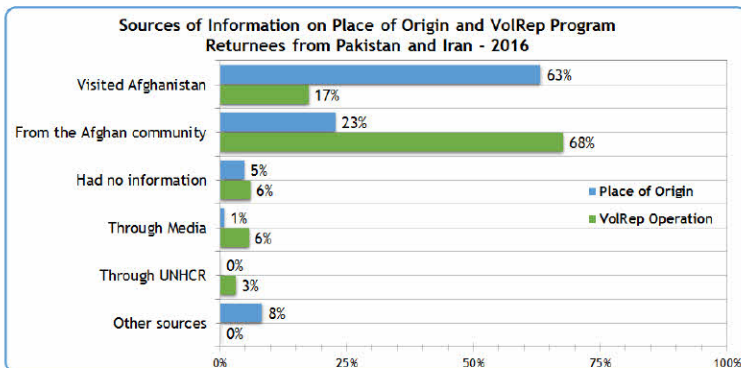
Returnees in October continue to report a reduced level of harassment compared to July–September. However, tight population movement management at the entry points, lack of labour opportunities for Afghan nationals due to harassment by police and changing attitudes of locals were mentioned as the major push factors (mainly returnees from KPK/Punjab were interviewed at Kabul and Samarkhel ECs). Some families claimed that they made a decision to return in order to avoid possible arbitrary arrest or intimidation as a result of fear based on the experience of Afghans over the last four months. Some families reported that a number of families/communities are taking the decision to return now in order to reach their final destination in Afghanistan before winter approaches.

The issue of extortion at the Dry ditch check point (close to zero point in Torkham) continued to be reported by majority of the interviewed returnees in October. Pandu Chawk of Peshawar, Jamil Chawk on Ring road, Takhtabig and Bogyari were reported as the other problematic check points. Extortion/bribery has mainly occurred with those returnees who brought back their livestock and shelter materials. However, many interviewed returnees reported that the level of extortions/bribery incident significantly reduced, when compared to the period between July and September.

Returnees highly appreciated the advocacy and the legal assistance that UNHCR Pakistan and partners provide in the affected areas. Returnees highlighted that the legal assistance is critical, particularly in legally challenging the custody/detention and avoiding the payment of significant sums of money to release unduly arrested family members. UNHCR Afghanistan maintain close contacts with UNHCR Pakistan to triangulate findings and for necessary follow-up and advocacy in the country of asylum.

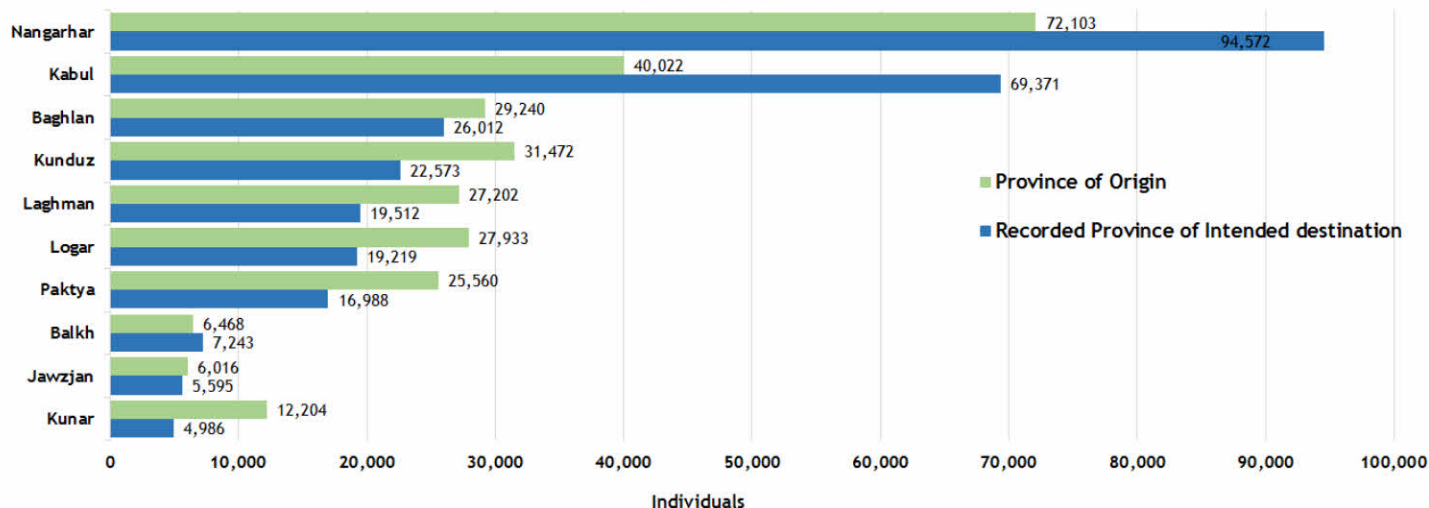
Return push and pull factors from Iran

- * Return from Iran remain very low, among whom the majority are single individual students.
- * Deteriorating economic situation particularly high cost of living were mentioned as the primary push factors while the Government land allocation scheme were reported as the primary pull factor motivating return from Iran.

