AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

UNDOCUMENTED AFGHANS RETURNED FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNEES FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN

AFGHAN REFUGEES RETURNED TO AFGHANISTAN

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of 591 Afghan refugees from Iran (532), Pakistan (16) and other countries (43) under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. UNHCR, as of 04 March 2020, temporarily suspended the voluntary return as a precautionary measure linked to COVID-19. Voluntary repatriation from Iran resumed as of 30 April and from Pakistan on 10 August. Similarly, UNHCR offices in other countries e.g. India, Azerbaijan had resumed to receive the request of potential refugees who are willing to return to Afghanistan. Based on information from UNHCR India, since June 2020, a number of Afghan refugees have requested UNHCR to facilitate their return to Afghanistan. UNHCR Afghanistan is following this matter with UNHCR India.

Refugee returnees receive a multi-purpose cash grant (on average USD 250 per person) and other services at Encashment Centers (ECs) located in Herat, Kandahar, Kabul, and Nangarhar provinces. UNHCR’s cash grants to refugee returnees are intended to prevent, reduce, and respond to immediate protection risks and vulnerabilities upon return to Afghanistan.

According to MoRR/IOM, during the weeks of 16 - 22 August, the total number of undocumented returnees from Iran was 19,778 (10,330 deportees and 9,448 spontaneous returnees) and from Pakistan was 68 (all spontaneous returnees). Since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is 469,059 individuals, including 466,984 from Iran (311,247 spontaneous returnees and 155,737 deportees) and 2,075 from Pakistan (1,944 spontaneous returnees and 131 deportees).

On 21 August, 6,551 stranded Afghans crossed through Torkham into Afghanistan, while 1,540 stranded Pakistanis returned to Pakistan. Spin Boldak/Chaman was opened for regular pedestrian movement on 21 and 22 August and a total of 52,334 stranded Afghans crossed into Afghanistan, and 55,455 stranded Pakistanis crossed into Pakistan.

As of 21 August, Spin Boldak/Chaman crossing point will be open seven days a week for pedestrians and commercial trucks, while Torkham crossing point will continue to be open once a week (on Saturdays) for pedestrian movements.

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/Chaman 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 16 - 22 August, 1,273 interviews, including 1,011 male and 262 female respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (1,091) and Pakistan (182). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of 19,363 returnees (15,874 M and 3,489 F) were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milak (9,126) and Islam Qala (9,006), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak/Chaman (776) and Torkham (455), including 15,233 single individuals and 4,130 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 returnees/deportees from Iran.

Respondents’ Return Status
- Deportee: 48.7%
- Spontaneous returnee: 36.4%
- Passport holder: 10.2%
- Tazkira/token holder: 4.2%
- VRF holder: 0.5%

Respondents (% by Entry Point)
- Zaranj/Milak: 47.1%
- Islam Qala: 46.5%
- Spin Boldak: 4.0%
- Torkham: 2.3%

Respondents’ Age and Gender
- 12-17: 0.2% Male, 6.7% Female
- 18-34: 12.9% Male, 62.7% Female
- 35-59: 4.1% Male, 11.6% Female
- 60 and over: 0.8% Male, 1.0% Female

Years Spent in the CoPR
- Less than 1 year: 66.4% in Iran, 90.0% in Pakistan
- 1 - 5 years: 25.6% in Iran, 4.4% in Pakistan
- 6 - 10 years: 3.5% in Iran, 0.7% in Pakistan
- More than 10 years: 3.6% in Iran, 1.9% in Pakistan

Reason for entry to CoPR
- In search of employment: 83.0% in Iran, 18.2% in Pakistan
- Conflict: 6.6% in Iran, 1.9% in Pakistan
- Family visit: 4.2% in Iran, 35.8% in Pakistan
- Drought: 1.7% in Iran, 1.9% in Pakistan
- To move to Turkey & onward to Europe: 1.7% in Iran, 0.4% in Pakistan
- For medical treatment: 1.5% in Iran, 26.5% in Pakistan
- Business: 0.8% in Iran, 6.7% in Pakistan
- Other: 0.5% in Iran, 8.6% in Pakistan

Sources of Information about COVID-19 in Iran & Pakistan
- TV: 47.2% in Iran, 31.2% in Pakistan
- Radio: 31.8% in Iran, 29.8% in Pakistan
- Mosque/religious leaders: 12.5% in Iran, 13.5% in Pakistan
- Local community: 6.7% in Iran, 13.9% in Pakistan
- Community leaders: 1.4% in Iran, 8.8% in Pakistan
- Information leaflet: 0.3% in Iran, 2.2% in Pakistan
- Other: 0.1% in Iran, 0.6% in Pakistan
**Situation in Country of Prior Residence (CoPR) - Iran and Pakistan**

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

- 52% deportees, 38% spontaneous returnees, 9% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 28% of the interviewed VRF holders, 24% 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, Fars, Kerman, and Khuzistan; 66% spent less than one year in Iran;
- 83% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 7% due to conflict, 4% to visit family/relatives, 2% due to drought, 2% (mainly deportees) to move to Turkey and onward to Europe, 1% for medical treatment, and 1% for other reasons;
- 33% (6,048 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;
- 93% of the respondents stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, through TV, radio and local communities;
- 12% 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%);
- 42% (7,653 respondents) claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/ approximately USD 7-35);
- 22% 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):**

