

UNHCR AFGHANISTAN

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

JANUARY- DECEMBER 2025



UNHCR Supports Registered Refugees Returning from Iran through Voluntary Repatriation Programme at Encashment Centre in Herat province
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157,660
Inflow and Outflow
Monitoring Interviews



106,600
68%

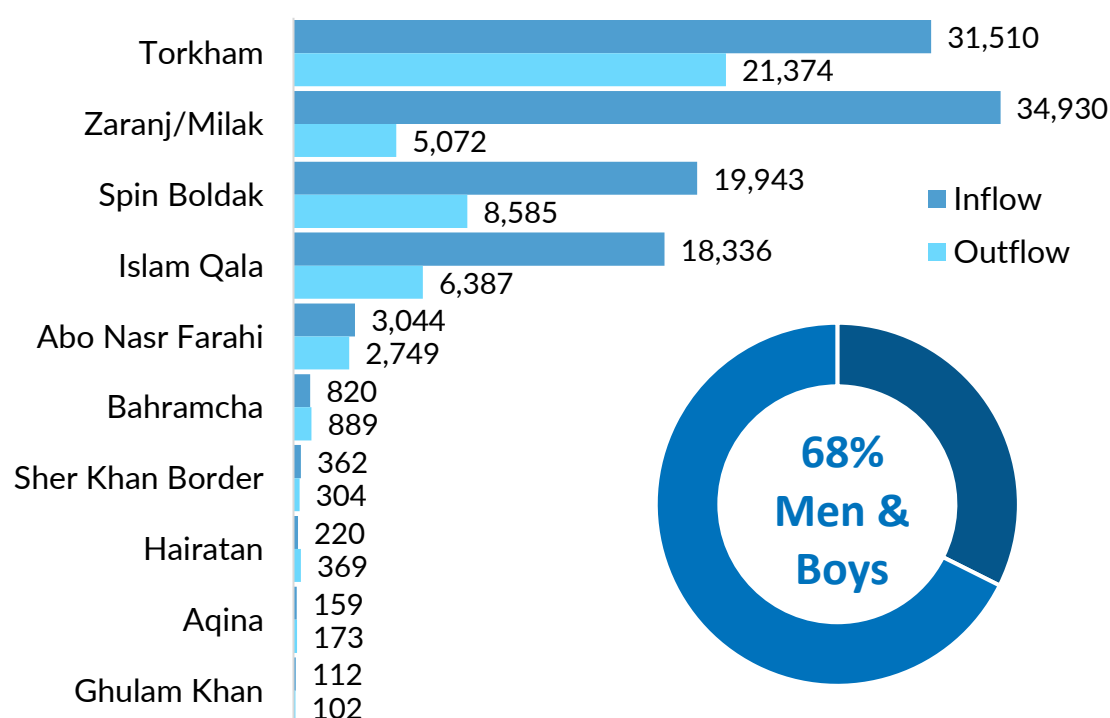
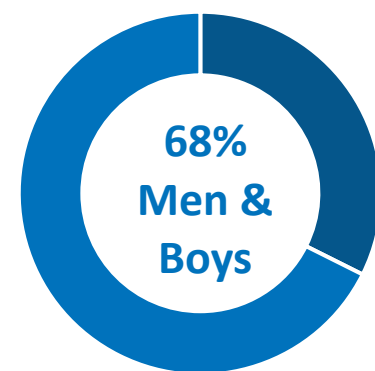


51,060
32%

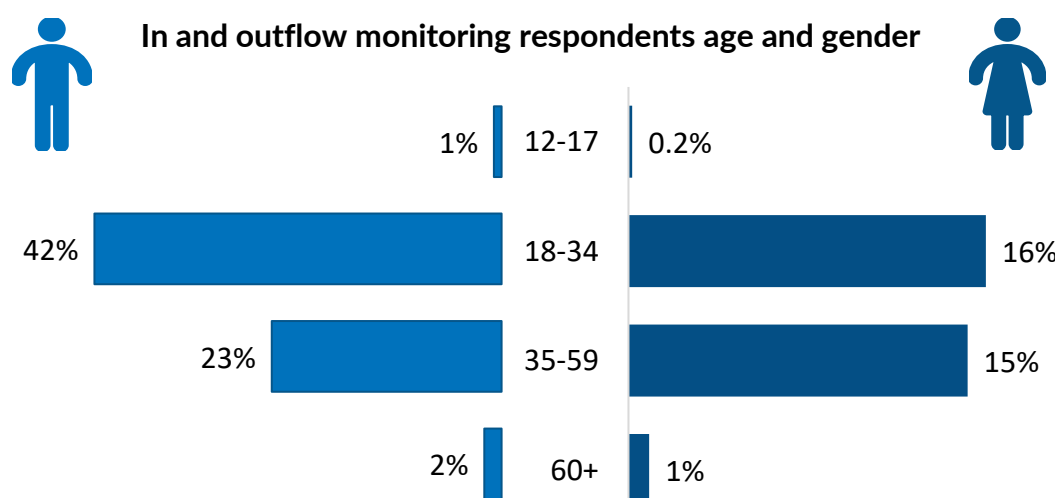
BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

- In line with UNHCR's protection monitoring objectives, UNHCR maintains strong presence through border monitoring partners at official and unofficial crossing points connecting Afghanistan with Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. UNHCR conducts inflow and outflow monitoring interviews at both individual and household levels across nine official crossing points and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across around 70 unofficial crossing points. The exercise is a protection centric activity and seeks to assess the triggers, intentions and motives behind Afghan cross-border movements, including for Afghans seeking protection, assess the scale of in and outflow movements as well as map out protection risks and human rights violations.
- Monitoring teams select respondents using a systematic sampling approach, which can generate representative samples with a fixed skipping interval. The interval is determined by the average arrivals of the previous week.
- Between 1 January to 31 December 2025, UNHCR border monitoring partners conducted a total of 157,660 interviews including 2,219 KIIs at 70 unofficial crossing points. 58 percent of respondents were 18-34 years old, 39 percent were 35-59 years old, 1 percent were 12-17 years old, and 3 percent were 60 and above.
- The lower proportion of female respondents reflects the profile of individuals crossing the borders and operational constraints (see page 2). To increase female participation, UNHCR and partners have implemented measures such as recruiting female staff and providing separate interview spaces. These efforts enabled the inclusion of 51,060 female respondents (32 percent of 157,660), a significant increase from 12 percent female sample size in 2024.
- This report present the findings of inflow monitoring interviews.

