

BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

3 - 9 May 2020



CHA staff (UNHCR partner) during border monitoring interview at Islam Qala reception center, Herat, Afghanistan
30 April 2020
CHA/ E. Karimi

309

AFGHAN REFUGEES
RETURNED TO
AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of over 309 Afghan refugees from Iran, Pakistan and other countries under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. While 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 from the Government of Iran (BAFIA), UNHCR Iran exceptionally issued VRFs to the most vulnerable refugees requesting voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan after that date. As of 30 April, voluntary repatriation from Iran has resumed.

279,738

UNDOCUMENTED
AFGHANS RETURNED
FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

According to MoRR/IOM, during the week of 3 - 9 May, the total number of undocumented returnees from Iran was 6,870 and since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is 279,738 individuals, including 277,905 from Iran and 1,833 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 06 May, the Government of Pakistan opened the Torkham border to allow some 5,552 stranded Afghans to return to Afghanistan, and on 7 May, 305 stranded Pakistanis returned to Pakistan. Furthermore, Spin Boldak was open on 09 May to allow 5,523 Afghans to return to Afghanistan and 585 Pakistanis to return to Pakistan.

2,103

INTERVIEWS WITH
RETURNEES FROM IRAN
AND PAKISTAN

Following allegations of abusive treatment of a group of Afghans who were reportedly apprehended by Iranian border authorities last week, Afghan and international media have reported that the joint investigation is continuing and that several bodies have been recovered from the Hairud river. UNHCR has received testimonies detailing similar allegations of mistreatment of Afghans by Iranian border guards from other deportees from Iran.

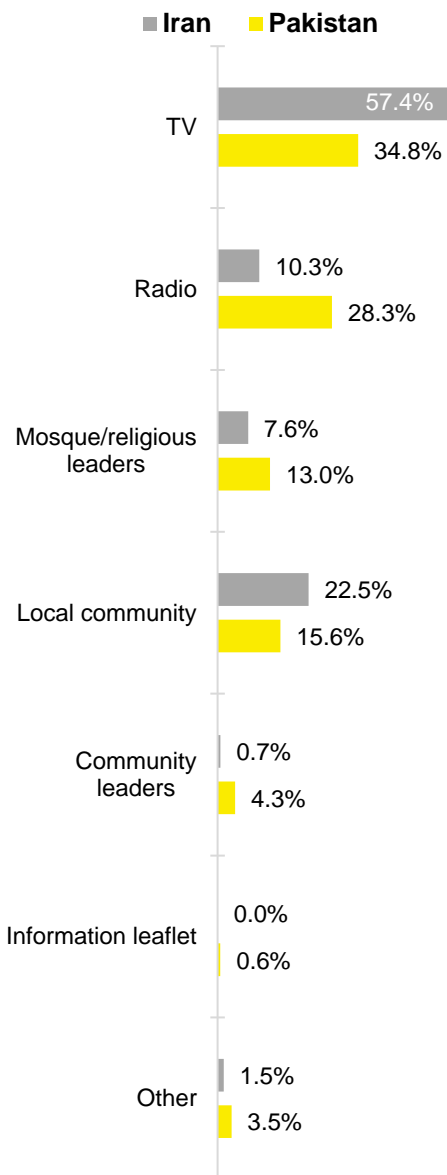
In addition, during the reporting period, UNHCR's partner interviewed at least one Afghan with a valid passport and visa who was deported from Iran. This was confirmed against his passport. UNHCR Afghanistan is following up on this case with our colleagues in Iran.

BORDER MONITORING

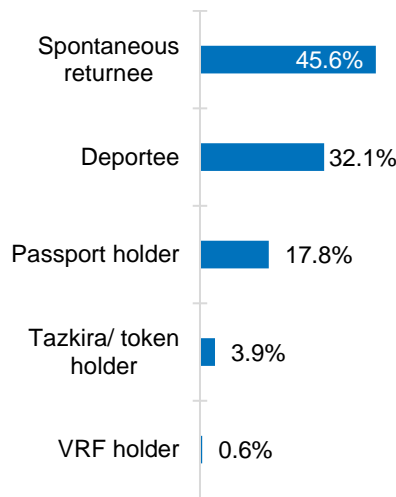
In line with UNHCR's protection monitoring objectives, and in the context of increased incidence of COVID-19 across the territory of Afghanistan, UNHCR made the decision to expand its protection and return monitoring activities to the official entry points with Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak crossing points), with the intention to extend to the crossings with Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham) when opened. 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 3 - 9 May, 664 interviews, including 499 male and 165 female respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (527) and Pakistan (137). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of 2,103 returnees (1,677 M and 426 F) were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (1,223), Islam Qala (681), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak (164) and Torkham (35), including 1,569 single individuals and 534 heads of households who returned with their families. **In total, 2,103 interviews were conducted with returnees from Iran (1,904) and Pakistan (199).** The latter group from Pakistan are mainly passport holders.

