

**Executive Committee of the  
High Commissioner's Programme  
Sixty-sixth session**  
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**High-level segment on the  
Afghan refugee situation**

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**Concept note for the high-level segment  
on the Afghan refugee situation**

**6-7 October 2015**

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The high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation will provide an opportunity for States, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to discuss challenges and solutions, make commitments in support of Afghanistan and the two main host countries, and agree on follow-up actions that will guide the period ahead. The over-arching objective is to reinvigorate action and mobilize the international community to support durable solutions through protection, assistance and development-oriented efforts.

This year's high-level segment is timely for a number of reasons. Firstly, the newly formed Afghan National Unity Government has made a firm commitment to supporting returns and reintegration in the context of the "transformation decade." Secondly, despite this unique opportunity to make progress, major gaps in the implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR) exist and must be urgently addressed. Thirdly, the attention of the international community has shifted to new emergencies and refugee returns from the host countries have reached an all-time low. Afghan refugees count on the support of the international community to put an end to their decades-long plight. This concept note provides initial information on the theme and desired outcomes of the high-level segment.

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## **Background**

Afghan refugees remain the largest population in protracted displacement under UNHCR's mandate. More than 2.6 million Afghans are living in exile around the world, but the vast majority is hosted in the two neighboring countries of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. While these two countries host 950,000 and 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees respectively, they are also impacted by the presence of an estimated 2 million unregistered Afghans.

Since 2002, some 5.8 million Afghan refugees have returned to their country of origin, representing 20 per cent of the total population in Afghanistan. However, in recent years the rate of voluntary return has been decreasing significantly, hitting historical lows in 2013 and 2014. The communiqué of the 2014 London Conference on Afghanistan, consistent with the Declaration of the 2012 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, called on the international community to provide further support to voluntary return and sustainable reintegration. UNHCR is committed to facilitating this endeavour, in close coordination with the Afghan Government and the host countries, as well as other partners.

## **Framework for solutions**

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR) remains the main conceptual and operational framework for the joint interventions aimed at facilitating durable solutions and providing support to host countries. Developed by the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, with the support of UNHCR, and endorsed by the international community in May 2012 in Geneva, the SSAR is structured along five outcomes:

- Support to voluntary repatriation;
- Access to shelter and essential social services for refugees, returnees and host communities;
- Improved and diversified livelihood opportunities and enhanced food security;
- Social and environmental protection of refugees and returnees, as well as assistance and support to host communities; and
- Capacity development of national authorities, associations, organizations and communities concerned with refugees, returnees and host communities.

The SSAR reiterates the importance of partnerships with all stakeholders to achieve voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, to pursue the strategic use of other solutions, such as resettlement and alternative-stay arrangements, and to ensure joint resource mobilization.

Over the past three years, UNHCR has co-led with the governments, efforts at the country level to operationalize the SSAR in the form of multi-partner country project portfolios. The preparation of these country project portfolios brought together more than 50 humanitarian and development actors, and they were endorsed by the National Steering Committees in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan (and provisionally in Afghanistan by the outgoing government). Priority was given to the empowerment of youth, who constitute great human capital and who, through education and skills training, can make important contributions to the overall development of both their country of asylum and their home country upon return.

## **The way forward**

The coming period is pivotal for the Afghan refugee situation. The Afghan National Unity Government is committed to strengthening cooperation with the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan and to support refugee reintegration in the framework of its national development strategy and national priority programmes.

In Afghanistan, a new high-level Migration Management Commission, chaired by the President, has been set up to oversee all issues relevant to migration and displacement, including the return and reintegration of Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Afghan Government, in cooperation with the host countries and UNHCR, has also endorsed an enhanced voluntary return and reintegration package (EVRRP), comprised of a series of cash grants. The EVRRP aims to strengthen reintegration at an individual level by meeting the priority needs of the returnees during the transition period. It will help facilitate reintegration and contribute to the economy in return areas. This package would be complementary to other forms of assistance and development initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable reintegration.

The Afghan Government's national solidarity programme (NSP) (2014-2016) is another important vehicle for achieving this. The NSP aims to empower rural communities and promote their participation in local development, as well as to improve their access to social services and infrastructure. It has significant potential to reach returnee communities, mainly in rural areas, and to contribute to their sustainable reintegration.

The three countries and UNHCR have met in tripartite and quadripartite meetings and agreed to align their respective plans for Afghan refugees focusing on solutions to their situation. More recently the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan have begun exploring ways to document all the undocumented Afghans in their countries and to strengthen the management of migration flows.

### **Expected outcomes**

It is against this background that the High Commissioner and the Chair of the Executive Committee have decided to hold a high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation during the sixty-sixth session of the Executive Committee in October 2015.

The high-level segment will provide a platform for leveraging support for solutions in light of the new opportunities that have been created. Through the high-level segment, the Executive Committee is expected to adopt a statement in support of the following objectives:

- Refocus international attention on Afghanistan and renew efforts to find solutions to this protracted refugee situation;
- Garner support for the implementation of the SSAR and country project portfolios;
- Seek commitments, including from development partners, to support sustainable return and reintegration in Afghanistan;
- Advocate inclusion into the Afghan Government's development planning, the needs of all displaced Afghans, including refugees currently living in neighbouring countries and outside the region;
- Recognize the critical role of the host countries in preserving asylum space and advocate assistance for host communities;
- Identify opportunities and means for reinforcing the resilience of local host communities and structures, in particular through education, skills training and vocational training;
- Seek solutions for refugees for whom voluntary repatriation is not an option, including through resettlement and alternative stay arrangements;
- Identify follow-up actions to be implemented.

*UNHCR*  
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