In 2023 UNHCR has assisted some 76,000 returns1, (99% from Pakistan), with the fourth quarter alone representing 83% of this year’s returns. The main drive for such an increase during the last quarter of the year, was October 3rd Pakistan’s national Apex Committee endorsement of a plan to repatriate over a million foreigners without valid documents, largely Afghans, requiring them to leave the country by 1 November.

The 2023 overall return figure, is some twelve times higher than the one recorded in 2022 (6,506 individuals). The 2022 registered total refugee returns had been already five times higher than the 2021 overall returns.

Based on protection monitoring interviews, conducted upon arrival with returnees, most have stated that economic reasons for return movements still mean a lot in decision-making, however since early September 2023, the statements on shrinking protection space, particularly fear of arrest and deportation, continuous harassment, arrest and bribing, night raids by police influenced the decision to return.

Throughout 2023, 75% of the Afghans returns occurred predominantly in these five provinces: Nangarhar (25%), Kandahar (18%), Kabul (18%), Kunduz (8%) and Helmand (6%).

### ASSISTED AFGHAN RETURNS

#### Assisted Afghan returns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oct-Dec 2023</th>
<th>Jan-Dec 2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assisted Afghan returns</td>
<td>63,154</td>
<td>75,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from Iran</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from Pakistan</td>
<td>63,042</td>
<td>75,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from other countries</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Assistance at Encashment Centres (ECs) in Afghanistan

USD 16M was provided in cash assistance to returnees during 2023 Q4. A total of USD 21M was provided in 2023.

Besides cash grants, returning refugees receive basic health care, vaccination for children, mine risk education, access to waiting areas and playgrounds for children, as well as, overnight accommodation when needed and protection referrals.

### Returnee Demographics 2023

- **77%** of the returnees are Women and Children
- **21%** are 18 - 59 years old
- **18%** are 6 - 17 years old
- **11%** are 0 - 5 years old

### Province of Destination 2023

1 **127** Returns from other countries
2 **75,325** Returns from Pakistan
3 **497** Returns from Iran

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1 Including Facilitated Volrep, Proof of Registration card holders, UNHCR slip holders, their nuclear family members with or without documentation, UNHCR asylum certificate holders and protection referrals.
Throughout 2023, UNHCR has conducted voluntary returns monitoring at Encashment Centers in Afghanistan. The main reasons for leaving the country of asylum were (1) high costs of living/high rent (90%), (2) no employment opportunities (82%), and (3) strict border requirements (60%). However, if analyzed month by month (as per the chart above), it’s possible to note a considerable increase after September 2023 for five specific reasons: fear of arrest and/or deportation (93% in December), abuse by police or state authorities (53% in December), uncertainty related to the Proof of Refugee cards extension in Pakistan (46%), night raids and eviction notice by landlord, police and/or army in Pakistan.

As a result of the October 3rd Pakistan's national Apex Committee endorsed a plan to repatriate over a million foreigners without valid documents, requiring them to leave the country by 1 November, UNHCR put in place a system to monitor and analyze these returns. The above charts reflect the problems reported by the returnees prior to the cross-border movement, and also at the border point.

For further information please visit the Afghanistan Situation Operational Portal or please contact RBAPDIMA@unhcr.org and AFGKAIMU@unhcr.org.