

BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

COVID-19 RESPONSE

17 - 30 May 2020



CHA staff (UNHCR partner) during interview with returnees at the Islam Qala reception center, Herat, Afghanistan
11 May 2020
CHA/ E. Karimi

320

AFGHAN REFUGEES
RETURNED TO
AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of **320** Afghan refugees from Iran (**270**), 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, UNHCR Iran resumed voluntary repatriation from Iran as of 30 April.

300,512

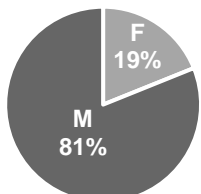
UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS
RETURNED FROM IRAN AND
PAKISTAN

According to MoRR/IOM, during the weeks of 17 – 23 and 24 - 30 May, the total number of undocumented returnees from Iran was **8,167** and **4,684** respectively and since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is **300,512** individuals, including **298,679** from Iran and **1,833** from Pakistan. On 01 May 2020, the Government of Pakistan announced that Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points will open five days a week (Monday – 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 21 – 23 and 30 May, 15,609 stranded Afghans crossed through Torkham into Afghanistan, while 599 Pakistanis returned to Pakistan. Spin Boldak crossing point has remained closed since 16 May for pedestrian movement of stranded Afghans and Pakistanis.

4,517

INTERVIEWS WITH
RETURNEES FROM IRAN
AND PAKISTAN

Due to Eid holidays (24-26 May), this update covers the past two weeks (17-30 May 2020).



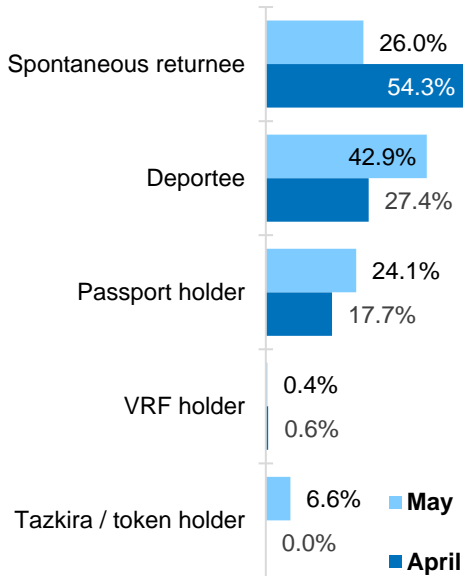
BORDER MONITORING

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.

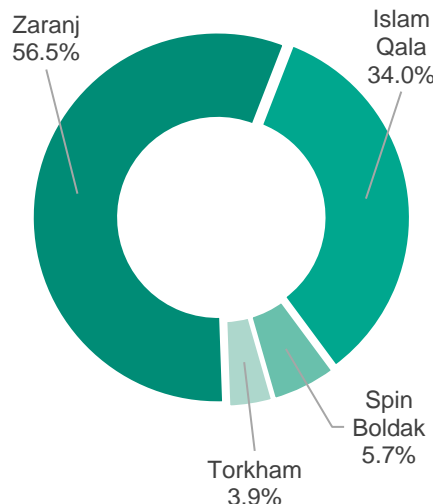
Between 17 and 30 May, **1,485 interviews, including 1,287 male and 198 female** respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (1,393) and Pakistan (92). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of **4,517 returnees (3,663 M and 854 F)** were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (2,550) and Islam Qala (1,534), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak (257) and Torkham (176), including 3,493 single individuals and 1,024 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 population returning from Iran.

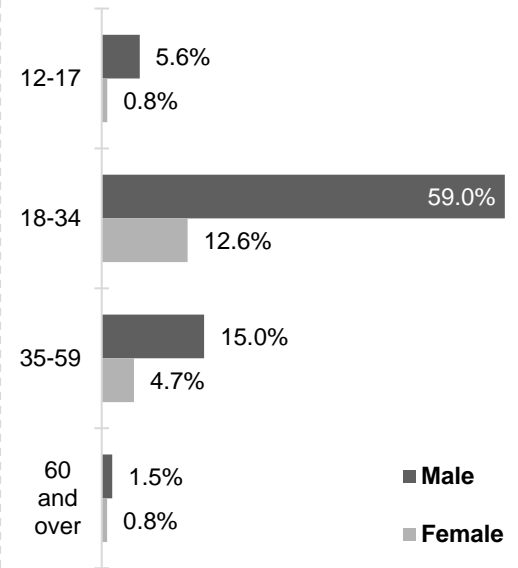
Respondents' Return Status



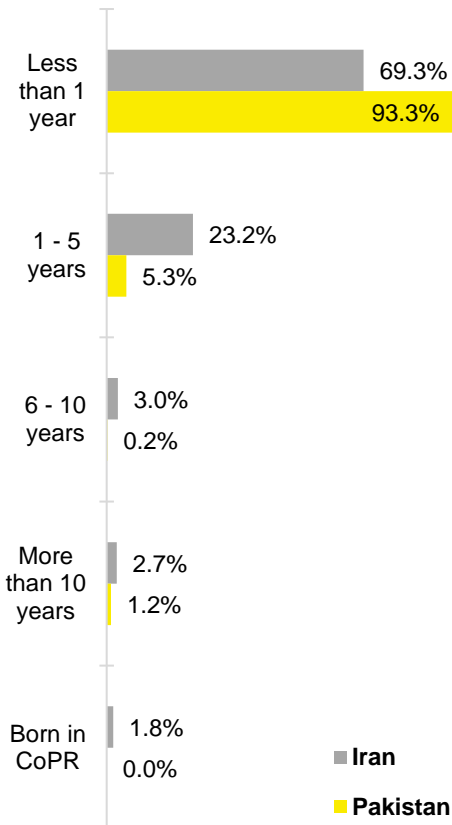
Respondents (%) by Entry Point



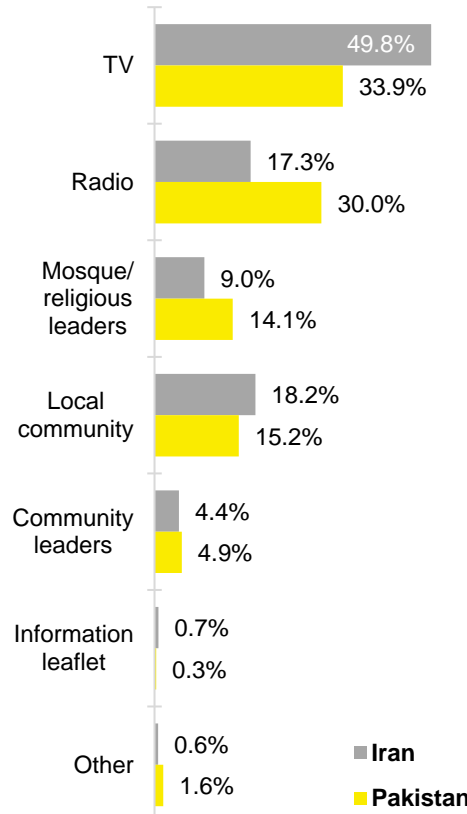
Respondents' Age and Gender



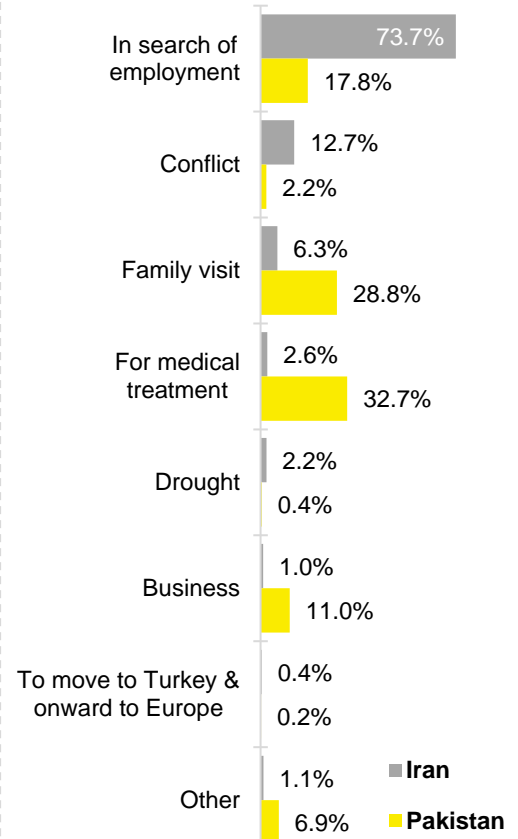
Years Spent in the CoPR



Sources of Information about COVID 19 in Iran & Pakistan



Reason for entry to CoPR



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

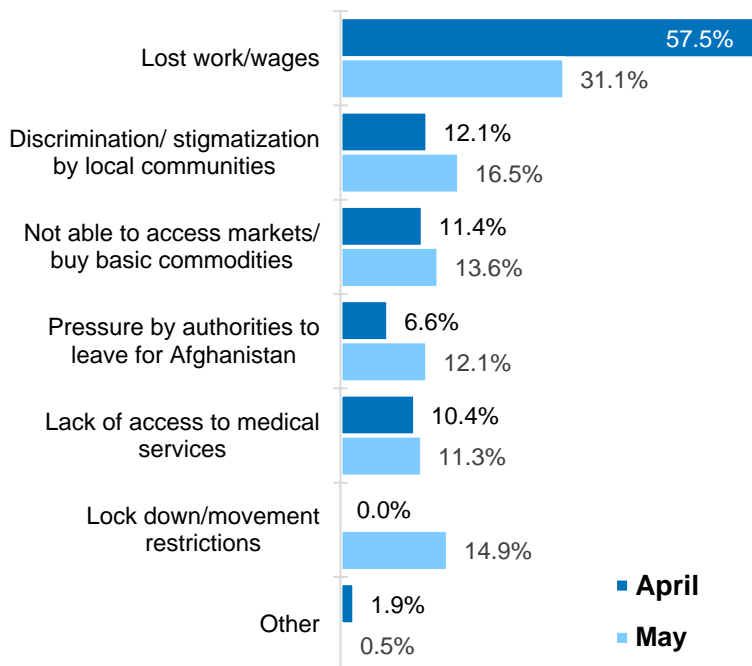
Interviewed Returnees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

- 42% deportees, 36% spontaneous returnees, 21% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 80% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from five provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Hormozgan, Kerman and Fars; nearly 70% spent less than one year in Iran;
- 74% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 13% due to conflict, 6% to visit family/relatives, 3% for medical treatment, and 4% other reasons;
- 42% (1,712 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, and lack of access to medical services;
- 86% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, mainly through TV, radio and local communities;
- 27% (1,116 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).
- 43% claimed that they faced problem during the return: high transportation/ travel cost, charged fee at detention center, limited transportation services to reach the border, overcrowded situation in the bus stations, paid bribe to pass police check point;
- Recently, Iranian health officials in Dogharoun have conducted a health screening process and provided returning refugees and passport holders with a health certificate issued after a temperature test and interview focused on possible COVID-19 symptoms. UNHCR's office in Dogharoun also confirmed this practice, which was initiated following a request for screening by Afghanistan's MoPH.

Key trends in May

- Among the interviewed returnees in May, a smaller number have expressed concern regarding the loss of work/wages (**57.5% in April vs 31.1% in May**);
- An increase in the level of discrimination/stigmatization by local communities in Iran against Afghans was observed (**12% in April vs 16.5% in May**);
- Pressure by authorities on Afghans to leave Iran almost doubled (**6.6% in April vs 12.1% in May**);
- A dramatic increase in the number of deportations in May was observed (**almost 4 times higher than April**);
- Far fewer returnees said that they left Iran due to fear of COVID-19 (**30.2% in April vs 12.6% in May**);
- Similarly, those who left Iran due to lack of employment opportunities dropped (**26.2% in April vs 12.1% in May**);
- A sharp increase in the number of returnees who said that they left Iran due to abuses by police or state authorities was recorded (**12.7% in April vs 32.4% in May**).

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



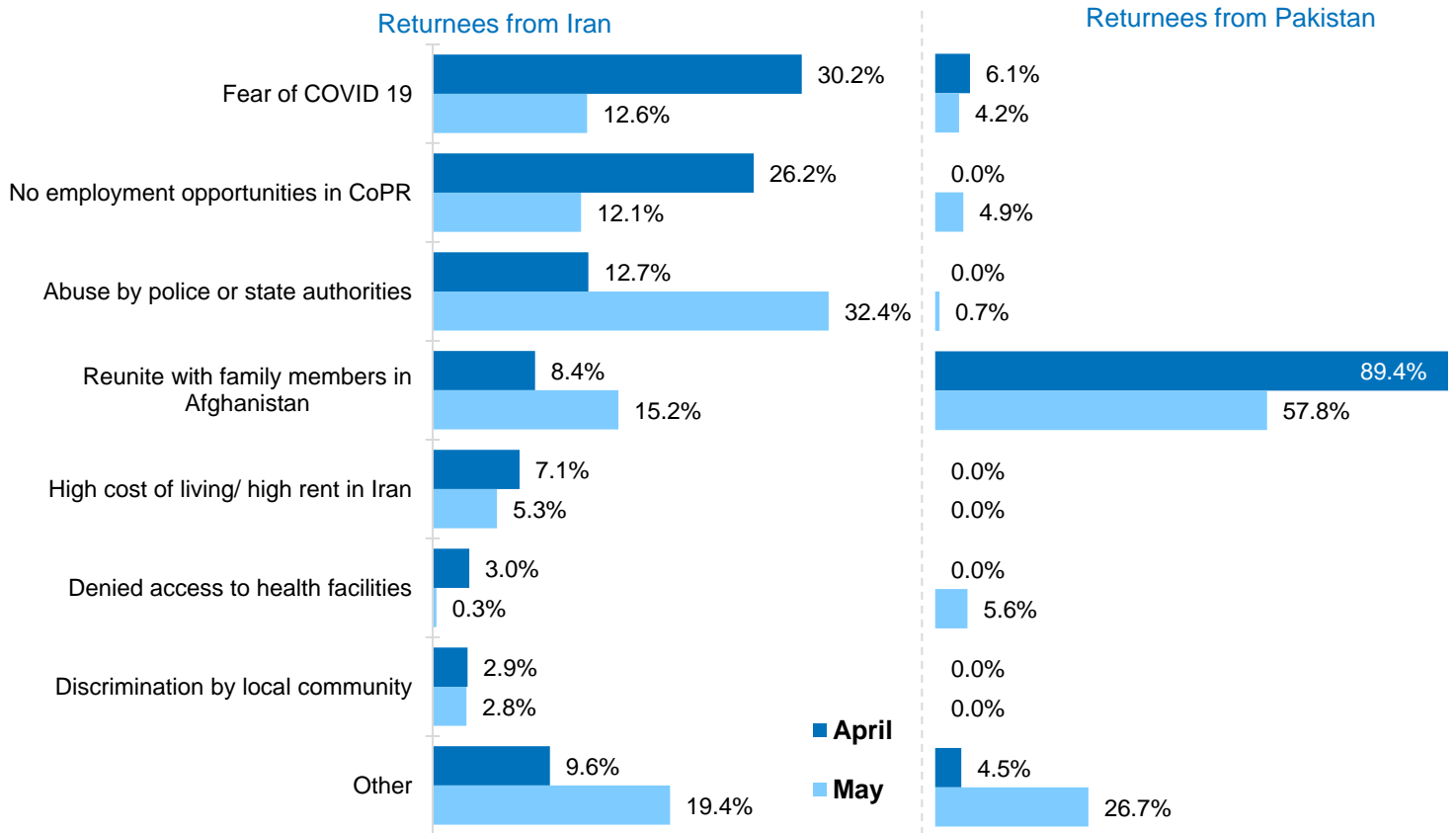
No. of Interviewed Returnees Monthly Breakdown by Return Status and Province of Residence in Iran

Province of residence in Iran	Deportee		Passport holder		Spontaneous returnee		VRF holder		Total
	April	May	April	May	April	May	April	May	
Tehran	49	237	66	266	301	262	6	7	1,194
Sistan va Baluchestan	121	356	37	7	138	166	0	0	825
Hormozgan	23	162	33	107	44	82	0	0	451
Kerman	68	203	8	23	54	63	0	0	419
Fars	37	157	15	26	55	68	0	2	360
Yazd	37	102	20	31	29	45	0	1	265
Khorasan Razavi	32	23	30	96	8	10	1	0	200
Esfahan	8	56	13	17	42	46	2	3	187
Other	9	42	17	44	34	37	0	0	183
Total	384	1,338	239	617	705	779	9	13	4,084

Interviewed Returnees from Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham):

- 47% were tazkira/token holders¹, 33% passport holders, and 20% spontaneous returnees;
- 46% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 33% from KPK, 12% Sindh, 7% Punjab, and 2% from Islamabad; 93% spent less than a year in Pakistan;
- 46% (201 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;
- 94% stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/ religious leaders and local communities.
- 36% claimed that they faced problem during the return: high transportation/ travel cost, overcrowded situation in the bus stations, limited transportation services to reach the border, paid bribe to pass police check point.

Reasons for Return to Afghanistan



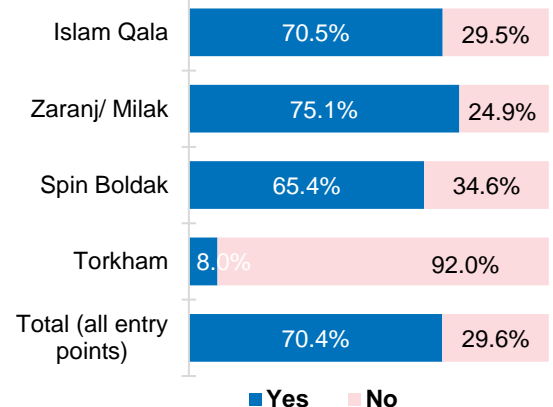
Information Dissemination in Afghanistan



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

30% of returnees interviewed at Islam Qala border crossing point, 25% at Zaranj/Milak, 92% at Torkham and 35% at Spin Boldak stated that they had not received information about COVID-19 upon arrival in Afghanistan. The information gap at Zaranj/Milak has improved (from 42% to 25%) since UNHCR's follow-up with partners in early May. However, the monitoring findings shows that the information gap at Islam Qala and Spin Boldak slightly increased compared to early May, while the information gap at Torkham remains very high. UNHCR will continue to follow-up on this issue with the partners in all four entry points.

Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan?



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.

Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination)

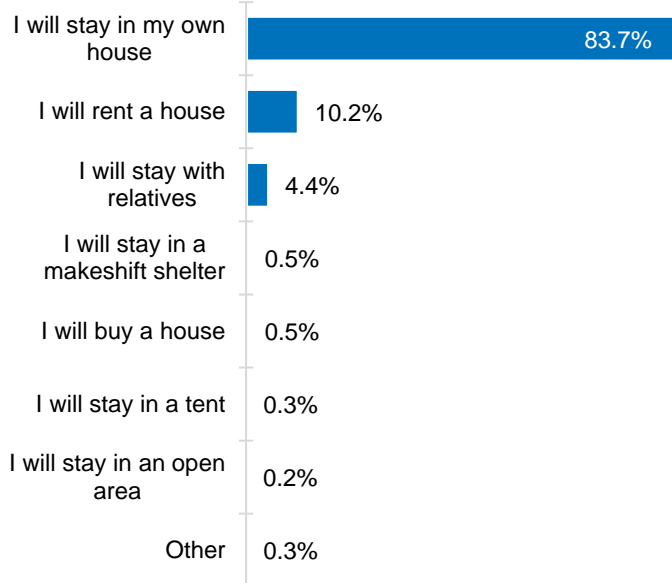


95%

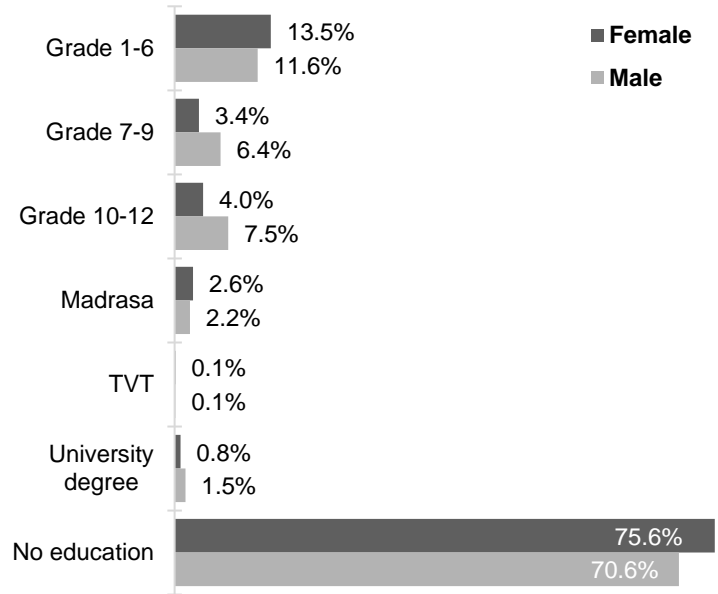
OF THE INTERVIEWED
 RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND
 PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING
 THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY
 ARE RETURNING TO THEIR
 AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **5%** 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 33 provinces across the country, with the majority (**76%**) intending to return to Herat, Farah, Kunduz, Faryab, Nimroz, Takhar, Ghor, Ghazni, Badakhshan and Sar-e-pul provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were traveling to 27 provinces, with the majority (**71%**) intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Ghazni and Paktika provinces.

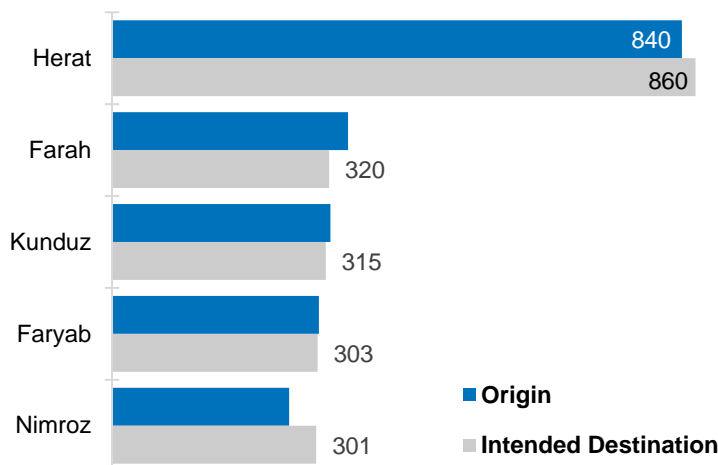
Living arrangements after return



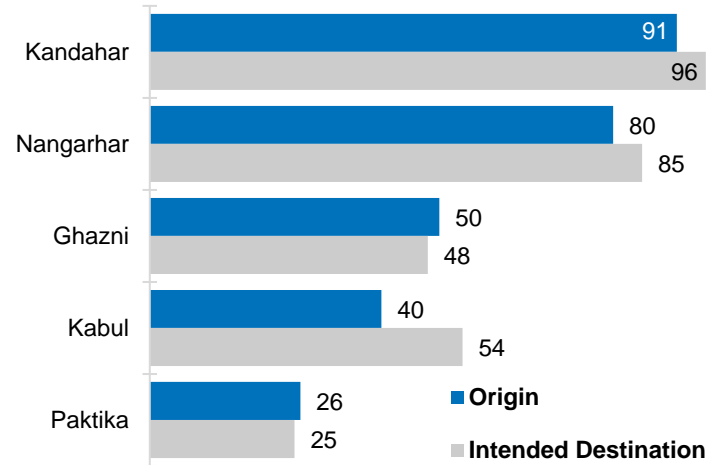
Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



Number of Interviewed Returnees from Iran Province of Origin vs Intended Destination



Number of Interviewed Returnees from Pakistan Province of Origin vs Intended Destination



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