



UNHCR Afghanistan

Voluntary Repatriation to Afghanistan - 2015 Key Findings of UNHCR Return Monitoring,

01 January – 31 December 2015

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Executive Summary

Since 2002, nearly 5.8 million Afghan refugees have voluntarily returned to Afghanistan, supported by UNHCR's largest ever assisted repatriation exercise. While 2015 trends were far below those of the peak years between 2002 and 2008, the 58,460 Afghan refugees who returned last year marked a significant increase in voluntary repatriation compared with 2014, when only 16,995 refugees opted to return. The increase in 2015 voluntary repatriation trends is largely attributed to an increase in push factors, primarily in Pakistan, following the Peshawar primary school massacre in December 2014. Although there was no evidence of involvement by any refugee elements in the attack, returnees generally cited a substantial increase in push factors following the tragedy, including harassment, evictions, arbitrary arrest and extortion throughout 2015.

Currently, 2.5 million Afghan refugees remain in neighboring host countries, many of whom are now 2nd and 3rd generation refugees with exceedingly weak links to their ancestral areas of origin and few viable coping mechanisms. Voluntary repatriation trends during the first quarter of 2016 reached historic lows, with only 1,871 returns, as security conditions continued to deteriorate. UNAMA's 2015 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict report documented the highest level of civilian casualties since the fall of the Taliban in 2002. Moreover, UNHCR documented some 385,000 people displaced by conflict in 31 out of Afghanistan's 34 provinces in 2015, marking a 96 percent increase in IDPs compared with 2014. Many of those who chose to repatriate over the past two years returned to comparatively worse socio-economic conditions with extremely challenging livelihood prospects in a constricting economy and limited access to land, shelter and services. Despite these challenges, the findings of UNHCR's returnee monitoring are not uniformly negative. Returnees interviewed cited reasonable access to services in many areas and appeared able to manage increasing security risks. Lack of livelihood opportunities and access to land and secure land tenure remain among the most pressing concerns of returnees, jeopardizing long-term prospects for sustainable reintegration.

Against this backdrop, and in the light of the increased vulnerability among returnees and subsequent protection risks, UNHCR Afghanistan in 2015 enhanced its returnee monitoring to improve the collection of information on reintegration challenges over a prolonged period. The revised methodology aims to facilitate return in safety and dignity, to contribute to the realization of returnees' basic human rights, to identify assistance needs and vulnerabilities, and to support interventions and advocacy as required. The enhanced monitoring takes place in two stages:

- a) At the UNHCR Encashment Centers (ECs) upon arrival to understand and document the level of information returnees had to make an informed decision, push/pull factors and problems faced during the repatriation process, and;
- b) Monitoring in the place of origin/intended destination through phone and home visit interviews in the first twelve months after return, (*please see details under methodology*). The latter is aimed to assess movement patterns, future plans, access to basic services, overall reintegration progress and key protection gaps and needs.

The methodology for the return monitoring is not scientifically representative: there are no random sampling procedures in place, but rather a looser methodology aimed at voluntary participation in the survey based on established targets for participation. However, UNHCR established (and exceeded) an initial target of approximately 10 percent of returning households to participate in the monitoring exercise: of 10,365 returning households in 2015, UNHCR interviewed 3,097 households upon arrival at the Encashment Centers, and included 1201 households from 31 of 34 provinces in the extended monitoring process. The results presented in this report are therefore broadly indicative of the nature of decision-making regarding return as well as the breadth and scope of reintegration challenges, whether in areas of origin or alternative destinations of choice. The phone interviews allow UNHCR to monitor reintegration challenges in both government-held and contested areas of origin, although the home-visit interviews are skewed toward areas where UNHCR and partners have regular access.

Key Findings:

Increased push factors: In general, economic hardship, harassment, movement restrictions and fear of arrest and deportation were mentioned as leading push factors from Pakistan influencing returnees' decision for return. Fifty-two percent of returnees cited increasing abuse by police, fear of arrest, deteriorating security environment and camp closures/relocations as primary reasons for return in 2015. In contrast, only 11 percent of returnees cited these factors in 2014, while 85 percent stated economic factors were the primary drivers of return decision-making.

Return destination patterns: Movement patterns of returnees remained dynamic, with findings highlighting that a significant number of returnees opt for alternative destinations due to insecurity, lack of land, shelter, livelihoods and access to basic services. Similarly a number of families confirmed that due to limited absorption capacity in the local market their family members (mainly

male members/Heads of Household) have left their families and either moved to urban areas within the country or returned back to country of asylum or migrated to a third country in search of job opportunities. Over 50% of the interviewed returnees confirmed that they faced challenges after return in their place of origin/intended destination. At the same time, however, the majority confirmed that they were warmly welcomed by the host communities, demonstrating a strong solidarity with returnees and the challenges they face.

Access to basic services and livelihoods: In general, it can be said that there is little significant difference in terms of access to social and economic rights between returnees and the general population.

- **Access to Shelter:** Lack of shelter is among the top problems faced by returnees. Seventy-seven percent of returnees stated that they live in a rented houses or with other family members. Landlessness is the single major obstacle to adequate access to shelter for returnees.
- **Self-reliance and livelihoods:** Fifty-four percent of returnees stated that they are employed, similar to the national employment rate of approximately 50 percent.¹ However, job security and sustainability of livelihood remains a top concern for all population including returnees. In general, the returnee monitoring found little comparative difference in returnees' ability to access social and economic rights on par with the general population.
- **Access to Health care:** Access/availability to health services for returnees is similar to that of the general population, with marked differences in the quality of care in urban vs. rural areas. The majority (nearly 80%) of interviewees were able to access government-run medical facilities such as local clinic, district/provincial or regional hospitals, which were on average of 10-30 minutes distance for 72% of the respondents. In addition, the availability of female health care providers remains an important obstacle for female returnees.
- **Access to education:** Similar to the health sector, since 2002 there have been significant improvements in access to education. Returnee monitoring shows that 82% of the interviewed returnees confirmed that their children have access to primary education. However, attendance rates between girls and boys are significantly lower than expected. Forty percent of respondents stated that their girls never go to school. The figure for boys is only slightly lower (33%). The main reasons for non-attendance are cultural sensitivities for girls, particularly in rural areas, while working to support their families is the main obstacle for boys.
- **Individual and civil status documentation:** Returnee monitoring data shows that **80%** of the respondents confirmed that they have a Tazkera, while 20% claimed they did not have any identity document. Lack of awareness about importance of Tazkera, residence outside the place of origin, and a lack of understanding of how to obtain a Tazkera were mentioned as the primary obstacles. When asked whether their spouse are in position of ID card or not, 68 percent of the respondents (predominantly male) confirmed that their spouse did not have a Tazkera, indicating a strong gender bias in access to civil documentation.
- **Vulnerability:** Out of 472 families interviewed during the home visit portion of the process, 42% were identified as persons with special vulnerabilities. Majority of the cases were poor families (36%), medical cases (23%), physically disabled (10%), chronically ill (7%), older persons with children (7%) and mentally disabled (6%).

Methodology Phase I: Monitoring in the Encashment Centers

UNHCR and Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DORR) staff conducted interviews either at random or based on evident protection concerns in the five Encashment Centers with newly arriving returnees. Topics include an assessment of the voluntariness of return, reasons for the decision to return (including pull and push factors), the level of information returnees received to make an informed decision to return, and conditions and respect for basic rights in the country of asylum. Observations and findings from interviews with returnees are regularly shared with UNHCR offices in host countries and serve as the basis for interventions to address particular protection problems faced by returnees during the initial return processes.

