2023 Multi-Stakeholder Pledge for the Afghanistan Situation

ReSolve: for Resilience and Solutions

With country-specific pledges for Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan in support of forcibly displaced Afghans and their host communities under the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees

Mursal, 8, gets water from the water point constructed with UNHCR support in Janat Bagh village, Afghanistan. The village is located in a Priority Area of Return and Reintegration (PARR).

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The Global Refugee Forum

As affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly, the Global Compact on Refugees establishes a comprehensive refugee response model and prioritizes more predictable and sustainable support to ease pressures on countries hosting refugees. It also seeks to enhance opportunities for refugees to become self-reliant; expand access to third-country solutions; and support conditions so that refugees can voluntarily return home in safety and dignity.

At the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, the international community will demonstrate its commitment to the Global Compact's principle of burden-and responsibility-sharing and the realization of its objectives through financial, technical, and policy pledges and contributions, informed by the priorities of forcibly displaced Afghans, host countries, and countries of origin.

A Multi-Stakeholder Pledge for Resilience and Solutions: ReSolve

With two-thirds of Afghanistan's population in need of humanitarian assistance and protection,[1] and an increasingly challenging economic context in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, which together host 8.2 million Afghans, the status quo is untenable. Stakeholders are invited to join the multi-stakeholder 'ReSolve Pledge for the Afghanistan Situation', covering country-specific pledges for Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. In line with the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) a range of pledge options is available to stakeholders seeking to expand solutions and enhance the resilience of Afghans in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and the communities hosting them.

This multi-stakeholder pledge will leverage the comparative advantage of each partner, and in particular members of the Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform[2], bringing together a ladder of options under one umbrella. As the Secretariat for the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, UNHCR has developed a menu of options (Annex 1). It can assist interested stakeholders to tailor pledge options based on their priorities, capacities and expertise.

1 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview, January 2023
2 For information, visit https://ssar-platform.org

A Tenuous and Complex Context

Overlapping shocks — including post-pandemic economic decline, protracted forced displacement, food insecurity, natural disasters, limited access to basic services, as well as the legacy of decades of armed conflict and continued insecurity — have tipped millions of Afghans into extreme poverty. Intertwined economic, environmental, and protection and human rights crises, particularly for women and girls, are fuelling massive humanitarian and development needs. The crisis is impacting all communities, with a staggering 28.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan alone.[3]

The assumption of control by the de facto authorities in August 2021 saw the suspension of direct international development assistance, which previously accounted for 75 per cent of public expenditure. Other legal restrictions and operational impediments have also affected the financing and delivery of humanitarian aid. The international community nonetheless recognizes that humanitarian aid cannot sustainably address the fundamental needs of the Afghan people in the medium and long term, with programmes needed to address basic human needs and build resilience, sustain livelihoods, strengthen social cohesion[4]. The sheer magnitude of the international relief effort for Afghanistan also raises concerns over continued humanitarian aid dependency in the future, underscoring the need for well coordinated humanitarian-development-peace nexus interventions.

Regionally, some 8.2 million Afghans, including 5.2 million registered refugees and persons in refugee-like situations, are living in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. For more than four decades, millions of Afghan refugees have sought and enjoyed asylum in these neighbouring countries, which have ensured their protection and provided access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods, despite increasing stress upon their public services.

Recognizing the resilience of the people of Afghanistan and the decades-long hospitality of the major hosting countries, the Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform and UNHCR are seeking to leverage the Global Refugee Forum to unite key actors in a coordinated pledging effort.

Behtar, 8, right, and her sister, Sahar, 6, are internally displaced in Kabul, Afghanistan and live with their mother and two brothers. UNHCR has been supporting the family, as well as 19 million other people in its 80 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs).

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3 OCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, January 2023
4 United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, July 2023

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, adopted by Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and UNHCR and endorsed by the international community in 2012, guides the regional approach to enable sustainable solutions for displaced Afghans. Its three strategic priorities (voluntary return, sustainable reintegration, and support for host counties) are translated in practice as:

The Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR Support Platform) was launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019 in order to forge new partnerships for multi-year humanitarian and development responses in line with the operational priorities of the SSAR.

Today, the Platform's Core Group consists of Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Qatar, Switzerland, the Republic of Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, as well as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme. The State of Qatar and the Kingdom of the Netherlands recently assumed the Chair and Vice-chair roles, respectively, following the European Union as the inaugural Chair.