Number of interviews by official entry point



In and outflow monitoring respondents age and gender





109,436
AFGHANS
62,669 families



60,359
55%



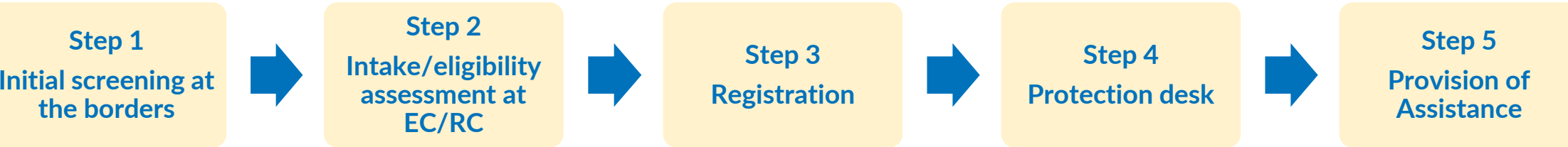
49,077
45%

SUMMARY FINDINGS

- 109,436 Afghans – 60,359 male (55 percent) and 49,077 female (45 percent) – were interviewed in 2025 upon arrival in Afghanistan. This includes 62,669 families and 46,767 single individuals. 68,852 interviews were conducted with returnees and 40,584 with deportees. However, Afghans who returned or were deported from Iran and Pakistan in 2025 were mainly families with women, children making up 80 percent of the returns (50 percent women and girls). UNHCR continues to receive inquiries from women seeking support for education and expressing concerns about the protection of women and girls. These cases involve reports of forced marriages, denial of employment opportunities, and other forms of gender discrimination. Women have also reported that their livelihoods have been detrimentally impacted by DfA policies.
- 60 percent of the respondents were 18-34 years old, while 36 percent were 35-59 years old, only one percent minors (12-17 years old), and three percent were older persons (60 and above).
- A majority (57 percent) of respondents from Iran were undocumented, 33 percent were head-counted slip, 5 percent Amayesh cards, and one percent were VRF holders. In contrast, 33 percent of respondents from Pakistan were passport holders, 28 percent were undocumented, 24 percent PoR, seven percent VRF and five percent ACC holders.
- Findings from 2025 interviews indicate that **Afghans continue to rely heavily on unofficial crossing points, particularly when travelling to Iran**. In 2025, **85 per cent of returnees and deportees**, including women and children, reported entering Iran through unofficial routes, a trend that remains consistent with **2024 (89 percent)**. This persistent reliance on informal crossings reflects ongoing barriers to regular movement, including limited access to visa, fear of arrest or refoulement, and protection concerns, especially for women and girls as well as persons with heightened protection risks pushing them toward riskier pathways. In contrast, **movements to Pakistan show a different pattern**. In 2025, **79 percent of respondents reported using official border crossings**, a proportion similar to 2024 but notably **lower than in 2023, when 92 percent crossed through official points**. This gradual decline suggests increasing movement constraints, including tightened border controls and documentation requirements, which may be reducing access to formal entry points overtime.
- Notably, 2025 data indicate an increase in first-time cross-border movements among Afghan returnees and deportees who reported having entered Iran and Pakistan via official crossings**. Among this group, **61 percent of respondents travelling to Iran and 39 percent travelling to Pakistan stated that this was their first time leaving Afghanistan for these destinations** compared to 25 percent and 14 percent respectively in 2024. **From a protection perspective, this trend suggests a widening push factor within Afghanistan**, with individuals and families, **previously able to remain in place, now resorting to cross-border movement as a harmful coping mechanism**. Deteriorating human rights, growing protection threats, particularly for women, girls and persons with heightened protection risks, socio-economic conditions, limited livelihoods, reduced access to basic services, are likely driving this new trend. The rise in first-time travelers to both countries underscores that cross-border movement is no longer limited to those with established networks, but increasingly involves populations seeking immediate safety, protection, and access to basic opportunities outside Afghanistan.
- 47 percent of respondents returning from Iran and 79 percent of those returning from Pakistan stated that they had no information about the risks of irregular migration to Iran and Pakistan and onward movement**. The risk of trafficking, physical violence perpetrated by smugglers, lack of food, water, and instances of robbery, were reported as the primary challenges encountered by travelers during the journey via irregular routes.
- In 2025, **36 percent of respondents returned/deported from Pakistan and 25 percent from Iran cited protection risks in Afghanistan as the primary reason for their departure from Afghanistan**. Additionally search of better life or employment opportunities and medical treatment were reported as the primary reasons of departure from Afghanistan. While some respondents said that they departed to Iran and Pakistan in search of better living condition, or healthcare services, capturing reasons for movement is complex as interviews are conducted in Afghanistan making it difficult for respondents, particularly those in need of international protection, to express concerns. The list of reasons provided is not exhaustive and may not capture all motivations as Afghans may initially prioritize immediate needs for survival. UNHCR continues to consider Afghan women and girls as well as persons with heightened protection risks as likely in need of international refugee protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention, given the extensive and systematic restrictions imposed by the DfA, which significantly curtail their fundamental rights and freedoms.
- In 2025, 41 percent of respondents (23,334) who returned/deported to Afghanistan from Iran and 14 percent of the respondents (7,583) who returned/deported from Pakistan cited that they are experiencing stress which affects their day-to-day life. The causes of stress includes economic hardship including lose of assets, uncertainty about future, food insecurity, health problem, family separation and protection concerns, and no education for females in Afghanistan.



Thousands of Afghans return to their homeland via the Islam Qala border in Herat Province, amid a sharp increase in mass returns from Iran.
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Step 1 – Initial Screening

- Trained UNHCR protection staff proactively and sensitively identified refugee returnees and deportees, including individuals with heightened protection risks (e.g. former government officials, human rights defenders, journalists). Persons at risk were referred to **Encashment Centers (ECs)** or **Reception Centers (RCs)** for return assistance, in full respect of confidentiality, informed consent, and the do-no-harm principle.

Step 2 - Intake/eligibility assessment at EC/RC

- Gender-balanced teams conducted eligibility screening to verify return documentation and identify persons with specific needs using AGD principles.
- Dissemination of accurate information on services, procedures, and rights/entitlements.
- Provision of MHPSS services to individuals experiencing psychological distress or trauma.

Note: UNHCR managed four Encashment Centers in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Jalalabad, through which returnees and deportees accessed protection services, including cash-based assistance.

- In May 2025, the Herat EC was relocated to the Islam Qala inter-agency Reception Center to ensure timely response to large-scale returns and deportations from Iran.
- In November 2025, operations at Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar ECs were suspended following restrictions on female staff and activities were relocated to Omari and Takhtapol Reception Centers.
- In December 2025, due to the ban on female staff at Islam Qala RC, return assistance operations were shifted back to Herat EC.

Step 3 – Registration

- Registration using the Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS), including the issuance of QR-coded tokens and collection of biodata through harmonized KoBo-based tools. These measures strengthened case integrity, prevented duplication and fraud, and were implemented in full compliance with UNHCR Data Protection Principles.

Step 4 - Protection desk

- UNHCR protection staff conducted confidential, survivor-centered interviews with women, men, girls, and boys presenting heightened protection risks, ensuring safe access to protection counseling and tailored referrals.

Step 5 - Provision of Assistance

- Provision of cash assistance through HesabPay cards.

