

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

APRIL 2021

nice



UNHCR border monitoring partner (CHA) staff during screening of returnee women for interview, Islam Qala crossing point, Herat, Afghanistan, April 2021

774

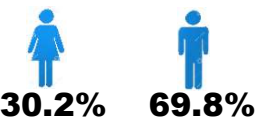
AFGHAN REFUGEES
RETURNED TO
AFGHANISTAN

368,406

UNDOCUMENTED
AFGHANS RETURNED /
DEPORTED FROM IRAN
AND PAKISTAN

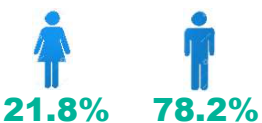
28,486

INFLOW INTERVIEWS
WITH RETURNEES FROM
IRAN AND PAKISTAN



2,493

OUTFLOW INTERVIEWS



62%

RESPONDENTS
WERE NOT AWARE
OF THE RISK OF
IRREGULAR
MIGRATION

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, in April 2020, 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 aims to ensure efficient, timely and systematic collection and analysis of protection related information from Afghan returnees 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.

As a recent improvement and in view of the current context in Afghanistan, UNHCR, in 2021, in consultation with UNHCR offices in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, revised its border (inflow) monitoring tool to include **outflow monitoring** in all four official entry points with Iran and Pakistan. The new tools were launched as of **01 April 2021** with the purpose to understand the triggers/intentions/reasons of Afghans movements to Pakistan and Iran. Outflows monitoring will also enable to assess access to the territory and "the right to seek asylum" for people fleeing persecution (in Afghanistan) who may be in need of international protection i.e. in Iran and / or Pakistan.

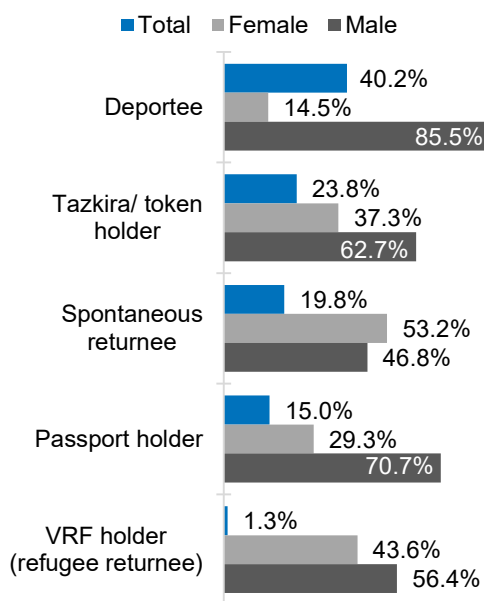
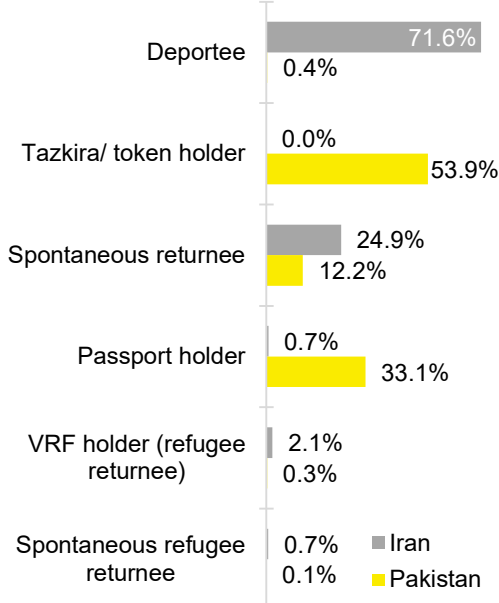
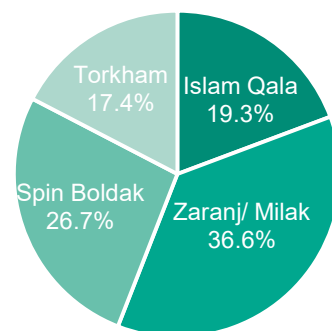
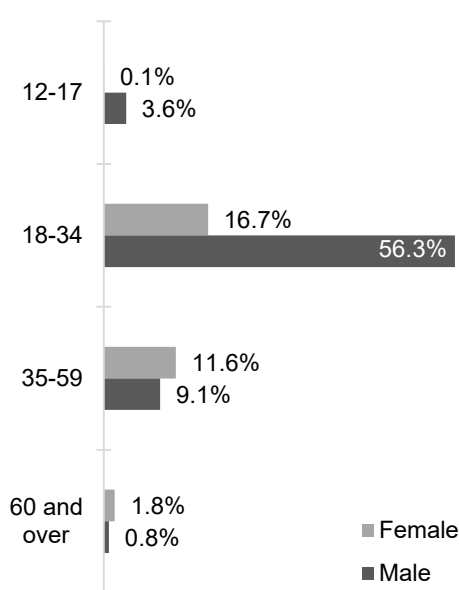
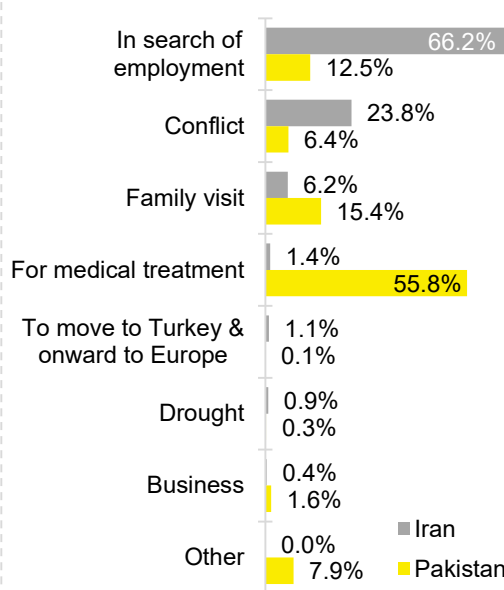
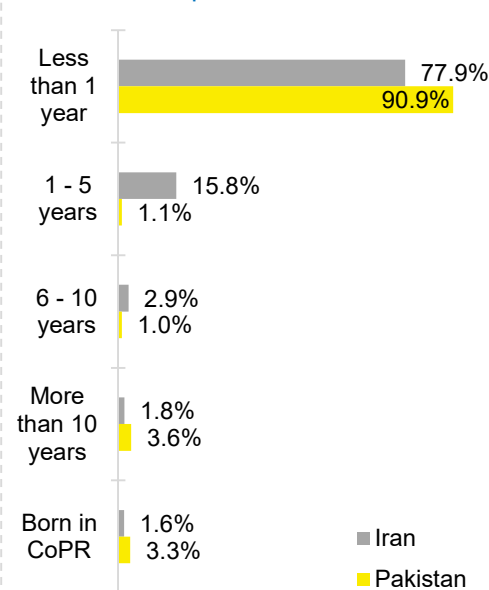
In April, UNHCR assisted the return of **201** Afghan refugees from Iran (**103**), Pakistan (**92**) and other countries (**6**). Cumulatively since the beginning of 2021, UNHCR assisted the return of **774** Afghan refugees from Iran (**536**), Pakistan (**226**) and other countries (**12**) under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. The figure is **153%** higher compared to 2020 figures at the same period when **306** refugees returned. Refugee returnees continue to receive upon arrival a multi-purpose cash grant (an average of USD 250 per person) and other multisector assistance services 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.

