

AFGHANISTAN

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION UPDATE

15,699 AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED IN 2018

In December 2018, UNHCR facilitated the return to Afghanistan of a total of 159 Afghan refugees, including 99 from Iran, 51 from Pakistan, and 9 from India. This figure is 82% lower than the 904 refugees who returned in November.

UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation programme from Pakistan will remain suspended from 1 December 2018 until 28 February 2019 due to the winter season. Returns from Iran will continue throughout the winter.

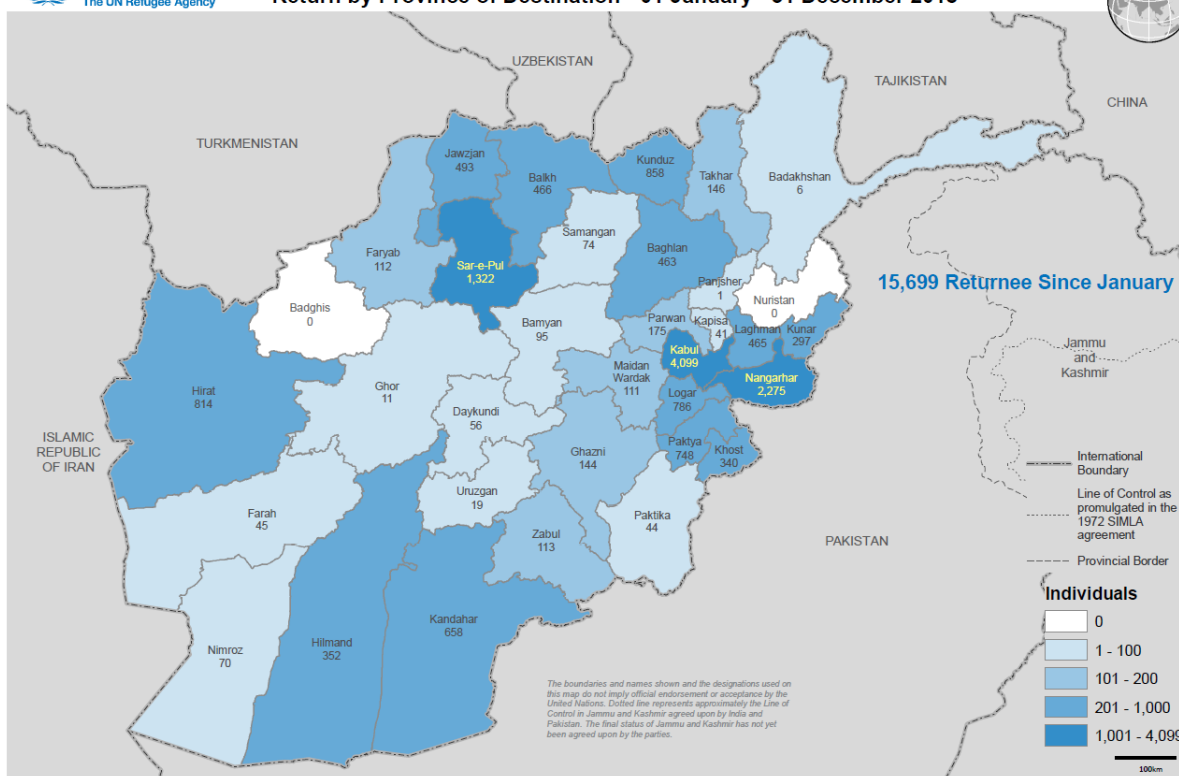
Over the course of 2018 returns from Pakistan (13,584) were 76% lower compared to the 57,411 refugees who returned in 2017. There were no major changes in the return trends from Iran and other countries.



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 - 31 December 2018



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Process of Return

UNHCR's Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs) in countries of asylum process 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 and Baleli in Quetta. 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 (exact amount calculated based on their area of origin) to support their immediate humanitarian needs.

In addition to cash grants, a range of inter-agency services are provided by UNHCR and its partners, including basic healthcare and vaccinations (by the Ministry of Public Health supported by WHO and UNICEF), mine risk awareness (by the Danish Demining Group supported by UNMAS), back to school campaign (by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education), and a transit facility for overnight accommodation (provided by UNHCR and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, MoRR).

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

card distribution also facilitates easy contact with returning refugees in areas of return when UNHCR and its partners conduct return monitoring through phone surveys.

