

BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

07 - 13 June 2020



UNHCR Iran minivan providing transportation services for refugee returnees at Islam Qala border, Herat, Afghanistan
08 June 2020
CHA/ E. Karimi

356

AFGHAN REFUGEES
RETURNED TO
AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of **356** Afghan refugees from Iran (**306**), Pakistan (**16**) and other countries (**34**) under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. UNHCR, as of 04 March 2020, temporarily suspended the voluntary return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, Iran and other countries as a precautionary measure linked to COVID-19. Upon the request of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs, UNHCR Iran resumed voluntary repatriation from Iran as of 30 April.

328,011

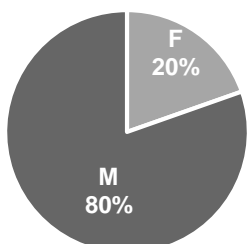
UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS
RETURNED FROM IRAN AND
PAKISTAN

According to MoRR/IOM, during the week of 07 - 13 June, the total number of undocumented returnees was **15,215** from Iran. Since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is **328,011** individuals, including **326,165** from Iran and **1,846** from Pakistan. On 01 May 2020, the Government of Pakistan announced that Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points will open five days a week (Monday – Friday) for commercial purposes. Pedestrian movement of stranded Afghans and Pakistanis is officially permitted once per week (Saturday), though in practice pedestrian traffic has been allowed more frequently. On 13 June, 6,842 stranded Afghans crossed through Torkham into Afghanistan, while 240 stranded Pakistanis returned to Pakistan. Spin Boldak crossing point remains closed since 06 June for pedestrian movement of stranded Afghans and Pakistanis.

7,077

INTERVIEWS WITH
RETURNEES FROM IRAN
AND PAKISTAN

There is a sharp increase in the number of deportees compared to May. Reportedly, relaxation of movement restrictions has led to many Afghans departing to Iran irregularly with the help of smugglers given the increased livelihood opportunities in Iran. The trend was observed during the monitoring interviews where many interviewed deportees stated that they went to Iran recently but were arrested by the police and immediately deported to Afghanistan.



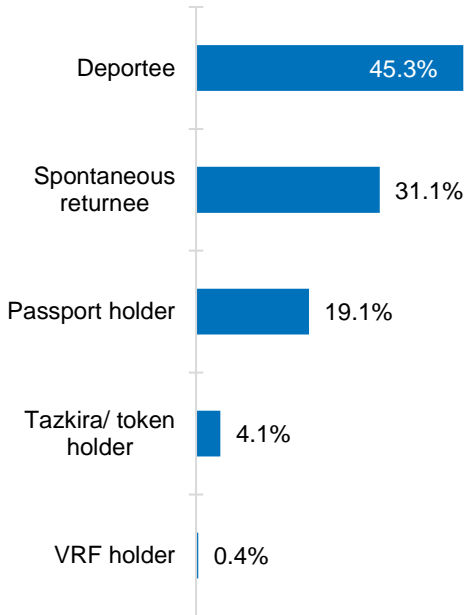
BORDER MONITORING

In line with UNHCR's protection monitoring objectives, and in the context of increased incidence of COVID-19 across the territory of Afghanistan, UNHCR made the decision to expand its protection and return monitoring activities to the official entry points with Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak crossing points) and with Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham), when open for pedestrian movements. Through maintaining a consistent presence at these zero points, UNHCR aims to ensure efficient, timely and systematic gathering of protection information from Afghan returnees.

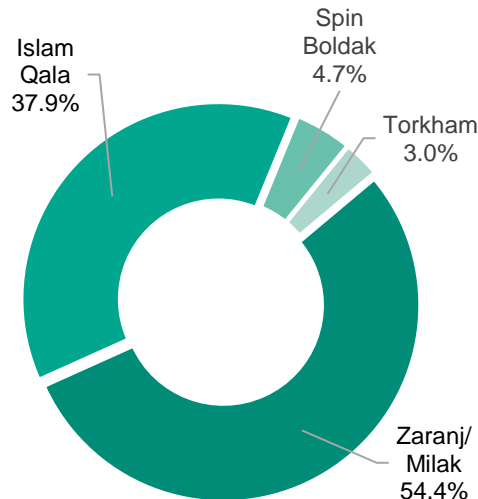
Between 07 - 13 June, **1,153 interviews, including 916 male and 237 female** respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (1,133) and Pakistan (20). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of **7,077 returnees (5,689 M and 1,388 F)** were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (3,849) and Islam Qala (2,684), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak (330) and Torkham (214), including 5,479 single individuals and 1,598 heads of households who returned with their families. It should be noted that because of the border restrictions, returnees from Pakistan are mainly passport/ID holders.