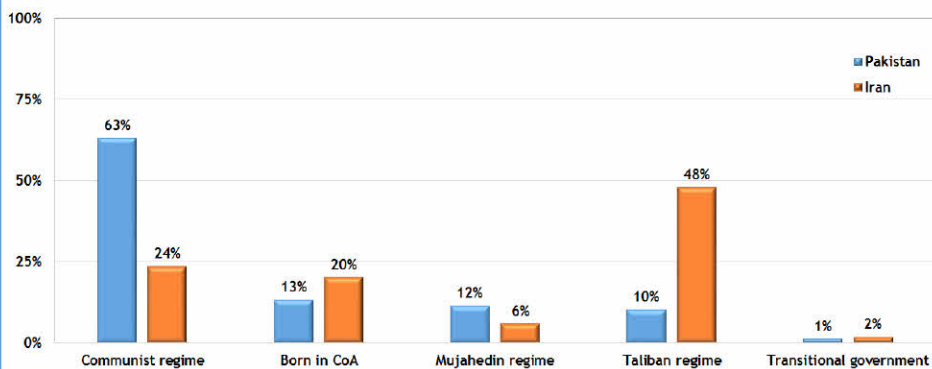


- ◆ Most of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan mentioned that they had visited Afghanistan within the past few months, while a majority of the returnees from Iran mentioned that they had visited Afghanistan five or more years ago. The reasons for this discrepancy may be related to the stricter border management by the Iranian authorities and by a lengthier journey to reach the areas of origin.
- ◆ The new border management scheme introduced between Afghanistan and Pakistan as of May 2016, allowing Afghan citizens to enter Pakistan only if in possession of a valid Afghan Passport and Pakistani visa, significantly impacted the opportunity to visit Afghanistan before the return, which is a critical step in the decision making process. It reduced refugees' ability to conduct preliminary self-organized "go and see visit" to Afghanistan to assess the situation and make the necessary arrangement for the subsequent return of the entire family.
- ◆ Out of 3,704 respondents, 1,356 returnees (37%) stated that they do not intend to return to their place of origin mainly due to lack of housing/shelter and land.
- ◆ The primary obstacles discouraging Afghan refugees from returning is the shortage of land, employment and shelter.

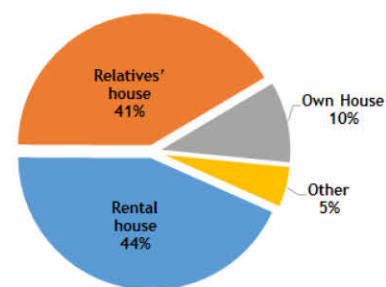
Comparison of recorded province of destination with place of origin
Top 10 province - 01 Jan - 31 Oct 2016



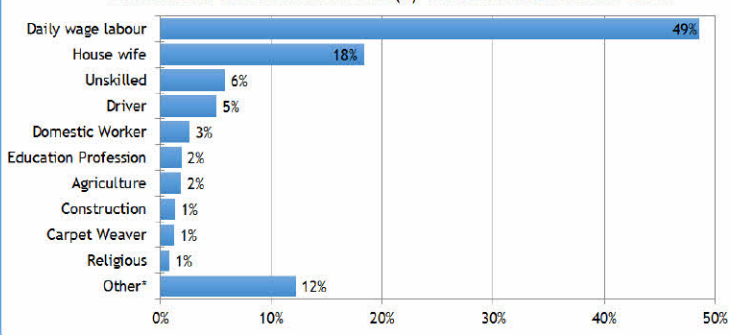
Years in Exile - returnees from Pakistan and Iran - 2016



Stay arrangement after return
Returnees from Pakistan and Iran - 2016

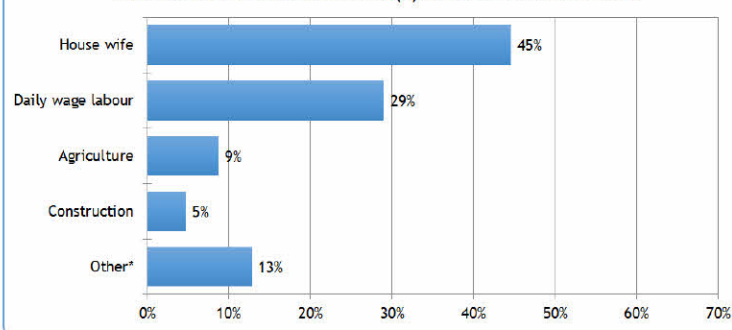


Professions of interviewed returnees (%) - Returnees from Pakistan - 2016



*Other: 434 responses: included professions such as engineer, carpet weaver, medical personal, artisan, and shopkeeper.

