



Return of Undocumented Afghans from Pakistan and Iran

2016 Overview



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

Overview

Decades of conflict and the search for better economic opportunities have pushed millions of Afghans into neighboring Pakistan and Iran. While an estimated 2.5 million Afghans are registered refugees, a possibly equal number of Afghans live in Pakistan and Iran without legal refugee status. These undocumented Afghans face numerous protection challenges both in their host country and upon their return to Afghanistan either voluntarily (“spontaneous return”) or through deportation.

From 1 January to 31 December 2016, a total of 691,581 undocumented Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan (248,054) and Iran (443,527). This is a 4% overall increase from 2015, when a total of 663,295 undocumented Afghans returned from Pakistan and Iran. Compared with 2015, spontaneous returns increased by 14% (474,234 vs. 416,457) and deportations decreased by 12% (217,347 vs. 246,838).



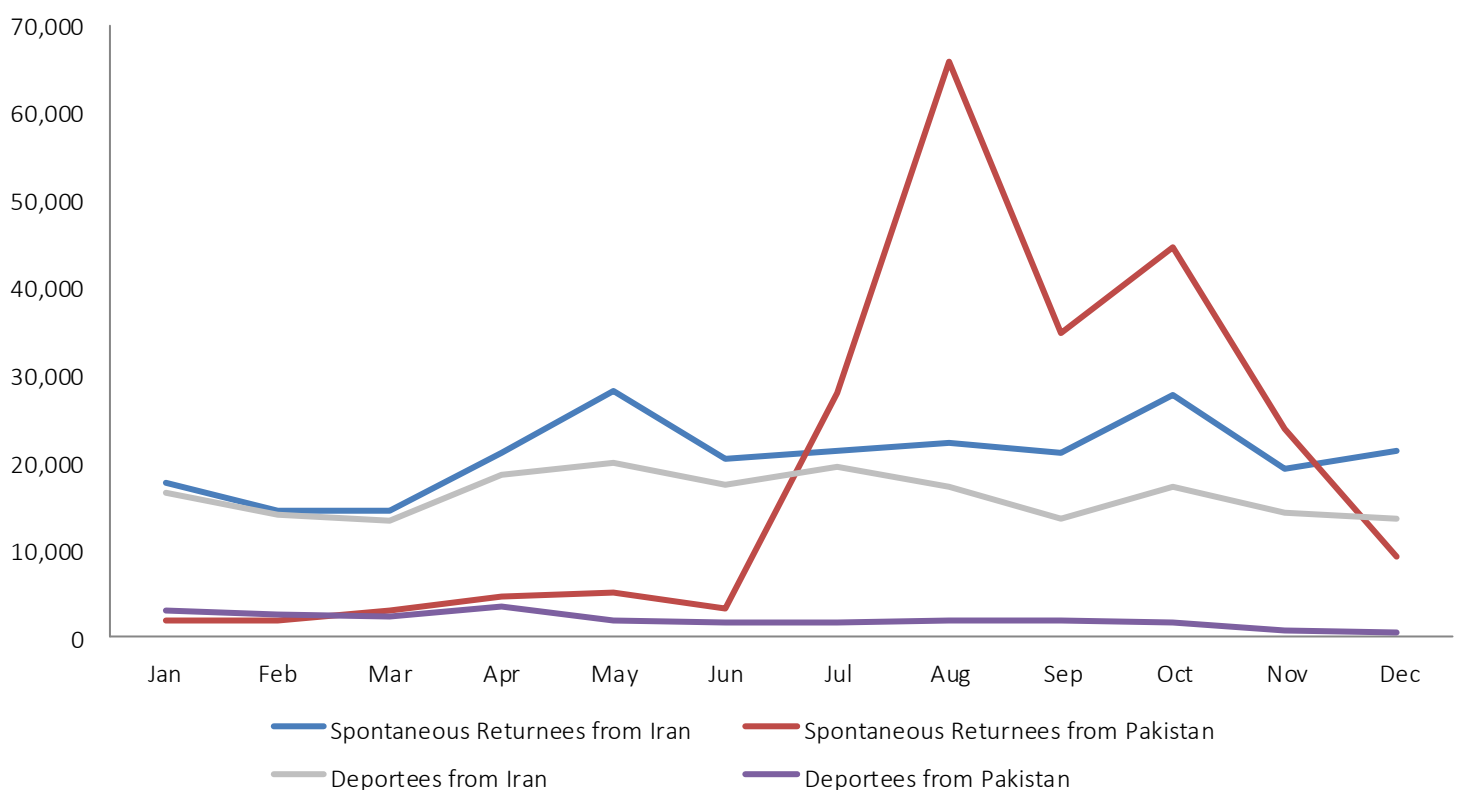
A returnee family on their rented truck at Torkham border. © IOM 2016