Note: The female sample size is small because there is a high proportion of single males among the population returning from Iran.

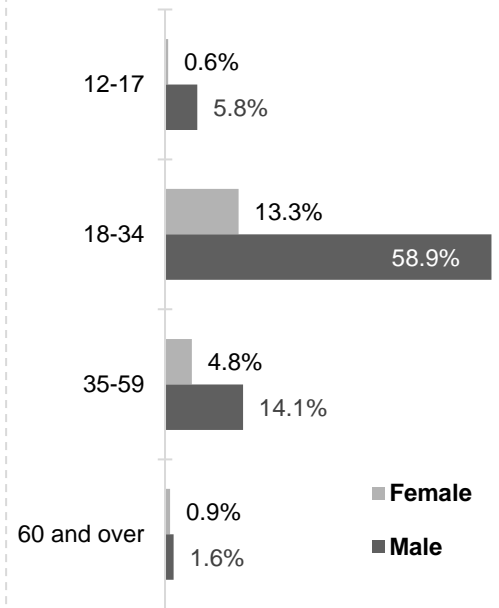
Respondents' Return Status



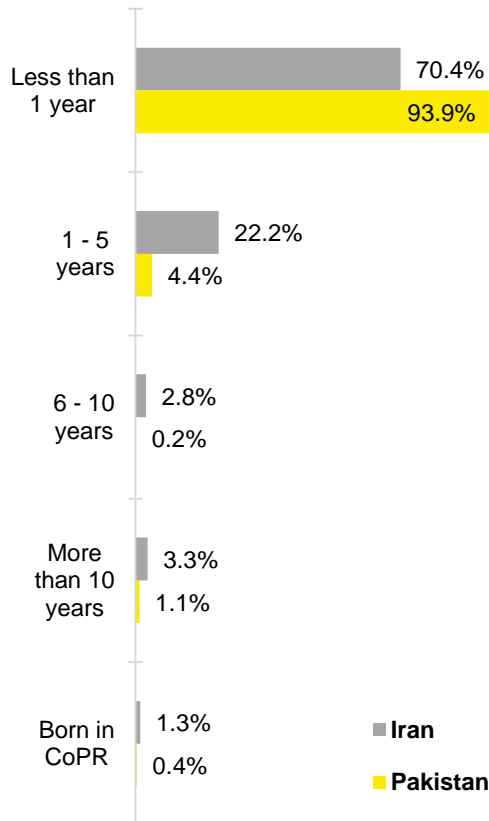
Respondents (%) by Entry Point



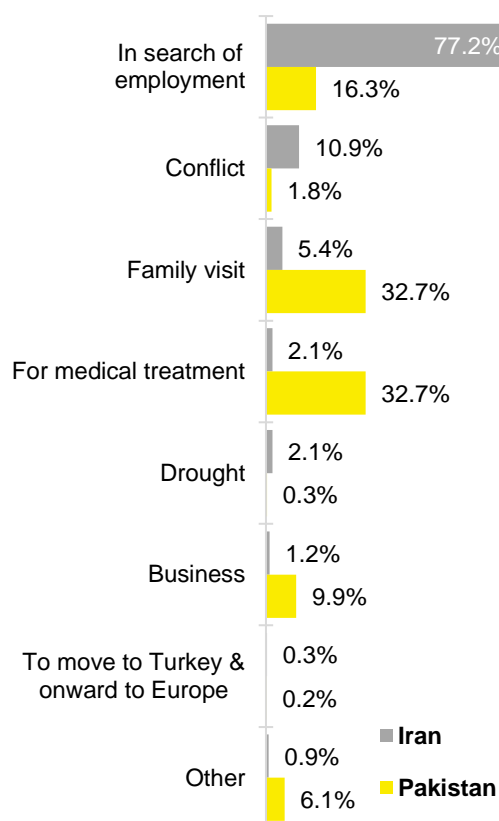
Respondents' Age and Gender



