

# UNHCR AFGHANISTAN

## BORDER MONITORING REPORT

JANUARY-JUNE 2023



Spin Boldak Crossing Point, Kandahar, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Afghanistan



**76,583**  
Inflow & Outflow  
Monitoring Interviews



**70,134**  
92%



**6,449**  
8%

### BACKGROUND

- UNHCR's border monitoring seeks to assess people's ability to access the right to return and map potential protection risks and human rights violations faced by people across four official crossing points shared with Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj) and Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham). In April 2021, UNHCR launched outflow monitoring interviews at the individual and household level at all eight official crossing points the country shares with Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in view of the situation in Afghanistan.
- In early August 2021, UNHCR expanded border monitoring interviews to include unofficial crossing points after receiving reports that many Afghans were departing to neighboring countries (mostly Iran and Pakistan) irregularly via unofficial crossing points.
- UNHCR border monitoring seeks to understand the triggers, intentions and reasons for Afghan cross-border movements, assess access to territory and "the right to seek asylum" as well as the barriers which hinder the movement of people who may need international protection.
- This report presents the findings of outflow and inflow border monitoring interviews with Afghans – irrespective of their status – conducted by UNHCR's partners at eight official crossing points and with key informants around unofficial crossing points during the first half of 2023. Interviewees were randomly selected upon entry to Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
- During the first half of 2023, 76,583 outflow and inflow monitoring interviews were carried out with 70,134 male and 6,449 female respondents. Inflow and outflow interviews were conducted mostly with male interviewees since many of those crossing the border, were single male individuals. In addition, male heads of households usually spoke on behalf of their families. Interviews at unofficial crossing points were held with male key informants mainly due to the remote nature of unofficial crossing points and difficulties in identifying female key informants.
- Although UNHCR remains committed to gender-balanced border monitoring, it has been particularly challenging to collect protection-sensitive information from female respondents due to the lack of confidential spaces required to conduct interviews at official crossing points. Furthermore, since December 2022, when the ban on female aid workers was introduced, the UNHCR border monitoring partners were not able to deploy female staff at the official crossing points, hence affecting UNHCR's efforts to conduct interviews with female travelers. However, as of 29 April, the DfA allowed the partner to resume activities at the Torkham crossing point. Negotiation is ongoing to secure authorization for other crossing points.



