

# UNHCR AFGHANISTAN

## BORDER MONITORING REPORT

JANUARY-DECEMBER 2022



Spin Boldak Crossing Point, Kandahar, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Afghanistan



**149,411**

Inflow & Outflow  
Monitoring Interviews



**134,742**

90%



**14,669**

10%

### BACKGROUND

- UNHCR resumed border monitoring in April 2020 triggered by COVID-19 which has impacted population movement. This exercise sought to assess people's ability to access "the right to return" and map potential protection risks and human rights violations faced by inflow movers across four official crossing points shared with Iran (Islam Qala and Zaranj) and Pakistan (Spin Boldak and Torkham).
- In April 2021, UNHCR launched outflow monitoring interviews at the individual and household level at all eight official crossing points the country shares with Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in view of the situation in Afghanistan.
- In early August 2021, UNHCR expanded border monitoring interviews to include unofficial crossing points after receiving reports many outflow movers were departing to neighboring countries (mostly Iran and Pakistan) irregularly via unofficial crossing points.
- UNHCR border monitoring seeks to understand the triggers, intentions and reasons for Afghan cross-border movements, assess access to territory and "the right to seek asylum" as well as the barriers which hinder the movement of people who may need international protection.
- This report presents the findings of outflow and inflow border monitoring interviews with Afghans – irrespective of their status – conducted by UNHCR's partners at official crossing points and with key informants around unofficial crossing points in 2022. Interviewees were randomly selected upon exit and entry to/from Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
- In 2022, 149,411 outflow and inflow monitoring interviews were carried out with 134,742 male and 14,669 female respondents. Inflow and outflow interviews were conducted mostly with male interviewees since many movers were single male individuals. In addition, male heads of households usually spoke on behalf of those moving with families. Interviews at unofficial crossing points were held with male key informants because unofficial crossing points are in remote areas where it is difficult to identify female key informants.
- Although UNHCR remains committed to conducting more gender-balanced border monitoring in order to further increase interview with female respondents, capturing protection-sensitive information has been particularly challenging due to the lack of confidential spaces required to conduct interviews at official crossing points.





