

AFGHANISTAN

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION UPDATE

13,274 AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED SINCE JANUARY 2018

In September 2018, UNHCR facilitated the return to Afghanistan of a total of 1,675 Afghan refugees, including 1,434 from Pakistan and 241 from Iran. This figure is 22% higher than 1,374 refugees who returned in August.

So far, the return figure from Pakistan is substantially (77%) low compared to the 50,641 refugees who returned during the same period in 2017. There are no major changes in the return trends from Iran and other countries.

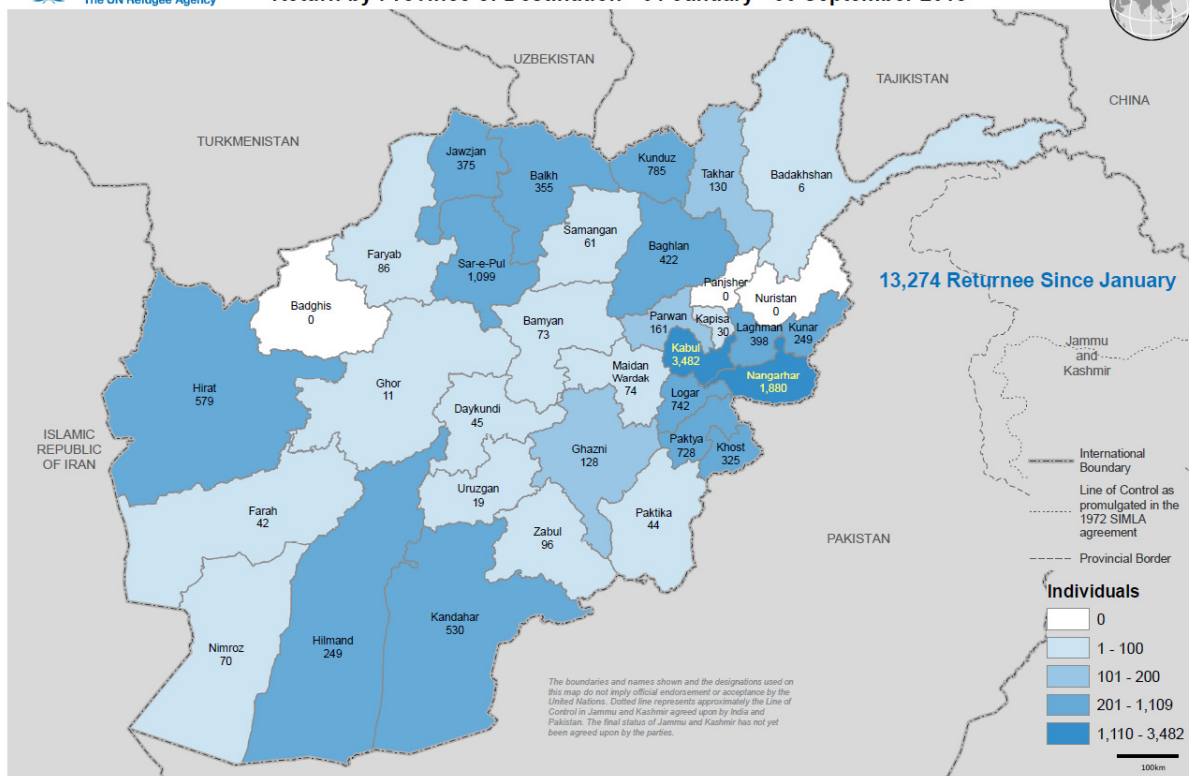
With improved protection and socio-economic conditions in Pakistan, including extension of PoR cards until 30 June 2019, and ongoing security concerns in Afghanistan, returns for the year are likely to remain lower than initially expected.