**38,672**  
AFGHANS  
13,801 families

**35,117**  
91%

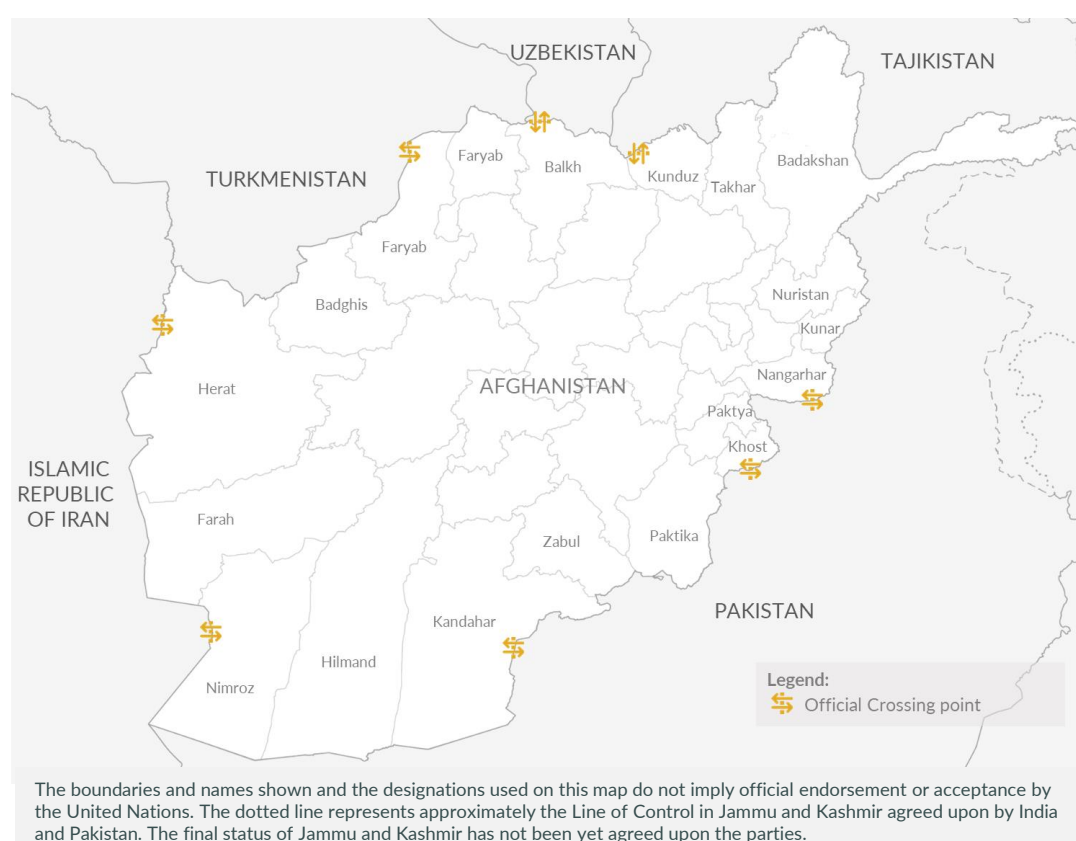
**3,555**  
9%

## SUMMARY FINDINGS

- 38,672 Afghans (35,117 male and 3,555 female) were interviewed prior to their departure to Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. This includes 24,871 single individuals and 13,801 families.
- UNHCR border monitoring partners conducted 272 key informant departure interviews. These interviews revealed that the primary reasons for leaving Afghanistan include medical reasons, family reunification, lack of livelihood opportunities, drought, lack of basic services, and loss of hope for the future in Afghanistan. Some KIs also referred to general insecurity, specific threats and discrimination as the main reasons for departure.
- Respondents said they faced many challenges, including a lack of potable water, food, health care, privacy, accommodation, and transportation. Other risks such as trafficking and ill-treatment at the hands of smugglers were also reported. Those on the move were at risk of starvation if the journey took longer than anticipated. This left children, pregnant and lactating women, medical patients, and elderly people especially vulnerable.
- The border monitoring findings show the number of respondents who report leaving the country due to protection risks (i.e., fear of persecution, security threats, restrictions on women’s access to education and work) is small in comparison with the number of respondents claiming to explore business opportunities, family visits and medical treatment. However, this does not mean movements are only migratory, the list of motivating reasons is not exhaustive and may not reflect the real motivations, given the challenges in data collection due to information disclosure and privacy concerns. Moreover, economic hardships and the search for livelihoods opportunities is intricately connected to limitations in freedoms and violations of rights. The reasons given should therefore, not overshadow the situation of widespread human rights violations taking place in the country. A thorough assessment of international protection needs is required for Afghan applicants for asylum. Significantly, UNHCR considers Afghan women and girls to be likely in need of international refugee protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention, in light of the wide range of increasingly restrictive measures imposed by the DfA.
- 2023 is thus far characterized by many pendular movements from Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan. Most respondents said they often stayed in both countries for around a month in accommodation provided by relatives. Of the total number of respondents who went to Iran, 70 per cent indicated they went to Iran more than once. Of this figure, 37 per cent said it was their second time moving to the country and 31 per cent their third time. 2 per cent said they were regularly moving back and forth while the remaining 30 per cent said they were moving to Iran for the first time. Conversely, 86 per cent of respondents who went to Pakistan said they went there more than once. Of this figure, 32 per cent said it was their second time moving to the country and 53 per cent their third time. 1 per cent moved back and forth between both countries while the remaining 14 per cent said they were moving to Pakistan for the first time. This finding is slightly different from the 2022 findings. During 2022, 51 per cent of the respondent who went to Iran indicated they went to Iran more than once while 49 per cent said they were moving to Iran for the first time, whereas 84 per cent of respondents who went to Pakistan said they went there more than once and 16 per cent said they were moving to Pakistan for the first time.

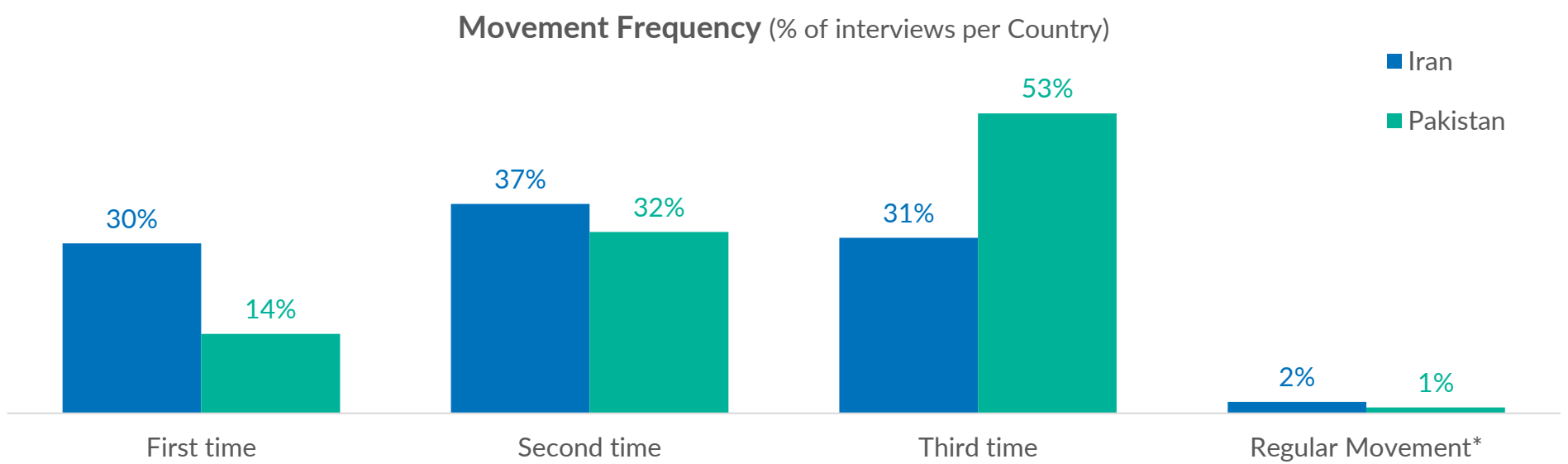
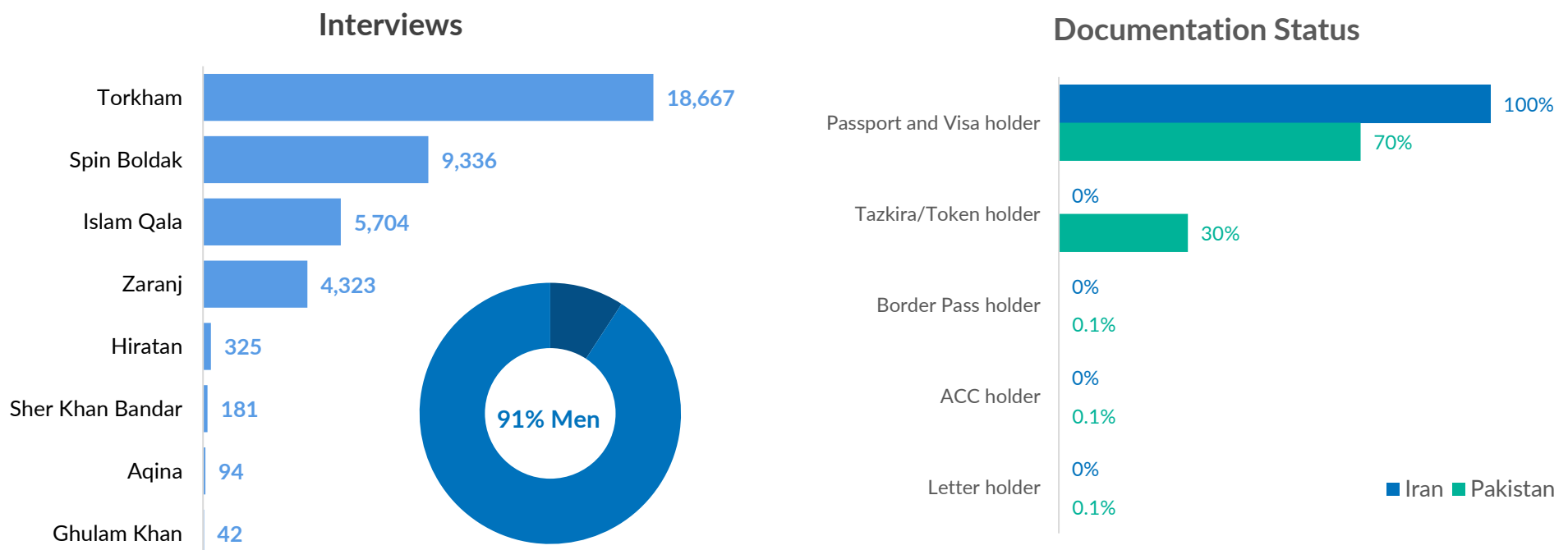
## Challenges Associated with Leaving Afghanistan:

- The Afghan National Passport Office resumed the issuance of passports in Afghanistan on 1 March 2023. Issuance of national passports is ongoing in all 34 provinces. The Passport Office issues up to 10,000 passports daily. However, due to the substantial backlog and continued demand for passports, waiting time is significant.
- The “Maharam” (a male chaperon) requirement prevents women/girls from travelling abroad unless accompanied by a male chaperone (husband, father, brother, son).
- Recently a number of Afghans complained about the existing challenges and significant delays with the issuance of visas to Pakistan, saying that they are unable to receive their visas despite waiting for months.





## Summary Findings: Official Crossing Points



\* Regular movement refers to individuals living in Afghanistan with businesses in Iran or Pakistan, or individuals living in Iran/Pakistan with businesses in Afghanistan.





**37,639**  
AFGHANS

8,467 families 



**34,745**  
92%



**2,894**  
8%

## SUMMARY FINDINGS

- 37,639 Afghans – 34,745 male (92 per cent) and 2,894 female (8 per cent) – were interviewed upon arrival in Afghanistan. This includes 29,172 single individuals and 8,467 families. 31,486 interviews were conducted with spontaneous returnees and 6,153 with deportees.
- An overwhelming majority of the respondents from Iran were undocumented while most respondents from Pakistan were passport holders.
- Many (including children) went to Iran via unofficial crossing points. Conversely, many of Afghan respondents who went to Pakistan left via official crossing points.
- The reasons for leaving Afghanistan reported by inflow and outflow interviewees are similar. Most respondents departed to Iran to seek a better life or more employment opportunities. While most respondents who went to Pakistan claimed it was for the purpose of medical treatment, seeking a better life or in search for employment opportunities.
- Respondents who returned spontaneously from Iran and Pakistan indicated that the high cost of living, lack of employment opportunities, and family reunification are the main reasons for return. Irregular entry and lack of documentation were mentioned as the main reasons for deportation of Afghans from both Iran and Pakistan.
- 55 per cent of respondents who went to Iran and 83 per cent of respondents who went to Pakistan said they left Afghanistan more than once.
- Nearly 24 per cent of respondents returning from Iran and 94 per cent of those returning from Pakistan stated that they had no information about the risks of irregular migration.
- Lack of food, water, robbery, physical violence by smugglers and risk of trafficking were reported as the main challenges during the journey to Iran.
- The cost of movement facilitated by smugglers ranges between AFN 3,000 – 6,000 (\$35 – \$70) per person. This represents a decrease in the amount reported in 2022, to wit; AFN 1,000 – 10,000 (\$10 – \$100) per person.



Interview with a deported Afghan at Zaranj/Milak crossing point, Nimroz, Afghanistan © UNHCR/Afghanistan



Women and children at Torkham crossing point, Nangarhar, Afghanistan © UNHCR/Afghanistan



## Deportation Trends

### FROM IRAN

- During the first half of 2023, an estimated **310,000 undocumented Afghans** were deported from Iran through Islam Qala and Zaranj crossing points. This represents a daily average of **1,716 individuals**. The 2023 figures are **16% higher** compared to the same period in 2022. Additionally, UNHCR recorded the deportation of **7 refugees** (Amayesh card holders) via Islam Qala and Zaranj. The refugees were generally deported after being arrested violating/ on suspicion of violating the law, e.g. for traveling to a No Go Area.
- Since 08 February 2023, UNHCR border monitoring partners at Islam Qala and Zaranj have identified Afghans who participated in the headcount exercise conducted by the Iranian authorities and were provided with a headcount slip among deportees and spontaneous returnees – among them **11,200** spontaneous returnees and **8,600** deportees. The latter were mainly arrested at various locations and deported because they did not have the slip with them at the time of arrest or because they had moved to other areas without a movement permit.
- UNHCR conducted protection monitoring interviews and delivered support to refoulment cases while IOM provided assistance to vulnerable undocumented deportees and returnees from Iran.
- Most deportees from Iran stated that they were deported without going through a legal procedure. They thus had no opportunity to raise concerns about potential protection risks in Afghanistan prior to the deportation.

