

## Afghanistan Region of Origin Programme, 2024-2026

### Key results:

*Outcome 1: Vulnerable Afghan refugees, returnees, displaced people and their host communities, especially women, girls and minorities, is able to better access to their rights and thereby enjoy improved safety.*


















*Outcome 2: Vulnerable Afghan refugees, returnees, displaced people and their host communities, especially women, girls and minorities, have increased access to sustainable and dignified livelihood options*

### Justification for support:

Decades of conflict and political, economic and social turbulence led to one of the World's worst protracted crises and massive displacement, which was considerably worsened by the Taliban take-over in August 2021. Iran and Pakistan are estimated to house over 8.2 million Afghan refugees while a further 6.3 million people are internally displaced within Afghanistan itself. By strengthening the protection of these vulnerable groups and helping facilitate their access to sustainable livelihoods in the three countries, the programme will contribute to lessening the humanitarian caseload, reducing incentives for potentially dangerous onward migration, and strengthen cohesion amongst the population groups concerned. The programme builds upon previous ROI support that has mainly focused on Afghanistan and Iran. It extends this now to Pakistan due to the increasingly adverse situation there (that also continues in Iran and Afghanistan itself).

### Major risks and challenges:

Key risks include changes in the political and economic landscape in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan that negatively affect the programme's operating environment. There is a high risk that Iran and Pakistan will step up their repatriation policies with negative consequences for, especially undocumented refugees but also the host communities in Afghanistan to which people return. This could lead to an increase in negative coping strategies, including possible further movement. There is a further risk that all three governments may try to influence implementation decisions, potentially leading to exclusion of certain vulnerable groups. These risks will be managed through the selection of robust programme partners with proven ability to operate in the complex environments.

File No.					
Country	Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan				
Responsible Unit	HUMCIV				
Sector	Multi-sector				
Partners	UNHCR, IOM, NRC, DACAAR				
	DKK million	2024	2025	2026	Total
Commitment		50	75	75	200
Projected disbursement		50	75	75	200
Duration	36 months				
Previous grants	2018-2023 (incl. extensions). DKK 101.8 m				
Finance Act code	06.32.02.09				
Head of unit	Birgitte Nygaard Markussen				
Desk officer	Uffe Troensegaard				
Reviewed by CFO	NO / YES: Karsten Ivar Schack				
Relevant SDGs					
 No Poverty	 No Hunger	 Good Health, Wellbeing	 Quality Education	 Gender Equality	 Clean Water, Sanitation
 Affordable Clean Energy	 Decent Jobs, Econ. Growth	 Industry, Innovation, Infrastructure	 Reduced Inequalities	 Sustainable Cities, Communities	 Responsible Consumption & Production
 Climate Action	 Life below Water	 Life on Land	 Peace & Justice, strong Inst.	 Partnerships for Goals	

### Strategic objectives

*Enhanced resilience and self-reliance of displaced Afghans, particularly women and girls, and their host communities in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan enabling them to better access their rights and meet their basic needs*

### Environment and climate targeting - Principal objective (100%); Significant objective (50%)

	Climate adaptation	Climate mitigation	Biodiversity	Other green/environment
Indicate 0, 50% or 100%	0	0	0	0
Total green budget (DKK)	0	0	0	0

### Budget (engagement as defined in FMI):

Projects (engagements as defined in FMI):	Partner	Total thematic budget: [million]
Project 1	DACAAR	55
Project 2	NRC	21
Project 3	UNHCR Iran	26
Project 4	UNHCR Pakistan	35

Project 5	IOM Pakistan	30
Unallocated		20
Review etc		3
Total		200

## **Afghanistan Region of Origin Programme, 2024-2026**

## Abbreviations

ACC	Afghan Citizen Card
ACCSAP	National Adaptation Programme of Action for Climate Change
ACG	Framework for International Partner Support in Afghanistan
AMG	Aid Management Guidelines
ARTF	Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund
ATP	Afghanistan Transition Programme
AWP	Annual Work Plan
BAFIA	(Iran) Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs
CBE	Community-based education
CCAR	(Pakistan) Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women
DAC	(OECD) Development Assistance Committee
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DFA	De Facto Authorities (Afghanistan)
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender based violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOP	Government of Pakistan
HUMCIV	Humanitarian Action, Civil Society and Engagement
HDI	Human Development Index
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
ICLA	Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRP	Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IO	International Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISCG	(Iran) Inter-Sector Coordination Group
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, +
MENA	Middle East & North Africa
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NAP	National Action Plan
NAPA	National Adaptation Programme of Action for Climate Change
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NOM	(Iran) National Organisation for Migration
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NRF	National Resistance Front
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
POR	Proof of Registration (Pakistan)
PRCF	Pakistan Refugee Consultative Forum

ROI	Region of Origin
RRG	(Iran) Refugee Response Group
RRRP	Regional Refugee Response Plan
SAFRON	(Pakistan) Ministry of States and Frontier Regions
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSAR	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
SSG	Salaam Support Group
STFA	Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
TOC	Theory of Change
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNSF	United Nations Strategic Framework
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WLO	Women-led Organization
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

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## 1 Introduction

The present programme document outlines the background, rationale and justification, objectives and management arrangements for Denmark's continued efforts to promote resilience and self-reliance amongst Afghan refugees, returnees, and host communities in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

Between 2024-2026, the **Afghanistan Region of Origin Programme** will provide DKK 200 million to Afghan refugees, returnees, and host communities in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran within an overall Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus approach. The support will be channelled through the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) in Afghanistan, to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Iran, and through UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Pakistan.

This programme has been prepared to take into account the complex and fragile context in the three countries, the international humanitarian and development assistance framework, the capacity of available partners, and relevant Danish policies, strategies and practice papers.<sup>1</sup> The difficult context, which exhibits a deteriorating economic climate and political stresses that negatively affect the lives of both refugees/displaced people and the local host communities, clearly points to the relevance of enhancing protection and livelihoods using an integrated approach that explicit targets the need of vulnerable groups, such as Afghan women and girls.

The programme builds upon previous ROI support in 2022-2023 from Denmark to Afghanistan and Iran. To these, Pakistan has now been included in view of the worsening situation facing the large number of Afghan refugees living in the country.

The programme will complement Denmark's humanitarian aid to the region and Denmark's other development assistance being provided through the Afghanistan Transition Programme (ATP), 2024-2025; the Peace and Stabilisation Fund (PSF) Salaam Support Group project; and the Capacity Building Programme for Reintegration and Social Protection in Afghanistan (PARSA) that supports returning Afghans with special needs. The programme support will also be closely harmonised with assistance being provided from other countries and through the inter-agency mechanisms such as the Regional Refugee Response Programme (RRRP) and the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).

## 2 Context, strategic considerations, rationale and justification

### 2.1 Overall rationale and justification

The overall rationale for the Afghanistan Region of Origin Programme is to strengthen the resilience and self-reliance of Afghan refugees, returnees and their host communities in the light of the protracted Afghanistan crisis. Iran and Pakistan are estimated to house over 8.2 million Afghan refugees while a further 6.3 million people are internally displaced within Afghanistan itself. By strengthening the protection of these vulnerable groups and helping facilitate their access to sustainable livelihoods in the three countries, the programme will contribute to lessening the humanitarian caseload, reducing incentives for potentially dangerous onward migration, and strengthen cohesion amongst the population groups concerned. Through adopting a localisation approach, the programme will involve communities in the solutions affecting them.

The programme's justification centres on the deteriorating socio-economic situation and the stresses facing the very high number of refugees and displaced in Afghanistan and its neighbours. Recent data indicates that voluntary return to Afghanistan is an unrealistic option for most refugees in the short term

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<sup>1</sup> How to Notes: Nr 1 - Fighting poverty and inequality, Nr. 3 – Climate Adaptation, Nr. 4 – Migration, Nr 5 – Peacebuilding and stabilization, Nr 7 – Human rights and democracy, Nr 9 – Humanitarian, Nr 11 – HDP nexus. The guidance notes on adaptive management and Women, Peace and Security have also been consulted.



to medium term and UNHCR therefore retains its non-return advisory.<sup>2</sup> Despite improvements to security, Afghanistan continues to be a protection emergency with high levels of displacement, safety threats from unexploded ordnance, restrictions on freedom of movement, gender-based violence (GBV), child labour, early marriage and increased levels of mental and psychosocial needs. These come on top of basic needs relating to rights (especially women's rights), food, health, water, education, and livelihoods. As a result, an estimated 23.7 million people are expected to require humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan during 2024.<sup>3</sup> There is a general consensus among donors as well as humanitarian and development actors that humanitarian aid alone will not solve the systemic crises in Afghanistan, thus, creating a need for sustainable solutions with longer term perspectives.

Amongst Afghanistan's neighbours, in large part due to their deteriorating economic situation, both Pakistan and Iran have recently stepped up efforts to repatriate refugees lacking required documentation; it is estimated that 524,799 returns from Pakistan and 691,000 from Iran occurred during 2023<sup>4</sup> and it is estimated that a further 1.46 million Afghans will return from these two countries during 2024, thereby increasing further the pressures on already highly vulnerable local communities in Afghanistan itself.<sup>5</sup>

While addressing this situation requires acute emergency action that is beyond the scope of the programme described here, there are nonetheless important complementary actions that can be taken to prevent vulnerable individuals from sliding into ever deeper negative coping strategies, including further and potentially dangerous onwards migration. Some of these steps relate to protection, where access to correct documentation through improved information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) amongst other steps is part of a critical gateway to increased access to services and safe livelihood options. A similar logic applies to vulnerable members of host communities who are often equally in need of assistance to achieve safe livelihoods. Improvements here will contribute to preventing the growth of inequalities and grievances that fuel social tensions between groups.

The package of support described here is fully aligned with the international consensus on refugees and burden-sharing (including the Global Compact and the Regional Refugee Response Plan). It also takes into account the lessons learnt from previous Danish support; particularly that development gains can be achieved despite the restrictive environment and that there is a need to extend support to refugees in Iran and Pakistan given the hardening of attitudes towards refugees in these countries. The programme is also coherent with the recently approved Afghanistan Transition Programme, 2024-2026, and with Denmark's existing humanitarian aid.

## **2.2 Context, risks and dilemmas**

The following section provides a brief snapshot of the key contextual features facing Afghan refugees and host communities in Pakistan and Iran and returnees in Afghanistan. It describes a situation that includes multi-faceted stress lines, thereby underlining the logic that a holistic nexus approach is required. A comprehensive context analysis is included in Annex 1.

### **2.2.1 Afghanistan**

Aside from its massive governance, human rights, poverty and service delivery challenges, Afghanistan continues to experience very high levels of displacement and a significant number of returnees, especially from Pakistan, which is set to increase further in 2024. This is placing the humanitarian caseload under extreme pressure alongside similar strains on basic needs provided through development funding, such as Denmark's Afghanistan Transition Programme.

The drivers of displacement in Afghanistan lie in the country's multiple political, safety, social and economic challenges, many of which were exacerbated by the Taliban takeover in August 2021. It is

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<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. External update: Afghanistan situation #29. November 2023. While voluntary returns do occur, many have been incentivized through mechanisms such as the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) in Pakistan and it is therefore questionable how truly voluntary they are.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, Humanitarian Needs Response Plan, Afghanistan, 2024

<sup>4</sup> Figures from UNHCR for repatriated refugees. There are additional refugees that return voluntarily.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR. Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Response Plan, December 2023

estimated that more than 1.7 million Afghans left for Iran and Pakistan in the period up to and following the Taliban take-over in August 2021.<sup>6</sup> Once out of Afghanistan, people do not wish to return voluntarily and often have limited financial means to do so safely.<sup>7</sup>

The Taliban's seizure of power in August 2021 completely changed the political, security, social and economic situation in Afghanistan and prompted a massive increase in the number of Afghans seeking refuge out of the country. The country continues to face multiple crises: a grave humanitarian situation; deterioration in human rights, especially rights of women and girls; massive economic constraints caused by Afghanistan's isolation from global markets and sources of finance; and a deep and widespread deterioration in public services. There remains a high degree of uncertainty surrounding the country's legal framework, although it is in most cases now based on Sharia law.

The overall humanitarian situation has worsened considerably since 2021 and economic shocks, climate induced disaster, such as drought and floods, as well as other natural disasters, such as earthquakes have overtaken conflict as the primary drivers of humanitarian need. According to UNICEF, 64% of households report being unable to meet their basic needs.<sup>8</sup> In 2024, 95% of Afghans were living in highly vulnerable conditions and 63% in extreme poverty.<sup>9</sup> The expanding poverty has manifested in heightened levels of food insecurity and the number of people suffering from hunger doubled from 2021 to 2022 with nearly 20 million people, equivalent to half of the country's population, suffering from hunger.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, more than 23.7 million people are projected to rely on humanitarian aid in 2024.<sup>11</sup>

The capacity of the DFA to support basic needs is low. While the health system has narrowly avoided collapse, 13.3 million people have no access to health care, largely due to the lack of infrastructure, coupled with high costs.<sup>12</sup> In 2023, UNICEF reported that around 8.7 million children required educational support, 7.2 million individuals needed nutrition assistance, and 7.5 million children and caregivers were in need of protection services.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, as a result of the continuous drought and water crisis, 60% of families in 2022 reported difficulties in accessing water, an increase from 48% in 2021.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the ban on secondary school education for girls has increased the vulnerability of this target group and currently only 3% of girls receive a secondary education.<sup>15</sup>

Contributing to the low service provision is an out-of-touch bureaucracy and significant economic deterioration since 2021. World Bank data shows that government expenditure on key sectors (including education and health) has declined by over 90% and that recurrent expenditure on infrastructure has almost ceased.<sup>16</sup> In 2023, 54% of households reported to have gone through an economic shock<sup>17</sup> and the majority of households (64%) are unable to meet their basic needs. The economic crisis is exacerbated by the substantial loss of workforce and brain-drain of educated individuals.<sup>18</sup> Climatic factors also play a role in this fragile situation, with Afghanistan subject to both droughts and flooding.

A further significant disincentive to voluntary return is the further deterioration in Afghanistan's human rights situation. The de-facto authorities have consistently reversed progress achieved in the last twenty years, especially concerning rights for women and girls and minority groups. In particular, the decrees during 2022 and subsequently suspending the right for girls' education beyond sixth grade, women's

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<sup>6</sup> OCHA (2023). Global Humanitarian Overview 2024: Afghanistan RRP (Refugee Response Plan), December 8, 2023. <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2024/article/afghanistan-rrp-0#footnote-paragraph-2757-1>

<sup>7</sup> Allcock and Higham, 2024

<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan: Humanitarian Action for Children. UNICEF. 2023.

<sup>9</sup> World Poverty Clock, Afghanistan. World Data Lab. 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Afghanistan: Nearly 20 million going hungry. UN News. 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Afghanistan: HNRP, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF. 2023.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (January 2023). OCHA. 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Afghanistan: HNRP, 2024.

<sup>16</sup> ARTF SG meeting slides, September 2023

<sup>17</sup> OCHA. 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Afghanistan Humanitarian Crisis. UNHCR. 2023

access to universities, and Afghan women's right to work for NGOs and the UN (although it should be noted that women continue to have the right to work in the private sector).

These challenges have also had a major impact on the civic space, which has progressively shrunk, especially among actors working on governance, human rights, and media. Many civil society actors have fled the country and those that remain (including INGOs) have a focus on service delivery. Despite these restrictions, actors on the ground find that it is possible to negotiate exceptions that permit them to work at the local level. Afghanistan is one of the countries where minority groups, particularly those of religious backgrounds, face significant risks due to repressive policies, persecution, conflict, and intolerance.

While the above factors represent strong disincentives for refugees to return, UNHCR notes that there are substantial numbers of forced and "voluntary" returns occurring from Iran and Pakistan. In 2023, at least 350,000 Afghans were repatriated from Iran and over 500,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan in the wake of the newly introduced Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan.<sup>19</sup>

Returning refugees and the large number of internally displaced add to the pre-existing stresses of local communities in Afghanistan which increases the vulnerability of all groups.<sup>20</sup> Most returnees come back to their provinces of origin and are accepted by their communities, but their presence creates additional demand for basic services (including psychosocial support, livelihood support, and food security) that are no longer available. Amongst host communities, 61% of respondents consider that their own livelihood opportunities have declined since August 2021, a finding that was largely mirrored by the returnees themselves (46% saying that no opportunities were available).<sup>21</sup> Self-identified priority needs include livelihoods, advice and counselling, medical treatment, and access to education. Three out of four returnee households face shelter issues. There may be acute issues due to a lack of financial resources, which may be perpetuated as money is borrowed to finance livelihoods. Addressing livelihood options is crucial (as it is one of the principal drivers of migration) and there should be strong links between protection and livelihoods programming.<sup>22</sup> These livelihood options need to reflect local markets and, in rural areas, agricultural practices that are adaptive to climate change.

The large number of returnees in major urban areas, such as Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar, also stretches the humanitarian capacity to respond. The Afghanistan humanitarian response plan (2024) notes that a durable solutions perspective will require longer-term assistance and service provision to both returnees and communities, with priorities being the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, transitional and permanent shelter, de-mining, and local livelihood opportunities.<sup>23</sup> There may also be serious protection issues, especially for those who left after August 2021 and who are now being forced to return. A further point is that many returnees have never lived in Afghanistan before, face a cultural shock when they return, lack documentation, and do not have access to economic resources.

### 2.2.2 Pakistan

Pakistan is included in the programme in view of the large number of Afghan refugees living in the country and the worsening situation concerning their protection, livelihoods and access to services, as described below.

As of October 2023, there were 3.7 million Afghans in Pakistan, out of which 1.5 million<sup>24</sup> were considered refugees or in refugee-like situations.<sup>25</sup> According to the Pakistani authorities, around 700,000

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<sup>19</sup> UNHCR data, 2024

<sup>20</sup> Afghanistan HNRP, 2024

<sup>21</sup> Afghanistan HNRP, 2024

<sup>22</sup> DRC, 2023

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR (2023a). Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan, 2023. [https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistan-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-summary#\\_ga=2.88117723.1195476686.1684367227-614228198.1683288107](https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistan-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-summary#_ga=2.88117723.1195476686.1684367227-614228198.1683288107)

<sup>25</sup> People in refugee-like situation refers to a category which is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained (UNHCR).

Afghans fled to Pakistan after the Taliban takeover in August 2021.<sup>26</sup> Pakistan has traditionally had an open-door policy for Afghans, many of whom share common Pashtu cultural and linguistic roots and have been there for several generations. In October 2023 – in the lead up to the national elections, however, the government introduced its Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) which was intended to incentivise voluntary return and deport undocumented refugees,<sup>27</sup> with the result that over 527,981 Afghans have returned to Afghanistan since then (including 30,000 who were deported and 27,000 assisted by UNHCR). According to UNHCR, most of the returnees were undocumented Afghans (88%), followed by Proof of Registration (PoR) holders (10%) and Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) holders (2%).<sup>28</sup> While return numbers have dropped in 2024, the impact of the IFRP is reported to have created a climate of fear amongst refugees, disincentivising school attendance and curtailing employment.<sup>29</sup>

Refugee status is therefore regarded as a key determinant of the degree to which refugees in Pakistan can access protection and social services. PoR provides holders with the legal right to remain in Pakistan and to access various services, such as opening bank accounts, renting property etc. Refugees holding ACC or who are completely undocumented have less access to services. They are generally considered more vulnerable as their formal rights are less extensive, although, recent monitoring data from UNHCR and IOM suggests that both groups of refugees remain vulnerable to arrest and detention.<sup>30</sup> In 2022, the government and UNHCR identified almost 1.3 million refugees with updated PoR cards and a similar exercise was undertaken with IOM for approximately 831,000 Afghans holding an ACC, leaving an estimated one million people entirely undocumented.<sup>31</sup>

Documentation is regarded as a key protection tool in Pakistan and, while PoR status enables higher degrees of access to health and education services, their access to other benefits is uncertain. UNHCR notes, for example, that there are currently no legal or administrative mechanisms addressing housing, land and property rights for refugees and that arrangements in these areas are therefore often informal. ACC holders and undocumented refugees are more vulnerable than PoR holders to a range of protection and livelihood issues. For example, the eligibility for free health care depends upon registration status, with only registered refugees being included in government health programmes.<sup>32</sup> Undocumented refugees have also been the primary target of the IFRP.

Afghan refugees generally live alongside their Pakistani host communities and in provinces bordering Afghanistan. While this hospitality is positive, it also means that refugees are generally affected by similar socio-economic and livelihood issues as vulnerable parts of the Pakistani population and it is widely acknowledged that these conditions have become increasingly stressed over the past few years. This is due to the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, record-high food and energy prices, the effects of the 2022 floods, and declining economic activity and real incomes. Reduced labour incomes and food inflation (at around 38%) have contributed to worsening poverty and vulnerability to poverty for the population as a whole. The national poverty rate is around 39.4% (a marked increase from 2022 when it was 34.2%); however, due to population growth, there are now 12.5 million more people living below the poverty line. One consequence of the increasing poverty levels is that around 40% of children are stunted.<sup>33</sup>

Living side by side with host communities also means that the Afghan refugees share many prevailing cultural norms. In terms of women's rights, for example, gender disparities persist amongst refugee and

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<sup>26</sup> Gul, Ayaz (2023). *Pakistan Pledges 'Phased, Orderly' Eviction of Unlawful Afghan Migrants*, VOA News – South and Central Asia, October 6, 2023. <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-pledges-phased-orderly-eviction-of-unlawful-afghan-migrants/7300378.html>

<sup>27</sup> Undocumented Afghans those individuals of Afghan origin residing in Pakistan, who a) do not have a document to stay in Pakistan, b) only have a Tazkira (Afghan national identity card), c) only have an Afghan passport and/or a visa that is expired.

<sup>28</sup> UNHCR/IOM Flash Update #16, 7 March 2024

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR, project proposal, March 2024

<sup>30</sup> UNHCR/IOM Flash Update #16, 7 March 2024

<sup>31</sup> UNHCR (2023d). Operational Data Portal: Afghanistan Situation, last updated November 2023. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>

<sup>32</sup> ACAPS. Briefing note: Forced return of Afghans from Pakistan. December 2023.

<sup>33</sup> World Bank, Pakistan Poverty and Equity Brief, October 2023

host communities alike and contribute to lower education for girls, under-reporting of GBV a lack of redress mechanisms, and under-participation in decision-making mechanisms.<sup>34</sup>

In the current political and economic context, the large numbers of refugees and their prolonged stay add load to an already overburdened system, which is prompting changes in the official and public attitudes towards them. Surveys indicate that over 98% of those voluntarily leaving Pakistan for Afghanistan are doing so because of concerns relating to deportation (sparked by the Repatriation Plan) and the risk of xenophobia.<sup>35</sup> There are reports of police abuse, detentions, seized livestock and destroyed identification documents.<sup>36</sup>

The above factors contribute to a range of medium to longer-term needs. These include strengthening the protection environment to ensure that refugees and host communities can realise their rights through access to documentation and legal support, healthcare, education, prevention and mitigation of GBV, and livelihoods and employment. There are particular needs relating to marginalised groups, including children, women, older persons, persons with disabilities etc.<sup>37</sup> For refugees facing repatriation, there are heightened protection risks, especially for women and girls.<sup>38</sup>

The main government departments with responsibility for refugee issues in Pakistan are the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) and its Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CCAR). SAFRON/CCAR work closely with the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs on refugee policy matters, notably the 2017 Repatriation and Management Policy for Afghan Refugees. Since early 2022, the Ministry of Interior has had responsibility for asylum-related matters.

### 2.2.3 Iran

Iran is included in the programme in view of the large number of Afghan refugees living in the country and the deteriorating situation concerning their rights/protection and livelihoods opportunities coupled with increased risk of involuntary repatriation, as described below.

Iran is well on its way to becoming the world's largest refugee host nation with estimates of 4.5 million Afghan refugees (71% women and children) and most of them live in urban or peri-urban areas.<sup>39</sup> The refugees are hosted by a country that is politically and economically isolated due to its support for proscribed terrorist organisations and severe restrictions on human rights. The leadership appears increasingly fractionalised, hardline, and out of sync with the majority of the population, as illustrated by the very low turnout (officially around 40% but likely less) at the 1 March 2024 legislative elections.<sup>40</sup> While hosting a very high number of refugees, the government seeks international burden-sharing while also exercising very restrictive controls over the activities of UN agencies and international (and national) NGOs, including in relation to access and monitoring of international support.<sup>41</sup>

The most recent World Bank poverty diagnostic shows that Iran's GDP contracted progressively between 2011 and 2020, with revenue heavily reliant upon oil exports (55% of exports) which are themselves affected by the effects of sanctions. The lack of growth has been compounded by inflation (45% in November 2023), eroding purchasing power (food prices have risen more than 50%), an ageing and urbanising population, and relatively high rates of youth unemployment (22%). Labour force participation was 41% in 2020 but shows considerable disparities according to gender (69%/14% men/women). Between 2011 and 2020, the share of Iranians living beneath the international poverty line for upper-middle-income countries increased from 20% to 28%. Estimates suggest that half of the

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<sup>34</sup> RRRP, 2023

<sup>35</sup> Return tracer report, 2023. Save the Children International.

<sup>36</sup> HRW (2023b). *Pakistan: Widespread Abuses Force Afghans to Leave*, November 28, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/28/pakistan-widespread-abuses-force-afghans-leave#:~:text=Police%20and%20other%20officials%20have,Afghanistan%2C%20deporting%20%2C000%20of%20them>

<sup>37</sup> RRRP, 2023

<sup>38</sup> ACAPS. Briefing note: Forced return of Afghans from Pakistan. December 2023.

<sup>39</sup> UNHCR. Afghanistan refugee response in Iran. August 2022

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/03/irans-electoral-facade>

<sup>41</sup> Interviews during identification process



population is vulnerable to falling into poverty, with female-headed households being particularly susceptible. In this situation, Iran's social protection systems provide an important buffer but they are also stretched and shortfalls can result in harmful coping mechanisms.<sup>42</sup>

Like Pakistan, Iran has traditionally accommodated refugees and seasonal migrants (mostly young men) from Afghanistan with which there are also linguistic and cultural linkages. Free healthcare and schooling are available for all children and, as a result, around 730.000 Afghan children were enrolled in Iranian schools in 2022-23. As very few Afghan refugees live in camps (approximately 1%), the vast majority live in urban areas side-by-side with Iranian citizens. Nonetheless, the deteriorating Iranian economy and its effects on social services are stressing this relationship and observers note a change in the official and public attitude towards the Afghan community.<sup>43</sup> An indicator of this change is the high number of repatriations of undocumented Afghans by the Iranian authorities – which, according to UNHCR, amounted to over 691.000 in 2023, a 45% increase from the previous year.<sup>44</sup> The main reasons for forced returns are linked to: lack of legal stay (regular entry, irregular stay), court orders as a result of committing crimes (including attempt irregular exit towards Turkey, alleged drug trafficking), and apprehension in no go areas. Thus, while Iran's refugee policies have been very inclusive, Afghans are likely to be particularly exposed to policy change caused by negative socio-economic dynamics.

As in Pakistan, although refugees are theoretically able to access key services, there are significant differences in this access depending upon the individual's registration status and the type of identification documents held. Those who hold an "Amayesh" card have access to education, health, and the labour market. Non-Amayesh card holders have much lower access to services. Meanwhile, undocumented Afghan refugees are at risk of repatriation and cannot apply for temporary work permits, which decreases their employment possibilities and increases their vulnerability to exploitation. The sort of work that tends to be available is informal and within the areas of construction, garbage collection, and agriculture.<sup>45</sup>

Access to registration and thereby services for refugees is bound by complex bureaucratic regulations and can incur costs that are beyond the reach of refugees.<sup>46</sup> Reduced household income results in many being unable to afford the renewal of Amayesh cards and health insurance premiums. Female-headed households are likely to be particularly adversely affected and harmful coping strategies may emerge, such as child labour and children dropping out of school. It also raises other protection concerns, including GBV and psychosocial damage.<sup>47</sup>

UNHCR noted that the limited livelihood opportunities increase the risks of poverty and - exacerbated by the combined impact of high inflation and economic sanctions - continue to drive needs for Afghan refugees and the host communities alike.<sup>48</sup> Afghans in Iran face barriers in accessing livelihood opportunities and employment because of restrictions on access to certain job categories, lack of insurance, and lack of documentation.<sup>49</sup> A central concern is the lack of documentation, which restricts access to services, such as education and health, as well as decent jobs. Lack of documentation also raises the risk of involuntary return and movement restrictions.<sup>50</sup>

The main government institution with responsibility for refugees in Iran is the National Organisation for Migration (NOM), operating under the Ministry of Interior, although its actual status is disputed. The NOM appears to have replaced the previous Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA). The Refugee Response Group (RRG) is the main platform for strategic-level Inter-Agency coordination.

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<sup>42</sup> World Bank. Iran poverty diagnostic. November 2023

<sup>43</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. Iran – situation of Afghan refugees. December 2022

<sup>44</sup> Formulation team correspondence with UNHCR Iran, 25 April 2024

<sup>45</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. Iran – situation of Afghan refugees. December 2022

<sup>46</sup> NRC (2023). NON-PUBLIC BRIEF: *Potential Impact of Pakistan's "Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan" for Afghan Refugees in Iran*, November 2023

<sup>47</sup> RRRP 2023

<sup>48</sup> UNHCR (2023a). Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan, 2023. [https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistan-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-summary#\\_ga=2.88117723.1195476686.1684367227-614228198.1683288107](https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistan-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-summary#_ga=2.88117723.1195476686.1684367227-614228198.1683288107)

<sup>49</sup> RRRP 2023

<sup>50</sup> ACAPS, 2024

It is chaired by UNHCR and includes the main UN Agencies and international NGOs. Below this, an Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) seeks to enhance cross-sector linkages.

## 2.3 Strategic framework

### 2.3.1 International policies

The international policy framework for responding to the needs of Afghan refugees is founded at the global level in the *Global Compact on Refugees, 2018*, which seeks to provide a basis for predictable and equitable burden and responsibility-sharing for refugees and affected host countries through easing pressures on host countries; enhancing refugee self-reliance; expanding access to third country solutions; and supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. Other international policy instruments include the *Grand Bargain 2.0* and *New Ways of Working*, which, inter alia, prioritise increased effectiveness through working with local partners and localisation.

Also relevant are a range of *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), in particular: No poverty (SDG 1); Zero hunger (SDG 2); Good health and well-being (SDG 3); gender equality (SDG 5); Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8); Reduced inequalities (SDG 10); and Peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). The SDGs include a commitment to Leave No-One Behind (LNOB), requiring that the most vulnerable, including those affected by crises and forced displacement, are included.

