

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

MARCH 2021



Refugee returnee family receive basic health services at Kandahar EC, Kandahar, Afghanistan, April 2021

573

AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

In line with UNHCR's protection monitoring objectives and noting with concern the increasing impact of COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border movements in 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 border monitoring activities mostly focusing on inflows. Through regular and consistent presence at these zero points, UNHCR aimed to ensure efficient, timely and systematic collection and analysis of protection related information from Afghan returnees and deportees, irrespective of their status. Border monitoring also helps to assess access to the territory and "the right to asylum" for people fleeing persecution who may be in need of international protection. It also aims at assessing the right to return for Afghan refugees and other nationals amidst possible limitations imposed by the Pandemic.

249,604

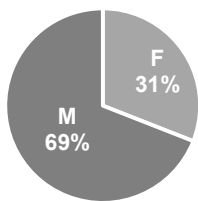
UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS RETURNED / DEPARTED FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

In March, UNHCR assisted the return of **265** Afghan refugees from Iran (**188**), Pakistan (**75**) and other countries (**2**). Cumulatively since the beginning of 2021, UNHCR assisted the return of **573** Afghan refugees from Iran (**433**), Pakistan (**143**) and other countries (**6**) under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. The figure is **106%** higher compared to 2020 figures at the same period when **278** refugees returned. Refugee returnees receive, upon arrival, a multi-purpose cash grant (an average of USD 250 per person) and other services such as basic health care, malnutrition screening and vaccination, mine risk awareness, information on school enrolment and overnight accommodation. In the context of COVID-19, awareness raising about the pandemic and preventive measures, as well as the distribution of PPE are systematically conducted at Encashment Centers located in Herat, Kandahar, Kabul, and Nangarhar provinces. UNHCR's cash grants to refugees upon return to Afghanistan intend to address their immediate needs to prevent, reduce, and respond to protection risks and vulnerabilities.

24,994

INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNEEES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

In addition to refugee returnees and in the context of coordinated activities at entry points, a total number of **103,823** undocumented returnees/deportees have been recorded during March, according to MoRR/IOM. This include **102,004** from Iran (**56,942** deportees and **45,062** spontaneous returnees) and **1,819** from Pakistan (**1,716** spontaneous returnees and **103** deportees). Cumulatively since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees/deportees stands at **249,604** individuals, including **246,324** from Iran (**136,608** deportees and **109,716** spontaneous returnees) and **3,280** from Pakistan (**2,983** spontaneous returnees and **297** deportees).



74%

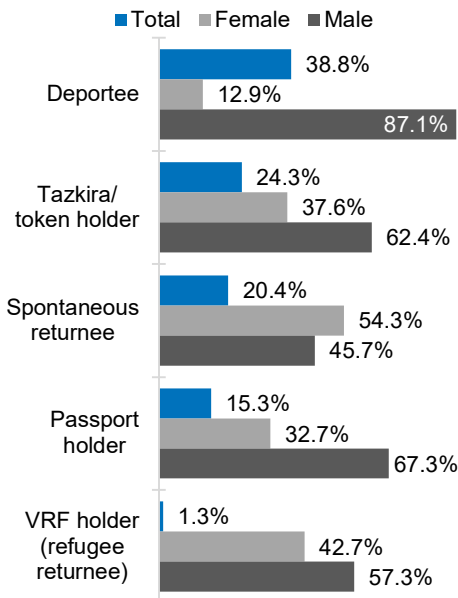
RESPONDENTS RECEIVED INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 UPON ARRIVAL IN AFGHANISTAN

During March, individual and household level interviews conducted by UNHCR through partners as part of border monitoring activities randomly reached a total of **10,074** returnees and deportees (representing **10%** of the total returnees/deportees during March) including **7,012 males** and **3,062 females**. Cumulatively during January and March 2021, a total of **24,994** interviews (representing **10%** of total returnees/deportees) were conducted with returnees/deportees of various status (**17,315 males** and **7,679 females**) upon return from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (**8,895**) and Islam Qala (**4,642**), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak/Chaman (**6,959**) and Torkham (**4,498**). These include **16,778** single individuals and **8,216** heads of households who returned with their families. In general, the majority of returnees/deportees from Iran are single males, while it is not the case among returnees/deportees from Pakistan.

