



The Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees:

An ADSP & ICVA Explainer

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A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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ACRONYMS

ADSP	Asia Displacement Solutions Platform
CCAR	Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees
DRIVE	Document Renewal and Identification Verification Exercise
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GRF	Global Refugee Forum
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IFI	International Financial Institution
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
MIRPS	Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PARRs	Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration
Q4	Quadripartite Steering Committee
SSAR	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
SP	Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. INTRODUCTION

The **International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)** is a global network of non-government organisations (NGOs) whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice. Established in 1962, ICVA has grown into a diverse network of 160 NGO members operating in 160 countries at global, regional, national and local levels. Since 2016, in line with [ICVA's pledge](#) at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum and [ICVA's Strategic Priorities 2022-2024](#), ICVA's role in supporting NGOs' engagement with the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and follow-up to the Global Refugee Forum focused on information dissemination, collective mobilization, and serving as a link on some specific pledges and the Global Compact on Refugees arrangements such as the Support Platforms for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. ICVA has members in all countries within which the Support Platform for the SSAR operates.

The **Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP)** is a joint initiative of the Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which aims to contribute to developing solutions for populations affected by displacement in the region. Drawing upon its members' operational presence throughout Asia, and its extensive advocacy networks, ADSP engages in evidence-based advocacy initiatives to support improved outcomes for displacement-affected communities from Afghanistan and Myanmar. ADSP was formed in Afghanistan in 2018 and has member presence in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan. Since its inception, ADSP has been engaged in research, advocacy and coordination activities supporting long-term solutions for displaced Afghans. ADSP's [2023 – 2025 Strategy](#) commits the organisation to engage with multilateral policy frameworks like the Support Platform for the SSAR. The aim is to strengthen these entities and ensure that decisions and policy informed by input from civil society and non-governmental organisations.



ADSP capacity building training with the Afghan diaspora in 2022. ADSP photo / Iffat Anjum

It is in this context that ADSP and ICVA present this *Explainer to the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees*. Due to the organic evolution of the Support Platform – for many in the humanitarian community – the Support Platform and its ways of working has appeared quite abstract. However, after three relatively short years (made shorter by the COVID-19 pandemic), the SSAR Support Platform, as one of the three Support Platforms launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, has become an established mechanism for international cooperation in relation to the displacement situation in South-West Asia.

We hope that this paper clarifies many questions and charts a path forward towards more effective and collaborative engagements for the improvement of protection space for displaced Afghans.

2. BACKGROUND: WHAT IS THE SOLUTIONS STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES (SSAR)?

Afghanistan has been plagued by conflict, drought, and instability for decades as well as the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to multiple humanitarian emergencies and the displacement of millions of people both within the country and in neighboring countries. According to UNHCR, as at the end of 2022, the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan continue to host some 8.2 million Afghans, including 5.2 million registered refugees and persons in refugee-like situations, in addition to over 3 million Afghans with other documentation statuses. 3.2 million people are also estimated to be internally displaced within Afghanistan. The protracted nature of the refugee situation has created significant challenges for both refugees themselves and the countries that host them.

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees¹ (SSAR), adopted by Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and UNHCR and endorsed by the international community in 2012, remains the cornerstone of the approach in the subregion to enable durable solutions.



International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, Opening Session. UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

The adoption of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees was a major step in opening and advancing regional discussions and approaches towards solutions for displaced Afghans. Moreover, the SSAR promotes the core tenets of burden and responsibility sharing in the quest for durable solutions.

The first objective of the SSAR is to **support voluntary repatriation for Afghan refugees** who wish to return to their country of origin. While acknowledging that the current situation in Afghanistan is not conducive to voluntary returns² as a durable solution for Afghan refugees, UNHCR recognises that voluntary repatriation remains the preferred solution for many refugees and continues to support Afghan refugees who want to return voluntarily, in safety and in dignity. As such, the SSAR includes measures to support and facilitate this process. This includes providing refugees with accurate information about the situation in Afghanistan, assistance with obtaining necessary documentation, and support for reintegration (see Objective three below) into their communities of origin.

The SSAR also includes measures to address the root causes of displacement in Afghanistan, such as supporting peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts, which not only benefit or target refugee returnees but also the host communities and increasingly IDP returnees. The measures and support in Afghanistan use an area-based approach, with currently 80 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs), where UN Agencies, international and national non-government organisations, and civil society actors are collaborating to build the resilience of the local communities. Since 2021, this support is channeled outside of the de facto authorities and goes directly to the affected communities.