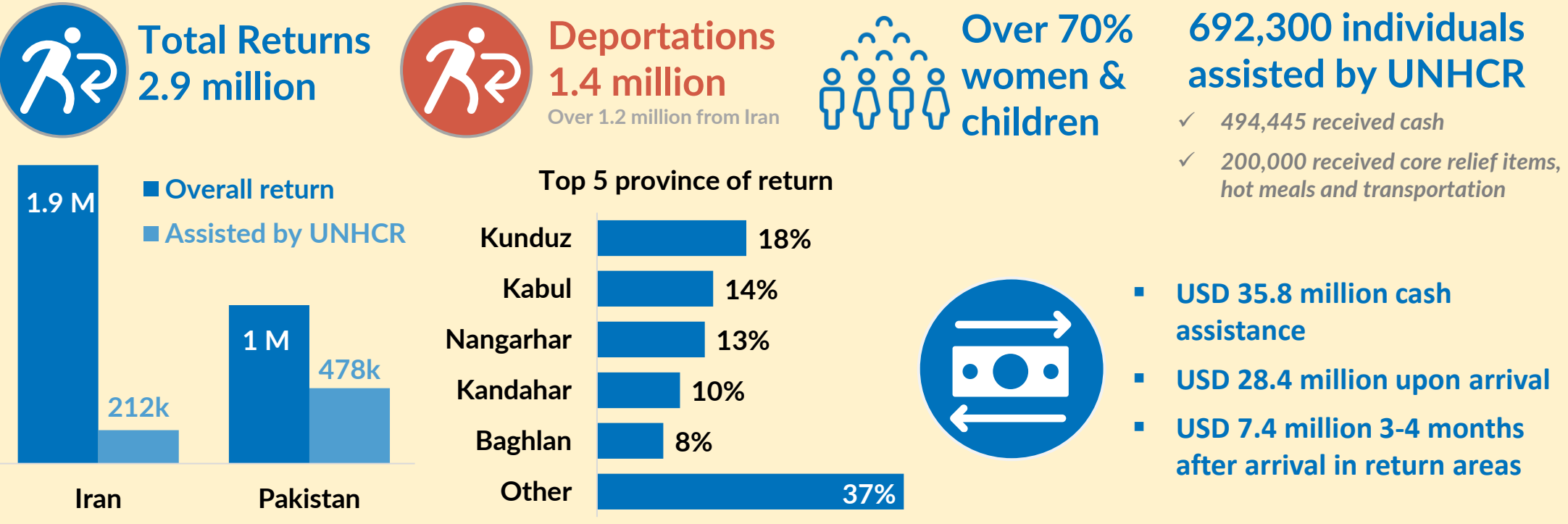
Returnee monitoring: It is an inherent part of the protection monitoring carried out upon arrival as well as follow up post return monitoring phone-based survey in return areas. These inter linked interviews are aim to:

- ✓ Assesses key areas such as return patterns and protection concerns.
- ✓ Assessment of the voluntariness of return and the level of information returnees had to make a well-informed decision to return.
- ✓ Reintegration progress, access to documentation, housing, and essential services as well as returnees' intentions.
- ✓ Highlighting gaps, including the impact of return assistance provided upon arrival and in return areas.

For further details regarding returnees' protection situation in return areas, please refer to UNHCR's Post-Return Monitoring (PRM) Phone Survey, Third Round Results, including the [Executive Summary](#) and [Full Report](#), which provide comprehensive analysis of protection risks, living conditions, and reintegration challenges faced by Afghan returnees.

Thousands of Afghans return to their homeland via the Islam Qala border in Herat Province, amid a sharp increase in mass returns from Iran.
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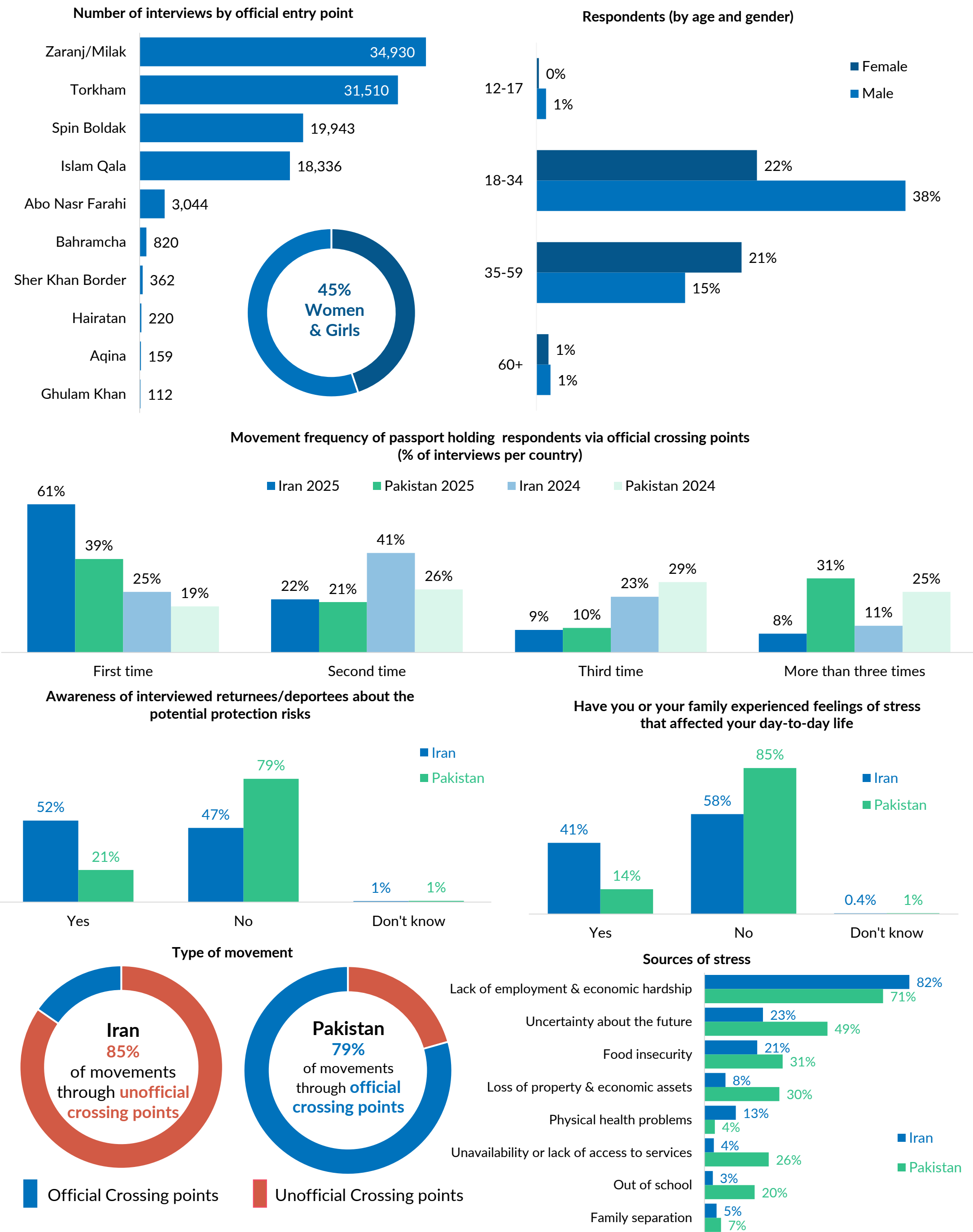