¹ Based on National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA 2013/2014), Labor force participation rate is 50% at the national level (<http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/Chapter4%20LABOUR%20FORCE%20CHARACTERISTICS.pdf>)

Between 01 January and 31 December 2015, a total of 3,097 interviews were conducted with returning refugees from Pakistan (2,946) and Iran (151) at five ECs (Jamal Mayna: 1,026, Kabul: 972, Samarkhel: 597, Gardez: 351, and Herat: 151). Interviewees were selected in two ways: at random (2,600) and from those with protection concerns (497).

Methodology Phase II: Monitoring in the Place of Origin/intended destination (Tracking):

Once the interviews are concluded in the ECs, families are asked (on a voluntary basis) for their consent to participate in the extended monitoring phase, which includes telephone interviews and home visits. UNHCR/UNHCR partners will visit the selected families in their places of origin/intended destination at fixed timeframes (see table below) and will interview them using standard forms.

Through the monitoring/tracking of families in their place of origin/intended final destination, the following questions can be addressed:

- i. What are the key protection and assistance challenges of returning refugees in the first twelve months after return?
- ii. To what extent do returning refugees actually go back to their place of origin?
- iii. If families do not go back to their place of origin, where do they go?
- iv. Do returning refugee families remain in Afghanistan in the first year upon arrival?

Interval	Communication and purpose
Day one	In-person - interview at the EC upon arrival Selection, informed consent to participate. Addresses in place of intended return and further contact details are shared.
1-3 months	First Phone interview Confirm location, short interview to assess future plans, living conditions and expectations
6-8 months	Home Visit Interview in the presence of other family members covering issues related to assistance, living situation, access to services and possible protection challenges
9-12 months	Exit Phone interview

Between 01 Jan – 31 December 2015, some 1,500 returnee families were selected for extended monitoring/tracking, out of the 3,097 families who participated in the first phase of the Encashment Center monitoring. This number was increased from an initial planning target of 600-1,000 families due to the larger-than-expected number of returning individuals and families in the first half of 2015.

As indicated above, the monitoring/tracking starts with first phone interview followed with a home visit and a final exit phone interview. The aim of the phone calls is to verify the location of the family, whether they left the place of return, whether the family is separated, and whether there are immediate protection concerns. The aim of the Home Visits (HV) is to monitor the reintegration process (6-8 months after arrival) as well as the challenges faced and the progress achieved over time. Again, the home visits presume a level of access in the midst of an escalating conflict that is not always possible. Therefore, some findings—such as the fact that few families report insecurity as a determining factor in their ability to reintegrate—should be read with caution.

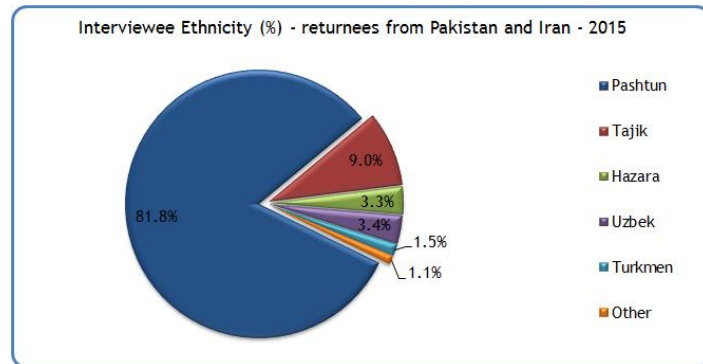
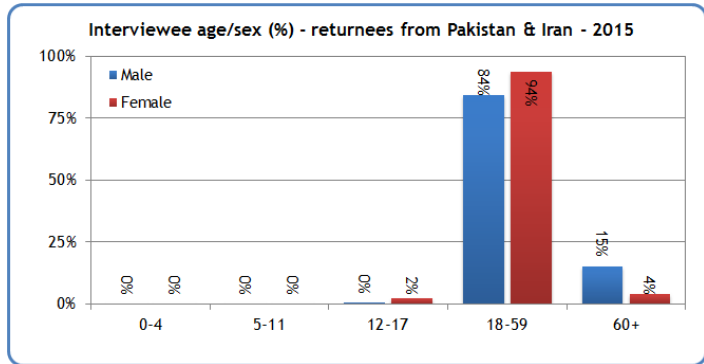
During the reporting period, out of 1,500 selected families, a total of 1,201 families (80% of the selected families) were reached for first phone interview followed by 472 (79% of the target/ 600 families) home visits and 230 exit phone interviews. One reason that accounts for the lower response to the targets is the fact that those who arrived later in the year may have not reached the point at which they expect a mid-term phone interview or home visit. For instance, those selected in July 2015 will be monitored through first phone interview in Aug – Oct, followed with a possible home visit in January 2016 and the final exit phone interview in July 2016. This means a number of families who are selected in the last quarter of the year will be monitoring in the following year. In addition, there are a number of challenges that impact on the response rate. These include: lack of mobile coverage in a number of areas, particularly in the remote/insecure provinces, change of sim-card, security concerns and access constraints as well as movement of returnees from one province to another province, or back to the country of asylum or elsewhere.

Geographic coverage: the first phone interviews were conducted in 31 provinces. 75% of the interviews were conducted in 10 provinces such as Kabul, Nangarhar, Paktya, Kuduk, Laghman, Baghlan, Kandahar, Kunar, Herat and Logar. These provinces were among the high return areas and have received 80% of the total returnees (58,460) in 2015.

Home visits were conducted in 17 provinces. Most of the home visits (444) were carried out in 10 provinces such as Nangarhar, Kabul, Herat, Paktya, Kandahar, Parwan, Balkh, Laghman, Helmand and Khost, which have received 56% of total returnees (58,460) in 2015. Similarly, exit phone interviews were carried out in 17 provinces including Nangarhar, Herat, Laghman, Kabul, Kunar, Baghlan, Kunduz, Logar.

