

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

January 2021



A refugee returnee woman accompanied by her son, approaching UNHCR Encashment Center in Jalalabad to collect their assistance grant, Jalalabad, Afghanistan, September 2020

121

AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

58,625

UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS RETURNED / DEPORTED FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

6,866

INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNÉES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN



67%

RESPONDENTS STATED THAT THEY RECEIVED INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 UPON ARRIVAL IN AFGHANISTAN

In line with UNHCR's protection monitoring objectives, notwithstanding the increase of COVID-19 related incidents 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 Pakistan (Spin Boldak/Chaman and Torkham) by establishing the border monitoring activities mostly focusing on inflows. Through maintaining a consistent presence at these zero points, UNHCR aimed to ensure efficient, timely and systematic gathering of protection information from Afghan returnees and deportees, irrespective of their status. Border monitoring also helps to assess the access of people to the territory "the right to asylum" for people fleeing persecution who may be in need of international protection as well as the right to return for Afghan refugees and other nationals amidst possible limitations imposed by the Pandemic.

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of 121 Afghan refugees from Iran (101) and Pakistan (20), under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. Refugee returnees receive, upon arrival, a multi-purpose cash grant (on average USD 250 per person) and other services (such as basic health care, malnutrition screening and vaccination, mine risk awareness, information on school enrolment, awareness raising about COVID-19, distribution of PPE, if needed, and overnight accommodation) at Encashment Centers (ECs) located in Herat, Kandahar, Kabul, and Nangarhar provinces. UNHCR's cash grants to refugee returnees are intended to address immediate needs aiming to prevent, reduce, and respond to protection risks and vulnerabilities upon return to Afghanistan.

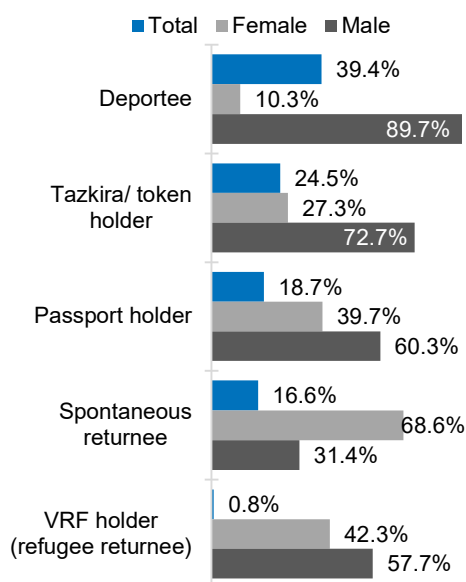
In addition, to refugee returnees, according to MoRR/IOM, the total number of undocumented returnees reached **58,625** individuals during January 2021, consisting of **57,978** from Iran (**30,636** spontaneous returnees and **27,342** deportees) and **647** from Pakistan (**542** spontaneous returnees and **105** deportees).

During the same period, UNHCR's border monitoring activities conducted through partners using individual and household level interviews reached a total of **6,866** returnees and deportees (**4,812 M** and **2,054 F**) upon their entry into Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (**2,557**) and Islam Qala (**745**), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak/Chaman (**2,054**) and Torkham (**1,510**). These include **4,660** single individuals and **2,206** heads of households who returned with their families. Some **5,133 (75%)** were selected randomly for interviews while **1,733 (25%)** interviews were self-selection. In general, the majority of returnees/deportees from Iran are single males.

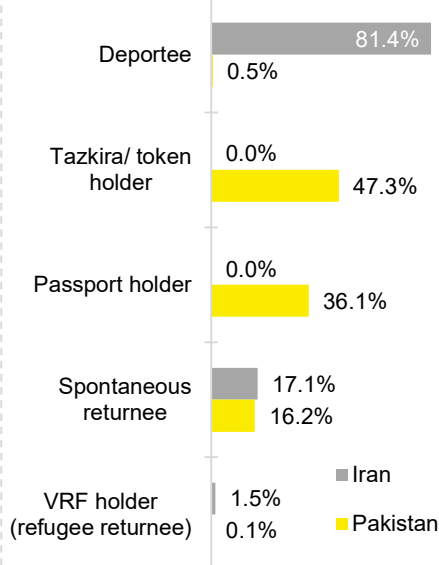
Despite the requirements of a negative PCR COVID-19 test to cross the border from Afghanistan to Pakistan through Torkham (which is in effect as of 19 December 2020), during the reporting period, regular population movements (to/from Afghanistan) continued through Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points. The requirement for PCR test caused an overcrowded situation and little attention of travelers to observe the recommended COVID-19 preventive measures (e.g. physical and social distancing). The requirement to present negative PRC test was not applied at Spin Boldak crossing point.