**81,562**  
AFGHANS  
30.000 families

**76,149**  
93%

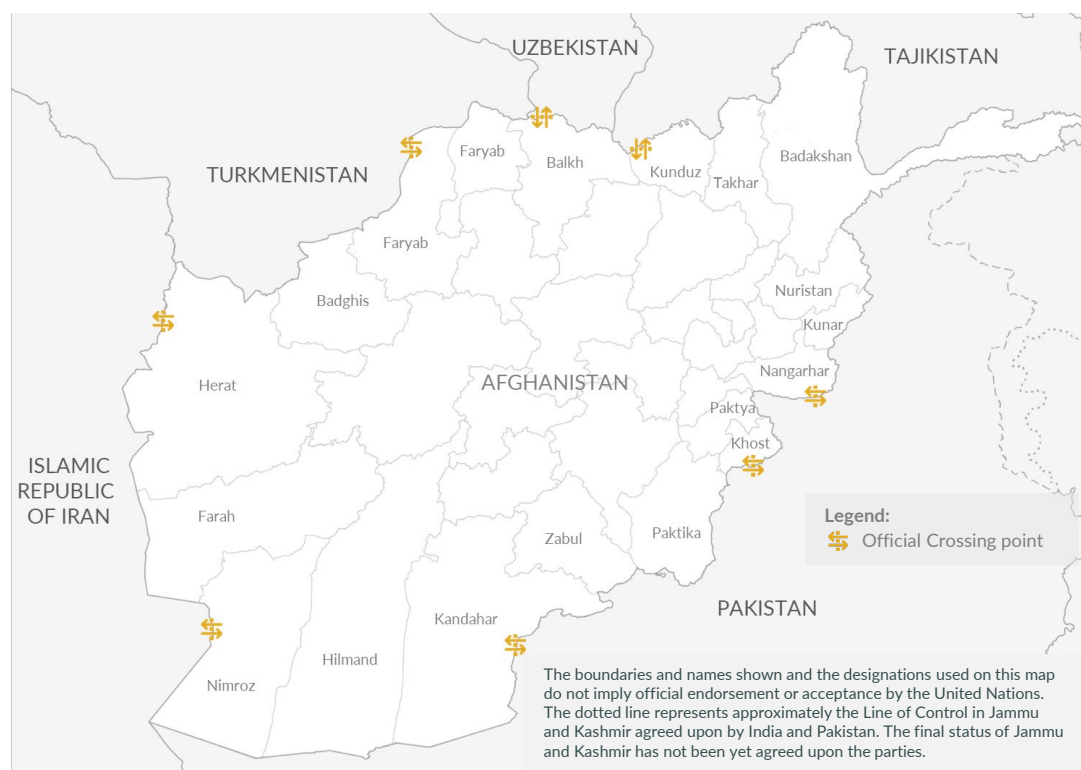
**5,413**  
7%

### SUMMARY FINDINGS

- 81,562 Afghans (76,149 male and 5,413 female) were interviewed prior to their departure to Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. This includes 51,557 single individuals and 30,005 families.
- Most 'movers' are single individuals with passports and visas. In interviews, many respondents said they were leaving to **seek medical treatment, visit family, and look for better employment and business opportunities. Between March and December, a fluctuating trend was observed in the number of respondents who said they were leaving Afghanistan because of the protection concerns.**
- Border monitoring findings show the number of respondents who report that they are leaving the country due to protection risks (i.e. fear of persecution, security threats, restrictions on women's access to education and work) is small compared to the high number of respondents who said they were moving to Iran or Pakistan for business purposes, to visit families, and to receive medical treatment. However, this does not mean movements are only migratory. Although widespread conflict in Afghanistan ended following the events of August 2021, the country continues to face an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. High levels of anxiety and fear continue to persist because of this volatile and unpredictable context, which affect people's psychosocial wellbeing and may force people to leave the country.
- Many pendular movements from Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan were reported in 2022. Most respondents said they often stayed in both countries for one to four weeks in accommodation provided by relatives. Of the total number of respondents who moved to Iran, 51 per cent indicated they went to Iran more than once. Of this figure, 19 per cent said it was their second time moving to the country and 22 per cent their third time. 10 per cent said they were regularly moving back and forth while the remaining 49 percent said they were moving to Iran for the first time. Conversely, 84 per cent of respondents who moved to Pakistan said they went there more than once. Of this figure, 27 per cent said it was their second time moving to the country and 55 per cent their third time. 2 per cent moved back and forth between both countries while the remaining 16 per cent said they were moving to Pakistan for the first time.
- UNHCR border monitoring partners conducted 597 key informant interviews. These interviews revealed that most respondents left Afghanistan was in search of a better life, for medical reasons, and because of a shortage of livelihood opportunities inside the country.
- Respondents said they faced many challenges, including a lack of potable water, food, health care, privacy, accommodation, and transportation. Other risks such as trafficking and ill treatment at the hands of smugglers were also reported. Those on the move were at risk of starvation if the journey took longer than anticipated, which left children, pregnant and lactating women, medical patients, and elderly people especially vulnerable. Media also reported that some border crossers froze to death or were severely injured by frost bite during the winter months.

### Barriers to leaving Afghanistan:

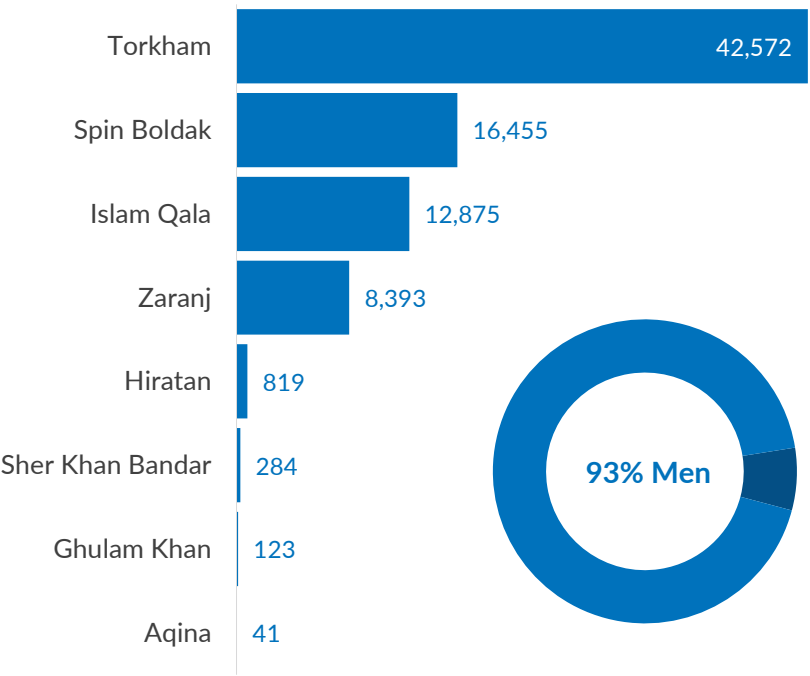
- In October 2022, de facto authorities stopped issuing and distributing passports to Afghan nationals. This suspension meant that more people were willing to consider irregular movements despite the many protection risks such as family separation, trafficking, lack of access to basic necessities, transportation, and harsh treatment by smugglers. The passport issuance has resumed in March 2023
- The "Maharam" (a male chaperon) requirement that bars women/girls travelling abroad unless accompanied by a male chaperon (husband, father, brother, son) continues to be in place in Afghanistan.