- Deportees reported human rights violations including physical violence, lack of access to proper food, water and sanitation, health care, as well as verbal abuse/insults, overcrowding in holding cells, family separation, loss of assets and money, etc.

### FROM PAKISTAN

- An estimated **3,300** undocumented Afghans were arrested and deported via Spin Boldak and Torkham border points after being charged with infringing the 1946 Foreigners Act - lack of travel documents and irregular entry into Pakistan.
- The deportation figures thus far in 2023 are higher than corresponding deportations in 2022.
- In addition, the deportation of 3 refugees in possession of PoR cards was recorded. This happened through Spin Boldak. Deportation of PoR card holders from Pakistan is new – had not been reported in previous years.
- Interviewed deportees said they left for Pakistan in search of jobs and medical treatment but were arrested detained for one to five months by Pakistani police in Karachi, Quetta as well as parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

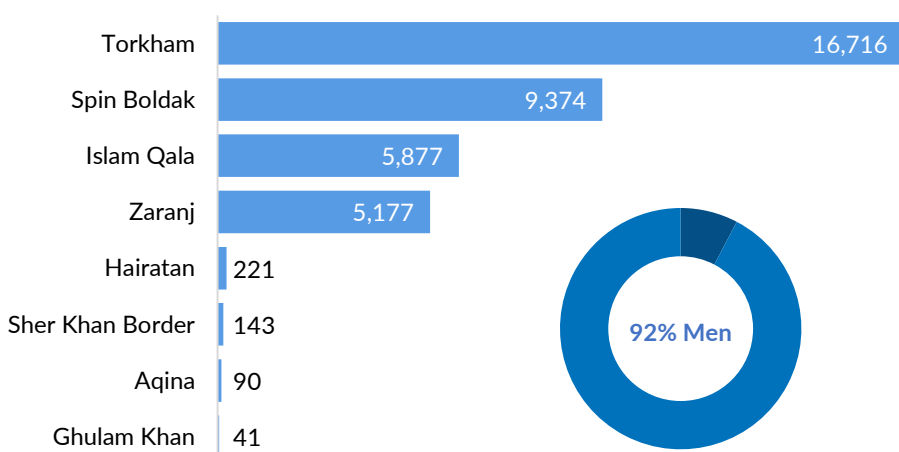
### FROM TAJIKISTAN

- No deportations have been reported in 2023.

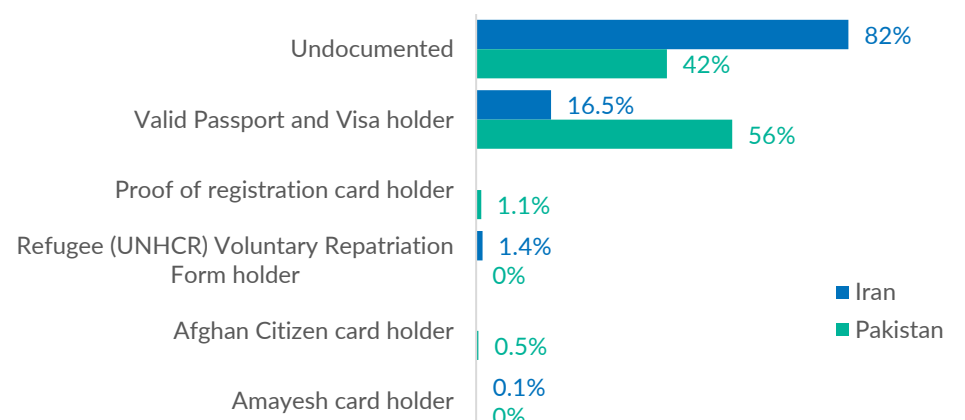
### FROM INDIA

- On 15 June, the first deportation of an Afghan refugee was reported by UNHCR office in India.

