

Process of return

UNHCR's Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs) in Iran and Pakistan process refugees wanting to return to Afghanistan and issue a voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) for each family. Two VRCs are located in Pakistan: one in Azakhel in Peshawar (KPK) and one in Baleli in Quetta (Baluchistan). Repatriation from Iran is facilitated through all UNHCR Offices, including the VRC in Soleimankhani.

Upon return to Afghanistan, returnees are assisted at four Encashment Centers (ECs) located in Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar for returnees from Pakistan and other countries, and in Herat for those returning from Iran.

At the ECs all returnees with a valid VRF receive a grant averaging USD 200 per person (based on their area of origin) to support their immediate humanitarian needs and transportation costs.

In addition to cash grants, a range of inter-agency services are provided for returning refugees, including basic health and malnutrition screening and vaccination (by the Ministry of Public Health supported by WHO and UNICEF), mine risk awareness (by the Danish Demining Group supported by UNMAS), information on school enrolment (by the Ministry of Education supported by UNICEF), and overnight accommodation.

UNHCR and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation also conduct returnee monitoring and identify persons with specific needs to refer to specialized service providers for assessment and assistance.

Mine risk education is important as a protection intervention for awareness of the threats associated with landmines, improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance, to prevent injury and loss of life particularly for children and those returning to rural areas.

IN BRIEF

All returnees are provided with a multi-purpose cash grant (an average of USD 200 per person) at 4 Encashment centres. UNHCR's cash grants to refugee returnees are intended to prevent, reduce, and respond to immediate protection risks and vulnerabilities upon return to Afghanistan. Cash grants are an important protection tool that provide returnees with the means to meet their immediate humanitarian needs and their transportation costs.



Returnees waiting to receive cash grants at Kabul Encashment Centre. UNHCR/M. Haroon

IN BRIEF

Between January and June 2019, a total of 3,070 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan under UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation program, with the majority returning from Pakistan (2,208) and smaller numbers returning from Iran (809), Tajikistan (42), India (4), the Russian Federation (4) and Azerbaijan (3).

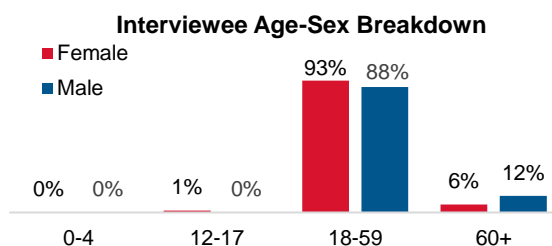
These returns were 61% lower than the 7,951 Afghans who returned during the same period in 2018. This is largely due to the worsening security and economic situation across Afghanistan.

Depending on the overall situation in Pakistan and Iran, return trends are likely to remain low.

Returnee Monitoring

Returnee monitoring is an inherent part of the **protection monitoring** carried out by UNHCR in Afghanistan. UNHCR monitors refugee returnees through the entire process of voluntary repatriation: beginning with an interview at the Voluntary Repatriation Centre in the country of

asylum, continuing with monitoring at the Encashment Centres in Afghanistan upon arrival, and followed up between 1 and 6 months later through phone surveys. UNHCR also includes refugee returnees as a population group in its protection monitoring at the community level.



ENCASHMENT CENTRE (EC) MONITORING

Encashment Centre monitoring is conducted with refugee returnees upon their arrival in Afghanistan. It aims at identifying return trends through an assessment of the voluntariness of return, reasons for return, the level of information that returnees received in countries of asylum to allow them to make a well-informed decision to return, the conditions and respect for basic rights in the country of asylum, and returnees' plans for the future. Monitoring identifies persons with specific needs, and also helps detect harassment and violations that should be brought to the attention of responsible authorities.

Between 1 January and 30 June 2019, a total of 437 households were interviewed, including 224 male and 213 female respondents. Interviewees are selected randomly from among returning families at the ECs, the first point of contact between returnees and UNHCR in Afghanistan.