The SSAR Support Platform has provided significant financial and technical assistance in Afghanistan's 80 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs), where UN Agencies, international and national non-government organizations, and civil society actors are collaborating to build the resilience of the local communities. Since 2021, this support has been channelled directly to the affected communities, with all due diligence. The international community and the Core Group continue to support the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, although with increasing needs, the lion's share of the responsibility and financial burden continues to be borne by the two lower-middle-income countries.

Beyond the region, resettlement and complementary pathways can be an important part of expanding opportunities and solutions, including for the most vulnerable refugees. With the support of the international community, resettlement and complementary pathways around education, labour mobility, family reunification, and sponsorship have been scaled up since 2021, though additional support is needed to reach the most vulnerable.

Pledging opportunities at the country-level: Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan

The ReSolve multi-stakeholder pledge offers a range of country-specific pledge ideas for Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, all working towards an ambitious common goal with a large-scale reach to advance burden and responsibility-sharing.

Pledges under the umbrella of ReSolve will be commitments by States and other stakeholders to advance the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, to achieve tangible benefits for forcibly displaced persons and the communities hosting them in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. ReSolve also offers stakeholders the opportunity to directly support priorities or pledges identified by the Governments of Iran and Pakistan, as the major host countries, to facilitate greater access to public services, enhanced protection, and support for refugees and to demonstrate solidarity with host communities. By matching pledges, the international community can translate the principle of responsibility sharing into action, providing a concrete and coordinated way for traditional and non-traditional partners to directly support the hospitality of host countries.

1 Afghanistan: Supporting Returnees, Internally Displaced People and Communities inside Afghanistan

Inside Afghanistan, 3.25 million[5] people remain internally displaced by conflict. Although 1.38 million[6] previously internally displaced persons are estimated to have voluntarily returned home since the cessation of the armed conflict in 2021, the country faces enormous social and economic challenges that are heavily impacting the welfare of the Afghan people, especially women, girls, and minorities. This continues to hamper prospects for refugee returns and further solutions for refugees and IDPs alike.

Already among the poorest countries in the world, Afghanistan's economic output collapsed by 20.7 per cent in 2021,[7] falling further in 2022. Today over two-thirds of households struggle to cover basic expenses. Without continuity for girls' education and women's ability to work, prospects for the country's recovery will remain grim. Additional uncertainties include risk of further restrictions on women's rights; instability of the banking sector; reduction in international aid; disease outbreaks or natural disasters; and worsening of the security and political situation. The massive humanitarian needs are impacting all communities, across age, gender, ethnicity, and displacement status. Short-term coping strategies are resulting in serious harm and increased protection risks, particularly for women and children.

The proposed pledges for Afghanistan aim to gather direct support for the people of Afghanistan. Pledge opportunities for Afghanistan focus on multisectoral, area-based interventions in education, health, community infrastructure, and livelihoods, with a special focus on women and girls.

More information on pledges for Afghanistan is found in the Annex below.
Requests for more information can be sent to the Secretariat of the SSAR Support Platform (ssar-secretariat@unhcr.org)

5 UNHCR Annual Statistical Report 2022, as of 31 December 2022
6 UNHCR Operational Data Portal Afghanistan Situation
7 UNDP Afghanistan Socio-Economic Outlook 2023

2 Pledges for Iran: Supporting Inclusive Policies in Education, Health, and Livelihoods

The Islamic Republic of Iran is host to the second largest and most protracted refugee situation in the world, with the majority in urban areas. The country now hosts over 3.4 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations from Afghanistan (of a total estimated 4.5 million Afghans in Iran of varying status and documentation). Afghans continue making their way to Iran through official and unofficial border crossing points. According to estimates by the Government of Iran, over 1 million have fled to Iran since August 2021.

By decree of the Iranian Supreme Leader, all children in Iran have had access to primary and secondary education, regardless of nationality or documentation. Refugees and undocumented Afghans study side by side with Iranian schoolchildren[8]. However, worsening economic conditions and insufficient enrolment capacity in schools and physical infrastructure have effectively limited many Afghan children's access to education, resulting in some 200,000 children out-of-school today.

With similarly inclusive policies for health, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education works with UNHCR to ensure that all refugees have access to vital and lifesaving public health services. Primary healthcare, which includes vaccinations, antenatal care, maternal and child health, essential medicines, and family planning, is available for free to refugees and undocumented Afghans in health posts located in settlements and refugee-populated urban areas. Registered refugees have access to the national health insurance scheme, similar to Iranians, covering both hospitalization and para-clinical services at a subsidized rate.

In collaboration with the Government and non-governmental partners, UNHCR is implementing a diverse portfolio of training and skills development programmes to enhance income and livelihood opportunities for refugees. This includes certified technical and vocational training in 60 occupations, enabling refugees to meet the basic needs of their families and ultimately preparing them for return to Afghanistan, when conditions become conducive.