In addition to refugee returnees and in the context of coordinated activities at entry points, a total number of **118,802** undocumented returnees/deportees have been recorded in April, according to MoRR/IOM. This include **117,618** from Iran (**67,153** deportees and **50,465** spontaneous returnees) and **1,184** from Pakistan (**1,091** spontaneous returnees and **93** deportees). Cumulatively since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees/deportees stands at **368,406** individuals, including **363,942** from Iran (**203,761** deportees and **160,181** spontaneous returnees) and **4,464** from Pakistan (**4,074** spontaneous returnees and **390** deportees).

Individual and household level **inflow** interviews conducted by UNHCR through partners as part of border monitoring activities randomly reached a total of **3,492** returnees and deportees including **2,581 males** and **911 females** (representing **3%** of total returnees/deportees in April). Cumulatively since January 2021, a total of **28,486** interviews (representing **8%** of total returnees/deportees) were conducted with returnees/deportees of various status (**19,896 males** and **8,590 females**) upon return from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (**10,438**) and Islam Qala (**5,493**), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak/Chaman (**7,603**) and Torkham (**4,952**). These include **19,243** single individuals and **9,243** 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.

Similarly, during April 2021, **outflow** interviews were conducted by UNHCR through partners with a total of **2,493** Afghans including **1,949 males** and **544 females** prior to their departure to Pakistan - through Torkham (**515**) and Spin Boldak (**1,128**) – and Iran - through Islam Qala (**578**) and Zaranj (**272**) crossing points. These were consisting of **1,743** single individuals and **750** families. Outflow monitoring do not cover unofficial entry points which are not accessible by the humanitarian organizations.

Main Findings of the Border (Inflow) 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):

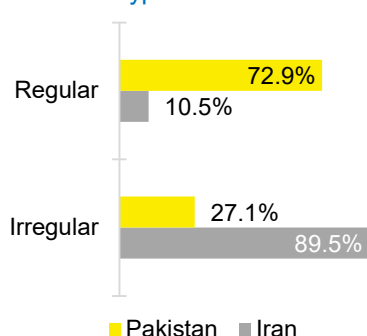
- Respondents include: 72% deportees, 25% spontaneous returnees (migrants), 2% VRF holders (refugee returnees), & 1% passport holders;
- 50% of the interviewed VRF holders, 42% of spontaneous returnees, and 15% of deportees were females;
- 81% of the respondents returned from 5 provinces in Iran: Sistan 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 24% spent less than a week, 37% around a month, 21% 1-6 months, and 18% over 6 months;
- 89% of the respondents moved to Iran irregularly, among whom the majority 97% paid a smuggler and 3% moved on their own arrangements;
- 82% of the respondents moved irregularly to Iran due to lack of financial means to obtain passport and visa, 14% said that it easier to reach Iran irregularly, 2% due to overcrowded situation in the embassy of Iran to obtain a visa, and 2% due to other reasons;
- 57% stated that they were not aware about the risks of irregular migration, including 91% males and 9% females. The lower percentage among females is due to the low female sample size. Majority of the returnees and deportees from Iran were single male individuals;
- 43% said that they had information about the risks of irregular migration, including 52% females and 48% males. Information was mainly obtained through the media and from friends/relatives;

- 66% of the respondents went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 24% due to conflict, 6% to visit family/relatives, 1% for medical treatment, and 3% for other reasons. The percentage (average) of those respondents who cited conflict as the main reason for leaving Afghanistan (24%) has slightly decreased compared to last month (March 25%). In 2020, this figure was 15% among the total sample size (40,861 interviews with returnees and deportees from Iran);
- 66% of the respondents who went to Iran due to conflict in Afghanistan were originally from 10 provinces: Herat, Ghor, Takhar, Faryab, Ghazni, Kunduz, Balkh, Badghis, Badakhshan, and Baghlan;
- 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;
- 62% of the respondents stated that they had moved to Iran for the first time, 7% for the second time, 3% for the third time, 9% for more than three times, 18% said that they were seasonal workers, and 1% said that they are regularly moving because they live in Afghanistan and have business in Iran or vice versa. This finding points out that approximately 40% of the interviewed returnees and deportees (2,394 respondents) were recyclers, though it is to be noted that this information was collected since 01 April 2021 and the percentage of recyclers may fluctuate over time;
- 30% of the respondents including 61% deportees and 39% the spontaneous returnees 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, overcrowded situation in the bus stations, fee charged at detention center, limited transportation services to reach the border, and bribe required to pass police check point;
- 36% 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.

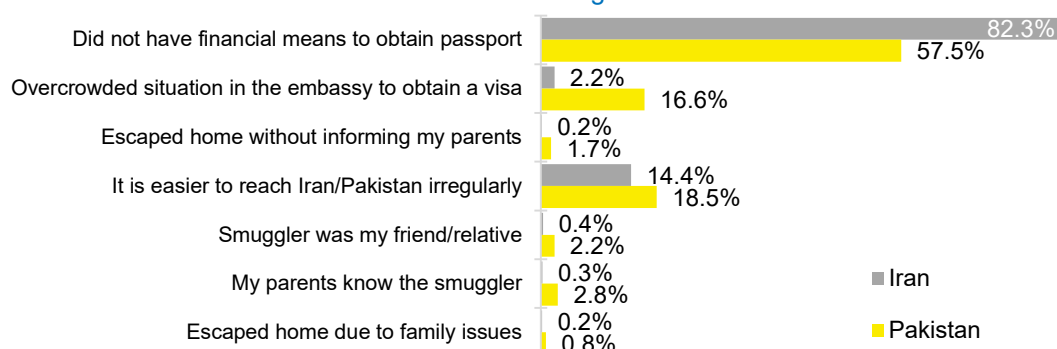
Findings of Interviews with Returnees and Deportees from Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham):