- 67% were Tazkira/token holders, 23% passport holders, and 10% spontaneous returnees;
- 67% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 43% of Tazkira/token holders, and 12% of passport holders were female;
- 53% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 31% from KPK, 10% Sindh, 5% Punjab, and 1% from Islamabad; 90% spent less than a year in Pakistan;
- 36% went to Pakistan to visit family/relatives, 27% for medical treatment, 18% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 7% for business purpose, 2% due to conflict, 2% due to drought, and 8% cited other reasons;
- 55% (6,048 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;
- 93% of the respondents stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran, through TV, radio and local communities;
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**Reasons for Return to Afghanistan (Spontaneous returnees, VRF holders, and Passport/ID holders)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Return</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reunite with family members in Afghanistan</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No employment opportunities in CoPR</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of COVID-19</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High cost of living/ high rent in CoPR</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denied access to health facilities</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat of detention /forced quarantine</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination by local community</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of arrest and/or deportation</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse by police or state authorities</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</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.
The border monitoring data shows that there was a sharp increase in the number of deportees in June/July as compared to May. This trend has continued in August. 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 8,892 interviews were conducted, including 4,330 interviews with deportees (3,725 M and 605 F).

The majority of interviewed deportees (95%) cited lack of documentation and irregular entry to CoPR as the reasons provided to them for their deportation.

Nearly 2% of interviewed deportees (96 respondents, including 64 single individuals and 32 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.

2% (67 respondents) of the interviewed deportees (4,330) stated that they went through a legal procedure and were deported after receiving a court order, while over 98% 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)

- Lack of documentation: 66.7%
- Irregular entry to CoPR: 28.8%
- Trying to exit CoPR/move onward without proper documentation: 1.9%
- I did not have a work permit: 0.8%
- Traveling/Working in “No Go Area”: 0.6%
- Deported after release from prison/custody: 0.5%
- Expiration of passport/visa: 0.4%
- Expiration of my work permit: 0.2%
- Could not present documentation at the time of arrest: 0.1%
- Other: 0.1%

### Information Dissemination in Afghanistan

- **Islam Qala**
  - Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan? Yes: 86.0%, No: 14.0%
  - Did you receive any information about COVID-19 while you were in your CoPR? Yes: 98.0%, No: 2.0%

- **Zaranj/ Milak**
  - Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan? Yes: 90.6%, No: 9.4%
  - Did you receive any information about COVID-19 while you were in your CoPR? Yes: 87.6%, No: 12.4%

- **Spin Boldak**
  - Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan? Yes: 64.0%, No: 36.0%
  - Did you receive any information about COVID-19 while you were in your CoPR? Yes: 89.7%, No: 10.3%

- **Torkham**
  - Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan? Yes: 26.2%, No: 73.8%
  - Did you receive any information about COVID-19 while you were in your CoPR? Yes: 94.1%, No: 5.9%

- **Total (all entry points)**
  - Did you receive information upon arrival in Afghanistan? Yes: 85.9%, No: 14.1%
  - Did you receive any information about COVID-19 while you were in your CoPR? Yes: 92.7%, No: 7.3%

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. Similarly, the information gap in Spin Boldak is related to limited opening hours of the border for pedestrian movement and the fact that returnees are not focused on services, including awareness raising about COVID-19. The information gap at Zaranj/Milak has improved significantly (from 42% to 9%) since UNHCR’s follow-up with partners in early May. Overall, the provision of information has improved (from 70% to 86%) since May/June.
Areas of Return in Afghanistan (origin vs intended destination) and Intentions after Return

- 96% of the interviewed returnees from Iran and Pakistan declared during the interview that they are returning to their areas of origin.

**Intention after return/deportation**

- **Will search for work in my province of origin**: 92.4% (Iran) vs 61.6% (Pakistan)
- **Want to go back to CoPR**: 6.5% (Iran) vs 29.7% (Pakistan)
- **Will search for a job in another province in Afghanistan**: 0.9% (Iran) vs 7.8% (Pakistan)
- **Will join the police/army**: 0.2% (Iran) vs 0.0% (Pakistan)
- **Other**: 0.0% (Iran) vs 0.9% (Pakistan)

**Reasons for going back to CoPR**

- **Employment**: 45.1% (Iran) vs 23.3% (Pakistan)
- **Collect property/assets**: 0.4% (Iran) vs 23.8% (Pakistan)
- **Join my family**: 74.6% (Iran) vs 23.9% (Pakistan)
- **Will move on to a third country**: 6.3% (Iran) vs 0.0% (Pakistan)
- **Other**: 0.9% (Iran) vs 1.7% (Pakistan)

**Living arrangements after return**

- **I will stay in my own house**: 83.3%
- **I will rent a house**: 11.8%
- **I will stay with relatives**: 4.0%
- **I will buy a house**: 0.3%
- **I will stay in a makeshift shelter**: 0.3%
- **I will stay in an open area**: 0.1%
- **I will stay in a tent**: 0.1%
- **Other**: 0.1%

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

- **Grade 1-6**: 9.5% (Female) vs 3.4% (Male)
- **Grade 7-9**: 3.3% (Female) vs 3.3% (Male)
- **Grade 10-12**: 3.3% (Female) vs 3.4% (Male)
- **Madrasa**: 0.2% (Female) vs 3.4% (Male)
- **Technical Vocational Training**: 0.0% (Female) vs 0.2% (Male)
- **University degree**: 0.5% (Female) vs 0.0% (Male)
- **No education**: 79.9% (Female) vs 72.9% (Male)

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