RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN IN 2017

Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report

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Cover photo: Young Afghan girl stands in the doorway of her home in Qarabagh district in Kabul province, Afghanistan (UNHCR/S. Rich)

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Kabul, Afghanistan

PREFACE

Historically, Afghans have always been on the move. As many as 8.5 million, or one in four Afghans have been displaced internally or abroad during the last four decades due to conflict, natural hazards, disasters and the resulting socio-economic challenges.
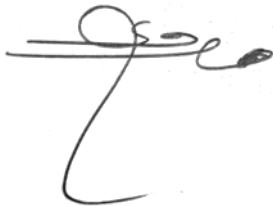
Each year, Afghans return from the neighbouring Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. Once back in country, with the over-stretched absorption capacity of host communities, reintegration challenges are daunting. Primary challenges include food insecurity, access to land, long-term shelter, access to services including health, education and legal assistance; and livelihoods opportunities that enable returnees to support themselves and their families. The establishment of the Displacement and Return Executive Committee to ensure inclusion of returnees in the national development programmes is a key step taken by the Government of Afghanistan. Additional efforts are required to ensure accountability of returnee response activities and longer term durable solutions at the provincial levels.

Together with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have been actively coordinating the provision of post-arrival humanitarian and re-integration assistance to returning Afghans since 2007.

We are very pleased to underline our inter-agency collaboration and issue a joint IOM-UNHCR report for the first time, depicting the challenges faced by returning Afghans.

We take this opportunity to thank our donors for their generous support and partnership.

UNHCR Representative
Fathiaa Abdalla

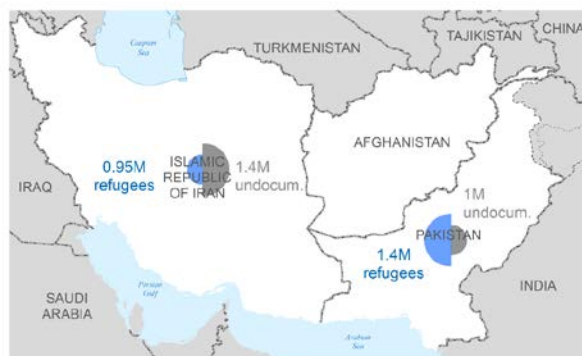IOM Chief of Mission and Special Envoy
Laurence Hart

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Populations of Concern

Registered Afghan refugees: Around 2.4 million registered Afghan refugees are living in **a)** Pakistan - 1.4 million refugees hold Proof of Registration (PoR) cards and **b)** the Islamic Republic of Iran hosts some 951,000 Afghan Amayesh card holders[1]. UNHCR supports the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, as well as return and reintegration in Afghanistan.

Undocumented Afghans: Some 2.3-3 million undocumented Afghans are living in a) Pakistan - (estimated 800,000 - 1 million Afghans) and b) According to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran there are 1.5-2 million undocumented Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran. 'Undocumented' in Pakistan refers to Afghans who do not hold PoR. In the Islamic Republic of Iran undocumented refers to Afghans who reside irregularly in the country, i.e. without Amayesh cards or valid visa. The designation as 'undocumented' does not refer to the possession of civil documentation in Afghanistan such as Tazkera and/or passports.

Overview of 2017 returns: Over 610,000 Afghans returned from the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan in 2017. This includes 60,000 registered refugees that returned from Pakistan, 100,000 undocumented returnees from Pakistan, and over 450,000 undocumented returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Following the arrival of more than 1 million documented and undocumented Afghan returnees that returned in 2016, the existing capacity to absorb new arrivals in country is under significant strain and negative coping mechanisms such as remigration are increasingly prevalent.

Additionally, in 2017 alone, UNHCR in Afghanistan assisted over 7,000 persons with specific needs (internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugee returnees, undocumented, host community members) directly (which benefitted some 50,000 persons indirectly), with cash or in-kind protection assistance or through its referral system.

