

BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

05 - 11 July 2020



UNHCR partner staff (CHA) during border monitoring interview with a returnee, Islam Qala border, Herat, Afghanistan

13 July 2020
CHA/ M. Tareq Faizi

410

AFGHAN REFUGEES
RETURNED TO
AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of **410** Afghan refugees from Iran (**360**), Pakistan (**16**) and other countries (**34**) 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. Upon the request of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA), UNHCR Iran resumed voluntary repatriation from Iran as of 30 April.

374,579

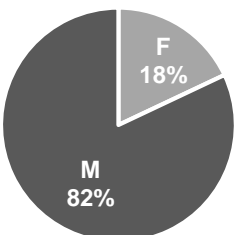
UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS
RETURNED FROM IRAN AND
PAKISTAN

According to MoRR/IOM, during the week of 05 - 11 July, the total number of undocumented returnees was **10,604** from Iran (**6,321 deportees and 4,283 spontaneous returnees**). Since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is **374,579** individuals, including **372,681** from Iran (**262,864 spontaneous returnees and 109,817 deportees**) and **1,898** from Pakistan (**1,809 spontaneous returnees and 89 deportees**). From 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), though in practice pedestrian traffic has been allowed more frequently. On 11 July, 4,707 stranded Afghans crossed through Torkham into Afghanistan, while 720 stranded Pakistanis returned to Pakistan.

11,738

INTERVIEWS WITH
RETURNEES FROM IRAN
AND PAKISTAN

Spin Boldak crossing point has remained closed since 06 June for pedestrian movement of stranded Afghans and Pakistanis. Ghulam Khan crossing point in Khost province, which was opened on 22 June for trade, has yet to officially open for pedestrian/passenger traffic.



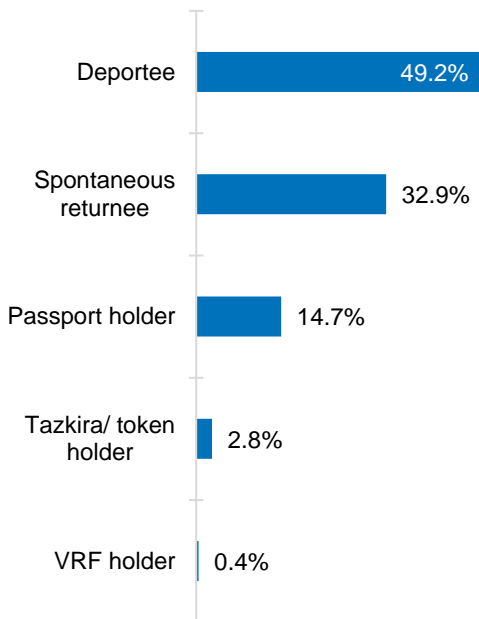
BORDER MONITORING

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.

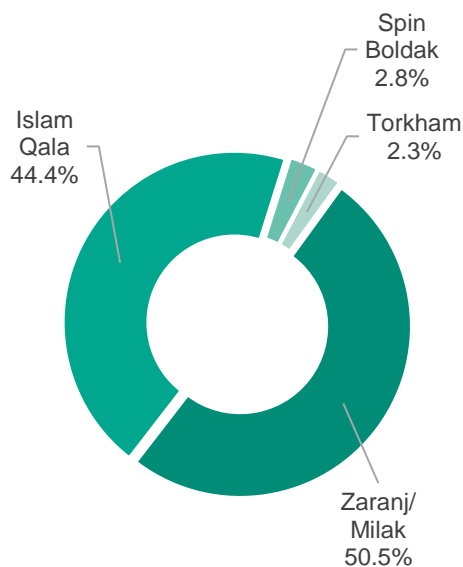
Between 05 - 11 July, **1,118 interviews, including 980 male and 138 female** respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (**1,106**) and Pakistan (**12**). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of **11,738 returnees (9,627 M and 2,111 F)** were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (5,924) and Islam Qala (5,209), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak (330) and Torkham (275), including 9,261 single individuals and 2,477 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. Since 06 June, no interviews were carried out at Spin Boldak due to the closure of the border for pedestrian movement.