Post-Return Monitoring

To supplement ongoing protection monitoring in Afghanistan and to ensure representative sampling, UNHCR uses mobile phone surveys to collect real-time data from returnee populations one to six months after the returnees have settled in their communities. This is supplemented by interviews with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and members of host communities for comparison purposes. This provides UNHCR an unparalleled perspective on current population mobility trends and actionable data regarding assistance needs, protection risks, vulnerability, and comparative information from a broader cross-section of the population. This also enables the design of evidence-based programming and advocacy to systematically address the protection

risks and immediate to short- and medium-term needs of populations of concern.

In November 2018, UNHCR contracted Orange Door Research and VOTO Afghanistan to conduct socioeconomic household phone surveys with returnees (2,738), IDPs (4,350) and members of host communities (3,351), as well as post distribution monitoring with returnees (2,738) and persons with specific needs (1,300) who were provided with cash grants over the course of 2018. The findings are presented in a final report available in UNHCR's data portal:

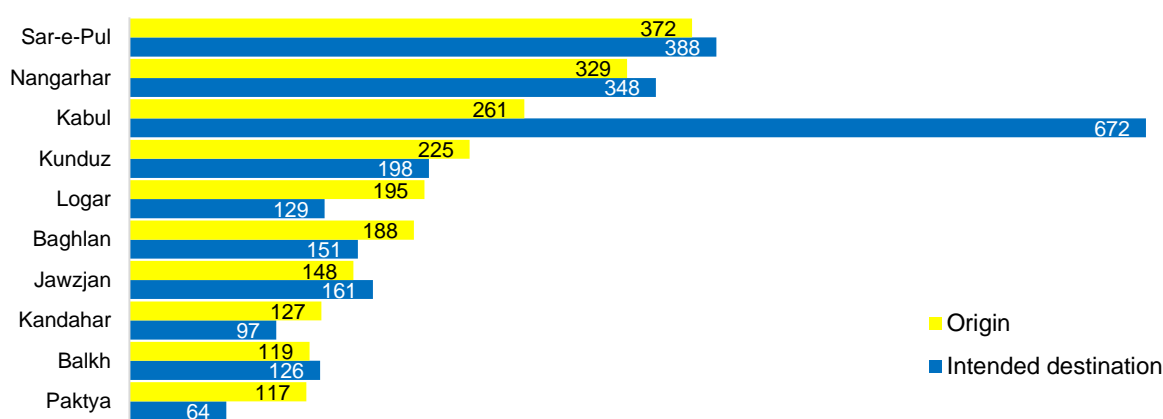
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/70157>

Return Trends

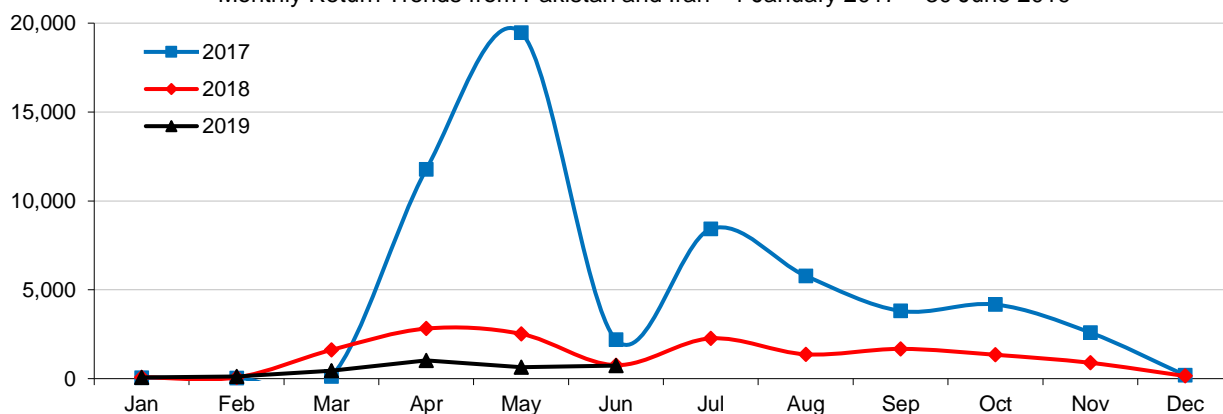
Since large-scale repatriation began in 2002 UNHCR has facilitated the return of over **5.2 million** Afghan refugees, mainly from neighboring Pakistan and Iran.

