

UNHCR Evaluation Management Response

Evaluation title:	UNHCR Country Operation Evaluation Afghanistan
UNHCR evaluation reference:	ES/2020/04
Entity that commissioned the evaluation:	Evaluation Service
Date of Management Response:	4 November 2020

General comments on the evaluation (as a process and product):

The evaluation process has provided an opportunity to reflect on the Operation's strategies. As would likely be the case with other large and complex operations, some elements have been challenging to fully capture in the evaluation report, including the long history of the operation and the complex network of political considerations, stakeholders, and regional dynamics that need to be taken into account. Beyond programme delivery and quantifiable outputs, these factors, too, are critical to acceptance on the ground and to maintaining mutually beneficial cooperation with government actors, in particular. The broad conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation to focus on clearly defining UNHCR's role and building relationships are well-understood. At the same time, the operation continues to work in a complex and extremely fluid context in which conflict is ongoing and the ability of other actors to meet the needs of UNHCR's persons of concern is limited. Accordingly, bringing greater focus to UNHCR Afghanistan's activities will be a focus going forward, but will need to be read against UNHCR's protection mandate and role, in some situations, as a provider of last resort. While UNHCR understands that this report focused on Afghanistan, it is important to highlight that UNHCR's strategies and priorities in Afghanistan cannot be analysed and understood in isolation from UNHCR's strategies in the principal host countries within a carefully calibrated regional approach of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).

UNHCR takes note of the methodology limitations, including limited interactions with beneficiaries, Government interlocutors and a broader range of partners, which may have had an impact on the ability of the evaluation team to acquire a more precise understanding of the complex context, UNHCR's strategies, partnerships and impact; notably as relates to the concept, objectives and whole-of-society approach in the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration through joint action and humanitarian-development-peace investments by a variety of actors. Some of the findings seem to be based on perceptions of individuals (from among a very small sample of those interviewed), rather than substantiated and driven by empirical and evidence-based analysis. This may also explain certain ambiguity in the report's reflections on whether to recommend a status-based or needs-based approach in UNHCR's strategies.

Critically, the evaluation report addresses the period of 2012 to mid-2019 (with focus on 2016 to mid-2019). In the intervening 16 months, the Operation has fundamentally progressed in the implementation of its strategies, including notably partnership building and inclusion advocacy, as reflected in critical new initiatives (including the launch of the SSAR Support Platform, institution of its Core Group, development of the SSAR regional portfolio of projects and UN decision on coordinated action in the PARRs, etc.). These initiatives, along with significant geo-political, security and socio-economic developments, have fundamentally changed the landscape in which UNHCR operates, rendering some of the findings and recommendations of the evaluation report less relevant/applicable to UNHCR's decisions and planning in 2020 and beyond.

<p>RECOMMENDATION 1:</p>	<p>Clarify the boundaries of UNHCR's roles and responsibilities in Afghanistan, defining the parameters of UNHCR involvement with different populations of concern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Conduct internal and external stakeholder consultations to identify where UNHCR can best add value and what 'success' for reintegration in Afghanistan looks like. ii. Articulate clearly where UNHCR's responsibility for PoCs ends and accompany this with metrics or criteria to measure whether the boundaries of UNHCR responsibility have been reached. iii. Continue to develop the vulnerability index to improve the identification of status based PoCs, rolling this out for UNHCR programming and with other actors where funding allows. iv. Leverage UNHCR data – particularly individual level data that other agencies do not typically collect - to inform advocacy campaigns to mobilise resources and galvanize support for all PoCs. v. Refine UNHCR planning frameworks to explicitly plan and budget for advocacy campaigns.
<p>Management response:</p>	<p> <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree </p>
<p>Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):</p>	<p>UNHCR has and will continue to conduct internal and external consultations on related issues, notably within the framework of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) which seeks to redefine the way the international community as a whole responds to the Afghan refugee situation, including importantly as relates to durable solutions in Afghanistan. The SSAR document entitled "The Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees: A Partnership for Solidarity and Resilience" is only one of a series of coherent and inter-linked strategy documents that outline UNHCR's "value added", including importantly its catalytic role in channelling humanitarian-development-peace investments in support of reintegration through a coordinated and targeted multi-stakeholder, area-based and whole-of-society approach. It articulates areas (and specific projects) where UNHCR can provide targeted support while clearly delineating that UNHCR's direct assistance constitutes only one piece of the support that is needed, complementing the critical investments by others (including bilateral and multi-lateral development actors, IFIs, private sector, UN agencies, civil society, traditional and non-traditional donors, in addition to Government response, etc.) with a view to forging synergies and building on comparative advantages and complementary approaches; while minimizing duplication and maximizing the impact of available resources. Relevant consultations also took place in the context of developing the One UN document which outlines the comparative advantages of respective UN agencies.</p> <p>UNHCR's responsibility ends when a PoC attains a durable solution; the criteria have been well defined within UNHCR protection and durable solutions framework, as well as in IASC principles. Any collective effort to measure the "success of reintegration" will need to consider a multitude of aspects, including legal, political, economic and social; and take into account the fact that Afghanistan is a country with ongoing conflict. UNHCR's programming for returnees at the individual/household level is limited to the voluntary repatriation cash grant provided to registered refugee returnees upon return to Afghanistan. Beyond this, investments in reintegration</p>