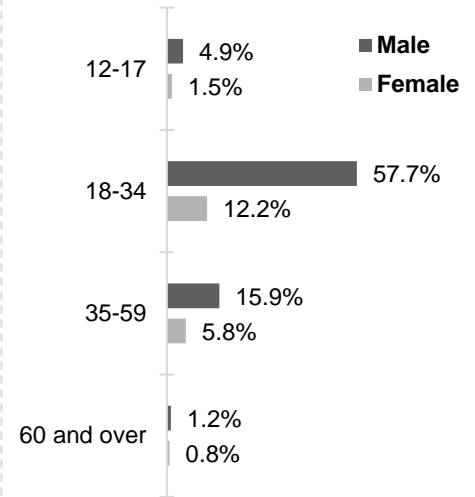
Primary Sources of Information about COVID 19 in Iran and Pakistan



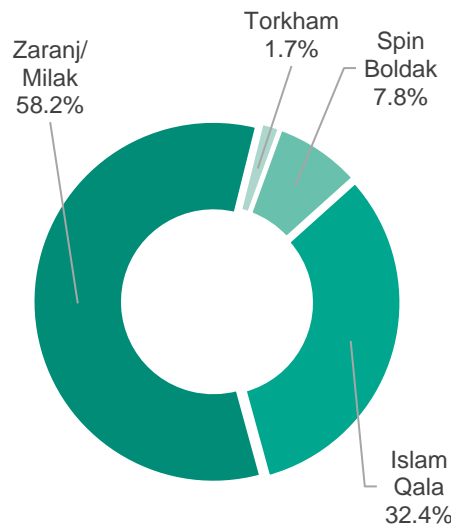
Respondents' Return Status



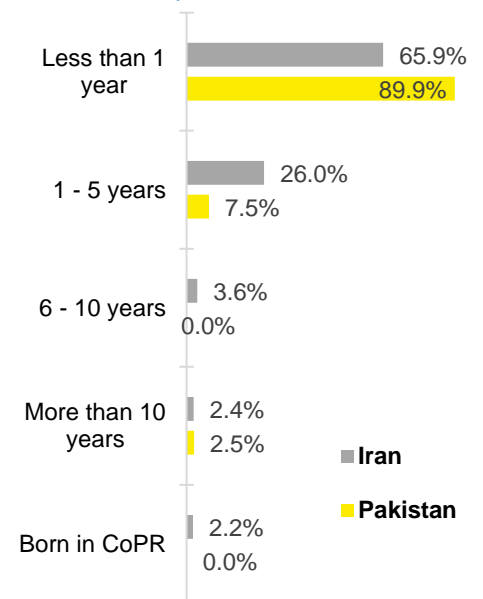
Respondents' Age and Gender



Respondents (%) by Entry Point



Years Spent in the CoPR

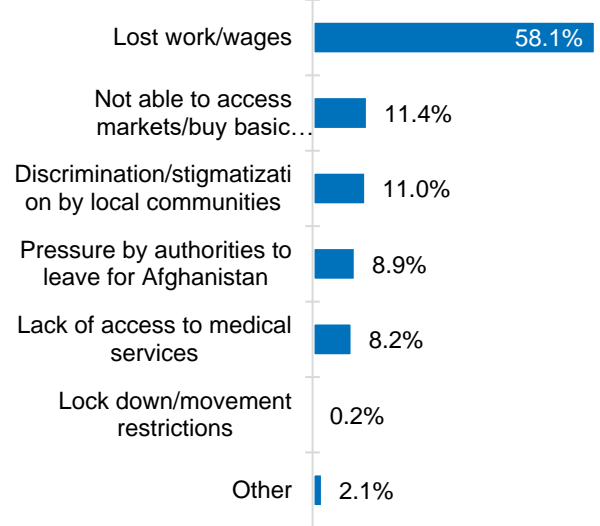


Situation in Country of Prior Residence (CoPR) - Pakistan and Iran

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

- 46% spontaneous returnees; 35% deportees; 18% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- Over 60% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from three provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, and Kerman;
- 76% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities; 9% due to conflict; 7% to visit family/relatives; 3% due to drought; and 5% other reasons;
- 47% (893 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak; such as lost work/wages; lack of access to markets; discrimination/stigmatization by local communities; pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan; and lack of access to medical services;
- 87% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, mainly through TV, radio and local communities;
- 34% (646 respondents, most of whom were spontaneous returnees) claimed that they had paid a return tax to the government (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/ approximately USD 7-35).