Some **76% (2,334)** of refugee returnees in 2019 have returned to Sar-e-Pul, Nangarhar, Kabul, Kunduz and Logar provinces. Kabul and Nangarhar have remained among the top five provinces of return since 2002.

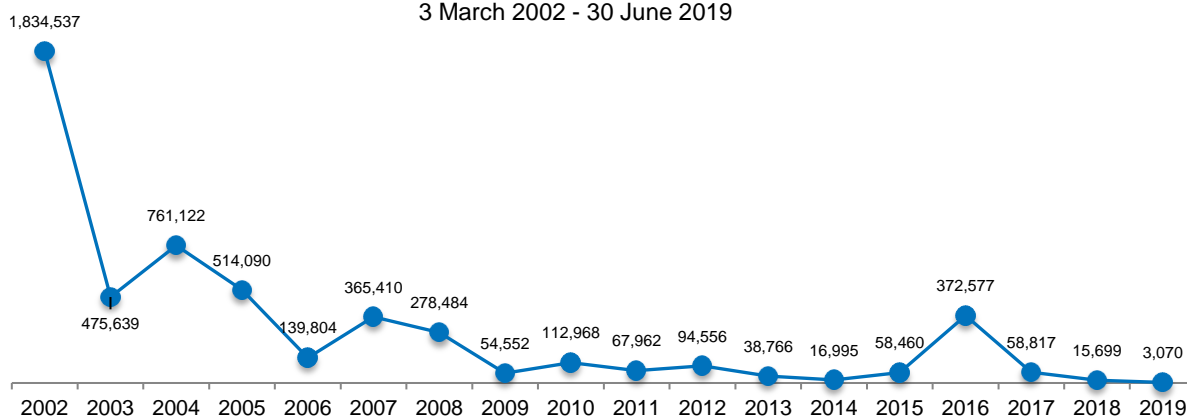
Comparison of Recorded Province of Destination with Province of Origin
 Top 10 provinces from 1 January - 30 June 2019



Monthly Return Trends from Pakistan and Iran - 1 January 2017 - 30 June 2019



Annual VolRep Trends from Pakistan, Iran and Other Countries to Afghanistan
 3 March 2002 - 30 June 2019