- Respondents include Tazkira/token holders (54%)¹, passport holders (33%), spontaneous returnees (12%), VRF holders and deportees (1% both);
- 90% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 37% of Tazkira/token holders, and 30% of passport holders were females;
- 54% of the respondents returned from Baluchistan, 34% from KPK, 6% Sindh, 4% 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;
- 27% of the respondents moved to Pakistan irregularly; 26% moved on their own arrangements, 15% paid bribe to border police;
- 58% of the respondents moved irregularly to Pakistan due to lack of financial means to obtain passport and visa, 19% said that it is easier to reach Pakistan irregularly, 17% due to overcrowded situation in the embassy of Pakistan to obtain a visa, and 6% due to other reasons;
- 83% stated that they were not aware about the risks of irregular migration, including 75% males and 25% females;
- 27% said that they had information about the risks of irregular migration, including 84% males and 16% females. Information was mainly obtained through the media, friends/relatives, community elders, and parents;
- 56% of the respondents went to Pakistan for medical treatment, 15% to visit family/relatives, 13% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 6% due to conflict, 2% for business purpose, and 8% cited other reasons;
- 66% of the interviewed returnees returned to Afghanistan to reunite with family members, 14% due to lack of employment opportunities and 13% due to denied access to health facilities, and 7% due to other reasons;
- 34% 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;
- 23% 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;
- 60% of the respondents had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/ religious leaders and local communities. This figure slightly increased compared to March 2021 (59%).

