

Modalities of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries

The SSAR Support Platform¹ was launched on 16 December 2019, prior to the Global Refugee Forum. As such, this document outlines its composition and modalities, as endorsed by the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and UNHCR. It takes into account relevant considerations outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), existing coordination mechanisms and platforms in the context of the Afghan refugee situation, as well as lessons learned from other region-specific Support Platforms and regional responses (e.g., IGAD and MIRPS)².

Guiding Principles

The Support Platform will build momentum and galvanize additional support for achievement of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, which remains the guiding regional policy framework for protecting and enabling solutions for Afghan refugees, with voluntary return and reintegration as the most preferred solution.

As envisioned in the GCR, a support platform is a flexible modality for situation-specific support by the international community – meaning that it can be structured and function in a manner best suited to the ground realities of the Afghan refugee context. It should be efficient, effective and practicable, avoiding duplication with existing processes and coordination mechanisms. Importantly, it is not intended to be a fixed or an operational body, rather it is a vehicle for the high-level mobilization of support.³

The SSAR Quadripartite Steering Committee⁴ will continue as the principal decision-making body, setting the priorities of the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and guiding its implementation at the cross-border and regional level.⁵

As a complementary mechanism, the SSAR Support Platform will facilitate more regular engagement with a core group of committed States, so as to enable a broader base of support for implementation of the SSAR approach, as outlined in the GCR. Other committed stakeholders, including regional mechanisms, international organizations, multi-lateral and bi-lateral development actors, and representatives of the private sector could be included as appropriate.

The SSAR Support Platform will reinforce the priorities of the SSAR and mobilize additional resources to promote and realize its three pillars – voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration, and assistance to host countries – while seeking to address the remaining gaps through reinvigorated, sustained and coherent humanitarian and development investments. It will seek to change the way in which the international community as a whole responds to the Afghan refugee situation, with a view to ensuring

¹ See the Concept Note on the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, 27 November 2019.

² The Support Platform for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region is led by Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The Support Platform for Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones (*Regional Comprehensive Framework for Protection and Solutions*) (MIRPS) is led by Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama.

³ For additional background, see Annex 1 on the GCR and Support Platforms.

⁴ The modalities of the SSAR Quadripartite Steering Committee (Q4) are described in the Terms of Reference of the Q4, as approved by the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and UNHCR.

⁵ See Annex II, Existing Coordination Mechanisms for the SSAR.

greater responsibility-sharing resulting from the protracted presence of large numbers of refugees. In doing so, it recognizes the inclusive policies of the host countries and the commitment of the Government of Afghanistan, at the highest level, to enable voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of its nationals.

Leadership

In line with the GCR provisions pertaining to State leadership and ownership, and building on the existing structures and mechanisms, the Support Platform will be led by the SSAR Quadripartite Steering Committee (Q4), composed of the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and UNHCR.

UNHCR will also support the Platform in a Secretariat capacity.

Membership and participation

The SSAR Support Platform will involve those partners who demonstrate sustained engagement and solidarity with the Afghan refugee situation and who intend to make concrete commitments in support of the SSAR, with emphasis on additional contributions.

Core Group of States

In line with the GCR, the Platform will benefit from the engagement of a core group of States to mobilize contributions and support. The membership of the Core Group will be determined and jointly agreed by the members of the Q4, based on the expressions of interest by States that are committed to sustained engagement and support. Contributions can take different form, including but not limited to:

- Provision of financial, political, material and/or technical assistance;
- Galvanizing political commitment, advocacy, awareness-raising and visibility, including by hosting solidarity events, campaigns and conferences;
- Sustained engagement in forging coherent and sustained humanitarian and development responses;
- Demonstrating leadership and utilizing relevant convening power by advocating for engagement of new non-traditional donors, development actors and the private sector.

Other Members and Participants

Additional stakeholders, including multi-lateral and bi-lateral development actors, UN agencies, and the private sector, may become members of the Platform based upon their interest and commitment. In line with the multi-stakeholder approach, civil society and faith actors could also participate as appropriate, mobilizing important community-based, material and technical support.

Modalities

The Platform will be developed as a light and flexible mechanism.

An annual High-Level Meeting of the Support Platform will be convened to review progress in the implementation of the SSAR, identify gaps, exchange good practices, and mobilize support to address those gaps. This High-Level Meeting will normally be convened after the SSAR Quadripartite Steering Committee meeting. It will be co-chaired by one member of the Q4⁶ and one Core Group member on an annual rotational basis.

The work of the Platform will be facilitated and prepared through more regular technical level meetings at a location to be agreed by the Q4. These technical-level meetings will review progress under the three pillars of the SSAR and progress on specific commitments made by States and other partners. Technical meetings may also address good practice and coordination in thematic areas, as agreed.

In addition, a Geneva chapter of the Platform will be convened at the Ambassadorial level, as appropriate.

UNHCR will provide secretariat support and assistance with the preparation of relevant documentation for these meetings. UNHCR will also ensure regular reporting on the work of the Support Platform to its Executive Committee and the UN General Assembly.

Indicative activities of the Support Platform

As outlined in the Joint Communiqué⁷ issued on the occasion of the launch of the Support Platform on 16 December 2019, the Support Platform will engage a broader base of stakeholders in the implementation of the three pillars of the SSAR, namely:

- Support to voluntary repatriation;
- Investment in sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan; and
- Assistance to host countries.

