

BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

28 June – 04 July 2020



Returnees at Islam Qala reception center, Islam Qala border, Herat

06 July 2020
CHA/ M. Tareq Faizi

377

AFGHAN REFUGEES
RETURNED TO
AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of **377** Afghan refugees from Iran (**327**), 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 (BAFIA), UNHCR Iran resumed voluntary repatriation from Iran as of 30 April.

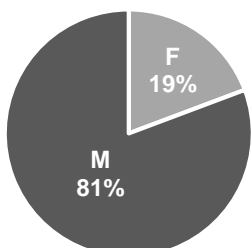
363,963

UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS
RETURNED FROM IRAN AND
PAKISTAN

According to MoRR/IOM, during the week of 28 June – 04 July, the total number of undocumented returnees was **12,204** from Iran (**6,227 deportees and 5,977 spontaneous returnees**). Since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is **363,963** individuals, including **362,077** from Iran (**258,581 spontaneous returnees and 103,496 deportees**) and **1,886** from Pakistan (**1,809 spontaneous returnees and 77 deportees**). From 22 June 2020, the Government of Pakistan announced that Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points will open six days a week (Sunday – 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 4 July, 6,769 stranded Afghans crossed through Torkham into Afghanistan, while 466 stranded Pakistanis returned to Pakistan. Spin Boldak crossing point has remained closed since 06 June for pedestrian movement of stranded Afghans and Pakistanis.

10,620

INTERVIEWS WITH
RETURNEES FROM IRAN
AND PAKISTAN



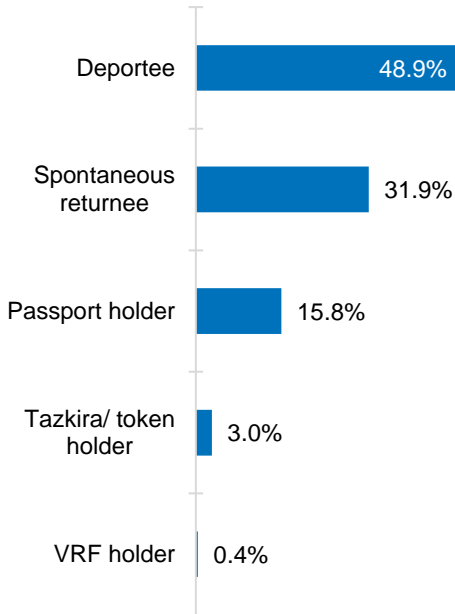
BORDER MONITORING

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.

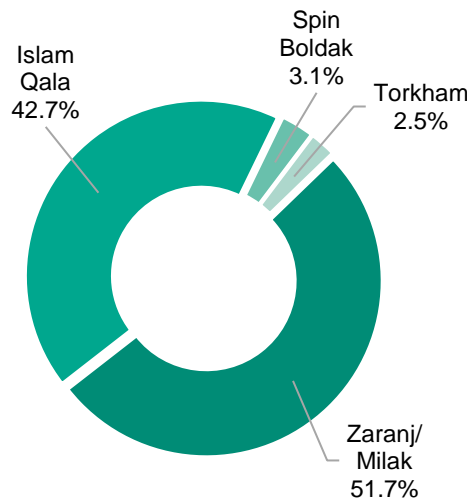
Between 28 June – 04 July, **1,411 interviews, including 1,214 male and 197 female** respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (1,393) and Pakistan (18). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of **10,620 returnees (8,647 M and 1,973 F)** were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (5,491) and Islam Qala (4,536), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak (330) and Torkham (263), including 8,338 single individuals and 2,282 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. Since 06 June, no interviews were carried out at Spin Boldak due to the closure of the border for pedestrian movement.

