

BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

09 - 15 August 2020



CHA staff (UNHCR partner) conducting interview with a returnee, Islam Qala, Herat, Afghanistan

August 2020
CHA/ Tariq Faizi

551

AFGHAN REFUGEES
RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of **551** Afghan refugees from Iran (**492**), Pakistan (**16**) and other countries (**43**) 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. Voluntary repatriation from Iran resumed as of 30 April and from Pakistan on 10th of August. UNHCR in Pakistan will process returning refugees on Mondays and Tuesdays and they subsequently will be able to cross through Torkham and Chaman/Spin Boldak crossing points on the same days. Once in Afghanistan, returnees will receive a cash grant covering transportation and initial reintegration (on average USD 250 per person) and other services at one of three encashment centers (located in Nangarhar, Kabul, and Kandahar). This working arrangement will be revised as necessary. During the reporting period there were no returns from Pakistan, but a number of refugee families who plan to return have approached UNHCR's voluntary repatriation centers in Pakistan and been scheduled for deregistration and subsequent voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan during the next week.

449,213

UNDOCUMENTED
AFGHANS RETURNED
FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

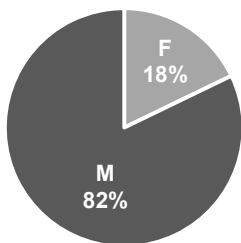
According to MoRR/IOM, during the weeks of **09 - 15 August**, the total number of undocumented returnees from Iran was **17,574 (8,868 spontaneous returnees and 8,706 deportees)** and from Pakistan was **44 (37 spontaneous returnees and 7 deportees)**. Since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is **449,213** individuals, including **447,206** from Iran (**301,799 spontaneous returnees and 145,407 deportees**) and **2,007** from Pakistan (**1,876 spontaneous returnees and 131 deportees**).

18,090

INTERVIEWS WITH
RETURNEES FROM IRAN
AND PAKISTAN

On 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).

On 15 August, **6,188** stranded Afghans crossed through Torkham into Afghanistan, while **820** stranded Pakistanis returned to Pakistan. In addition, Spin Boldak was opened for pedestrian movement after protesters removed the barriers. A total of **10,227** stranded Afghans crossed into Afghanistan, and **13,415** stranded Pakistanis crossed into Pakistan.



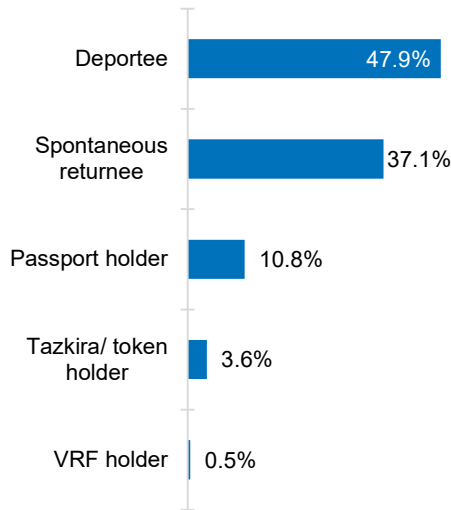
BORDER MONITORING

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.

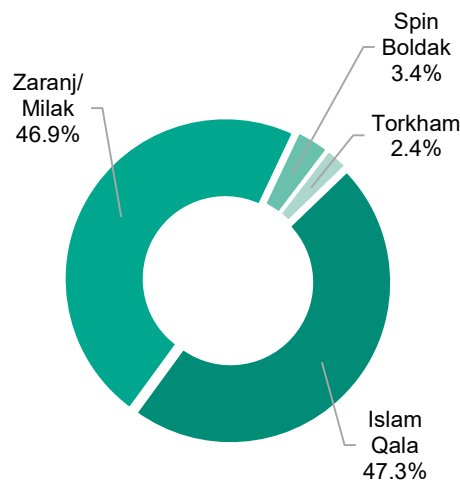
Between 09 - 15 August, **1,444 interviews, including 1,121 male and 323 female** respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (1,320) and Pakistan (124). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of **18,090 returnees (14,863 M and 3,227 F)** were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Islam Qala (8,551) and Zaranj/Milak (8,490), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak (619) and Torkham (430), including 14,284 single individuals and 3,806 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.