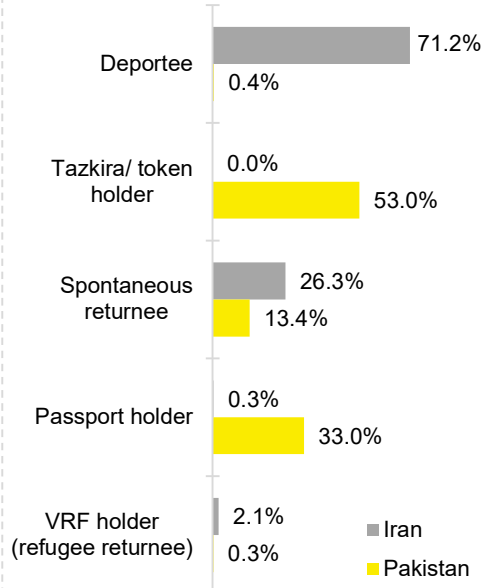
As a major issue that affected cross border movement, a demonstration at Islam Qala was reported on 9 -10 March, which caused the temporary suspension of population movement including voluntary repatriation.

Main findings of the border monitoring

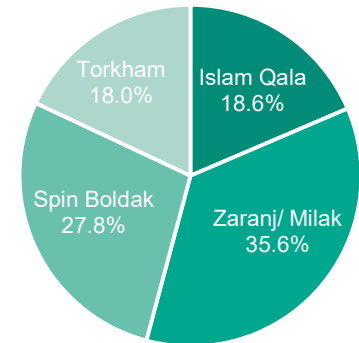
Respondents' Return Status by Gender



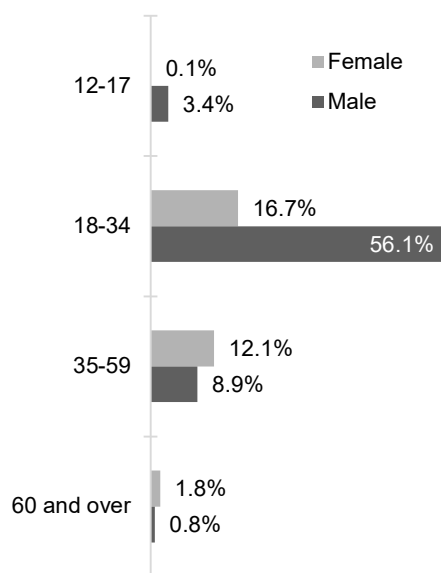
Respondents' Return Status by CoPR



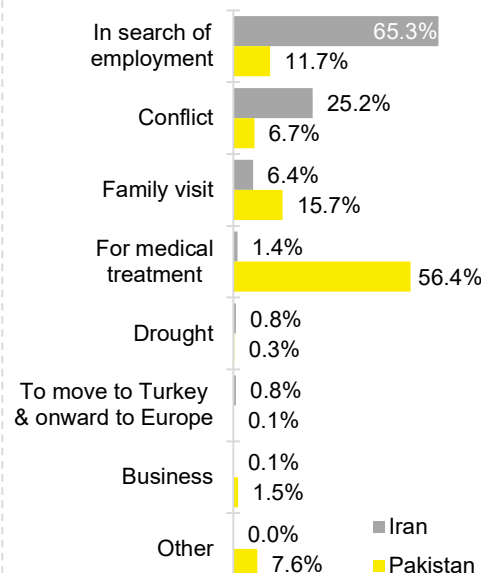
Respondents (%) by Entry Point



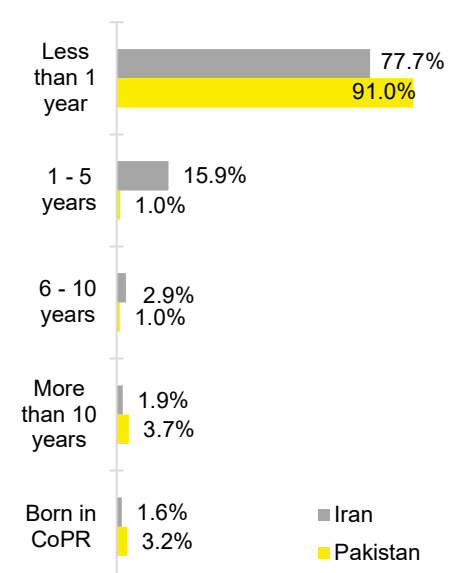
Respondents' Age and Gender



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):

