



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

IOM AFGHANISTAN

Overview of Voluntary Returns in 2016



IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme offers a dignified, safe and cost-effective return option for Afghans who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

The programme provides the following services to returnees:

- Arrangement of travel, including assistance in transit and reception on arrival.
- Pre-departure and post-arrival provision of information, counselling and referral.
- Temporary accommodation in Kabul.
- Medical assistance/referrals.
- Arrangement of onward transportation to final in-country destination.
- Provision of immediate and longer-term reintegration assistance.

In 2016, a total of 6,864 Afghans voluntarily returned to their country through the AVRR programme. This report provides an overview of returns for the year, including country of arrival, demographics and final destination.

CONTACT US

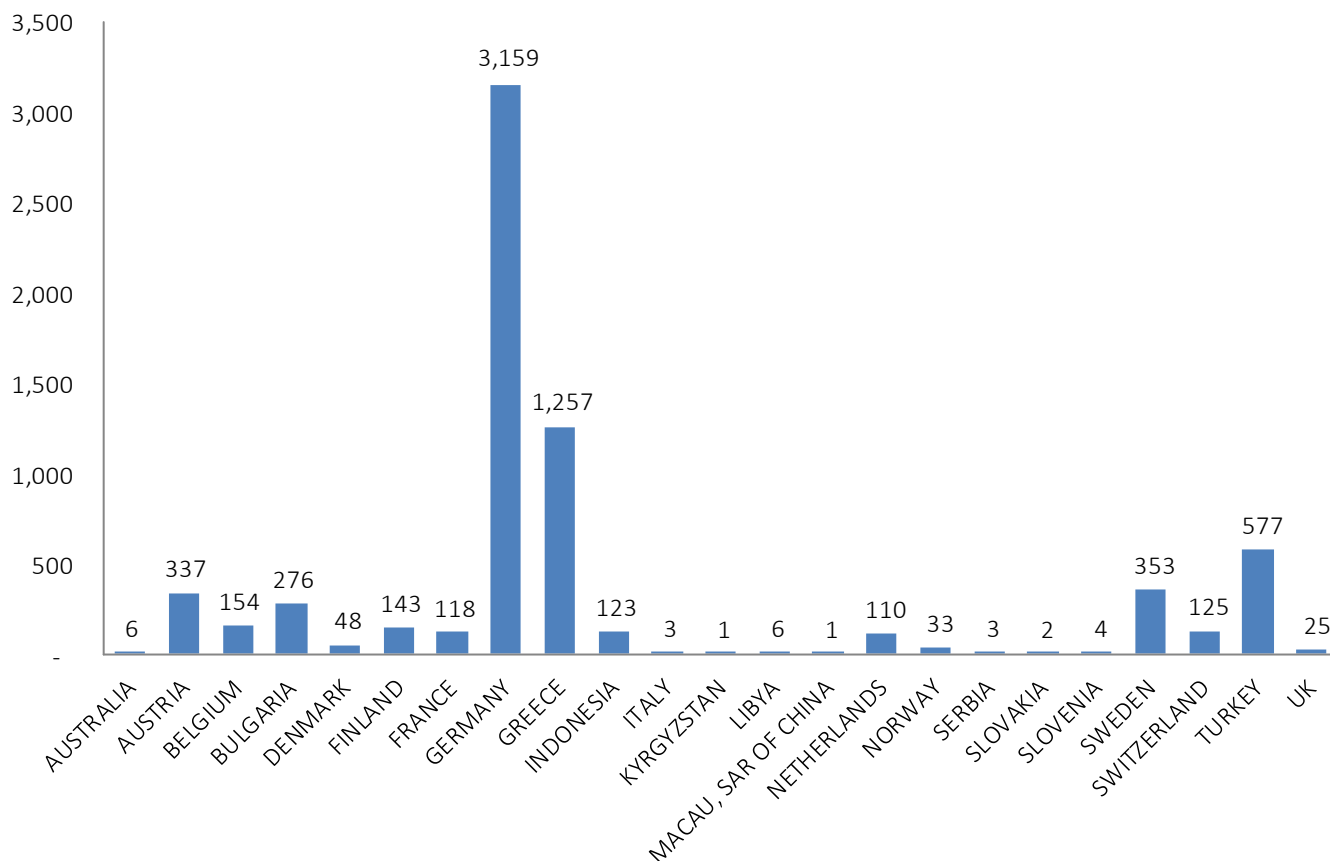
IOM Kabul

✉ iomkabul@iom.int
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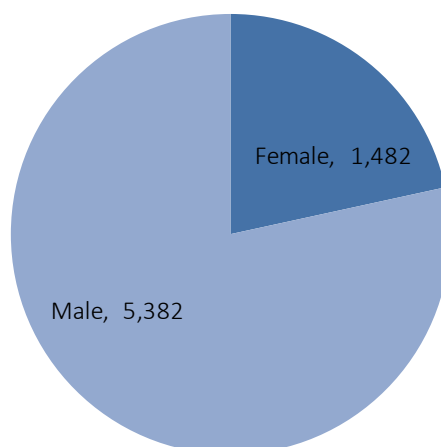
Country of Arrival

The substantial majority of voluntary returns in 2016 were from Germany (46%, 3,159 individuals), followed by Greece (18%, 1,257 individuals), Turkey (8%, 577 individuals) and Sweden (5%, 353 individuals).