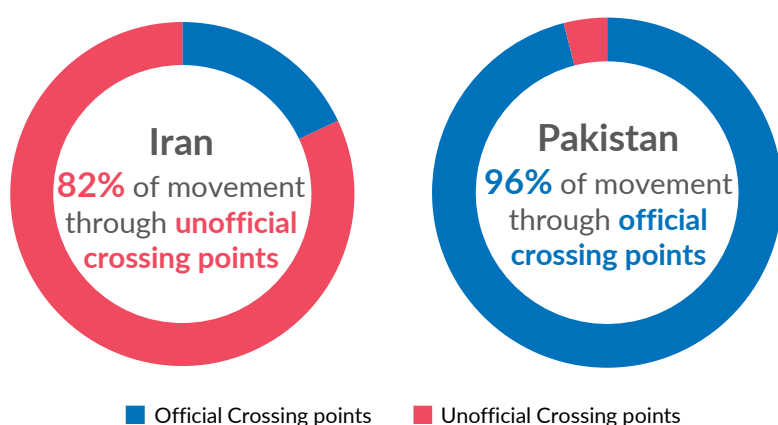
Interviews by Entry Point



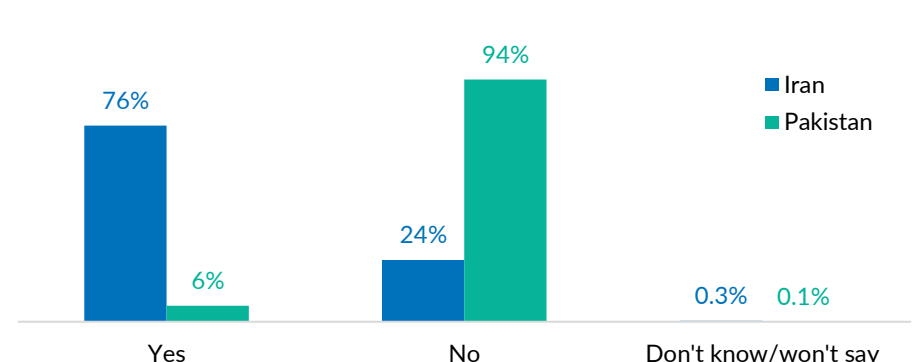
Documentation Status of Respondents



Type of Movement



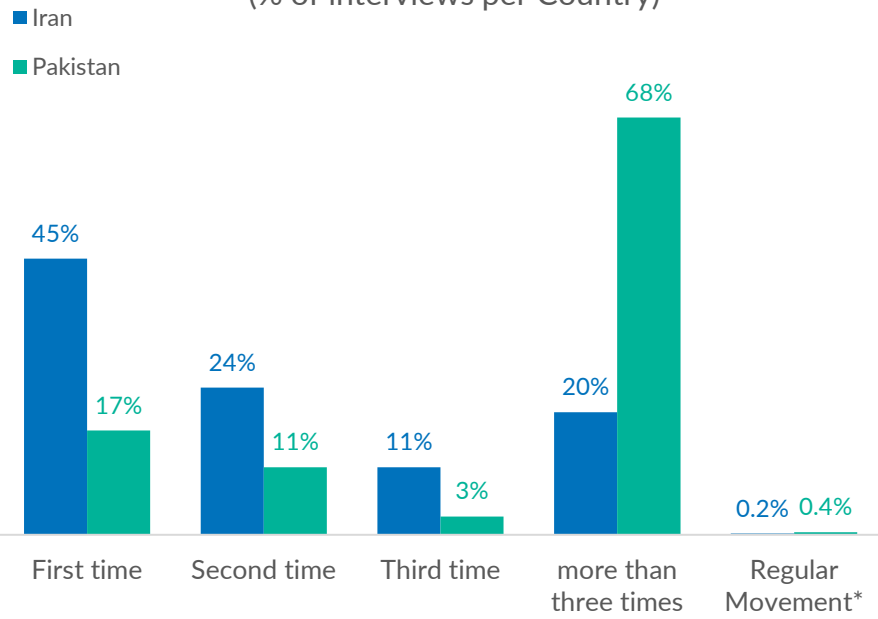
Awareness about Irregular Migration





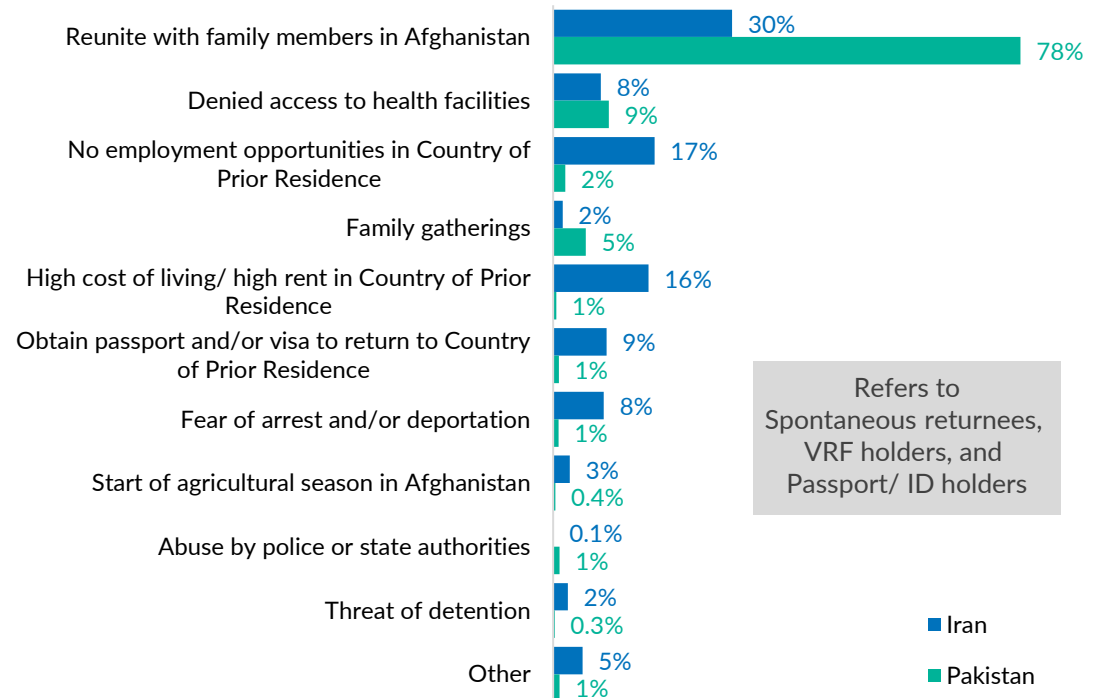
## Deportation Trends

**Movement Frequency**  
(% of interviews per Country)

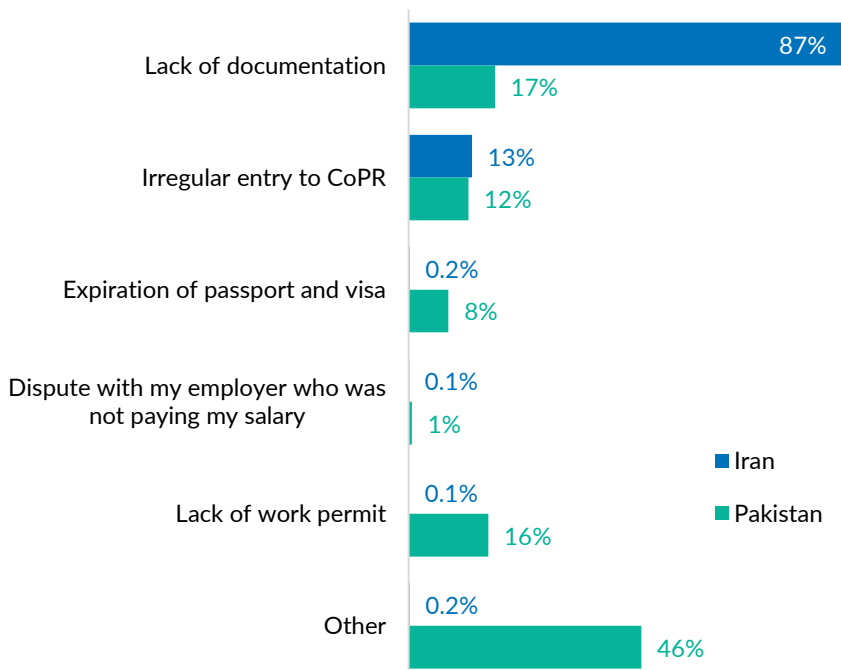


\* Regular movement refers to individuals living in Afghanistan with businesses in Iran or Pakistan, or individuals living in Iran/Pakistan with businesses in Afghanistan.

**Reasons for Return to Afghanistan**



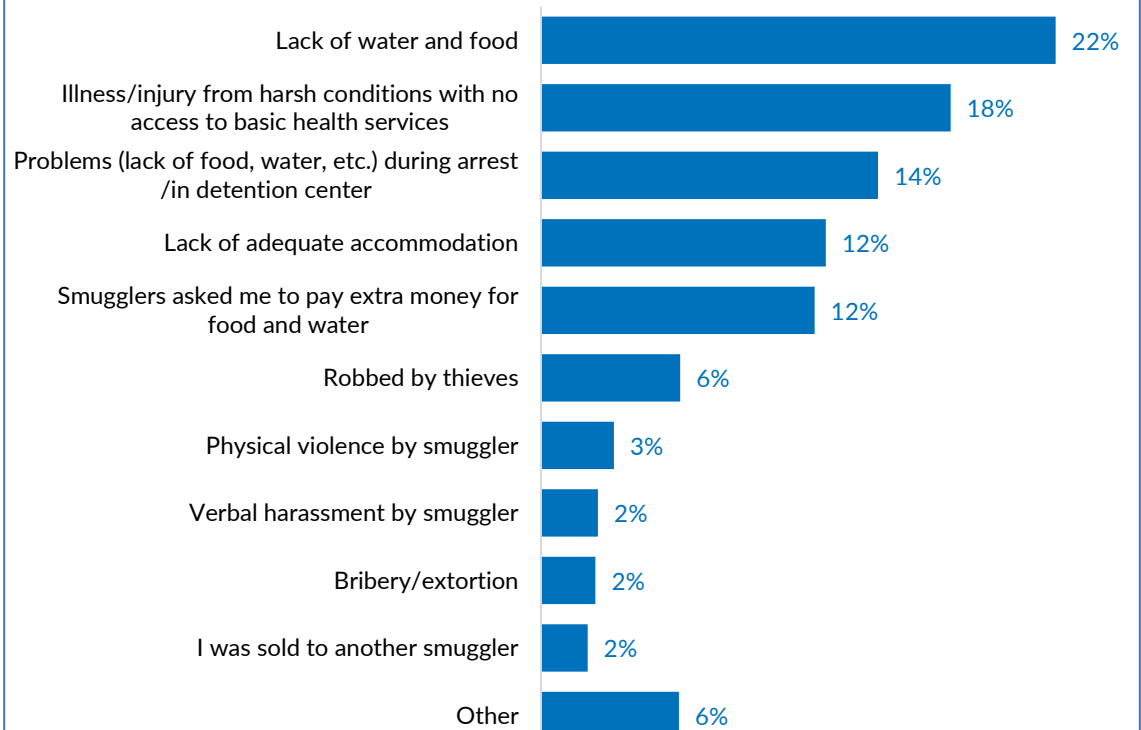
**Reasons of Deportation**



The vast majority of deportation are crossing through unofficial points to/from Iran.



**Problems Faced During the Journey through Unofficial crossing points: Iran**



# Overview of Population Movements During the First Half of 2023

UNHCR partners collected the estimated overall inflow and outflow figures at official crossing points. Over the first half of 2023, an estimated **9 movements** (mainly Afghans) were recorded from/to Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. An overwhelming majority moved via Spin Boldak in Afghanistan (to Pakistan), followed by Torkham (to Pakistan), Islam Qala and Zaranj (to Iran), Hiratan (to Uzbekistan), Aqina (to Turkmenistan) and Sher Khan Bander (to Tajikistan).

