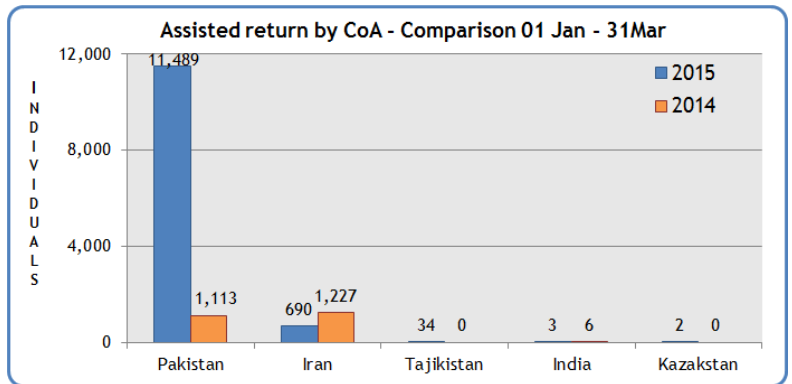


In March 2015, a total of 5,173 Afghan refugees voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan. 4,727 came from Pakistan 411 from Iran, 34 from Tajikistan and 1 from India. This figure is nearly 3 times higher compared to March 2014, and is also 39% higher compared to 3,728 returnees in February 2015.

In the first three months of 2015, a total of **12,218** Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan under UNHCR’s assisted return program.



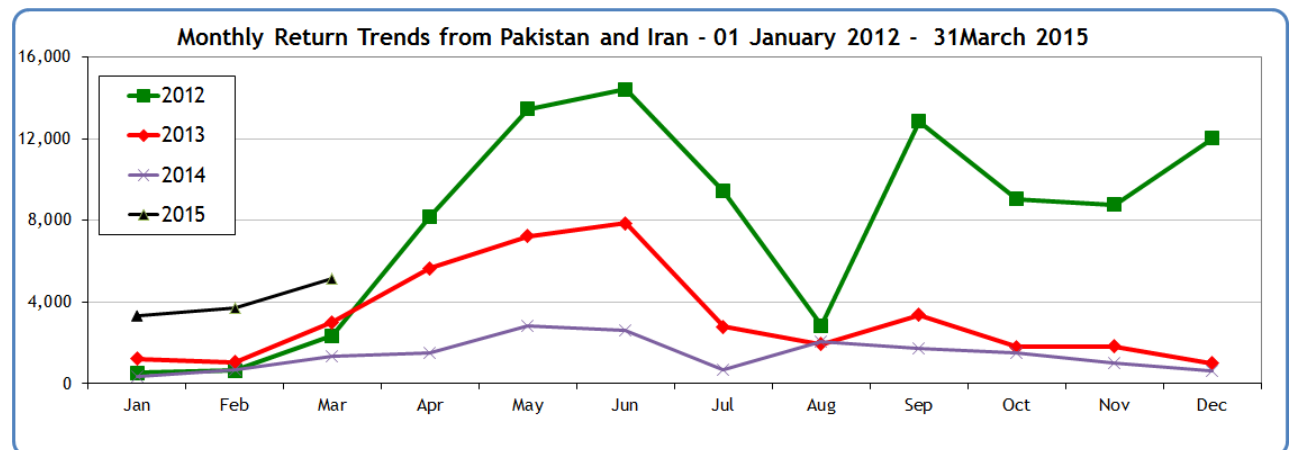
The majority (11,489) came from Pakistan and 690 from Iran. The return trend this year represents a substantial increase compared to the 2,346 Afghan refugees who returned during the same period in 2014. Normally the return trend is very low during the winter season. The peak of return regularly starts in mid-April and continues until October. However, the return trend has been significantly different in 2015.

Since January 2015, the return trends from Pakistan have markedly increased following the terrorist attack against the school in Peshawar (KPK). The attack in Peshawar triggered a series of measures by the Pakistani authorities, particularly the police, and caused a general constriction of asylum space in Pakistan. Reportedly refugees are facing increasing challenges such as arrests, detention, termination of lease agreements by local landowners, closure of business, extortion and harassment by local Police. The most seriously impacted areas are Azad Jamu Kashmir/AJK (mainly Mirpur district) and KPK (mainly Haripour and Peshawar districts). Recently returnees also reported harassment and arbitrary arrests by the police in Punjab and Karachi.

