

# UNHCR REGIONAL PLAN

Building resilience  
and solutions for  
Afghan refugees in  
South-West Asia

1 July 2016 - 31 December 2017



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

# Regional Context

While early last year there was a sense of optimism about the situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the country has reverted back to a humanitarian emergency, combined with dire socio-economic conditions. Since mid-2015, a series of political, security and economic developments in Afghanistan have affected its people and forced large numbers out of their homes with, in the last year and a half, over 500,000 people newly displaced within the country. There are now some 1.2 million internally displaced people in Afghanistan. Today, Afghans constitute the second largest group of new arrivals in Europe.

The recent developments in Afghanistan have slowed voluntary returns from major hosting countries in the region. In total, less than 59,000 Afghan refugees have opted to return from the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan in 2015. Furthermore, only some 7,500 Afghans have returned during the first half of 2016.

For almost four decades, millions of Afghans have found protection, assistance and temporary solutions in the neighbouring countries thanks to **the generosity of the governments and people of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan**. According to current figures, Pakistan hosts some 1.5 million Afghan refugees, holding Proof of Registration Cards and the Islamic Republic of Iran hosts some 951,000 *Amayesh* card holders<sup>1</sup>. The majority of them are second and third generation refugees living in protracted displacement and with no imminent solutions.

Last year, at the request of countries in the region, UNHCR convened a **High Level Segment (HLS)** on the Afghan refugee situation during the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. The objective of the segment was to draw global attention to the slow progress achieved in addressing this protracted situation and encourage support from the international community.

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR), developed by the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and UNHCR has provided the overall framework for Afghan refugees in the region since 2012.<sup>2</sup> Member states participating at the HLS reaffirmed the validity of the SSAR and recognized the critical role played by host countries in the region. The HLS also called for increased international solidarity and responsibility-sharing to address the protracted

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, both countries host large numbers of undocumented Afghans who have been estimated at 1.5-2 million in the Islamic Republic of Iran and 1 million in Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup> SSAR is a regional multi-year initiative to help facilitate voluntary return and sustainable reintegration while providing assistance to host countries. As part of it, Governments, along with more than 50 humanitarian and development partners, developed three country-specific portfolios of projects in 2014. Designed around education, health, and livelihoods, the portfolios offer an integrated framework for multilateral cooperation. See also <http://www.unhcr.org/afghan-solutions-strategy.html>.

situation, including greater financial and political support to reinforce the resilience of refugees and host communities and to find durable solutions for Afghan refugees.

The Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan have been strong supporters of the SSAR and regularly participate in tripartite and quadripartite meetings with UNHCR to coordinate solutions for Afghan refugees. However, there are serious concerns about the limited prospects for return to Afghanistan and the decreasing support of the international community for the Afghan refugee situation.

Inside Afghanistan, the situation remains precarious. The National Unity Government, formed in 2014, showed strong commitment to address issues related to displacement and placed it among its highest national priorities. This included the formation of the High Commission on Migration, chaired by the President, to address key issues relating to Afghan refugees, returnees and internally displaced people. The Government developed a national Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Strategy with UNHCR's support and in coordination with the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan through the tripartite commission framework.

Despite these positive developments, since mid-2015 the **security situation in most parts of Afghanistan has been rapidly deteriorating**. It has seen the highest civilian casualties recorded since 2009 (11,002 people), alongside an unprecedented number of conflict-affected IDPs today totalling 1.2 million. The country continues to face serious challenges in its nation-building and in addressing complex security issues. The situation is further exacerbated by economic challenges and slow progress in the implementation of development programmes. At the same time, the humanitarian community is severely constrained in addressing the country's growing needs due to increasing insecurity, narrowing humanitarian space, and dwindling resources.

The waning hope of many Afghans for their country's political and economic future is driving people out of the country, many of them to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Many **have also tried to reach Europe**, hoping to find protection and opportunities for better lives for themselves and their families. Representing some 20 per cent, Afghans are ranked the second largest group of new arrivals in the Mediterranean since the beginning of 2016, roughly equivalent to that of 2015. The movement toward Europe is also reported to include Afghans who transited or resided in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In particular, younger refugees, many of whom were born in exile, find it difficult to relate to Afghanistan and believe they will have better educational and economic prospects in European countries.

## Resilience and Solutions Measures

These evolving dynamics have resulted in four major developments in recent months:

- Rising internal displacement resulting from the situation of conflict and political instability in Afghanistan and the lack of development investments;
- Continuing population outflows from Afghanistan beyond the region towards Europe;
- Limited returns from neighbouring countries and unlikely prospects for large-scale voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in the foreseeable future;
- Resulting need for reinvigorated responsibility-sharing by the international community with the two principal host countries.

To respond to these developments, the regional plan reconfigures key parts of UNHCR's planned activities in South West Asia for the next eighteen months into a set of concrete measures ("resilience and solution measures") which will contribute to building resilience among Afghan refugees, IDPs, returnees and hosting communities, and in finding innovative solutions to their situations. These measures are in line with the SSAR, endorsed by the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. They are also designed to **mitigate displacement of the Afghan population within and beyond the region** by ensuring dignified and safe stays, as well as increasing prospects for more viable solutions, in particular for youth.

In the same vein, the resilience and solutions measures are grounded in Government strategies and policies, and in firm partnerships. First and foremost, these are with UNHCR's operational counterparts within the respective Governments at the local and the capital levels, and with civil society, development and humanitarian actors, SSAR partners, donors, and the private sector. In the three countries, coordination platforms have been established and will be used to exchange information, develop common strategies and priorities at the national level, and coordinate response.

The success of UNHCR's regional plan rests on an inclusive notion of partnership, especially with development actors and international financial institutions. Various mechanisms are used to pool expertise and capacity via joint assessments, planning, implementation and fundraising. UNHCR is pursuing opportunities for joint or complementary programming and advocates with participating agencies for the mainstreaming of needs or referral of IDPs, returnees and refugees into related projects.

**In refugee hosting countries**, the resilience and solutions measures aim to nurture a viable protection space for Afghan asylum-seekers and refugees. They will continue to ensure refugees' access to basic services and enhance social cohesion and peaceful co-existence with host communities. These measures are articulated around five key areas of intervention: **(1)** access to

protection (legal and policy framework), **(2)** access to basic services, **(3)** youth empowerment through education, skills training and livelihood support, **(4)** support for durable solutions, and **(5)** advocacy, coordination and partnership.