At the regional level, the inter-agency *Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP)* for 2024-2025 is a key guiding document and complements UNHCR's guidance note on the international protection needs of people fleeing Afghanistan (February 2022), including its *non-return advisory*, that remains in force. The RRRP aims to support Afghan refugees and host communities in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, amongst others. During 2024-2025, it will evolve into a two-year plan in order to facilitate more predictable funding and longer-term solutions. The RRRP operates on an inter-agency basis and includes 14 UN agencies, 21 INGOs, and 30 local NGOs as partners. The funding requirements for 2024 and 2025 amount to USD 620.4 million and USD 624.5 million respectively. Denmark has previously contributed to the RRRP via its core contributions to the UN agencies involved.

Of particular relevance to the Afghanistan ROI programme is RRRP Strategic Objective 2 which aims to build resilient communities, including through reinforcing the capacities of host countries in relation to national education and healthcare infrastructure and supporting livelihoods for Afghans and host communities. It also incorporates mechanisms, such as the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). Established in 2012, the SSAR aims to create conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation through community-based investments in areas of high return; building Afghan refugee capital based on livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan in order to facilitate return; and preserve protection space in host countries, including enhanced support for refugee-hosting communities, alternative temporary stay arrangements for the residual caseload, and resettlement in third countries.<sup>51</sup> Denmark is a member of the SSAR core group of donors, alongside the European Union, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Qatar, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, as well as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and UNDP.

In Pakistan, the RRRP supplements the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) Programme, which was initiated by UNHCR and a consortium of other UN agencies together with the Pakistan Government in 2009. RAHA aims at enhancing social cohesion and building empowerment, resilience and productive capacities of both refugees and their host communities through targeted investments into national public service delivery systems (health, education, social protection etc.), infrastructure, and support to livelihoods and local economies.

In Iran, the scope for direct support to the government is much more limited and the RRRP therefore underscores the need to support *access* to national systems and the provision of basic services. RRRP

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

priorities are to strengthen self-reliance through livelihoods, inclusive national health, education and specialised protection services. There is a particular need to promote women's and girl's protection.

In Afghanistan, there are no systematic policies or programmes from the DFA against which to align and the programme will therefore use the 2024 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) as a foundation. While the HNRP has its primary focus on humanitarian needs, it reflects the understanding that there has to be a stronger distinction in Afghanistan between short-term, acute (humanitarian) needs and basic needs with longer-term, more sustainable (development) programming based on linkages between the two. In terms of the latter, it highlights the relevance of protection of vulnerable groups, especially women, girls, boys and those living with disabilities, remains paramount, involving safe spaces, legal support, psychosocial services, and long-term resilience initiatives. Likewise, it notes that the deterioration of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, water and sanitation systems, roads, bridges and dams, has a compounding impact on humanitarian needs, necessitating investments in sustainable livelihoods and infrastructure to build resilience.

The priorities are also recognised in the *UN Strategic Framework (UNSF)* that has the aim of strengthening the resilience of Afghan women and girls, men and boys, including returnees and other displaced people, to shocks while also sustaining livelihoods, protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and supporting durable solutions to displacement caused by conflict, climate change, and natural disasters. The UNSF is complemented by the *Framework for International Partner Support in Afghanistan* which has three mutually reinforcing joint priorities against which partners will align their support: a) Sustained Essential Services; b) Economic Opportunities and Resilient Livelihoods; and c) Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Rule of Law. These medium to longer-term objectives are in turn being pursued through the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) and the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF), both of which are supported by Denmark through the Afghanistan Transition Programme (ATP), 2024-2025.

### **2.3.2 Danish policies and strategies**

The Afghanistan ROI programme will contribute to various Danish policies and strategies, including the Danish Foreign and Security Policy Strategy (2023), the current Danish development strategy, *The World We Share* (2021), and the Government's Priorities for Danish Development Cooperation (2023-2026).

A common theme running through these is the need for holistic, long-term approaches to the prevention and stabilisation of crises and other global challenges, including climate change, poverty and inequality, fragility, displacement and irregular migration. Human rights, the rule of law and democracy represent cross-cutting foundations and are reflected in a particular focus on the rights of women and girls and the most vulnerable groups.

Continued support for the people of Afghanistan is mentioned as one of the priorities in the Government's development cooperation for 2023-2026. The development support complements the Danish humanitarian assistance also being provided by helping to reduce the humanitarian caseload. This should also enable humanitarian assistance to reach those most in need. In doing so, the implementing partners will also ensure that climate adaptation is in focus, for example, through adaptive approaches to agriculture and irrigation. Localisation priorities will equally be prioritised through the active involvement of national NGOs with access to communities and ensuring that these communities are involved in decision-making; for example, through the involvement of local shuras. These aspects are described in further detail in the sections that follow.

The programme formulation process has drawn from the How To Notes and Approach Papers; in particular: How To Notes: Nr 1 - Fighting poverty and inequality, Nr. 3 – Climate Adaptation, Nr. 4 – Migration, Nr 5 – Peacebuilding and stabilization, Nr 7 – Human rights and democracy, Nr 9 – Denmark as a humanitarian actor, and Nr 11 – HDP nexus. The guidance note on adaptive management has also been consulted. These guidelines will be used to help inform HUMCIV's dialogue with the implementing partners and its monitoring of progress.



## 2.4 Past results and lessons learned

The most recent period of Danish support to returnees, displaced and host communities through the 2022-2023 Regions of Origin (ROI) programme was channelled to Afghanistan and Iran through three NGO partners: Save the Children (supporting livelihoods through small income generation activities, multipurpose cash assistance, and cash for work); DACAAR (water and sanitation, agricultural natural resource management, small-scale enterprise development, and women's empowerment), and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) (shelter, socio-economic reintegration, and information and legal assistance). Save the Children and DACAAR both had a geographical focus on Afghanistan while NRC's activities covered both Afghanistan and Iran.

Reporting from the partners shows positive effects: Save the Children's income generation activities, for example, led to a 36% increase in profitability and included useful findings relating to the sort of activities to prioritise; these including various market-orientated activities, such as shopkeeping (gas, fruit and vegetable, mobile tools), vehicle repair, and solar panel repair. Repairs to local infrastructure had employment and wider benefits, such as increased access to services and reduced soil erosion. Lessons learned include the relevance of providing soft skills (such as business plans) and ensuring the participation of village committees in the selection of the most vulnerable households for cash programming, including cash for work.<sup>52</sup>

DACAAR found that home-based businesses were viable solutions given the restrictions on women's participation and served to increase household income and promote social cohesion. Enrolling jobless youths, particularly males, in vocational training equipped them with skills, leading to increased incomes. With regards to agricultural livelihoods, the establishment of high-value and market-oriented crops enhances the beneficiaries' sustainable earning capacity and creates long-term impact. The value added by processing fruits, vegetables, and dairy enables farmers to generate high revenues and manage low prices during the harvest season. Agriculture, as well as DACAAR's focus on water resources (WASH), provide opportunities to integrate climate adaptive approaches into the support.

NRC's activities in Afghanistan and Iran achieved mixed results – generally achieving targets where NRC was able to exercise control over activities (e.g. information and legal assistance) but less positive where there were dependencies on local approvals and procurement (e.g. in construction of shelters and multidisciplinary centres). NRC's reporting indicates the likelihood of positive and sustainable effects resulting from information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) and from WASH activities (that have reduced hygiene risks). Key learning from these activities has been the relevance of ensuring participatory programming processes so that initiatives are firmly anchored in local communities as well as undertaking market assessments prior to undertaking livelihoods training. A further finding is that multi-year funding allows a greater focus on sustainability. There are also benefits to be had from close interaction with UN agencies.<sup>53</sup>

These lessons complement similar experiences from other Danish support since August 2021 through the Afghanistan Transition Programme, 2022-2023. They underline the relevance of involving local communities so that the voices of the more powerful do not obscure those of the more vulnerable, of building sustainability through meeting individual needs in a manner that also strengthens community systems, and taking a coordinated and integrated approach so that multi-dimensional needs are met. It has also been found that discrepancies in the interpretation and enforcement of the bans on women's participation meant that local conditions could be conducive to greater engagement, mobility and participation (women and men). Some sectors have, however, been more impacted than others, especially concerning training on human rights and the protection/GBV area.

A further lesson from the support since August 2021 has been to adopt a locally anchored and flexible approach by negotiating directly with local Taliban administrations. The results demonstrate that, while

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<sup>52</sup> Save the Children, Project status report 2022/23.

<sup>53</sup> NRC, Status Report, 31 October 2023.

some engagement with the de facto authorities is necessary and that the bans have complicated work and made it more expensive, there remains scope for providing and extending off-budget support to meet basic needs. The experience also shows the relevance of securing community ownership, so that community leaders can advocate with local authorities for waivers. UN agencies have also had positive results from “bundling” together interventions in a non-negotiable package. The experience has shown that community leaders can accommodate a principled approach if they see a risk of losing the benefits of an intervention through adherence to restrictive practices.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.5 Aid effectiveness

The programme is fully aligned with the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP), which provides an overall framework for refugee responses to the crisis in Afghanistan. The programme will contribute to Strategic Objective 2 of the RRRP, which aims to build resilient communities, including through reinforcing the capacities of host countries in relation to national education and healthcare infrastructure and supporting livelihoods.

The scope for alignment with national policies in **Afghanistan** is not yet ripe due to the international community’s current consensus on avoiding direct support, as set out in the ACG’s guiding principles. Instead, the programme will be fully aligned with the UN Strategic Framework and the medium to longer-term aspects of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan. These include a priority on facilitating access to basic needs, protection, and livelihoods for returnees, displaced persons, and local communities. The programme will also align with the UN’s Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) and the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF), both of which support basic needs from a nexus perspective. In **Pakistan**, the programme will align with the RRRP and with the government’s Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) Programme, which is a longstanding government initiative supported by UNHCR amongst others. The programme partners will coordinate closely their actions and jointly advocate for refugee rights with the government. In **Iran**, the programme will not directly support the government but will nonetheless align with the policy priorities for refugees in Iran outlined in the RRRP, which include ensuring access to correct documentation and livelihoods. As in Pakistan, the programme partners will coordinate closely their actions and jointly advocate for refugee rights with the government.

The programme has been designed to build upon **synergies** with other interventions supporting refugees, returnees and local communities. The scope for this varies according to the aid architecture in the three countries. In Afghanistan, there will be close synergy with the transition programme (2024-2025), including through coordination with the UN and World Bank trust funds (the STFA and ARTF) as well as bilateral activities supported through UN agencies and INGOs; for example, UNICEF and UNWOMEN, both of which are supported by multiple donors, including Denmark. Similarly, the programme will coordinate with Danish SPA partners in Afghanistan. In Pakistan, this alignment will work through UNHCR and IOM, both of whom receive project funding from other likeminded donors. The Danish support to UNHCR will be closely harmonised with that from the Netherlands (€20 million, 2023-2026) which has a similar focus. In Iran, the Danish support to NRC will be complementary to that also being provided by other likeminded donors, including the EU, Japan (education and health), France (education, health and vocational training), and UK (humanitarian aid).

The programme will also promote aid effectiveness by ensuring that the **localisation** agenda is integrated into all its projects. For example, the projects will include local partners (generally NGOs) as part of their implementation modality and they will ensure that local stakeholders (municipal authorities, refugees and local communities) are consulted and have an opportunity to influence project design and implementation at the grassroots level. Similarly, the integration of the **HDP nexus** approach will ensure that the programme builds upon shorter-term humanitarian inputs by coordinating with humanitarian actors and linking programme initiatives to them with a medium to longer-term perspective, thereby

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<sup>54</sup> Impact on STFA portfolio to date: navigating the challenges and charting a way forward, STFA, July 2023

strengthening sustainability and resilience. While a core part of the approach will be to ensure that interventions are screened for conflict sensitivity (Do No Harm), they will also support the “peace” element of the nexus through ensuring that host communities are involved where relevant, thereby helping to reduce potential grievances and tensions.

## 2.6 Justification according to the DAC criteria

Criterion	Justification
<b>Relevance</b>	The programme aligns with the objectives of the Regional Refugee Response Plan. The support is needs-based and coordinated at the sectoral level. The programme has a clear poverty alleviation and rights focus, which also integrates gender and other priorities (e.g. relating to marginalised groups and basic human rights) that support longer-term resilience. In Afghanistan, this helps preserve key developments and peacebuilding gains from the pre-August 2021 era. In Pakistan and Iran, it will help refugees and host communities to utilise available economic opportunities, thereby mitigating the negative effects of the current economic stresses on refugees, particularly through reducing the need to adopt negative coping strategies. The inclusion of host communities will help reduce social tensions that could arise through perceived preferences to refugees.
<b>Impact</b>	The short to medium term results contribute to reducing the burden on humanitarian assistance through strengthening the target groups’ resilience to economic and climate shocks and the reduced effectiveness of the authorities’ ability to make essential services available. The impact on the local population will likewise be strengthened livelihoods facilitating improved access to education and health etc. There will be a positive effect on local leadership through involving communities in decision-making.
<b>Effectiveness</b>	The approach builds on a mixed approach that utilises key UN agencies working on refugee issues in Pakistan, where there are stronger possibilities (and a need) to work together with government and a limited number of INGOs in Afghanistan and Iran (one in each country) that have a substantial track record on the ground and have proven themselves able to operate in the difficult circumstances. The effectiveness of all partners will be enhanced through their participation in local sector and technical working groups. All partners will utilise existing monitoring and evaluation capacities to ensure informed results and adaptive management. The findings from MEAL activities will be included in partners’ reporting and strategic dialogue. These will in turn inform MFA/HUMCIV decision-making and reporting. The RI programme’s multi-annual financing modality will increase predictability of funding, which should help programme effectiveness by promoting a medium term perspective.
<b>Efficiency</b>	The management of the programme is built on alignment with partner systems and procedures (although not the DFA) and will be soft-earmarked. This means that the selected partners have drawn from their own core competences and strategic planning within the two principal thematic priority areas of protection and livelihoods. This choice has been made from an efficiency and effectiveness perspective to help the Danish contribution carry sufficient weight to utilise economies of scale. Denmark will utilise the partners’ own monitoring and reporting mechanisms and encourage joint programming where feasible.
<b>Coherence</b>	The Danish support will be able to draw from a high level of coherence with other initiatives through its alignment with the RRRP and use of well-known and trusted UN/INGO implementing partners able to attract other sources of funding. It will, for example, complement Denmark’s other support through SPA partners. The use of UN agencies in Pakistan will contribute to overall coherency. From a HDP nexus perspective, the programme aligns also with the new phase of the Danish Afghanistan Transition Programme, which follows a broadly similar focus on essential needs, albeit from a more population-wide perspective and in Afghanistan only. The programme will also be aligned with other donor support and partnerships.
<b>Sustainability</b>	The programme is intended to promote sustainability of results through its focus on resilience rather than short-term acute humanitarian needs. The programme is not able to channel funding through on-budget mechanisms and the scope for close coordination with

	government is only really feasible in Pakistan, where the needs are massive. This will have a negative effect on sustainability at the systemic level. However, at grassroots level, the programme seeks to preserve previous results (e.g. in livelihoods), which will contribute positively to sustainability. Through involving refugees, returnees, displaced persons, and host communities through participatory processes, the programme will also generate longer term ownership.
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## 2.7 Alignment with cross-cutting priorities

This programme is closely aligned with Danish cross-cutting priorities, including the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), Leaving No-One Behind (LNOB), localisation, Do No Harm principles, gender and youth, climate change and environmental considerations. It also aligns with the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus.

The conditions for pursuing HRBA vary across the three programme countries, although it is restricted in all of them. In Afghanistan, access to rights has been severely constrained by the Taliban's conservative interpretation of Sharia Law and its bans on women's meaningful participation in society and decision-making. Less drastic, though nonetheless constraining legal and cultural norms are also pervasive in Iran and Pakistan. In order to mitigate the negative consequences of this, the programme's partners will promote participation and inclusion in various ways; for example, through the roll-out of activities in isolated areas in Afghanistan (difficult to access previously), through the use of local NGOs as implementers on the ground, and interaction with local NGOs/CSOs and communities (refugees, returnees and displaced people as well as host community structures) during planning, implementation and monitoring.

In relation to inclusion, the programme will reflect the steps being taken by international actors in all three countries to maintain and enhance women's roles, including by ensuring that interventions for women by women continue and gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) considerations continue to guide interventions. In Afghanistan, the international community, including Denmark, has reacted resolutely to the Taliban's decrees against women's inclusion and humanitarian assistance and development support are currently provided in accordance with the *Guiding principles and donor expectations* and *complementary principles* to help prevent normalisation of the bans and further discrimination.

The programme is also fully aligned with the principle of Leaving No-One Behind (LNOB) and prioritises the needs and rights of the most vulnerable and marginalised Afghan refugees, displaced and host communities, including women and girls, youth, displaced persons, ethnic and religious minorities, geographically isolated communities, sexual and gender minorities, and persons with disabilities, amongst others. The programme will incorporate Do No Harm principles by ensuring that interventions are designed and implemented so that they do not contribute to further human rights violations and/or discriminatory practices affecting vulnerable and marginalised groups and these aspects will be monitored and reported on. All implementing partners will therefore ensure that gender inequalities are not exacerbated.

The programme will operate within the perspective of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus. The delivery of protection and livelihoods-orientated interventions to help meet basic human needs and increase resilience will therefore be in close coordination with humanitarian assistance – this will be assisted through the choice of implementing partners that also operate as humanitarian actors. The programme operates in the somewhat grey zone between humanitarian aid that helps meet short-term, acute needs and medium to longer-term inputs that help promote self-reliance. In terms of the peace dimension, increased self-reliance amongst refugees and host communities is expected to reduce actual and potential grievances and tensions between them, thereby contributing to a more peaceful dynamic by reducing societal stress points.

Where relevant, the programme will incorporate initiatives that integrate climate resilience into interventions. This will mostly be in relation to livelihood interventions; for example, through promoting climate-smart agriculture and management techniques, soil erosion control and regenerative agriculture and livestock techniques, drought-resistant seeds, and water resource management. There will be opportunities for this in Afghanistan. This will be managed in a participatory manner so that local knowledge and perspectives are considered when designing projects.

### 3 Outline of the ROI Programme

#### 3.1 Programme Objective

The objective of the Afghanistan ROI Programme is: *Enhanced resilience and self-reliance of displaced Afghans, particularly women and girls, and their host communities in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan enabling them to better access their rights and meet their basic needs.*

Contributing to this overall objective are two outcomes:

1. *Outcome 1: Vulnerable Afghan refugees, returnees, displaced people and their host communities, especially women, girls and minorities, is able to better access to their rights and thereby enjoy improved safety.*
2. *Outcome 2: Vulnerable Afghan refugees, returnees, displaced people and their host communities, especially women, girls and minorities, have increased access to sustainable and dignified livelihood options*

The above objectives apply equally across the three ROI programme countries and reflect both the findings of the context analysis and the current policy priority placed on improving resilience through mutually supporting protection and livelihood interventions with a particular focus on the vulnerability of women and girls. The logic for this is further explained in the theory of change below.

#### 3.2 Theory of change and key assumptions

The programme level theory of change is, that: IF vulnerable Afghan refugees, especially women and girls and minorities, in the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan benefit from a stronger protective environment, including access to legal aid and relevant documentation relating to their status, and IF people's skills and access to finance improve in ways that better match market opportunities and provide a basis for decent jobs and reflecting climate resilience where relevant, and IF the local host communities in Iran and Pakistan where the Afghan refugees are living are also included within these opportunities and benefit from them, THEN the ability of people to provide for their own livelihoods will improve, increasing household income and access to services, including health and education, and reducing the number of people who are forced to resort to harmful coping strategies, including onward and potentially dangerous unregulated migration, LEADING to enhanced self-reliance and resilience of both groups, as well as improved cohesion between them, and improved opportunities should the refugees return to Afghanistan.

Furthermore, and in relation to returnees, IF those displaced persons who have returned to Afghanistan, including women and girls, have stronger abilities to provide for their livelihoods and thereby meet their basic needs and IF the local communities where the Afghan returnees are now living are also included within these opportunities, THEN returnees will be less dependent upon humanitarian assistance and the socio-economic conditions in the host areas will improve, LEADING to enhanced self-reliance and resilience of both groups and LEADING to reduced incentives for further migration among the Afghan population.

The main assumptions relating to this theory of change are that improved rights and legal status (documentation) of refugees coupled with market-focused and demand-driven skills training facilitates improved access to employment; that those seeking work are better able to choose jobs with decent working conditions; that small grants will help generate profit and add further to household incomes, and

that the income thereby gained will be used to meet basic needs, especially relating to nutrition, shelter, health, and education.

It is assumed that targeting both refugee and host communities will reduce socio-economic tensions between them because there is less competition over jobs and resources. These improvements will also reduce both communities' dependence on short-term humanitarian aid.

From a rights perspective, it is assumed that livelihood approaches will include means to promote decent, market-driven jobs, and women's economic empowerment, especially for female-headed households, that are feasible within the socio-economic conditions.

Contextual assumptions include that: Afghan refugee and host communities in Iran and Pakistan can be reached, dedicated support to women and girls in Afghanistan can continue to be delivered despite the restrictions, and sufficient engagement with local-level stakeholders can be established to foster ownership of activities, identification of demand-based interventions, and strong support for what is being achieved together.

It is assumed that the ability of governments to provide inclusive access to services for refugees will continue to deteriorate as long as the economic downturn persists and that pressures on refugees to return (whether voluntarily or not) will probably increase. It is also assumed that the mounting pressures on aid budgets will not improve and that this will force aid agencies (including UNHCR) to prioritise and cut services.

### **3.3 Choice of partners**

The programme acknowledges that the modest financial window and the need to keep management efforts within reasonable limits are factors recommending the selection of a small number of partners with relevant country experience and sector portfolios. For the same reasons, the programme wishes to maximise its impact by operating through a few, relatively large, grants rather than distributing smaller grants amongst a larger number of partners, which it is seen will not present sufficient efficiencies.

In the complex context, there is a strong argument for selecting partners with strong demonstrated experience from the specific operating environment as well as the sectors that the programme is prioritising and with whom Denmark has cooperated previously.

The selection also takes account of the advantages that different types of organisations offer. Thus, UN agencies, for example, can be better suited to policy dialogue and advocacy with host governments on sensitive issues such as protection and rights. UNHCR and IOM are well placed to do this through their formal mandates relating to protection for refugees, stateless persons, and migrants. This is particularly relevant in Pakistan where refugee rights are becoming further constrained. The same applies, although to a lesser extent, in Iran. On the other hand, INGOs hold advantages in relation to the localisation agenda and can complement UN agencies and national NGOs; for example, concerning the integrated approaches to protection and livelihoods at the community level being prioritised by the programme.

The selection has taken into account the most recent MOPAN assessments. In relation to UNHCR, it was concluded that the organisation is a strong and principled actor within its mandated areas and with impressive emergency response. However, the organisation (at the overall level) continues to operate within a short-term mindset and its strategic approach is not yet fully reflected in practice. There is also scope to improve its knowledge management systems and its coordination with other UN agencies while it remains an active and engaged member of inter-agency response.<sup>55</sup> In relation to IOM, the assessment notes the organisation's rapid growth but that it remains largely project-funded and this presents certain organisational constraints. Nonetheless, the organisation is considered to be an agile performer in emergency settings, noting that IOM provides quality services and capacity-building support on migration issues, and tailoring its support to national needs and priorities.<sup>56</sup> The Danish MFA's recent strategy

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<sup>55</sup> UNHCR assessment, MOPAN, February 2024

<sup>56</sup> IOM assessment, MOPAN, October 2023

assessment for IOM found that IOM's dependency on project funding limits the opportunity to engage in more strategic long-term collaboration with partners and that the area needs attention and joint donor support. Further, while IOM has significantly improved in terms of funding channeled through local partners over the past years, this is still an area for improvement.<sup>57</sup> In relation to UNHCR and IOM's important roles in the present programme, the areas highlighted in the assessments have been taken into account in the dialogue surrounding the formulation and will be closely monitored by the MEAL set-up during implementation.

The selection of partners has also taken account of the substantial assistance already being channelled through Danish SPA partners, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This includes CARE Denmark, Danish Refugee Council, Mission Øst, Red Barnet, and Danish Red Cross with a combined focus on acute humanitarian and basic needs, water and sanitation (WASH), health and mental health, as well as inputs relating to women and children. The total humanitarian support to Afghanistan in 2023 amounted to DKK 168 million.

In **Afghanistan**, a precondition is that Danish support must circumvent the DFA in line with the international consensus. The DFA are not in a position to provide a solid partnership due to the absence of coherent strategies and policies as well as institutional capacity. The recent experience of Danish partners is that the DFA seek to control international support but that local agreements can often be reached that allow INGOs and local partners to operate. It is thus essential that the selected partner has a robust capability to operate effectively without a compliant government counterpart. While a UN agency could provide a robust vehicle for Danish support, Denmark is already supporting basic needs through the STFA and ARTF (which themselves utilise INGO/NNGOs as partners). With this logic in mind, it is seen that there will be advantages in continuing the previous ROI support to DACAAR, which has an extensive track record and a strong presence at community level in Afghanistan.

Certain of the above considerations also apply to **Iran**, although the government does not lack the institutional capacity in the same way that its neighbour does. The experience suggests that the Iranian authorities take a direct interest in the activities of international actors and that the operating freedom is thus constrained. This means that there are advantages in utilising UNHCR's position as a government counterpart, especially in relation to protection issues. A further consequence is that there are relatively few INGOs operating in Iran – with one of the main ones being the current ROI partner, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

In **Pakistan**, international actors have more space to operate and a government counterpart with a strategic policy framework, albeit one that is becoming increasingly restrictive. This suggests the need to partner with one or more international organisations with sufficient weight to interact meaningfully with the Pakistani government. They need to display sufficient political weight and have services that local administrations recognise that they need. Taking these perspectives into account, there will be advantages in engaging UNHCR and IOM as programme partners in Pakistan, these being the two main UN agencies with a focus on POR and ACC/undocumented refugees respectively.

The selection of partners is summarised in Table XX below and Annex 2.

*Table XX: Selection of implementing partners*

Country	Partner	Key rationale
Afghanistan	DACAAR	DACAAR stands out as a unique partner due to its extensive experience, relevant thematic focus, and deep-rooted presence at the local level in Afghanistan. With over three decades of operation, DACAAR has demonstrated an ability to improve livelihoods, empower women, and enhance community resilience, particularly in relation to displaced people. It's focus on sustainable development

<sup>57</sup> Strategy for Denmark's engagement with IOM, 2023-2026

		initiatives, particularly in the WASH sector, aligns closely with Danish priorities on climate resilience and adaptation and is highly relevant in Afghanistan. DACAAR's local knowledge, technical expertise, and established networks ensure effective localisation and programme implementation and impactful outcomes. Moreover, DACAAR's emphasis on community engagement and capacity building fosters ownership and long-term sustainability, making them a reliable and trusted partner in a volatile and changing environment. DACAAR is well-integrated within the aid coordination structures in Afghanistan, which is essential to ensure complementarity with other humanitarian actors and the UN and World Bank trust funds.
Iran	NRC	NRC is one of the few INGOs operating in Iran (as well as across the border in Afghanistan) and is a current ROI partner with a good track record. With its local networks and ability to navigate Iran's bureaucracy, NRC is able to operate throughout the country. Its focus on integrated approaches that blend protection and livelihoods is highly relevant to the ROI objectives. NRC has a good existing cooperation with UNHCR's Tehran office, which is necessary to ensure harmonised approaches to protection and livelihoods.
	UNHCR	UNHCR is a long-standing Danish global partner (also core support). In Iran, it has a central role in relation to refugee advocacy and protection. As a UN mandated agency, it is able to interact at all levels of government, which is seen as a critical attribute in relation to protection. Its special status also allows it to operate throughout the country, including with local implementing partners.
Pakistan	UNHCR	As above, in view of its mandate, UNHCR is able to interact at all levels of government, which is seen as a critical attribute in relation to protection. Its special status also allows it to operate throughout the country, including with local implementing partners. UNHCR has major role in relation to Pakistan government (advocacy, joint activities) and in relation to registered (POR) and asylum seekers.
	IOM	IOM is the main UN agency with global mandate for protection of migrants. It is a long-standing Danish partner (also core support). Together with UNHCR, IOM will lead on advocacy with the Pakistan government on protection of ACC card holders and undocumented Afghans, both of which are critical at the present time.

### 3.4 Summary of the results framework

The higher-level results shown below have been selected from the partner's own results frameworks for the purposes of overall monitoring. Selected results at output level are included in the individual project documents and, in further detail, in the partners' own documentation. At programme level, two overall outcomes are presented for overall monitoring purposes as shown in Table XX below. A full results framework is included in Annex 3.

Table XX: Programme level results

Programme	Afghanistan Region of Origin
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Programme Objective		<i>Enhanced resilience and self-reliance of displaced Afghans, particularly women and girls, and their host communities in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan enabling them to better access their rights and meet their basic needs.</i>
Impact Indicator		Tbd
Baseline		Tbd
Outcome 1		<i>Vulnerable Afghan refugees, returnees, displaced people and their host communities, especially women, girls and minorities, enjoy improved safety and access to their rights</i>
Outcome indicator		Tbd
Baseline	2023	Tbd
Target	2026	Tbd
Outcome 2		<i>Vulnerable Afghan refugees, returnees, displaced people and their host communities, especially women, girls and minorities, have increased access to sustainable and dignified livelihoods options</i>
Outcome indicator		Tbd
Baseline	2023	Tbd
Target	2026	Tbd

### 3.5 Short summary of projects

The following sections provide an overview and further details are in the individual project documents and in the partners' own documentation.

#### 3.5.1 DACAAR, Afghanistan

The Programme will provide DKK 55 million to the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) with the objective of *enhanced access to sustainable and dignified livelihood opportunities and access to clean, safe drinking water for vulnerable communities, with a focus on women and girls, ultimately increasing their resilience and self-reliance*. The funding builds the most recent ROI support package (2023-2024) that has sought to improve essential services and community infrastructure (health, agriculture, education and clean drinking water supply) in various provinces where there are also returning refugees and displaced persons. DACAAR takes an integrated approach to its interventions, working with the local community to link, for example, the provision of safe drinking water with community hygiene. DACAAR has been working in Afghanistan since 1984 and in that time estimates that it has reached over 20 million people across 29 provinces. DACAAR co-leads the WASH cluster and has a strong emphasis on the localisation agenda, with most senior positions being held by Afghan managers and regular interaction with local populations.

The project aligns with Priority 2 of the UN Strategic Framework concerning economic opportunities and resilient livelihoods. It will directly target the root causes of economic instability, unemployment, and social tensions by working to improve access to sustainable livelihood opportunities and increase agricultural productivity and resilience among vulnerable communities that include returnees and other displaced people, especially women. Inter alia, it will do this by strengthening the skills of vulnerable youth, providing means for female-headed households to engage in small businesses, and enhancing agricultural productivity based upon assessments of market potential. It will have a geographic focus on Kunduz, Kabul, Kunar, Nangarhar, Laghman, and Logar provinces.