At the ECs, UNHCR and MoRR also conduct returnee monitoring at the 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 landmines, 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 a multi-purpose cash grant (an average of USD 200 per person) at UNHCR's 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 grants are an important protection tool that provides returnees with the means to meet their immediate humanitarian needs, as well as transportation costs.

IN BRIEF

Between January and December 2018, a total of 15,699 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan under UNHCR's facilitated repatriation program, with the majority returning from Pakistan (13,584) followed by smaller numbers from Iran (1,964), India (77) and Tajikistan (74). Compared to 2017, the return trend from Pakistan significantly decreased.

This is mainly due to the changing regional political dynamics and the improved protection environment for Afghan refugees in Pakistan as well as the deteriorating security environment in Afghanistan, the drought and the poor socio economic conditions.

Returnee Monitoring

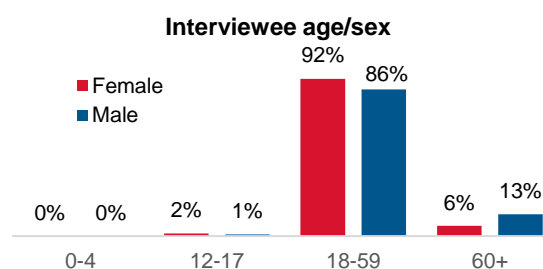


*Returnee children receiving mine awareness
Kabul EC. UNHCR/ M. Haroon, July 2018*

Returnee monitoring is an inherent part of the **protection monitoring** carried out by UNHCR across 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 an interview at the Encashment Centre upon arrival in Afghanistan, followed by a phone survey conducted 1-6 months later in places of return. 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 by assessing the voluntariness of return, reasons for the decision to return, the level of information that returnees received in countries of asylum to allow them to make a well-informed choice to return home, and the conditions in the country of asylum. It also assists in detecting harassment, trafficking, and other violations that should be brought to the attention of responsible authorities.

Between 1 January and 31 December 2018, a total of 1,477 households were interviewed at the ECs, including 746 male and 731 female respondents. Interviewees were selected randomly from among returning families.

Post-Return Monitoring

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

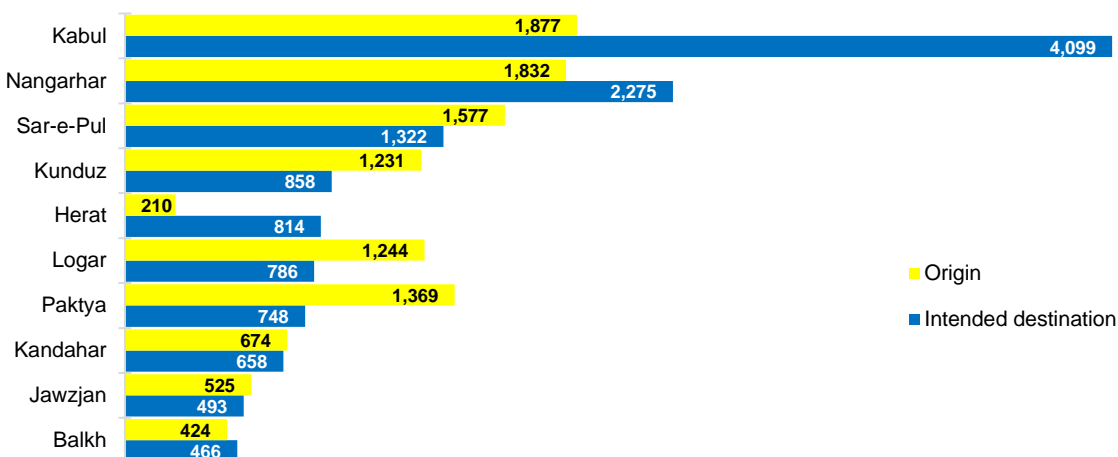
section of the population. In 2017 UNHCR contracted Orange Door Research and Viamo to conduct phone surveys with returnees, IDPs and the general population. A total of 14,095 household level interviews were carried out including with 4,003 returnees, 6,097 IDPs and 3,995 members of the general population. A similar study is currently being conducted in 2019. The findings of these and similar reports can be found on UNHCR's data portal at:

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/afg>

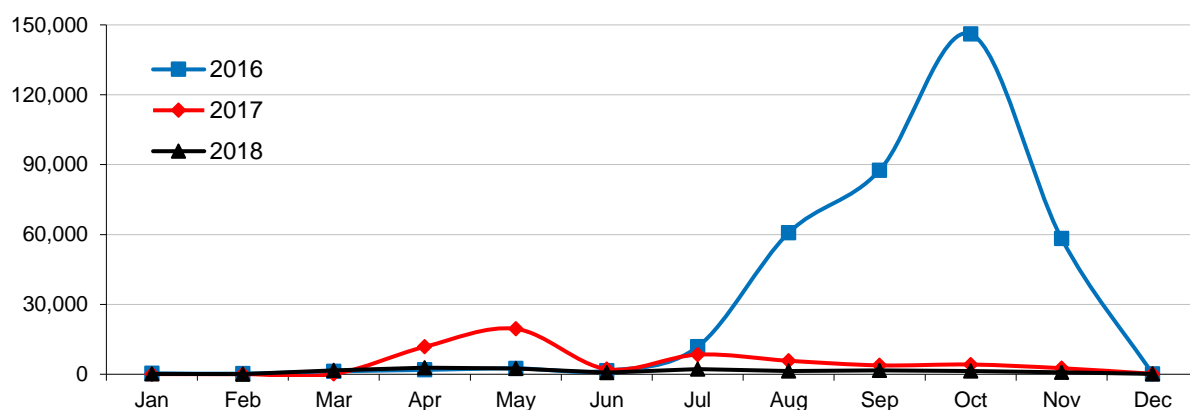
Return Trends

Some **60%** of returnees have settled in Kabul, Nangarhar, Sar-e-Pul, Kunduz and Herat provinces. Since 2002 UNHCR has facilitated the return of over **5.2 million** Afghan refugees, mainly from neighboring Pakistan and Iran.

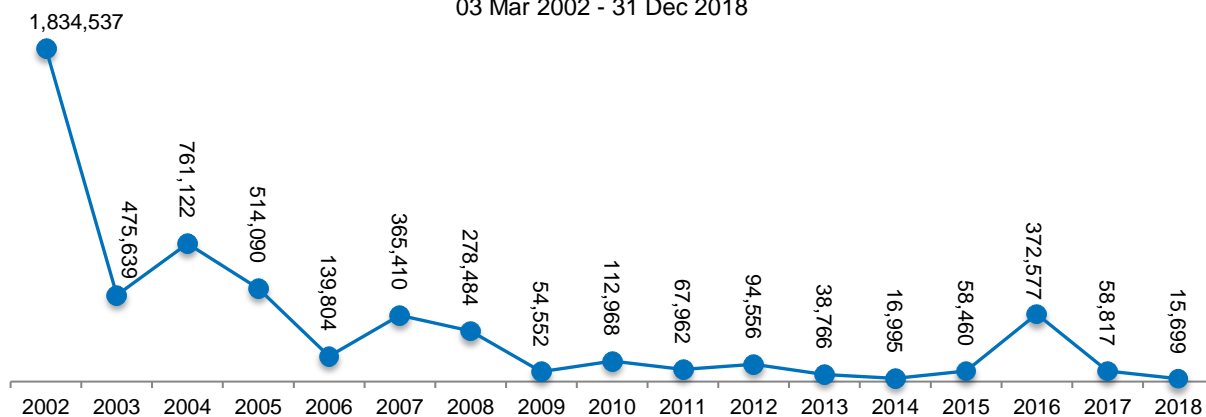
Comparison of recorded province of destination with province of origin
Top 10 province - 01 Jan - 31 Dec 2018



Monthly Return Trends from Pakistan and Iran - 01 Jan 2016 - 31 Dec 2018



Annual VolRep trend from Pakistan, Iran and other countries to Afghanistan
03 Mar 2002 - 31 Dec 2018



IN BRIEF

In 2017 and 2018 roughly 56% of Afghan returnees interviewed by UNHCR returned to their province of origin, while the remaining 44% settled in new communities.

