

# BORDER MONITORING REPORT

Protection Monitoring of Afghan Returnees  
crossing Milak border, Nimroz province

د افغان راستنیدونکو د خونديتوب نظارت  
میلک پوله، نیمروز ولایت

نظارت بر مصونیت عودت کنندگان افغان  
مرز میلک، ولایت نیمروز

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

April - December 2020



UNHCR partner staff during interview with a returnee, Nimroz/Milak crossing point, Nimroz, Afghanistan December 2020

# 2,147

AFGHAN REFUGEES  
RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of **2,147** Afghan refugees from Pakistan (**1,092**), Iran (**939**) and other countries (**116**) including Tajikistan, India, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation, under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. The figure of refugee returnees in 2020 was 73% lower than 2019 when 8,079 refugees returned and 86% lower than 2018 when 15,699 refugees returned.

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.

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) by establishing the border monitoring activities mostly focusing on inflows. Through maintaining a consistent presence at these zero points, UNHCR aimed to ensure efficient, timely and systematic gathering of protection information from Afghan returnees, irrespective of their status.

In a nutshell, the large number of returnees were undocumented returnees and deportees. According to MoRR/IOM, at the end of 2020, the total number of undocumented returnees reached **865,793** individuals, including **859,092** from Iran (**534,313** spontaneous returnees and **324,779** deportees) and **6,701** from Pakistan (**5,956** spontaneous returnees and **745** deportees). They were all referred to IOM that jointly with MoRR lead the humanitarian response for undocumented returnees and deportees at Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak crossing points with Iran and Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points with Pakistan.

# 865,793

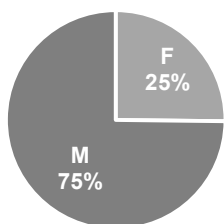
UNDOCUMENTED  
AFGHANS RETURNED /  
DEPORTED FROM IRAN  
AND PAKISTAN

Border monitoring activities conducted in 2020 reached a total of **55,522** returnees and deportees (**41,539 M** and **13,983 F**) all interviewed by UNHCR partners as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Islam Qala (**21,052**) and Zaranj/Milak (**19,806**), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak/Chaman (**10,588**) and Torkham (**4,076**), including **41,345** single individuals and **14,177** heads of households who returned with their families. Out of the total interviews, some **30,599 (55%)** were selected randomly and **24,923 (45%)** interviews were self-selection. The sample size for Torkham is small as the border was open only once per week for pedestrian movements **until late September 2020**. Furthermore, the low number of female sample size, in general, is justified by the fact that the high proportion among the returnees/deportees from Iran are single males.

# 55,522

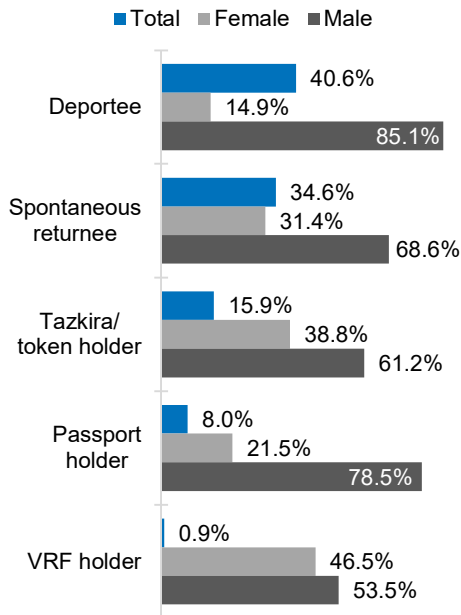
INTERVIEWS WITH  
RETURNEES FROM IRAN  
AND PAKISTAN

