

BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

25 - 31 October 2020



Refugee returnees from Iran during verification procedure at Herat Encashment Center, Herat, Afghanistan October 2020
CHA/ S. Raz Mohammad

1,607

AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of **1,607** Afghan refugees from Pakistan (**798**), Iran (**755**) and other countries (**54**) including Tajikistan, India, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation, under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. After a temporary suspension of voluntary repatriation between 04 March and 29 April due to COVID-19, UNHCR resumed its facilitated voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Iran as of 30 April and from Pakistan and other countries as of 10 August.

701,268

UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS RETURNED FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

Refugee returnees receive a multi-purpose cash grant (on average USD 250 per person) and other services at Encashment Centers (ECs) located in Herat, Kandahar, Kabul, and Nangarhar provinces. UNHCR's cash grants to refugee returnees are intended to prevent, reduce, and respond to immediate protection risks and vulnerabilities upon return to Afghanistan.

According to MoRR/IOM, during the weeks of **25 - 31 October**, the total number of undocumented returnees from Iran was **29,420** (**20,143** spontaneous returnees and **9,277** deportees) and from Pakistan was **89** (**80** spontaneous returnees and **9** deportees). Since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is **701,268** individuals, including **695,677** from Iran (**436,593** spontaneous returnees and **259,084** deportees) and **5,591** from Pakistan (**5,111** spontaneous returnees and **480** deportees).

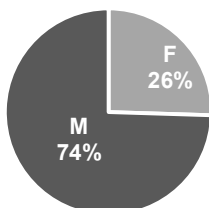
39,074

INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNEEES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

During the week, regular population movements continued through Spin Boldak and Torkham crossing points to/from Afghanistan. In addition, the Government of Pakistan has recently resumed issuance of visas, including visas upon arrival for people with medical issues, which has resulted in increased population movements.

UNHCR monitoring partner recorded the spontaneous return of PoR card holders through Torkham, among whom a number of them reported that the border authorities in Torkham punched their cards for unknown reasons. UNHCR Afghanistan, in coordination with the office in Pakistan, is closely monitoring this trend at Torkham.

Since 21 August, Spin Boldak crossing point has been open seven days a week for pedestrians and commercial trucks. As of 25 August, Torkham border has been open on Mondays and Tuesdays for refugee returnee movements to Afghanistan. Furthermore, on 28 September the Government of Pakistan decided that the Torkham and other crossing points with Afghanistan located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will be open for pedestrian traffic on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.



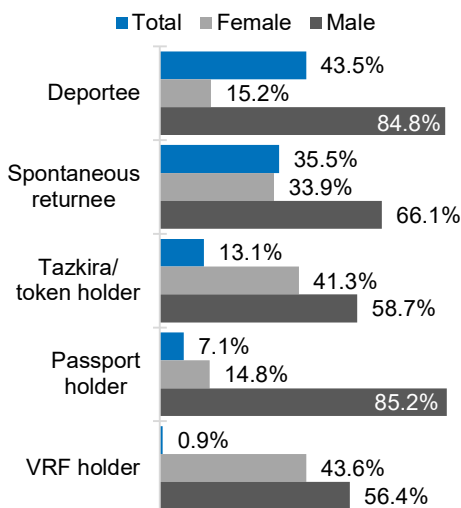
BORDER MONITORING

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/Chaman and Torkham). Through maintaining a consistent presence at these zero points, UNHCR aims to ensure efficient, timely and systematic gathering of protection information from Afghan returnees and deportees, irrespective of their status.