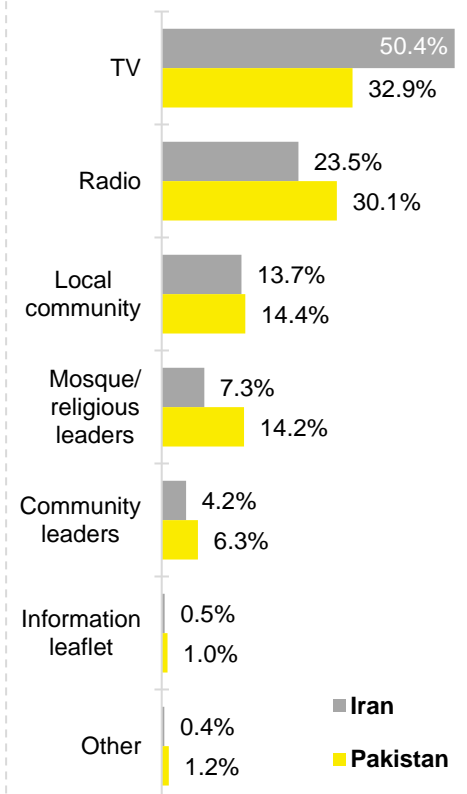
Years Spent in the CoPR



Reason for entry to CoPR



Sources of Information about COVID 19 in Iran & Pakistan



Situation in Country of Prior Residence (CoPR) - Iran and Pakistan

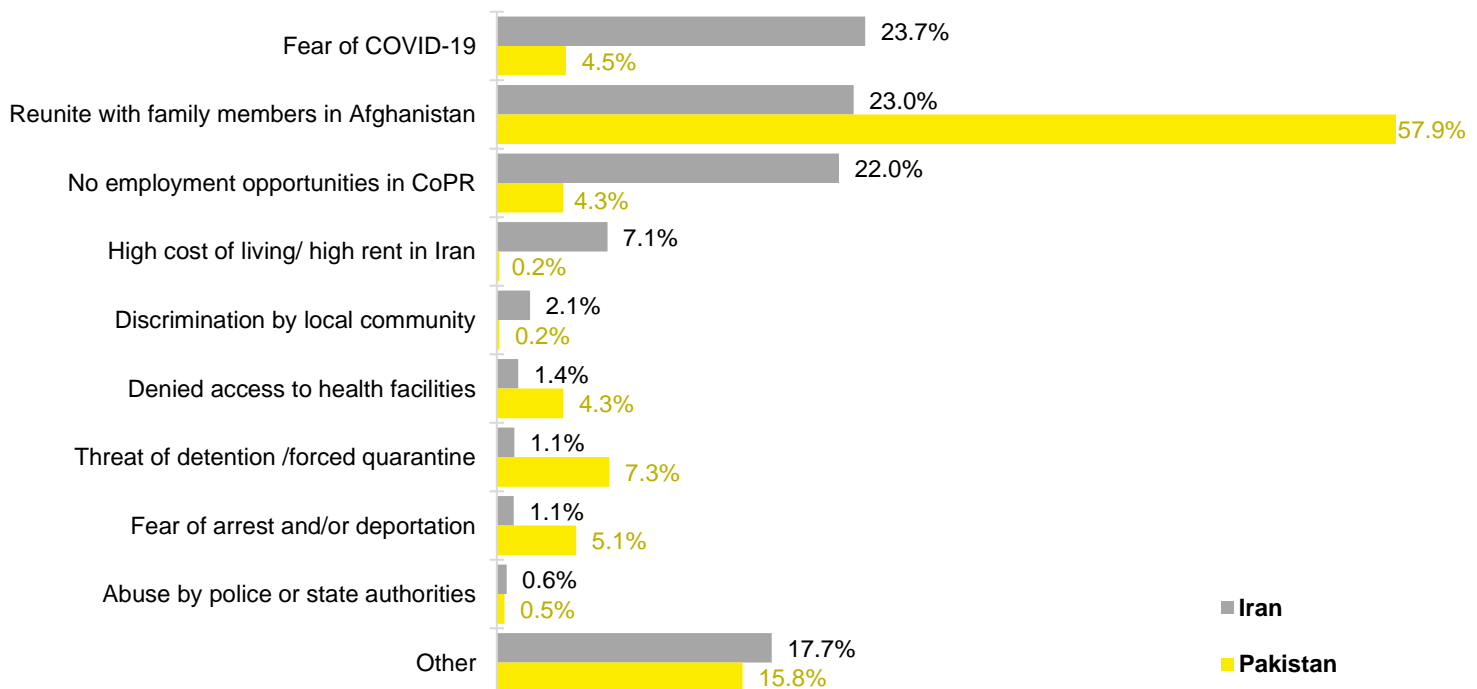
Interviewed Returnees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