The project has two outcomes:

- a. Displaced persons, returnees, vulnerable youth, women and men from host communities have improved access to sustainable and dignified livelihood opportunities and income-generation activities.

b. Enhanced access to clean, safe drinking water for vulnerable communities.

Under outcome 1, the project will operate through a number of output areas to: a) providing demand-driven and gender-responsive vocational education and training, job placement opportunities and start-up capital to 120 vulnerable and displacement-affected youth (50% women) to boost individual and household incomes; b) supporting 990 vulnerable female-headed households with means to increase their income through diversified activities such as livestock rearing, agriculture and small-scale business enterprises; c) enhancing agricultural productivity and resilience among farmers through targeted training and infrastructure development, Farmer Field Schools (FFS) will provide training to 156 farmers on climate smart agricultural practices; d) a further 156 farmers will receive training and resources in dairy processing, and fruits, vegetable processing and cultivation of asafetida (which is a high value crop allowing farmers to diversify their income), and e) an additional 630 women entrepreneurs will improve their access to markets and business development services through entrepreneurship training, mentorship, start-up capital, and facilitating market access. The logic here is that by equipping people with the necessary skills and linking them to markets, the project will enhance their economic independence and impact their communities positively. It will ensure that women and girls, who are often disproportionately affected by displacement and vulnerability, receive targeted support to overcome social and economic barriers.

Under outcome 2, the project will install and rehabilitate existing water supply networks to directly address the pressing need for access to clean and safe drinking water among vulnerable and displacement-affected communities. This will directly benefit 1,680 underserved households and communities, providing them with reliable access to safe drinking water. In addition to the direct health benefits, this outcome will contribute to climate adaptability, reduce displacement by mitigating conflicts related to water scarcity and alleviate the burden on women and girls who often bear the responsibility of fetching water.

Based on a participatory needs assessment, vulnerability criteria (such as income level, household composition (e.g., female-headed households, households with persons with disabilities), displacement status (e.g., internally displaced persons, returnees), access to basic services (e.g., clean water, education, healthcare) coupled with principles of inclusivity and non-discrimination will guide the selection of project beneficiaries. It is estimated that at least 12,636 individuals will directly benefit.

DACAAR takes a direct approach to implementation while coordinating closely with local partners, including NGOs, local authorities, communities, and other humanitarian and development organisations. At the community level, the project will be implemented in collaboration with local bodies such as Community Development Councils, Shuras, Farmers Associations, and Water Management Committees and agreements delineate roles to ensure sustainability post-handover and that local social issues are addressed. All activities will be coordinated with other organisations at provincial and regional levels, such as the WASH cluster and Humanitarian Regional Team.

### 3.5.2 UNHCR Iran

The programme will provide DKK 26 million to support UNHCR Iran's protection services relating to Afghan refugees, especially undocumented refugees that are most vulnerable. This has the overall objective of *Enhancing access and quality inclusion of Afghans in public services, social inclusion and providing protection assistance and support*. UNHCR's Iran operation is guided by the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) and the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP). Both of these operate within the overall spirit of the Global Compact, which seeks to share the burden of hosting refugees within an overall solutions perspective.

The project has four outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Refugees and asylum-seekers maintain inclusive and affordable access to secondary and tertiary healthcare through the provision of Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI)

- Outcome 2: Increased number of refugees and asylum-seekers enjoy expanded and diversified livelihood opportunities
- Outcome 3: Access to legal assistance and legal remedies for persons in need of international protection enhanced
- Outcome 4: Services and assistance to support the most vulnerable people through the psychosocial support provided.

Outcome 1 will enable refugees and undocumented Afghans to access secondary and tertiary health services through subsidised premiums to the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) scheme, which is a government-led initiative. Refugees enrolled in UPHI will then only have to pay 10% of the franchise fee for their treatment and hospitalization and 30% for para-clinical services. The project will thus facilitate both the access to treatment and hospitalization, as well as to the social protection benefits associated with relieving households who could otherwise be forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms to cover health-related costs.

Through Outcome 2, UNHCR will support government-certified and market demand-driven technical and vocational training through the Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO) for refugees and access to wage-earning employment or establishment of home-based enterprises, small businesses and manufacturing workshops. It will also enable NGO partners to provide technical and entrepreneurship training female heads of households, to establish home-based enterprises. This will be closely coordinated with NRC.

Under Outcome 3, UNHCR will provide legal assistance to Afghan refugees through 18 UNHCR Hired Lawyers (UHLs) and 16 Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs). The lawyers will provide free legal counselling and assistance to Afghan refugees, including to those without an *Amayesh* card. The DSCs will provide Afghan refugees with a forum for easily accessible and effective resolution of primarily civil claims through mediation and arbitration. DSCs are implemented as part of a partnership between UNHCR and the (Iranian Government's) National Organization for Migration (NOM). UNHCR will continue to advocate with the government to ensure that the costs of obtaining/renewing documentation are not a barrier to retaining refugee status.

Finally, through Outcome 4, UNHCR will support the identification of survivors of violence and other persons in need of psychosocial support and facilitate their access to and awareness of the available support services. UNHCR will also seek to convene key stakeholders, including governmental counterparts, to get their support for the establishment of a strengthened referral system in line with the existing national support systems. Ensuring effective outreach will require proactive information dissemination and advocacy as well as bolstering local GBV prevention mechanisms and ensuring that survivors can access the support and services they require.

### **3.5.3 Norwegian Refugee Council, Iran**

The programme will provide DKK 21 million to NRC in Iran with the objective of: *Support Afghan refugees to contribute towards (i) improving access to rights and protection, and (ii) sustainable livelihoods and services for Afghan refugees and host communities with the overall goal of supporting pathways to durable solutions.* This draws from NRC's expertise in five core competencies areas: Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA), Livelihoods and Food Security (LFS), Protection from Violence (PfV), Shelter and WASH - and intends to provide an integrated, evidence-driven response to the Afghan displacement crisis in Iran drawing also from NRC's reinforcing activities across the sub-region.

The project is informed by NRC's existing work in Iran in the protection and livelihoods area using integrated approaches. Assessments indicate that legal status and documentation are critical to accessing services, mobility, employment and exercising rights. Moreover, 60% of Afghans are unemployed (with only 3% of those working, in full-time employment) and 99% of Afghans' earnings in Iran fall below the

poverty line.<sup>58</sup> The lack of employment opportunities contributes to financial instability, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.

The project is therefore designed to enhance access to rights and livelihoods while mitigating protection risks. Given the complex operating environment, strong emphasis will be placed on ensuring the response is in line with humanitarian principles. NRC will leverage local NGO partnerships to strengthen the response through activities of integrated ICLA, LFS and Protection and it will draw from its local Community Centres, which promote community drive responses and are designed to be safe spaces where individuals can access information and pathways to services.

The project has two outcomes:

- a. Outcome 1: Afghan refugees in Iran have access to protection and are able to claim and exercise legal rights, facilitating and enabling self-reliance as a path towards durable solutions.
- b. Outcome 2: Enhance the resilience and self-reliance of Afghan refugees in Iran and local host communities through access to sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment

Under outcome 1, the project will utilise Community Centres as hubs for information, provision of services and referrals. NRC's ICLA response focuses on legal empowerment, particularly for women and girls, through access to information, services and rights. By expanding integrated information desks within Community Centres, the project will widen existing outreach and scale-up referral services, both within NRC's operations and external actors. Households facing the risk of repatriation or loss of legal status will be supported with legal counselling. Individual legal services also include information and financial support on renewing legal documents and status: civil identity, work permit and legal stay documents, and those in need of support to access essential services. The approach to ICLA will offer individualised Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) services for those facing imminent eviction threats. The project will collaborate with local partners and Afghan outreach volunteers to strengthen community engagement and trust and ensure a locally driven response to needs within the community.

Under outcome 2, the project will strengthen access to livelihood opportunities through technical skills training based on market analysis, accompanied by toolkit provision and set-up grants. NRC will target women-headed households and caregivers facing financial barriers to support access to their children's education and those at risk of child labour. A strong component of the business and skills training includes marketing and linkages with online platforms, particularly to women-headed households, to allow flexibility across income generation. NRC will seek linkages with graduates from Technical and Vocational Trainings who need job market support to address the limited access of Afghans to the labour market due to limited employment networks. Community Centres will be used to facilitate linkages with the employment market.

### 3.5.4 UNHCR Pakistan

The programme will provide DKK 45 million to UNHCR in Pakistan with the objective of: *Refugees and asylum-seekers can realize their rights in line with international protection standards*. This objective relates to UNHCR's multi-year strategy for 2022-2024, which includes the goal that refugees and asylum seekers can exercise their freedoms and rights and make use of access to public services leading to greater levels of gender equality and self-reliance. In particular, UNHCR's work on protection has assumed increased importance following the introduction by the government of the IFRP in 2023.

UNHCR Pakistan is a new partner for the ROI programme and the choice reflects the agency's important role in protecting the rights of refugees and asylum seekers (which is a core part of its global mandate) as a key government counterpart. The Danish support is earmarked to key parts of UNHCR Pakistan's strategy relating to protection and livelihoods within a resilience framework and joins funding being provided by other donors, notably the Netherlands and Switzerland.

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<sup>58</sup> NRC Vulnerability Assessment tool, which assessed 1,571 Afghan households (8,036 individuals) during 2023

It should be noted that UNHCR has a close collaboration with IOM in Pakistan whereby UNHCR takes the lead on protection issues relating to Proof of Registration (POR) cardholders and IOM takes the lead on Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders and undocumented refugees. The division of labour reflects the two organisations' respective mandates and the distinctions being taken on different categories of refugees by the Pakistan government. They operate closely together to ensure that protection and livelihoods are supported and provided holistically and inclusively.

The project has two outcomes:

- a. Outcome 1: Refugees and Asylum-seekers can realise their rights in line with international protection standards
- b. Outcome 2: Refugees and Asylum-seekers can exercise their freedoms and rights for greater levels of gender equality and strengthened livelihoods

Under outcome 1, UNHCR will continue to support various protection priorities. These include the Proof of Registration (PoR) Card Modification (PCM) Centres operated jointly with the government to ensure that PoR cardholders have access to registration services. UNHCR will also advocate for the extension of the validity of PoR cards that expire to ensure that Afghan refugees have access to valid documentation. Issuance of birth certificates to the newly registered children as well as those, who have been registered prior to the resumption of the issuance of birth certificates will also be prioritized. A further focus area will be advocacy with the government, UN Country Team, World Bank and other international financial institutions to ensure that refugees are included in national statistical systems, such as the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER), and benefit from relevant programming in their hosting areas. In key areas such as access to gainful employment opportunities, UNHCR will engage with key government and other stakeholders to advocate for the regularisation of refugees in the labour market with the view to expand livelihoods. Furthermore, through the network of Advice and Legal Aid Centres (ALACs), legal aid and advice, counselling, legal camps, Shura meetings and helpline support will be provided to forcibly displaced and stateless people. Special attention will be given to women with access to legal assistance and who need recourse to local courts.

Under outcome 2, the project will utilise a graduation approach through vocational and technical skill training, internships and career development counselling, financial literacy and life skills training for POR refugees. Priorities include engaging with national and provincial forums of financial stakeholders, building food security and livelihood support through green sector interventions, and seeking the expansion of private sector engagement and value chains promoting youth entrepreneurship. UNHCR will continue advocacy for the gainful employment of refugees, as well as the right to own property, register businesses, and obtain a driving license.

This project will be implemented through direct implementation by UNHCR and through a range of implementing partners, with a geographic focus on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Baluchistan, the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Sindh and Punjab, which are the main areas hosting Afghan refugees.

The project will be closely coordinated with IOM in view of the jointly agreed approach to POR, ACC and undocumented Afghans. IOM and UNHCR have scaled up their operational coordination, through joint weekly workplans and deployment of field teams in each province, monthly coordination meetings to discuss field dynamics, challenges and joint actions, referrals pathways between respective legal protection programmes, common materials for legal protection and GBV services, as well as joint consolidated tools to collect information on the number of arrest, detention and deportation across the country. In addition, IOM and UNHCR closely coordinate their engagement and advocacy efforts towards external stakeholders, by publishing flash updates on a regular basis, conducting donor briefings on key developments related to the protection environment in Pakistan and formulating key asks and advocacy messages to maintain the protection space for all Afghan nationals in Pakistan, regardless of their legal status.

### 3.5.5 IOM Pakistan

The programme will support IOM's protection activities in Pakistan for ACC holders and undocumented refugees with DKK 30 million and the overall objective of: *Improved protection and livelihoods leading to increased resilience for undocumented Afghan refugees and host communities in Pakistan*. This project will be closely coordinated with, and is complementary to, the support that UNHCR is providing to Afghan refugees with POR status and it will thereby fill an important gap contributing to the Leaving No-One Behind (LNOB) agenda.

Since the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan, IOM has been providing evidence-based protection interventions, emergency health service, livelihoods support, multipurpose cash assistance, and rehabilitation of essential public infrastructure such as health and education facilities for Afghan populations and host community members in Pakistan, as well as movement and operations for resettling Afghans in third countries. IOM draws from its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), which is also shared with other agencies, to gain a better understanding of particular mobility flows and the needs of migrants and host communities. IOM Pakistan supports the Government of Pakistan (GoP) to develop and implement policies and normative frameworks for migration management

The project has two outcomes:

- a. Outcome 1: The protection environment for Afghan populations in Pakistan, particularly ACC card holders and undocumented refugees, is strengthened.
- b. Outcome 2: Targeted Afghan and host community populations demonstrate increased resilience and social cohesion through strengthened livelihoods.

Under outcome 1, IOM will carry out systematic protection monitoring to better understand the protection risks and challenges faced by ACC holders and undocumented Afghan populations, inform the overall protection response and provide the evidence for protection advocacy, while also contributing to building the capacities of national NGOs to conduct protection monitoring and analysis. The protection response will include awareness-raising about protection risks, available protection services, and recent policy developments and support legal interventions for ACC holders and undocumented Afghan individuals and households in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The legal assistance will be tailored to at-risk individuals or households and could include information and support on national legal frameworks, regulations and policies, Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights, protection risks, rights and obligations of ACC holders and undocumented Afghans in Pakistan, and referrals to specialized services, such as court representation and appointments with authorities. A community-based protection approach will be applied through trained Community Outreach Volunteers (COVs). Furthermore, the project will continue IOM's efforts to build and strengthen the protection and legal capacities of relevant authorities, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, local bar associations, I/NGOs and other stakeholders. Training sessions will focus on international human rights law and relevant legal and policy frameworks regarding the protection of ACC holders in Pakistan.

Under outcome 2, the project will draw from market and value chain assessments to provide livelihood support through Individual Livelihoods Assistance (ILA) and through the Enterprise Development Fund (EDF). ILA is a medium to long-term job creation strategy in which IOM will provide Business Support Packages (BSP), either cash grants or in-kind material, for existing and new micro-business start-ups to promote entrepreneurship. In addition, to enhance employability skills, the ILA includes Vocational Trainings (VT) and on-the-job training (OJT) through apprenticeships. The selection of economic sector(s) and training topics to focus on will depend on the market assessments as well as jobseekers and recruiters' interests and priorities. The EDF is a long-term job creation strategy in which IOM Pakistan will establish a financing mechanism that provides capital for business expansion and job creation in promising and labour-intensive Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs).<sup>59</sup> The main focus will be to

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<sup>59</sup> See <https://edf.iom.int/#> for more information. The EDF is an innovative programme that has been piloted in Iraq and Türkiye, with plans to expand to five more countries worldwide.

engage businesses registered in Pakistan either owned by Pakistani nationals or Afghan business owners (both men and women) who are authorized to operate in Pakistan. The EDF support will create jobs that will be filled by ACC holders and vulnerable host community members.

The interventions will be implemented directly by IOM and through its network of NGO implementing partners. There will be close coordination with UNHCR – as described in the previous section - and opportunities for joint activities (including advocacy) will be utilised in order to maximise efficiency and effectiveness. At the government level, IOM will interact with the Chief Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees (CCAR) and the Provincial Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees (CAR), amongst others.

## 4 Inputs/budget

An overview of the budget is provided in Table XX below. This is further detailed in Annex 5 and in the individual project documents. The budget allocations take into account the overall funding needs of the partners (which exceed the funding available) and previous Danish funding levels. A modest unallocated budget will also enable HUMCIV to channel additional funding to partners that are performing well or experiencing unusually high demand.

*Table 1: Afghanistan ROI Programme budget (DKK million)*

Country	Partner	2024	2025	2026	Total	% of total
Afghanistan	DACAAR	15	20	20	55	28
Iran	NRC	6	7	8	21	11
	UNHCR	8	9	9	26	13
Pakistan	UNHCR	13	16	16	45	23
	IOM	8	10	12	30	15
Unallocated			10	10	20	10
MTR etc			3		3	2
Total		50	75	75	200	100

### 4.1 Arrangements for the use of unallocated funding

The programme includes DKK 20 million (10%) as an unallocated budget in order to ensure flexibility in the programme and enable adaptation to changes in context. The flexibility will also give an opportunity to enhance funding to engagements in any of the three countries according to need and performance. While this may be used to regulate the flow of funds to existing partners, part of it could also be used to support possible new initiatives

Decisions regarding the use of unallocated funds will be taken by the MFA/HUMCIV, with input where appropriate from the partners concerned and consulting other MFA departments (especially ASILAC) and the Danish embassies in Tehran and Islamabad.

As a guiding principle, opportunities relating to the use of unallocated funds will be considered during meetings with partners and at least annually as part of the Annual Stocktaking process. This process will be initiated in advance of the Mid Term Review in mid-2025. The aim will be to ensure that unattributed funds are utilised before the final 6 months of the programme period so that the risks of leaving unused funding are minimised.

## 5 Institutional and Management arrangement

The Programme's management arrangements will ensure adequate reporting, dialogue with partners and other stakeholders, learning and timely decisions about possible adaptations to ensure the achievement of agreed outcomes.

## **5.1 Organisational set-up**

The Danish management of the Programme will be provided by a dedicated unit located within the Humanitarian Action, Civil Society and Engagement (HUMCIV) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The unit will take responsibility for regular contact with programme partners and other development partners. The unit will take responsibility for monitoring programme implementation, reporting on progress within the MFA system, and providing feedback to implementing partners. Based on partners' reporting and dialogue with the Danish embassies in Islamabad and Tehran, and other donors, the needs for possible adaptation (including use of unallocated funds) will be regularly assessed and action taken.

HUMCIV will also be supported by a financial officer from the Department. It will also maintain close contact with other MFA departments, including the Department for Migration, Stabilization and Fragility (MIGSTAB), and the Department for Green Diplomacy and Climate (KLIMA). Close contact will be maintained with the Department for Asia, Latin America, and Oceania (ASILAC), which has responsibility for the Afghanistan Transition Programme as well as with the Danish Embassies in both Tehran and Islamabad.

At the project level, each partner has its own management set-up and will take responsibility for ensuring implementation arrangements run smoothly. The UN agencies will use a Direct Implementation Modality (DIM) and apply their standard management, compliance and reporting mechanisms. These arrangements often involve NGOs acting locally on behalf of the UN. With regard to the UNHCR and IOM in Pakistan, the joint operational approach to POR, ACC and undocumented refugees will be guided by the arrangements described in section 3.5.4 above.

DACAAR and NRC will draw from their own networks of national NGOs in Afghanistan and Iran respectively and will also coordinate with other international actors through the relevant sector working groups.

Each year, HUMCIV will draw from the partners' work plans and reporting for its Annual Stocktaking Reports (ASR). This monitoring, coupled with the findings of a Mid Term Review in 2025, will help inform decisions about adaptation and future support options.

## **5.2 Financial Management, planning and reporting**

Financial management will be undertaken in accordance with the MFA's Financial Management Guidelines (2019). Denmark will strive for full alignment of Danish support to the implementing partner rules and procedures while respecting sound international principles for financial management and reporting. Details relating to the individual partners are set out in the various project documents and will be specified also in the grant agreements. These will include: disbursements; partner procedures pertaining to financial management; procurement; work planning; narrative progress reports and financial reports; accounting and auditing. Attention will be drawn to Denmark's zero tolerance for corruption.

Disbursements will take place in accordance with the agreed disbursement schedules which are based upon the agreed budgets and taking into account any previous funds disbursed but not spent. Conditions for the transfer of funds are generally:

- Satisfactory use of prior transfers;
- Satisfactory technical and financial reporting;
- There is an approved work plan and budget for the period to be financed;
- Request for disbursement from the partner.

Financial reports from the partner will be provided on an annual basis. As the details of budgets from the implementing partners vary considerably, HUMCIV will initiate a dialogue to ensure a stronger and more transparent overview of project budgets and their alignment with financial reporting in order to strengthen financial monitoring.



The grant agreements will specify that the grants to each partner will be audited annually, in accordance with the partner's own procedures, and will be made available within six months of the end of each year. In addition, Denmark will have the right to a) carry out any audit or inspection considered necessary as regards the use of the Danish funds in question and b) inspect accounts and records of suppliers and contractors relating to the performance of the contract, and to perform a complete audit.

### 5.3 Approach to Adaptive Management

The Programme will operate within a complex, multilateral environment where progress against the objectives will be conditioned by multiple, sometimes conflicting, demands, interests and capacities, including from the governments in the three countries. This can mean that projects proceed at different speeds and some may be challenged relating to ease of access and inclusion. A further concern is the general decline in donor engagement, which may mean that funding for the partners fails to be replenished at sufficient levels to support their expected allocations and roll-out. An adaptive approach will enable Denmark to turn up Danish support for projects that are progressing well and reallocate funding for ones that are stalling. The programme includes several mechanisms for achieving this, including the use of the unallocated budget and reallocation between budget lines.

Adaptive management requires robust monitoring and decision-making fora. All the partners have well-established systems for decision-making, strategic planning, and management that present opportunities for Denmark bilaterally as well as multilaterally. For this to be fully effective at the project level, there will need to be strong and consistent reporting from partners that allows HUMCIV to draw strategic-level conclusions. The MFA/HUMCIV will utilise meetings with the partners, as well as the formal reporting and inputs from the Danish embassies, to inform its decision-making. Aside from their overall political role and monitoring at this level, the embassies will not have a direct role in the programme implementation.

The findings from these monitoring processes will feed into adaptive management considerations, including the scope for adjustment of results expectations, theory of change (incl. assumptions), updating of risks, use of unallocated funds, reallocations between budget lines etc., leading to several possible actions. These will be undertaken in accordance with the relevant Aid Management Guidelines (AMG) and in accordance with the legal basis provided by the Finance Act. Possible adaptive responses could include those outlined in the table below:

Possible response
a. Deployment of technical assistance to alleviate critical temporary capacity gaps.
b. Use of unallocated funds to: a) Expand existing support to productive areas; b) New projects.
c. Reallocations between budget lines within projects.
d. Reallocations between projects.
e. Pausing of support, no-cost extensions, costed extensions etc.
f. Commissioning of special studies to identify options.
g. Audit.

A further adaptive management tool will be a Mid Term Review (MTR) of the programme in mid-2025. Given the current state of flux in certain of the funding mechanisms as well as the turbulent context, the MTR will provide an additional layer of analysis to support decision-making.

### 5.4 Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning

The Afghanistan ROI Programme will be closely monitored to ensure that relevant information is fed back into the programme management (including the various partner setups) to facilitate reporting and decision-making relating to any adaptation needed. The basis for programme monitoring is provided by

the theories of change (and assumptions), results frameworks and their indicators, and risk assessments for each of the projects being supported.

In practice, there are three levels of monitoring: i) regular assessment of changes in contextual factors that influence the implementation environment for Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan as a whole and for each of the projects; ii) programme and project implementation monitoring processes, drawing from reporting from implementing partners; and iii) risk monitoring, including of emerging risks. Each of the partners will report against changes in ToC assumptions, expected results and possible risks. This will occur through their annual consolidated progress reports as well as the regular updates provided to donors

The partners' MEAL systems will ensure close monitoring of changes in the context, including overall political, economic, security, social, and humanitarian contextual changes, as well as progress at the project level, opportunities, and challenges. Monitoring will guide the continuous assessment of assumptions, theory of change and risks and feed into reporting and discussions with the MFA on lessons learned and possible adaptation and use of the unallocated budget (see 5.3 above).

The ROI Programme includes provision for a Mid Term Review (MTR), ideally with field-based data collection, in 2025. The MTR will include an assessment of the following:

- a. The context and continued relevance of the programme;
- b. Performance of the individual projects
- c. How partners have operationalised their focus on women's and girls' rights
- d. Review the management of the programme, including amongst the programme partners
- e. Review and update ToC assumptions
- f. Review and update risks and risk management strategies
- g. Results and possible further needs, including possible adaptation
- h. Lessons being learned and strategic pointers for post-2026
- i. Cooperation with other donors, including joint arrangements
- j. Extent of political dialogue with decision-making bodies sought and generated
- k. Consider and make recommendations in relation to changes in the above and possible adaptation
- l. Assess the management of the Danish funds (i.e. assessment of Value for Money and sound financial management of the funds)
- m. Assess possible implementation options relating to the post-2026 period.

## **5.5 Communication of results.**

The Programme will utilise the partners' communications set-ups, which are generally strong and provide regular updates regarding the intervention areas and results being achieved. All partners will provide updates on project progress through their websites.

## **5.6 Risk Management**

There are a number of risks common to each of the projects. Key contextual risks include changes in the political and security landscape in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan that negatively affect the environment in which the projects are implemented. The risks are considered high in view of the governance challenges facing the three governments, the economic deterioration and direct security challenges. That said, the authorities also have an interest in the basic needs provision offered by the partners and are therefore expected to continue to allow UN agencies and INGOs to operate. The mitigation strategy will be to monitor developments and maintain consistency in interaction with the authorities to ensure access to all citizens, including women and girls and excluded groups, is maintained. In Afghanistan, the unclear policy environment and continued restrictions on women and girls present a further contextual and programmatic risk that requires close monitoring. In Pakistan, the further implementation of the IFRP and its side effects can be expected to complicate the protection agenda. In Iran, the possible impact of

geo-political developments is difficult to predict but may complicate the operations of external actors, particularly Western INGOs.

The context produces a variety of programmatic risks, particularly concerning possible attempts by the de-facto authorities in Afghanistan and the authorities in Iran to influence programme interventions for political reasons, which may lead certain target locations to be marginalized. There may also be pressure from the authorities in all three countries to be included in the programme's decision-making (e.g. concerning the selection of locations and beneficiaries). This is likely in Iran. The policy environment presents a further contextual and programmatic risk that requires close monitoring. Initiatives supporting gender and women's rights may be particularly vulnerable. In Afghanistan, the increased restrictions on women also threaten the commitment to deliver aid "for women by women" and the principled approach. This may also mean that projects are not fully able to deliver aid in the priority locations and to the most vulnerable people.

There are also risks that the projects do not deliver according to expectations because of delays in obtaining approvals and constraints over access (especially in Afghanistan and Iran). There may also be weaknesses in coordination and/or fund allocation amongst the UN agencies and I/NGOs, or because project plans are not yet fully developed. All the partners have strong monitoring and approval arrangements that include donors, which should help mitigate these risks. In Afghanistan, the overall coordination set-up that has improved since the pre-August 2021 period also helps mitigate risks in this area. In Pakistan, coordination structures are not particularly effective, although as both partners are UN agencies, there will be links to the UN Country Team and sector working groups. In Iran, NRC and UNHCR are both part of the Humanitarian Access Group and the Protection Cluster, amongst others.

For all projects, there are institutional risks that donor funds may end up at the hands of sanctioned or debarred individuals and entities that funds may be used fraudulently, and/or that interventions may inadvertently contribute to doing harm. The projects mitigate these risks through the partners' financial and project approval and implementation procedures and monitoring. HUMCIV will monitor the coverage of these issues in the partners' reporting together with other donors. There is a reputation risk (donor dilemma) of being seen to de-facto support the Taliban administration by filling the gap in service delivery. There is also a similar risk in Iran. Here is also a risk of inadvertently doing harm; for instance, through drawing attention to vulnerable individuals or exacerbating grievances over access to resources (all countries).

A detailed risk assessment is included in Annex 4.

## **6 Closure**

The Programme is focused on a limited number of partnerships with multilateral organisations and international NGOs with which Denmark has a history of partnership. The organisations receive funding from other donors too and do not individually depend on Danish funding. That said, in a period of declining aid levels, the Danish contributions will have important practical and political value. All interventions address basic human needs – for which there will be a vast continued requirement for the foreseeable future. However, the HDP nexus approach being taken has longer-term sustainability as a goal and the interventions are therefore developed so that they a) increase target groups' resilience, thereby reducing the reliance upon humanitarian aid, b) prioritise capacities (e.g. employment skills) that can be scaled up and act as foundations for development.

In the current dynamic and fluid context, it is expected that the coming period will provide important lessons and learning that will inform possible future Danish programming. The performance of the partners, and the scope for a functioning civil society will also be important indicators for future Danish planning. The MTR and a small budget provision for a preparatory study have been included should it be decided to continue into a further phase.

At the end of the programme, the following steps will be taken:

- Implementing partners' final reports;
- Responsible unit's final results report (FRR);
- Closure of accounts: final audit, return of unspent funds and accrued interest and administrative closure by reversing remaining provision.

Annexes:

Annex 1: Context Analysis (included)

Annex 2: Partner Assessment (included)

Annex 3: Theory of Change, Scenario and Result Framework.

Annex 4: Risk Management (included)

Annex 5: Budget Details.

Annex 6: List of Supplementary Materials.

Annex 7: Plan for Communication of Results.

Annex 8: Process Action Plan for Implementation.

Annex 9: Quality Assurance Checklist or signed table of appraisal recommendations and follow-up actions taken, depending on whether the appraisal has been conducted by a development specialist.

Annex 10: Overview of other ongoing Danish assistance to Afghanistan.

## Annex 1: Context analysis

### 1. Poverty and inequality analysis

#### What is the status regarding multidimensional poverty (see approach note on poverty and inequality)?

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)<sup>1</sup>, created by UNDP, is only available for Pakistan, and in Afghanistan up to 2015/2016, and remains unavailable for Iran. In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, high levels of multidimensional poverty are shown.

**Afghanistan.** Afghanistan has faced enduring challenges related to poverty due to its intricate political and economic circumstances, which have impeded its developmental progress over several decades. The most recent publicly available survey data for Afghanistan's MPI is from 2015/2016; based on this data, assessing health, education, and standard of living indicators, Afghanistan is among the most deprived countries globally, with a score of 0.272<sup>2</sup>, with around 37% of Afghans at the time categorized as multidimensionally poor.<sup>3</sup> In 2015/2016, 55.9% of Afghanistan's population was categorized as experiencing multidimensional poverty, half of which were faced with severe levels of such poverty. The most recent assessments (2024) indicate that 63 % of Afghans are living in extreme poverty.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Afghanistan ranks 182<sup>nd</sup> out of 193 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI)(2024),<sup>5</sup> indicating extremely low levels of development.<sup>6</sup> The shift in power following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 has likely had an adverse effect on these MPI indicators. In 2023, more than 28.3 million Afghans, 77% of which were women and children, relied on humanitarian aid.<sup>7</sup>

**Iran.** MPI data is currently unavailable for Iran. On the Human Development Index in 2022, the most recent year in which data is available, Iran ranked 78<sup>th</sup> worldwide with an HDI of .78, indicating high levels of development.<sup>8</sup> Iran's HDI score stands in contrast to Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have HDI levels classified as low human development.

