

## Inaugural Meeting of the Core Group of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

7 October 2020

### Chairperson's Summary

The inaugural meeting of the Core Group of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) with the SSAR Quadripartite Steering Committee, chaired by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was held on 7 October 2020 in a virtual format.

The purpose of the meeting was to facilitate the first joint interaction between the members of the SSAR Quadripartite Steering Committee and the newly established Core Group, with a view to begin discussing policy and operational priorities of the Support Platform for the way forward in 2021, based on convergence of interests and towards a coordinated approach by Core Group members.

The Quadripartite Steering Committee was represented by Hon. Noor Rahman Akhlaqi, Minister of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; Hon. Mahdi Mahmoudi, Assistant Minister of Interior and Director General of the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Hon. Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, Federal Minister of States and Frontier Regions of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; and Mr. Indrika Ratwatte, Director of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

Participating Core Group members were Denmark, Germany, Japan, Republic of Korea, Qatar, Switzerland, Turkey, United States, European Union, Asian Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme and World Bank.

### ***I. Context: Challenges and Opportunities***

The participants recalled that after more than four decades of uprooting, Afghan refugees constitute one of the largest protracted refugee situations in the world and one of the biggest displacement crises of our time. The 2020 Islamabad Refugee Summit<sup>1</sup> provided an opportunity to reflect on the achievements, challenges and lessons learned over the past forty years, and stressed the urgent need to move away from the status quo, building on the outcomes of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF). It was widely recognized that the local, regional and global implications of the protracted Afghan displacement necessitate a renewed commitment towards sustainable solutions in Afghanistan and more equitable and predictable responsibility-sharing with the principal host countries.

Participants welcomed the initiation of the first-ever intra-Afghan negotiations. Noting that gradual progression on the path towards peace and stability can pave way for the long-awaited solution of voluntary repatriation, they stressed the need to revitalize efforts to create and expand conditions conducive to voluntary return and sustainable reintegration. Planning for return and reintegration is critical and can only be successful if underpinned by an inclusive approach, in line with the GCR, and with the engagement of development and peace actors.

Inclusion of returning refugees into national development planning and programming was deemed essential to enable sustainable reintegration, which in turn will contribute to the peacebuilding, reconciliation and stabilization efforts. Development interventions must also alleviate the pressure on the host countries and contribute to efforts to address the root causes of (recurrent) displacement and reduce irregular movements in and outside of the region. Participants expressed their hope that the 2020 Afghanistan Conference and its outcomes -- notably the Afghanistan National Peace

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<sup>1</sup> Chairperson's Summary of the 2020 Islamabad Refugee Summit, available at <https://ssar-platform.org/>.

and Development Framework II (2021-2025) and the Afghanistan Partnership Framework -- will anchor the imperative of solutions to forced displacement in Afghanistan's development plans and partnerships with the international community.

Participants appreciated the hospitality and generosity of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan in extending protection and assistance to generations of Afghan refugees and commended their inclusive policies, particularly in the areas of education, skills training and healthcare. Investments in the resilience and human capital of refugees will serve Afghanistan's reconstruction and stabilization efforts. Noting pressures on infrastructure and service delivery systems, as well as the severe socio-economic impact of COVID-19, participants underscored the need for greater international responsibility- and burden-sharing.

## **II. SSAR: Key priorities and deliverables**

Participants commended the consultative process among the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and UNHCR that led to the development of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) in 2010-2011. Noting progress in its implementation, participants called for additional support by the international community to advance its objectives of enabling voluntary repatriation, supporting sustainable reintegration and providing assistance to the host countries and communities. The Support Platform and its Core Group are well-placed to galvanize political and financial support, raise awareness, and mobilize a broader base of partners, including non-traditional donors, development actors, private sector, international financial institutions and civil society.

Reaffirming the regional, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach that bridges humanitarian and development assistance and builds resilience of communities as a whole, the participants stressed the need for concrete and coordinated action, with a focus on solutions, community-based interventions and cross-border collaboration, in line with the country-specific and regional priorities of the SSAR presented by the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and UNHCR<sup>2</sup>:

- **Facilitating voluntary repatriation**, including by: i) supporting the Government of Afghanistan in distribution of land to returnees; ii) investing in human capital, resilience and portable skills of refugees in host countries to enhance the potential for return and reintegration; iii) tailoring assistance to enable anchoring upon return; and iv) assisting host governments in registration, data collection and documentation processes that support regulated border management and inform cross-border programmes on return and reintegration.
- **Enhancing capacity and creating conditions for sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan** through coordinated multi-sectoral, area-based, humanitarian-development-peace investments in the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs). The PARRs link short- and medium-term community-based projects to longer-term development programmes and encourage private sector investment; benefitting communities as a whole, including returnees, IDPs and local communities. They are aligned with Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework II (ANPDF II) and relevant National Priority Programmes, notably the Citizens' Charter.
- **Channelling additional investments into the national public services in Iran and Pakistan** (education, healthcare, vocational skills development and social protection) to mitigate the impact on national systems and support the inclusive policies of the host governments. In addition to the impact of hosting Afghan refugees for four decades, the national systems – particularly the health infrastructure – have been severely stretched as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Pakistan, the backbone of the SSAR is the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative, which benefits both refugees and their host communities through investments in national service delivery. In Iran,

