



**THE PRIORITY AREAS OF RETURN
AND REINTEGRATION (PARRS) –
PROVIDING EFFECTIVE,
SUSTAINABLE PROTECTION AND
SOLUTIONS IN CRISIS-HIT
AFGHANISTAN**

A context of overlapping crises in Afghanistan

With the end of major hostilities in Afghanistan after 20 years and the consolidation of control by the *de facto* authorities in August 2021, conflict is no longer the primary driver of displacement in-country. Nonetheless, 3.25 million Afghans remain displaced within the country and over 5.53 million are registered refugees or Afghans in refugee-like situations in the region.

The simultaneous overlay of several ongoing emergencies means that the situation in-country is exceptionally complex. Afghans are confronted with severe restrictions to their human rights, especially women and girls, with economic hardship, climate and natural disasters, poverty, and food insecurity.

Natural disasters, climate change and other environmental risks frequently contribute to displacement and heightened vulnerability in Afghanistan. In Herat, several earthquakes in October 2023 took many lives and destroyed homes and livelihoods.

The Government of Pakistan's continued implementation of its plan to deport an estimated 1.7 million foreigners, most of them Afghans, further compounded pressure on already strained resources in receiving communities in Afghanistan, including for shelter and access to basic services.

Returning Afghans will have difficulties re-establishing their lives in Afghanistan and risk overburdening receiving communities. High levels of returns of Afghans, many of them forced, are expected to continue. Projections indicate over 1.46 million Afghans from Pakistan and Iran will return in 2024.

As a result, the needs in Afghanistan are vast and Afghans are dealing with extreme hardship. Approximately 85 percent of them live on less than one dollar a day. The humanitarian country team estimates that 23.7 million people - more than half of Afghanistan's population - require humanitarian assistance in 2024.

Supporting displaced populations and host communities alike

Despite their own serious humanitarian needs, Afghan communities - serving as first responders - are hosting displaced people and welcoming returnees from Pakistan and elsewhere. Supporting receiving communities directly is imperative in view of the ongoing crises in the country and the high numbers of returns. Without linking humanitarian aid with robust medium and longer-term support from the international community, local communities may become overburdened, resulting in further poverty, protection risks and displacement.

Linking emergency responses up with a forward-looking strategy that enables Delivery as One is therefore key. Humanitarian assistance alone is not sufficient to sustainably address the deep protection, humanitarian and basic human needs crisis that resulted from the effects of decades of conflict, recurrent natural disasters, large numbers of returns and the takeover of the *de facto* authorities in August 2021.

The international community has recognised this through UN Security Council Resolutions [2615 \(2021\)](#) and [2664 \(2022\)](#) by emphasising the need to continue to assist the Afghan people not only in addressing immediate humanitarian needs but also in meeting basic human needs through the sustained provision of essential services and livelihoods, thereby reducing the need for life-saving humanitarian support over time. In Resolution [2721 \(2023\)](#), the Security Council encouraged Member States and other relevant stakeholders are encouraged to increase international engagement in a more coordinated manner.

Finding durable solutions for forcibly displaced people, including returnees, is core to the mandate of UNHCR was given by the UN General Assembly. It is with this in mind, that UNHCR has established the [Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration \(PARRs\)](#) programme in Afghanistan.

UNHCR has developed PARRs programmes under the umbrella of the regional [Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees \(SSAR\)](#), the framework for protection and solutions for Afghan refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration, and assistance to host countries. They are fully aligned with and embedded in the 2023 [United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan](#) and promote collaboration and synergy among humanitarian and basic human needs actors, bridging the gap and ensuring a more effective and sustainable solution to displacement challenges.

Through their inclusive, “whole-of-community” focused design, the PARRs are also an example of the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#) in action. By applying an area-based, “whole-of-community” approach and supporting the entire population in an area, including host communities, their ability to welcome forcibly displaced people and returnees is strengthened.

In PARR areas, projects aim to enhance access to education, healthcare, shelter, key community-based projects to facilitate access to public services and livelihoods’ opportunities, provide cash assistance and in-kind support to vulnerable families. UNHCR’s programmes also facilitate access to land, documentation, social services, self-reliance, and inclusion in decision-making structures. Through this holistic approach, interventions improve the lives of Afghans, building resilience and self-sufficiency.

