

HUMANITARIAN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (HIP)

AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, IRAN AND CENTRAL ASIA ¹

**The activities proposed hereafter are still subject to the adoption of the financing decision
ECHO/WWD/ BUD/2024/010002**

AMOUNT: EUR 129 800 000

The present Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) was prepared on the basis of financing decision ECHO/WWD/BUD/2024/01000 (Worldwide Decision) and the related General Guidelines for Operational Priorities on Humanitarian Aid (Operational Priorities). The purpose of the HIP and its annexes³ is to serve as a communication tool from DG ECHO⁴ to its partners and assist them in the preparation of their proposals. The provisions of the Worldwide Decision and the General Conditions of the Agreement with the European Commission shall take precedence over the provisions in this document.

The 2024 HIP responds to a steep increase in humanitarian needs in Afghanistan, for which humanitarian assistance remains insufficient in a context of persistent funding shortfalls. Access to beneficiaries strongly depends on services by women for women. In this respect the Taliban edicts of 24 December 2022 and 4 April 2023, against women working for NGOs and UN Organisations, make the delivery of services more difficult. Similarly, the edict of 23 March 2023 reduced access to education for girls and continues to impact millions of female teenagers.

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Afghanistan

Afghanistan remains one of the largest complex humanitarian emergencies with 29.2⁵ million people in need of humanitarian assistance, exacerbated by very high poverty rates. Key drivers of needs against the backdrop of a faltered economy include consecutive drought/drought-like conditions, lack of progress in rural and previously inaccessible areas, and a devastating escalation of protection threats. Furthermore, economic assistance massively reduced after the take-over of the Taliban in August 2021. Food security saw reduced targeting in 2023 due to the mid-year fiscal cliff leading to, amongst other concerns, the World Food Programme (WFP) cutting 8 million food-insecure Afghans from receiving assistance entirely, including 1.4 million mothers and children⁶⁷. In September 2023, WFP needed to drop another 2 million hungry people from assistance, due to the lack of funds. Capacities to respond are critically limited by the

¹ Countries covered in Central Asia are Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

² *Conditionality clause to be inserted if the HIP is released before adoption of the Worldwide Decision. To be deleted after the formal adoption of the decision.*

³ Technical annex and thematic policies annex

⁴ Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)

⁵ HNO 2023

⁶ June 2 2023 Humanitarian update

⁷ HNO 2023.

reduced resilience and livelihood recovery strategies and important financial barriers at household level⁸. Half of the working population (women) are further impacted by the systemic block on women and girls' inclusion in workforce, education, and the political landscape. At the same time, development funds remain partially frozen, impacting the capacities of basic services.

Overall, the security situation and geographical access has improved. Despite the complex socio-economic situation and imposed restrictions by the Taliban, humanitarian partners remain committed to “stay and deliver” with respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and humanitarian principles, and in line with the guiding principles adopted in the Council Conclusions of 20 March 2023⁹. Safe, secure, equitable and meaningful real time access for humanitarian support remains the premise for DG ECHO. In particular, solutions supporting women humanitarian staff are central to reaching female beneficiaries. That includes children and young people, aging population, and people living with disabilities/injuries.

1.2 Pakistan and Iran

The deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan continues to have an adverse ripple effect in its neighbouring countries, especially **Pakistan and Iran**. While large scale movements from Afghanistan have not unfolded since August 2021, cross-border displacement have nonetheless continued with over 1.6 million Afghans¹⁰ reported to have arrived since January 2021. Pakistan and Iran are hosting together more than 8.2 million Afghan refugees. Ranking third globally, **Pakistan** has hosted refugees for over four decades. There are currently 3.7 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, including an estimated 600 000 new arrivals since August 2021. With 4.5 million Afghans living on its territory with varying statuses¹¹, **Iran** is the second country hosting the largest number of displaced Afghans in the world. Media in Iran report that the number of Afghan nationals entering Iran (legally or illegally) has increased four times compared to before the Taliban takeover. Iran also ranks as the second-highest host country for refugees from any origin (after Turkey), and the country with the highest host ratio relative to its own population in the Asia Pacific region (39 refugees per 1 000 inhabitants, many of them born in Iran).

Both countries have generously accommodated Afghan nationals and refugees for decades, yet global and regional geo-political dynamics, and consequences of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine have exerted severe strain on the two countries in their ability to provide key services. The situation for Afghans in host countries, especially recent arrivals, is challenging and of increasing concern. The economic situation has deteriorated, and the cost of living has increased dramatically due to inflation¹². Coupled with limited livelihood opportunities, this has eroded purchasing power and severely impacted vulnerable population's capacity to afford basic services and goods. More recently, on 3 October 2023, the caretaker Pakistan Government announced the repatriation of 'illegal foreigners', the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' which foresees an estimated 1.7 million Afghan nationals living in Pakistan, to leave before 1 November voluntarily, or face deportation. This led to serious concern of Afghans requiring international protection and lacking access to pathways to safety. There is a critical need to reinforce protection, including an increase for legal aid and provision of information. Borders are likely to remain tightly regulated in 2024 but a certain level of population movement to Pakistan and Iran is expected to continue irregularly, increasing

⁸ WoAA 2023.

⁹ Council Conclusion ref 7264/23, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7264-2023-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁰ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>

¹¹ 4.5 million of displaced people of varying statuses (762 000 registered refugees, 360 000 Afghans with resident permits, 267 000 Afghan family passport holders, the headcount undertaken by the Government of Iran in 2022, 2.6 million Afghans were recorded. An estimated 500 000-1m Afghans who have entered Iran following the fall of Kabul).

¹² Total annual inflation in Iran has now exceeded 35 per cent for a third year in a row, reaching 54 per cent in July 2022, the highest level since June 1995. Inflation in Pakistan reached 31.5 per cent in March 2023, its highest level since 1975.

vulnerabilities and protection risks, including exploitation and abuse of those crossing borders. Against this landscape in Pakistan and Iran, climate and other natural-hazards induced disasters continue to adversely affect the poorest segments of society – host communities, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants alike, as evident in Pakistan where the 2022 floods affected 33 million people and displaced 8.2 million people across the country. Forty-one of the districts hit host an estimated 800 000 Afghan refugees.

1.3 Central Asia / Regional

Due to the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine and the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, Central Asia has witnessed in the past years' population movement or so-called 'through-flux' across the region which highlighted the gaps in protection monitoring and analysis in the event of a deterioration across the region. The last outbreak of conflict on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in September 2022, while largely due to natural resources, was more violent and more intense than recently experienced. The lack of real legal frameworks and protection space for refugees (including Afghan refugees) in the region raises serious protection concerns.

Against this fragile risk landscape across the countries covered by this HIP, the upward trend of climate induced hazards, including the return of El Niño, a natural climate phenomenon characterised by the presence of warmer than normal sea surface temperatures (and higher sea levels) in the Pacific Ocean, further compounds vulnerabilities and can lead to disastrous outcomes for affected communities. Those who are most vulnerable and marginalised are often the least prepared for, acting early, ahead of recurrent and protracted hazards' manifestation in the region. The 2023 Inform Risk Index shows that Afghanistan is ranked as very high risk, Pakistan, and Iran as high risk. Tajikistan displays a medium risk, while the rest of the Central Asia countries display a low risk.