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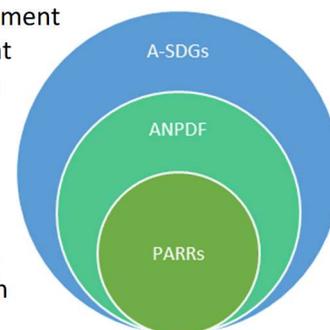
<sup>2</sup> A portfolio of scaleable projects that responds to priority needs in all three countries is contained in the *SSAR Support Platform document - A Partnership for Solidarity and Resilience*, available at <https://ssar-platform.org/>

the SSAR focuses on expanding access to national education and healthcare, including the Government's Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) scheme.

### ***Sectoral and geographic focus***

In recognition of the imperative of building resilient communities that can withstand shocks, participants reaffirmed the **three sectoral priorities of the SSAR, identified by refugees: enhancing access to education and healthcare and expanding livelihood opportunities**. In view of the demographic composition of the Afghan refugee population, **youth empowerment** through education, skills and vocational training constitutes a vital investment in refugee resilience and self-reliance pending return and in Afghanistan's human capital and reconstruction processes upon return. Another cross-cutting priority, identified by refugees, is **access to land in Afghanistan**.

These sectoral priorities are aligned with Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) II for 2021-2025 and the Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals (A-SDGs), which outline Afghanistan's longer-term macro-development priorities and investments country-wide. To date, there has been a lacuna of **conflict-sensitive, community-based programmes**, particularly in rural areas, which has negatively impacted prospects for sustainable return and reintegration. The Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs) seek to address this gap through programmes with immediate impact and outcomes for targeted communities. The Core Group can play an important role in further solidifying these linkages and complementarity through concrete synergies with the National Priority Programs, including the Citizens' Charter.



In the principal host countries, SSAR interventions pursue a whole-of-community approach in areas hosting refugees.

### ***Additional thematic priorities***

Core Group members identified additional areas where coordinated action and support can contribute towards the overall objectives of the SSAR:

- **Development interventions in Afghanistan that provide immediate gains for communities and build resilience** by expanding public service delivery and infrastructure and investing in human capital and livelihoods, rule of law, institution-building and social protection services.
- Supporting **access to civil documentation, including passports, in Afghanistan** (and in the host countries, as appropriate), **with a view to enabling the return of non-refugees, improving migration management and reducing irregular movements** within the region and beyond.
- **Establishing programs on voluntary return of skilled/qualified Afghan refugees.**
- Supporting the Government of Afghanistan to **expedite land distribution** in line with Presidential Decree 108 on the **Government's Land Allocation Scheme (LAS)**.
- Continued support for **COVID-19 response and recovery**, including in the areas of healthcare, livelihoods, water and sanitation, cash and food assistance, provision of PPE and awareness-raising.
- Initiatives addressing the **economic empowerment of women, child protection, minority rights and gender-based violence in Afghanistan**.

- **Investments in renewable and sustainable energy** with a particular emphasis on health infrastructure.
- **Supporting agriculture and natural resource management in Afghanistan**, in line with the priorities outlined in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework II (ANPDF II) for 2021-2025.
- **Using digital technologies** to enhance access to social protection, essential services and new livelihood opportunities/forms of employment.
- Supporting **accelerated learning** and ensuring a smooth transition from “education in emergencies” to reinforced national education systems.
- **Expanding economic and income generation opportunities, supporting private sector investment and facilitating access to microfinance services in Afghanistan** so as to enable refugees to return, find livelihoods and contribute to Afghanistan’s reconstruction and development.
- Supporting **data collection, analysis, joint planning and policy dialogue to enable evidence-based programming**. Particular emphasis should be on i) **cross-border programming for skills training and livelihoods, linking data and information on skillsets of refugees in host countries with the labour market needs in Afghanistan**; ii) analysis of cross-border population movements and emerging needs of refugees contemplating to return; and iii) studies of socio-economic conditions of returnees and the receiving communities in Afghanistan.