Protection is at the core in the PARRs, ensuring that every intervention is guided by the fundamental principle of safeguarding the rights and dignity of forcibly displaced populations and host communities.

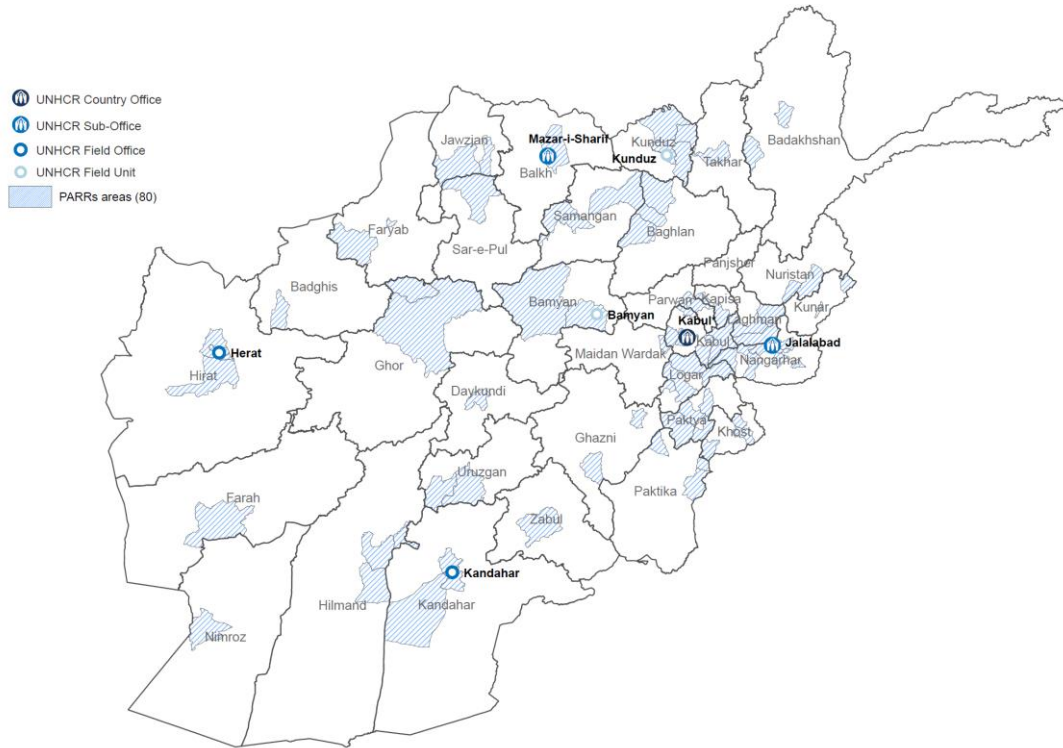
In view of the situation in Afghanistan, the empowerment of women, in line with the [Sustainable Development Goal 5](#) to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, is the cross-cutting theme in all UNHCR interventions in Afghanistan, including the PARRs. This is done by recognizing the unique challenges faced by women through an age, gender and diversity (AGD) approach. Further to mainstreaming, UNHCR has prioritised the design and delivery of programming by women and for women and the prioritization of women in beneficiary selection, financial inclusion, technical and vocational education, all of which grounded in the accountability to affected people (AAP) framework. UNHCR’s existing strength in community-based protection and Communication with Communities (CwC) is key to maintaining close contact with women and girls. Through this approach, support is delivered directly to the communities and individuals.

[An area-based approach in the context of ongoing return movements](#)

The PARRs were established to improve access to basic services in areas where internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returning Afghan refugees settle. This objective is more relevant than ever, given the large-scale arrivals from Pakistan and Iran. The PARRs are an effective mechanism to support communities in welcoming back fellow Afghans.