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

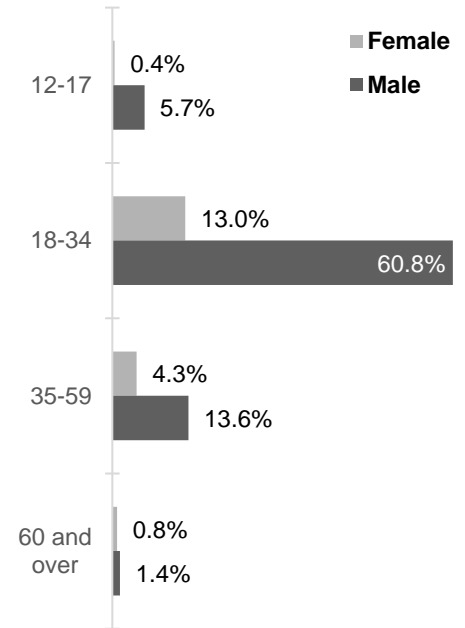
Respondents' Return Status



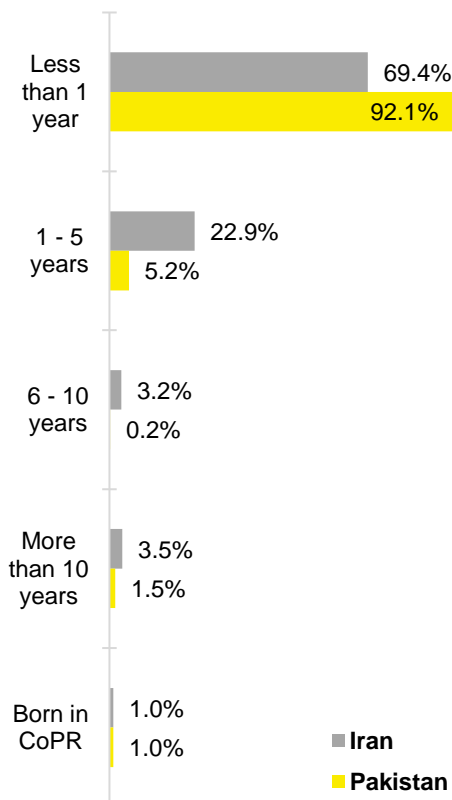
Respondents (%) by Entry Point



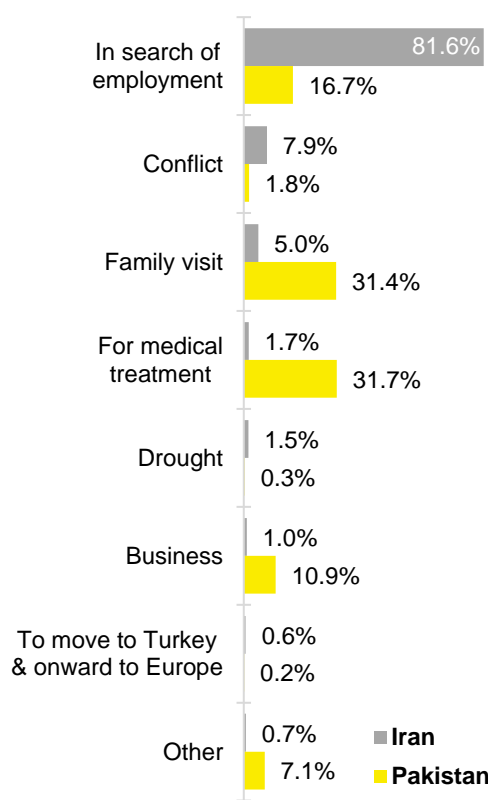
Respondents' Age and Gender



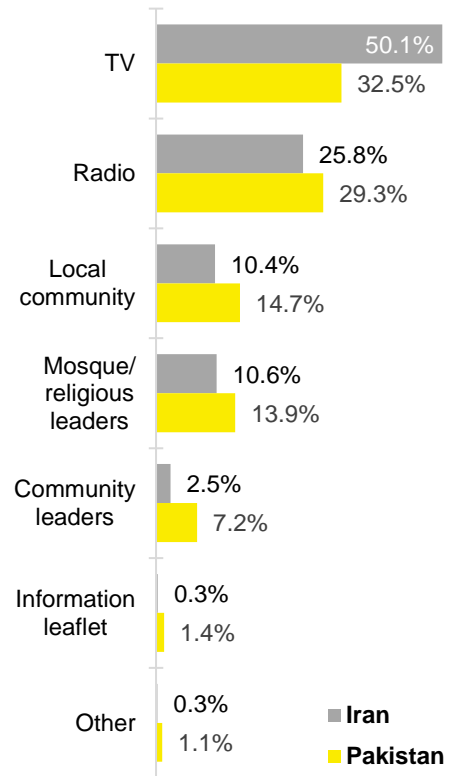