**Pakistan.** Based on the MPI, Pakistan has lower poverty rates than Afghanistan, with a national score of .198, signifying that roughly 38% of the population was in multidimensional poverty in 2023.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that multidimensional poverty is worse in the provinces that host the most refugees, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, with rates at 73% and 71%, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Pakistan ranks 164<sup>th</sup> on the HDI (2024), indicating a position only slightly improved from Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> Discussion on poverty and inequality continues in the following sections.

#### Status and progress in relation to SDGs 1 End poverty- disaggregated by age, sex, poverty thresholds.

Poverty in all 3 countries remains a prominent issue; however, in Afghanistan it is especially dire, with 63% of the population in extreme poverty.<sup>12</sup> The most vulnerable groups in the region include refugees and returnees, as well as women and minorities.

**Afghanistan.** As of 2024, roughly 95% of the Afghan population is living in highly vulnerable conditions and 63% of those are living in extreme poverty.<sup>13</sup> According to UNICEF, 64% of households report being

<sup>1</sup> The MPI measures multidimensional poverty based on health, education, and standards of living.

<sup>2</sup> Briefing note for countries on the 2023 Multidimensional Poverty Index, Afghanistan. UNDP. 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2015. Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative. 2015.

<sup>4</sup> World Poverty Clock, Afghanistan. World Data Lab. 2024.

<sup>5</sup> The HDI measures development based on 3 dimensions: a long and healthy life, education, and living standards.

<sup>6</sup> Human Development Insights. UNDP Human Development Reports. 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan: Humanitarian Update, June 2023. OCHA. 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Human Development Reports, Data and statistics readers guide. UNDP. n.d.

<sup>9</sup> Summary Results: MPI, H and A, Vulnerability, and Severe Poverty. OPHI Data Bank. 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Human Development Insights. UNDP Human Development Reports. 2024.

<sup>12</sup> World Poverty Clock, Afghanistan. World Data Lab. 2024.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

unable to meet their basic needs.<sup>14</sup> The expanding poverty has manifested in heightened levels of food insecurity and the number of people suffering from hunger doubled from 2021 to 2022 with nearly 20 million people, equivalent to half of the country's population, suffering from hunger.<sup>15</sup> These estimates must be put into perspective of the 2021 Taliban insurgency which has accentuated the country's level of poverty due to the immediate disruption of markets, the freezing of 9.5 billion USD worth of bank reserves, and the interruption of development aid.<sup>16</sup> Analysing the impact by age, children under the age of 20 are the most vulnerable group, accounting for 56% of individuals experiencing extreme poverty in the country.<sup>17</sup> In 2024, 41.6 million USD of the UN budget has been allocated for SDG 1, encompassing roughly 12% of the total SDG funding in Afghanistan,<sup>18</sup> as more than 23.7 million people are projected to rely on humanitarian aid in 2024.<sup>19</sup> Amongst Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan, about 4% are considered to be vulnerable individuals.<sup>20</sup>

**Iran.** The number of people living in extreme poverty in Iran in 2024 is significantly less than that in Afghanistan, with about 1% of the population, or 1.1 million people, living in extreme poverty.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, about 17 million people in Iran are living in highly vulnerable conditions, encompassing about 19% of the population.<sup>22</sup> Amongst Afghan refugees specifically, there is limited knowledge of the state of poverty, however, they are likely to be more vulnerable to poverty due to limited resources.

**Pakistan.** More than 7.5 million people in Pakistan, roughly 3% of the population, are living in extreme poverty, and close to 100 million people in Pakistan, approximately 45 % of the country, are living in highly vulnerable conditions in 2024.<sup>23</sup> Although not much information is available regarding the status on poverty amongst Afghan refugees in Pakistan, the EU estimated that over 50% of Afghan refugees can be considered "extremely poor".<sup>24</sup>

#### **Status and progress in relation to SDGs 10 (Reduce inequality). Income share per poorest 40%. (See [Human Development Reports](#))**

Inequality remains a significant issue in all 3 countries, as the poorest 40% of the population has less than 12% of the share of wealth in all countries. This indicated levels of medium to high inequality throughout the region of interest, with inequality in Iran being the most severe.

**Afghanistan.** The achievement of reduced inequality in Afghanistan is proving challenging due to the setbacks in human rights following the Taliban's takeover, particularly concerning women and girls, as well as an ongoing economic crisis. In 2021, the income share for the poorest 40% of the population was 11.5%, while the share for the top 10% was 41.5%.<sup>25</sup> The overall income share ratio<sup>26</sup> for the country stands at 0.276, categorizing it as having "medium inequality".<sup>27</sup>

Funding allocated to achieving SDG 10 in Afghanistan amounted to 0 USD in 2023.<sup>28</sup> In response to the lack of progress and anticipation of potential further deterioration, the UN has introduced the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025, which aims to address SDG 10 by enhancing equitable access to essential services meeting minimum quality standards and promoting increased participation in a more socially cohesive, gender-equal, and inclusive society governed by the principles of the rule of law and human rights.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Afghanistan: Humanitarian Action for Children. UNICEF. 2023.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (January 2023). OCHA. 2023.

<sup>17</sup> World Poverty Clock, Afghanistan. World Data Lab. 2023.

<sup>18</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals in Afghanistan. UN. 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Afghanistan: HNRP, 2024.

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR-IOM FLASH UPDATE #16. UNHCR. 2024.

<sup>22</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals in Afghanistan. UN. 2023.

<sup>23</sup> World Poverty Clock, Iran. World Data Lab. 2024.

<sup>25</sup> World Poverty Clock, Pakistan. World Data Lab. 2024.

<sup>24</sup> European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations: Pakistan. European Commission. 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Mapping income inequality: the bottom 40 and top 10 percent. UNDP. n.d.

<sup>26</sup> *Income share ratio refers to the ratio of wealth of the top 10% to the bottom 40% in a country, where lower scores represent higher inequality.*

<sup>27</sup> Mapping income inequality: the bottom 40 and top 10 percent. UNDP. n.d.

<sup>28</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals in Afghanistan. UN. 2023.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025. UN. 2023.

**Iran.** In Iran in 2021, the income share for the poorest 40% of the population was 8.4%, while the income share of the richest 10% was 52.7%, resulting in an income share ratio of .16, indicating high levels of inequality.<sup>30</sup>

**Pakistan.** In Pakistan in 2021, the income share for the poorest 40% of the population was 11.04%, while the income share of the richest 10% was 43.3%, resulting in an income share ratio of .26, a very similar inequality level to Afghanistan indicating medium-levels of inequality.<sup>31</sup>

### **Which are the most vulnerable groups, and do we target these (Leaving No One Behind)?**

Vulnerable groups in the region of interest include women, refugees and returnees, and marginalised social groups. Furthermore, the vulnerabilities discussed below in all 3 countries are compounded by the vulnerabilities associated with being a refugee from Afghanistan to Pakistan or Iran, as refugees often have other vulnerable identifications that may exacerbate their situation.

**Afghanistan.** Vulnerable groups encompass people in or near poverty, persons with disabilities, displaced populations, returnees, widows, and women headed households, minorities (religious, ethnic, and identity-related<sup>32</sup>), and women and children. People with disabilities in Afghanistan, which formally includes 16% of the population, as well as almost 80% of the adult population that has a physical impairment, often face discrimination and barriers to accessing services.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, journalists are at risk of persecution and constitute a vulnerable profession.<sup>34</sup> Vulnerability of women and girls is expanded in Chapter 4, however, it is clear that women and girls face extreme risks of GBV, trafficking, and abuse.<sup>35</sup> Due to instability, long standing conflict, economic hardship, and drought, more than 270,000 people have been displaced in Afghanistan since January 2021.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, children are disproportionately affected by malnutrition, given their significant representation among the population living in extreme poverty.<sup>37</sup> Overall, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) has estimated that 28.3 million people in Afghanistan are in need in 2023.<sup>38</sup>

**Iran.** Vulnerable groups in Iran include women and girls, religious and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ persons, who all face discrimination on a daily basis,<sup>39</sup> as well as people with disabilities, who constitute 16% of the population.<sup>40</sup> Women and girls continually face both legal and social discrimination in Iran and face violence, harassment, and denial in education, employment, and civil society.<sup>41</sup> Afghan refugees in Iran, and the host communities, are increasingly vulnerable due to the lack of sufficient resources and funding to support Afghan refugees, as only 6% of the cost of Afghan refugees is supported by international aid.<sup>42</sup> Afghan refugees are increasingly forced to make difficult trade-offs or resort to negative coping strategies to make ends meet. Specifically, they may face challenges in covering costs related to school enrollment, healthcare, or documentation.<sup>43</sup> Those without documentation face a particularly precarious situation due to risks of deportation, labour exploitation, and further barriers to accessing services. The situation is compounded by increasing anti-Afghan sentiment across society. With durable solutions elusive to most, Afghan refugees - irrespective of documentation status - face immediate and interlinked challenges in establishing self-reliance, leaving them susceptible to shocks and stresses.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Mapping income inequality: the bottom 40 and top 10 percent. UNDP. n.d.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Vulnerability in Afghanistan before and during the shift in power. AREU. 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Afghanistan: Journalists at risk of persecution need urgent protection – UN experts. OHCHR. 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Statement from CARE Afghanistan's Deputy Country Director, Marianne O'Grady. CARE. 2021.

<sup>37</sup> World Poverty Clock, Afghanistan. World Data Lab. 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Iran 2022. Amnesty International. 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Iran 2022. Amnesty International. 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Testimonies from the Danish Embassy in Iran based on meetings with NRC, UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, & IOM. October 2023.

<sup>43</sup> OCHA. Global Humanitarian Overview 2024: Afghanistan RRP (Refugee Response Plan), December 8, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*



**Pakistan.** Population groups most at risk include those who are poor and/or landless, as well as women and girls.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, religious, ethnic, and caste-based discrimination leave many groups more likely to face violence and less able to obtain services and resources,<sup>46</sup> as well as the 16% of the population that has a disability.<sup>47</sup> As around 16% of the population in Pakistan is food insecure, the prolonged presence and stay of Afghan refugees and nationals adds a severe load to an already overburdened system.<sup>48</sup> In recent years, Pakistan has taken a more restrictive approach to Afghan refugees, increasing their vulnerability in Pakistan; i.e., with the passing of the ‘Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan’ in October 2023.<sup>49</sup> As part of this plan, Pakistani police have orchestrated mass detentions, seized livestock, and destroyed identification documents, in an effort to expel thousands of Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers.<sup>50</sup> According to UNHCR, an estimated 375,000 people have returned to Afghanistan since October 2023 – mostly in fear and haste and by force.<sup>51</sup> With Pakistan’s turbulent domestic politics and economic constraints prevailing, there is a strong likelihood that this return policy will remain in place, which underlines the importance of enhancing registration and legal rights and the capacities of the refugee and host communities, particularly in the areas of livelihoods and economic opportunity.

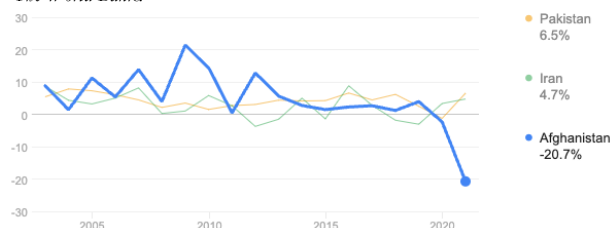
### Are there any risks that the project/programme may cause harm to poor and vulnerable groups?

The programme does not entail any risks for poor or for vulnerable groups. On the contrary, it aims to improve their living conditions in the face of the ongoing difficult context in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, as envisaged as the main objective of the UNSF and the ACG framework.<sup>52</sup>

### What are the drivers of poverty and inequality (see also section 2 on political-stakeholder analysis)?

Drivers of inequality in the region most often include violence, conflict, and economic instability. These issues have been worsened in recent years due to the situation in Afghanistan, as refugees have added an additional strain to resources in Iran and Pakistan, as discussed below.

Figure 1: GDP Growth (%) in Afghanistan, Iran, & Pakistan 2012 – 2023. The World Bank.



**Afghanistan.** In Afghanistan, poverty is the result of three main multidimensional drivers: long standing conflicts, economic instability, and the recurrence of natural hazards. In 2021, the Taliban’s assumption of power triggered an economic crisis, leading to heightened food insecurity, elevated rates of unemployment, volatile price levels in essential commodity prices, a notable rise in poverty, a significant weakening of the national public health system, constraints on media and civil society activities, and the exclusion of nearly half the population—women and girls—from public life.<sup>53</sup> Notably, the economic crisis in has worsened due to the abrupt suspension of direct developmental assistance, the freezing of central bank reserves, and disruptions to financial markets and trade institutions, collectively contributed to the sharp decline in the economy following the Taliban take over.<sup>54</sup> At the beginning of 2023, 54% of households reported to have gone through an economic shock.<sup>55</sup> Overall, the country’s GDP experienced a decline of 20.7% in 2021.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, poverty and inequality are impacted by the rising effects of climate change in the country (discussed further in section 6).

**Iran.** The most recent World Bank poverty diagnostic for Iran (November 2023) shows that Iran’s GDP contracted progressively between 2011 and 2020, with revenue heavily reliant upon oil exports (55% of

<sup>45</sup> Areas and population groups in Pakistan most exposed to combined effects of climate change, food insecurity and COVID-19. K4D. 2021

<sup>46</sup> Pakistan 2022. Amnesty International. 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Country Snapshot: Pakistan. Relief International (received from RI via email). 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Pakistan: Widespread Abuses Force Afghans to Leave. HRW. 2023.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> UNHCR concerned at adverse effects of Pakistan orders for undocumented foreigners to leave. UNHCR. 2023.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023–2025. UN. 2023; Framework for International Partner Support in Afghanistan, 2023–2025. Afghanistan Coordination Group. 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (January 2023). OCHA. 2023.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> GDP growth (annual %) – Afghanistan. The World Bank. 2023.

exports) which are severely affected by the global sanctions.<sup>57</sup> The lack of growth has been compounded by inflation (45% in November 2023), eroding purchasing power (food prices have risen more than 50%), and by an aging and urbanising population, and relatively high rates of youth unemployment (22%).<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, resource strain due to increased migration of Afghan refugees, as well as increased instances of violence, drive poverty in Iran.<sup>59</sup>

**Pakistan.** According to the World Bank, Pakistan's economy saw a decline in 2023, after two consecutive years of growth.<sup>60</sup> Floods in 2022 caused heavy damage to crops and livestock, while difficulties securing critical inputs, including fertilizers, further slowed agriculture output growth.<sup>61</sup> According to the RRRP, about half of the 94 worst hit districts hosted an estimated 800,000 Afghan refugees.<sup>62</sup> The poverty rate is around 37%, an increase from 2018 (28%), although population growth means approx. 3 million more people to account for.<sup>63</sup> Around 16% of the population is food insecure and lacks access to essential services, including health care and nutrition, further exacerbating nutritional challenges. While multidimensional poverty decreased from 55.2% in 2005 to 38.3% in 2018, it remains high.<sup>64</sup>

## 2. Political Economy and Stakeholder Analysis

**State of democracy; what are the most important political and democratic trends in the specific context incl. regime persistence, political inclusiveness, and government accountability?**

Although Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan each have differing political structures and varying levels of democratic institutions, the region remains largely authoritarian, as Afghanistan and Iran are categorised as “not free” and have rank extremely low on various indexes that attempt to measure levels of democracy, presented below.

**Afghanistan.** The Taliban regime has disrupted the rule of law, closed the political space, and suppressed opposition efforts, contributing to the notable increase in authoritarianism in the country.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, women and minority groups have faced marginalisation and curtailed rights, while media censorship has been intensified, contributing to heightened political polarization and the dissemination of misinformation.<sup>66</sup> On the Electoral Democracy Index<sup>67</sup>, Afghanistan obtained a score of .08, indicating almost no presence of democratic structures<sup>68</sup>, and a Freedom in the World<sup>69</sup> score of 10/100, classified as “not free”.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Afghanistan is ranked 15 in the world of countries that have had the most dramatic decreases in freedom in the past 10 years.<sup>71</sup> Under Taliban rule, Afghanistan has transitioned into a one-party state, severely curtailing political inclusiveness, and government accountability. Furthermore, there are no elections, no political pluralism or participation, and extremely limited civil rights and liberties.<sup>72</sup> The population lacks political rights and opportunities for electoral participation, while governance transparency remains elusive.<sup>73</sup>

**Iran.** On the Electoral Democracy Index, Iran obtained a score of .18 in 2022, showing low levels of democracy, although still greater than Afghanistan.<sup>74</sup> Iran is categorised as “Not Free”, with a Freedom in the World Score of 14/100.<sup>75</sup> The electoral process in Iran is extremely limited, with the elections that take place being heavily manipulated by the regime's approval of candidates.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, civil participation and liberties are extremely limited or non-existent, with heavy censorship on speech.<sup>77</sup> Elected officials in Iran appear to have been decreasingly important in government, showing that there is not an expectation

<sup>57</sup> World Bank. Iran poverty diagnostic. November 2023.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> States of Fragility 2018. OECD. 2019.

<sup>60</sup> The World Bank In Pakistan, Overview. The World Bank. 2023.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan Situation. 2023.

<sup>63</sup> World Bank, Pakistan overview

<sup>64</sup> The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2023. Our World in Data. 2023.

<sup>65</sup> Democracy Report 2023. V- Dem Institute. 2023.

<sup>66</sup> *Dem ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *The Electoral Democracy Index, by V-Dem, refers to the extent that electory democracy is achieved and encompasses liberal, participatory,*

*deliberative, and egalitarian factors. Measured from 0-1, with 1 indicating higher levels of democracy.*

<sup>68</sup> Variable Graph, Afghanistan. V-Dem. 2024

<sup>69</sup> *The Freedom in the World Score is based on the electoral process, political pluralism, government functionings, freedom of expression, organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy.*

<sup>70</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid..*

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Variable Graph, Iran. V-Dem. 2024

<sup>75</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2022.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

of a decrease in authoritarianism in Iran in the near future. This has been exemplified by the March 2024 elections, discussed further in Section 3, where the Guardian Council was given increased political power and voter turnout was historically low.<sup>78</sup> This is reflective of the decreasing state of democracy in Iran as the government structure and electoral processes are increasingly moving in an authoritarian direction, limiting government accountability. This has continued the growing trend of the gap between state and society, which is marked by the lack of government accountability, distrust, and growing political instability.<sup>79</sup>

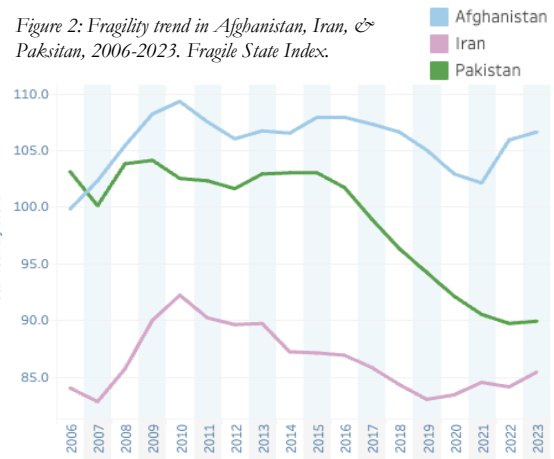
**Pakistan.** On the Electoral Democracy Index, Pakistan obtained a score of .39 in 2022, showing limited, but still present, levels of democracy.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, Pakistan scored 37/100 in the Freedom in the World Index and is categorised as partly free.<sup>81</sup> While Pakistan regularly holds elections, the military's influence in politics limits the effectiveness of the electoral process. Furthermore, media is severely limited, and discrimination or violence on the basis of religion occurs.<sup>82</sup> Although Pakistan has taken steps towards increased reliable democratic structures, the complex actors and conflict at hand limits the ability of further democratisation. Because of this, despite increased political plurality, freedoms, and transparency compared to Afghanistan, there is still limited government legitimacy.<sup>83</sup> In the recent 2024 elections, discussed further in Section 3, in Pakistan, the lack of state legitimacy and trust can be observed due to the election's contested results, which led to political protests regarding election rigging.<sup>84</sup>

**Are there stable politics in the country with the low risk of regime breakdown and opportunities for ordered political transition? Identify social, political, economic and institutional factors affecting the dynamics and possibilities for change.**

All countries in the region of interest have an unstable political situation and all rank 40<sup>th</sup> globally, or lower, in terms of fragility. This fragility is due to a combination of factors in the region, including political issues and economic strife. Recent elections in Iran and Pakistan exemplify issues of instability and political discontent, while the authoritarian nature of politics in Afghanistan has further escalated issues in the country.

**Afghanistan.** Afghanistan has been heavily fragilized by repeated conflict which have disrupted processes of institution building and state formation, the fragmentation of power, the erosion of local government by the long-standing conflicts, which interacted with factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of popular legitimacy and large inflows of security-driven aid. Afghanistan scores 106.6 on the Fragile State Index, ranking 6<sup>th</sup> out of 173 countries in 2023.<sup>85</sup> In 2023, Afghanistan's multidimensional fragility has intensified, particularly following the Taliban insurgency in 2021, leading to increased violence and economic collapse. As discussed in Section 1, the aid withdrawal, economic crisis, and environmental crises, and food insecurity has resulted in an extreme increase in poverty. Afghanistan also contends with recurrent terrorism, often perpetrated by groups like the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).

**Iran.** Iran scores 85.4 on the Fragile State Index for 2023, ranking 40<sup>th</sup> globally, indicating moderate to high levels of fragility, however, significantly less than what is seen in Afghanistan.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, since 2019, fragility in Iran has been increasing, after a near decade long period of decrease. Political instability



<sup>78</sup> Closing Circles: Iran's Exclusionary 2024 Elections. Al Jazeera. 2024.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Variable Graph, Pakistan. V-Dem. 2024

<sup>81</sup> Freedom in the World, Pakistan. Freedom House. 2022.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Shehbaz Sharif elected Pakistan PM for second term after controversial vote. Al Jazeera; Abid Hussain. 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Fragile States Index Annual Report 2022. Fund For Peace. 2023.

<sup>86</sup> Country Dashboard, Iran. Fragile States Index. 2024

has been shown through Iran's March 2024 elections, in which a low voter turnout was recorded due to the decrease in political legitimacy.<sup>87</sup> The election turnout indicates to a decrease in legitimacy of the government, increasing the risk of regime breakdown. The authoritarian nature of the government and limitations for change to occur from electoral results severely limits opportunity for ordered political transition in Iran. Additionally, environmental, social, and economic indicators play into an increase in fragility in Iran, which is further exacerbated by resource strain due to the influx of Afghan refugees in Iran.

**Pakistan.** Pakistan scores similarly to Iran on the Fragile State Index, with a score of 89.9, ranking 31<sup>st</sup> globally. Fragility levels in Pakistan had been consistently decreasing since 2015 until 2023, where a very slight increase in fragility is observed.<sup>88</sup> In 2023, Pakistan reportedly saw a dramatic surge in violence with attacks occurring in border provinces which host the vast number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan,<sup>89</sup> increasing levels of fragility in Pakistan. Political instability is also exemplified by the contested February 2024 elections, which saw low voter turnout, claims of election rigging, and protests.<sup>90</sup> Specifically, claims of corruption and rigging curtail the legitimacy of election results, increasing political instability in Pakistan.

**Is extraction of rents an issue? How are rents extracted (distortion funds, creation of monopolies, public tenders, land allocation....)? To what extent are rents influencing sustainable development. Are rent seeking practices relevant to the issue/problem at hand? And has it increased or decreased over the last decades?**

There remains limited data available on this topic, however, further discussion on overall corruption is provided later.

**Afghanistan & Iran.** No available data could be found to answer this question. In general, reports on Afghanistan indicate a reduction in the (previously high) levels of petty corruption in the years leading up to 2021. In Iran, there are reports from the 2000s and 2010s that indicate rent seeking in Iran is an issue and tends to centre around foreign trade and the oil market. Discussion on corruption will continue in section 7.

**Pakistan.** According to Transparency International's 2017 Global Corruption Barometer<sup>91</sup> results, the percentage of the population in Pakistan that had experienced bribery is expected to be around 25%.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, 60% of respondents thought that most or all government officials were involved in corruption, 52% of respondents thought that most or all local government counsellors were involved in corruption, 76% of respondents thought that most or all police were involved in corruption, and 62% of respondents thought that most or all tax collectors were involved in corruption.<sup>93</sup>

**Assess the legitimacy of a given political process**

Government legitimacy throughout the region of interest remains low, particularly in Afghanistan and Iran, where growing authoritarianism and suppression of civil society are major issues.

**Afghanistan.** The current Taliban regime's political legitimacy is low, primarily due to its ascent to power through the overthrow of the previous constitutionally elected government and its exclusion from participatory governance of half of the population. Following its take-over, the Taliban established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) and has formed an unelected cabinet, comprising wholly of men.<sup>94</sup> In the IEA, formal legislative bodies and representative structures are absent. The Taliban's governance approach involves the rejection of the 2004 constitution in favour of their interpretation of Sharia and

<sup>87</sup> Closing Circles: Iran's Exclusionary 2024 Elections. Al Jazeera. 2024.

<sup>88</sup> Country Dashboard, Pakistan. Fragile States Index. 2024

<sup>89</sup> Why is Pakistan Planning to Deport Undocumented Afghans? Al Jazeera News; Hussain, Abid. 2023.

<sup>90</sup> Shehbaz Sharif elected Pakistan PM for second term after controversial vote. Al Jazeera; Abid Hussain. 2024.

<sup>91</sup> *The Global Corruption Barometer measures corruption through public opinion surveys of the experiences of civilians.*

<sup>92</sup> GCB-2017\_Global-Results. Transparency International. 2017. (excel file extracted from

<https://www.transparency.org/en/gcb/global/global-corruption-barometer-2017/press-and-downloads>)

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

Islamic Law.<sup>95</sup> The regime's reliance on violence to maintain control underscores the fragility of its institutions and the lack of legitimacy.<sup>96</sup>

**Iran.** Legitimacy in Iran appears to have declined in recent years as a result of protests going on against the state.<sup>97</sup> Protests under the “woman, life, freedom” movement in 2022 were sparked by the death of Mahsa Jina Amini while in police custody, which was followed by a crackdown on civil society and public expression by Iranian authorities.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, increased power of non-elected government officials and suppression of reformist figures show additional causes of decreased government legitimacy in Iran, which can be demonstrated by the low voter turnout in the 2024 elections, as previously discussed. While there has been increased mobilisation amongst young people around issues regarding corruption, authoritarianism, and human rights abuses in Iran that has led to questions of government legitimacy,<sup>99</sup> the government in place is more stable than the Taliban governance in Afghanistan, causing Iran to remain a favourable destination for refugees.

**Pakistan.** Issues of military political influence in Pakistan have resulted in questions of government legitimacy in wake of the February 2024 elections.<sup>100</sup> While the government structure itself does not appear to be put into question the same way the authoritarian governments of Afghanistan and Iran are, the multiple competing actors in Pakistan's government and military, coupled with issues of the economy, discrimination, and violence along the Afghan border has resulted in increased questions of legitimacy. This has been demonstrated by the contested February 2024 elections, as previously discussed.

### **What are the barriers for women and minority groups to entering and participating in the political arena and in influencing decisions and address inequity and the distribution of power and social and economic resources?**

Barriers for women and girls in the region of interest remain extremely high, as human rights violations are continuously observed in both law and in the social sphere. While women are underrepresented from politics in Iran and Pakistan, women have been almost fully barred from the public sphere in Afghanistan, presenting a further worsening situation that has become a push factor for emigration.

**Afghanistan.** Since the takeover by the Taliban in 2021, the rights and freedoms of Afghan women have been increasingly eroded. The Taliban have been passing a series of measures that curtail women's freedom and limit their participation in social, economic, and public life.<sup>101</sup> This is elaborated in section 4. In 2021, Afghanistan ranked 4<sup>th</sup> out of 115 on the Peoples under Threat Ranking<sup>102,103</sup> Minority communities like the Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Baluchis find themselves particularly vulnerable due to the absence of legal safeguards.<sup>104</sup> Following the Taliban's overthrow of the previous government, the Shi'a Hazara group has fled the country in increasing numbers due to fears of persecution. Additionally, Hazaras face escalated threats from terrorists in the IS-Khorasan Province that recently carried out mass executions in a girls' school, a hospital maternity unit, and a mosque.<sup>105</sup> Vulnerabilities extend across gender, sexual orientation, and minority status, exposing these communities to threats, marginalisation, and stigmatization.

**Iran.** Iran ranked 14<sup>th</sup> on the Peoples under Threat ranking in 2021, with Arabs, Azeris, Bahá'ís, Baluchis, Kurds, and Turkmen being listed as vulnerable groups.<sup>106</sup> While men from the Shiite Muslim population disproportionately dominate the political sphere, 5 seats in parliament have been reserved for non-Muslim religious minorities.<sup>107</sup> Women are severely underrepresented in Iranian politics and are often barred from

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Afghanistan: Risk and Resilience Assessment. The World Bank. 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Iran vs. the People: A Test of Legitimacy. CEPA; Ben Dubow. 2023.

<sup>98</sup> Iran: Crackdown on Dissent Ahead of Protest Anniversary. Human Rights Watch. 2023.

<sup>99</sup> BRICS Membership Won't Solve Iran's Crisis of Legitimacy at Home. DAWN. 2023.

<sup>100</sup> A weak coalition government in Pakistan will find it hard to stabilize relations with its neighbours. Chatham House. 2024.

<sup>101</sup> Democracy Report 2023. V- Dem Institute. 2023.

<sup>102</sup> *The peoples under threat ranking identifies countries where populations are most at risk of genocide, violent repression, and mass killings.*

<sup>103</sup> Peoples under Threat data. Minority Rights Group International. 2021.

<sup>104</sup> Afghanistan. Minority Rights Group International. 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Afghanistan: Surge in Islamic State Attacks on Shia. Human Rights Watch. 2021.

<sup>106</sup> Peoples under Threat data. Minority Rights Group International. 2021.

<sup>107</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2023.

running for certain positions, such as president.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, all Iranians must undergo the process of *gozinesh* when applying to higher education or public employment, which assesses candidate based on their loyalty to the Islamic Republic, leading to the exclusion of minority religions.<sup>109</sup> For decades, Iranian women's rights have been severely undermined and politically neglected by the Iranian theocratic regime. Continuous exclusion of the work force in various fields, the lack of legal protection against domestic violence and sexual harassment, and the forced use of hijab, created the backdrop to the sweeping protests that erupted across Iran in September 2022, as a result of excessive police force and violence that killed Mahsa Jina Amini - a young Iranian woman who was arrested for not wearing her hijab in accordance with the ordinances of the religious police.<sup>110</sup> These issues of representation, discrimination, and violence impact local communities, host populations, and refugees in Iran alike.