The 25th Tripartite Commission meeting between the Governments of Islamic Republics of Afghanistan and Pakistan and UNHCR was held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 11 March 2015. The three parties reaffirmed their commitment to the principle of voluntary repatriation, in safety and dignity, to end the protracted Afghan refugee situation and urged that intensified efforts should be undertaken to create an enabling environment for voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration.

Eviction notices by the authorities are cited as the primary push factor that influenced Afghan refugees to return from Pakistan. Discrimination, harassment, economic factors, settlement closure and fear of arrest or deportation are mentioned as additional reasons for return from Pakistan in 2015.

The return trend from Iran in 2015 (690) is 56% lower compared to 1,227 returnees during Jan - Mar 2014.



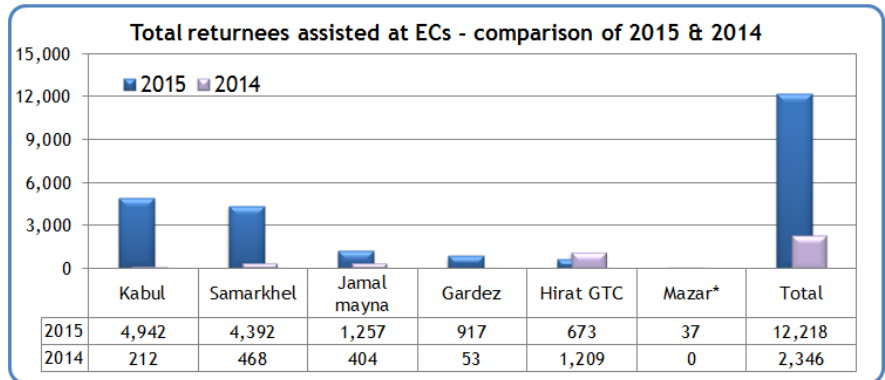
RETURN PROCESS

UNHCR’s Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs) are processing refugees in the country of asylum willing to return to Afghanistan and issuing a Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) for each family.

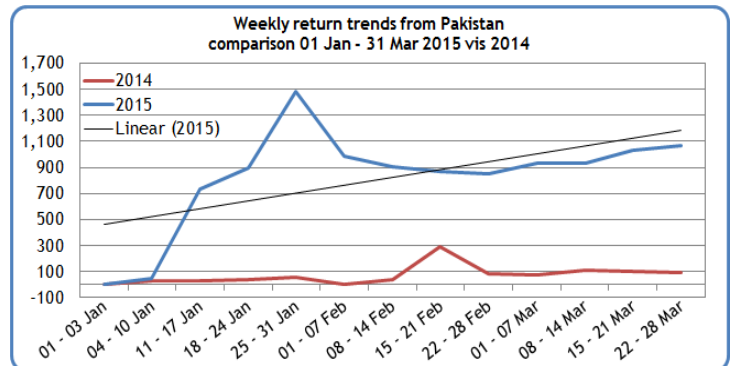
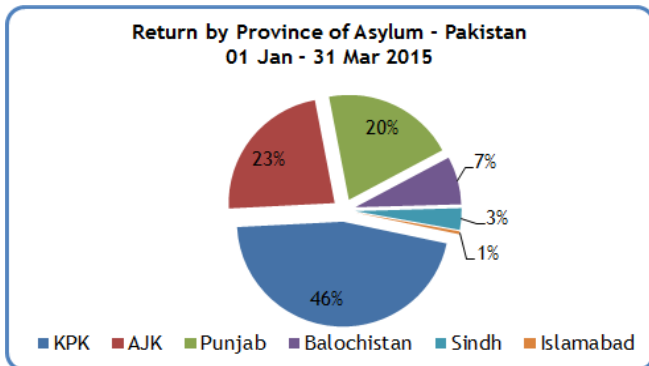
Two VRCs are in Pakistan: Chamkani in Peshawar (KPK) and Baleli Quetta in Baluchistan.

Repatriation from Iran is facilitated through Soleimankhani, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Mashhad VRCs, the Sub-Offices, or directly through the Border Crossing Station (BCS) at Dogharoun.