Returnee verification before cash grant distribution
Kabul Encashment Center – Jul 2018 - UNHCR/ M. Haroon



Afghanistan: Assisted Voluntary Repatriation Return by Province of Destination - 01 January - 30 September 2018



Process of return

UNHCR's Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs) in the countries of asylum are processing refugees wanting to return to Afghanistan and issue a Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) for each family. Two VRCs are located in Pakistan: Azakhel in Peshawar (KPK) and 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, Samarkhel (Nangarhar), Jamal Mayna (Kandahar) and Herat.

At the ECs all Afghan returnees with a valid VRF receive a grant of approximately USD 200 per person based on their area of origin to support returnees' immediate humanitarian needs.

Besides cash grants, a range of inter-agency services including basic health care and vaccinations (Ministry of Public Health supported by WHO and UNICEF), mine risk awareness (Danish Demining Group supported by UNMAS), back to school campaign (UNICEF/Ministry of Education), and a transit facility for overnight accommodation (UNHCR/MoRR) are also provided for returning refugees.

Returnees are also provided with a valid sim card (by Afghan Wireless Communication Company) provided free of charge. UNHCR also provide air time USD 2 per month for 3 months. This is aimed to ensure returnees access to communication services. Sim card distribution will also facilitate

easy contact with returning refugees in return areas when UNHCR and partners conduct return monitoring through phone survey.

At the ECs, UNHCR and Ministry/Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR/DoRRs) also conduct returnee monitoring (household level) and identify persons with specific needs to refer to service providers for assessment and potential assistance.

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

IN BRIEF

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

IN BRIEF

Between January and September 2018, a total of 13,274 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan under UNHCR's facilitated repatriation program, with the majority from Pakistan (11,735) followed by a smaller number from Iran (1,428), Tajikistan (59) and India (52).

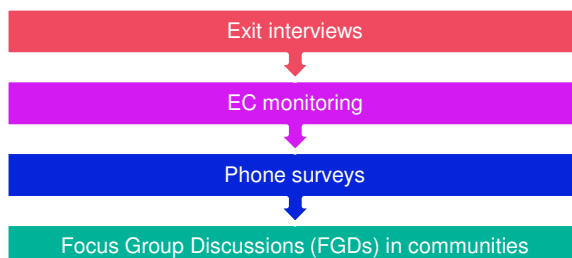
This is 74% lower than 51,801 Afghans who returned during the same period in 2017. This is largely due to improvements in the protection situation in Pakistan including extension of PoR cards until 30 June 2019. Depending on overall situation in Pakistan the return trend is likely to remain low.

Returnee Monitoring

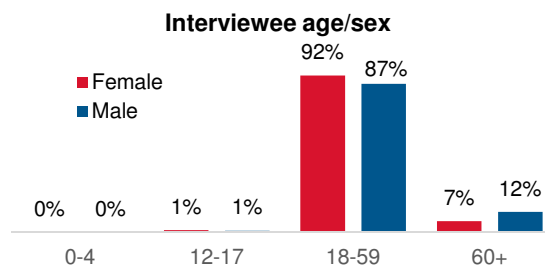


Returnee children receiving mine awareness
 Kabul EC. UNHCR/ M. Haroon, July 2018

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 the Encashment Centre Monitoring, conducted upon arrival to Afghanistan which is followed up 1-6 months later with a phone survey. Additionally, UNHCR includes refugee returnees as a population group into its protection monitoring at the community level.



ENCASHMENT CENTRE (EC) MONITORING

Encashment Centre monitoring is conducted with refugee returnees upon their arrival to Afghanistan. It aims at identifying return trends; an assessment of the voluntariness of return, reasons for the decision to return (in Pakistan/Iran to Afghanistan), the level of information that returnees received in countries of asylum to make a well-informed choice to return home, and conditions and respect for the basic rights in the country of asylum. It also assists to detect harassment and violations that should be brought to the attention of responsible authorities.

Between 1 January and 30 September 2018, a total of 1,216 households were interviewed including 611 male and 605 female respondents. Interviewees were selected randomly from the returning families at the ECs, being the first point of contact in Afghanistan.