1. A snapshot of Encashment Center Monitoring Findings¹

1.1 Age, sex and ethnicity breakdown of families interviewed at the Encashment Centers – 3,097 families

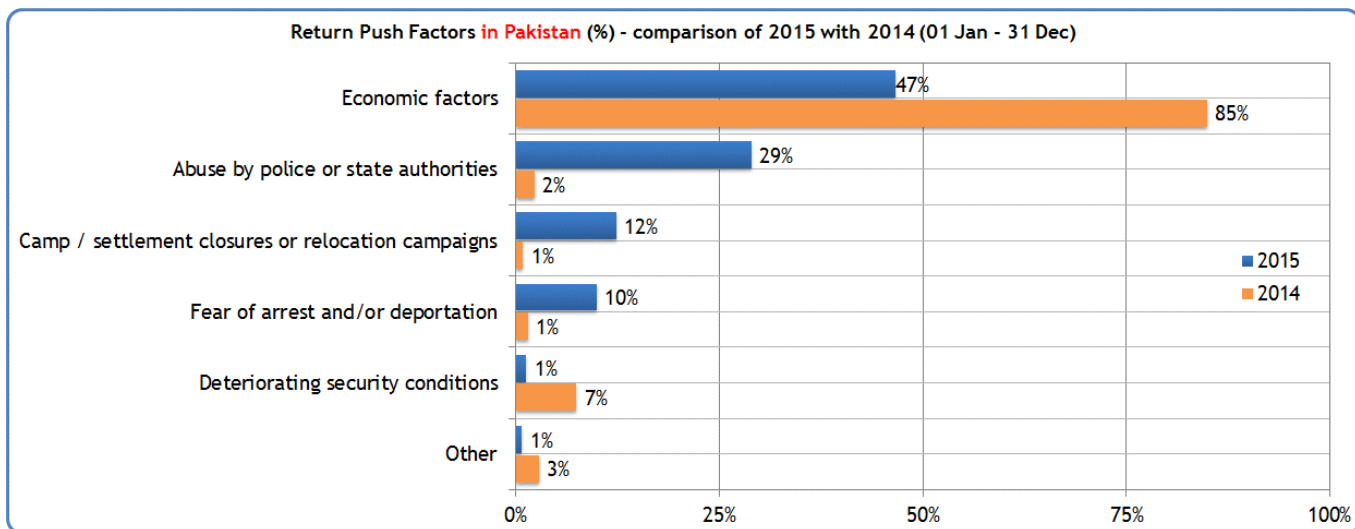


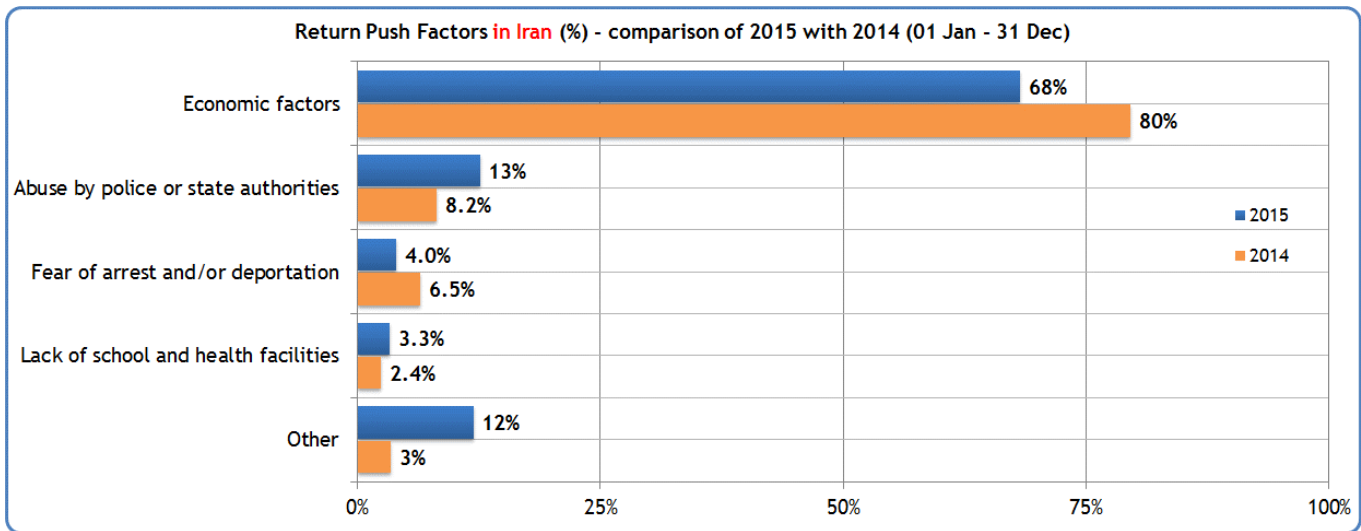
1.2 Information on the Voluntary Repatriation Program:

Over 96% of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan and Iran said that they had received adequate information to make an informed decision to return. Information on place of origin was mainly obtained through visits to Afghanistan (44%) and from the Afghan community (39%). Similarly, 65% of the interviewed returnees said that they had been informed about UNHCR’s repatriation operation by members of the Afghan community, 15% obtained information directly from UNHCR and 12% stated that they had visited Afghanistan, and learned about UNHCR’s repatriation operation from returnee families.

1.3 Return Push and Pull factors:

Economic problems, harassment, intimidation, eviction notices, movement restrictions and fear of arrest and deportation were mentioned by interviewed returnees as the leading push factors for return in 2015. Conversely, perceptions of an improvement in the security situation in some parts of Afghanistan, UNHCR’s assistance package, the perception of improved employment opportunities and reduced fear of persecution were mentioned as the main pull factors encouraged the return to Afghanistan.

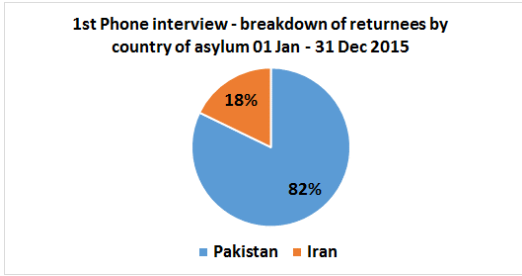




2 - Overall situation one month after return (first phone interview findings)

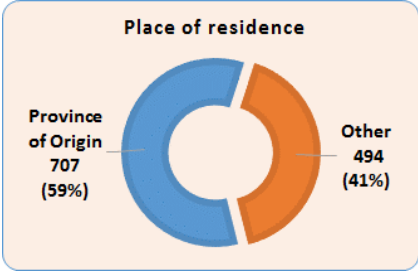
During this initial phase of monitoring, the findings provide confirmation whether the families are still living in their intended destination, whether the family is separated, whether there are protection concerns that require immediate interventions/advocacy, and to ascertain the future plans of the families.

The findings below are the result of 1,201 phone interviews carried out between 01 January and 31 December 2015² in 31 provinces. This figure represents 80% of the selected families. It is to be noted that those selected during November and December 2015 will be interviewed at the beginning of 2016 given the first interview, as stated above, takes place 1-3 months after return.



2.1 Place of return:

Movement patterns of returnees are dynamic and a significant number of returnees opt to return to destinations other than areas of origin. Among the interviewed families, 59% confirmed that they are currently living in their areas of origin, while 41% said they settled in alternate destinations due to insecurity, lack of land, shelter, livelihood opportunities and access to basic services. In addition, a significant portion of the remaining Afghans are 2nd and 3rd generations of refugees born in exile who were exposed to urban or semi urban contexts and livelihoods. Therefore, they either don't have the desire to return to rural areas or may have weak linkages with their ancestral communities, or both.



2.2 Changes in the family composition:

Among the respondents, 92% (1,102) confirmed that there were no changes in their family composition, while 8% (99 respondents) said that family members had left:

- To other location in Afghanistan 54%
- Returned to CoA 36%
- Family member moved to a third country 10%

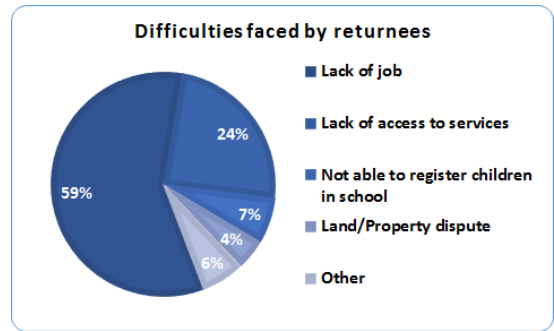
Although migration, whether internally or to neighboring countries, has historically been an important means of survival and managing risk in an insecure context, it does not appear that Afghan returnees are relying on family separation and mobility

² It is to be noted that among these respondents there are families who have returned in 2014 but the actual interview were concluded in 2015.

strategies in numbers disproportionate to those of the community at large. In the current insecure context, the lack of absorption capacity in the labor market is a serious problem for all Afghans including returnees.

2.3 Difficulties faced after return:

In 2015, shrinking protection space as a result of increased push factors in several parts of Pakistan resulted in families repatriating without adequate preparations. This has made it difficult for families to resolve property issues, collect educational documents, contact relatives and friends, and make housing arrangements prior to their return. In extreme cases, heads of households were reportedly arrested and held by the police until their families packed all of their belongings and brought them to the police station. In such circumstances, refugees had no option but to return home to an insecure context as the least bad option they faced. These negative Patterns can often create further vulnerability among returnee families and jeopardize the sustainability of return and reintegration. Among the interviewed families who returned in 2015, 54% reported facing difficulties upon return, including unemployment and lack of access to basic services.



In contrast, some **97% (1,158)** of the respondents mentioned that they didn't face any problems with host communities in Afghanistan and they were warmly welcomed upon return. Only **2% (23)** said that they had problems with host communities, while 1% (17) did not respond.