Sustained international support is vital to help the Government of Iran maintain its inclusive refugee policies on education, health, and livelihoods. States, international financial institutions, the private sector and others may pledge to provide the financial, material, or technical support necessary for their implementation.

Potential pledges for Iran focus on supporting the Government of Iran to

- keep its inclusive policies for refugees and asylum seekers in the areas of education, including tertiary education, and health, especially in the areas of Primary Health Care and Universal Primary Health Insurance;
- facilitate enhanced professional skills development;
- enable the departure of refugees for third-country solutions, whether resettlement or complementary pathways, regardless of their existing documentation and legal status in Iran.

More information on pledges for Iran is found in the Annex below.
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8 According to the Ministry of Education (MoE), 800,080 Afghan and Iraqi children are enrolled in primary and secondary schools for the 2022-2023 scholastic year, including 385,000 undocumented children.

3 Pledges for Pakistan: Protection, livelihoods, Health and Education

Pakistan is the fifth largest refugee-hosting country globally,[9] having shown remarkable solidarity by hosting millions of Afghans for over 40 years. Its progressive approach allows refugees to move freely, with access to health, education, and banking services. Refugees are benefiting from public vocational training programmes and poverty graduation schemes. The majority of refugees work as day labourers, with a growing number of entrepreneurs and some others earning income via the private sector.

Currently, Pakistan hosts 3.7 million Afghans of diverse status and documentation, including 1.3 million registered refugees. It maintains this generous approach despite the magnitude of the responsibilities shouldered and the economic and development challenges facing the country. This year, Pakistan's GDP growth is projected to slow to just 0.6 per cent, while last year's floods have exacerbated economic challenges with average inflation projected at 27.5 per cent and agricultural output declining for the first time in two decades.

Most Afghan refugees and other Afghan nationals in Pakistan live in urban or semi-urban areas, alongside members of the host community, many of whom are from among the most vulnerable sections of society and experience the same socio-economic challenges. Pakistan is also at the frontline of the climate crisis. In 2022, the catastrophic flooding which affected an estimated 800,000 Afghan refugees in the Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, forced nearly 8 million people to leave their homes.

The Global Refugee Forum is a critical opportunity to reinvigorate support for Pakistan through existing and new programmes focused on health care interventions, education, livelihoods, protection, green energy, and bridging humanitarian and development assistance.

Potential pledges for Pakistan focus on support for

- Education and Skills Development, with a focus on women, girls, and youth: As the Government of Pakistan continues to allow refugees to access national education systems at all levels, including tertiary, stakeholders are encouraged to provide livelihoods opportunities and economic empowerment for skilled and qualified refugees under work schemes, including in third countries, with a focus on skilled youth.

- Social Protection and Health Care: Sustainable international support is needed to bolster Pakistan's social protection system and enable refugees and other vulnerable groups to be assisted via existing national systems. This includes access to quality healthcare services under the national health system, particularly equitable and sustainable access to primary health care programmes.

- Protection, Solutions and Data: Opportunities can be extended for undocumented Afghans though their registration, while also strengthening Pakistan's refugee protection framework. Continued registration of refugee children and issuance of birth certificates is fundamental to securing their rights and legal identity. Technical and financial support is needed to ensure that disaggregated data on refugees informs the country's planning.

More information on pledges for Pakistan is found in the Annex below.
Requests for more information can be sent to the Secretariat of the SSAR Support Platform (ssar-secretariat@unhcr.org)

9 UNHCR, Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2022

Afghanistan Pledge Ideas

Infrastructure for access to basic education

Support girls' and boys' access to education in the 80 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration, through education infrastructure, such as the construction of additional mixed-gender schools and classrooms.

Scholarships for tertiary education

Expansion of scholarship schemes for young Afghans, especially women and girls, in third countries to overcome financial and other barriers to develop skills. Scholarship schemes could build on existing programmes, such as the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) programme, which educates students from Afghanistan and the diaspora in Education City in Doha, or the Qatar Afghan Scholarship Project (QASP), which enables Afghan refugees to continue their studies with scholarships at U.S. universities.

EDUCATION

Online education programs and technical support

Expansion of online education programmes, such as the American University for Afghanistan programme, which provides female DAFI students in Afghanistan an opportunity to continue their studies.

Technical and IT support for university and other students to continue their education online.

HEALTH

Infrastructure for access to health services

Improved access to health services in the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration, through the construction and rehabilitation of health care facilities.