Post-return monitoring

UNHCR uses mobile phone surveys to collect real-time data from returnee population one to six months after the returnees have settled in communities. It is supplemented with interviews with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and general Afghan population for comparison purposes. This provides UNHCR an unparalleled perspective on current population mobility trend and actionable data regarding assistance needs, protection risks and vulnerability, as well as comparative information from a broader cross-

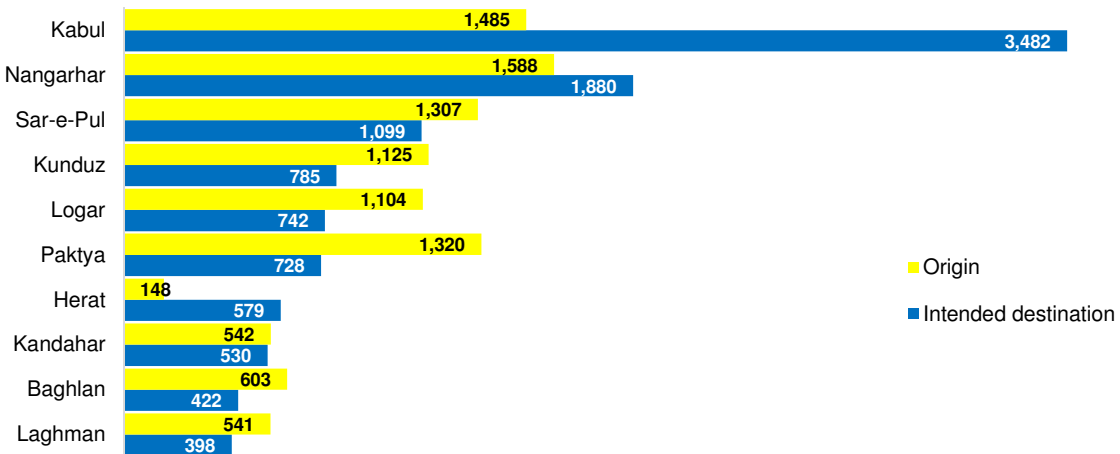
section of the population. In July 2017, UNHCR contracted Orange Door Research and Viamo (former VOTO mobile) to conduct phone surveys with returnees, IDPs and the general population. Between August 2017 and January, 2018, a total of 14,095 household level interviews were carried out including 4,003 returnee surveys, 6,097 IDPs and 3,995 general population surveys. The findings are presented in a final report (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/afg>)

Return Trends

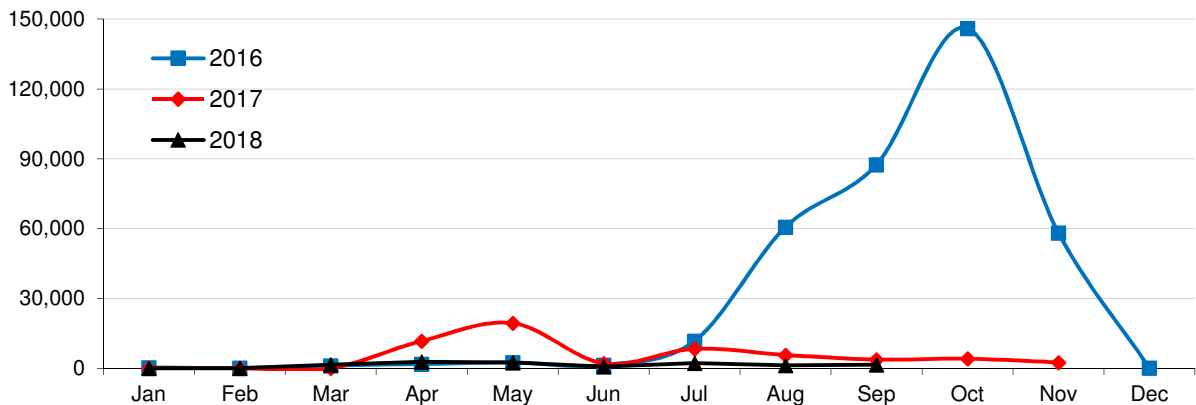
60% (7,988) returned to Kabul, Nangarhar, Sar-e-Pul, Kunduz and Logar provinces. Kabul and Nangarhar remain among the top five provinces of return since 2002.