1 <https://ssar-platform.org/documents/international-conference-solutions-strategy-afghan-refugees-support-voluntary>

2 UNHCR, Non-Return Advisory <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/611a4c5c4.pdf>, issued in August 2021

The second objective of the SSAR is to **provide assistance to the major host countries** i.e., the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, to registered Afghan refugees, and Afghans with various statuses of documentation, who are unable or unwilling to return to Afghanistan, and the communities hosting them. Currently these two countries collectively host some 8.2 million Afghans, including 5.2 million registered refugees and persons in refugee-like situations.

Iran is the second largest refugee hosting country in the world, it hosts over 3.4 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations from Afghanistan, of an estimated 4.5 million Afghans in Iran of varying status and documentation. According to estimates by the Government of Iran, over 1 million Afghans have fled to Iran since January 2021. The assistance to the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan includes measures to improve access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities for refugees and Afghans with varying status and documentation, as well as measures to address legal and protection issues. To facilitate refugees' access to essential services and protection as well as their relations with host communities, the SSAR includes measures to promote partnerships and collaboration between these stakeholders, as well as measures to ensure that the needs and perspectives of refugees are taken into account to create transitional solutions in the absence of formal integration opportunities.

The third objective of the SSAR is to **strengthen reintegration for Afghan refugee returnees**, through supporting the voluntary, dignified and orderly return of Afghan refugees once conditions are conducive, and supporting their sustainable reintegration.

The SSAR aims to bridge the humanitarian-development gap by introducing multi-sectoral, community-level programming with the hope of anchoring returnees meaningfully within Afghanistan and to prevent secondary movements. For the same reason, the Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform (see below) consists of both humanitarian and development actors.

Overall, the SSAR represents a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the refugee situation as it relates to Afghanistan, with the goal of providing durable solutions for refugees that considers their diverse needs and circumstances. The strategy is based on the principle of refugee protection, which recognises the inherent dignity, rights and worth of every individual, and the importance of ensuring that refugees are able to live their lives with dignity and respect.

The implementation of the SSAR requires the involvement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, and communities. To ensure the realization of “burden-and responsibility-sharing” for the protracted Afghan refugee situation—a key principle of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) — it's essential to broaden support of the international community for the SSAR's objectives. Ergo, UNHCR works closely with these stakeholders to develop and implement programs and initiatives that support the objectives of the SSAR.

The Quadripartite Steering Committee of the SSAR

The Quadripartite Steering Committee, consisting of the three Governments of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and UNHCR, has guided the implementation of the SSAR at the regional level since its creation. The Quadripartite Steering Committee, or 'Q4' provides overall leadership and coordination, sets strategy direction and promotes informed decision-making for the implementation of the three pillars of the Solution Strategy.

The relevant ministers of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan chair the Q4 meeting on a rotational basis. The last meeting of the Quadripartite Steering Committee took place in Tehran, on 12 December 2022, with the participation of UNHCR, the Governments of Iran and Pakistan, and the de facto authorities of Afghanistan. At the meeting, the Quadripartite Steering Committee was informed of the progress and support by the SSAR Support Platform. Besides the Quadripartite Steering Committee, also two Tripartite Steering Committees set the overall strategy for the SSAR, the Tripartite Steering Committee between UNHCR, Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Tripartite Steering Committee between UNHCR, Afghanistan and Iran.

Together the Quadripartite and Tripartite Steering Committees define the priorities and potential areas for support from the SSAR Support Platform and its Core Group.

3. THE THREE GLOBAL SUPPORT PLATFORMS³

In December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees. The GCR – the culmination of a two-year process of extensive consultations with Member States, international organisations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts – articulated a fresh model of cooperation and joint objectives. The four GCR objectives are:

1. Easing the pressures on host countries;
2. Enhancing refugee self-reliance;
3. Expanding access to third-country solutions; and
4. Supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity

Paragraphs 22 to 27 of the Global Compact on Refugees⁴ describe the Support Platforms:

22. *In support of national arrangements, host countries would be able to seek the activation of a Support Platform.*

23. *The Support Platform would enable context-specific support for refugees and concerned host countries and communities. In a spirit of partnership and in line with host country ownership and leadership, its functions would include:*

- *galvanizing political commitment and advocacy for prevention, protection, response and solutions.*
- *mobilizing financial, material and technical assistance, as well as resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries, in support of the comprehensive plan, where applicable, drawing on Global Refugee Forum pledges.*
- *facilitating coherent humanitarian and development responses, including through the early and sustained engagement of development actors in support of host communities and refugees; and*
- *supporting comprehensive policy initiatives to ease pressure on host countries, build resilience and self-reliance, and find solutions.*

24. *Upon the request of concerned host countries or countries of origin, where appropriate, a Support Platform could be activated/deactivated and assisted by UNHCR, in close consultation with relevant States that have committed to contributing in principle, taking into account existing response efforts and political, peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives. Criteria for activation would include:*