**Pakistan.** Pakistan ranked 11<sup>th</sup> on the Peoples under Threat ranking in 2021, with religious minorities being listed as at risk.<sup>111</sup> In parliament, out of a 342-member national assembly, 60 seats are reserved for women and 10 seats are reserved for non-Muslim religious minorities.<sup>112</sup> Despite this, however, women and minorities are shown to have increased barriers to voting and are less likely to hold leadership positions in government.<sup>113</sup> With increasing instability in government, as well as increasing violence in the country, minority groups have been facing increased exclusion from the political sphere, increased discrimination, and decreased safety.<sup>114</sup>

## Stakeholder analysis

### Governing Bodies

**Afghanistan:** The de facto authorities in Afghanistan lack gender, ethnic, religious, political, and geographical diversity.<sup>115</sup> Pre-existing norms around male leadership have been consolidated and legitimised, undoing decades of gains that women had achieved in leadership and representation within public institutions. However, international humanitarian and basic human needs interventions will only be effective so long as the de facto authorities invest in equitable essential services and an economic enabling environment, including the removal of restrictions on access to essential services for women and girls, and to economic opportunities for women, as such restrictions obstruct the trajectory of economic and social recovery and development in Afghanistan.<sup>116</sup> Regarding the engagement strategies, to avoid removing accountability from local authorities to deliver basic services whilst avoiding legitimisation, clear communication with the de facto authorities is essential.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, it has been noted by the Afghanistan Education Cluster that community pressure is integral to convince de facto authorities that girls need to return to school.<sup>118</sup>

**Iran:** Politically, the unelected officials in Iran, including the Supreme Leader, hold large amounts of power regarding institutions and decision making. Political participation, government accountability, and human rights are all highly limited. The economy is highly reliant on oil revenues, however, international sanctions, specifically by the United States and the European Union, have significantly hampered economic growth and Iran's access to global markets, trade, and technology, contributing to economic isolation and limited investment.

**Pakistan:** While Pakistan has higher levels of participation than Afghanistan and Iran, anti-corruption and anti-discrimination policies in the law, and elected government officials, the functioning of these policies and structures often do not work as intended, causing a variety of socio-political issues in the country. This is partially due to the military, which wields high influence and directly impacts politics, governance, foreign policy, and security issues. In addition to the military capacity, Pakistan has a prominent informal economy and grapples with issues such as unemployment and inflation. On a social level, despite policies against it, gender-based violence persists, along with religious and ethnic discrimination.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Iran. Minority Rights Group. 2024.

<sup>110</sup> Iranian women and girls face further violations of their rights under compulsory veiling. Amnesty International. 2023; Unveiling Resistance: The Struggle for Women's Rights in Iran. Human Rights Watch. 2023.

<sup>111</sup> Peoples under Threat data. Minority Rights Group International. 2021.

<sup>112</sup> Freedom in the World, Pakistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Pakistan. Minority Rights Group. 2024.

<sup>115</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025. UN. 2023.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework. Afghanistan Education Cluster. 2022.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*



**UN organisations.** Denmark primarily supports UN organisations through the Transition Programme Afghanistan 2022-23, with a central role played by the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan, which enables donors to channel their resources to support the Transitional Engagement Framework, focusing on basic human needs' priorities in four areas: essential services, community livelihoods, protecting livelihoods, and community resilience.<sup>119</sup> Despite initial concerns that Afghan women staff might be replaced by men due to the bans, the proportion of Afghan women working for the UN within the national staff category has actually increased by 1 percent in the last six months to 18 percent in June 2023.<sup>120</sup> Nonetheless, the ban on women staff hinders UN organisations' effective delivery of activities, leading to delays and inefficiencies, according to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.<sup>121</sup>

**Civil society.** The interventions falling under the Transition Programme provide flexible, long-term funding will be provided to community structures, civil society, NGOs, human rights defenders, and labour-related organisations to advance human rights, labour rights, and gender equality. Among those, one important stakeholder community is the women-led civil society. Therefore, it is important to note that the national women-led organisations (WLOs) continue to be disproportionately impacted by the bans.

### NGOs

There are a range of international and national NGOs operating in Afghanistan, despite the difficult environment. Some of these operate as implementing partners to UN agencies. Many have been in Afghanistan for decades - Danish examples include DACAAR, Mission East, Danish Refugee Council. The INGOs are often operating in partnership with local NGOs and are connected to the humanitarian aid structures.

### Local populations

**Afghanistan:** In 2023, 28.3 million people in Afghanistan, two thirds of the population, are projected to need urgent humanitarian assistance to survive. Women and children are estimated to constitute 77% of these.<sup>122</sup> In light of this, a major focus of the interventions supported by Denmark under the Transition Programme Afghanistan 2024-2025, are women's rights and education.

**Iran:** Currently there are between 3.4 and 8 million Afghan refugees in Iran, encompassing 5-10% of the total population.<sup>123</sup> With the cost of supporting these refugees seldom covered, the Iranian economy, host communities, and resources have increasingly struggled.

**Pakistan:** The UNCHR reported that as of October 2023, there were 3.7 million Afghans in Pakistan, out of which 1.5 million<sup>124</sup> were considered refugees or in refugee-like situations.<sup>125</sup> Violence and resulting tensions on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border have been increasing and as a result, Pakistan has adopted a stricter policy regarding Afghan refugees. Both the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, as well as host communities facing conflict in the region, are considered stakeholders.

## 3. Fragility, Conflict and Resilience

### Situation with regards to peace and fragility based on the FRAAT

Regarding security, terrorism, violence against citizens, and increasing tensions in the MENA region are increasing fragility. Conflicts between governments because of the war in Gaza, have further increased tension and fragility in the region as a whole and particularly in Iran. Additionally, recent elections in Iran and Pakistan, increasing authoritarianism, and economic hardship are negatively impacting the region. Social and environmental aspects will be discussed more in-depth in later sections.

**Afghanistan.** Afghanistan's overall security has improved compared to under the republic, although sporadic attacks from terrorist groups continue to challenge Taliban authority. In the early months of 2022,

<sup>119</sup> Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan. UNDP. n.d.

<sup>120</sup> Afghanistan Pulse Check: January - June 2023. IASC. 2023.

<sup>121</sup> Additional Reporting on Basic Human Needs Interventions, 3rd monitoring report (January to June 2023). IASC. 2023.

<sup>122</sup> Afghanistan: Humanitarian Update, June 2023. OCHA. 2023.

<sup>123</sup> Testimonies from the Danish Embassy in Iran based on meetings with NRC, UNAMA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, & IOM. October 2023.

<sup>124</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan. UNHCR. 2023.

<sup>125</sup> *People in refugee-like situation refers to a category which is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained (UNHCR).*

according to UN estimates, fighting diminished to only 18% of previous levels,<sup>126</sup> and the number of displaced persons due to conflict totalled less than 1% of previous monthly peaks.<sup>127</sup> However, there is an observable resurgence of the local Daesh (IS/ISIS) branch which is attributed to the integration of numerous foreign fighters who were previously aligned with the Taliban.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, the prevalent poverty in Afghanistan is providing the ISIS group with opportunities to recruit Afghan youth, particularly in rural regions where economic hardships and food insecurity are pronounced.<sup>129</sup>

Due to the extreme political centralisation of the Taliban regime, coupled with issues of conflict, economy, and the environment, there is little ability for the government in Afghanistan to enact change through a decision-making process to increase stability.<sup>130</sup> As there are no elections, no political plurality, and extreme human rights violations, the legitimacy and accountability of the Taliban government remain low, decreasing the ability to address fragility in the country.

After a period of economic contraction by 25% after the Taliban's government takeover in 2021, Afghanistan is expected to hover around zero growth moving forward.<sup>131</sup> The World Bank describes Afghanistan's economy as "extremely fragile", due to its weak private sector and declines in the service sector, agricultural sector, and industrial sector.<sup>132</sup> As international aid to Afghanistan has been important for the maintenance of livelihoods, decreases in aid pose a threat to the country's fragility in the future.<sup>133</sup>

Conflict, natural disasters, economic crises, and socio-political issues exacerbated by the Taliban have fuelled instability in Afghanistan, and, according to the UN, the current Afghan context is encompassing an imminent risk of a systemic collapse.<sup>134</sup> Afghanistan continues to rank as one of the most fragile countries globally, holding the 6th position out of 179 countries.<sup>135</sup>

**Iran.** Iran saw a sharp increase in violence in the country in 2022 as a result of the "woman, life, freedom" protests, with 494 recorded riots and 181 instances of violence against civilians.<sup>136</sup> Since 2022, there has been a decrease in the number of riots and violence against civilians, however, an increase in the amount and frequency of explosions, from 3 in 2022 to 17 in 2023, as well as 12 recorded in the first 2 months of 2024.<sup>137</sup> As of January 2024, overall conflict in Iran has increased, partially due to the deadliest terrorist attack in Iran since the 1979 revolution, where ISIS killed over 80 people.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, tensions have increased in the region due to the Palestine-Israel conflict, and missile launches from Iran into Pakistan and Syria.<sup>139</sup> Iran ranks as the 40<sup>th</sup> most fragile country worldwide.<sup>140</sup>

Leading up to the 2024 elections in Iran, the political environment remained fragile. Relevant issues included changed election laws that gave the guardian council increased power, the lasting impact of the government's brutality in reaction to the September 2022 "woman, life, freedom" protests, economic decline, and the abstention of reformist figures.<sup>141</sup> Due to the changing political landscape and increased authoritarianism, voter turnout was historically low. Official estimates mark the voter turnout rate at 41% of the eligible population.<sup>142</sup> This indicates a high degree of civilian frustration with Iran's current political and economic course, and increased fragility of the political system moving forward.

Iran has seen economic growth in recent years, despite a decade of stagnation prior.<sup>143</sup> Despite this, issues of inflation and income inequality have left much of the population with decreased household purchasing power.<sup>144</sup> Economic strife has the largest consequences on people's purchasing power and food security,

<sup>126</sup> Afghanistan's Security Challenges under the Taliban. International Crisis Group. 2022.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Dysfunctional centralization and growing fragility under Taliban rule. Middle East Institute. 2022.

<sup>131</sup> Afghanistan's Contracted Economy Faces Uncertainty, Afghan Families Are Struggling. The World Bank. 2023.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework For Afghanistan 2023-2025. UN. 2023.

<sup>135</sup> Fragile States Index, Afghanistan. Fund for Peace. 2023

<sup>136</sup> Global Dashboard. ACLED. 2024.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Iran. International Crisis Group. 2024.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Fragile States Index, Iran. Fund for Peace. 2023

<sup>141</sup> Closing Circles: Iran's Exclusionary 2024 Elections. International Crisis Group. 2024.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> PolicyWatch 3833: Tehran Makes Gains, But Concerns Persist About Regime Vulnerability. The Washington Institute; Patrick Clawson. 2024.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*



as the prices for a basket of food has increased 70% in one year.<sup>145</sup> Although economic stability has increased in Iran, these issues, along with issues of economic sanctions and oil export dependency, leaves economic fragility to remain an issue.

**Pakistan.** Since 2020, Pakistan has been on an upward trend regarding the number of violent instances in the country. In 2023, 407 riots, 401 violent instances against civilians, and 307 instances of explosions were recorded, marking 3 years of consistent increases in each of these measures.<sup>146</sup> In the last half of 2023, the situation regarding peace and fragility in Pakistan has declined due to tensions with both Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>147</sup> Specifically, militant attacks in provinces bordering Afghanistan have decreased peace in the region.<sup>148</sup> These militant attacks have increased in the months leading up to the February 2024 elections, as Baloch militant groups and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) carried out over 50 attacks, usually with political aims.<sup>149</sup> Additionally, in January 2024, Iran launched cross-border strikes at Pakistan, aiming for anti-Iranian militant groups, however, a de-escalation agreement between Tehran and Islamabad has since been made.<sup>150</sup> Pakistan ranks as the 31<sup>st</sup> most fragile country worldwide.<sup>151</sup>

On a political level, Pakistan saw relatively low voter turnout, at about 47.8% of the eligible population.<sup>152</sup> The election was particularly controversial, as allegations of election rigging and corruption, causing delays and protests.<sup>153</sup> Low voter turnout and allegations of election rigging have further displayed a low level of state legitimacy amongst the civilian population. Specifically, a communication blackout imposed by the government has resulted in claims that the election was not transparent, not fair.<sup>154</sup> This political instability, combined with economic and security issues, has increased Pakistan's fragility.<sup>155</sup>

Economic fragility in Pakistan appears to remain an issue of concern. A contracting GDP in 2023, floods, inflation, and increased interest payments, among other issues, have exacerbated social and financial issues.<sup>156</sup> Additionally trade deficits, inflation around 30%, and currency performance have increased economic instability in the country.<sup>157</sup> It is clear that these economic issues have had real-life consequences in Pakistan, as unemployment has increased to a high of 8.5%, power outages are common, and poverty persists.<sup>158</sup>

### **Key drivers of conflict and fragility, protection and resilience, organised transnational crime and illicit money flows**

The Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan and Iran has further driven conflict, economic instability due to resource strain, and increased illicit flows due to smuggling and trafficking in the region. Furthermore, undocumented Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan have increased the proportion of the population vulnerable to trafficking.

**Afghanistan.** The key drivers of conflict and fragility can be summarized as: a weak economy, struggles for power and wealth, the recurrence of natural disasters, global isolation, and a food security crisis.<sup>159</sup> The withdrawal of US and NATO forces in 2021 provided the opportunity for the Taliban to seize power by overthrowing the government. Since then, the country has been confronted with conflicts involving entities such as the National Resistance Front (NRF), local ISIS, and Al Qaeda.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Free-falling rial leaves Iranians worried about financial future. Al Jazeera. 2023.

<sup>146</sup> Global Dashboard. ACLED. 2024.

<sup>147</sup> Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Pakistan. International Crisis Group. 2024.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Fragile States Index, Pakistan. Fund for Peace. 2023.

<sup>152</sup> Pakistan's elections in numbers — low turnout, gender inequality, voting mishaps. DAWN; Wara Irfan, Aniq Atiq Khan, Hawwa Fazal. 2024.

<sup>153</sup> Shehbaz Sharif elected Pakistan PM for second term after controversial vote. Al Jazeera; Abid Hussain. 2024.

<sup>154</sup> Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Pakistan. International Crisis Group. 2024.

<sup>155</sup> Shehbaz Sharif elected Pakistan PM for second term after controversial vote. Al Jazeera; Abid Hussain. 2024.

<sup>156</sup> The World Bank in Pakistan: Overview. The World Bank. 2023.

<sup>157</sup> In Pakistan, old hopefuls jostle to turn around struggling economy. Al Jazeera. 2024.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Afghanistan: Unemployment worsens humanitarian crisis, people with disability among worst affected. ICRC. 2023.

<sup>160</sup> Afghanistan's Security Challenges under the Taliban. International Crisis Group. 2022.

This fragile scenario has created fertile ground for organised criminal activities and illicit economies which have continued to function and gain in significance as the licit economy falters. Notably, between 2018 and 2021, estimates indicated that the potential opiate exports from Afghanistan could have generated illicit financial flows ranging from 1.300 to 2.233 million USD.<sup>161</sup> News reports and private organizations have warned that the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan very likely drives human trafficking, particularly of young people, as families sell their children due to poverty.<sup>162</sup> According to the 2021 Global Organised Crime Index<sup>163</sup>, Afghanistan ranks 7<sup>th</sup> worldwide in terms of criminality.<sup>164</sup> The country also exhibits a pervasive black-market trade in weapons catering to militias, insurgents, and civilians, while concurrently evolving into a hub for methamphetamine production.<sup>165</sup> The human trafficking of Afghans in Iran and Pakistan is a further issue involving illicit flows discussed in section 5.

**Iran.** Drivers of fragility in Iran include its horizontal inequality, gender inequality, violent instances, and the high number of Afghan refugees in the country.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, economic, security, and environmental issues increase fragility in Iran.<sup>167</sup> Additionally, illicit money flows in Iran is an issue acknowledged by the government and includes problems of organized drug crimes, money laundering, and corruption.<sup>168</sup> An increase in Afghan refugees in Iran, specifically undocumented refugees and youth, also presents a driver of crime and illicit money flows, as there is an increased proportion of the population that is vulnerable.<sup>169</sup> There has reportedly been an increase in both child trafficking and child labour in Iran in recent years.<sup>170</sup>

**Pakistan.** Pakistan's vulnerability to issues of fragility is largely due to uneven economic growth, militarism, issues along the border with Afghanistan, and political instability.<sup>171</sup> Issues of transnational crime in Pakistan mainly center around illicit drug trafficking, where Pakistan is particularly vulnerable due to its border with Afghanistan.<sup>172</sup> Like in Iran, undocumented Afghan refugees are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and organized crime in Pakistan.<sup>173</sup> Often in areas along the Afghan border, undocumented Afghan children have been forced into drug trafficking and smuggling.<sup>174</sup> In both Iran and Pakistan, it is clear that a large driver of fragility is due to issues along their borders with Afghanistan and the toll of the influx of Afghan refugees, which exacerbate existing issues of social and economic tensions.

### **Highlight how conflict and fragility affect inclusive private sector development and women and youth.**

Private sector development, women, and youth have been negatively impacted across the region due to the escalating situation in Afghanistan and the growing diasporic population. Specifically, women and youth are put in a place of economic hardship due to economic strife in the region, and are at an increased risk of violence. All countries rank below 100 globally on the World Bank ease of doing business scale<sup>175</sup>.

**Afghanistan.** The unstable situation in Afghanistan is significantly impacting the private sector development as the country is experiencing a profound economic crisis resulting from the withdraw of foreign development aid and the country international isolation affecting finance markets.<sup>176</sup> As of 2020, Afghanistan ranked 173<sup>rd</sup> globally on the ease of doing business scale.<sup>177</sup> This economic crisis is further enhanced by the exclusion of Afghan women and girls from the labour market. In 2022, the rate of unemployment among Afghan youth (aged 15-24) was recorded at 17.8%.<sup>178</sup> Since 2021, 1.6 millions of

<sup>161</sup> First-ever official data on illicit financial flows now available. UNCTAD. 2023.

<sup>162</sup> Human Trafficking in Afghanistan since the Taliban Takeover. The Counterterrorism Group. 2022; Afghanistan: heroin and human trafficking are the only two sectors of the economy still thriving. The Conversation. 2021

<sup>163</sup> The Global Organised Crime Index measures criminality based on the presence of criminal markets, actors, and resilience.

<sup>164</sup> Afghanistan. Global Organized Criminal Crime Index. 2021.

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> States of Fragility 2018. OECD. 2019.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Islamic Republic of Iran. UNODC. 2024.

<sup>169</sup> 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iran. US Department of State. 2023.

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Heterogeneous fragility: The case of Pakistan. International Growth Centre. 2018.

<sup>172</sup> Pakistan. UNODC. 2024

<sup>173</sup> 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Pakistan. US Department of State. 2023.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *The ease of doing business index ranks countries based on how well the environment is conducive to business operations.*

<sup>176</sup> Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (January 2023). OCHA. 2023.

<sup>177</sup> Ease of doing business rank. World Bank. 2019.

<sup>178</sup> Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) – Afghanistan. The World Bank. 2020.

Afghans have fled the country resulting in a substantial loss of workforce and significant outflow of capital.<sup>179</sup>

**Iran.** There are seldom reports on the impact of conflict on private sector development, however, multiple reports detail the negative impact of corruption and economic fragility on the private sector in Iran.<sup>180</sup> Iran, as of 2020, ranks 127<sup>th</sup> globally on the World Bank's ease of doing business scale.<sup>181</sup> Regarding youth, domestic government violence as a response to protests have resulted in the deaths of 68 children, and have decreased the peace in educational institutions.<sup>182</sup> Youth unemployment remains high, but has decreased in recent years, with 22.8% of youth unemployed as of 2022.<sup>183</sup> Of unemployed youth, girls have significantly higher rates of unemployment compared to boys.<sup>184</sup>

**Pakistan.** Constraints to private sector development in Pakistan include economic instability, security challenges such as issues previously mentioned on the Afghan border, and weak governance.<sup>185</sup> As of 2020, Pakistan ranks 108<sup>th</sup> globally on the ease of doing business scale.<sup>186</sup> Regarding gender, the presence of heightened militarism and terrorism in Pakistan has been shown to increase threats of gender-based violence and early marriage.<sup>187</sup> Youth employment in Pakistan has had a general increasing trend in the past decade, although youth unemployment still remains lower than in Iran and Afghanistan, at 9.7% in 2022.<sup>188</sup>

### Relevant issues for pursuing the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (the '1325' agenda)

The WPS agenda is highly relevant to all 3 countries as women are generally excluded from decision making (completely in Afghanistan and partially in Iran and Pakistan) and violence against women, discrimination, and exclusion persist.

**Afghanistan.** Prior to the Taliban's takeover, there had been commitments in adhering to ratified international agreements and adhering to relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs), related to women's rights.<sup>189</sup> Collaboratively formulated by governmental agencies, civil society organisations, and international entities, the first National Action plan (NAP) yielded some advancements in the realm of Women, Peace, and Security.<sup>190</sup> However, the resurgence of the Taliban regime after the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces has put the implementation of the NAP agenda on hold, impacting the prospect for the adopting further NAPs. Since August 2021, the role of women in the political area has been severely restricted through limits of their rights to participation in public life, freedom of movement, health, work, education and to attain an adequate standard of living, and effectively confine them to the home.<sup>191</sup> In 2023, women and girls face acute vulnerability and threats, being the primary targets of the measures and violence imposed by the new regime. They have been systematically deprived of economic, political, cultural rights, and excluded from public life.<sup>192</sup>

**Iran.** Many issues regarding the WPS agenda are present in Iran, including issues of violence against women, the denial of safety and independence, and discrimination regarding women and health, employment, finances, and more.<sup>193</sup> As previously, discussed, women face barriers to political inclusion in Iran, and are often excluded from leadership positions within government.<sup>194</sup> Despite, this, Iran has made efforts towards women's empowerment, including the approval of the Sixth National Development Plan on women's empowerment in 2019.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, there has been large improvements recorded regarding

<sup>179</sup> Afghanistan Humanitarian Crisis. UNHCR. 2023

<sup>180</sup> Dark Comedy or Tragedy? The Dire Straits of Iran's Economy. Clingendael. 2023.

<sup>181</sup> Ease of doing business rank. World Bank. 2019.

<sup>182</sup> The Toll of Violence on Women and Youth in Iran. Think Global Health. 2023.

<sup>183</sup> Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) – Iran. The World Bank. 2020.

<sup>184</sup> Iran Poverty Diagnostic, Report No 185679, Poverty and Shared Prosperity. World Bank Group. 2023.

<sup>185</sup> Heterogeneous fragility: The case of Pakistan. International Growth Centre. 2018.

<sup>186</sup> Ease of doing business rank. World Bank. 2019.

<sup>187</sup> How Fragile Contexts Affect The Well-Being And Potential Of Women And Girls. OECD. 2022.

<sup>188</sup> Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) – Pakistan. The World Bank. 2020.

<sup>189</sup> Afghanistan's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security 2015-2022. Government of Afghanistan. 2015.

<sup>190</sup> Afghanistan: Women's Full Participation Needed in Talks. Human Rights Watch. 2021.

<sup>191</sup> Situation of human rights in Afghanistan. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. OHCHR. 2023.

<sup>192</sup> Afghanistan: Risk and Resilience Assessment. The World Bank. 2021.

<sup>193</sup> The Toll of Violence on Women and Youth in Iran. Think Global Health. 2023.

<sup>194</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>195</sup> National Report on Women's Status in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Beijing + 25). UN Women. n.d.

the education, entrepreneurship, employment, and sanitation for women and girls.<sup>196</sup> Gender will be discussed further in Section 4.

**Pakistan.** The government of Pakistan has taken steps towards ensuring peace and security for women, including recognizing gender security within its first National Security Policy (2022-2026).<sup>197</sup> The takeover of the Taliban in 2021, however, has presented a heightened security risk for women and girls in Pakistan, as both displaced and host populations of Afghan refugees are impacted by limited social services, disproportionately affecting women and girls.<sup>198</sup> Issues regarding peace and security for Pakistani women include problems stemming from the strong patriarchal social norms such as gender stereotypes, discrimination, and violence.<sup>199</sup> Gender will be discussed further in Section 4, but can be noted as a cross-cutting issue for both citizens and Afghan refugees alike in Iran and Pakistan.

**Identify on-going stabilisation/development and resilience efforts and entry points and the potential for establishing partnerships and alliances with national, regional and other international partners in order to maximise effects of the engagements.**

In relation to refugees, the key framework is the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP), which aims to create solutions and provide funds to address the situation in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries impacted. The RRRP has 65 partners and crosses 6 countries. Furthermore, various UN agencies, notably the UNHCR, are involved in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. It is important to note, however, that with increasing regional tensions due to the war in Gaza, pre-existing aid gaps are expected to worsen.

**Afghanistan.** NGOs and UN Agencies have tried to carry on their activities, through the current economic crisis and isolation in Afghanistan by delivering humanitarian aid and support to the most vulnerable, including through the actions of the UNAMA mission which is still operating within the country.<sup>200</sup> In 2022, Afghanistan was the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest recipient of humanitarian assistance, totalling to 3.9 billion USD, and is expected to increase in 2023.<sup>201</sup> All 65 RRRP partners are involved in Afghanistan.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, in response to the humanitarian emergency and the decline of women's and girls' rights, the UN has adopted a strategic framework in 2023 (UNSF) to strengthen the resilience of Afghan women and girls, men and boys to shocks, sustaining livelihoods, protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and supporting durable solutions to displacement caused by conflict, climate change, and natural disasters.<sup>203</sup> In the absence of a national development plan against which to align, international partners also developed the ACG Framework for International Partner Support in Afghanistan in parallel to the UN Strategic Framework. This outlines three complementary and mutually reinforcing joint priorities (and outcomes) against which partners intend to align their support: Sustained Essential Services, Economic Opportunities and Resilient Livelihoods, Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Rule of Law.<sup>204</sup> Therefore, most development activities, like those part of the UNSF and the ACG Framework are now focused on meeting basic human needs and humanitarian assistance.

**Iran.** Due to international economic sanctions, Iran is a relatively isolated country. Despite Iran's relevance to the RRRP, only 15 of the 65 partners involved are working in Iran.<sup>205</sup> In 2022, of the 258.7 million USD required for the RRRP, only 47% of the plan was funded, amounting to roughly 121.5 million USD in aid.<sup>206</sup> This number is expected to increase in 2023 despite its political isolation. Amongst UN agencies in Iran, UNHCR is perhaps the most widespread. UNHCR, along with partner agencies, NGOs, and governments, launched the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) in 2012 to provide a framework for humanitarian and development actors to cooperate to address the needs of Afghans in Iran and Pakistan.<sup>207</sup> Notably, Iran's international partnership with China through a 25-year agreement aimed to give

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action. UN Women: Asia and the Pacific. 2024.

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> National Report On The Status Of Women In Pakistan, 2023, A Summary. UN Women. 2023

<sup>200</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025. UN. 2023.

<sup>201</sup> Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023. Development Initiatives. 2023.

<sup>202</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>203</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025. UN. 2023.

<sup>204</sup> Framework for International Partner Support in Afghanistan, 2023-2025. Afghanistan Coordination Group. 2023.

<sup>205</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>206</sup> Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023. Development Initiatives. 2023.

<sup>207</sup> UNHCR and UN agencies in Iran. UNHCR. 2024.

Iran economic and technological support to foster development, in return for discounted oil to China.<sup>208</sup> Due to Iran's economic isolation and sanctions, this partnership is an economic lifeline for Iran.

**Pakistan.** Of the 65 partners involved in the RRRP, 56 partners have involvement in Pakistan. In 2022, Pakistan's Country Response Plan was 69% funded, amounting to roughly 325.7 million USD, while the Regional Response plan was 62% funded, amounting to about 192.4 million USD, although expected to decrease in 2023.<sup>209</sup> Of the 56 partners involved in Pakistan, WASH, education, health, and livelihoods and resilience are the top sectors that partners work in.<sup>210</sup> In addition to the RRRP, both UNHCR and IOM have a humanitarian, as well as a political present in Pakistan, as they are currently providing support and advocacy for those negatively affected Pakistan's repatriation plans for Afghans.<sup>211</sup> As previously discussed, Pakistan's international involvement, particularly in contrast to Iran, allows for more space for international aid, responses, and partners on a variety of levels.

### Relevant issues and considerations related to radicalisation and violent extremism

Terrorism and radicalisation in the region of interest have been exacerbated by authoritarianism and the Taliban presence in Afghanistan, as well as economic deterioration and increased inflation across all countries. All countries display high levels of instability and violence, all with indicators scoring worse than approximately 90% or more of countries worldwide, according to the World Bank.

**Afghanistan.** Following the takeover by the Taliban, there has been a drop in recorded occurrences of violent incidents per week in Afghanistan (Figure xx)<sup>212</sup>. In 2023, the new Taliban regime is facing two main insurgencies: one involving the National Resistance Front (NRF) and other former government-aligned entities, and the other involving the local faction of Daesh, known as the Islamic State Khorasan Province. Furthermore, Al-Qaeda's trajectory in Afghanistan remains a major concern. In the 2020 U.S.-Taliban Doha agreement the Taliban committed to preventing international jihadists, including al-Qaeda, from using Afghan soil to threaten the United States and its allies.<sup>213</sup> However, in 2022, U.S. intelligence assessed that the Taliban were still maintaining ties with al-Qaeda's senior<sup>214</sup>. Despite a significant reduction in civilian casualties recorded as a result of armed conflict since the Taliban takeover, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to document significant levels of civilian harm resulting from deliberate attacks employing improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Between 15 August 2021 and 30 May 2023, UNAMA recorded a total of 3,774 civilian casualties (1,095 killed, 2,679 wounded) as a result of bombings and other acts of violence targeting mainly crowded public areas including marketplaces, mosques, and schools.<sup>215</sup> Additionally, according to the Worldwide Governance Indicators<sup>216</sup> regarding political stability and the absence of violence/terrorism, which is measured on a scale from approximately -2.5 to 2.5 and shows the likelihood of political instability or politically motivated violence, Afghanistan was given a score of -2.6 in 2022, a score that has continually decreased since 2016, indicating very high levels of political instability and violence, estimated as worse than 99% of countries worldwide.<sup>217</sup> This exhibits a high likelihood of politically motivated violence in Afghanistan.