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

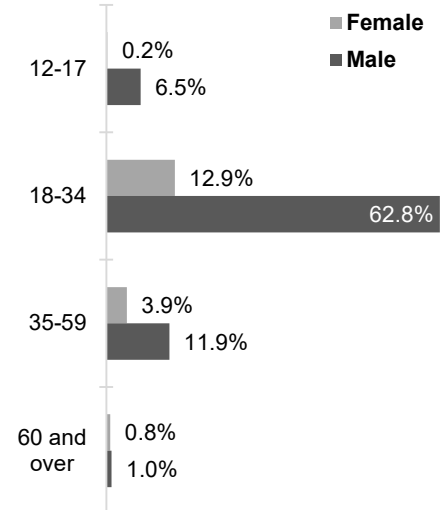
Respondents' Return Status



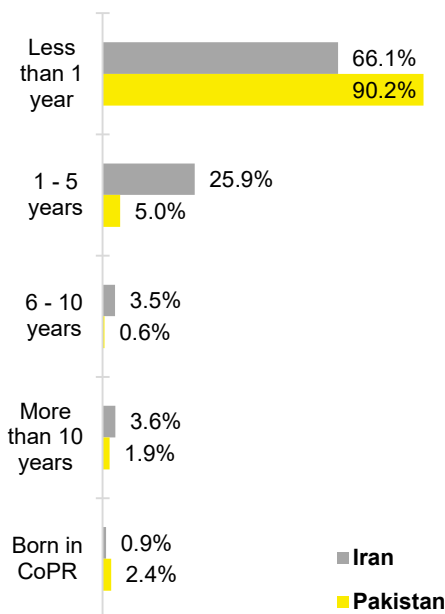
Respondents (%) by Entry Point



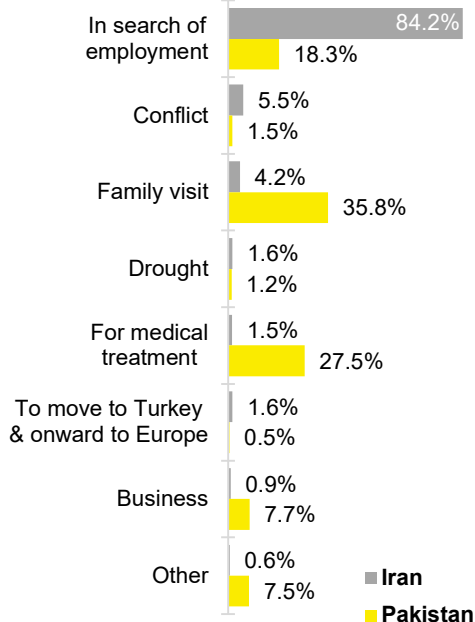
Respondents' Age and Gender



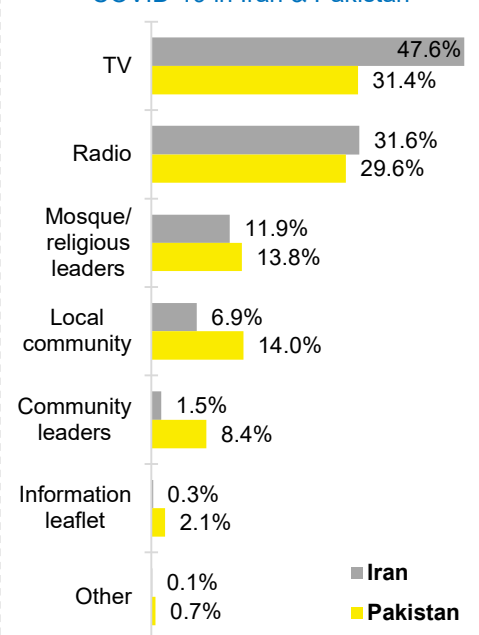
Years Spent in the CoPR



Reason for entry to CoPR



Sources of Information about COVID-19 in Iran & Pakistan



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

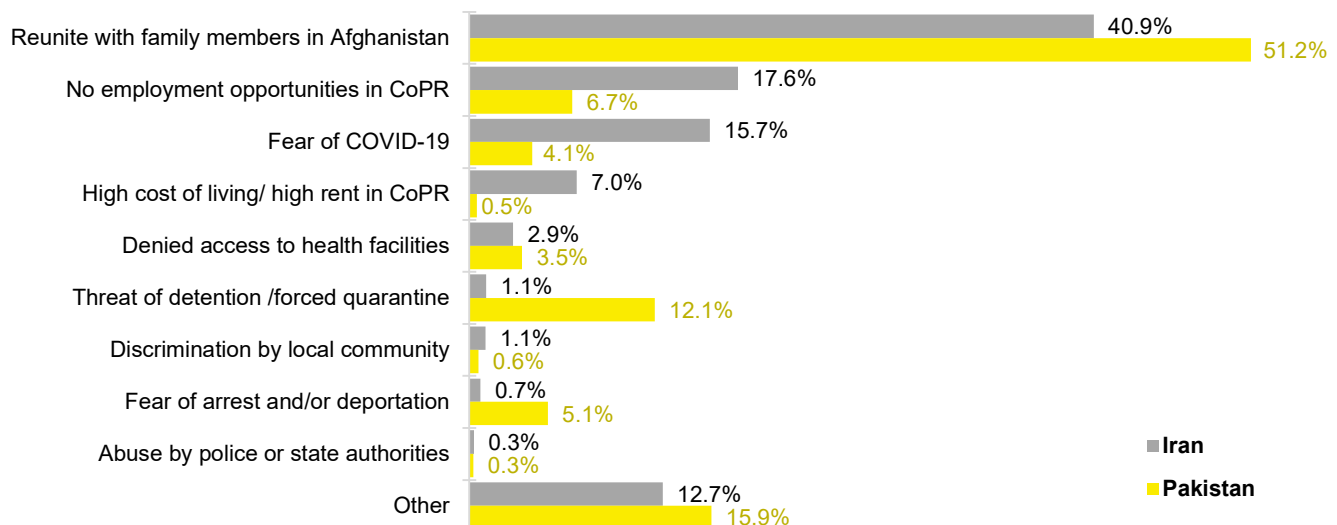
Interviewed Returnees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

- 51% deportees, 38% spontaneous returnees, 10% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 27% of the interviewed VRF holders, 24% spontaneous returnees, 13% of deportees, and 6% of passport holders were female;
- 72% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from five provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Fars, Khuzistan, and Kerman; 66% spent less than one year in Iran;
- 84% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 6% due to conflict, 4% to visit family/relatives, 2% for medical treatment, 2% (mainly deportees) to move to Turkey and onward to Europe, and 2% for other reasons;
- 33% (5,539 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, such as lost work/wages, lack of access to medical services, movement restrictions related to the lockdown, pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan discrimination/stigmatization by local communities, and lack of access to markets;
