

Frequently Asked Questions

Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Pakistan, 2015

Who is eligible to receive UNHCR's assistance to repatriate voluntarily to Afghanistan?

All registered Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan holding a Proof of Registration (PoR) card issued by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) with an expiry date of 31 December 2015 are eligible to repatriate with UNHCR's assistance. Afghans who hold no PoR card or only an expired one, are not entitled to any return assistance from UNHCR. Afghans who have already received UNHCR's assistance to repatriate in previous years will not receive cash assistance again.

Can Afghan refugees holding a Refugee Identify Card issued by UNHCR also repatriate under the facilitated return programme?

Afghan refugees holding only a Refugee Identity Card issued by UNHCR and no PoR card, who wish to return with UNHCR's assistance, should contact UNHCR at the below given helpline numbers for information before approaching the Voluntary Repatriation Centre.

How do Afghans wishing to return with assistance from UNHCR begin the repatriation process?

Registered Afghan refugees wishing to return should approach the UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Centre (VRC) in Baleli in Quetta or Chamkani (on the GT Road) in Peshawar during opening hours (see below). As there may be disruptions to the operation of the repatriation centres, Afghans are encouraged to call on the UNHCR helpline (between 8am and 8pm) on the following numbers before approaching the VRCs:

Balochistan Helpline: 0333 781 9601, Quetta VRC: 0333-7819134,
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Helpline: 0300 858 5600, Peshawar VRC: 091-2262809 and
Islamabad Helpline: 0300 501 8698

Please ensure your arrival at the VRCs by 12:00 noon in order to be processed the same day. Families traveling long distances are advised not to travel during nights for their own safety.

What kind of assistance will repatriating Afghans receive?

Depending on the province of origin in Afghanistan, Afghan returnees who have been issued with a Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) at the VRC receive approximately US\$ 200 per person comprising of the following two components: US\$ 150 as a short-term integration grant and between US\$ 30 to US\$ 70 as a transportation grant. The transportation grant varies according to the travel distance from the areas of residence in Pakistan to the areas of origin in Afghanistan. Those returning from distant places such as Karachi, Punjab, Sindh and Azad Jamu and Kashmir will receive an additional transportation grant of US\$ 15 to US\$ 30 per person.

The transportation and integration grant are provided at the UNHCR Encashment Centres (ECs) inside Afghanistan, located in Nangarhar, Paktya, Kandahar and Kabul provinces. Returning refugees are informed at which ECs they must present themselves to receive this assistance when passing through the VRCs in Pakistan prior to departure.

At the ECs, returning refugees will receive briefings on landmine awareness and education procedures in Afghanistan. They can also benefit from transit facilities for overnight stay and basic health services. All children under the age of five years will receive polio and measles vaccinations. In addition, returnees will also receive information on how to access legal aid assistance if required.

Which documents do Afghans need to take to the VRC?

Afghans must bring their family members' and their own PoR cards to the VRCs. Refugees wishing to repatriate through the VRC Baleli in Quetta, should also bring two colour family group photos, with faces of all family members visible and recognizable.

Prior to approaching the VRCs for return, Afghans should make sure that all the documents they will need in Afghanistan, such as their children's school enrolment documents and records, are updated and properly signed/verified by the Afghan Embassy or Afghan Consulate in Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi or Islamabad. School certificates issued by refugee schools in the refugee villages should be stamped for free by an official of the Afghan Ministry of Education at the Afghan Embassy/Consulate to facilitate integration in schools and the labour market in Afghanistan. As regards certificates issued by Pakistani schools, they need to be legalized by the Afghan Embassy/Consulate, for which a fee is being charged. Afghan refugees must ensure that they start this process well in advance of the date on which they intend to repatriate.

What happens to family members who hold no PoR card?

At the VRCs, only children up to age five, who are born to registered parents can be added to the PoR database after the provision of relevant documents (birth certificate, vaccination cards etc.) and/or after a thorough verification interview. However, parents are strongly encouraged to register their children up to age five at the nearest PCM prior to proceeding to the VRC in order to avoid complications at the VRC.

Family members who are not already registered and cannot be added to the PoR database can nonetheless repatriate with their family. However, they will not receive any assistance from UNHCR.

How can newborn children be registered prior to departure?