From February until September 2017, Islam Qala, one of two major border crossings with the Islamic Republic of Iran was closed, rediverting all returns to Nimroz. During this period voluntary repatriation from the Islamic Republic of Iran was discouraged by UNHCR, and only very few refugees returned. With funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund, IOM instigated an inter-agency humanitarian response on the Afghan side of the border with World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Returns are taking place against a backdrop of increased internal displacement and high civilian casualties due to persisting instability in several regions of Afghanistan. During 2017, over 500,000 individuals were newly displaced, while over 674,000 individuals were displaced in 2016. The continuing insecurity and limited capacity to absorb returning Afghans and those displaced within Afghanistan could lead to secondary displacement and onward movement.

Photo 1. UNHCR staff speaking to refugee returnee children about education at the Kabul Encashment Centre, September 2017 / © UNHCR / A.Mazurenko

Photo 2. Children are playing hide and seek while eating dinner at the IOM Transit Center. Zaranj City/Nimroz @ IOM / E.Reid

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[1] The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran registers all refugees in the country. With the exception of refugees in settlements, UNHCR has most recently received only the aggregate number of refugees from the Government in May 2015. Source: Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2016, UNHCR.

Return Support

Refugee returnees: UNHCR in coordination with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and partners manages four Encashment Centres (ECs) where it provides a cash grant of an average USD 200 to each registered refugee returnee. The grant aims to cover transportation costs and immediate needs upon return. Besides cash grants, services include basic health care and vaccinations (delivered by Ministry of Public Health supported by WHO and UNICEF), mine risk awareness (coordinated by United Nations Mine Action Service and delivered by the Danish Demining Group), educational information, a transit facility for overnight accommodation provided by UNHCR and MoRR, and hygiene kits provided by United Nations Population Fund. At the ECs, UNHCR also conducts household level interviews to assess the voluntary nature of return as well as return trends, including reasons for return and protection risks in asylum and during return. During interviews persons with specific needs (PSN) are jointly identified by UNHCR and the Directorate of Refugee and Repatriation (DoRR) and referred to service providers for assessment and potential assistance. In addition to refugee returnees, the PSN programme is also used to assist internally displaced persons and undocumented returnees with specific needs. IOM and UNHCR jointly revised the 11 categories of PSN criteria to include specific sub-categories to effectively identify vulnerabilities, assist and refer accordingly.

In addition, UNHCR implements **community based protection projects** to assist returnees, IDPs and the host population who are identified through UNHCR's protection monitoring to be in need of protection assistance.

UNHCR provided winterization assistance (multi-purpose cash grant of USD 200 per family, and non-food items) to nearly 50,000 vulnerable (refugee) returnee, IDP and host families (350,000 individuals) across 34 provinces while coordinating the winterisation response as the Emergency Shelter/NFI Cluster lead Agency.

Undocumented Afghans: IOM leads the humanitarian undocumented returnee response at four border crossings with the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. In the screening centres and at all zero points, IOM and DoRR jointly identify, screen and register PSNs. IOM then conducts assessments and provides immediate humanitarian post-arrival assistance in the IOM Transit Centers. This includes meals, accommodation, seasonal clothes, psychosocial assistance, basic medical and tuberculosis screening, vaccinations, food and non-food items, referrals to specialised services, onward transportation for special cases including deceased persons and multi-purpose cash grants for transportation and in-kind assistance. IOM provides PSNs with tailored protection-sensitive post arrival humanitarian assistance according to the specific needs. As part of the protection program, IOM provides comprehensive case management and protection assistance including reunification of vulnerable returnees in 15 destination areas unconditional cash, in-kind assistance and referrals to protection actors for unaccompanied children, single females, female headed households, medical cases and victims of human rights violations.