- *a large-scale and/or complex refugee situation where the response capacity of a host State is or is expected to be overwhelmed; or*
- *a protracted refugee situation where the host State(s) requires considerable additional support, and/or a major opportunity for a solution arises (e.g., large-scale voluntary repatriation to the country of origin).*

25. *Each Support Platform would benefit from the leadership and engagement of a group of States to mobilize contributions and support, which may take different forms (para 23). The composition of this group would be specific to the context. Other relevant stakeholders would be invited to engage as appropriate.*

26. *Support Platforms would not be fixed bodies or undertake operational activities. They would draw on pre-announced expressions of interest (including at the Global Refugee Forum) and standby arrangements. They would complement and interact with existing coordination mechanisms for humanitarian and development cooperation. In consultation with participating States, UNHCR would ensure regular reporting on the work of the Support Platforms to its Executive Committee, the United Nations General Assembly and the Global Refugee Forums, including to facilitate exchange of information, practices and experiences between different platforms.*

27. *The strategy for support by a Platform could draw on a wide range of options. It could initiate a solidarity conference to generate support for the comprehensive plan, where this would add value and not duplicate other processes, bearing in mind the call for humanitarian assistance to be flexible, multi-year and unearmarked. A solidarity conference would be situation-specific, providing a strategic vehicle to garner broad-based support for host States or countries of origin, encompassing States, development actors, civil society, local communities and the private sector, and seeking financial, material and technical contributions, as well as resettlement and complementary pathways for admission.*

³ A fourth Support Platform for the situation in and around the Central African Republic is also being launched to bring additional attention and support to this often-forgotten crisis.

⁴ The Global Compact on Refugees: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet>



2019 Global Refugee Forum. UNHCR / Andrew McConnell

In December 2019, as a follow-up to the GCR, the inaugural Global Refugee Forum was held in Geneva, Switzerland. The aim of the Forum was to translate the principle of international responsibility into action through pledging, commitments, and sharing of best practices. The event was co-hosted by UNHCR and Switzerland, and co-convened with Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Germany, Pakistan and Türkiye.

The Forum led to an historic set of commitments and pledges, one which specifically called for the formation of ‘Support Platforms’ in an effort to promote responsibility sharing and regional refugee responses⁵. Initially conceived as a ‘group of friends’, the three Support Platforms were created i.e., MIRPS in Central America and Mexico, the Nairobi Process facilitated by IGAD in the East and Horn of Africa, and the SSAR Support Platform for Afghan Refugees⁶.

There were a range of perspectives, as well as a lack of clarity, on what a Support Platform is. Today, a Support Platform is described as follows:

“A Support Platform is a mechanism for international cooperation in relation to a specific displacement situation, established pursuant to the Global Compact on Refugees, that seeks to align the efforts of the international community in supporting the displaced and their hosts with host government priorities and the Global Compact itself”.

Three Support Platforms were launched at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019:

Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (“MIRPS” in its Spanish acronym)

MIRPS, or ‘Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones’ promotes a coordinated regional response to forced displacement in Central America, engages all relevant stakeholders, and galvanizes essential humanitarian, development, public, and private sector initiatives. The seven countries that make up the MIRPS are Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama.

5 <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/compact-action/initiatives/support-platforms>

6 C. Lensing-Hebben, M. Formisano, F. Carver, UNHCR, *Exchange on good practice examples from other regional support platforms*, 13 September 2022; ADSP-ICVA Forced Migration Workshop

The Support Platform is made up of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, the European Union, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), France, Spain, Switzerland, Uruguay, the United States of America, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the World Bank Group, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI). UNHCR and the Organization of American States (OAS) jointly form the Secretariat for the Platform.

The primary objectives of the MIRPS platform are:

- Improve mechanisms for reception and admission
- Respond to humanitarian and protection needs
- Support host countries and communities
- Enhance opportunities for durable solutions

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Support Platform

The IGAD Support Platform is designed to maintain the existing momentum and generate additional support for the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action. It does this through strategic engagement with a wide range of stakeholders including Member States, development actors and the private sector.

The IGAD Support Platform functions with close cooperation between the IGAD Secretariat, the European Union, the World Bank, Germany, and UNHCR. The primary objectives of the IGAD Support Platform are to amplify impact related to:

- Return and reintegration
- Education
- Economic inclusion of refugees
- Health

Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees



UNHCR Photo / Violaine Martin

The Support Platform for the SSAR (SP for the SSAR) was designed to deliver comprehensive support to Afghan refugees and displaced persons in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. The initiative was designed with a clear mandate to address long-term solutions and not to simply coordinate humanitarian service provision.