Parents who hold PoR cards that are valid until 31 December 2015 should register their children, who have been born in the past five years and obtain birth certificates for them. For registration purposes, parents have to bring their children below the age of five, along with any supporting documentation (e.g. vaccination card, hospital certificate etc.) to one of the six PoR Card Modification (PCM) centres in Haripur, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta and Rawalpindi.

What are the repatriation procedures at the VRCs?

All family members wishing to return are required to be present at the VRC in order to complete the procedure.

At the VRC, NADRA de-registers returning Afghans from the PoR database, invalidates their PoR card by cutting one of its corners, and issues Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRFs) to the returning families. UNHCR then conducts an iris scan on all returning Afghans over five years of age, which is a mandatory and harmless verification procedure to ensure that nobody receives assistance twice. Afghans must complete all procedures at the VRC, otherwise they cannot receive the repatriation grant in Afghanistan.

Once de-registered and their PoR card invalidated, Afghan refugees will no longer have a legal status to reside in Pakistan. However, they can safely travel to the border with Afghanistan on the basis of the VRF.

Note for females: For ease of biometric verification (thumb impression), refugee women should not dye their hands with 'henna'. The darker the colour of henna, the more difficult it is to verify the thumbprint.

Do families need to pre-schedule their arrival at the VRC?

Families opting to return via Torkham-Jalalabad border are encouraged to pre-schedule their intended departure date at the VRC Chamkani in order to avoid unnecessary delays to their departure. For pre-

scheduling, the head of family is required to come in person to the VRC and bring along his/her PoR card and the cards of the family members, who wish to return with him/her, as well as two colour photographs of all returning family members. On the day on which the family has been scheduled for VRC processing and departure, they should come to the VRC where they will be de-registered from the NADRA database and issued with the Voluntary Repatriation Form facilitating their return.

Afghans residing in Karachi and intending to return should approach the UNHCR scheduling centre in Karachi in order to determine which route (Quetta or Peshawar) suits them the best. The expected time of arrival and records of pre-scheduled families are shared with the UNHCR offices in Peshawar or Quetta ahead of a family's arrival at the VRC. This saves the family from long delays at the VRC and such families are prioritized for departure.

Refugees in Balochistan opting to return can directly approach the VRC Baleli as no pre-scheduling is required for them.

What is a Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF)?

A VRF is a document issued by UNHCR to returning Afghans confirming their intent to return voluntarily to Afghanistan with the assistance of UNHCR and facilitating their safe travel and provision of assistance in Afghanistan. VRFs are issued at the VRCs. In order to obtain a VRF, a declaration must be signed which states the returnee's decision to return voluntarily to Afghanistan and confirms the details of his/her family.

What happens if an Afghan fails to get a VRF before repatriating to Afghanistan?

UNHCR does not provide any assistance to Afghans, who do not hold a VRF. Returning Afghans must therefore ensure that they have obtained their VRF before leaving the VRC, and that it is readable. If the print is faded or cannot be read, then another copy must be obtained before leaving the VRC.

Can returnees change information on the VRF after it has been issued?

VRFs cannot be altered. It must therefore be ensured that all information is correct at the time the VRF is issued. If any forgery is found on the VRF at the Encashment Centres in Afghanistan, cash assistance will not be provided.

Is there a fixed period within which returnees must approach the Encashment Centres (EC) in Afghanistan to receive assistance?

Returnees must approach the Encashment Centre (EC) within seven days of having been issued a VRF in Pakistan. If they fail to call at the EC within this fixed period, UNHCR will not provide them with cash assistance. Returnees who encounter major problems such as the death or serious illness of a family member may approach the EC later, but still within a maximum of 15 days.

Can a family repatriate to a place in Afghanistan other than their actual place of origin or to a place other than that indicated in the PoR card?

Refugees can repatriate to any place in Afghanistan. If a returnee wishes to repatriate to a place other than his/her place of origin, s/he should inform UNHCR and NADRA staff at the de-registration point before printing of the VRF, so that the place of destination can be properly captured in the VRF.

It is important to note that in case of a change of destination, the returnee may not be eligible for certain reintegration programmes which require proof of residence in the place of origin, such as the governmental land allocation scheme.

Do returning Afghans have to pay custom duties to bring back their belongings?