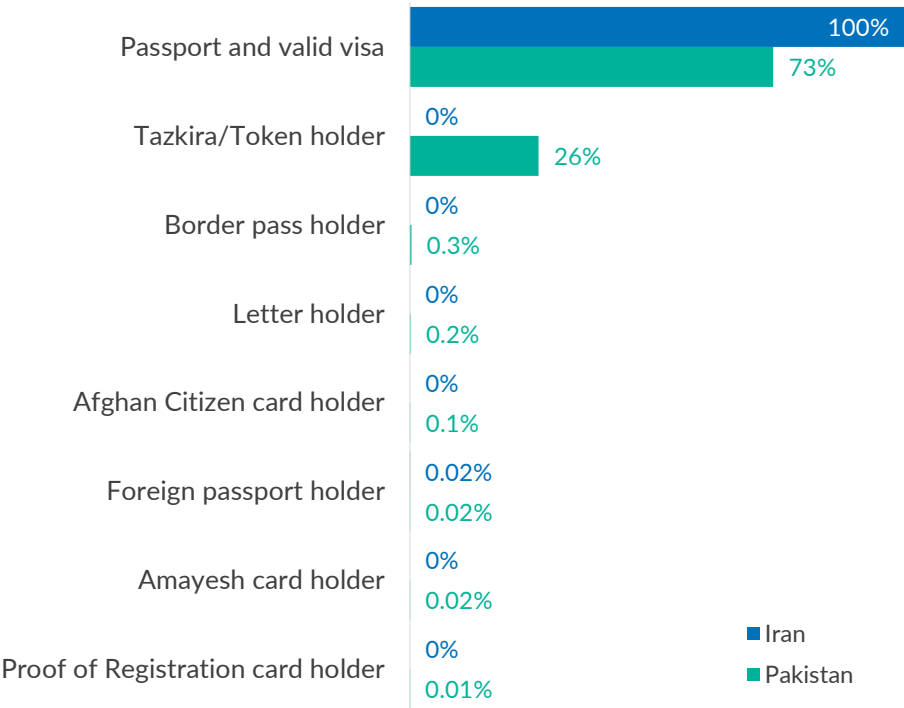


Summary Findings: Official Crossing Points

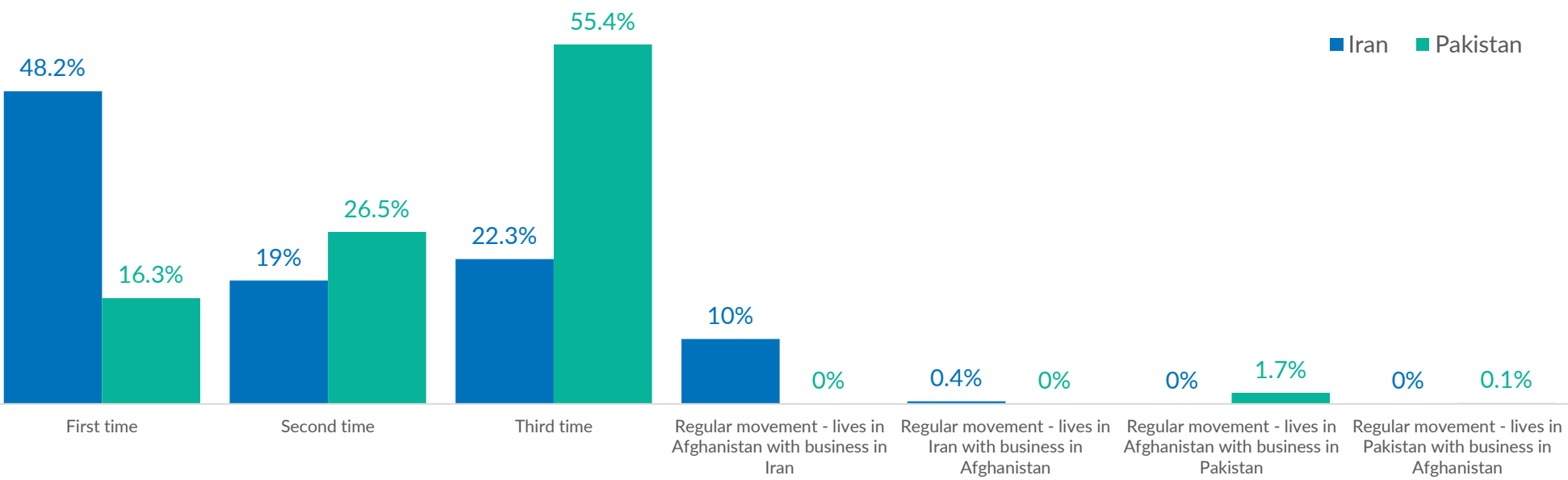
Interviews



Documentation Status



Movement Periodicity



Torkham Crossing point, Nangarhar, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Afghanistan





**67,252**  
AFGHANS  
14.000 families

**57,996**  
86%

**9,256**  
14%

## SUMMARY FINDINGS

- **67,252 Afghans** – **57,996** male (86 per cent) and **9,256** female (14 per cent) – were interviewed upon arrival in Afghanistan. This includes **53,085** single individuals and **14,167** families. **47,456** interviews were conducted with spontaneous returnees and **19,796** with deportees.
- An overwhelming majority of Afghan respondents from Iran were undocumented while many respondents from Pakistan were passport holders. Most (including children) moved to Iran via unofficial crossing points. Conversely, many movers to Pakistan left via official crossing points.
- There was some overlap in the reasons for leaving Afghanistan reported by inflow and outflow movers. Most respondents departed to Iran in search of a better life or more employment opportunities. Similarly, most left for Pakistan in search of a better life or more employment opportunities as well as for medical treatment.
- One of the main reasons respondents returned spontaneously from Iran and Pakistan include the high cost of living, lack of employment opportunities, and a desire to reunite with family members in Afghanistan. Irregular entry and lack of documentation were mentioned as the main reasons of deportation cited by Afghans deported from Iran and Pakistan.
- **29 per cent** of movers to Iran and **95 per cent** of movers to Pakistan said they left Afghanistan more than once.
- Over **50 per cent** of respondents to Iran and Pakistan said they had no information about the risks of irregular migration. The risks cited by respondents were similar and included a lack of basic necessities, looting by robbers, physical violence by smugglers and the risk of trafficking



Women and children at Zaranj/Milak crossing point, Nimroz, Afghanistan.  
© UNHCR/Afghanistan



## Deportation Trends

### FROM IRAN

- Based on estimations provided by UNHCR's border monitoring partners, some **485,000 undocumented Afghans** were deported from Iran through Islam Qala and Zaranj crossing points in 2022. This represents a daily average of **1,330 individuals**. In addition, UNHCR recorded the deportation of **12 refugees** (Amayesh cardholders) via Islam Qala and Zaranj.
- UNHCR conducted protection monitoring interviews and delivered support to documented deportees while IOM provided assistance to vulnerable undocumented deportees and returnees from Iran. There was a slight uptick in deportations between March and April and October and November although declined between May and September.

Note: the figure of 485,000 is an estimation and does not represent the actual figure of Afghan deportees from Iran.

- 99 per cent** of interviewed deportees from Iran said they were deported without going through a legal procedure (a court order). This means deportees had no chance to raise concerns about their potential protection risks in Afghanistan prior to deportation.
- Deportees said they were poorly treated by police, experienced physical violence and forced to pay money as government taxes to cover their transportation, accommodation, and food costs. Those unable to pay were kept in detention until they could do so.

