BORDER MONITORING UPDATE

COVID-19 RESPONSE
13 - 19 September 2020

Since 01 January, UNHCR assisted the return of 1,027 Afghan refugees from Iran (598), Pakistan (380) and other countries (49) including Tajikistan, India, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation, under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. 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.

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 13 - 19 September, the total number of undocumented returnees from Iran was 21,781 (11,198 deportees and 10,583 spontaneous returnees) and from Pakistan was 420 (368 spontaneous returnees and 52 deportees). Since 01 January, the total number of undocumented returnees is 549,769 individuals, including 544,999 from Iran (349,932 spontaneous returnees and 195,067 deportees) and 4,770 from Pakistan (4,478 spontaneous returnees and 292 deportees).

During the week, regular population movements (over 300,000 individuals in both directions) continued through Spin Boldak to/from Afghanistan. Torkham border was opened for pedestrian movement on 19 September, on which date a total of 7,789 stranded Afghans crossed into Afghanistan and 1,685 stranded Pakistanis crossed into Pakistan.

Since 21 August, Spin Boldak crossing point has been open seven days a week for pedestrians and commercial trucks. In addition, as of 25 August, Torkham border has been open on Mondays and Tuesdays for refugee returnee movements to Afghanistan, while it will continue to be open once a week (on Saturdays) for undocumented returnees and other pedestrian movements.

During the week, UNHCR’s partner at Islam Qala interviewed several Afghan deportees who wanted to go to a third country from Iran. Some of them alleged that they were injured by gunshots while they were attempting to irregularly cross the border into Turkey, and were handed over to the Iranian authorities, who deported them to Afghanistan after they were treated for their injuries.
BORDER MONITORING

Between 13 - 19 September, 2,270 interviews, including 1,483 male and 787 female respondents, were carried out with returnees from Iran (1,446) and Pakistan (824). Since the start of border monitoring on 05 April, a total of 27,154 returnees (20,750 M and 6,404 F) were interviewed as they entered Afghanistan from Iran at Zaranj/Milik (11,530) and Islam Qala (11,345), and from Pakistan at Spin Boldak/Chaman (3,682) and Torkham (597), including 19,872 single individuals and 7,282 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. The small sample size in Torkham is due to opening of the border once a week for pedestrian movements.

Note: The female sample size is small because there is a high proportion of single males among the returnees/deportees from Iran.
Situation in Country of Prior Residence (CoPR) - Iran and Pakistan
Interviewed Returnees from Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj/Milik):

- 55% deportees, 36% spontaneous returnees, 8% passport holders and 1% VRF holders;
- 31% of the interviewed VRF holders, 24% spontaneous returnees, 14% of deportees, and 6% of passport holders were female;
- 93% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from nine provinces in Iran: Tehran, Sistan va Baluchestan, Kerman, Fars, Esfahan, Khuzestan, Khorasan Razavi, Yazd, and Hormozgan; 67% spent less than one year in Iran;
- 81% went to Iran in search of livelihoods opportunities, 8% due to conflict, 4% to visit family/relatives, 2% (mainly deportees) to move to Turkey and onward to Europe, 2% due to drought, 1% for medical treatment, and 2% for other reasons;
- 33% (7,493 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;
- 93% of the respondents stated that they had received information about COVID-19 in Iran through TV, radio and local communities;
- 10% 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%);
- 43% (9,831 respondents) claimed that they had paid a municipality (return) tax (100,000 – 500,000 IRR/approximately USD 7-35);
- 21% 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):

- 64% were Tazkira/token holders1, 27% spontaneous returnees, 8% passport holders, and 1% VRF holders and deportees;
- 96% of the interviewed spontaneous returnees, 47% of Tazkira/token holders, and 17% of passport holders were female;
- 76% of the interviewed returnees stated that they returned from Baluchistan, 12% from KPK, 9% Sindh, 2% Punjab, and 1% from Islamabad; 84% spent less than a year in Pakistan;
- 31% went to Pakistan to visit family/relatives, 29% for medical treatment, 12% in search of livelihoods opportunities, 8% due to conflict, 5% for business purpose, 2% due to drought, and 13% cited other reasons;
- 31% (1,310 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;
- 80% 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%).
- 12% 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)

<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>43.6%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No employment opportunities in CoPR</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of COVID-19</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High cost of living/ high rent in CoPR</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denied access to health facilities</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat of detention /forced quarantine</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination by local community</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of arrest and/or deportation</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse by police or state authorities</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>9.7%</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.