	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Iran
INFORM Risk Index (0-10)¹³	8.1/10	6.1/10	5.1/10
Hazard and Exposure	8.9/10	5.8/10	4.4/10
Vulnerability	8.5/10	7.2/10	6.7/10
Lack of Coping Capacity	7.1/10	5.4/10	4.6/10
INFORM Severity Index (0-5)¹⁴	4.5/5	3.8/5 ¹⁵	3.6/5
Impact of the crisis	4.7/5	10/10	9.4/10
Condition of people affected	4.5/5	7.6/10	7.7/10
Complexity of the crisis	4.2/5	3.1/5	4.0/5
Number of People in Need	5.0/5	7.3/10	6.8/10
Human Development Index (0-1)	180 (0.478)	156 (0.54)	76 (0.77)
Total Population¹⁶	41 400 000	239 632 928¹⁷	89 054 133

	Tajikistan	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan
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¹³ INFORM Risk is a global, open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters

¹⁴ The INFORM Severity Index is a way to objectively measure and compare the severity of humanitarian crises and disasters globally.
<https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Severity>

¹⁵ [Global crisis severity index](#)

¹⁶ World Bank data, year

¹⁷ [World population](#)

INFORM Risk Index (0-10)¹⁸	4.0/10	3.0/10	2.0/10	3.1/10
Hazard and Exposure	3.7/10	2.8/10	2.4/10	3.2/10
Vulnerability	3.5/10	2.4/10	0.9/10	2.5/10
Lack of Coping Capacity	4.9/10	4.2/10	3.7/10	3.6/10
INFORM Severity Index (0-5)¹⁹				
Impact of the crisis				
Condition of people affected				
Complexity of the crisis				
Number of People in Need				
Human Development Index (0-1)	0.685	0.692	0.811	0.727
Total Population²⁰	9 952 790	6 808 300	19 621 97	35 648 100

2 HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

2.1 People in need of humanitarian assistance:

Population in Need	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Iran
Total number of vulnerable people in need of humanitarian assistance	29.2 ²¹	20.6 million ²²	
Refugees ²³ (including children in need of Education in Emergencies (EiE))	52 000, vast majority of whom were displaced from Pakistan ²⁴	3.7 million Afghans of varying statuses incl. 1.32 million registered Afghans	4.5 million (Afghans and Iraqis) of varying status
IDPs and returnees			
– IDPs affected by natural hazards.	200 000 ²⁵	11,340,621 ²⁸	42 000 ³⁰
– IDPs affected by conflict.	691 000 ²⁶	116 545 ²⁹	
	1.2 million returnees ²⁷		

¹⁸ INFORM Risk is a global, open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk>

¹⁹ The INFORM Severity Index is a way to objectively measure and compare the severity of humanitarian crises and disasters globally. <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Severity>

²⁰ World Bank data

²¹ [afghanistan-revised-humanitarian-response-plan-2023](#)

²² [UNOCHA, Pakistan: 2022 Floods Response Overview](#)

²³ [UNHCR](#)

²⁴ AFG-HNO-2023

²⁵ AFG-HNO-2023

²⁶ AFG-HNO-2023

²⁷ AFG-HNO-2023

²⁸ IDMC, displacement data 2022: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/pakistan>

²⁹ <https://cewpdma.gkp.pk/dsr/>

³⁰ IDMC, displacement data 2022: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/iran>

People affected by food insecurity and malnutrition.			
– Number of moderately and severely food insecure people	19.1 million ³¹	97.9 million ³³	35.9 million ³⁵
– People of malnourished people (acute and chronic)	7.2 million ³²	7.1 million ³⁴	3.4 million ³⁶ malnourished

2.1.1 Refugees

Afghanistan is at the origin of the world's largest protracted refugee population. It is host to 52 000³⁷ refugees and asylum seekers from Pakistan, many of them with unclear legal status. Movements in and out of Afghanistan have continued following August 2021. Rotational movements, in particular with Iran, continue and are difficult to quantify.

Pakistan is currently hosting 3.7 million Afghan refugees. According to the Documentation Renewal and Information Verification Exercise (DRIVE) in 2021 led by the Government of Pakistan, the latest figure of registered Afghan refugees holding a Proof of Registration (PoR) in Pakistan stands at 1.32 million, of which 52%³⁸ are children and 16%³⁹ are estimated to be with disabilities. An estimated 31% of registered refugees live in villages, while 69% live in urban or semi-urban settings with limited external assistance. The provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan host the most Afghans (81%) with both provinces exposed to multi-dimensional poverty levels⁴⁰. Additionally, the expiration in the Proof of Registration cards at the end of June 2023, has placed this category in a precarious position with currently no clarification on the possible extension. Compounding the refugee figures are the estimated 0.84 million Afghan Citizen Card holders and 0.775 million undocumented Afghans residing in Pakistan. In the absence of a national refugee/asylum framework, all three categories of Afghans live in a legal limbo and are exposed to multi-layered protection risks undermining of their basic human rights, particularly: a) the right to employment and self-reliance being disallowed for all three categories of Afghans, resulting in a large majority of them working in the informal sectors (e.g., transport, construction and agricultural) mainly as daily wage labourers facing challenges maintaining stable employment and at risk of exploitation b) access to primary health and education for PoR cardholder is feasible yet multiple barriers to both basic rights remain a challenge, whilst ACC holders have informal access to both services based on the willingness of service providers. The situation is more precarious for the newly arrived Afghans since August 2021. Pakistan officials estimate that between 800 000 and 1 000 000 have entered the country however, humanitarian partners continue to be restricted by the Government of Pakistan to assist newly arrived vulnerable Afghans. More recently, on 3 October the caretaker Pakistan Government announced the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' which foresees an estimated 1.7 million Afghan nationals living in Pakistan, to leave before 1 November voluntarily, or face deportation. Since the ultimatum was announced in early October,

³¹ [afghanistan-revised-humanitarian-response-plan-2023](#)

³² [afghanistan-revised-humanitarian-response-plan-2023](#)

³³ FAO Pakistan statistics: <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#country/165>

³⁴ 2022 Flood Response Plan - Pakistan

³⁵ FAO Iran statistics: <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#country/102>

³⁶ [FAO Stat \(2020/2019-2021\)](#)

³⁷ AFG-HNO-2023

³⁸ UNHCR, Pakistan Education Factsheet DRIVE Data, as of 31 July 2022

³⁹ Afghan Regional Refugee Response Plan, January-December 2023

⁴⁰ Ibid.

deeply worrying reports have emerged of intimidation, threats, coercion, and extortion towards Afghan citizens residing in Pakistan. Law enforcement agencies have cracked down and arrested hundreds of Afghans including women and children prior to the deadline. Moreover, despite circulars issued by the Government of Pakistan that PoR and ACC card holders will not be affected by the repatriation plan, increased harassment, threats, and evictions have continued, with Afghans of all status (PoR/Asylum seekers, ACC, undocumented) reported to have been arrested.

Iran hosts some 4.5 million Afghans with various legal statuses, of whom 750 000 are Afghan refugees with Amayesh cards and 20 000 Iraqi refugees holding a Hoviat card, as well as 267 000 Afghan passport-holders, 360 000 holding a residence permit, 2.6 million head counted⁴¹ and an estimated 500 000 undocumented Afghans. An estimated 40% of the Afghan population in Iran are children⁴². Access to documentation remains a key concern as it not only provides protection against detention and deportation but also enables predictable access to national services and other assistance. Around 1% of the registered Afghans live in 20 refugee settlements across 13 provinces while 99% live in urban and rural areas with the Iranian host population⁴³. In Iran, refugees are allowed to work in a number of prescribed sectors on a daily wage basis (approx. EUR 61/month)⁴⁴ thus subject to unstable incomes. The deteriorating economic situation continues to impact livelihood opportunities, with reduced household income leaving many unable to afford the renewal of their Amayesh cards, which have reportedly doubled in cost, or to cover the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) premium fee. Regardless of documentation status (refugees, passport holders, undocumented), Afghans have access to Primary Health Care (PHC) at no cost, like Iranian nationals. Education is likewise accessible to Afghans and more than 500 000⁴⁵ Afghan children – including undocumented Afghans and newly arrived in Iran – benefit from Iran's inclusive education policies. Despite these progressive policies, to retain the refugee status and access to basic services, several mandatory annual expenses are incurred (e.g., school enrolment, health insurance premiums, Amayesh renewal, temporary work permits). The 2023 Afghanistan Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) remains largely underfunded with an 82% funding gap for Pakistan and 76% for Iran respectively.

