

# BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

19 - 25 July 2020



UNHCR partner staff (CHA) during identification of returnees for interview, Islam Qala border, Herat, Afghanistan

6 July 2020  
CHA/ M. Tareq Faizi

# 456

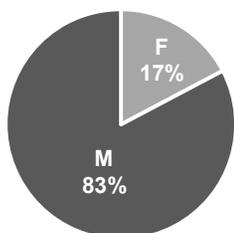
AFGHAN REFUGEES  
RETURNED TO  
AFGHANISTAN

# 406,801

UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS  
RETURNED FROM IRAN AND  
PAKISTAN

# 14,576

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 Paktia and Paktika provinces for trade.

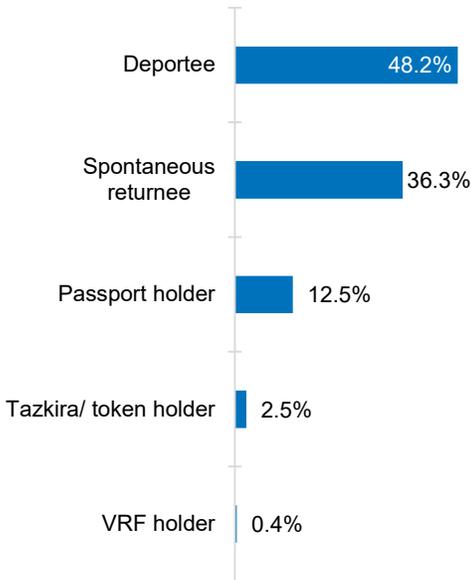
## BORDER MONITORING

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.

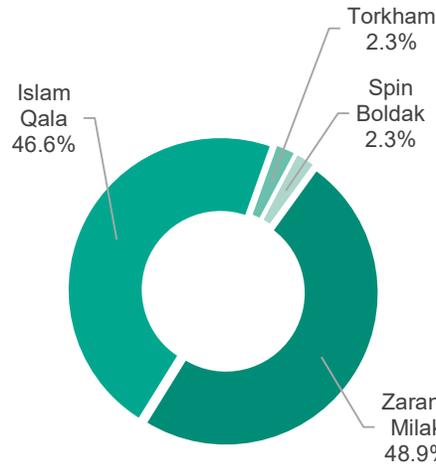
Between 19 - 25 July, **1,553 interviews, including 1,327 male and 226 female** respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (1,527) and Pakistan (26). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of **14,576 returnees (12,055 M and 2,521 F)** were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan 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.