Type of movement

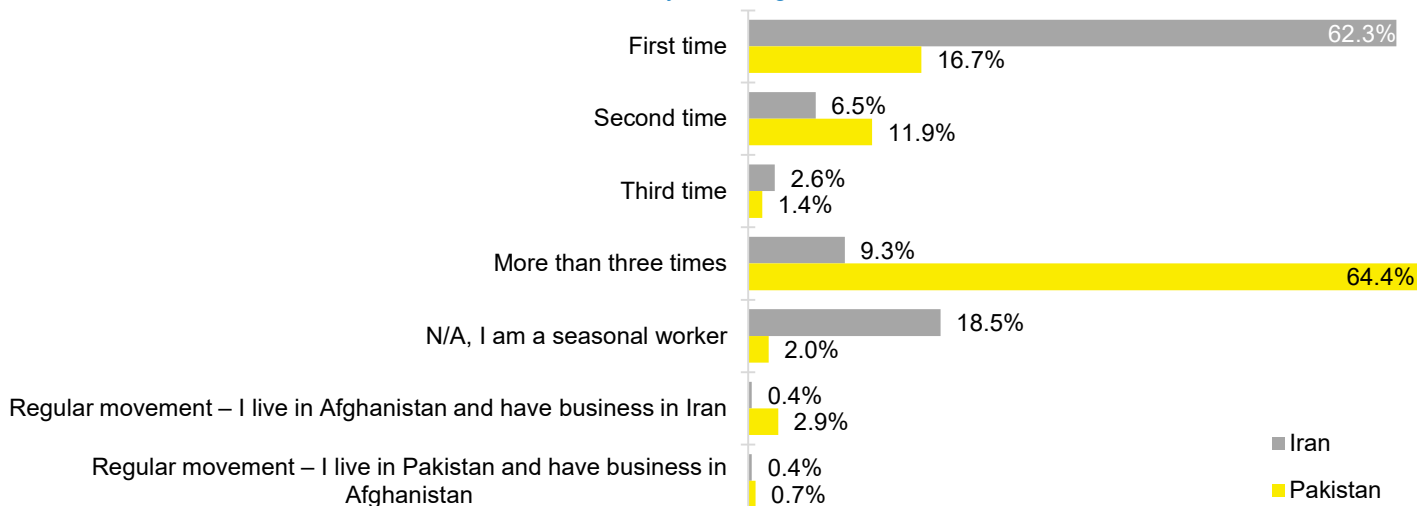


Reasons of Irregular movement

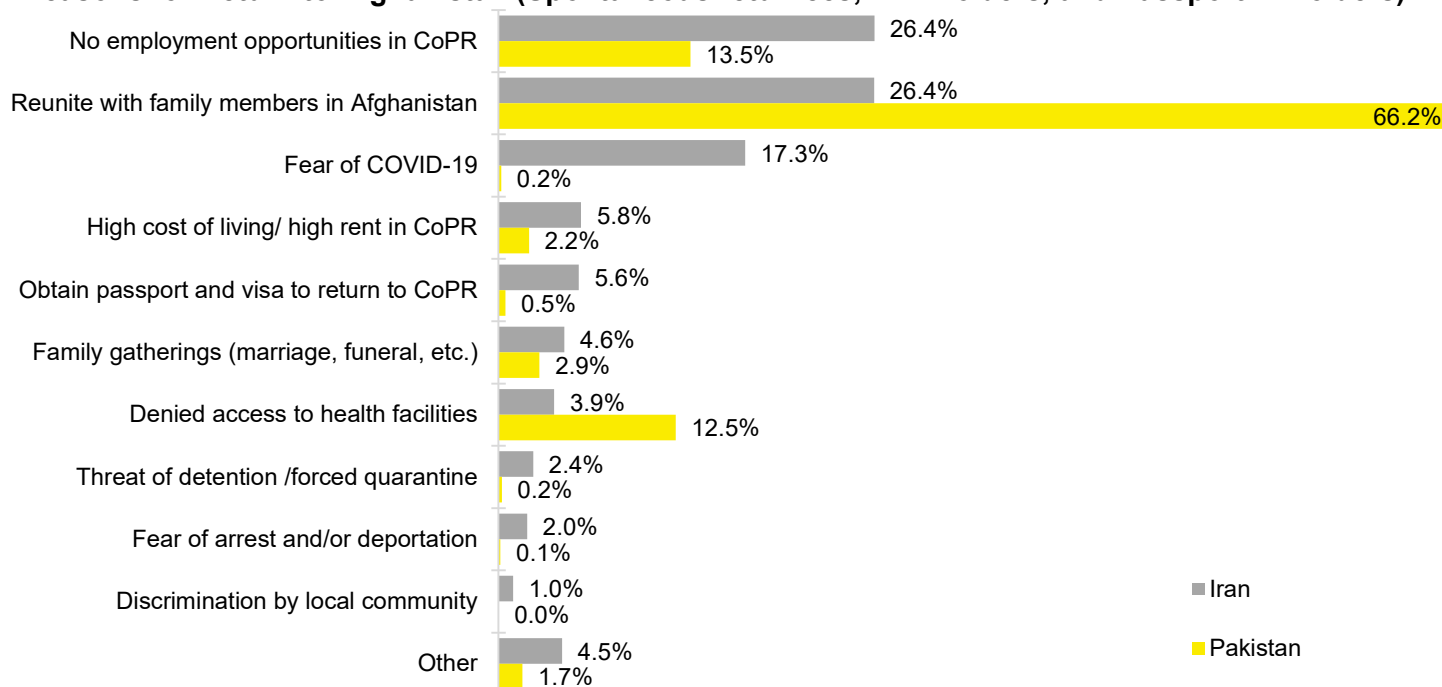


¹ This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently.

Movement Periodicity from Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan



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



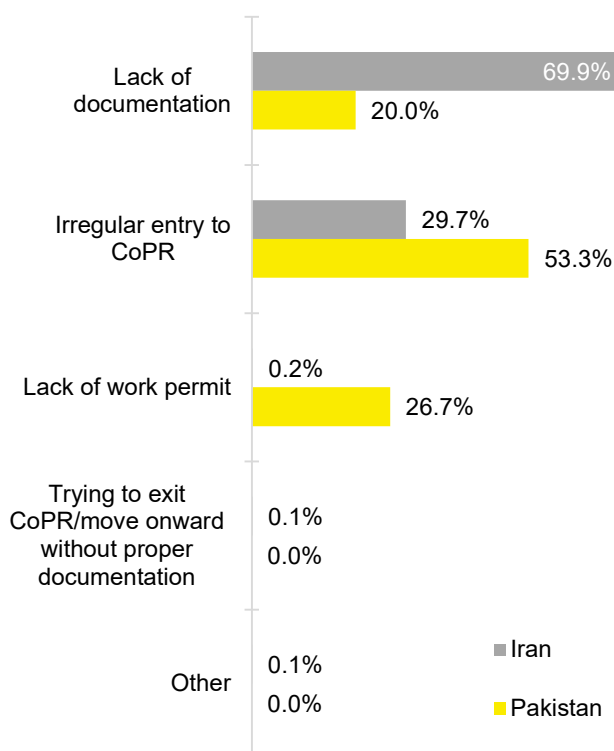
Incident Monitoring/ Challenges

- The suspension of outflow movement of Afghans to Iran** as a preventive measure to avoid the transmission of new type of COVID-19 identified in India was reported on 29 April. Similar measure was further taken by the Government of Pakistan on 05 May at Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points impacting outflows of Afghans to both countries. Exception was however provided for Pakistani citizens as well as for Afghans with serious medical conditions to enter into Pakistan after going through a screening process conducted by health officials inside Pakistan.
- 02 cases of **deportation of two refugee families** (Amayesh holders looking like refoulement) were reported. The two refugee families were arrested by Iranian police while attempting to cross from Iran to Turkey irregularly through Oromia border crossing point which is among the “No Go Areas” for Afghans. Both cases were referred to UNHCR’s reception center in Herat to receive necessary assistance. This issue was also shared with UNHCR office in Iran for possible advocacy and follow-up with the authorities in Iran. It is recalled that as per the regulations in Iran, Afghans who need to travel to No Go Areas are required to obtain a movement permit from the authorities.
- 4% of interviewed returnees from Iran and 24% from Pakistan reported to have been subject to **extorsion/bribery** to pass police check points. This issue was shared with UNHCR office in Iran for possible advocacy and follow-up with the authorities in both countries.
- Even though the number of cases reported remains low, less than 1% of interviewed returnees from Iran and Pakistan reported to have faced **physical assault** perpetrated by the police or local authorities in CoPR.

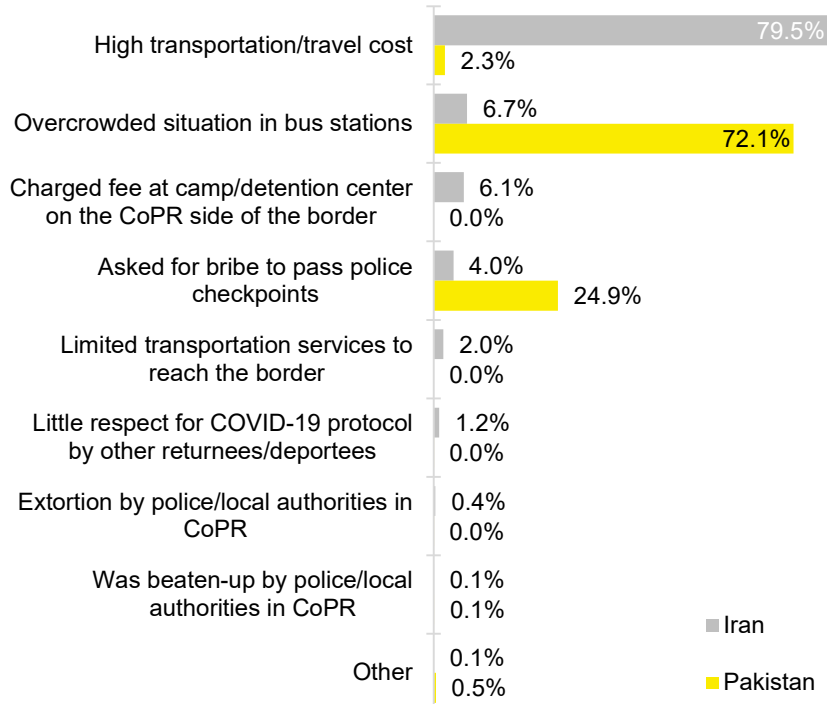
Reasons for Deportation to Afghanistan

- A total of **11,454** interviews were conducted with deportees (**9,794 M and 1,660 F**), including **11,405** 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 (99.6%) 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 15 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)