In **Central Asia**, according to UNHCR, as of 1 January 2023 there are 15 135 refugees and asylum-seekers between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In addition, there is a reported number of 37 740 known stateless people across Central Asia, the majority of which Afghans.

2.1.2 IDPs and returnees

Despite a decline since August 2021, 691 000 people have been estimated to be internally displaced in **Afghanistan**⁴⁶. **Unemployment and poverty** have now become the most prevalent driver of displacement. Over the years, people moved to provincial/urban centers in search of social protection and humanitarian aid, as well as more long-term access to basic services such as health care, education, and markets. Pressure is mounting from the de facto authorities to return internally displaced people to their areas of origin, with increasing concerns over forced returns especially from informal settlements. Small pockets of conflict, and therefore displacement (particularly in the northern provinces) remain and should be monitored. It is well acknowledged that humanitarian response is not the appropriate substitute for basic needs of people (forcibly) returning to their areas of origin. While data is not entirely consolidated because of circular

⁴¹ In recognition of the steady inflow of Afghan nationals, especially through irregular pathways, the Government of Iran conducted in 2022 a headcount exercise which was open to all undocumented populations in Iran, including new arrivals. While final data is not yet released, it is reported that 2.6 million Afghans enrolled in this exercise which provides them with a headcount slip and temporary protection from deportation.

⁴² Regional Refugee Response Plan, January -December 2023

⁴³ UNHCR Iran: <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran>

⁴⁴ UNHCR, Cost of basic needs for refugees in Iran, December 2021

⁴⁵ <https://iran.un.org/en/178030-unhcr-and-wfp-help-refugee-children-stay-school-and-reach-their-dreams>

⁴⁶ HNO 2023

movements, 1.2 million cross border returnees have been estimated for 2023, with the majority returning from Iran and Pakistan.

In the context of the 3 October decision by the caretaker Pakistan Government on the repatriation Plan, as of 1 November 2023, Phase I of the Plan came into effect, with a surge of Afghans having moved ahead of the deadline and soon thereafter to the two main border crossing points – Torkham in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Chaman in Baluchistan Province. While official figures are unavailable, media report an estimated 200 000 Afghans have crossed since the ultimatum to leave the country was announced. Since 15 September 2023, more than 300 000 Afghans have left Pakistan spontaneously, with IOM data showing that 62% of returnees are children and with 86% of families reporting fear of arrest as the most common reason for leaving. Social media images of kilometre-long queues and of trucks carrying families' belongings are widely shared. Government officials have stated that the repatriation plan will take place over several months and up to a year.

Ahead of the deportations which commenced on 1 November, the Government of Pakistan had reportedly established 'holding centres' across the country, to which no access was granted for media. Humanitarian organisations continue with their principled approach vis-a-vis such deportation holding centres. Further concerning media reports include restrictions imposed on Afghans, such the permission to only take 50 000 Afghanis in Afghan currency per family as well as restrictions on livestock. Such a large-scale repatriation plan is likely to also have a negative impact on Pakistan's economy. In the absence of a screening and registration system, there is serious concern about Afghans requiring international protection and lacking access to pathways to safety. There is a critical need to reinforce protection, including an increase for legal aid and provision of information. Moreover, fear has reduced Afghans' access to health services especially also impacting those requiring critical health care such as pregnant women. Partners likewise report increasing anxiety among Afghans and increasing needs for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Livelihoods of Afghans are likewise severely impacted due to fears of mobility.

These factors create massive needs for humanitarian assistance at the border, in particular on the Afghan side. Immediate humanitarian assistance is needed to alleviate the suffering and preserve the dignity of returnees awaiting registration and then moving towards areas of destination. Aside from urgent medical cases, emergency humanitarian assistance is largely needed, especially in the arrival and waiting areas to ensure the dignity of individuals already traumatised by the return. Access to water and sanitation, protection services, temporary shelter for the most vulnerable, food rations, nutrition supplements are the most immediate needs. Drinkable water and handwashing stations, water supply, instalment of latrines, sanitation (including management of solid waste), provision of hygiene items and sanitary pads for women and girls, infection prevention and control for the overcrowded areas are the most immediate needs. Primary Healthcare, including reproductive healthcare, and provision of essential drugs are essential to meet the most immediate needs of the individuals returning. Border Protection monitoring and Psychological First Aid are essential to support the return process of returnees.

In Pakistan, discounting short-term displacements due to insecurity, 116 545 conflict affected persons remain to be in a situation of protracted displacement in the country. Displacement resulting from human and natural induced hazards continue to occur, especially in the aftermath of the 2022 floods which triggered 8.2 million internal displacements, making it the world's largest disaster displacement event in the last ten years⁴⁷. More than 1.3 million people remained displaced to date, demonstrating the challenges that disaster affected communities still face in finding solutions following a disaster of this magnitude. Similarly, during the same period **in Iran**, for 2022, 42 000 displaced persons have been recorded because of natural-induced

⁴⁷ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/pakistan>

hazards.⁴⁸ In both countries, worsening extreme weather conditions are likely to trigger internal climate induced displacement thus leading to key protection issues of affected populations.

2.1.3 Population affected by food insecurity and malnutrition

In **Afghanistan**, the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Analysis reports that 17.2 million people (43% of the total population) were facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) by April 2023. 33 of 34 provinces are expected to be categorised in IPC 3 or 4. Though markets remain functional, increasing prices of essential food and non-food commodities, decreasing remittances from abroad, decreasing livelihood opportunities and the further reduction of daily labour continue to compromise the vulnerabilities of the affected populations, exacerbated by epidemics and natural hazards induced disasters⁴⁹. The food security sector remains largely underfunded. 3.2 million children and 800 000 pregnant and lactating women (PLW) suffer from acute malnutrition.

In **Pakistan**, according to the latest Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) reports of 2023 carried out in 43 districts of 3 provinces⁵⁰, nearly 10.52 million people (29 percent of the 36.7 million rural population analysed) experienced high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) between April and October 2023. These include around 2.07 million people (6 percent of the population analysed) in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) and around 8.45 million people (23 percent of the population analysed) in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) across the 43 districts analysed. Of the 43 rural districts analysed, five are classified in IPC phase 2 (Stressed) and remaining 38 are classified in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) during April to October 2023. The acute food insecurity is projected to increase to 11.81 million people between November 2023 and January 2024. Of the 43 rural districts analysed, four are projected to be in IPC phase 2 (Stressed), 37 in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) and remaining two are estimated to be in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency).

In **Iran**, a report published in December 2022 by the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare (MCLSW), announced that currently 26 million Iranians, or almost one-third of the population, are living below the poverty line⁵¹. In the same report, it is established that the median calorie per capita consumption among Iranians has fallen below the standard threshold since 2018 and is persistently declining⁵². This can signal the deterioration of children's nutritional status across the country. The Food and Nutrition surveillance (FEWs)⁵³ reported eight food insecure provinces, including refugee hosting provinces. While the trend of stunting is escalating in all eight studied provinces, the prevalence is particularly worrying in Sistan-Balochistan⁵⁴ (29%) and South Khorasan (16%).

