

Pakistan : Afghan Refugee Return Monitoring Update (1st Oct - 31st Dec 2019)

Introduction



UNHCR Pakistan facilitates the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees as part of its mandate to provide durable solutions. It operates two Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRC) in Quetta, Balochistan and Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. At the VRC, families who wish to repatriate are counselled, to ensure the voluntary nature of the return, and scheduled for their return to Afghanistan. In addition, UNHCR also administers an exit questionnaire to understand the profiles of individuals wishing to return, the push and pull factors, special needs, and intended place of return.

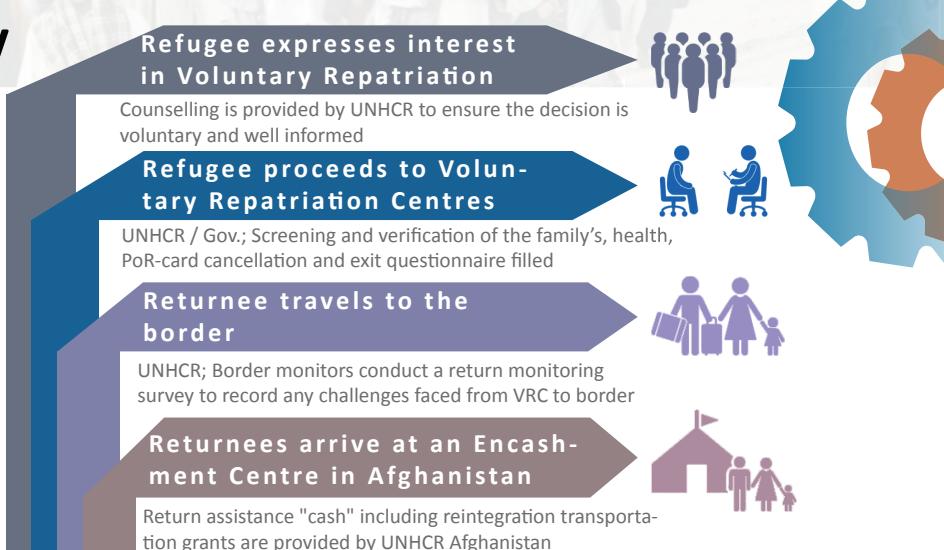
In May 2018, UNHCR strengthened its monitoring of returns at the border. This includes a returnee interview, which allows UNHCR to gather information on any protection issues faced in between the time the families depart the VRC and arrive at the border. In addition to interviewing returnees, UNHCR staff systematically report on the protection situation and changes in procedures or practices of border authorities to better inform UNHCR's advocacy, planning, and protection interventions.

Purpose

- 1 To capture any protection issues and concerns faced by returnees between the Voluntary Repatriation Centre (VRC) and the Afghan border, including detention, delays, etc.
- 2 To monitor the quality of services provided at the Voluntary Repatriation Centre (VRC) to ensure that persons of concern are adequately prepared for their return.

Process and Methodology

- Monthly narrative reports are completed by UNHCR protection staff to analyse key security developments, changes in practices of the border authorities, and any protection concerns.
- Border monitors conduct return monitoring interviews with a random selection of returning families. Data from these interviews is recorded in KOBO (an online/mobile data collection tool) for analysis and reporting.



Border Situation and Observation (Oct - Dec 2019)



Key Political and Security Developments

UNHCR facilitated voluntary repatriation is halted for the winter break from December 2019 – 1st March 2020 due to poor weather conditions at the border.

The Government effort to fence the 1,343-kilometer Pakistan-Afghan border is ongoing since the project began in April 2017. The fencing of a priority area of approximately 600 kilometres has been completed while it is expected that the remaining work will be completed in 2020. The fencing is expected to further restrict illegal border crossings.

Torkham, KP; Overall, the security situation at Torkham Border remained relatively stable. On 03 November, two rockets fired by unknown people landed at the Frontier Corps cantonment in Landi Kotal. Security forces launched a search operation in the area after the attack, however UNHCR facilitated returnees were not affected.

Chaman, Balochistan; At Chaman border, two rallies were held by Jumait-e-Ulema Islam (JUI) in October to protest the killing of a religious leader and to show solidarity with Kashmir. Fortunately, the rallies did not affect UNHCR assisted returnees in their return to Afghanistan. However, in November, JUI supporters blocked the Quetta-Chaman road at Khojak Pass and Yaro. Due to the road blocks, UNHCR facilitated returnees and other Afghans faced challenges on reaching the border between the 19-29 November and not to use alternative routes to reach their destinations.