		<p>(including in the context of the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration) take place at the community level, pursuing a whole-of-society approach, fully in line with the Global Compact on Refugees and other relevant global guidance. These interventions seek to preserve access to rights and services for all community members (including returnees regardless of their status in the country of asylum, IDPs and local communities), with new arrivals or independent shocks (such as natural disasters or economic downturns) posing new challenges. Measures to mitigate the risks identified in relation to these interventions are also implemented. Accordingly, this programming is responsive to changing conditions and not driven by status of persons of concern, but rather by a multi-dimensional analysis that takes into account the diverse composition of the communities and their unique needs. It has always been evident that in the context of the fluid and unpredictable situation in Afghanistan, the Government and the international community as a whole need to strike a balance between addressing the massive immediate humanitarian needs as they arise (including in order to prevent further/secondary/onward displacement) and the efforts to pursue sustainable solutions through medium to long-term investments.</p> <p>Additionally, UNHCR's response to the IDP situation is clearly defined as part of the broader inter-agency cluster response and UNHCR's budgetary allocation under Pillar IV, subject to the availability of corresponding funding. It is to be noted that while the findings of the evaluation report put a lot of emphasis on UNHCR's IDP response (and how this should/could be re-calibrated), the report simultaneously absolves itself of analysing/assessing UNHCR's significant leadership role in and contribution to the protection and ES/NFI clusters over the years, as well as other forms of response, stating that this is outside of the scope of its ToRs. As such, the analysis is incomplete and omits to recognize the full scope of UNHCR's long-standing and substantive engagement with IDPs.</p> <p>UNHCR is in the process of implementing its renewal of UNHCR's Results-Based Management (RBM) system to enable UNHCR to make decisions based on evidence; be accountable for results; and inclusively, effectively and efficiently deliver and report on its protection and solutions results by improving RBM structure and tools through developing a lean and flexible results framework focusing on impact. In addition, this will empower field operations with flexible indicators and limited mandatory requirements, facilitating use of direct feedback from persons of concern and donors. All operations including Afghanistan will start implementation with the new RBM/Results framework from 2022. In addition, Afghanistan will also be embarking on multi-year strategic planning from 2022. The new Global Result Framework and its tool (Board) will allow UNHCR to improve the planning, budgeting and reporting at the country level and globally. Subsequently, the operation will be able to refine the way its advocacy interventions and campaigns are planned for and reported.</p> <p>UNHCR will continue to leverage its data with relevant stakeholders, as has been the case with a number of development partners including the World Bank and UNDP. In 2021, UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan will launch a joint PoR Document Renewal and Information Verification Exercise (DRIVE) which will collect important Afghan refugee population data (including socio-economic circumstances, skill sets, level of education, sources of income, and places of origin in Afghanistan, etc.) to inform effective and efficient solutions-oriented programming in Afghanistan.</p>				
Unit or function responsible:		Representative, Afghanistan; Regional Bureau Asia; Relevant HQ entities				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress	
					Status	Comments
	Conduct returnee monitoring three years after return to evaluate the situation of	Reintegration Unit/ CO Afghanistan		31/12/2021		