## PAKISTAN – OUTFLOW MOVEMENTS

- There were an estimated **4.2 million** outflow movements in 2023; the overwhelming majority through Spin Boldak (**3.7 million**), followed by Torkham (**0.42 million**). Approximately **70 per cent** of outflow movement via Spin Boldak were Afghans (Tazkira, Token and passport holders mainly from Kandahar province). Approximately **30 per cent** were Pakistani National ID Card holders (mainly from the Chaman area). Many of those travelling via Spin Boldak are small business owners who live on one side of the border and conduct business on the other side, hence moving either way on a daily/regular basis.
- An overwhelming number of outflow movement via Torkham were Afghans with valid passports and visas although Pakistani authorities would sometimes allow people without travel documents to cross for critical medical purposes.
- In addition, an estimated **5,000 – 6,000** Afghans went to Pakistan via unofficial crossing points located in several provinces on a weekly basis. These were mainly local people who moved back and forth for business, medical treatment, and family visits.

## IRAN - OUTFLOW MOVEMENTS

- An estimated **233,000 Afghans** went to Iran with valid travel documents during the first half of 2023. This was an average of **1,288** individuals daily.
- Between mid-May until end of June, approximately **1,200 to 1,500** undocumented Afghans (mainly single males and small family groups) went to Iran through unofficial crossing points on a weekly basis. The estimated weekly movement figure was slightly higher (**1,500 – 1,800** individuals) during January – April.
- All movements through unofficial crossing points were reportedly facilitated by smugglers.
- Challenges in obtaining passports and visas due to the overcrowded situation at national passport offices and at respective embassies or consulates, and the deterioration of the economic situation, continues to limit individuals' ability to obtain documents, and may motivate more people to rely on irregular movement channels.

## PAKISTAN – INFLOW MOVEMENTS

- There were an estimated **3.8 million** inflow movements in 2023. The slightly lower inflow figure from Pakistan might be due to the outflow intentions/plans. Some people went to Pakistan to seek medical treatment or deal with livelihood/business related issues.
- Afghans who returned from Pakistan include with passport, Afghan Citizen Card (ACC), refugees on voluntary repatriation, few Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders, and undocumented Afghans.

## IRAN - INFLOW MOVEMENTS

- An estimated **710,000** Afghan inflow movements were recorded in the first half of 2023. This included **310,000** undocumented deportees and **400,000** spontaneous returnees. There were also a few cases of refugee voluntary repatriation cases. This represents a daily average of **1,716** inflow movements.

### POPULATION MOVEMENTS BY CROSSING POINT

Movement type	Spin Boldak	Torkham	Islam Qala	Zaranj	Sher Khan Bandar	Hiratan	Aqina	Total
Outflow total (A)	3,725,245	427,656	172,160	60,990	589	3,777	4,189	4,394,606
Outflow Monthly Average	620,874	71,276	28,693	10,165	98	630	698	732,434
Inflow total (B)	3,508,874	379,860	329,953	380,170	510	3,879	4,102	4,607,348
Inflow Monthly Average	584,812	63,310	54,992	63,362	85	647	684	767,891
<b>Total (A+B)</b>	<b>7,234,119</b>	<b>807,516</b>	<b>502,113</b>	<b>441,160</b>	<b>1,099</b>	<b>7,656</b>	<b>8,291</b>	<b>9,001,954</b>