2.1.4 People affected by shocks, including natural hazards induced disasters

Afghanistan ranks number 2 in the world, in terms of exposure to natural risks and hazards, due to its geographical location and decades of environmental degradation. The changing climate is exacerbating frequency and intensity of either risk drivers, resulting in escalating needs and/or complicating access to those most in need. High intensity floods are frequent, damaging or destroying houses, as well as leading to crop destruction and livestock or other livelihood assets. Earthquakes are experienced routinely, with an average impact of 560 deaths per year. The Herat quakes of 7 October and during the days after resulted in 1

⁴⁸ IDMC, Displacement Data, Country Profile Iran, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/iran>

⁴⁹ REACH, Whole of Afghanistan Survey 2022.

⁵⁰ 18 rural districts of Balochistan, 16 rural districts of Sindh and nine rural districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were analysed, comprising of around 36.7 million rural population (e.g. 16.3 percent of the Pakistan's total population).

⁵¹ UNICEF country Office Annual Report 2022

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Food and Nutrition surveillance, April 2022.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

482 fatalities. At least 114 000 need humanitarian support. In July 2023 massive flashfloods affected 126 000 people in central and eastern parts of the country. Compound risks accumulate, for example shocks are exacerbated by droughts, such as experienced in 2018, 2021 and 2022. Precipitation between October 2022 and April 2023 was below average. In addition, decreasing water tables and reduced sanitation exacerbates the risks of outbreaks of infectious and diarrheal diseases.

Pakistan and Iran are exposed to a variety of risks – hydro-meteorological and geophysical hazards, including outbreaks of communicable diseases with epidemic and pandemic potential. The range and intensity of extreme natural and weather-related events, coupled with fast-growing urbanisation and inadequate disaster preparedness, are increasing both countries' vulnerability to natural hazards as evident in Pakistan where the devastating floods in 2022 affected 33 million people and displaced 8.2 million people. According to the global Climate Risk Index (CRI), Pakistan is the eighth most vulnerable country to the impact of climate change and is ranked 15th with a score index of 25, whilst Iran CRI ranking is 18 with a score index of 27.⁵⁵ According to the Islamic Republic of Iran Meteorological Organisation, the average temperature has risen by 2°C since the 1960s, and rainfall has decreased by 20% in the past two decades. As a result, climate-related events, water scarcity and natural-hazard induced disasters are expected to become more frequent and intense and, compounded by socio-economic risks, are affecting the poorest segments of the population, most notably refugees and displaced people. A Post Disaster Needs Assessment Report found that the national poverty rate may increase by up to 4.0 percentage points, potentially pushing between 8.4 and 9.1 million more people below the poverty line. The latest data shows even worse scenarios. For instance, in September 2023, the World Bank reported that Pakistan's poverty rate rose to 39.4% in 2023, from 34.2% in 2022, pushing an additional 12.5 million people below the poverty line due to GDP contraction, rising food, energy costs and the severe impact of the 2022 floods⁵⁶.

2.2 Description of the most acute humanitarian needs

2.2.1 Protection

In **Afghanistan** it is estimated that more than 20.3 million people⁵⁷ face several intrinsically interlinked protection risks. Women and children constitute more than 77% of the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance. Protection concerns include stand-alone sectors that overlap: child protection (7.5 million), housing, land and property (5.9 million), gender-based violence (GBV) (10.1 million) and mine action (5 million)⁵⁸. In 2022 and 2023 protection services became one of the most difficult sectors, as inaccessible areas now reached made mass caseloads across all protection sub-types visible. Considering that the core access needs depend on services by women for women, the edict of 24 December 2022 reduced the service delivery. Similarly, the edict of 23 March 2023 reduced access to education and continues to impact an estimated 8.7 people in need of education and therefore the same number in need of protection against risks of early marriage, high risk forced child labour⁵⁹, family separation and recruitment into armed groups.⁶⁰

The ban and other restrictions on women's participation in economy, education, politics and society are counterproductive to a positive economic development. The number of people in need of GBV services has grown by 25% from 10.1 million to 13.1 million. Incidents of murder, rape, forced marriages including child marriage, assault and battery as well as "honour killings" have been reported to the United Nations in

⁵⁵ Global climate risk index 2021, German Watch

⁵⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/poverty-and-equity-briefs>

⁵⁷ HNO 2023

⁵⁸ HRP 2023

⁵⁹ Scrap metal collection in areas contaminated by explosive ordinances; drug trafficking.

⁶⁰ HNO 2023; WoAA

Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover of the country. In many provinces the presence of explosive ordnance and improvised explosive devices remain an important risk. Overall, mines are an ongoing impediment to accessing remote communities by humanitarians, and for communities to access humanitarian and basic services.

In **Pakistan and Iran**, lack of proper legal status and documentation remains the crux of protection. The first large-scale refugee verification between April and December 2021, after 10 years in **Pakistan** provides legitimacy to registered Afghans and facilitates access to humanitarian assistance, yet the situation remains precarious as the validity of this registration expired in June 2023. For ACC holders and undocumented, especially newly arrived Afghans, the situation is far worse with humanitarian assistance and access to basic services thwarted by the Government of Pakistan. In **Iran** access to documentation remains a key concern as documentation not only protects against detention and deportation, but also enables predictable access to national services and other assistance. Although the headcount exercise is likely to result in protection benefits for those who participated and were issued with temporary documentation (headcount slip), the duration of these protection safeguards remains vague over the longer-term. Specific concerns exist for the situation of Afghans who, for a variety of reasons did not participate and remain without any form of documentation. Borders are likely to remain tightly regulated but a certain level of population movement is expected to continue irregularly, exposing Afghans, especially women and children, to heightened risks of smuggling and trafficking. Thus, focus on child protection and GBV remains critical. Upon arrival, people moving through irregular channels are at increased risk of deportation, which may be in contravention of the principle of non-refoulement. Advocacy on access and protection-oriented humanitarian assistance remains equally paramount.

In **Central Asia**, the lack of real legal frameworks and protection space for refugees (including Afghan refugees) in the region raises serious protection concerns. People repeatedly fall through the cracks and end up in irregularity due to very bureaucratic and complex asylum procedures. Refugee Status Determination (RSD) decisions are based on political and security concerns rather than individual protection needs. Most remain in temporary status for years, or even decades, as obtaining permanent status is virtually impossible. In 2022, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan experienced what can best be labelled a massive “through-flux” of Russian citizens in September-October 2022 following the call for partial mobilisation in Russia. There is a very low capacity for managing large-scale influx of refugees.

2.2.2 Health

In **Afghanistan**, there is a massive mismatch between health care needs and the availability and access to basic health care services. The socio-economic crisis and a reduced capacity to meet basic needs still triggers de-prioritisation of people seeking health care services. In addition, restrictions on movement for women (and therefore children) has reduced access for these population groups and those that rely on women for healthcare (the disabled, the elderly etc). As a result, almost 18 million people are in need of healthcare. Decades of conflict has led to gaps in immunisation (only 16% of children with full immunisation)⁶¹, resulting in recurrent outbreaks of diseases such as polio and measles, escalated by challenges in supply lines and capacity limitations in the authorities.⁶² Thus, outbreak mitigation is a significant priority for humanitarian action, in addition to responding to critical primary and secondary healthcare caseloads. Recurrent outbreaks of communicable diseases remain a key concern in addition to other concerns like malnutrition, acute waterborne diseases (AWD) variants like cholera and dysentery. Sanitation risks exist. Access to clean water is limited. There is a lack of understanding/implementation of

⁶¹ UNICEF MICS 2023

⁶² Humanitarian Access Group – lack of capacity in ministries due to brain drain and intentional appointment of non-technical focal points within ministries by Defacto Authority core challenge noted consistently.

appropriate treatment options. In addition, access to trauma-based healthcare for people remains a priority, including mental health support (for anxiety, depression, and early stages of newly acquired trauma), in particular after sudden onset shocks, e.g., earthquakes, floods, conflict, explosives etc.