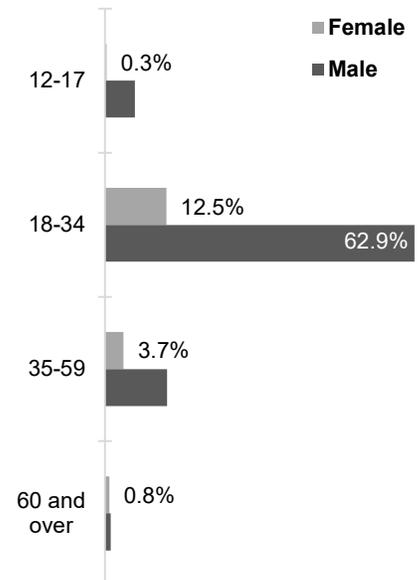
**Respondents' Return Status**



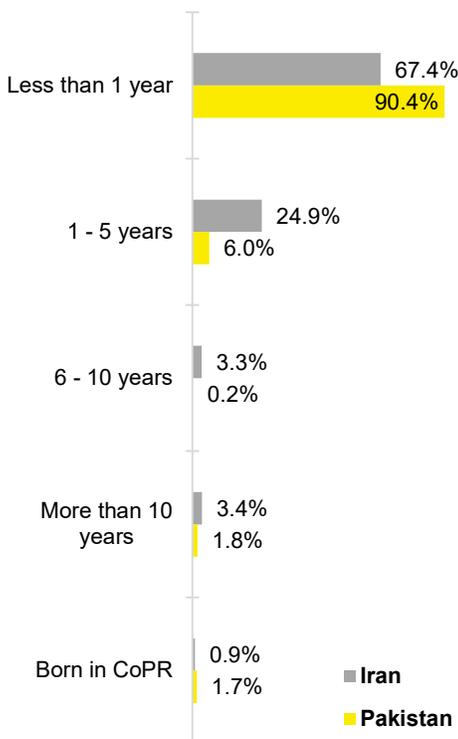
**Respondents (%) by Entry Point**



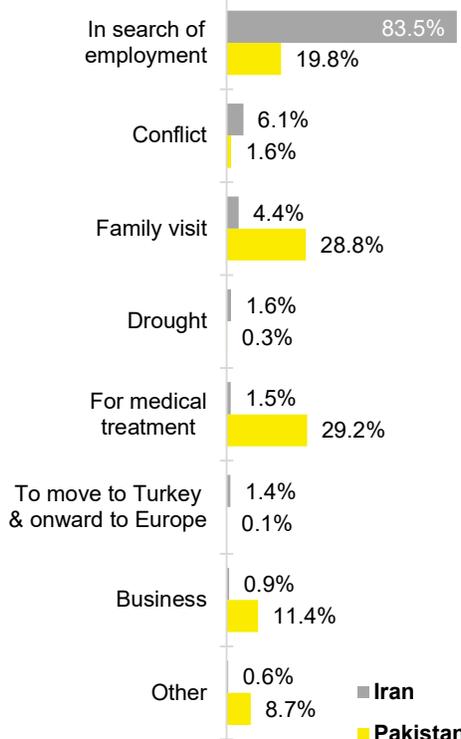
**Respondents' Age and Gender**



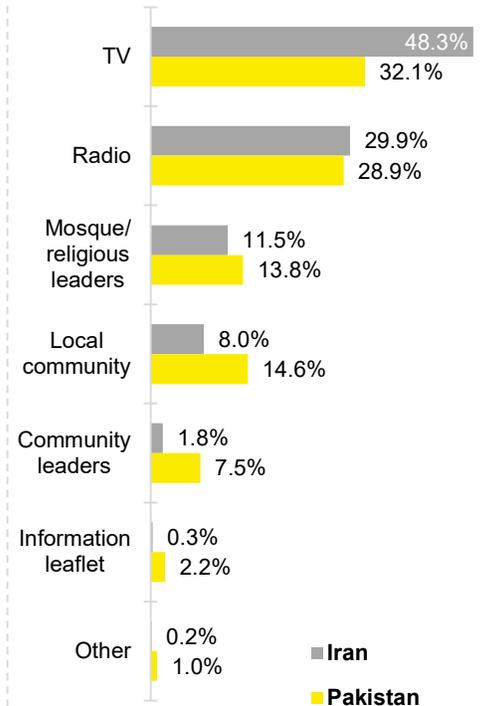
**Years Spent in the CoPR**



**Reason for entry to CoPR**



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



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

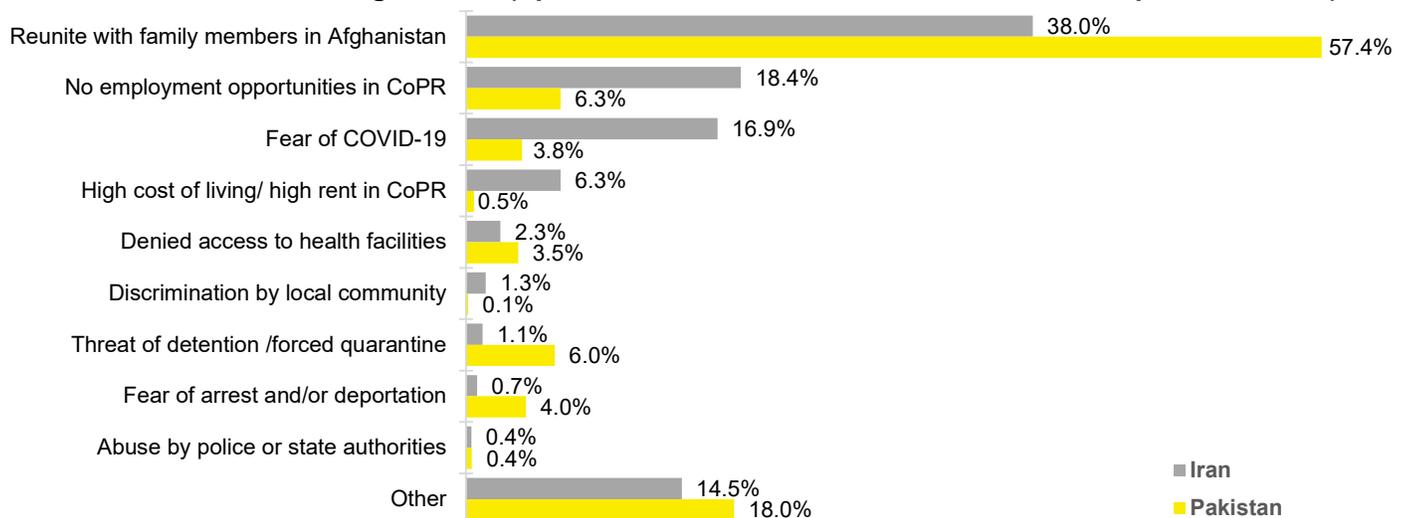
### Interviewed Returnees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milak):

- 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;
- 16% 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%);
- 40% (5,621 respondents) claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/ approximately USD 7-35);
- 24% 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;
- 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.

