

'More support' vital to put Afghanistan back on a 'positive trajectory' – top UN officials

After four decades of conflict and insecurity, and with elections to be held in the coming months against a backdrop of growing humanitarian need, Afghanistan needs more support than ever to tackle its challenges, [said](#) the United Nations humanitarian and refugee chiefs on Monday after a joint two-day visit in the country.

The United Nations humanitarian affairs chief, [Mark Lowcock](#), and the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#), [Filippo Grandi](#), were speaking to the press in Geneva, ahead of a major international conference on Afghanistan due to be held in November.

"The world needs to pay a bit more attention again to Afghanistan to help them through this challenging period," said Mark Lowcock, "it's possible that a year from now they could be back on a positive trajectory if they get the right engagement and help".

Afghan refugees, who have made the difficult decision to voluntarily return home to Afghanistan, some after decades living in Pakistan, here pictured at UNHCR's voluntary repatriation centre in Peshawar, which provides administration and services to help them go home. UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) ([OCHA](#)), nearly 4.2 million people in Afghanistan are in acute need of humanitarian assistance, including 1.9 million internally displaced by conflict, and more than 60,000 refugees who have returned home and need help to restart their lives.

In addition, the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)) [highlights](#) that, outside the country, 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees are hosted by Pakistan and Iran, along with an even larger number of undocumented Afghans.

Ongoing insecurity, including terrorist attacks and growing criminality, was cited by Mr. Grandi as "having a very negative impact," as it "continues to produce internal displacement" and "has caused a sharp decline in the number of people going back to Afghanistan." The head of UNHCR explained that the number heading home around the same time last year reached 40,000 to 50,000; whereas this year it's fallen to around 12,000.

To make things worse, the country is facing a [massive drought](#) that is affecting 70 per cent of its territory, and putting 1.3 million women, children and men at risk.

As the country is gearing up for parliamentary and presidential elections in the coming months, Mr. Lowcock commended the “good efforts” made by the Afghan Government to address issues preventing returns and reintegration such as a lack of available land. He also applauded bilateral agreements with other countries hosting Afghan refugees, such as Pakistan and Iran. He added however that the problem remains finding ways to translate “those laws and policies into practice” so they can “have a real impact on people”.

The two UN officials called on the world to support Afghanistan in its path to peace, political stability and economic recovery and stressed that international backing of the Government’s policies and strategies is required for their effective implementation.

On 27 and 28 November, an [international conference](#) co-hosted by the United Nations and the Afghan Government, will be held in Geneva to discuss the way forward, described by Mr. Lowcock as “an important opportunity to reaffirm international commitments to peace, stability, development and progress in Afghanistan”.