**Iran.** The situation regarding violent extremism in Iran has worsened in recent months, with the deadliest terrorist attack in Iran in over 4 decades occurring in January 2024 when ISIS killed over 80 civilians and injured over 200.<sup>218</sup> Additionally, the war in Gaza has escalated tensions and violence in the region as hostilities with Hezbollah continue. According to Worldwide Governance Indicators, a score of -1.6 was given regarding political stability and the absence of violence/terrorism, indicating moderate to high levels of political instability and violence in the country and estimated to be worse than 91% of countries

<sup>208</sup> The 25-year Iran-China agreement, endangering 2,500 years of heritage. Middle East Institute. 2022.

<sup>209</sup> Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023. Development Initiatives. 2023.

<sup>210</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>211</sup> Help, Pakistan. UNHCR. 2024.

<sup>212</sup> Afghanistan's Security Challenges under the Taliban.

International Crisis Group. 2022.

<sup>213</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> Human rights situation in Afghanistan: May - June 2023 Update. UNAMA 2023.

<sup>216</sup> The worldwide governance indicator of Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism, from the World Bank, measures perceptions of the likelihood of instability and violence.

<sup>217</sup> Worldwide Governance Indicators. World Bank. 2024.

<sup>218</sup> Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Iran. International Crisis Group. 2024.

worldwide.<sup>219</sup> Further information on violent instances and casualties has been described earlier in section 3, under the FRAAT framework.

**Pakistan.** Violence and extremist in Pakistan has increased. In 2023, the country saw a dramatic surge in violence with the majority of attacks occurring in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, both of which border Afghanistan and host the vast number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.<sup>220</sup> Subsequently, in conjunction with the new policy, Pakistani Interior Minister claimed that Afghan nationals were behind 14 out of 24 suicide bombings in Pakistan in 2023. Unsurprisingly, with an increase in the reach and presence of Taliban, Pakistan's concern for national security has heightened.<sup>221</sup> As a result, widespread police abuses have been carried out against Afghans living in Pakistan.<sup>222</sup> Regarding political stability and the absence of violence/terrorism in Pakistan, a score of -1.9 was given in 2022, indicating quite high levels of political instability and violence, worse than approximately 93% of countries worldwide.<sup>223</sup> Further information on violent instances and casualties has been described earlier in section 3, under the FRAAT framework.

#### **Issues and concerns of relevance to Danish interest in the area of security and migration**

After the Taliban's takeover, Denmark airlifted 956 Afghans from Kabul and granted Afghans refugees asylum for two years.<sup>224</sup> In 2023, Denmark decided to grant asylum to all Afghan women and girls' applicants.<sup>225</sup> Since 2021, Denmark suspended all development aid given through Afghan Government mechanisms. Instead, the Danish government has concentrated on maintaining and increasing funding for humanitarian efforts. By collaborating with UN partners and the global NGO community, Denmark contributed over USD 76 million towards humanitarian assistance in 2021.<sup>226</sup> Denmark is affected by the situation as the takeover has led to rise of fragility in the region, a severe humanitarian crisis and has directly undermined the rights and freedoms of women and girls.

#### **Considerations regarding the humanitarian situation, migration, refugee and displacement issues, including the need to integrate humanitarian-development linkages and long term strategies**

This is discussed in section 5.

### **4. Human Rights, Gender, Youth and applying a Human Rights Based Approach**

#### **Human Right Standards (international, regional and national legislation)**

Issues of women's and minority rights, media censorship, extrajudicial violence, and limited freedoms of expression are relevant problems in all 3 countries of interest. Increased limitations on the right to protest and assemble in each country has further exacerbated these issues, which impact citizens and refugees alike.

**Afghanistan.** Since the takeover by the Taliban in August 2021, the situation has deteriorated as human rights violations and abuses have been multiplied.<sup>227</sup> Notably, women and girls represent the main target of rights deprivation as they have been excluded from schools, public spaces, workplaces including UN entities and NGOs as well as from participating in public life.<sup>228</sup> Political rights of ethnic minority groups, and LGBT+ people have been largely suspended under the Taliban as well as those of members of religious minority groups which have also faced restrictions and violence from the Taliban and armed groups.<sup>229</sup> The Taliban have further implemented extensive censorship measures, curtailed critical reporting, and resorted to the imprisonment and torture of journalists.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, the June 2023

<sup>219</sup> Worldwide Governance Indicators. World Bank. 2024.

<sup>220</sup> Why is Pakistan Planning to Deport Undocumented Afghans?, Al Jazeera News; Abid Hussain. 2023.

<sup>221</sup> Pakistan Pledges 'Phased, Orderly' Eviction of Unlawful Afghan Migrants. VOA News; Ayaz Gul. 2023,

<sup>222</sup> Pakistan: Widespread Abuses Force Afghans to Leave. Human Rights Watch. 2023.

<sup>223</sup> Worldwide Governance Indicators. World Bank. 2024.

<sup>224</sup> Afghan, Syrian refugees face uncertain future in Denmark. Al Jazeera. 2022.

<sup>225</sup> Denmark to grant asylum to all Afghan female applicants. AA. 2023.

<sup>226</sup> Denmark in Afghanistan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. n.d.

<sup>227</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025. UN. 2023.

<sup>228</sup> Afghanistan: Report highlights multiple human rights violations and abuses under Taliban. UN News. 2022.

<sup>229</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>230</sup> Afghanistan. Human Rights Watch. 2023.

UNAMA report denounced the systematic application of corporal punishment and death penalty, often carried out publicly, as well as extrajudicial killings targeting former government and military personnel throughout Afghanistan.<sup>231</sup>

**Iran.** Many human rights violations have been taken in Iran, including violations of freedom of expression, assembly, and refugee rights.<sup>232</sup> Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexuality is common both legally and socially.<sup>233</sup> Within the justice system, the death penalty is legal and practiced, and has been increasing in usage in recent years, while unfair trials, cruel punishments, torture, enforced disappearances, and the denial of medical care is widespread and systematic.<sup>234</sup>

**Pakistan.** The right to assemble and the right to protest have been limited by authorities in recent years, as well as limitations to freedom of expression and media censorship.<sup>235</sup> The government has made attempts to protect women and girls from violence, support transgender rights, protect freedom of religion, and to criminalize torture, however, these issues have subsisted on a social level.<sup>236</sup> Furthermore, discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and caste continues socially in Pakistan with little access justice.<sup>237</sup>

### Universal Periodic Review

The most cited recommendations in Iran and Pakistan's UPRs regard human rights obligations, anti-discrimination, protection of vulnerable groups, and the abolishment of the death penalty.

**Afghanistan.** Afghanistan's UPR is currently paused and the country is not meeting its Human Rights obligations.

**Iran.** In the most recent UPR cycle, a list of 329 recommendations were given to Iran to review in 2019. Based on this list, the most important themes of recommendations regard human rights obligations, including supporting gender equality, judicial reform, and moratoriums on the death penalty and cruel punishments. Furthermore, supporting anti-discrimination and establishment of rights for ethnic and religious minorities and vulnerable groups such as children, disabled people, and women. Additional recommendations often regarded international cooperation and diplomacy, including with the UN and with neighbouring countries/regions.<sup>238</sup>

**Pakistan.** In 2023, a list of 340 recommendations were given to Pakistan to review as part of the UPR. Of these recommendations, the most important themes include gender equality and rights, ethnic and religious minority rights and protections, and abolition or moratoriums on the death penalty. Furthermore, issues of child welfare and education, and environmental protection are also discussed. Similarly to Iran, human rights recommendations appear to be the most important theme across the UPR for Pakistan.<sup>239</sup>

### Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) Principles

The HRBA principles include participation, accountability, non-discrimination, and transparency. The countries of interest vary regarding their ability to meet these principles; however, it can be noted that they are, in general, not met in the region of interest.

#### Participation

**Afghanistan:** Citizens cannot exercise any meaningful political choice under the Taliban. Policymaking, resource allocation, and the selection of officials all take place opaquely within the structures of the IEA. No legislative assembly or representative body operates in the IEA. Akhundzada's decrees and orders from

<sup>231</sup> Human rights situation in Afghanistan: May - June 2023 Update. UNAMA. 2023.

<sup>232</sup> Iran. Amnesty International. 2024.

<sup>233</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Pakistan. Amnesty International. 2024.

<sup>236</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Islamic Republic of Iran. United Nations. 2019.

<sup>239</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Pakistan. United Nations. 2023.

ministers have taken the place of legislation and regulation. There is no freedom of assembly in Afghanistan.<sup>240</sup>

**Iran:** All aspects of Iran's political participation are limited by unelected state officials, who only allow parties that are loyal to the state ideology to operate and choose who can run for election. Women and minority groups are severely underrepresented in politics, and no woman has been allowed to run for president.<sup>241</sup>

**Pakistan:** Political participation in Pakistan exists and is preserved in the structure of government, however, has various factors limiting the ability for people to participate to the fullest extent. The ability for the military to exert power and influence elections, corruption, manipulation by religious extremists diminishing freedom of expression, and lower levels of voting from women and minorities all limit the extend of political participation in Pakistan.<sup>242</sup>

### Accountability

**Afghanistan:** There is limited information regarding measures taken by the de facto authorities to investigate reports of human rights violations and hold perpetrators to account and a general climate of impunity prevails.<sup>243</sup> IEA's judiciary is staffed by Taliban and supporters who are considered sufficiently reliable by the regime implying the absence of rule of law.<sup>244</sup> The suspension of the role of prosecutors and reorientation of the role of the former Attorney-General's Office also effectively ended the work of its International Crimes Directorate.<sup>245</sup> Moreover, media freedom is severely restricted under the Taliban and is reinforced through threats and violence.<sup>246</sup> Shortly after their takeover of the country, the de facto authorities seized control of the premises of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which they purported to abolish by decree in May 2022.<sup>247</sup> In response, UN has appointed a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan who will be supported through the Danish Transition programme.<sup>248</sup>

**Iran:** Government accountability in Iran is severely limited. Media is restricted by the government and activists or opposing politicians face arbitrary detention. Reformist politicians have faced house arrests without charges, media bans, and expulsion from running in elections.<sup>249</sup>

**Pakistan:** Although there are various safeguards to ensure government accountability, the use of these safeguards is highly selective. Discussion of corruption and accountability is continued in section 7.

### Non-discrimination

**Afghanistan:** As discussed in the beginning of Section 4, the Taliban has engaged in discrimination against women and girls, members of ethnic minority groups, and LGBT+ people. More specifically regarding gender, women's employment opportunities have been severely curtailed.<sup>250</sup> Gender is discussed further in the following section.

**Iran:** Discrimination in Iran is widespread and exists both socially and within the legal system, as discussed in the beginning of section 4. Gender is discussed in the following section, but women and girls in Iran generally face high levels of discrimination and violence.

**Pakistan:** Pakistan has passed multiple anti-discrimination laws to protect minority ethnicities and religions, women and girls, and LGBTQ+ members, however, in practice these issues persist, as discussed in the beginning of the section.

### Transparency

Transparency will be discussed further in Chapter 7. In general, there is no transparency in Taliban governance and decision-making in Afghanistan. In Iran, transparency is severely limited by the government, and in Pakistan transparency is moderately limited due to military actions.

<sup>240</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>241</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>242</sup> Freedom in the World, Pakistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>243</sup> Situation of human rights in Afghanistan. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. OHCHR. 2023.

<sup>244</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>245</sup> Situation of human rights in Afghanistan. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. OHCHR. 2023.

<sup>246</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>247</sup> Situation of human rights in Afghanistan. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. OHCHR. 2023.

<sup>248</sup> Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan. OHCHR. n.d.

<sup>249</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>250</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025. UN. 2023.



## Gender

According to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report, Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan are all at the bottom of the regional and global ranking tables when it comes to gender parity, and the attempts to ensuring the rights and protection of women and girls have either been unsuccessful or non-existent.

**Afghanistan.** Constituting 49.5% of the country's population,<sup>251</sup> Afghan women and girls find themselves in a highly vulnerable situation since the Taliban's takeover. The de facto regime has passed a series of regulations excluding women from the social, political, and economic life of the country. The decrees limit their movements, dictate their appearance, restrict their access to economic opportunities and services such as education and employment, and severely suppress their participation in civic space and social and political life.<sup>252</sup> Additional regulations were enforced which banned girls from higher education and employment in NGOs and IOs,<sup>253</sup> followed by a new ban on beauty salons, which had previously represented a space for freedom, social interaction, and a crucial income source for many Afghan families. This led to 60,000 women losing their jobs.<sup>254</sup> As a result, women and children were projected to constitute 77% of the 28.3 million Afghan people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023.<sup>255</sup> Most Afghan women have very limited or no access to essential services and healthcare and are the most at-risk group for droughts and food insecurity. They are also likely to be coerced into early marriages and to be victims of diverse forms of gender-based violence.<sup>256</sup> Out of 146 countries, Afghanistan ranks last on the Global Gender Gap report<sup>257, 258</sup> In response to these rights infringements, many Western countries and International Organisations have cut or frozen their aid to the country as well as suspended their operations.<sup>259</sup> However, these responses and the current restrictive policies made it harder to provide aid to the women and girls in need of humanitarian assistance, notably to those located in rural areas. The activities of civil society, NGOs, human rights advocates, and the media have also been impacted by restrictions, which have a negative impact on civic space and freedom of expression.<sup>260</sup> Additionally, drug use and HIV infections are becoming more prevalent among women and girls.<sup>261</sup> Furthermore, minorities that identify as sexual, gender, or religious are in a vulnerable position as well due to the Taliban regime's restrictive policies and persecution of these groups.<sup>262</sup>

**Iran.** As one out of six countries<sup>263</sup>, who have yet to sign the Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW), the lack of commitment of the Iranian Government to the protection and promotion of women, is shattering. Iranian women face discrimination regarding marriage, divorce, child custody, clothing veiling regulations, education, and public space inclusion.<sup>264</sup> The nation-wide uprising (later global uprising) in the wake of the death of Mahsa Jina Amini in September 2022 was the culmination of decades of structural and institutional oppression of women.<sup>265</sup> In February 2023, Iran was expelled from the UN Commission on the Status of Women, after the world witnessed the violent crackdown by the Iranian authorities and regime on the women-led protest movement.<sup>266</sup> Additionally, issues of child marriage, marital rape, and domestic violence and murder prevail in Iran with minimal to no legal protections<sup>267</sup>; moreover, women face barriers to political inclusion and are underrepresented in positions of political power<sup>268</sup> (only 6 % of parliamentary seats were held by women in 2022)<sup>269</sup> Out of 146 countries, Iran ranks 143rd on the Global Gender Gap report<sup>270</sup>, and only 15 % of the labour force was female in 2022.<sup>271</sup>

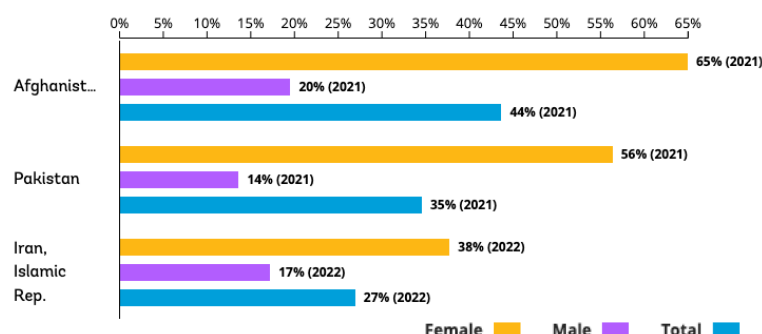
**Pakistan.** Despite having adopted various key international commitments to gender equality and women's human rights and having made several national and local commitments, as well as having embedded the promotion and protection of women in the Constitution of the country<sup>272</sup>, Pakistan is still significantly behind. The country places at the bottom of the regional and global ranking tables when it comes to gender parity – alongside Iran and Afghanistan. Pakistan is ranked 142 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, with Iran following as number 143, and Afghanistan as the very last one.<sup>273</sup> Gaps are evident in nearly every sector but are particularly wide for economic/political participation, education and health<sup>274</sup>; e.g., as of 2022, only 20 percent of parliamentary seats were held by women in Pakistan<sup>275</sup>, and in the same year, only 25 percent of the Pakistani waged labour force was female.<sup>276</sup> Gender issues in Pakistan largely centre around violence towards women and girls. The Domestic Violence Bill (2021) was passed but not enacted by the National Assembly; meanwhile, the issue of violence against women in Pakistan is being

continually highlighted as an issue, although convictions remain low.<sup>277</sup> 40% of women in Pakistan who have been married have experienced spousal abuse at some point.<sup>278</sup>

## Youth

The number of youth not involved in education, training, or employment is an issue of concern across the region, with statistics showing a quarter to over-half of youth not involved. Youth inclusion is most unfavourable in Afghanistan and amongst refugees in Iran and Pakistan. It is important to note that girls face higher barriers to education and are 45 percentage points higher than boys in the share that is not involved in education, training, or employment.<sup>279</sup>

Figure 3: Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total (% of youth population). The World Bank. 2023.



**Afghanistan.** As of 2023, the estimated median age in Afghanistan is 19.9 years.<sup>280</sup> The share of young people not in education, employment, or training as of 2021 was 61.8%, representing the 2nd highest rate worldwide.<sup>281</sup> In 2023, UNICEF reported that around 8.7 million children required educational support, 7.2 million individuals needed nutrition assistance, and 7.5 million children and caregivers were in need of protection services.<sup>282</sup> In 2022 the youth constituted 47% of refugees and asylum-seekers, and 58% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the country.<sup>283</sup> The current de facto regime does not seem to hold an agenda for the Afghan youth, especially for girls who are gradually excluded from education, employment, political and public life.<sup>284</sup> In 2021, 42% of people aged 15 to 24 lacked education, were unemployed, or not enrolled in any type of vocational training.<sup>285</sup> Moreover, 1.1 million secondary girls have been prohibited from attending secondary school since March 2022, resulting in a 60% decline in enrolment.<sup>286</sup> Major difficulties for Afghan youth include those related to immigration, education, employment, health, their involvement in decision-making bodies, and high rates of child marriage and insecurity. Despite the existence of a National Youth Strategy, the situation has worsened due to elevated corruption levels, insecurity, unemployment, and poverty, particularly following the Taliban's rise to power in 2021.<sup>287</sup>

<sup>251</sup> Population, female (% of total population) – Afghanistan. The World Bank. 2022.

<sup>252</sup> Afghanistan: Risk and Resilience Assessment. The World Bank. 2021.

<sup>253</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023–2025. UN. 2023.

<sup>254</sup> Afghanistan's beauty salons ordered to close as Taliban's ban takes effect. ABC News. 2023.

<sup>255</sup> Afghanistan: Humanitarian Update, June 2023. OCHA. 2023.

<sup>256</sup> Statement from CARE Afghanistan's Deputy Country Director, Marianne O'Grady. CARE. 2021.

<sup>257</sup> The Global Gender Gap report considers the dimensions of economic opportunity, education, health, and political empowerment.

<sup>258</sup> World Economic Forum. World Gender Gap Report. 2023.

<sup>259</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework For Afghanistan 2023–2025. UN. 2023.

<sup>260</sup> Afghanistan: Risk and Resilience Assessment. The World Bank. 2021.

<sup>261</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>263</sup> UN Human Rights Treaty Body, OHCHR. n.d.

<sup>264</sup> Amnesty International Report 2022/23. Amnesty International. 2023

<sup>265</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> *Iran: The Politics of Women's Rights and Hypocrisy.* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2023

<sup>267</sup> Amnesty International Report 2022/23. Amnesty International. 2023

<sup>268</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>269</sup> Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%). World Bank Data Portal. 2024.

<sup>270</sup> World Economic Forum. World Gender Gap Report. 2023.

<sup>271</sup> Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+). World Bank Data Portal. 2024.

<sup>272</sup> CEDAW (2018). CEDAW Fifth Periodic Review, October 23, 2018, United Nations.

<sup>273</sup> World Economic Forum. World Gender Gap Report 2023.

<sup>274</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%). World Bank Data Portal. 2024.

<sup>276</sup> Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+). World Bank Data Portal. 2024

<sup>277</sup> Amnesty International Report 2022/23. Amnesty International. 2023

<sup>278</sup> Gender-based Violence. UNFPA. n.d.

<sup>279</sup> Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total (% of youth population). The World Bank. 2023.

<sup>280</sup> Afghanistan. CIA. 2023.

<sup>281</sup> Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total (% of youth population). The World Bank. 2023.

<sup>282</sup> Humanitarian Action for Children, Afghanistan. UNICEF. 2023.

<sup>283</sup> Afghanistan situation. UNHCR. 2023.

<sup>284</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework For Afghanistan 2023–2025. UN. 2023.

<sup>285</sup> National Youth Policy Review: Afghanistan. Ammar, A. 2021.

<sup>286</sup> Protecting Education in Afghanistan. UNESCO. 2023.

<sup>287</sup> National Youth Policy Review: Afghanistan. Ammar, A. 2021.

**Iran.** As of 2023, the estimated median age in 33.3 years,<sup>288</sup> a significantly higher statistic than in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The share of young people not in education, employment, or training as of 2021 was 27.5%.<sup>289</sup> Additionally, it appears that Iran does not have a national youth development strategy or policy at this time. Human rights and gender equality are an issue that Iran's youth have been attempting to address, as recent 2022 protests were largely led by youth and women.<sup>290</sup> Other issues commonly cited that disproportionately impact youth include the lack of employment opportunities and the economy. We can additionally note that young refugees in Iran are likely to have youth issues exacerbated by additional issues that refugees often face, such as resource access.

**Pakistan.** As of 2023, the estimated median age in Pakistan is 22.7 years.<sup>291</sup> The share of young people not in education, employment, or training as of 2021 was 34.6%.<sup>292</sup> Importantly, there is a governmental focus on youth development in Pakistan, with the creation of “Prime Minister's Kamyab Jawan Program” in 2018, which aimed to focus on education, employment, and engagement of youth in Pakistan.<sup>293</sup> Despite a governmental programme for youth, youth in Pakistan still face major issues of illiteracy, lack of access to quality education, lack of social engagement, and lack of skill training and employment.<sup>294</sup> Furthermore, amongst refugees the IFRP has been reported to have created a climate of fear amongst refugees, disincentivising school attendance.<sup>295</sup>

## 5. Migration

**Can the context be characterized as a country of origin, transit or destination and/or with a significant displacement/migration situation?**

As of December 2022, Afghanistan had a recorded number of more than 6.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), with approximately 4.4 million attributed to conflict and violence.<sup>296</sup> Additionally, around 220,000 individuals were displaced due to natural disasters during the same year, primarily caused by floods and droughts.<sup>297</sup> In 2022, the country counted approximately 1.1 million individuals who returned across borders. Notably, nearly half of the returnees from Pakistan and Iran in 2023 were children, as reported by UNOCHA.<sup>298</sup> Since 2021, a significant number of Afghans have sought refuge abroad. The primary destinations are neighbouring countries, with Iran and Pakistan hosting around 4.5 million and 3.1 million Afghan individuals, respectively, as of 2024, each with varying legal status.<sup>299</sup>

Afghan refugees in Iran hail from the Herat (43%), Faryab (34%), and Takhar (23%) regions situated in the western part of the country. Afghan refugees in Pakistan primarily originate from the Nangarhar (42%),

Figure 4: Number of Afghans in Iran and Pakistan as of March 2024. Source: UNHCR Operations Data Portal, Afghanistan Situation

Zabul (31%), and Kunduz (27%) provinces located in the eastern part of the country.<sup>300</sup>



<sup>288</sup> Iran. CIA. 2023

<sup>289</sup> Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total (% of youth population). The World Bank. 2023

<sup>290</sup> Iranian youth and the protest movement in 2023: Drivers and limitations. Middle East Institute. 2024.

<sup>291</sup> Pakistan. CIA. 2023.

<sup>292</sup> Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total (% of youth population). The World Bank. 2023.

<sup>293</sup> A Study of Youth Policies in Pakistan. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development And Transparency. 2020.

<sup>294</sup> Unleashing the potential of a young Pakistan. UNDP. 2018.

<sup>295</sup> UNHCR, project proposal, March 2024

<sup>296</sup> Afghanistan Overview. IDMC. 2023.

<sup>297</sup> ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Afghanistan: Snapshot of Population Movements (January to June 2023) June 2023. OCHA. 2023.

<sup>299</sup> Afghanistan situation data. UNHCR. 2024.

<sup>300</sup> Afghanistan July 2022, Baseline Mobility Assessment & Emergency Community-Based Needs Assessment. IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. 2022.

## How does the migration/displacement situation influence the development of the country, the public debate and policy decisions related to migration?

The increasing number of refugees from Afghanistan in recent years exacerbated resource strain in Iran and Pakistan, leading to negative Afghan sentiments and changing policies towards Afghan refugees in the countries. In recent months, both Iran and Pakistan have become more strict with their policies towards Afghan refugees, leading to increased forced repatriations.

**Afghanistan.** The continuous displacement situation significantly impacts the country's development, as it leads to a substantial outflow of both workforce and capital, which has caused a significant loss of skills and knowledge in Afghanistan for decades. In 2022, Afghanistan witnessed the return of approximately 1.1 million individuals from neighbouring countries, however, these returnees face considerable challenges, including elevated levels of insecurity and the looming risk of involuntary evictions,<sup>301</sup> as well as difficulties regarding employment and socioeconomic circumstances.<sup>302</sup>

**Iran.** The 2023 Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) highlighted that Iranian authorities are tightening up on access and that arrest, detention, and deportation of Afghans without required documentation is likely to continue. From March to September 2022 there were an estimated 231,000 returnees to Afghanistan, of which 58.5% were forced returns.<sup>303</sup> In 2023, an estimated 691,000 Afghans were deported from Iran.<sup>304</sup> There is thus a need for more accessible, transparent and fair asylum procedures – and access to documentation is a key priority as it opens possibilities for protection and service provision. A further concern is the deterioration in livelihood opportunities, which reduces household income and results in many being unable to afford the renewal of Amayesh cards and health insurance premiums.

**Pakistan.** While Afghan refugees in employment contribute to the economy, their large numbers and prolonged stay nonetheless adds an additional load to an already overburdened system.<sup>305</sup> This is prompting changes in the official and public attitudes towards Afghan refugees; a prominent example of which is the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' which was launched in October 2023. Since then, over 500,000 Afghans have left the country, of which 88% were undocumented.<sup>306</sup> Data indicates that the most common reason cited for Afghan repatriation is fear of arrest in Pakistan, which was said by 89% of returnees.<sup>307</sup> Furthermore, surveys indicate that over 98% of those voluntarily leaving Pakistan for Afghanistan are doing so because of concerns relating to deportation (sparked by the Repatriation Plan) and the risk of xenophobia.<sup>308</sup> There are additional reports of police abuse, detentions, seized livestock, and destroyed identification documents.<sup>309</sup> As in Iran, therefore, documentation is regarded as a key protection tool in Pakistan enabling documented refugees to access services. Without appropriate documentation, Afghan refugees are more vulnerable to a range of protection and livelihood issues.

## Does the migration/displacement situation affect the national communities? How do displaced persons and host communities interact?

Issues of integration, economic livelihoods, asset building, stigma, and discrimination persist across the region for refugees and returnees. Despite this, positive experiences of refugee and host-community interactions have been recorded, as integration has been an ongoing process over multiple decades.

**Afghanistan.** As of November 2023, returnees from the Pakistan border have increased to around 17,000 returnees per day, increasing the need for resources and infrastructure.<sup>310</sup> Returning refugees and the large number of internally displaced add to the pre-existing stresses of local communities in Afghanistan which

<sup>301</sup> Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan. OCHA. 2023.

<sup>302</sup> Will the Taliban's Takeover Lead to a New Refugee Crisis from Afghanistan?. MPI. 2021.

<sup>303</sup> Iran – Situation of Afghan Refugees. European Union Agency for Asylum. 2022. Pajhwok Afghan News, Iran forcibly expels over 135,000 Afghans in 6 months, 11 September 2022

<sup>304</sup> External Update: Afghanistan Situation #32. Unhcr Regional Bureau For Asia And Pacific (RBAP). 2024.

<sup>305</sup> Relief International (2024). Country Snapshot: Pakistan. (received from RI via email).

<sup>306</sup> UNHCR-IOM Flash Update #16. UNHCR; IOM. 2024.

<sup>307</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>308</sup> Return tracer report, 2023. Save the Children International.

<sup>309</sup> Pakistan: Widespread Abuses Force Afghans to Leave. Human Rights Watch. 2023.

<sup>310</sup> Desperate Afghan returnees from Pakistan face uncertain future: IOM. UN News. 2023.

increases the vulnerability of all groups.<sup>311</sup> Most returnees return to their provinces of origin and are accepted by their communities, but their presence creates additional demand for basic services (including psychosocial support, livelihoods support, and food security) that are no longer available. Amongst host communities, 61% of respondents consider that their own livelihood opportunities have declined, a finding that was largely mirrored by the returnees themselves (46% saying that no opportunities were available).<sup>312</sup> Returnees to their area of origin in Afghanistan had worries of lack of assets, outstanding debts to pay, and social stigma regarding their perceived lack of success.<sup>313</sup> Female returnees to Afghanistan have limited reintegration options due to policies limiting their rights to work, obtain an education, and be in public spaces. As of March 2024, there have been approximately 470,788 total returnees from Pakistan to Afghanistan, as well as roughly 691,000 deportations from Iran in 2023 alone.<sup>314</sup>

**Iran.** The continuous economic crisis in Iran, has contributed to a rise in xenophobic sentiments towards Afghan refugees, as there is a tendency to blame the refugees for the increased national burden.<sup>315</sup> Research shows that during times of economic hardship in Iran, social cohesion between host communities and Afghan refugees is hurt, and inequality increases at both inter and intra-community levels.<sup>316</sup> Amongst young people in Iran, however, a 2023 study concluded that Afghan school students had been seamlessly integrated into Iranian classrooms, and that most or all students and teachers had non-discriminatory attitudes.<sup>317</sup> Despite the social cohesion within schools, some parents interviewed shows prejudice against Afghan children attending Iranian schools, as well as the overall effect of Afghan refugees on the economy and labour market.<sup>318</sup> Furthermore, resentment,<sup>319</sup> poor treatment,<sup>320</sup> and ethnic profiling<sup>321</sup> of Afghan refugees in Iran have been reported throughout 2022 as unemployment rates increase in Iran.<sup>322</sup> UNHCR note that the limited livelihoods opportunities increase the risks of poverty and - exacerbated by the combined impact of high inflation and economic sanctions - continue to drive needs for Afghan refugees and the host communities alike.<sup>323</sup> Afghans in Iran face barriers in accessing livelihood opportunities and employment because of restrictions on access to certain job categories, lack of insurance, and lack of documentation.<sup>324</sup> A central concern is the lack of documentation, which restricts access to services, such as education and health, as well as decent jobs. Lack of documentation also raises the risk of involuntary return and movement restrictions.<sup>325</sup>

**Pakistan.** Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, Pakistan reportedly voiced ambivalence about accepting Afghan refugees and has not offered an official welcome.<sup>326</sup> A 2021 study found that “the overall strong social cohesion that had existed between Afghans and Pakistani hosts was decreasing”.<sup>327</sup> The Pakistani government preceding the recent government of Imran Khan had contributed to this development by supporting a discourse that associated Afghan refugees with terrorism and security issues in Pakistan.<sup>328</sup> In the current political and economic context, despite some Afghans in Pakistan feel treated as equals by their host communities<sup>329</sup>, the large numbers of refugees and their prolonged stay adds an additional load to an already overburdened system, prompting changes in the official and public attitudes towards them. Surveys indicate that over 98% of those voluntarily leaving Pakistan for Afghanistan are doing so because of concerns relating to deportation (sparked by the Repatriation Plan) and the risk of xenophobia.<sup>330</sup> There are reports of police abuse, detentions, seized livestock, and destroyed identification documents.<sup>331</sup>

<sup>311</sup> Afghanistan HNRP, 2024

<sup>312</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> Post-return experiences in Afghanistan: perceptions of the 'rightless' on failed reintegration policies and their paths from returnees to internally displaced persons (IDPs). Maira Omar; University of South-Eastern Norway. 2020.