Main findings of the border monitoring in 2021:

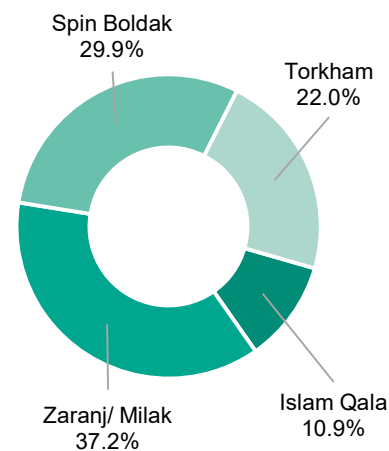
Respondents' Return Status by Gender



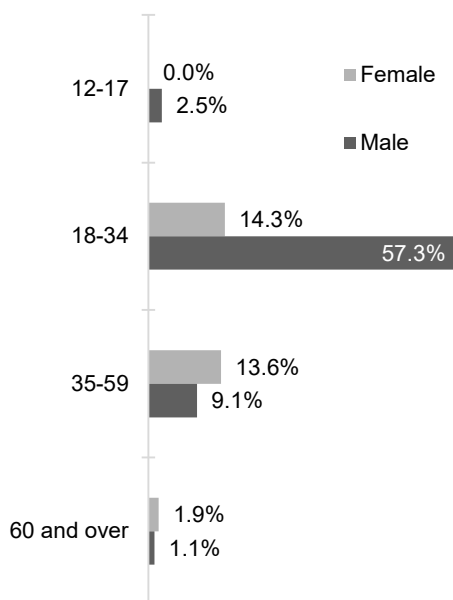
Respondents' Return Status by CoPR



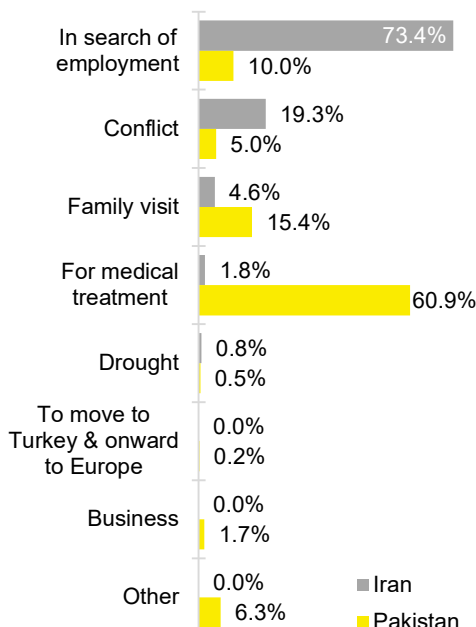
Respondents (%) by Entry Point



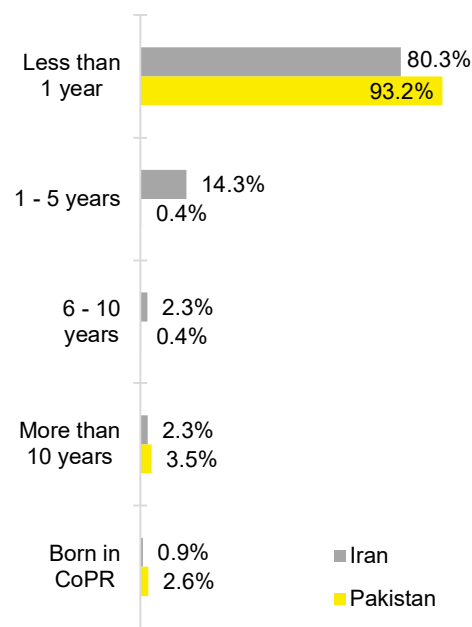
Respondents' Age and Gender



Reason for entry to CoPR



Years Spent in the CoPR



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

Findings of Interviews with Returnees and Deportees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