Practice of the Border Authorities

Torkham, Balochistan: The trend of allowing Afghans to cross into Afghanistan using only Tazkiras continues at Torkham border. Border officials verify the Tazkiras and issue a gate pass so that Afghans may cross as undocumented returnees. UNHCR staff note that this loophole allows PoR and ACC cardholders to cross the border without their cards being punch-holed, as is the current practice.

In October, concerns were raised at Torkham Border regarding hundreds of vehicles loaded with goods stranded on the Pesha-war-Torkham highway. This resulted in stranded drivers, heavy traffic, and other security risks. These problems were due to delays at the border as a result of shifting schedules of Afghan border authorities, the slow scanning process for large vehicles, and 10 separate days of official work suspension on both sides of the border due to high level visits, holidays, and the Afghan presidential elections. Despite the delays at the border, officials allowed Afghan returnees to cross without waiting in queue or facing any unnecessary hurdles.

Chaman, Balochistan: The official border timings had changed at Chaman border. The border is now open from 8:00am-5:00pm (was 7:00am - 5:00pm). UNHCR Quetta shared the updated timings with POC through community outreach and information sharing at the VRCs.



Protection and Other Concerns of Afghan Returnees

Torkham border During the reporting period, there were no reports of arrest and detention from October-December 2019.

In Chaman, Balochistan At the Chaman border, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Frontier Corps (FC) arrested 40 undocumented Afghan nationals in October. In November, 18 undocumented Afghans were arrested while they were trying to enter Pakistan illegally. These individuals were charged under the Foreigner's Act for illegally crossing into Pakistan. The Afghan nationals reported that their reasons for crossing illegally were for work opportunities, medical treatment, and to visit relatives.



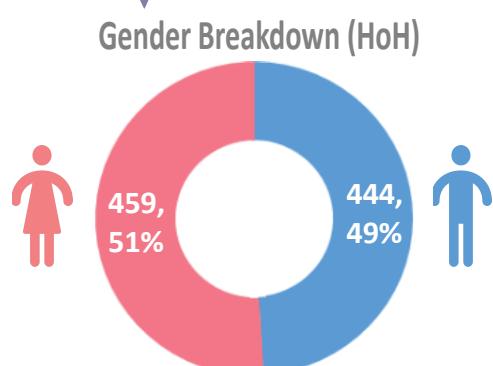
Ongoing Actions

Torkham, KP and Chaman, Balochistan

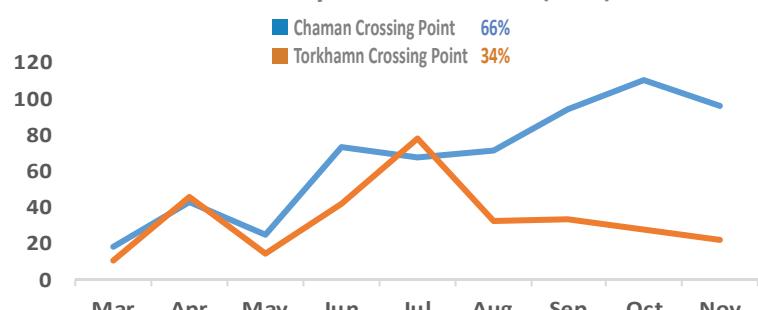
At both Torkham and Chaman borders, UNHCR border monitors and protection staff will continue to ensure:

- Regular coordination with local authorities at the border for smooth, safe, and dignified passage of UNHCR assisted POCs returning through the border checkpoints.
- Visit and coordinate with checkpoints on route to the border to ensure that UNHCR assisted POCs are not harassed or mistreated on their journey back to Afghanistan.

Return Monitoring Interview Statistics (Mar - Dec 2019)



Overall Monthly Interview Trend (HoH)



Voluntary repatriation is halted for the winter break from December 2019 – 1st March 2020.



	Older Person at Risk	37%
	Women at Risk	35%
	Disability	14%
	Serious Medical Condition	12%
	Child at Risk	2%



	Shelter	33%
	Non Food Items	22%
	Food Items	20%
	Health	8%
	Education	8%
	Legal	1%
	Other	8%



	Household Items / Personal Belongings	77%
	Medicine / Medical Item	20%
	Livestock (Animal)	3%



Satisfied 100%

Places of Return from Pakistan

- No. of Individuals Voluntary Repatriated to Afghanistan
- No. of Individuals Interviewed at Border Crossing Points (Chman, Torkham)