Given the worsening security and humanitarian situation, **the resilience and solutions measures for inside Afghanistan** will target assistance to the most vulnerable IDPs, returnees and local communities. The measures are designed to be a flexible set of immediate interventions focused on vulnerable families and displaced communities in locations where humanitarian access is possible. Interventions include cash and in-kind assistance, referral to service providers, cash-for-work and quick impact projects.

These humanitarian interventions are complemented by two longer-term solutions-oriented measures: 1) Targeted livelihoods interventions, and 2) area-based pilot projects to foster durable solutions for protracted IDPs as well as returnee communities.

UNHCR will also continue to support refugees who opt to return voluntarily to Afghanistan. An increased voluntary repatriation grant will aim at enhancing coping mechanisms of returnees for the initial period following their return. In parallel, UNHCR will play a larger catalytic role in calling for more international attention and support to Afghanistan and the neighbouring refugee hosting countries to ensure equitable responsibility-sharing and to address root causes of displacement towards solutions with voluntary repatriation, accompanied by long-term reintegration, as the most preferred option.

**The resilience and solutions measures presented in this regional plan cover July 2016 to December 2017. The financial requirements needed to implement these activities amount to USD 468,126,067.**



## Youth empowerment

In both the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, the majority of the refugee population are second and third generation. In Pakistan, 74 per cent of refugees are under 24 years old. Given the demographics of the Afghan refugee population, youth empowerment is the cornerstone of the resilience and solutions measures.

Youth empowerment through education, skills training and livelihoods support, will be critical in building resilience. These interventions also foster social cohesion among Afghan refugees and their host communities through investments in local systems and contribute to the economic development of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. Education and access to livelihoods will also minimize the risk of refugee youth being marginalized or adopting negative coping strategies.

It is expected that these measures will pave the way towards longer-term solutions by giving hope to Afghan youth, help build their futures, and also enable them to contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan when return becomes possible.

Furthermore, as part of its approach to people with specific needs in Afghanistan, UNHCR will provide cash-based support to the most vulnerable children and youths among IDPs, returnees and host communities to facilitate their access to education.

In Pakistan, Parliament endorsed the country's commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning), opening a valuable opportunity for UNHCR and the Government to work together towards youth empowerment through education. UNHCR works closely with the federal and provincial authorities, as well as the SDG 4 leads, UNESCO and UNICEF, to support the Government of Pakistan to mainstream the needs of refugee children and youth within the new education sector plans and national development planning and processes. UNHCR will also actively engage within the global platform for education to be launched in 2016.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been placing much emphasis on ensuring the education of refugees. The literacy rate among Afghan refugees has risen from 6 per cent in 1979 to 60 per cent in 2013. To support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in continuing with this policy priority, now extended to undocumented Afghan children, UNHCR works closely with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, UNESCO and other partners towards increasing the rate of school enrolment and reducing drop-out rates through the construction or rehabilitation of schools. In May 2016 following sustained advocacy, regulations on the registration of foreign national students in the education system in the Islamic Republic of Iran were revised. This resulted in the removal of all refugee-specific tuition fees (USD 70-90 /child) for primary and secondary education as of the upcoming school year (2016-2017 starting in September). Refugee students will now receive the same benefits as Iranian students regarding registration and educational services

UNHCR also supports the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and partners to enhance skills training based on market demand and livelihood opportunities, including revolving loans. A range of small projects implemented by young refugees will also be supported.

## Resilience and Solutions Measures

# Resilience and Solutions

### IRAN

1. Access to protection: legal and policy framework
2. Access to basic services
3. Youth empowerment
4. Durable solutions
5. Advocacy, coordination and partnership

### AFGHANISTAN

1. Facilitation of voluntary repatriation
2. Support to persons with specific needs
3. Community based humanitarian QIPs
4. Targeted livelihood support
5. Area-based solutions for protracted IDPs and returnees

### PAKISTAN

1. Access to protection: legal and policy framework
2. Access to basic services
3. Youth empowerment
4. Durable solutions
5. Advocacy, coordination, and partnership

Funding requested				
	2016 ExCom approved budget (July- Dec)	2016 Additional requirements	2017*	2016-2017 Total
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	51,803,670		106,870,410	158,674,080
Islamic Republic of Iran	34,634,134	6,102,137	95,526,963	136,263,234
Islamic Republic of Pakistan	54,211,416		118,977,337	173,188,753
<b>Total</b>	<b>140,649,220</b>	<b>6,102,137</b>	<b>321,374,710</b>	<b>468,126,067</b>

Notes:

All amounts in this table are in USD.

\*Pending approval by the 67th Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee.

# Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Target population: 1,5 million internally displaced persons and returnees

Requirements: USD 158,674,080 (July 2016 - December 2017)

	2016 ExCom approved budget (July- Dec)	2017*	Total
1. Facilitation of voluntary repatriation	14,900,015	66,485,767	81,385,782
2. Support to people with specific needs	10,927,944	17,866,558	28,794,502
3. Community-based quick impact projects	19,644,067	6,303,325	25,947,392
4. Targeted livelihoods support	2,271,388	10,110,987	12,382,375
5. Area-based pilot for local integration of IDPs	4,060,256	6,103,773	10,164,029
<b>Total</b>	<b>51,803,670</b>	<b>106,870,410</b>	<b>158,674,080</b>

Notes: All amounts in this table are in USD.

\*Pending approval by the 67th Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee.

2015 was one of the worst years for conflict-induced displacement in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, with more than 400,000 people recorded as displaced during the year because of renewed fighting in an increasing number of provinces. This represents one of the highest figures since 2001 and is a 96 per cent increase over 2014. In 2016, as at mid-May, 134,000 new IDPs have been verified,<sup>3</sup> indicating that the level of displacement will likely be similar to 2015. The total number of people displaced in Afghanistan is now estimated at some 1.2 million, including populations living in protracted displacement. Civilian casualties also reached record highs, with violations committed by all parties to the conflict. The emergence of new groups, such as groups affiliated with Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) in the country's east, and the increasing presence of groups affiliated with Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the north/northeast has added new layers of complexity to the growing insurgency.

<sup>3</sup> See also <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/idps>.



The deterioration of security in most parts of Afghanistan, coupled with a significant macro-economic contraction and the lack of sustainable livelihoods, has also contributed to high levels of secondary displacement and a large-scale mobility crisis, in which a broad cross-section of the Afghan population is on the move in search of protection from violence and a better future for themselves and their children. Recent returnees, who often have limited coping mechanisms after prolonged absences, face similar problems.