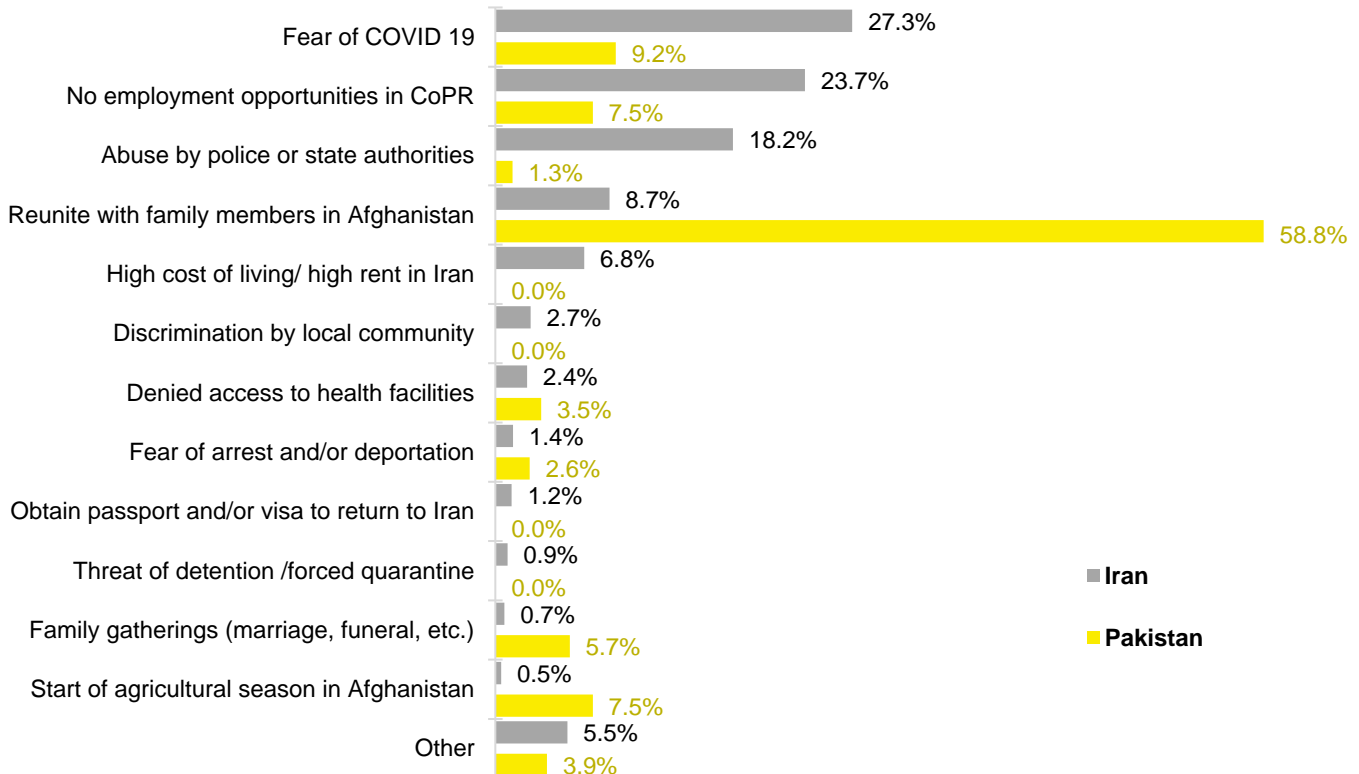
Types of Problems faced by Afghans during COVID-19 in Iran



Interviewed Returnees from Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham):

- 41% were Tazkir/token holders¹; 39% spontaneous returnees; and 20% passport holders;
- 64% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan; 16% from Sindh; 13 from KPK; and 7% Punjab; and
- 41% (81 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak; mainly lost work/wages; lack of access to markets; and lack of access to medical services;
- 93% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio and local communities;

Reason for Return to Afghanistan



¹ This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan on daily/weekly basis

Information Dissemination in Afghanistan



71%

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

Border monitoring data indicating that **42%** of returnees interviewed at Zaranj/Milak border crossing point had not received information about COVID-19 upon arrival in Afghanistan. UNHCR followed up with partners at Zaranj/Milak and were able to identify a gap in awareness raising activities. Following advocacy, IOM and public health authorities are seeking to address this need and ensure that all returnees receive adequate COVID -19 messages upon arrival.

Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination)

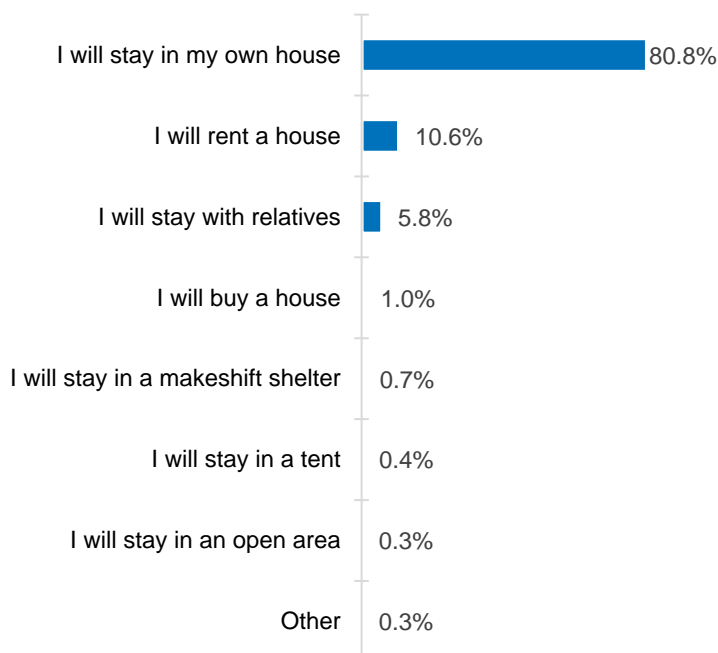


96%

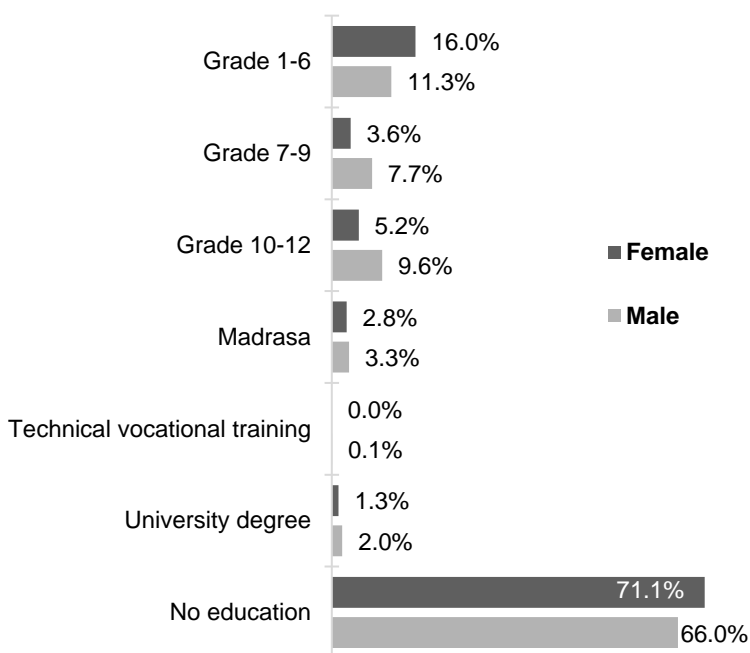
OF THE INTERVIEWED RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY ARE RETURNING TO THEIR AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **4% Do not return to their areas** of origin due to lack of livelihoods opportunities; reunification with family/relatives; lack of housing/shelter; and perceived insecurity.
- **Interviewed returnees from Iran** were travelling to 33 provinces across the country, **majority (76%)** to Herat, Kunduz, Nimroz, Farah, Faryab, Takhar, Ghor, Ghazni, Sar-e-pul, and Badghis provinces.
- **Interviewed returnees from Pakistan** were traveling to more than 20 provinces.
- **Most (73%) of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan** have returned to Kandahar, Ghazni, Kabul, Paktika, and Nangarhar provinces.

Living Arrangements after Return



Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



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