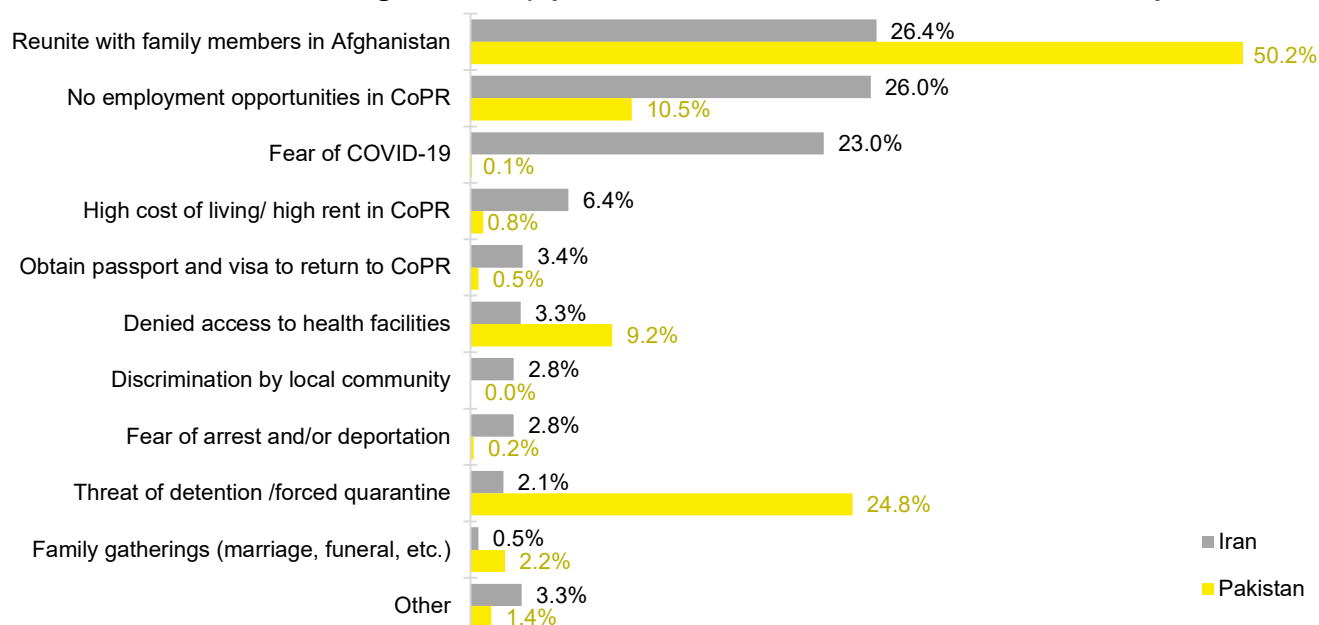
- Respondents include: 81% deportees, 17% spontaneous returnees (migrants), and 2% VRF holders (refugee returnees);
- 45% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 44% of VRF holders, 10% of deportees were female;
- 83% of the respondents stated that they returned from 5 provinces in Iran: Teheran, Kerman, Sistan va Baluchestan, Fars, and Khorasan Razavi. These areas were among the top provinces from where many Afghans returned and/ or deported in 2020;
- 80% of the respondents spent less than one year in Iran, among whom 29% stated that they spent less than a week, 22% around a month, 29% 1-6 months, and 20% over 6 months;
- 73% of the respondents went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 19% due to conflict, 5% to visit family/relatives, 2% for medical treatment, and 1% for other reasons. When comparing this with the data collected in 2020, the findings show an increase in the percentage of those respondents who cited that they left Afghanistan due to conflict. In 2020, this figure was 15% among the total sample size (40,861 interviews with returnees and deportees from Iran).