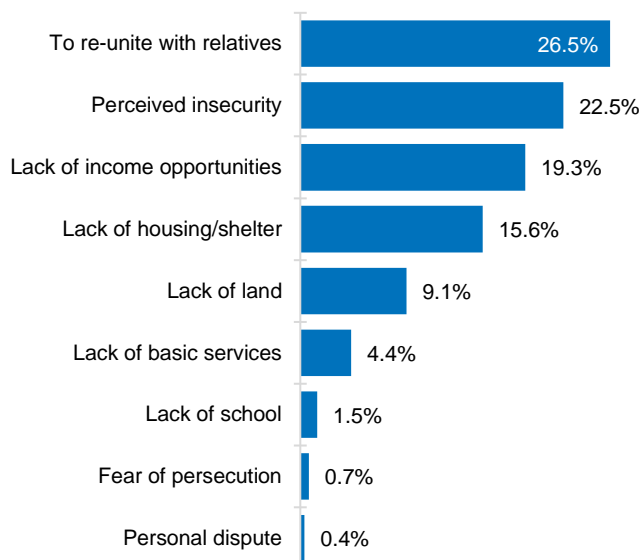
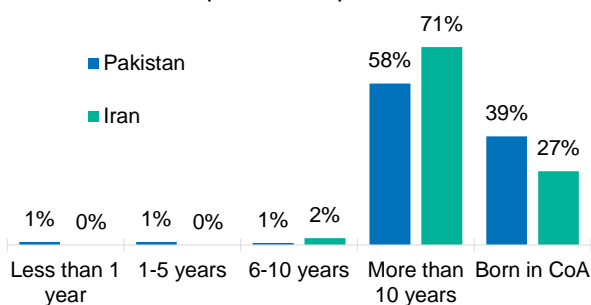
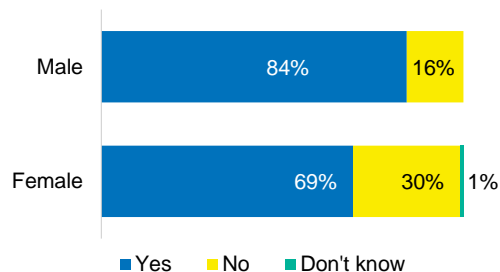
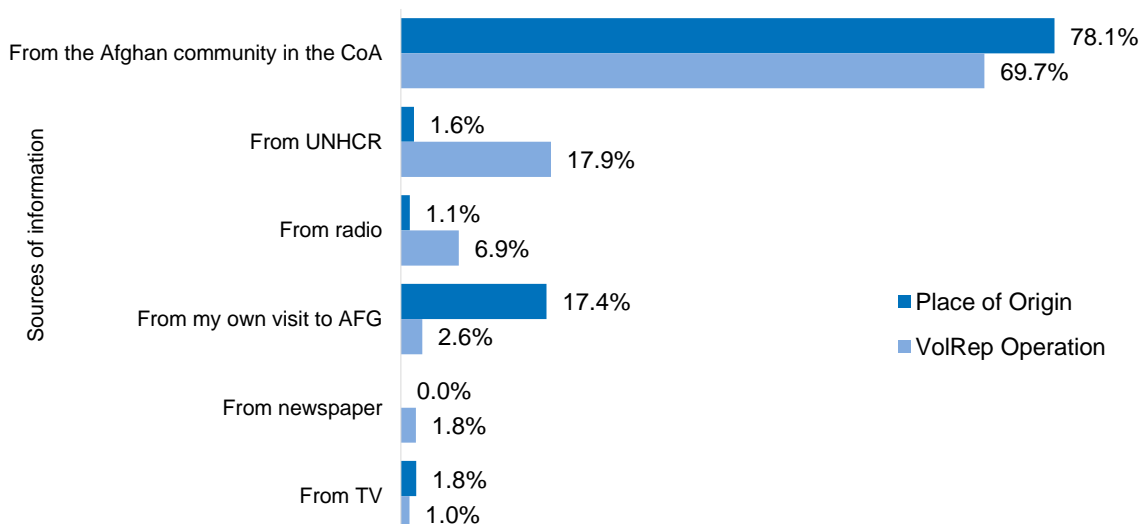
IN BRIEF

53% of interviewed Afghan refugee returnees returned to their province of origin, while 47% returned to other locations.

58% of returnees from Pakistan and 71% from Iran returned after spending more than 10 years as refugees.

39% of returnees from Pakistan and 27% from Iran were born in the country of asylum.

80% of returnees stated they had information about the overall situation in Afghanistan, including security in their place of origin, before leaving the country of asylum.

