Context

In light of the upcoming withdrawal of US and foreign militaries from Afghanistan and the impact of the deterioration in the COVID-19 situation across the country, there is a significant risk of increasing insecurity impacting the humanitarian supply chain and logistics operations. Any impact could risk the efficient and effective delivery of humanitarian relief items. The Logistics Working Group (LWG) established and formalized in April 2020 is facilitating the coordination of the partners and providing a key forum for relevant logistics information sharing and updates, as well as bringing partners together to advocate for resolving of critical logistics issues.

Logistics Gaps Review

To better understand the current and potential logistics and supply chain gaps caused by the impact of the deterioration in security as well as COVID-19, a series of interviews has been conducted. The interviews took place between the 6 and 10 June 2021 and involved 11 LWG members who currently have significant supply chain operations in the country. The objective of the exercise was to:

- Review the current and potential logistics gaps as identified by the humanitarian community;
- Support the identification of mitigating activities that should be implemented to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the partners’ logistics response;
- Review the value and effectiveness of the LWG and identify potential areas for enhancement based on partner’s needs;
- Based on potential risks, support logistics preparedness activities through mapping of partners capacities as well as logistics contingency plans.

Gaps and Bottlenecks

Based on the discussions and feedback provided by partners during the interviews, the following logistics gaps were identified as having an impact on organisations humanitarian supply chain and logistics currently, as well as posing a concern for efficient and effective logistics operations in the upcoming six months.

1) Ongoing concerns with customs processes including delays and lack of clarity on the process (specifically for pharmaceutical commodities)

- There are significant challenges being faced with the customs process for importation of humanitarian relief items as well as pharmaceutical commodities. The recent shift to an online customs processing system has caused a lack of clarity around the process within organisations and the authorities which is causing delays in clearance and importation. In addition, for importation of pharmaceutical commodities, there are delays with regards to the Afghanistan Food and Drug Authority (AFDA) providing authorisation for importation and distribution of the cargo. They AFDA are reported to lack capacity to process the authorisations in a timely manner which leads to long delays. Frequent change of leadership in MoPH (Ministry of Public Health) has caused additional challenges for timely and consistent process for the customs.

2) Limited information on alternative corridors as potential options for international importation of commodities

- The majority of organisations rely on the Port of Karachi (Pakistan) for importation of commodities which faces congestion and delays to cargo moving through the port. There are also delays at the border crossing points from Pakistan into Afghanistan which have faced operational limitations and technical issues in particular during the COVID-19 period.
- There is limited use of other corridors for international importation primarily due to lack of information available on corridor infrastructure, viability as well as costs. This includes corridors such as through Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan...
which could provide alternative options for the transport of humanitarian cargo into Afghanistan. Use and viability of alternative corridors is dependant on the evolving access and security context.

3) **Need for further information sharing on details of available commercial transport service providers (including potential in-country air transport)**

- In the coming months, with the withdrawal of US and foreign militaries, the security context could deteriorate and access to certain areas become restricted. This includes the key supply routes to and from Kabul that act as vital arteries for re-supply around the country. Should this happen, there may be a need to deliver cargo by air as well as identify alternative commercial transporters who may have access in certain areas of the country where others do not. Currently, information on available commercial air and land transporters is limited.

4) **Concerns around logistics coordination to secure access for land transport and access to storage facilities in certain areas should the security context deteriorate**

- The majority of organisations are currently relying on commercial transport capacity. Whilst there is a strong commercial transport sector and no shortage reported past or present on availability of commercial transport capacity, there is a concern that if access to certain locations deteriorates, commercial transport will be unviable. Commercial transporters may be subject to additional scrutiny and taxes as opposed to humanitarian trucks which, with a guarantee letter, are afforded less encumbered passage.
- Whilst current availability of storage capacity through commercial or humanitarian facilities is reported to be sufficient, should access deteriorate in certain locations, this could impact access and therefore utilisation of facilities. In addition, as part of preparedness and contingency planning, a number of organisations will be pre-positioning cargo and therefore capacity needs will increase and put a strain on existing supply.