The public health system in **Pakistan** is woefully under resourced and suffers from a low level of coverage requiring support to provision of key primary health care with a focus on maternal and child health care as well as quality service provision. The numerous barriers (e.g. affordability, distance, language barriers etc) for Afghans to access health care continue to require advocacy. **Iran's** national health system has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as sanctions – which impact the supply and availability of medicines and medical devices and the financial support to the existing health care services, including research and development of new therapies and procedures⁶³. Among Afghans, the lack of health insurance and, consequently, high medical expenses, continue to be persistent and widely reported challenges and result in limited access to secondary and tertiary health care services. Many Afghans are not covered by insurance due to a lack of documentation, while for documented Afghans, the price of enrolment in the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) scheme is often prohibitive. For undocumented refugees the fear of deportation deters them from approaching health care centres. Strengthening health care services in Afghan hosting areas remains critical including advocating for access to health care for undocumented persons. Furthermore, reports of increasing mental health needs in **Pakistan** and **Iran** resulting from the multiple implications of COVID-19 and the challenge of displacement likewise need attention.

2.2.3 Nutrition

In **Afghanistan** childhood malnutrition is the main cause of child mortality with one of the world's highest rates of wasting and stunting in children under five, with stunting rates at 48.4%.⁶⁴ Only 14.8% of Afghan children aged 6-24 months receive the right variety of food in the quantity needed for their age.⁶⁵ Of particular concern is the high rate of malnutrition seen in pregnant and lactating women - which increases the chances of malnutrition in children under 6 months whose nutritional intake is co-dependent during pregnancy and early childhood - and the limited integration of the role of nutrition in female healthcare. The current nutrition situation is exacerbated by increased food insecurity across the board, which has led to increased negative coping mechanisms including reduced quality foods, fewer meals, fewer diverse nutritional foods per meal. In at least 33 out of 34 provinces malnutrition rates are above the emergency threshold for acute malnutrition with concentrations in areas which are difficult to reach. Contingency planning includes the stockpiling of supplies (as a dynamic preparedness action) to pre-empt loss of life.

In **Pakistan**, chronic malnutrition is one of the highest in Asia and compounded by persistent high levels of acute child malnutrition in vulnerable areas. Recently conducted IPC Acute Malnutrition preliminary analysis identified 17 districts in Phase 4 (critical) and 2 districts in Phase 5 (extremely critical) out of 36 flood-affected districts across Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces. While over 2.14 million children need GAM treatment, over 1.5 million children in need of MAM treatment and over 635 000 children in need of SAM treatment, addressing maternal malnutrition combined with a multi-sectoral response remains a priority.

In **Iran**, multi-dimensional causes (e.g., epidemic disease outbreaks, disasters, sanctions, inflation) are impacting the food availability and nutrition services for the most vulnerable communities in Iran notably Afghans who rely on a daily wage. The children's nutritional status is deteriorating across the country⁶⁶. Integrated health and nutrition services remain relevant in both countries.

⁶³ UN Special Rapporteur – Alena Douhan visits to Iran, May 2022

⁶⁴ UNICEF MICS 2023.

⁶⁵ UNICEF MICS 2023

⁶⁶ UNICEF Country Office Annual Report 2022

2.2.4 Food Assistance and Basic Needs

In **Afghanistan** prevailing climatic conditions (droughts in the last years), the economic downturn, drought and the global food and commodity crisis are exerting pressures on livelihoods and food insecurity of millions of vulnerable population groups. Continuous shocks have exhausted the resilience of displaced and host communities making it difficult for households to meet their basic needs. Altered rainfall can be expected until mid-2024. The severe economic crisis leads to a loss of purchasing power and a lower household income. According to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification IPC (April – October 2023), around 17.2 million Afghans are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity, classified in Crisis or Emergency (IPC Phase 3 or 4) in April 2023. This includes nearly 3.4 million people experiencing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity.

Limited physical access during winter (due to a failing infrastructure) and a restrictive environment for working women will further aggravate the situation. In addition, based on observation in 2023 of the breeding cycle of locusts, in 2024 the threat of locust infestation, could, if it materialises, lead to significantly diminished harvests.

The 2023 hunger hotspot outlook identifies **Pakistan** as a country of very high concern, having a high number of people facing critical acute food insecurity, coupled with worsening drivers that are expected to further intensify life threatening conditions in the coming months⁶⁷. Pakistan is going through an uncertain political and economic situation, which has significantly hampered access to employment and other income opportunities and resulted in continued loss of purchasing power due to the soaring costs of basic goods and services. Other factors include the impacts of 2022 devastating flooding on food crop production and livestock deaths/diseases, and border closure with Afghanistan and Iran (for some areas in Balochistan) which all contribute to reduced employment and income opportunities. In **Iran**, the situation is equally dire considering the multiple shocks, the deteriorating economic situation and high inflation rates. To control rising food import prices, the Government removed subsidies for imports of certain essential foods, contributing to increased food prices, with inflation surpassing 80% by mid-2022. Faced with increased barriers to accessing livelihoods, Afghan populations are likely to become increasingly reliant on unstable sources of income generation and resort to harmful coping strategies that may generate protection risks.

2.2.5 WASH, Shelter and Settlements

In **Afghanistan** WASH infrastructure, especially in previously inaccessible areas faced decades of underinvestment, disruption and destruction. Combined with the depletion and overexploitation of water resources, the existing WASH services are unable to cover the Afghan population needs with an estimated 21.2 million people in need of assistance in 2023⁶⁸. As a result, Acute Diarrheal Disease is the second leading causes of morbidity among all age groups from January to May 2023⁶⁹, and cholera is rampant in Afghanistan (although the presence of the vibrio bacterium remained yet unconfirmed). Frequent earthquakes⁷⁰ and floods combined with worsening effects of harsh winter expose population to critical shelter needs when those natural hazards induced disasters occur. In 2023, an estimated 9.6 million people in need of shelter and non food items were considered by the humanitarian response plan⁷¹. More than 1 million of individuals will probably be forced to return from Pakistan, many of them in need of humanitarian assistance, in particular shelter.

⁶⁷ Hunger Hotspots FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity June to November 2023 outlook

⁶⁸ OCHA, Revised Humanitarian Response Plan June-December 2023, June 2023 p47.

⁶⁹ Health Cluster Afghanistan Bulletin, May 2023, p2

⁷⁰ 40 earthquakes over 4.5 magnitude in Afghanistan between January and May 2023 [Source: USAID, Afghanistan: Earthquake Events Overview, May 2023]

⁷¹ OCHA, Revised Humanitarian Response Plan June-December 2023, June 2023 p23

Pakistan and Iran suffer from water scarcity which has a serious impact on communities at risk. Given the vulnerability to frequent natural hazards which trigger disasters and displacement, as evidenced by the devastating floods in 2022 in Pakistan, hundreds of thousands of people need emergency water and sanitation support. Poor access to water and sanitation equally has a direct impact on the health and nutrition status of poor communities, especially children. In Pakistan, the prevalence of waterborne and vector-borne diseases remains a concern in the districts affected by the floods. During the monsoon season, the risk of vector-borne diseases as well as waterborne diseases are expected to further increase; continuous monitoring and preparedness are required to effectively respond to disease outbreaks. Similarly, shelter and settlement solutions remain critical in both countries especially for Afghan refugees and those who arrived since 2021.

2.2.6 Education in Emergencies (EiE)

In Afghanistan 8.7 million children do not have access to education. The declaration by the de facto authorities in March 2022 preventing girls and women from attending school or teaching past grade 6, was followed by multiple directives: (i) in April 2023 initially blocking Community Based Education (CBE) classes in Kandahar and Helmand and (ii) in June 2023 directing transition of all education programmes from international NGOs to national NGOs. EiE requires capable negotiation to respond to challenges for equitable access⁷², as well as physical, psycho-social and cognitive protection support. EiE needs are likely to increase, where unanticipated emergencies will further de-prioritise education. Life sustaining and protective learning environments for children are at risk; the setting may become restrictive for girls in 2024.