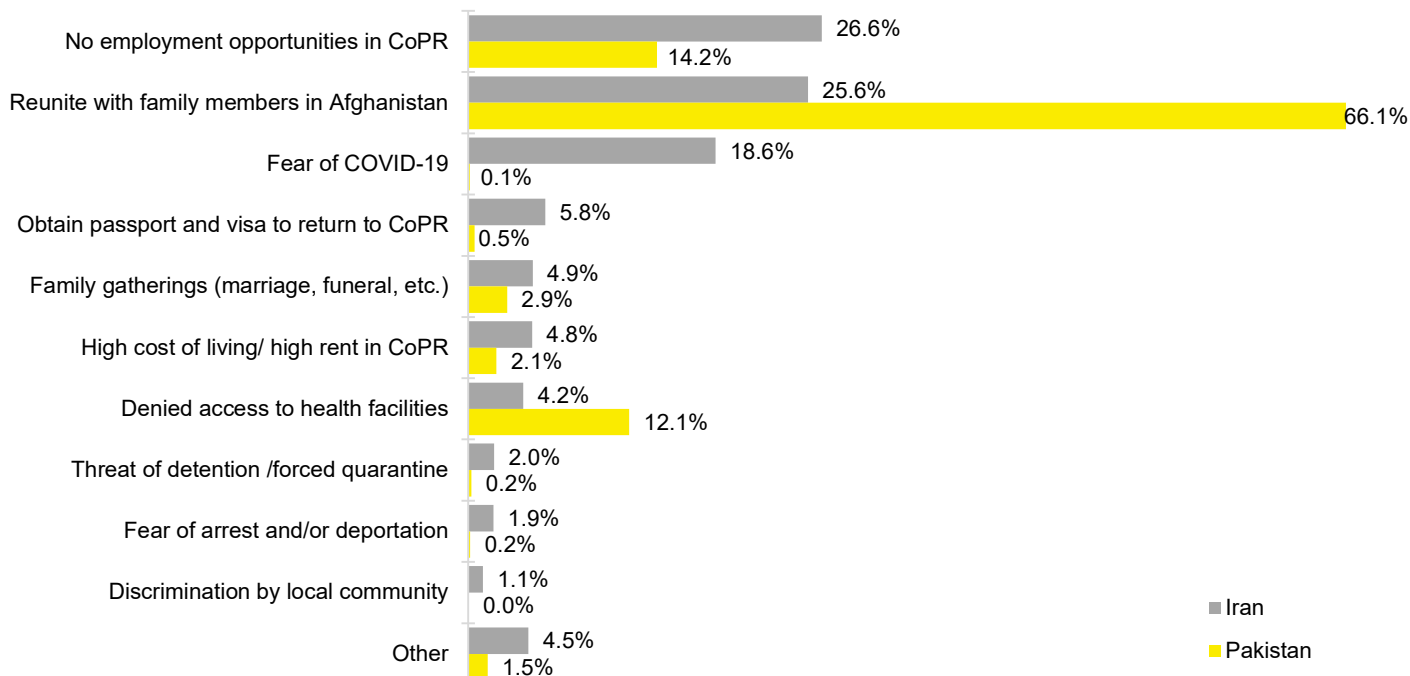
- Respondents include: 71% deportees, 26% spontaneous returnees (migrants), 2% VRF holders (refugee returnees), & 1% passport holders;
- 47% of the interviewed VRF holders, 39% of spontaneous returnees, and 13% of deportees were females;
- 82% of the respondents returned from 5 provinces in Iran: Sistan va Baluchestan, Teheran, Kerman, Khorasan Razavi, and Fars. These areas were among the top provinces from where many Afghans returned and/ or deported in 2020;
- 78% of the respondents spent less than one year in Iran, among whom 25% spent less than a week, 35% around a month, 22% 1-6 months, and 18% over 6 months;
- 65% of the respondents went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 25% due to conflict, 6% to visit family/relatives, 1% for medical treatment, and 2% for other reasons. The percentage of those respondents who cited conflict as the main reason for leaving Afghanistan (25%) has increased compared to last update (February 24%). Similarly, in 2020, this figure was 15% among the total sample size (40,861 interviews with returnees and deportees from Iran).