- 93% of returnees and deportees stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, mainly through TV, radio and local communities;
- 13% of interviewed deportees stated that they did not receive information about COVID-19 in Iran; this figure is much lower among passport holders (4%), spontaneous returnees (1%) and VRF holders (1%);
- 43% (7,252 respondents) claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/ approximately USD 7-35);
- 22% 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):

- 63% were Tazkira/token holders¹, 27% passport holders, and 10% spontaneous returnees;
- 63% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 46% of Tazkira/token holders, and 12% of passport holders were female;
- 49% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 34% from KPK, 10% Sindh, 6% Punjab, and 1% from Islamabad; 90% spent less than a year in Pakistan;
- 36% went to Pakistan to visit family/relatives, 28% for medical treatment, 18% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 8% for business purpose, 2% due to conflict, and 8% cited other reasons;
- 55% (579 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, mainly movement restrictions due to the lockdown, lost work/wages, lack of access to markets, and lack of access to medical services;
- 92% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/ religious leaders and local communities;
- 33% claimed that they faced problems 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)

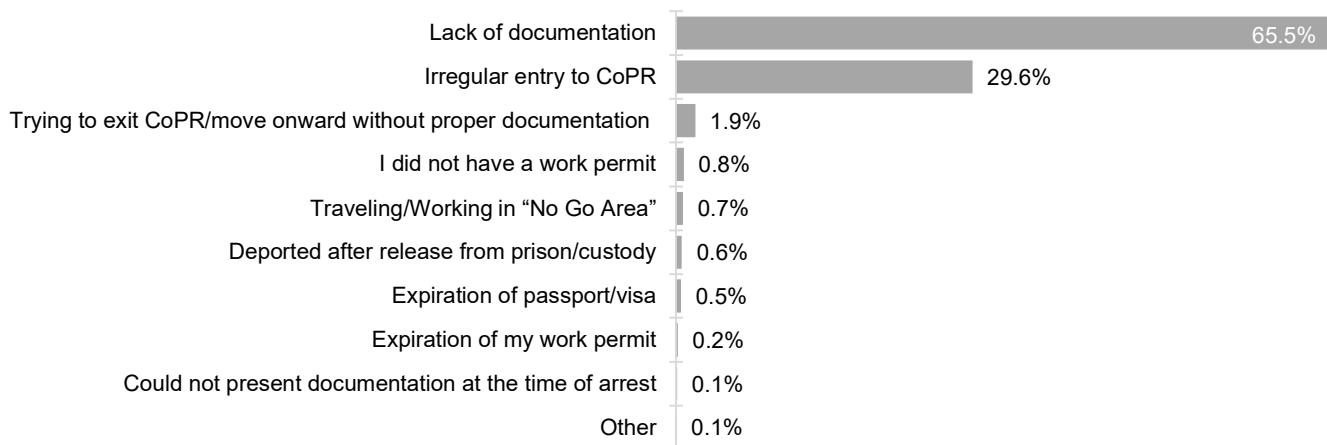


¹ This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently.