As of late February 2018, the Government of Pakistan's National Database and Registration Authority, supported by the Government of Pakistan and IOM, has received over 800,000 applications from undocumented Afghans for Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) across 21 registration centres. The registration exercise commenced on 16 August 2017 and closed on 28 February 2018. ACC cards will be distributed to applicants and are intended to grant undocumented Afghans temporary stay in Pakistan, pending their return to Afghanistan, to regularize their legal status by acquiring a passport and visa.
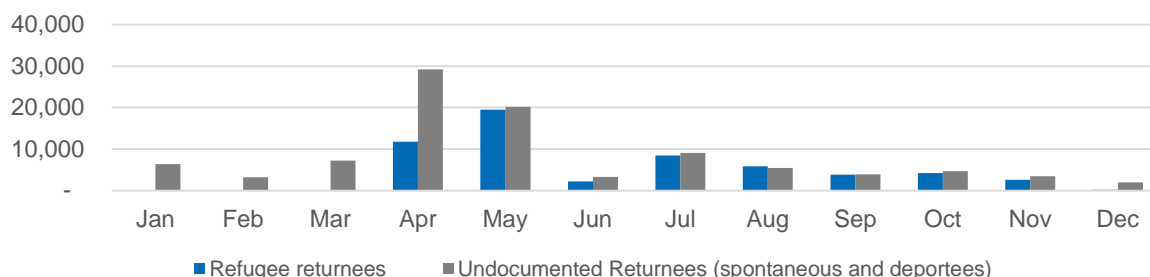
KEY RETURN TRENDS

Top 5 Areas of Return
Registered Refugee Returnees: 68% returned to Kabul, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Logar, and Sar-e-Pul provinces. Kabul, Nangarhar and Kunduz remain the top provinces of return since 2002.
Undocumented Afghans: The top 5 provinces of destination of returnees from Pakistan were Nangarhar, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz and Helmand with 52% of the total returning to Nangarhar and Kabul. Returnees from Islamic Republic of Iran went primarily to Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh and Bamyan.

Returns to Afghanistan in 2017, by month

■ Refugee returnees ■ Undocumented Returnees (spontaneous and deportees)
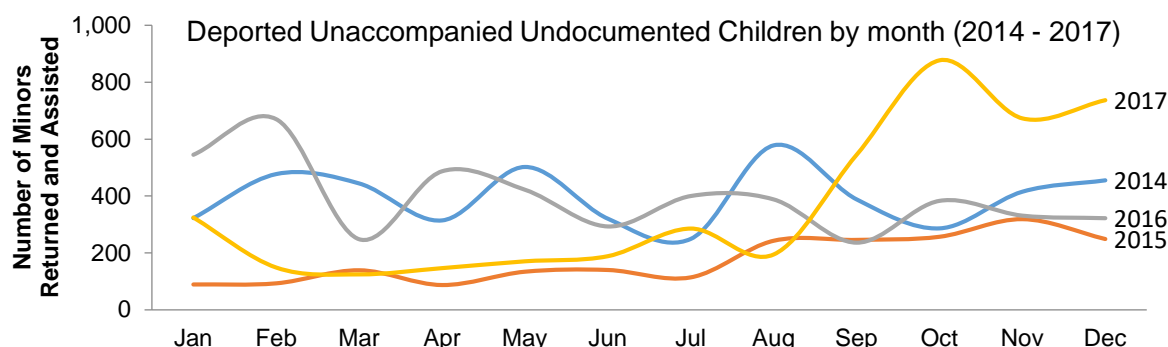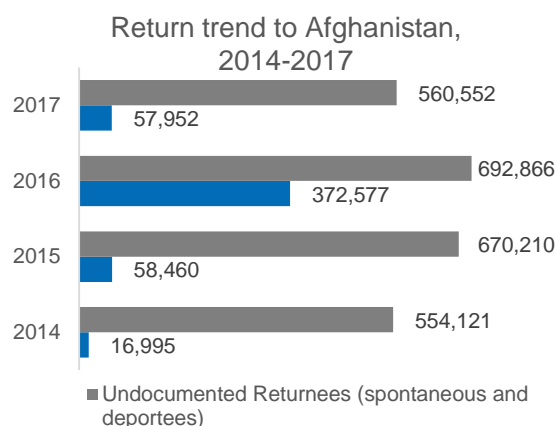
- One in four Afghans have been displaced.
- The top five challenges for returnees are food security, shelter, land, livelihoods and access to services.
- The majority of returnees from Pakistan are from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan followed by Sindh, Punjab, Islamabad and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Refugee returnees:

- Only 60% of Afghan refugees return to their province of origin[2].
- 60% of refugee returnees spent over three decades in Pakistan.
- 21% of refugee returnees from Pakistan and 31% from Islamic Republic of Iran were born in exile[3].