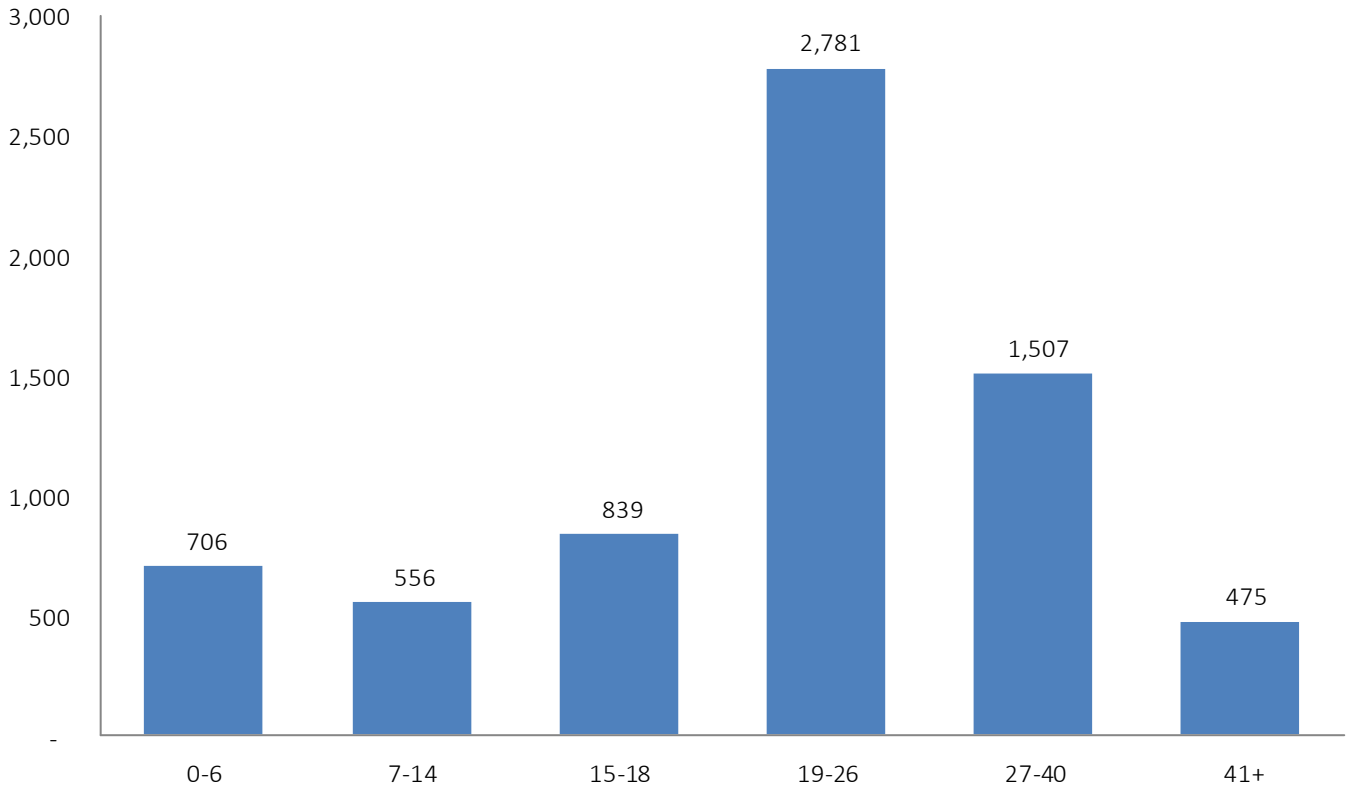
Gender

The majority of voluntary returnees were male (78%, 5,382 individuals). Females comprised 22% of returnees (1,482 individuals).



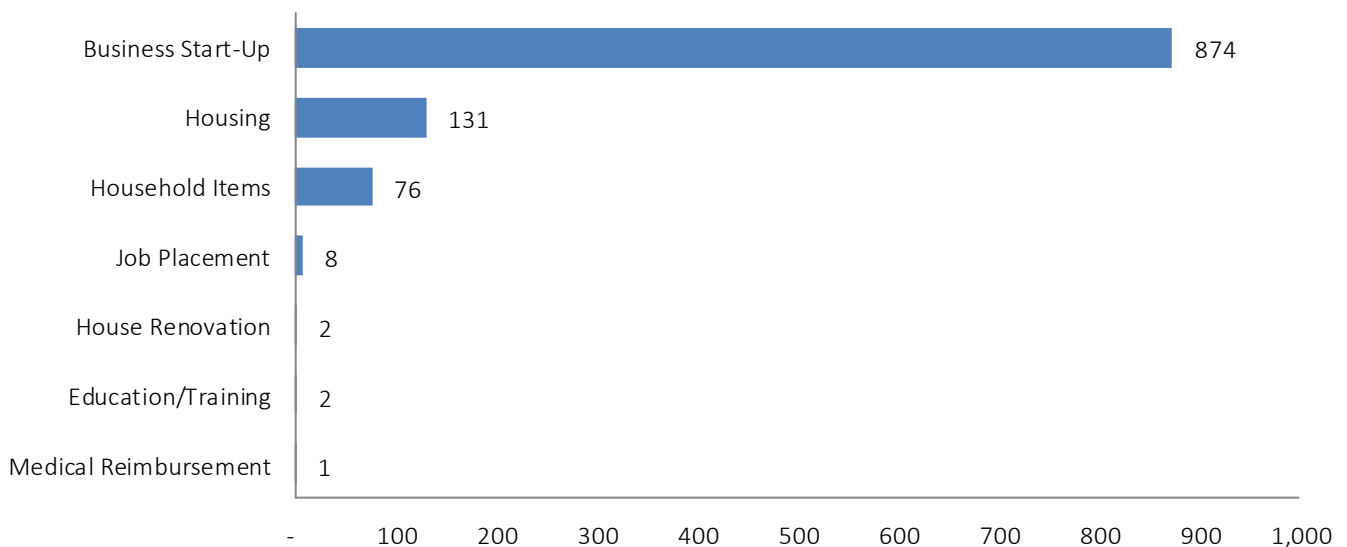
Age Groups

Most voluntary returnees were between the ages of 19 and 26 (41%, 2,781 individuals), followed by 27-40 (22%, 1,507 individuals) and 15-18 (12%, 839 individuals).



Type of Reintegration Project

The substantial majority of returnees (80%, 874 individuals) who were eligible for reintegration assistance chose to start a small business, followed by financial support for housing (12%, 131 individuals).