RETURN TRENDS AND PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- In 2025, Afghanistan experienced one of the largest return movements in recent decades, with **some 2.9 million Afghans returning or being deported from Iran and Pakistan**, alongside smaller numbers returning from Tajikistan, India, Azerbaijan, and Indonesia, bringing the total number of Afghan returns **since 15 September 2023 to over 5 million, representing 10 percent of Afghanistan estimated population**. These movements are largely driven by restrictive policies and deteriorating conditions in host countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran. Many returns occurred under adverse conditions, involving abrupt departures and arduous journeys back to Afghanistan amid unfavorable conditions abroad.
- Daily returns and deportations from Iran in 2025 increased sharply from mid-June 2025, peaking on 4 July, when close to 40,000 individuals returned/deported in a single day. Thereafter, return rates declined but remained elevated compared to earlier in the year. In December, daily returns averaged approximately 2,900, consistent with the preceding week and above the first-quarter 2025 daily average of around 2,450. During 2025, border monitoring data reveals that nearly 1.9 million Afghans had returned from Iran of which over 1.26 million were deported.
- Monthly return and deportation figures from Pakistan also increased significantly toward the end of 2025. Return/deportations exceeded 180,000 individuals in September and rose sharply to some 249,000 in November, making November the highest month for returns in 2025 and the second-highest monthly total since September 2023, following November 2023 (262,000). In December, returns declined to 97,300 individuals, including 16,400 deportations. Notably, November also recorded an unprecedented surge in deportations, with nearly **70,000 individuals deported**, the highest monthly deportation figure since the launch of the IFRP in November 2023, indicating a significant escalation in enforcement measures toward the end of the year. Most of those returned/deported during the last quarter of 2025 were refugees (PoR card holders).
- A total of 1,974 Afghans, including refugees and asylum seekers, were also deported from Tajikistan, a significant increase from 79 deportations in 2024. Reports indicate that Tajikistani police arrested individuals at markets, in their homes, and on the streets, deporting them without explanation. Deportees reported verbal and physical harassment during detention. UNHCR has raised concerns with Tajikistani authorities regarding these forced returns and has advocated for the refugees’ re-admission.
- UNHCR provided protection assistance to a total of **692,300 Afghan refugees and those in refuge like situation who returned/deported in 2025 including 494,445 with cash grant and close to 200,000 with core relief items, hot meals and transportation**. This figures brings the total assistance provided to returnees by UNHCR since September 2023 to **813,600 individuals**. The number of returnees assisted by UNHCR in 2025 represent an **eleven-fold increase compared** to the same period in 2024 (**54,789 individuals**), underscoring the scale and intensity of this return surge.
- This unprecedented returns have been propelled by Pakistan’s Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP), notably Phase III from August 2025 which targeted 1.4 million Afghan refugees holding Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, and Iran’s regularization/return plan in 2025 as well as the 12 days war. The magnitude of returns since September 2023 has placed severe pressure on reception and return areas, exacerbating existing protection gaps and significantly constraining access to essential services. Women and girls, who constitute more than half of all returnees, face heightened protection risks, including restricted access to education, employment, and freedom of movement, conditions that either precipitated earlier displacement or represent new challenges for those born and raised in Pakistan and Iran. Individuals with heightened protection risks, including those requiring international protection, are returning to a complex and fragile environment, where exposure to risks such as harassment, discrimination, and arbitrary arrest remains a serious concern.

DRIVERS OF RETURN

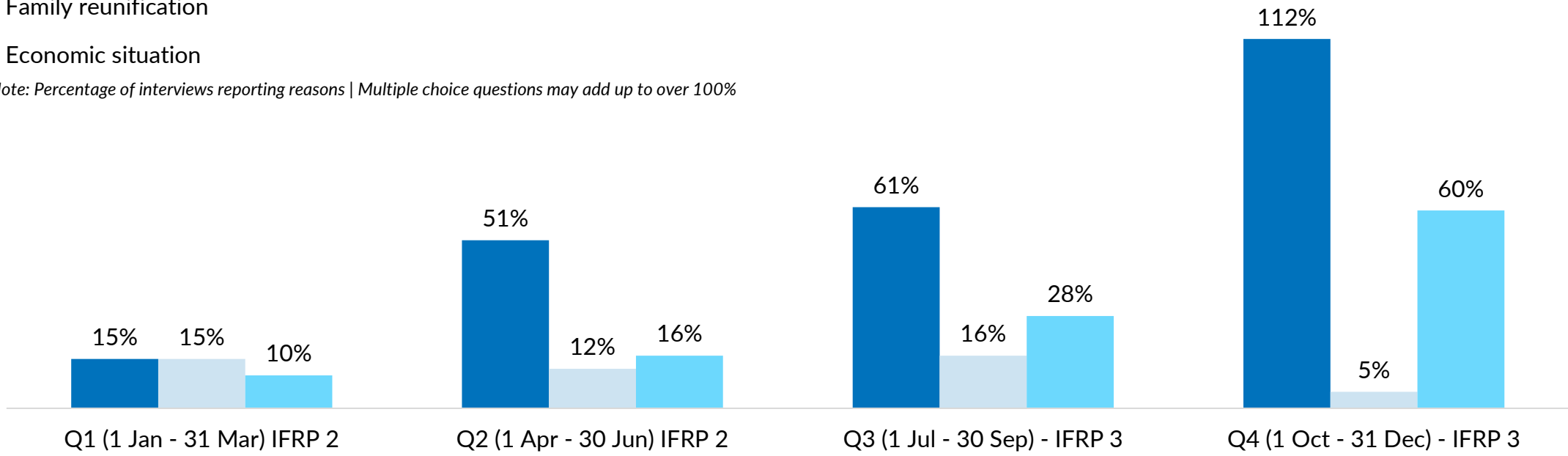
- In September 2023, the Government of Pakistan launched the IFRP, structured in three phases. The first phase, initiated in November 2023, targeted undocumented Afghans. On 7 March 2025, enforcement under IFRP Phase II resumed, focusing on holders of Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACC), who were requested to depart voluntarily by 31 March 2025, with deportations commencing from 1 April 2025. The programme was further expanded on 31 July 2025 under IFRP Phase III to include PoR card-holding Afghan refugees, who were granted a one-month grace period until 31 August 2025. Since September 2023, more than 1.7 million Afghans have returned from Pakistan alone, including nearly one million in 2025. In parallel, [following the expiry of headcount slips on 20 March 2025, the Government of Iran introduced a regularization and return framework](#) affecting an estimated two million Afghans. Individuals covered by this measure are required to undergo government assessments to determine eligibility to remain in the country, contributing to a sharp acceleration in returns during mid-2025.
- Based on monitoring interviews, returnees from Pakistan and Iran reported facing significant protection concerns that influenced their return. Returnees from Pakistan reported heightened insecurity, including harassment, arrests, extortion, and police raids, which led many families to leave abruptly and abandon assets and livelihoods. Returnees from Iran similarly reported anti-Afghan sentiment, significant protection concerns, and forced deportations. Vulnerable groups, including women, children, unaccompanied minors, and older persons, were disproportionately affected, resulting in elevated protection and assistance needs upon return. Persistent pressure from Pakistan and Iran authorities reflects a shrinking protection space and increased pressure on Afghans to return under coercive and unsafe conditions, heightening risks of family separation and vulnerability upon return. [UNHCR’s Guidance Note on Afghanistan – Update II - September 2025](#), underscores ongoing concerns that Afghans, regardless of legal status, continue to face significant protection risks in Afghanistan amid the current human rights context, particularly women and girls.