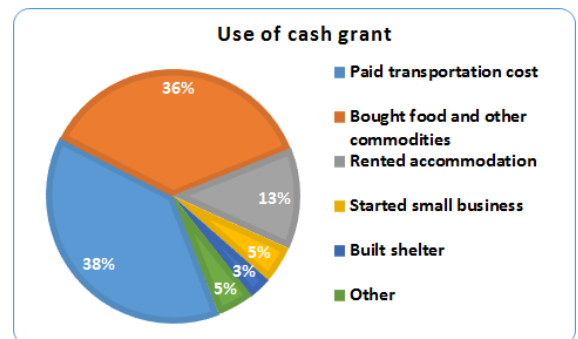
Problems	No.	No. %
Property/land disputes	6	26%
Threats	5	22%
Dispute regarding water	5	22%
Discrimination	4	21%
Other	2	9%
Total	23	100%

2.4 Future planning:

To gauge longer term intentions and advocate for appropriate development solutions, UNHCR asks families about their future intentions. A great majority (**91%**) said that they plan to remain in the location/province of chose return, while **6%** (75 respondents) said that they will move to another province (62 respondents) and or return back to Pakistan/Iran (13 respondents). Three percent (38 respondents) did not respond.

2.5 Use of repatriation cash grant:

In general the findings show that the cash grant provided to all returnee families is successfully meeting the short-term needs identified by returnees, particularly immediate cash requirements and short-term water, food, shelter and transportation needs. Respondents indicated that cash was the most effective response mechanism to meet immediate and short-term reintegration needs and expenses. However, respondents did not feel that the cash grant was particularly effective for longer term needs or investments in needs such as livelihoods or sustainable housing.



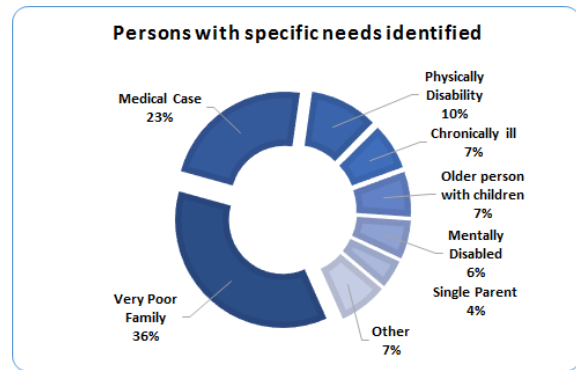
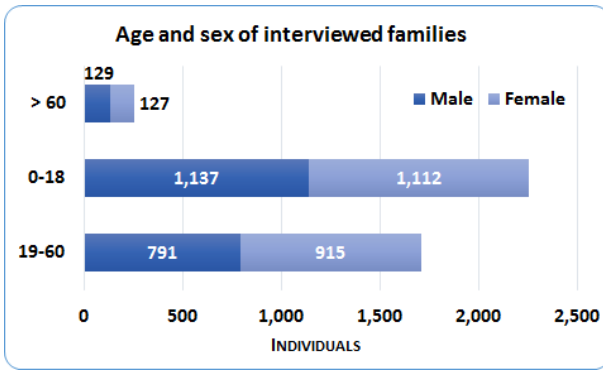
3 - Second phase of returnee tracking through physical "Home visits"

As indicated above, home visit interviews are carried out 6-8 months post-return in the presence of other family members. The aim of the Home Visits (HV) is to monitor the reintegration process, the challenges faced and the progress made by returnees over time.

During the reporting period a total of 472 homes were visited by the monitoring teams in 17 provinces. This figure is 79% of the targeted families (600). It is to be noted that a number of families selected in the last quarter of 2015 will be interviewed in 2016 given the home visits normally 6-8 months after return. Also, UNHCR again stresses that home visits are only possible in accessible areas, which could skew the representativeness of the data, as many refugees return to contested areas and may face particular challenges in terms of security or access to security. That said, home visits help to monitor the reintegration process/impact of assistance, map the challenges faced by the returnees and the progress since the returnees have arrived to their places of

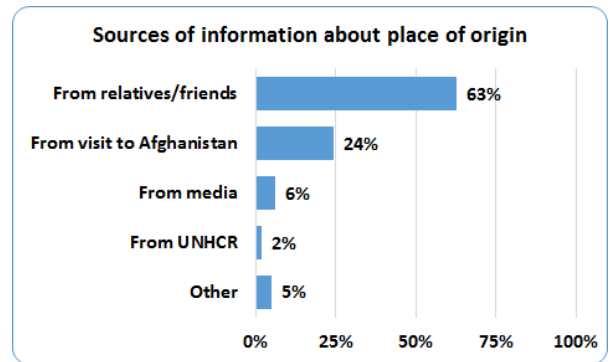
origin/destination. During this phase of return monitoring, data on overall access to basic services, documentation, safety and security, and priorities will be gathered. The findings complement the comprehensive needs assessment and will provide evident based information for advocacy, planning and decision making purposes.

Most of the home visits (444) were carried out in 10 provinces such as Nangarhar, Kabul, Herat, Paktya, Kandahar, Parwan, Balkh, Laghman, Helmand and Khost which have received 56% of total returnees (58,460) in 2015. In addition, most of these provinces are among the top provinces of return and afford interviewers better access to returnees than many other areas. These provinces are also receiving returnees from other areas who sought better security, access to services and job opportunities. The remaining visits were carried out in Farah, Bamyan, Kunar, Baghlan, Takhar, Jawzjan and Faryab provinces in which access sometimes proved a challenge.



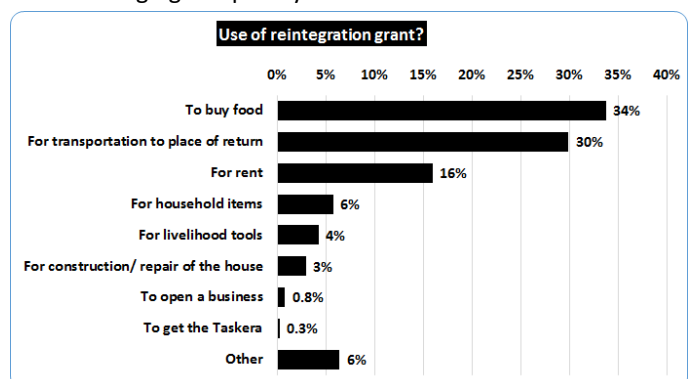
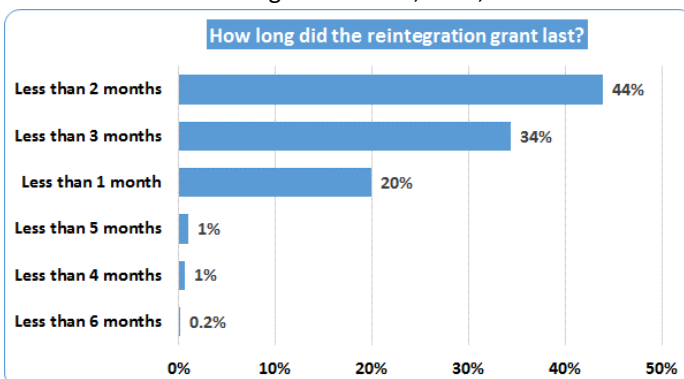
3.1 Level of information prior to return:

Generally, refugees in countries of asylum have a clear understanding of conditions in Afghanistan, which enables them to make an informed decision regarding return. The main sources of information are friends and family or visits to the country of origin. Returnees also obtain information from the media, UNHCR and other sources. These findings also tally with the information obtained in the encashment centers, where returnees were interviewed to assess their return situation including the level of information they had before deciding to return.