Since 2002 UNHCR facilitated the return of over **5.2M** Afghan refugees mainly from neighboring host countries (Pakistan and Iran).

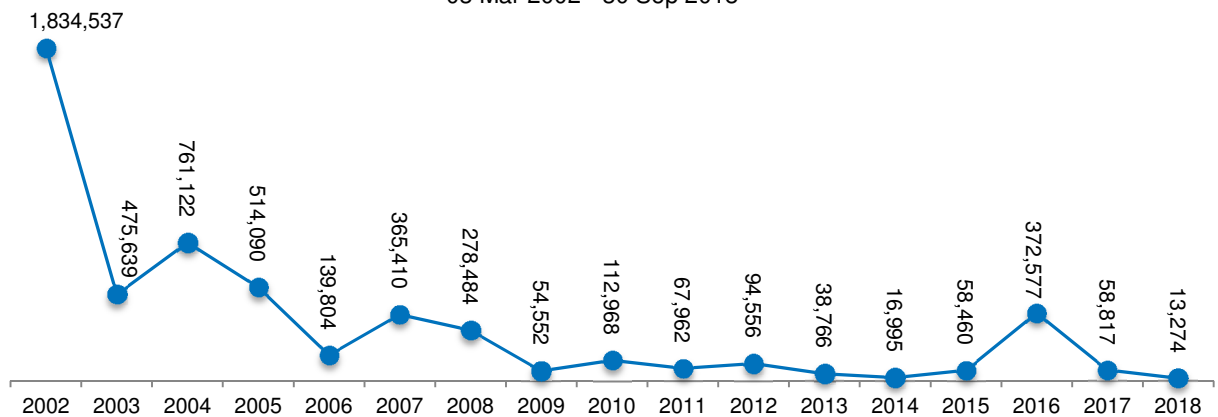
Comparison of recorded province of destination with province of origin
 Top 10 province - 01 Jan - 30 Sep 2018



Monthly Return Trends from Pakistan and Iran - 01 January 2016 - 30 Sep 2018



Annual volrep trend from Pakistan, Iran and other countries to Afghanistan
 03 Mar 2002 - 30 Sep 2018