To this end and more specifically, the Support Platform will seek to:

- *Support voluntary repatriation* and create conditions conducive to sustainable reintegration, including through strengthened cross-border initiatives that build the human capital, resilience and portable skills of refugees in host countries and facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of refugees in a sustained manner, with the aim of utilizing their capacity and skills in Afghanistan as an engine for the progress and development of their homeland;
- *Provide assistance to host countries and communities* through additional investments into the national public service delivery systems of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, in the areas of education, healthcare, social protection and vocational skills development, and support their inclusive policies that benefit both host communities and refugees, in a way that supports their voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan and enables them to contribute to their country of origin.
- *Enhance the capacity for voluntary return* to and sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan, including in the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs) and through other relevant

⁶ Meetings of the Quadripartite Steering Committee are chaired in rotation by its members. Thus, the member chairing the Q4 would co-chair the High-Level meeting.

⁷ See the *Joint Communiqué on the occasion of the launch of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries*, 16 December 2019.

initiatives, including comprehensive return programs, with the objective of realizing an increase of voluntary repatriation in a safe, dignified and sustained manner.

In support of the above objectives, the Support Platform will undertake the following non-exhaustive activities:

- develop and present to the international community a compilation of country-specific, scalable projects that require financial support in 2020-2021;
- mobilize diverse stakeholders, including non-traditional donors, development agencies, bilateral development actors, international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector, in support of the operational priorities of the SSAR;
- facilitate inclusive and sustained dialogue and coordination among these stakeholders, including through periodic stock-taking and joint review of progress and outstanding needs;
- galvanize more predictable and sustained financial, political and technical support, with emphasis on additional contributions;
- raise awareness and visibility of the Afghan refugee situation and of the impact of relevant solutions responses including through visits to selected field locations in the host countries and in Afghanistan;
- provide channels for regular exchanges of experience, lessons learned and good practices;
- enable greater coherence among humanitarian and development investments, as appropriate, and strengthen a whole-of-society approach, including by engaging relevant actors in strategic discussions on how best to channel development resources in support of the SSAR and the priorities and existing national plans of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan;
- stimulate joint cross-border initiatives that support solutions and resilience in a holistic manner and based on sound data analysis.

Annex I: The Global Compact on Refugees and Support Platforms

The GCR provides for a number of specific “arrangements” to achieve more equitable and predictable burden and responsibility-sharing with host countries and communities, and to support the search for solutions, including through assistance to countries of origin. These include national arrangements, regional responses and support platforms.

The arrangements, including support platforms, are intended to be **efficient, effective and practicable**. The GCR provides that “action will be taken to avoid duplication and to streamline the arrangements within existing processes where this is appropriate... At the same time, these arrangements will necessarily go beyond existing processes, changing the way that the international community as a whole responds to large refugee situations so as to ensure better sharing of the burden and responsibility resulting from the presence of large numbers of refugees.” (GCR para. 16)

The GCR provides flexibility regarding the organization, structure and functioning of support platforms, indicating that they must be context-specific.

The general **purpose of a support platform** is described as follows:

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 (para 21), 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. (GCR, para. 23)*

The **process and criteria for activation** of a support platform include:

Upon the request of concerned host countries, or countries of origin, 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 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). (GCR, para. 24)

On **leadership and composition** of a support platform, the GCR provides:

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. (GCR, para. 25)

Finally, on **the role of the support platform**, and its **relationship to existing coordination mechanisms**, the GCR further clarifies:

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. (GCR, para. 26)

Annex II: Existing Coordination Mechanisms for the SSAR

The Joint Communiqué of 3 May 2012 endorsed at the International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) highlighted the importance of the quadripartite consultative process which led to the formulation of the SSAR. The International Conference⁸ expressed its full support for the continuance of this process through the **Quadripartite Steering Committee**, to guide the implementation of the Solutions Strategy. The Conference participants recognized the central importance of bridging the gap between humanitarian assistance and sustainable development, called on relevant stakeholders to channel development resources to support the implementation of the SSAR, and welcomed the enhanced coordination and partnerships that were being created within its framework. These key concepts were further reiterated, inter alia, at the 2012 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, 2014 London Conference on Afghanistan, 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan and 2018 Geneva Conference on Afghanistan.

The international community further reaffirmed its support for the SSAR, as a valid framework to identify and implement lasting solutions for Afghan refugees, at the High-Level Segment on the Afghan Refugee Situation held in October 2015 at the 66th Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee. The Statement issued by the Executive Committee on this occasion highlighted the commitment of the international community to the principles of international solidarity, responsibility- and burden-sharing, and partnership, and reiterated the need to promote dialogue, broadening of the donor base and engagement of diverse actors in the implementation of the SSAR.

The international community has since been engaged through various bilateral or multilateral donor briefings and consultations, led by the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and UNHCR, including notably the **Friends of the SSAR (FOSSAR)** in Pakistan, the **Friends of UNHCR** in Iran or meetings convened by the **Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DiREC)** in Afghanistan.

⁸ The Report of the International Conference is available at <https://www.unhcr.org/4fdb28a79.pdf>. The Joint Communiqué is available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/4fa27c839.pdf>.