However, despite the consistency in the overall total, return levels were significantly different between 2015 and 2016, with returns from Pakistan increasing by 108% (248,054 vs. 119,279) and returns from Iran decreasing by 18% (443,527 vs. 544,016). The large increase in returns from Pakistan can be attributed to a variety of push and pull factors that led to a sudden surge in returns in the latter half of 2016.

IOM’s Cross-Border Return and Reintegration (CBRR) programme provides vulnerable undocumented Afghans returning from Iran and Pakistan with immediate humanitarian post-arrival assistance at key border crossing points. This assistance includes basic household supplies, food, health care, temporary accommodation, referral services and transportation to the returnee’s final destination.

Through CBRR, IOM has been assisting returnees at Islam Qala border (Herat province) and Milak border (Nimroz province) with Iran since 2008, Torkham border with Pakistan in Nangarhar province since 2012 and Spin Boldak border with Pakistan in Kandahar province since 2016.

Returns from Pakistan and Iran in 2016



Please refer to Annex 1 for a comprehensive breakdown of returns from all border crossing points.

Returns from Pakistan

From 1 January to 31 December 2016, a total of 248,054 undocumented Afghans returned from Pakistan through Torkham (211,541 individuals) and Spin Boldak (36,513 individuals) border crossing points. The total returns from Pakistan in 2016 were more than double the number of returns in 2015 (119,279) and at their highest level since at least 2008, when IOM began tracking undocumented returns at the border.

Compared with 2015, spontaneous returns from Pakistan increased by 125% (225,470 vs. 100,042) in 2016 while deportations increased by 17% (22,584 vs. 19,237).

In July 2016, returns of both registered and undocumented Afghans from Pakistan surged due to a mixture of factors, including deteriorating protection space in Pakistan and a substantial increase in the value of UNHCR's reintegration grant for registered returnees. While approximately 34,000 undocumented Afghans returned from Pakistan in the first six months of 2016, over 210,000 returned between July and December. In total, more than 600,000 registered and undocumented Afghans returned from Pakistan in 2016.

Many of those returning have lived outside of Afghanistan for decades, and will need support from the government, humanitarian and increasingly developmental actors both on arrival and as they seek to reintegrate into a country already struggling with widespread conflict and displacement.

Returns from Pakistan began to decline in November 2016 due to both seasonal factors and a pause in UNHCR's provision of cash assistance to refugee returnees. However, returns in December 2016 were still more than twice as high as returns in December 2015 (9,628 vs. 3,745).