The SSAR Support Platform places a strong emphasis on ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable are addressed. This includes enhancing the protection of Afghan refugees and their rights. It also includes advocating for the rights of refugees and ensuring that their basic needs are met, such as access to food, shelter, and healthcare. The Platform also works to address the specific needs of vulnerable refugees, such as women, children, and people with disabilities. The three main areas of focus of the Support Platform re: health, education and livelihoods, with a strong focus on support to public service delivery systems⁷.

⁷ UNHCR, Experience sharing for the use of data, including financial tracking, for GCR Support Platforms, p. 35.

The Support Platform has several objectives. One of its main goals is to mobilize political, financial and technical resources to support the implementation of the SSAR. This includes funding for refugee assistance programs, as well as support for the development of sustainable solutions for refugees, including resettlement and complementary pathways. The Platform also aims to strengthen coordination among stakeholders, to ensure that efforts are well-planned and effectively implemented.

In addition, the Platform seeks to promote self-reliance among Afghan refugees, both in countries of asylum and upon return to Afghanistan as the country of origin. This includes supporting education and skills development programs, as well as providing opportunities for refugees to participate in the labor market.

The Support Platform is an attempt to redefine the way in which the international community responds to the Afghan refugee situation, recognizing the inclusive and generous policies of the major hosting countries, the urgent need for enhanced support for host communities, and the need to create a stable and peaceful environment in Afghanistan as the country of origin, conducive to voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration.

The Support Platform forges new partnerships, such as with International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and leverages existing ones for sustainable multi-year humanitarian and development responses in line with the operational priorities of the SSAR. It also facilitates voluntary repatriation when conditions are conducive, enhancing absorption capacity, and creating conditions for sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan by leveraging humanitarian and development partnerships through 80 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARR) and by supporting the channeling additional investments into the national public services in Iran and Pakistan, in particular for education, healthcare, vocational skills development, and social protection, to mitigate the impact on national systems and support the inclusive and generous policies of the host government.

In its first two years implementation, the SSAR Support Platform focused on establishing national structures and foundations. With the changing circumstances in Afghanistan in July and August 2021, more of the Core Group members of the SSAR Support Platform at the country and global levels focused on contingency planning, information gathering, and analysis of the situation. As the year progressed, and as the Afghan situation loomed larger on every screen, the Platform took on further momentum and adopted emergency response and preparedness under its remit.

As we look towards the GRF and the future of the platform, particularly during this critical time of need in Afghanistan, it is important to look at the role of other stakeholders including how NGOs can work with and complement the platform and the work of its Core Group to ensure the dignity of Afghan refugees and access to durable solutions. This explainer is an attempt to support this critical discussion.

4. SSAR SUPPORT PLATFORM STRUCTURE

Members of the Core Group:

To mobilize political, financial, and technical assistance for the two major hosting countries and the country of origin, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees invited a selected group of committed key stakeholders to become a Member of the Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform. The Core Group currently comprises 15 members, 12 States, and three development partners: Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Asian Development Bank, UNDP, and the World Bank.

On 7 October 2020, the Inaugural Meeting of the Core Group of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, together with the SSAR Quadripartite Steering Committee, chaired by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was held. Ahead of the Inaugural Meeting, UNHCR launched the SSAR Support Platform website, which holds all the essential documents on the SSAR and Support Platform.

The European Union held the Chairmanship of the Core Group from 2021 until March 2023. The current Chair and Vice-Chair of the Core Group are the State of Qatar and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Vice-Chair is expected to take over once the Chairmanship comes to an end. The Secretariat of the SSAR Support Platform is managed by UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

For comparison, in 2022, the main humanitarian donors to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan were: the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Asian Development Bank and the European Union⁸. The main donors for the Regional Refugee Response Plan were the United States of America, Italy, Germany, the European Union and the United Kingdom⁹.

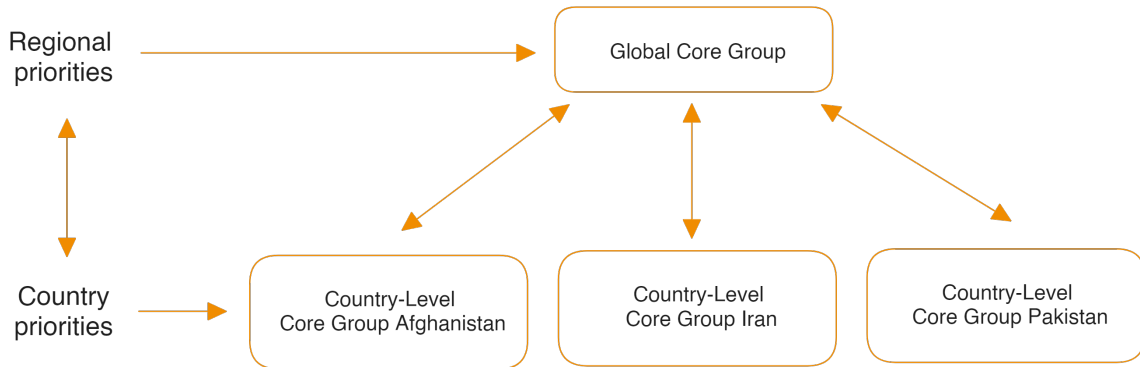
8 OCHA Services – Financial Tracking Services, Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022, <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1100/summary>