	returnees as compared to host community members					
	Launch CBPM dashboard on data portal and share with key stakeholders.	Protection Unit/CO Afghanistan	The CBPM dashboard is largely complete, with just a few remaining modifications to be made. It will be possible to filter for specific protection criteria to see where needs are most acute in areas surveyed by UNHCR's protection monitoring. But it has to be emphasized that despite UNHCR's broad reach, we are not able to survey every district or village to draw conclusions on needs from an absolute perspective. We will continue to also work with the Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (WoAA) and protection information collected by other members of the Protection Cluster in order to prioritize interventions.	31/12/2020		
RECOMMENDATION 2:		<p>Update country level partnership strategy to complement the SSAR support platform which includes direct and indirect influencing opportunities for UNHCR, capitalising where possible on well-established relationships of other actors working towards the GCR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Diversifying UNHCR's capacity development engagement with additional government ministries to strengthen the ability of the government to respond to UNHCR's priorities in the short and long term. ii. Mobilising key development actors and others within the humanitarian sector to support UNHCR's priorities. iii. Identifying how these partnerships can be deepened at the field as well as policy level. iv. Using the SARR to increase the opportunities throughout the year to engage with the humanitarian and development sector – such as civil society and academia – to improve buy-in and assist mobilisation. v. Developing a results framework and indicators for tracking success and achievements of the partnership plan. vi. Identifying current activities that sit outside UNHCR's mandate and identify the most responsible ways for UNHCR to transition out, developing 2-3 year responsible disengagement strategies. 				
Management response:		<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):		Efforts to diversify and broaden the base of partnerships are central to the concept of the Support Platform for the SSAR and relevant ongoing initiatives. By defining a mutually supportive and complementary set of actions within multi-stakeholder plans (e.g. government, humanitarian and development actors including the UN, I/NGOs, CBOs/CSOs, private sector), UNHCR will continue to pursue a holistic approach towards integrated humanitarian-development-peace programming that promotes a robust and predictable response for PoCs				

		<p>and affected populations in an equitable manner, creating opportunities to access local and national services and structures. Importantly, UNHCR has and will continue to play a catalytic role in linking humanitarian action to development programming, including projects that provide examples of good practice for development actors to scale up and support local authorities to prepare and implement localized plans and interagency, area-based programming through a CRRF approach. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Global Compact on Refugees will remain the overarching frameworks.</p> <p>To ensure a coordinated and complementary approach, UNHCR remains pro-actively engaged with the Government of Afghanistan, including ongoing advocacy to ensure that the needs of and solutions for refugees, IDPs and other forcibly displaced populations are firmly embedded in Afghanistan's national development processes, planning and programming; including notably Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF II) for 2021-2025, as well as relevant implementation mechanisms, such as the National Priority Programs (NPPs).</p> <p>UNHCR will also continue to promote the inclusion of returnees, refugees, IDPs and other affected populations via established mechanisms and frameworks (such as the UN Country Team, UNSDCF, Durable Solutions Working Group) and through partnerships with new actors, including civil society, private sector, think-tanks and academia. Reinvigorated collaboration with key development partners, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and UNDP will be further reinforced. Within the UN, particular focus will be on the implementation of the UN decision, at highest level, to pursue joint and targeted area-based humanitarian, development and peace investments in the PARRs, as a means of confidence-building and supporting the peace process; as well as cross-border initiatives with neighbouring countries and Central Asia.</p> <p>The proposed phase out and responsible disengagement of UNHCR in the country within 2-3 years' timeline is not feasible given the prevailing deteriorating security and socio-economic conditions since the report was finalised. UNHCR will need to continue to build partnerships with the Government and other actors in support of inclusive policies, enhanced capacity on the ground and strengthened national and local systems; taking into consideration the overall security and enabling environment in the country before disengagement.</p>				
Unit or function responsible:		Representative, Afghanistan; Regional Bureau Asia; Relevant HQ entities				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress	
					Status	Comments
	Update country level partnership strategy with an action plan and indicators to measure progress.	Reintegration Unit/CO Afghanistan		31/03/2021		
	Develop transition strategy outlining the key areas for inclusion advocacy with an action plan and indicators to measure progress.	Reintegration Unit/CO Afghanistan		31/03/2021		
		CO Afghanistan		30/11/2020		

	Provide inputs into Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF II) for 2021-2025 and continue relevant advocacy					
	Continue consultations on the implementation of the UN EC decision on the PARRs	CO Afghanistan		31/03/2021		

RECOMMENDATION 3:	<p>Work with government and UNHCR partners to analyse government action on PoCs through a political-economy lens to understand the range of factors that inhibit or enable greater support to PoCs and use this to inform a more rounded approach to capacity building by UNHCR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Conduct a joint analysis with government actors to analyse government capacity development through a political-economy lens and consider commitment and corruption, as well as capacity. ii. Develop specific approaches to address the range of issues arising from the political-economy analysis and work collaboratively with other stakeholders working on similar issues. iii. Develop metrics to measure progress of capacity building and use those to inform adaptation of approaches as needed.
Management response:	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Disagree
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):	<p>The proposed analysis of the Government's capacity through a political-economy lens is beyond both the mandate and capacity of UNHCR. This falls within the ambit of governance reform, broad-based anti-corruption drives by the Government, as well as various national accountability mechanisms and measures.</p> <p>UNHCR will, however, continue working on related issues, including capacity building, within the One UN approach, utilizing the available tools, such as the UNSDCF's common country analysis (CCA) and the ANPDF-II. With regard to the latter, UNHCR has already started working with relevant counterparts on solidifying the integral linkages between timely, inclusive and forward-looking planning for return and reintegration and the three overarching pillars of ANPDF II for 2021-2025 (peace-building, market-building and state-building), as well as relevant implementation mechanisms, including the National Priority Programs (NPPs).</p> <p>UNHCR will further encourage discussion with relevant stakeholders on how to best support MoRR's effectiveness and efficiency in delivering quality services to PoCs.</p>
Unit or function responsible:	Representative, Afghanistan; Regional Bureau Asia; Relevant HQ entities

Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress	
					Status	Comments
RECOMMENDATION 4:		<p>Develop a comprehensive communications campaign to improve the humanitarian and development communities' understanding of the rationale of UNHCR's mandate and why others need to support UNHCR priority PoCs, as well as UNHCR's contributions to vulnerable groups outside its mandate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Identify key opportunities to strengthen the understanding of other stakeholders as to why support to UNHCR priority PoCs is important and highlight the recognition that there is a substantial gap in support between humanitarian and development assistance. These opportunities may include: ii. Highlight the link between PARRs and peace processes and value to wider One UN objectives iii. Highlight challenges faced on the ground at the Afghanistan international pledging conference in November 2020 (TBC), encouraging donors to close the humanitarian-development gap iv. Use common country analyses linked to the sustainable development framework to further emphasise the humanitarian-development link. v. Articulate clearly the unique vulnerabilities and needs of UNHCR's priority PoCs and why they need to be prioritised; communicate this systematically across the humanitarian and development sectors linking to the partnership strategy (recommendation 2). vi. Highlight the benefits that the information collected by UNHCR's needs assessments make to needs-based PoCs as well as status-based PoCs. vii. Develop a quarterly 2-page briefing to show the impact of UNHCR's vulnerability index on programming choices. 				
		<p>Management response:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree</p>				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):		<p>The scope of this recommendation may be extended beyond the humanitarian-development nexus, including enhanced understanding of the work of UNHCR and the UNAMA Peace Team based on UNSC Resolutions – S/RES/2543 (2020) or S/RES/2489 (2019) as pertains to joint action on "creating conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees from neighbouring and other countries."</p>				

Unit or function responsible:		Representative, Afghanistan; Regional Bureau Asia				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress	
					Status	Comments
	Develop the communication strategy highlighted in this recommendation along with specific deliverables and timelines to achieve the objectives	CO Afghanistan/ Bureau		31/03/ 2021		
	Develop a briefing note demonstrating the link between vulnerability analysis and programming.	CO Afghanistan	Data collected and analysed through the CBPM Dashboard will provide an evidentiary basis for a vulnerability analysis, which may also consider information gathered from other sources.	31/03/2021		
	Convene High-Level Consultations on Return and Reintegration to inform the proceedings and outcomes of the 2020 Afghanistan Conference and related processes	CO Afghanistan/ Bureau		20/11/2020		
RECOMMENDATION 5:		Strengthen the implementation of the age, gender and diversity policy (AGD) to better monitor and adapt to complex and changing AGD needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Embed gender context analysis within the programme cycle and conduct these analyses across different contexts within Afghanistan to inform operation plans and ensure AGD-inclusive programming (policy area 1). Key findings should be clearly documented and developed into appropriate monitoring indicators. ii. Further develop AGD monitoring mechanisms to ensure outcome level change data is captured. Outcome-level evidence will strengthen organisational learning and allow for adaptation (policy area 5) in relation to shifting gender and social norms. iii. Strengthen systems for monitoring cases of SGBV to inform prevention and referral mechanisms (policy area 6e) 				
Management response:		<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				

Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):		UNHCR recognizes the centrality of the UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender, and Diversity to its work. UNHCR will continue to adhere to this policy throughout the programme cycle, however noting that UNHCR Afghanistan does not conduct case management for GBV cases; this is rather a cluster responsibility and as such we emphasize the coordination aspect of Core Action 6E.				
Unit or function responsible:		Representative, Afghanistan				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress	
					Status	Comments
	Collect data in a participatory manner, ensuring that inputs from women, men, girls, and boys from diverse backgrounds and of diverse abilities contribute to the planning cycle. Ensure all data is disaggregated in line with the AGD Policy.	Protection, Programme, IMU Afghanistan		End-2021		
	Support development and update of referral pathways for GBV cases.	Protection Cluster	The update and dissemination of referral pathways is underway as a priority activity of the Afghanistan Protection Cluster.	End-2021		