IN BRIEF

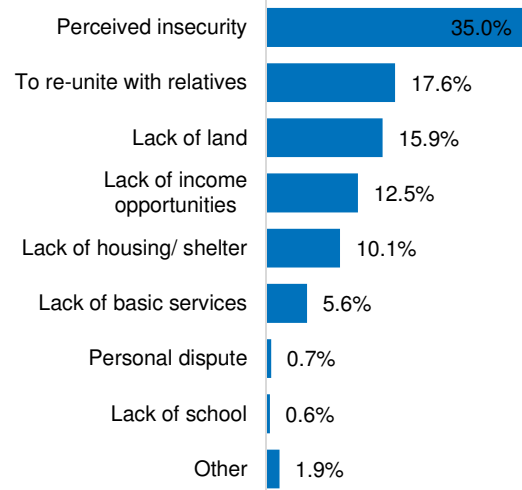
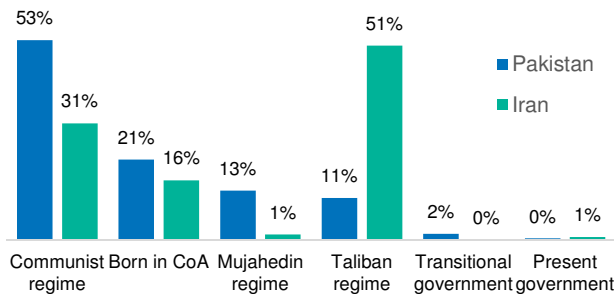
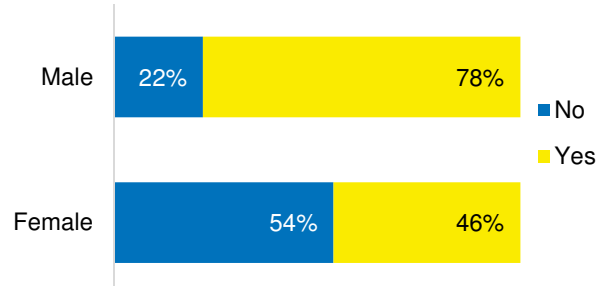
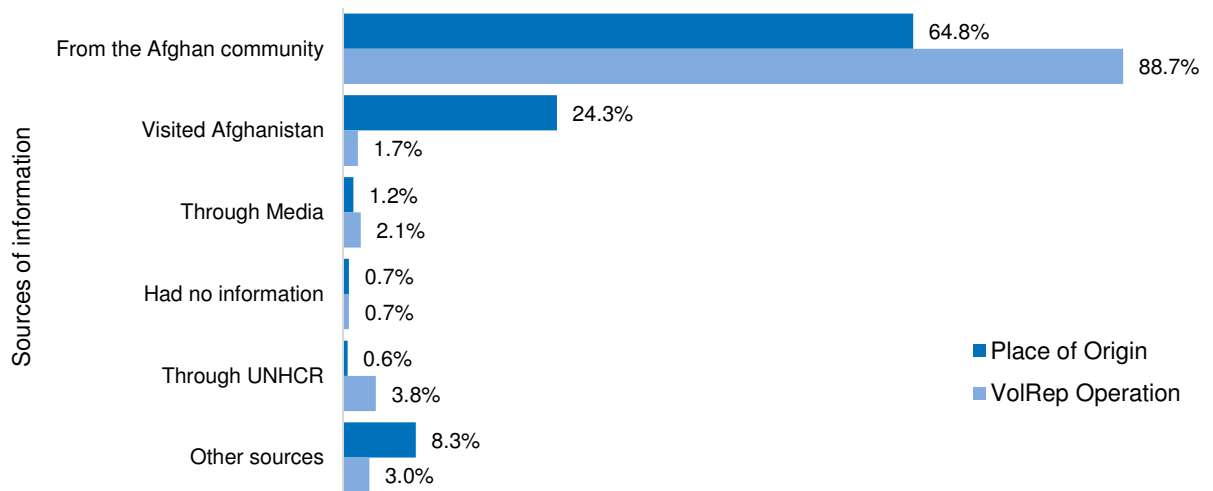
56% of interviewed Afghan refugees return to their province of origin, while the remaining 44% do not.

Nearly 60% of refugees returned after spending over 3 decades in exile.

21% of returned refugees from Pakistan and 16% from Iran were born in exile.

Over 90% of the interviewed returnees stated that they had sufficient information to make an informed decision prior to the return.

Information mainly obtained through Afghan communities and visits to Afghanistan.