**Mitigating Activities and Preparedness Actions**

**Gap: Ongoing concerns with customs processes including delays and lack of clarity on the process (specifically for medical items)**

**Mitigating/Preparedness Activities:**

- Maintain the coordination between key logistics partners on critical logistics gaps and customs delays as well as coordination on mitigating activities though the LWG meetings. Potentially increase the regularity of the LWG meetings (e.g. to a weekly basis) if required and agreed by LWG partners.
- Through the LWG forum, share regular information updates via dedicated products on the customs process including key developments, updated directives, changes to the process, workflows and relevant contact details.
- Update and make available the Logistics Capacity Assessment (LCA) to include information on the customs process and relevant customs and government contacts.
- Encourage training and guidance to be made available to LWG partners on the new online customs system to ensure a better understanding of the system.
- Specifically, for concerns around importation of pharmaceutical commodities:
  - Establish a dedicated Pharmaceutical Logistics Sub-Working Group to advocate on behalf of the group for clarification and easing of customs processes. The group to monitor lead times and developments in the requirements for the clearance process as well as advocate as a group through the HCT to prioritise expedition of humanitarian commodities.
Gap: Limited information on alternative corridors as potential options for international importation of commodities

Mitigating/Preparedness Activities:
To reduce reliance on one corridor and ensure alternative options for importation of commodities are available, optimising cost and lead time as well supporting preparation for a deterioration in insecurity and limitation on access to certain areas, the following mitigation measures are recommended:

- Through the LWG forum, share regular information products and updates including border crossing status, corridor assessments undertaken by LWG partners and any issues that may impact the use of the corridors.
- Update the LCA to include information on border crossings and corridor infrastructure including road and transport networks and relevant contact details.
- Continue to ensure coordination through the LWG forum including on viability and concerns around use of various corridors.
- Host dedicated forums and meetings to information sharing on alternative corridors including viability, cost and process to ensure knowledge sharing in support of partners contingency planning.

Gap: Need for further information sharing on details of available commercial transport service providers (including potential in-country air transport)

Mitigating/Preparedness Activities:
Should access to certain areas become restricted, there may be a need to deliver cargo via air or contract commercial transport companies that may have access in certain areas that others do not. In support of this, the following actions are recommended:

- Through the LWG forum, share regular information updates on availability and contact details of available commercial transporters. Information to be used to update the LCA.
- Continue to ensure coordination through the LWG forum including on suitable service providers and access related constraints.
- Information on humanitarian cargo air service providers (including UNHAS and PACTEC) cargo transport availability and request process to be shared with the LWG in case of need to facilitate movement of cargo via air to certain locations.

Gap: Concerns around logistics coordination to secure access for land transport and access to storage facilities in certain areas should the security context deteriorate

Mitigating/Preparedness Activities:
To ensure organisations can access storage facilities and deliver relief items effectively and efficiently through land transport should the context deteriorate, the following preparedness actions are recommended. Before implementing any of the below actions, it will be critical to be mindful that there is no impact on the commercial logistics sector. Any impact could increase the risk of insecurity and access issues.

- LWG to map capacities of partners logistics infrastructure including storage facilities and transport assets. This mapping will help to provide early indication on where there may be limitations in commercial availability.
- Ensure close coordination with the Humanitarian Access Group (HAG) with a representative sitting in on the LWG meetings on a regular basis to provide relevant updates, support and guidance on access related concerns.
- Stocks of temporary storage facilities such as Mobile Storage Units (MSUs) are currently being assessed. If required, information on sourcing of additional stocks of temporary storage facilities can be provided (e.g. local commercial
providers and United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD)). As an early mitigation measure, partners are encouraged to follow up within their organisation on if technical agreements with UNHRD are in place and if not, to be followed up accordingly.

- The LWG to investigate options to establish land transport support should the access situation deteriorate, and the need arise. Use of the commercial transport sector should remain the priority where available capacity can facilitate delivery of humanitarian relief.

- As a preparedness measure, organisations encouraged to discuss potential agreements (e.g. SLA) with WFP in case of need to access logistics support.