Reasons of return from Pakistan

- Abuse by authorities/Fear of arrest or deportation
- Family reunification
- Economic situation

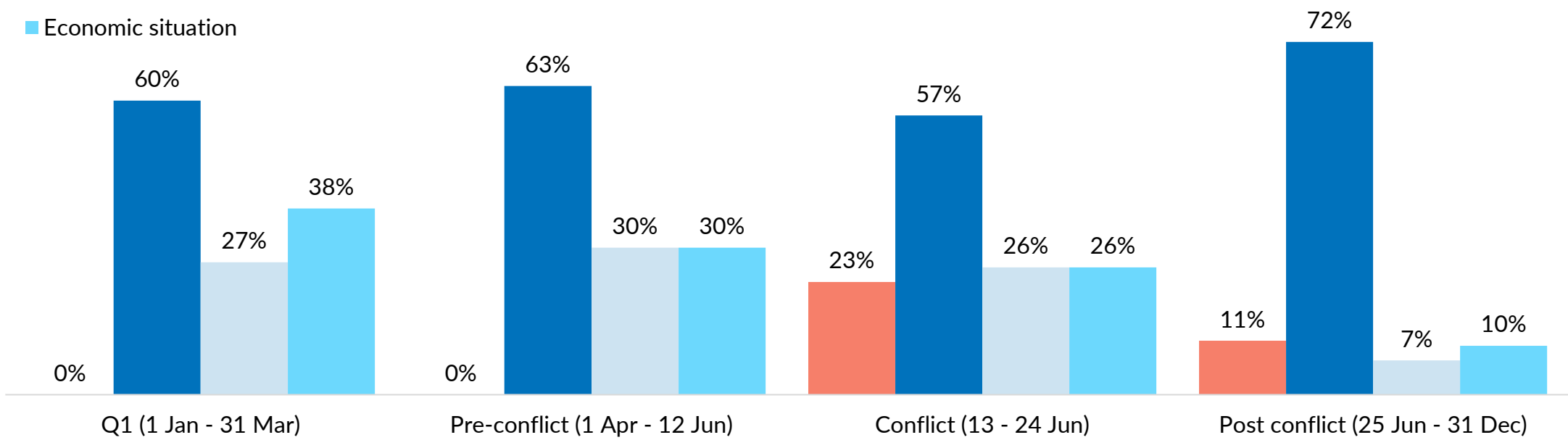
Note: Percentage of interviews reporting reasons | Multiple choice questions may add up to over 100%



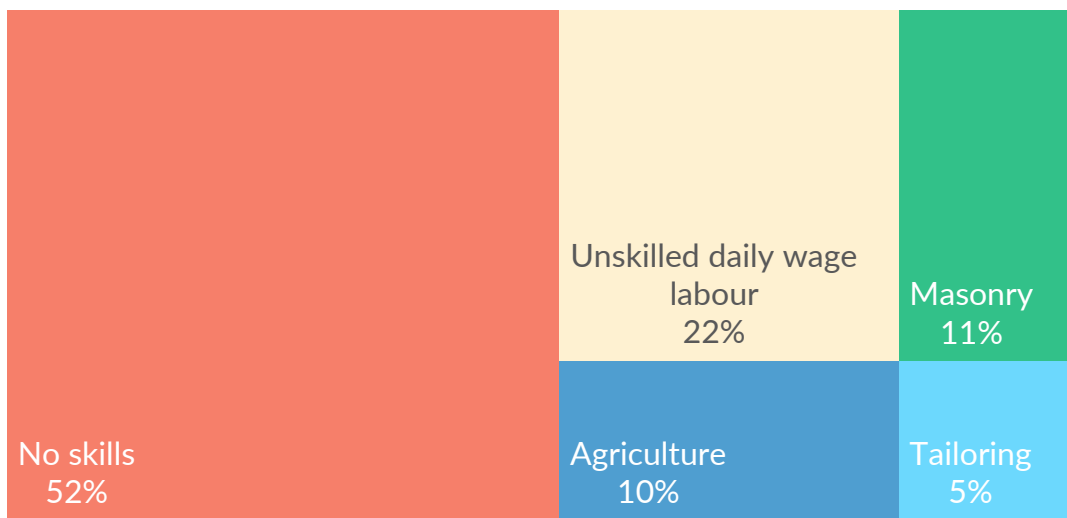
Reasons of return from Iran

- Conflict/fear of bombing
- Abuse by authorities/Fear of arrest or deportation
- Family reunification
- Economic situation

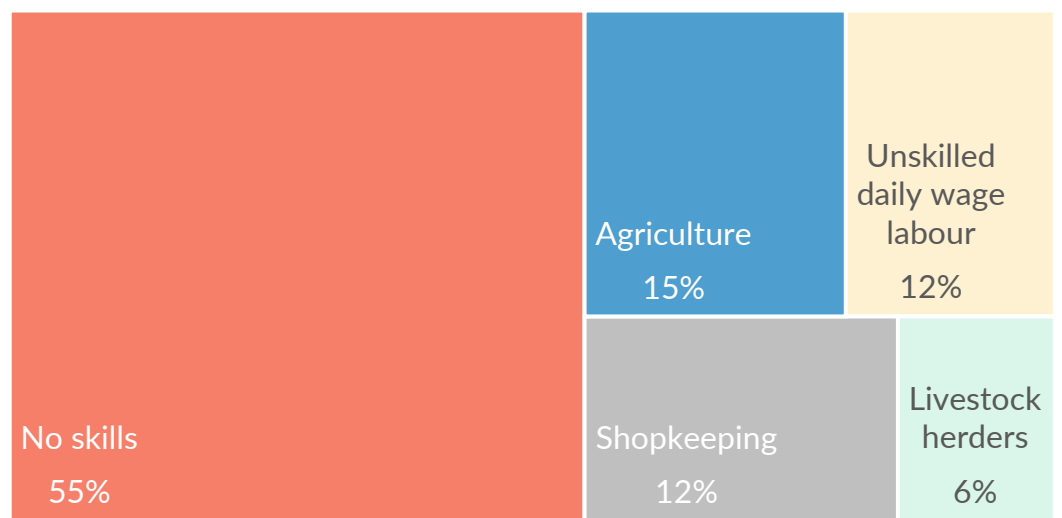
Note: Percentage of interviews reporting reasons | Multiple choice questions may add up to over 100%