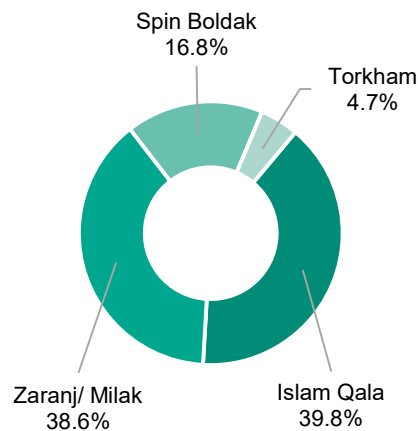
Between 25 - 31 October, **1,639 interviews, including 1,154 male and 485 female** respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (996) and Pakistan (643). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of **39,074 returnees and deportees (29,107 M and 9,967 F)** were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Islam Qala (15,556) and Zaranj/Milak (15,082), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak/Chaman (6,582) and Torkham (1,854), including 28,524 single individuals and 10,550 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. The sample size for Torkham is limited as the border was open only once per week for pedestrian movements until late September.

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

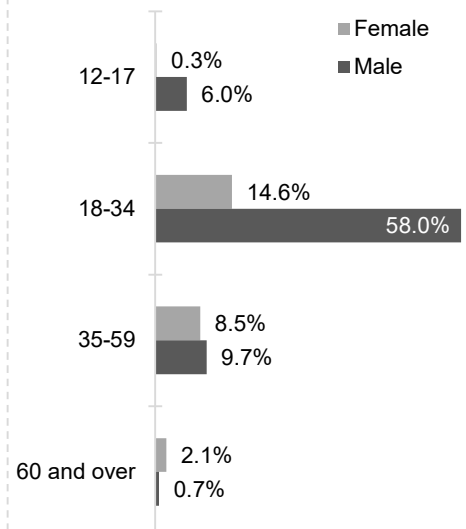
Respondents' Return Status by Gender



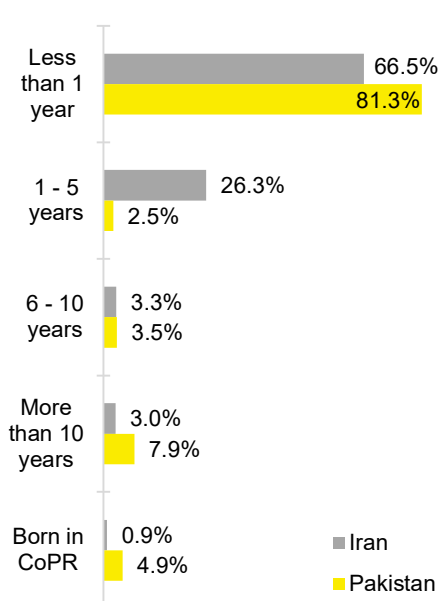
Respondents (%) by Entry Point



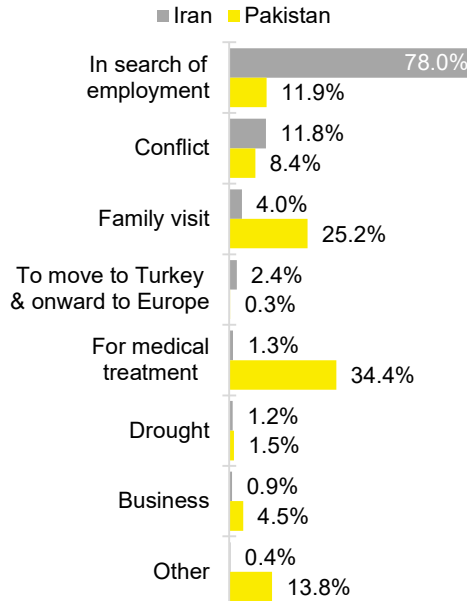
Respondents' Age and Gender



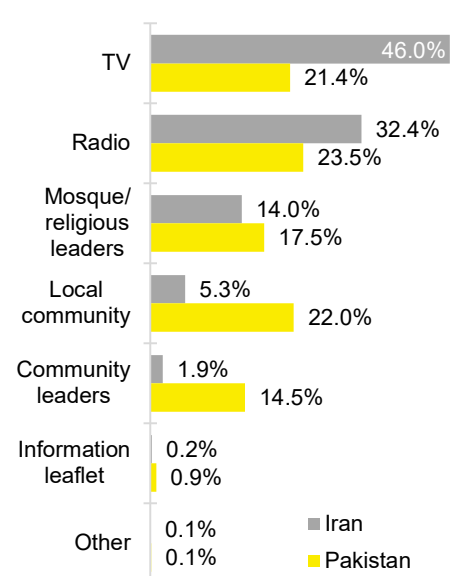
Years Spent in the CoPR



Reason for entry to CoPR



Sources of Information about COVID-19 in Iran & Pakistan



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

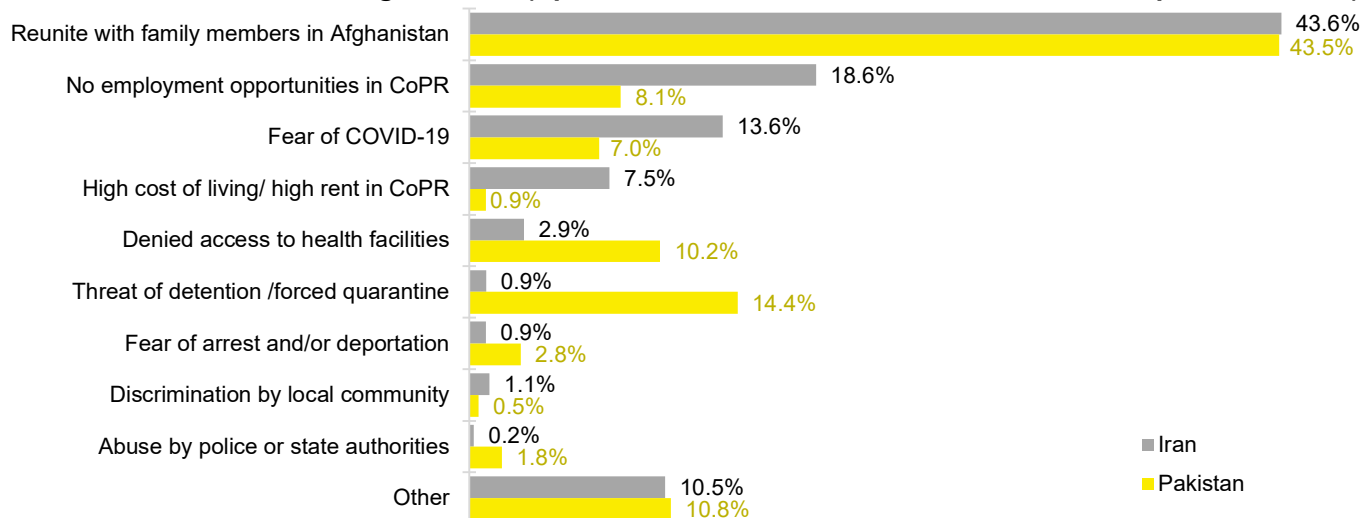
Interviewed Returnees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

- 55% deportees, 38% spontaneous returnees, 6% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 33% of the interviewed VRF holders, 21% spontaneous returnees, 15% of deportees, and 5% of passport holders were female;
- 93% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from nine provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Kerman, Fars, Esfahan, Khorasan Razavi, Khuzistan, Yazd, and Hormozgan;
- 66% of the respondents spent less than one year in Iran, among whom 14% stated that they spent less than a week, 32% around a month, 24% 1-6 months, and 30% over 6 months;
- 78% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 12% due to conflict, 4% to visit family/relatives, 2% (mainly deportees) to move to Turkey and onward to Europe, 1% due to drought, 1% for medical treatment, and 2% for other reasons;
- 34% (10,314 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, such as lost work/wages, movement restrictions related to the lockdown, lack of access to medical services, discrimination/stigmatization by local communities, pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan, and lack of access to markets;
- 95% of the respondents stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran through TV, radio and local communities;
- 8% 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%);
- 46% (14,059 respondents) claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/ approximately USD 7-35);
- 21% 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.

Interviewed Returnees from Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham):

- 61% were Tazkira/token holders¹, 27% spontaneous returnees, 10% passport holders, 1% VRF holders, and 1% deportees;
- 97% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 67% of VRF holders, 41% of Tazkira/token holders, 37% of passport holders were female;
- 69% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 18% from KPK, 9% Sindh, 3% Punjab, and 1% from Islamabad and Keshmir;
- 81% spent less than a year in Pakistan, among whom 16% stated that they spent less than a week, 53% around a month, 22% 1-6 months, and 9% over 6 months;
- 34% went to Pakistan for medical treatment, 25% to visit family/relatives, 12% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 8% due to conflict, 5% for business purpose, 2% due to drought, and 14% cited other reasons;
- 33% (2,785 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;
- 74% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/ religious leaders and local communities. This figure has declined compared to August (87%), July (94%), and June (95%);
- 11% 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 Afghanistan² (Spontaneous returnees, VRF holders, and Passport/ID holders)



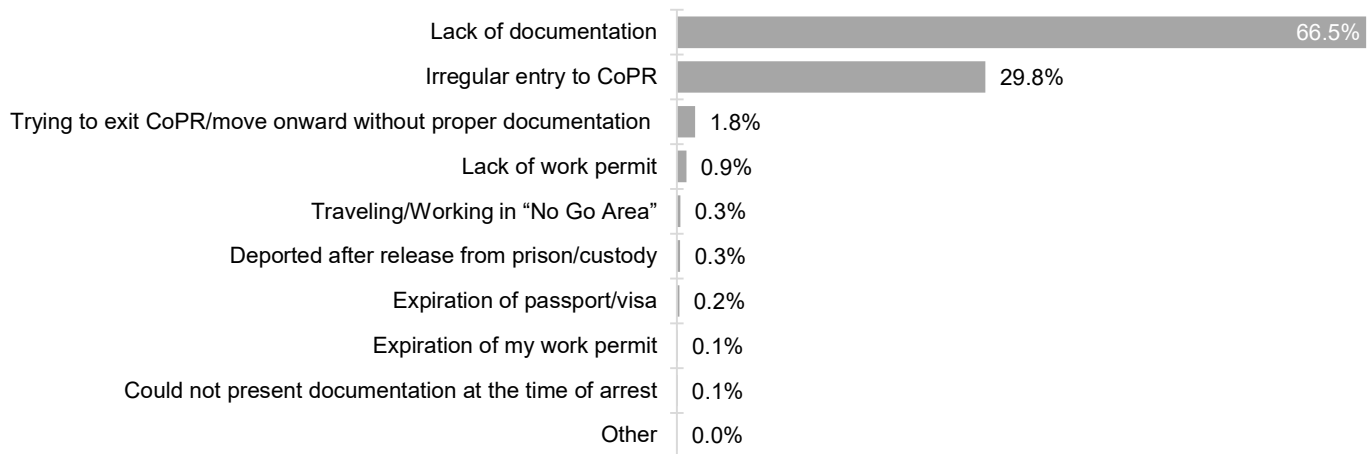
¹ This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently.

² The "other" category includes: to obtain passports/visas, family gatherings (marriage, funeral, etc.), and the start of the agriculture season in Afghanistan.

- In July, UNHCR revised its border monitoring tool to collect deportation reasons as well as intentions of returnees and deportees after their arrival in Afghanistan to better assess deportations trends. The revised tool has been implemented since 04 July in all entry points and since then a total of **28,603** interviews were conducted, including **11,886** interviews with deportees (**9,916 M and 1,970 F**).
- **The majority of interviewed deportees (96%)** cited lack of documentation and irregular entry to CoPR as the reasons provided to them for their deportation.
- Close to **2%** of interviewed deportees (245 respondents, including 164 single individuals and 81 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.
- **1%** (109 respondents) of the interviewed deportees (**11,886**) stated that they went through a legal procedure and were deported after receiving a court order, while **99%** 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)

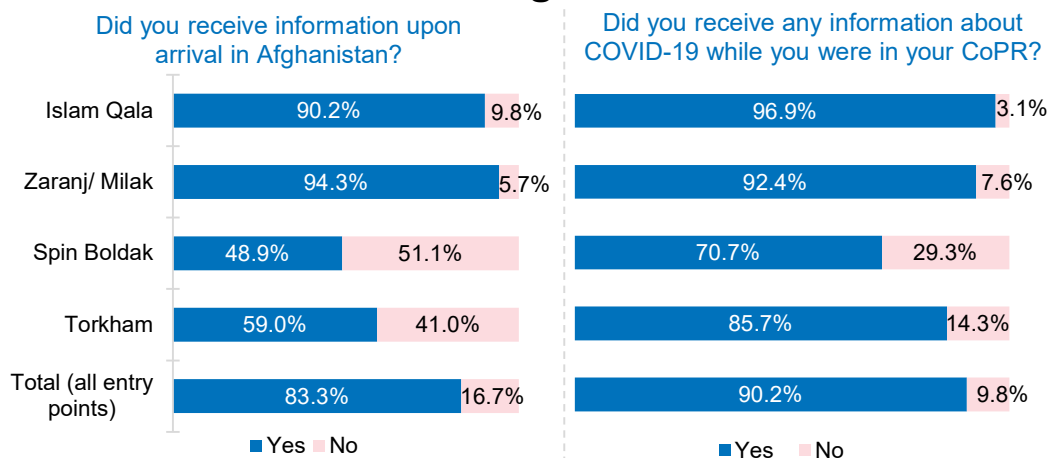


Information Dissemination in Afghanistan



83%

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



The gap in information dissemination in Torkham which was very high in August (74%) and September (63%) has improved (40%) subsequent to UNHCR's follow-up with partners and with the adoption of a more regular border opening schedule from 28 September. In general, the information gap was mainly the result of the limited opening of the border for pedestrian movements, which created an overcrowded situation as thousands of people tried to cross at once. Such a situation led to reduced attention to services provided by partners, including health screening and information dissemination about COVID-19. However, it should be noted that close to 90% of the interviewed returnees in Torkham confirmed that they had received information about COVID-19 in the CoPR. The information gap in Spin Boldak has slightly increased since the re-opening of the border (21 August) due to increased population movement to/from Afghanistan. This gap is, again, related to the overcrowded situation and the fact that returnees are not focused on services, including awareness raising about COVID-19. UNHCR will continue to raise this matter with partners. Overall, the provision of information upon arrival in the border entry points, has improved (from 70% to 83%) since May/June.

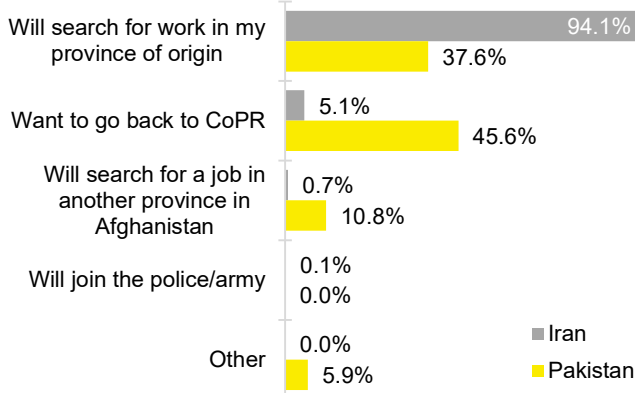
Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination) and Intentions after Return



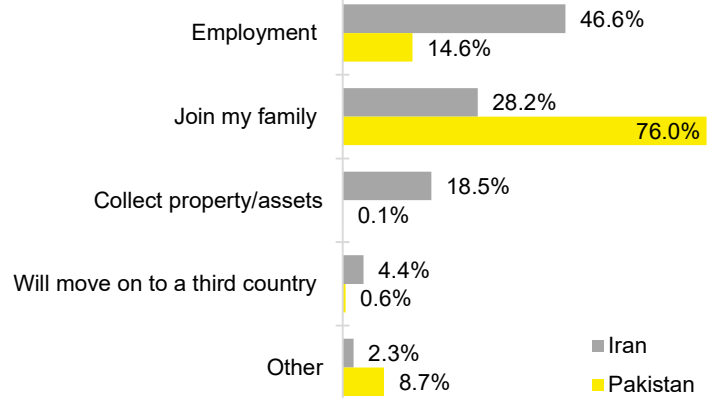
OF THE INTERVIEWED RETURNÉES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY ARE RETURNING TO THEIR AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **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 (**69%**) intending to return to Herat, Faryab, Nimroz, Takhar, Kunduz, Ghor, Farah, Badghis, Balkh, and Kabul provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were travelling to **34** provinces, with the majority (**87%**) intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Zabul, Kunduz, Uruzgan, Herat, and Maidan Wardak provinces.
- **77%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**84%** of male respondents and **59%** of female respondents).
- **73%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees stated that have no education, (**77% female and 72% male**). **9 %** stated that they have minimal education (up to grade 6), **6%** up to grade 9, **7%** up to grade 12, close to **3%** went to madrasa, and **1%** went to university.
- **80%** stated that they will stay in their own house, **12%** stated that they will rent a house, and **7%** will stay with relatives.
- **94%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees from Iran and **38%** from Pakistan stated that they will try to find a job in their province of origin.
- **5%** of respondents from Iran and **46%** from Pakistan stated that they intend to go back to the CoPR: for employment, to join family or to collect property. Close to **5%** of the respondents from Iran stated that they intend to go back to Iran to move on to a third country.

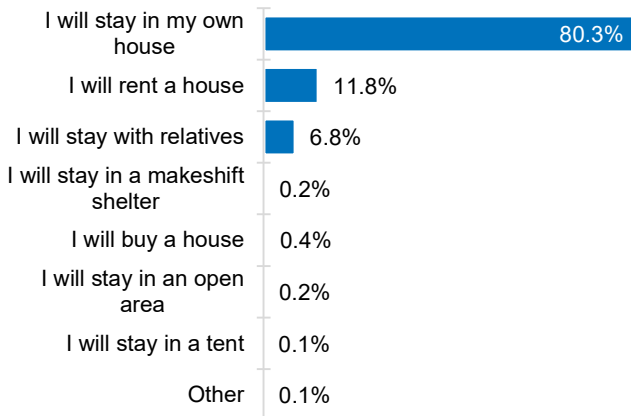
Intention after return/deportation



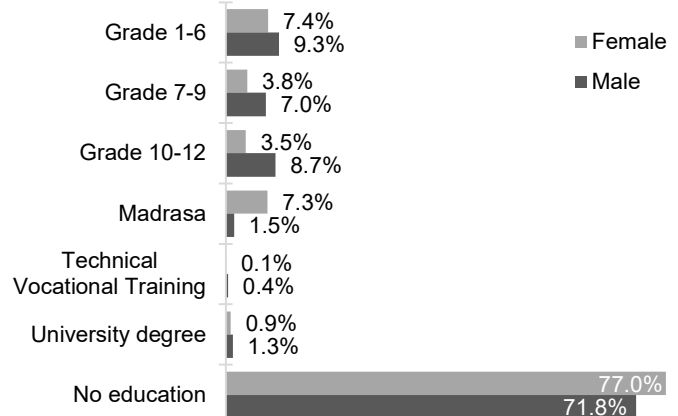
Reasons for going back to CoPR



Living arrangements after return



Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



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