9 Refugee Response Financial Tracking – RRRP 2022

The SSAR Support Platform works in cooperation with the existing humanitarian mechanisms, including the Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan (RRRP), however the structures and activities remain independent from one another¹⁰.

Global and Country Level (Local) Core Groups:

The Core Group functions at the global and country level, the latter is active in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. Throughout 2021, the Core Groups of the Support Platform started to take shape in Kabul, Islamabad, and Tehran, and moved from expressions of support to concrete actions, focusing on three key areas: education, health, and livelihoods. Country-level Core Groups are responsible for translating national priorities at the regional level.



Further information can be found at: <https://ssar-platform.org/core-group/local-groups>

Afghanistan

A country level Core Group was originally convened by the EU as Chair in March 2021, and, met physically three times before being temporarily disrupted by the political instability following the takeover by the Taliban de facto authorities in August of the same year. After the events of August 2021, the Core Group continued to meet virtually at the ambassadorial and technical level.

The workplan for the Core Group was revised in December 2021, with a focus on IDP returns and reintegration. The group has articulated an ongoing commitment to fostering support to Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs), and to providing support to local communities to mitigate the need for further displacement.

Iran

Iran’s country level Core Group was first convened in April 2021. From the start due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the absence of a Delegation of the European Union - the Chair at that time-meetings were held virtually. The Core Group operates at the Ambassadorial level but has no technical working groups so far. The Core Group in Iran meets annually with the relevant ministries.

Pakistan

Similar to Iran, the Pakistan Country Level Group first came together in April 2021. The group comprises both regular working level and ambassadorial-level meetings. In addition, two thematic working groups were created in 2021 focusing on education and livelihoods, which are chaired by the United States. The group primarily focusses upon support to protracted refugee populations, however, there is an openness and willingness to engage with new populations arriving from Afghanistan. Each technical WG has a “champion”, leading its activities, and a workplan. Pakistan is also working towards establishing connections between sectorial partners and the local Core Group.

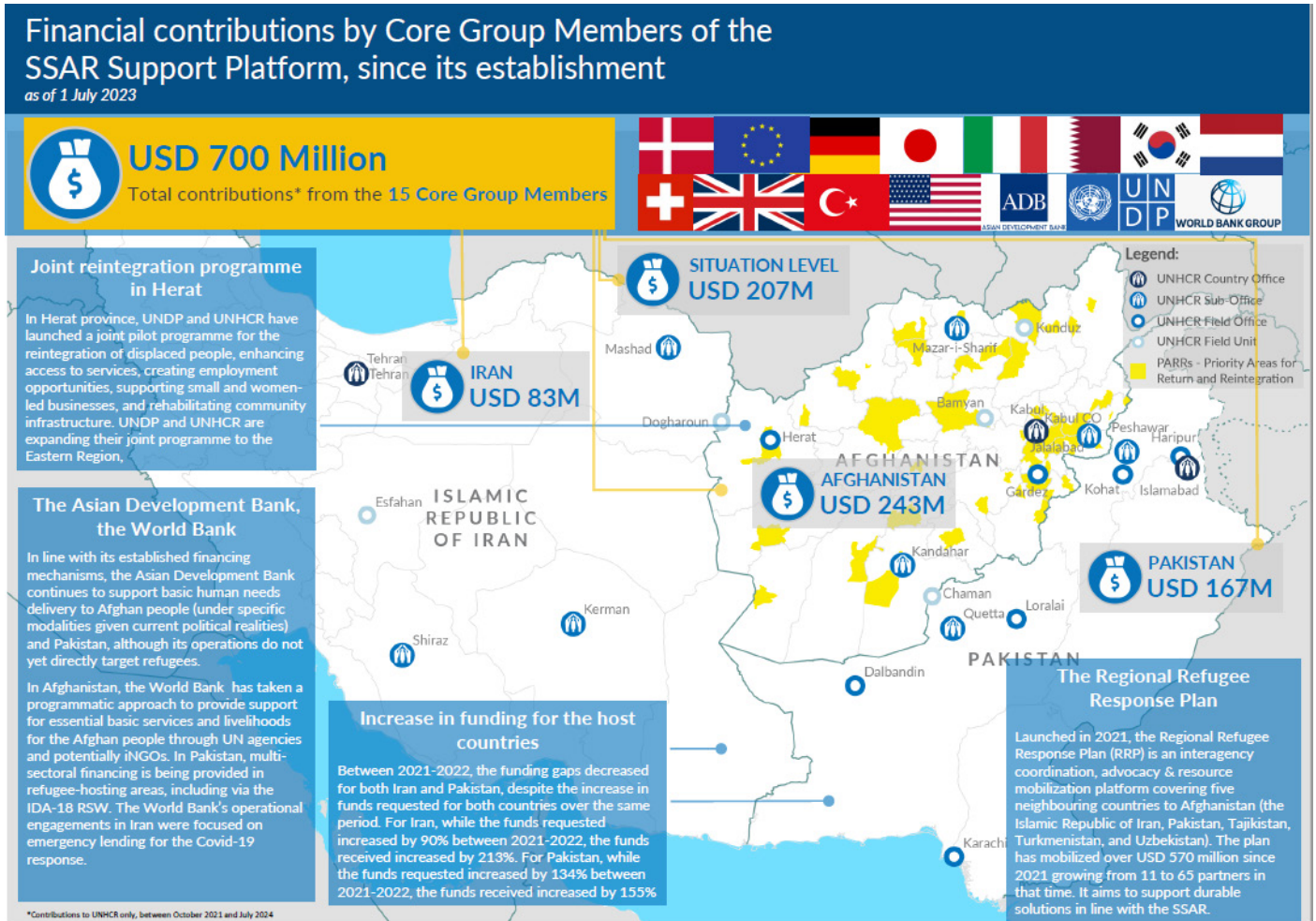
In Pakistan there are two thematic areas of focus, i.e. on expanding access to quality education and livelihoods. These two foci were identified as areas whereby the Support Platform would be able to offer additional support to the Government of Pakistan, including through the reinforcement of public services to which refugees have access. Solutions programming is at the forefront of work.