- 70% of the respondents who went to Iran due to conflict in Afghanistan were originally from 10 provinces: Herat, Ghor, Takhar, Faryab, Saripul, Ghazni, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Balkh, and Baglan.
- 32% of the respondents stated that they returned to Afghanistan due to economic problems including lack of employment opportunities (26%) and high cost of living (6%) in CoPR; 26% to reunite with family members in Afghanistan, 23% due to fear of COVID-19, and 19% due to other reasons.
- 24% of the respondents including 47% the spontaneous returnees and 19% deportees claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/approximately USD 5 - 25);
- 17% of respondents claimed that they faced problems during return: high transportation/travel costs, fee charged at detention center, overcrowded situation in the bus stations, limited transportation services to reach the border, and bribe required to pass police check point.
- 46% of 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, movement restrictions related to the lockdown, lack of access to medical services, and pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan;
- Close to 100% of the respondents stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran through TV, radio and local communities;

Findings of Interviews with Returnees and Deportees from Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham):

- Respondents include Tazkira/token holders (47%)¹, passport holders (36%), spontaneous returnees (16%), VRF holders and deportees (1% both);
- 92% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 40% of passport holders, and 27% of Tazkira/token holders were female;
- 65% of the respondents stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 23% from KPK, 7% Sindh, 3% Punjab, and 2% from Islamabad and Keshmir;
- 93% of the respondents stated that they spent less than a year in Pakistan, among whom 23% stated that they spent less than a week, 58% around a month, 17% 1-6 months, and 2% over 6 months;
- 61% of the respondents stated that they went to Pakistan for medical treatment, 15% to visit family/relatives, 10% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 5% due to conflict, 2% for business purpose, and 7% cited other reasons;
- 50% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned to Afghanistan to reunite with family members, 25% due to threat of detention/forced quarantine, 10% due to lack of employment opportunities and 9% due to denied access to health facilities;
- 40% of the respondents claimed that they faced problems during return. The problems include, among others, overcrowded bus stations, bribe required to pass police check points, and high transportation/ travel costs;
- 20% of the 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;
- 57% of the respondents stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/religious leaders and local communities. This figure slightly declined compared to December 2020 (60%).

Reasons for Return to Afghanistan² (Spontaneous returnees, VRF holders, and Passport/ID holders)

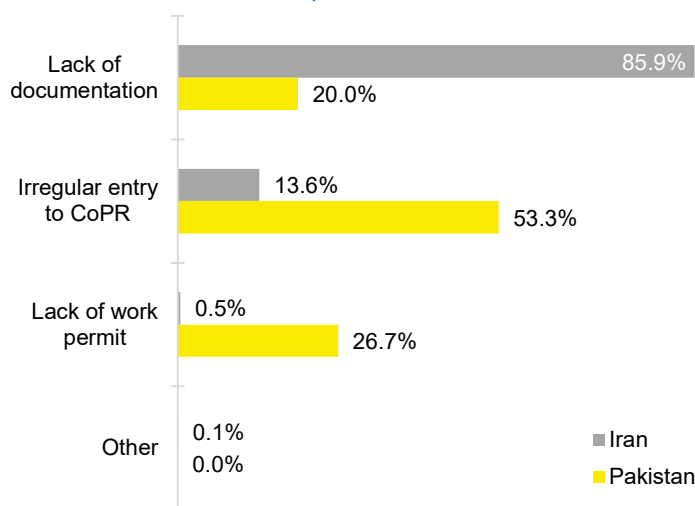


¹ This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently.

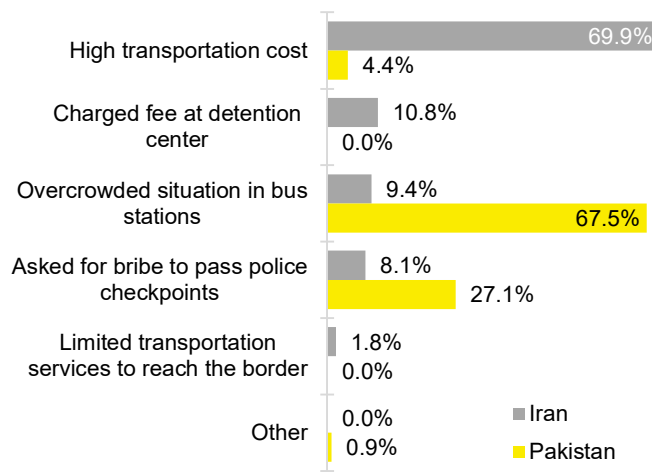
² The "other" category includes: to obtain passports/visas, family gatherings (marriage, funeral, etc.), and the start of the agriculture season in Afghanistan.