### FROM PAKISTAN

- No deportation of Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders was recorded in 2022. However, based on information provided by UNHCR border monitoring partners, an estimated 1,500 undocumented Afghans were arrested and deported on charges of infringing the 1946 Foreigners Act. Interviewed deportees said they left for Pakistan in search of jobs and medical treatment, but were arrested detained for one to five months by Pakistani police in Karachi and Quetta as well as parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

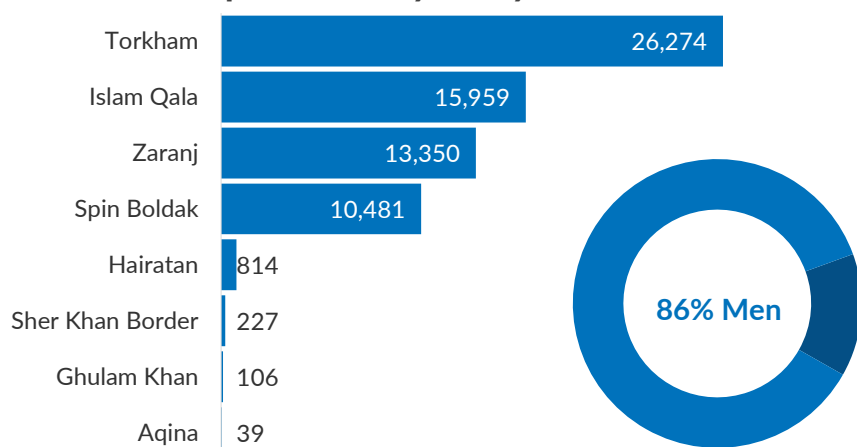
### FROM TAJIKISTAN

- In 2022, UNHCR recorded over **100 cases of refoulement**. UNHCR conducted protection monitoring and provided necessary assistance to these deportees (single individuals and families).

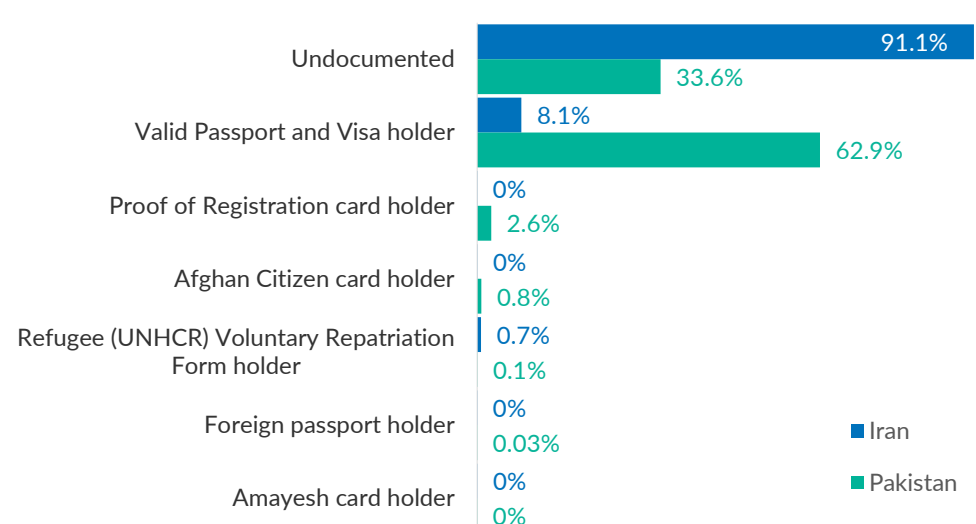
### General

- Out of the total respondents, only 38 (mainly from Iran) mentioned that they feared persecution in Afghanistan, but they did not specify further. Among these, 17 respondents mentioned that they had shared their concern with the authorities, but the authorities had not paid any attention to their claims.