3.2 Use of Repatriation Cash Grant:

The repatriation cash grant is the main support provided to returnees and plays an important role in the initial stages of return and reintegration. However, the cash grant is sufficient to cover only basic needs, after which returnees have limited means of support. This increases the risks of vulnerabilities and emergence negative coping strategies over time, given their prolonged stay in exile as well as in the areas with limited absorption capacity, access to services, and insecurity. The majority (78%) of the respondents stated that the cash grant covered their expenses for up to 3 months, meeting their immediate needs upon arrival and helping them cover household items including travel costs, food, basic household items and arranging temporary accommodation. 20% said the cash



grant lasted for less than a month and only a very small number of respondents said that it remained up to five months. With regard to the use of cash grant, 65% said they used the grant to buy food and pay their transportation costs, 14% said they used the cash grant to pay rental costs, 6% bought household items, and 4% bought livelihood tools.

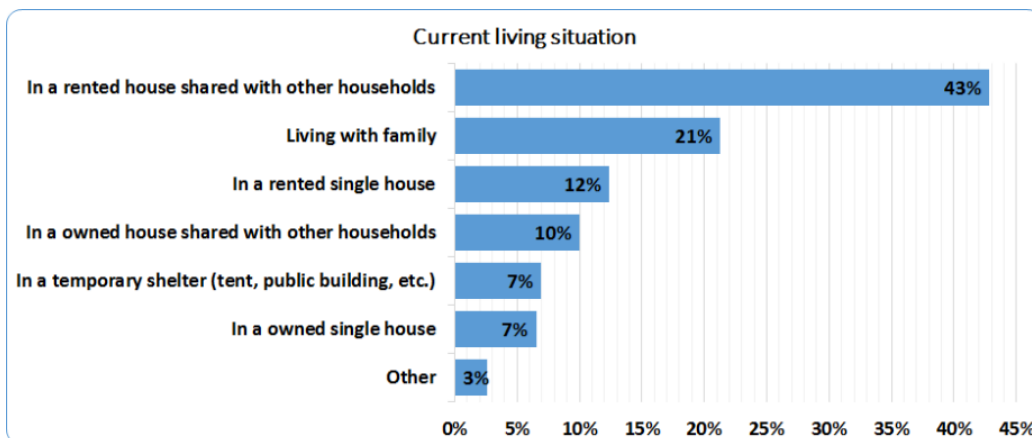
3.3 Shelter/housing arrangement:

Lack of shelter remains the most pressing challenge and a major obstacle to reintegration. **86%** of returnee respondents said that they are not living in their original, pre-flight homes. This could be due to the fact that the recent returnees and the remaining refugees are the 2nd and 3rd generations of Afghans who never lived in Afghanistan (born in exile). Among this group, 44% said their current living condition is worse than in exile, while 30% said their living condition has improved, and 16% said it is the same as it was in countries of asylum.

Currently living in the same house arrangement as prior to exile?		
Housing	No.	No. %
No	407	86%
Yes	65	14%
Total	472	100%

When asked about their current living situation, 77% of the respondents mentioned that they are either living in a rented house or with other family members, 10% said they live in their own house but that it is shared with other households, 7% said they are living in their own single house, 7% said they are living in temporary shelters and 3% said other forms of shelter. These figures give a clear indication that the overwhelming majority of refugees face challenges in arranging adequate shelter on return.

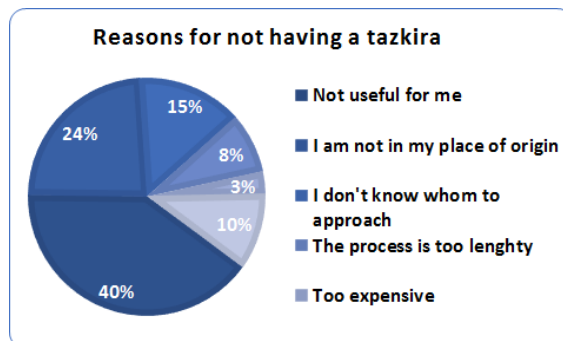
If not living in the same house, current living conditions?		
Current Condition	No.	No. %
Worse than before	178	44%
Better than before	122	30%
The same as before	107	16%
Total	407	100%



3.4 Individual and civil status documentation

Access to individual and civil status documentation is one of the key protection concerns facing returnees, often limiting returnees' ability to access services, including education and health facilities. Also, simple procedures such as applying for a driver's license or registering for land allocation under Decree 104, are often impossible without civil documentation or personal identity documents.

Interestingly, RM data show that **80%** of the respondents (**375 out of 472** visited families) said they possess a Tazkera, while **20% (97)** stated that they did not possess a Tazkera. Among the latter, **40%** said that they did not have a Tazkera because they deemed it of little or no value, **24%** said they were not living in their place of origin, **14%** said they were not aware of the procedures to obtain a Tazkera, **8%** said the process is too lengthy, and **3%** said it is very expensive to obtain it. Normally, national IDs are issued only in the province of birth or at the Ministry of Interior in Kabul. The obstacle for those who are not living in their place of origin is the lack of administrative procedures adapted to handle such cases. However, when returnees were asked whether their spouse are in position of ID card or not; **32%** said yes and **68%** said no.

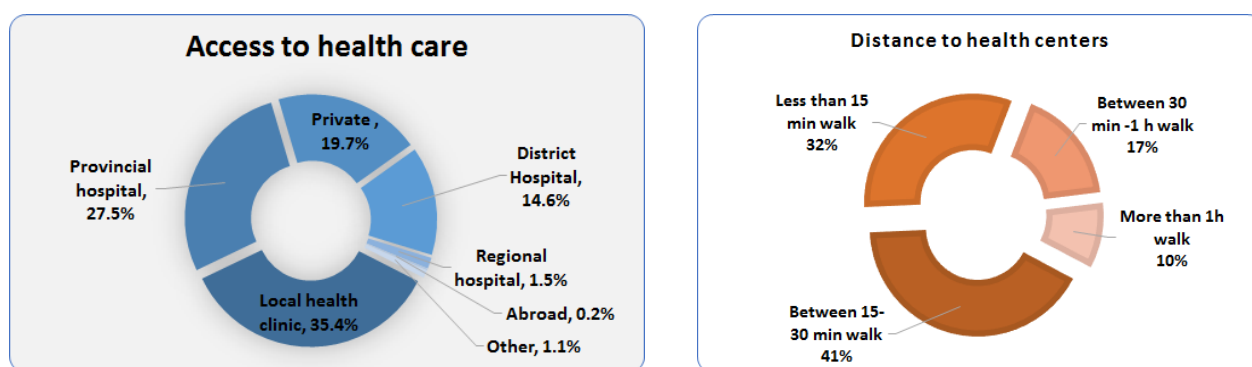


3.5 Access to Health services:

According to the Ministry of Public Health and National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-12, there has been important progress in access to healthcare since 2002, although some indicators remain among the worst in the world. In addition, according to the Asia Foundation Survey in 2015³, nearly 50% of respondents say they are somewhat or very satisfied with their access to clinics and hospitals, and 42.4% report satisfaction with their access to medicine. Among rural Afghans, just 44.3% of respondents are satisfied with clinics and hospitals in their area, while 38.3% are satisfied with access to medicine.

Returnee monitoring confirms the essence of other surveys and demonstrates that the availability of and access to health services for returnees is similar to the general population. When returnees were asked “where do you go if you or one of your family members is unwell?” the majority (nearly 80%) have mentioned that they will approach a government medical facility (either local clinic, district, provincial or regional hospitals), while nearly 20% said that they will go to a private health service provider. However, a number of respondents cited issues around of the quality and quantity of medicine, and the presence (or lack thereof) of female personal or equipment in some of the health centers. Similar concerns were also highlighted in the NRVA 2011/12 report⁴. The report specifically indicates that cultural responsiveness of the health sector – for instance in terms of provision of female health care providers – remains an important obstacle for the effective use of health care, especially by women. In addition, costs for health services and treatment are prohibitive for many households, in particular for poor households. In addition, health care provision is unequal between urban and rural population.