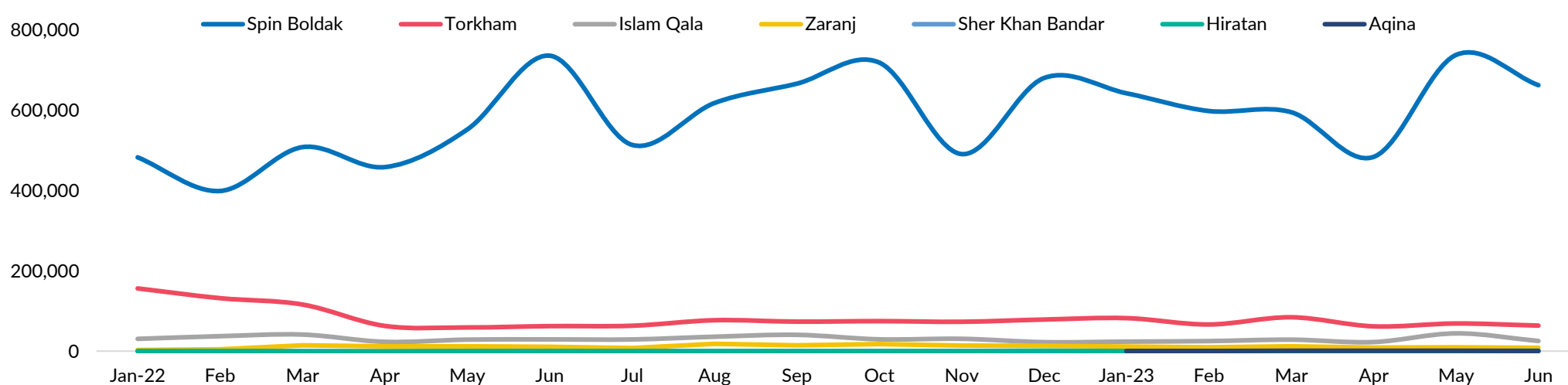
## Population Movements - Central Asia

### Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan – 2023

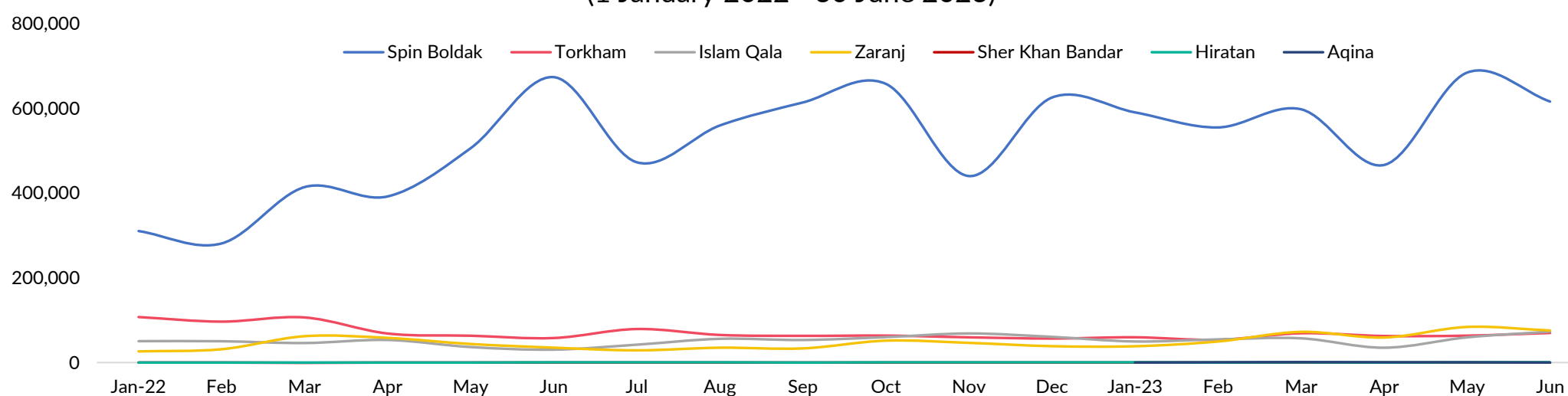
- Population movements to Central Asia remained low.
- TURKMENISTAN:** The Aqina border was open only for commercial movements and visa holders in 2023. An estimated **4,200** individuals mainly foreigners (railway staff, and drivers) and small number of Afghan visa holders went to Turkmenistan and an estimated **4,100** individuals came back to Afghanistan.
- UZBEKISTAN:** The border in Hiratan was open only for commercial movements and visa holders. An estimated **3,700** individuals mainly foreigners (such as railway staff, drivers, diplomats) and Afghan visa holders went to Uzbekistan while an estimated **3,800** individuals came back into Afghanistan. To be able to cross the border, Afghans were required to have resident permits, business/education documents or an official letter from the Government of Uzbekistan.
- TAJIKISTAN:** The border in Sherkhan-Bandar remains open. An estimated **590** Afghans and foreigners with valid visas, gate passes, or permission documents went to Tajikistan while an estimated **510 individuals** came back to Afghanistan.

Note: the figures of in/outflow movements, in the below charts, are estimates based on observation and do not represent actual figures of Afghans moving either way to Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan weekly. For Torkham and Spin Boldak, the figures are for both Afghans and Pakistani citizens. For Sher Khan Bandar and Hiratan, the figures are for both Afghans and Tajikistan/Uzbekistan citizens. For Islam Qala and Zaranj, the figures are Afghans

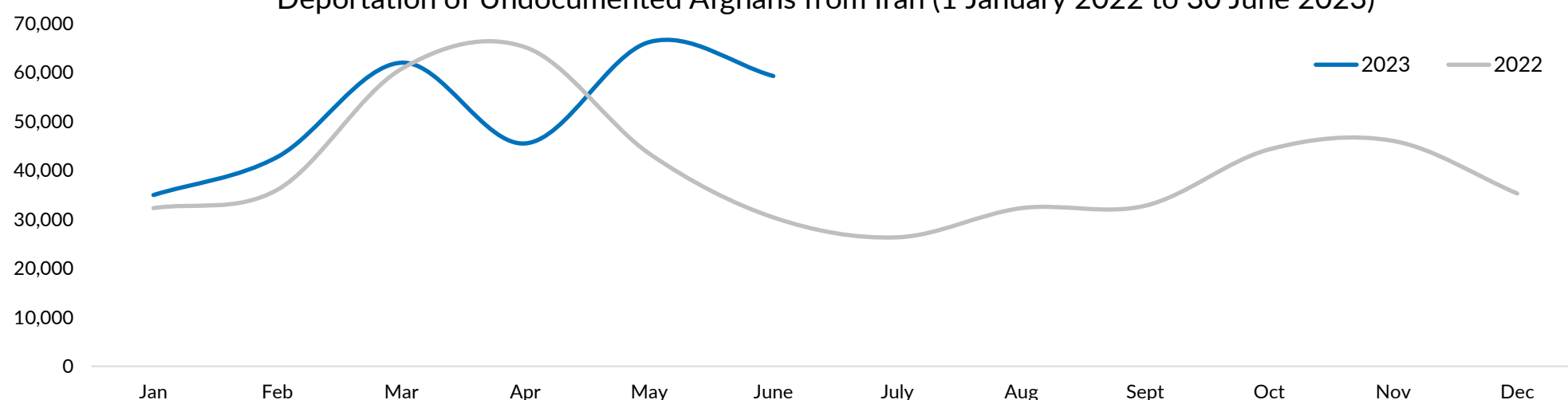
Estimated Monthly Outflow Movement via Official Points – Individuals  
(1 January 2022 - 30 June 2023)



Estimated Monthly Inflow Movement via Official Points – Individuals  
(1 January 2022 - 30 June 2023)



Deportation of Undocumented Afghans from Iran (1 January 2022 to 30 June 2023)





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