Many IDPs in a protracted situation consider local settlement in areas of displacement a more viable solution, as return to areas of origin seems unlikely. Some provincial governments are now exploring local settlement initiatives, including land allocation and/or relocation within the municipal or district boundaries, and are looking to the international community for support in areas such as shelter and livelihoods. IDPs have also increasingly chosen to move to urban or semi-urban areas and often settle in slum-like conditions.

Concurrently, 20 per cent of arrivals in the Mediterranean are Afghan nationals. While recognition rates of asylum applications by Afghans vary depending on the country of asylum, return programmes for people not found to be in need of international protection are in the process of being negotiated bilaterally by some European countries with the Government of Afghanistan.

The current insecurity and the absence of dividends associated with peace and stability—such as increased livelihoods opportunities, policy and regulatory reform, and improved access to and quality of basic services in urban and rural areas—equally impacts durable solutions for Afghans returning from neighbouring countries and those returning from further afield.

The dramatic increase in internal displacement and subsequent humanitarian needs have prompted the Humanitarian Country Team and national and international NGOs to adjust programmes and interventions accordingly. The following initiatives are aligned with Afghanistan's 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview and the Humanitarian Response Plan, as well as UNHCR's Global Appeal.

## 1. Facilitation of voluntary repatriation

In line with the SSAR and in support of the Government's Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Strategy, UNHCR will continue to facilitate the **voluntary return** of registered Afghan refugees, in accordance with established protection principles and support, and to the extent possible, the sustainable reintegration of returnees. **UNHCR will increase the voluntary return and reintegration grant** to facilitate the initial phase of reintegration in a context of decreasing humanitarian presence and subsequent development investments.

UNHCR's returnee monitoring has indeed documented the inadequacy of the reintegration grant in covering the basic needs involved in re-establishing families in areas of origin or chosen destination. According to the latest returnee survey, the current grant is sufficient only to cover transport and meet the basic needs, such as food and initial household purchases, for up to three months following arrival. The grant will be increased based on the most recent market survey and returnee monitoring,

and extended to cover the needs for up to six months, bringing it to USD 400 per person, up from the current USD 200 per person. It will aim to achieve the following:

- *Support* voluntary repatriation and help anchor returnees by strengthening their coping mechanisms to facilitate reintegration;
- *Mitigate* current outflows to Europe and elsewhere and facilitate greater freedom of choice among returnees, to prioritize reintegration needs, and enlarge their ability to make investments in household livelihood strategies.

The enhanced grant has been calibrated not to provide undue pull factors or constitute an incentive to onwards movement outside of Afghanistan.

## 2. Support to people with specific needs

Addressing the increased displacement situation demands that UNHCR also broaden its interventions to meet the urgent needs of different profiles of people on the move: returnees, those people newly displaced by conflict, the long-term displaced, those unable/unwilling to return, or returnees who are secondarily displaced by insecurity or lack of access to services or livelihoods. Returnees, in particular second and third generation former refugees, have limited coping mechanisms and face significant obstacles in sustainably reintegrating in areas of origin, or in chosen settlements. Likewise, vulnerable families who have been internally displaced for many years and, as a result, have exhausted their coping mechanisms, often fall between the cracks of humanitarian and development assistance frameworks.

In response, UNHCR will further enhance its ***people with specific needs approach, which provides a much-needed social safety net for highly-vulnerable returnee and displaced individuals, and their families.*** UNHCR's support is a combination of referrals to other service providers and a mix of in-kind and cash-based assistance provided to individuals falling into UNHCR vulnerability categories tailored to the context of Afghanistan (e.g. female-headed households, child-headed households, elderly people with no support, people with disabilities, and other at-risk individuals). This can take the form of immediate cash support for urgent medical expenses, or for legal expenses (for example, to obtain civil documentation), or a limited cash or in-kind allocation to start a micro-business and support family resilience (particularly for women-headed households, families with a breadwinner with a disability, or families with a high dependency rate and one or more individual vulnerabilities).

UNHCR, in its capacity as lead of the non-food item and emergency shelter cluster, will also provide one-off assistance to families newly displaced by conflict in coordination with other humanitarian actors. Through an inter-agency assessment process, people with specific needs will be identified and provided with cash assistance, and referred for additional support and services within the PSN (people with specific needs) Network.

### 3. Community-based quick impact projects (short-term “interim solutions”)

In an environment characterized by growing forced displacement, increasing humanitarian needs and limited prospects for immediate returns, **an “interim solutions” approach will address the most urgent needs of displaced communities**. This will contribute to enhance cohesion and peaceful coexistence in mixed communities, and also provide a bridge to longer-term development approaches.

UNHCR will **target three specific community profiles** for small project interventions, identified through the enhanced protection monitoring system and partnerships in place in 2016:

- **Protracted IDP communities (and mixed communities including secondarily displaced returnees and urban poor):** These populations are often marginalized in informal squatter settlements, with difficulties in accessing schools, clinics, land tenure, suitable shelter, and livelihoods. Interventions will be targeted to address issues related to scarce resources, peaceful coexistence, and basic support for start-up livelihoods.
- **IDP return communities:** With urban/peri-urban areas being increasingly targeted in the conflict, UNHCR will address growing requirements to quickly restore conflict-damaged infrastructure (small bridges, roads, schools, clinics) in communities with relatively rapid flight/return patterns to facilitate the immediate reintegration of returning IDPs. Programme interventions will seek to quickly restore damaged infrastructures in disrupted communities and provide a quick infusion of cash into local economies through cash-for-work.
- **Refugee return communities:** UNHCR will continue to target communities of high return in areas it or implementing partners can access. To facilitate durable solutions, project interventions will include cash-for-shelter interventions, and small cash-for-work projects such as canal construction, road repair, water point rehabilitation. These initiatives will provide immediate cash to returnees to facilitate investments in household reintegration needs, as well as contribute to increasing absorption capacity for returnees in local communities. It should be noted that refugee returnees and returnees originally from undocumented populations in the Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran live side by side in areas of high return.

UNHCR envisions some variation in the **types of projects** to be implemented, based on local and regional differences, partner capacity, and the different profiles of the target communities. However, all projects will place a premium on **community-mobilization and involvement**, including that of women, in the identification of needs and programmatic solutions. Projects fall into two broad categories:

- **Construction/restoration of communal infrastructure:** Projects will include the construction of additional classrooms, construction of community centres and playgrounds, and the rehabilitation of water points. In cases of immediate IDP return, projects target the repair/reconstruction of conflict-damaged infrastructure, such as repair of irrigation canals or damaged roads, or cash-for-work initiatives to support reconstruction of homes belonging to people with specific needs, etc.