- 49% deportees, 32% spontaneous returnees, 18% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 77% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from five provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Kerman, Fars, and Hormozgan; over 70% spent less than one year in Iran;
- 77% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 11% due to conflict, 5% to visit family/relatives, 2% for medical treatment, and 5% other reasons;
- 34% (2,223 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, such as lost work/wages, discrimination/stigmatization by local communities, lack of access to markets, pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan, movement restrictions related to the lockdown, and lack of access to medical services;
- 83% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, mainly through TV, radio and local communities;
- 31% (1,998 respondents, most of whom were spontaneous returnees and deportees) claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/ approximately USD 7-35).
- 38% claimed that they faced problems during return: high transportation/ travel costs, fee charged at detention center, limited transportation services to reach the border, overcrowded situation in the bus stations, or bribe required to pass police check point;
- Since early May, Iranian health officials in Dogharoun have been conducting a health screening process and providing returning refugees and passport holders with a health certificate issued after a temperature check and interview focused on possible COVID-19 symptoms. This practice was put in place after a request for screening by Afghanistan's MoPH.

Interviewed Returnees from Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham):

- 53% were Tazkira/token holders¹, 31% passport holders, and 16% spontaneous returnees;
- 47% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 32% from KPK, 13% Sindh, 7% Punjab, and 1% from Islamabad; 94% spent less than a year in Pakistan;
- 49% (267 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, mainly lost work/wages, movement restrictions due to the lockdown, lack of access to markets, and lack of access to medical services;
- 95% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/ religious leaders and local communities;
- 1% (7 respondents, who are Tazkira/token holders) of respondents claimed that they had paid a return tax (Pak. Rs. 500 – 1,000 / approximately USD 3 - 7). This is the first-time payment of a return tax was reported in Spin Boldak.
- 38% claimed that they faced problem during return: overcrowded bus stations, high transportation/ travel cost, limited transportation services to reach the border, or bribe required to pass police check point.

Reasons for Return to Afghanistan (Spontaneous returnees, VRF holders, and Passport/ID holders)



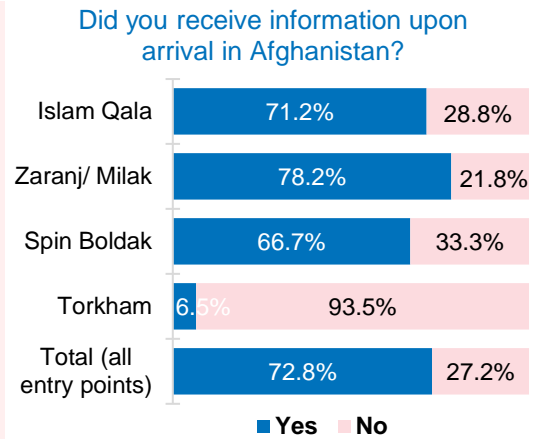
¹ This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently.