Reasons for not returning to the province of origin

Displacement period

Awareness about cash grant

Sources of Information on Place of Origin and VolRep Program


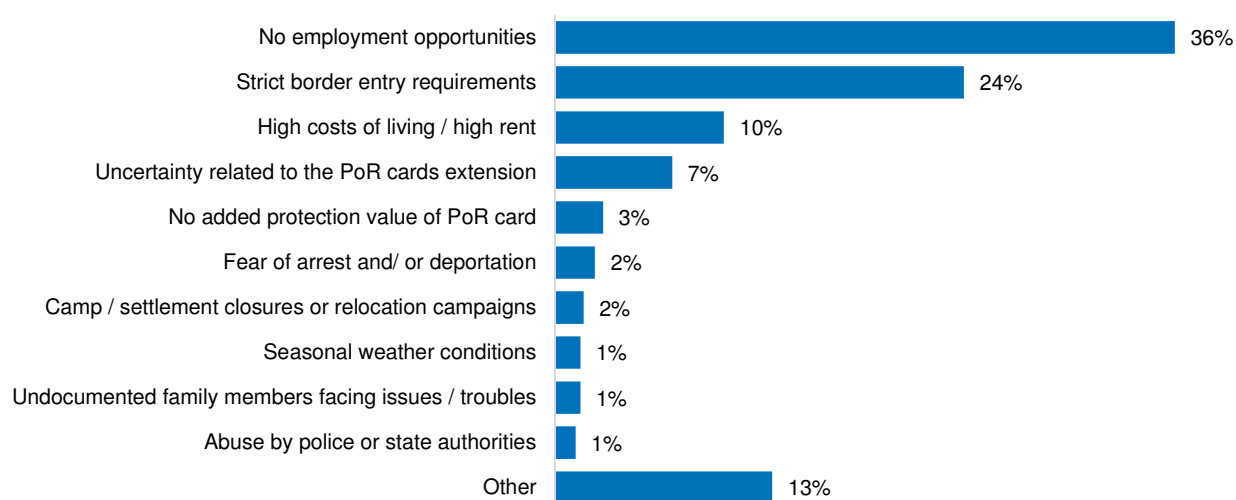
Reasons for Return

IN BRIEF

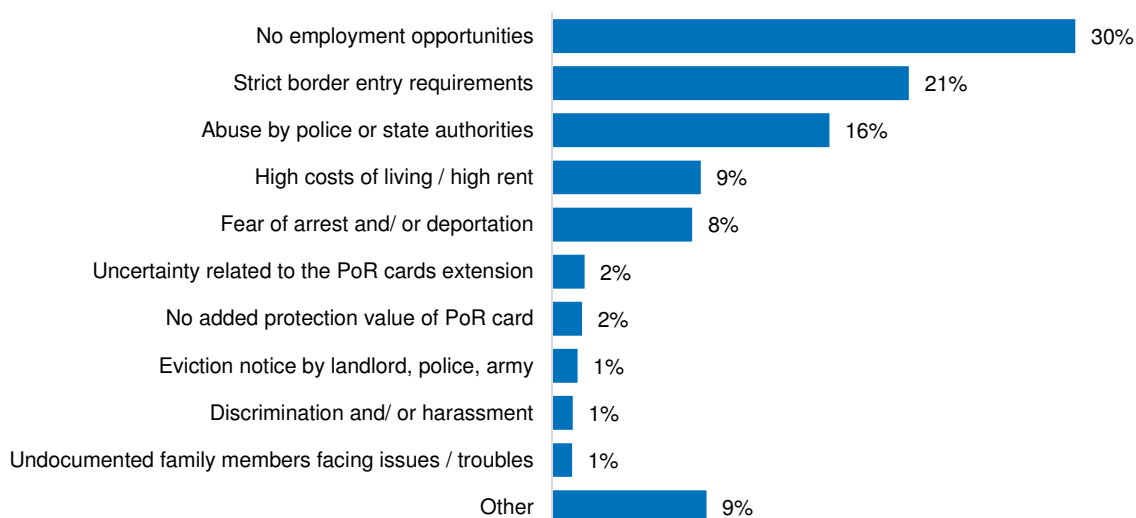
Over 1,070 newly arrived returnees from Pakistan were interviewed during monitoring in 2018. The main reasons for leaving Pakistan include: a lack of employment opportunities; stricter border controls resulting in separation of families; high cost of living and uncertainty related to the PoR cards extension.

3% of interviewed returnees reported that they or their relatives were arrested in Pakistan within the last year.