Interventions will be implemented on a simple cash-for-work basis, with the added objective of increasing household-level purchasing power and the ability to make individual investments. Moreover, communities will be required to contribute some degree of labour or materials in support of project interventions.

- **Start-up community-based livelihoods interventions:** Potential activities will be identified with communities and could include, for instance, simple animal husbandry projects, communal and/or kitchen gardens (based on availability of land), restoration or establishment of communal markets, fish farms, or quilt-making projects (to support winterization interventions) and purchase of small communal electricity-generating items (solar, generators).

Enhanced protection monitoring will be the primary channel for the identification of needs. Moreover, UNHCR intends to programme funds as required on a rolling basis to ensure that needs can be addressed in a timely manner, and projects will be supported through protection monitoring at community-level.

## 4. Targeted livelihood interventions

In Afghanistan, unemployment exceeds 40 per cent, and UNDP ranks the country 171 out of 188 countries in its 2015 Human Development Report. It is facing a severely limited economic absorption capacity, compounded by insecurity, capital flight, fragmentation and regionalization of the country's natural resource base, as well as the rise of illicit economic activities. With the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), over 200,000 people have lost their employment as they were directly or indirectly involved in supporting foreign troops.

The availability of viable livelihoods is a key decision-making factor regarding voluntary repatriation. Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries have cited their inability to find employment matching their skills as a main obstacle to return. UNHCR's return monitoring also strongly suggests that the lack of livelihoods opportunities is the key factor inhibiting sustainable reintegration.

According to the 2016 Afghanistan National Development Framework (ANDF) the Government estimates that more than 400,000 people enter the labour force every year. The Government therefore is prioritising job creation through promotion of growth and social measures. Specifically, the ANDF highlights the importance of investing in people to increase labour productivity: "the Government will invest in vocational education, engineering, managerial skills development, service industry needs, and in reforms to make Afghan labour markets more flexible and responsive to new needs". In addition, the National Youth Strategy (NYS, 2014) points to the need to empower youth: "the benefit of this population can only be harnessed if they are productively employed [...] and are well educated to ensure high return for their labour".

Moreover, research conducted amongst displaced people in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the region shows that the lack of livelihoods is the key obstacle to integration and reintegration of

refugees, returnees and IDPs. According to a World Bank/UNHCR study conducted in 2011<sup>4</sup>, IDPs have limited earning opportunities due to high illiteracy rates, limited work experience outside agriculture, and a lack of social networks. The limited coping mechanisms of returnees with joblessness, homelessness, and food insecurity on the increase, notably in urban settings, have also been pointed out in the 2014 People in Need (PIN) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) study.<sup>5</sup>

A shift is therefore needed from an assistance-based approach to a holistic approach to integrate the forcibly displaced in economic and social terms. To achieve durable solutions, facilitating and promoting returnee and IDP livelihoods strategies is a cornerstone to building their self-reliance and resilience.

The impact of forced displacement on economic well-being, including marginalization within the formal economy and increased reliance on informal or illicit economic activities, often reinforces negative coping strategies and various forms of exploitation and the denial of basic rights; it contributes to significant, and often dangerous, household mobility strategies to survive.

Reversing the downward trajectory of unemployment will require carefully crafted livelihood interventions and the identification of entry points for labour market integration for returnees and IDPs with a particular focus on youth. Such activities include the provision of market-oriented formal and informal vocational training, access to credit and financial services, and innovative support to community development councils and local trade guilds. UNHCR will focus particular attention on returnees and IDPs settled in those areas with significant employment potential such as urban and peri-urban settings, and in particular the growing youth population, concentrating on two specific areas of livelihood interventions:

- **Promote informal economic development in urban and peri-urban areas:** In partnership and/or close coordination with development agencies and the private sector, UNHCR will work towards improving formal and informal technical and entrepreneurial skills development, facilitate access to loans and credits to start businesses, and promote access to markets. To ensure returnees and IDPs are an integral part of local community governance and thereby participate in setting local development priorities, UNHCR will support the integration of IDPs, returnees and host communities into local decision making structures through training, awareness raising and support to community development councils.
- **Strengthening and expanding cross-border livelihood opportunities and potential:** In partnership with its offices in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, UNHCR will support cross-border economic initiatives to identify employment opportunities in Afghanistan. This would include providing support to specific refugee returnee groups in promoting small and medium sized enterprises through credits and loans and the diversification of household incomes.

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank/UNHCR (2011). *Research Study on IDPs in urban settings – Afghanistan*.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Hall (2014). *A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan cities*, for DRC and PIN.

## 5. Area-based solutions for protracted IDPs and returnees

In line with the National IDP Policy recommendations, provincial action plans are being developed with the potential for a joint approach between the central government, municipalities, and communities. UNHCR will join hands with partners to support **localized community based approaches aiming at longer-term integration of communities in protracted displacement, as well as reintegration of returnees**. At national and sub-national levels, UNHCR will work closely with other agencies to implement such approaches and ensure the close involvement of communities in setting priorities and programme design. UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of returnees and IDPs into the development agenda via the ANDF, national priority programmes, and the Citizen's Charter.

UNHCR will support on a pilot basis some projects where governors have made commitments to allocate land with security of tenure to returnees and IDPs in selected cities. The provision of land titles or other forms of occupancy recognition (such as occupancy certificates) are being explored in accordance with the current legal framework.

UNHCR will support partners in community mobilization and undertake projects to facilitate integration in current settlements, as well as alternative, long-term settlement on newly allocated land, including support to livelihoods, shelter, water and sanitation, and education. Special attention will be given to youth and women's empowerment as well as inclusion of IDPs and returnees into local representative structures such as community development councils.



# Islamic Republic of Iran

Target population: 951,142 Afghan refugees<sup>6</sup>

Requirements: USD 136,263,234 (July 2016 - December 2017)

	2016 ExCom approved budget (July- Dec)	2016 Additional requirements	2017*	Total
1. Access to protection: Legal and Policy framework	983,124	884,165	6,040,536	7,907,825
2. Access to basic services	19,671,134	3,441,337	55,374,608	78,487,079
3. Youth empowerment	11,969,878	1,677,110	30,083,437	43,730,425
4. Durable solutions	1,433,416	57,905	2,400,466	3,891,787
5. Advocacy, coordination and partnership	576,582	41,620	1,627,916	2,246,118
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,634,134</b>	<b>6,102,137</b>	<b>95,526,963</b>	<b>136,263,234</b>

Notes: All amounts in this table are in USD.