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

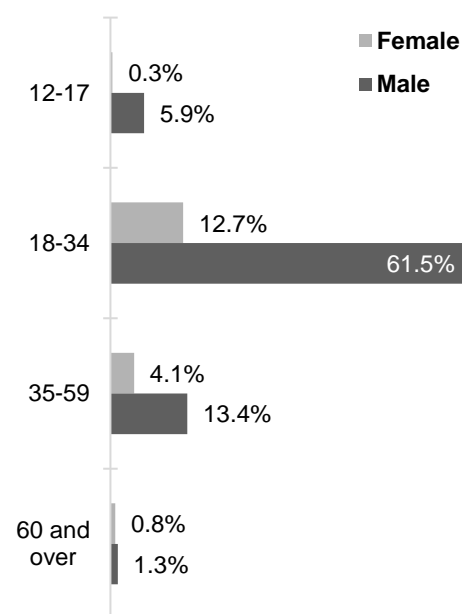
Respondents' Return Status



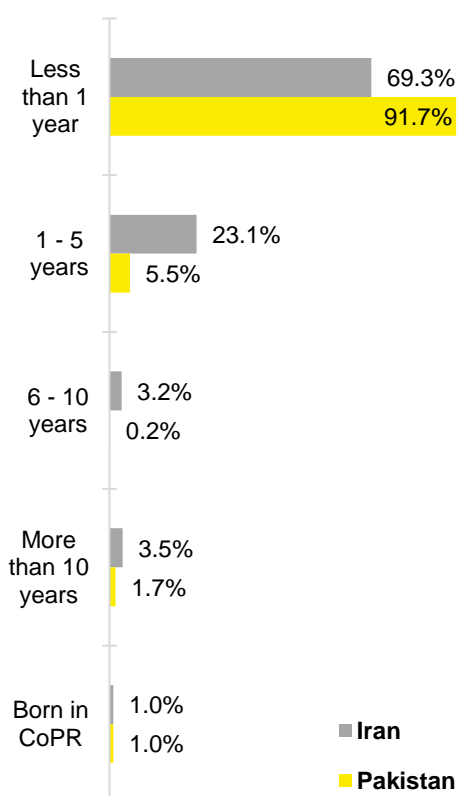
Respondents (%) by Entry Point



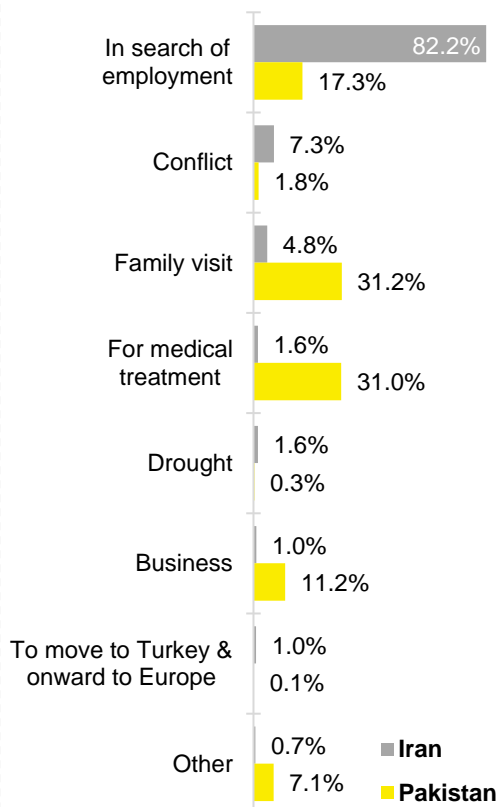
Respondents' Age and Gender



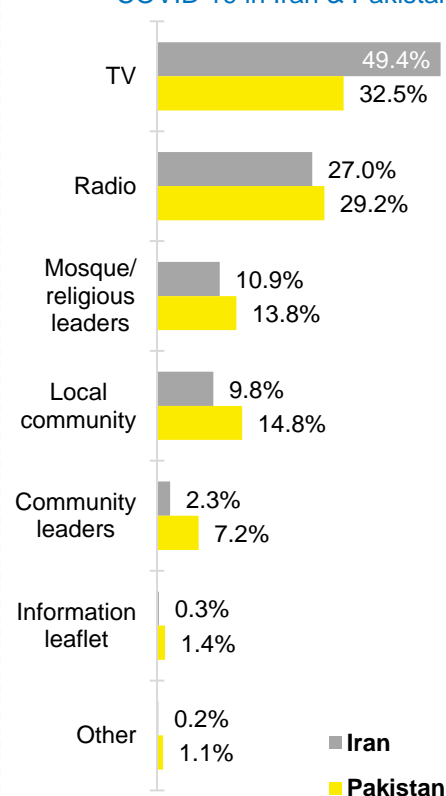