The health infrastructure in Afghanistan is made up of the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), including health posts, basic health centers, comprehensive health centers and the district hospitals, which provides some basic services such as maternal and newborn health, immunization, and nutrition; the Essential Package of Health Services, including some district, provincial and regional hospitals, with a range of health services including minor surgeries; and the clinics and hospitals in the private sector. Tertiary level hospitals are available only in Kabul and few provincial centers such as Herat, Mazar, Kandahar, etc.



3.6 Access to drinking water:

By and large, returnees were able to access safe, potable drinking water. During the home visits, the interviewed families confirmed that all of them have access to water from different sources. The majority (66%) of the interviewed returnees stated that they get their drinking water from a secure/covered water source. While 14% said they have access to uncovered water source, and 20% said they have access to other sources of water. These findings are almost similar to the findings of “The Asia Foundation Survey Conducted in 2015. According to this survey⁵, Afghans report the highest level of satisfaction (71.8%) with access to clean drinking water, with rural and urban residents reporting satisfaction at similar rates. The finding of this survey also indicates that the level of satisfaction with the availability of clean drinking water has increased over time, compared to satisfaction with other services.

Sources of drinking water	No.	No. %
Hand pump	243	52%
Covered shallow well	66	14%
Uncovered shallow well	50	11%
Spring	13	3%
River / Canal	4	1%
Other	96	20%
Total	472	100%

In terms of distance, the source is less than 15 minutes away from the main habitation place for the majority (90%) of interviewed returnees. All the responders mentioned that they have the same access to water as the host community. However, there are

³ <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2015.pdf> - page 9, Executive summary

⁴ <http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/Chapter9%20HEALTH.pdf>

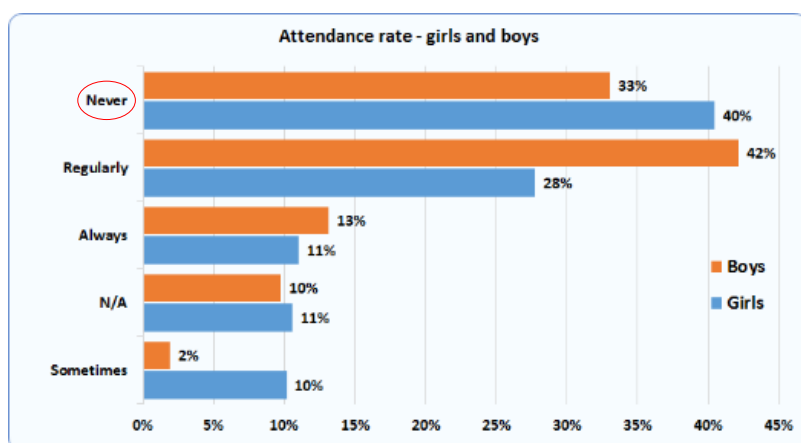
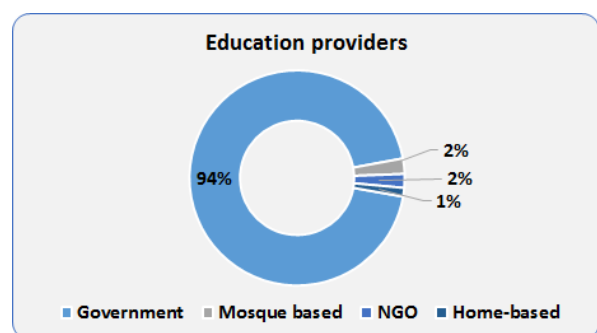
⁵ <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2015.pdf> - page 8

reports about disputes on water resources between communities. This generally becomes a challenge during the summer when the level of water goes down or the springs/canals getting dry.

3.7 Access to education:

Free and compulsory primary education is guaranteed by the Afghan Constitution. Despite concerns about access to education particularly in the rural areas, the finding of UNHCR’s RM shows that returnees did not express any major problems in accessing education facilities. 82%⁶ of the respondents stated that their children have access to primary education. 6% (29 respondents) said no and 12% (56 respondents) did not respond whom possibly didn’t have school age children. The main provider of education is the Government, while NGOs also provide education in some areas. Despite better access to education, attendance rates among girls and boys are significantly lower than expected. 191 (40%) respondents stated that their girls never go to school. The figure for boys (33% /156) is only slightly lower. The main reasons for non-attendance are cultural sensitivities for girls, particularly in rural areas, while working to support their families is the main obstacle for boys. Some families also mentioned that due to long distance they don’t feel comfortable to send their children to school or are not able to afford transportation cost. Read and write capacity is also not good with a ratio of 47% among interviewed men and very low level (20%) among women.

Availability of Education for children		
Primary Education	No.	No. %
Yes	387	82%
No	29	6%
N/A	56	12%
Total	472	100%



UNHCR’s main concern in the education sector is the smooth inclusion of returnees in the education system in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Education has a recognition system for education certificates of returnees from Iran and Pakistan. Currently, persons intending to return have their certificates stamped by the respective school and then certified by the Education attaché based in Afghan Embassy/Consulate in the country of asylum. In Afghanistan, documents are then stamped by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and assessed by the Ministry of Education. Afghan education attaches ensure liaison with Ministry of Education to facilitate recognition upon return. This lengthy and bureaucratic process hampers the smooth enrolment of returnee children in school, given that many families in remote areas may not be able to travel from their places of origin/return to the provincial capitals to complete the enrolment process. The cumbersome and expensive process has also been cited by refugees in Pakistan as an impediment to their voluntary repatriation.

Differences in the academic years between Afghanistan and Pakistan also poses a reintegration challenge for some returnee students. Normally the peak return season is between April and October⁷. In addition, in Iran, contrary to Pakistan, schools are not registered or officially recognized with MoE, so that returnees have to pass an evaluation exam with MoE upon return. Until September 2015, returnees who studied in Pakistani/Iranian schools have had to pay significant certification fees at Embassy/Consulate. However, this issues was addressed. According to an official letter shared by MoRR with UNHCR, the certification fee was waived by the National Unity Government in September 2015 and the issue was communicated with Afghan diplomatic missions / education attachés in Pakistan, Iran and India. UNHCR Afghanistan shared the letter with UNHCR Offices in countries of asylum to understand whether the waiver of the certification fees has been enforced.

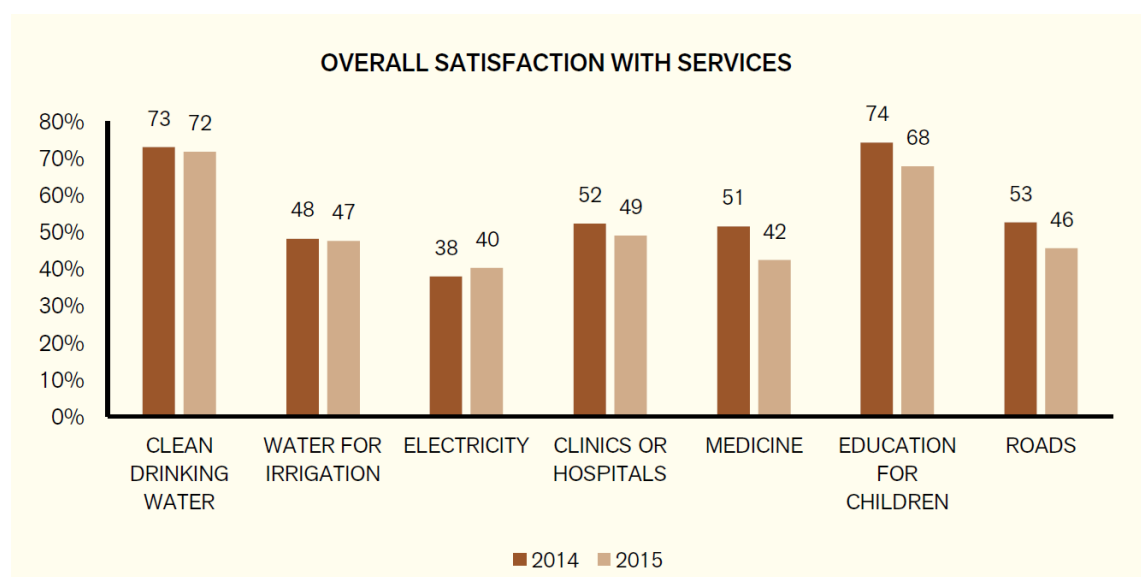
⁶ According to the Asia Foundation Survey in 2014 - <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2014final.pdf> - “Over half of Afghans report having good access (often or always) to education for children (70.8%)” – page 9

⁷ Normally schools in Afghanistan resume in spring (April) and end at the beginning of winter.