Undocumented Afghans:

- Profiling surveys of undocumented Afghan returnees crossing the border from Pakistan show that 78% intended to return to their province of origin whereas 22% chose different provinces[4].

Return trend to Afghanistan, 2014-2017

2017: 560,552 / 57,952
2016: 692,866 / 372,577
2015: 670,210 / 58,460
2014: 554,121 / 16,995

■ Undocumented Returnees (spontaneous and deportees)

- 29% of the undocumented Afghans returned from Tehran, 25% from Fars, 16% from Khurasan Razawi and the remaining from other provinces.
- In 2017, 263,612 undocumented Afghan returnees were deported, predominately from Islamic Republic of Iran though Herat and Nimroz border crossings[5].
- According to IOM screenings at border points, in 2017, the number of unaccompanied children returning to Afghanistan doubled from 2,110 in 2015 to 4,419 in 2017[6].

Deported Unaccompanied Undocumented Children by month (2014 - 2017)

Specific Protection Concerns

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[2] Source: UNHCR Returnee and IDP monitoring report, October 2017
[3] Source: UNHCR Encashment Centre monitoring
[4] Source: IOM Intension survey, January 2018
[5] IOM TO ADD SOURCE
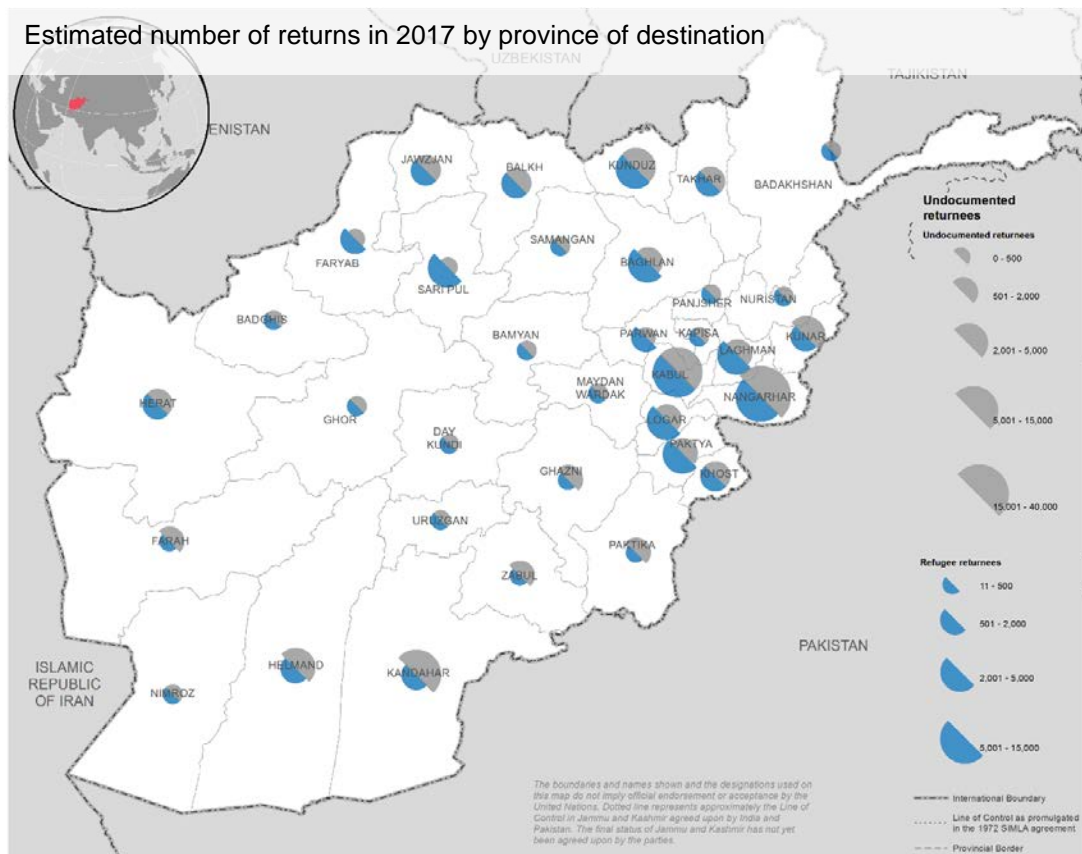[6] IOM Beneficiary Screening Assessment Database, January 2018

Lack of access to basic services, land/land tenure, shelter, and livelihoods remains a major obstacle to sustainable return and reintegration for both refugees and undocumented returnees.