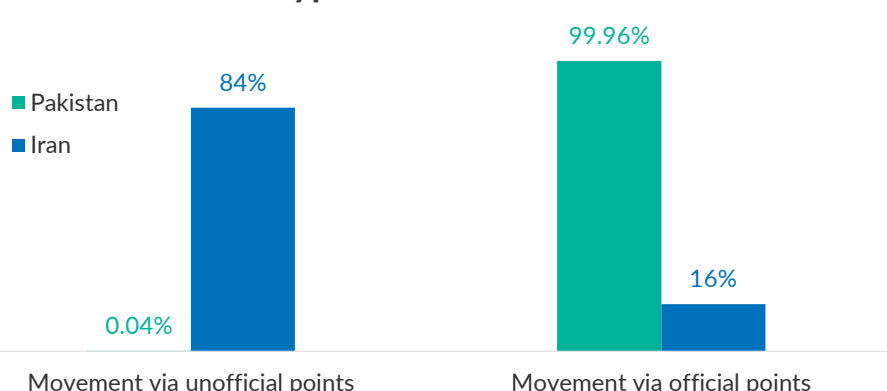
Respondents by Entry Point



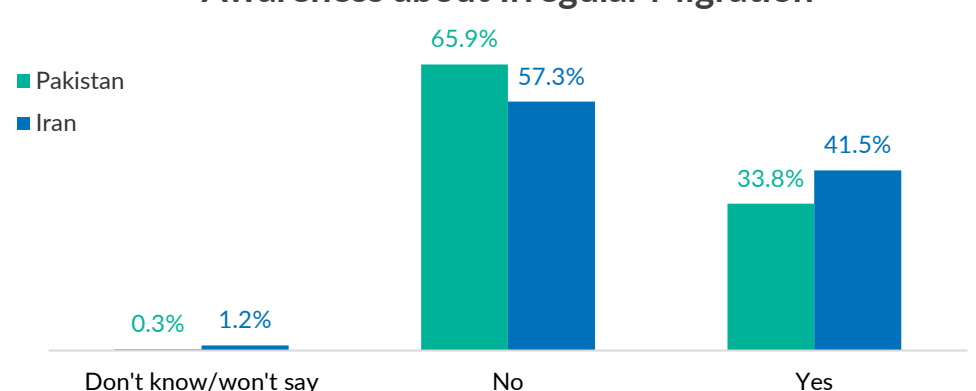
Documentation Status of Respondents



Type of Movement



Awareness about Irregular Migration

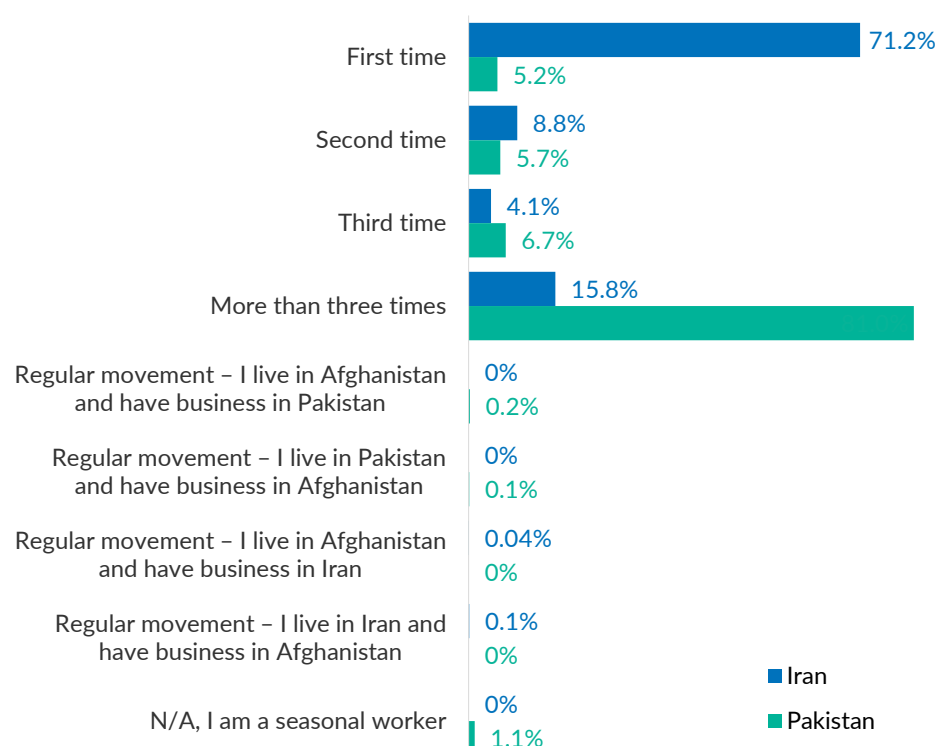




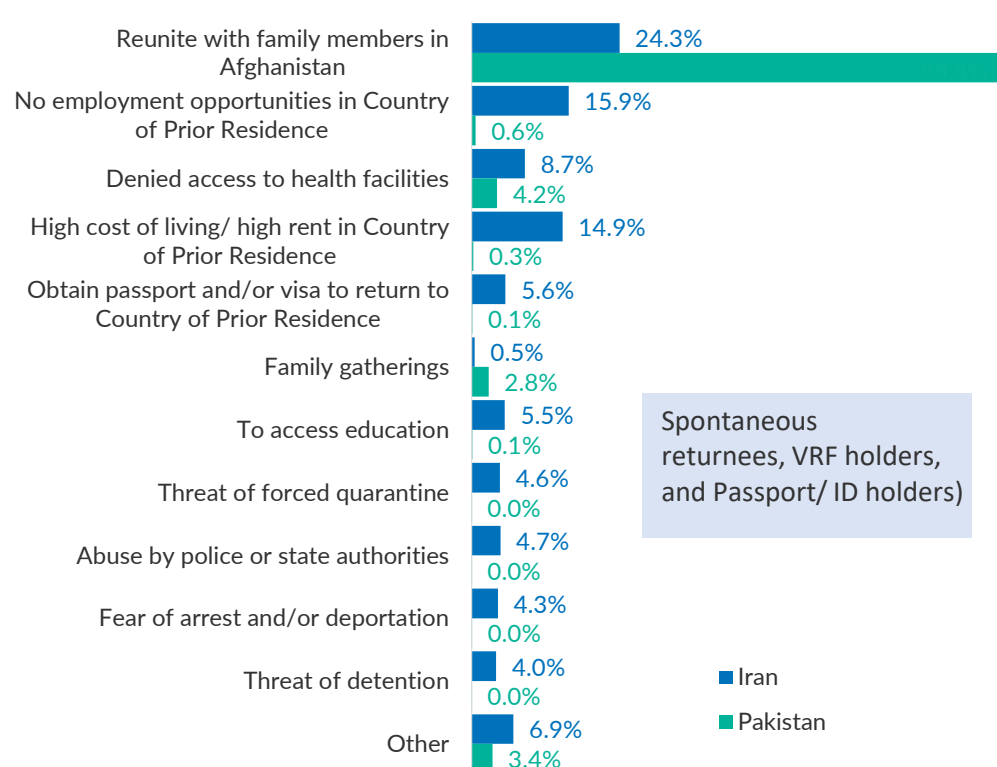


## Deportation Trends

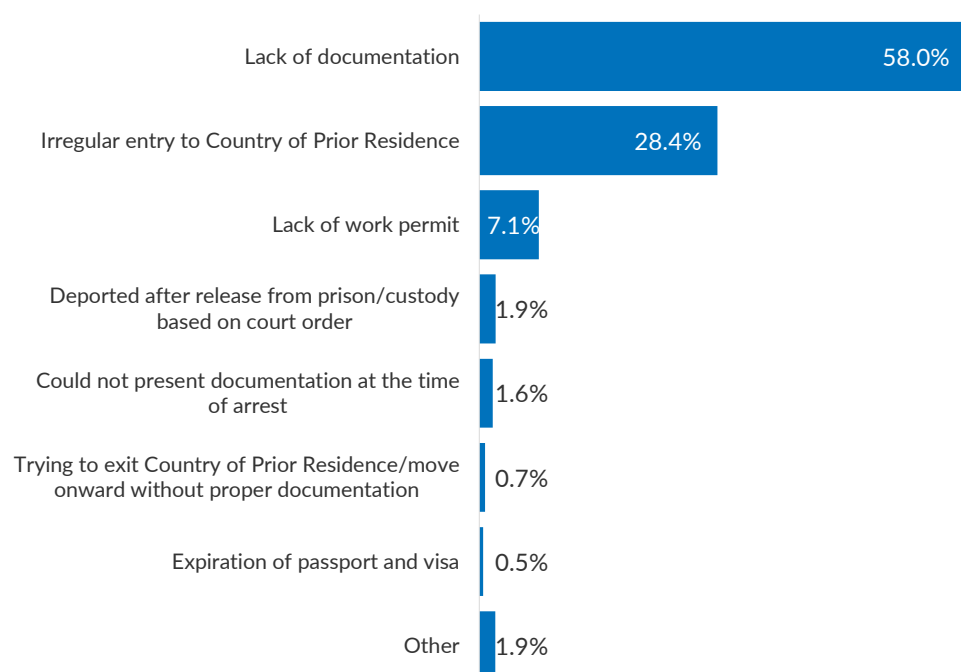
### Movement Periodicity: Iran vs Pakistan



### Reasons for Return to Afghanistan



### Reasons of Deportation: Iran



\*The vast majority of deportation and crossing through unofficial points are to/from Iran.

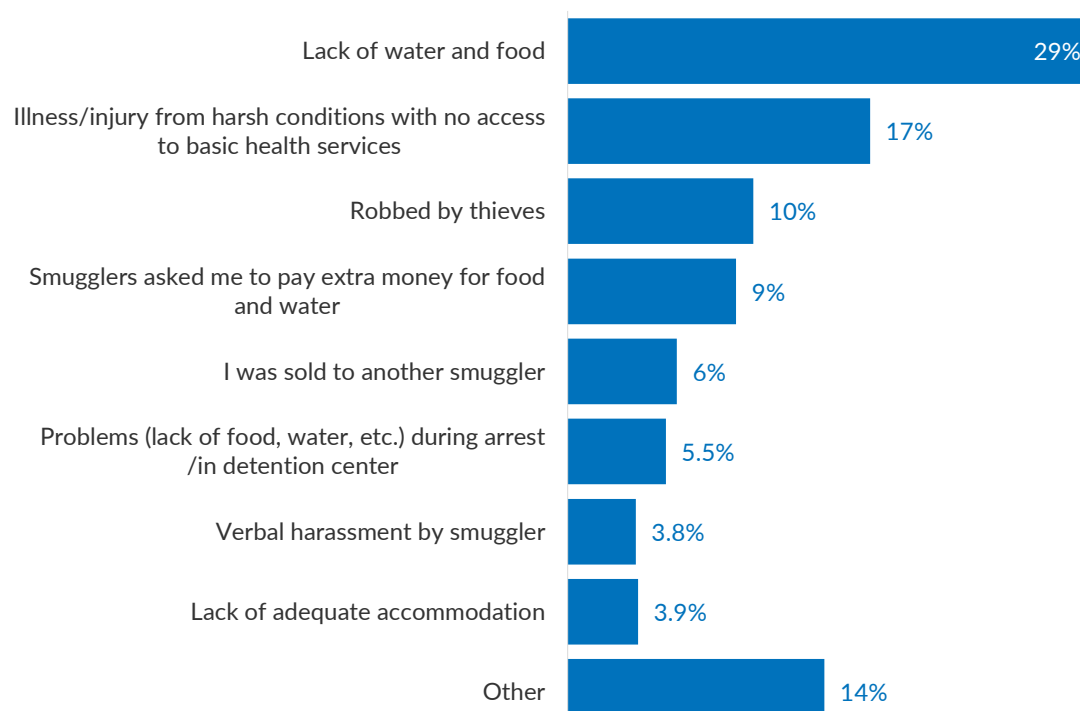


Torkham, crossing point, Nangarhar, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Afghanistan



Torkham, crossing point, Nangarhar, Afghanistan. © UNHCR/Afghanistan

### Problems Faced During the Journey through Unofficial crossing points : Iran



## Overview of Population Movements 2022

UNHCR partners collected the estimated inflow and outflow figures at official crossing points. In 2022, an estimated **16.3 million** (mainly Afghans) moved from/to Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. An overwhelming majority moved through Spin Boldak in Afghanistan (to Pakistan), followed by Torkham (to Pakistan), Islam Qala and Zaranj (to Iran), Sher Khan Bander (to Tajikistan) and Hiratan (to Uzbekistan).