<sup>314</sup> External Update: Afghanistan Situation #32. UNHCR Regional Bureau For Asia And Pacific (RBAP). 2024.

<sup>315</sup> Iran - Situation of Afghan Refugees. EUAA. 2022.

<sup>316</sup> How Do Shared Experiences of Economic Shocks Impact Refugees and Host Communities? Evidence from Afghan Refugees in Iran. Mohammad Hoseini & Mahsa Jahan Dideh; World Bank Group. 2022.

<sup>317</sup> Integration into host community at schools: study on Afghan refugee students' interactions with the Iranian community. Majid Komasi. 2023.

<sup>318</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> Refugees face increased racism and discrimination. Fair Planet. 2022.

<sup>320</sup> Afghan Refugees in Iran Complain of Harassment. TOLONews. 2022.

<sup>321</sup> Afghan Immigrant's Deadly Knife Attack on Clerics in Iran Fuels a Crisis. New York Times. 2022.

<sup>322</sup> Iran – Situation of Afghan Refugees. European Union Agency for Asylum. 2022.

<sup>323</sup> UNHCR (2023a). Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan, 2023. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistan-situation-RRRP>

<sup>324</sup> RRRP 2023

<sup>325</sup> ACAPS, 2024

<sup>326</sup> Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan, TRAFIG working paper no. 7, August 2021. Mielke, K. et al. 2021; Pakistan – Situation of Afghan Refugees. EUAA. 2022.

<sup>327</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>328</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> Understanding the Relationship Between Refugees and the Host Community Through Afghan Refugees' Lived Experiences in Pakistan. Beenish Malik, Novel Lyndon, and Vivien W.C. Yew. 2020

<sup>330</sup> Return tracer report, 2023. Save the Children International.

<sup>331</sup> Pakistan: Widespread Abuses Force Afghans to Leave. Human Rights Watch. 2023.

**Is migration (including communities affected by migration) considered in the national development strategy (or equivalent)?**

Migration is not considered a national development strategy in any of the countries of interest.

**Afghanistan.** At the moment, migration is not considered a priority in the national development strategy. However, prior to the Taliban's takeover, migration occupied a more prominent position. The former Afghan government adopted a Comprehensive Migration Policy in June 2019 funded by the EU and implemented by ICMPD.<sup>332</sup> Additionally, the former government adopted a National Labour Migration Strategy spanning from 2018 to 2022.<sup>333</sup> Nonetheless, after the Taliban took power, the effectiveness and application of these measures were called into question.

**Iran & Pakistan.** Migration is not currently considered within Iran's National Development Plan or Pakistan's National Development Plan.

**Is institutional capacity building in the target countries, or migration policy/cooperation, envisaged (national/regional/local levels)? Does the country have a migration/asylum/border management/reintegration strategy and does the action contribute to its implementation?**

Despite the openness of Pakistan and Iran to Afghan refugees in the past, both countries have recently developed stricter migration policies due to resource strain and escalation of conflicts as a result of the increased migration of refugees since 2021. Repatriation policies in Iran and Pakistan have been described early in this section.

**Afghanistan.** Migration policies were in place during the previous government's tenure; however, migration policies appear to be lacking under the Taliban's rule.

**Iran.** Although Iran has welcomed millions of Afghans and provided access to education and health care, economic challenges, coupled with a greater influx of Afghan refugees in Iran, have made continued open policies and increased capacity building uncertain in the future.<sup>334</sup> The government of Iran appears to have less formal strategies regarding integration, asylum, and capacity building, however, organizations such as UNHCR are working towards solutions to better the livelihoods of Afghan refugees in Iran, as well as their host communities.

**Pakistan.** In 2009, Pakistan implemented the Refugee-affected and Hosting Areas Programme, aimed at increasing the social cohesion between Afghan refugees and Pakistani host communities, as well as mitigating the potential financial, environmental, and social effects of increased refugee inflows.<sup>335</sup> The main coordination structure is the Pakistan Refugee Consultative Forum (PRCF), which is co-chaired by the Government of Pakistan and UNHCR. A Refugee Inter-Sector Working Group provides working-level coordination. Compared to Iran, there are significantly more organisations available in Pakistan. The RRRP, for example, includes 56 partners.

**Do migrants face barriers and challenges in accessing services (social, healthcare, education, financial etc.) and to jobs?**

While refugees in the region of interest have largely obtained social support in Iran and Pakistan, the greater influx of migrants in recent years has created a more precarious situation for both migrants and host communities, as resource strain and anti-immigration policy has developed. Particularly, refugees without proper documentation face limitations to the services they can receive and have a risk of deportation, however, the upcoming second phase of Pakistan's IFRP will affect Afghans with documentation as well.

<sup>332</sup> The potential of migration for development in Afghanistan. Government of Afghanistan. 2019.

<sup>333</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Annual Results Report 2022, Islamic Republic of Iran. UNHCR. 2022.

<sup>335</sup> Refugee-affected and hosting areas. UNHCR. 2024.

**Afghanistan.** The majority of Afghan refugees are concentrated in Iran and Pakistan, where they, despite various refugees policies and initiatives, encounter difficulties and discrimination in accessing essential services and employment. Iran and Pakistan already face challenges in providing adequate access to services such as healthcare, education, and social support, for their own citizens, so the accessibility of these services for Afghan refugees is limited.<sup>336</sup> Furthermore, their ability to participate in the formal labour market within their host nations is restricted; as such, Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan engage in wage labour considered high risk, particularly strenuous, or occupations considered low-ranked. Afghan women and girls are particularly susceptible to these challenges, experiencing limited access to services and higher rates of unemployment, noticeable both in Iran and Pakistan.<sup>337</sup> Meanwhile, returnees to Afghanistan have likely faced increased challenges accessing services, as World Bank data shows that in Afghanistan government expenditure on key sectors (including education and health) has declined significantly, in a number of cases by over 90%, since 2019 and that recurrent expenditure on infrastructure has almost ceased.<sup>338</sup> Furthermore, while the health system has narrowly avoided collapse, 13.3 million people have no access to health care, largely due to the lack of infrastructure, coupled with high costs.<sup>339</sup>

**Iran.** Iran has traditionally accommodated refugees and seasonal migrants (mostly young men) from Afghanistan with which there are also linguistic and cultural linkages. Free healthcare and schooling are available for all children and, as a result, around 730,000 Afghan children were enrolled in Iranian schools in 2022-23. As very few Afghan refugees live in camps (approximately 1%), the vast majority live in urban areas side-by-side with Iranian citizens. Nonetheless, the deteriorating Iranian economy and its effects on social services is stressing this relationship and observers note a change in the official and public attitude towards the Afghan community.<sup>340</sup> An indicator of this change is the high number of deportations of undocumented Afghans by the Iranian authorities – which, according to official sources, amounted to over 350,000 in 2023. Thus, while Iran's refugee policies have been very inclusive, assessments indicate that Afghans are likely to be particularly exposed to negative socio-economic dynamics.

Additionally, access depends heavily on the individual's registration status and identification documents held. Those who hold an Amayesh card, have access to education, health, and the labour market; Non-Amayesh card holders – notably “headcounted” populations and “blue card” holders – have much lower access to services. Meanwhile, undocumented Afghan refugees (of whom UNHCR estimate there are 500,000) are at risk of deportation. In addition, undocumented Afghans cannot apply for temporary work permits, evidently increasing vulnerability to exploitation. The sort of work that tends to be available to Afghans in Iran tends to be within the areas of construction, garbage collection, and agriculture.<sup>341</sup> In addition, access to registration and thereby services, is bound by complex bureaucratic regulations and can incur high costs, placing vulnerable groups at a disadvantage.<sup>342</sup>

**Pakistan.** Pakistan has traditionally had an open-door-policy for Afghans, many of whom share common Pashtu cultural and linguistic roots. Afghans have been able to access both work permits and social services, like health and education; however, 61% of refugees in Pakistan reported having no education.<sup>343</sup> Documentation is regarded as a key protection tool in Pakistan enabling documented refugees to access services. In 2022, the Government of Pakistan and UNHCR identified almost 1.3 million refugees with updated Proof of Registration (PoR) cards and a similar exercise was undertaken with IOM for approximately 831,000 Afghans holding Afghan Citizen Card (ACC cards), leaving an estimated one million are entirely undocumented.<sup>344</sup> Developments, as of April 2024, detail the government's plan to extend the IFRP to ACC card holders as well, putting these additional 831,000 Afghans at risk of deportation, representing a serious human rights violation.<sup>345</sup>

<sup>336</sup> Pakistan – Situation of Afghan Refugees report. EUAA. 2022.

<sup>337</sup> Iran - Situation of Afghan Refugees. EUAA. 2022.

<sup>338</sup> ARTF SG meeting slides, September 2023

<sup>339</sup> Afghanistan: Humanitarian Action for Children. UNICEF. 2023.

<sup>340</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. Iran – situation of Afghan refugees. December 2022

<sup>341</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. Iran – situation of Afghan refugees. December 2022

<sup>342</sup> Non-Public Brief: Potential Impact of Pakistan's “Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan” for Afghan Refugees in Iran. NRC. 2023.

<sup>343</sup> Regional Refugee Response Plan. 2023.

<sup>344</sup> Operational Data Portal: Afghanistan Situation. UNHCR. 2023.

<sup>345</sup> Pakistan: Government must stop ignoring global calls to halt unlawful deportation of Afghan refugees. Amnesty International. 2024.

Afghan refugees generally live alongside their Pakistani host communities and in provinces bordering Afghanistan. While this hospitality is positive, it also means that refugees are generally affected by similar socio-economic and livelihood issues as vulnerable parts of the Pakistani population and it is widely acknowledged that these conditions have become increasingly stressed over the past few years due to the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, record-high food and energy prices, the effects of the 2022 floods, and declining economic activity and real incomes. Reduced labour incomes and food inflation (at around 38%) have contributed to worsening poverty and vulnerability to poverty for the population as a whole.

**Are there sectors, regions or areas in which migrants are especially vulnerable to human trafficking, exploitation, or abuse?**

Refugees are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, exploitation in Iran and Pakistan. Particularly, unaccompanied children and women are the most vulnerable.

**Afghanistan.** Given its fragile context and substantial displacement rates, migrants are at a heightened risk of falling victim to human trafficking.<sup>346</sup> Women and children, who constitute the majority of the displaced population within Afghanistan, find themselves in highly vulnerable situations, including the risk of being subjected to coerced marriages, forced labour, sexual abuse, recruitment as child soldiers, organ harvesting, forced involvement in criminal activities, and being coerced into becoming child or female suicide bombers.<sup>347</sup> Most trafficking victims in Afghanistan are children who have been coerced into labour.<sup>348</sup> International organisation experts have indicated that child labour increased after the Taliban takeover, noting that 25% of children are involved in child labour and that boys are more vulnerable than girls to be victims of trafficking.<sup>349</sup>

**Iran.** Children in Iran, particularly Afghan migrant children, are especially vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and trafficking. Specifically, older Afghan children who have used smugglers to gain transportation to Iran are often forced to work for the smuggler after and are often subjected to work in criminal begging rings, drug trafficking, or sex trafficking.<sup>350</sup> Undocumented or unaccompanied Afghan children are at the highest risk of trafficking, and with the increased number of Afghan migrants in Iran, trafficking of both Afghan children and adults is expected to be an increasingly more common issue.<sup>351</sup>

**Pakistan.** Afghan nationals in Pakistan who have been forced to leave following the new refugee policies in Pakistan, have a high risk of human rights violations, trafficking, and exploitation, according to the UN.<sup>352</sup> Of these Afghans, women and girls, along with minorities, disabled people, and the elderly are most likely to be impacted. Trafficking of Afghans in Pakistan includes being subject to drug production and trafficking, smuggling in border areas, and child sex trafficking.<sup>353</sup>

**Does the country have visa facilitation agreements with the EU and/or with European countries?**

There are no visa facilitation agreements between Afghanistan and the EU or European countries, even though it can be noted that in 2021, EU Members of Parliament highlighted the necessity for a specialized visa programme catering to Afghan women seeking protection.<sup>354</sup> Instead, countries such as Denmark and Sweden decided to grant asylum to all women and girls from Afghanistan in 2023.<sup>355</sup>

**Are there high levels of unemployment and underemployment of migrants?**

<sup>346</sup> Afghanistan renews commitment to address human trafficking and migrant smuggling. UNDOC. 2021.

<sup>347</sup> Human trafficking in Afghan context: Caught between rock and hard place?. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. 2022.

<sup>348</sup> 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iran. US Department of State. 2023.

<sup>349</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>350</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> UN experts call for protection of Afghan nationals in Pakistan. UN Human Rights Office of the High Commission. 2023.

<sup>353</sup> 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Pakistan. US Department of State. 2023.

<sup>354</sup> MEPs call for special visa programme for Afghan women seeking protection. European Parliament. 2021.

<sup>355</sup> Denmark, Sweden Offer Protection to All Women, Girls from Afghanistan. Human Rights Watch. 2023.



Although data on unemployment rates of refugees and returnees in the region of interest is seldom, evidence suggests that income and employment are prominent issues of concern.

**Afghanistan.** Employment rates for Afghan returnees are unknown, however, 85% of returnees surveyed claimed that their main concern upon arrival home was lack of income.<sup>356</sup>

**Iran.** The unemployment rate among Afghan refugees in Iran is 4.8%, a rate much lower than the unemployment level of Iranians in Iran (10.8%). Nonetheless, Afghans are much more likely to be working in unskilled professions in Iran, i.e., low-paying jobs that Iranians are reluctant to take.<sup>357</sup>

**Pakistan.** Although the employment rate of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is not available at this time, evidence suggests that it is difficult for refugees to gain access to the job market.<sup>358</sup>

### **Are environmental degradation or climate impacts influencing migration and mobility?**

Environmental disasters and climate impacts have been large issues across the region, as floods and droughts have negatively impacted agricultural production and caused economic strain and displacement.

**Afghanistan.** Climate-related problems and disasters in an additional driver of migration and displacement in Afghanistan, as environmental issues exacerbate pre-existing drivers of emigration from Afghanistan. More specifically, floods and droughts may decrease livelihoods and agricultural resources, resulting in increased poverty.<sup>359</sup> Additionally, with the Taliban insurgency, water, and food resources to mitigate the effects of climate impacts have decreased.<sup>360</sup> It is difficult to separate environmental, social, political, and economic factors from one another, but it is clear that environmental degradation influences migration.

**Iran.** Climate impacts have further worsened other pre-existing drivers of migration such as resources, agriculture, and poverty in Iran, however, as shown in the following section, displacement due to environmental issues is not as commonplace as in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**Pakistan.** Environmental displacement in Pakistan is almost solely caused by floods, which worsened in 2022 due to the increase in monsoon rainfall.<sup>361</sup> Aside from the increased forced migration, and displacement caused by floods, waterborne diseases and food shortages have further increased forced migration.

### **Have conflict, natural disasters, and other emergencies impacted migration/forced displacement in the country?**

Internal displacement due to disasters is a relevant issue across the whole region of interest, however, is specifically drastic in Afghanistan due to the large number of natural disasters that occurred in 2022.

**Afghanistan.** In 2022, Afghanistan experienced 71 reported disasters events leading 220,000 Afghan people to be displaced.<sup>362</sup> As highlighted by the figure on the right, earthquakes and floods constitute the two most recurrent climate disasters in the country, both contributing to extensive population displacement in 2022.<sup>363</sup> The IDMC reported the displacement of approximately 4.4 million Afghans due to violence and conflicts.<sup>364</sup> Further elaborated in section 6.

<sup>356</sup> Return & Reintegration Protection Risks of Returnees in Afghanistan. Danish Refugee Council. 2023.

<sup>357</sup> How Do Shared Experiences of Economic Shocks Impact Refugees and Host Communities? Evidence from Afghan Refugees in Iran. World Bank Group. 2022.

<sup>358</sup> The impact of Afghan Refugee Influx on Labor Market Outcomes in Pakistan. Maria Faiq Javaid, Sadaf Mohyuddin, Furrakh Bashir, Ismat Nasim. 2022.

<sup>359</sup> Climate Change Compounds Longstanding Displacement in Afghanistan. Migration Policy Institute. 2022.

<sup>360</sup> Climate Change Compounds Longstanding Displacement in Afghanistan. Migration Policy Institute. 2022.

<sup>361</sup> Pakistan's Flood Problem Is Supercharged by Climate Change. Recovery Means Going Beyond Damage Control. International Peace Institute; Emil Marc Havstrup & Pieter Pauw. 2023.

<sup>362</sup> Afghanistan Overview. IDMC. 2024.

<sup>363</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> *ibid.*

**Iran.** In 2022, Iran experienced 5 environmental disasters, most of which were floods, leading to 42,000 internally displaced people.<sup>365</sup> No data was found regarding internally displaced people in Iran specifically as a result of conflict or violence.

**Pakistan.** In 2022, Pakistan experienced 17 reported environmental disasters, all of which were severe floods, leading to the internal displacement of roughly 8.2 million people.<sup>366</sup> Alongside the internal displacement due to environmental disasters, Pakistan has a total of 21,000 internally displaced people due to conflict and violence.<sup>367</sup>

### **Are there opportunities for migrants and diaspora to transfer their knowledge and skills?**

Since the 1980s, skill and knowledge drain in Afghanistan has been prominent, as wealthier, or more skilled Afghans were more likely to emigrate. This phenomenon has continued into the 2010s and 2020s, however, changes in Afghanistan's political and social landscape following the Taliban insurgency in 2021 appear to have changed the potential for knowledge sharing amongst returnees. A 2011 study on the effectiveness of temporary return programmes exemplified that many returnees focused on using their skills to contribute to education and improve women's rights.<sup>368</sup> Presently, however, opportunities for migrants and diasporas to transfer their knowledge and skills appear to be lacking due to the lack of constructive relationships between communities.<sup>369</sup> Women returnees to Afghanistan who may have worked and learned skills while in Iran or Pakistan have little ability to transfer knowledge once returned to Afghanistan, as women are severely restricted from public spaces, as previously discussed.

### **Are remittances an important percentage of the GDP? Are the costs of sending remittances above the SDG 10 target?**

In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, remittances are an important percentage of the GDP, however, the cost of sending remittances remains above the SDG target in both countries.

**Afghanistan.** In 2020, Afghanistan received an estimated total of USD 788.9 million in remittances, making up nearly 4.1% of the GDP.<sup>370</sup> However, the security changes in 2021 led to a decrease in remittances USD to 300 million annually, representing only 2.05% of the country's GDP.<sup>371</sup> As of 2020, the cost of sending remittances to Afghanistan was 9.89%, well above the SDG 10 target.<sup>372</sup> The flow of remittances is also affected by the country's international isolation, which impacts the financial market and has compelled users to explore alternative methods for transferring money into the country.<sup>373</sup> Remarkably, around 90% of Afghanistan's financial transactions are conducted through the informal hawala system.<sup>374</sup>

**Iran.** Data on remittances to Iran has not been recorded since 2004.

**Pakistan.** In 2022, remittances in Pakistan made about roughly 8% of the GDP.<sup>375</sup> In 2022, however, this number grew to about 20% of the GDP, at about 31 billion USD in remittances to Pakistan.<sup>376</sup> This growing number is partially due to the ongoing political and economic crisis, as there has been a surge in remittance outflows from Afghanistan to Pakistan.<sup>377</sup> The cost of sending remittances to Pakistan was last recorded at 4.0% in 2020, slightly above the SDG 10 target.<sup>378</sup>

<sup>365</sup> Iran Overview. IDMC. 2024.

<sup>366</sup> Pakistan Overview. IDMC. 2024.

<sup>367</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> The Role of the Diaspora in Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building in Post-Conflict Settings: The Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals to Afghanistan. Katie Kuschminder; Maastricht Graduate School of Governance. 2011.

<sup>369</sup> The Constructive and Destructive Role of Afghanistan's Diaspora. Wilson Center; Mirwais Balkhi. 2023.

<sup>370</sup> Remittances to and from Afghanistan. Migration Data Portal. 2022.

<sup>371</sup> Personal remittances received (% of GDP) – Afghanistan. The World Bank. 2021.

<sup>372</sup> Average transaction cost of sending remittances to a specific country (%). The World Bank. 2020.

<sup>373</sup> Afghanistan, Remittances: the scale and role of private financial transfers. ACAPS. 2023.

<sup>374</sup> Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis. Migration Data Portal. 2022.

<sup>375</sup> Personal remittances received (% of GDP). The World Bank. 2024.

<sup>376</sup> A War In A Pandemic, Migration and Development Brief 36. The World Bank; Ratha, et al. May 2022.

<sup>377</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>378</sup> Average transaction cost of sending remittances to a specific country (%). World Bank. 2024.

## 6. Inclusive sustainable growth, climate change and environment

### Impact of climate change and environmental degradation on development

Climate change is a relevant issue across the region and has led to increased food and water insecurity, displacement due to disasters, and has compounded pre-existing economic and social issues.

**Afghanistan.** The climate crisis has precipitated a humanitarian emergency, prominently manifesting in a severe food scarcity crisis that impacts over half of Afghanistan's population, particularly children. 18.9 million people were estimated to face high levels of acute food insecurity between June and November 2022.<sup>379</sup> According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 80% of the conflicts in the country are linked to disputes over natural resources.<sup>380</sup>

The country's most significant industry is agriculture, which provides a source of income for more than 60% of the population.<sup>381</sup> However, farmers are affected by the consequences of natural disasters such as heavy rains and drought, which occurred in 33 of 34 provinces in 2022.<sup>382</sup> Moreover, Afghanistan is prone to recurrent earthquakes, with three major quakes occurring in Badghis Province, the South-eastern Region, and Kunar Province in 2022.<sup>383</sup> Severe or catastrophic drought affected more than 50% of the population in 25 of the 34 provinces in 2022, with 14 provinces classified as high-priority areas, according to an OCHA report.<sup>384</sup> Consequently, as of 2022, around 60% of Afghan households are grappling with difficulties in accessing water. Due to their heightened vulnerability attributed to factors such as food insecurity, inadequate dietary practices, prevailing cultural norms, and limited access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and healthcare services, women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the consequences of natural disasters. This environmental adversity significantly affects children's access to healthcare and education, and contributes to malnutrition. According to UNICEF, approximately 2.3 million children, and 840,000 pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers are expected to experience malnutrition in 2023.<sup>385</sup> In addition, the climate crisis has accelerated the illegal drug trade, as opium poppy cultivation requires less water than other crops, presenting a more dependable source of agricultural income for impoverished farming families.<sup>386</sup>

**Iran.** The adverse effects of climate-related disasters and emergencies, such as earthquakes, drought and floods, have also played a role in the increasing poverty levels in Iran.<sup>387</sup> An increase in the frequency and severity of dry spells in the last decade has made arable lands unavailable to grow crops, consequently, leaving many people without work and livelihood options.<sup>388</sup> Such disasters can also lead to displacement, internal migration, and destruction of properties, infrastructure and entire livelihoods.

The combined effects of climate-related disasters, US sanctions and COVID-19 aftermaths, have added significant pressure on Iran's economy, intensifying the challenges faced by refugees and citizens in Iran alike. Although poverty has increased across the country, the rural-urban disparity gap has widened, and the poor population is increasingly concentrated in rural areas. The depth of poverty has also increased, as rural inhabitants have cut back significantly on their consumption in response to high inflation and overall deteriorating economic conditions.<sup>389</sup> Inevitably, this puts a massive strain on the Iranian people, their livelihoods, the system and its ability to continue to sustain a growing number of people arriving in Iran every day. Without a doubt, this is also the reality for the many Afghan refugees residing in the border cities of Iran – who, to a bigger or lesser extent, rely entirely on the support of the Iranian government.

<sup>379</sup> Afghanistan National SMART Survey Report, April-October 2022. Afghanistan Nutrition Cluster. 2023.

<sup>380</sup> How climate change helped strengthen the Taliban. CBS News. 2021.

<sup>381</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>382</sup> Taliban Restrictions on Women's Rights Deepen Afghanistan's Crisis Asia Report N°329. International Crisis Group. 2023.

<sup>383</sup> How climate change helped strengthen the Taliban. CBS News. 2021.

<sup>384</sup> Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan. OCHA. 2023

<sup>385</sup> Children bearing the brunt of Afghanistan crisis: UNICEF. UN News. 2023.

<sup>386</sup> Climate, Peace and Security Factsheet: Afghanistan. NUPRI & SIPRI. 2022.

<sup>387</sup> Fact Sheet: NCR's Operations in Iran. NRC. 2023.

<sup>388</sup> Iran Poverty Diagnostic: Poverty and Shared Prosperity. World Bank. 2023.

<sup>389</sup> World Bank. Iran Poverty Diagnostic: Poverty and Shared Prosperity. 2023.

**Pakistan.** Devastating floods in Pakistan in 2022 affected 33 million people and displaced half a million. Forty-one of the affected districts were homes to an estimated 800,000 Afghan refugees. The floods caused severe damage and loss for millions of people. Meanwhile, a 2022 Post Disaster Needs Assessment Report<sup>390</sup>, projected the national poverty rate of Pakistan to increase by up to 4.0 percentage points, potentially pushing between 8.4 and 9.1 million more people below the poverty line. Furthermore, the floods caused heavy damage to crops and livestock, and difficulties securing critical inputs, such as fertilizers, further slowed agriculture output growth. Large parts of the population grapple with severe food insecurity and persistently high global acute malnutrition rates. Around 16% of the population is food insecure and lacks access to essential services, including health care and nutrition, further exacerbating nutritional challenges.<sup>391</sup> The provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have the highest multidimensional poverty levels - yet host the vast majority of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The overwhelming presence of refugees mainly in urban areas has inevitably overstretched Pakistan's available resources, especially the provision of health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and education services.<sup>392</sup> To alleviate some of the pressure, UNICEF closely coordinated with Pakistani authorities to launch a project to improve families' access to WASH services, focusing on Afghan refugees and host communities in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan Provinces in Pakistan.<sup>393</sup>

### Effective and inclusive green transformation

All countries in the region of interest display low-to-no levels of readiness to address climate change, despite the high level of vulnerability that all countries face due to their geographic features and location. While Afghanistan and Iran have not mentioned climate action in their governmental strategies or policies, Pakistan has taken small steps to formally address climate change.

**Afghanistan.** The current de facto Taliban administration has not yet demonstrated any formal strategy or policies aimed at promoting environmentally sustainable practices. In the efforts to combat climate change, the current de facto Taliban regime encounters substantial impediments, stemming from a reduction in international aid combined with escalating costs associated with climate-related disasters. In 2022 alone, Afghanistan incurred losses exceeding 2 billion USD due to the adverse impacts of climate change.<sup>394</sup> However, preceding the Taliban's takeover, former governments had initiated efforts in climate change governance.<sup>395</sup> In 2009, with the support of the United Nations, Afghanistan established a National Adaptation Programme of Action for Climate Change (NAPA), which subsequently evolved into the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan for Afghanistan (ACCSAP) in 2015.<sup>396</sup> This plan encompassed the six core focus areas of agriculture, biodiversity, energy/infrastructure, forests/rangelands, natural disasters, and water. On the ND-GAIN index<sup>397</sup>, Afghanistan ranks 179<sup>th</sup> out of 185 countries in 2024, exhibiting extremely high climate vulnerability and extremely low levels of readiness.<sup>398</sup>

**Iran.** Iran's bill of the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan did not include any mentions of climate actions and, in fact, left the environmental section out completely.<sup>399</sup> Due to economic sanctions, Iran has chosen not to sign the Paris Agreement, and there appear to be seldom actions taken in Iran to mitigate climate change. Furthermore, the energy sector in Iran centres around fossil fuels, as Iran ranks second and third in fossil gas and oil reserves, respectively.<sup>400</sup> Iran has shown to be critically insufficient in addressing climate change and participating in a green transition. Iran ranks 83<sup>rd</sup> on the ND-GAIN index, exhibiting low levels of readiness and resilience measures, but only moderate levels of climate vulnerability.<sup>401</sup>

<sup>390</sup> Government of Pakistan (2022). The Pakistan Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Report, October 28, 2022. Supported by Asian Development Bank, EU, UNDP and WB.

<sup>391</sup> Pakistan. United Nations Population Fund. 2024.

<sup>392</sup> UNICEF. Humanitarian Action for Children: Afghanistan Refugees, January 1, 2023. (reliefweb)

<sup>393</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>394</sup> Without Adaptation, Middle East and Central Asia Face Crippling Climate Losses. IMF. 2022.

<sup>395</sup> Climate Change and Governance in Afghanistan. Government of Afghanistan. 2015.

<sup>396</sup> Summary of Afghanistan's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. Adapting To Climate Change. 2022.

<sup>397</sup> *The ND-GAIN index summarises a country's vulnerability to the climate crisis in combination with resilience measures it has taken*

<sup>398</sup> ND-GAIN, Rankings. Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative. 2024.

<sup>399</sup> Iran (Islamic Republic of). Climate Action Tracker. 2023.

<sup>400</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> ND-GAIN, Rankings. Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative. 2024.

**Pakistan.** Pakistan has taken steps to address the climate crisis, including by becoming a signatory member of the Paris Agreement, as well as setting targets to reduce emissions by 50% and to shift to 60% renewable energy by 2030.<sup>402</sup> Furthermore, as of 2021, Pakistan has a National Climate Change Policy produced by the Ministry of Climate Change. Despite these intended changes, Pakistan ranks 150<sup>th</sup> on the ND-GAIN index, showing high levels of vulnerability and low levels of readiness.<sup>403</sup>

#### **Screening for climate and environment risks and opportunities of the project / programme intervention (in particular interventions that are not climate / environment specific).**

The Programme will support initiatives that integrate climate resilience in interventions. This is particularly relevant in the light of Afghanistan's vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters. The ARTF and STFA, for example, will do this through promoting climate-smart agriculture and management techniques, soil erosion control and regenerative agriculture and livestock techniques, drought resistant seeds, and water resource management. The UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan states that the UN will aim to prioritize interventions that promote climate-resilient livelihoods and services and ensure that climate risks are systematically integrated into all project designs and implementation plans.<sup>404</sup> The implementing partners will also ensure that climate adaptation is in focus, for example, through adaptive approaches to agriculture and irrigation. As such, the programme aims to contribute to building the resilience of Afghan communities.