- 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 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 since then a total of **7,619** interviews were conducted, including **3,578** interviews with deportees (**3,070 M and 508 F**).
- **The majority of interviewed deportees (95%)** cited lack of documentation and irregular entry to CoPR as the reasons provided to them for their deportation.
- **Nearly 2%** of interviewed deportees (82 respondents, including 56 single individuals and 26 family cases) stated that they were arrested and deported following their attempt to leave Iran and move onward to a third country in the absence of proper documentation.
- **2%** (66 respondents) of the interviewed deportees (**3,578**) stated that they went through a legal procedure and were deported after receiving a court order, while over **98%** of the interviewed deportees stated that they were deported in the absence of a court order.

Note: "No Go Areas" are specific provinces in Iran where foreign nationals including Afghans are not allowed to travel and work.

Reason Provided for Deportation (only deportees from Iran)

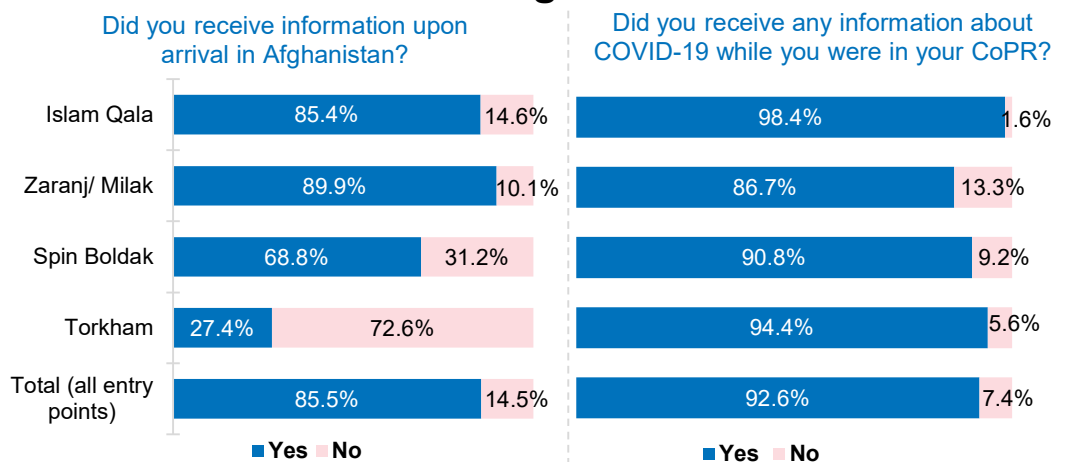


Information Dissemination in Afghanistan



86%

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



As noted in previous updates, the gap in information dissemination in Torkham is mainly the result of the limited opening of the border for pedestrian movements, which creates an overcrowded situation as thousands of people try to cross at once, with little attention to services provided by partners, including health screening and information dissemination about COVID-19. However, it should be noted that 94% of the interviewed returnees in Torkham confirmed that they received information about COVID-19 in the CoPR. UNHCR has raised this matter with the border authorities and partners. Similarly, the information gap in Spin Boldak is related to limited opening hours of the border for pedestrian movement and the fact that returnees are not focused on services, including awareness raising about COVID-19. The information gap at Zaranj/Milak has improved significantly (from 42% to 10%) since UNHCR's follow-up with partners in early May. Overall, the provision of information has improved (from 70% to 86%) since May/June.

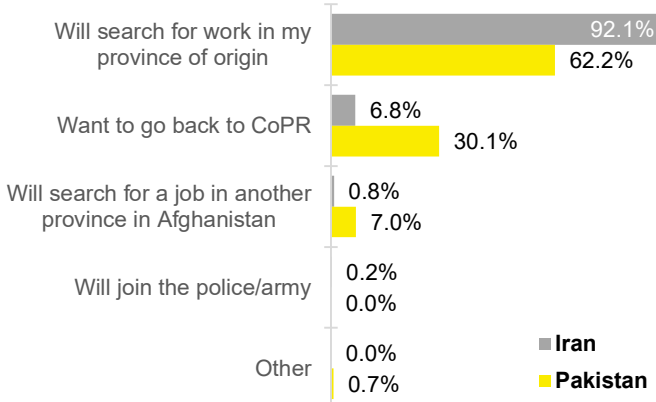
Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination) and Intentions after Return