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In July, UNHCR revised its border monitoring tool to collect deportation reasons as well as intentions of returnees and deportees after their arrival in Afghanistan to better assess deportations trends. The revised tool has been implemented since 04 July in all entry points and since then a total of 16,683 interviews were conducted, including 7,486 interviews with deportees (6,320 M and 1,166 F).

The majority of interviewed deportees (96%) cited lack of documentation and irregular entry to CoPR as the reasons provided to them for their deportation.

2% of interviewed deportees (172 respondents, including 115 single individuals and 57 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.

1% (79 respondents) of the interviewed deportees (7,486) 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.

**Reason Provided for Deportation (only deportees from Iran)**

- Lack of documentation: 66.6%
- Irregular entry to CoPR: 29.3%
- Trying to exit CoPR/move onward without proper documentation: 2.0%
- Lack of work permit: 0.8%
- Traveling/Working in “No Go Area”: 0.4%
- Deported after release from prison/custody: 0.4%
- Expiration of passport/visa: 0.3%
- Expiration of my work permit: 0.1%
- Could not present documentation at the time of arrest: 0.1%
- Other: 0.0%

**Information Dissemination in Afghanistan**

Did you receive information about COVID-19 upon arrival in Afghanistan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Don’t Know (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam Qala</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaranj/Milak</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin Boldak</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torkham</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (all entry points)</strong></td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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>
<th>Don’t Know (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam Qala</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaranj/Milak</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin Boldak</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torkham</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (all entry points)</strong></td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted in previous updates, the gap in information dissemination in Torkham is mainly the result of the limited opening hours 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 92% of the interviewed returnees in Torkham confirmed that they received information about COVID-19 in the CoPR. The information gap in Spin Boldak has slightly increased since the re-opening of the border (21 August) and increased population movement to/from Afghanistan. This gap is related to the overcrowded situation and the fact that returnees are not focused on services, including awareness raising about COVID-19. UNHCR will continue to raise this matter with partners. Overall, the provision of information upon arrival in the border entry points, has improved (from 70% to nearly 85%) 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.

**Reasons for going back to CoPR**

- **81.3%** of the interviewed returnees/deportees from Iran and **55%** from Pakistan stated that they will try to find a job in their province of origin.

**Intention after return/deportation**

- **93.5%** of the respondents confirmed that they own a Tazkira (**84%** of male respondents and **61%** of female respondents).

**Living arrangements after return**

- **81.3%** will stay in their own house.
- **12.4%** will rent a house.
- **5.3%** will stay with relatives.
- **5.5%** will stay in a makeshift shelter.
- **0.5%** will stay in an open area.
- **0.1%** will stay in a tent.

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

- **No education**
  - **Female**: 8.9%
  - **Male**: 8.9%
- **Grades 1-6**
  - **Female**: 9.9%
  - **Male**: 6.9%
- **Grades 7-9**
  - **Female**: 3.4%
  - **Male**: 6.9%
- **Grades 10-12**
  - **Female**: 3.6%
  - **Male**: 8.5%
- **Madrasa**
  - **Female**: 6.2%
  - **Male**: 1.3%
- **Technical Vocational Training**
  - **Female**: 0.1%
  - **Male**: 0.4%
- **University degree**
  - **Female**: 0.7%
  - **Male**: 1.0%
- **Other**
  - **Female**: 7.7%
  - **Male**: 7.3%

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