### **7. Capacity of public sector, public financial management and corruption**

#### **Capacity of the public sector for policy making, implementation of policies, enforcement of regulations and effective service delivery.**

While public sector capacity is limited across all countries in the region of interest, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan display varying structures to support potential public sector capacity. Afghanistan is particularly limited in its governmental capacities due to the Taliban regime; however, Iran and Pakistan maintain structures in place to produce and implement policy.

**Afghanistan.** While there is some consistency in staffing in former republic ministries, in general, the capacity for policy implementation has decreased since August 2021. There appears to be less authority at the ministerial level and major policy decisions are taken by the Taliban movement's leader Akhundzada in Kandahar.<sup>405</sup> For the enforcement of the Taliban's stringent 'morality laws', which include a strict dress code and gender segregation in society, the Taliban established the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.<sup>406</sup> Members of the ministry's morality enforcement agencies have been reported to publicly punish violators, often resorting to violence.<sup>407</sup> There is little information about steps taken by the de facto authorities to hold perpetrators accountable, leading to an apparent impunity of members of the de facto authorities.<sup>408</sup> These actions not only exacerbate the humanitarian crisis but also intensify the hardships, particularly faced by women and girls. According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators, on a range from 2.5 to -2.5, Afghanistan's government effectiveness<sup>409</sup> is scored -1.88 in 2022, in comparison to -1.67 in 2021, and -1.61 in 2020.<sup>410</sup> This score is lower than approximately 98% of other countries.

**Iran.** Regarding the ability of elected government heads and representatives to determine policy, powers are severely limited by unelected authorities such as the supreme leader and the guardian council. Due

<sup>402</sup> Pakistan. UNDP Climate Promise. 2024.

<sup>403</sup> ND-GAIN, Rankings. Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative. 2024.

<sup>404</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025. United Nations. 2023.

<sup>405</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2022.

<sup>406</sup> Policing Public Morality: Debates on promoting virtue and preventing vice in Taliban's second Emirate. Afghanistan Analyst Network. 2022.

<sup>407</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>408</sup> Situation of human rights in Afghanistan. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Advance Unedited Version, 11 September 2023). OHCHR. 2023.

<sup>409</sup> *The government effectiveness indicator captures perceptions of the quality of public services, civil services, the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government.*

<sup>410</sup> Worldwide Governance Indicators. World Bank & National Resource Governance Institute. n.d.

process prevails in neither civil nor criminal matters, as authorities commonly violate regulations and take extrajudicial measures, and reports of violence during arrests and torture have been reported.<sup>411</sup> Regarding government effectiveness, Iran scored -.88 in 2022, displaying moderately low levels of government effectiveness, lower than roughly 81% of countries.<sup>412</sup>

**Pakistan.** The ability for the prime minister, cabinet, and parliament to create policy that will be implemented and enforced is often limited by the military, which has established control of national security, counterterrorism, and foreign policy.<sup>413</sup> Furthermore, the military maintains its own court, has the ability to influence elections, and is considered to be more powerful than elected politicians.<sup>414</sup> Despite this, Pakistan displays higher levels of government effectiveness when compared to Afghanistan and Iran. Pakistan scored -.62 in government effectiveness on the Worldwide Governance Indicator, displaying moderately low levels of government effectiveness, lower than roughly 70% of countries.<sup>415</sup>

**Quality and capacity of PFM in general and at sector level, including budget credibility, comprehensiveness and transparency as well as control and external scrutiny/audit in all phases of the budget process; participation of citizens/CSOs in monitoring public budgets and corruption.**

Transparency of governments in the region varies, with low levels of transparency in Pakistan, extremely limited transparency in Iran, and no transparency in Afghanistan.

**Afghanistan.** There is no transparency in Taliban governance and decision-making. The national budget released in May 2022 did not include significant detail. Ministers provided few details of their ministries' activities and avoided questions in public accountability sessions held in August and September.<sup>416</sup> Institutional safeguards against corruption have been weakened. In December 2022, a regime spokesman said the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission had been suspended for financial reasons but would resume.<sup>417</sup>

**Iran.** Transparency within the Iranian government is extremely limited, and the state is not accountable to the public. Information is routinely suppressed or manipulated, and, in recent times, access to information regarding arrested protestors has been restricted. The lack of transparency within the government is supported by its legal system, which allows for the protection of information that conflicts with state interests.<sup>418</sup>

**Pakistan.** The government of Pakistan is somewhat transparent regarding finances and general government operations; however, the military has an extremely low level of openness in its practices and often censors media regarding its actions. Furthermore, access to information laws and information commissions exist, but are sometimes inconsistent in compliance and implementation.<sup>419</sup>

<sup>411</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>412</sup> Worldwide Governance Indicators. World Bank & National Resource Governance Institute. n.d.

<sup>413</sup> Freedom in the World, Pakistan. Freedom House. 2023

<sup>414</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>415</sup> Worldwide Governance Indicators. World Bank & National Resource Governance Institute. n.d.

<sup>416</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

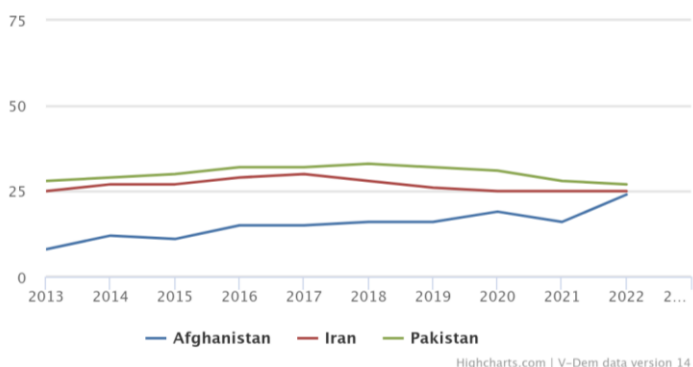
<sup>417</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>418</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>419</sup> Freedom in the World, Pakistan. Freedom House. 2023.

## The corruption situation and relevant anti-corruption measures and reforms

Figure 5: Corruption Perceptions Index in Afghanistan, Iran, & Pakistan. Transparency International



Corruption is a prominent issue in all 3 countries, as rankings on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)<sup>420</sup>, are low. Corruption is evident at all levels of government across the multiple governments in the region; however, formal policy has, at times, been created to handle corruption, although often unsuccessful.

**Afghanistan.** The Taliban claims to have achieved progress in checking the widespread corruption present under the

republic, particularly in the field of revenue collection.<sup>421</sup> Although the CPI scores in 2022 and 2023 remain low, at 24 and 20, respectively, ranking 149<sup>th</sup> worldwide, these scores indicate an improvement in Afghanistan compared to scores ranging from 8 to 19 during the decade prior.<sup>422</sup> This has been interpreted as the result of the reduction of corruption in customs and at road checkpoints.<sup>423</sup> However, it has been highlighted that while the Taliban have called bribery in the public sector a criminal act, other forms of corruption such as diversion of public funds, nepotistic appointments in public positions, access to information on government activities and the abuse of official powers remain prevalent across the country. In addition, petty corruption has also been reported under the current regime. Individuals seeking passports, for example, have had to pay bribes.<sup>424</sup> Furthermore, institutional safeguards have been weakened. In December 2022, a regime spokesman said the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission had been suspended for financial reasons but would resume.<sup>425</sup>

**Iran.** Iran ranks 149<sup>th</sup> on the CPI.<sup>426</sup> Although Iran has anti-corruption provisions throughout its legal framework, along with penalties for corruption, it appears that the law regarding corruption is seldom applied and that corruption is evident at all levels of government.<sup>427</sup> In recent years, however, it appears that a type of corruption law, known as “corruption on earth”, has been used to prosecute protesters.<sup>428</sup> While reports on governmental corruption are highly limited, it appears that corruption in the Iranian government is widespread and faces little opposition.

**Pakistan.** Pakistan ranks 133<sup>rd</sup> on the Corruption Perceptions Index.<sup>429</sup> Pakistan has taken several measures aimed at reducing corruption, including the 1999 creation of the National Accountability Bureau, the Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2010, and the Whistleblower Protection and Vigilance Commission Act of 2017.<sup>430</sup> Despite these efforts, corruption in the Pakistani government remains a significant and widespread issue, as it appears that the measures to address corruption are implemented highly selectively.<sup>431</sup>

## Considerations on gender responsive and/or transformative budgeting and financing

**Afghanistan.** There is no application of gender-responsive analysis to the formulation and implementation of the de facto government’s budgeting in Afghanistan. On the contrary, Taliban policies are profoundly curtailing women’s and girls’ rights, as has been elaborated in section 4.

<sup>420</sup> The Corruption Perceptions Index measures perceived levels of public sector corruption; lower scores indicate worse corruption.

<sup>421</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>422</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index. Transparency International. 2023.

<sup>423</sup> Changing the Rules of the Game: How the Taliban Regulated Cross-Border Trade and Upended Afghanistan’s Political Economy. XCEP, Alcis & UKAID. 2022.

<sup>424</sup> Freedom in the World, Afghanistan. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>425</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>426</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index. Transparency International. 2023.

<sup>427</sup> Freedom in the World, Iran. Freedom House. 2023.

<sup>428</sup> Human Rights Watch. Iran, Events of 2023. 2023.

<sup>429</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index. Transparency International. 2023.

<sup>430</sup> Anti Corruption Laws in Pakistan: Understanding and Compliance. Association for the Conservation of Lake Geneva. 2023.

<sup>431</sup> Freedom in the World, Pakistan. Freedom House. 2023.

**Iran & Pakistan.** No mentions of gender-responsive or transformative budgeting are found in reports on Iran's budget. Pakistan's budget for 2023-24 amounts to over 14 trillion rupees, however, there does not appear to be a gender-responsive focus in the budget.

## **8. Matching with Danish strengths and interests, engaging Danish actors and seeking synergies**

### **Identify areas/sectors where we have the most at stake – interests and values.**

All three countries perform poorly in relation to Danish values and development priorities, including human rights, gender equality, participation and inclusion, freedom of expression etc. Pakistan and Iran have generally been supportive of Afghan refugees within their territories and have enabled them to access education and healthcare. This hospitality has reduced the pressures or incentives for onward and potentially dangerous migration. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan has very limited capacity to support its own population, displaced people, and returning refugees.

### **Identify where we can have influence through strategic use of positions of strengths, expertise and experiences.**

The key opportunities are seen to be through interaction via UN agencies in both Pakistan and Iran. Both countries stress the importance of burden-sharing on refugee issues, which means that Danish support in this area will be welcome. In Afghanistan, there are very limited opportunities for influence.

### **Identify where Denmark can play a role through active partnerships for a common aim/agenda or where there is a need for Denmark to take lead in pushing an agenda forward.**

Denmark is a member of the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) which aims to create conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation through community-based investments in areas of high return; building Afghan refugee capital based on livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan in order to facilitate return; and preserve protection space in host countries, including enhanced support for refugee-hosting communities, alternative temporary stay arrangements for the residual caseload, and resettlement in third countries.<sup>432</sup> Other core donors are the European Union, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Qatar, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, as well as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme.

### **Assessment of the donor landscape and coordination, and opportunities for Denmark to deliver results through partners including through multilaterals and EU.**

There are opportunities for Denmark to contribute through the key UN agencies with the responsibilities in the refugee/migration areas – these being UNHCR and IOM. Denmark will remain in close contact with the EU and other EU HoMs via its embassies in Islamabad and Tehran. In Afghanistan, Denmark is closely linked to the UN and World Bank Trust Funds and their coordination mechanisms.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid



**1. Brief presentation of partners**

**UNHCR (Iran and Pakistan).** The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 as the UN's refugee agency, to provide assistance to refugees displaced during and in the aftermath of World War II. Together with the UNHCR Statute, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol provide the foundation for UNHCR's work. The 1951 Convention sets out the rights to which refugees are entitled and enshrines fundamental principles of refugee protection including the strict prohibition of refoulement, which is widely recognised as a norm of customary international law. UNHCR has offices in 135 countries and 20 739 staff in 2023. The UNHCR offices in Islamabad and Tehran will be key partners for Denmark in the Afghanistan ROI programme.

Within the UN system, UNHCR has the responsibility for coordinating the humanitarian response in refugee situations and it leads the Global Protection Cluster and co-lead the Global Shelter Cluster (with IFRC) and the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster (with IOM). UNHCR is committed to working closely with other UN agencies through the 'Delivering as One' initiative, and UNHCR works closely with WFP, UNICEF, IOM, UNDP, OCHA and OHCHR.

With UNHCR's exclusive mandate, there is no other humanitarian organization, which can shoulder the responsibility for international protection, assistance and durable solutions for refugees. There is a high degree of convergence between UNHCR's Global Strategic Priorities and priorities of Danish Humanitarian Assistance. UNHCR's role as catalyst for more comprehensive approaches to protracted refugee situations in line with the Global Compact on Refugees is an expression of the implementation of the humanitarian-development nexus. UNHCR aims to ensure that everyone can exercise the fundamental right to seek and enjoy asylum and to find safe refuge in another country with the option to repatriate voluntarily, integrate locally or resettle permanently in a third country. In addition, the UN General Assembly has mandated UNHCR to address statelessness and has authorized UNHCR to be involved operationally under certain circumstances in enhancing protection and providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs).

In relation to the Afghanistan crisis, UNHCR together with Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan established the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) in 2012 to support voluntary return, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries. Today this strategy guides refugee programming in Pakistan and Iran and also underlies the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP), of which UNHCR is also a custodian and which provides operational priorities for the refugee response.

**IOM** is the UN agency mandated to ensure humane and orderly management of migration through the provision of advice, capacity building and services to governments on migration policies and the management of all forms and impacts of migration. IOM provides assistance and advice to migrants in need, and works to build resilience of people on the move, especially those in situations of vulnerability. The organization is also a key source of data and knowledge on migration issues. In 2016, IOM was admitted into the UN System as a related organization and is guided by its

Constitution as well as the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, including the Human Rights Charter and the child rights convention. Especially since its entry into the UN system and the adoption of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in 2018, IOM has enhanced its global policy-formulating role and gained new responsibilities in terms of international coordination and internal UN coordination on migration issues. IOM serves as coordinator and secretariat of the UN Network on Migration, tasked to ensure a coherent and effective UN system-wide support to the implementation of the GCM.

IOM Pakistan works in close partnership with Humanitarian and UN Country Teams, donors and government partners, and implements various programmes spanning humanitarian assistance, development activities, mobility monitoring, community stabilization, migration management, capacity building and communications in cooperation with an extensive network of local and international NGO partners. IOM Pakistan is also among 19 UN agencies working together with the Pakistan government to assist the most vulnerable populations under the umbrella of the “Delivering as One UN Programme”.

**NRC** is an independent humanitarian organisation focusing on displacement. It pursues a holistic rights based approach across the HDP nexus, encompassing emergency relief and early recovery, seeking to build on displaced people’s own resilience to promote sustainability and recovery. It specialises in shelter, food security, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), information counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) and camp management with a particular focus on refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). NRC also includes host communities in its activities given the important role that they often have in supporting displaced people and contributing to durable solutions. NRC operates in both Afghanistan and Iran and was a ROI implementing partner for the 2022-2023 programme.

NRC has been actively involved in assisting displaced Afghans and their host communities in Iran since 2012. NRC operates across ten provinces including Alborz, Hormozgan, Kerman, Markazi, Qom, Razavi Khorasan, Semnan, Sistan and Baluchestan, South Khorasan, and Tehran with a team composed of 12 international staff and 114 national staff. NRC efforts are coordinated closely with UNHCR and other partners under the Regional Refugee Response Plan, as well as with NRC operations in Afghanistan.

**DACAAR.** The Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization focused on humanitarian and development efforts in Afghanistan since 1984. It aims to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable Afghans, including Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), returnees, refugees, and host communities, through sustainable development initiatives. These initiatives span Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Natural Resource Management (NRM), Small Scale Enterprise Development (SSED), and Women’s Empowerment. Since 2010, DACAAR has been implementing programmes funded by the Danish MFA through the ROI programme, positively affecting around 534,000 people, including returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and vulnerable host communities in Kabul, Nangarhar, Kunar, Kunduz, and Balkh provinces. An estimated 51% of these beneficiaries are women and girls. DACAAR operates with an annual budget of approximately 37 million US dollars, funded by various donors including Danida, Norwegian MFA, Dutch MFA, FCDO, UNICEF, UNODC, UNHCR, UNOCHA (AHF), ECHO, and the European Union.

## 2. Summary of partner capacity assessment

**UNHCR (Iran and Pakistan)** is a long-standing Danish global partner (also core support). In Iran, it has a central role in relation to refugee advocacy and protection. As a UN mandated agency, it is able to interact at all levels of government, which is seen as a critical attribute in relation to protection. Its special status also allows it to operate throughout the country, including with local implementing partners. In both Pakistan and Iran, UNHCR has major role in relation to government (advocacy, joint activities) and in relation to its mandate areas of responsibility. The most recent MOPAN assessment of UNHCR concluded that the agency is a strong and principled actor within its mandated areas and with impressive emergency response. However, at the overall level, it continues to operate within a short-term mindset and its strategic approach is not yet fully reflected in practice. There is also scope to improve its knowledge management systems and its coordination with other UN agencies while it remains an active and engaged member of inter-agency response.<sup>1</sup>

**IOM** is the main UN agency with global mandate for protection of migrants. It is a long-standing Danish partner (also core support). Together with UNHCR, IOM will lead on advocacy with the Pakistan government on protection of ACC card holders and undocumented Afghans, both of which are critical at the present time. The most recent MOPAN assessment of IOM notes the organisation's rapid growth but that it remains largely project-funded and this presents certain organisational constraints. Nonetheless, the organisation is considered to be an agile performer in emergency settings, noting that IOM provides quality services and capacity-building support on migration issues, and tailoring its support to national needs and priorities.<sup>2</sup> While the MOPAN found that IOM was partnership-oriented working with a broad range of partners at both global, regional and international level. However, the Danish MFA's recent strategy assessment for IOM also found that IOM's dependency on project funding limits the opportunity to engage in more strategic long-term collaboration with partners and that the area needs attention and joint donor support. Further, while IOM has significantly improved in terms of funding channeled through local partners over the past years, this is still an area for improvement.<sup>3</sup>

**NRC** is one of the few INGOs operating in Iran (as well as across the border in Afghanistan) and is a current ROI partner with a good track record. With its local networks and ability to navigate Iran's bureaucracy, NRC is able to operate throughout the country. Its focus on integrated approaches that blend protection and livelihoods is highly relevant to the ROI objectives. NRC has a good existing cooperation with UNHCR's Tehran office, which is necessary to ensure harmonised approaches to protection and livelihoods.

**DACAAR** stands out as a unique partner due to its extensive experience of refugee responses, relevant thematic focus, and deep-rooted presence at the local level in Afghanistan. With over three decades of operation in Afghanistan, DACAAR has demonstrated an ability to improve livelihoods, empower women, and enhance community resilience, particularly in relation to displaced people. It's focus on sustainable development initiatives, particularly in the WASH sector, aligns closely with Danish priorities on climate resilience and adaptation and is highly relevant in

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR assessment, MOPAN, February 2024

<sup>2</sup> IOM assessment, MOPAN, October 2023

<sup>3</sup> Strategy for Denmark's engagement with IOM, 2023-2026

Afghanistan. DACAAR's local knowledge, technical expertise, and established networks ensure effective localisation and programme implementation and impactful outcomes. Moreover, DACAAR's emphasis on community engagement and capacity building fosters ownership and long-term sustainability, making them a reliable and trusted partner in a volatile and changing environment. DACAAR is well-integrated within the aid coordination structures in Afghanistan, which is essential to ensure complementarity with other humanitarian actors and the UN and World Bank trust funds.

### 3. Summary of key partner features

Name of Partner	Core business <i>What is the main business, interest and goal of the partner?</i>	Importance <i>How important is the project/programme for the partner's activity-level (Low, medium high)?</i>	Influence <i>How much influence does the partner have over the project programme (low, medium, high)?</i>	Contribution <i>What will be the partner's main contribution?</i>	Capacity <i>What are the main issues emerging from the assessment of the partner's capacity?</i>	Exit strategy <i>What is the strategy for exiting the partnership?</i>
UNHCR Pakistan	Lead UN agency for refugees, displaced and stateless persons	With reducing aid levels, the project assumes greater importance both in financial and political terms.	High. The project draws from UNHCR's country strategic priorities	UNHCR is the key agency on refugee protection issues in Pakistan, particularly in relation to registered refugees (POR holders). It has a constructive working relationship with the government, which increases its influence.	UNHCR is generally regarded as a strong agency within its core competence areas. The most recent MOPAN assessment of UNHCR concluded that the agency is a strong and principled actor. However, it continues to operate within a short-term mindset and its strategic approach is not yet fully reflected in practice. There is also scope to improve its knowledge management systems and its coordination with other UN agencies.	At global level, UNHCR remains a recipient of Danish core funding.
IOM Pakistan	Lead UN agency for migration	With reducing aid levels, the project assumes greater importance both in financial and political terms.	High. The project draws from IOM's country strategic priorities	IOM is the key agency on migration issues in Pakistan and, based on a burden sharing arrangement with UNHCR, takes the lead on protection of unregistered refugees and ACC holders. Like	IOM has increased its capacity (and staffing) markedly in recent years. While the most recent MOPAN assessment was generally positive, other recent assessments point to dependency on project	At global level, IOM remains a recipient of Danish core funding.

				UNHCR, IOM has a constructive working relationship with the government, which increases its influence.	funding, which limits the opportunity to engage in more strategic long-term collaboration with partners. Further, while IOM has significantly improved in terms of funding channeled through local partners over the past years, this is still an area for improvement	
UNHCR Iran	Lead UN agency for refugees, displaced and stateless persons	With reducing aid levels, the project assumes greater importance both in financial and political terms.	High. The project draws from UNHCR's country strategic priorities	UNHCR is the key agency on refugee protection issues in Iran and has a constructive working relationship with the government, which increases its influence.	UNHCR is generally regarded as a strong agency within its core competence areas. The most recent MOPAN assessment of UNHCR concluded that the agency is a strong and principled actor. However, it continues to operate within a short-term mindset and its strategic approach is not yet fully reflected in practice. There is also scope to improve its knowledge management systems and its coordination with other UN agencies.	At global level, UNHCR remains a recipient of Danish core funding.
NRC	INGO which specialises in protection of refugees and displaced persons.	Medium. NRC operates at a global level with funding from multiple donors. At country level, the Danish support assumes higher value as there are fewer donors.	High. The project supports NRC's own objectives and programming priorities.	NRC will implement an integrated protection and livelihoods approach that also complements UNHCR's activities relating to protection. The two will coordinate closely.	To follow	NRC will ensure that project initiatives are sustainable to the extent possible via its local partners and utilising its cooperation with UNHCR.
DACAAR	Danish NGO specialising on support to returnees, displaced people and local	High. While DACAAR has multiple donors, it remains dependent upon Danish MFA grants.	High. The project supports DACAAR's own objectives and programming priorities.	The project will operate within DACAAR's areas of core expertise, including WASH, and in areas where there are a	To follow	DACAAR will ensure harmonisation with other initiatives, including other HUM initiatives and linkages

	communities in Afghanistan.			mix of returnees and local host communities.		to the UN STFA and ARTF where appropriate.
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## Annex 4: Risk Management Matrix **PRELIMINARY VERSION AND WILL BE UPDATED**

### Contextual risks

Risk Factor	Likelihood	Impact	Risk response	Residual risk	Background to assessment
Further negative changes in the political context in one or more of the ROI countries affecting situation for refugees, returnees, displaced	Likely	Major	Continual monitoring and contingency planning. UNHCR and IOM to maintain advocacy efforts with governments to ensure consequences of decisions are understood. Prioritise protection.	Unlikely to reduce short term risks but may reduce negative impact in the medium term	Likely in both Iran and Pakistan as a wider consequence of increasing economic pressure and government decisions to prioritise national populations. Both countries are already repatriating large numbers of Afghan refugees and there are indications this will continue. Ensuring correct documentation is a mitigating action that UNHCR/IOM can take.
Political unrest increases	Likely	Minor	Continual monitoring and contingency planning. Avoid or temporarily reduce activities in turbulent areas.	Expected to reduce short term risks	This is most in Iran (and possibly Pakistan) where the regime is under economic and political pressure from various population groups dissatisfied with national issues (including rights, but also economic policies))
Economic crisis deepens further in one or more of the ROI countries	Likely	Major	Continual monitoring and contingency planning. Ensure balanced approach to livelihoods and protection interventions. UNHCR and IOM to maintain advocacy efforts with governments to ensure consequences of decisions are understood.	Unlikely to reduce repatriation risks but will help mitigate livelihoods risks and help reduce decisions relating to negative coping strategies, including onward migration.	All three countries are experiencing major economic contractions with severe consequences for service provision (already minimal in Afghanistan), the effects of which are disproportionately being felt by refugees.
Security situation worsens in Iran as a consequence of spread of the Gaza conflict	Likely/unlikely	Potentially major	Continual monitoring and contingency planning. Ensure balanced approach to livelihoods and protection interventions.	Very difficult to predict. Risk likely to remain. At low levels, it will not impact the programme.	The Gaza conflict (and also before) has heightened regional tensions and lead to limited direct attacks between Iran and Israel. At the current time, it is very difficult to predict how tensions will evolve.
Further natural disasters, esp drought and flooding	Likely	Minor	Continual monitoring and contingency planning. Ensure that livelihoods interventions include climate adaptive approaches.	Also difficult to predict because of potential scale (eg Pakistan flooding). Climate adaptation will help protect livelihoods.	All three countries are affected to varying degrees and according to varying types of natural disaster/climatic shocks, including earthquakes, droughts, flooding.
Continued restrictions on women's rights, minority rights (all three countries but especially Afghanistan and Iran)	Likely	Minor	Continual monitoring and contingency planning. Ensure that women and minorities are highlighted as part of a inclusive, HRBA approach to advocacy, livelihoods and protection interventions.	Residual risk will almost certainly remain but effects on programme interventions will be minimized.	All three countries have highly restrictive systemic and cultural (norms) relating to women and girls -and also minorities – that limited their inclusion in all aspects of political life, as well as (in Afghanistan) broader sectors, such as education, business.

### Programmatic risks

Risk Factor	Likelihood	Impact	Risk response	Residual risk	Background to assessment
Interference by authorities in programme	Likely	Minor	Ensure authorities are consulted at local level and utilize	Residual risk will remain. However, all partners are experienced in navigating	National approval processes for (esp, NGO) projects often require consultation with authorities and

decision-making (esp at project level)			potential for exemptions to restrictive policies. Ensure inclusive and equitable approaches maintained.	local bureaucracies, which will reduce this risk.	approval, which provides an opportunity for them to influence choice of site and beneficiary. The experience (from Afghanistan) is that these risks can be reduced through proactively exploiting contacts at local level.
Continued restrictions on women's rights, minority rights restrict beneficiary groups (all three countries but especially Afghanistan and Iran)	Likely	Minor	Continual monitoring and contingency planning. Ensure that women and minorities are highlighted as part of a inclusive, HRBA approach to advocacy, livelihoods and protection interventions.	Residual risk will almost certainly remain but effects on programme interventions will be minimized.	All three countries have highly restrictive systemic and cultural (norms) relating to women and girls -and also minorities – that limited their inclusion in all aspects of political life, as well as (in Afghanistan) broader sectors, such as education, business.
Bureaucratic delays to approval processes	Likely	Potentially major	Maintain effective and regular contacts with approving authorities. Present initiatives as benefitting host communities as well as refugees/ returnees.	Residual risks likely to remain.	Previous ROI programmes have experienced delays in approvals (in Iran)
Constraints over access (esp Iran, Afghanistan)	Likely	Minor	Maintain effective and regular contacts with approving authorities. Present initiatives as benefitting host communities as well as refugees/ returnees. Undertake joint visits.	Residual risks remain and will be unpredictable	Iran controls access by international stakeholders to certain areas.
Weaknesses in coordination (all countries)	Unlikely	Minor	Ensure effective communications with other multilateral and INGO/NNGO actors	Residual risks likely to remain.	Potential overlap with other aid initiatives (eg with STFA in Afghanistan)
Inadequate funding levels (all countries)	Likely	Major	Strong fund management, transparency of decision-making, inclusive planning, resource mobilization, realistic planning.	Risks will remain.	Reducing global aid patterns (including due to Gaza, Ukraine conflict), donor fatigue, and lack of diversification of donor partners.
National NGOs do not have the capacity to implement key components of the projects.	Possible	Moderate	Capacity assessments conducted on the ability of national partners to implement parts of the programme. Capacity development approach will strengthen capacities of local CBOs. Performance of NGOs to be closely monitored.	Residual risks will remain	Effect of shortage of skilled staff and difficult operating environment, especially for human rights and women's NGOs.  NRC and DACAAR are assessed to be strong partners. However, all partners (incl UN agencies) utilise national NGOs, which may be weaker than expected.



### Institutional risks

Risk Factor	Likelihood	Impact	Risk response	Residual risk	Background to assessment
Projects contravene sanctions regimes  Legal & reputation risk	Unlikely	Minor	Ensure full awareness and monitor	Minor risk remains	Both Afghanistan and Iran are under various sanctions regimes. However, programme activities are unlikely to relate to proscribed fields.
Projects relieve authorities of responsibilities to provide essential services and inadvertently underpin the regimes (mainly Afghanistan and Iran)  Reputation risk	Likely	Moderate	Maintain focus on basic needs. Monitor developments and results of implementer's mitigating actions and include these within its regular dialogue.	Residual risk remains	Risk is unavoidable and presents a donor dilemma. There is also a risk of being perceived as not doing anything and/or exacerbating the humanitarian caseload
Interventions may inadvertently cause harm.  Reputation risk	Possible	Major	Conflict sensitivity analysis to inform field activities. Risks will be identified by partners prior to approval Partners will engage in participatory planning and confidence building and discuss sensitive topics with local stakeholders during preparation and implementation..	Residual risk remains	Programme interventions may inadvertently contribute to unintended consequences – e.g. by inadvertently aggravating local grievances and/or inequalities that raise tensions at community level.
Risk of aid fraud and corruption.  Reputational risk	Likely (but unlikely to be extensive)	Major	Surprise visits, regular, special and forensic audits, investigations; Information on fraudulent behaviours and findings are shared with stakeholders (incl. Denmark); all actors aware that any fraudulent behaviour will be reported and shared between agencies.	Residual risk remains	Financial misuse may occur where funds not used for intended purpose and/or where there is improper accounting for cash. This may reduce the effectiveness of the aid and de facto support unintended beneficiaries.