Information Dissemination in Afghanistan



73% OF INTERVIEWED RETURNEES STATED THAT THEY RECEIVED INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 UPON ARRIVAL IN AFGHANISTAN

29% of returnees interviewed at Islam Qala border crossing point, 22% at Zaranj/Milak, 93% at Torkham and 33% at Spin Boldak stated that they had not received information about COVID-19 upon arrival in Afghanistan. The information gap at Zaranj/Milak has improved (from 42% to 22%) since UNHCR's follow-up with partners in early May. However, the monitoring findings shows that the information gap at Islam Qala and Spin Boldak slightly increased compared to early May, while the information gap at Torkham still remains very high. UNHCR will continue to follow-up on this issue with the Points of Entry Working Group and partners in all four entry points.



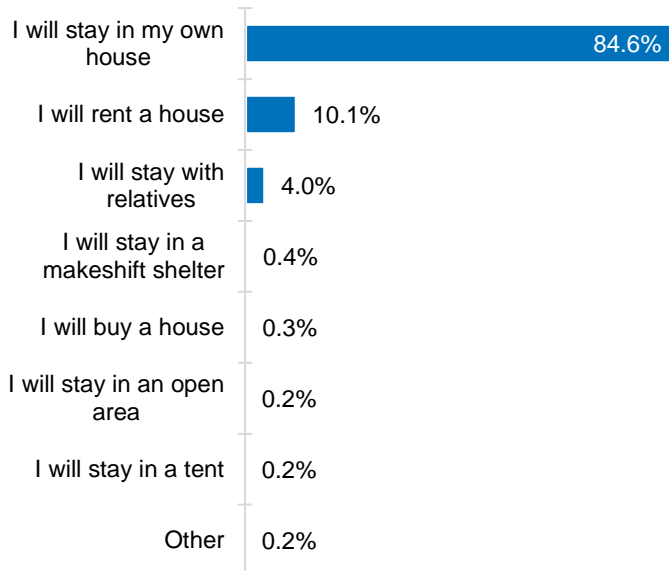
Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination)



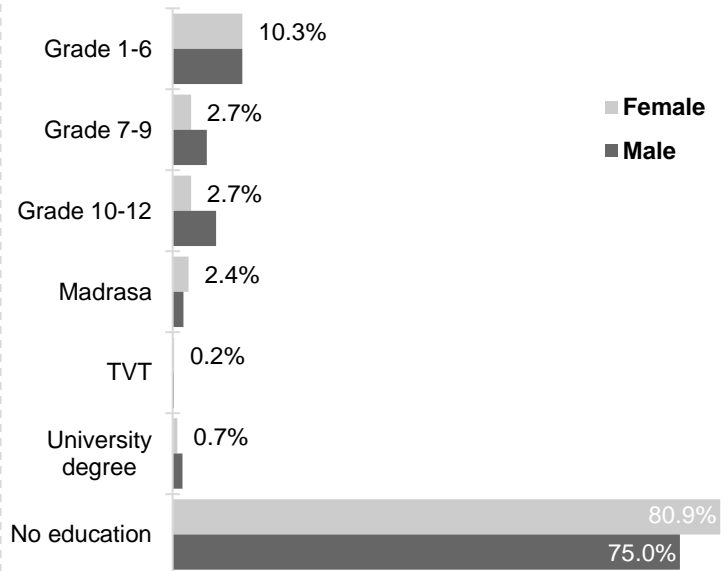
96% OF THE INTERVIEWED RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY ARE RETURNING TO THEIR AREAS OF ORIGIN

- 4% do not return to their areas of origin due to lack of livelihood opportunities, reunification with family/relatives, lack of housing/shelter, and perceived insecurity.
- Interviewed returnees from Iran were travelling to 33 provinces across the country, with the majority (73%) intending to return to Herat, Faryab, Nimroz, Farah, Kunduz, Takhar, Ghor, Ghazni, Badakhshan, and Badghis provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were traveling to 27 provinces, with the majority (72%) intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Ghazni and Paktika provinces.

Living arrangements after return



Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



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