

THE AFGHANISTAN SITUATION: **STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY & ACHIEVING SOLUTIONS**

The Afghanistan Situation: 40 Years On

Large-scale displacement from, and within, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is now in its 40th year, having first erupted during the civil war that broke out in 1979. Since 2002, more than 5.2 million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan from the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, facilitated through the largest voluntary repatriation programme in UNHCR's history. Yet in 2019, Pakistan and Iran continue to host 1.4 million and 950,000 registered refugees respectively.

In the migration context, Pakistan has, in close collaboration with Afghanistan, registered and is providing documentation to some 880,000 undocumented Afghans in Pakistan, and Iran has conducted a headcount exercise for 850,000 undocumented Afghans. Significant numbers of additional Afghans, uncounted and undocumented, exist in both countries. At the same time, an estimated 2 million Afghans have been internally displaced within Afghanistan by ongoing conflict, and large numbers of Afghans continue to leave the country, either seeking asylum, better economic opportunities or both.

At this complex juncture, the international community cannot walk away from the Afghan people or the countries that have hosted them for decades. Rather, it is imperative that we redouble our collective efforts to find solutions for Afghans, and more equitably share the responsibility with Afghanistan and generous hosting countries like Pakistan and Iran.

2012 Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees

In 2012, the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, together with UNHCR, launched the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). The strategy has promoted responsibility-sharing at regional and global levels, with the primary objectives of easing pressure on hosting communities, and creating the conditions for voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan.

Under the auspices of the SSAR, the Governments of Iran and Pakistan have upheld their international protection commitments and demonstrated unparalleled hospitality and generosity towards Afghan refugees. By linking humanitarian and development initiatives, impressive progress has been made to enhance access to education, health, livelihoods, and documentation. At the same time, some 630,000 registered refugees have voluntarily repatriated from Pakistan and Iran to Afghanistan since the SSAR was launched.

2018 Global Compact on Refugees & International Framework for Solutions

In December 2018, the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, along with other States of the UN General Assembly, affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees and created the Global Refugee Forum, in addition to endorsing a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Government of Afghanistan also endorsed the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in July 2018.

These global agreements constitute a new framework that builds upon the SSAR, embracing its fundamental objectives, and establishing a platform to better mobilise international support to achieve solutions for Afghan refugees, while standing in solidarity with hosting countries like Iran and Pakistan. The framework also contemplates approaches to humanely manage and regulate migration movements, while ensuring international protection for those entitled to it. The Global Compact on Refugees is particularly noteworthy in the context of Afghan refugees, as it aims to facilitate more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, with increased engagement of the community of nations, international finance institutions, development actors, the private sector and civil society.

Strengthened International Solidarity: 2019 and Beyond

Taking into account existing frameworks for multi-stakeholder collaboration, UNHCR seeks to further strengthen international solidarity in the context of the Afghanistan Situation by focusing on four key areas:



1. Facilitating Voluntary Repatriation & Sustainable Reintegration

UNHCR will continue to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees who make an informed choice to return home, while catalysing local and international support for sustainable reintegration. As part of these efforts, UNHCR will work with development actors and other partners to develop 15 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs), in line with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework and the National Priority Programmes. Due to the unpredictable security situation in Afghanistan and mixed migration movements, UNHCR will also advocate for alternative stay arrangements for Afghans in hosting countries with protection safeguards.

2. Expansion of Support for Refugee Hosting Communities

The communities that host forcibly displaced Afghans require increased support. Priority will be given to supporting national systems to strengthen resilience and build human capital, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and “Leave No One Behind” principle. In Iran and Pakistan, UNHCR will reinforce its engagement with government actors, development partners, the private sector and civil society to catalyse livelihood opportunities for everyone in the community. Increased attention will also be given to education and skills development, particularly for youth. In Afghanistan, UNHCR will advocate for greater inclusion of returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in economic integration and social protection programmes.

3. The Mixed Migration Component: Refugees and Migrants

While recognising the unique legal status and protection that must be afforded to registered refugees, and maintaining a clear status-based distinction between refugees and other Afghans on the move, it is important to recognise that the flow of Afghans regionally is of a mixed nature. UNHCR will continue to advocate for flexible visa regimes for registered refugees, the registration of undocumented Afghans, and the issuance of documentation (including Afghan passports) with a view to regulating migration movements, enhancing labour mobility and facilitating economic opportunities. UNHCR will also promote protection-sensitive border management systems, cross-border data sharing and analysis, and the expanded use of biometrics to monitor and regulate cross-border movements.

4. Broader Partnerships, including Non-Traditional Actors

UNHCR will engage a broader range of stakeholders to achieve solutions for Afghans, including development actors, multi-lateral development banks, the private sector, civil society, faith-based actors, and refugees themselves. The Global Refugee Forum will support this objective by creating fresh opportunities to develop new partnerships. At the same time, UNHCR will create a multi-stakeholder “support platform,” comprised of key partners, to support specific objectives of the SSAR. Potential actors will include:

- ◆ Humanitarian and development actors
- ◆ World Bank / International Development Association (IDA) 18
- ◆ Asian Development Bank
- ◆ Refugees and host communities (especially women and girls)
- ◆ Heads of State, Ministers, Parliamentarians, Governors
- ◆ Networks of cities and municipalities
- ◆ Public-private partnerships
- ◆ Civil society organizations (including local and global academic networks, faith-based actors, grassroots movements, NGOs, etc.)