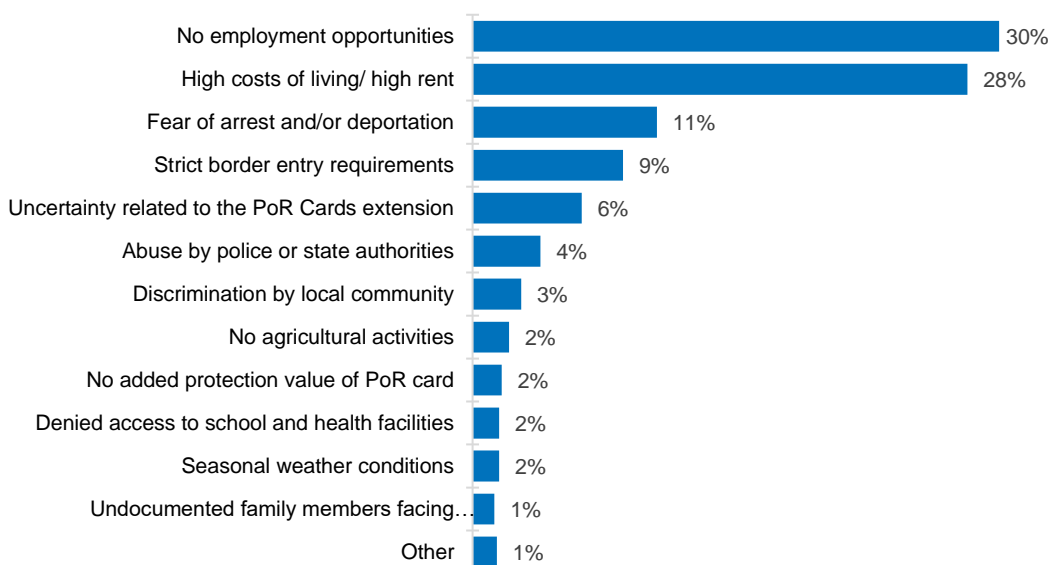
Reasons for Not Returning to the Province of Origin

Displacement period

Awareness About Cash Grant

Sources of Information on Place of Origin and UNHCR's VolRep Program


Reasons for Return

IN BRIEF

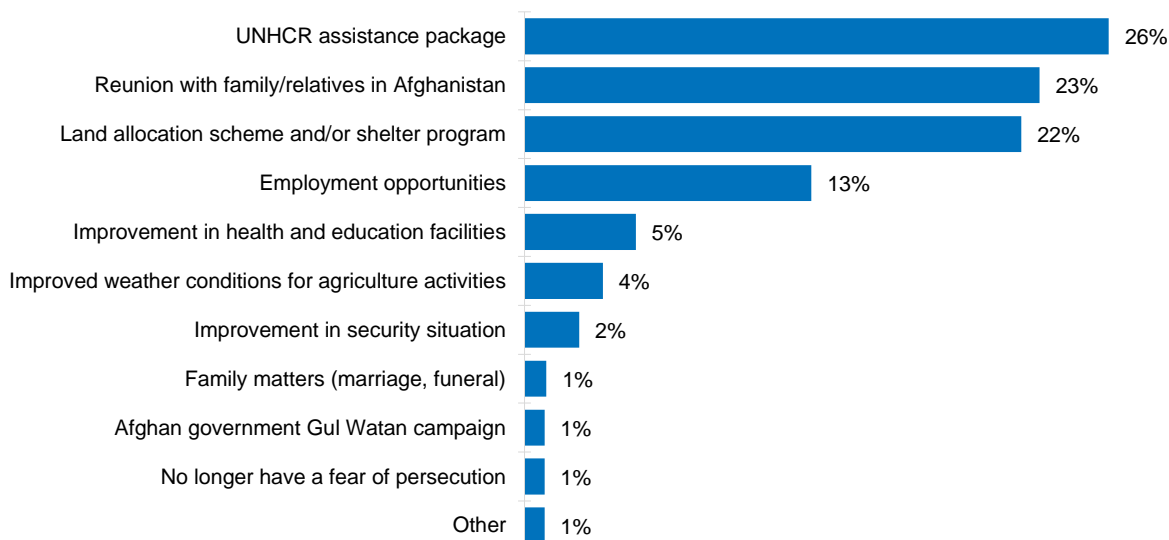
Some 269 newly arrived refugee returnees from Pakistan, 166 from Iran and 2 from other countries were interviewed as part of UNHCR's returnee monitoring in 2019. The main reasons for leaving Pakistan include: lack of employment opportunities; high cost of living; stricter border controls resulting in separation of families; and uncertainty related to the extension of government-issued refugee documentation. Only 2 returnees interviewed reported they or their relatives were arrested (in Pakistan) within the last year.

Reasons for Leaving Pakistan and Iran - 2019



The main reasons of return to Afghanistan in both 2019 and 2018 are almost the same for returnees from Pakistan and Iran. The lack of employment opportunities, the high cost of living, and strict border controls resulting in separation of families were mentioned as the main reasons influencing refugees' decision to return.