Years Spent in the CoPR



Reason for entry to CoPR



Sources of Information about COVID-19 in Iran & Pakistan



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

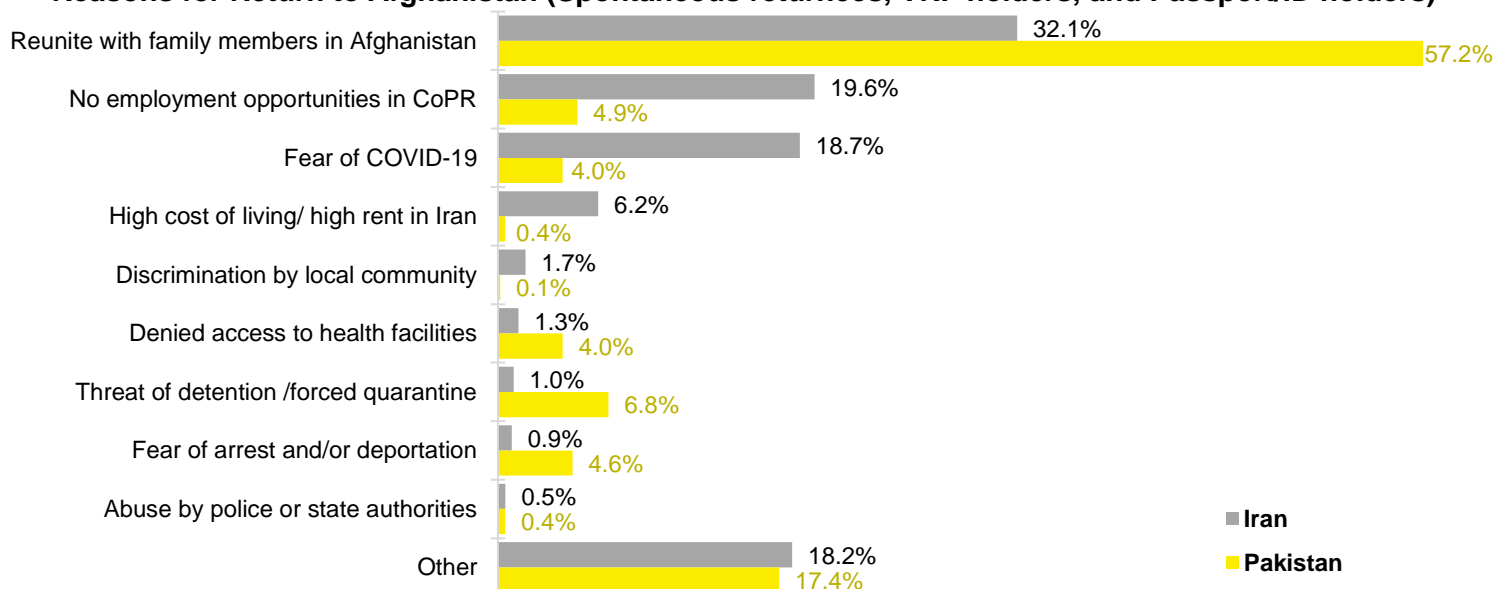
Interviewed Returnees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