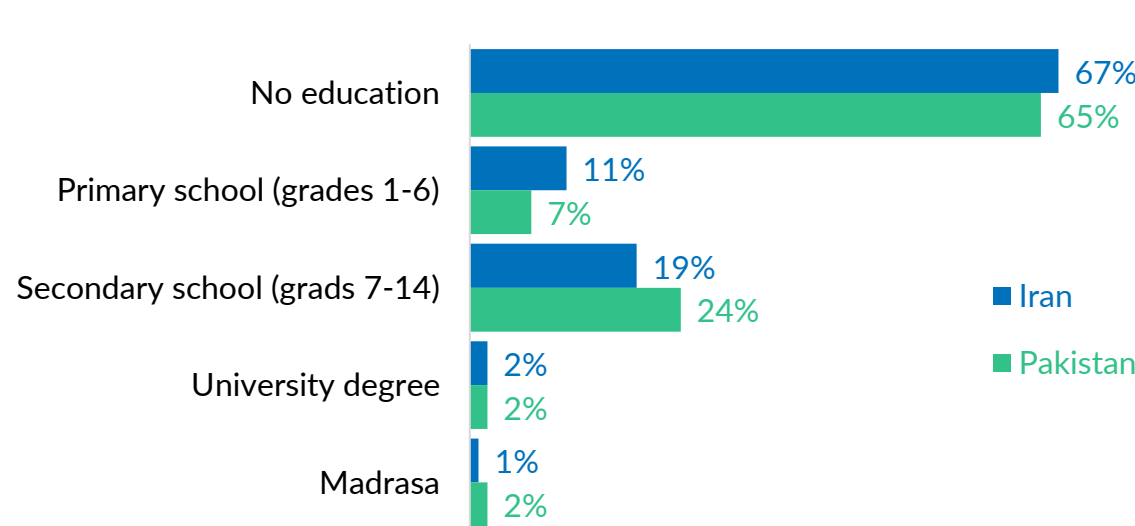
Occupational skills (HoHs) - Returnees from Iran



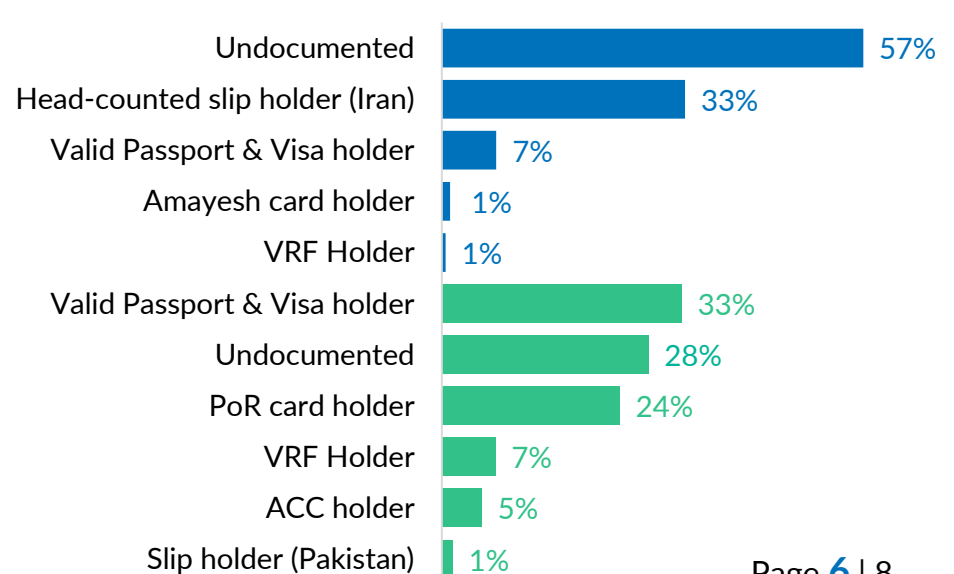
Occupational skills (HoHs) - Returnees from Pakistan

