

**High-Level Meeting on the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghans Refugees
6 July 2020**

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Thank you for associating NGOs to this high-level event. **Including NGOs in the Support Platform's work is an important recognition of their contributions and a visible marker in implementing the Whole-of-Society approach and the Principles of Partnership promoted by the Refugee Compact.**

First, I wish to commend Iran and Pakistan for hosting the vast majority of Afghan refugees, UNHCR for catalyzing further support and Afghanistan for its own strategic investments in sustainable reintegration.

Hoping for sustainable results, NGOs have always been supportive of the SSAR, aligning their strategies accordingly. In Afghanistan NGOs such as Save the Children implement programs in all the fundamental sectors of the Support Platform: education, health, nutrition, child rights and protection. In Iran, NGOs such as NRC and HAMI help reinforce education interventions for displaced Afghans, including women, in addition to offering vocational training coupled with psychosocial and legal assistance. In Pakistan, NGOs such as SHARP assisted in the recent development of cash based interventions for vulnerable refugees in the COVID-19 context.

In all three countries, the impact of COVID-19 is amplified by weaknesses of health systems, a worsening economy, environmental issues, conflict and other restrictions. The virus is already having a catastrophic impact on millions of vulnerable families, particularly children and youth – the majority of Afghan refugees.

In this context, **we welcome further progress on this Support Platform as a way to renew momentum and generate concrete outcomes.** NGOs support the key objectives of the Platform and, in line with the GCR approach, we strongly highlight that **all three objectives are interdependent and should be pursued with equal vigor and respect for non-refoulement.** This will help build necessary trust, achieve responsibility-sharing and durable solutions. Attention only to the first objective (returns), without balancing with the other two, will not be sustainable.

We all know that **well-functioning asylum systems and inclusion policies require international support through funding, technical inputs but also resettlement and complementary pathways.** To ease pressure on host communities, it is fundamental that additional third country solutions are made available to Afghan refugees and NGOs can assist with identification and referral.

Moreover, **enabling host countries to maintain their traditions as welcoming and inclusive societies is in everyone's interest.** It helps build refugees' human capital and portable skills to enhance their potential of achieving a durable solution. **With the benefits of education, professional experience and good health, refugees are more likely to engage in sustainable reintegration but also to qualify for third country solutions or to contribute to their host communities.**

Voluntariness is of course key as it is the foundation of 'buy-in' and sustainability. NGOs have witnessed premature or involuntary returns from various countries, often undermining prospects for solutions, leading to secondary displacement and increasing pressure on services.

NGOs are eager to contribute to the Platform's portfolio of projects and invite further details on the selection process and how to suggest or join projects. Moreover, NGOs can contribute to a number of areas requiring further attention, for example:

- access to legal documentation, a most challenging issue impacting access to services and solutions. Host countries and Afghanistan should be supported in this perspective.
- mental health and psychosocial support.
- accelerated learning, for example helping children to reintegrate into formal education.

Beyond projects, **NGOs are interested in leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus.** Strengthening consultation and coordination mechanisms with and among NGOs in all three countries is key to identify gaps, exchange information and enhance collective strategizing towards collective outcomes. This can build on existing fora such as the ACBAR network in Afghanistan. NGOs also look forward to contributing to the accountability process of reviewing the Platform's progress.

To conclude, **NGOs expect concrete results from the Platform and call on donors and other stakeholders** to extend their support to Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. **Support should also be extended to NGOs, particularly in the COVID-19 context.** Expertise from national and local NGOs should particularly be engaged.

NGOs wish to be associated to further international efforts in support of Afghan displaced populations. We therefore **look forward to contributing to the November International Conference on Afghanistan.** Finally, notwithstanding the composition of today's panel, we welcome a focus on Gender Equality for this conference.

Further NGO inputs are available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.