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

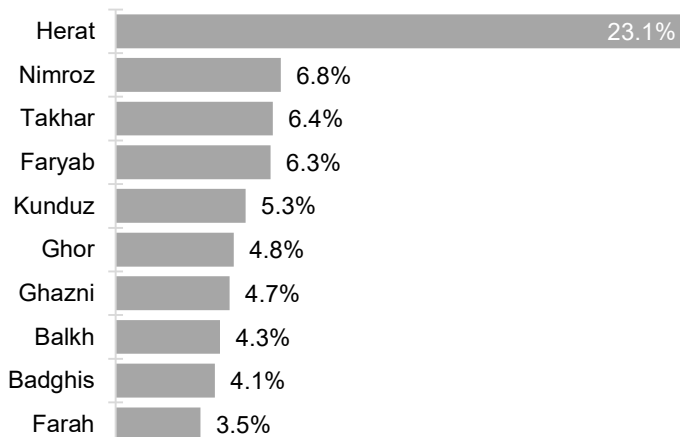


93%

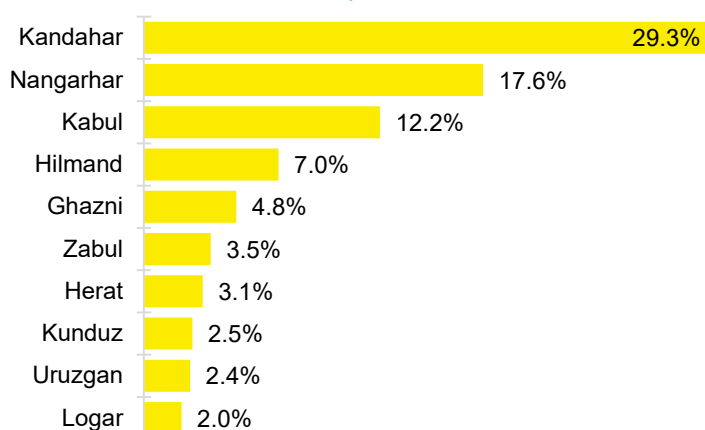
OF THE INTERVIEWED
 RETURNEES FROM IRAN
 AND PAKISTAN INTEND
 TO RETURN TO THEIR
 AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **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, Takhar, Faryab, Kunduz, Ghor, Ghazni, Balkh, Badghis, and Farah, provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were travelling to **34** provinces, with the majority (**84%**) intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Zabul, Herat, Kunduz, Uruzgan, and Logar provinces.
- **83%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**89%** of male respondents and **71%** of female respondents).
- **69%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees have no education, (**78% female and 64% male**). **9%** 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 **9%** intend to rent a house, and **8%** will stay with relatives.
- **88%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees from Iran and **26%** from Pakistan they will try to find a job in their province of origin.
- **43%** of respondents from Pakistan and **4%** from Iran intend to go back to the CoPR: for employment, to join family, to continue education, or to collect property.

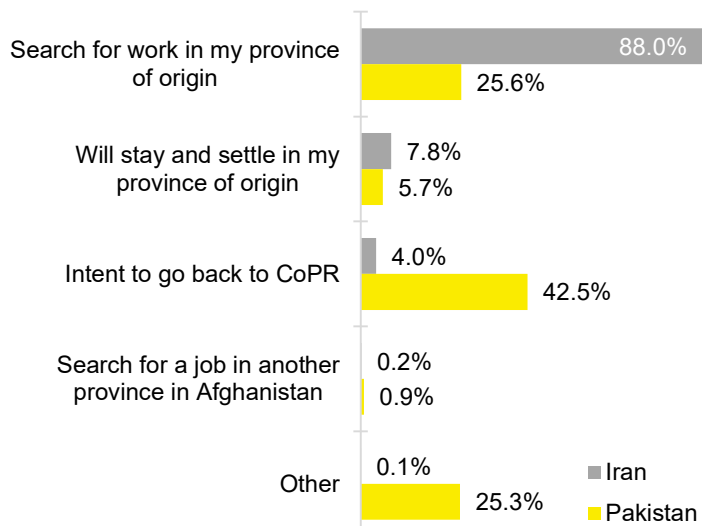
Top 10 Provinces of Intended Destination Returnees and Deportees from Iran



Top 10 Provinces of Intended Destination Returnees and Deportees from Pakistan

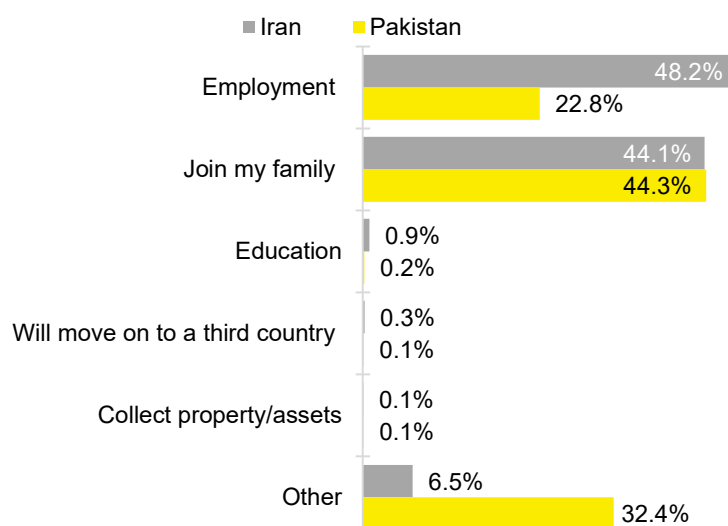


Intention after return/deportation



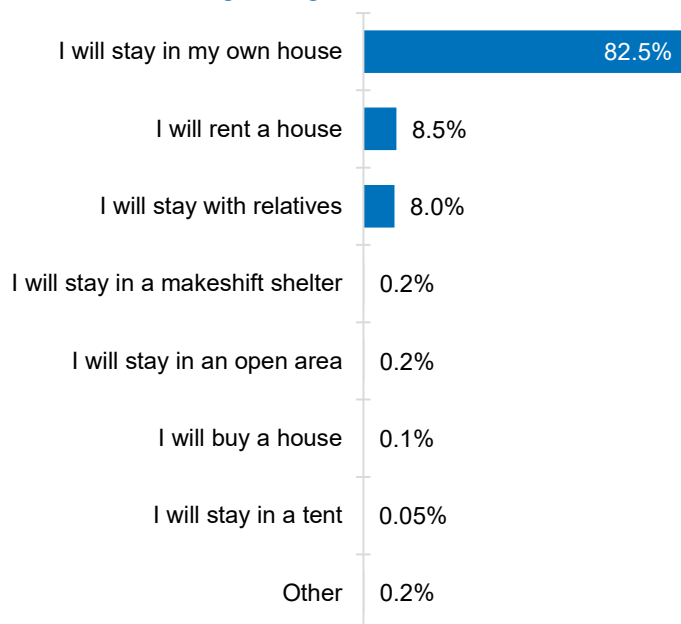
Other category includes: will stay with family, start small business, continue my education