10 Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan – Situation Overview, p, 7.

The Support Platform operates at two levels, Ministerial/Ambassadorial and technical. Representatives of the Support Platform meet regularly with the Minister of SAFRON at the ambassadorial-level and with the Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CCAR) at the technical level. In June 2021, a virtual mission was organised for the Core Group which highlighted continued host community needs and refugee support requirements in Pakistan.

Financial contributions by Core Group Members to the Support Platform:

Since its establishment, Core Group members contributed 700 million USD to UNHCR for the Afghanistan Situation. According to UNHCR data, between 2021 and 2022 the Support Platform contributed to reducing the funding gap for both Iran and Pakistan, despite the increase in funds requested for both countries over the same period¹¹. However, tracking commitments remains challenging and limited information is available on exact fund distribution as part of the SSAR (e.g. the EU continues to channel majority of its funds through ECHO and UN institutions¹²).



11 For Iran, while the funds requested increased by 90% between 2021 and 2022, the funds received increased by 213%. For Pakistan, while the funds requested increased by 134% between 2021 and 2022, the funds received increased by 155%. See UNHCR, *Experience sharing for the use of data, including financial tracking, for GCR Support Platforms*, p. 39

12 M. Masood, *Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees*, p. 3

5. THE WORK OF THE SSAR SUPPORT PLATFORM

What's been achieved?

According to publicly available information, there are several examples of work completed by the Support Platform to date. This includes some of the concrete actions of the SSAR Support Platform and its Core Group:

- The Core Group in Pakistan, under the leadership of the European Union as the Chair at that time, advocated at the political level with the Government for the extension of the Proof of Registration cards and subsequently also financed the Document Renewal and Identification Verification Exercise (DRIVE) in Pakistan, whereby as part of the country-wide campaign, some 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees were verified and issued with new biometric cards through 35 sites and seven mobile units.
- In Iran, the SSAR Support Platform and the country-level Core Group during the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly scaled up its support for the Government of Iran's inclusive policies for refugees and undocumented foreign nationals affected by the pandemic on the same basis as Iranian nationals, by the provision of essential medicines, medical and personal protective equipment, and cash assistance. Core Group Members delivered the goods to Iran with a humanitarian airbridge set up by their humanitarian branches.
- In Iran, the Core Group advocated with the Government of Iran for more access and more data, in order to be able to better support the Government's inclusive policies for Afghans of various status in Iran. Following the discussions between the Government and Core Group several donor missions from Core Group Members took place.
- With the diplomatic community and most key donors being mostly not present in Afghanistan anymore after the regime change, the SSAR Support Platform organised three virtual missions to Afghanistan, to keep Core Group members at the capital level informed of the fluid situation on the ground, and all related challenges and opportunities.