### PAKISTAN – OUTFLOW MOVEMENTS

- An estimated **80 per cent** of outflow movers who crossed via Spin Boldak were Afghans (Tazkira, Token and passport holders mainly from Kandahar province). **20 per cent** were Pakistani National ID Card holders (mainly from the Chaman area).
- Many who crossed via Spin Boldak either daily or weekly were small business owners who lived on one side of the border and conducted business on the other side.
- An overwhelming number of outflow movers who crossed via Torkham were Afghans with valid passports and visas although Pakistani authorities would sometimes allow people without travel documents to cross only for critical medical purposes.
- In addition, an estimated 5,800 Afghans moved to Pakistan via unofficial crossing points located in several provinces on a weekly basis. This group was mainly local people who moved back and forth for business, medical treatment, and family visit purposes.

### IRAN - OUTFLOW MOVEMENTS

- An estimated **528,000 Afghans** moved to Iran with valid travel documents in 2022. This was an average of 44,000 individuals every month.
- In addition, between 8,600 to 29,000 undocumented Afghans moved to Iran through unofficial crossing points on a weekly basis between January and early May 2022. These movements were suspended from mid-May to August after De-facto-authorities established checkpoints and deployed mobile teams to prevent movements to Iran via unofficial crossing points. However, since August 2022, outflow movements resumed via irregular pathways to Iran. Approximately 3,800 individuals moved to Iran every week. This figure declined to around 800 – 1,000 individuals every week in November and December 2022 due to the harsh winter conditions.
- All movements through unofficial crossing points were reportedly facilitated by smugglers.

### PAKISTAN – INFLOW MOVEMENTS

- There were an estimated 6.83 million inflow movements in 2022. The low inflow figure from Pakistan might be due to the temporary closure of crossing points and movers' intentions/plans. Some people recently moved to Pakistan to seek medical treatment or deal with business related issues.
- Inflow Afghan movers from Pakistan include with passport, Proof of Registration (PoR), Afghan Citizen Card (ACC), voluntary repatriation form (VRF) and Token holders and undocumented Afghans.

### IRAN - INFLOW MOVEMENTS

- An estimated 1.1 million Afghans came back to Afghanistan in 2022, including 485,000 undocumented deportees and 617,000 spontaneous returnees who were either undocumented, passport holders or small number of VRF holders. This represents a monthly average of 91,700 inflow movements.

### POPULATION MOVEMENTS BY CROSSING POINT

Movement type	Spin Boldak	Torkham	Islam Qala	Zaranj	Sher Khan Bandar	Hiratan	Total
Outflow Total (A)	6,835,004	1,030,072	383,543	144,656	478	5,328	8,399,081
Outflow Monthly Average	569,584	85,839	31,962	12,055	40	444	699,923
Inflow Total (B)	5,944,563	889,093	609,563	492,639	603	6,026	7,942,487
Inflow Monthly Average	495,380	74,091	50,797	41,053	50	502	661,874
<b>Total (A+B)</b>	<b>12,779,567</b>	<b>1,919,165</b>	<b>993,106</b>	<b>637,295</b>	<b>1,081</b>	<b>11,354</b>	<b>16,341,568</b>

Notes to the table:

Figures in **Aqina** was not collected as movers were mainly Rail-way staff, transportation drivers and very small number of Afghans i.e., diplomats.

Figures through **Ghulam Khan** was not collected given the movements are limited to local people who are moving for family visit, medical reasons and business purposes.