- A total of **2,704** interviews were conducted with deportees (**2,425 M and 279 F**), including **2,687** from Iran and **17** from Pakistan. The latter figure is small due to the low number of reported deportations from Pakistan in January 2021.
- **Almost all of the interviewed deportees from Iran (99.5%) and Pakistan (73%)** cited that lack of documentation and irregular entry to CoPR as the reasons provided to them for their deportation. It is expected that the ongoing efforts by the governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan aiming at documenting Afghans in Iran and Pakistan could contribute to address this issue.
- **Close to 27%** of interviewed deportees from Pakistan stated that they were deported due to lack of a work permit. In 2020, the figure was **0.9%** among all interviewed deportees from Iran, while it was not reported by the interviewed deportees from Pakistan.
- Almost all of the interviewed deportees from Iran and Pakistan stated that they were deported in the absence of a court order. So far, only one deportee, who was deported from Iran, stated that he was deported following a court order.

Reasons of Deportation from CoPR



Types of problems faced during the return (in the CoPR)



Incident Monitoring

Following the reported tragic incident in May 2020 where a group of Afghan workers trying to enter Iran were reportedly forced into a river, UNHCR established an incident monitoring system at all official entry points. This is aimed to record possible human rights violations as well as protection risks and challenges during the border crossing (outflow and inflow). During the reporting period, no incident was reported.

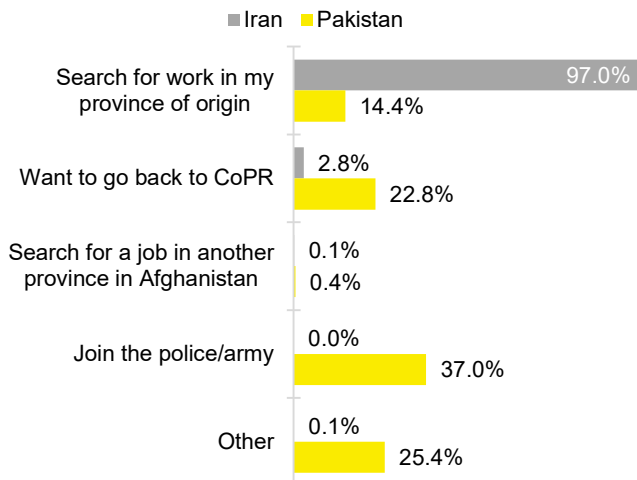
Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination) and Intentions after Return



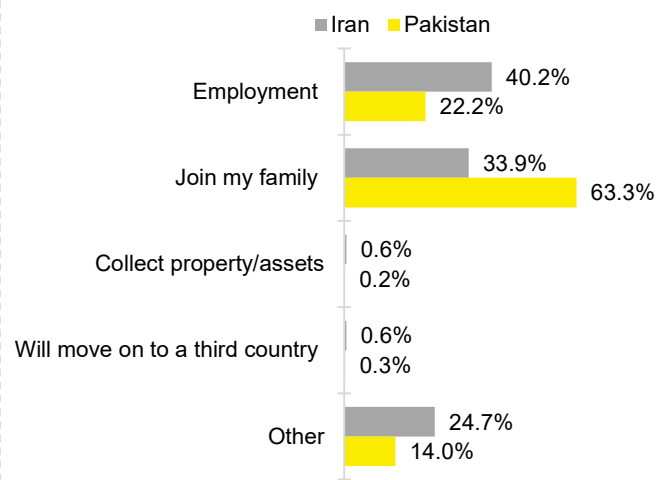
OF THE INTERVIEWED
RETURNEES FROM IRAN
AND PAKISTAN
DECLARED DURING THE
INTERVIEW THAT THEY
ARE RETURNING TO
THEIR AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **7%** do not return to their areas of origin due to lack of livelihood opportunities, perceived insecurity, lack of basic services including schools, reunification with family/relatives, and lack of housing/shelter.
- Interviewed returnees from Iran were travelling to 33 provinces, with the majority (**70%**) stated that they were intending to return to Herat, Nimroz, Faryab, Takhar, Ghor, Ghazni, Badghis, Farah, Sar-e-Pul, and Kunduz provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were travelling to **33** provinces, with the majority (**85%**) stated that they were intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Zabul, Herat, Kunduz, Uruzgan, and Laghman provinces.
- **82%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**88%** of male respondents and **65%** of female respondents).
- **71%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees stated that have no education, (**83% female and 67% male**). **9%** stated that they have minimal education (up to grade 6), **8%** up to grade 9, **7%** up to grade 12, **2%** went to madrasa, and **3%** went to university.
- **85%** stated that they will stay in their own house, close to **8%** stated that they will rent a house, and **6%** will stay with relatives.
- **97%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees from Iran and **14%** from Pakistan stated that they will try to find a job in their province of origin. **37%** of the interviewed returnees and deportees stated they would like to join the police/army. The latter was satated by a very small number of interviewed deportees and returnees from Iran (**0.1%**) in 2020.
- Close to **23%** of respondents from Pakistan and **3%** from Iran stated that they intend to go back to the CoPR: for employment, to join family or to collect property. **3%** of the respondents from Iran stated that they intend to go back to Iran to move on to a third country. This suggests appropriate response to prevent pendular movements including by putting in place /expanding reintegration programmes in return areas, including livelihood opportunities based on the skills of returnees to enable sustainable returns.