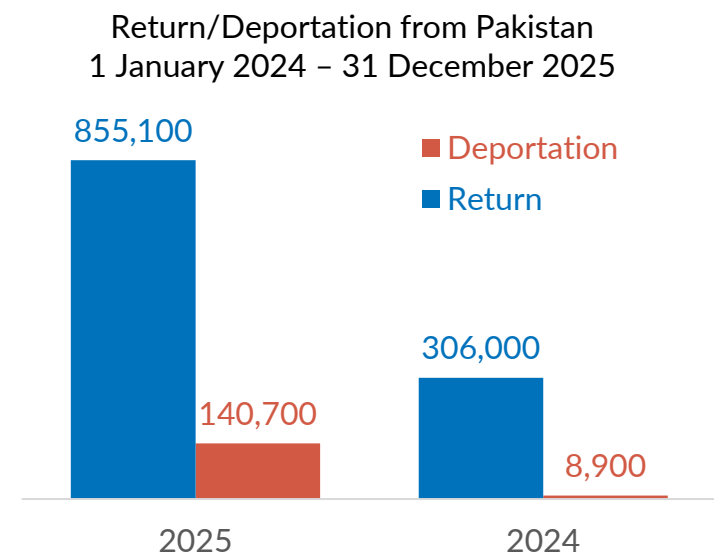
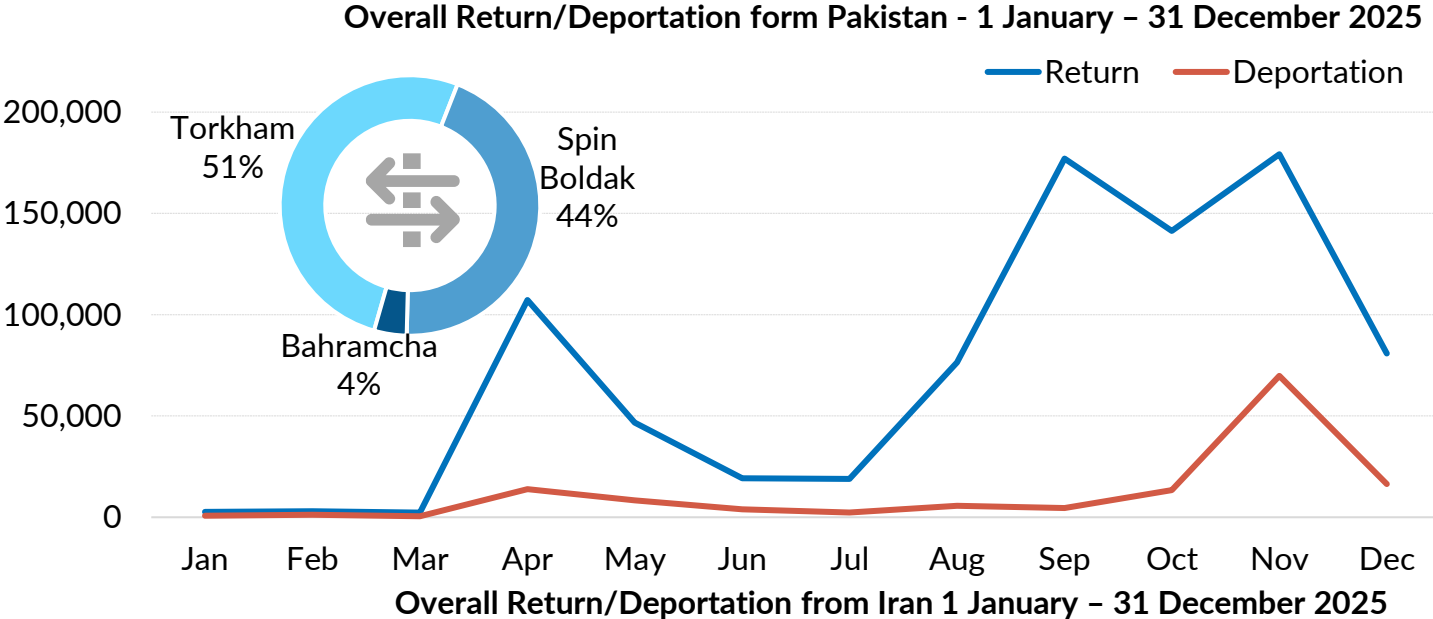
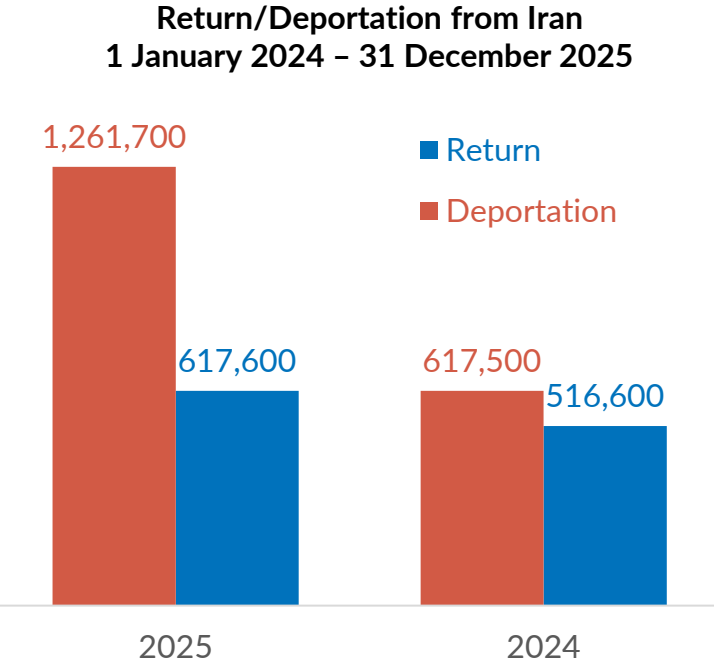
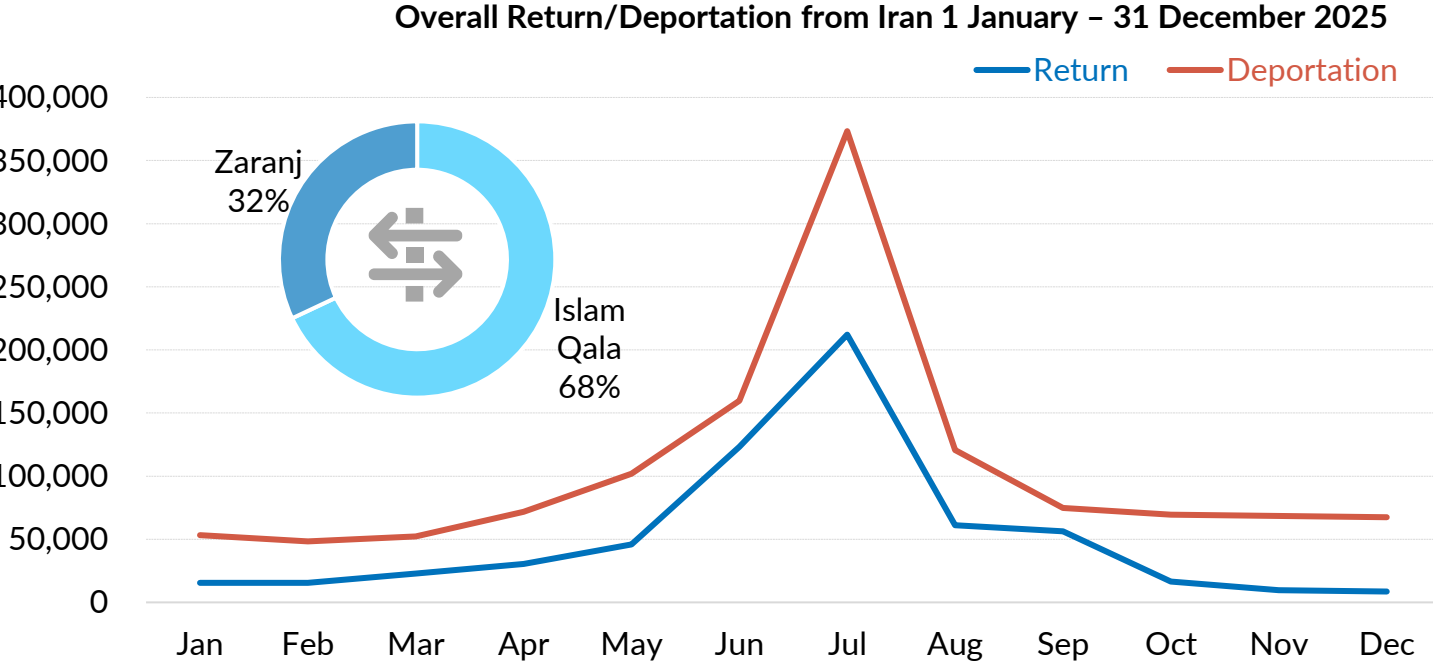
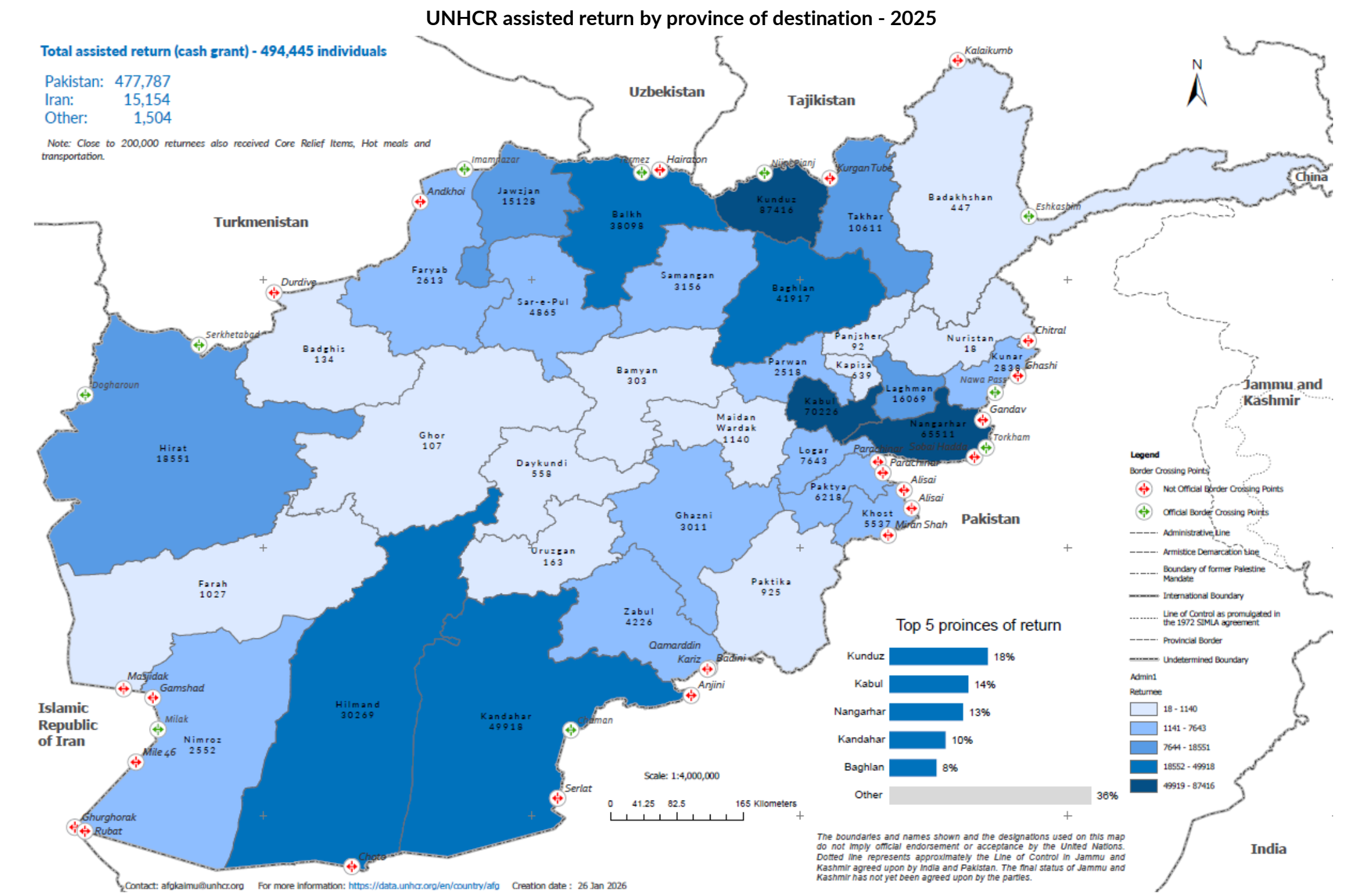