Refugee returnees[7]:

- In 2017, 27% of refugee returnees reported skipping a meal in the last week. This trend is much more pronounced amongst female respondents (53%) than male respondents (28%);
- 31% of refugee returnees reported that they are unable to access healthcare. This trend is again more pronounced amongst female respondents (34%) than male respondents (31%);
- 16% of refugee returnees in 2017 and 18% of refugee returnees in 2016 report having a child under 14 years old working to support the family in times of need compared to the 37% among the general population. Interviews conducted signal that in the absence of on-going assistance families resort to negative coping strategies over time[8];

Undocumented Afghans:

- Through its programmatic presence at the border crossing points, in 2017 IOM worked to ensure an enhanced protection mainstreaming approach for the provision of assistance to undocumented Afghans returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Assistance is needs-based and prioritised to Persons with Specific Needs, particularly persons with disabilities, vulnerable unaccompanied migrant children, single females and female headed households and medical cases, who upon return may face heightened protection risks where needs are unmet

Estimated number of returns in 2017 by province of destination

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[7] Source: UNHCR returnee monitoring conducted 1-6 months after arrival of the refugee returnees.
[8] The interviews for 2017 returnees were conducted by phone 1-6 months following the return. The data illustrates that proportion of children under 14 years old working to support the family in times of need increases over time upon return / in prolonged displacement.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS IN AFGHANISTAN

UNHCR

Protection monitoring: UNHCR systematically and regularly collects, verifies and analyses information over an extended period of time to identify violations of rights and protection risks for IDPs, returnees and host communities for the purpose of developing effective responses. Protection risk analysis helps to inform the overall humanitarian response and upholds the centrality of protection. UNHCR's protection monitoring is used as a tool for community based interventions and for interventions aimed at persons with specific needs; it furthermore assists UNHCR and partners in the overall programme planning and response, as well as in providing evidence for advocacy efforts with the Government of the Islamic republic of Afghanistan and development stakeholders. UNHCR is using mobile data collection to enhance the analysis of data collected through protection monitoring, the categorisation and most importantly systematisation of evidence, as well as to develop advocacy and intervention strategies. Analysis of collected data is key for its effective usage: UNHCR is in the process of developing a new analytical framework that will help formulate the key priorities and main activities**.**

In June 2017 UNHCR piloted the first round of post-return monitoring through phone interviews (in-house) and developed a monitoring framework in partnership with Orange Door Research which conducts interviews on an ongoing basis.

Encashment Centers (ECs) monitoring is a component of UNHCR's overall protection monitoring. EC monitoring is conducted upon the arrival of refugee returnees in Afghanistan. It aims at identifying return trends, assessing the voluntariness of return and identifying reasons for their decision to return as well as assessing the level of information returnees received pre-departure in countries of asylum in order to make a well-informed choice to return home, and the conditions and respect for the basic rights in the country of asylum. It also assists to detect harassment and human rights violations that will be brought to the attention of responsible authorities in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan through the respective UNHCR offices.

UNHCR carries out **protection assessments** of individual cases of PSN using a participatory approach. Home visits are carried out to assess the needs, capacities and vulnerabilities of each individual case in order to respond in the most appropriate manner, in consultation with the beneficiary, family and community.

UNHCR signed a **data sharing agreement with the World Bank**, which aims to strengthen existing return/protection monitoring initiatives and data analysis. Furthermore, UNHCR has signed a **data sharing agreement with WFP** to ensure food assistance to vulnerable returnees through WFP's SCOPE program. UNHCR contracted the Afghanistan Holding Group (a third-party evaluation company) to conduct an **evaluation of the voluntary repatriation cash grant.** The evaluation aims to provide an objective overview of the impact, efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance of the voluntary repatriation cash grant, and to make recommendations for future programming.