- 52% deportees, 33% spontaneous returnees, 14% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 31% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees and 12% of deportees were female;
- 75% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from five provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Kerman, Fars, and Hormozgan; 70% spent less than one year in Iran;
- 82% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 8% due to conflict, 5% to visit family/relatives, 2% for medical treatment, 1% (mainly deportees) to move to Turkey and onward to Europe, and 2% other reasons;
- 32% (3,185 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;
- 88% of returnees and deportees stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, mainly through TV, radio and local communities;
- 21% of the interviewed deportees stated that they did not receive information about COVID-19 in Iran; this figure is very low among passport holders (5%) and spontaneous returnees (1%);
- 35% (3,519 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);
- 30% 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, 32% passport holders, and 15% spontaneous returnees;
- 57% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees and 39% of Tazkira/token holder returnees were female;
- 43% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 35% from KPK, 12% Sindh, 8% Punjab, and 2% from Islamabad; 92% spent less than a year in Pakistan;
- 52% (308 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;
- 39% claimed that they faced problem during return: overcrowded bus stations, high transportation/ travel costs, limited transportation services to reach the border, or bribe required to pass police check point.

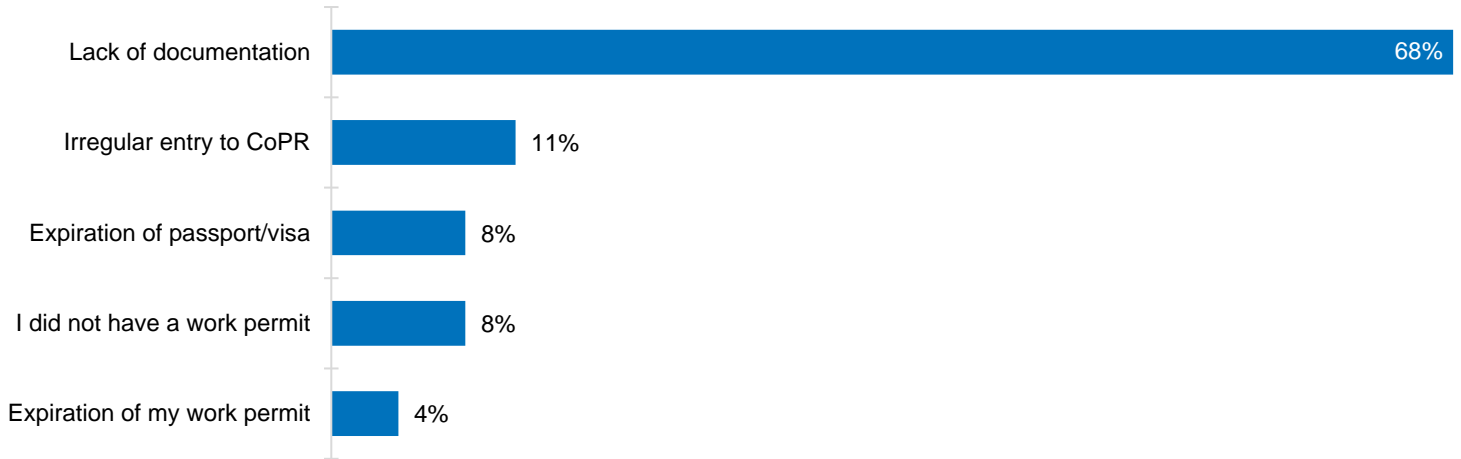
Reasons for Return to Afghanistan (Spontaneous returnees, VRF holders, and Passport/ID holders)



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.

The border monitoring data shows that there was a sharp increase in the number of deportees in June/July as compared to May. In order to better assess these trends, UNHCR revised its border monitoring tool that to collect deportation reasons as well as intentions of returnees and deportees after their arrival in Afghanistan. The revised tool has been implemented as of 04 July in all entry points and 149 interviews were conducted following this revision.

Reason Provided for Deportation (only deportees from Iran)