225,470 spontaneous returnees from Pakistan in 2016

22,584 deportees from Pakistan in 2016

248,054 total undocumented returns from Pakistan in 2016

28% of returnees from Pakistan (66,442 individuals) assisted

680 returns per day on average

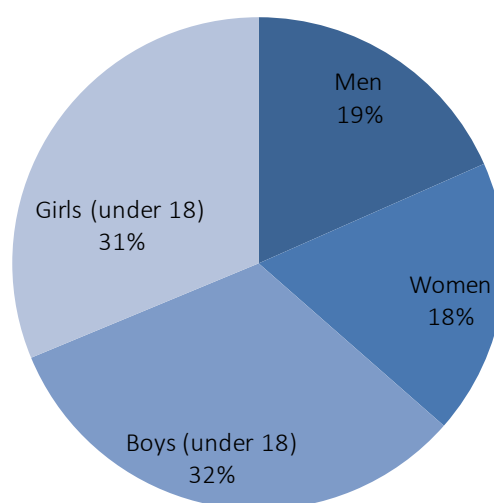


Figure 2. Gender Breakdown of Returnees from Pakistan

Hassan's Story

Hassan, a 22-year-old Afghan from Mazar-e-Sharif, left his country in October 2016 to find work in Iran to support his family. He paid a smuggler who promised to take him into Pakistan and across the vast desert border with Iran, where there are fewer police patrols than on the Afghan-Iran border. Once he arrived in Pakistan, however, the smuggler abandoned him and his companions, leaving them without money or a way to get home. The police arrested them and placed them in a jail with hundreds of other Afghans. "We thought we would be deported right away," Hassan told IOM staff. "But we were held at the jail and forced to work for over a month. It was a horrible experience." When Hassan was eventually deported back to Afghanistan through Spin Boldak border, he was received by staff from IOM and provided with accommodation, food and other assistance at the organization's Transit Center in Kandahar. IOM also provided Hassan with transportation back to his home in Mazar-e-Sharif. "I thank God that I am back in my country," said Hassan. "I hope that no human being will ever have to suffer like I did."



Hassan (center), an undocumented Afghan deportee in Kandahar. © IOM 2016

Post-Return Monitoring of Returnees

To better understand the livelihood conditions, socio-economic and reintegration needs of undocumented Afghan returnees from Pakistan and Iran, IOM has been conducting Post-Return Monitoring (PRM) in Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar and Kunduz provinces. The first phase of the PRM consisted of interviews with 644 households by telephone, taking place within 10-45 days of the initial return or deportation. Highlights of the first phase of the PRM include:

- The majority of the households surveyed (57%, 365 HH) have settled in Nangarhar province. 16% (102 HH) settled in Kunduz, while Herat (14%, 91 HH), Kabul (9%, 60 HH) and Kunar (2%, 16 HH) follow.
- Access to land/housing was the main challenge cited by returnees (38%, 242 HH), followed by unemployment (30%, 190 HH), access to food (18%, 115 HH) and insecurity (9%, 61 HH).
- The majority of returnees interviewed (44%, 281 HH) were living in a rented property, while 30% (191 HH) were living with relatives and 14% (93 HH) had their own property.
- The substantial majority of returnees interviewed (72%, 457 HH) cited daily wage labor (manual, unskilled labor) as their main source of income, followed by farming (11%, 67 HH) and support from extended family (8%, 50 HH).