Professions of interviewed returnees (%) - Returnees from Iran - 2016

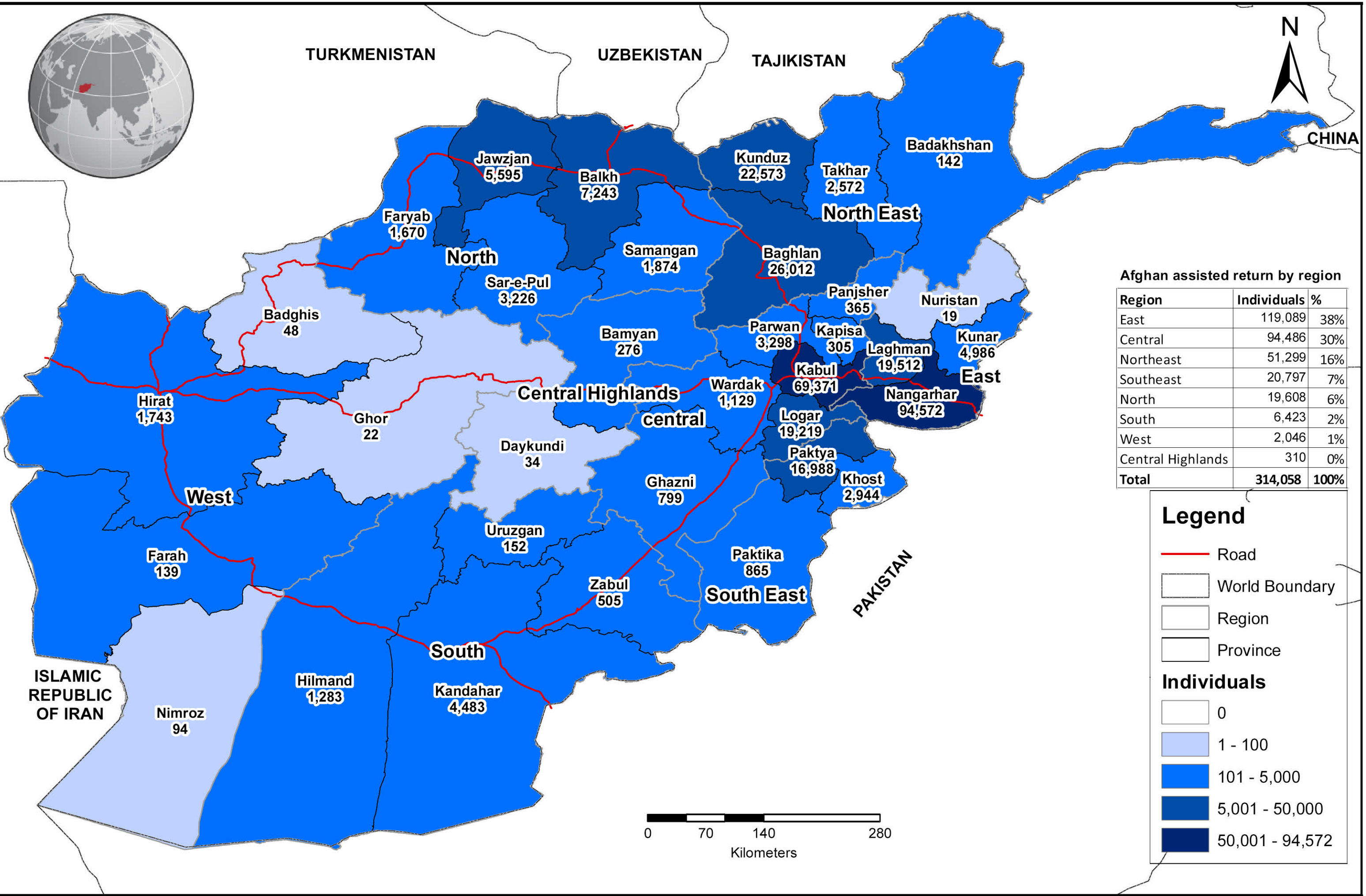


*Other: 19 responses: included professions such as carpet weaver and shopkeeper.

Contact for suggestion and queries:

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 Mohammad Haroon, Assistant Repatriation Officer, UNHCR CO Kabul, haroon@unhcr.org

Assisted Voluntary Repatriation to Afghanistan
Return by Province of Destination - 01 January - 31 October 2016



Afghan assisted return by region

Region	Individuals	%
East	119,089	38%
Central	94,486	30%
Northeast	51,299	16%
Southeast	20,797	7%
North	19,608	6%
South	6,423	2%
West	2,046	1%
Central Highlands	310	0%
Total	314,058	100%

Legend

- Road
- World Boundary
- Region
- Province

Individuals

- 0
- 1 - 100
- 101 - 5,000
- 5,001 - 50,000
- 50,001 - 94,572