AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS RETURNED FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of 456 Afghan refugees from Iran (406), 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.

According to MoRR/IOM, during the week of 19 - 25 July, the total number of undocumented returnees was 18,692 from Iran (9,896 spontaneous returnees and 8,796 deportees) and 6 from Pakistan (all deportees, notwithstanding the formal closure of the border). Since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is 406,801 individuals, including 404,868 from Iran (278,420 spontaneous returnees and 126,448 deportees) and 1,933 from Pakistan (1,809 spontaneous returnees and 124 deportees).

During the week, a sharp increase (75%) was observed in the number of spontaneous returnees compared to last week. Based on information provided by interviewees, it seems that this increase is likely due to the approach of Eid al-Adha festivities. On 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 25 July, 3,452 stranded Afghans crossed through Torkham into Afghanistan, while 1,650 stranded Pakistanis returned to 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. On 12 July, both governments also opened two crossing points (Angor Ada and Dand-e-Patan) in Paklia and Paktika provinces for trade.

BORDER MONITORING UPDATE
COVID-19 RESPONSE
19 - 25 July 2020

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 19 - 25 July, 1,553 interviews, including 1,327 male and 226 female respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (1,527) and Pakistan (26). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of 14,576 returnees (12,055 M and 2,521 F) were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (7,122) and Islam Qala (6,788), and from Pakistan at Torkham (336), and Spin Boldak (330), including 11,599 single individuals and 2,977 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 official 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

- Deportee: 48.2%
- Spontaneous returnee: 36.3%
- Passport holder: 12.5%
- Tazkira/ token holder: 2.5%
- VRF holder: 0.4%

Respondents (%) by Entry Point

- Zaranj/Milak: 48.9%
- Islam Qala: 46.6%
- Torkham: 2.3%
- Spin Boldak: 2.3%

Respondents' Age and Gender

- 12-17: 0.3%
- 18-34: 12.5%
- 35-59: 62.9%
- 60 and over: 0.8%

Years Spent in the CoPR

- Less than 1 year: 67.4%
- 1 - 5 years: 24.9%
- 6 - 10 years: 3.3%
- More than 10 years: 3.4%
- Born in CoPR: 0.9%

Reason for entry to CoPR

- In search of employment: 83.5%
- Conflict: 6.1%
- Family visit: 4.4%
- Drought: 1.6%
- For medical treatment: 1.5%
- To move to Turkey & onward to Europe: 1.4%
- Business: 0.9%
- Other: 0.6%

Sources of Information about COVID 19 in Iran & Pakistan

- TV: 48.3%
- Radio: 29.9%
- Mosque/ religious leaders: 11.5%
- Local community: 8.0%
- Community leaders: 1.8%
- Information leaflet: 0.3%
- Other: 0.2%
Situation in Country of Prior Residence (CoPR) - Iran and Pakistan

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

- 51% deportees, 37% spontaneous returnees, 11% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 25% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 13% of deportees, and 6% of passport holders were female;
- 72% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from five provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Khuzistan, Fars, and Kerman; 67% spent less than one year in Iran;
- 84% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 6% due to conflict, 4% to visit family/relatives, 2% for medical treatment, 1% (mainly deportees) to move to Turkey and onward to Europe, and 3% other reasons;
- 31% (4,377 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, such as lost work/wages, lack of access to medical services, movement restrictions related to the lockdown, pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan discrimination/stigmatization by local communities, and lack of access to markets;
- 91% of returnees and deportees stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, mainly through TV, radio and local communities;
- 56% (370 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during return: overcrowded bus stations, high transportation/ travel costs, 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):

- 54% were Tazkira/token holders\(^1\), 33% passport holders, and 13% spontaneous returnees;
- 57% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 34% of Tazkira/token holders, and 15% of passport holders were female;
- 41% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from KPK, 38% from Baluchistan, 11% Sindh, 8% Punjab, and 2% from Islamabad; 90% spent less than a year in Pakistan;
- 29% went to Pakistan for medical treatment, 29% to visit family/relatives, 20% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 11% for business purpose, 2% due to conflict, and 9% cited other reasons;
- 31% (4,377 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, such as lost work/wages, lack of access to medical services, movement restrictions related to the lockdown, pressure by authorities to leave for Afghanistan discrimination/stigmatization by local communities, and lack of access to markets;
- 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.