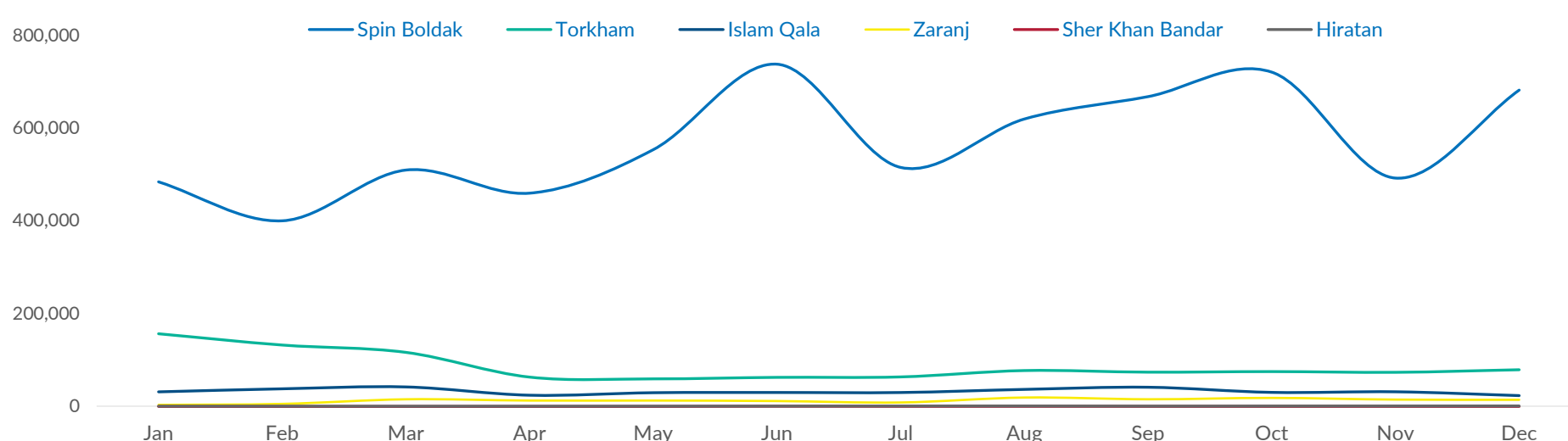
## Population Movements - Central Asia

### Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan – 2022

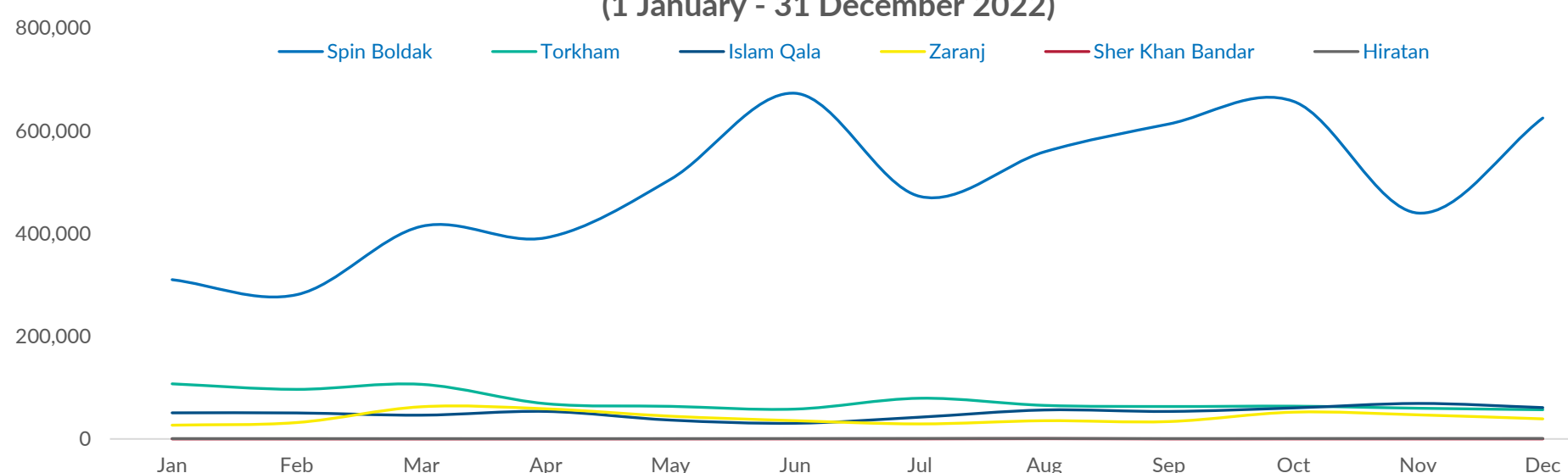
- Population movements to Central Asia remained low.
- UZBEKISTAN:** The border in Hiratan was open only for commercial movements and visa holders in 2022. An estimated 5,300 Afghans and foreigners (such as railway staff, drivers, diplomats) moved to Uzbekistan while an estimated 6,000 individuals came back to Afghanistan. To be able to cross the border, Afghan movers needed to have resident permits, business/education documents or an official letter from the Government of Uzbekistan.
- TAJIKISTAN:** The border in Sherkhan-Bandar remains open to all traders thereby enabling the transfer of goods from both sides. An estimated 478 Afghans and foreigners with valid visas, gate passes or permission documents moved to Tajikistan while an estimated 600 individuals came back to Afghanistan.

Note: the figures of in/outflow movements, in the below charts, are estimates and do not represent actual figures of Afghans moving either way to Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan weekly. For Torkham and Spin Boldak, the figures are for both Afghans and Pakistani citizens. For Sher Khan Bandar and Hiratan, the figures are for both Afghans and Tajikistan/Uzbekistan citizens. Islam Qala and Zaranj were closed between 25 December 2021 – 10 January 2022 for tourist visa holders due to COVID-19.

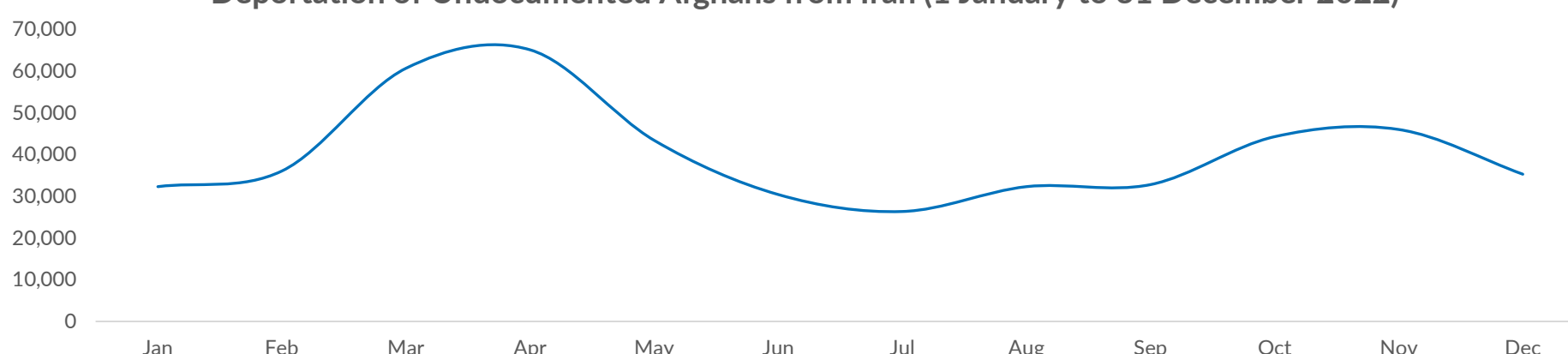
**Estimated Monthly Outflow Movement via Official Points – Individuals  
(1 January - 31 December 2022)**



**Estimated Monthly Inflow Movement via Official Points – Individuals  
(1 January - 31 December 2022)**



**Deportation of Undocumented Afghans from Iran (1 January to 31 December 2022)**





**UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who contributed to UNHCR's response in Afghanistan in 2022 as well as those who contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funds which allow us to respond in an agile manner where the needs are greatest:**

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