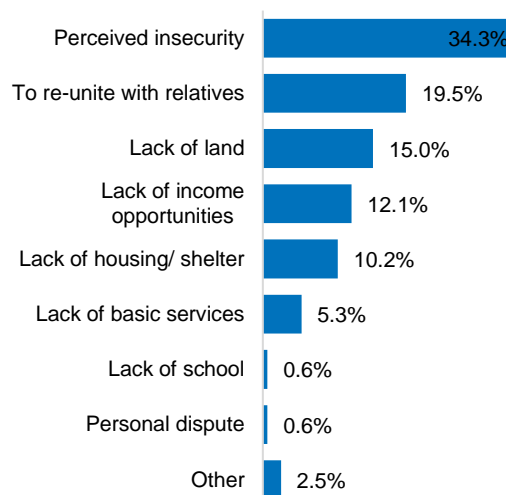
Nearly 60% of refugees returned after spending over 3 decades in exile.

More than 22% of refugee returnees from Pakistan and 16% from Iran were born in exile.

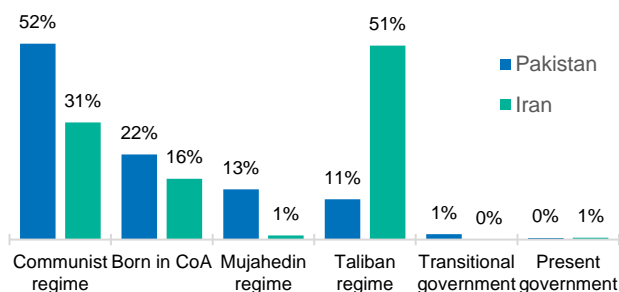
Over 90% of interviewed returnees stated that they had sufficient information to make an informed decision prior to the return.

Information was mainly obtained through Afghan communities and visits to Afghanistan.

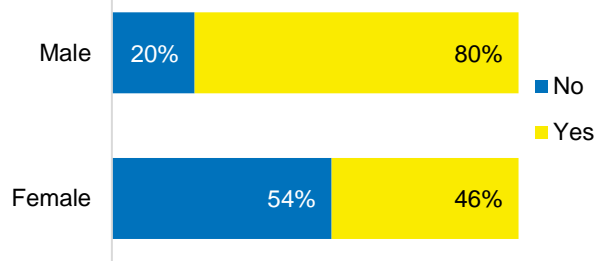
Reasons for not returning to the province of origin