Education levels (HoH)
Returnees from Iran and Pakistan



Documentation stats of respondents





Recommendations

- States should reaffirm their obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and customary international law, notably non-refoulement, by halting deportations to Afghanistan and ensuring access to territory and fair asylum procedures. Individuals at heightened protection risk must receive individualized protection assessments with timely access to UNHCR, legal aid, and effective remedies against removal. These safeguards are essential amid fluctuating return, deportation, and onward movement trends.
- Constructive measures by DfA to facilitate safe and unhindered civilian exit from Afghanistan. This includes removing administrative and discriminatory constraints on freedom of movement, ensuring access to documentation, and removing requirements that disproportionately restrict movement of women and girls, so that all individuals can leave the country safely and with dignity.
- DfA should guarantee unimpeded, principled humanitarian access across entry/exit and reception locations and refrain from interference in humanitarian activities. Predictable access including female staff active and free engagement in protection response enables timely delivery of life-saving assistance, protection case management, and referrals, especially critical during spikes in return and deportation.
- Reception procedures must be child-focused and rights-based, applying best-interest determinations for every child. States and partners should prevent family separation, ensure rapid family tracing and reunification, and provide safe alternative care for unaccompanied and separated children. Equal, non-discriminatory access to education, health, psychosocial support, and protection services is essential to uphold child rights.
- Given heightened protection risks, women and girls require targeted protection. Safe access to services and documentation, freedom of movement, GBV prevention and response (including confidential reporting and care), and meaningful participation in assistance design and delivery. Removing barriers to work and education is vital for dignity, safety, and self-reliance.
- In line with the objectives of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), which emphasizes strengthened regional cooperation and the advancement of durable solutions, States, together with UNHCR and donors, should work collectively to ensure that voluntary, informed, and sustainable return is supported only when conditions permit, through area-based reintegration approaches backed by predictable, multi-year investment in return areas.
- Iran and Pakistan should continue to be commended for their decades-long history of providing asylum and protection to displaced Afghans and should be encouraged to continue to do so.
- All states are called on to allow access to territory for people fleeing war and persecution.
- Advocate for neighbouring and transit States to transparently investigate reports of human rights violations against civilians at border crossings, provide for access to justice for survivors, and protection of civilians from harm.
- Advocate for unhindered access for humanitarian assistance, and for non- interference in humanitarian activities.
- With the support of donors, humanitarian stakeholders to maintain enhanced protection response and systematic monitoring at border points to ensure timely emergency response, particularly for persons with specific needs, children at risk, including unaccompanied/separated children, women particularly single females and female heads of households, survivors of gender-based violence (male and female), older persons and persons with disabilities.

UNHCR-Supported Code4Fun Project Equips Women and Girls in Herat with Digital Skills for Employment
Thousands of Afghans return to their homeland with over 50 percent of them are women and girls
© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production, September 2025





We would like to thank first and foremost the thousands of returnees who agreed to take the survey and contributed invaluable information.

Across the Asia and the Pacific region, UNHCR has been forced to reprioritize programmes due to constrained humanitarian funding. Many refugees, stateless people, and other forcibly displaced populations face reduced access to critical assistance, with women and children among the most affected.

UNHCR is deeply grateful to the following donors who have stepped forward with earmarked contributions and those providing flexible funding to Afghanistan, enabling life-saving assistance and protection to reach those most in need. These contributions are vital to sustaining operations and supporting the most vulnerable:

Austria | Belgium | Canada | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Islamic Development Bank | Italy | Japan | Republic of Korea | Luxembourg | Netherlands (Kingdom of the) | Norway | Poland | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | United States of America | Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund | Country-based Pooled Fund | Central Emergency Response Fund | Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan

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Annual 2025 Border Monitoring
and Return Response Report

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