Reasons for going back to CoPR

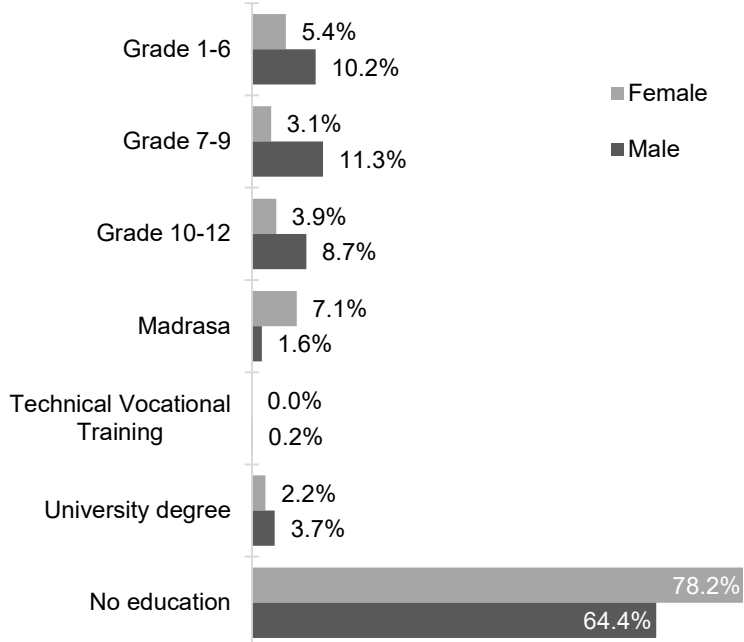


Other category includes: family visit, medical treatment, education and business.

Living arrangements after return



Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan

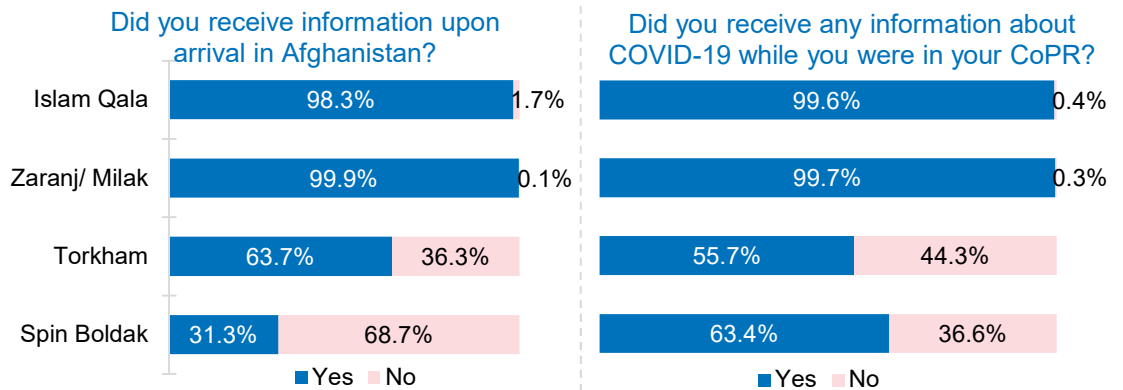


Information Dissemination on COVID-19 in Afghanistan and CoPR

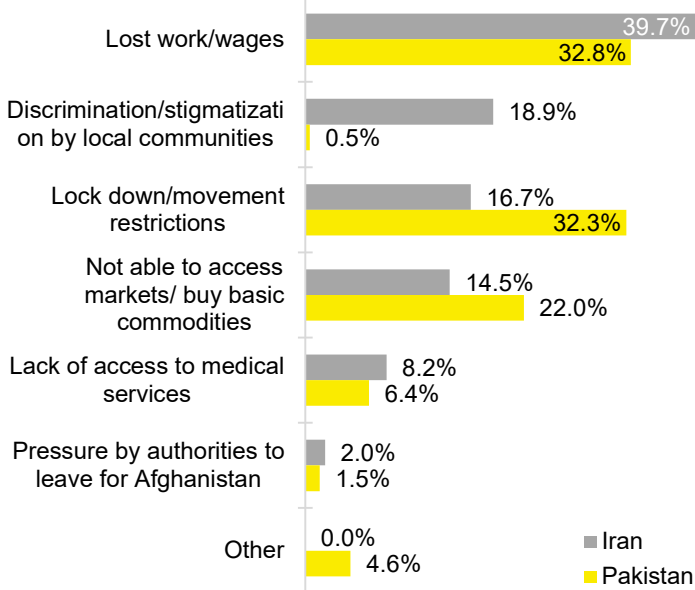


75%

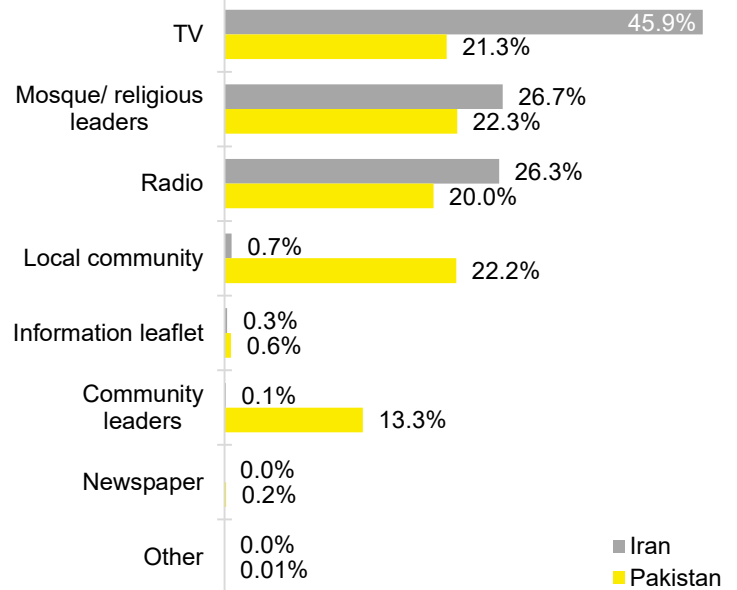
OF INTERVIEWED RETURNEES RECEIVED INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 UPON ARRIVAL IN AFGHANISTAN