Pakistan has the world's second-highest number of out-of-school children (OOSC) with an estimated 22.8 million children aged 5-16 not attending school, representing 44% of the total population in this age group.⁷³ Moreover 80% of Afghan refugee children are out of school and the figure is likely to be higher among the ACC holders and undocumented Afghan children, where access is hindered due to lack of documentation, language barriers, distance, lack of schools and classrooms, poverty and socio-cultural pressure.

In Iran, the 2015 decree allows all Afghan children to access schools regardless of their status. Yet learning opportunities are hampered due to the lack of schools and classrooms, language barriers, teacher-student ratio, poverty, and socio-cultural barriers that prevail. Girls' access to education as well as children with special needs remain a key concern in Pakistan and Iran alike.

2.2.7 Vulnerability to natural hazard induced disasters (Disaster Preparedness -DP)

The overall aim of Disaster Preparedness actions in the region is to create better-prepared and more resilient individuals, people, communities, and institutions to withstand both natural-hazards and human-induced crises. Disaster risk management (DRM) is often a priority in regional and national strategies, but its pace of implementation differs widely across the region. Development gains are undermined by frequency of disasters, crises, lack of comprehensive risk informed preparedness for and early action to reduce the impact of future shocks and disasters. One of the main causes of human suffering in Southwest Asia is directly linked to the socio-economic vulnerability of sections of its people. Vulnerable people who lack training and therefore capacities, social connections, support, or finances to deal with an event such as a flood or drought are those who pay, often with their own lives, the most severe costs of disasters and climate change. With climate-induced hazards increasing in intensity and frequency, shocks, crises, and disasters result in a high human and economic cost. The secondary impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating pre-existing vulnerability and creating new needs. Several countries and subnational regions remain caught in protracted cycles of conflict and violence, which contribute to underdevelopment and fragility. Countries

⁷² https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2022_afg_edu_cluster_strategy_2022-2023.pdf

⁷³ UNICEF Pakistan

experiencing violent conflict and/or fragile governance are in addition those least likely to be able to respond to disasters and adapt to climate change.

In Afghanistan, a country already prone to natural and human induced hazards, decades of conflict and environmental degradation, coupled with low investments in disaster risk management (DRM) strategies, have contributed to people's vulnerability. As a result, the Afghan people, their governance system and infrastructure are left with very a low capacity to cope with sudden new shocks. DP mainstreaming must therefore be systematically integrated into every humanitarian action.

In Pakistan, the prevailing fragile DRM framework is characterised by lack of institutional capacity and understanding of multi-hazard risks, weak coordination, lack of resources and comprehensive institutional approaches. Investment in targeted preparedness interventions such as generating evidence to enhance inter-departmental coordination and strengthening adaptivity/flexibility of social protection systems of the Government of Pakistan, building on multi-hazard risks analysis combined with socio-economic vulnerability, remains critical.

Iran's DRM system and frameworks present weaknesses, especially in terms of being informed by a meaningful multi-hazard approach, limited availability of financial resources to increase investment in preventive measures and retrofitting, and limited access to disaster risk information (hazard and vulnerability data) to inform planning, preparedness, and prevention interventions. This has been over the last year further compounded by the negative impact of COVID-19 and sanctions, which put additional strain on national preparedness and response capacities to prepare for and respond to future shocks. In both Pakistan and Iran, it remains therefore imperative to ensure that disaster preparedness is scaled up and mainstreamed into humanitarian response, increasing beneficiaries' resilience to future shocks and disasters.

In Central Asia (Regional), the impact of climate change coupled with its diverse geography, ranging from mountains, steppes, and deserts to large river systems, has the potential to intensify the vulnerabilities and exposure to hazards in the coming years. The region is prone to drought and water scarcity. The region is also prone to climate-related conflicts, which often stem from water disputes. These disasters cause loss of life, destroy homes and resources, and hinder long-term development.

3. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND COORDINATION

3.1 National / local response and involvement

3.1.1 In Afghanistan most public services are partially suspended and the capacity of public organisations to deliver quality and timely services has been undermined, resulting in the erosion of developmental gains achieved in earlier decades. Mitigation measures, including financial support to prevent further degradation are critical in the current crisis context. National NGOs were severely disenfranchised by suspended and/or withdrawn developmental funds. In 2023, national NGOs restarted to assume a more active role in delivering humanitarian assistance, under contracts with INGOs and UN agencies/funds. The support and prioritisation of the localisation agenda, including the building of local financial and programming capacity, remains a priority.

3.1.2 The Government of Pakistan (GoP) together with the national armed forces serve as the first responders in emergency settings. The first response is often followed by a cash transfer compensation system to vulnerable Pakistani disaster affected/displaced persons. Yet, despite the willingness and ability of the government to address the needs of affected population, it encounters multi-layered challenges affecting the capacity of DRM system, which emphasises ex-post, rather than ex-ante, preparedness and early action. Crisis-affected Afghans (registered, ACC and undocumented) remain solely dependent on humanitarian organisations, including humanitarian assistance being thwarted by GoP for Afghans who newly arrived since 2021.

3.1.3 In 2022 The **Government of Iran** (GoI) conducted a headcount exercise which was open to all undocumented populations in Iran, including new arrivals. This seems to indicate that the Government is committed to maintaining inclusive policies and identifying opportunities to provide documentation (and therefore facilitate predictable access to social services). Yet the capacity and willingness to support Afghans in Iran is running the risk of reversal as the GoI is adversely affected by economic challenges, sanctions and consequences of COVID-19. Iran calls for greater burden sharing on refugees. In terms of frequent natural hazard induced disasters Iran faces, the authorities together with the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) are the first responders. Disaster response is challenged due to the secondary implications of sanctions despite humanitarian waivers and the national disaster risk management framework is at a nascent stage. However, the GoI has set DRM as a priority.

3.2 International Humanitarian Response

3.2.1 In **Afghanistan**, the UN Resident Coordinator /Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) and Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary General lead the humanitarian response. At the stage of the mid-term review the Humanitarian Response Plan stipulated needs in the order of USD 3.227 billion. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) meets on a fluid schedule depending on the urgency of topics to be discussed providing strategic direction for the collective response, while the donor community has regular exchanges with the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA. Humanitarian aid is so insufficiently funded it has reached a fiscal cliff, with only 24% of USD 3.227 billion funded in October 2023. In the summer of 2023 critical supplies for emergency shelter and non food items, WASH and food such as pulses, wheat flour and vegetable oil are at risk of pipeline break due to funding gaps. The HRP represents a 2.5 billion increase since 2021 and ranks in the top 5 highest HRPs worldwide, even after a reduction of initial targets.

3.2.2 In **Pakistan**, the Flood Response Plan (FRP) for 2023 is 60.5% funded. But this does not take new and/or emerging shocks such as inflation into consideration. Therefore, the humanitarian needs remain significant and the level of funding low to ensure adequate coverage of the needs. Similarly, the Pakistan requirements of the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) 2023 is only 18% funded of the USD 383 764 416. A similar funding level applies for the **Iran** component of the RRRP with only 24% funding to date of the USD 198 981 998. Neither Pakistan nor Iran has a Humanitarian Response Plan, thereby leaving large segments of the humanitarian needs unmet. In-country coordination among the humanitarian partners in Pakistan and Iran exists without a formal humanitarian cluster system.