A young Afghan refugee is biometrically registered for a smartcard at a centre in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

In both Iran and Pakistan, despite the challenges and needs of their respective populations, both countries have maintained a commitment to refugees. They have each provided services, especially in areas of education, healthcare, and to an extent livelihoods. It is important that the Support Platform remains on-hand to continue to generate and solidify international solidarity for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and the communities that host them.

6. HOW NGOS CAN ENGAGE WITH THE SUPPORT PLATFORM FOR THE SSAR

At present, the ability for NGOs or civil society to engage with the Support Platform for the SSAR in a consistent, structured and formalised manner is limited. It is however established that NGOs can provide critical contributions to humanitarian and development interventions, especially related to refugees. Article 25 in the Global Compact on Refugees stipulates:

“Each Support Platform would benefit from the leadership and engagement of a group of States to mobilize contributions and support, which may take different forms (para 23). The composition of this group would be specific to the context. Other relevant stakeholders would be invited to engage as appropriate”

Efforts are in motion to create and institutionalise this and increased cooperation with the NGOs and civil society is included in the 2024 workplan of the SSAR Support Platform. There has been so far no engagement with the Core Group (as a body) in the three respective countries or regionally, only bilaterally and not as it relates to the Support Platform.

Future engagement could be in the form of briefings, data, supporting virtual or in-person missions, engaging in constructive policy dialogues, informing Member State engagement related to Afghan displacement amongst others. Closer cooperation and engagement between the Support Platform and NGOs would therefore reinforce such activities and give an important contribution in achieving SSAR objectives.

In particular, both at the country and regional level, it is essential to streamline communication, better understand points of convergence, inform Support Platform Members’ policymaking, and work towards regional level durable solutions. Importantly, NGOs do acknowledge the difficult balance that is required by the Support Platform to ensure that external engagement does not become too unwieldy, nor does it dilute the momentum or trust amongst members.

NGOs participation could be structured in different form, according to the specific needs of each context and respecting the structure set up until now. Below are some options for future engagement:

Participation:

To capitalize upon the expertise and on-the-ground engagement of NGOs with affected populations, it is recommended that NGOs actively participate in the activities and debates of the SP for the SSAR Core Group and related in-country structures, either directly or through some form of delegation / representation. This could take a variety of forms, such as:

- Formalised engagement with the Support Platform, either by a group of NGOs or by a local-elected representative;
- Association or participation as observers;
- Informal contributions to the Support Platform by NGOs without formal association (e.g. upon invitation / request by a majority of members);

Beyond such participation mechanisms, NGOs contribution could contribute in terms of **regular consultations**:

- Instituting regular consultations between SP for the SSAR members and NGOs, at country and regional level;
- Developing an NGO advisory or sounding board for the SP for the SSAR to consult NGOs on specific issues and at set points in time (to be defined);
- Through UNHCR, which would undertake a specific role of intermediary, collecting and then conveying NGO perspectives to the SP for the SSAR structures at national and regional level, presenting them to the Core Group forums for discussion;
- Explore how NGOs may contribute to future or ongoing M&E/learning exercises on the SP for the SSAR;
- Explore how NGOs operating at the global level could help by ensuring NGOs are consulted on matters related to the SP for the SSAR.

Finally, NGOs could actively support concrete activities under the SP for the SSAR, i.e.: **Implementation approach**:

- NGOs may be associated to projects reflecting the SP for the SSAR’s priorities and translating those into concrete action;
- NGOs could help in developing projects and costed plans to address identified needs and priorities;
- NGOs could contribute to taking forward elements of the country Core Groups workplans;

- NGOs could contribute to identifying PARRs and Area-Based Solutions;
- NGOs could dedicate programs on research and advising on policies;
- NGOs could provide material support to Member States, for example, offering to deploy experts.

Through the Global Refugee Forum and its process NGOs can explore:

- joining Support Platform Core Group members or local Core Groups to discuss joining or supporting collective or individual pledges;
- making their own (joint or individual pledges) in connection to the SP for the SSAR. It could, for example, involve pledging capacity to drive NGO inputs into the SP for the SSAR (coordination time/staff);
- increasing the NGO community's knowledge and understanding of the SP for the SSAR;
- organising specific events around the SP for the SSAR meetings at the regional or country level;
- facilitating spaces that ensure the voices and perspectives of displaced Afghans are captured and make their way into policy spaces and to Core Group members; and
- sharing good practices and tools through the Global Compact on Refugees Dashboard.

These suggestions are not exhaustive, and will require different levels of support, engagement and willingness from different actors.

7. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUPPORT PLATFORM FOR THE SSAR IN 2023

In December 2023, the Second Global Refugee Forum will be held in Geneva, Switzerland. This will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to take stock of achievements, progress and challenges since the first GRF in 2019. It will also offer an opportunity for participants to announce new pledges, share good practices, and revitalize collective action around specific refugee situations.