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



Sources of Information about COVID-19 in Iran & Pakistan



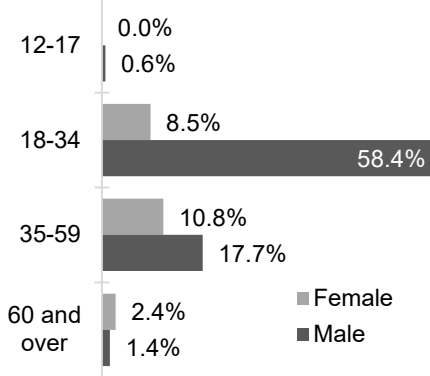
Outflow monitoring findings

Respondents moving to Iran (850)	Respondents moving to Pakistan (1,643)
Type of Documentation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All were Passport Holders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 75% Tazkira/Token holders 24% Passport holders 1% Other (PoR, ACC and border pass holders)
Family Situation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 94% were single male Individuals vs 6% family cases 86% married and 14% single 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 58% were single Individuals vs 42% family cases 84% married, 13% single, 3% widow
Reasons of Departure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 47% move for business 17% in search of employment 11% for medical treatment 10% move to join other family members 9% family visit 4% to continue education 2% other reasons including close to 1% due to conflict in AFG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 64% for medical treatment 15% family visit 11% in search of employment 4% for business 2% to attend social gathering (funeral, wedding) 1% to continue education 4% other reasons including close to 1% due to conflict in AFG
Movement Periodicity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33% stated that this is their first time moving to Iran 7% stated that they are moving for the second time 3% for third time 57% were regular movers (business owners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 37% stated that they are moving for the first time 23% for the second time 36% for third time 4% were regular movers (business owners)

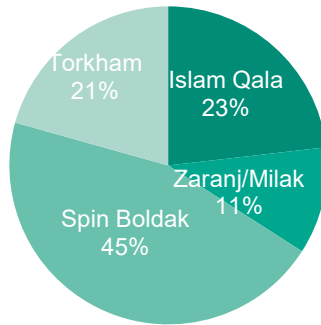
Expected Duration of Stay

- 17% stated that they will stay in Iran for one week
 - 31% for 1 month
 - 13% up to 6 months
 - 7% up to one year
 - 3% more than one year
 - 21% regularly move to Iran
 - 8% did not provide a response
- 60% stated that they will stay in Pakistan for one week
 - 26% for one month
 - 5% up to 6 months
 - 1% up to one year
 - 1% regularly move to Pakistan
 - 7% did not provide a response