- 67% of the respondents who went to Iran due to conflict in Afghanistan were originally from 10 provinces: Herat, Takhar, Ghor, Faryab, Ghazni, Kunduz, Balkh, Badghis, Badakhshan, and Saripul.
- 31% of the respondents returned to Afghanistan due to economic problems including lack of employment opportunities (27%) and high cost of living (5%) in CoPR; 26% to reunite with family members in Afghanistan, 19% due to fear of COVID-19, 6% to obtain passport and visa to return to CoPR, 5% to attend family gatherings (marriage, funeral), 4% due to denied access to health facilities, and 9% due to other reasons.
- 33% of the respondents including 41% the spontaneous returnees and 27% deportees had to pay a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/approximately USD 5 - 25);
- 17% of respondents 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.
- 37% of respondents 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 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):

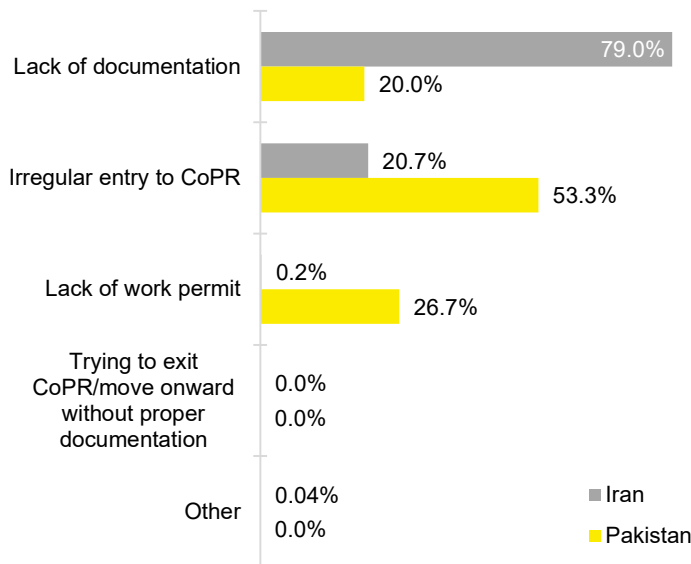
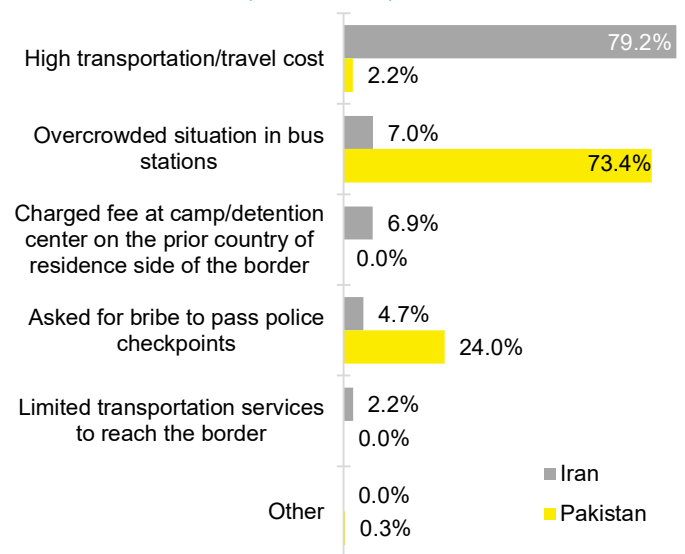
- Respondents include Tazkira/token holders (53%)¹, passport holders (33%), spontaneous returnees (13%), VRF holders and deportees (1% both);
- 90% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 38% of Tazkira/token holders, and 33% of passport holders were females;
- 55% of the respondents returned from Baluchistan, 34% from KPK, 6% Sindh, 3% Punjab, and 2% from Islamabad;
- 91% of the respondents spent less than a year in Pakistan, among whom 25% stated that they spent less than a week, 55% around a month, 19% 1-6 months, and 1% over 6 months;
- 56% of the respondents went to Pakistan for medical treatment, 16% to visit family/relatives, 12% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 7% due to conflict, 2% for business purpose, and 7% cited other reasons;
- 66% of the interviewed returnees returned to Afghanistan to reunite with family members, 14% due to lack of employment opportunities and 12% due to denied access to health facilities, and 8% due other reasons;
- 36% of the respondents faced problems during return. The problems include, among others, overcrowded bus stations, bribe required to pass police check points, and high transportation/ travel costs;
- 37% of the respondents 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;
- 59% of the respondents had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/ religious leaders and local communities. This figure slightly declined compared to January 2021 (57%) and December 2020 (60%).