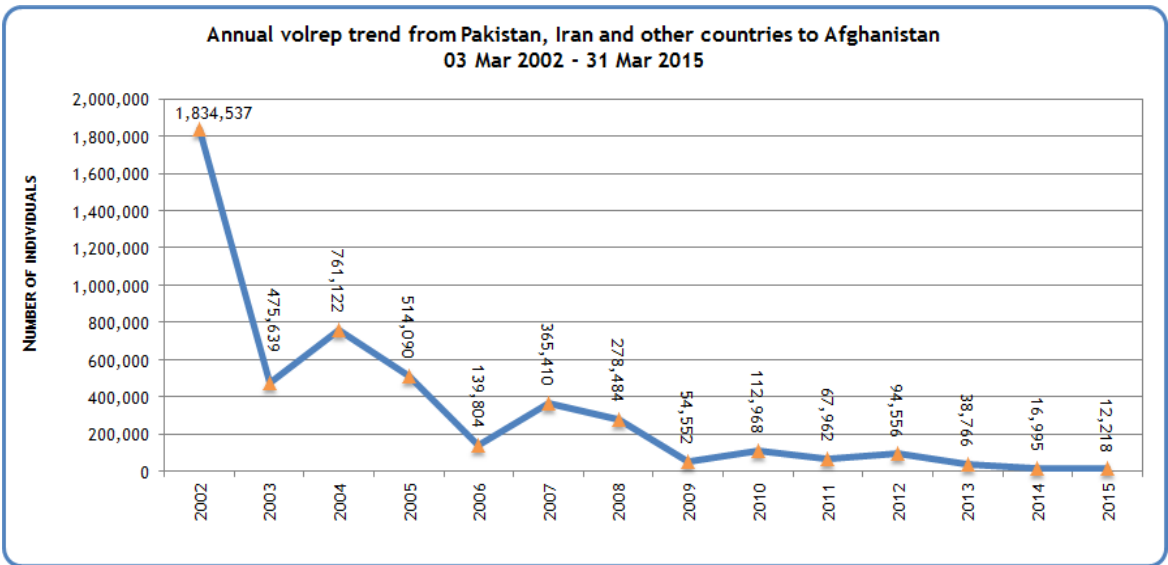
Upon return to Afghanistan, returnees are assisted at five Encashment Centers (ECs): Samarkhel (Nangarhar), Kabul (Kabul), Gardez (Paktya), Jamal Mayna (Kandahar) and Herat (Herat).



At the ECs, depending on the province of origin, all Afghan returnees with VRFs received approximately US\$ 200 per person (between US\$30 - US\$70 for transport and US\$150 as a short-term integration grant). The transportation grant varies according to the distance from the areas of asylum to the areas of origin. Returning refugees are also briefed on mine awareness and education procedures in Afghanistan at the EC. They can benefit from transit facilities for overnight stay and basic health services. All children under the age of five are vaccinated for polio and measles. Returnees are briefed also on how to access legal aid, if required.