\*Pending approval by the 67th Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee.

The Islamic Republic of Iran hosts 951,142 documented Afghan refugees according to the Government's figure from mid-November 2015. Refugees are registered and issued refugee identity cards (*Amayesh*) by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Of these, approximately 97 per cent live in urban areas while the remaining 3 per cent reside in 20 settlements managed by UNHCR's main government counterpart, the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA) of the Ministry of Interior. UNHCR assists *Amayesh* cardholders, all of whom have access to primary and secondary education in public schools as well as basic health care. While refugees formally have access to employment in some 87 different job categories, they also work informally in a variety of other industries not officially authorised by the Government.

<sup>6</sup> In addition, there is an estimated 1,5 million – 2 million undocumented Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran

In addition, at least 620,000 Afghans who hold Afghan passports and Iranian visas also live in the Islamic Republic of Iran. They either previously held *Amayesh* cards or opted for the alternative stay arrangement scheme (ASA), or were undocumented and benefitted from the comprehensive regularization plan. Visas allow them to access services unavailable to refugees (such as driving licences, university education, greater job opportunities, and freedom to travel out of the country).

The Islamic Republic of Iran estimates that around 1.5 - 2 million undocumented Afghans also reside in the country. They are largely tolerated. Following a decree by the Supreme Leader in May 2015 declaring that all children have access to public education, the Government has started gradual registration of undocumented children, of which some 48,000 were already enrolled in schools. Recently, the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan and Iran agreed to regularise the status of the undocumented Afghans, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been preparing for the staggered registration of this particular population.

According to the recent results of profiling of Afghans in Greece conducted by UNHCR, a considerable proportion of them have resided in the Islamic Republic of Iran either as refugees, on Iranian visas, or undocumented. While the numbers of such Afghans reduced in the winter of 2015, this situation remains of concern to UNHCR. The protracted displacement of Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran presents a different set of challenges, and the aspirations and needs of people of concern is often more sophisticated in nature than in traditional emergencies. In particular, most young Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran are second or third-generation refugees, born and raised in urban areas, who find it difficult to identify their future with that of Afghanistan which is mired in conflicts and economic hardship. However, despite the efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran to improve access to basic services and livelihoods, many of them are unable to break the 'glass ceiling' to access a better economic situation in the country. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is further considering how to register the undocumented and extend more services to Afghans.

Through the resilience and solutions measures, UNHCR will provide greater support to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in documenting all people in need of protection, and ensuring that access to basic services can be further enhanced for Afghan refugees living in the country, whilst working towards longer term solutions for this protracted refugee population.

## **1. Access to protection: Legal and Policy framework**

### **Registration of undocumented Afghans and access to asylum**

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has signalled its intention to register the 2 million undocumented Afghans residing in the country in a phased manner. It has sought UNHCR's support in this regard, and discussions are currently underway.

While most of the costs will be borne by the Government, UNHCR could complement these efforts through capacity building of the Government, including trainings and workshops, deployment of trained personnel to provinces and borders, support facilities at border points, and assisting with the

procurement of registration equipment. Information will also be disseminated to Afghan communities via appropriate communication campaigns.

Additionally, this process will, over time, enhance the Government's capacity to assess cases for asylum, both at the individual and group level. This will allow for a more protection-sensitive border management system in the country, and ensure that those individuals and groups identified by the Government are documented and have access to protection and assistance in the country.

## 2. Access to basic services

### Continued access to health services

For the first time in 2015, the Government allowed the inclusion of all registered refugees in the universal public health insurance scheme. In addition to the health benefits of this scheme, it helped reduce the financial burden shouldered by many refugees due to high medical expenses which often resulted in school drop outs, child labour and other social harms.

UNHCR will continue to support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in developing a more comprehensive and attractive **Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) scheme**, and ensure that a greater number of refugees subscribe to it. An enhanced scheme will include hospitalisation and other services, similar to what Iranians receive. UNHCR, in support to the Government will aim and extend its support so that all refugees, including the vulnerable and refugees with special diseases (thalassemia, haemophilia, renal failure, kidney transplant, and multiple sclerosis) benefit from a more comprehensive health insurance package and coverage aligned to the health insurance package made available to nationals.

UNHCR will improve access to **quality primary health care** in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and also ensure access to specialist referral care at secondary and tertiary levels, and HIV/AIDS prevention, and rehabilitation services to refugees with disabilities through community-based rehabilitation programmes. Given the large number of children and youth in the country, these programmes are important to improve the health status of younger generations, especially women and girls.

### Targeted support for people with specific needs

UNHCR and its partners will ensure that individuals with specific needs and those at risk are better **identified**, including through the use of information contained in databases, community outreach, and trends analysis. Multi-functional teams will help find **solutions to their immediate concerns**. Specifically, some areas of focus include preventing and responding to SGBV, protection and the empowerment of children and youth, and protection of the disabled, sick and elderly.

Through enhanced community outreach, UNHCR will identify and refer refugees with specific needs to essential service providers such as hospitals, rehabilitation centres, government organizations and NGO partners in the areas of health, WASH, nutrition, education and livelihoods support. However,

when there are gaps in services or in urgent situations, UNHCR will directly assist the most vulnerable through cash-based interventions or with core relief items. Over time, UNHCR will work to empower the State Welfare Organisation (SWO) as well as other government agencies to carry out more of these functions.

## Infrastructure support for refugee settlements

Although settlements host only around 3 per cent of the total refugee population in the Islamic Republic of Iran, many of these residents are some of the most vulnerable and require specific interventions to address their needs. As most refugee settlements were constructed over 20 years ago, the shelters and other infrastructure (water, gas, electricity and public spaces) are in dire need of maintenance or rehabilitation to ensure the sanitary conditions and **physical safety of Afghan refugees, and to give them a more dignified life in the country**. UNHCR will endeavour to complement the government's effort in this regard. Some of these improvements will also benefit to the extent possible host communities living nearby.

## 3. Youth empowerment

### Support to community empowerment

UNHCR will expand and strengthen community-based/led activities and further enhance its dialogue with refugees. With the support of UNHCR, refugees will develop and implement projects that address some of the protection problems they are facing (e.g. child labour, school drop outs, support to vulnerable refugees). These high-impact projects **empower refugee communities**, strengthen **community bonds**, aim to reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid, and promote social cohesion. A set of tools that systematize this activity is already being developed by UNHCR.