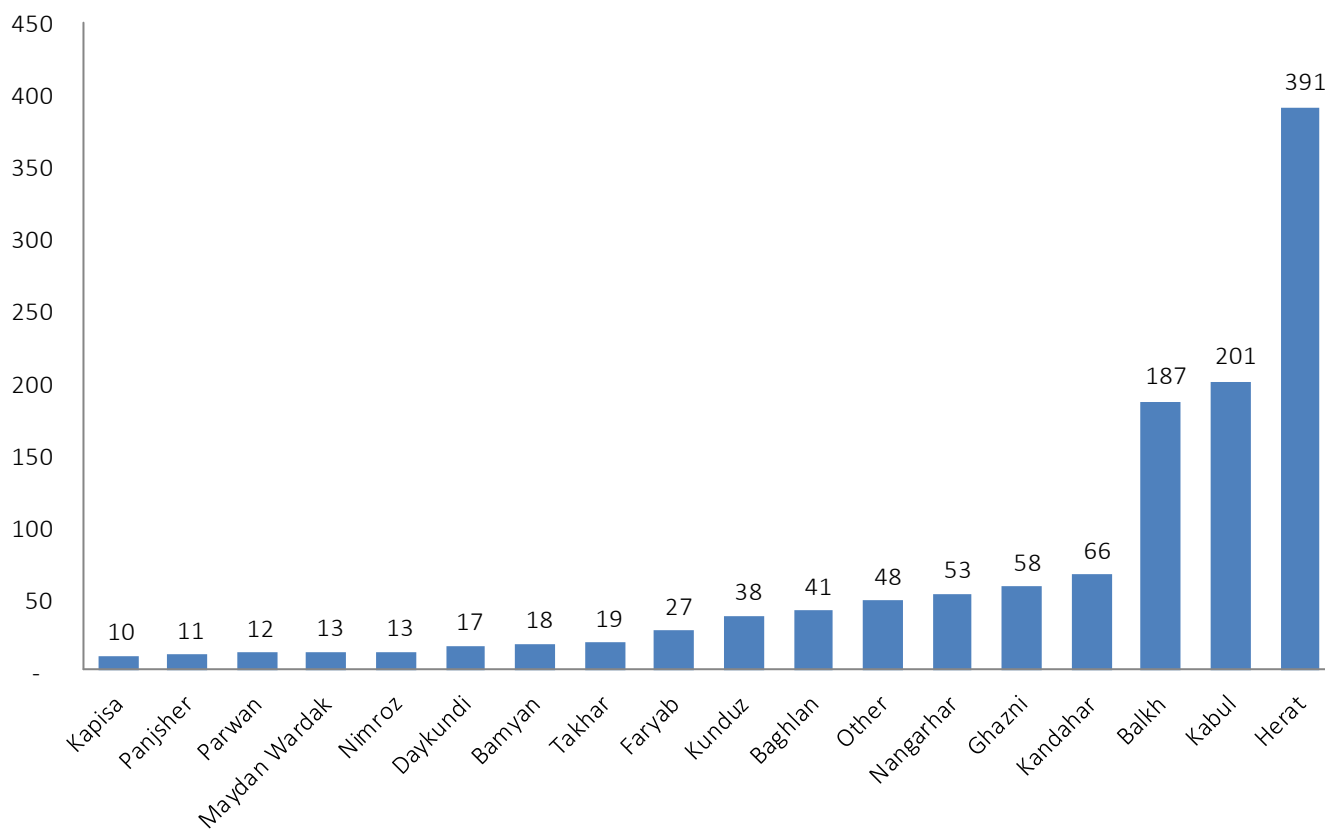


Temporary Accommodation

In total, 149 voluntary returnees opted to receive temporary accommodation at the Jangalack Reception Center in Kabul operated by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation.

Province of Final Destination

Of the voluntary returnees who chose to receive onward transportation as part of their assistance from IOM, the majority opted to settle in Herat (32%, 391 individuals), Kabul (16%, 201 individuals) and Balkh (15%, 187 individuals).



STORIES OF RETURN

ABDUL KARIM, AUSTRIA



Abdul Karim, an Afghan returnee from Austria, helps a customer at the shoe store he started through IOM's AVRR program. © IOM 2017

The moment the trunk slammed shut on the Toyota Corolla, leaving him locked in its dark, cramped confines, Abdul Karim* knew without a doubt that he had made a mistake.