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

- 54% were Tazkira/token holders<sup>1</sup>, 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;
- 56% (370 respondents) claimed that they faced problems during the COVID-19 outbreak, mainly movement restrictions due to the lockdown, lost work/wages, 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;
- 45% 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 Afghanistan (Spontaneous returnees, VRF holders, and Passport/ID holders)

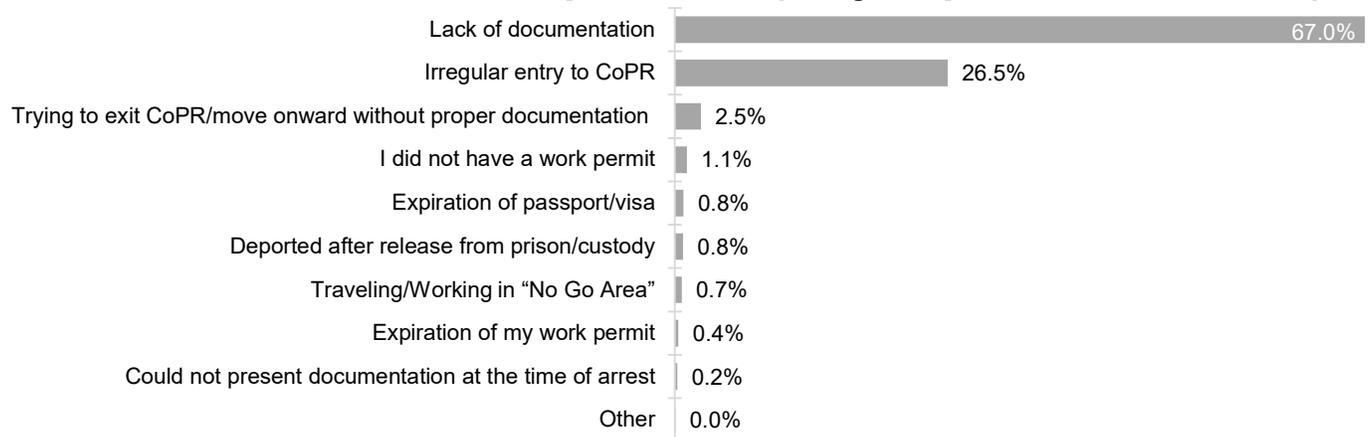


<sup>1</sup> This category are those Afghans who live along the border area in Afghanistan and normally move back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently.

- 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)

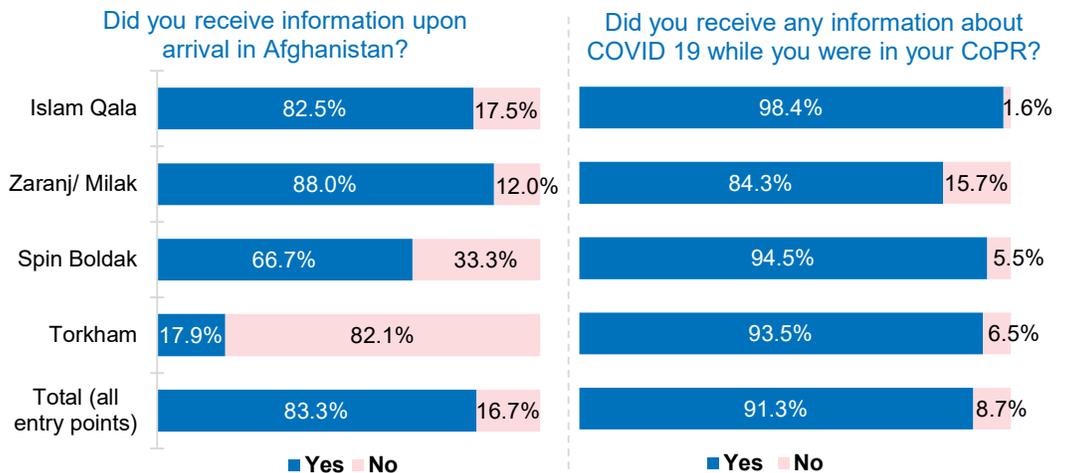


## Information Dissemination in Afghanistan



**83%**

OF INTERVIEWED RETURNÉES STATED THAT THEY RECEIVED INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 UPON ARRIVAL 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.