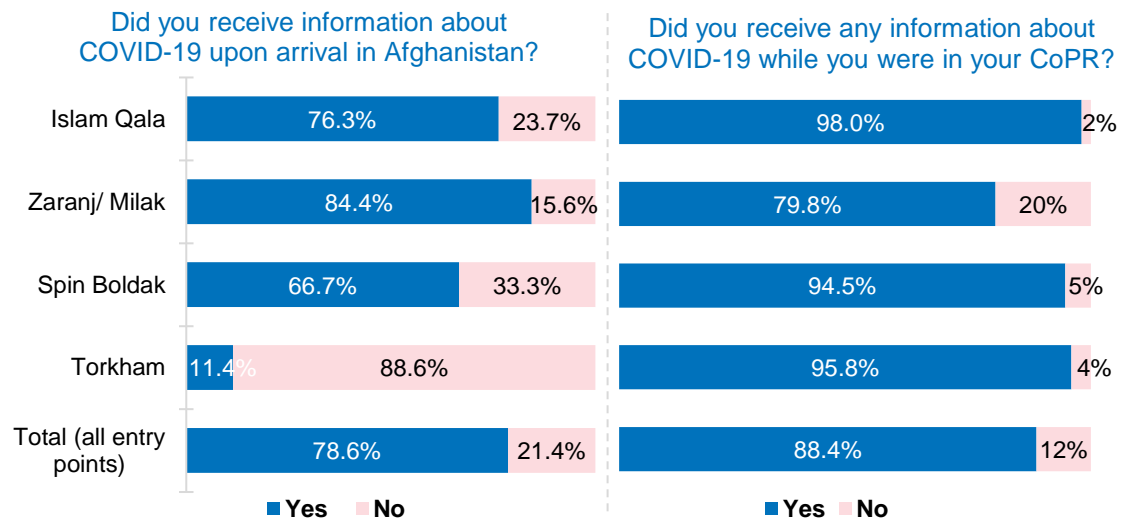


Information Dissemination in Afghanistan



79%

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



24% of returnees interviewed at Islam Qala border crossing point, 16% at Zaranj/Milak, 89% 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 the entry points has improved since UNHCR's follow-up with partners in May. The information gap in Torkham, in particular, is mainly related to the opening of the border only for 8-10 hours for one day per week. This issue creates an overcrowded situation as thousands of Afghans, who were stranded on the other side of the border, try to cross at once, with little attention to services provided by partners, including health screening and information dissemination about COVID-19. UNHCR raised this matter with the border authorities and partners and is working with them to find a solution. The information gap in Spin Boldak remains the same because there was no population movement due to the closure of the border since 06 June.

While the gap in the dissemination of information upon arrival in Afghanistan is of concern, particularly for Afghans returning as part of large-scale weekly returns via Torkham, the monitoring findings shows that nearly 90% of returnees and deportees received information in their areas of residence in the respective CoPR - in Iran 88%, and in Pakistan 95%. When comparing this data by entry point, the findings show that only 4% of those who came via Torkham and 5% of those who came via Spin Boldak stated that they did not receive information about COVID-19 in Pakistan. Similarly, 2% of the interviewed returnees and deportees who came through Islam Qala and 20% of those came via Zaranj/Milak did not receive information in Iran.

Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination)