He was only 14 years old, alone in the middle of Iran and at the mercy of a people smuggler. Until that moment, Abdul Karim had thought going to Europe would be the best way to build a life for himself and help provide for his family.

"I had heard so many things from my friends about life in Europe, and they encouraged me to go there too," recalls Abdul Karim. But the journey from Afghanistan's Nangarhar province to Austria was more treacherous than Abdul ever could have imagined.

After borrowing all that he could, Abdul Karim paid USD \$6,000 to a people smuggler to get him into Europe through Iran and Turkey.

"Every step of the way was so difficult," said Abdul Karim. "In Turkey we walked through the mountains in the freezing snow, and in Bulgaria we hid in the forest for three days without any food to eat."

When he finally reached Austria, his experience was very different than he had expected. Almost immediately, he was arrested and put into a detention center. He had no money, and had lost his cell phone during the journey.

Eventually Abdul Karim travelled onward to Calais, France, in hopes of reaching the United Kingdom. Instead, he

found himself stuck at the border for months, living in a makeshift shelter and desperately missing home. Travelling back to Austria frustrated and disillusioned, Abdul Karim heard about IOM's Assisted Voluntary Returns program from a relative in Afghanistan.

"I went to IOM, and they give me a letter explaining all of the assistance I could get if I went through their program," said Abdul Karim. "It was a big relief, because I was feeling hopeless in Europe."

Upon his return to Afghanistan, Abdul Karim met with IOM staff and developed a plan to start a small business.

"I looked at the market in Jalalabad, and thought that selling shoes could be a good business opportunity," explained Abdul Karim. "My relative has experience in this line of work, so I brought him on as a partner."

Now, when a customer walks into Abdul Karim's tidy store in Jalalabad's bustling main bazaar, he greets them with a smile. From sandals to loafers to sneakers, Abdul Karim has a shoe for every customer and every occasion. The store is earning Abdul Karim a good income, and his family is happy to have him home.

"When I came back to Afghanistan, I told my friends and relatives about my experience traveling to Europe and warned them not to repeat my mistake," said Abdul Karim. "Some of them didn't listen to me and went anyway, but now they're calling and telling me I was right."

*Name changed for privacy purposes.

STORIES OF RETURN

RAHIMULLAH, FRANCE



Rahimullah at the clothing shop he opened with assistance from IOM after returning from France. © IOM 2017

When Rahimullah* arrived in France, he thought that life would be much easier than back in Afghanistan. As it turned out, life was far more difficult.

“In Afghanistan at least I had a home and food to eat,” said Rahimullah. “In Calais, I lived in a tent and had to wait in line with thousands of people just to get a meal. It was much tougher than I ever expected.”

Rahimullah made the long journey from Afghanistan’s Nangarhar province to Europe on a path travelled by thousands of other Afghans. He also faced the same perils along the way.

In Iran, the smugglers he had hired to get him across the border beat and robbed him. As he slogged on foot through Turkey and Bulgaria, his stomach ached from lack of food. By the time he reached France, he was completely disillusioned.

“The journey was brutal, and France was nothing like I’d been led to believe,” said Rahimullah.

After waiting months for a chance to cross into the United

Kingdom that never materialized, Rahimullah decided that he wanted to go back to Afghanistan.

Upon his arrival, he approached IOM and was given a comprehensive reintegration assistance package to help him start a new life.

As part of his reintegration assistance, Rahimullah decided to open a shop selling clothes in Jalalabad’s bazaar.

“There are a lot of clothing shops in this area, but I know my shop is one of the best,” said Rahimullah proudly. “My business partner has a lot of experience, and he taught me how to select the right materials and make sure our customers are happy.”

The income from the shop is enough to support Rahimullah, and he is satisfied with his decision to return.

“There was no way for me to stay in France,” he said. “I’m happy to be back with my family, and I tell everyone now to stay in Afghanistan and use their money to go to school instead of going to Europe.”

*Name changed for privacy purposes.