3.3 Operational constraints in terms of:

- i) access/humanitarian space:

In **Afghanistan**, the cessation of open conflict resulted in a considerable increase in physical access across the country, but access challenges persist and are expected to continue. This in addition to restrictions imposed by the Taliban directly affecting women and girls. Some of the main challenges are now the regulations, decisions, and approach from provincial and local governmental focal points towards humanitarian organisations increasing the risk of interferences and highlighting new challenges facing the humanitarian community. Throughout 2022 and 2023 sequential decisions have severely reduced women's ability to engage safely and meaningfully in many sectors of the humanitarian response. In December 2022 the Taliban banned women to work for NGOs. This ban was extended to UN organisations in April 2023. In many parts of the country girls older than 12 years have limited access to education. Access to remote regions saw an improvement as a result of the changes in security, however some violent attacks continued to be reported including incidents directly targeting humanitarian aid workers. The presence of explosive

ordnances continues to constitute a high risk, particularly in areas that have been out of reach to the humanitarian community for the past decades. Challenges also persist with regards to movement into and across the country. Airports, including Kabul, are still only partially operational, impacting movement of staff as well as supplies. Commercial airlines from Europe and the Gulf region still do not offer scheduled flights to Afghanistan. Severe seasonal climatic conditions, natural and human-induced disasters, logistical constraints, such as poor infrastructure, further hinder movement of humanitarian staff and supplies to areas with no developed or maintained throughfares. This is a particular issue during winter. In **Pakistan**, humanitarian operations continue to be hindered by a complicated registration process and national counterterrorism regulations that allow the Government to deny or cancel permissions of NGOs and INGOs to operate. Access constraints remain high across Pakistan as a result of insecurity between armed non-state actors and government. In **Iran**, only a limited number of international organisations are allowed to operate within a controlled operational environment. The bureaucratic restrictions and impediments imposed by the Government of Iran moreover undermine timely and effective responses.

- ii) partners (presence, capacity), including absorption capacity on the ground:

Despite **Afghanistan's** complex environment, humanitarian organisations remain operational, throughout the country. Despite the attempts of aid organisations to stand unified, the burden of case-by-case assessments and implementation challenges remain. Edicts from Kandahar or Kabul impact specific sectors, in particular education. Increased staff presence outside of Kabul, including international staff, is key in supporting critical humanitarian access negotiations, to ensure that the response remains principled. Local level agreements seek to secure permission for needs-based responses that include assurances for safety and security, the inclusion of women for women, and no interference on overall implementation of humanitarian actions. Additional funds are needed, as the presence of women requires dedicated office space, transport, and often the presence of a Mahram presence. The complexity of the operational environment requires all organisations (including donors) to work with a high degree of flexibility. Further, all organisations in Afghanistan remain with the challenge on how to transfer foreign funds into the country, as central banks maintain risk-avoiding policies in compliance with sanctions adopted.

In **Pakistan**, the humanitarian landscape has starkly changed over the last years. The footprint of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) in-country has significantly reduced, due to declining funding trends and operational constraints. The UN is still present in country with UNHCR being one of the main actors, whilst OCHA has a minimal presence. In **Iran**, the humanitarian footprint is limited to a number of UN agencies including the Resident Coordinator Office, two international organisations and less than a handful of INGOs. In overall, humanitarian partners have the operational capacity despite the restrictive operational environment.

- iii) other:

In **Iran**, Humanitarian partners highlight the unintentional consequences of sanctions and their adverse impact on humanitarian operations. Suppliers and manufacturers are reluctant to engage and provide deliveries to Iran for various reasons. Consequently, bringing key humanitarian commodities into the country requires a long, expensive, and cumbersome process.

4. HUMANITARIAN – DEVELOPMENT – PEACE NEXUS

The developments in 2022 and 2023 in **Afghanistan** have altered the nexus strategies originally envisioned. The setting has fundamentally changed. In the context of an increasingly unstable and unpredictable environment, DG ECHO will contribute to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus, while safeguarding the humanitarian and guiding principles. A coordinated Team Europe Approach to “saving and safeguarding Afghan lives and livelihoods” as well as a unified donor position are critical. The nexus

approach is applied across sectors. DG ECHO and DG INTPA are working closely together, to maximise efficiency of funding. Measures to implement the basic needs approach and humanitarian assistance complement each other. For food/livelihood DG ECHO will provide support to the most vulnerable populations (such as people in acute food-insecurity, the displaced, and the exposed due to natural hazards, etc). DG ECHO will provide treatment services in areas with a high prevalence of malnutrition, while basic needs funding by DG INTPA will look into providing livelihood support to people and to enhance livelihood and job creation opportunities. In the sector of health, DG ECHO will focus on primary and mobile facilities, including nutritional emergencies, while DG INTPA support will be directed towards existing and static facilities. As for education, DG ECHO will fund community-based education (CBE) under Education in Emergencies (EiE), targeting children at risk and delivering a specialised education safeguarding retention rates. At the same time, DG ECHO can deliver mainstreamed child protection, while basic needs funds by DG INTPA would support existing structures with infrastructural rehabilitation and teachers training.

The **EU Pakistan** Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027 focuses on i) Green Inclusive Growth; ii) Human Capital; and iii) Governance, including the Rule of Law and Human Rights and one integrated Team Europe Initiative (TEI). Actions under this MIP are both gender mainstreamed and targeted for implementation of Gender Action Plan III, working towards achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. Furthermore, it is foreseen to mainstream, where relevant these initiatives to refugees (and their hosting communities) and returnees. The EU continues to advocate in its policy dialogue for a comprehensive and holistic migration policy, adequate legislation, as well as administrative and financial capacities. The humanitarian-peace-development nexus is addressed by targeting interventions in provinces affected by conflict and/or heavily impacted by climate change and/or the presence of Afghan nationals. In September 2023, a mission was organised by DG INTPA in a team Europe approach to further operationalise the HDP nexus in Pakistan. Between the services (DG INTPA, FPI and DG ECHO) and Member States, three collective outcomes of the collaborative framework were agreed upon: Climate Resilience, Social Protection and Forced displacement and Migration. The EU support will feed into the overarching Team Europe Approach on nexus leveraging resources with FPI, DG INTPA and Member States Support. This follows up and builds on the Post Disaster Needs Assessment feeding the Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Framework (4RF), which serves as the relevant government's framework on the post-floods' climate resilient recovery and reconstruction.

In **Iran**, complementarities of the humanitarian-development nexus will continue to be strengthened as the support to Afghan refugees is provided by both DG ECHO and DG INTPA. Furthermore, **under the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugee (SSAR) framework**, the nexus will be fostered through close coordination and joint advocacy on the protection of Afghans. Coordination under the HDP nexus will also be pursued in relation to actions supporting displaced Afghans and their host communities in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, implemented under the Regional Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 for the Asia-Pacific Region.

Disaster Preparedness: Developing comprehensive partnerships beyond traditional communities of practice is key to achieving progress in tackling complex, multi-layered hazards, and risks. The establishment of partnerships, notably with regional fora and/or networks that facilitate the exchange of information and learning across public and private stakeholders, is encouraged. Likewise, opportunities for engagement in national and regional advocacy initiatives will continue to be researched.

Though the main focus remains on regional and national multi-hazard preparedness for response and early action, synergies with the European Union Civil Protection (UCPM) and nexus opportunities with development and Team Europe's Initiatives will be explored.

5. ENVISAGED DG ECHO RESPONSE STRATEGY AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF HUMANITARIAN AID INTERVENTIONS

5.1 Envisaged DG ECHO response

5.1.1 *Priorities*

In **Afghanistan**, DG ECHO will continue to respond to the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable populations, prioritising remote and hard to reach communities as much as possible and advocating for and supporting an enabling environment for equitable and safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. Principled humanitarian engagement and needs-based interventions will be central to the DG ECHO response, in line with the guiding principles agreed by donors in February 2023. Practical considerations on how to realistically target and include women to ensure equitable and wider access to assistance among the whole population is essential. Particular attention will be paid to coordination between humanitarian and basic human needs actors and programmes to realistically promote longer-term solutions.