FREQUENCY OF ACCESS TO PUBLIC GOODS AND SERVICES

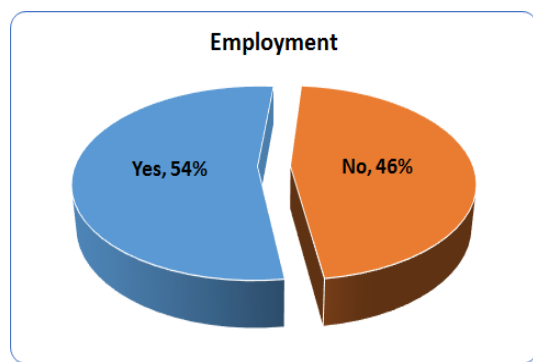
	OFTEN / ALWAYS	RARELY / SOMETIMES	NEVER	REFUSED / DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN	71	26	3	0	100
CLEAN DRINKING WATER	69	26	5	0	100
ROADS	51	44	5	0	100
MEDICINE	43	50	6	1	100
CLINICS / HOSPITALS	44	47	8	1	100
WATER FOR IRRIGATION	40	42	16	2	100
ELECTRICITY	37	29	33	1	100

Source: The Asia Foundation Survey 2014 – page 69 - <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistan2014final.pdf>



Source: The Asia Foundation Survey 2015 – page 7 - <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistan2015.pdf>

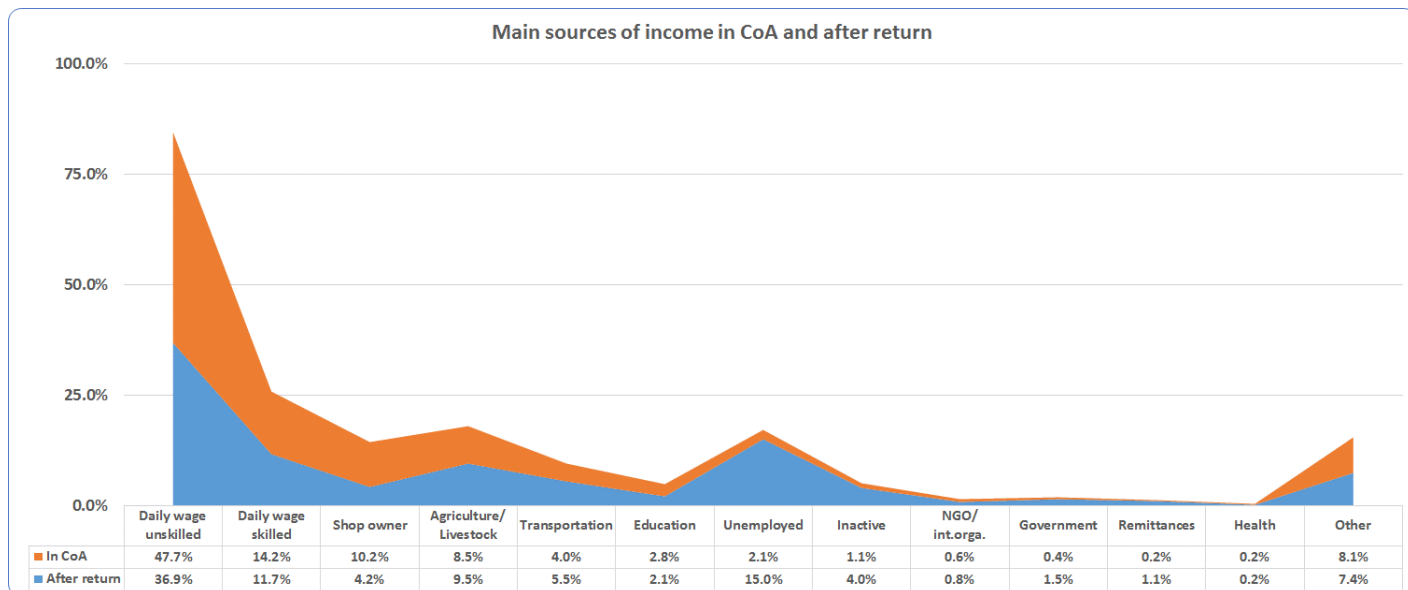
3.8 Livelihood/Income:



In general, returnees appear to have similar sources of income as in countries of asylum. Despite a slightly better employment rate than the national average, the level of income is very low. 63% of the respondents stated that they gain more than 50 Afghanis per day while 37% said they gain less than 50 Afghanis (less than a dollar) in a day. Among families interviewed, child labor appears relatively low. Ten percent of the interviewed families confirmed that their children are working as daily laborers, shop assistants, garbage collectors, street vendors and farm hands. They work between 5-10 hours a day. The most worrisome statistic, however, is the fact that 69% of those interviewed reported a relatively worse economic situation compared to that in countries of asylum, while only 21% reported improved economic conditions. Ten percent said they have similar level of income.

Though lack of livelihood opportunities is a major issue for all Afghans⁸, the employment rate among interviewed returnees is relatively better, according to RM findings. 54% of the interviewed families stated that they are employed while 46% said they don't have a job. The majority (nearly 50%) of employed returnees said they are daily wage laborers. Small number are also engaged with other employment opportunities such as transportation, agriculture/livestock, etc. A small number said they are government and NGO employees. However, respondents expressed concern about job security and sustainability of livelihood opportunities available in the country.

Economic Situation	No.	No. %
Worse	306	65%
Better	93	20%
Same	73	15%
Total	472	100%



3.9 Safety and Security and public attitudes towards persons of concern:

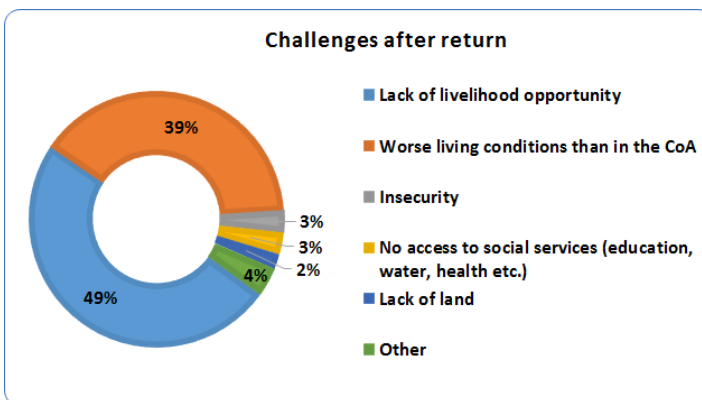
According to the Asia Foundation Survey conducted in 2015, the most frequently cited national problem is insecurity (42.7%), up from 34.1% in 2014 and at its highest level since 2007. In general, returnees are welcomed by host communities upon return which shows a strong sense of solidarity between returnees and host communities. RM data shows that 90% of interviewed returnees stated that they don't have any problem with security, which seemingly conflicts with findings in other polls. Following the midyear results, UNHCR conducted further follow up interviews and focus group discussions with returnees to better understand perceptions of security. While there was no conclusive evidence regarding perceptions of security, many returnees cited the fact that they 'felt free' in Afghanistan and they no longer feared arrest or harassment by simple virtue of their nationality, suggesting a strong correlation between perceptions of security and the exercise of fundamental rights. UNHCR is also aware of significant secondary displacement of returnees in conflict affected areas, so it is entirely possible that perceptions of security change over time.