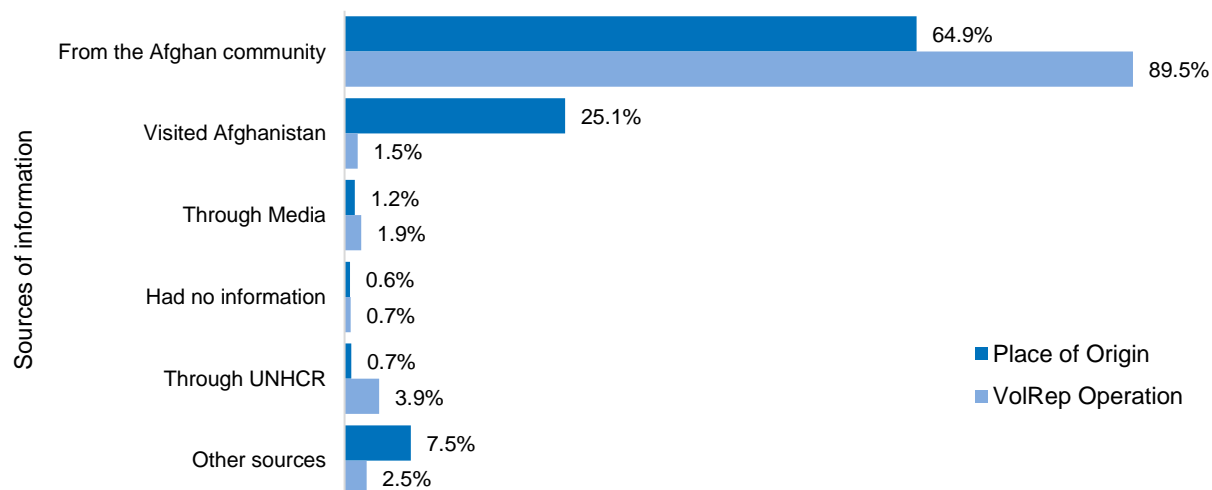
Displacement period



Awareness about cash grant



Sources of Information on Place of Origin and VolRep Program

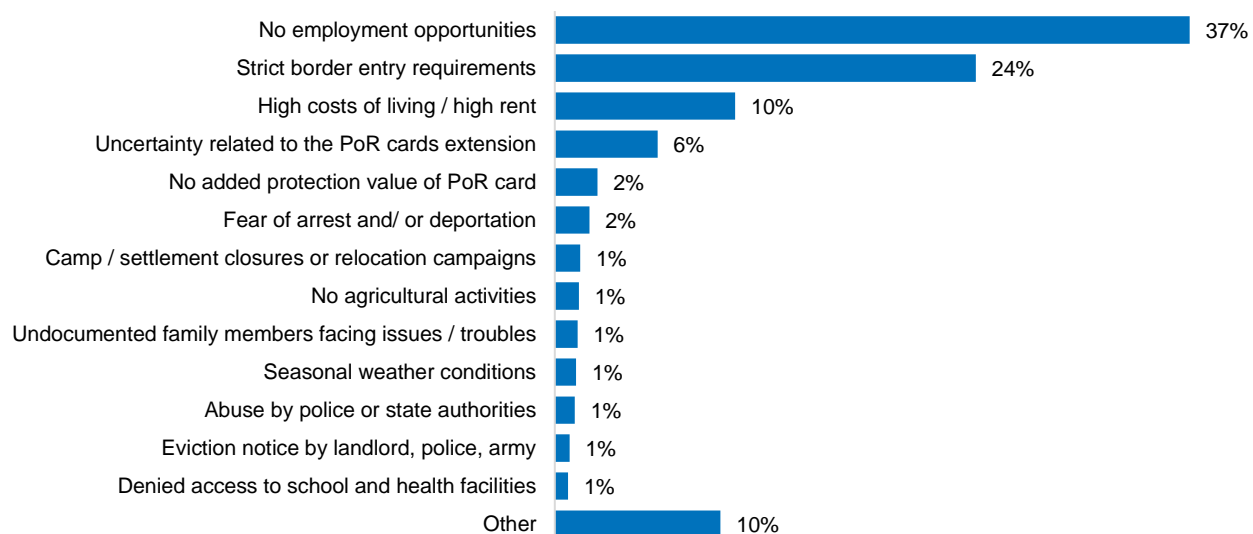


Reasons for Return

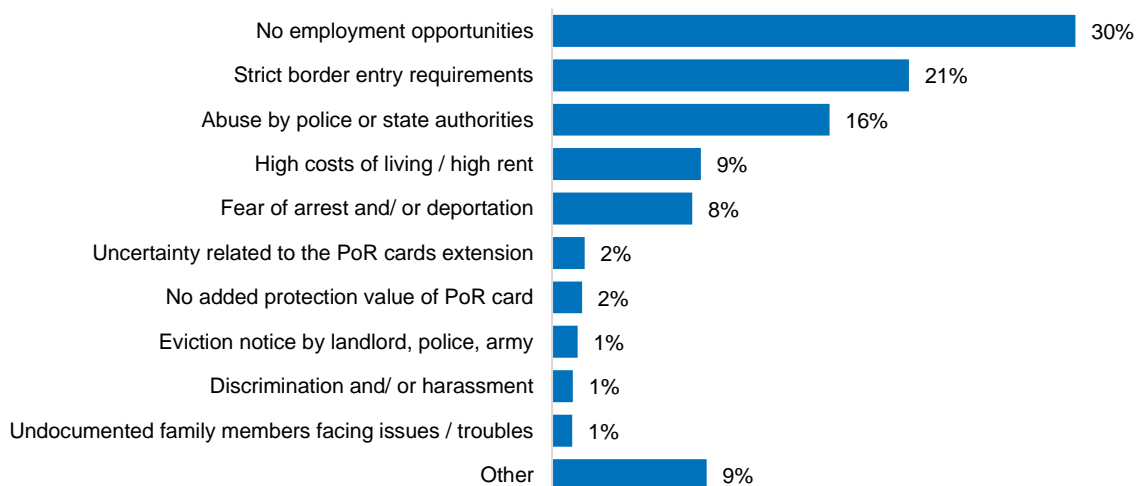
IN BRIEF

Some 1,290 newly arrived returnees from Pakistan were interviewed during monitoring in 2018. The main reasons for leaving Pakistan include: lack of employment opportunities, stricter border controls resulting in separation of families, the high cost of living, and uncertainty related to the extension of refugee ID cards. Only 2% of returnees interviewed reported that they or their relatives were arrested in Pakistan within the last year.