Reasons for leaving Pakistan - 2018



Reasons for leaving Pakistan - 2017

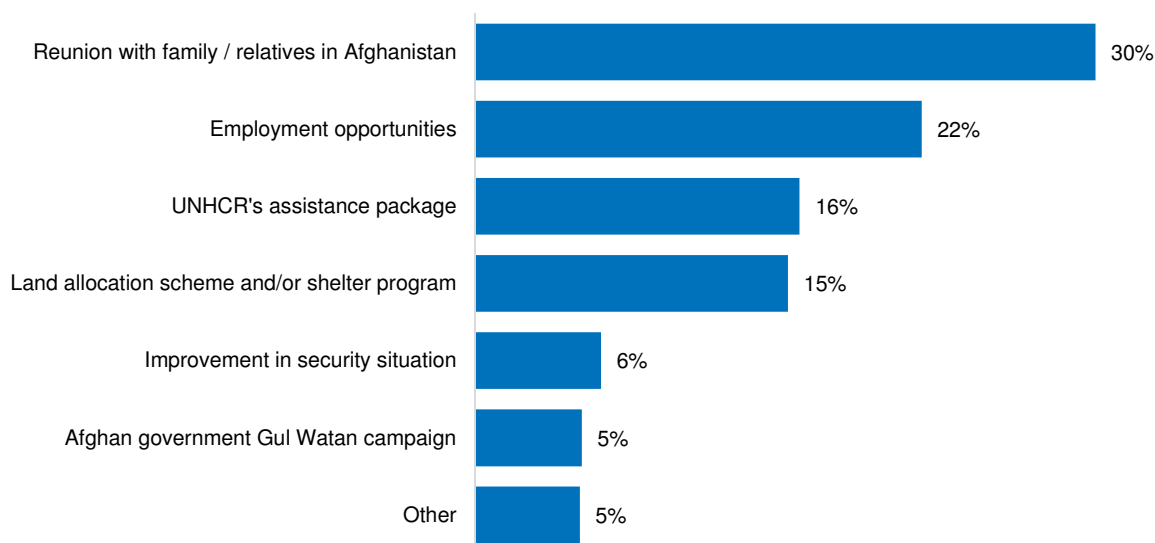


The overall protection/asylum conditions in Pakistan has improved since November 2016. Main reasons of return during 2017 and 2018 are almost the same; lack of employment and strict border controls resulting in separation of families were mentioned as the main reasons influenced refugees' decision to return.

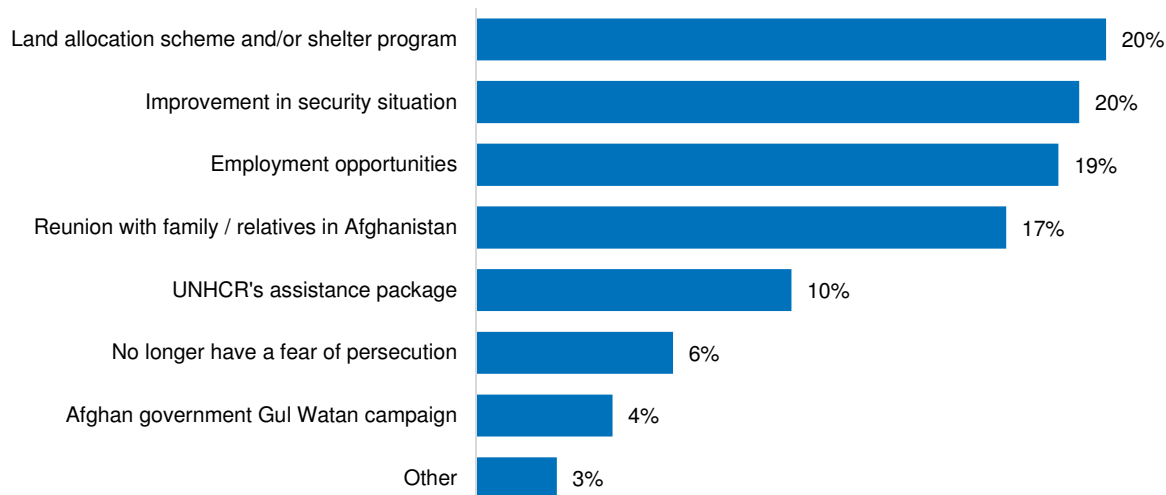
IN BRIEF

Incentives for returning to Afghanistan include reunification with family members/relatives; a perception of increased employment opportunities; offers of land allocation, including government assurances of house/land through the Gul Watan campaign¹; UNHCR assistance package; and a perceived improvement in the security situation.