In some specific cases, it has been reported that returnee girls and young women face problems of social acceptance because of their more open social mores, in issues such as dress and gender relations. This problem is usually more serious for girls, given that young boys have more mobility to return to the country of asylum for work purposes, while this possibility is very limited or feasible for girls. In some cases too, there is increasing evidence of a stigmatization of returnees, who are sometimes thought to have benefited from educational opportunities during their stays in neighboring countries and are successfully competing for scarce jobs. These problems, however, are not reported to be widespread and the general rule is a positive welcome and acceptance.

⁸ According to the Asia Foundation (AF) Survey conducted in 2015, the most frequently cited local level problem is unemployment (31.2%) - <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2015.pdf>

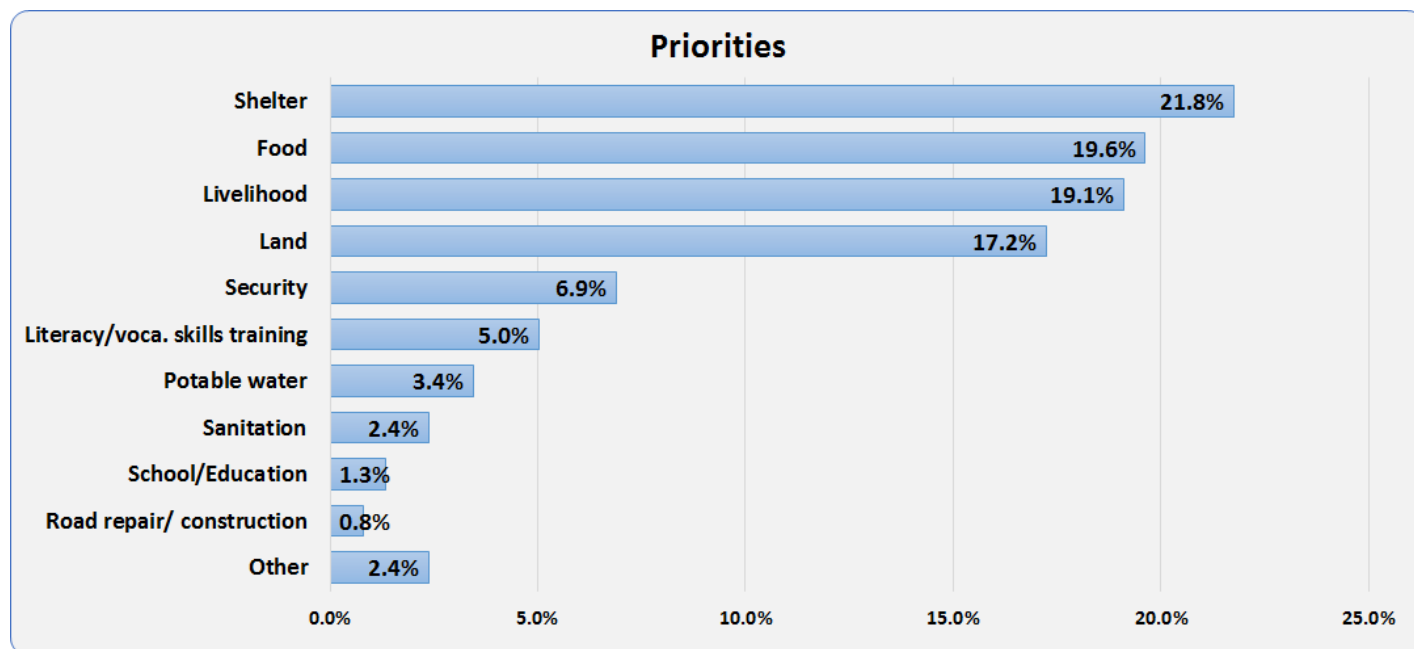
In terms decision for return and whether they made the right decision, 66% of the respondents said they are happy to have returned in Afghanistan, 23% said they are not happy and 11% (50 families) did not provide a response. Similarly when they were asked about their future in Afghanistan, 71% of the respondents expressed that they feel hopeful about their future in Afghanistan, 5% said they have a negative feeling about their future in Afghanistan and 24% did not respond.

Among the 23% who said they are not happy about their return, lack of livelihood opportunities, worse living conditions as compared to country of asylum, lack of land and no access to basic services were mentioned as the main problems they faced after return.



3.10 Priorities:

The top priorities highlighted are humanitarian needs: 22% of returnees asked for shelter, 20% of returnees cited food. While nearly 20% said livelihood and same number asked for land. Interestingly small number of respondents (7%) specified security as their main priority despite increased insecurity in several parts of the country in 2015 including in rural and urban areas. The remaining have mentioned literacy/ skill building, potable water, sanitation, schools and other issues as their priority.



4. Last phase of returnee tracking through - Exit Phone Interview

In the final phase of monitoring, 230 families were interviewed in 17 provinces after they had been in the intended destination for approximately one year. During the exit phone interview those families who took part in the home visit process will be called to see any progress they had and possible changes as compared to their first phone interview as well as during the home visits.

4.1 Progress and challenges after one year of return:

Nearly 70% of the interviewed returnees cited continued difficulties when asked if they continued to face challenges hampering the reintegration after nearly one year of return: Lack of employment is among the top challenges (43%), followed by lack of access to basic services and other problems. Only 1% mentioned land/property dispute as a challenge.

Returnees are also asked whether their expectations were met after one year of their return: 60% said no. The lack of job opportunities, lack of access to land, and inadequate shelter were among the unmet expectations they cited. Nonetheless, progress was noted in terms of the number of interviewed returnees who had bought land or applied to the land allocation scheme, built houses, or rented new accommodation. Over 95% of the interviewed returnees stated that they have access to education. A significant majority (72%) of the interviewed families indicated that their access to basic services increased during the course of the year. Critically, 43% of the interviewed returnees indicated that they had found employment and 11% said they started a small business since the home visit.

4.2 Conclusion:

UNHCR's return monitoring suggests that, despite the many obstacles and deteriorating security environment within Afghanistan, the situation of refugee returnees often improves gradually over time despite the array of specific challenges due to prolonged periods as refugees in neighboring countries of asylum. Without exception, those interviewed reported high levels of social integration and cohesion in communities of origin or destination. Challenges to sustainable reintegration are clearly linked to the lack of livelihoods and land tenure obstacles, which limits their potential to re-establish families and make future investments. UNHCR continues to have serious concerns regarding the increase in push factors, particularly from Pakistan, which cast considerable doubt on whether potential returnees are making free and well-informed decisions regarding return, particularly to contested districts, or if they are simply returning due to a lack of viable alternatives. While the findings of the return monitoring tend to downplay security risks faced upon return, this could also be due to the methodology employed by UNHCR, which biases interviews with returnees in accessible areas, particularly the home visits. Overall, returnees appeared able to adapt to a challenging security environment, however it remains unclear if this is due to the emergence of negative coping strategies or acquiescence with local power brokers and structures. Finally, the findings of this report underscore the need for targeted support for rural and urban livelihood interventions and long-overdue policy reforms that would facilitate access to land and secure land tenure.

End