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.

- A total of **9,693** interviews were conducted with deportees (**8,447 M and 1,246 F**), including **9,644** from Iran and **49** from Pakistan. The latter figure is small due to the low number of reported deportations from Pakistan.
- **Almost all of the interviewed deportees from Iran (99.7%) and Pakistan (73.3%)** 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 (4 respondents) from Pakistan and **0.2%** (24 respondents) from Iran 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. Only 11 deportees from Iran stated that they were 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 human rights violations as well as protection risks and challenges at entry points during the border crossing (outflow and inflow). During the reporting period, no incident was reported.

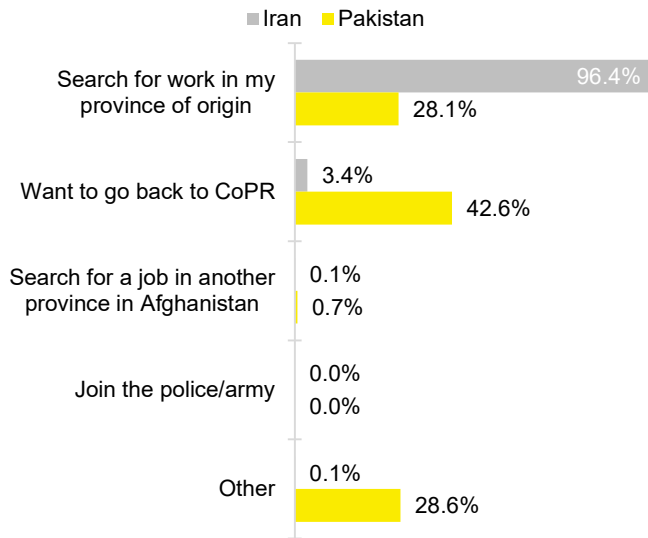
Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination) and Intentions after Return


93%

OF THE INTERVIEWED
 RETURNEES FROM IRAN
 AND PAKISTAN INTEND
 TO RETURN TO THEIR
 AREAS OF ORIGIN

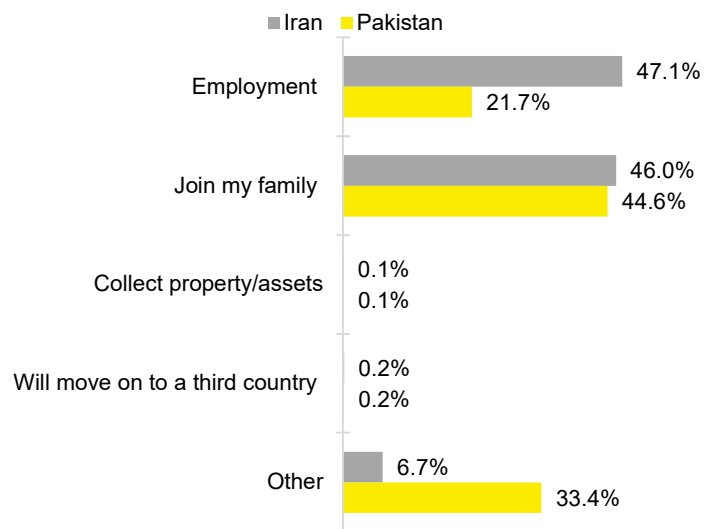
- **7%** do not return to their areas of origin due to lack of livelihood opportunities, perceived insecurity, lack of basic services including schools, reunification with family/relatives, and lack of housing/shelter.
- Interviewed returnees from Iran were travelling to 33 provinces, with the majority (**69%**) intend to return to Herat, Nimroz, Faryab, Takhar, Ghor, Kunduz, Ghazni, Badghis, Balkh, and Farah, provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were travelling to **34** provinces, with the majority (**85%**) intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Zabul, Herat, Kunduz, Uruzgan, and Logar provinces.
- **82%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**88%** of male respondents and **69%** of female respondents).
- **70%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees have no education, (**79% female and 66% male**). **8%** have minimal education (up to grade 6), **9%** up to grade 9, **7%** up to grade 12, **3%** went to madrasa, and **3%** went to university.
- **83%** stated that they will stay in their own house, nearly **8%** intend to rent a house, and **8%** will stay with relatives.
- **96%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees from Iran and **28%** from Pakistan they will try to find a job in their province of origin.
- **43%** of respondents from Pakistan and **3%** from Iran intend to go back to the CoPR: for employment, to join family, or to collect property.