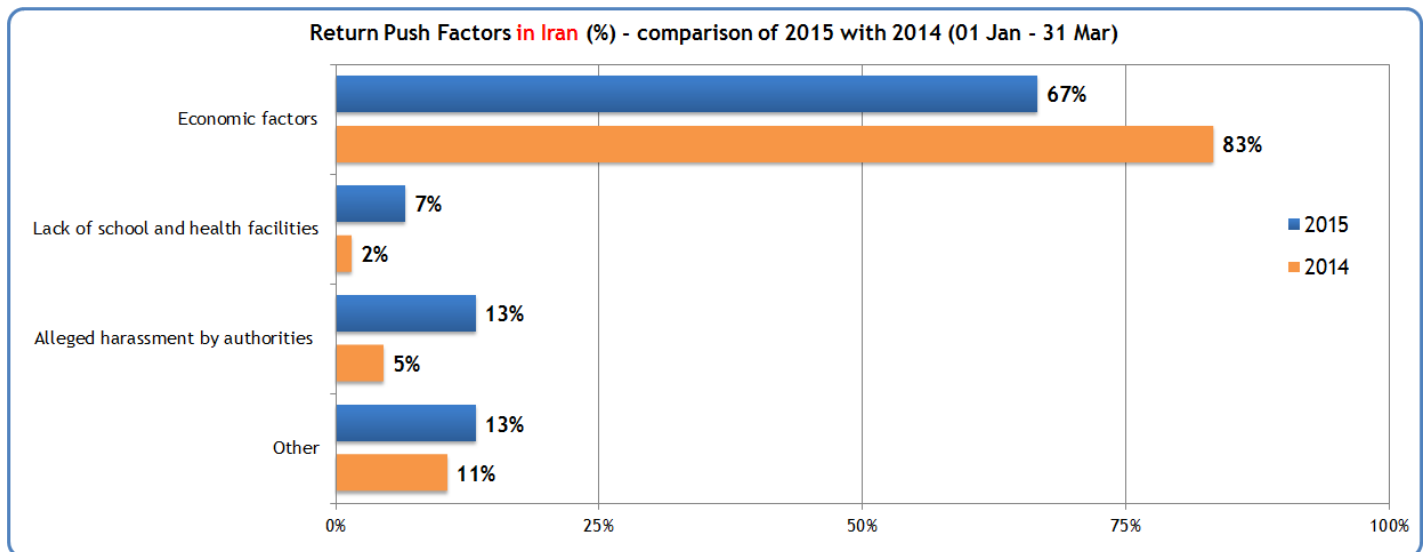
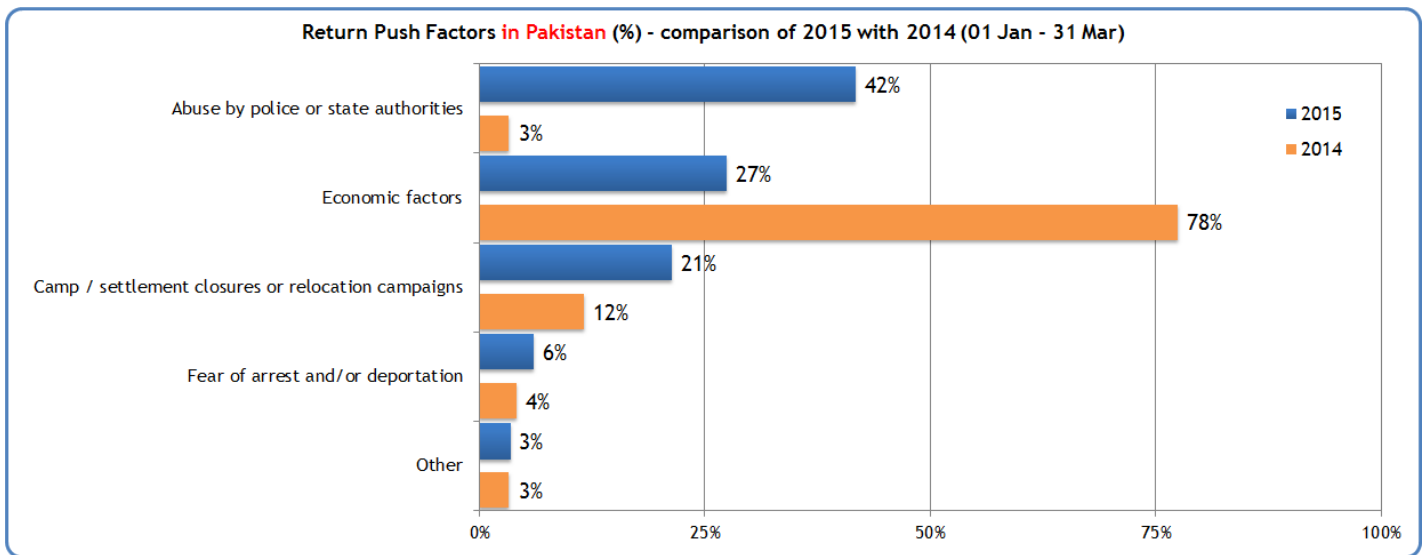
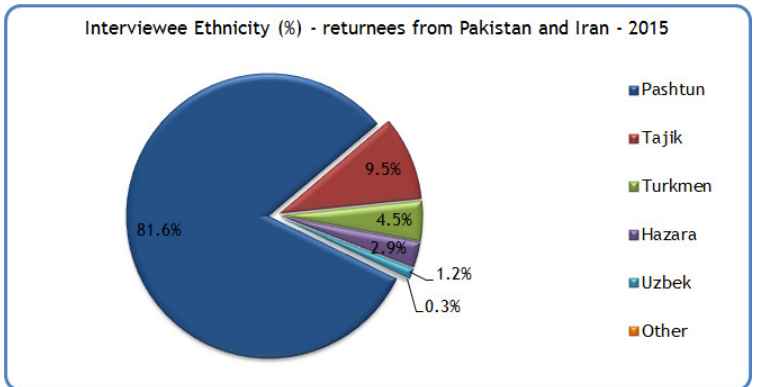
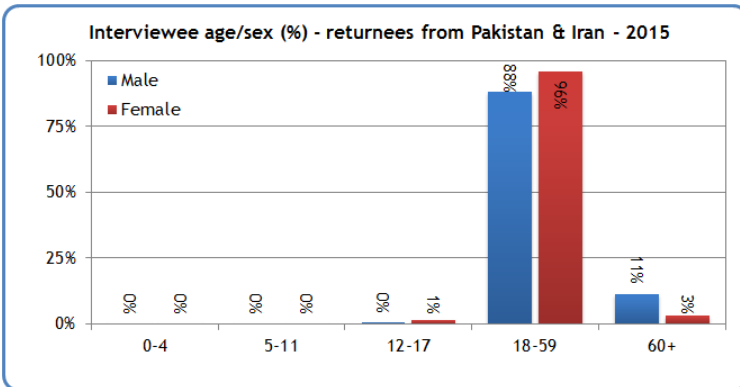