Midwife training centres

Construction and support of midwife training centers, including training of female health workers and midwives. Building on an initial project in Bamyan in 2023, scale up the midwife training across the country.

LIVELIHOODS

Support civil society

Direct support to civil society organizations, in particular those working with and for women and girls, such as the Women's Access, Dignity and Advancement (WADA) initiative, where UNHCR has partnered with FAO and UNWomen.

Support to Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI) to advance livelihoods opportunities for women.

Microfinance Initiative

Building on a successful pilot, enhance self-reliance through livelihoods support to small and medium-sized enterprises and microfinance grants and loans. Special attention to women and girls, through cooperation with the Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI).

Cold Storage Facilities

Construction of cold storage facilities, to be run by women's cooperatives, to strengthen food security whilst preserving access to livelihoods for the women involved, through their integration into the agricultural value chain of Afghanistan.

Iran Pledge Ideas

EDUCATION

Inclusive education policies

The Government of Iran maintains its inclusive education policies for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons in Iran, including tertiary education.

To support the continuation of these policies, States, international financial institutions, the private sector and others provide financial, technical, and material support.

Inclusive health policies

The Government of Iran maintains its inclusive health policies for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons in Iran.

To support the continuation of these policies, States, international financial institutions, the private sector and others provide financial, technical, and material support, including primary health care and Universal Primary Health Insurance.

HEALTH

LIVELIHOODS

Professional and skills development

The Government of Iran continues supporting resilience building for refugees and other populations, enabling them to obtain enhanced professional skills, contributing to the host communities and to the countries of origin upon voluntary repatriation.

In support, States, international financial institutions, the private sector, and others provide financial, technical, and material assistance for skills development and training for Afghans in Iran.

RESETTLEMENT & COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

Resettlement and complementary pathways

The Government of Iran facilitates resettlement of refugees and complementary pathways for Afghans in need.

The international community offers increased resettlement quotas and complementary pathway opportunities.

Pakistan Pledge Ideas

Strengthen Pakistan's protection framework
In support of the Government of Pakistan, the international community provides financial and technical support to further strengthen the national refugee management framework.

Access to national social protection programs
To support the prospective inclusion of refugees in the National Socio-Economic Registry, the international community provides financial and technical resources, including multi-year investments to fund the extension of social protection programmes to refugees.

PROTECTION

Resettlement and complementary pathways
The international community expands resettlement and complementary pathways opportunities to support durable solutions in the spirit of global burden- and responsibility-sharing.

THIRD COUNTRY SOLUTIONS

Clean energy
States, private sector actors and others provide financial, technical and other resources for clean and sustainable energy for Afghans refugees and their host communities.

CLEAN ENERGY

Quality health services under the national health system
Pakistan maintains its policy allowing refugees access to national health services.

In support of the Government of Pakistan, the international community provides multi-year funding for (1) the extension of the national health insurance scheme to refugees, and (2) the construction and solarization of health facilities and provision of equipment for the benefit of refugees and host communities.

HEALTH

Livelihoods and economic empowerment: A Pakistan Compact
Pakistan could include refugees in its flagship Youth Programme and allow refugee graduates who benefitted from skills development or on-the-job trainings (as supported by the international community or the private sector) to work if offered a job. Work opportunities could focus on sectors with a labour shortage, thus benefitting from qualitied Afghan refugee workers. This could be formulated as a compact between the Government of Pakistan and the international community, linking Pakistan's commitment to allow refugees to work in specific sectors with financial commitments and/or trade concessions by the international community.

LIVELIHOODS

Quality education services under the national education system
Pakistan maintains its policy in favour of refugees' access to national primary and secondary education services, while strengthening collection of refugee enrollment data and increasing admission quotas for refugee students in public higher education institutions.

As a matching pledge in support of the Government of Pakistan, the international community provides multi-year funding for school construction, equipment and solarization of public schools. States, private sector or others finance scholarships for Afghan refugee students in higher education institutions.

EDUCATION

Birth registration and documentation
Pakistan continues to ensure that all refugee children have their births registered and receive birth certificates.

The international community provides financial and technical resources as appropriate.

Registration of the undocumented Afghan population
In support of the Government of Pakistan, the international community provides financial and technical resources for the registration of undocumented Afghans in Pakistan as appropriate.

REGISTRATION & DATA

Disaggregated data on refugees
Pakistan could support the enhanced availability and quality of comparable, timely and disaggregated data on refugees, through UNHCR's Socio-Economic Flagship Survey and by including disaggregated refugee data in national statistics and surveys.

In support, the international community provides financial and technical resources to enable data on refugees to be included in Government statistics/surveys.