The situation inside Afghanistan remains dire

Everyday conditions for Afghans remain challenging and push factors for displacement (both inside Afghanistan and in neighboring countries) are not likely to decrease. Conflict, ecological crises, internal instability and limitations to international assistance continue to represent a reality where livelihoods and security of Afghans is constantly at risk, pushing many to seek alternatives elsewhere. In this context, UNHCR has issued (and maintains to this date) a non-return advisory for all displaced Afghans¹³. At the same time, conditions in host countries remain challenging, especially for undocumented people: economic crisis and lack of livelihood opportunities force refugees to adopt harmful coping mechanisms (e.g. selling assets, reducing meal intake, dropping children out of school).

The GRF poses a strategic opportunity to garner multistakeholder support

In preparation for the second Global Refugee Forum, throughout the year member States, NGOs, academia, the private sector and other stakeholders will engage in a series of processes and forums to assess the results achieved by SP for the SSAR, its challenges and determine the way forward for the coming years in order to contribute through financial support, technical expertise, and policy changes to reach the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees.

In 2023, opportunities are various to make targeted inputs as well as specific calls and updates orally and in writing on the needs for the Support Platform such as:

- UNHCR GRF formal and informal meetings and briefings;
- GRF initiatives;
- Through direct submissions and dialogue with the GRF co-conveners;
- UNHCR-NGOs Regional Consultations;
- UNHCR Task Team on Meaningful Engagement and Partnership with Organisations led by Forcibly Displaced and Stateless People;
- GRF NGO Reference Group;
- GCR Dashboard;
- UNHCR Standing and Executive Committees.

Such openings will offer prospects for reflecting on the role, structure and future of the Support Platforms, including the SP for the SSAR, and for NGOs to share their expertise and experience to develop common pathways for sustainable solutions.

In particular, different stakeholders to the Global Refugee Forum expressed their interest in a stronger participation of NGOs to the Support Platforms. This represents a unique opportunity to rediscuss the existing mechanisms and identify new ways forward for a holistic approach to the displacement crisis in Afghanistan and neighboring states.

Other crises risk diverting attention and action from Afghanistan

Humanitarian crises globally are constantly underfunded and often overlooked in international debates. The situation in Afghanistan and for Afghan refugees is no different¹⁴. In addition, since the start of the international armed conflict in Ukraine, international attention and resources have been focussed in this response and the related refugee response in the region, thereby shifting resources and attention from other crises globally. The response to the conflict in Ukraine has also demonstrated solidarity and reinforced global commitments to refugee protection worldwide. Additional commitments are needed in response to all the other forced displacement situations and in Afghanistan including through equitable financing.

Here too, a stronger participation of NGOs to regional coordination and discussion mechanisms would represent an important opportunity to increase resource mobilization and optimization.

Some suggested actions for the Support Platforms with NGOs in 2023 and beyond:

- Local Support Platforms engage with stakeholders like ADSP to produce a series of Briefing Notes / Policy Papers to feed into thinking in the lead up to the GRF.
- Core Group Members engage in a (series) of consultation(s) with NGOs in the lead up to the GRF to co-design modalities for engagement.
- Core Group Members consider pledges related to NGO engagement and implementation.
- Core Group Members consider pledges for multi-year funding for Afghan displacement, taking into consideration the reality of the situation in Afghanistan.
- Host a side event at the GRF to highlight the inclusive policy environments in Iran and Pakistan.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Everyday conditions for Afghans remain challenging and push factors for displacement (both inside Afghanistan and in neighboring countries) are likely to decrease. Conflict, ecological crisis, internal instability and limitations to international assistance continue to represent a reality where livelihoods and security of Afghans is constantly at risk, pushing many to seek alternatives elsewhere. In this context, UNHCR has issued (and maintains to this date) a non-return advisory for all displaced Afghans¹⁵.

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and its objectives continue to represent a cornerstone for regional sustainable solution to the refugee crisis in the region, especially for key host-States.

Preparations leading to the Global Refugee Forum represent an important opportunity to reassess the successes and opportunities for further development of the SP for the SSAR, including to reevaluate the participation of NGOs to this forum.

Closer cooperation between the SSAR stakeholders, the Core Group of SP for the SSAR in particular, and NGOs would represent a valuable opportunity to further develop effective and sustainable responses to the crisis, and significantly contribute to foster conditions favorable to voluntary returns, provide assistance to displaced Afghans and host communities and strengthen reintegration of Afghans.

14 Currently, the 2023 HRP for Afghanistan is only 26.8% funded, see <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1117/summary>

15 *Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan – Situation Overview.*

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