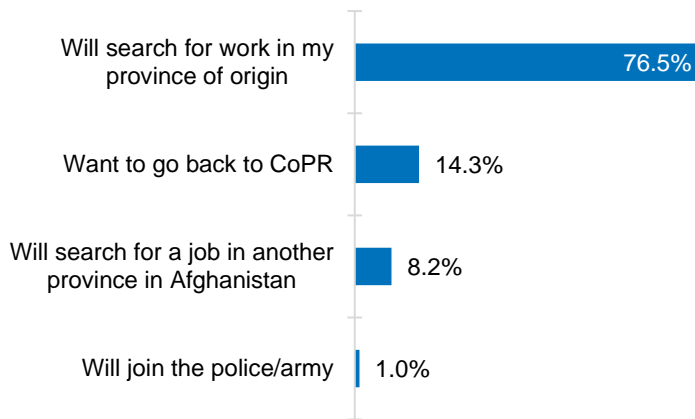


97%

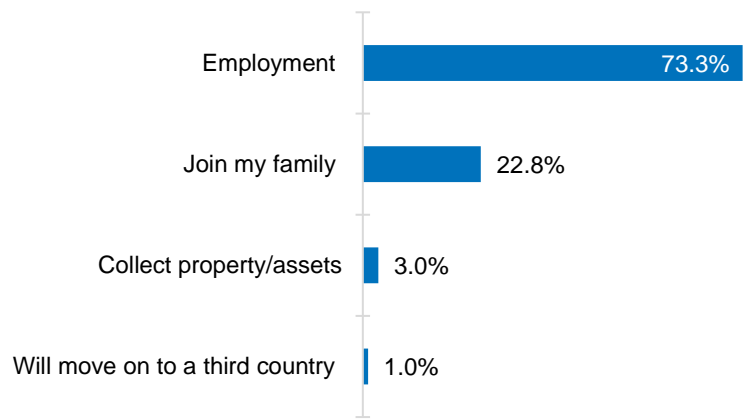
OF THE INTERVIEWED
 RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND
 PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING
 THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY
 ARE RETURNING TO THEIR
 AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **3%** 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 all **34** provinces across the country, with the majority (**72%**) intending to return to Herat, Faryab, Nimroz, Takhar, Kunduz, Farah, Ghor, Badakhshan, Badghis, and Ghazni provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were traveling to **28** provinces, with the majority (**72%**) intending to return to Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kabul, Ghazni and Paktika provinces.
- **89%** stated that they will stay in their own house, **9%** stated that they will rent a house, **4%** will stay with relatives;
- **76%** (mainly deportees) stated that they will try to find a job in their province of origin;
- **14%** (all deportees from Iran) stated that they intended to go back to Iran: for employment, to join family, or to collect property in Iran. In addition, **1%** stated that they are intended to move on to a third country.

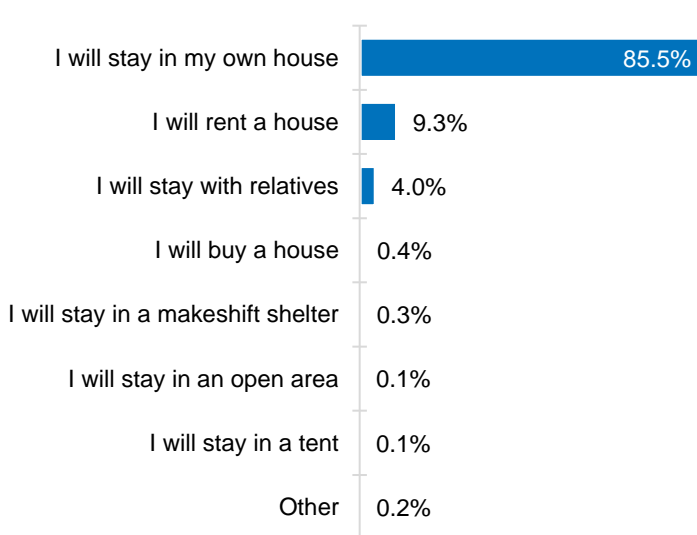
Intention after return/deportation



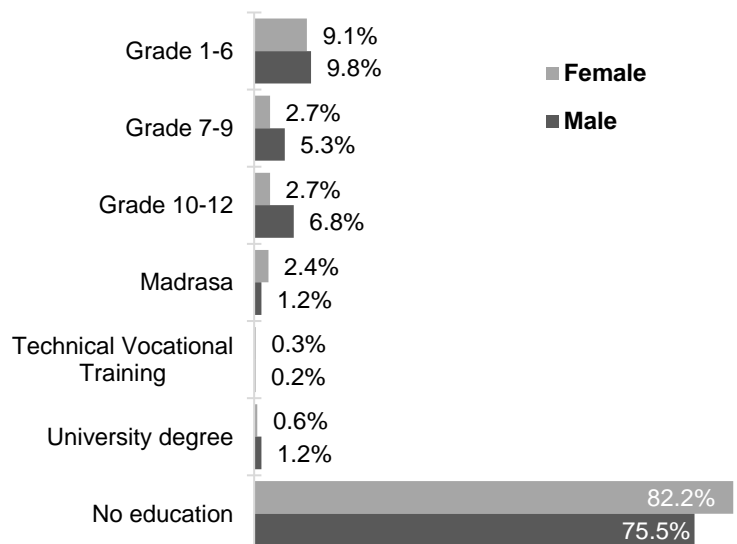
Reasons for going back to CoPR



Living arrangements after return



Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



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