From the start of UNHCR’s assisted voluntary repatriation operation in March 2002 to the end of March 2015, over 5.8 million Afghan refugees have returned home, of whom over 4.7 million repatriated with assistance from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and UNHCR. In total, returnees comprise 20% of the Afghanistan’s population.



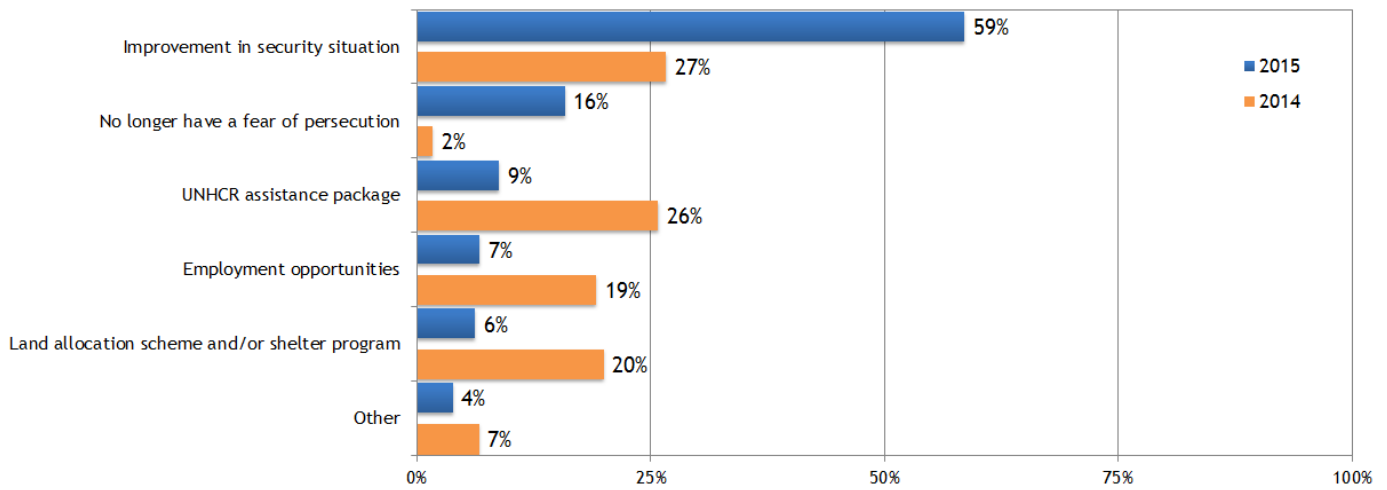
ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING

Between 1 January - 31 March 2015, a total of 756 interviews were conducted with returning refugees from Pakistan (726) and Iran (30). Interviewees were selected in two ways: at random (468) and from those with protection concerns (288) at the first point of contact in Afghanistan, the UNHCR Transit/Encashment Centres in Kabul, Jalalabad (Samarkhel), Kandahar (Jamal Mayna), Gardez and Herat (GTC). This monitoring exercise helps UNHCR to identify return trends, push/pull factors and check on the level of information returnees received to make an informed choice to return home.

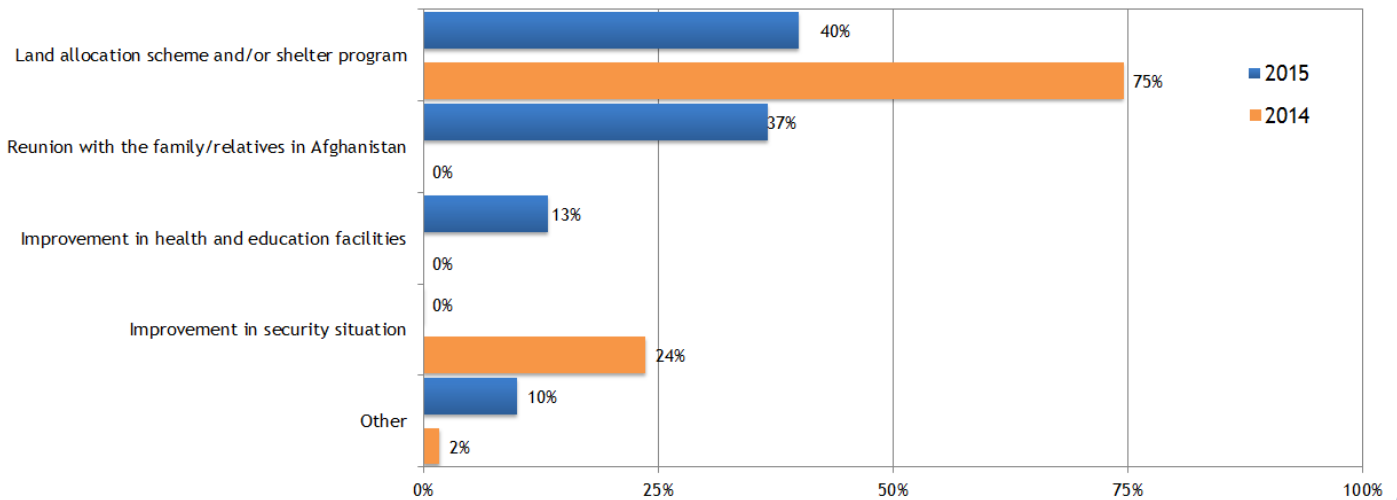


ENCASHMENT CENTRE RETURNEE MONITORING

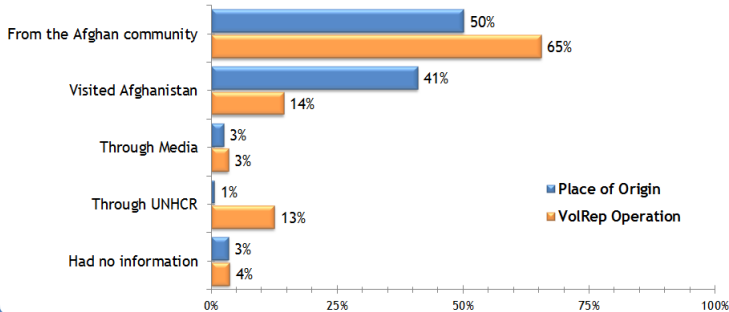
Return Pull Factors in Afghanistan (%) - Returnees from Pakistan - comparison of 2015 with 2014 (01 Jan - 31 Mar)



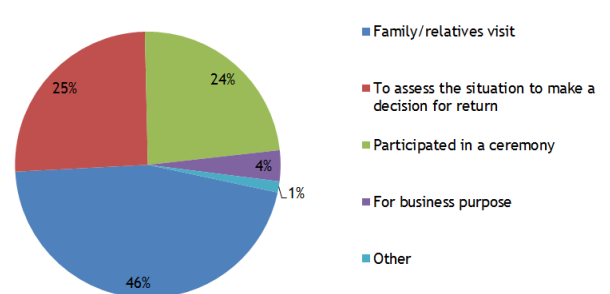
Return Pull Factors in Afghanistan (%) - Returnees from Iran - comparison of 2015 with 2014 (01 Jan - 31 Mar)



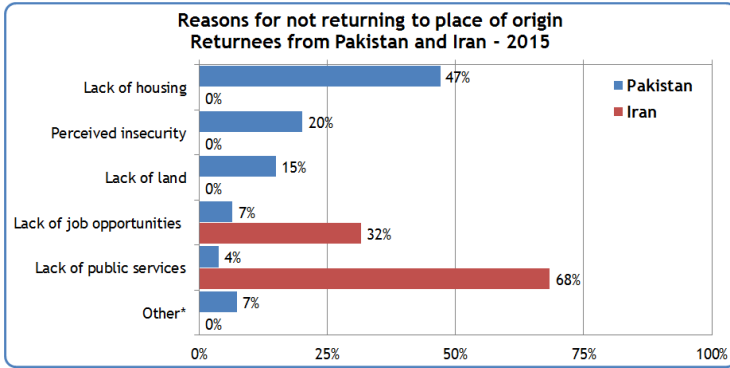
Sources of Information on Place of Origin and VolRep Program Returnees from Pakistan and Iran - 2015



Purpose of visit to Afghanistan before return Returnees from Pakistan and Iran - 2015