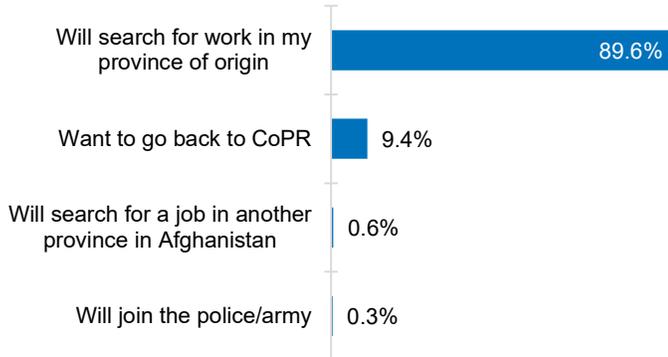
## Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination) and Intentions after Return



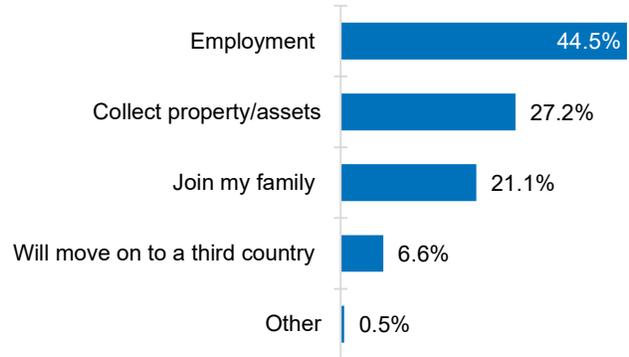
OF THE INTERVIEWED  
RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND  
PAKISTAN DECLARED DURING  
THE INTERVIEW THAT THEY  
ARE RETURNING TO THEIR  
AREAS OF ORIGIN

- **3%** 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 (**71%**) intending to return to Herat, Faryab, Nimroz, Takhar, Kunduz, Ghor, Farah, Badakhshan, Badghis, and Balkh provinces.
- Interviewed returnees from Pakistan were traveling to **28** provinces, with the majority (**86%**) intending to return to Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kabul, Ghazni, Paktika, Kunduz, Helmand, Paktya, Kunar, and Laghman provinces.
- **82%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**85%** of male respondents and **67%** of female respondents).
- **75%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees stated that have no education. **10%** stated that they have minimal education (up to grade 6), **6%** up to grade 9, **7%** up to grade 12, **1%** went to university, and **1%** went to madrasa.
- **84%** stated that they will stay in their own house, **11%** stated that they will rent a house, **4%** will stay with relatives.
- **90%** stated that they will try to find a job in their province of origin.
- **9%** (mainly deportees) stated that they intend to go back to Iran: for employment, to collect property or to join family in Iran. **6.6%** stated that they intend to go back to Iran to move on to a third country.

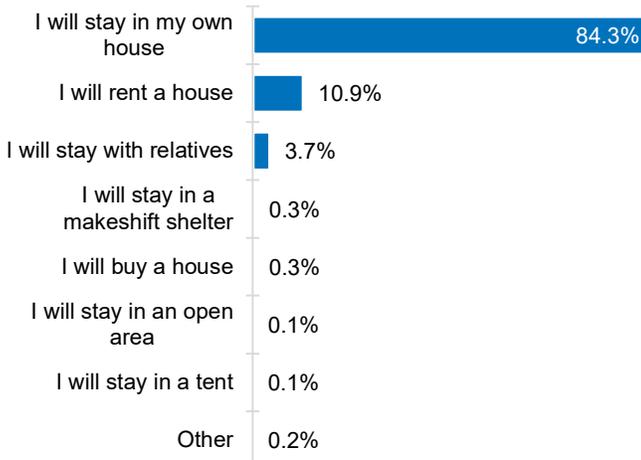
Intention after return/deportation



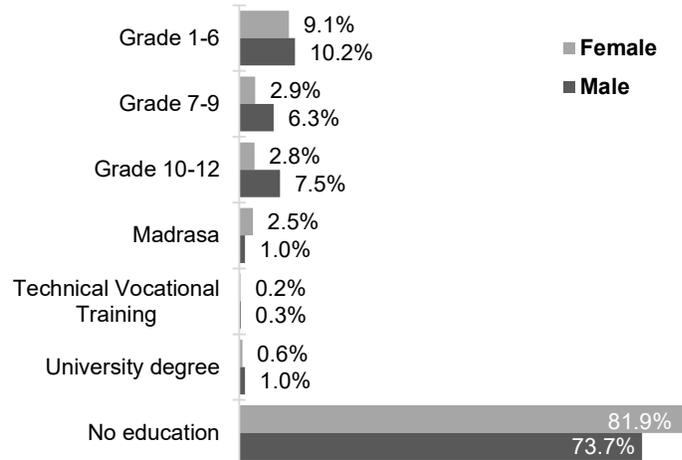
Reasons for going back to CoPR



Living arrangements after return



Education Level - Returnees from Iran & Pakistan



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