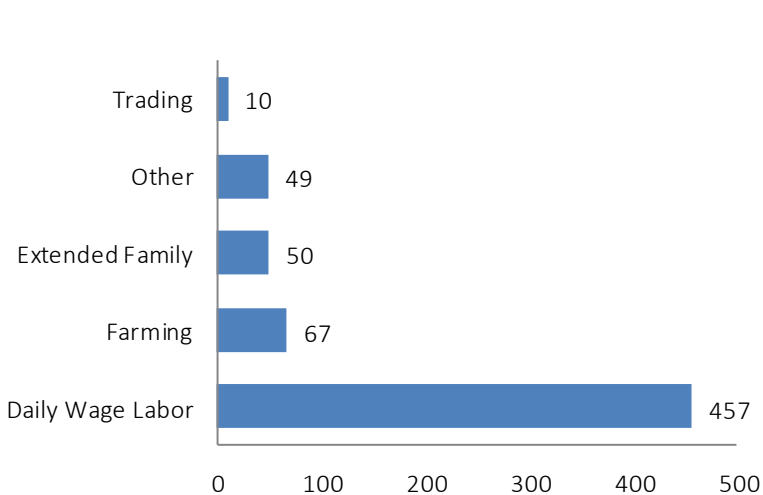


Figure 2. Source of Income

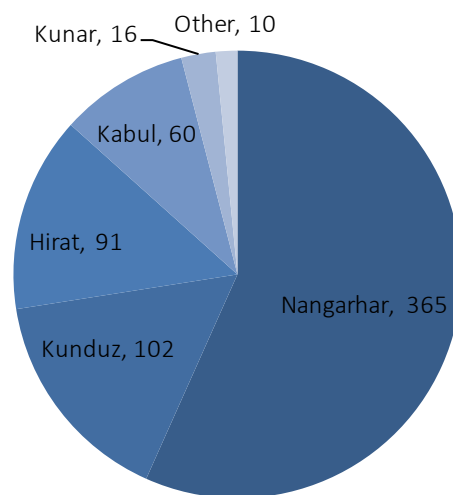


Figure 3. Province of Return

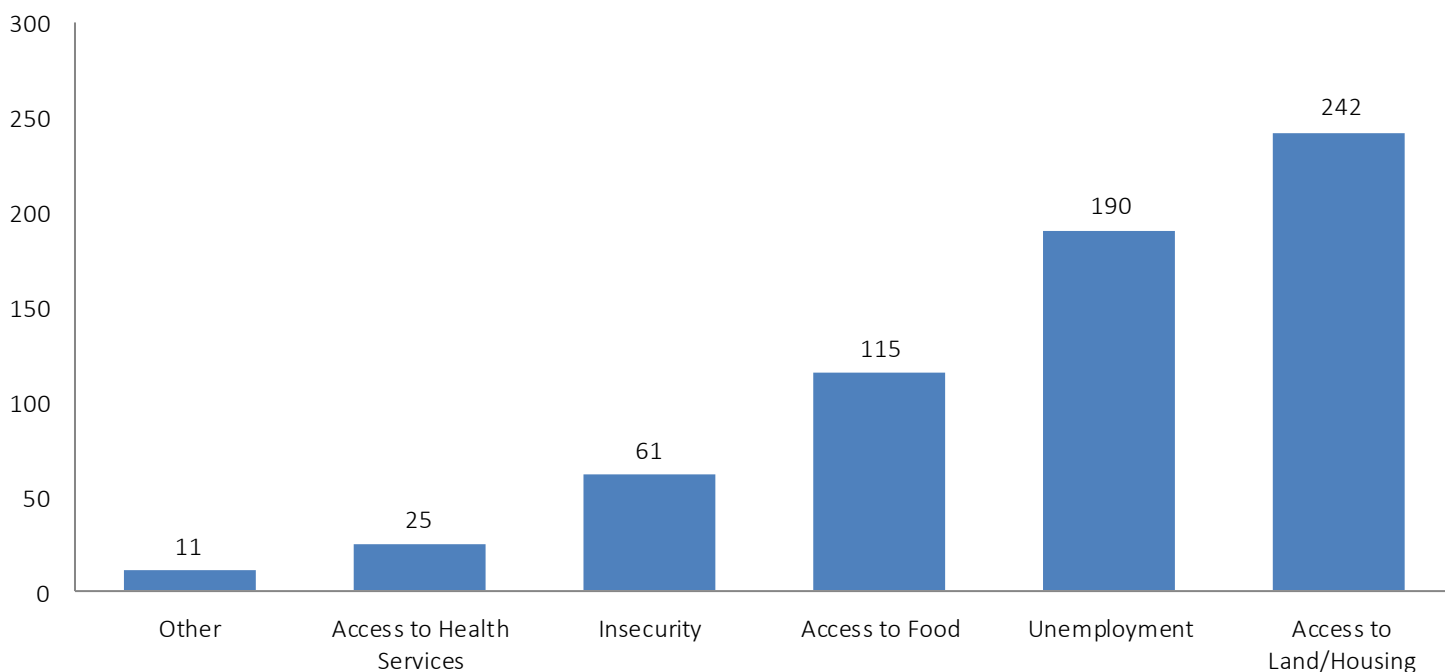


Figure 4. Main Challenges

Returns from Iran

From 1 January to 31 December 2016, a total of 443,527 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran through Islam Qala (335,561 individuals) and Milak (108,011 individuals) borders. This is an 18% decrease from returns in 2015 (443,527 vs. 544,016).

Compared with 2015, spontaneous returns from Iran decreased by 21% (248,764 vs. 316,430) while deportations decreased by 14% (194,763 vs. 227,601).

Iran is a main transit country for Afghans attempting to reach Turkey and subsequently Europe via irregular means. Afghans comprise the second largest group of migrants arriving in Europe. The decrease in returns from Iran in 2016 can be partially attributed to an overall decrease in arrivals in Europe compared with 2015.