### Access to primary and higher education

UNHCR will focus on **increasing school enrolment and reducing dropouts** especially for children completing primary school. Various incentives and awareness-raising efforts will be directed to Afghan families, especially targeting girls, as some Afghans cannot afford the costs of sending children to school while others are reluctant to send girls to school due to traditional practices. UNHCR is working closely with the Ministry of Education but also with UNICEF, UNESCO and other partners on this matter.

UNHCR will enhance its contribution towards the **construction or rehabilitation of schools** in areas hosting vulnerable refugees and host communities. This will also ensure that **undocumented Afghans** are able to access formal education following the Supreme Leader's decree to this effect.

Following the revision of the regulations on registration of foreign nationals in the Islamic Republic of Iran in May 2016, the refugee-specific school fees of USD 70-90 per child will be discontinued and refugees will receive the same treatment as nationals when it comes to payment for schools and other curricular and extra-curricular activities. UNHCR is advocating for the implementation of the directives on removal of **fees** and reduction of other education-related costs and provide other services such as

educational kits, to ensure refugees have access to education institutions. UNHCR will monitor the implementation of the revised regulations.

UNHCR will continue advocating with the government to increase opportunities for refugees to **access higher/university education**, both in relation to easing restrictions on the admissions process as well as reducing their enrolment/ tuition fees. UNHCR will also explore increasing scholarship opportunities for refugee students. UNHCR will enhance its support to **literacy courses** for adolescents and adults. It will also provide **training to refugee university students** to enable them to teach their communities how to read and write.

## Self-reliance and livelihoods

UNHCR will enhance refugees' access to **employment opportunities** through the provision of income-generating tools, skills and vocational training, as well as cash-based incentives or grants to refugees to establish and expand businesses (including home-based businesses). These interventions will be made while also ensuring that **host communities**, especially those who are vulnerable, are also included.

UNHCR is establishing a link between skilled Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran and job opportunities in Afghanistan. UNHCR will also facilitate access of refugees to **financial services** including revolving loans and micro credits (self-help groups). Moreover, UNHCR will strengthen advocacy with the Government to expand job opportunities, including internship/apprenticeship programs for refugees/students, with special focus on women and girls. This is especially important for the highly skilled and educated community members who can support others in need of jobs.

## 4. Durable solutions

### Voluntary repatriation

UNHCR will continue to facilitate voluntary return of refugees to Afghanistan under the SSAR. In addition to providing information on services and access to return areas, and supporting the processing of returnees, UNHCR will provide a **voluntary return and reintegration grant** to returnees at the encashment centres in Afghanistan.

In 2015, 2,846 refugees were assisted by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR to return to Afghanistan voluntarily. Most of them did so in order to pursue tertiary education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as they are required to return and obtain passports to enrol in their further education.

### Resettlement and legal pathways to migration

Continuing to enhance resettlement opportunities is essential for refugees with specific needs. Simultaneously, UNHCR will develop partnerships and seek opportunities to ensure refugees can work and study abroad. This would be critical in ensuring that there are legal pathways by which

refugees can access better opportunities elsewhere, while at the same time sharing the responsibility for Afghan refugees with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## 5. Advocacy, coordination and partnership

### Awareness-raising and advocacy

High inflation, economic hardship and rising unemployment have contributed to undermining host communities' tolerance towards both registered and undocumented Afghans in the context of this protracted situation.

UNHCR will continue to promote awareness, raise the visibility of refugee issues, and **improve co-existence and positive engagement between refugees and the host community**. UNHCR will also support social and sports activities and public events to promote peaceful co-existence, encouraging friendly interaction between the host community and Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Such activities will improve mutual understanding and eliminate negative perceptions.

UNHCR will continue its dialogue with refugees, particularly with young refugees, and disseminate **information about dangerous journeys to Europe** among refugee communities in order to prevent refugees from falling victim to human trafficking. In order to ensure protection from exploitation by opportunistic people smugglers, UNHCR will raise refugees' awareness through various communication means. These will include organizing information sessions at public events, printing posters and distributing pamphlets, sharing targeted messages through social media, and posting announcements on the UNHCR website.

UNHCR will continue to work closely with the **media** to ensure that refugees and refugee protection in the Islamic Republic of Iran are considered positively by the Government, civil society and host communities. This will be done mainly by demonstrating the contribution that refugees are making to the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as highlighting the work that UNHCR, the Government and other partners are doing to ensure that refugees and host communities are supported. In addition, UNHCR will organize briefing sessions for **journalists** to strengthen media relations, to improve awareness among the media about issues of concern for UNHCR, and to provide a foundation for counterbalancing negative media stories.

### Coordination and partnership

UNHCR is leading efforts to build upon partnerships and strengthen coordination for the successful implementation of the resilience and solutions measures in the Islamic Republic of Iran, by expanding the SSAR coordination mechanisms. At the senior management level, UNHCR will advocate for progressive policies with the host Government, promote regional cooperation on resilience and solutions, and strategically engage donor countries in resource mobilization. At working level, UNHCR will facilitate and expand technical coordination of the key humanitarian assistance sectors and stakeholders, for example in protection, health, education and livelihoods, as well as with the Government, UN agencies, and international and national NGOs.



The **Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA)** of the Ministry of Interior remains UNHCR's operational counterpart in the government in implementing the resilience and solutions measures. Regular coordination between BAFIA and UNHCR will continue, including multi-functional teams for key intervention areas at technical level and advocacy for progressive policies at senior management level. UNHCR will also continue working closely with line ministries, including the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

To ensure effective multipurpose cash programming for refugees, UNHCR and BAFIA will lead an inclusive coordination platform to facilitate learning and sharing, a harmonized approach among actors, and avoid duplication of **multi-sectoral cash assistance**. It is recognized that cash is and will continue to be used across a wide variety of sectors. UNHCR is already coordinating with WFP on food assistance for refugees in settlements, alongside UNHCR's own cash-based assistance to access higher education, health care, livelihoods, support for shelter, people with disabilities, voluntary return, and resettlement. UNHCR is currently exploring further ways to diversify its **cash-based interventions**, enhancing its expertise and planning to conduct assessments.

Regarding humanitarian actors, UNHCR will **enhance and expand technical coordination with its key partners** (with UN agencies, international and national NGOs) through sectoral working groups to promote information-sharing, avoid duplication and to guide monitoring of humanitarian assistance. Within the SSAR framework, UNHCR works with partners to ensure interventions are effective, targeted and efficient, and guided to advance resiliency and solutions-based initiatives within refugee communities.

# Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Target population: 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees  
 Requirement: USD 173,188,753 (July 2016 - December 2017)

	2016 ExCom approved budget (July- Dec)	2017*	Total
1. Access to protection: Legal and policy framework	4,414,725	10,147,861	14,562,586
2. Access to basic services	20,221,398	35,108,432	55,329,830
3. Youth empowerment	17,798,868	42,908,077	60,706,946
4. Durable solutions	8,251,733	25,048,647	33,300,380
5. Advocacy, coordination and partnership	3,524,692	5,764,319	9,289,012
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,211,416</b>	<b>118,977,337</b>	<b>173,188,753</b>

Notes: All amounts in this table are in USD.

\*Pending approval by the 67th Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee.

After nearly four decades of protracted displacement, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan continues to host over **1.5 million registered Afghan refugees, holders of Proof of Registration (PoR) cards**, in addition to approximately **1 million undocumented Afghans**. The political, socio-economic, financial and environmental consequences associated with this protracted refugee presence have contributed to a sense of asylum fatigue among the host communities and placed a heavy burden on the over-strained public delivery systems, coupled with complex internal security challenges.

Yet durable solutions for Afghan refugees remain elusive, as the prevailing security situation and limited absorption capacity in Afghanistan affects prospects for any large-scale voluntary repatriation in the near future. There is growing concern that the attention of the international community has moved to new emergencies and refugee crises. Pakistan has been calling for **sustained international engagement** in sharing the responsibility for hosting Afghan refugees and finding solutions for them. As such, UNHCR's operation in Pakistan stands at a critical juncture in efforts to advance innovative solutions approaches through **joint interventions by both humanitarian and**

**development actors.** This constitutes an effort to move away from prolonged dependence on open-ended humanitarian aid (“care and maintenance”) by enhancing social cohesion and building empowerment, resilience and productive capacities of both refugees and their host communities through targeted investments into national public delivery systems (health, education, social protection).

Under the overall framework of the SSAR, the UNHCR operation in Pakistan continues to be guided by its 2015-2017 strategy for Pakistan which revolves around three key elements: 1) solutions; 2) protection and assistance; and 3) partnerships and collaboration. **The Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative**, which forms a cornerstone of the implementation of the SSAR in Pakistan, remains the principal responsibility-sharing platform for maintaining temporary protection space, promoting social cohesion and enhancing community acceptance of Afghans in Pakistan. As such, it will serve as the central delivery platform for the implementation of the resilience and solutions measures in Pakistan, linking with efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its principal commitment of “leaving no one behind,” including refugees and their host communities.

## 1. Access to protection: Legal and policy framework

While voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees remains the preferred solution, the Government of Pakistan recognizes that the prevailing security situations, as well as the lack of sustainable reintegration opportunities in Afghanistan, affect prospects for sizeable voluntary returns in the current environment. As such, the Government of Pakistan acknowledges that the status quo can no longer help address this protracted situation, and that sustainable solutions can only be achieved through comprehensive strategic planning which empowers refugees and enhances resilience.

Against this background, UNHCR will continue advocating for the adoption of the Government’s **draft Policy on Voluntary Repatriation and Management of Afghan Nationals beyond 2015**, currently pending endorsement by the federal cabinet. The draft policy proposes (i) extension of the validity of the PoR cards and of the Tripartite Agreement on Voluntary Repatriation until the end of 2017; (ii) continued protection for those in need; (iii) implementation of temporary management arrangements for different categories of people, that would allow Afghan refugees to acquire Afghan identity/travel documents with Pakistani visas with residence/work permits; and (iv) adoption of a national refugee law.

UNHCR will continue to carry out its **core mandate activities**, including facilitated voluntary repatriation, provision of legal assistance, registration of new asylum-seekers and refugee status determination, and resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees. To ensure civil and birth registration and documentation, UNHCR will continue its support to the six PoR card modification centres, which in 2015 processed over 130,000 applications for PoR card modifications due to birth registration, lost/stolen cards, etc. In addition, UNHCR, as a member of the national civil registration and vital statistics working group, will continue to advocate for universal birth registration.

Since 66 per cent of PoR card holders reside outside of the 54 refugee villages (mostly in urban or semi-urban settings) UNHCR, in close collaboration with the Government, will strive to implement the **urban refugee strategy**. Efforts will target access to protection and services, as well as community outreach with the overall objective of strengthening resilience, in line with UNHCR's global policies on alternatives to camps and community-based protection.

UNHCR will continue its advocacy in support of the implementation of the bilateral agreement between the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan to register all **undocumented Afghans** in Pakistan for the purpose of identity in a comprehensive database, followed by issuance of necessary travel documents by the Government of Afghanistan. This initiative would help ensure identification and management of cross-border population movements, also contributing to potential efforts to develop mutually acceptable border management systems. To complement these efforts, UNHCR will support the Government of Pakistan in identifying practical approaches to the management and regulation of mixed migratory movements, along the lines of UNHCR's 10-Point Plan of Action on refugee protection and international migration (i.e. data collection and analysis, establishment of profiling, referral systems and differentiated procedures for different groups on the move, addressing secondary movements, etc.).

## 2. Access to basic services

In 2014, UNHCR began the implementation of a five-year health strategy in Pakistan to responsibly disengage from blanket health assistance in refugee villages towards provision of more cost-effective and sustainable targeted assistance for vulnerable refugees. Interventions aimed at building the capacity of refugees through tailored health training programmes will enhance the resilience of the refugee community, enabling refugees to cater for their own health needs by effective delivery of critical services through a community-based health care system. Importantly, this shift will also create livelihoods opportunities. Under this strategy, the operation will continue to focus on four overarching priorities: (1) Enhanced collaboration with the Government and the UN agencies; (2) gradual and responsible disengagement from curative services in the basic health units model; (3) development of a pool of refugee health professionals; and (4) maintaining essential preventative health services through mother and child health care activities.

The new strategy aligns with SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.) and the commitment of the Government of Pakistan to improve neonatal, maternal and child health care services at community level, leading to reduced complications associated with childbirth. Concurrently, through RAHA projects, UNHCR will continue to invest in upgrading perinatal and child care services in remote health facilities by setting up and equipping labour rooms, strengthening the cold chain supply, and management of the department of health immunization services that contribute to the overall reduction in childhood morbidity and mortality.

### 3. Youth empowerment

74 per cent of registered Afghan refugees are second or third generation, born in Pakistan. More than half of the Afghan refugee population is under the age of 15. Youth (15-24 years old) comprise 20 per cent of the total Afghan refugee population. Children and youth thus constitute nearly 70 per cent of the Afghan refugee population in the country, a fact that underlines the vulnerability of displaced communities and necessitates robust investment in resilience-building and empowerment with a view to enhancing prospects for solutions.

In Pakistan, youth empowerment is being pursued through a series of inter-linked interventions in the areas of education, skills training and livelihoods support. While self-reliance helps to significantly enhance social protection, cohesion and peaceful co-existence with host communities, it also helps to build resilience and thereby yields important dividends for stability in the region and beyond. Furthermore, this investment in building the human capital of the Afghan refugee youth has a direct impact on the future prosperity and stability of Afghanistan by contributing to prevent situations when disenchanted youth may resort to negative coping strategies such as radicalisation and/or other anti-social behaviours.

Against this background, and in alignment with the 2016-2018 refugee education strategy, UNHCR's 2015-2017 country strategy, as well as the protection and urban refugee management strategies in Pakistan, UNHCR will prioritize interventions that will seek to:

- Enhance access to, and quality of, primary education (for maximum transferability to secondary education), particularly for girls, through investment in national education facilities in urban and rural areas with high concentrations of Afghan refugees;
- Equip young people with transferrable skills through enhanced access to national (certified) vocational training facilities;
- Empower and mobilize youth communities to seek and implement solutions at community level.

Envisaged investment in **national education** and **vocational training/skills development facilities** will help to promote the inclusion and access of Afghan refugees into public/national systems and simultaneously benefit host communities. The RAHA initiative will serve as a platform for the implementation of these interventions. Through RAHA funding and programming, UNHCR and partners will seek to enhance **the absorption capacity and quality of education provided in Pakistani schools**, so as to allow for inclusive enrolment and retention of Afghan refugee children. In addition to shifting away from unsustainable provision of education in schools in refugee villages by UNHCR towards **long-term solutions based on cooperation with development actors**, this approach will simultaneously yield benefits for the local Pakistani population.

The critical window of opportunity in 2016 is the commitment of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly **SDG 4** (Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning), which have been recently fully endorsed by the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. This is further in full alignment with

the 18th Constitutional Amendment (Article 25-A) which stipulated free and compulsory education as a constitutional right of all children on the territory of Pakistan.

UNHCR is working closely with federal and provincial authorities, as well as the SDG 4 leads, UNESCO and UNICEF, to ensure that refugee children and youth are fully mainstreamed within all relevant initiatives, and that their needs are fully reflected in the new education sector plans and national development planning and processes at both federal and provincial levels. UNHCR will actively engage within the global platform for education to be launched in 2016.

## 4. Durable solutions

UNHCR will continue to facilitate voluntary return of refugees to Afghanistan under the SSAR. In addition to providing information on services and access to return areas and supporting the processing of returnees at the voluntary repatriation centres in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, UNHCR will provide a **voluntary return and reintegration grant** to returnees at the encashment centres in Afghanistan.

In spite of several high-level fundraising missions led by the Minister of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR) of Afghanistan, supported by the Minister of States and Frontier Regions of Pakistan and facilitated by the UN High Commissioner during the summer and autumn of 2015, it has not been possible to get the required donor financial support for an Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package (EVRRP). The EVRRP, as endorsed by the quadripartite steering committee, was intended to be a special grant provided by MORR to returnees to support them in their integration, pending full access to government services and development programmes. In view of this lack of donor interest and given the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, this concept will need to be revisited. Meanwhile, UNHCR is planning to double its voluntary repatriation and reintegration grant covering transport costs and immediate needs upon return.

Since large-scale returns to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are not expected to take place in the near future, UNHCR will strive to enhance its support to host communities and continue building the capacity of the Government to manage and assist the protracted refugee population. To pursue this objective, UNHCR will continue to seek close collaboration with key development actors to channel investment into national and local government structures and delivery systems. This will help ensure greater government national ownership, aid efficiency, and better management of current as well as future risks and crises.

At the same time, UNHCR will continue outreach efforts to identify people in need of protection interventions in order to empower them and further help build resilience. Through the tripartite commission framework and under the draft policy on voluntary repatriation and management of Afghan nationals beyond 2015, UNHCR will pursue avenues to realize temporary management arrangements for certain categories of Afghan refugees as a further resilience strengthening measure.



## 5. Advocacy, coordination and partnership

To support the above measures, UNHCR will continue enhancing its cooperation and partnerships with a variety of stakeholders in Pakistan, with a view to pursuing joint advocacy and forging **stronger synergies between humanitarian and development interventions** towards solutions to the world's most protracted refugee crisis. This collaboration, firmly embedded in the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and its central commitment of "leaving no one behind," will contribute to efforts to move away from short-term "care and maintenance" practices towards long-term and sustainable strategies aimed at building the resilience and self-reliance of both Afghan refugees and their Pakistani host communities through investments in national/public systems.

As an important first step in this endeavour, UNHCR will be part of a development partner and international financial institution-led group in Pakistan that will advocate with the Government on key messages linked to the pursuit of SDG 3 and SDG 4 in general, and UNHCR's youth empowerment efforts within the SSAR in particular. The recently concluded Wilton Park discussions (co-hosted by DFID, the World Bank and UNHCR) on new approaches to managing protracted refugee situations further reiterate the importance of working through national systems and meaningful initiatives to empower host communities and refugees.

UNHCR will continue pro-actively engaging key line ministries and provincial authorities to further foster cooperation at policy and operational levels and enhance the capacity of the relevant authorities. The well-established cooperation within the UN system will continue, particularly with UNESCO and UNICEF in the areas of education and youth empowerment, with WHO on SDG 3, with UNDP within the RAHA initiative, and with the office of the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA on key policy and advocacy efforts. In addition to close cooperation with the World Bank, DFID and other development partners, new areas for cooperation are being explored with leading national development platforms, such as the Benazir Income Support Programme or the National Rural Support Programme. UNHCR will continue cooperating with Aik Hunar Aik Nagar on livelihoods and with Alif Ailaan on joint youth empowerment messaging and initiatives.

UNHCR will further build on the recently initiated advocacy and awareness raising initiatives with prominent academic and research institutions, including the National Defence University, the South Asian Strategic Stability Institute, or the Regional Peace Institute. An eminent people group has been established to promote engagement of key civil society actors and opinion leaders in the refugee and solutions discourse. The operation will continue pro-actively engaging the donor community, including through the well-established "Friends of SSAR" group or joint field trips and project inaugurations.

For more information and enquiries, please contact:

**The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

*[hqfr00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqfr00@unhcr.org)*

P.O. Box 2500  
1211 Geneva 2