The PARRs model is designed to adapt to an evolving landscape of displacement and return movements. In the selection of PARRs various criteria are considered, such as numbers of returnees to a certain area, the size of the displaced population already in the area, the size of the host communities and their

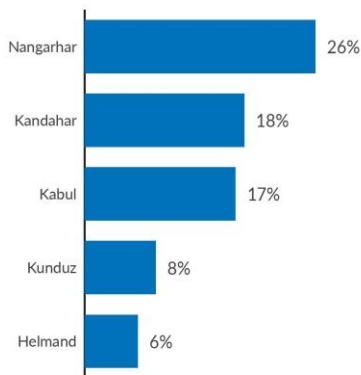
absorption capacity, their needs and services available, previous investments in the area, partner activities, and others. Based on these criteria, over the years, 80 PARRs were identified across the country.



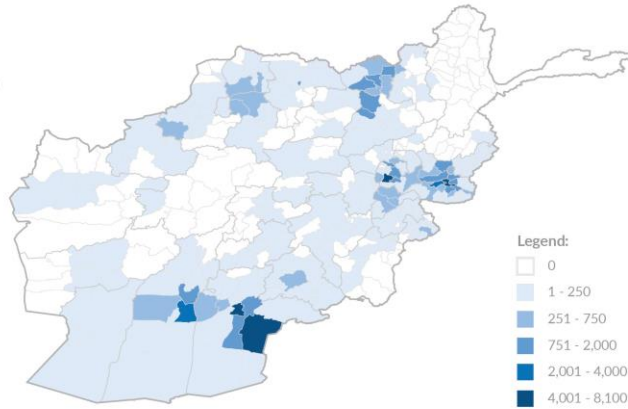
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The top five intended districts of destination of those returning from Pakistan are within PARRs, indicating that overall, a significant number of those returning over the coming period will go to PARRs as well.

Top 5 provinces of intended destination



Intended districts of destination



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In view of this, the PARRs present a firmly established and mature fundament for emergency responses in Afghanistan. Adapted, built on and closely linked up with emergency humanitarian interventions, past investment into this area-based approach can sustainably benefit the Afghan people today.

Supporting and strengthening these already-established programmes and continuing an area-based and community level approach presents a key opportunity to manage the current crisis in the country as efficiently and sustainably as possible. UNHCR is therefore actively seeking to ensure that all areas of high return from Pakistan are covered under its area-based programmes.

UNHCR is consulting returnees and host communities and analysing return movements to adjust its priority engagement areas where necessary and explore, together with partners, where assistance gaps exist and where services need to be expanded. This will support and strengthen the capacity of communities to welcome returnees in all key areas of return.

UNHCR is currently reviewing its 2024 activities, to strengthen its work in areas of high return in the current context of forced returns from Pakistan, possibly through inclusion under existing PARRs or expanding into other areas. It may also lead to the graduation of some PARRs in close partnership with basic human needs actors or the slowing down of activities in others.

To plan and monitor its activities, UNHCR closely collaborates with stakeholders, including local communities and civil society organisations, and conducts its own protection needs assessments and participatory community outreach sessions to identify needs. Based on these assessments, UNHCR will continue to refine its programs in the different areas.

By grounding interventions in empirical data, such as labour market trends, socio-economic-vulnerability assessments and participatory approaches, UNHCR's area-based approach through the PARRs ensures that forcibly displaced populations, returnees and host communities receive the support they need.

The PARRs furthermore promote peaceful co-existence and social cohesion by engaging all segments of society in decision-making. This way, community representatives, opinion leaders or youth groups, become the agents of change. UNHCR puts a special emphasis of inclusion of women and girls in this process.

Fostering partnerships and increasing collaboration and coordination

The PARRs have fostered inclusive partnerships, and complementary programming. UNHCR strategically engages with actors such as the World Bank, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, UNESCO, UNDP, ILO, FAO, UNIDO, various NGOs such as NRC, DRC, and the private sector through the Chamber of Commerce & Industries (ACCI).

The UNHCR - UNDP collaboration where UNDP has extended its [ABADEI](#) approach into 13 PARR areas - is a successful example of gradually bridging the humanitarian - basic human needs gap. The ABADEI programme focuses on economic recovery, social cohesion, and resilience building, which fully aligns with the PARR approach and is crucial in the current situation of heightened returns.

Additionally, most projects under the [Special Trust Fund in Afghanistan \(STFA\)](#) are implemented in the PARRs, not only by UNHCR, but also by other Participating UN Organizations of the STFA. The PARR is one of the key criteria for funding allocation and selecting locations while rolling out STFA in different regions/provinces.

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