Reasons for Return to Afghanistan (Spontaneous returnees, VRF holders, and Passport/ID holders)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reunite with family members in Afghanistan</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No employment opportunities in CoPR</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of COVID-19</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High cost of living/ high rent in CoPR</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denied access to health facilities</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination by local community</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat of detention /forced quarantine</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of arrest and/or deportation</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse by police or state authorities</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

www.unhcr.org
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 4,105 interviews were conducted, including 1,940 interviews with deportees (1,660 M and 280 F).

The majority of interviewed deportees (93%) cited lack of documentation and irregular entry to CoPR as the reasons provided to them for their deportation.

2.5% of interviewed deportees (57 respondents, including 38 single individuals and 19 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.

Less than 3% (56 respondents) of the interviewed deportees (1,940) stated that they went through a legal procedure and were deported after receiving a court order, while over 97% 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason Provided</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of documentation</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular entry to CoPR</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to exit CoPR/move onward without proper documentation</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not have a work permit</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expiration of passport/visa</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deported after release from prison/custody</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveling/Working in “No Go Area”</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expiration of my work permit</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not present documentation at the time of arrest</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information Dissemination in Afghanistan

As noted in previous updates, the gap in information dissemination 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. However, it should be noted that 94% of the interviewed returnees in Torkham confirmed that they received information about COVID-19 in the CoPR. UNHCR has raised this matter with the border authorities and partners. The information gap in Spin Boldak remains unchanged because there was no population movement due to the closure of the border since 06 June. The information gap at Zaranj/Milak has improved significantly (from 42% to 12%) since UNHCR’s follow-up with partners in early May.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam Qala</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaranj/Milak</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin Boldak</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torkham</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (all entry points)</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam Qala</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaranj/Milak</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin Boldak</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torkham</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (all entry points)</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

83% of interviewed returnees stated that they received information about COVID-19 upon arrival in Afghanistan.
Of the interviewed returnees from Iran and Pakistan declared during the interview that they are returning to their areas of origin.

### 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**

#### Intentions after return/deportation

- **Will search for work in my province of origin**
  - 89.6%
- **Want to go back to CoPR**
  - 9.4%
- **Will search for a job in another province in Afghanistan**
  - 0.6%
- **Will join the police/army**
  - 0.3%

#### Reasons for going back to CoPR

- **Employment**
  - 44.5%
- **Collect property/assets**
  - 27.2%
- **Join my family**
  - 21.1%
- **Will move on to a third country**
  - 6.6%
- **Other**
  - 0.5%

#### Living arrangements after return

- **I will stay in my own house**
  - 84.3%
- **I will rent a house**
  - 10.9%
- **I will stay with relatives**
  - 3.7%
  - **I will stay in a makeshift shelter**
  - 0.3%
  - **I will buy a house**
  - 0.3%
  - **I will stay in an open area**
  - 0.1%
  - **I will stay in a tent**
  - 0.1%
  - **Other**
  - 0.2%

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

- **Grade 1-6**
  - Female: 9.1%
  - Male: 10.2%
- **Grade 7-9**
  - Female: 2.9%
  - Male: 6.3%
- **Grade 10-12**
  - Female: 2.8%
  - Male: 7.5%
- **Madrasa**
  - Female: 2.5%
  - Male: 1.0%
- **Technical Vocational Training**
  - Female: 0.2%
  - Male: 0.3%
- **University degree**
  - Female: 0.6%
  - Male: 1.0%
- **No education**
  - Female: 81.9%
  - Male: 73.7%

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