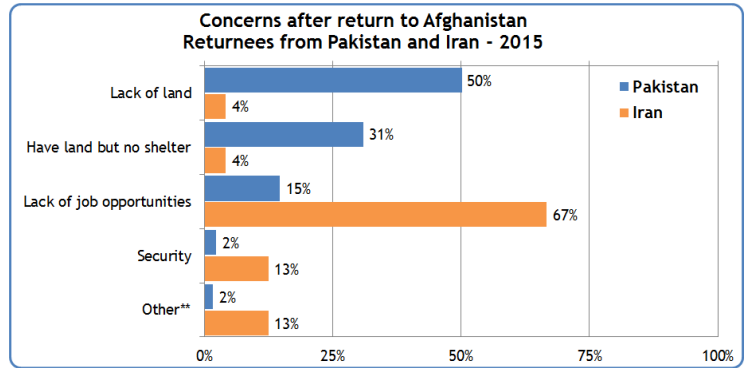
* Most of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan mentioned that they had visited Afghanistan within the past few months, while a majority of the returnees from Iran mentioned that they had visited Afghanistan five or more years ago. The reason for this discrepancy could include strict border control by Iran and longer distances.



Out of a total of 756 respondents, 386 returnees stated that they do not intend to repatriate to their place of origin.

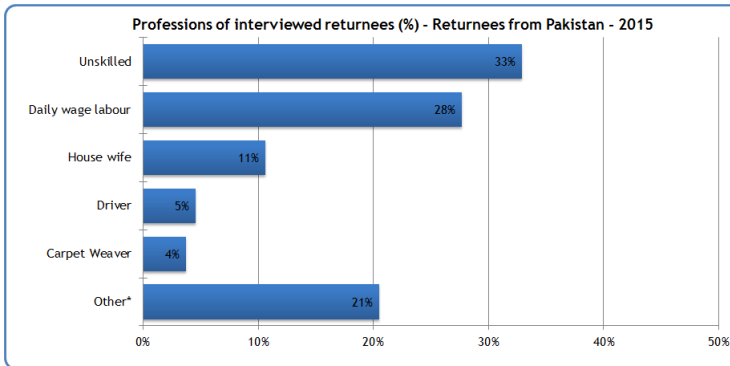
During the interviews, it emerged that the lack of income generating opportunities is one of the main factors leading returnees to opt to remain in urban settings, particularly in Kabul, where opportunities to find work - even if precarious - are perceived to be higher. However, this is not always a fact, and unemployed returnees have been found even in Kabul.

*Other represents 27 interviews; responses provided included lack of quality education and health facilities

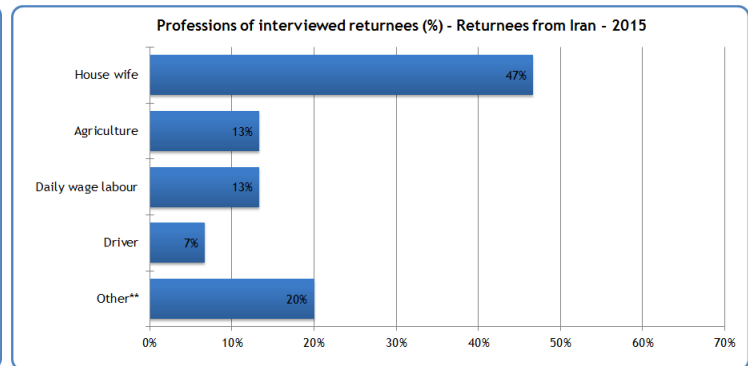


The primary obstacles discouraging Afghan refugees from returning have been lack of land, employment and shelter.

**Other represents 13 interviews; responses provided included lack of health care and education facilities



*Other: responses included construction worker, teachers, agriculture, business, domestic worker,



** Other: responses included construction worker and teachers

Alleged arrest/detention and extortion in Pakistan

Interviewed returnees have stated that episodes of harassment, including cases of arrests and detention, markedly increased in the aftermath of the Peshawar attack, after the government of Pakistan informed Afghan refugees on the necessity to leave urban/ rural areas and settle in designated camps/settlements through announcements in the media and through villages' mosques. Some 62 (9%) of the total interviewed returnees from Pakistan (729) specifically stated that they were arrested/detained in Pakistan.

In addition to the reported harassment by authorities, many of the interviewed returnee families stated that they were stopped at different check points on the way to the VRC in KPK as well as from the VRC up to Torkham border crossing point. Some returnee families reported that, despite having necessary documents obtained from UNHCR's VRC in Peshawar (i.e. the Voluntary Repatriation Forms), their trucks and vehicles have been stopped by police/Khasadars for a search of their luggage. Reportedly, requests to pay bribes to pass the check point (s) were not uncommon. Returnees alleged that they paid up to 500-25,000 Pakistani RS (i.e. from 5 to 250 USD) to avoid long delays at the checkpoints and border crossing and reach their destination in Afghanistan before evening.