Years Spent in the CoPR



Reason for entry to CoPR



Sources of Information about COVID 19 in Iran & Pakistan



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

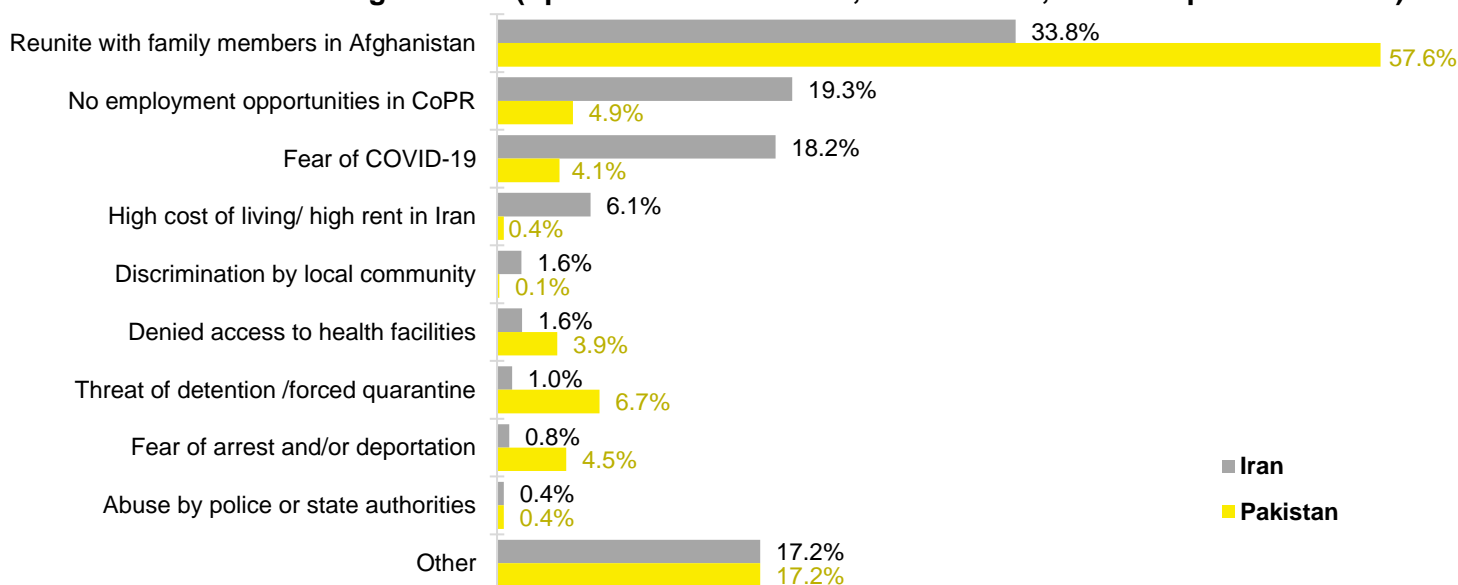
Interviewed Returnees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