Returnees' personal or commercial property, including household and electronic items, food and livestock are exempted by the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan from all custom duties, charges and tariffs, provided that such property is not prohibited for export by the Government of Pakistan or Afghanistan.

According to an official agreement of the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions of Pakistan and the Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, returnee families are allowed to take with them any used domestic commodities including crockery and furniture, electronic appliances such as washing machines, TV/DVD player, refrigerator, deep freezer, ACs, medical or surgical equipment for hospitals, livestock such as a cow, a few sheep and goats.

In Balochistan, the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees provides a 'RAHDARI' or permit for exporting one cow, 3-5 sheep, 20 kg sugar, 50 kg rice, 100 kg wheat and 20 liters oil.

Note: All of the above mentioned items are strictly allowed for domestic use only, therefore it is clearly stated in the Government notification that the household items must be used, not newly purchased.

What if a lorry driver carries items that do not belong to the returnees?

Returnees could face problems with Afghan or Pakistani authorities if the lorries they use are transporting illegal items. Returnees should therefore ask drivers to carry only returnees' belongings.

Please note that returning families have to make personal arrangements for transport. Repatriating families are advised to hire only vehicles, which have proper documents, and drivers, who have a valid license and permits for travel inside Afghanistan.

Have returnees faced security problems while en route to their final destination?

Some returnees have reported problems during travel. Returnees are advised to travel only during the day, to seek shelter in major settlements while traveling, and to report any problems such as bribery, extortion etc. to UNHCR or DoRR border monitors, or the appropriate personnel at the ECs in Afghanistan.

Address, contact details and working hours: Pakistan Voluntary Repatriation Centres (VRCs)

Chamkani VRC, Gul Abad, Chamkani (GT Road, near Chamkani Police Station), Peshawar, KPK:
Opening hours: Monday to Thursday, 8.00 am to 3.30 pm and Friday, 8.00 am to 12.00 pm
Saturday and Sunday: closed
Helpline number: 091-2260574

Baleli VRC, Quetta-Chaman Road, Quetta, Balochistan:
Opening hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday: 8.00 am to 3.30 pm
Sunday: 8.00 am to 12.00 pm
Thursday and Friday: closed
Helpline number: 0333-7819134

Scheduling Centre Songal, Karachi, UC5, near Camp-e-Jadeed Afghan Basti-Johnjhar Goth Gadap Town, Karachi:
Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9.00 am to 3.00 pm
Saturday and Sunday: closed
Helpline number: 0342-2704 888

Border Monitors in Pakistan

Balochistan (Chaman): Hidayatullah Khan: 0333-7819145, Sultan Ahmed: 0333-7825070
KPK (Torkham): 0924-308655, Hazrat Shah: 0301-594263/ 03439504643, Arif: 0343-9503500

Border Monitors in Afghanistan:

Nangarhar (Torkham): +93(0)799898693, +93(0)786321440, +93(0)756004003 and +93(0) 789660275

Kunar (Nawa Pass): +93 (0)798017506

Kandahar (Spin Boldak): Please contact returnee support and orientation centre: +93(0)793656400,
+93(0)704251304 or +93(0)705415937

Afghanistan Encashment Centres (ECs)

Jamal Mayna: Kandahar-Spin Boldak Highway, 4 km from Shur Andam Kotal towards Kabul Dorahi on the right side of the road, open from Saturday to Thursday, 8.00 am to 4.00 pm

Phone: +93(0)791990370, +93(0)700308705 or +93(0)799032233

Samarkhel: Main Jalalabad-Torkham Highway, Samarkhel area close to Tagab IDP camp, Bihsud district, Nangarhar province

Phone: +93 (0)791990201 and +93(0)791990340

Kabul: Kabul-Jalalabad Road, next to Tangi Gharoo, close to Jalalabad Bus Station, open from Monday to Friday, 8.00 am to 2.00 pm

Phone: +93(0)791990244 or +93(0)774571908

Gardez: Between Gardez Radio Station and Revenue (Mastofyat) Department, the area is called Gudami Arzaq inside the city, open from Monday to Friday, 8.00 am to 4.00 pm

Phone: +93(0)791990077 and +93(0)791990074

For more information about ECs in Afghanistan, please contact: +93(0)791990019