Reasons for return to Afghanistan 2018



Reasons for return to Afghanistan 2017



¹ *Khpal Watan, Gul Watan ("My country, my beautiful country") is the Government of Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation's campaign launched in July 2016 in Pakistan to encourage Afghans to return home.*

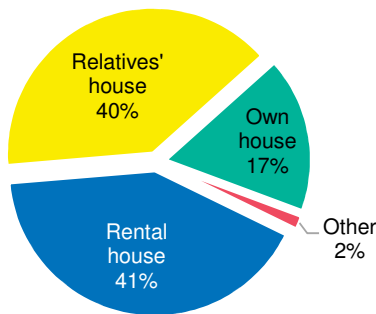
Intentions after leaving the Encashment Centre

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

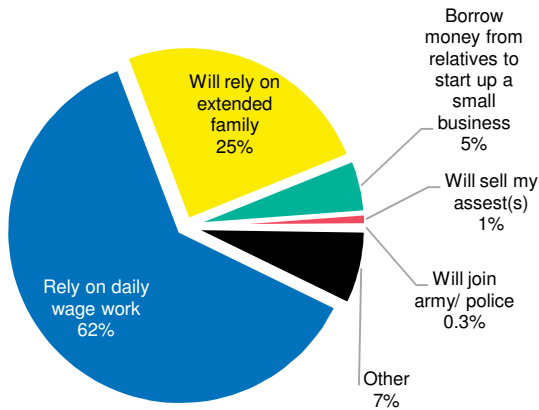


Returnee women heads of household receiving cash grant, Kabul EC. UNHCR/ M. Haroon, Jul 2018

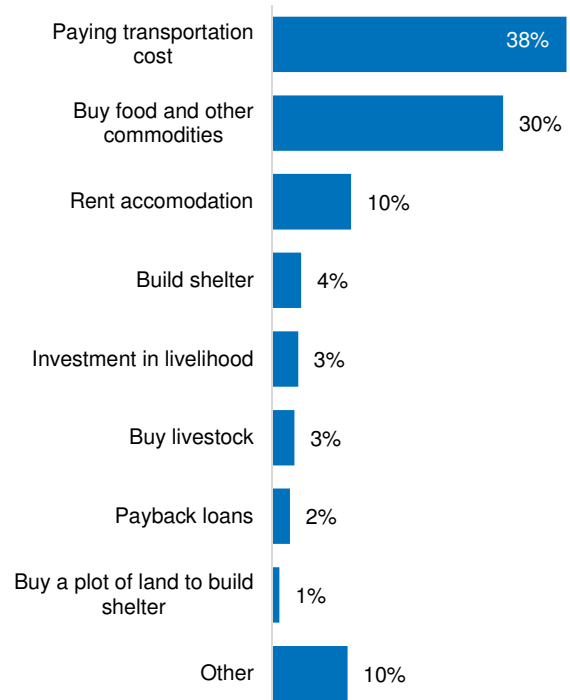
Stay arrangement after return



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



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



Did you, your family members or your relatives consider moving to Europe?



[CONTACT US]**Donna Corcoran**

External Relations Officer, Afghanistan

Tel.: +93 791990011

Email: corcoran@unhcr.org

M. Nadir Farhad

Associate Public Information Officer, Afghanistan

Tel.: +93 791990018

Email: farhadm@unhcr.org