Reasons for leaving Pakistan - 2018



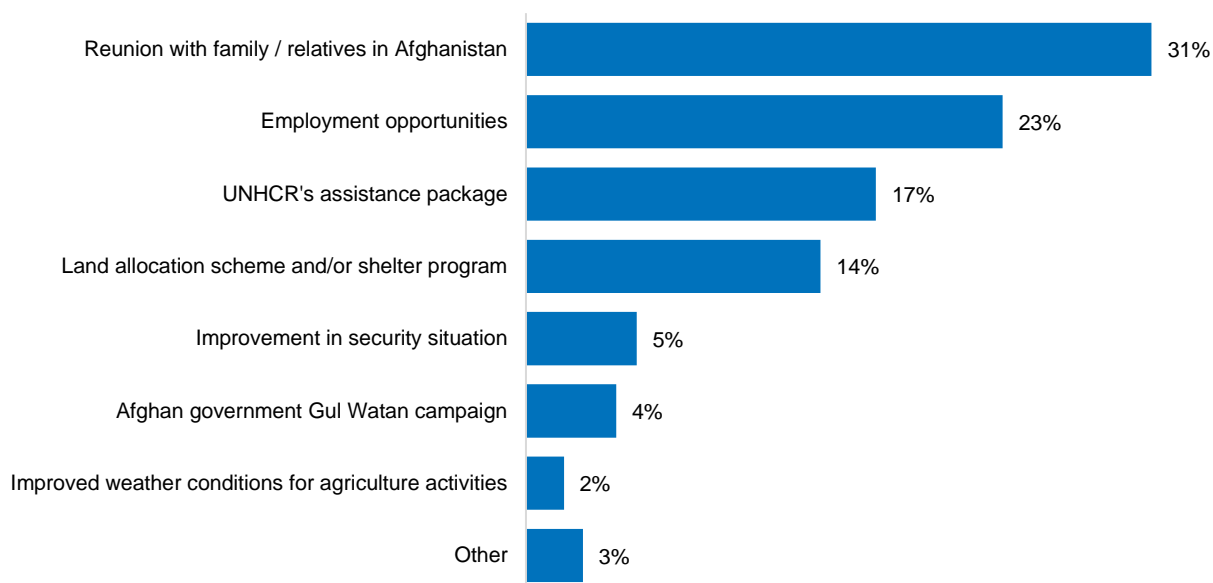
Reasons for leaving Pakistan - 2017



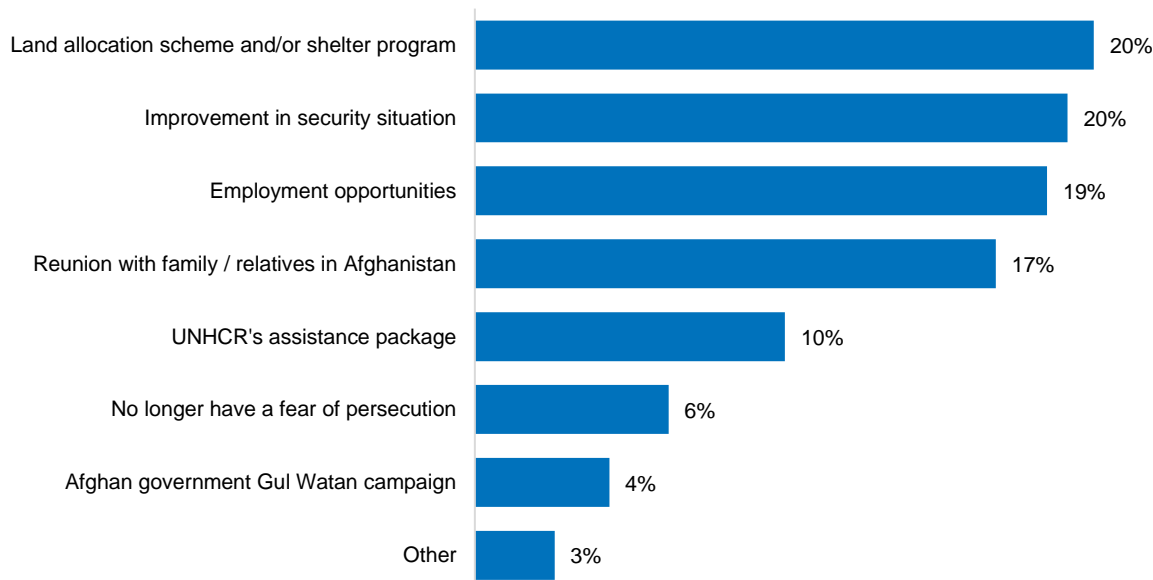
IN BRIEF

Incentives for returning to Afghanistan include: reunification with family members, a perception of increased employment opportunities, offers of land allocation, including UNHCR's assistance package, a perceived improvement in the security situation, and government assurances of a house and land through its Gul Watan campaign.¹