Intention after return/deportation



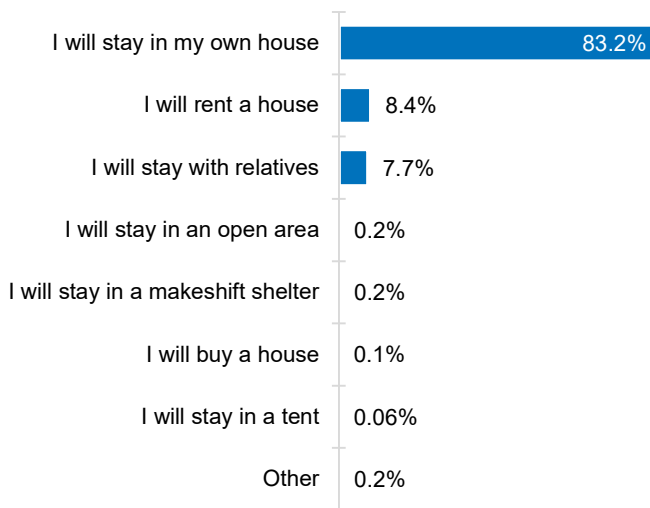
Other category includes: will stay with family, start small business, continue my education

Reasons for going back to CoPR

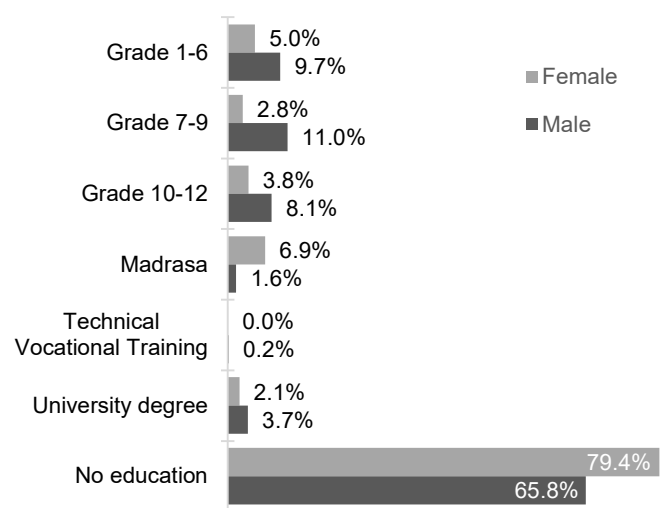


Other category includes: family visit, medical treatment, education and business.

Living arrangements after return



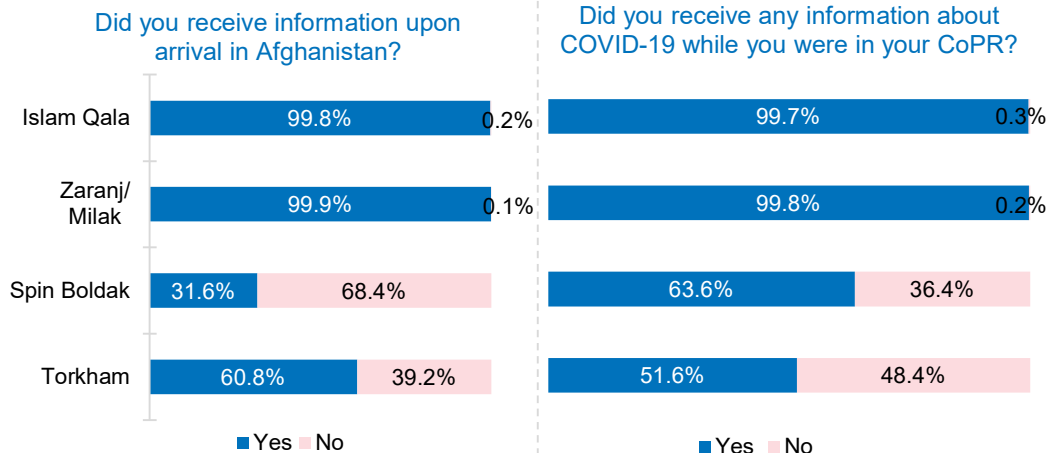
Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