UNHCR/IOM

Post-return monitoring: UNHCR and IOM use mobile phone surveys (at household level) and focus group discussions (at community level) to collect real-time data from both returnee populations one to six months after the returnees have settled in communities. UNHCR conducts comprehensive socio-economic profiling and vulnerability assessments in selected locations of high return and displacement to design evidence-based programming for protection and solutions. This is supplemented by interviews with IDPs and the general Afghan population for comparison purposes. This provides UNHCR and IOM with an unparalleled perspective on current returnee population mobility trends and real-time data regarding assistance needs, protection risks and vulnerabilities, as well as comparative information from a broader cross-section of the population.

IOM

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM): IOM's DTM is a unique data collection mechanism currently deployed in over 40 countries within complex humanitarian emergencies to track and monitor population movements, mobility patterns and presence of specific population categories and their needs. DTM supports effective and targeted aid delivery as an inter-agency tool for the entire

humanitarian community that enables partners to understand the mobility patterns of IDPs, returnees, and population movement in general. DTM also tracks the presence of vulnerable groups within communities that enhances the ability of IOM and humanitarian partners to target specific, priority areas and provide more efficient and timely delivery of assistance.

Beneficiary Selection Assessment Form: is filled out for all persons screened by DoRR who receive IOM assistance at border crossing points to identify protection concerns. This includes profiling of beneficiaries intended destination.

Vulnerable Migrant Protection Assessment: is conducted for all PSNs that require protection sensitive humanitarian assistance. As part of the comprehensive case management process, this assessment is conducted after successful family tracing and safe reunification in destination areas with family members (or alternative). This identifies the immediate, medium and longer-term needs of vulnerable returnees such as single females, unaccompanied migrant children, female-headed households, medical cases or victims of human rights violations. IOM's protection-sensitive post arrival humanitarian assistance also provides referrals to specialist protection actors and in-kind assistance according to the beneficiary's self-identified priority needs (typically food, NFIs and civil documentation and livelihood opportunities).

Photo 3. A Female Headed household who was deported from Islamic Republic of Iran is assessed in the IOM/DORR Screening Center at the zero point in Zaranj in Nimroz Province ©IOM/Emily Reid

Community Response Map (CRM): CRM is a real-time two-way monitoring & evaluation tool, which measures the impact and sustainability of reintegration support over time through collecting, mapping and analysing community feedback in real-time. CRM maps beneficiaries' concerns and levels of satisfaction collected via face to face meetings, SMS (through SIM card distribution), call centres, and community events. This will inform programming while integrating accountability to affected populations.

Protection Monitoring: IOM systematically collects, verifies and analyses data to identify violations of rights and protection risks of returnees at the border areas, as well as areas of final destination to enhance the response. This includes protection monitoring of populations of concern, protection monitoring missions, (internal and inter-agency) at each of the four major border crossings and areas of final destination for PSNs. Needs assessments identify the manifold protection concerns that arise during the return and reintegration process amidst evolving nature of complex humanitarian crises. Regular monitoring of individual caseloads is conducted through comprehensive case management for the most vulnerable PSNs in coordination with partners in the field.

In 2018, UNHCR and IOM will finalize a data sharing agreement, while harmonizing all post return monitoring forms with joint reporting and analysis through an integrated dashboard. In addition, baseline data for reintegration programming and community selection will be informed by UNHCR protection monitoring and IOM's DTM. UNHCR and IOM will jointly work on the development of key indicators for displacement and mobility monitoring tools. Further areas for joint programming will include continuing coordination efforts; advocacy and public outreach; cash; and protection referrals.

Linking return to reintegration

UNHCR's Community Protection Measures (CPMs) are part of UNHCR's multi-year strategy and focus on mitigating protection risks, both at the individual and community level. CPMs adopt an integrated community-based approach to address the protection and solutions for Pakistani refugees

(Khost/Paktika provinces), refugee returnees, and IDPs, while fostering social cohesion, peaceful coexistence and community resilience. CPMs are: area-based site selection and site-specific activities/projects are informed by protection monitoring, baseline socio-economic profiling, and protection risk and market analyses. This enables the design of evidence-based programming to systematically address the protection risks and immediate to short and medium term needs of UNHCR's persons of concern.