Reasons for return to Afghanistan 2018



Reasons for return to Afghanistan 2017

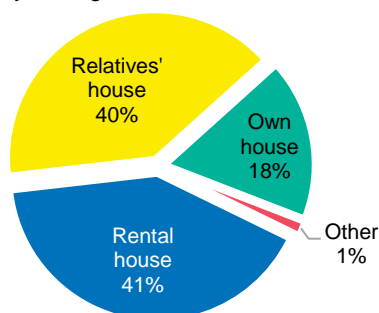


¹ *Khpal Watan, Gul Watan ("My country, my beautiful country") is the Government of Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation's campaign launched in July 2016 in Pakistan to encourage Afghans to return home.*

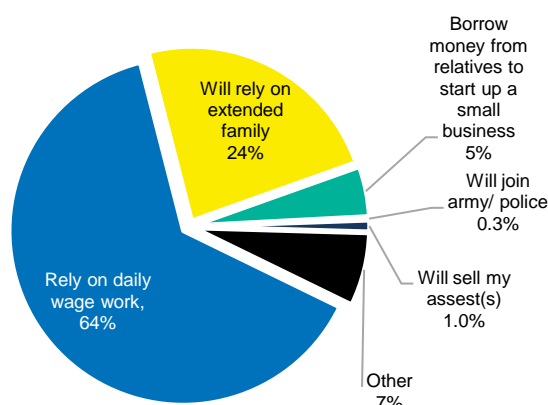
Intentions after leaving the Encashment Centres

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

Stay arrangement after return

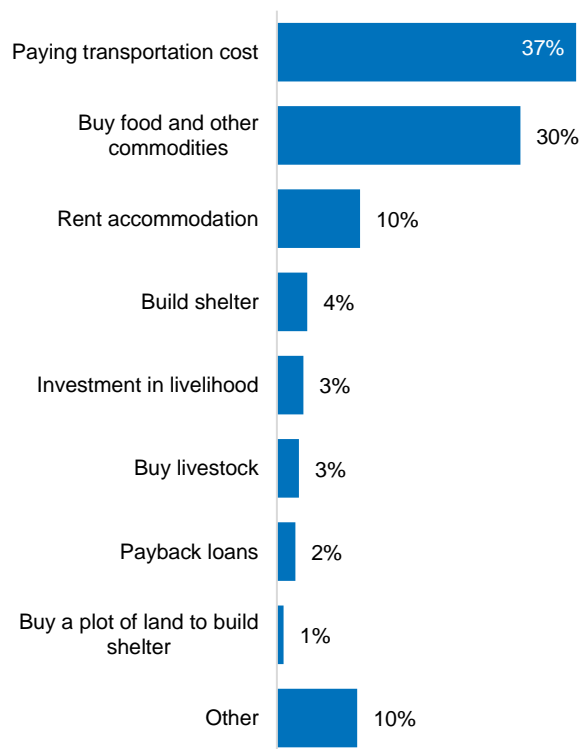


After you spend your cash grant, how will you support your family?

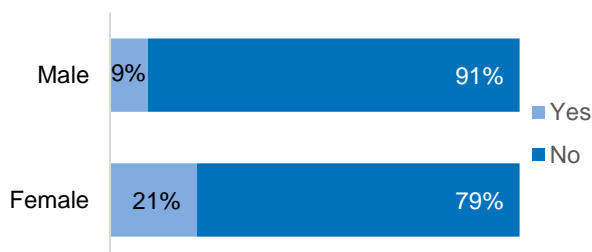


Returnee women heads of household receiving cash grant, Kabul EC. UNHCR/ M. Haroon, Jul 2018

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

Tel.: +93 791990011

Email: corcoran@unhcr.org

M. Nadir Farhad

Associate Public Information Officer

Tel.: +93 791990018

Email: farhadm@unhcr.org