In addition, the decrease can be linked to an improvement in the Iranian economy following the relaxing of international financial sanctions, resulting in the need for more Afghan laborers. Return patterns from Iran tend to be cyclical in nature, with the same individual crossing the border and returning multiple times in one year. However, it is also important to note that over 70% of Afghans move out of the western region due to conflict and instability, according to a [recent IOM study](#).

A particular group of concern among returnees from Iran are Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UMCs). UMCs make up the largest group of vulnerable returnees from Iran, and have unique protection concerns. In 2016, IOM assisted 4,652 UMCs at its Transit Centres in Herat and Nimroz. IOM provides UMCs with specialized assistance including medical care, safe accommodation and family tracing. More information on assistance for UMCs and other vulnerable returnees can be found in the “Assistance to Persons with Specific Needs” section of this report.

248,764 spontaneous returnees from Iran in 2016

194,763 deportees from Iran in 2016

443,527 total undocumented returns from Iran in 2016

4% of returnees from Iran (19,656 individuals) assisted

1,215 returns per day on average

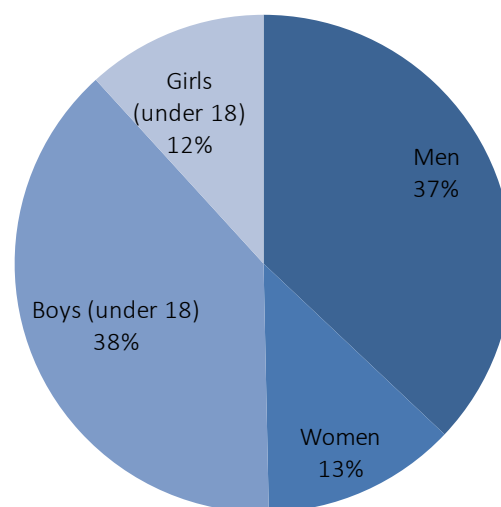


Figure 5. Gender Breakdown of Returnees from Iran

Reunited in Herat

When the young man arrived alone at Milak border in Nimroz after being deported from Iran, he was unable to tell IOM staff where he was from or even the name of his father. Masood (name changed for privacy) suffered from mental illness, and carried no documents or other clues to his background. From his accent, IOM staff determined Masood was from Herat province, and he was transferred to the organization’s Transit Center in Herat city. “One day, Masood mentioned a particular village in Herat,” said an IOM staff member at the Transit Center. “With this bit of information, we were able to start searching for his family.” Although an initial inquiry in the village did not turn up any relatives, word eventually reached Masood’s uncle, who immediately came to the Transit Center. As soon as they saw each other, the two men embraced in tears. Masood’s uncle explained that Masood had been traveling to Iran with his brother to find work, but they became separated while crossing the border. Knowing Masood’s condition, his family did not think they would ever see him again. But with the help of IOM, the family was reunited and Masood returned home.



Afghan returnees from Iran at Milak border in Nimroz. © IOM 2016

Assistance for Undocumented Returnees

IOM provides post-arrival humanitarian assistance to eligible undocumented spontaneously returning and deported Afghans at its Transit Centers near major border crossing points. This assistance includes basic medical care at an on-site clinic, temporary accommodation, Non-Food Item (NFI) kits including household and kitchen supplies, hot meals and onward transportation to the final destination in Afghanistan. Partner organizations provide additional support as highlighted in the table below.

To help identify and assist the most vulnerable returning Afghans, IOM, UNHCR and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation have agreed upon eleven categories of “Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs).” Returnees meeting PSN criteria are provided with assistance appropriate for their needs, including referral to local partners such as hospitals, rehabilitation centers or shelters. In addition, medical staff at the Transit Centers provide tuberculosis screening and referral through the National TB Control Programme.

In 2016, IOM considered 40% of returnees from Pakistan as vulnerable and potentially in need of humanitarian assistance, while 10% of returnees from Iran were considered vulnerable and/or Persons with Specific Needs. IOM was able to provide assistance to 28% of undocumented Afghans returning from Pakistan (66,442 individuals) and 4% of returnees from Iran (19,656). With increased support from donors in the latter half of the year, the assistance rate for returnees from Pakistan improved to 87% by December.

Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs) Assisted in 2016

Categories	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Islam Qala	Milak	Total
Poor Family	47,097	5,768	628	694	54,187
Unaccompanied Migrant Child	18	39	3,552	1,100	4,709
Single Parent	11,564	-	-	44	11,608
Special Case	1,752	121	1,073	979	3,925
Medical Case	1	-	1,043	424	1,468
Physically Disabled	-	-	154	81	235
Unaccompanied Elderly	-	-	253	181	434
Drug Addicted	-	-	354	39	393
Single Female	-	-	67	5	72
Mentally Ill or Severely Traumatized	2	-	14	12	28
Chronically Ill	-	-	-	53	53
Deported Family*	45	35	4,048	4,858	8,986
Total	60,479	5,963	11,186	8,470	86,098

Breakdown of Assistance Provided in 2016

Categories	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Islam Qala	Milak	Total
Non-Food Item (NFI) Kits	5,621	678	999	1,192	8,490
Family Winter Kits	2,417	-	-	-	2,417
Medical Care	4,745	419	1,041	321	6,526
Tuberculosis Screening	11,331	-	2,432	2,291	16,054
Overnight Accommodation	1,733	-	11,186	7,564	20,483
Total	25,847	1,097	15,658	11,368	53,970

Assistance Contributed by Partners in 2016

Partner	Type of Assistance	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Islam Qala	Milak	Total
WFP	Food Rations	8,825	551	989	1,081	11,446
UNICEF	Family Kits	4,315	-	-	-	4,315
UNICEF	Hygiene Kits	2,817	-	-	-	2,817
UNICEF	Hygiene Training	14,599	-	-	-	14,599
WHO	Medical Services	4,745	-	-	-	4,745
UNFPA	Dignity Kits	548	-	-	-	548

Trends and Planning for 2017

The UN's [Humanitarian Response Plan](#) for 2017 projects the possible return of a further 1 million Afghans from Pakistan.

As the rate of return is influenced by a number of political, security and other related factors both in Afghanistan and neighboring countries, another surge in returns could occur at any time. IOM remains prepared for an influx of undocumented returnees and is working to expand its capacity in preparation for increased returns.

In September, IOM launched a [Flash Appeal](#) for USD 21 million to support 136,000 additional returnees with an expanded support package. As of 31 December, the Flash Appeal was 50% funded with generous contributions from the Governments of Norway, Sweden, Japan, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Germany, and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).



The Flash Appeal funding has seen an expansion of IOM's presence at the Torkham border and construction to double the size of the Transit Center, which is located 3 km from the border itself. The expansion is planned for completion in February 2017. In October 2016, IOM opened a Reception Center at Spin Boldak border in Kandahar province and a Transit Center in Kandahar city. Undocumented returnees arriving at Spin Boldak border began receiving assistance in November 2016.

To better understand the needs and intentions of returnee families both at the border and once they have reached their final destinations, IOM will roll out the [Displacement Tracking Matrix \(DTM\)](#).¹ DTM is a unique IOM data collection mechanism which utilizes a variety of tools and processes to track and monitor population movement during crises. It regularly and systematically captures, processes and disseminates information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of vulnerable populations, whether on site or en route. The first phase of the DTM in Afghanistan will put a framework in place to track various populations of concern in Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar provinces, and will start in January 2017.

Next year will also see the roll out of the [Community Response Map \(CRM\)](#), a tool and methodology developed by IOM to facilitate communication with communities and collect, analyze and visualize feedback. When people receive services from IOM, they can provide direct feedback through in-person surveys, SMS, phone calls or other channels. The responses are collected on a live online platform that IOM and its partners can use to instantly identify gaps and assess the efficacy of the assistance they have provided, modifying project interventions as needed.

IOM is closely coordinating all of its emergency humanitarian response actions through the UN Humanitarian Country Team, the Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNMAS, the cluster system including the Refugee and Returnee Chapter, the High Commission on Migration, various working groups including the Reintegration Working Group, the Emergency Operations Management Team and the Government's coordination structure through the Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DiREC) led by the Office of the CEO and its corresponding policy, technical and financial working groups. IOM maintains frequent and regular communication with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), as its primary government interlocutor from national to field level.