### **III. Core Group: Expanding the scope of engagement**

In addition to political, financial and technical support for the above-mentioned priorities, participants identified the following areas where the Core Group can exercise leadership and add value:

- **Bolstering humanitarian and development collaboration** to meet short-term and long-term needs of Afghan refugees and returnees and to create an enabling environment for voluntary and sustainable return. Stronger synergies between emergency relief, resilience-building and peace efforts are critical for ensuring sustainability of returns and mitigating recurrent displacement or secondary movements.
- **Encouraging development actors to integrate support for return and reintegration into their overall activities and to prioritize investments in PARRs in development engagements in Afghanistan through concrete connectivities in programming.**
- Strengthening **cross-border coordination and programming** (particularly in the areas of education and livelihoods) on the part of donors, among humanitarian and development actors, and between host countries and the country of origin, to better prepare for sustainable return and reintegration.
- **Engaging the private sector** in solutions to infuse additional resources into the economies supporting Afghan refugees and returnees and accelerate self-reliance and socio-economic reintegration, including through creation of new income generation opportunities and productive assets.
- Encouraging **traditional donors to sustain their support** while **mobilizing new and non-traditional donors.**
- **Engaging the international and national NGO partners, civil society, academia and think-tanks.**

#### **IV. Way Forward: Logistical arrangements and modalities**

Core group members adopted the Terms of Reference for the Core Group and thanked UNHCR for providing secretariat support for the Support Platform and its Core Group. UNHCR expressed its gratitude to the European Union for additional financial resources allocated for this purpose.

As part of its secretariat functions, UNHCR will:

- provide a SSAR Support Platform website (<https://ssar-platform.org/>), to serve as a repository of all relevant information and documentation.
- review Global Refugee Forum pledges with a view to encourage States and other stakeholders to channel “unallocated/thematic” pledges towards the Afghan refugee situation.
- convene a side-event on return and reintegration in the margins of the 2020 Afghanistan Conference. This event will build upon the ongoing consultations within the context of the SSAR Support Platform and the Global Compact on Refugees. The deliberations of this consultative process will inform the 2020 Afghanistan Conference that will take place on 23-24 November 2020.

The second meeting of the Core Group will take place in the first quarter of 2021. Prior to this meeting, the Core Group members will establish dedicated “SSAR contact groups” in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan to advance coordination among all relevant stakeholders at country level. The SSAR contact group in Kabul will play an important role in promoting collaboration among humanitarian and development partners in channeling investments in the PARRs and strengthening linkages between the SSAR priorities and the Government’s policies and programmes.

The Core Group members may also become “thematic champions” and form “thematic coalitions” (e.g. in the areas of education, health, livelihoods, etc.) to mobilize support and coordinate action around specific priorities of common interest.

*15 December 2020*

**Annex:**

**Inaugural Meeting of the Core Group of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
Virtual meeting (via zoom), 7 October 2020**

**Agenda**

<b>Time (Bangkok)</b>		<b>Agenda Item</b>
<i>Log-in and IT check will start at 17:30 hrs</i>		
<b>18:00 – 18:15</b>		<b>Welcome and introduction</b> by Mr. Indrika Ratwatte, Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR ( <i>Chair of the meeting</i> )
<b>18:15 – 18:20</b>	<b>Opening Segment</b>	<b>Opening remarks</b> by Mr. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>18:20 – 18:25</b>		<b>Opening remarks</b> by H.E. Noor Rahman Akhlaqi, Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
<b>18:25 – 18:30</b>		<b>Opening remarks</b> by H.E. Mahdi Mahmoudi, Assistant Minister of Interior and Director General of the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran
<b>18:30 – 18:35</b>		<b>Opening remarks</b> by H.E. Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, Federal Minister of States and Frontier Regions, Islamic Republic of Pakistan
<b>18:35 – 19:25</b>		<b>Tour de Table: Remarks</b> by the Core Group members (5 mins each)
<b>19:25 – 19:35</b>	<i>Break</i>	
<b>19:35 – 19:45</b>	<b>Presentations of the SSAR Priorities and Deliverables for 2021</b>	<b>Presentation</b> by UNHCR
<b>19:45 – 19:55</b>		<b>Presentation</b> by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
<b>19:55 – 20:05</b>		<b>Presentation</b> by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran
<b>20:05 – 20:15</b>		<b>Presentation</b> by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
<b>20:15 – 21:35</b>	<b>Thematic Plenary Discussion on the SSAR Priorities and Deliverables for 2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humanitarian and Development Priorities in Focus: Who does What? (geographical and sectoral interests)</li> <li>• Traditional and Non-traditional Partnerships: How do we work together and engage others?</li> <li>• Other areas of collaboration: Expertise, Advocacy, Convening Power</li> </ul>
<b>21:35 – 21:45</b>	<i>Break</i>	
<b>21:45 – 22:00</b>	<b>Way Forward: Core Group in 2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of the Terms of Reference for the Core Group</li> <li>• Introduction of the Secretariat and Chair for 2021</li> <li>• Calendar of events</li> </ul>
<b>22:00 – 22:20</b>	<b>Concluding Segment</b>	<b>Wrap-up</b> by Mr. Indrika Ratwatte, Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR
<b>22:20 – 22:30</b>		<b>Closing remarks</b> by Mr. Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner (Operations)