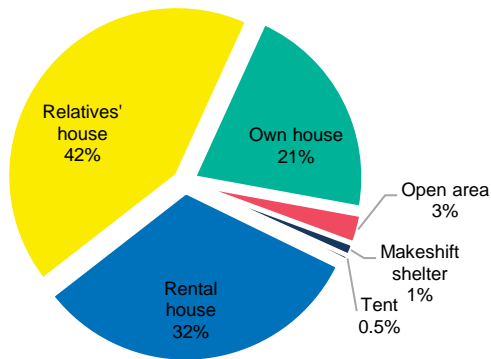
Reasons for return to Afghanistan - 2019



Intentions after leaving the Encashment Centre

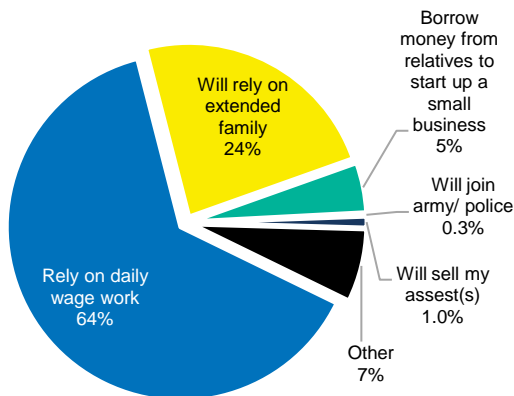
The below findings are based on interviews carried out at the four Encashment Centers. These findings give an indication of returnees' intentions upon return, which could of course change after returnees settle in their communities. These findings also help compare dynamics among returnees during the return and reintegration phases.

What will be your living arrangements after return?

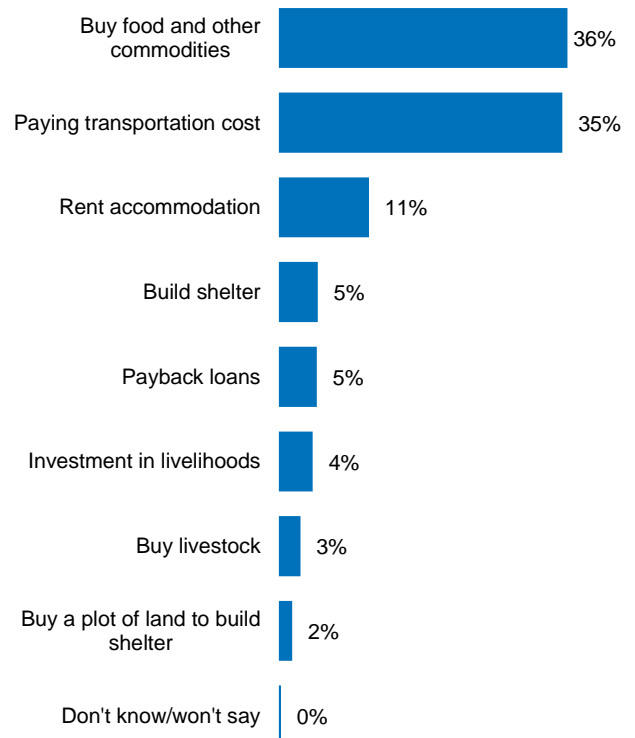


A returnee women head of household receiving her family's cash grant at Kabul Encashment Center. UNHCR/M. Haroon

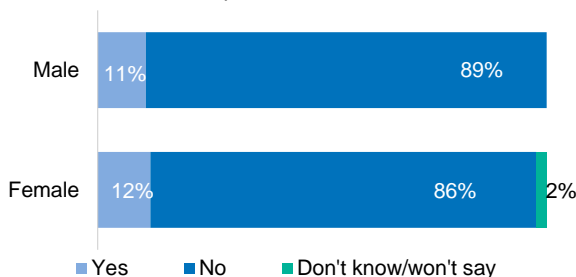
After you spend your cash grant, how will you support your family?



Upon return, how do you plan to spend the cash grant?



Did you or your family members consider moving to Europe or other countries?



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