¹ DTM and CRM are now live and can be accessed at the links above.

IOM Afghanistan's support for undocumented returnees is generously provided by:



CONTACT US

IOM Kabul

✉ iomkabul@iom.int
 🌐 <http://afghanistan.iom.int>

[facebook.com/iomafghanistan](https://www.facebook.com/iomafghanistan)
twitter.com/iomafghanistan

Annex 1: Breakdown of Returns from all Border Crossings in 2016

Date	Spontaneous Returnees				Deportees				Total	Total	Grand
	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Islam Qala	Milak	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Islam Qala	Milak	Pakistan	Iran	Total
Jan 16	676	1,090	13,982	3,695	1,448	1,390	9,892	6,619	4,604	34,188	38,792
Feb 16	930	886	11,655	2,728	1,172	1,401	7,566	6,353	4,389	28,302	32,691
Mar 16	1,784	1,092	11,217	3,239	1,613	736	7,503	5,869	5,225	27,828	33,053
Apr 16	3,901	678	17,158	3,945	2,262	1,148	12,117	6,506	7,989	39,726	47,715
May 16	3,605	1,377	23,230	4,882	1,121	669	12,699	7,130	6,772	47,941	54,713
Jun 16	1,803	1,446	17,679	2,713	1,035	631	12,543	4,870	4,915	37,805	42,720
Jul 16	26,724	1,139	18,980	2,246	1,133	339	14,549	4,951	29,335	40,726	70,061
Aug 16	64,284	1,662	19,278	2,910	1,334	524	11,077	6,166	67,804	39,431	107,235
Sept 16	31,521	3,173	19,105	1,863	832	1,086	8,742	4,843	36,612	34,553	71,165
Oct 16	38,807	5,903	24,574	3,185	234	1,335	10,384	6,741	46,279	44,884	91,163
Nov 16	19,980	3,827	16,846	2,450	110	585	8,920	5,170	24,502	33,386	57,888
Dec 16	4,798	4,384	18,425	2,779	434	12	7,395	6,158	9,628	34,757	44,385
Total	198,813	26,657	212,129	36,635	12,728	9,856	123,387	71,376	248,054	443,527	691,581

Annex 2: Breakdown of Returns from all Border Crossings in 2015

Date	Spontaneous Returnees				Deportees				Total	Total	Grand
	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Islam Qala	Milak	Torkham	Spin Boldak	Islam Qala	Milak	Pakistan	Iran	Total
Jan 15	22,274	-	14,939	3,674	1,472	-	6,599	6,323	23,746	31,535	55,281
Feb 15	18,935	268	14,948	5,303	1,575	235	8,152	11,266	21,013	39,669	60,682
Mar 15	11,855	1,755	15,513	4,697	1,472	620	7,543	8,658	15,702	36,411	52,113
Apr 15	7,920	2,046	19,653	5,775	1,229	330	8,725	10,828	11,525	44,981	56,506
May 15	7,569	2,392	22,703	4,399	1,120	539	12,429	6,525	11,620	46,056	57,676
Jun 15	5,245	1,591	22,678	3,521	845	173	12,494	5,762	7,854	44,455	52,309
Jul 15	1,804	986	21,002	3,334	495	281	10,754	4,693	3,566	39,783	43,349
Aug 15	3,090	1,922	27,589	4,267	914	600	15,008	2,128	6,526	48,992	55,518
Sept 15	1,427	1,323	35,596	3,804	800	174	20,985	7,007	3,724	67,392	71,116
Oct 15	1,773	1,603	23,245	3,918	853	576	17,681	8,791	4,805	53,635	58,440
Nov 15	1,236	1,240	27,724	3,933	1,139	1,838	11,283	8,754	5,453	51,694	57,147
Dec 15	673	1,115	21,492	2,708	1,409	548	9,009	6,204	3,745	39,413	43,158
Total	83,801	16,241	267,082	49,333	13,323	5,914	140,662	86,939	119,279	544,016	663,295