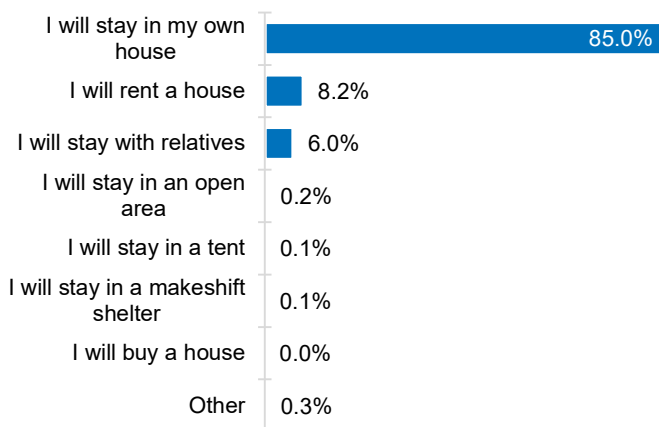
Intention after return/deportation



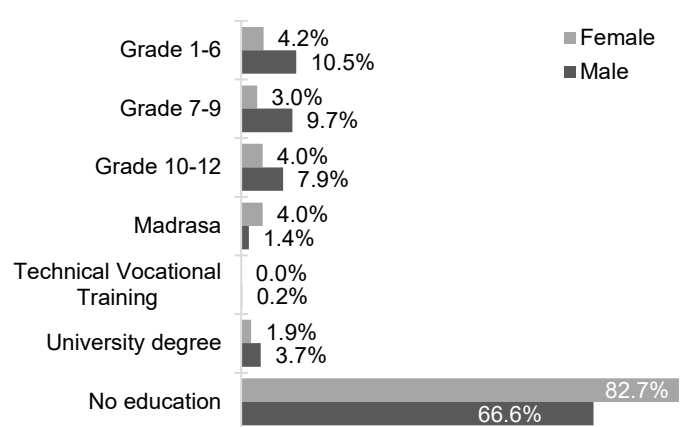
Reasons for possible return to CoPR



Living arrangements after return



Respondents Education Level



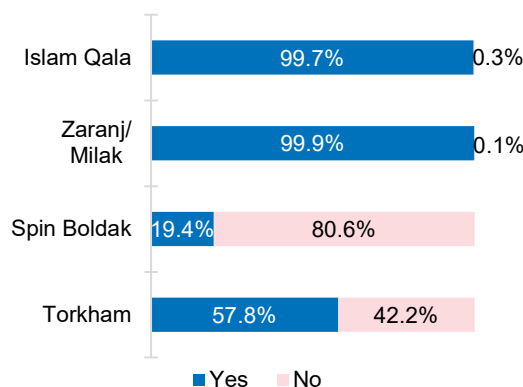
Information Dissemination on COVID-19 in Afghanistan and CoPR



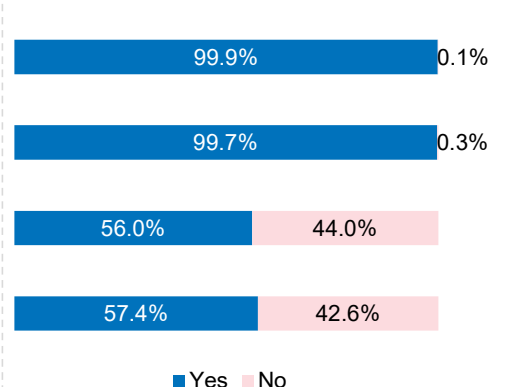
67%

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

Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan?