- 52% deportees, 34% spontaneous returnees, 13% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 29% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees and 12% of deportees were female;
- 75% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from five provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Fars, Kerman, and Esfahan; 70% spent less than one year in Iran;
- 82% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 7% due to conflict, 5% to visit family/relatives, 2% for medical treatment, 1% (mainly deportees) to move to Turkey and onward to Europe, and 3% other reasons;
- 31% (3,460 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, pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan, movement restrictions related to the lockdown, and lack of access to medical services;
- 89% of returnees and deportees stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, mainly through TV, radio and local communities;
- 19% of interviewed deportees stated that they did not receive information about COVID-19 in Iran; this figure is much lower among passport holders (5%) and spontaneous returnees (1%);
- 37% (4,144 respondents, most of whom were spontaneous returnees and deportees) claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/ approximately USD 7-35);
- 28% 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):

- 54% were Tazkira/token holders¹, 32% passport holders, and 14% spontaneous returnees;
- 57% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees and 38% of Tazkira/token holder returnees were female;
- 42% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 36% from KPK, 12% Sindh, 8% Punjab, and 2% from Islamabad; 92% spent less than a year in Pakistan;
- 53% (320 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;
- 95% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/ religious leaders and local communities;
- 40% 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)

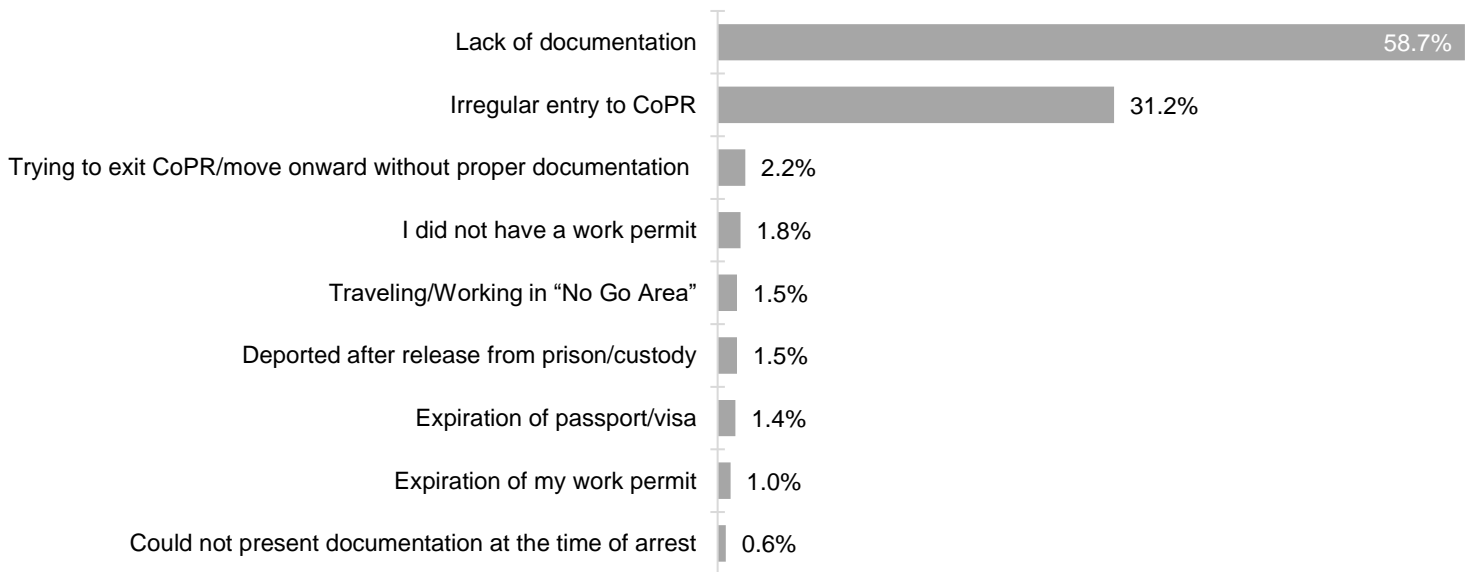


¹ This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently.