Even though the borders remained open to enable cross-border movements, some challenges have been reported: As of 19 December, the Government of Pakistan included the mandatory requirement of a negative PCR test result for those traveling from Afghanistan to Pakistan through the Torkham crossing point, while this practice was not applied at Spin Boldak/Chaman crossing point in Kandahar. In relation to this, the MoPH in Afghanistan, through social media, advised Afghans not to travel to other countries to avoid the spread of COVID-19. In addition, MoPH informed Afghans that the health authorities in the border entry points would not be able to provide COVID-19 testing services due to limited testing capacity. However, on a more positive note, despite the COVID-19 test results requirement for crossing the border from Afghanistan to Pakistan, it was not observed any substantial impact on out-flow and in-flow movements through Torkham border, except an increased overcrowded situation due to the required immigration process at the border. The later lead to little attention of travelers to the respect of recommended COVID-19 preventive measures (e.g. physical and social distancing) which, made the travelers at risk of COVID-19 transmission. At present, Afghans traveling to Pakistan were requested to present a COVID-19 test result (upon entry into Pakistan) which they mainly obtained from the private laboratories in Afghanistan.

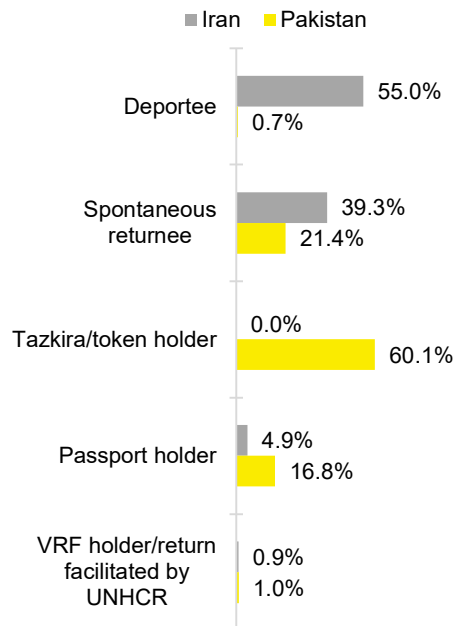


Below are the main findings of the border monitoring in 2020:

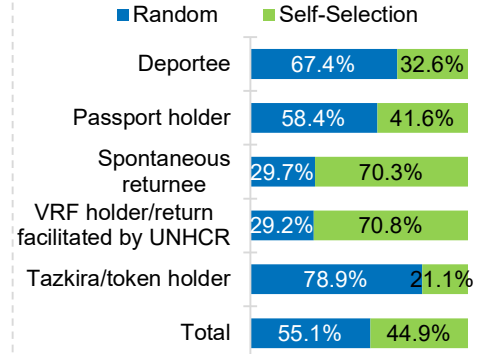
**Respondents' Return Status by Gender**



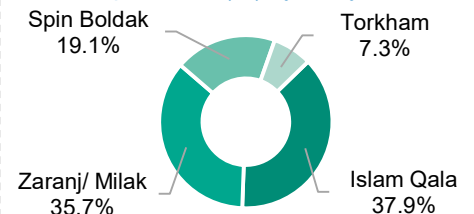
**Respondents' Return Status by CoPR**



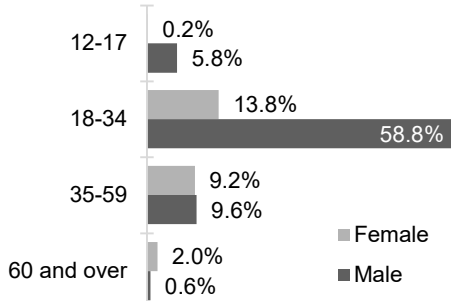
**Selection of Respondents by Return Status**



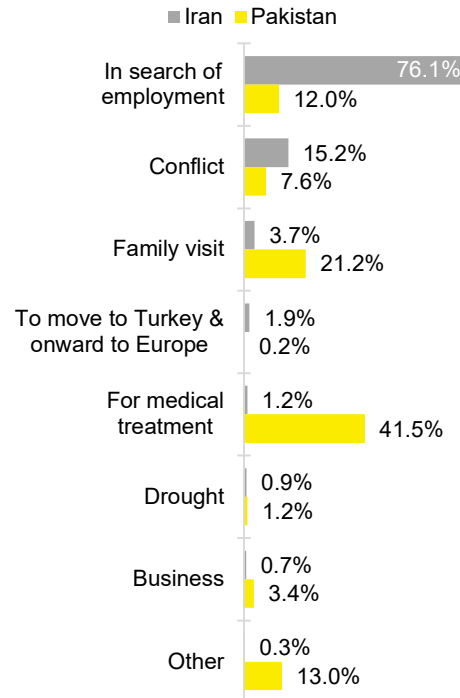
**Respondents (%) by Entry Point**



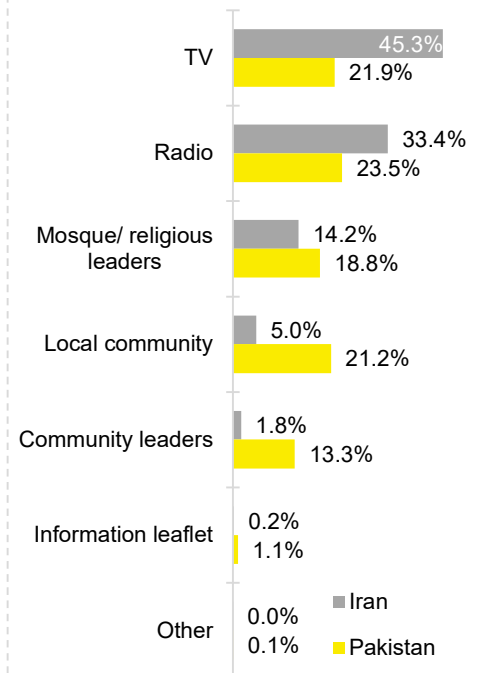
**Respondents' Age and Gender**



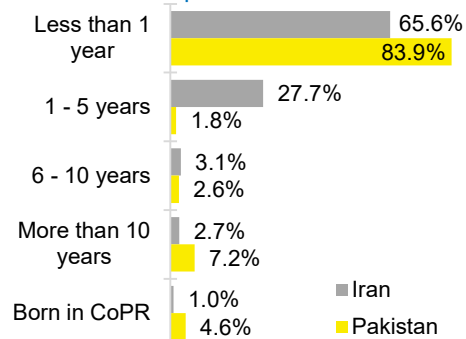
**Reason for entry to CoPR**



**Sources of Information about COVID-19 in Iran & Pakistan**



**Years Spent in the CoPR**



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

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

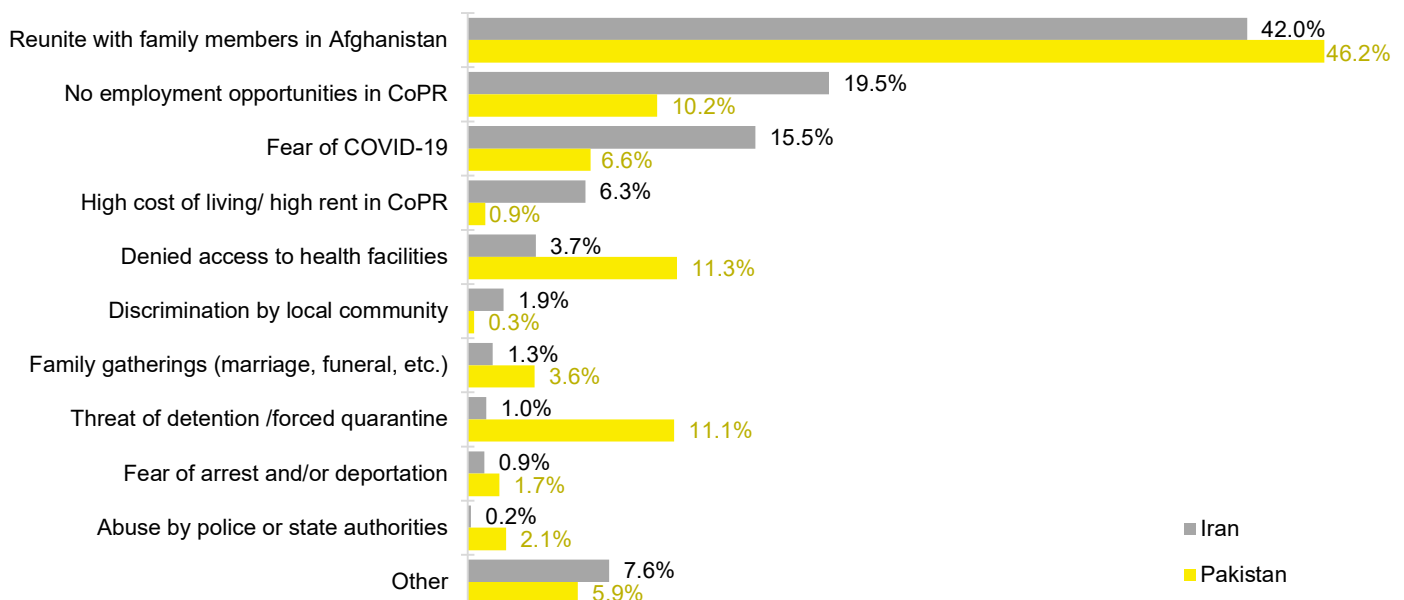
- 55% deportees, 39% spontaneous returnees, 5% passport holders and 1% VRF holders (refugees);
- 37% of the interviewed VRF holders, 19% spontaneous returnees, 15% of deportees, and 5% of passport holders were female;
- 95% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from ten provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Kerman, Esfahan, Fars, Khorasan Razavi, Yazd, Khuzistan, Hormozgan, and Mazandaran;
- 65.6% of the respondents spent less than one year in Iran, among whom 13% stated that they spent less than a week, 32% around a month, 26% 1-6 months, and 29% over 6 months;

- 76% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 15% due to conflict, 4% to visit family/relatives, 2% (mainly deportees) to move to Turkey and onward to Europe, 1% for medical treatment, 1% due to drought, and 1% for other reasons;
- The 71% of the respondents who went to Iran, due to conflict in Afghanistan, were originally from 11 provinces: Herat, Faryab, Ghor, Takhar, Kunduz, Farah, Badghis, Ghazni, Balkh, Badakhshan and Baglan. The remaining 29% were from other 23 provinces;
- 35% (14,352 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;
- 96% of the respondents stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran through TV, radio and local communities;
- 7% 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%);
- 48% (19,511 respondents) including spontaneous returnees (60%), deportees (39.6%) and VRF holders (0.4%) claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/ approximately USD 7-35);
- 19% claimed that they faced problems during return: high transportation/travel costs, fee charged at detention center, overcrowded situation in the bus stations, limited transportation services to reach the border, and bribe required to pass police check point.
- 42% returned to Afghanistan to reunite with family members, 19% due to lack of employment opportunities and 11% due to denial of access to health services.

**Interviewed Returnees from Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham):**

- 60% were Tazkira/token holders<sup>1</sup>, 21% spontaneous returnees, 17% passport holders, 1% VRF holders, and 1% deportees;
- 97% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 70% of VRF holders, 39% of Tazkira/token and 34% of passport holders were female;
- 64% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 23% from KPK, 8% Sindh, 3% Punjab, and 2% from Islamabad and Keshmir;
- 84% spent less than a year in Pakistan, among whom 16% stated that they spent less than a week, 59% around a month, 19% 1-6 months, and 6% over 6 months;
- 42% went to Pakistan for medical treatment, 21% to visit family/relatives, 12% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 8% due to conflict, 3% for business purpose, 1% due to drought, and 13% cited other reasons;
- 31% (4,555 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;
- 68% 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%);
- 15% 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.
- 46% returnees returned to Afghanistan to reunite with family members, 11% to due to denied access to health facilities and thread of detention.

**Reasons for Return to Afghanistan<sup>2</sup> (Spontaneous returnees, VRF holders, and Passport/ID holders)**



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

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

The above shows that a great majority of those going to Iran are single individuals, predominately male deportees, spontaneous returnees and passport holders, who moved to Iran mainly for job opportunities (76%) and due conflict in Afghanistan (15%). The possibility of combined reasons is not to be excluded. Furthermore, the findings (between September and December) shows an increase in the number of respondents who stated that they went to Iran due to conflict in Afghanistan, particularly Herat, Faryab, Ghor, Takhar, Kunduz, Farah, Badghis, Ghazni, Balkh, Badakhshan and Baglan provinces, revealing that insecurity continue to cause displacement of population including outside of Afghanistan.

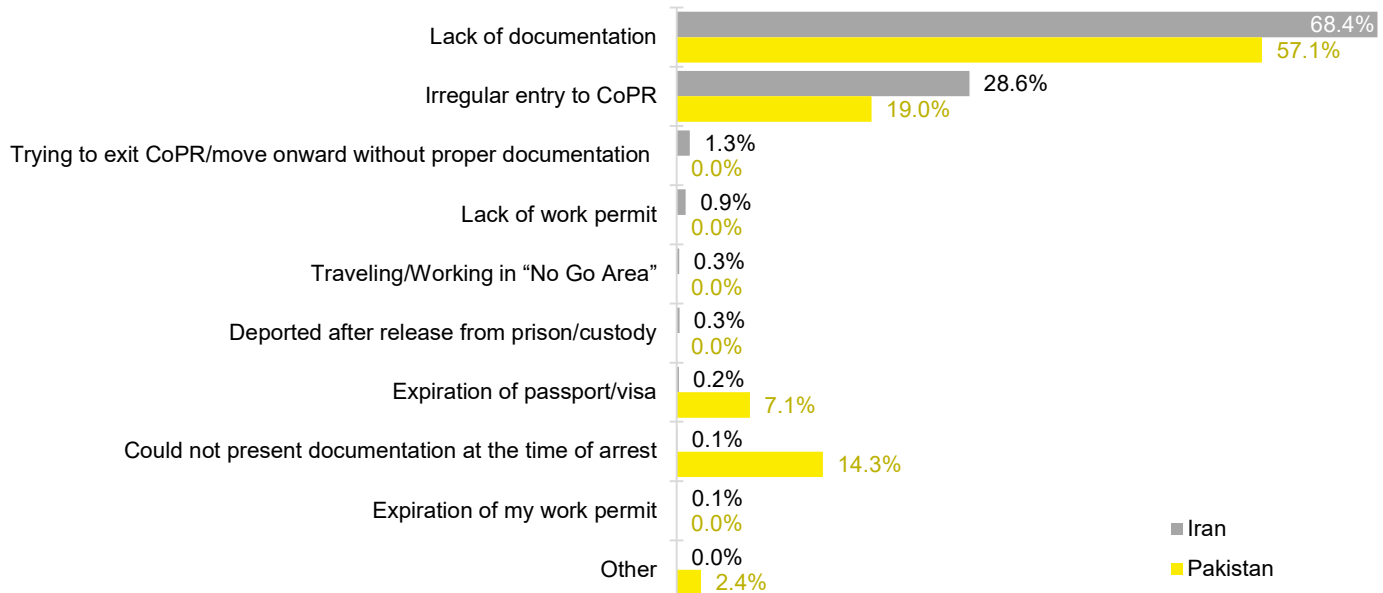
Regarding returnees from Pakistan, the above findings are slightly different compared to the returnees from Iran in relation to the reasons of departure from Afghanistan, reasons for returning back, and their profile. Most of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan initially travelled to Pakistan for medical treatment (41%), family visits (21%) and job opportunities (12%). Exception made of the need to reunite with family members expressed both by returnees from Iran and Pakistan as the main reason for returning to Afghanistan, the denied access to health facilities and the threat of detention/forced quarantine were particularly mentioned by returnees from Pakistan as important reasons that prompted their decision to return. Unlike the profile of returnees from Iran who were mainly single individual males, returnees from Pakistan were female .The findings further illustrates that the lack of adequate services including health services remain a concern among Afghans including females, prompting to some extend their decision to move to Pakistan to access such services. Conflict in Afghanistan has also been mentioned by a small proportion of returnees from Pakistan (7%) confirming conflict as one of the root causes of displacement in the region, same as reported by some returnees from Iran. The huge socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the lives of returnees in CoPR, contributing to their decision to return.

In both cases the findings suggest to continue to focus on joint actions aiming at building the humanitarian development peace nexus by working towards addressing the root causes of displacement including through conflict resolution, ensuring Afghan’s access to social services and their self-reliance. It is expected that positive developments in the intra-Afghan peace negotiations will contribute to address internal and external conflict- induced displacements and offer a more conducive environment for the implementation development projects.

- In July, following an increase in the number of deportees from Iran, UNHCR revised its border monitoring tool to collect deportation reasons and intentions of returnees and deportees after their arrival in Afghanistan to assess deportations and return trends better. The revised tool has been implemented since 04 July in all entry points and, since then, a total of **45,051** interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted with **17,474** deportees (**14,732 M and 2,742 F**), including **17,378** from Iran and **96** from Pakistan. The latter figure is small due to the low number of reported deportations from Pakistan in 2020.
- **The majority of interviewed deportees from Iran (close to 97%) and Pakistan (76%)** cited lack of documentation and irregular entry to CoPR as the reasons provided to them for their deportation. It is expected that the ongoing efforts by the governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan aiming at documenting Afghans in Iran and Pakistan could contribute to address this issue.
- **1.3%** of interviewed deportees (271 respondents, including 179 single individuals and 92 family cases) from Iran 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.
- Close to **1%** (132 respondents) of the interviewed deportees (**17,474**) 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.

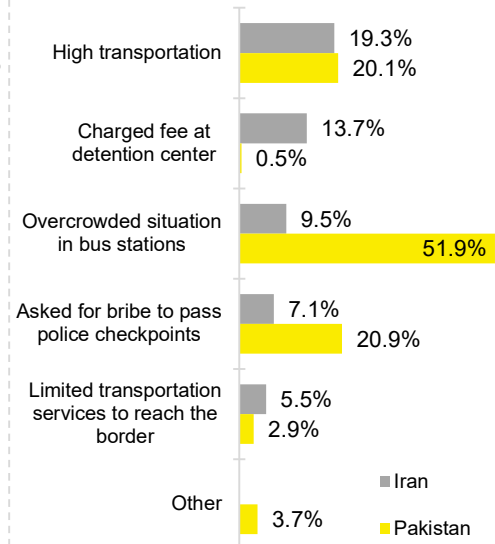
### Reasons of Deportation from CoPR



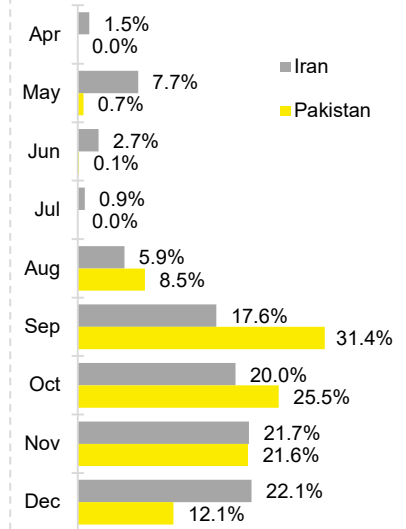
**Types of Problems faced by Afghans during COVID-19 in CoPR**



**Types of problems faced during the return (in the CoPR)**



**Respondents (%) who entered CoPR due to conflict**



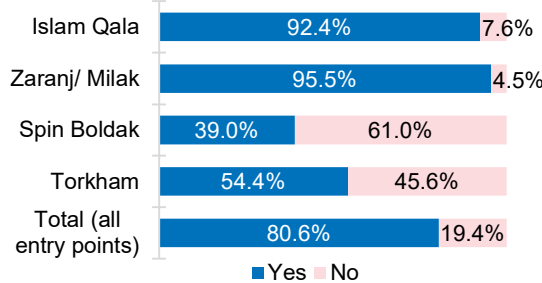
**Information Dissemination on COVID-19 in Afghanistan and CoPR**



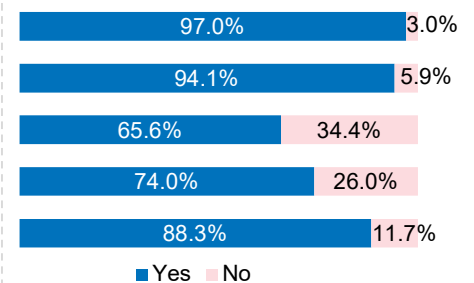
**81%**

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

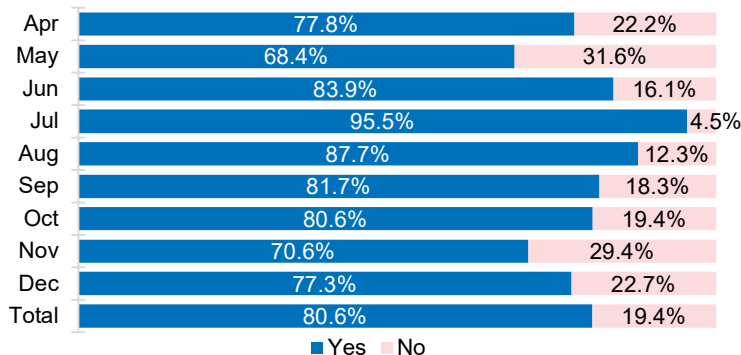
**Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan?**



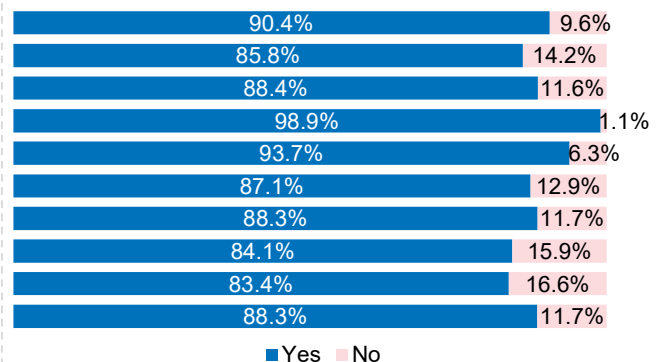
**Did you receive any information about COVID-19 while you were in your CoPR?**



**Level of awareness about COVID-19 upon entry into Afghanistan - monthly breakdown**



**Level of awareness about COVID-19 in CoPR monthly breakdown**



As a general trend, a vast majority of returnees in 2020 received information regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic, through various means while in CoPR as well as upon arrival in Afghanistan. Regarding the information gap/little observance to covid-19 preventive measures upon arrival in Afghanistan, mostly observed at Spin Boldak and Torkham, this was due to limited opening of the borders for pedestrian movements (until late September 2020), which created an overcrowded situation as thousands of people tried to cross at once therefore, reducing attention to services provided by partners, including health screening and information dissemination about COVID-19.

In order to fill the gap, efforts have been made by conducting systematic sensitizations and awareness raising campaigns by partners, upon the arrival of returnees and deportees at Torkham and Spin Boldak, to increase awareness on the pandemic and promote the respect of preventive measures.

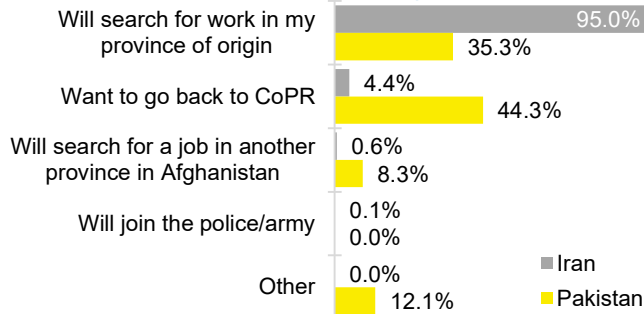
## Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination) and Intentions after Return



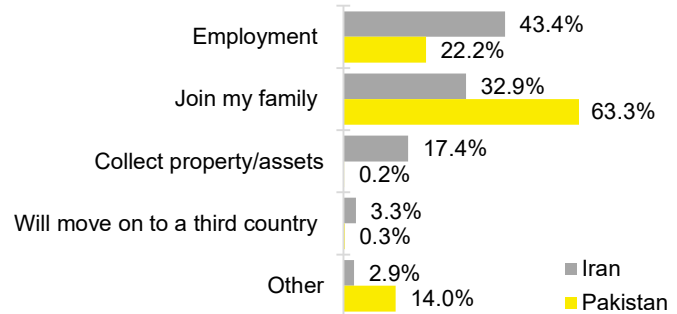
95% OF THE INTERVIEWED RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY ARE RETURNING TO THEIR AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **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 all **34** provinces across the country, with the majority (**69%**) stated that they were intending to return to Herat, Faryab, Nimroz, Takhar, Ghor, Kunduz, Badghis, Balkh, Farah, and Ghazni provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were travelling to **34** provinces, with the majority (**85%**) stated that they were intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Zabul, Kunduz, Uruzgan, Herat, and Maidan Wardak provinces.
- **78%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**83%** of male respondents and **62%** of female respondents).
- **73%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees stated that have no education, (**77% female and 71% male**). **9 %** stated that they have minimal education (up to grade 6), **6%** up to grade 9, **7%** up to grade 12, **3%** went to madrasa, and close to **2%** went to university.
- **81%** stated that they will stay in their own house, close to **11%** stated that they will rent a house, and **7%** will stay with relatives.
- **95%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees from Iran and **35%** from Pakistan stated that they will try to find a job in their province of origin.
- Close to **5%** of respondents from Iran and **44%** from Pakistan stated that they intend to go back to the CoPR: for employment, to join family or to collect property. **3%** of the respondents from Iran stated that they intend to go back to Iran to move on to a third country. This suggests appropriate response to prevent pendular movements including by putting in place /expanding reintegration programmes in return areas, including livelihood opportunities based on the skills of returnees to enable sustainable returns.

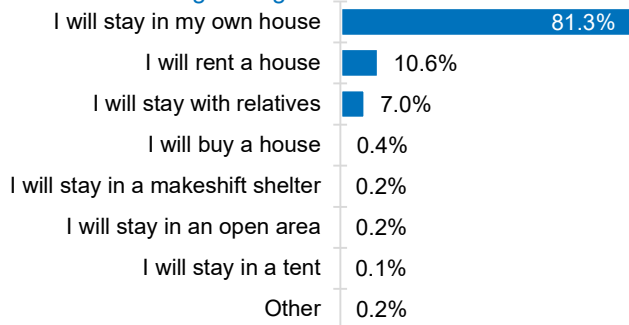
### Intention after return/deportation



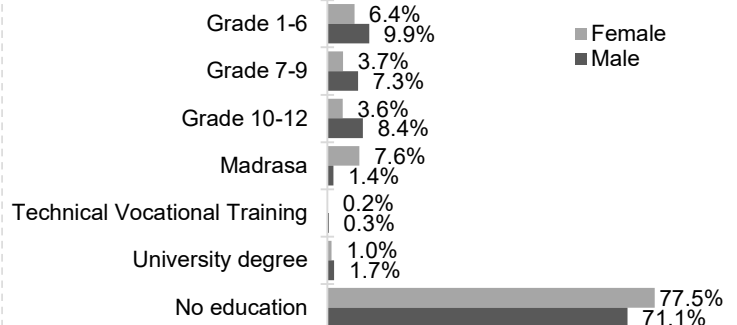
### Reasons for going back to CoPR



### Living arrangements after return



### Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



## Contacts

**Ms. Michele Apala Donfack**, Senior Protection Officer, [apala@unhcr.org](mailto:apala@unhcr.org), Cell: +93 702 465 606

**Mr. Mohammad Haroon**, Assistant Repatriation Officer, [haroon@unhcr.org](mailto:haroon@unhcr.org), Cell: +93 791 990 019

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is grateful for the support of:

