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Evaluation of UNHCR's Country Operation, Afghanistan

EVALUATION REPORT
AUGUST 2020

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UNHCR Evaluation Service

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The UNHCR support for this evaluation has been outstanding, both logistically and more intellectually providing a constant sounding board for our questions, findings, conclusions, and reflections on UNHCR's operations. The Evaluation Team has witnessed some of the daily security challenges the country team are faced with. We have the utmost respect for their professionalism and constant dedication to implementing UNHCR's mandate to support the many vulnerable persons of concern (PoC) in Afghanistan, in spite of endless daily security challenges.

The evaluation Team Leader, Lene Poulsen, and team member Katie Tong are the co-authors of this report. They were supported by team members Saliha Olker and Kamran Saeed, while Jason Collodi, the Project Manager, gave editorial and technical support. Dane Rogers (Itad) provided quality assurance.

The evaluation report follows the Annotated Content Guide to draft Quality Evaluation Reports as laid out in UNHCR's Guidance on Evaluation and Related Quality Assurance (pilot version, November 2016). For the style the evaluation report follows UNHCR's Evaluation Service's Report Template Blue Cover (2019).

Evaluation information at a glance	
Title of the evaluation:	Evaluation of UNHCR's Country Operation in Afghanistan
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Evaluation manager / contact in UNHCR:	Nabila Hameed, Senior Evaluation Officer
Support staff:	-

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the evaluation and intended audience

The purpose of the Afghanistan Country Operation Evaluation (COE) is to generate practical recommendations to inform UNHCR operations in the future, informed by robust and systematic analysis. The evaluation aimed to:

- a) Support UNHCR to make evidence-based decisions for future operational planning and strategy;
- b) Inform decisions to strengthen partnership and programme design thereby improving assistance to IDP's, returnees, refugees and host populations, including Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs);
- c) Assess the effectiveness of UNHCR's plans and activities within the specific country context.¹

This evaluation is part of a series of evaluations of a similar nature also being undertaken in three other countries (Angola, Iraq and Egypt). While the different country evaluations should be seen as individual exercises, they have taken a consistent approach in terms of design, execution and presentation.

The evaluation covers the timeframe 2012 to 2019, with a focus on 2016 to mid-2019, and examines results achieved in the areas of protection, inclusion and durable solutions, as well as looking at UNHCR Afghanistan's strategic positioning. Where relevant, the evaluation seeks to highlight the main features in the operational environment that either constrain or enable efforts in the transitional period.

This report is prepared primarily for the UNHCR Afghanistan Country Office, and the UNHCR Regional Bureau Bangkok. A secondary audience of the evaluation includes other UNHCR Bureaux and Divisions, the Senior Executive Team, as well as UNHCR partners – including government and humanitarian and development actors. This includes; The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR); The Provincial Directorates of Refugees and Repatriation (DORRs)²; the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the One UN team; other United Nations and multilateral agencies³; cooperating partners and other NGOs; and donors. It is expected that these stakeholder groups will use the evaluation for future strategic decisions. While not a primary intended user, the direct beneficiaries of UNHCR's operations in Afghanistan are a key stakeholder group for the evaluation: communities, refugees, returnees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), and (Persons with Specific Needs) PSNs; men and women, and boys and girls.

Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach combining a desk study, interviews with key internal and external stakeholders and two field visits. A total of 222 stakeholders were interviewed or participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), including UNHCR staff, NGO partners, actors within the Government of Afghanistan, donors, Persons of Concern (PoCs) and other multilateral agencies. Field visits were conducted in Kabul and three sub- and field offices of Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

Three areas of inquiry provide an overall framework for the evaluation:

- **Results and Performance:** What have been the results in the areas of assistance, protection, and solutions as achieved by the UNHCR Country Operation? Under which conditions has UNHCR achieved these results, and what were the most important contextual and operational factors/decisions contributing to or impeding achievement of these results?
- **Contributing and constraining factors:** How strategically has UNHCR been positioned within the country context, and what are the key factors driving strategic decision-making? To what

¹ This is in line with the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Afghanistan COE in Annex 1).

² MORR and DORR are UNHCR's DiREC counterpart at the level of the Government of Afghanistan.

³ Key Interagency partners that the COE consider as intended audiences are development-oriented agencies: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN International Organization on Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization (ILO), and World Bank.

extent do the strategy and Country Operation Plan have coherence and/or alignment with the work of other humanitarian/development actors, private sector, and civil society actors within the country? How well aligned is the existing UNHCR strategy and Country Operation Plan to the current and/or evolving needs of the population and wider country context?

- **Future strategic directions:** How can UNHCR build on results achieved to date, and further leverage UNHCR's strategic position and influence within the country, to optimize the potential impact of collective efforts towards protection and solutions for UNHCR Persons of Concern, and the communities that host them?

Following the development of key findings, a co-creation workshop was held with members of UNHCR staff to generate appropriate and realistic recommendations. The workshop was attended by UNHCR staff from both UNHCR's evaluation service, regional bureau and country operation in Afghanistan.

An adverse context

The UNHCR Operation in Afghanistan is working within an extremely complex and challenging context. Afghanistan is now entering the 40th year of conflict which has resulted in a complex humanitarian situation and protracted displacement of its population. As of the end of 2018, there were 2,759,010 PoCs living in Afghanistan and the number is increasing. Attempts to reduce conflict over the last decade have consistently failed. The latest peace talks in 2019 between the US government and the Taliban – which notably excluded the GoA – have not led to any reduction in violence thus far, and political instability and armed violence remains widespread.

The on-going insecurity is exacerbated by multiple and recurrent natural hazards that are intensified by ongoing climate change. Within this context, there is no linear progression from humanitarian to developmental support for those displaced, as repeated shocks and crises reconfirm the need for humanitarian assistance. This adds resource pressure on agencies like UNHCR, and creates further complexity as PoCs can suffer multiple displacements and hence not easily conform to status-based criteria.

Furthermore, there are significant regional dynamics that affect PoCs in Afghanistan, politicizing the asylum space, requiring UNHCR to carefully co-ordinate its policy positions and operations across Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Summary of Findings

UNHCR has delivered a wide range of results supporting significant numbers of PoCs, demonstrating an ability to provide short-term protection and showing leadership where others have been absent. This has involved playing an important role in piloting and mainstreaming cash-based interventions and finding ways to overcome cash-based challenges that currently limit its potential use. In addition, UNHCR has provided long-term livelihood support to PoCs with some success.

However, UNHCR has struggled to mobilise longer-term support from other stakeholders which is not helped by **structural challenges within the UN system which constrains a One UN approach**, such as incompatible budgetary systems. This has led to a critical absence of development partners within UNHCR's areas of operation, leaving a gap between humanitarian and development support. UNHCR has stepped into this gap, stretching its resources, but at the same time struggled to cultivate an enabling environment which would help PoCs transition into sustainable situations.

This is compounded by the fact that **UNHCR's government partners are not yet capable of taking full responsibility of PoCs, despite some UNHCR successes to mobilise government support**. Combined with an absence of development actors, **UNHCR is left with no real strategies to transition responsibility for PoCs to others**.

This is not helped by **a lack of clarity of UNHCR's roles and responsibilities**, both thematically and temporally, and an unclear understanding of what success looks like and how to measure it. This lack of clarity on the boundaries of where UNHCR's roles and responsibilities end has contributed **to a lack of strategic focus where needs-based and status-based responses can be in tension with each other, blurring UNHCR's boundaries with other stakeholders**.

UNHCR's coordination and leadership within the cluster system are appreciated by the sector, although more can be done to complement data produced by other actors. Outside of the cluster system UNHCR is lauded as working well with government departments, with a willingness to provide support and information to other UN-projects. This strong relationship with the government has led to **the adoption of important policies at the national level**, with the recent *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees* (SSAR) well aligned with the global Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and Global Compact for Refugees (GCR).

Finally, UNHCR has made progress to increase its support to women and girls in the face of challenging social norms, **but there are design and capacity issues which limit the scope and reach of its gender-based programming.**

Conclusions

UNHCR has, commendably, tried to respond to the immense needs in Afghanistan, but that has resulted in over-stretch and a certain lack of strategic coherence. This is complicated by the difficulty in defining – conceptually and contextually – where UNHCR responsibility for PoCs ends.

While UNHCR has provided valuable support to PoCs, there are tensions between UNHCR's status-based approach which predominantly focuses on returnees and refugees, and a needs-based approach which often identifies IDPs as the priority. As such, UNHCR is not always reaching the most vulnerable PoCs.

The transformational change in the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation needed for UNHCR to be able to transition responsibility to the government is unlikely in the near-term, and the continuing struggle to mobilise sufficient support for UNHCR PoCs from other actors has resulted in UNHCR finding it difficult to develop and implement any effective transition strategies.

The SSAR planning and policy-making process currently does not sufficiently engage other key actors which has compromised UNHCR's ability to mobilise those actors to provide support to returnees in (Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARR) areas and has failed to harness the collective wisdom of the humanitarian sector.

The One UN approach is encouraging greater alignment and collaboration between UN agencies and UNHCR is valued for its leadership role within the protection cluster. However, structural challenges within the UN system remain, inhibiting the full scale of collaboration that is rightly expected by the government of Afghanistan.

There has been progress in addressing age and gender through the lens of the global AGD, particularly within the PSN programme in Afghanistan. However, not all of the mechanisms used work as effectively as they could to ensure AGD is fully embedded within operations, and continued work in this area will be important to fully harness the AGD potential of UNHCR.

Recommendations

Recommendations were co-created with UNHCR staff during a co-creation workshop. The workshop was framed around four key questions:

- How can UNHCR (including regional and global levels) work effectively through national government (a la CRRF/GCR) when faced with uneven government capacity, particularly with the principal national government counterpart agency in Afghanistan?
- How can UNHCR (including regional and global levels) more effectively respond to community-based development needs in Afghanistan, including through partnerships?
- How can UNHCR Afghanistan move beyond meeting basic needs in chronic and protracted emergency situations (e.g. winterization) and effectively influence other actors who need to do more?
- How can UNHCR (including regional and global levels) better support and inform decision-making and prioritization when managing limited resources to meet acute needs across multiple pillars in Afghanistan?

Discussions from these questions informed the following five recommendations.

1. Clarify the boundaries of UNHCR’s roles and responsibilities in Afghanistan, defining the parameters of UNHCR involvement with different populations of concern.

UNHCR’s roles and responsibilities in Afghanistan can be better defined. Improving the clarity of roles and responsibilities is key and this should be accompanied by improved prioritisation processes that identify status based PoCs that are within UNHCR’s mandate. In parallel, UNHCR should use the information it collects through its needs-assessments to inform advocacy campaigns for all PoCs, whether they are prioritised for direct support or not. This will allow UNHCR to be more focused whilst recognising that it has a duty to all PoCs as rights holders. In advance of the next planning cycle, UNHCR Headquarters, the Country Operation and the Field Offices should:

- 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.

2. Update the 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.

Many of UNHCR’s operational and conceptual challenges are linked to the support provided (or not) by other stakeholders and UNHCR needs to develop a strategy at the country level that seeks to mobilise and engage these stakeholders. This strategy should immediately be developed by the Country Operation with support from their Field Offices. The strategy should consider:

- 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.

3. 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.

A thorough analysis of the enablers and disablers of government support to UNHCR priority PoCs is needed and a political-economy analysis lens applied to fully understand the dynamics of capability, commitment, corruption and co-ordination. This then needs to inform what 'capacity' means for UNHCR within the context of capacity development in Afghanistan. In advance of the next planning cycle, the Country Operation should:

- i. Conduct a joint analysis with government actors to analyse government capacity 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.

4. 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.

As per UNHCR's communications strategy, a key communications objective is to build support for protection and solutions for refugees and other PoCs. In order to strengthen UNHCR Afghanistan's approach to this objective, the Country Operation, with help from the Regional Bureau, should:

- 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:
 - Highlight the link between PARRs and peace processes and value to wider One UN objectives
 - Highlight challenges faced on the ground at the Afghanistan international pledging conference in November 2020 (TBC), encouraging donors to close the humanitarian-development gap
 - Use UN Common Country Analyses linked to the sustainable development framework (UNSDCF) to further emphasise the humanitarian-development link.
- ii. 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).
- iii. Highlight the benefits that the information collected by UNHCR's needs assessments make to needs-based PoCs as well as status-based PoCs.
- iv. Develop a quarterly 2-page brief to show the impact of UNHCR's vulnerability index on programming choices.

5. Strengthen the implementation of the age, gender and diversity policy (AGD) to better monitor and adapt to complex and changing AGD needs

UNHCR's approach to inclusion follows core actions from six areas of engagement in the AGD policy. The current approach to inclusion is focused on reach and output targets and less on the actual change that those targets are leading to for individuals and communities. The Country Operation should therefore work with the Field Offices to:

-
- 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)

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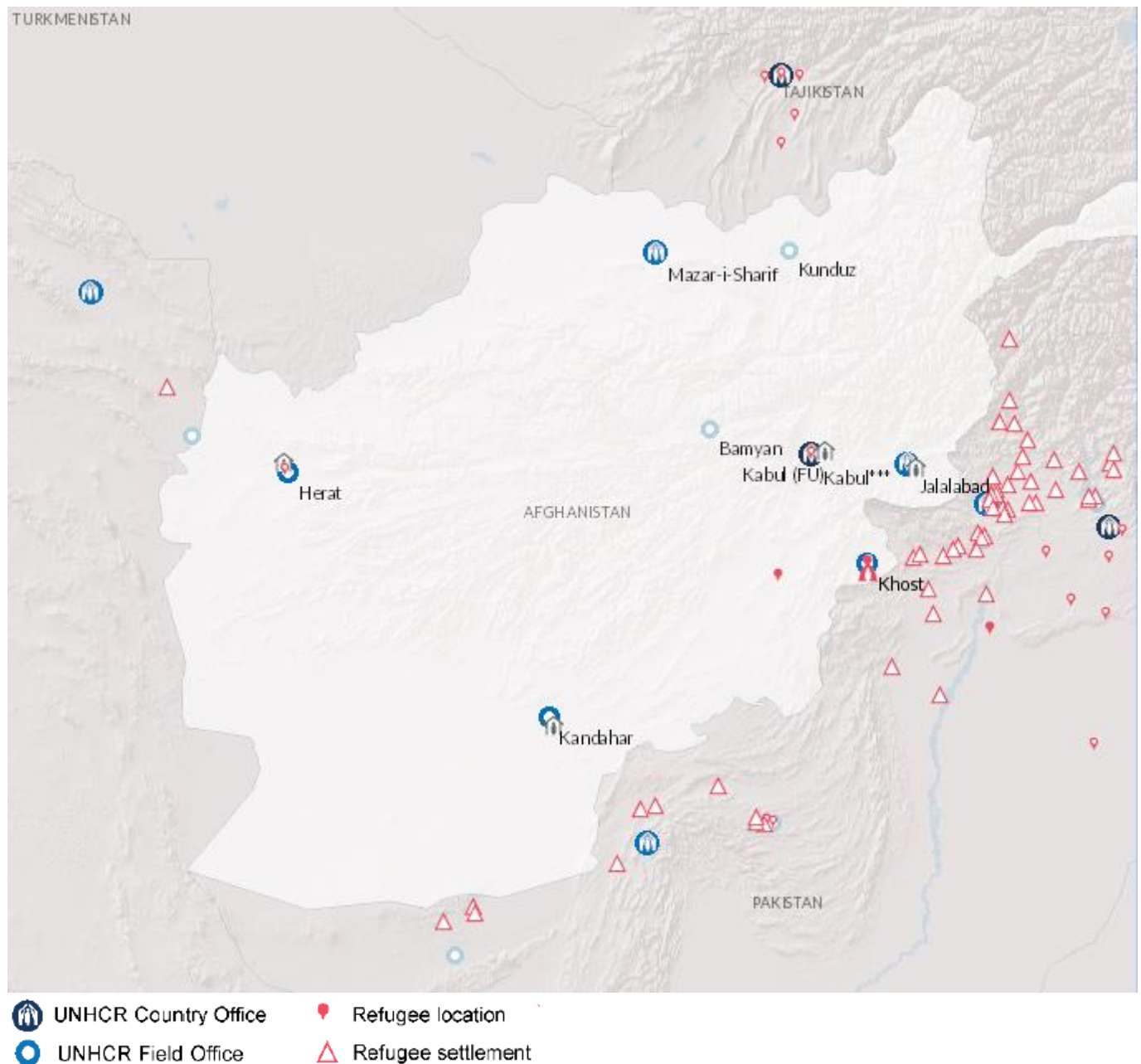
List of abbreviations

ABOD	Administrative Budget and Obligation Document
ACBAR	Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief & Development
AGD	Age, Gender, and Diversity
ANDMA	Afghan National Disaster Management Authority
ANPDF	Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework
AoI	Area of Inquiry
AOL	Above Operating Level
CBI	Cash-Based Interventions
CBP	Community-Based Protection
CO	Country Office
COE	Country Operation Evaluation
COP	Country Operations Plan
CPM	Community-Based Protection Measures
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DiREC	Displacement and Return Executive Committee
DORR	Provincial Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation
DSWG	Durable Solutions Working Group
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAM	Gender & Age Marker (IASC)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GEEW	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
HCT	UN Humanitarian Country Team
HEAT	Household Emergency Assessment Tool
HLP	Housing, Land, and Property
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMCC	Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee on Refugees, Returnees
IOM	UN International Organisation on Migration
MORR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
NFI	Non-food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPP	National Priority Programme
OCHA	UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OL	Operating Level
PARR	Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration
PMT	Population Movement Tracking
PoC	Persons of Concern

PPG	Population Planning Group
PSN	Persons with Specific Needs
QIP	Quick Impact Project
SALAM	Support Afghanistan Livelihoods and Mobility
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SO	Strategic Objective
SSAR	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDAF	UN Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UN-HABITAT	UN Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNMAS	UN Mine Action Service
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WHO	UN World Health Organisation

Map of UNHCR operational area in Afghanistan

Figure 1: Map of Afghanistan and bordering regions of Pakistan showing UNHCR's operational area



Timeline of major events – UNHCR Afghanistan Operation

The following events have defined the Persons of Concern situation and UNHCR's operations in Afghanistan:

Contextual factors	Year	International & National policy and frameworks
	2012	At the <i>International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR)</i> the international community endorsed the SSAR developed by the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and UNHCR.
The Presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan agree to work for an Afghan peace deal within six months.	2013	
Pakistani military operations against local militant groups in North Waziristan led to the displacement of Pakistanis into Afghanistan.	2014	National IDP policy endorsed by Cabinet of Ministers providing a systematic framework for emergency and durable solutions for IDPs.
NATO combat mission ends and most combat troops withdraw from Afghanistan. Security is transferred to Afghan military and police.	2015	United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in place 2015 – 2019 forming overall vision of the UN. The National Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Policy introduced outlining the main components of the national voluntary return policy.
A surge in returnees to Afghanistan in due to a convergence of factors saw 372,577 refugees return in 2016, compared to 58,000 the previous year.	2016	The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) was presented at the Brussels Conference with ten National Priority Programmes (NPPs) in which inclusion of IDPs and returnees have been stated, most notably in the 'Citizens Charter'. The Policy Framework and Action Plan for Returnees and IDPs adopted by the Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DIREC). The Grand Bargain is launched to align humanitarian actors in addressing emergency needs.
United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reclassifies Afghanistan as an active conflict, as opposed to post-conflict.	2017	UNDAF updated in line with ANPDF to One UN Mutual Accountability Framework 2017 - 2021.
Afghanistan experience the worst droughts in decades displacing hundreds of thousands. The UN Country team decides to focus on drought victims in the 2018 response.	2018	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) adopted by Afghanistan government. Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) affirmed by UN General assembly UN OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2018-2021
Presidential elections planned; postponed from March to 28 September. Heightened insecurity in the run-up to the elections with increasing challenges for daily UNHCR operations.	2019	Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARR) initiative launched identifying 15 areas. The SSAR support platform is launched.
UNHCR closes the Khost office.		
UNHCR hands over refugee management responsibility to the Government in Khost and Paktika (on-going).	2020	The PARRs are expanded from 15 to 20 areas.

1. Introduction, purpose, scope and methodology of the evaluation

1.1 Introduction

This report relates to an independent evaluation of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) country operations in Afghanistan for the period 2012–2019. This evaluation is part of a series of evaluations of a similar nature also being undertaken in three other countries (Angola, Iraq and Egypt). The evaluation started with an inception phase during which the Evaluation Team undertook scoping interviews and a brief mission to the country, besides conducting preliminary desk reviews of key documents. Following this, an inception report with a detailed methodology for conducting the evaluation was produced and discussed with the UNHCR Evaluation Service, which managed the evaluation. The inception phase was followed by desk research to map all available evidence from secondary sources before the evaluation team undertook a country visit to gather evidence from the field. This report brings together findings, conclusions and recommendations from the various processes of the evaluation. It should be noted that whilst the report does in places acknowledge the complex regional dynamics of working with Persons of Concern (PoCs) across Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, this is an evaluation of UNHCR in Afghanistan only.

1.2 Evaluation purpose, objectives, scope and approach

The purpose of the Afghanistan Country Operation Evaluation (COE) is to generate practical recommendations to inform UNHCR operations in the future, informed by robust and systematic analysis. The evaluation aimed to:

- a) Support UNHCR to make evidence-based decisions for future operational planning and strategy;
- b) Inform decisions to strengthen partnership and programme design thereby improving assistance to IDP's, returnees, refugees and host populations, including Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs);
- c) Assess the effectiveness of UNHCR's plans and activities within the specific country context.⁴

While the different country evaluations (Afghanistan, Angola, Iraq and Egypt) should be seen as individual exercises, the evaluations take a consistent approach in terms of evaluation design, execution and presentation.

Scope

The evaluation covers UNHCR's Country Operation activities in Afghanistan over the period 2012 to mid-2019, with a focus on 2016 to mid-2019.⁵ The year 2012 has been identified in the evaluation as a critical moment in time for the country operation with the launching of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). The SSAR was developed with the three Governments of Afghanistan (GoA), Iran and Pakistan as a framework for joint interventions that aim to create an environment conducive to voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration inside Afghanistan, and ease pressure on host communities. This evaluation will also touch upon the SSAR support platform launched in December 2019 as another important juncture in the regional approach to finding lasting solutions for refugees.

The evaluation analyses key results of the Country Operation and takes into account contributing and constraining factors for Country Operation performance and future strategic direction. It examines the following initiatives as supported by UNHCR Afghanistan in the context of the country portfolio:

- Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).
- Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARR) and Community-Based Protection measures (CBP).

⁴ This is in line with the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Afghanistan COE in Annex 1).

⁵ UNHCR's country operation in Afghanistan has never been independently evaluated in its entirety before. Individual initiatives have been independently evaluated, including as case studies for global thematic evaluations including Multi-purpose and Sectoral Outcomes (2018), Evaluation of UNHCR's leadership of the global cluster and field protection clusters: 2014-2016 (2017), and UNHCR Shelter Assistance Programme to Afghanistan (2012).

- Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).⁶

It also assesses the Country Operations' alignment with other initiatives, particularly the UNHCR core mandate, Global Strategic Priorities, UNHCR Strategic Directions, the One UN Mutual Accountability Framework, the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (2017-2021), and the Grand Bargain. This will help to inform recommendations for future strategic directions.

The Country Operation covers the following PoCs under UNHCR's core mandate: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Returnees, Refugees, and host populations, including Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs).⁷ The evaluation addresses all these groups, particularly IDPs, Returnees, and Refugees in line with the planning structure of the Country Operation Plans (COPs). In principle and according to its mandate, UNHCR Afghanistan provides assistance to stateless persons. However, statelessness is a less prominent challenge in Afghanistan and hence not included in this evaluation.

As per the ToR, the role of UNHCR in the global protection cluster and field protection cluster was not included as a key component of enquiry. Furthermore, it should be noted that the COE does not assess efficiency. Hence, the overall assessment in the evaluation addresses the perceived outcomes,⁸ effectiveness, relevance, coverage, connectedness, and sustainability of the Country Operations.

Intended audience of the evaluation

The evaluation report is prepared primarily for the UNHCR Afghanistan Country Office, and the UNHCR Regional Bureau Bangkok. The secondary audience of the evaluation includes other UNHCR Bureaux and Divisions, the Senior Management Team, as well as UNHCR partners – including government and humanitarian and development actors. This includes; The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR); The Provincial Directorates of Refugees and Repatriation (DORRs)⁹; the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the One UN team; other United Nations and multilateral agencies¹⁰; cooperating partners and other NGOs; and donors. It is expected that these stakeholder groups will use the evaluation for future strategic decisions.

While not a primary intended user, the direct beneficiaries of UNHCR's operations in Afghanistan are a key stakeholder group for the evaluation: communities, refugees, returnees, IDPs, and PSNs; men and women, and boys and girls.

1.3 Evaluation framework and methods

Evaluation process

The evaluation was carried out between July 2019 and November 2019 (end of fieldwork). The evaluation followed close and critical dialogue with UNHCR including the following touch points:

- At the end of the inception mission the evaluation team met with the country management and key technical staff in Kabul to debrief them of preliminary findings.
- Following the second data collection visit, a combined debriefing/validation workshop was organised with a broad range of UNHCR Afghanistan staff members and with participation of staff at sub- and field offices linked via teleconference for feedback on key findings.
- Post-data collection, the evaluation team communicated and discussed preliminary findings with the UNHCR Evaluation Manager.

It was originally planned that the validation workshop in Kabul should have included co-generation of conclusions and recommendations, but logistical and time constraints did not allow for this. Instead a follow-up workshop was held remotely as a participatory process that co-created key recommendations

⁶ The GCR was affirmed by the UN General Assembly in December 2018 providing a framework for a regime of responsibility-sharing i.e. (i) funding and effective and efficient use of resources; (ii) a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach; (iii) data and evidence. The COE addresses how these key principles are, and can be, reflected in UNHCR's operations in Afghanistan.

⁷ UNHCR's PSN programme provides targeted assistance based on acute vulnerability and protection risks (needs-based rather than status-based) to extremely vulnerable individuals, including undocumented returnees, refugees, IDPs, and host populations.

⁸ The COE is not an Impact Evaluation per se, but analyses likely and perceived impacts from the country operations at a general level.

⁹ MORR and DORR are UNHCR's DiREC counterpart at the level of the Government of Afghanistan.

¹⁰ Key Interagency partners that the COE consider as intended audiences are development-oriented agencies: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN International Organization on Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization (ILO), and World Bank.

with core UNHCR staff, and centred around four strategic questions that emerged from the evaluation as follows:

- How can UNHCR (including regional and global levels) work effectively through national government (a la CRRF/GCR) when faced with uneven government capacity, particularly with the principal national government counterpart agency in Afghanistan?
- How can UNHCR (including regional and global levels) more effectively respond to community-based development needs in Afghanistan, including through partnerships?
- How can UNHCR Afghanistan move beyond meeting basic needs in chronic and protracted emergency situations (e.g. winterization) and effectively influence other actors who need to do more?
- How can UNHCR (including regional and global levels) better support and inform decision-making and prioritization when managing limited resources to meet acute needs across multiple pillars in Afghanistan?

Evaluation framework

The three areas of inquiry (AoI) specified in the ToR provided the overall framework for the evaluation (see the AoIs in box 1 below and full ToR in Annex D). The AoI criteria were used to frame the key evaluation questions and thereby develop an evaluation matrix during the inception phase. The matrix outlines the AoIs and the corresponding key evaluation questions, key indicators, main sources of information, data collection and analysis tools, evaluation criteria and the evaluation team's estimation of the quality of the data to be collected. The full evaluation matrix is available in Annex A.

Box 1: Areas of Inquiry (as per the ToR)

AOI1: Results and Performance: What have been the results in the areas of assistance, protection, and solutions as achieved by the UNHCR Country Operation? Under which conditions has UNHCR achieved these results, and what were the most important contextual and operational factors/decisions contributing to or impeding achievement of these results?

AOI2: Contributing and constraining factors: How strategically has UNHCR been positioned within the country context, and what are the key factors driving strategic decision-making? To what extent do the strategy and Country Operation Plan have coherence and/or alignment with the work of other humanitarian/development actors, private sector, and civil society actors within the country? How well aligned is the existing UNHCR strategy and Country Operation Plan to the current and/or evolving needs of the population and wider country context?

AOI3: Future strategic directions: How can UNHCR build on results achieved to date, and further leverage UNHCR's strategic position and influence within the country, to optimize the potential impact of collective efforts towards protection and solutions for UNHCR Persons of Concern, and the communities that host them?

There is some overlap between these AOI questions which has been dealt with in this report as follows:

- Section 3.1 focuses on AOI1 and presents the evaluation findings relating to results achieved by UNHCR with discussion of 'contextual and operational' inhibitors and enablers of those results.
- Section 3.2 focuses on UNHCR's strategic value within Afghanistan, which is closely linked to AOI2. Necessarily, this requires positioning UNHCR as a core stakeholder within the wider operating environment.
- Section 4 draws conclusions from the Findings under section 3.1 and 3.2.
- Section 5 is then forward-looking, using the AOI3 questions to frame the key strategic considerations for UNHCR going forward (section 5.1) before presenting the recommendations that were co-created with the UNHCR team (section 5.2).

Evaluation methods

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach combining a desk study, interviews with key internal and external stakeholders and field visits. The evaluation methodology was defined in the inception

phase in close collaboration with the UNHCR Evaluation Manager, other senior UNHCR staff and key staff at the country office. The full methodology can be found in the inception report. This section provides a summary of the evaluation methods and data collection tools.

A total of 222 stakeholders were interviewed or participated in FGDs. Table 1 presents the overall number of persons interviewed and/or participating in focus group discussions by stakeholder group. A full list of persons interviewed can be found in Annex B.

Table 1: Breakdown of key informants by category and group discussions

Stakeholder group	No. of interviewees/groups
UNHCR staff	57
UNHCR NGO partners	45
Government of Afghanistan	23
Donors	11
Other multilateral agencies	26
PoC interviews	60 (23 Kandahar; 37 Balkh)

The data collection included three visits to Kabul, and visits to three different sub- and field offices to gain insights of the operations and to meet with beneficiaries. During visits to Kabul, the evaluation team met with relevant stakeholders from UNHCR, government partners, implementing partners, inter-agency organisations, and donors.

The sub-office and field office visit locations were selected in a discussion between the evaluation team and UNHCR. An important consideration while selecting sub- and field office locations was the need to capture the breadth of the work being done by the operation, including the varying political and contextual differences between regions, while being cognisant of what was possible from a logistical and security stance. The four sub- and field offices selected include:

- Mazar-i-Sharif: Sub-office and central for activities in the whole northern region; an accessible area in an otherwise inaccessible region due to security concerns; central for Community-Based Protection (CBP) activities; UNHCR's support is concentrated on IDPs as a result of conflict.
- Jalalabad: High return area for returnees from Pakistan; UNHCR's support concentrates on reintegration of returnees from Pakistan, many of whom are subject to conflict-induced displacement after return; also support to large groups of PSNs.
- Herat: Key location for the drought response; all UN resources in 2018 were dedicated to drought response; UNHCR's support concentrated on the many drought affected IDPs; provides examples of joint programming and responding to the One UN framework.¹¹
- Kandahar: Field office covering the south with mixed migration with all groups of PoCs; accessible in a region that is otherwise difficult to access for security reasons; UNHCR's assistance includes support to protracted cases, including large groups of PSNs.

Data Sources, Data Collection, and Data Analysis Methods

To assess performance of the portfolio as a whole, the evaluation used the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, connectedness and sustainability, guided by an evaluation matrix for data collection and analysis (Annex A) The evaluation relied mainly on qualitative data obtained from interviews with 1) UNHCR staff in Geneva, Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, and Bangkok; 2) government partners, 3) UN agencies, 4) donors 5) implementing partners and other NGOs, and 6) beneficiaries.

The interviews were guided by a set of interview guidelines presented in the Inception Report and, when necessary, the national team members of the evaluation team facilitated translation between English and Pashto and Dari. The qualitative data from the interviews and FGDs have been complemented with data and information obtained from a document review of studies, operation documents, strategies, and

¹¹ The visit to Herat did not take place due to heightened security concerns, and instead a teleconference was organized.

evaluations from UNHCR and its partners. A list of reviewed documents is presented in Annex C. Finally, the analysis of the qualitative data and information was informed by the assessment of results versus planning and needs.

For the overall analysis, data and information collected was recorded in an Evidence Assessment Framework to facilitate triangulation and evidence-based findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Quality Assurance

Overall, the evaluation complies with the principles laid out in UNHCR's Evaluation Policy¹² as well as UNHCR's Guidance on Evaluation and related Quality Assurance.¹³ To ensure compliance with these principles, the evaluation process and key products have been managed by Itad's Project Manager, Jason Collodi and Senior Quality Assurance Experts, Richard Burge and Dane Rogers. The key products of the evaluation include: An Inception Report, PowerPoint presentations of preliminary findings complemented by a brief of the evaluation process, and this final Evaluation Report.

Methodology limitations

As identified in the Inception Report, there are a series of limiting factors which have affected the evaluation. This includes: staff turnover and a lack of institutional memory; lack of systematic baselines and monitoring data; insecurity, distances to operations at the regional level, and overall logistical constraints; lack of counterfactuals; key donors and other partners not available in Kabul; and election preparation and its impact on access to key government representatives. This had repercussions for the evaluation in terms of:

- Availability of key informants – this was mitigated as the evaluation team was still able to meet a broad range of UNHCR staff and key partners.
- Limited beneficiary interactions - The evaluation was only able to have a limited number of interactions with beneficiaries, including IDPs, returnees, and PSNs. The evaluation did not meet any Pakistani refugees, very few PSNs and overall, it was not possible to make a representative sampling. Where this has affected confidence in the Findings it has been reflected in the language used in this report.
- Limited interactions with government and authorities – Despite limitations the evaluation team met with the key counterpart agencies and partners.
- Logistical constraints and use of time for transportation - For instance, a return from Jalalabad took two days which limited the debriefing opportunities with UNHCR staff. This was made up for by a follow-up remote workshop with UNHCR staff to co-create recommendations.
- In addition, systematic monitoring data has been difficult to obtain, and the available data cannot be verified.

The limitations continued during the data collection phase. Indeed, it must be stressed that due to heightened insecurity the evaluation faced severe access constraints to key stakeholders and locales. For example, due to a heightened level of security concerns during the data collection missions, it proved impossible to visit Herat. In lieu of a visit, the evaluation had a teleconference with key staff from UNHCR-Herat and key implementing partners. Moreover, the team were heavily reliant on the Country Operation to determine where it was able to go and hence who it was able to meet.

To also note, the evaluation would ideally present a comprehensive overview of results achieved compared to planning targets. However, considering the wide range of activities that UNHCR Afghanistan is involved in, an overall presentation showing planned versus realised results is challenging. Furthermore, the evaluation recognises that internal planning documents present various forms of 'key results' but they are not comprehensive and not comparable across the years. The summary year-end reports presented in the country reporting section of UNHCR's website¹⁴ display key results against targets for the three population planning groups in Afghanistan. Whilst it provides useful information, the results are not presented in a systematic manner; they cannot be compared across years; and for some years they are non-existent. These limitations have made it difficult to fully understand the totality of UNHCR's achievements and identify trends over time.

¹² UNHCR Policy on Evaluation – UNHCR/HCP/2016/2, <https://www.unhcr.org/3d99a0f74>.

¹³ UNHCR (November 2016) "Guidance on Evaluation and related Quality Assurance" – Pilot Version.

¹⁴ UNHCR Afghanistan Global Focus, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/4505>.

Evaluation principles and ethics

The evaluation team was guided by internationally recognised ethical practices¹⁵ and codes of conduct for evaluators, particularly in humanitarian and conflict situations. The evaluation also used the Sphere Handbook and Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation.¹⁶ As a large portion of UNHCR's Country Operation is protection-related, the evaluation used a protection lens and good practice principles around issues of access and ethics.

In line with United Nations Evaluation Group's Norms and Standards¹⁷, the evaluation applied a 'Do No Harm' approach, ensuring that all information was collected based on informed consent with confidentiality. Care was given to ensure that the premises of an independent evaluation based on anonymous informants with safeguarding of recorded information were fully explained to all informants.

The evaluation team adhered to the following protocol in all interactions with stakeholders:

- Informed consent – All participants voluntarily gave their consent to participate in any activity related to the evaluation.
- Confidentiality – All discussions with stakeholders and data provided by individuals and groups are presented and shared on a non-attribution basis.
- Respect of rights – All those involved in any evaluation process or activity were duly informed of the purpose so they could participate freely and equitably.
- Respect dignity – Interviews and data-gathering were conducted in a way that respected individuals' dignity.
- Ensure inclusivity – All voices were heard, ensuring respect to privacy and confidentiality.

The team attempted to ensure the highest-quality standards in terms of the following factors: comprehensiveness (i.e. evaluation criteria); independence and objectivity (i.e. robustness and reliability of results); conduct without influence or pressure from any organisation; full autonomy of the team in conducting and reporting its findings; transparency of judgement (i.e. based on data available and previously agreed judgement criteria as per the evaluation matrix); and evidence-based (i.e. collected and triangulated from different sources, with limitations addressed).

For the interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries, the evaluators ensured that women and men were interviewed separately when necessary. The evaluation did not have any direct interactions with children.

2. Operating context and UNHCR operations in Afghanistan

2.1 Afghanistan context with regard to UNHCR PoCs

General

In 2017, Afghanistan ranked 168 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index and is classified as a low human development country.¹⁸ It is estimated that Afghanistan has a total population of 36.5 million people. However, there has never been a full population census, and the last census by samples took place in 1978. It is estimated that 44 percent of the population is under the age of 15.¹⁹ Afghanistan is now entering the 40th year of conflict which has resulted in protracted displacement and the humanitarian situation remains complex.²⁰ Protracted and continued conflict has severely

¹⁵ OECD-DAC Guidance for Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/2667294.pdf>; ALNAP Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide: <http://www.alnap.org/resource/23592.aspx>.

¹⁶ <https://www.spherestandards.org/resources/sphere-for-monitoring-and-evaluation/>.

¹⁷ UNEG (2016) "Norms and Standards for Evaluations".

¹⁸ UNDP. Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update, Afghanistan.

¹⁹ Population Reference Bureau (2019) "World Population Data Sheet - 2018."

²⁰ UNHCR. Global Focus. Year-End Overviews 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018 http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/4505?y=2014#year_. Please note that funding information is not available for 2012, 2013, and 2016.

constrained development. In addition, Afghanistan is prone to natural disasters and given the underlying political, economic, and security fragility, has very little ability to cope with them.²¹

During the last decade a number of attempts to reduce conflict have been made. In 2013 the Presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to work for an Afghan peace deal within six months. In 2014 the majority of foreign troops withdrew from Afghanistan and security was transferred to Afghan military and police. However, peace processes have consistently failed, with the latest peace talks in 2019 between the US government and the Taliban – which notably excluded the GoA – has so far not led to any sustained reduction in violence. In 2017, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reclassified Afghanistan as an active conflict rather than a post-conflict country. These natural and human-induced shocks on an already highly vulnerable population poses real challenges for UNHCR's engagement and responsibility in Afghanistan.

According to Amnesty International (quoting a survey by Trust Law) Afghanistan is the worst country in the world to be a woman based on a variety of factors such as rape and violence, lack of health services, poverty and human trafficking.²² This assessment is also reflected in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), which was 0.58 in 2019²³ and showed very high levels of discrimination in all measured categories (discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted access to productive and financial resources, and restricted civil liberties). Amongst returnees, the level of gender discrimination is often less severe based due to acclimatization to the slightly lower gender discrimination in Pakistan and Iran. However, the situation is highly dynamic and heterogenous as reflected in UNHCR's regular assessments of Age, Gender, and Diversity reported in the COPs.

The PoC population

PoCs within Afghanistan consist of asylum seekers and refugees, mainly from Pakistan; IDPs from conflict and natural disasters; and returning Afghan refugees, mainly from Iran and Pakistan and host communities. According to International Organisation for Migration (IOM), one in three Afghans has migrated or been displaced since 2012.²⁴ As of the end of 2018, there were 2,759,010 PoCs living in Afghanistan. The majority, 76% (2,106,893) of this number fall into the category of IDPs including people in IDP-like situations followed by 17% (489,854) into the category 'others of concern'²⁵ and the lowest, 7%, in the 'refugee' category.²⁶

From 2013, the total number of PoCs in Afghanistan has been steadily increasing as seen in Figure 2. Across this time-period, the number of IDPs including people in IDP-like situations, has consistently been the highest in comparison to other categories. This is reflective of the ongoing insecurity in the country whereby PoCs experience multiple displacements – many returned Afghans become IDPs facing overstretched housing capacity, infrastructure and basic services and, IDPs already within Afghanistan are displaced several times due to outbreaks of conflict or natural disasters.

Although at a national level IDPs make up the majority of PoCs in Afghanistan, when considering global PoC numbers, the size of the returned refugee population in Afghanistan puts the operation in a unique position. Table 2 shows the total PoCs, returned refugees and IDPs in Afghanistan as a % of global figures. Between 2012 and 2018, Afghanistan's total returned refugee population was very high, particularly in 2015 and 2016 where Afghanistan's total returned refugees made up 30% and 70% of the total global number respectively.²⁷

Afghan refugees are biometrically registered in the country of asylum and UNHCR reports that by 30 June 2019 there were 1.4 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan²⁸ and 951,142 in neighbouring Iran.²⁹ Aside from registered refugees, there are also undocumented Afghans living in neighbouring countries. In 2017 the Governments of Iran and Pakistan initiated a headcount exercise to identify undocumented Afghans and support issuing of documentation. During these documentation drives 800,000

²¹ UNOCHA. Afghanistan overview. <https://www.unocha.org/afghanistan/about-ocha-afghanistan>.

²² Amnesty International – USA "The World's Worst Places to be a Woman" <https://www.amnestyusa.org/the-worlds-worst-places-to-be-a-woman>

²³ OECD Development "Social Institutions and Gender Index – 2019." <https://www.genderindex.org/ranking> SIGI is developed by OECD Development as a measure for discrimination against women in social institutions.

²⁴ IOM (May 2019) <https://afghanistan.iom.int/press-releases/third-afghans-have-migrated-or-been-displaced-2012-iom>.

²⁵ Others of concern in Afghanistan include refugees who had returned through the UNHCR assisted voluntary repatriation programme and remained of concern during their integration (UNHCR: Global Trends; forced displacement in 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>)

²⁶ UNHCR: Global Trends; forced displacement in 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>.

²⁷ It should be noted that UNHCR only support the return of registered Afghan refugees.

²⁸ UNHCR, Pakistan: Afghan Refugees Registration Update |1 January — 30 June, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/70396.pdf>.

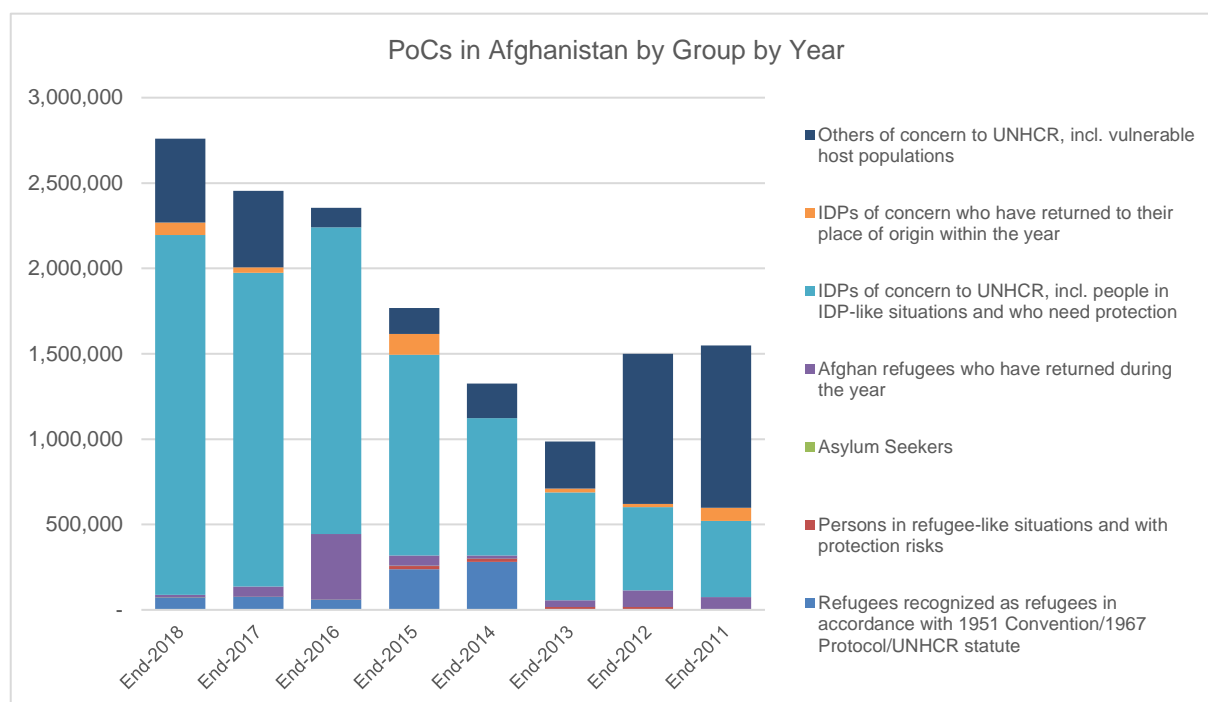
²⁹ UNHCR Iran Global Focus, 2019, working environment, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2527?y=2019#year>.

undocumented Afghans were identified in Iran and 880,000 in Pakistan.³⁰ Challenges with registration are on-going and, as a result, the exact number of Afghans living in refugee-like situations and the number of returnees has not been possible to ascertain.

Table 2: Total number of PoCs returned to Afghanistan as % of global figure. Source: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/population>

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total PoCs in Afghanistan as % of global PoCs	4%	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%	4%
Total returned refugees in Afghanistan as % of global returnees	19%	10%	14%	30%	70%	9%	17%
Total IDPs in Afghanistan as % of global IDPs	1%	3%	2%	3%	5%	5%	5%

Figure 2: Persons of Concern. Source: UNHCR: Global Trends 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018



2.2 Policy and institutional environment vis-à-vis UNHCR's PoC

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

At a regional level the SSAR is the central strategy developed by the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, together with UNHCR. The outcome areas of the SSAR include;

- Support to voluntary repatriation;
- Access to shelter and essential social services for refugees, returnees and host communities;

³⁰ UNHCR Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/66534.pdf>

- Improved and diversified livelihood opportunities and enhanced food security;
- Social and environmental protection of refugees, returnees, as well as assistance and support to host communities; and
- Capacity development of national authorities, associations, organisations and communities concerned with refugees, returnees and host communities.³¹

The regional strategy is based on shared responsibilities and aims to ensure voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees in Afghanistan, and thereby also prevent subsequent internal displacement of returnees.³² The SSAR support platform was launched at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in Geneva, December 2019, to reinforce regional efforts towards lasting solutions. The SSAR platform identifies that for Afghanistan, the core areas of support within the priority areas of return and reintegration (PARR) include; education, health, livelihoods and infrastructure and services³³.

UNHCR and the Government of Afghanistan

At a national level, Afghanistan has been a party to the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Protocol of 1967 since 2005. Within the government of Afghanistan, there are two key stakeholders to UNHCR's work: the MORR which is UNHCR's government counterpart and the Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DiREC), the primary coordination mechanism for return and reintegration. The MORR is a critical partner for UNHCR's national capacity development initiatives. UNHCR's support to MORR has included extensive support in the areas of policy development (including on land-related issues) to strengthen MORR's mandate of protection of refugees, IDPs and returnees, training, donation of equipment, financial incentives for specific activities, and support to policy development. At the provincial level, DORRs are responsible for providing guidance and advice to local authorities on IDPs, refugees, and returnee issues.

In late 2016, the government established DiREC to put more focus on returnee and IDP issues and to mobilise line ministries and other stakeholders. DiREC functions as a multi-actor platform and coordination body to execute policy recommendations regarding returnee and IDP issues outlined in the Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework. It is supported by the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG) chaired by MORR and co-chaired by UNHCR, the UN International Office on Migration (IOM) and the United National Development Programme (UNDP) on a rotational basis. Hence, the DSWG is a partnership of Ministries, UN agencies, and national and international NGOs.

UNHCR has been advocating for a National Asylum Law in Afghanistan for more than eight years working with the High Commission on Migration to build consensus on its critical importance. Whilst a draft of a law has been prepared by the MORR, the law is still not approved. Despite the absence of national refugee law, the Government of Afghanistan has demonstrated a commitment to implementing reforms and prioritising IDPs, returnees and refugees at a national level through the following policies and frameworks:

- **The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF)** presented at the Brussels Conference in 2016 includes a set of ten National Priority Programmes (NPPs) in which IDPs and returnees have been included. Of particular importance for UNHCR's operation are: the 'Citizens Charter' (a compact between government and citizens for the provision of basic social services particularly, but not only, in rural areas), the Urban Development Programme (under preparation), the Human Capital Development Programme (under preparation) and the NPP for Women's Economic Empowerment.
- **Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARR)** is an initiative that was launched in 2019 in partnership with the Afghan Government.³⁴ The PARR sites themselves are identified jointly by

³¹ UNHCR (May 2012) "Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries".

³² UNHCR has provided assistance to returnees in various forms over the years and assisted almost 800,000 returnees from Pakistan and Iran since 2012 with protection, reintegration, and durable solutions within the SSAR framework. Reflecting the security situation - and opportunities for return - the number of Afghan refugees fluctuates from year to year; for instance, in 2016 there was a particularly high number of returnees from Pakistan.

³³ UNHCR (2020), *Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)*, 17 February, accessed online <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/74014>

³⁴ As can be seen, the PARR has only been launched recently. However, the PARR builds on former experience with support to Areas of High Return identified by the MORR / the Government of Afghanistan for reintegration. These areas have been the focus of various pilots aiming at sustainable reintegration and often in different partnership arrangements with development and humanitarian actors. For instance, in 2012,

UNHCR and the Government of Afghanistan and will benefit from enhanced support and coordinated action. The PARR builds on an existing Community-Based Protection (CBP) approach in line with the ANPDF, which denotes a shift from a focus on individualized case management to community-based programming.

- The **National IDP Policy** was endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers in November 2013 and launched in 2014 for implementation by line ministries and with overall leadership of MORR.³⁵ The policy was drafted in cooperation with UNHCR. It outlines the responsibilities of national and provincial authorities, highlights the right of IDPs to durable solutions and to be consulted in decision-making processes, and outlines the rights of host communities. As such, it provides a systematic framework for emergency and durable solutions for IDPs³⁶ in line with the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. This includes provisions for promoting access to appropriate housing and access to land, as well as sustainable livelihoods. The policy recognises that displacement causes are typically multi-faceted and multi-causal.
- The national **Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Policy** from 2015³⁷ complements the SSAR. The policy outlines the main components of the national voluntary return policy: cash grants to support returning families for six months, vaccination and health checks, information on reintegration options, coordinated effort of key line ministries, improved income generation and livelihood options, and focus on development assistance in selected areas. It is stressed that the approach should be flexible. The policy notes that, post-arrival in Afghanistan, the returnees will be received at UNHCR's Encashment Centres. It also outlines the piloting of the Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package developed with UNHCR with cash assistance for six months.
- The **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRFF)** adopted by Afghanistan in 2018³⁸ is a Roadmap which has been developed with UNHCR support and has been adopted for Afghanistan. The Roadmap aims to 1) prepare conditions for safe return and reintegration of Afghan refugees, and 2) ease pressure on host communities and enhance refugee self-reliance. The Roadmap includes five work streams: Priority Actions in PARR, Coordination and Facilitation at Provincial level, Progress and Monitoring, Refugee Law and Documentation, and Private Sector Engagement.
- The **Policy Framework and Action Plan for Returnees and IDPs** was adopted by the DiREC in December 2016 and developed with support from UNHCR. The Policy Framework is based on a whole-of-community approach focusing on strengthening community-based activities developed and implemented through a participatory approach, as developed in the Citizens Charter.
- The **Citizens Charter National Priority Programme**³⁹ was developed from the lessons learned of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP)⁴⁰ but with more focus on government ownership and access to basic services in community activities. The project focuses on building core infrastructure and strengthening local development councils through a whole-of-community approach. The Citizen Charter is being implemented by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) which reports directly to the Office of the President. The Citizens Charter was expanded in 2016 to support the most vulnerable IDPs, returnees, and host communities with a cash for work programme.

UNHCR and related partner policies and strategies

Apart from national policy, UNHCR also operates within the context of key policies and strategies of related partners in Afghanistan including:

- **Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).** The GCR was affirmed by the UN General Assembly in December 2018 providing a framework for a regime of responsibility sharing i.e. (i) funding and

UNHCR, MORR and UNDP identified 48 areas of high return for joint activities while in 2016 UNHCR implemented 38 projects in the areas of women's empowerment, livelihood/vocational skills training and small-scale infrastructure projects in areas of high return.

³⁵ MORR (Nov 2013) "National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons".

³⁶ The policy also states that IDPs include, among other groups: "returnees (returning refugees and migrants deported back to Afghanistan) who are unable to settle in their homes and/or places of origin because of insecurity resulting from armed conflict, generalized violence or violations of human rights, landmine or ERW [explosive remnants of war] contamination on their land, land disputes, or tribal disputes.

³⁷ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Aug 2015) "Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Policy 2015" Version 12.

³⁸ Afghanistan was the first country in Asia that adopted the CRRF.

³⁹ Citizens Charter Afghanistan Project. <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P160567>

⁴⁰ The NSP was created in 2002 to promote democratic local administration and access to basic services. The NSP was planned to support 5,000 villages with up to US\$60,000 community funding for local projects.

effective and efficient use of resources; (ii) a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach; (iii) data and evidence. The COE reflects on how these key principles are, and can be, reflected in UNHCR's operations in Afghanistan.

- **United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2015 – 2019.**⁴¹ UNDAF is organised around five pillars: economic development, basic services, social equity, law and order maintenance, and accountable governance. Protection services are seen as a basic service. A mid-term evaluation of UNDAF (November 2017) noted that four agencies stood out in developing and implementing UNDAF: UNHCR, UNDP, World Food Programme (WFP), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).⁴²
- **One UN Mutual Accountability Framework (2017-2021).**⁴³ The 2015 – 2019 UNDAF was updated to be realigned with the ANPDF in 2017 moving towards the 'One UN for Afghanistan.' The One UN was launched in 2018 focusing on education; food security, nutrition and livelihoods; health; return and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons; rule of law; and normative work. UNHCR and the IOM led the development of the return and reintegration thematic area. Furthermore, within the One UN Framework, UNHCR has co-led with the government, an inter-agency durable solutions initiative, which translated the Action Plan of the DiREC. The initiative includes UNDP, IOM, WFP, the Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and is seen as an example of what One UN can do.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the inter-agency action plan has not been implemented. It should be noted, that Afghanistan's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), has recently narrowed its definition of "humanitarian", so it only refers to life-saving activities while protracted crises are covered by the One UN Framework, making it a key instrument for the humanitarian-development nexus.
- **UN OCHA HRP (January 2018 – December 2021).**⁴⁵ The response plan has three strategic objectives: 1) save lives in the areas of highest needs, 2) reduce protection violations and increase respect of International Humanitarian Law, and 3) give people affected by sudden onset crises the help they need, on time. UNHCR's responsibilities are outlined as support to the national DiREC, support to the government on managing voluntary returns and migration, and supporting durable solutions for returnees and protracted IDPs. The response plan stresses that "unpredictability requires country-wide preparedness, strengthened capacity, prepositioned resources and timely financing to support a flexible and agile response."

⁴¹ UN (2015) "United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2015 – 2019"

⁴² UN (2017) "United Nations Development Assistance Framework Afghanistan 2015-19 - Mid-Term Review Report November 2017"

⁴³ UN (2017) "One UN for Afghanistan"

⁴⁴ Afghanistan's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) has recently narrowed its definition of 'humanitarian', so it only refers to life-saving activities while protracted crises are covered by the One UN Framework.

⁴⁵ UNOCHA (Dec 2017) "Humanitarian Response Plan January 2018 – December 2021"

National and International Policy and Frameworks Summary

The matrix below outlines GoA and partner strategies and policies, alongside the UNHCR country strategy to summarize the key components and which PoC groups they impact.

Year	Policy/Framework	Key components	Impacting
2012	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)	Outcome area: 1) Support to voluntary repatriation; 2) Access to shelter and essential social services for refugees, returnees and host communities; 3) Improved and diversified livelihood opportunities and enhanced food security; 4) Social and environmental protection of refugees, returnees, as well as assistance and support to host communities; and 5) Capacity development of national authorities, associations, organizations and communities concerned with refugees, returnees and host communities.	Afghan Refugees and returnees
2014	National IDP policy endorsed by Cabinet of Ministers	Systematic framework for emergency and durable solutions for IDPs	Afghan IDPs
2015	United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in place 2015 – 2019 forming overall vision of the UN	Priority area: 1) Equitable economic development 2) Basic social services 3) Social equity and investment in human capital 4) Justice and rule of law 5) Accountable Governance	All PoC groups
2015	The National Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Policy introduced outlining the main components of the national voluntary return policy	Key components: 1) Cash grants to support returning families for six months, 2) Vaccination and health checks, 3) Information on reintegration options, 4) Coordinated effort of key line ministries, 5) Improved income generation and livelihood options, 6) and focus on development assistance in selected areas.	Afghan Returnees
2016	The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) 2017 -2021 presents ten National Priority Programmes (NPPs)	Vision for Afghanistan to achieve self-reliance. Ten National Priority Programmes stated inclusion of IDPs and returnees, most notably in the 'Citizens Charter'.	All PoC groups

2016	The Policy Framework and Action Plan for Returnees and IDPs adopted by the Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DiREC)	Humanitarian assistance should transition to permanent solutions following a 'whole of community approach'	Afghan returnees and IDPs
2016	The Grand Bargain	<p>Commitments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Greater transparency 2) More support and funding tools for local & national responders 3) Increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming 4) Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews 5) Improve joint and impartial needs assessments 6) Participation Revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives 7) Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding 8) Reduce the earmarking of donor contribution 9) Harmonize and simplify reporting requirements 10) Enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors 	All PoC groups
2017	One UN Mutual Accountability Framework 2017 - 2021 introduced to update UNDAF in line with ANPDF	<p>Return and reintegration outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Access to basic services is increased and community resilience and social cohesion enhanced 2) Returnees and IDPs have improved access to adequate Land and Housing 3) Access to livelihoods and jobs enhanced through market based programmes 4) Voluntary, gradual and safe return, regular and responsible migration and mobility facilitated through the implementation of well-planned and managed policies 5) Access of the returnees, displaced populations, and host communities to the infrastructural services in areas of high return and displacement, including (or particularly) in the returnee townships is enhanced. 	All PoC groups
2017	UNHCR Afghanistan Multi-Year Country Strategy for Afghanistan 2017 - 2019	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Support to immediate needs of registered refugee returnees through cash grants, 2) Targeted Protection activities for refugees and asylum seekers, returnees, IDPs, and host communities, including enhanced Protection Monitoring and Community-Based Protection Measures (CBP), 3) Productive partnerships for advocacy, coordination, and promotion of the humanitarian-development nexus, 4) Cluster leadership and emergency assistance to IDPs, and 5) Self-reliance and durable solutions for refugees and asylum seekers. 	All PoC groups

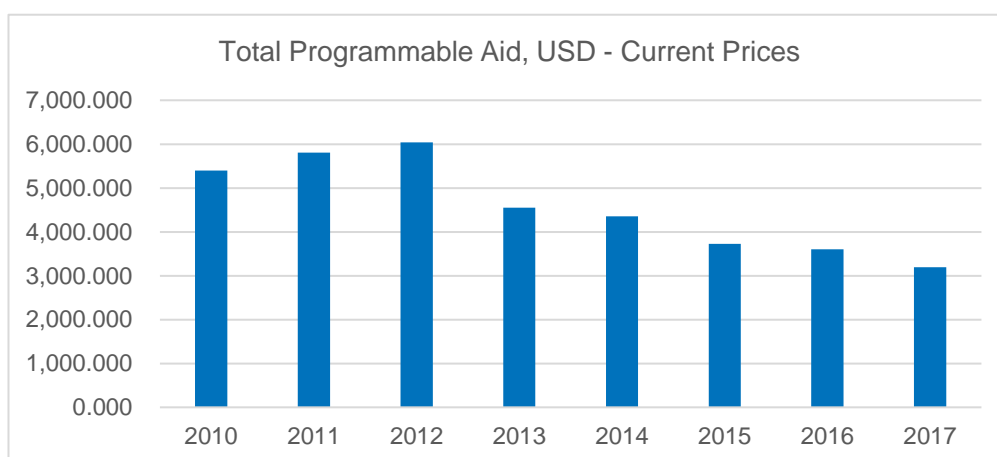
2018	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) adopted by Afghanistan government, developed with UNHCR support	Objectives: 1) Ease pressures on the host countries involved; 2) Enhance refugee self-reliance; 3) Expand access to third-country solutions; and 4) Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.	All PoC groups
2018	Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) affirmed by UN national assembly	Informed by the CRRF, the objectives are: 1) Ease pressure on countries that welcome and host refugees 2) Build self-reliance of refugees 3) Expand access to resettlement in third countries and other complementary pathways 4) Foster conditions that enable refugees voluntarily to return to their home countries	All PoC groups
2018	UN OCHA Humanitarian Response Framework (HRP) 2018-2021	1) Lives are saved in the areas of highest need 2) Protection violations are reduced and respect for International Humanitarian Law is increased 3) Vulnerable people are supported to build their resilience	All PoC groups
2019	Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs) initiative launched identifying 15 areas	15 locations where UNHCR can link its short- to medium-term community-based protection (CBP) projects to longer-term development programmes	All PoC groups
2019	The SSAR support platform is launched identifying priority areas of intervention for Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan	Afghanistan core areas of support: Education Health Livelihoods Infrastructure & services	All PoC groups

International aid in Afghanistan

For international aid in Afghanistan, 2012 marked a dividing line in aid from Official Development Assistance (ODA). The Country Programmable Aid (CPA)⁴⁶ has decreased since 2012 from USD 6 billion to USD 3.2 billion in 2017, as can be seen in figure 3. A pledging conference for Afghanistan was held in Brussels in 2016 – where USD 3.8 billion per year was committed – and a second pledging conference is due in 2020.⁴⁷ Despite this, there has been a steady ODA decrease since 2012 as seen in figure 3. This has potentially reduced opportunities for complementary sustainable development activities to UNHCR’s reintegration agenda. While donors have informed the Government of Afghanistan that they should adapt to lower levels of provision in the coming years, Afghanistan remains financially dependent on international support.⁴⁸

Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, and the US have remained constant and significant contributors, together with a combination of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)⁴⁹ or Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) contributions.

Figure 3: Country Programmable Aid 2010 - 2017. Source: OECD.org



2.3 UNHCR role and key actions

UNHCR has provided support to PoCs⁵⁰ in Afghanistan for several decades and has been a resident organisation in Afghanistan since 2001. For four decades, Afghans have been one of the largest protracted refugee populations of concern to UNHCR. Through assisted repatriation,⁵¹ protection, reintegration and durable solutions within the SSAR framework, UNHCR has provided assistance to more than 800,000⁵² returnees from Pakistan and Iran since 2012. Between 2012 and 2019, Afghan refugees have come back in waves reflecting both pull and push factors and the constantly changing contexts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. However, assisted return programmes of Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan has been, and continues to be, the hallmark of UNHCR’s Country Operation in Afghanistan.

⁴⁶ Country Programmable Aid (CPA) ('core aid'), is the portion of ODA over which receiving countries have or could have a significant say. According to OECD, CPA captures predictable funds for multi-year planning and is therefore valuable for assessments of the funding context and opportunities for development investment (to complement UNHCR’s support to reintegration and potential of durability). www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness

⁴⁷ World Bank. Afghanistan overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1>

⁴⁸ ATR Consulting (2018) "Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan", Swedish Committee for Afghanistan & Oxfam.

⁴⁹ CERF is a humanitarian fund established by the UN General Assembly in 2006. CHF is a country based pooled fund providing early and predictable funding within the UN humanitarian architecture.

⁵⁰ UNHCR defines a Person of Concern as "A person whose protection and assistance needs are of interest to UNHCR. This includes refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people, internally displaced people and returnees". <http://reporting.unhcr.org/glossary/pdf>

⁵¹ UNHCR’s return and repatriation program in Afghanistan constitutes of voluntary return from Iran and Pakistan. Throughout the COE report, references to UNHCR’s return and repatriation implicitly refers to "voluntary" based on the assumption that UNHCR’s only support voluntary return. The COE recognizes that some stakeholders question the level of "voluntary" and consider for instance the adverse policy environment in Pakistan for certain periods to have led to what is considered as forced return. The scope of the COE did not allow a further analysis of these aspects.

⁵² UNHCR Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/66534.pdf>.

UNHCR Afghanistan Multi-Year Country Strategy for Afghanistan 2017 - 2019⁵³ outlines five priorities for the country operation: 1) support to immediate needs of registered refugee returnees through cash grants, 2) targeted protection activities for refugees and asylum seekers, returnees, IDPs, and host communities, including enhanced protection monitoring and Community-Based Protection Measures (CBP), 3) productive partnerships for advocacy, coordination, and promotion of the humanitarian-development nexus, 4) cluster leadership and emergency assistance to IDPs, and 5) self-reliance and durable solutions for refugees and asylum seekers. Eleven focus areas are identified for the implementation of the strategy, highlighting UNHCR Afghanistan's key activities:

- Linking regional to national frameworks;
- National policy development and implementation;
- Protection, including legal assistance, cash grants, profiling, targeted assistance, and advocacy;
- Returnee monitoring, including use of telephone surveys;
- Interim solutions strategy for mixed populations (asylum seekers and refugees, protracted and newly displaced IDPs, returnees and host communities);
- Cluster leadership and emergency humanitarian assistance;
- Community-Based Protection Measures and Livelihoods strategy (Pro-LIVE);
- Advocacy and humanitarian and development nexus;
- Assistance to Pakistani refugees in Khost and Paktika provinces, and asylum seekers (support will transition towards focus on protection through targeted assistance);
- Information and data; and
- Monitoring and accountability.

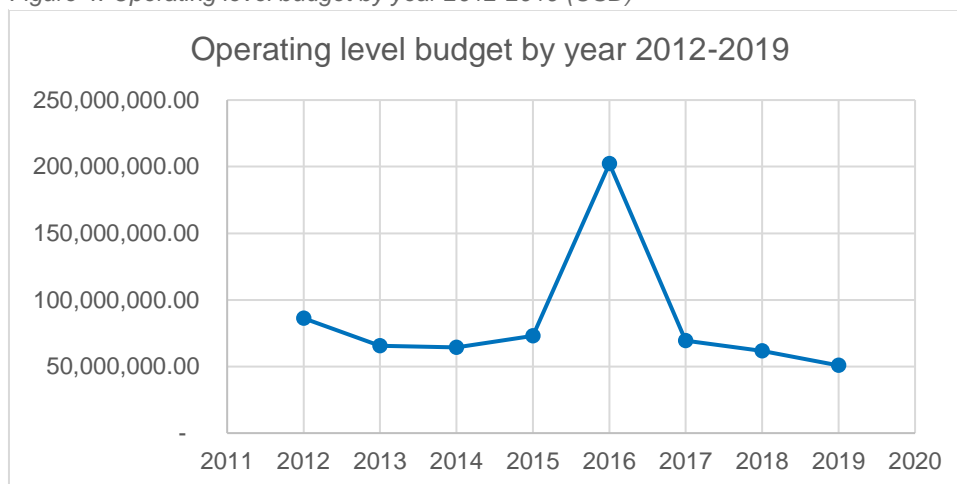
The rise in the PoC population in Afghanistan year on year is not reflected in the UNHCR annual budget. The Afghanistan Country Operation budget has fluctuated in the period 2012 – 2019 with an overall downward trend from 2017 (see figure 4). There was a significant budget increase in 2016 to USD 202 million due to a large influx of returnees from Pakistan in that year, and the subsequent high level of donor interest. Otherwise, the annual Operating Level budget - that is the funded budget - has fluctuated between USD 86 million (2012) and USD 50 million (2019). The mismatch between the increasing number of PoCs in Afghanistan and decreasing budget means that UNHCR has to prioritise support for PoCs and focus areas.

UNHCR's budget is then allocated by population planning group (PPG). There are three PPGs; IDPs, refugees and returnees with the returnee group including budget for both voluntary returns and reintegration activities. Between 2012 and 2019, the returnee group has the highest budget allocation, with allocation to IDP and refugee groups fluctuating as shown in Figure 5. UNHCR's budget allocations are not proportionate to the volume of different PoC groups, and instead reflect UNHCR's prioritization of refugee returnees, as per mandate, and focus on reintegration activities within the PARRs. Therefore, although in the Afghanistan context the number of IDPs are significantly higher than returnees, budget allocation for IDP support remains lower or on par to return activities.

Budget allocation to returnee and IDP support activities are also disproportionate to the volume of these groups as, in general, reintegration activities continue over a period of time and therefore, cumulative numbers of returnees are supported under this budget line. On the other hand, much of IDP support falls under emergency assistance which is short-term. As such, reintegration activities have a higher unit cost than emergency assistance.

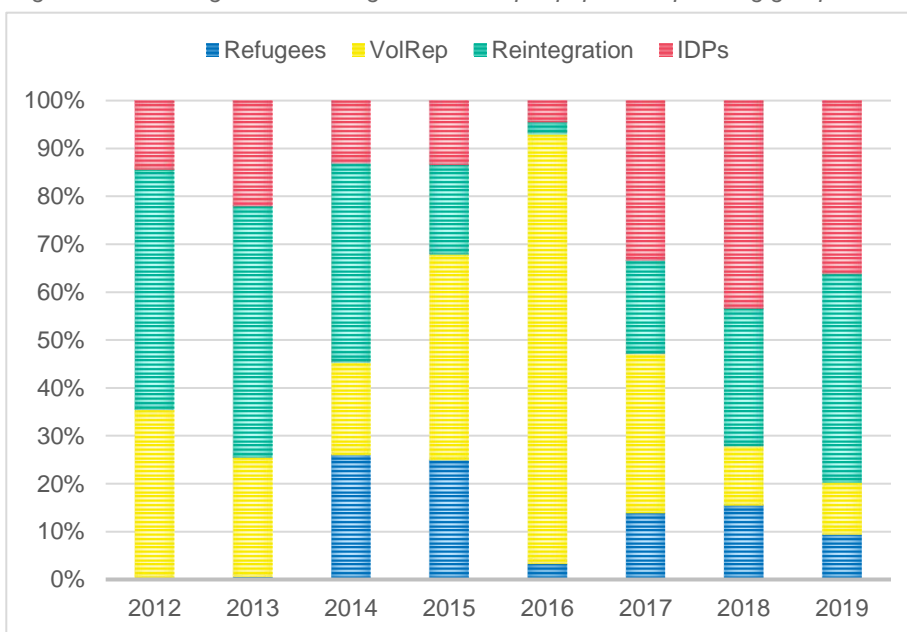
⁵³ UNHCR (2017) "Afghanistan Multi-Year Country Strategy 2017 – 2019".

Figure 4: Operating level budget by year 2012-2019 (USD)



Note 1: Operating level (OL) budget includes project and partner budget, staffing and administrative budget

Figure 5: Percentage of OPS budget allocation per population planning group 2012-2019⁵⁴



⁵⁴ VolRep stands for voluntary repatriations.

3. Findings

3.1 Country Operation results

This section presents the key findings and supporting evidence around results achieved by UNHCR through direct assistance to PoCs and links closely to AO11.

Main findings

- 1.1 UNHCR has demonstrated an ability to provide short-term protection, showing leadership where others have been absent.
- 1.2 UNHCR has played an important role in the piloting, development, and mainstreaming of CBIs in Afghanistan, and finding ways to overcome CBI challenges that currently limit its potential use.
- 1.3 UNHCR has provided long-term livelihood support to PoCs with some success where development actors are absent.
- 1.4 UNHCR's systems, tools and decision-making processes for beneficiary targeting and selection have improved over time, however the complexity of the context in Afghanistan makes it difficult for UNHCR to demonstrate clearly it is reaching the most vulnerable.
- 1.5 UNHCR has focused relatively more of its resources on returnees than IDPs, despite the numbers of IDPs and, at times, the needs of IDPs being greater.
- 1.6 In principle the PARR is a well-considered response to provide returnees with a durable solution, but the reality is that UNHCR will struggle to transition out of its responsibility to returnees in these areas.
- 1.7 UNHCR has delivered a wide range of results supporting significant numbers of PoCs, but a lack of focus in the face of very high demands means it is over-stretched with less impact on any one issue.
- 1.8 UNHCR's coherence and ability to support PoCs has been further undermined by contextual factors beyond UNHCR's control.
- 1.9 UNHCR has made progress to increase its support to women and girls in the face of challenging social norms, but there are design and capacity issues which limit the scope and reach of its gender-based programming.

Finding 1.1: UNHCR has demonstrated an ability to provide short-term protection, showing leadership where others have been absent.

UNHCR has demonstrated an ability to provide important short-term protection to PoCs which is appreciated by other UN agencies, INGOs and the government. It has implemented its protection mandate vis-à-vis refugees, returnees and IDPs in Afghanistan through a multi-faceted response, particularly providing registration, shelter, and basic needs. Assistance has also cut across water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, livelihoods, energy, education, protection and infrastructure.

The evaluation found that short-term protection for returnees and returnee management has been well structured and has offered future-looking perspectives and response to immediate specific needs. This begins with assistance at UNHCR's Encashment Centres which provide cash grants (see Finding 1.2) and referrals to other services for returnees. In addition, there are a wide range of follow-up activities for returnees, both at the community and individual level, including skills-training, solar panels for communities and households, school construction, health infrastructure, small shops for basic items, primary education and road construction. These services fill critical livelihood and basic service gaps that no other agency is filling.

In particular, UNHCR's leadership in its direct response to Pakistani refugees in Paktika and Khost has been highlighted during the evaluation⁵⁵ (see Text Box 1) where few protection agencies have engaged in the refugee response, often because of security concerns. Further examples are UNHCR leadership

⁵⁵ Kills with INGOs, government officials, interagency partners, and UNHCR staff.

during the drought response in 2018, distribution of 15,100 tents for 15,100 families and 1,200 non-food item (NFI) kits for 700 families to date in western Herat province, and Winterisation support providing cash grants for heating costs and basic items distributed to the most vulnerable PoCs.⁵⁶

Text Box 1: Responding to Pakistani refugees - An example of UNHCR leadership

In June 2014, the number of arriving Pakistani refugees in Afghanistan intensified as a result of heightened insecurity in Waziristan. Under UNHCR leadership an emergency response was launched providing ES/NFI as well as winter assistance to a large number of the newly arrived refugees. To facilitate the response, UNHCR upgraded its local capacity through a field office in Khost.¹ Moreover, a camp was opened in Gulan, which has become a settlement with more permanent shelters and greater integration into local services.

Finding 1.2: UNHCR has played an important role in the piloting, development, and mainstreaming of CBIs in Afghanistan and finding ways to overcome CBI challenges that currently limit its potential use.

UNHCR has applied cash-based interventions (CBI) to enable greater coverage of its direct response to PoCs, drawing on experience and lessons learned with similar activities in Afghanistan and other countries,⁵⁷ contributing thought leadership in this important area. Although most inter-agency partners and NGOs use cash-based delivery mechanisms in Afghanistan for humanitarian assistance, the overall amount is relatively limited compared to the humanitarian budget – in 2018, USD 10 million was spent on CBI out of a total humanitarian budget of USD 541 million.⁵⁸ Of this, UNHCR was responsible for 12 percent of the total amount of cash transferred.

The relatively limited use of cash assistance as a delivery modality in Afghanistan is partly linked to challenges such as the absence of financial infrastructure, security concerns as cash may be attractive to armed groups and criminals, and low literacy and numeracy rates inhibiting PoCs' access to banking services and mobile money. Despite these challenges, CBIs have emerged as a relevant and efficient delivery modality, especially as in-kind responses such as ES/NFIs face their own logistical challenges.⁵⁹

UNHCR has been playing an important role to address the operational dilemmas of CBIs, investing globally and at the country-level to understand and mitigate risks in cash assistance systems, with several studies over the last few years.⁶⁰ Leading on from this, in July 2018, UNHCR and WFP launched a joint project in Afghanistan⁶¹ which includes the Awaaz system, in part designed to identify and mitigate risks of abuse within the cash assistance systems (see Finding 1.4).

The investment in thought-leadership that UNHCR has committed to CBIs is significant, as they have become a key component of the implementation of the SSAR and UNHCR's repatriation strategy, opening and closing encashment centres in response to need and funding. The centres are well regarded by beneficiaries and provide additional services such as vaccinations and information, and are considered a critical component for successful return.⁶² However, it can be difficult to predict the rate of use of the encashment centres, as shown by the highly variable return rate of Afghan refugees over the last 15 years,⁶³ and this can mean there is at times a high number of staff at the centres who are not always utilized.

Whilst it is clear that CBIs have an important function in supporting returnees, especially considering the lack of social safety nets in Afghanistan,⁶⁴ it is unclear what happens to the cash recipients after the time-limited CBIs are provided.

⁵⁶ Orange Door (Nov 2018) "UNHCR Winterization 2018: Post Distribution Monitoring Report".

⁵⁷ Internal planning documents; KIIs with UNHCR staff; observations during field visits.

⁵⁸ Financial Tracking Service, UNOCHA.

⁵⁹ "Afghanistan Cash and Voucher Working Group (CVWG) Meeting Minutes – 11 April 2018".

⁶⁰ UNHCR, 2019, 'Afghanistan: Mitigating risks of abuse of power in cash assistance in Afghanistan' and Altai Consulting (2009) UNHCR's 'Voluntary Repatriation Program: Evaluation of the Impact of the Cash Grant', UNHCR, Kabul.

⁶¹ UNHCR & WFP (2018) "Mitigating Risks of Abuse of Power in Cash Assistance – Project description".

⁶² KIIs with beneficiaries, implementing partners and government officials during a field visit to an encashment centre by the evaluation team.

⁶³ In the first six months of 2019, the average rate per day was 17 returnees.

⁶⁴ KIIs with UNHCR staff.

This is problematic as research commissioned by UNHCR shows that the CBIs typically only cover short-term needs, such as transport,⁶⁵ despite UNHCR referring to CBIs as ‘reintegration’ grants.⁶⁶ The survey commissioned in September 2017 showed that the three main uses of the cash grant were: food (33%), transportation (28%), and to build shelter (11%) and refers to UNHCR’s own survey data that highlighted 93% of the returnees spent the repatriation grant in less than two months.⁶⁷

Whilst the CBIs are an important part of the support UNHCR provides, they are only part of the support PoCs need. Currently UNHCR has no apparent viable transition strategy, which is part of a wider issue of an absence of development partners (see Finding 1.8).

Finding 1.3: UNHCR has provided long-term livelihood support to PoCs with some success where development actors are absent.

UNHCR finds itself in a context where the needs of highly vulnerable people far outstrip the resources that the government and international community can provide. This is compounded for UNHCR by the absence of development actors in many of the areas in which UNHCR operates, meaning that UNHCR is obliged to provide a range of ongoing humanitarian support. One way of responding to this has been through the CBP approach and the PSN programme, which offers a flexible funding mechanism that can be applied to a range of needs at the community level, and hence presents more of a needs-based rather than status-based approach.

The support that UNHCR has provided through these initiatives is varied, ranging from infrastructure, to WASH, to livelihoods. In the case of livelihoods, there are good examples of training and livelihood support to PoCs through the CBP. For example, in 2018, 13,088 PoCs had received life-skills training for livelihood purposes, with a variety of demand-led courses offered.⁶⁸ The evaluation also found good evidence of the operation looking to ensure linkages to job markets post-training and thereby initiating viable models for job creation. For example:

- The UNHCR Kandahar Office has introduced a new model this year which arranges 6-month placements with a tailoring company following six months training for participants who pass a practical exam, guaranteeing a job for two years.⁶⁹
- The UNHCR partner in Herat is placing four to five returnees a month with the private sector chamber of commerce, with an initial part-payment of salaries by UNHCR.

Whilst there is evidence demonstrating that some livelihood support has been effective,⁷⁰ job creation in a country like Afghanistan is challenging. At times support is limited to advice alone without official training which is considered to be insufficient⁷¹ and, without a market for their goods and services, not all beneficiaries generate an income.⁷² This supports findings by Orange Door research in 2017 which found that 60% of returnees identify problems with host communities related to a lack of job opportunities.⁷³

Finding 1.4: UNHCR's systems, tools and decision-making processes for beneficiary targeting and selection have improved over time, however the complexity of the context in Afghanistan makes it difficult for UNHCR to clearly demonstrate it is reaching the most vulnerable.

⁶⁵ Currently, the grant is USD 150 per person plus up to USD 50 per person to cover transport costs. During the evaluation, implementing partners and beneficiaries noted that the grant only covers transport and immediate needs for some kind of resettlement, while reintegration will require continuous support for longer time periods.

⁶⁶ See for instance in the UNHCR document “Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees – Enhancing Resilience and Co-existence through Greater Responsibility Sharing.”

⁶⁷ Orange Door Research (May 2018) “Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report”. It should be noted that the June 2017 survey showed a somewhat different level of key spending items for the repatriation grant, namely: transportation (39%), food (37%) and shelter / rent (12%).

⁶⁸ 2 x FGDs, 4 x KIIs.

⁶⁹ KII with UNHCR; KII with implementing partner.

⁷⁰ For example, market gardening in Kunduz allows PoCs to also help cover their basic food needs; in Mazar a women’s tailoring course plus equipment received from WFP and Save the Children has allowed them to generate income.

⁷¹ 3 x KIIs; for example, one woman was provided with cash to buy chicks but many of those chicks died due to a lack of training on poultry raising.

⁷² 1 KII and 1 FGD in Mazar; for example, the women’s group in Mazar found that the carpet weaving programme had little impact on their livelihoods as there was no job market for carpets. They were then unable to gain business support from government despite meeting with the relevant officials.

⁷³ Orange Door Research (May 2018) “Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report”.

The context in Afghanistan can quickly change causing rapid shifts in the status of PoCs and creating new vulnerabilities for individuals and families. Improvements have been made to UNHCR's systems to address the challenge of shifting needs, such as advances in the targeting of PoCs through the kobo data collection tool and introducing a reporting mechanism that has enabled high numbers of PoCs to provide feedback on the services UNHCR has provided. However, the challenging context which can cause repeated shocks for households creates difficulties in identifying the most vulnerable PoCs within the PSN programme.

The structure for comprehensive needs assessments was updated by UNHCR in 2016 in response to the requirements set out in the Grand Bargain, specifically commitment 5: 'improve joint and impartial needs assessments'.⁷⁴ As such, UNHCR regularly participates in joint needs assessments at a national level, including the OCHA-led multi-cluster needs assessment for the HRP, identifying needs and vulnerabilities across all Afghan populations, including UNHCR PoCs. Then, to inform specifically the PoCs to be prioritised at a sub-national level, UNHCR's annual planning exercise includes UNHCR-specific comprehensive needs assessments led by its sub-offices⁷⁵ through field visits and interviews with PoCs and other stakeholders, typically conducted by UNHCR implementing partners. These needs assessments together – the system-wide joint assessments and the UNHCR-specific PoC assessments - inform programming.

The needs assessment processes are complemented by new tools which generate greater inclusion and beneficiary input in programme design. In late 2018, UNHCR jointly launched the kobo data collection tool; a household survey to improve targeting of PoCs. Another good example is the 'Awaaz Afghanistan'⁷⁶ initiative - a country-wide call centre which registers feedback and complaints and offers excellent opportunities to assess beneficiary appreciation of the assistance. The first call was received on 28 May 2018 and during the first 15 months the centre received 78,000 calls concerning a range of issues such as cash, education, food/agriculture, government, health, livelihood, nutrition, protection, shelter/NFIs, WASH, and more general enquiries about Awaaz.⁷⁷ The Awaaz initiative and the introduction of kobo household surveys are good opportunities for UNHCR to improve its targeting and the quality and relevance of its support.

Within the PoC targeting activities, UNHCR also identifies PSNs through home visits and profiling individuals and families against fixed criteria. UNHCR has flexibility to respond to PSNs, where requests for allocation of resources can be ad hoc,⁷⁸ relying on vulnerable people to seek out UNHCR for support. Whilst this makes pragmatic sense – it is not possible to assess the needs of everyone - it does mean that UNHCR cannot be certain it reaches the most vulnerable.

Finding 1.5: UNHCR has focused relatively more of its resources on returnees than IDPs, despite the numbers of IDPs and, at times, the needs of IDPs being greater.

The complexity of striking the right balance between IDP and returnee support should not be underestimated, as UNHCR operates within a highly complex political environment and has to maintain a careful balance between regional and national demands and the reality of its mandate on the ground. This includes a focus on supporting returnees as a priority of UNHCR's mandate. However, UNHCR also has a responsibility as cluster lead agency for the protection cluster to coordinate protection response for IDPs within humanitarian contexts and to act, as part of cluster-lead responsibilities, as provider of last resort for IDP protection programming. In Afghanistan, with a high number of protracted IDPs, management is split between UNHCR addressing the needs of conflict-induced IDPs, and IOM addressing the needs of natural disaster and climate change-induced IDPs.

This responsibility for IDPs is reflected in UNHCR budgets where there is a fairly equal distribution of resources allocated between returnees and IDP groups. However, the numbers of IDPs are often greater, affected by both conflict and natural disasters, with numbers not decreasing and the situation of protracted IDPs not improving.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the numbers of returnees have declined steadily over the years to a record low - 58,817 in 2017, 15,699 in 2018, 8,079 in 2019 – but this is not mirrored in

⁷⁴ UNHCR (2017) "Needs Assessment Handbook".

⁷⁵ There are two sub-offices in Afghanistan: Jalalabad and Mazar-i-Sharif.

⁷⁶ Promoting collective accountability and community engagement in Afghanistan', implemented by UNOPS with financial support from the AHF, ECHO, WFP and UNHCR, <https://awaazaf.org>.

⁷⁷ The structure of Awaaz is not facilitating specific information on host populations or refugee returnees.

⁷⁸ KII with implementing partner; FGD in Mazar; and, during the evaluation field visit, a PSN recipient visited by the evaluation team highlighted that they were told about the PSN programme by a neighbour and then went to ask for assistance which they were granted.

⁷⁹ KII with UNHCR staff.

UNHCR's budget allocations (see Figure 5 in Section 2.3). As such, the budget relative to need reflects greater support to returnees overall.⁸⁰

The prioritisation of returnees is also reflected in structural changes. For example, until 2015, UNHCR led overall IDP coordination but then transferred this responsibility to OCHA, where OCHA became a key liaising agent with the MORR.⁸¹ This transference is despite the coordination of protracted IDP support sitting outside OCHA's core competencies (Afghanistan is the only country where OCHA does this) and a less developed working relationship between OCHA and the MORR, than between the MORR and UNHCR. These changes reflect a rationalization of UNHCR's resources which are necessary and in line with its Afghan priorities and global protection mandate, but reflect tensions within UNHCR between status- and needs-based interventions and its wider roles and responsibilities (see Finding 2.3).

Finding 1.6: In principle the PARR is a well-considered response to provide returnees with a durable solution, but the reality is that UNHCR will struggle to transition out of its responsibility to returnees in these areas.

The PARR represents a strategic focus on specific geographical areas and is informed by previous approaches to align UNHCR support with government land allocation schemes for returnees, aimed at easing pressures from PoCs in urban areas whilst investing in the development of rural areas. UNHCR has identified 15 areas of high return as PARR sites to focus CBP programming and reach vulnerable persons through PSN. PARR sites in principle are supposed to link UNHCR's short- to medium-term interventions with longer-term development initiatives, and selection of the sites is led by several factors: alignment with the government-citizen charter priority programme⁸²; access which must allow UNHCR and partners to be present; sustainability ensuring that key elements for reintegration are present which include access to markets, land and basic services, and cohesion ensuring benefits reach all people with a focus on the long-term reintegration of returnees.

However, there are fundamental problems with the PARR sites where investments in development needed to make the sites viable for returnees in the long-term are not being met by development actors. This leaves UNHCR trying to transition responsibility for the returnees to actors that do not exist. As such, UNHCR is left holding too much responsibility which stretches its resources (see Finding 1.7). Many of the stakeholders interviewed questioned site selection, citing examples where these sites are not providing easy access to local markets, goods and services, making them unappealing to returnees.⁸³ For example, one implementing partner noted that land given by government sometimes had no water or electricity supply⁸⁴ and an FGD in Mazar noted the lack of education opportunities for their daughters.

Without delivery of a full range of services, the PARR sites will continue to be a challenge when all services have to be provided, despite some opportunities presented to returnees by UNHCR.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, without an increase in activity from development actors in PARR sites this does not look set to change in the near future (see Finding 1.8).

Finding 1.7: UNHCR has delivered a wide range of results supporting significant numbers of PoCs, but a lack of focus in the face of very high demands means it is over-stretched with less impact on any one issue.

There are enormous needs in Afghanistan and huge demands on UNHCR which makes decisions about resource allocations very challenging. This is not helped by a lack of clarity around where the boundaries of UNHCR protection responsibility end, both thematically and temporally (see Finding 2.3). This challenging conceptual position is then further compounded by the operational reality that other

⁸⁰ The evaluation recognises that the budget does not strictly reflect the actual PoC distribution on the ground, especially as the PARR sites may benefit both IDPs and returnees, but the overall PoC population for UNHCR consists of significantly more returnees than IDPs (366,738 returnees compared to 80,581 IDPs): <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/unhcr-afghanistan-overview-15-priority-areas-return-and-reintegration-may-2019>

⁸¹ Noting that UNHCR retains responsibility for the protection cluster for humanitarian response, including IDPs.

⁸² The National Citizens Charter priority programme builds core infrastructure and strengthens local development councils, see the 'UNHCR and related partner policies and strategies' for more information.

⁸³ KII with interagency; an FGD with women in Mazar noted a lack of education opportunities, especially for their daughters.

⁸⁴ For example, in Jowzjan.

⁸⁵ UNHCR staff stress that there are opportunities for returnees to pool their reintegration grants to buy land, but this does not necessarily include enough budget to build a house.

actors who are expected – and, indeed, *needed* – to be part of a holistic response to PoCs are not providing the resources that are required for returnees and IDPs to become self-sufficient.⁸⁶

This combination of conceptual and operational factors leaves UNHCR open to ongoing and wide-ranging obligations to support individuals. For example, there is currently a lack of clarity on the timeframes in which returnees should receive protection support from UNHCR,⁸⁷ coupled with uncertainty on the remit of protection and what sectors it covers in an environment where so many needs are acute. The evaluation found protection activities delivered by UNHCR were thereby stretched thin and consequently had lower strategic value overall, with the country operation engaging in a wide range of development activities to compensate (see Finding 2.3).⁸⁸

To some extent this is not helped by UNHCR adopting a community-based approach as it has opened it up to a much wider range of eligible activities, so increasing the demand even further. For example, a number of respondents, both internal and external to UNHCR, reported a sense of a high number of small-scale ‘quick low impact’ projects leading to UNHCR being compared to a ‘supermarket’:⁸⁹ *“Community needs a school – we give them a school. Community say we need water, we dig a well. There is no proper analysis of broader considerations or how this links to government strategy.”*⁹⁰

In a context such as Afghanistan with multi-faceted repetitive displacement (both conflict and climate-induced), prevalent high levels of poverty and low levels of self-reliance across all populations, the question of when, and under what conditions, UNHCR caseloads should be handed over to development partners has yet to be answered. This has resulted in a portfolio of activity that is of limited strategic coherence as UNHCR struggles to respond meaningfully to the vast array of needs, limiting its impact on any one group of PoC with less strategic value, and confusing some of its partners (see Finding 2.2 and 2.3).

Finding 1.8: UNHCR’s coherence and ability to support PoCs has been further undermined by contextual factors beyond UNHCR’s control.

The evaluation identified four key contextual factors, largely outside of UNHCR’s control, that undermine its ability to support PoCs. These are i) the absence of development actors; ii) security; iii) government capacity; iv) funding; each of which is discussed in turn below.

Development actors:

As discussed in Finding 1.6 and 1.7, development actors are an essential complementarity to UNHCR’s mandate and strategy, without which UNHCR finds it difficult to transition out of its initial responsibility for PoCs. However, in areas of Afghanistan where UNHCR operates, there is a critical absence of development support which means the enabling environment needed for the status of the PoCs to change sustainably is not there, and hence, PoCs can remain perpetually within UNHCR’s mandate. The absence of development actors also leaves UNHCR pulled in many directions as it tries to respond to overwhelming needs.

In recognition of the complementary dependency that UNHCR has with the development sector, UNHCR’s CPM approach is supposed to focus on “strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus by fostering linkages with development partners, including the private sector, towards longer-term development and sustainability”.⁹¹ However, there is limited evidence that this has been achieved on any noticeable scale (see Finding 2.2).

The absence of development actors is influenced by a mixture of development agency operational issues, and the need to strengthen UNHCR’s engagement of development actors. For instance, UNHCR staff highlight that inflexible development agency funding cycles are frustrating better alignment, but also that while coordination is good in the humanitarian sector there is not that level of engagement amongst development actors, with no real mapping for coordination and information management cited as particular problems.⁹² UNHCR also reports that in certain areas (such as

⁸⁶ According to some reports up to 80% of land allocated is abandoned due to a lack of services and employment opportunities: <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/08/10/problems-with-the-reintegration-of-afghan-refugees/>

⁸⁷ Observations during a field visit by the evaluation team found that UNHCR has been providing livelihood support to returnees in some areas for up to 15 years under their protection mandate.

⁸⁸ During the evaluation visit the evaluation team visited various areas where UNHCR has been investing in activities such as providing input to a family for establishment of a shop, providing computer skills training for a limited number of young men and women, building roads, providing chickens to persons with special needs, and more.

⁸⁹ UNHCR KII

⁹⁰ UNHCR key informant.

⁹¹ IOM and UNHCR. Returns to Afghanistan. Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 2018. 2019.

⁹² KIIs with UNHCR.

Kandahar)⁹³ other UN agencies claim limited resources and limited capacity, and therefore constantly request UNHCR to provide basic needs assistance to populations. Some other UN agencies also concur with this: “UNHCR is doing its best but we can hardly find agencies working in humanitarian field with longer-term resources so we expect more from UNHCR.”⁹⁴ The counter-critique from other UN agencies is that it is less about the absence of other actors and more about the lack of focus of UNHCR, and, if it were more focused then it would not require so much extra support from others.⁹⁵ See Finding 2.6 for more on inter-UN co-ordination.

While UNHCR’s engagement with development actors has, by UNHCR’s own admission, not been as good as it could have been, the GCR is providing an opportunity to improve this which UNHCR is looking to capitalize on (see Finding 2.7). The One UN Approach also presents an opportunity, and as the DRSG reported, it was clear that agencies should not plan against what they would like to do but rather what they can achieve with the UN system as a whole, recognising that while an important player, the UN in Afghanistan is not the biggest.⁹⁶

Security:

All of UNHCR Afghanistan’s achievements and results must be viewed through the prism of the extreme security conditions within the country and the associated challenges of access. Insecurity is both a cause of the problems UNHCR seeks to address, and a hindrance for UNHCR to effectively carry out its mandate. Insecurity also reinforces the impact of all other factors described in this section, not least that the constant flux in peoples’ status makes it very hard to define them: “We might have a returnee that comes back from Kunduz and then is displaced and not a returnee now, so then receives a displaced package, they then may be able to return to their area of origin but whatever they have left behind would be looted or lost.”⁹⁷

In 2019, UNHCR Afghanistan intensified work at the country level on implementing the Enterprise Risk Management Framework⁹⁸ to develop mitigation activities in order to respond to the programmatic, institutional and contextual risks identified through workshops at the sub- and field office level. While the national risk register is still in the making, it offers opportunities to identify key challenges and thereby provide the background for analysis to inform all activities.⁹⁹ However, the biggest challenge for UNHCR remains insecurity at a country-wide level, which no risk management model can adequately mitigate against. The Taliban and ISK (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province) represent significant threats to a shrinking humanitarian space within which UNHCR operates, which impacts negatively on all aspects of access, assistance and protection across Afghanistan. Although armed clashes have decreased (between 2017 and 2018 there was a 5% decline in security incidences) the number of airstrikes is up by 42%, increasing civilian deaths.¹⁰⁰ In addition, areas of Afghanistan are further rendered inaccessible by terrain and weather at different times.

Within this context, sustainable solutions “remain elusive for the vast majority of Afghanistan’s IDPs...with almost a quarter of IDPs citing it as the single most important factor guiding their decision on whether to return, relocate or to try and integrate locally.”¹⁰¹ This is also true for returnees, many of whom are subsequently secondarily displaced by conflict.

Government capacity:

The vast majority of stakeholders, including PoCs and the government itself interviewed for the evaluation, as well as available documents, refer to uneven capacity at the government level, particularly when it comes to UNHCR’s direct counterpart MORR/DORR. This is generally seen as a critical constraining factor for UNHCR’s performance considering that MORR/DORR is UNHCR’s designated counterpart. It is generally recognised that MORR/DORR do not have the most appropriate

⁹³ KII with UNHCR staff in Kandahar.

⁹⁴ KII with another UN agency.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ For example, to 2020, the World Bank alone has committed more than \$4.4 billion for development projects, and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Fund (administered by the World Bank) has provided more than \$11 billion <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview>.

⁹⁷ KII with UNHCR staff.

⁹⁸ See <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/5ba3522e4.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Note that the evaluation does not review the country operation in the same way the ERM allows for, with the ERM being a critical element of a high-risk operation like Afghanistan.

¹⁰⁰ UNHCR. SSAR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. Enhancing Resilience and Co-Existence through Greater Responsibility-Sharing:2018-2019; 2018.

¹⁰¹ Samuel Hall, 2018, 'Escaping War: Where to next - a study of on the challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan' https://adsp.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/A-7_ESCAPING-WAR_WHERE-TO-NEXT_-_Research-Study-on-the-challenges-of-IDP-protection-in-Afghanistan.pdf

organisational structure and institutional location to play the counterpart role they are supposed to play for UNHCR.

Alongside this, 2018 witnessed the “*highest number of District Administrative Centres taken by the Taliban since 2015*”¹⁰² further compromising the ability for the government to support PoCs. Overall, the constrained coordination capacity of MORR limits opportunities to transfer responsibilities to national authorities, and thereby also limits opportunities for more sustainable solutions (see Finding 2.4 for more on this).

Funding:

As outlined in the introduction of this report, the UNHCR Afghanistan budget has been in a steady decline from 2012.¹⁰³ The funding distribution across partner, project, staff, and administrative costs such as rent, security, vehicles, utilities etc. has remained relatively constant across the years, with funding allocated to partners decreasing significantly after 2012.

Nevertheless, with all the operational challenges that are faced in Afghanistan, it must also be recognised that unlimited funding for UNHCR Afghanistan would not necessarily resolve all problems. Challenges would remain in relation to successfully integrating short and long-term initiatives, capacity constraints within government (see Finding 2.4) and the issues with coordination across all development and humanitarian actors (see finding 2.6).

Finding 1.9: UNHCR has made progress to increase its support to women and girls in the face of challenging social norms, but there are design and capacity issues which limit the scope and reach of its gender-based programming.

The very strong patriarchal and gendered social norms in Afghanistan make addressing gender and inclusion both challenging and necessary, and should be a well-defined and very specialized aspect of UNHCR’s work. Whilst UNHCR has achieved some important successes, the gender-sensitivity of the programme during design and implementation could be strengthened. For example, the evaluation found no evidence of gender analysis being conducted within the differing contexts of Afghanistan with attention to the dynamic nature and context specific aspects of gender needs. There were also some limitations in how staff and implementing partners understood the AGD mainstreaming framework, tending to focus more on reaching more numbers, rather than meaningful outcome-level change.¹⁰⁴

Despite these challenges, the evaluation found that UNHCR has done well to increase its effectiveness in reaching women¹⁰⁵ with evidence that this has led to positive outcomes,¹⁰⁶ especially from livelihood support within the PSN programme which offers vocational training and micro-finance. This progress should be understood within the context where UNHCR is faced with challenging cultural norms which require female PSN cases to only be assessed by female staff, however at the same time make recruitment of female field staff a challenge. For many implementing partners in Afghanistan this limits their ability to increase their support to women.¹⁰⁷

There has also been some progress to address women’s empowerment beyond economic means such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) awareness raising and women’s centres which promote participation of women in community decision-making.¹⁰⁸ However, these activities are small in scale and UNHCR acknowledges in its operational plans that further work needs to be done on strengthening referral and support systems for SGBV, including access to health and psychosocial services.¹⁰⁹

Whilst this progress is good, especially within the challenging environment, the potential benefits have not been fully realised due in part to capacities with UNHCR (see Finding 2.2).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Apart from a significant increase in 2016 due to the large influx of returnees in this year.

¹⁰⁴ FGD with UNHCR staff and partners.

¹⁰⁵ Female beneficiaries increased from 40% in 2014, to 58% in 2016 and 2017, to 62% in 2018.

¹⁰⁶ FGDs with women highlighted livelihoods support from UNHCR included poultry rearing, carpet weaving, sewing, baby sheet making; UNHCR, 2019, ‘Overview of 15 priority areas of return and integration’.

¹⁰⁷ KII with UNHCR staff.

¹⁰⁸ UNHCR Afghanistan Factsheet as of September 2019.

¹⁰⁹ UNHCR Afghanistan CoP 2019.

3.2 Strategic positioning

This section presents the key findings and supporting evidence around UNHCR's strategic positioning within the Afghanistan context, and where and how UNHCR is able to add strategic value.

Main findings

- 2.1 UNHCR's coordination and leadership within the cluster system are appreciated by the sector, but often it is left with too much responsibility for the emergency response and protection of PoCs.
- 2.2 UNHCR has struggled to mobilise longer-term support from other stakeholders which limits the prospect of UNHCR transitioning out of its responsibility for the current PoC population.
- 2.3 A lack of clarity on the boundaries of where UNHCR's roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis 'protection' end has contributed to a lack of strategic focus, and blurred its boundaries with other stakeholders.
- 2.4 UNHCR has worked jointly with the MORR to improve capacity with some notable achievements, but attempts to transition responsibility to the government have raised a number of concerns with regard to continued provision of services to PoCs.
- 2.5 UNHCR has demonstrated successful influence on national policy, and can do more to fully leverage its strategic potential.
- 2.6 Coordination with UN agencies has been positive in some areas, but structural challenges within the UN system constrains a One UN approach.
- 2.7 Data provided by UNHCR to its partners is appreciated, and an illustration of how UNHCR is strengthening knowledge across the sector. However, there are other actors that produce more comprehensive data which UNHCR could better complement.

Finding 2.1: UNHCR's coordination and leadership within the cluster system are appreciated by the sector, but often it is left with too much responsibility for the emergency response and protection of PoCs.

UNHCR is recognized as playing an important role in Afghanistan by a wide range of stakeholders¹¹⁰ leading to some significant achievements which have been of strategic importance to the sector as a whole. For instance, stakeholders referred to UNHCR's active role in defining the Humanitarian Agenda through the HRP and UNHCR's leadership roles in the Protection and Emergency Shelter/Non-Food Items (ES/NFI) clusters. Moreover, UNHCR's active participation in the United Nations Country Team and UNHCR's advocacy in general has been critical for the special attention to the returnee and IDP agenda in the UNDAF and the current One UN Framework. UNHCR has also been able to mobilise support from others to respond to emergency and protection needs, playing an important catalytic role.¹¹¹

In spite of these successes, UNHCR has often been left with too much of the burden of support, and has stepped in on issues such as winterization and long-term support to returnee communities. This speaks to the problem highlighted in Finding 1.7 and 1.8 – that UNHCR is too often leaned on as provider of last resort where other agencies might be expected to provide support. This has consequences for UNHCR's added value, where its fire-fighting role to fill urgent provision gaps leaves it with less time to fulfil its strategic role and leveraging support from others (see Finding 2.2), which is further compounded by the wider issue around the clarity of where UNHCR's roles and responsibilities start and end (see Finding 2.3).

¹¹⁰ KIIIs with national and provincial authorities, inter-agency organisations, and implementing partners.

¹¹¹ In 2018 UNHCR was key to co-ordinating support to 1,500 new IDPs; in 2019 it mobilised shelter for 32,000 people in flood affected communities; and through the Emergency Shelter/NFI Cluster \$8m was secured from the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund for 15,100 emergency tents.

Finding 2.2: UNHCR has struggled to mobilise longer-term support from other stakeholders, which limits the prospect of UNHCR transitioning out of its responsibility for the current PoC population.

Whilst UNHCR has demonstrated an ability to mobilise resources in emergency contexts, it has been less successful in mobilising resources that are needed for PoCs to attain any kind of self-reliance. This is most apparent in the PARR sites which are chosen in part because they need investments for long-term development. Unfortunately, the development partners UNHCR needs are largely absent (see Finding 1.8) contributing to the resource and strategic challenges described in Finding 2.1 above and Finding 2.3 below.

To address this, UNHCR is taking steps to make links with development actors, advocating for more engagement of development actors in various fora such as the One UN Framework, donor meetings, and regular direct meetings with potential partners. For instance, UNHCR has negotiated with UNDP for joint projects, such as the often-mentioned Support Afghanistan Livelihoods and Mobility (SALAM) project. SALAM started as a collaboration between UNHCR, UNDP, ILO, and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, to support reintegration of IDPs and returnees through vocational skills training based on local needs. However, originally developed as a One UN initiative, SALAM was only able to find a fraction of the funding needed (see Finding 2.6).¹¹² Hence, whilst highly relevant, results from SALAM have been slow to emerge.¹¹³

The evaluation team recognises the important catalytic role UNHCR is playing in some development initiatives, such as the SALAM, but the evaluation did not identify a corresponding strategic advocacy plan framing how, when, and with whom UNHCR should engage. As such, the catalytic impact from UNHCR engaging development actors may not be reaching its potential, and UNHCR appears to be in a Catch-22: in trying to directly fill the gap caused by the absence of development actors, UNHCR struggles to find the space for a comprehensive effort to mobilise those development actors that it needs. Without improved advocacy by UNHCR to mobilise support for the PARRs it will continue to remain in this Catch-22 situation.

Finding 2.3: A lack of clarity on the boundaries of where UNHCR's roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis protection end has contributed to a lack of strategic focus, and blurred its boundaries with other stakeholders.

A common theme throughout the evaluation has been over-stretch of UNHCR resources leading to a limited coherence at the activity-level (see Finding 1.1, 1.6, 1.7 and 2.2). This has knock-on effects for UNHCR in how it delivers on its core mandate, how it is perceived by others and, ultimately, the added strategic value for PoCs in Afghanistan.

Contributing to this problem are unclear guidelines globally for when UNHCR support should end, and poorly defined responsibilities between agencies locally. For example, UNHCR has no clear measures for when reintegration of returnees has been successful. According to UNHCR a person considered a returnee is identified as a person of concern and remains so for "a limited period (usually two years) after returning to the country of origin"¹¹⁴ yet, the UNHCR multi-year country strategy 2017-2019, in the spirit of the CRRF, aims for 'self-reliance' of refugees, asylum seekers, and logically, by extension, returnees, as a key priority. In a context of protracted emergency like Afghanistan, very few households are self-reliant, whether UNHCR-designated PoCs or not. Without clear guidelines and milestones, accompanied with indicators to track progress, UNHCR is unable to circumscribe its support to returnees in Afghanistan, leaving it open to never-ending demands (see Finding 1.7). To some extent these issues are reflected in UNHCR's approach to IDPs, where UNHCR has tried to rationalize overall humanitarian response resources to focus on its priorities for Afghanistan of returnees and refugees.¹¹⁵

UNHCR, by nature of its mandate, must be status-driven as it does not provide assistance to all people, everywhere, and is governed by its mandate to work with refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, returnees, and certain IDPs. Within these population groups, UNHCR has the option to be status-driven (based on a ranking of perceived vulnerability of different population groups) or more needs-based. However, several partners, including donors, expressed concern that beneficiary status rather than

¹¹² SALAM was designed with a budget of USD 120 million for five provinces and for five years. Eventually only kick-start funding of USD 5 million from the Government of Finland was mobilized for a three-year project (2017 – 2019) in Nangarhar province.

¹¹³ Emmott, S. (2018) "Mid-term Evaluation: Support Afghanistan Livelihoods and Mobility (SALAM)".

¹¹⁴ According to UNHCR Global Focus Glossary. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/glossary>

¹¹⁵ KIIIs with UNHCR staff.

beneficiary needs prevailed in UNHCR's approach to prioritization,¹¹⁶ despite efforts by UNHCR in some cases to adopt a more needs-based approach through the CBP. Despite UNHCR intensifying advocacy campaigns, this narrative reflects a general lack of external understanding of UNHCR's mandate and role as a protection agency, but as a protection agency for specific population groups.¹¹⁷ This leads to confusion between needs- and status-based support and mandate protection obligations leading to some misperceptions about UNHCR's role and prioritisation process.

These challenges are only likely to get worse as the context in Afghanistan gets more complex. To take the case of IOM where UNHCR deals with registered refugees and IOM undocumented refugees and migrants, and UNHCR is responsible for conflict-induced IDPs and IOM for natural disaster induced IDPs. For the latter, the ability to discern between the two types of IDP is already impossible as climate change becomes an increasingly important component of conflict, and in Afghanistan, many individuals and households are displaced multiple times, by a combination of conflict and natural disaster. Linked to this is a sense of “*UNHCR angst as an institution: UNHCR is still grappling with refugee vs IDP, real refugee, migrant, documented and undocumented. There is a strong manifestation of this angst in Afghanistan.*”¹¹⁸

In an environment where UNHCR is under considerable pressure to meet a wide variety of needs, and where its funding is substantially less than that of other aid actors, such as the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund and the World Bank, it is particularly important that UNHCR has a clear and widely understood strategic focus with clarity on where its responsibilities end and the responsibility of other actors begins.

Finding 2.4: UNHCR has worked jointly with the MORR to improve capacity with some notable achievements, but attempts to transition responsibility to the government have raised a number of concerns with regard to continued provision of services to PoCs.

As part of UNHCR's provision of strategic support to PoCs in Afghanistan, it has been working closely with the government of Afghanistan, in particular the MORR and its sub-national counterparts, the DORRs. As part of this close relationship UNHCR has been building the capacity of these institutions to be better able to respond to the needs of PoCs and reduce dependency on international actors.

To some extent this capacity building has been successful and the government has been receptive to UNHCR support. For example, the SSAR has led to increased government involvement in PoC issues and engagement with UNHCR over the returns process, contributing to reintegration pilots and more structured discussions with line ministries, serving as “an enabling platform for dialogue, consensus-building and partnerships”.¹¹⁹ Significantly, in 2018, the MORR successfully advocated that the government commits to providing winterisation assistance to over 12,000 families across the country, including adopting the same cash assistance package as agreed by the cluster.¹²⁰ In part, these successes can be attributed to UNHCR's engagement with the MORR.

Nevertheless, the challenge of capacity building of government institutions in Afghanistan is not underestimated by UNHCR which recognises that it needs to do more at the sub-national level to raise awareness and provide some training to local authorities. For example, in many provinces, the DORR did not understand what protection monitoring meant, believing it to be an unnecessary use of time.¹²¹

Existing capacity shortfalls became most evident when UNHCR tried to transition responsibility for Pakistani refugees in Khost to the responsibility of the government in 2019. Multiple stakeholders in Afghanistan have raised concerns with this. Firstly, the Afghan government does not consider the Pakistani population as refugees and believe they have the same status as IDPs.¹²² Secondly, the capacity of MORR to provide services to PoCs is questioned by many partners, concerned that the capacity of the MORR does not extend beyond an ability to distribute provisions.¹²³

¹¹⁶ KII with implementing partners, interagency partners, national authorities, and UNHCR staff.

¹¹⁷ The operation makes a clear distinction between mandated responsibilities, for instance registration of all refugees based on status but reintegration support to returnees, IDPs, and vulnerable host populations, based on needs although at community level mostly. The PSN support is purely needs-based.

¹¹⁸ KII with UN agency staff.

¹¹⁹ UNHCR KII ; SSAR Joint Communiqué, 2019.

¹²⁰ UNHCR, Afghanistan at a Glance, 2018.

¹²¹ KII with implementing partners.

¹²² Afghan Government key informant.

¹²³ Partner key informant.

UNHCR has taken some measures to mitigate the uneven commitment and capacity of MORR and DORR by establishing DiREC at the end of 2017 – an initiative where UNHCR is recognized for playing an active and catalytic role. The establishment of DiREC seems to offer new opportunities for more effective collaboration and strengthening of national capacity for management of returnees and IDPs, as well as implementation of national obligations towards international conventions. However, in DiREC's current form as a Kabul-based structure only, DiREC has the opportunity to be critical for national policy-making, but it is essential that UNHCR continues to develop the capacities of the MORR and DORR for field operations.

However, the capacity building approach taken by UNHCR is unlikely to deliver the transformational change needed. Firstly, while a lot of respondents report uneven government capacity, the evaluation found a lack of clarity about the definition of 'capacity', and it seems to be used as synonymous for capacity, coordination, commitment, and corruption management. Secondly, there are limits to the way UNHCR is approaching capacity building of the MORR, taking a supply-led, rather than problem-driven approach where the focus is predominantly on increasing capacity without fully considering the political economy that may motivate certain behaviours. This is problematic as the issue of the MORR's service delivery is not just about capacity but also about commitment, corruption and coordination. UNHCR should do more to analyse the whole range of reasons for poor service delivery and extend its support accordingly.

Finding 2.5: UNHCR has demonstrated successful influence on national policy, and can do more to fully leverage its strategic potential.

The introduction of SSAR is the most effective outcome of UNHCR leveraging its strategic position within Afghanistan, and, as a regional framework, Iran and Pakistan also. The SSAR is well aligned with the subsequent global CRRF and GCR, building on the same principles, and it is notable that the Government of Afghanistan was the first government in the region to sign up to CRRF. Other significant successful attempts by UNHCR to influence policy are the National IDP Policy and draft National Asylum Law.

Linked to this success, there is a sense within UNHCR that it is always present at the top-level meetings, participating in drafting relevant strategies, policies and plans¹²⁴ and UNHCR continues to share information on CRRF with DiREC and the Office of the President, and supports a presidential advisor for CRRF meetings. There is also evidence from stakeholder interviews that UNHCR's work on the CRRF has improved coordination.¹²⁵

To try to ensure that key policies affecting returnees and IDPs, such as policies on land allocation and documentation, are addressed through a protection lens, MORR and UNHCR co-chair the DiREC Policy Working Group and offer technical support to a taskforce on housing, land and property, in close coordination with UN-Habitat. MORR, UNDP, UNHCR and IOM also co-chair the DSWG and foster partnerships and coordination with development agencies and the private sector, in view of implementing livelihoods and economic inclusion programmes. The engagement of MORR in this Working Group since 2019 is a positive sign.

The ability for UNHCR to play this valuable and valued role is in no small part down to its staff who are seen as team players, willing to be part of a broader UN collaborative and very open to others.¹²⁶ Outside of the cluster system, this sentiment is echoed and UNHCR is lauded as working well with government departments, with a willingness to provide support and information to other UN-led projects, with a positive and participatory approach to partnerships.¹²⁷

However, there are also examples of potential opportunities to work with the government which were not taken. For example, the Ministry of Labour is not involved in the UNHCR encashment centres, which is reported by some government key informants as a missed opportunity. Within the SSAR there is an opportunity to expand the number of stakeholders regularly engaged and contributing to its development,¹²⁸ engaging civil society beyond the annual consultative processes to be more engaged in decision-making processes for programming and policy throughout the year.¹²⁹ These concerns are

¹²⁴ FGD with UNHCR staff; KII with senior UNHCR staff member in the country office.

¹²⁵ FGD with donors, KII with government official.

¹²⁶ In a KII with UN agency the interviewee noted: - 'UNCHR here is much more of a team player than I have seen in other places with a genuine interest in being part of the team, there seems to be a real commitment and that is welcome. A+ for team player and willing to be part of a broader UN and being super-open and collaborative'.

¹²⁷ 5 x KIIs, several agencies noted their 'close', 'positive' and 'really excellent working relationship' with UNHCR.

¹²⁸ KII.

¹²⁹ 3 x KIIs with INGOs.

echoed by others within the UN system, some of whom further recommended that the SSAR be subject to evaluations.¹³⁰

Finding 2.6: Coordination with UN agencies has been positive in some areas, but structural challenges within the UN system constrains a One UN approach.

The challenges that UNHCR faces in terms of over-stretch and high demand in areas that it operates, and the importance of influencing national policy, make a One UN approach particularly valuable in Afghanistan. The evaluation found that there have been some significant successes of coordination and collaboration between UN agencies as well as good working relationships in co-chairing the return and reintegration thematic group, demonstrating good collaboration at a technical level.

Examples of collaboration can also be seen around new policies, where UNHCR has stepped in to ensure policies developed with the government are done collaboratively with other relevant agencies, and a One UN voice has been appreciated by government officials.¹³¹ Other examples of a One UN approach include the 'Awaaz Afghanistan' Hotline platforms – joint with UNHCR, WFP and UNOPS – and plans by IOM and UNHCR in Kandahar to combine encashment centres with transition centres.

In the future, the One UN approach will become even more important as the UN Accountability Framework 2017-2019 replaces UNDAF and the One UN approach has to align with the ANPDF. Crucially, this requires greater collaboration and coordination among UN agencies, and there is a feeling that any agency not part of the One UN approach will not be appreciated by the government.¹³² With this in mind, UNHCR and other UN agencies can do more to co-ordinate¹³³ and there are negative perceptions between the UN agencies of each other which need to be addressed.¹³⁴

There are also questions about the effectiveness of the One UN Framework as a realistic approach to coordinate humanitarian and development agencies, given the different operational modalities of different UN agencies. For example, the SALAM example referenced in Finding 2.2 which was catalysed by UNHCR in the end had no involvement of UNHCR in its implementation due to incompatible budgetary systems. A One UN approach will require changes in how the UN agencies, including UNHCR, operates and will have implications for the way donors administer and coordinate their funding across multiple stakeholders. For example, UNHCR's funding and agreements often do not allow it to enter into a joint funding agreement, meaning working within the humanitarian-development nexus can be challenging financially and operationally. A further example of where funding arrangements disincentivized inter-agency collaboration is the inability of IOM to share UNHCR encashment centres, as IOM could not afford to give the same packages of support to unregistered refugees as UNHCR gave to registered refugees. Even after years of negotiation between the two agencies it is difficult to see how one centre would work.¹³⁵

These challenges present obstacles to a much-needed One UN approach and will need to be addressed if resources are to be aligned to maximise UN strategic effect.

Finding 2.7: Data provided by UNHCR to its partners is appreciated, and an illustration of how UNHCR is strengthening knowledge across the sector. However, there are other actors that produce more comprehensive data which UNHCR could better complement.

UNHCR plays a key and mandated role in the production of protection information in Afghanistan, but according to various partners the information has not always been transferred in a reliable, consistent, and timely manner.¹³⁶ That said, there are some positive examples of UNHCR's data management. For example, there is a new World Bank and UNHCR data sharing agreement that is being used as an

¹³⁰ KII with senior manager at a UN agency.

¹³¹ An example was cited where IOM and UNHCR worked together to develop a shared policy position when MORR and DiREC were developing a comprehensive migration policy for Afghanistan.

¹³² KII with another UN agency.

¹³³ IOM is implementing a European Commission funded project in collaboration with MORR focusing on reintegration in eight high return provinces, of which six corresponds to the nine provinces of the PARRs. A central component of the IOM project is the establishment of Returnee Information Centres (RICs) in key locations to serve as "one-stop shops" offering counselling and information on assistance for returnees as well as safe migration. However, the evaluation team found no evidence of systematized efforts to coordinate IOM and UNHCR's support to high return areas.

¹³⁴ 2 x KIIs with UNHCR staff.

¹³⁵ KII with IOM.

¹³⁶ 2 x KIIs with inter-agencies. However, a lack of documentation of information products makes it difficult to assess the extent to which this is true.

example globally; and UNHCR's weekly updates to the government have been cited as crucial for programme and strategy planning.¹³⁷

Furthermore, UNHCR has recently developed data-sharing agreements with inter-agency partners to improve the coordination and sharing of data, including IOM, WFP, World Bank, and UN-Habitat. However, interviews with inter-agency partners revealed that there is a significant pool of protection-related information that is not being used systematically because of the lack of coordinated data and information plans.

Nevertheless, UNHCR is taking action to improve its position. This includes the recent recruitment of information officers at the country office, upgrading of professional levels, and basic steps for integration of data and information management in the communication strategy. Likewise, the continuous efforts to improve the Population Movement Tracking system (PMT) has the potential of a positive impact on the country office's information management; and 'Awaaz Afghanistan'¹³⁸ has the potential to strengthen the overall information management system further with regular, predictable, and protection relevant information for different PoCs.

4. Conclusions

Firstly, UNHCR has, commendably, tried to respond to the immense needs in Afghanistan, but that has resulted in over-stretch and a certain lack of strategic coherence. This is complicated by the difficulty in defining – conceptually and contextually – where UNHCR responsibility for PoCs ends.

Operating in Afghanistan is phenomenally fraught and complex, with the needs of PoCs wide-ranging and subject to change over time as they suffer multiple and repeated conflict and climate-induced displacement. This is compounded by a context where the government has significant capacity constraints, and development actors are not comprehensively providing complementary long-term support to PoCs. These contextual factors combine with a lack of clearly defined boundaries of protection and UNHCR's responsibilities for PoCs in Afghanistan, making it difficult to define what successful reintegration looks like, and hence, where UNHCR's responsibility to PoCs should end.

Given the context and the high levels of extreme poverty across the country, with associated low levels of self-reliance across all communities, the aim of self-reliance as the end goal of reintegration is unrealistic. Without a clear 'cut-off' point UNHCR will remain a reactive agency with limited strategic coherence and therefore reduced overall impact.

Secondly, while UNHCR has provided valuable support to PoCs there are tensions between UNHCR's status-based approach to the PARR and SSAR, which predominantly focuses on returnees and refugees, and a needs-based approach which often identifies IDPs as the priority. As such, UNHCR is not always reaching the most vulnerable PoCs.

UNHCR spends comparable resources on IDPs as it does on returnees but the numbers, and therefore the needs, of IDPs are often greater. This has led to a tension between the status-based approach UNHCR is committed to in the PARR and SARR and a needs-based approach that would often prioritise IDPs. This is compounded both by the fact that returnees often become secondarily displaced and therefore are, de facto, both returnees and IDPs, and by the artificial division of responsibility in Afghanistan between IOM-supported natural disaster-induced IDPs and UNHCR-supported conflict-induced IDPs. The reality is, that people displaced in Afghanistan include returnees and they all experience protracted displacement, and multiple waves of displacement, driven by both disaster and conflict. This is compounded by the fact that development actors do not – and are not obliged to – focus on PARRs and are not limited by status in the same way UNHCR is. Therefore, UNHCR resources are spread thin as it attempts to provide a wide range of support.

Over time, UNHCR has made efforts to rationalise its support but with inconsistent success. The result is that UNHCR is pulled in multiple directions and unable to guarantee an equitable approach to supporting the most vulnerable PoCs. Without a sufficiently systematic and robust approach to the assessment of need within the Afghan context, coupled with a clearly delineated boundary of protection

¹³⁷ 2 x KIIs with government officials; KII with World Bank staff.

¹³⁸ <https://awaazaf.org>

and UNHCR responsibility, UNHCR will continue to be overwhelmed by the level of need across multiple PoCs with multi-faceted issues and histories, limiting UNHCR's strategic value.

Thirdly, the transformational change in the MORR needed for UNHCR to transition responsibility to the government is unlikely in the near-term, and the continuing struggle to mobilise sufficient support for UNHCR PoCs from other actors has resulted in UNHCR finding it difficult to develop and implement any effective transition strategies.

UNHCR has clearly achieved significant advocacy successes with the government, in particular the rapid engagement of the government in the CRRF/GCR. However, UNHCR's approach to capacity building has had less success, and the capacities of MORR and DORR remain a key limitation for transitioning responsibility for PoCs to the government. In part, this is due to a focus by UNHCR on the capacity of government officials rather than the political economy that drives certain behaviours and decision making within government institutions. UNHCR's options for transition strategies are further compromised by not succeeding in sufficiently mobilising other actors to provide support to PoCs in the PARRs as initially envisioned. As such, UNHCR has found itself in a Catch-22, whereby the overwhelming work of directly filling the gaps of other actors leaves no space to be able to develop a comprehensive approach to mobilising the actors UNHCR needs to fill those gaps. The end result is that UNHCR finds itself in the unenviable position of being overwhelmed by the needs of PoCs with no viable transition strategies in sight.

Fourthly, the SSAR planning and policy making process currently does not sufficiently engage other key actors which has compromised UNHCR's ability to mobilise those actors to provide support to returnees in PARR areas, and has failed to harness the collective wisdom of the sector.

The SSAR as a framework has been invaluable for engaging the government, and UNHCR has used that to achieve some significant buy-in successes. However, the process has been exclusive of the regular engagement of other stakeholders, with an annual consultation process considered inadequate for the fast moving and complex context of Afghanistan. This has had the consequence of limiting buy-in from these key actors to complement UNHCR provision in the PARR sites. Greater engagement of civil society, INGOs, and other UN agencies would benefit broader coordination and collaboration and bring together expertise from across the sector to address the high level of complex challenges that UNHCR PoCs in Afghanistan face. There is potentially an opportunity through the CRRF and GCR to expand this engagement and encourage the number of development actors operating in PARR locations – a critical condition for UNHCR to be able to transfer some of the responsibility it currently holds for the PoCs.

Additionally, the One UN approach is encouraging greater alignment and collaboration between UN agencies, and UNHCR is valued for its leadership role within the protection cluster. However, structural challenges within the UN system remain, inhibiting the full scale of collaboration that is rightly expected by the government of Afghanistan.

These challenges of inter-agency collaboration and shared strategic direction are neither specific to UNHCR nor the responsibility of UNHCR alone to address. However, as a critical and principal UN agency, part of the role of UNHCR is to show leadership through collaborative and coordinated responses. The One UN approach, encouraged by the government, has led to examples of increased collaboration and coordination, with a One UN voice evident on some policies and activities. However, operational and financial constraints, some of which are UN specific and others encouraged by donors, inhibit the scale of which a change in planning, strategy and culture can be achieved. As such, efforts for greater inter-agency working have not always panned out as hoped, ultimately limiting the overall impact on PoCs.

Finally, there has been progress in addressing age and gender through the lens of the global AGD, particularly within the PSN programme in Afghanistan. However, not all of the mechanisms used work as effectively as they could to ensure AGD is fully embedded within operations and continued work in this area will be important to fully harness the AGD potential of UNHCR.

There is evidence that UNHCR programming has had positive outcomes for women and girls, but the potential is not fully realised, with a gender approach focused on reach rather than the localised analysis needed to really understand how to achieve transformative change. Specifically, this requires more effort to conduct gender analyses across different contexts within Afghanistan to better understand nuanced dynamics at both the outset and during programme implementation, as well as a strategy to train staff and partners on how to better integrate AGD mainstreaming principles into operations.

5. Looking Forward: summing up and recommendations

5.1 Summing up and country context

Overall, UNHCR's activities in Afghanistan have resulted in clear assistance and protection to extremely vulnerable PoCs between 2012 and 2019. However, a fundamental challenge for UNHCR in Afghanistan has been to clearly define its own role according to its mandate.

In seeking durable solutions to protracted IDP and returnee crises, UNHCR has tried to promote the refugee, returnee, and IDP agenda into the national development agenda, particularly UNDAF and the One UN framework, and this advocacy approach remains valid and worthwhile. However, these planning instruments have yet to deliver effective integrated multi-stakeholder responses for sustainable livelihoods, and is exacerbated by the absence of sufficient development partners within a context of immense need (not just for returnees and IDPs, but for communities across the country). This is alongside a downward trend in programmable aid since 2012. Therefore, while UNHCR Afghanistan implementation frameworks such as the SSAR and the PARR have been effective at a limited individual and household level, at the programme level they have been unable to achieve the degree of sustainable self-reliance among IDPs and returnees that is needed.

As UNHCR looks forward, it needs to reflect on how its role can be both responsive and strategic. This is not an easy task where understandably staff in the field often feel obliged to alleviate suffering in an environment where need significantly outstrips supply. However, as needs are likely to continue to rise as the context worsens, the challenges for UNHCR outlined in this evaluation will become even more acute.

As UNHCR moves forward there are four key strategic questions to focus on, and which were the basis of the co-creation workshop facilitated by the evaluation team and UNHCR staff which led to the recommendations in section 5.2 below. These four strategic questions specific to Afghanistan are listed below and relate to UNHCR at the local, regional and global level:

- How can UNHCR maintain strategic focus in a situation where there are immense needs?
 - How can UNHCR better support and inform decision-making and prioritization when managing limited resources?
 - What are the boundaries of protection - both temporal and thematic?
 - What is the right balance between status vs needs-based approaches?
- How can UNHCR more effectively respond to community-based development needs?
 - How can UNHCR mobilise more resources from others, and to what extent can those resources be expected to fill the gaps? What are the implications for scale and focus of where that mobilisation is directed?
 - How can UNHCR increase buy-in from needs-based agencies to provide support to the PARR and SARR?
- How can UNHCR work effectively through national government when faced with uneven government capacity?
 - What additional approaches can UNHCR adopt to influence behaviours and decision-making within key government institutions?
 - How can it better leverage successes such as DiREC to support MORR and DORR?
- How can UNHCR Afghanistan move beyond meeting basic needs in chronic and protracted emergency situations, and effectively influence other actors who need to do more?
 - What are the enablers and inhibitors for a One UN approach and what does this mean for UNHCR's strategy?
 - How can UNHCR better manage the short-term demands to fill the gaps whilst also implementing a comprehensive advocacy effort to mobilise others?

5.2 Recommendations

1. Clarify the boundaries of UNHCR's roles and responsibilities in Afghanistan, defining the parameters of UNHCR involvement with different populations of concern.

UNHCR's roles and responsibilities in Afghanistan can be better defined. Improving the clarity of roles and responsibilities is key and this should be accompanied by improved prioritisation processes that identify status-based PoCs that are within UNHCR's mandate. In parallel, UNHCR should use the information it collects through its needs-assessments to inform advocacy campaigns for all PoCs, whether they are prioritised for direct support or not. This will allow UNHCR to be more focused whilst recognising that it has a duty to all PoCs as rights holders. In advance of the next planning cycle, UNHCR Headquarters, the Country Operation and the Field Offices should:

- 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.

2. 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.

Many of UNHCR's operational and conceptual challenges are linked to the support provided (or not) by other stakeholders and UNHCR needs to develop a strategy at the country level that seeks to mobilise and engage these stakeholders. This strategy should immediately be developed by the Country Operation with support from their Field Offices. The strategy should consider:

- 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.

3. 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.

A thorough analysis of the enablers and disablers of government support to UNHCR priority PoCs is needed and a political-economy analysis lens applied to fully understand the dynamics of capability, commitment, corruption and co-ordination. This then needs to inform what 'capacity' means for UNHCR within the context of capacity development in Afghanistan. In advance of the next planning cycle, the Country Operation should:

- 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.

4. 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.

As per UNHCR's communications strategy, a key communications objective is to build support for protection and solutions for refugees and other PoCs. In order to strengthen UNHCR Afghanistan's approach to this objective, the Country Operation, with help from the Regional Bureau, should:

- 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:
 - Highlight the link between PARRs and peace processes and value to wider One UN objectives
 - Highlight challenges faced on the ground at the Afghanistan international pledging conference in November 2020 (TBC), encouraging donors to close the humanitarian-development gap
 - Use common country analyses linked to the sustainable development framework to further emphasise the humanitarian-development link.
- ii. 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).
- iii. Highlight the benefits that the information collected by UNHCR's needs assessments make to needs-based PoCs as well as status-based PoCs.
- iv. Develop a quarterly 2-page briefing to show the impact of UNHCR's vulnerability index on programming choices.

5. Strengthen the implementation of the age, gender and diversity policy (AGD) to better monitor and adapt to complex and changing AGD needs

UNHCR's approach to inclusion follows core actions from six areas of engagement in the AGD policy. The current approach to inclusion is focused on reach and output targets and less on the actual change that those targets are leading to for individuals and communities. The Country Operation should therefore work with the Field Offices to:

- 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 6).

Annex A: Evaluation Matrix

AREA OF INQUIRY 1: RESULTS TO DATE: What have been the results in the areas of assistance, protection, and solutions as achieved by the UNHCR Country Operation in the past 3-5 years? Under which conditions has UNHCR achieved these results, and what were the most important contextual and operational factors/decisions contributing to or impeding achievement of these results?							
#	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS	JUDGEMENT CRITERIA / KEY INDICATORS	MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION	DATA COLLECTION METHODS	DATA ANALYSIS METHODS	EVIDENCE QUALITY	IMPORTANCE FOR EVALUATION CRITERIA
1.1	What have been the key results achieved through the UNHCR Afghanistan Multi-Year Strategies (Focus on 2017 – 2019) particularly with regard to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the SSAR, - PARR, - Community Protection Measures (CPM)/CBP, - the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) / CRRF? - Partnerships, - Advocacy, - Data and Information Management 	Comparing planned results with actual results achieved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Indicators from COPs ➤ Indicators from project documents Comparing actual results with UNHCR's five corporate directions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Indicators from Corporate Results Framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assistance ➤ Protection ➤ Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ COPs ➤ Monitoring documents from UNHCR and implementing partners ➤ UNHCR Global Focus data ➤ UNHCR Progress (registration) database ➤ UNHCR Afghanistan Data Portal ➤ Population Movement Tracking (PMT) ➤ Key informants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews ➤ Site observations ➤ KI Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Qualitative assessment of qualitative and quantitative data ➤ Quantitative analysis 	Medium to high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Coverage ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Impact ➤ Connectedness
1.2	How effective are the key strategies in responding to protection and durable solution needs of PoCs?	Contribution to community and household resilience and self-reliance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Access to basic social services (education, health, water, shelter) ➤ Livelihood options ➤ Food Security ➤ Community organisation ➤ Women's roles in local decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ COPs ➤ Monitoring documents ➤ Global Focus Data ➤ UNHCR Afghanistan Data Portal ➤ KIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews ➤ Site observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Qualitative assessment of qualitative and quantitative data ➤ Quantitative analysis 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Impact ➤ Sustainability ➤ Connectedness

1.3	How has the UNHCR Country Operation 2012 – 2019 contributed to enhancing national capacity to address: 1/refugees and voluntary return, 2/statelessness, 3/reintegration 4/ IDPs on a continued basis.	Comparing national capacity over time ➤ National participation in protection activities ➤ Legislative framework ➤ Implementation of legislative framework ➤ Staff capacity (number and training)	➤ COPS ➤ KIs	➤ Desk Review ➤ Interviews	➤ Qualitative analysis	Low to Medium	➤ Coverage ➤ Relevance ➤ Sustainability
1.4	How has the UNHCR Country Operation 2012 – 2019 contributed to UNDAF and UN Humanitarian Agenda in Afghanistan? ➤ Positive trade-offs	Comparing UNDAF / UN Humanitarian Agenda results with Operation results ➤ Outputs ➤ Outcomes	➤ COPS ➤ UN	➤ Desk Review ➤ KI	➤ Qualitative assessment ➤ Contribution Assessment	Medium to High	➤ Coverage ➤ Coordination ➤ Coherence ➤ Relevance
1.5	To what extent and in what ways has UNHCR contributed to reduction of gender inequality, age discrimination, and equality among Persons of Concern and host populations?	Review of use of the IASC Gender & Age Marker (GAM) in all phases of operations ➤ Gender sensitive needs assessments with reflection of different gender, age, vulnerability needs in different population planning groups at different times ➤ Gender, age, and vulnerability sensitive activities reflecting needs and preferences in different population planning groups ➤ Flexibility of gender, age, and vulnerability sensitive activities	➤ COPS, incl. Comprehensive Needs Assessment for returnees and IDPs using the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) ➤ Monitoring documents from UNHCR and implementing partners ➤ Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster	➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews	➤ Qualitative assessments ➤ Comparative assessments vis-à-vis relevant policies AGD Policies (2011 and 2018)	Medium	➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Description of concrete GEEW activities ➤ Use of Sex and Age Disaggregated Data in planning and monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ KI, incl. gender focal points from UNHCR and partners ➤ IDP Population Movement Tracking (PMT) 				
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AREA OF INQUIRY 2: Understanding key contributing and constraining factors for realising planned results: How strategically has UNHCR been positioned within the country context, and what are the key factors driving strategic decision-making? To what extent do the strategy and Country Operation Plan have coherence and/or alignment with the work of other humanitarian/development actors, private sector, and civil society actors within the country? How well aligned is the existing UNHCR strategy and Country Operation Plan to the current and/or evolving needs of the population and wider country context?

#	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS	JUDGEMENT CRITERIA / KEY INDICATORS	MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION	DATA COLLECTION METHODS	DATA ANALYSIS METHODS	EVIDENCE QUALITY	IMPORTANCE FOR EVALUATION CRITERIA
2.1	What are the major effects of the prioritisation of UNHCR's operations in terms of impact, effectiveness, relevance, coverage, connectedness, and sustainability?	Planning and management of operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Coverage (beneficiaries, geographically) ➤ Needs (different groups of Persons of Concern) ➤ Unmet needs for different groups of PoCs ➤ Partnership arrangements ➤ Capacity development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Background / context documentation ➤ Country strategies ➤ Project documents ➤ COPs ➤ Evaluations and studies ➤ KIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desk Review ➤ Interviews 	Qualitative analysis	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Connectedness ➤ Coverage
2.2	What are the key explanations including factors beyond UNHCR's control such as funding levels, conflict, and natural disasters that have influenced levels of relevance, effectiveness, coverage, connectedness, and sustainability?	Planning and management of operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Flexibility (in time and scope) ➤ Differentiation of activities (beneficiaries, geographically) ➤ Participatory approaches¹³⁹ in planning and implementation ➤ Timeliness and quality of needs assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Background / context documentation ➤ UNHCR Protection and Solution Strategies? ➤ Project documents ➤ COPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desk Review ➤ Interviews 	Qualitative analysis	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness

¹³⁹ Note: participatory approaches refer to level of participation, incl. resource sharing and formal agreements, e.g. for implementation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Natural disasters ➤ Resource ➤ Management, incl. planning and monitoring ➤ Staffing ➤ Advocacy ➤ Prioritisation ➤ Consideration of alternatives ➤ Knowledge management ➤ Conflicts and insecurity ➤ Demographic profiles of PoCs? ➤ Political contexts (local, national, and Iran / Pakistan) ➤ National policies ➤ Risk management ➤ Corporate policies ➤ Efficiency and effectiveness of partners ➤ Selection and training of partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Project design quality / Use of lessons learned ➤ Targeting (incl. status vs. needs) ➤ Delivery mechanisms (incl. cash / voucher / in-kind) ➤ Innovativeness ➤ Synergy of activities ➤ Staffing (matched qualifications, timeliness) <p>Sustainable approach to country operation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Level of involvement of national and regional partners in planning and implementation of operation activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Evaluations and studies ➤ KIs 				
2.3	To what extent, and in what ways, has UNHCR leveraged its strategic position to effectively influence national policy frameworks that address the needs of refugees, returnees and IDPs?	<p>UNHCR's leadership role in protection in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Coordination (UNCT) ➤ Clusters ➤ Joint implementation ➤ Advocacy ➤ Data and Information management ➤ Communication strategy ➤ Considerations on where it can make the biggest difference / prioritisation ➤ Innovative methods ➤ Risk taking / embracing failure ➤ Streamlining/simplifying/re-organising activities to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ COPs ➤ Monitoring documents ➤ Policy documents ➤ KIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desk review ➤ KIs 	Qualitative assessment	Medium to high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Relevance ➤ Coverage ➤ Connectedness ➤ Coordination ➤ Complementarity

		achieve better coherence and complementarity with other stakeholders, including donors and partners?					
2.4	How well aligned are the main UNHCR-led instruments (SSAR, PARR, CRRF) with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ UNHCR approach ➤ Prioritisation ➤ Funding ➤ Government commitment 	Strategic approach to country operation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Integrated planning ➤ Flexibility ➤ Double / Triple Nexus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ COPs ➤ Multi-year strategies ➤ Monitoring and evaluations ➤ KIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews 	Qualitative assessment	Medium to high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Coherence ➤ Coordination ➤ Coverage ➤ Complementarity ➤ Sustainability

AREA OF INQUIRY 3: Future strategic directions identifying how the operation can be strategically strengthened based on lessons learned: How can UNHCR build on results achieved to date, and further leverage UNHCR's strategic position and influence within the country, to optimize the potential impact of collective efforts towards protection and solutions for UNHCR Persons of Concern, and the communities that host them?

#	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS	JUDGEMENT CRITERIA / KEY INDICATORS	MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION	DATA COLLECTION METHODS	DATA ANALYSIS METHODS	EVIDENCE QUALITY	IMPORTANCE FOR EVALUATION CRITERIA
3.1	What can UNHCR learn from, and how can UNHCR build upon, past and existing programming to improve effectiveness of interventions for PoC across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in the future?	Use of lessons learned from relevant activities, including UNHCR's and partners' in Afghanistan and other countries. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lessons learned referred to and applied ➤ Recommendations from assessments, studies, evaluations, workshops related to former and existing operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Evaluations ➤ Assessments ➤ Monitoring ➤ COPs ➤ KIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Qualitative assessment 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Connectedness ➤ Sustainability
3.2	Which key areas of the operation could be strengthened to capitalize on voluntary repatriation	Use of effective results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Outputs and outcomes of different activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Evaluations ➤ Assessments ➤ Monitoring ➤ COPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Comparative qualitative analysis 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Sustainability

	and reintegration-related results achieved to date?		➤ KIs				
3.3	How can UNHCR further advance ongoing efforts for developing and institutionalizing a national policy framework addressing needs of refugees, returnees, IDPs and the host communities? ➤ Citizen Charter	Use of lessons learned from relevant activities, including UNHCR's and partners' in Afghanistan and other countries. ➤ Lessons learned referred to and applied ➤ Recommendations from assessments, studies, evaluations, workshops related to former and existing operation	➤ Evaluations ➤ Assessments ➤ Monitoring ➤ COPs ➤ KIs	➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews	➤ Qualitative assessment	High	➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Coverage ➤ Connectedness ➤ Sustainability ➤ Coordination
3.4	How can UNHCR most effectively support and facilitate the development of the CRRF / GCR 'roadmap' for Afghanistan?	Use of lessons learned from relevant activities, including UNHCR's and partners' in Afghanistan and other countries. Lessons learned ➤ Recommendations from assessments, studies, evaluations, workshops related to former and existing operation	➤ Evaluations ➤ Assessments ➤ Monitoring ➤ COPs ➤ KIs	➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews	➤ Qualitative assessment	High	➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Connectedness ➤ Sustainability ➤ Coordination
3.5	Where could UNHCR consider further investment or adaptation to strengthen its coordination and leadership role in protection?	Use of lessons learned from relevant activities, including UNHCR's and partners' in Afghanistan and other countries. Lessons learned ➤ Recommendations from assessments, studies, evaluations, workshops related to former and existing operation	➤ Evaluations ➤ Assessments ➤ Monitoring ➤ One UN documents	➤ Desk review ➤ Interviews	➤ Qualitative assessment	Medium to High	➤ Relevance ➤ Effectiveness ➤ Connectedness ➤ Sustainability ➤ Coordination ➤ Coverage

Annex B: Stakeholders interviewed

Name	Position	Organisation
Caroline Van Buren	Country Representative	UNHCR
Aurvasi Patel	Deputy Representative	UNHCR
Francis Teoh	Senior Operations Manager	UNHCR
Jing Song	Senior Programme Officer	UNHCR
Jeffrey Savage	Senior Protection Officer	UNHCR
Mohammad Pervez Jalili	Assistant Programme Officer	UNHCR
Malang Ibrahim	Associate Reintegration Officer	UNHCR
David Obota	Project Control Officer	UNHCR
Urayayi Mutsindikwa	Cash-Based Intervention (CBI) Officer	UNHCR
Sulakshani Perera	External Relations Officer	UNHCR
Antoine Russell	Senior Field Safety Advisor	UNHCR
Robert Maroni	Senior Risk Management Advisor (Roving)	UNHCR
Sergii Lavrukhin	Protection Officer	UNHCR
Tahira Basharat	Assistant Protection Officer	UNHCR
Julius Velas	Information Management Officer	UNHCR
Jawid Faqiry	Assistant Data Management Officer	UNHCR
Fazal Rahman Arghandewal	Senior Field Associate	UNHCR
Storay Saeed	Senior Field Associate	UNHCR
Ahmad Faheem Sattar	Senior Repatriation Associate	UNHCR
Ahmad Zia Furmolly	Ass. Programme Officer & CBI Focal Point	UNHCR
Elyas Hassan	Field Safety Advisor (Roving)	UNHCR
Dost Ahmad Ahmadi	Program Associate	UNHCR
Najiba Haider	Senior Protection Officer	UNHCR
Khan Mohammad Sultani	Assistant programme officer	UNHCR
Anwar Osmani	Assistant Protection Officer	UNHCR
Gabriela Espinosa	Protection Officer	UNHCR
Richard Ndaula	Head of Sub-Office Mazar	UNHCR
Sayed Asrar Akbari	Assistant Field Officer	UNHCR
M. Akbar Sidqi	Asst. Admin officer	UNHCR
Waheed Human	Prog. Officer	UNHCR
Wakil	Field Associate	UNHCR
Farida Kakar	Protection Associate	UNHCR
Abdul Baset	Snr. Sup Assistant	UNHCR
Muhammad Eamal	Assistant Program Officer	UNHCR
Mohamed Shekimeri	Head of Sub-Office	UNHCR
Fariba		UNHCR
Rawak	Snr. Prog. Assistant	UNHCR
Ramin	Asst. Security Officer	UNHCR
Marouf	Protection Cluster Lead	UNHCR
Abdul Karim	Head of Office	UNHCR

Timor Shar	Senior Programme Associate	UNHCR
Mirwais Khan	Programme / Supply Associate	UNHCR
Shamini Bibi	Protection Associate	UNHCR
Bilal Zadran	Field Associate - Protection	UNHCR
Normyalai Aryan	Senior Protection Associate	UNHCR
Abdul Hameed	Admin / Finance Associate	UNHCR
Abdul Haq	Senior ICT Assistant	UNHCR
Haj Mohammad Niazy	Senior Security Assistant	UNHCR
Sher Ahmad Shakir	Head of Field Office, Kandahar	UNHCR
Ahmad Jan Dost	Senior Protection Assistant	UNHCR
H. Jawed	Protection Assist	UNHCR
Mohammad Haroon	Assistant Repatriation Officer	Protection Cluster – UNHCR
Najiba Barakzai	Protection Associate	Protection Cluster – UNHCR
Irene Mutevu	Shelter Technical Coordinator	ES/NFI Cluster – UNHCR
Nabila Hameed	Senior Evaluation Officer	UNHCR Geneva
Kristina Zitnanova	Policy Advisor	UNHCR, Bangkok
Alexander Mundt	Senior Policy Advisor	UNHCR, Geneva
Duncan Bell	Humanitarian Advisor	DFID
Said Ebad Hashemi	Refugee Affairs Specialist	US Embassy
Robert Newsome	Refugee Coordinator	BRPM, Embassy of US
Yama Omari	Advisor	EU
Alejandro EGGENSCHWILER	Programme manager	EU
Abdul Sattar Safi	Program Officer	DG ECHO
Juan-Carlos Martinez Bandera	Technical Assistant	DG ECHO
Alejandro Eggenschwiler	International Aid/Cooperation Advisor	European Delegation to Afghanistan
Chelsea Sayers	First Secretary, Development	Canadian Embassy
Antje Schwesig	Senior Management Advisor	GIZ
Hashem Rasouli	Project Coordinator for Returnees	GIZ
Mher Khuda Sabar	Head of Emergency	MORR
Sultan Ali Javid	Director of Policy and Planning	MORR
Hadi Noori	Consultant	MORR
Rahmatullah Hakimi	Head of Repatriation Department	MORR
Sayed Abdul Karim Hashimi	Deputy Minister	MoLSA
Sameer Najeeb	Advisor	MoLSA

Ahmad Sayed Faizi	Snr. Advisor	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
Basir Ahmad Mohamadi	Snr. Policy Advisor	DiREC
Nafisa Kohistani	Director, Monitoring and Evaluation	Ministry of Women's Affairs
Mohammad Tamin Aref Momand	Deputy Governor (Admin and Finance)	Nangahar Provincial Government
Najeebullah Qayumi	Director	DORR, Nangarhar Province
Alhaj M Bashir Tawhedi	Deputy Head of Balkh Province	Balkh Province Government
Mr. Farhang	Director of technical sectoral services division	Balkh Province Government
Mr. Qaderri	Director	DORR
Mr. Foulad Sazawar	Director of RRD	Balkh Provincial Government
Mr. Rabany Dastger	Director of economic division	Balkh Provincial Government
Mr. Hosaen Watan Dost	Director of ANDMA	Balkh Provincial Government
Mr. Hayatollah Hayat	Governor of Kandahar	Kandahar Provincial Government
Mr. Goul Mohamad	Director of Department of Economics	Kandahar Provincial Government
Mr. AB Khaliq	Director of Department of Education	Kandahar Provincial Government
Mr. Mafizollah	Representative of ANDMA	Kandahar Provincial Government
Mr. Ajmail Koraishi	Director of DORR	Kandahar Provincial Government
Mr. Ahmad Jaweed	Director of technical sectoral services division	Kandahar Provincial Government
Toby Lanzer	DSRSG	UNAMA/RC Office
Marziya Bayduloeva	Deputy Head of RCO	UNAMA/RC Office
Francesco Tisei	Policy Advisor	WFP
Lucie Rivka	Strategic Planning Officer	UNOPS
Nuria Roca Ruiz	Project Coordinator	UNESCO
Laura Rio	Section Chief - Livelihoods & Resilience	UNDP
Mohammad Saleem	Programme Analyst	UNDP
Nuria Roca Ruiz	Project Coordinator	UNDP
Justine Davies	Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Specialist	UNDP
Mohammad Salim	Programme officer	UNDP
Mohammad Mansoor Akbar		ILO
Azima Roya		UN-Habitat
Saad Malwok Sharhad	Regional Manager	UN-Habitat
Lan Ridley	Head of Office	OCHA
Danielle Parry	Intercluster Coordinator	OCHA
Mirwais Muzafar	Humanitarian Affairs Officer	OCHA
Fahim Safie	Head of Sub-Office	IOM
Chris Foulkes	Programme Support Officer	IOM
Nandini Krishnan	Senior Economist	World Bank

William Carter	Country Director	NRC
Toory Alam	Team Leader – LTS	DRC
Mohammad Ismail	Field Officer	DRC
Dagmar Ruehrig	Grants & Communication Advisor	DACAAR
Engr Shah Wali	Deputy Director / Head of Programme	DACAAR
Vicki Aken	Country Director	IRC
Anna Stein	Coordinator	ADSP
Representatives from local organisations anonymized. The COE is aware of their identify.		
45 representatives (head of organisations, community workers, local coordinators)	National NGO staff members	ORCD, WADAN, ACBAR, Hewad, Amran, BEST, Women for Afghan Women, OHW, ORD, COAR, ARAA, CHA, HRDA, APA, AHDA, WASSA
Persons of Concern anatomized. The COE is aware of their identify.		
23 Community female and male members (IDPs, returnees, combined IDPs/returnees, host population)	Persons of Concern	Nandahar
37 Community female and male members (IDPs, returnees, combined IDPs/returnees, host populations)	Persons of Concern	Balkh

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Annex D: Terms of Reference



EVALUATION SERVICE TERMS OF REFERENCE

COUNTRY OPERATION EVALUATIONS IN MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

Key Information at glance about the evaluation	
Title of the evaluation:	Country Operation Evaluation
Proposed Countries:	Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq and Egypt (subject to change)
Time-frame covered:	Variable
Type of evaluation:	Independent evaluation of multiple UNHCR country operations
Evaluation commissioned by:	UNHCR Evaluation Service

1. INTRODUCTION

UNHCR's country operations around the world aim to work effectively to pursue protection and solutions, to support the inclusion of internally displaced, refugees and stateless people in national and local services, and to contribute to societies and economies, especially in refugee hosting countries. Such efforts require learning lessons from implementation on the ground. These lessons inform UNHCR's strategic thinking, programme design and programme implementation both at the global and country operation level, as well as ensure UNHCR country operations are supported in both practically applying and seeing impact in their specific contexts.

To help inform this learning process, the UNHCR Evaluation Service is planning to commission four country operation evaluations in Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq and Egypt to be completed in 2019, though one or more of the selected countries may be subject to change.

2. BACKGROUND

There are more than 67 million people of concern to UNHCR around the world—refugees, stateless persons, returnees, and IDPs affected by conflict—a number which has doubled over the past two decades. These historic levels of displacement have highlighted the need to revisit some of the traditional approaches to the provision of protection and assistance as well as the search for solutions.¹ UNHCR is committed to taking a strategic, evidence-based approach to identifying those areas where UNHCR can have most impact,² and where we can most effectively leverage others in securing protection and solutions.

The adoption of the [New York Declaration](#) in September 2016 ushered UNHCR and partners into a new era of collaboration as States agreed to address and resolve refugee flows through a new model—the [Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework](#) (CRRF)—that places the rights, interests and potential of refugees and of their hosts at the heart of a multi-dimensional response extending beyond, humanitarian action. Building on lessons learnt through the practical application of the CRRF, the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) provides a platform through which UNHCR can reinforce existing, and build new partnerships, to improve response to refugee situations. Important

developments linked to UN Reform, the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 are also fundamentally reshaping the way in which UNHCR works.

In line with these transformative developments at the global level, UNHCR is also undertaking ambitious internal change management processes. These measures should help support UNHCR country operations be more agile and responsive to evolving contexts and emerging opportunities as the organisation works constructively with new and existing partners, and engage more deeply with UN Country Teams towards collective outcomes. Evaluations of UNHCR's country operations can therefore provide much needed evidence to inform these above-mentioned transformations.

3. UNHCR COUNTRY OPERATIONS

As mass displacement across the world continues to grow, it is usually low- and middle-income countries that shoulder much of the responsibility for refugees, and other UNHCR persons of concern, in protracted displacement and emergency settings. UNHCR works in two principal operational settings – camp and non-camp – with the latter divided into urban and rural. Emergency and insecure environments present specific challenges to UNHCR and require adaptations in programming.

In alignment with the five core areas of UNHCR's [2017-2021 Strategic Directions](#) to ensure protection, respond in emergencies, promote inclusion, empower the people UNHCR serves, and expand opportunities for solutions, UNHCR country operations develop multi-year and annual protection and solution strategies, guided by participatory planning exercises (joint assessments of needs and priorities with partner organisations and key stakeholders including governments, donors, and people of concern). The annual planning process further defines country priority actions and allocates resources against these priorities in line with global and regional priorities. Mid-year reviews are undertaken in each country to review progress and recommend course correction actions. The current RBM system in place is used across all operations and integrates financial, HR and output data. The monitoring and reporting is being revised, as it the results-based management system and indicator framework, which will shape the organisations future approach to assessment, planning, implementing and reporting.

Much of UNHCR's work at the country operation level focuses on:

- **Ensuring a favourable protection environment:** UNHCR strives to ensure that everyone has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to eventually return home, integrate or resettle. International protection³ for asylum seekers and refugees begins with admission to a country of asylum and registration and documentation by national authorities or UNHCR, which facilitates access to basic assistance and protection - including protection against *refoulement*, and arbitrary arrest and detention. UNHCR works closely with States to support, or conduct, the vital Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process to help ensure refugees can realise their rights under international law. UNHCR also advises governments on refugee law, and advocates and builds capacity for a conducive policy environment to support the well-being of refugees and other persons of concern.
- **Meeting basic needs and providing essential services:** During times of displacement, UNHCR provides critical emergency assistance in the form of clean water, sanitation and [healthcare](#), as well as [shelter](#), blankets, household goods and providing [cash grants or vouchers](#) to cover the cost of families' basic needs. Since 2016, UNHCR has distributed approximately USD1.4 billion in cash, assisting 8 million people in over 100 countries,
- **Coordinating assistance:** The UNHCR [Refugee Coordination Model](#) (RCM) promotes best practice in order to make refugee coordination more predictable, inclusive and collaborative. It also helps other humanitarian actors working in refugee operations, leading to better protection, assistance and durable solutions for refugees.
- **Supporting livelihoods and refugee self-reliance:** UNHCR works to promote economic inclusion⁴ of those forced to flee their homes by advocating for their right to work and building their livelihoods through market-oriented programmes. Enhancing refugee self-reliance involves facilitating inclusion in local and national services, supporting communities who host refugees, and promoting social cohesion, as well as facilitating investment in refugee hosting areas in support of national development plans and strategies
- **Facilitating durable solutions:** UNHCR operations facilitate traditional [durable solutions](#), namely voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration, as well as other local

solutions and complementary pathways for admission to third countries, UNHCR also arranges transport and assistance packages for people who return home. Four countries – Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq and Egypt – are intended to be covered in the broad scope of this TOR. Detailed TORs for each of the four operations will be prepared in close collaboration with the UNHCR Country Office and other relevant UNHCR stakeholders.

4. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The country operation evaluations are intended to be forward-looking in their orientation. They will each be undertaken as distinct evaluations. The main purpose of these evaluations is to generate timely evidence to inform UNHCR's future operational planning and strategy in Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq and Egypt - leading to more effective and impactful UNHCR partnerships and programming, in pursuit of protection and solutions for UNHCR persons of concern and the communities that host them. The country operation evaluations will seek to analyse and assess the effectiveness of UNHCR's plans and activities in light of the specific country context, reflect on recent results and the evolving needs of the population across the full breadth of UNHCR's activities, and examine how UNHCR can strengthen its strategic approach and partnerships, as well as impact, in Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq and Egypt vis-à-vis other humanitarian, development and government actors. In highlighting lessons learnt at the country operation level, recommendations from these evaluations should help inform future UNHCR guidance for country level operational planning, resource mobilisation, and implementation. The detailed scope of each evaluation is dependent on the respective context and UNHCR Country Office priorities

The primary audience for these evaluations are the UNHCR Country Offices in Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq and Egypt and their respective Regional Bureaux. Other UNHCR Bureaux and Divisions, as well as UNHCR partners – including government and humanitarian and development actors – will serve as a secondary audience.

5. EVALUATION APPROACH

1. Proposed Areas of Inquiry

The areas of inquiry broadly outlined below will be further developed for each of the four country operations being evaluated in form of detailed questions, and can be refined during each evaluation's inception phase. Evaluation criteria pertaining to coverage, effectiveness, relevance and coherence are of particular interest.

Areas of Inquiry 1: What have been the results in the areas of assistance, protection, and solutions as achieved by the UNHCR country operation in the past 3-5 years? Under which conditions has UNHCR achieved these results, and what were the most important contextual and operational factors/decisions contributing to or impeding achievement of these results?

Area of Inquiry 2: How strategically has UNHCR been positioned within the county context, and what are the key factors driving strategic decision-making? To what extent do the strategy and country operation plan have coherence and/or alignment with the work of other humanitarian/development actors, private sector, and civil society actors within the country? How well aligned is the existing UNHCR strategy and country operation plan to the current and/or evolving needs of the population and wider country context?

Area of Inquiry 3: How can UNHCR build on results achieved to date, and further leverage UNHCR's strategic position and influence within the country, to optimise the potential impact of collective efforts towards protection and solutions for UNHCR persons of concern, and the communities that host them?

2. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology should use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. UNHCR welcomes the use of diverse and innovative evaluation methods. Data from a wide range of sources and a representative range of stakeholders will need to be triangulated and cross validated so as

to ensure the credibility of evaluation findings and conclusions. Data collection is expected to comprise of: 1) desk reviews and content analysis of relevant background as well as programmatic data and documents; 2) focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and rapid surveys (as appropriate) with UNHCR staff, implementing and operational partners, key interagency stakeholders (e.g. WFP, UNDP, UNICEF, etc.), national host governments; development partners and key donors, and; 3) field data collection in the selected country operations involving a mixed-method approach, which in addition to the above may also include paired-interviews, participatory appraisals, outcome mapping and problem ranking exercises etc.,

The Evaluation Team will be expected to refine the methodology and final evaluation questions following the initial desk review, country visit and key informant interviews undertaken during the inception phase. The final inception report will specify the evaluation methodology, and the refined focus and scope of the evaluation, including final key evaluation questions, data collection tools and analytical framework.

6. ORGANISATION AND CONDUCT OF THE EVALUATION

1. Evaluation Management and Quality Assurance

An Evaluation Manager will be appointed from the UNHCR Evaluation Service for each country evaluation. S/he will be responsible for: (i) managing administrative day to day aspects of the evaluation process (ii) acting as the main interlocutor with the Evaluation Team (iii) facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders to ensure evaluators receive the required data (iv) facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders to ensure technical guidance on content, and (v) reviewing the interim deliverables and final reports to ensure quality – with the support of the relevant UNHCR Country Office and Regional Bureaux. The Evaluation Manager will share and provide an orientation to the EQA at the start of the evaluation. Adherence to the EQA will be overseen by the Evaluation Manager with support from the UNHCR Evaluation Service as needed.

The Evaluation Manager will remain in close contact with designated focal points in each of the four country operations to facilitate mission arrangements to all the designated locations. The respective UNHCR Country Offices will designate focal points that will assist the Evaluation Manager and Evaluation Team with logistical and administrative arrangements.

The Evaluation Team will be required to sign the UNHCR Code of Conduct, complete UNHCR's introductory protection training module, and respect UNHCR's confidentiality requirements. In line with established standards for evaluation in the UN system, and the UN Ethical Guidelines for evaluations, evaluation in UNHCR is founded on the fundamental principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility. These inter-connected principles subsume a number of specific norms that will guide the commissioning, conducting and supporting the use of the evaluation. This includes protecting sources and data, informed consent, respect for dignity and diversity and the minimisation of risk, harm and burden upon those who are the subject of or participating in the evaluation, while at the same time not compromising the integrity of the evaluation.

A Reference Group may be established with the participation of the key internal, and possibly external, stakeholders for each evaluation to help guide the process. Members of the Reference Group would be asked to:

- Provide suggestions to identify potential materials and resources to be reviewed and key contacts to be considered for key informant interviews.
- Review and comment on the draft inception report.
- Review and comment on the data collection and data analysis instruments that will be developed by the Evaluation Team.
- Review and comment on the draft final reports, validate emerging findings and conclusions.
- Advise on the focus of the evaluation recommendations that will form the basis of the Management Response to the review.

Upon completion, each final evaluation report will be shared with the UNHCR Representative and Senior Management Team in the relevant UNHCR Country Office with the request to formulate the formal management response, which will also be made available in the public domain.

2. Expected Deliverables and Timeline

The request for secondary bids will be issued in March 2019, and the selection process and signing of contracts is expected to be completed by April 2019. An indicative timeline for an individual country operation evaluation is outlined below. Each country operation evaluation is expected to be completed in five to six months, and, as such, two or more of the evaluations will need to take place concurrently to ensure all four evaluations are completed in 2019. This consideration must be taken into consideration when proposing Evaluation Team Leader(s) and Members.

Activity	Key Deliverable	Indicative Timeline	Payment Schedule
Inception phase including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial desk review Inception visit to country operation and key informant interviews EQA review on the draft inception report Circulation for comments and finalisation 	Final inception report – including methodology, final evaluation questions and evaluation matrix.	Week 1-6	20%
Data collection phase including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key stakeholder interviews and FGDs (in country and remotely as required); in depth document review; field visits as required. Validation workshop on preliminary findings, conclusions and possible recommendations (in country) Stakeholder feedback on preliminary findings and emerging conclusions 	Validation workshop on preliminary findings, conclusions and possible recommendations at stakeholder workshop in country.	Week 7-11	20%
Data Analysis and Reporting phase including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis and write up EQA review of draft report, circulation for comments Stakeholder feedback and validation of evaluation findings, conclusions and proposed recommendations 	Draft final report including recommendations (for circulation and comments)	Week 12-16	40%
Finalisation of evaluation report	Final Evaluation Report (including recommendations and standalone executive summary)	Week 17-20	20%

7. EVALUATION TEAM QUALIFICATIONS

Each of the country operation evaluation will be undertaken by a team of qualified independent evaluation consultants, comprising of at least a Team Leader and one Team Member. Bidders should propose names/CVs of Team Leaders and Team members for each evaluation in their proposal based on the proposed list of countries. Evaluation Teams are expected to demonstrate evaluation expertise as well as expertise in refugee response and humanitarian operations, with excellent understanding of UNHCR's protection mandate and operational platform, and good knowledge of issues pertaining to the humanitarian-development nexus. All members of the relevant Evaluation Team must be willing and able to travel to Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq and

Egypt respectively, and be able to work fluently in English. Language skills in Portuguese, Dari and/or Pashto and Arabic within the relevant Evaluation Team would be highly desirable. Further required skills and qualifications are outlined below:

Evaluation Team Leader

- A post-graduate or Master's degree in social science, development studies, international relations or economics plus a minimum of 12 years of relevant professional experience in humanitarian response settings and/or development interventions.
- Minimum of 7 years' of evaluation experience with demonstrated ability in mixed research methodologies, and an excellent understanding of humanitarian/development country operations. Experience in evaluation in humanitarian or development settings preferred
- Proven experience in successfully leading an evaluation team and managing fieldwork in complex environments.
- Technical expertise in refugee assistance, basic-needs, and protection work. With an emphasis on durable solutions and local integration, including relevant analytical frameworks and programming approaches and standards.
- Proven track record in leading (preferable) or participating as a senior team member in previous large-scale evaluations, preferably country portfolio evaluations, commissioned by a large development, donor, or humanitarian agency.
- Institutional knowledge of UNHCR's protection mandate and operational platform.
- In-depth knowledge of and proven experience with various data collection and analytical methods and techniques used in evaluation and operational research.
- Experience in generating useful and action-oriented recommendations to senior management and programming staff.

Evaluation Team Member

- A post-graduate or Master's degree in social sciences, development studies, international relations, or economics plus a minimum of 5 years of relevant professional experience ideally in humanitarian and/or development settings.
- Minimum of 4 years' experience supporting quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for evaluation purposes (preferable) or operational research in humanitarian and development settings.
- Good knowledge of humanitarian response programming, relevant analytical frameworks and programming approaches and standards.
- In depth knowledge with various data collection and analytical methods and techniques used in evaluation and operational research.
- Proven expertise in facilitating participatory workshops involving different groups and participants.
- Excellent communication and presentation skills.

8. EVALUATION TEAM SELECTION CRITERIA

Technical criteria used to evaluate proposals will comprise 70% of the total score while the remaining 30% is based on the financial offer. The technical offer will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Company/Consultant capability and qualification: Experience carrying out evaluations of large-scale programmes and or country operations, interventions in humanitarian settings; multi-country evaluations involving mixed methods (max 21.25 points)
- Proposed services: Approach and methodology to the evaluation(s) (max 20 points)
- Team Composition and Strength: Number of people, qualifications and relevant experience (max 28.75 points)

Operational and Country Context

For nearly four decades, millions of Afghans have sought protection and found temporary solutions in neighbouring countries, notably Pakistan and Iran. However, despite a fragile security situation in many parts of Afghanistan, as well as a range of socio-economic and political challenges, more than 7 million Afghans have decided to return since 2002, including some 5.2 million registered refugees assisted by UNHCR with cash and other assistance through the largest voluntary repatriation programme in its history. In 2016, over 600,000 Afghans returned from the Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran, including more than 370,000 refugees, marking a renewed surge in repatriation despite adverse conditions for return. In 2017, the number of Afghan refugee returns decreased significantly to nearly 60,000 individuals, decreasing further still to less than 16,000 in 2018.

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)¹ is the result of a unique quadripartite consultative process between the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and UNHCR. The SSAR was initiated in 2011 to identify and implement lasting solutions for Afghan refugees in the region, and designed as a regional multi-year initiative that offers a comprehensive and integrated framework for joint interventions aimed at facilitating voluntary return and sustainable reintegration, while at the same time providing assistance to refugees, host countries and host communities. Since its endorsement by the international community in 2012, the SSAR has served as an enabling multilateral platform for consensus-building, strengthening existing partnerships and engaging new actors.

In recent years, Afghanistan has seen substantial internal displacement due to conflict and natural disaster. In 2017, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reclassified Afghanistan as an active conflict emphasizing the need to reinforce peace building efforts, and the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported over 600,000 new conflict-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs), affecting almost every province of the country. In 2018, more than 300,000 Afghans were forced from their homes by conflict while at least 250,000 were displaced by drought, mostly in the western part of the country, adding to the already complex humanitarian situation. The trends in 2019 and beyond will depend on the evolving and highly unpredictable security situation, as well as the impending presidential election, the uncertainty surrounding ongoing peace talks, and the potential for a withdrawal of US military forces from the country.

The increased numbers of refugees returning in 2016, as well as continued displacement to urban areas due to ongoing conflict and drought, has added further pressure on community services and social infrastructure in Afghanistan, seriously affecting its absorption capacity. In 2017, UNHCR identified 15 priority areas of high return and reintegration that would benefit from enhanced support and coordinated action through a range of community-based protection initiatives in partnership with development actors and the Afghan Government.

Within the regional framework of the SSAR, UNHCR continues to facilitate a protection and solutions dialogue to ensure that repatriation takes place gradually, voluntarily, and in conditions of safety and dignity. The Government of Afghanistan committed renewed efforts towards sustainable reintegration and development, formally endorsing the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in July 2018.

Afghanistan continues to host an estimated 76,000 Pakistani refugees who fled North Waziristan Agency (NWA) in 2014 due to military operations in their area. Refugees benefit from the generous hospitality of Afghan government authorities and host communities, due in part to close tribal affiliations and a shared understanding of the trauma of forced displacement. UNHCR and other partners, including the World Food Program (WFP), provide targeted assistance and support to the most vulnerable individuals, and has led a coordinated response with humanitarian partners in Khost and Paktika to provide essential services to support the resilience of refugees and host communities while working with the Government of Afghanistan toward durable solutions. Over the course of 2019 UNHCR will progressively hand over responsibility for coordinating the response to the refugee situation in Khost and Paktika to the Government, in line with the CRRF and Afghanistan's commitments as a State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

In the absence of a national asylum framework, UNHCR registers asylum-seekers and conducts refugee status determination on behalf of the Government, and as of March 2019 some 450 refugees and asylum-seekers of various nationalities are registered with UNHCR under its mandate in Kabul and other urban centres. A National Asylum Law was drafted by

the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and UNHCR in 2013. Though the law is yet to be formally adopted, renewed discussions have been taking place over the course of 2018 and there are hopes the law will be enacted in 2019.

Nevertheless, the Government of Afghanistan has formulated various policy measures that demonstrate its commitment to implementing reform and development priorities at the national level. Of particular significance is the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017-2021 (ANPDF) and the related National Priority Programs (NPPs), in which IDPs and returnees have been included. The implementation of the ANPDF is supported by the international community through the One UN Framework. Furthermore, through the Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DiREC), which is the primary coordination mechanism for sustainable return and reintegration, the Government has developed a comprehensive action plan that is supported by UNHCR in its responsibility as co-chair of the DiREC policy working group.²

UNHCR Afghanistan's strategic directions are closely aligned with UNHCR's Regional and Global Strategic Directions for 2017-2021³ which focus on the following five principles: protect, respond, include, empower, and, solve. The UNHCR Afghanistan Multi-Year Protection and Solutions Strategy 2019 – 2021⁴ outlines the prioritized protection goals and activities for returnees, IDPs, refugees, asylum-seekers, and members of host communities, and is based on the current operational and security context in Afghanistan, patterns of displacement, protection risk analysis, and regional dynamics, combined with a critical evaluation of UNHCR's role as a protection agency in partnership with other UN agencies, humanitarian and development actors, and the Government of Afghanistan.

The One UN Framework is aligned with the Afghanistan national strategic and policy framework. It was developed in 2018 and is now in place to support the Government's humanitarian and development efforts, and UNHCR co-leads the Return and Reintegration Pillar along with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In line with the New Way of Working⁵ and other UN reforms, UNHCR interventions are intended to play a catalytic role in linking the humanitarian response to sustainable development programs to improve collective outcomes across multi-year timeframes. UNHCR, together with IOM and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), co-chairs the Durable Solutions Working Group to gather relevant stakeholders to capitalize on respective expertise and comparative advantages and to act as an incubator of innovative approaches towards protection and durable solutions. UNHCR promotes the centrality of protection, accountability and conflict sensitivity to be mainstreamed across efforts by the Government, civil society, and the international community, including UNAMA, UN agencies, the World Bank, NGOs and the private sector.

The outlook for 2019 and beyond remains heavily dependent on national and regional political dynamics and continued interest among key international stakeholders in promoting a negotiated peace settlement. Despite strong political will, prevailing regional uncertainties and security challenges define complex geo-political dynamics and bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its neighbours, notably Pakistan and Iran. The already overstretched absorption capacity of housing, basic services and infrastructure, slow progress on land allocation, and limited economic opportunities within the deteriorating security situation, remain key factors affecting the voluntary return of Afghan refugees. Furthermore, in Afghanistan persistent social, cultural and economic challenges compound protection risks and limit reintegration prospects for returnees, which often result in negative coping mechanisms (e.g. child labour, early marriage, labour exploitation, debt, illegal activities, onward migration, etc.) and secondary displacement, as witnessed with the ongoing drought situation in many parts of the country.

Purpose and Objectives of the Evaluation

The main purpose of the country operation evaluation is to generate timely evidence to inform UNHCR's future operational planning and strategy in Afghanistan. The evaluation will help inform decisions that strengthen partnerships and programme design in the pursuit of assistance, protection and solutions for UNHCR persons of concern and the communities that host them. In addition to this, the evaluation will seek to analyse and assess the effectiveness of UNHCR's plans and activities in light of the specific Afghanistan country context, and evolving needs of the population, the government, and its partners. In highlighting lessons learnt at the Afghanistan country operation level, recommendations from the evaluation should be practical, feasible, and forward-looking in their orientation.

The primary audience for these evaluations is the UNHCR Country Office in Afghanistan, and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. Other UNHCR Bureaux and Divisions, as well as UNHCR partners – including government and humanitarian and development actors – will serve as a secondary audience.

Evaluation Approach

Scope

The evaluation scope – relating to population, timeframe and locations– is as follows:

- Timeframe to be covered in the evaluation: Although forward-looking in its orientation, the evaluation should focus on analysing results achieved over the last two years (2017-2018), whilst also broadly reflecting on key achievements and operational challenges, as relevant, since international endorsement of the SSAR in 2012.
- Population location and details: Primary data collection is envisaged to involve fieldwork, should access and security considerations allow travel to selected field locations. Exact locations will be determined during the inception phase.

Proposed Areas of Inquiry

The generic ToR for the country operation evaluation outlines three key areas of inquiry. Aligned to these, specific sub-areas of inquiry for Afghanistan have been proposed below. The Evaluation Team will be expected to refine a final set of key evaluation questions and sub-questions in close collaboration with the Evaluation Manager, UNHCR Afghanistan Country Office and Regional Bureau during the inception phase.

Areas of Inquiry 1 (generic): What have been the results in the areas of assistance, protection, and solutions as achieved by the UNHCR country operation in the past 3-5 years? Under which conditions has UNHCR achieved these results, and what were the most important contextual and operational factors/decisions contributing to or impeding achievement of these results?

Sub-areas of Inquiry 1.1 (country-specific): What have been the key results achieved through the UNHCR Afghanistan 2017-2019 Multi-Year Strategy? What were the main contributing and constraining factors in the achievement of these results, and has consideration of these - as well as the prevailing operational context - been adequately reflected in the UNHCR Multi-Year Protection and Solutions Strategy 2019-2021?

Sub-areas of Inquiry 1.2 (country-specific): What have been the results of UNHCR Community-Based Protection Measures (CPM)? What have been the main contributing and constraining factors in the achievement of these results?

Area of Inquiry 2 (generic): How strategically has UNHCR been positioned within the country context, and what are the key factors driving strategic decision-making? To what extent do the strategy and country operation plan have coherence and/or alignment with the work of other humanitarian/development actors, private sector, and civil society actors within the country? How well aligned is the existing UNHCR strategy and country operation plan to the current and/or evolving needs of the population and wider country context?

Sub-areas of Inquiry 2.1 (country-specific): To what extent, and in what ways, has UNHCR leveraged its strategic position to effectively influence national policy frameworks that address the needs of refugees, returnees and IDPs – and how can UNHCR further advance ongoing efforts? What can UNHCR learn from, and how can UNHCR build on, existing joint programming and implementation initiatives to improve outcomes across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in areas of high return?

Sub-area of Inquiry 2.2 (country-specific): What aspects of UNHCR's approach to, and role in, the SSAR have most contributed to the Government of Afghanistan's formal commitment to the CRRF? How can UNHCR most effectively support and facilitate the development of the CRRF 'roadmap' for Afghanistan?

Sub-areas of Inquiry 2.3 (country-specific): To what extent, and in what ways, have UNHCR-led coordination mechanisms interacted with national government, development partner and other relevant country-level coordination structures? Where could UNHCR consider further investment or

adaptation to strengthen its coordination and leadership role in emergency, and particularly IDP, responses?

Area of Inquiry 3 (generic): How can UNHCR build on results achieved to date, and further leverage UNHCR's strategic position and influence within the country, to optimise the potential impact of collective efforts towards protection and solutions for UNHCR persons of concern, and the communities that host them?

Sub-areas of Inquiry 3.1 (country-specific): Which key areas of the operation could be strengthened to capitalise on voluntary repatriation and reintegration-related results achieved to date? At both regional and national levels, what are the main implications of the evolving political and operational context for UNHCR's approach to voluntary repatriation and reintegration?

Sub-area of Inquiry 3.2 (country-specific): How can UNHCR build on existing efforts to strategically contribute to both current and anticipated data and information needs for humanitarian/development, private sector and civil society actors in Afghanistan – including potential new areas of investment?

Sub-area of Inquiry 3.3 (country-specific): In what ways can UNHCR learn from, and capitalise on, existing relevant approaches with humanitarian partners, to strengthen advocacy on the centrality of protection with development and private sector partners?

Methodology

The evaluation methodology should use a mixed-method approach. UNHCR welcomes the use of diverse and innovative evaluation methods. Data from a wide range of sources and a representative range of stakeholders will need to be triangulated and cross validated so as to ensure the credibility of evaluation findings and conclusions. Data collection is expected to comprise of: 1) desk reviews and content analysis of relevant background documents and data, including programmatic data; 2) focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and rapid surveys (as appropriate) with UNHCR staff, implementing and operational partners, key interagency stakeholders (e.g. WFP, UNDP, UNICEF, IOM World Bank etc.), central and local governments; development partners and key donors, and; 3) field data collection in selected locations involving a mixed-method approach, which in addition to the above may also include paired-interviews, participatory appraisals, outcome mapping and problem ranking exercises etc.

In addition to developing a final set of key evaluation questions, the Evaluation Team will be expected to refine the methodology following the initial desk review, country visit and key informant interviews undertaken during the inception phase. The final inception report will also specify data collection tools and analytical approach in an Evaluation Matrix.

Evaluation Timeline and Deliverables

The evaluation contract will be finalised by April 2019, and will be managed following the indicative timeline tabled in the generic ToR. Exact dates for the inception workshop and possible scoping mission will be refined in consultation with the Country Office during inception. Key evaluation deliverables are further summarized in bullet points below:

- Draft and Final Inception Report, including Evaluation Matrix;
- Data collection toolkit (including questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and data monitoring methods);
- Draft and Final Evaluation Report⁶ including recommendations (30-40 pages excluding annexes); and,
- Standalone Executive Summary (10 pages).