The DG ECHO intervention strategy will support humanitarian assistance, protection, and advocacy in the best interest of the affected population and will include:

- Response to lifesaving and life-sustaining needs, prioritising integrated responses to maximise the impact of interventions. This will encompass: (i) delivery of humanitarian food assistance and livelihoods' protection; (ii) WASH services, shelter, and non-food items assistance, EiE and Protection; and (iii) support to primary and secondary health care and treatment of severe and moderate acute malnutrition.
- Response to sudden shocks triggered by natural and human induced hazards, epidemics, in a timely, efficient and principled way; this will be done by mainstreaming disaster preparedness across proposals, so that partners are systematically: (i) supporting evidence-based and risk-informed assessments and information sharing; (ii) embedding flexibility into proposed actions to strengthen early response capacity with a view to optimising co-operation between sectors; and (iii) supporting contingency planning to prepare for a response in real time.
- Targeted protection programming using integrated approaches, with a specific focus on gender, age, disability and diversity, along with measures to reduce/mitigate exposure to violations and respond with an appropriate package of services.
- Support to humanitarian coordination, with particular attention to strengthening sub regional coordination and centrality of protection, as well as common humanitarian services.
- Promotion of a balanced, principled humanitarian assistance and advocacy (grounded on IHL, IHRL and humanitarian principles) in the best interest of the affected population) including where there is demonstrable and appropriate added value of localisation.

The DG ECHO strategy in **Pakistan** for 2024 will continue focusing on the refugee crisis meeting the protection and humanitarian needs of Afghans, regardless of their status and strengthening resilience of affected communities. Upholding the Do No Harm principle, attention will be on sectors that benefit Afghans and host community alike. Complementing the targeted disaster preparedness engagement, natural hazard induced disasters should likewise be addressed when needed through mainstreaming a preparedness approach across proposals:

- Protection: strengthening protection services including referral pathways as well as access to justice and legal assistance for Afghans. Prevention of and response to GBV, child protection and case management will remain a key priority. Including joint advocacy for Afghans in country as well as issuance of key documents (birth certificate, driving licenses etc) as envisioned under the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) workplan for Pakistan. Structured prevention activities, in line with international standards and with clearly articulated intentional protection outcomes, may also be considered.

- Health and Nutrition: Integration of refugees and host communities to primary health care and nutrition services. Limited and very focused support to cover the districts with the highest rate of malnutrition reported by IPC nutrition can be considered.
- Education in Emergencies: access to education for children at risk of school dropout or out of school children will continue to be a priority. Partners are expected to address education barriers, while equity for girls and boys will be pursued with a clear definition of needs and appropriate responses.

Disaster Preparedness: Building on the experience and work undertaken in 2022 and 2023 under the dedicated DP Budget Line, the targeted DP strategy for Pakistan will continue to foster the institutionalisation of multi-hazard approaches through strengthening DRM governance and ownership for (multi) risk-informed preparedness, connectivity and harmonisation of models, which must be demonstrated as a precondition. Proposals must seek addressing any relevant and justified gap and bottleneck based on joined-up, shared analysis to enhance frontline responders' capacity and capabilities within a framework for more effective and timely responses to operate at scale, adapting to new shocks and crises. As such, attention to strengthen the DRM system to detect earlier and respond faster based on agreed and effective Early Warning Systems and Contingency Plans should be maintained as a key foundation. Against the compounding effects of the 2022 floods, the sky-rocketing inflation with multi-faceted impacts including declining purchasing power, compromised food consumption patterns, depletion of coping strategies among the most vulnerable households, DG ECHO foresees preparedness for cash to meet basic needs in targeted districts manifesting multiple risks and vulnerabilities.

In **Iran**, DG ECHO's strategy will likewise continue to focus on the refugee crisis meeting the protection and humanitarian needs of Afghans regardless of their status. Upholding the Do No Harm principle, attention will be on sectors that benefit Afghans and the host community alike. Complementing the targeted disaster preparedness engagement, natural hazard induced disasters should likewise be addressed when needed by mainstreaming a preparedness approach across proposals:

- Protection: strengthening protection programming and services including referral pathways that remove/reduce barriers to access services and assistance will be a priority. Prevention and response to GBV, child protection and case management will likewise remain a key priority. Structured prevention activities, in line with international standards and with clearly articulated intentional protection outcomes, may also be considered.
- Multipurpose cash to cover essential needs: integrated multi-sectoral or cross-sectoral approaches that aim at meeting the essential needs of Afghans will be pursued. DG ECHO prioritises multipurpose cash (MPC) to meet essential needs, complemented by other modalities, as appropriate, and timely referrals, to meet specific sectoral outcomes. Enhanced coordination and coherence across sectors among the humanitarian agencies will be required.
- Health: access to health services with a focus on primary health care (PHC) will continue. In the context of Iran, procurement of life-saving medical drugs and equipment can be considered if well justified and coordinated with humanitarian organisations engaged in the same sector.
- Education in Emergencies: access to education for children at risk of school dropout or out of school will continue to be a priority. Equity for girls and boys will be pursued with a clear definition of needs and appropriate responses.

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In **Central Asia (Regional)** the focus is two-fold:

- i) Protection: Displacement tracking/monitoring, protection monitoring, analysis, and response to those on the move, most vulnerable refugees.
- ii) Disaster preparedness: the main aim of DG ECHO's disaster preparedness strategy is to put people at the very core of regional and state DRM design. This will be pursued through leveraging previous DG ECHO targeted Disaster Preparedness investments to reinforce local preparedness and response capacity, whenever possible working at the system level. The systematic inclusion of those who are most vulnerable in relevant DRM plans at all levels, advocating for inclusive policies that comprehensively protect vulnerable and at-risk populations so that they are better prepared to withstand shocks and crises whenever they reside, will remain at the center of DG ECHO action. DG ECHO will also continue to seek improvements in the localised preparedness systems in conflict-affected and fragile settings, whenever possible acting in anticipation of shocks and crises. In every preparedness investment, the inclusion of climate and environmentally sensitive programming will be systematically promoted through a multi-hazard and multi-sector approach whereby risks are identified by those who are most vulnerable, marginalised, and in need. The thematic focus will be put on supporting anticipatory action and shock responsive social protection systems whenever meaningful for those who are most vulnerable.

5.1.2 Programmatic Partnerships

An indicative amount of EUR 700 000 may be dedicated to ongoing Programmatic Partnerships.

5.1.3 Multi-Year Funding

Interventions in the sectors of Education in Emergencies or Disaster Preparedness, as well as other relevant sectors, including for humanitarian action that aims at environmental sustainability in an innovative and more strategic (mainstreaming) way, may benefit from multi-year funding. Please refer to HIPTA sections 3.g and 4.d for technical and administrative details.

5.2 Other DG ECHO interventions

The Emergency Toolbox HIP may be drawn upon for the response to crisis and/or outbreaks of Epidemics. Under the Emergency Toolbox HIP, the Small-Scale Response, Acute Large Emergency Response Tool (ALERT) and Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) instruments may also provide funding options.

In view of the importance of logistics for humanitarian operations, DG ECHO remains committed to contribute to logistics operations, via funding or any other tool, such as the European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC), at its disposal.

The European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC) is a global initiative, aiming at supporting the delivery of humanitarian assistance with a gap-filling approach. Under the EHRC, the Commission has at its disposal several tools that can be activated in case of sudden onset disasters, e.g., a series of Common Logistics Services (including air operations, warehousing services, last-mile ground transportation, etc.), and a stockpile of emergency WASH and shelter items to be pre-positioned in regional warehouses worldwide.

IFRCs programmatic partnership in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan continues.