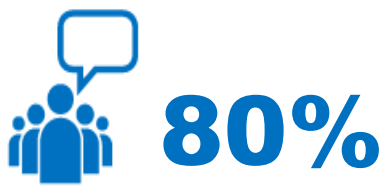
- The border monitoring data shows that there was a sharp increase in the number of deportees in June/July as compared to May. In order to better assess these trends, UNHCR revised its border monitoring tool to collect deportation reasons as well as intentions of returnees and deportees after their arrival in Afghanistan. The revised tool has been implemented as of 04 July in all entry points and since then a total of 1,267 interviews were conducted, including 684 interviews with deportees.
- **The majority of interviewed deportees (90%)** cited lack of documentation and irregular entry to CoPR as the reasons provided to them for their deportation.
- **2%** of interviewed deportees (17 respondents, including 10 single individuals and 7 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.

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

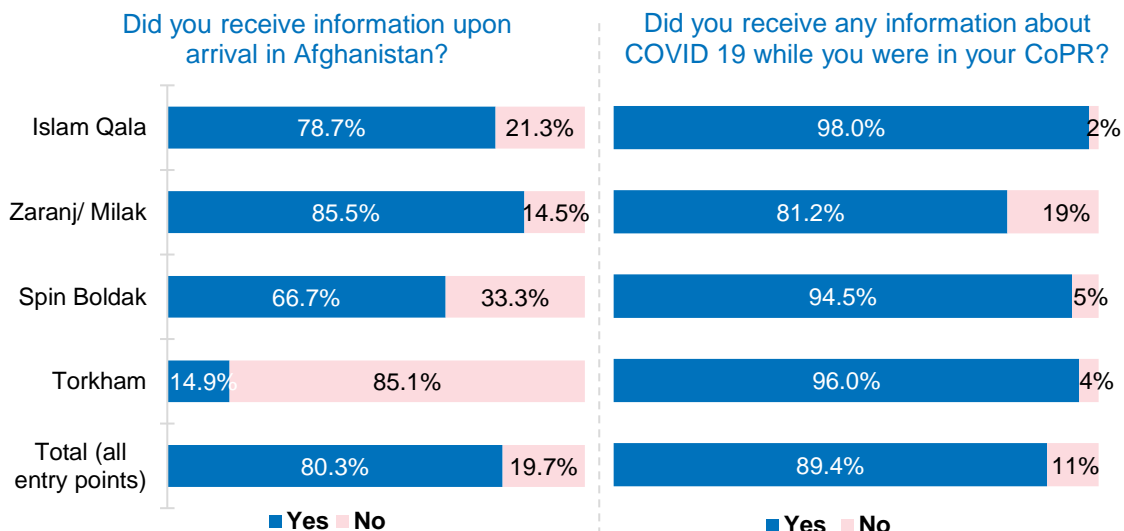
Reason Provided for Deportation (only deportees from Iran)



Information Dissemination in Afghanistan



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



As noted in previous updates, the information gap 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. UNHCR has raised this matter with the border authorities and partners and is working with them to find a solution. The information gap in Spin Boldak remains unchanged because there was no population movement due to the closure of the border since 06 June.

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

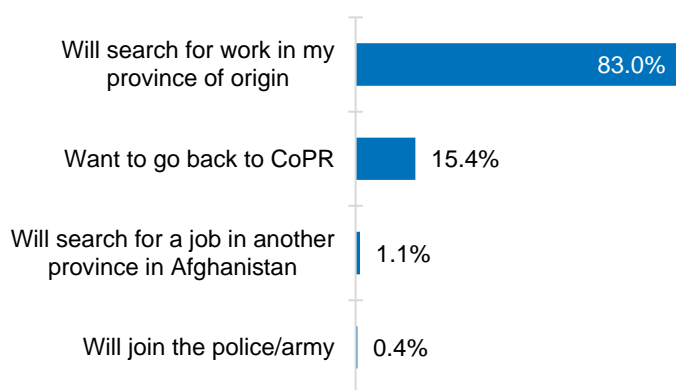


97%

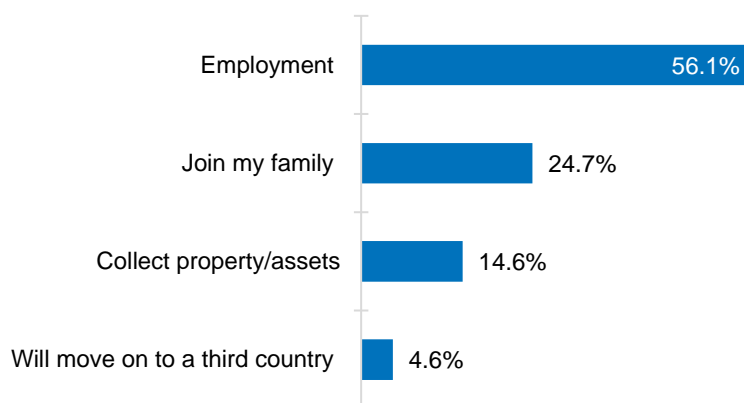
OF THE INTERVIEWED
 RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND
 PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING
 THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY
 ARE RETURNING TO THEIR
 AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **3%** 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 (**72%**) intending to return to Herat, Faryab, Nimroz, Takhar, Kunduz, Farah, Ghor, Badakhshan, Badghis, and Ghazni provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were traveling to **28** provinces, with the majority (**70%**) intending to return to Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kabul, Ghazni and Paktika provinces.
- **85%** stated that they will stay in their own house, **10%** stated that they will rent a house, **4%** will stay with relatives;
- **83%** stated that they will try to find a job in their province of origin;
- **15%** (mainly deportees) stated that they intend to go back to Iran: for employment, to join family, or to collect property in Iran. **4.6%** stated that they intend to go back to Iran to move on to a third country.

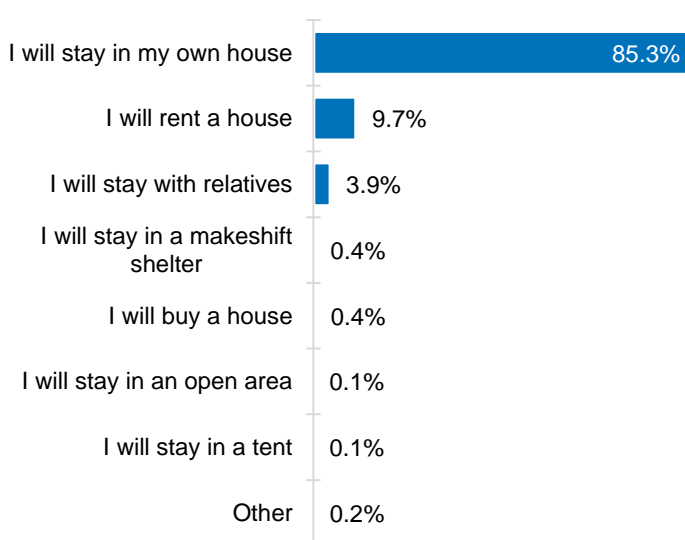
Intention after return/deportation



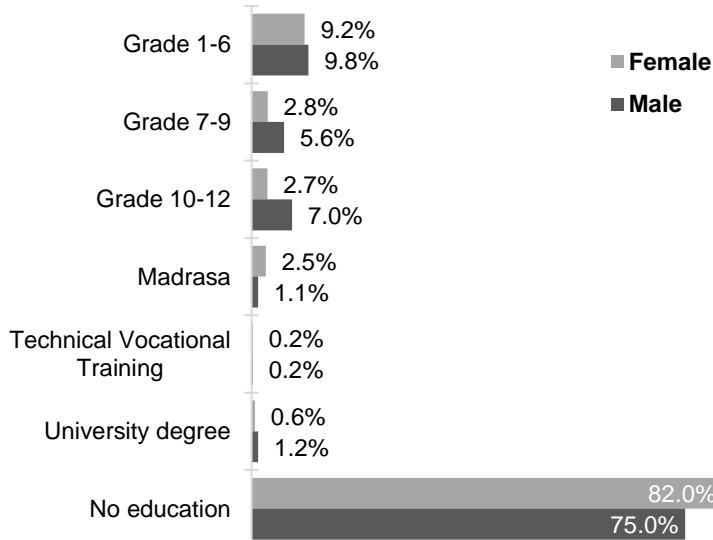
Reasons for going back to CoPR



Living arrangements after return



Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



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