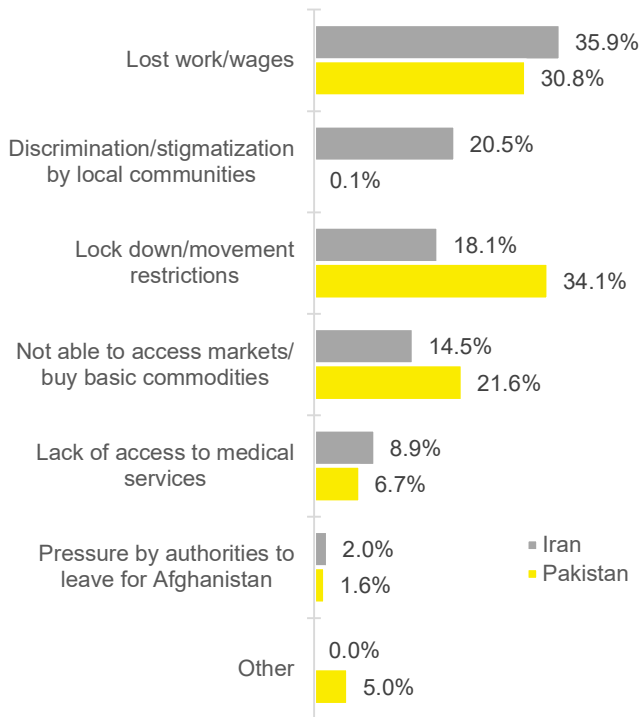
Information Dissemination on COVID-19 in Afghanistan and CoPR

74%

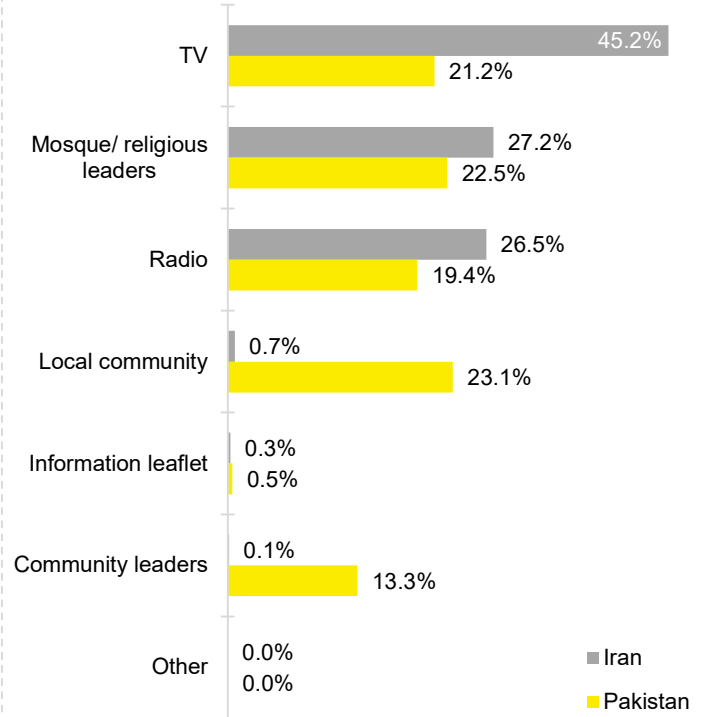
OF INTERVIEWED RETURNEES RECEIVED INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 UPON ARRIVAL IN AFGHANISTAN



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



Sources of Information about COVID-19 in Iran & Pakistan



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:

