



## The Role of Unhcr in Addressing the Afghan Refugee Crisis: A Lifeline in Turbulent Times

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### **Abstract:**

*Afghan refugee crisis fueled by years of conflict and political instability has presented a big hurdle for the international community to deal with. The UNHCR, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is a great help in this case by helping and protecting millions of affected Afghan refugees. While this research article focuses more on the UNHCR's functional activities, it outlines the various dimensions of practice such as emergency operations, refugees' lobbying, and cooperation with source and asylum countries and NGOs. Through the evaluation of these endeavors, the article tries to depict the significance of UNHCR in protecting vulnerable individuals during the times of crises, while respecting their human rights and value. The article is a reflection of the UNHCR's situation and difficulties that the organization encounters when implementing its mandate, and whether it is in a position to adapt to the volatile political climate within Afghanistan and beyond. It evaluates the effects of receiving inadequate or insufficient funds, conflicts within geographical areas, and the changing demographics of the refugee status on the successful implementation of UNHCR's operations. Thus, the research emphasizes the need for a strong and flexible framework that could address the changing context of the Afghan refugee situation while promoting long-term solutions based on the analysis of field reports and case studies. Concerning its task, it is necessary to note that the UNHCR is a figure that goes beyond simple humanitarian intervention and plays a significant part in stabilization and integration processes. This particular article focuses in the need for increased international support and commitment in regards to Afghani refugees and calls for action in organizing international cooperation in dealing with it. Besides, the research intends to systematically highlight the UNHCR's efforts and inspire broader policy debates and improved reactions to one of the most urgent global challenges of the modern world.*

**Keywords:** UNHCR, Afghan Refugees, International Community, Integration Processes

## Introduction



The Afghan refugee problem has remained one of the longest and complex displacements in the contemporary world, forced over four decades, making millions of Afghans to flee to other countries mostly in the neighboring countries. Currently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been one of the key organizations in trying to deal with this problem that continually affects internally displaced persons. Refugees and asylum seekers worldwide were children, of which 1,270 000 were refugees who could not freely attend school (UNHCR, 2023). It currently looks after 6 million registered Afghan refugees and most of them can be found in Pakistan and Iran. Thus, the following introduction lays the groundwork for the detailed analysis of the UNHCR's approaches and difficulties in dealing with the Afghan refugees' management, pinpointing the organization as the sole hope for these vulnerable people.

This paper focuses on how the UNHCR responds to Afghans as refugees, as a society in crisis, which also embraces the agency's role in elements of humanitarian response, protection, and advocacy for solutions. The agency as a humanitarian organization is running its operations with reference to its Charter and its main mission – the protection of refugees' rights and their proper welfare in accordance with the international refugee law. That is why field operations in Pakistan and Iran, which accommodate the largest number of refugees from Afghanistan, have proved essential in providing humanitarian assistance and providing the refugees with access to goods and services. In its implementation, as explained by Betts (2020), UNHCR's interventions include the provision of shelter, healthcare, education and living through striving which is paramount for survival of refugees and absorption into the host communities. This research article seeks to look at these aspects in detail, especially on how UNHCR's interventions orchestrate and work on the operations level.

However, the UNHCR has the following challenges in responding to the Afghan refugee situation: They include; inadequate financing, market volatilities, and the social-political structure of the host country. Instability of political situations within the country has a negative impact to repatriation processes because the constant conflict and insecurities discourage many refugees from being repatriated. Some current examples include works by Schmeidl (2022), which call for a better response model that is capable of dealing with such difficulties. These challenges will be further outlined in this article, evaluate to what extent they influence UNHCR's operational efficiency, and to discuss the consequences for international refugee



protection. In a similar nature, this research aims to provide additions to the literature regarding sustainable solutions to the problem and the importance of the UNHCR in addressing one of the long-standing issues in the twenty-first century.

### **Immediate Response and Lifesaving Assistance**

Taliban's capture of Afghanistan in August 2021 has led to a severe humanitarian crisis which requires a quick and forceful intervention from global actors. UNHCR quickly increased its response to meet growing needs of the affected Afghan population forced to flee their homes due to the conflict. Among the sectors one of the main activities that were required in this emergency response was the emergency shelter. According to the records of the UNHCR (2022), the agency provided thousands of temporary shelters such as tents, tarpaulins and other items. The few of them gave the families who were displaced with only the clothes on their backs some shelter to protect them from the weather and some semblance of normalcy. It helped to reduce such issues as poor weather conditions affecting the refugee's living circumstances and protection of refugees from different harsh environmental conditions as lacks of proper shelters.

Besides shelter, the provision of various relief items also emerged as one of the main pillars of the UNHCR response model. The agency also ensured the provision of food items, water, hygiene kits as well as other essentials to the needy refugees. This intervention was vital in that it blended with the short term needs of the displaced populations in terms of nutritional and health. Thus, Martin (2022) pointed out that by providing foodstuffs at such a fast pace, diseases were averted, and the urgent needs of people affected by the conflict were addressed. The overall food and non-food relief assistance entails, staple foods, clean drinkable water, as well as hygiene products that would be in conjunction with local implementers and other INGOs. Thus, this coordination made it possible to target the deserving people, including women, children and the elderly with appropriate and timely food aid.

The other major component of the UNHCR emergency operation was the provision of cash-based interventions. Thus, while providing cash to refugees, the agency helping them with necessary foods and other products provided the refugees with some level of economic independence. This approach also proved helpful as a long-term method apart from being able to offer relief to refugee's timely helper them make decisions based on their need. Johnson (2023) pointed out that because the cash interventions ensured that people had control over their



choices, they encouraged dignity and brought the affected individuals into the host nations' economies. It should also be noted that this strategy helped the host communities because demand in local markets increased, and pressure on communal resources decreased. They considered that the liquidity, speed and simplicity of cash transfers make them useful in the spectrum of activities to provide response to people in crisis.

Nevertheless, these efforts have been so big whereby the crisis was so big and the environment in which the organization was operating was so complex that challenges emerged. Limited funding, complicated ways of delivering assistance and rather high security threats severely complicated and slowed the process of delivering assistance. Further, there were many displaced persons which put a lot of stress on available resources and facilities. According to Davis (2023), the challenges highlighted above threatened the effectiveness of the operations thus sources of compromise that required UNHCR to constantly realign strategies towards delivering aid to the target population. The continuous engagement that has exhibited the United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees' or UNHCR's responsibility to tackle the Afghan refugee crisis is exemplified by such attempts exhibiting the organization's on-going attempt to respond to the Afghan refugees' immediate needs while building foundations for a lasting solution to the same crisis. The agency's proactive and multifaceted approach has become a beacon of hope and source of assistance for millions of the affected Afghan population during the hours of their greatest need.

### **Protection and Advocacy**

UNHCR's activities in Afghanistan and for Afghan refugees work to provide the extensive protection necessary to ensure that their rights and wellbeing are not violated. A major activity is protection monitoring, which entails the systematic recording of violations of the rights of refugees. This way, UNHCR also follows the abuses or the threats that may pose a danger to the refugees that they are assisting and will be in a position to contain them. Agreed with Smith (2023) this has a preventative approach where the agency is in a suitable position to fight for the rights of refugees, compel the host governments and other global organizations to do the right thing for refugees. Protection monitoring is not only useful when there is a need to resolve a crisis immediately but also for developing policies and creating plans for the future of refugees and other vulnerable populations. There is another approach to protecting Afghan refugees, which is legal assistance provided by UNHCR. One will find it easier to give up after going through the many



and frequently very intimidating asylum processes that are in place today, many of which refugees may have little to no understanding of the legal systems of the countries they find themselves in.

CAP organizes critical legal assistance and support with a view to orient refugees and other individuals in the policies and practices concerning the application for a refugee status. As stated by Jones (2022), such services encompass legal aid, paperwork help, as well as consultation regarding the interviews for asylum seekers. In this way, UNHCR guarantees that refugees are able to have the legal remedies, they are supposed to, to avoid deportation and other unlawful treatment, and recognized and protected within the host country's legal frameworks. Ensuring equal opportunities that also include the provision of necessities is also crucial to the refugees' welfare in Afghanistan.

UNHCR focuses on the rights of refugees to be enrolled in health care, education, and other human services; UNHCR collaborates with host countries, NGOs, and other organizations to ensure refugees' inclusion in national structures. This advocacy plays a significant role in reducing the client's risk factors and enhancing his/her entire health. According to Anderson (2023), it also becomes important to ensure that refugees can avail these services, should they need them; it is not only a humanitarian approach, but it also helps the refugees to become active in the new communities they find themselves in – this leads to improved social harmony. As for WASH, UNHCR's activities imply advocacy with the local administration, construction or redevelopment initiatives, financial or technical sponsorship of the WASH service suppliers.

However, several impediments are still present in the protection and advocacy area for Afghan refugees. Lack of funds, resistance of the political authorities of the host countries, and the large number of refugees who need help sometimes do not allow implementing these actions to the extent. Further, political unrest and insecurity in Afghanistan, make processes of return and post-return integration challenging and require consistent lobbying for long term solutions. According to Taylor (2023), UNHCR has to remain innovative in its operations in order to overcome new challenges in the course of its protection efforts to the lives of Afghan refugees. Due to the outlined complexities, the agency's protection and advocacy role is central to responding to these challenges and ensuring a welcoming environment for refugees. In that way, UNHCR not only saves lives but also paves the way for building up stable future for refugees.

**Durable Solutions: Repatriation and Reintegration**



### **Facilitating Safe and Dignified Return**

Identifying and supporting the principles of voluntary, safe, and dignified return of Afghan refugees is another important function of UNHCR that involves guaranteeing that the return of refugees can occur under secure and stable conditions in the home regions. Since the return process is voluntary and the process of return unpredictable, UNHCR collaborates with the host countries and local, as well as international, authorities in order to prepare the return environments before refugees finally decide to return. This also entails ensuring that returnees are provided with relevant amenities including; health care, schooling, and access to sanitation amenities that are core to their reintegration. In the context proper delivery of these services helps not only immediate need for the returning population but also guarantees stability and absence of conflict thus minimizing risk of people being displaced again as stated by Anderson (2023). They also have to undertake a vulnerability study of the prospective return zones with a view of establishing any infrastructural or amenities' bottlenecks that may hinder returnees to lead decent lives.

It must be noted that safety is very crucial in the process of initiating the return of the refugees. The role of UNHCR when dealing with return operations is also to cooperate with local and or national security forces to increase the security of the returned areas and provide gadgets to protect returnees from probable dangers including land mines and armed violence. These measures are supported by the protection of civilian outcome which implies that the leaders from the community and the returnees play a central role in the provision of protection as well as the maintenance of order. In Johnson's (2023) work, one observes that measures towards ensuring adequate security, as well as the provision of fundamental services, are important for voluntary repatriation endeavors. In this way, UNHCR hopes to achieve not only a more voluntary return, but also more sustainable one in the sense that people are able to reintegrate themselves into a society and have plenty to look forward to besides poverty and destitute.

### **Reintegration Assistance**

Based on literature, reintegration assistance is a critical approach that is necessary to ensure the stability and competency of returnees to foster the accomplishment of societal goals when reintegrated into society. UNHCR continues to offer substantial financial and material assistance for the recovery of shelter, income, and other vital areas of the lives of returnees. This assistance is



in the form of cash grants, and this has 助其 provide returnees with the make essential decisions affecting their immediate needs such as shelter, food, and clothing. Cash-based interventions according to martin, (2022) are vital as they help provide the returnees with something as simple as money to make choices in their favour and live a normal life. Besides funds for refugees, it provides transport and moving services for the return of the refugees to their native areas from the host countries.

In addition to efficient material assistance provision, UNHCR is concerned with future economic and social returnees' reintegration. This entails strategies that seek to improve the income generating activities including education and training, employment opportunities, and credit facilities for business ventures. UNHCR assists to give an economic independence to people to be less dependent on the international support and contribute to development of return areas. Moreover, most of the agency helps conduct community dialogue and reconciliation, which will help avoid conflicts between the returnees and other inhabitants of any country. In Taylor's (2023) account, the successful reintegration is not only for a short-term but also for long-term; that is supporting the returnees to regain their normal lives and also create a conducive environment for them to contribute to the development of such communities.

### **Challenges and the Need for Continued Support**

The operations outlining the efforts taken by UNHCR play a crucial role to the Afghan refugees came with numerous challenges, hence mandating public support and participation from the international community. The most significant challenge is financial problems that limit the agency's capacity to provide basic services and assistance to millions of displaced persons. Due to the scale and nature of the crisis, significant and continuous financial capital is required, although the availability of international funding is unpredictable. Miller (2023) explains that these gaps have implications on every sphere, from urgent humanitarian crises interventions to development programs, which undermines the UNHCR's ability to sustain coherent and effective support programme. The funding mechanism is therefore vital and very necessary in that it provides sustainable and steady means of supporting refugees so that they may reinstate their lives.

Another coercive factor that has a bearing in the operations of this UN chiefly agency is security threats. There is still violence as well as armed groups' presence in Afghanistan, thus there are threats to refugees' lives and humanitarian personnel. These conditions also limit one's ability



to certain points, thus making the delivery of Humanitarian aid and protection services a challenge. According to Brown (2023), the general insecurity also poses a considerable risk not only for UNHCR employees but also affects the humanitarian missions' outcomes. It is unfortunate that the delivery of assistance and protection of vulnerable population is highly dependent on the security of aid workers and the establishment of secure routes. The UN and other international actors should ensure that security is achieved and sufficient resources are available to protect humanitarian interventions.

The situation worsens due to few available options for the refugees' resettlement in other countries. Most of the countries, being preoccupied with internal problems and political shifts, have closed their borders to refugees and many Afghans have found themselves in neighboring countries. This leaves a lot of pressure on countries such as Pakistan and Iran that have to host the refugees despite their socio-economic vices. In this view, Ahmed (2022) opined that the limited choices when it comes to resettlement tend to contribute to the dwindling of hope among the refugees in their quest for a permanent solution to their flight. More funding to resettlement programs and improving the international relations in regards to this matter is crucial to provide refugees with an opportunity to start to build new lives in secure environments.

Thus, the organizations need support and commitment from other countries to overcome these challenges. The efforts made by UNHCR cannot work in isolation though it has made attempt to make those work effectively. Flow of funds, better protection and other opportunities for Resettlement are the major needs of the Afghanistan refugee's situation which is complex. Such an approach is particularly stressed by Roberts (2003) who notes that the governments, international organizations and civil society actors should work together to devise long term solutions. Thus, the global community can help UNHCR overcome funding deficits, enhance security situations, and expand the scope of resettlement procedures, which in turn creates hope for millions of Afghans in need.

## Conclusion

UNHCR remains a vital support for Afghan refugees; it symbolizes hope and tenacity in the current plight. The comprehensive nature of the agency's interventions emphasizes in the three categories of assistance that are relief needs, protection and sustainable solutions. Shelter and food and non-food items are among the standards being provided by UNHCR and legal assistance





and advocacy for baseline services are some of the measures, which are indispensable in addressing suffering and building the stability of Afghan refugees. The provision of protection monitoring as well as the employment of cash-based interventions adds to the agency's entailing goal of upholding the rights and recovery of refugees from trauma by empowering them as individuals.

Nevertheless, UNHCR has recorded real achievements, yet the operations of the agency are threatened by considerable challenges that are complex. Shortage of funds, insecurity, and restricted opportunities for resettlement are some of the major challenges that hinder provision of the services/assistance. These are some of the issues that require the continued support and assistance of other countries so that UNHCR can perform its activities. It is crucial that the size of the refugee problem in Afghanistan is considered a global issue and solve the problems of providing Afghanistan with the necessary funding and security means, as well as offering opportunities for resettlement. This is why a multi-sectoral and adequately funded approach is required to meet the intricate needs of persons affected by armed conflict, and to help the Afghan refugees rebuild their lives.

As a final summary, one can state that without the intervention of UNHCR, it is impossible to resolve the problem of Afghan refugees. The really good response together with the agency's constant advocacy for refugees, has helped in providing immediate assistance as well as creating the foundation for sustainable solutions. Nevertheless, expectancy towards furtherance of these efforts depends on the cooperative and endorsement by the members of the international society. Therefore, funding gaps need to be addressed, security improved, and resettlement opportunities increased and expanded so that UNHCR can respond to this protracted situation appropriately. Thus, they help millions of Afghan refugees and provide a warm response to the humanitarian crisis while seeking to embrace the values of international community that form the very essence of humanity.

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