UNHCR Afghanistan is constantly sharing this information with UNHCR offices in Pakistan for necessary advocacy and follow-up with governmental authorities in Pakistan.



A returnee family at UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Center (Chamkani, Peshawar), 12 Mar 2015

BORDER MONITORING

DEPORTATION OF UNDOCUMENTED AFGHAN NATIONALS (NON-REFUGEES)

Undocumented Afghan nationals returning from Iran or Pakistan due to eviction, conflict, military operations, natural disasters, or other reasons do not fall under UNHCR's mandate, and all international response to their needs will be led by IOM. However, UNHCR in co-ordination with other protection actors monitors their protection situation to ascertain that registered refugees are not deported.

IRAN:

1 - 31 March 2015: A total of 16,223 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported (via Zaranj: 53% and Islam Qala: 47% border points) from Iran. This figure is 14% lower compared to 18,899 deportees in February 2015.

1 Jan–31 March 2015: A total of 49,071 undocumented Afghans were deported from Iran. This is 3% higher compared to 47,452 Afghans were deported during the same period in 2014.

A total number of 206,149 Afghans were deported from Iran in 2014.

Deportations from Iran											
Reporting Period	Entry Point	Family Groups				Single				Total Individuals	
		Families	Individuals			Male		Female			Total
			M	F	Total	Adult	UAM	Adult	UAM		
01 - 31 Mar 2015	Zaranj	225	505	504	1,009	7,617	30	0	0	7,647	8,656
	Islam Qala	44	84	97	181	7,302	84	0	0	7,386	7,567
Total		269	589	601	1,190	14,919	114	0	0	15,033	16,223
01 Jan -31 Mar 2015	Zaranj	693	1,363	1,492	2,855	23,368	58	0	0	23,426	26,281
	Islam Qala	81	153	176	329	22,202	259	0	0	22,461	22,790
Total		774	1,516	1,668	3,184	45,570	317	0	0	45,887	49,071

PAKISTAN:

1 - 31 March 2015: A total of 2,092 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham (1,472) and Spin Boldak (620) border points. This figure reflect 16% increase compared to 1,810 deportees in February 2015.

1 January - 31 March 2015: A total of 4,519 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Torkham Border. This figure shows a substantial increase compared to 328 deportees (via Torkham) during same period in 2014.

Recent measures taken by the Pakistani authorities following a terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar, KPK seems to be driving the high number of deportees in 2015.

The vast majority of deportees (98%) were single males who entered Iran illegally, to look for work.

Since April 2009, IOM has been present in Islam Qala and Zaranj border crossing points and has procedures in place to screen and identify vulnerable deported undocumented Afghans (non-refugees).

IOM provides vulnerable cases with transportation, transit and health services at the border and assists with their transportation costs from the cities of Herat and Zaranj to their final destinations.

Since November 2012, IOM has established a transit centre in Torkham to screen, identify and assist vulnerable deported undocumented Afghans (non-refugees). IOM provides vulnerable cases with NFIs and free transportation from Torkham to their final destination.

In addition, 855 undocumented Afghan nationals (non-refugees) were deported via Spin Boldak (SB) between 22 Feb and 31 Mar 2015.

A total number of 9,592 Afghans were deported from Pakistan via Torkham (3,800) and Spin Boldak (5,792) in 2014.

Deportations from Pakistan											
Reporting Period	Entry Point	Family Groups				Single				Total Individuals	
		Families	Individuals			Male		Female			Total
			M	F	Total	Adult	UAM	Adult	UAM		
01 - 31 Mar 2015	Torkham	0	0	0	0	1,472	0	0	0	1,472	1,472
	Spin Boldak*	0	0	0	0	620	0	0	0	620	620
Total		0	0	0	0	2,092	0	0	0	2,092	2,092
01 Jan -31 Mar 2015	Torkham	0	0	0	0	4,519	0	0	0	4,519	4,519
	Spin Boldak	0	0	0	0	855	0	0	0	855	855
Total		0	0	0	0	5,374	0	0	0	5,374	5,374

* Border monitoring activities were resumed in Spin Boldak on 21 February 2015.

UNHCR would like to extend its deep appreciation for the continuing support and generous contributions of donors to its operation in Afghanistan.

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