IOM's 4-year Reintegration Assistance and Development for Afghanistan (RADA) programme is being implemented in eight provinces of high return and internal displacement at the community and individual level and target over 30,000 vulnerable Afghans. Activities are implemented on the individual, community and institutional level across 8 provinces- Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh, Kandahar, Baghlan, Laghman and one final province to be decided based on needs- with five different sets of activities. RADA incorporates technical assistance and capacity building to the MoRR and Labour, Social Affairs and Martyrs (MoLSAMD); community development projects; in-kind grant assistance to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs); post-arrival reception assistance to returning migrants from Europe; and Technical and Vocational training courses.

Importantly CPMs and RADA focus on **strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus** by fostering linkages with development partners including the private sector for continuum to long-term development and sustainability. The CPM and RADA programmes are aligned to the Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DiREC) national action plan, the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANDPF, 2017-2021), the relevant National Priority Programs, and ONE UN. UNHCR through innovation programming such as Code4Fun and MADE51 supports women and youth empowerment

Photo 4. Sher Moh, a 32 years old returnee to Kabul, learns to weld through UNHCR's vocational training which helps returnees acquire livelihood skills to restart their life and foster self-reliance upon return. Kabul Province, Afghanistan ©UNHCR/S. Rich

including explicit focus on addressing sexual and gender based violence. UNHCR's cross border programming – Support for Self-Reliance (S4S initiative) – is built on the human capital of the returnees and capitalizes on their knowledge and skills to foster self-reliance. In 2017, UNHCR's community-based protection measures supported **23 communities** and nearly **80,000 families** (over 500,000 individuals), including approximately 10,000 families from the host community (12% of the targeting on an average).

PLANNING SCENARIOS FOR 2018

Refugee returnees: Based on DiREC planning figure for 2018, the Government of Afghanistan is planning for the return of 280,000[9] registered Afghan refugees, mainly from Pakistan and smaller numbers from the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries. However, this figure depends on a number of factors, including the situation in Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan has extended PoR cards for Afghan refugees until 30 June 2018 while instructing the Minister of States and Frontier

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[9] Based on 2017 return trends, UNHCR budgeted for the return of 70,000 refugee returnees in 2018. For additional returns UNHCR will launch an appeal for a supplementary budget.

Regions (SAFRON) – the line Ministry responsible for refugees – to submit a plan to repatriate all Afghan nationals.

Undocumented returnees: IOM is projecting a return from Pakistan in 2018 of 420,000 undocumented Afghans, all of whom are in need of humanitarian assistance as well as transitional and recovery to support sustainable reintegration. However, as witnessed in 2016, this can be significantly impacted by events on the ground in Pakistan. In addition, IOM is projecting a return of roughly 400,000 undocumented Afghans from Islamic Republic of Iran. IOM estimates that 30% of returnees from Islamic Republic of Iran need assistance. IOM will require USD 60,000,000 to meet the humanitarian requirements of these vulnerable populations.

Additional resources

IOM Afghanistan

1. IOM Afghanistan Website
   a. Weekly Situation Update on Return of Undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan
   b. Protection Overview for Western Afghanistan / Returnees from Iran
   c. Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Round 1 Report
   d. Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Round 2 Report
2. IOM Humanitarian Compendium
3. IOM Afghanistan Displacement Tracking Matrix Website
4. IOM Afghanistan Facebook
5. IOM Afghanistan Twitter
6. IOM Afghanistan Instagram

UNHCR Afghanistan

1. UNHCR Afghanistan data portal
   a. UNHCR presence in Afghanistan
   b. UNHCR Operational Fact Sheet – December 2017
   c. Weekly return statistics
   d. Voluntary Repatriation monthly update – November
   e. UNHCR return and IDP monitoring report – October 2017
   f. Assisted refugee return – by province of destination
2. Humanitarian Data Exchange: UNHCR Afghanistan data
3. UNHCR Global Focus – Afghanistan
   a. Funding Update as of 13 February 2018
4. UNHCR Population Statistics Database
5. UNHCR Afghanistan Twitter

Other Useful Resources

1. Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016
2. World Migration Report 2018
3. IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre
4. IOM Framework on Resolution of protracted displacement scenarios
5. New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants
6. Global Compact on Migration
7. 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan