

# BORDER MONITORING REPORT

FEBRUARY 2021



UNHCR partner (CHA) staff during identification of returnees/deportees for border monitoring interview Islam Qala crossing point, Herat, Afghanistan December 2020

**308**

AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

In line with UNHCR's protection monitoring objectives and noting with concern the increasing impact of COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border movements in 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 Pakistan (Spin Boldak/Chaman and Torkham) by establishing border monitoring activities mostly focusing on inflows. Through regular and consistent presence at these zero points, UNHCR aimed to ensure efficient, timely and systematic collection and analysis of protection related information from Afghan returnees and deportees, irrespective of their status. Border monitoring also helps to assess access to the territory and "the right to asylum" for people fleeing persecution who may be in need of international protection. It also aims at assessing the right to return for Afghan refugees and other nationals amidst possible limitations imposed by the Pandemic.

**145,781**

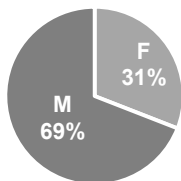
UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS RETURNED / DEPORTED FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

In February, UNHCR assisted the return of **187** Afghan refugees from Iran (**144**), Pakistan (**39**) and other countries (**4**). Cumulatively since the beginning of 2021, UNHCR assisted the return of **308** Afghan refugees from Iran (**245**), Pakistan (**59**) and other countries (**4**) under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. The figure is **44%** higher compared to 2020 figures at the same period when **214** refugees returned. Refugee returnees receive, upon arrival, a multi-purpose cash grant (an average of USD 250 per person) and other services such as basic health care, malnutrition screening and vaccination, mine risk awareness, information on school enrolment and overnight accommodation. In the context of COVID-19, awareness raising about the pandemic and preventive measures, as well as the distribution of PPE are systematically conducted at Encashment Centers located in Herat, Kandahar, Kabul, and Nangarhar provinces. UNHCR's cash grants to refugees upon return to Afghanistan intend to address their immediate needs to prevent, reduce, and respond to protection risks and vulnerabilities.

**14,920**

INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

In addition to refugee returnees and in the context of coordinated activities at entry points, a total number of **87,156** undocumented returnees/deportees have been recorded during February, according to MoRR/IOM. This include **86,342** from Iran (**52,324** deportees and **34,018** spontaneous returnees) and **814** from Pakistan (**725** spontaneous returnees and **89** deportees). Cumulatively since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees/deportees stands at **145,781** individuals, including **144,320** from Iran (**79,666** deportees and **64,654** spontaneous returnees) and **1,461** from Pakistan (**1,267** spontaneous returnees and **194** deportees).



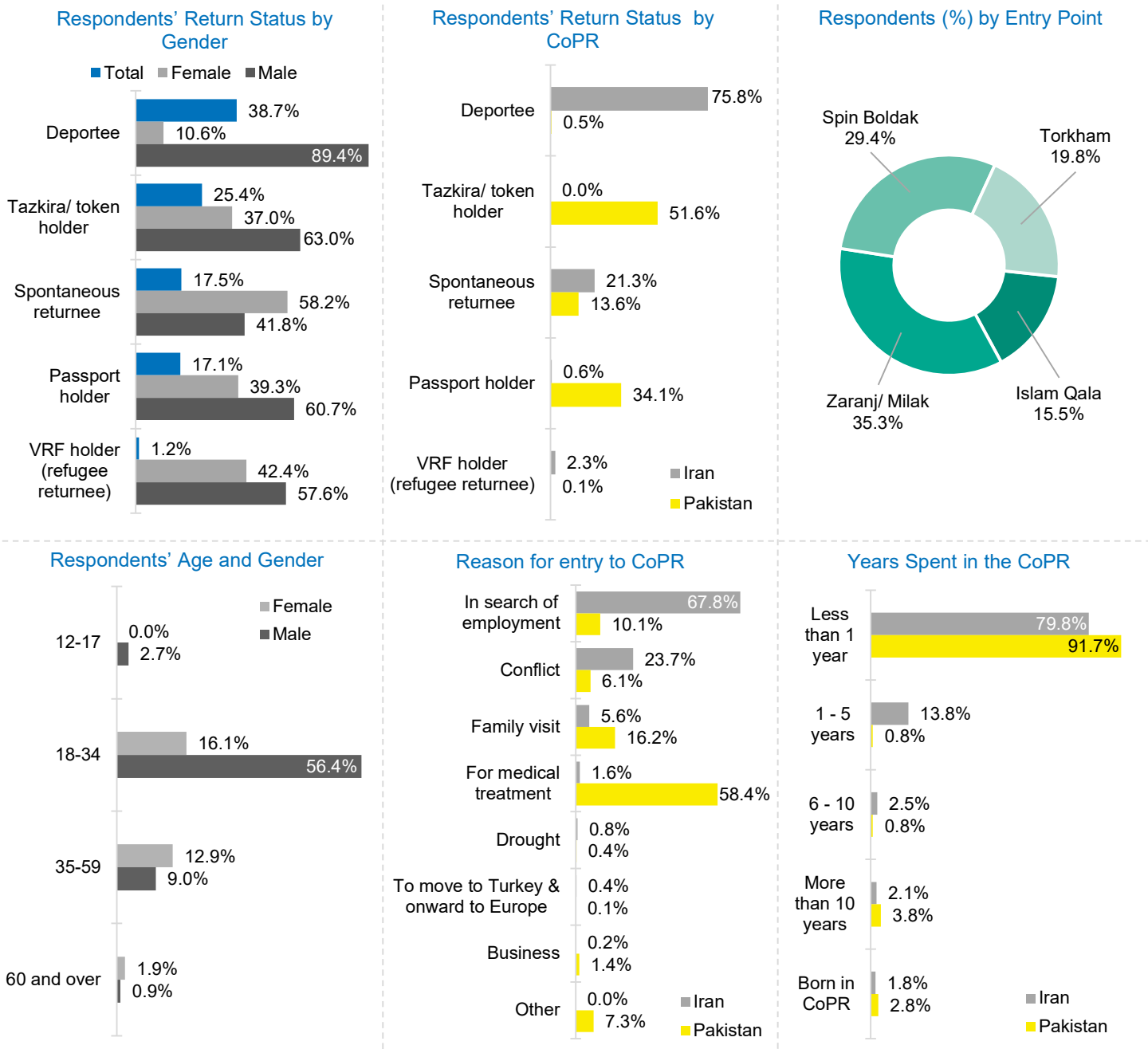
**68%**

RESPONDENTS RECEIVED INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 UPON ARRIVAL IN AFGHANISTAN

During February, individual and household level interviews conducted by UNHCR through partners as part of border monitoring activities randomly reached a total of **8,054** returnees and deportees (representing **9%** of the total returnees/deportees) including **5,491** males and **2,563** females. Cumulatively during January and February 2021, a total of **14,920** interviews (representing **10%** of total returnees/deportees) were conducted with returnees of various status (**10,303** males and **4,617** females) upon return from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (**5,266**) and Islam Qala (**2,310**), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak/Chaman (**4,387**) and Torkham (**2,957**). These include **9,994** single individuals and **4,926** heads of households who returned with their families. In general, the majority of returnees/deportees from Iran are single males, while it is not the case among returnees/deportees from Pakistan.

As a major incident that affected cross border movement, a fire incident at Islam Qala was reported on the 13 February, causing injuries, and the temporary suspension of population movement including voluntary repatriation. On the positive, the temporary suspension of cross border movements however did not impact the return trends.

## Main findings of the border monitoring



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

### Findings of Interviews with Returnees and Deportees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

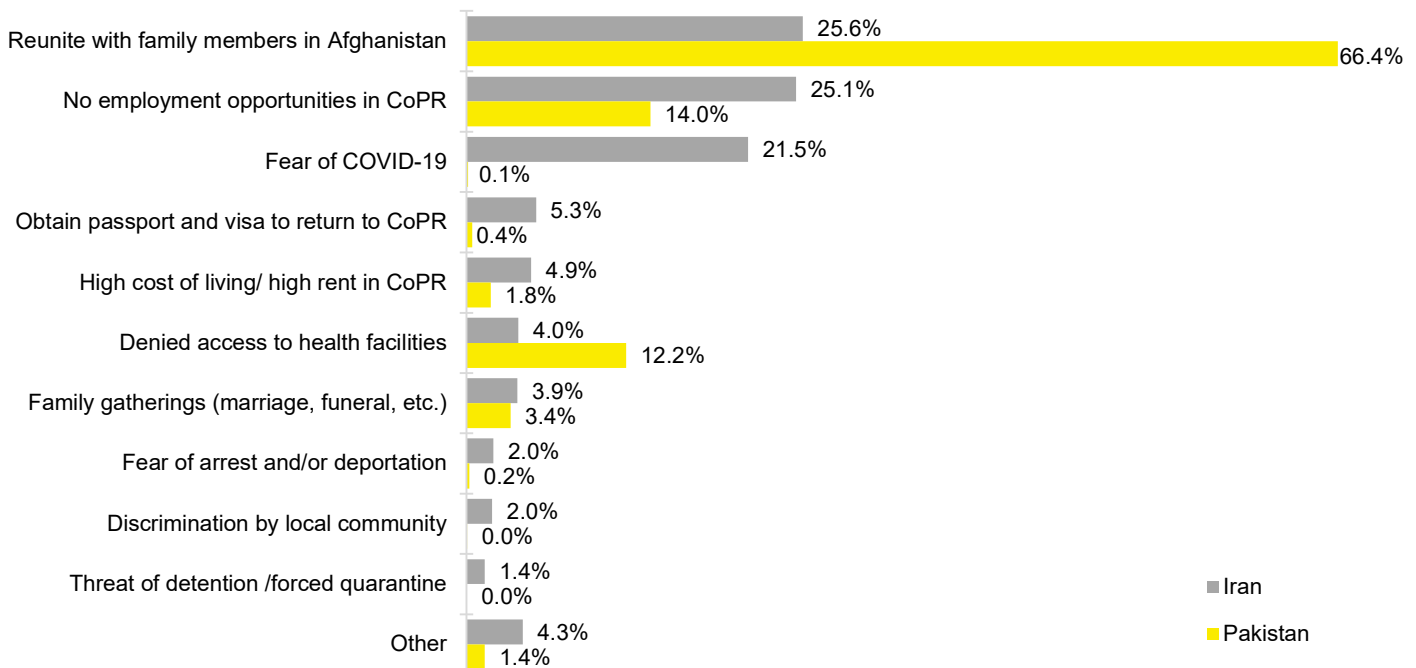
- Respondents include: 76% deportees, 21% spontaneous returnees (migrants), 2% VRF holders (refugee returnees), & 1% passport holders;
- 45% of VRF holders, 41% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 11% of deportees were female;
- 82% of the respondents returned from 5 provinces in Iran: Teheran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Kerman, Khorasan Razavi, and Fars. These areas were among the top provinces from where many Afghans returned and/ or deported in 2020;
- 80% of the respondents spent less than one year in Iran, among whom 29% spent less than a week, 29% around a month, 23% 1-6 months, and 19% over 6 months;
- 67% of the respondents went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 24% due to conflict, 6% to visit family/relatives, 2% for medical treatment, and 1% for other reasons. The percentage of those respondents who cited conflict as the main reason for leaving Afghanistan (24%) has increased compared to January (19%). Similarly, in 2020, this figure was 15% among the total sample size (40,861 interviews with returnees and deportees from Iran).

- 68% of the respondents who went to Iran due to conflict in Afghanistan were originally from 10 provinces: Herat, Ghor, Faryab, Takhar, Ghazni, Saripul, Badghis, Balkh, Kunduz and Badakhshan.
- 30% of the respondents returned to Afghanistan due to economic problems including lack of employment opportunities (25%) and high cost of living (5%) in CoPR; 26% to reunite with family members in Afghanistan, 22% due to fear of COVID-19, 5% to obtain passport and visa to return to CoPR, 4% due to denied access to health facilities, and 13% due to other reasons.
- 29% of the respondents including 38% the spontaneous returnees and 24% deportees had to pay a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/approximately USD 5 - 25);
- 15% of respondents 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.
- 38% of respondents faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, such as lost work/wages, discrimination/ stigmatization by local communities, lack of access to markets, movement restrictions related to the lockdown, lack of access to medical services, and pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan;
- Close to 100% of the respondents received information about COVID-19 in Iran through TV, radio and local communities;

**Findings of Interviews with Returnees and Deportees from Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham):**

- Respondents include Tazkira/token holders (51%)<sup>1</sup>, passport holders (34%), spontaneous returnees (14%), VRF holders and deportees (1% both);
- 87% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 40% of passport holders, and 37% of Tazkira/token holders were female;
- 54% of the respondents returned from Baluchistan, 35% from KPK, 6% Sindh, 3% Punjab, and 2% from Islamabad;
- 92% of the respondents spent less than a year in Pakistan, among whom 24% stated that they spent less than a week, 58% around a month, 17% 1-6 months, and 1% over 6 months;
- 58% of the respondents went to Pakistan for medical treatment, 16% to visit family/relatives, 10% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 6% due to conflict, 1% for business purpose, and 9% cited other reasons;
- 66% of the interviewed returnees returned to Afghanistan to reunite with family members, 14% due to lack of employment opportunities and 12% due to denied access to health facilities, and 8% due other reasons;
- 38% of the respondents faced problems during return. The problems include, among others, overcrowded bus stations, bribe required to pass police check points, and high transportation/ travel costs;
- 20% of the respondents 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;
- 56% of the respondents had received information about COVID-19 in Pakistan, mainly through TV, radio, mosque/ religious leaders and local communities. This figure slightly declined compared to January 2021 (57%) and December 2020 (60%).

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

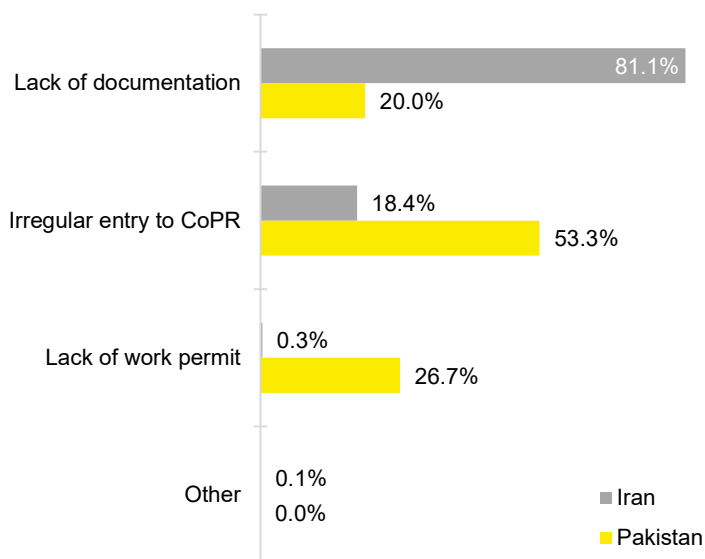


<sup>1</sup> This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently.

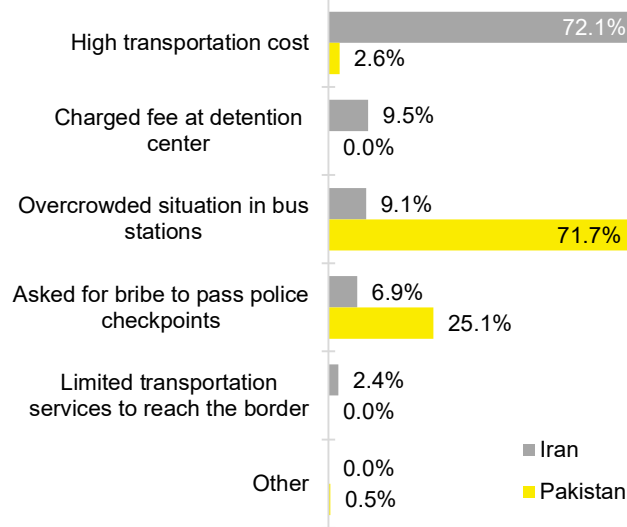
<sup>2</sup> The "other" category includes: to obtain passports/visas, family gatherings (marriage, funeral, etc.), and the start of the agriculture season in Afghanistan.

- A total of **5,781** interviews were conducted with deportees (**5,167 M and 614 F**), including **5,744** from Iran and **37** from Pakistan. The latter figure is small due to the low number of reported deportations from Pakistan during January and February 2021.
- **Almost all of the interviewed deportees from Iran (99.6%) and Pakistan (73%)** cited that 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.
- **Close to 27%** of interviewed deportees (4 respondents) from Pakistan were deported due to lack of a work permit. In 2020, the figure was **0.9%** among all interviewed deportees from Iran, while it was not reported by the interviewed deportees from Pakistan.
- Almost all of the interviewed deportees from Iran and Pakistan stated that they were deported in the absence of a court order. Only 9 deportees from Iran stated that they were deported following a court order.

Reasons of Deportation from CoPR



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



### Incident Monitoring

Following the reported tragic incident in May 2020 where a group of Afghan workers trying to enter Iran were reportedly forced into a river, UNHCR established an incident monitoring system at all official entry points. This is aimed to record human rights violations as well as protection risks and challenges at entry points during the border crossing (outflow and inflow). During the reporting period, except the fire incident (mentioned above) which caused injuries, loss of property, and temporary suspension of population movements, no other incident was reported.

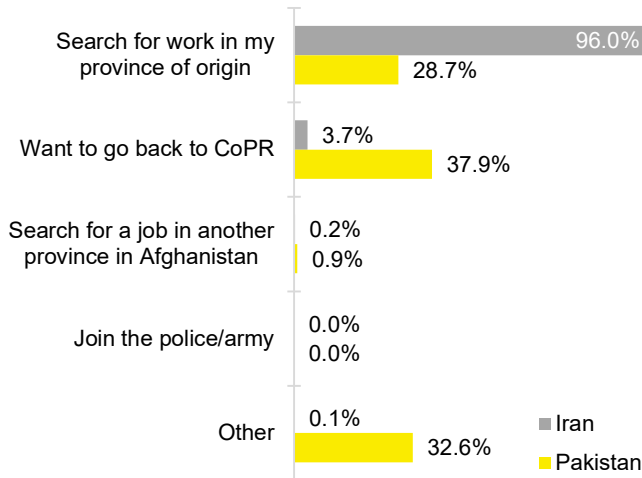
### Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination) and Intentions after Return



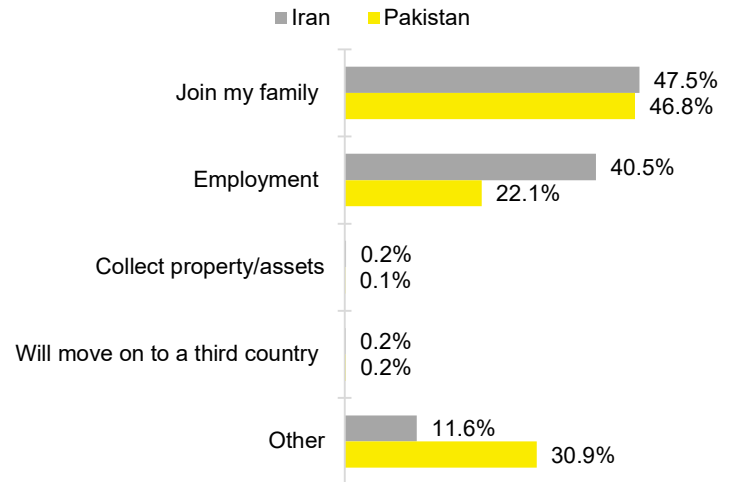
OF THE INTERVIEWED  
RETURNEES FROM IRAN  
AND PAKISTAN INTEND  
TO RETURN TO THEIR  
AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **8%** do not return to their areas of origin due to lack of livelihood opportunities, perceived insecurity, lack of basic services including schools, reunification with family/relatives, and lack of housing/shelter.
- Interviewed returnees from Iran were travelling to 33 provinces, with the majority (**70%**) intend to return to Herat, Nimroz, Faryab, Takhar, Ghor, Badghis, Ghazni, Balkh, Kunduz, and Farah, provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were travelling to **34** provinces, with the majority (**85%**) intending to return to Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Zabul, Herat, Kunduz, Uruzgan, and Laghman provinces.
- **83%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**88%** of male respondents and **72%** of female respondents).
- **72%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees have no education, (**81% female and 67% male**). **8%** have minimal education (up to grade 6), **8%** up to grade 9, **6%** up to grade 12, **3%** went to madrasa, and **3%** went to university.
- **84%** stated that they will stay in their own house, close to **9%** intend to rent a house, and **7%** will stay with relatives.
- **96%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees from Iran and **29%** from Pakistan they will try to find a job in their province of origin.
- **38%** of respondents from Pakistan and **4%** from Iran intend to go back to the CoPR: to join family, for employment, or to collect property.

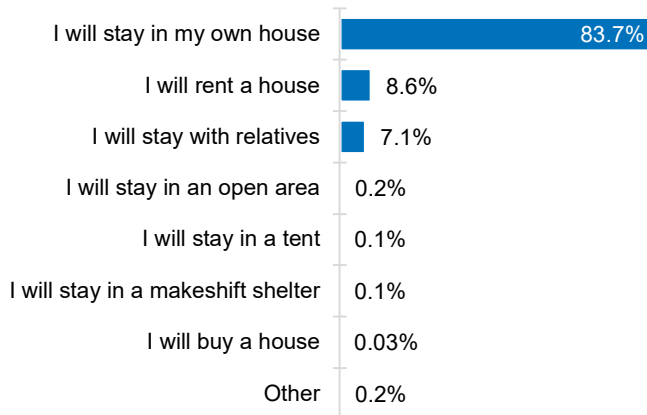
**Intention after return/deportation**



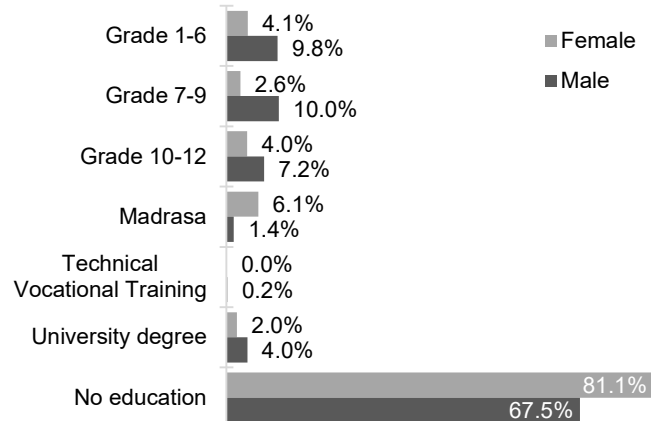
**Reasons for going back to CoPR**



**Living arrangements after return**



**Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan**



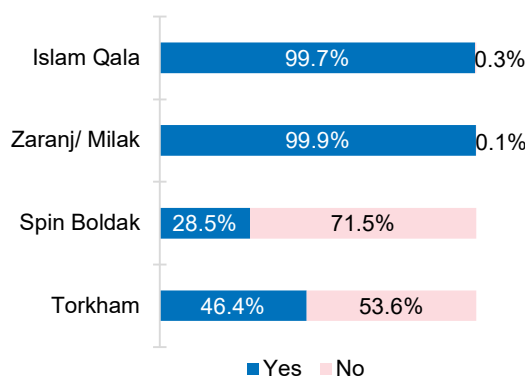
**Information Dissemination on COVID-19 in Afghanistan and CoPR**



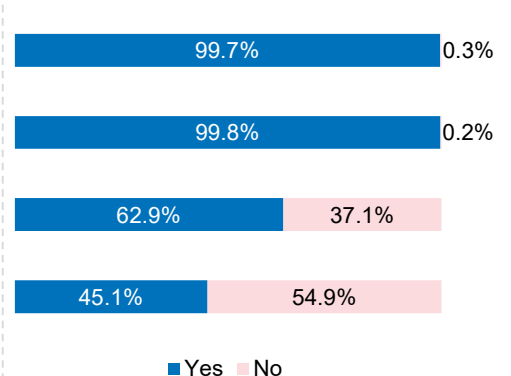
**68%**

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

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

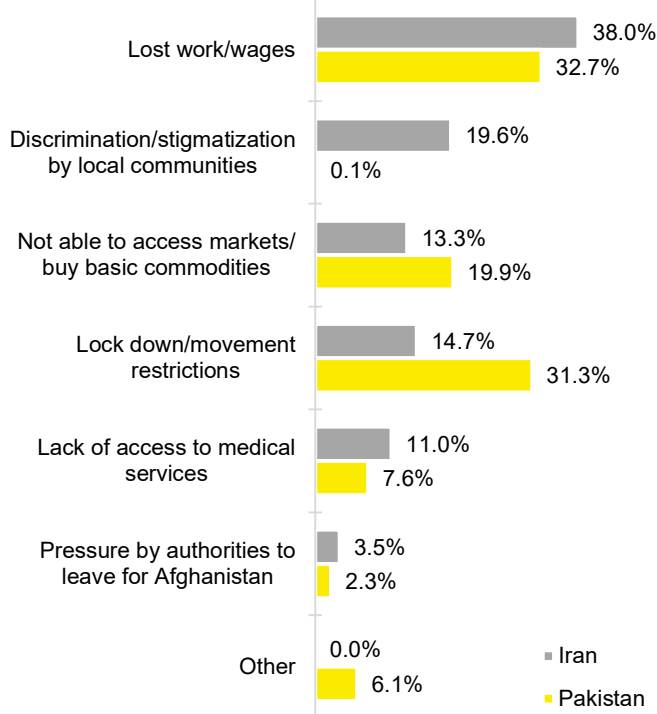


**Did you receive any information about COVID-19 while you were in your CoPR?**

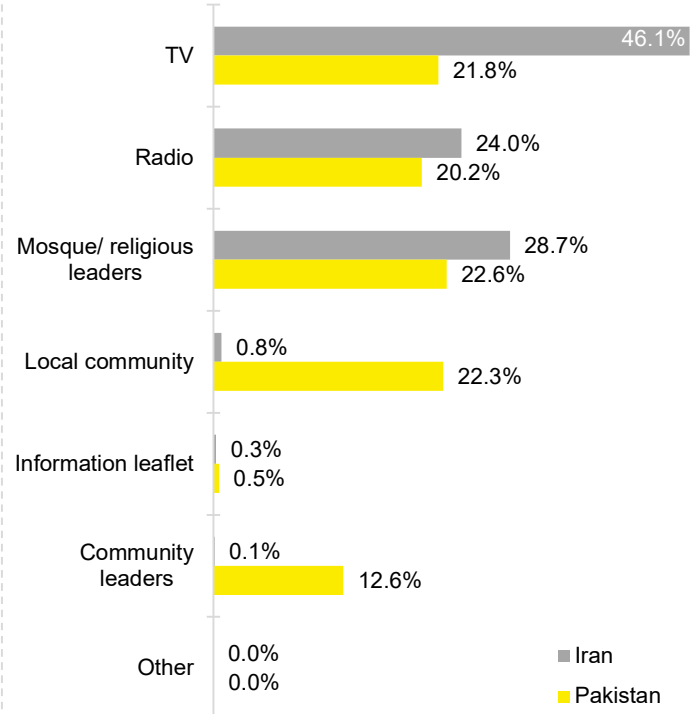


In general, all returnees/deportees received information on Covid-19 upon arrival at entry points. This is done through awareness raising campaigns at encashment centers. However, it has been observed during the month of February that access to COVID-19 information at Spin Boldak and Torkham remain very low (28.5%) and (46.4%) respectively. The information gap at these entry points are largely due to the high volume of the population movement in either sides. As a result, people are in hurry to cross the border with little attention to services provided by partners, including health screening and information dissemination about COVID-19. However, the level of information gap, particularly in Spin Boldak is of concern. UNHCR raised this matter with concerned partners and border authorities (e.g. DoPH) to address this gap.

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



Sources of Information about COVID-19 in Iran & Pakistan



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