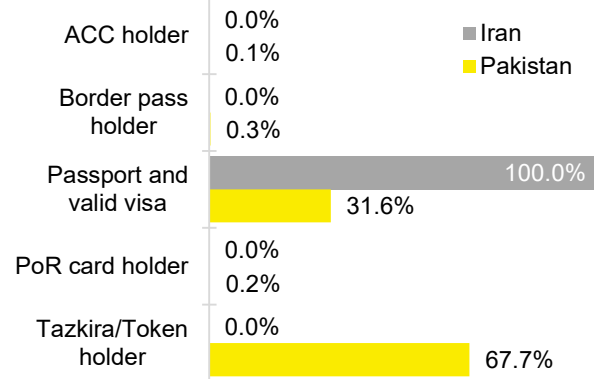
Respondents' Age and Gender



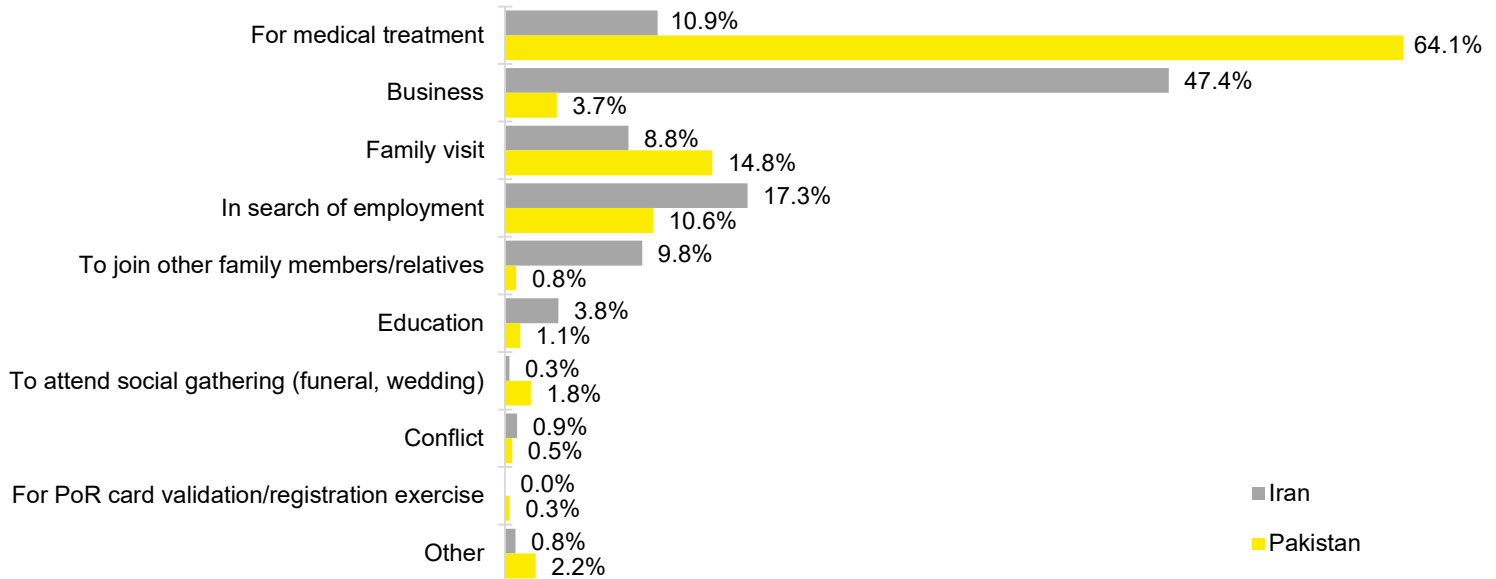
Respondents (%) by Exit Point



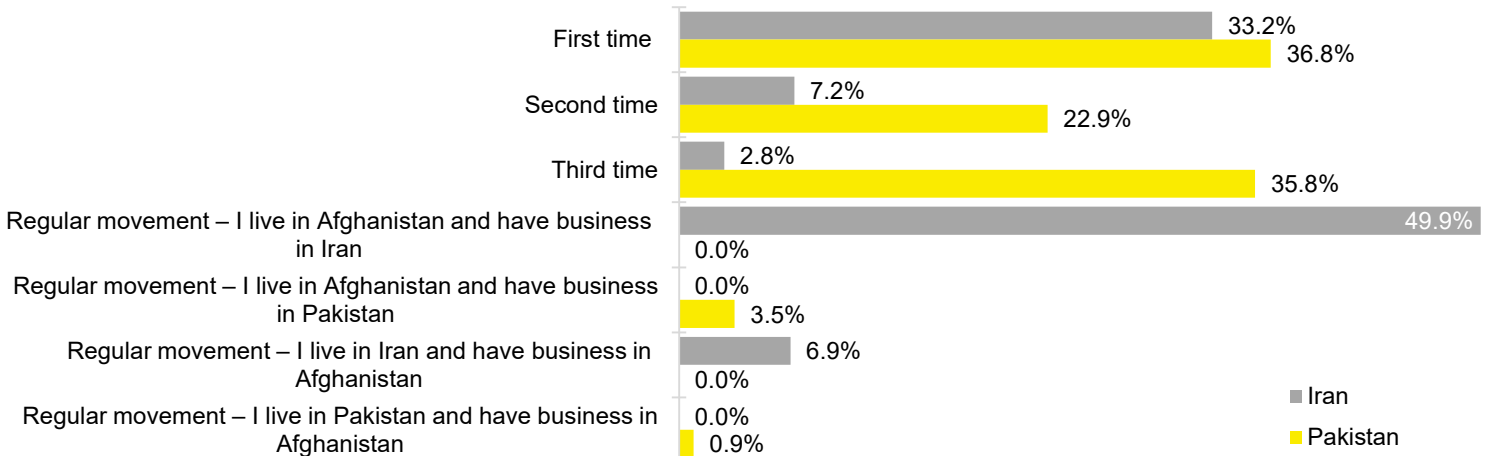
Documentation Type



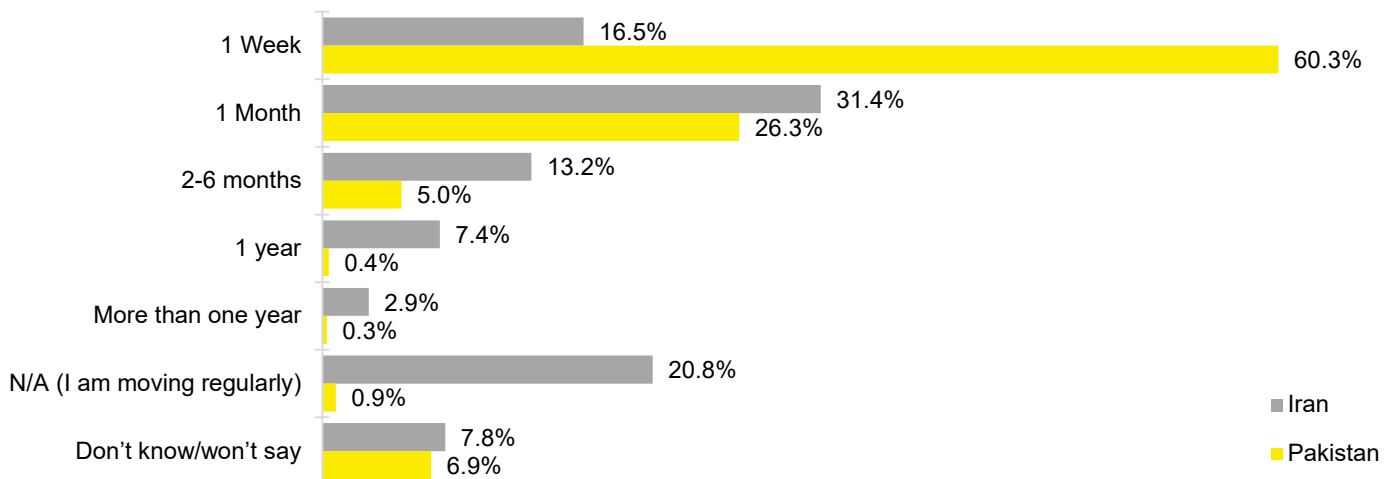
Reasons of departure



Movement periodicity



Expected duration of stay in Iran/Pakistan



- Outflow monitoring findings suggest that despite the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, insecurity is not the main driver of population movement from Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan. In April, only **0.9%** (out of a total of **850** interviewed Afghans who were traveling to Iran) and **0.5%** (out of a total of **1,643** interviewed Afghans who were traveling to Pakistan) stated that they are leaving Afghanistan due to conflict. The majority stated that they are moving to Pakistan and Iran for a temporary duration ranging from **1 week to 1 month**, mainly for medical reasons, business, and family visits.
- 100%** of the movers to Iran had a valid passport and visa that could be justified by the very rigid immigration policies in place in Islam Qala and Zaranj crossing points with Iran as compared to Pakistan given only **31%** of the movers were holding a passport and visa.
- The majority of the outflow movements Afghanistan to Pakistan are justified by medical treatment (**61%**), and family visit (**14%**); while those moving to Iran were principally for business (**47%**) and in search for employment opportunities (**17%**).
- An average of **35%** of the outflow monitoring respondents stated that they were moving to Iran and Pakistan (**33%** and **37%** respectively) for the **first time** compared to an average of **40%** of the inflow monitoring respondents who stated that they moved to Iran and Pakistan (**62%** and **17%** respectively) for the first time. The difference is due to the fact that the inflow monitoring respondents were deportees and returnees who normally move to Iran and Pakistan irregularly through unofficial entry points with the help of smugglers.
- Nearly **50%** of the outflow movers stated that they are regularly moving back and forth to Iran because they live in **Afghanistan** but have a business in **Iran** while **7%** of the outflow movers stated that they live in **Iran** but have a business in **Afghanistan**. In contrast, the percentage of regular movers to Pakistan is very low - only **4%** stated that they live in Afghanistan but have a business in Pakistan and **0.9%** stated that they live in Pakistan but have business in Afghanistan.
- An average of **15%** stated that they are moving to Iran and Pakistan for the **second time** (**7%** and **23%** respectively). This figure is slightly low compared to the inflow monitoring respondents (**an average of 10%**) from Iran and Pakistan (**7%** and **12%** respectively).

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

