

as well as rights-based, inclusive and representative governance. Despite some signs of macroeconomic recovery, albeit at a low and fragile level, private sector resilience, reduced corruption, progress on poppy reduction, and the absence of war across the country, Afghanistan remains affected by one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. Two-thirds of its population require immediate assistance and more than 9 in 10 people are living in poverty, while external aid is drying up. Widespread acute food insecurity and malnutrition are of high concern and may be further exacerbated by economic downturn and eroding purchasing power, as well as increasing climate vulnerability and extreme weather-related events causing disasters. Severe droughts affect rain-fed agriculture, climate change is exacerbating water scarcity (also provoking displacement), and desertification and soil degradation is affecting farming and livelihoods. The lack of a functioning government able to articulate comprehensive sector policies, fiscal transparency and macroeconomic stability, put at risk any social gains made under the former Republic in the sectors of health and education. Institutionalised and systemic human rights violations and discrimination, particularly targeting women and girls, have been endemic under Taliban rule. Any past gains made in the social sectors are put at risk by the de facto authorities' abuses against women and girls, lack of capacity, and highly insufficient public investment. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimated that an Afghan economy restricting women from working would result into a 5% GDP cut<sup>4</sup>.

Human rights defenders and media workers, as well as ethnic, religious and other minority groups, remain highly exposed to repressions by the Taliban de facto authorities. Subsequent decrees issued by the Taliban de facto authorities violating notably women's and girls' rights to education, work, leisure, and freedom of movement, have drastically reduced the operating space for aid implementors and harshly challenged principled service delivery. Considering these developments, the EU, together with international partners from both the humanitarian and basic needs communities, put into place a robust framework for principled assistance and monitoring mechanisms since February 2023 to ensure that the "for women by women" principle is continued. There are 'exemptions' formally granted by the Taliban de facto authorities to the December 2022 ban on Afghan female NGO workers. These exemptions can be found in the health, nutrition and primary education sectors. Beyond these exempted sectors, implementing partners have, at great difficulty, overall managed to navigate Taliban restrictions, among others by finding localised solutions safeguarding access to women by women. Within this highly volatile context, opportunities for building resilience of communities and individuals persist through basic social services, community-based safety nets, and livelihoods support including agriculture, income generation, and climate adaptation. Local communities, grassroots organisations, and private sector, have even more than before become key actors of change in Afghanistan. Despite all difficulties in aid implementation, partners welcome an improved security situation, which allows them to reach beneficiaries in previously inaccessible areas.

It has been recognised widely that the emergency response alone is insufficient to address the current challenges and associated risks, and only briefly delays a looming socio-economic crisis (but does not avert it). Therefore, basic needs assistance is a necessary complement to provide the population with some medium-term perspective, create a set of stabilising factors and put a break on the ever-increasing humanitarian needs of the population. For the purpose of ensuring a coordinated approach, the Afghanistan Coordination Group (ACG) developed, with substantial EU involvement, the *ACG Framework for International Partner Support in Afghanistan (2023-2025)*. Subsequently, the *United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (2023-2025)*<sup>5</sup> adopted in June 2023 and the World Bank strategic approach are also aligned to the *Framework for International Partner Support in Afghanistan (2023-2025)*.

Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council meeting held on 20 March 2023 acknowledge that a stable Afghanistan is in the interest of the entire international community to prevent regional instability, terrorism threats, forced displacement and irregular migration. They reaffirm the European Union's principled commitment to supporting the people of Afghanistan. The present Action contributes to the international efforts for addressing basic human needs in Afghanistan, within the boundaries of the Commission's objectives and priorities, as well as Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Afghanistan of 21 September 2021 and 20 March 2023. In the absence of any notable progress by the Taliban de facto authorities on the benchmarks outlined in the Foreign Affairs Council

<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan Socio-Economic Outlook 2021-2022: Averting a Basic Needs Crisis, UNDP

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan articulates the UN's approach to addressing basic human needs in Afghanistan. Anchored in the principle of leaving no one behind, the UN Strategic Framework prioritizes the needs and rights of those most vulnerable and marginalized, including women and girls, children and youth, internally displaced persons, returnees, refugees, ethnic and religious minorities, geographically isolated communities, sexual and gender minorities, the Kuchi community, persons with disabilities, human rights defenders, people who use drugs, and people living with and affected by HIV.