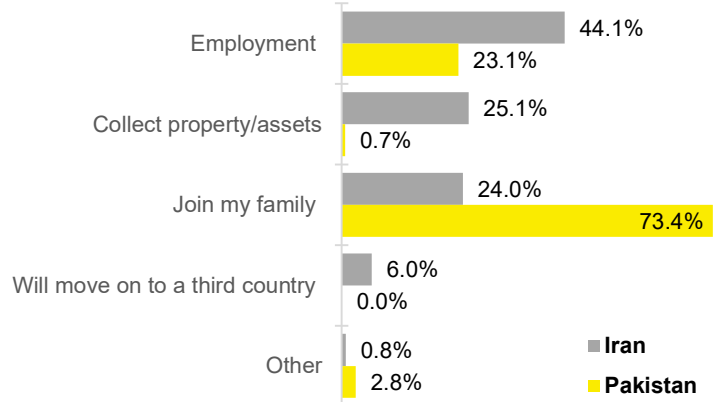
96% OF THE INTERVIEWED RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY ARE RETURNING TO THEIR AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **4%** do not return to their areas of origin due to lack of 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 (**70%**) intending to return to Herat, Faryab, Nimroz, Takhar, Kunduz, Ghor, Farah, Badghis, Balkh, and Badakhshan provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were traveling to **29** provinces, with the majority (**87%**) intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Ghazni, Helmand, Kunduz, Paktika, Paktya, Kunar, and Laghman provinces.
- **81%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**84%** of male respondents and **68%** of female respondents).
- **75%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees stated that have no education. **10%** stated that they have minimal education (up to grade 6), **6%** up to grade 9, **7%** up to grade 12, **1%** went to university, and **1%** went to madrasa.
- **83%** stated that they will stay in their own house, **12%** stated that they will rent a house, and nearly **4%** will stay with relatives.
- **92%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees from Iran and **62%** from Pakistan stated that they will try to find a job in their province of origin.
- **7%** of respondents from Iran and **30%** from Pakistan stated that they intend to go back to the CoPR: for employment, to collect property or to join family. **6%** of the respondents from Iran stated that they intend to go back to move on to a third country.

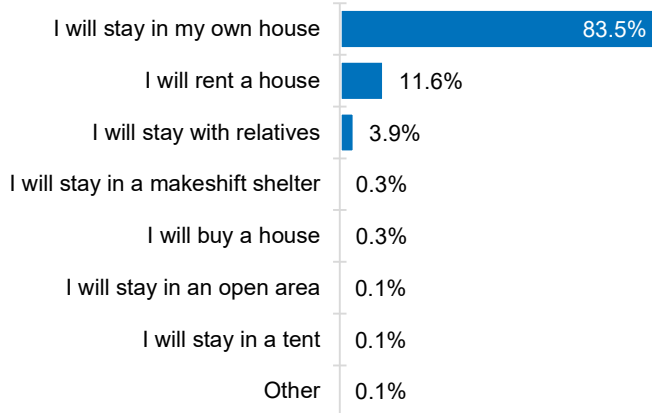
Intention after return/deportation



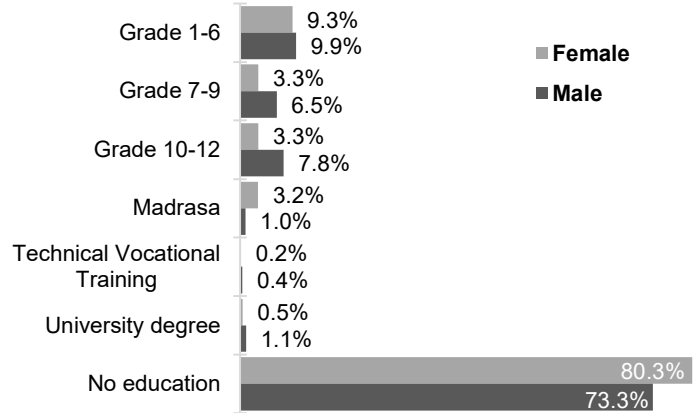
Reasons for going back to CoPR



Living arrangements after return



Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



CONTACT US

Angela Moore, Snr. Protection Officer | Tel.: +93 791990160 | Email: moorea@unhcr.org

Mohammad Haroon, Assistant Repatriation Officer | Tel.: +93 791990019 | Email: haroon@unhcr.org