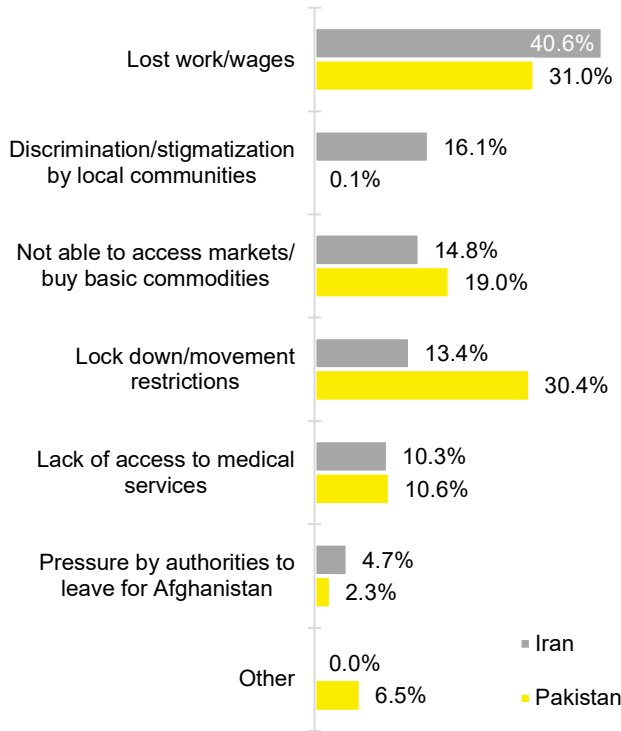
Did you receive any information about COVID-19 while you were in your CoPR?



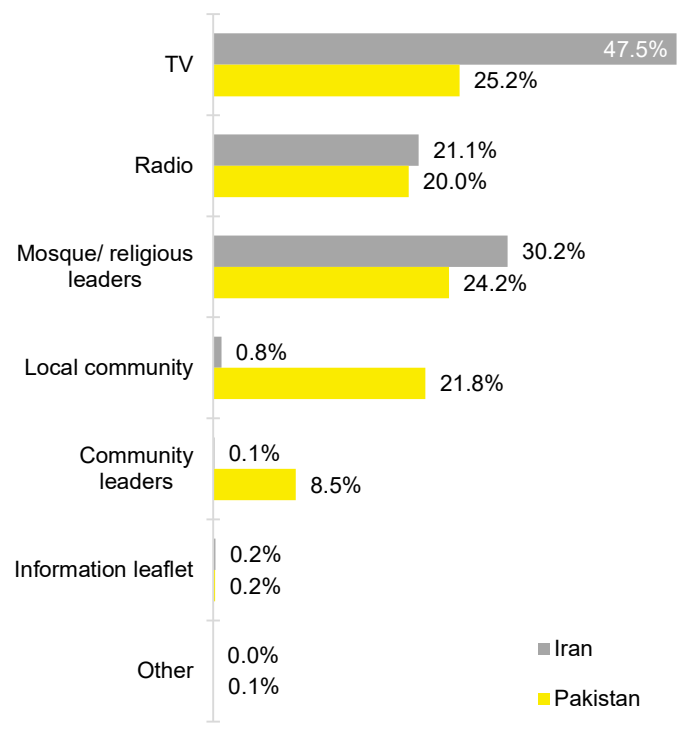
The information gap in Spin Boldak and Torkham is largely due to the high volume of the population movement in either sides. As a result, people are in hurry to cross the border with little attention to services provided by partners, including health screening and information dissemination about COVID-19. However, the level of information gap, particularly in Spin Boldak is of concern and UNHCR is following up on this matter with the concerned partners providing awareness about COVID-19 in Spin Boldak and Torkham.

In general, however, nearly **80%** of the respondents stated that they obtained information about COVID-19 while they were in Iran or Pakistan.

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



Sources of Information about COVID-19 in CoPR



Contacts

Ms. Michele Apala Donfack, Senior Protection Officer, apala@unhcr.org, Cell: +93 702 465 606

Mr. Mohammad Haroon, Assistant Repatriation Officer, haroon@unhcr.org, Cell: +93 791 990 019

UHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is grateful for the support of:

