

CONCEPT NOTE

Global Core Group Technical Consultation
on Pillar Three of the Solutions Strategy for
Afghan Refugees (SSAR)



BACKGROUND

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) is the result of an unprecedented quadripartite consultative process among Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in 2012. In 2019, the Support Platform for the SSAR was created to underpin collective global efforts to build on a solutions approach agreed to by Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. Its creation was grounded in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees. The Support Platform aims 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 SSAR Support Platform has provided a comprehensive strategic vision built around three mutually reinforcing Pillars: (1) Creating conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation through community based investments in areas of high return, (2) Building Afghan refugee capital based on livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan in order to facilitate eventual sustainable return and reintegration, and (3) Enhanced support for refugee hosting communities, preserving protection space in host countries and third country solutions.

Three dedicated virtual consultations aligned with the thematic focus of the three pillars of the SSAR Support Platform provide an opportunity for the Members of the Global Core Group to review the current operational context in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan as it relates to each Pillar, and consider needs, priorities, and future planned responses in support of solutions. The consultations will inform the preparation of a common outcome document, presenting a summary of key considerations and recommendations, that will inform a strategic dialogue between the Global Core Group members and the Quadripartite Steering Committee, and support future actions by the Global Core Group Members. The consultation on Pillar One took place on 26 June 2024, while the consultation on Pillar Two took place on 7 August 2024.

PILLAR THREE:

ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR REFUGEE HOSTING COMMUNITIES, PRESERVING PROTECTION SPACE IN HOST COUNTRIES AND RESETTLEMENT IN THIRD COUNTRIES

Pillar Three of the SSAR envisages investments that preserving the asylum space in host countries, including enhanced support for refugee hosting communities, together with alternative temporary stay arrangements, and resettlement in third countries. As humanitarian and human rights situation inside Afghanistan continues to deteriorate, a non-return advisory remains in place, pending the observance of international human rights norms and standards essential for sustainable and dignified return. Women and girls, journalists, musicians, artists, and ethnic minorities are at particular risk of returns from either Pakistan or Iran, which are not voluntary in nature. In this regard, it is essential to preserve and expand the protection space in host countries. This involves ensuring that host nations uphold their international obligations to protect refugees, including non-refoulement, access to asylum procedures, and the provision of basic rights.

Equally, situation for Afghans in the neighbouring host countries has become increasingly challenging, with economic fragility reducing livelihoods opportunities, a spiralling cost of living crisis, and rising instances of xenophobia. Since 2021, over 1.6 million Afghans have sought safety and protection in Iran and Pakistan,

adding a significant additional burden to the two host countries, who need to be adequately supported, to host a total of eight million Afghans, the largest refugee population globally. By providing targeted international assistance—such as infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities— the international community can not only alleviate the burden on these communities but also fosters social cohesion between refugees and local populations, reducing the potential for conflict and enhancing the overall well-being of both groups. Investing in local development can also help build resilience, enabling host communities to better absorb and integrate refugees in a sustainable manner.

While supporting host countries is essential, resettlement in third countries remains a critical solution for the most vulnerable Afghan refugees. Resettlement provides an opportunity for refugees who face particular risks to start a new life in a safe and supportive environment. However, the current global resettlement capacity is insufficient to meet the needs of Afghan refugees, necessitating an increase in resettlement quotas, and a commitment to prioritize Afghan refugees and expedite processing to ensure timely protection. Additionally, innovative resettlement pathways, such as community sponsorship and private sector involvement, can help expand opportunities for Afghan refugees.

OBJECTIVES

Reflective of an unprecedented number of pushbacks of Afghans in the sub-region, in contravention of UNHCR’s non-return advisory, and despite an ongoing humanitarian and human rights crisis in Afghanistan, the SSAR Global Core Group Consultation on Pillar 3 will focus principally on preserving and expand the protection space in Iran and Pakistan, to ensure alignment with international obligations to protect refugees, including non-refoulement, access to asylum procedures, and the provision of basic rights.

The specific objectives include:

1. Consider the context of forced returns of Afghan refugees in the region, in the context of the human rights crisis in Afghanistan, and the risks posed to vulnerable groups such as women, girls, journalists, and ethnic minorities.
2. Review current protection monitoring data on the treatment of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan, including in the context of forced returns, and access to asylum, and consider mechanisms to respond to incidents of refoulement, where Afghan refugees are at risk.
3. Discuss the importance of supporting host communities through area-based, holistic programming that includes livelihoods, protection, and community development, particularly interventions that also benefit Afghan women and girls, to encourage the continuation and expansion of inclusive policies in Iran and Pakistan.
4. Discuss the involvement of civil society organizations and local communities in supporting the asylum process, raising awareness of the non-refoulement principle, and providing on-the-ground assistance and advocacy for Afghan refugees.
5. Consider investments in monitoring and data collection to strengthen the knowledge base on the needs and challenges faced by Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan, to inform policy decisions, humanitarian responses, and advocacy efforts aimed at preserving the protection space for Afghan refugees.

METHODOLOGY

This session will be chaired by the Netherlands, as incoming Chair of the Global Core Group of the SSAR Support Platform, with the support of the SSAR Support Platform Secretariat. The session will be a plenary virtual consultation, with presentations facilitated by select Global Core Group Members, with feedback rounds after each intervention. The consultation will inform the preparation of a common outcome document covering the three Pillars of the SSAR, presenting a summary of key considerations and recommendations.