



FARSIGHT

# Linking aid and migration:

## *What are we targeting?*

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# LINKING AID AND MIGRATION: WHAT ARE WE TARGETING?

Many Western donors have become much more interested in making aid conditional upon a recipient country strengthening migration management. Donors want recipients to accept returns of irregular migrants and failed asylum-seekers; take law enforcement action against smugglers; and agree to aid being directed to addressing the root causes of emigration.

This article discusses the profound practical, ethical and political implications of conditionality on Afghanistan and argues that it requires targeting. It is not clear that either donors, or Afghanistan, are prepared for these.

## BACKGROUND

Donors to Afghanistan have attempted aid-migration conditionality through diplomatic channels for several years. The classic example is a foreign minister visiting Kabul, discussing their aid to Afghanistan, then raising an urgent request for Afghanistan to accept returnees that the donor country has backlogged at home. This is evident in the 'Joint Way Forward' agreement signed at the Brussels Conference on October 5<sup>th</sup>. The document balanced Afghan commitments to take back unsuccessful asylum seekers with an EU commitment to fund a comprehensive reintegration package.

Over the last few years, aid-migration conditionality has matured from political/diplomatic agreements and moved towards a technical debate on implementation - particularly for European member states and European Union institutions. The discussion involves a stronger emphasis on long-term programming that reflects aid-migration conditionality, rather than just ad hoc bargains. The commitment to establish a high-level dialogue on migration between Afghanistan and the EU and funds to tackle the 'root causes' of migration to a certain extent reflects stronger intent in cooperation over the issue.

## DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Afghanistan and European donors have different ideas about what such an agreement means in practice. Though the language of the Joint Way Forward document is purposeful, its implications for development programming on the ground remain unclear. Both sides are inspired and burned by the EU-Turkey deal. For Afghanistan, this looks like an opportunity to increase overall aid and increase Afghan discretion over what that aid is for. The Government of Afghanistan has occasionally presented large-scale funding requests as part of discussions on reducing irregular migration towards Europe in the past.



While this deal seems to have tied development aid more firmly to migration management goals, no explicit condition has been placed on the aid, surely a necessary measure if the condition is to be applied meaningfully. Nor has any theory been advanced for why proposed activities—such as an emergency jobs programme—will be the best way to impact irregular migration.

Donors vary in their willingness to consider additional money for Afghanistan as part of an aid-migration conditional program. Most would prefer to negotiate over existing levels of aid and even donors who are suggesting new money are internally justifying some of their existing contributions on the basis that it reduces unwanted migration. In any case, the arrangement requires a prospect for funds to be cut in the event that Afghanistan does not fulfil whatever terms could be agreed – a link the EU appears to be avoiding, at least publicly.

## IMPLICATIONS

There are multiple principles and practical issues that this raises, such as:

- To what degree and how would humanitarian funding be quarantined from aid-migration conditionality?
- What are the terms of ‘compliance’ on both sides?
- In practice will support try to address root causes or will the focus remain more rigidly fixed on purchasing Government of Afghanistan compliance with stricter border management, including accepting returns?
- If donors are expecting the Government of Afghanistan to crack down on migrant smugglers, why would we expect them to be better at policing this huge and diverse market, when they cannot do the same for narcotics?
- How would the hundreds of thousands of Afghans already in Iran and Turkey be addressed?

There is also a fundamental point that would need to be addressed: geographically and ethnically, the most effective and efficient targeting would be much narrower than “Afghanistan”. Whether the focus is on root causes or on migrant smugglers, the fact is that the priority populations for different donors are different subsets of Afghans.

### “AFGHANS” ARE NOT A PRIORITY

Most countries in Europe who receive irregular migrants and asylum-seekers from Afghanistan have internalised the idea that Afghans are a priority population. This is obviously a big step forward from seeing inflows as a homogenous mass, but it does not go far enough. Of Afghanistan’s 30 million people, it is only a minority that are actively attempting to migrate irregularly to Europe. Here are three examples:



1. First, interest in irregular migration to the UK is concentrated among eastern Pashtuns, with secondary concentrations in some northern provinces. It is inefficient and can even be counter-productive to target resources at the rest of the country, if the aim is to reduce irregular migration from Afghanistan to the UK.
2. Second, of all Afghanistan's ethnic groups, Hazara populations have the strongest norm of emigrating to a western country. The strongest concentrations who have absorbed this norm are in Ghazni, Bamyan and Kabul. If Europe wants its aid-migration conditionality euros to have their maximum impact, they would be shaped around Hazara needs, motivations and interests.
3. Third, many Afghan migrants go to Pakistan and the Middle East. These are mobile people, many with the means to migrate, but they are not departing Afghanistan for Europe. Presumably, any aid-migration conditional program from Europe would want to exclude such people. However, they would still be of interest to the Government of Afghanistan as part of the Afghan diaspora and as a sizeable outflow.

## PRACTICAL AND ETHICAL PROBLEMS

Targeting based on geography and/or ethnicity generates a lot of practical and ethical problems. This is the case even if aid-migration conditionality purely involves a top-level bargain of more development money for more Afghan cooperation on smugglers and returns. If the aid itself is to address root causes and intermediate drivers, then the problems multiply.

To the extent that donors have accurate theories about how aid can reduce unwanted emigration, then efficiency would demand that they target their money at particular sub-national populations. But would European donors and the Government of Afghanistan be happy to send more aid to Hazaras? Or more aid to (relatively) well-off Pashtun communities in eastern Afghanistan? And for the sake of efficiency and avoiding unintended consequences, should European donors avoid funding to populations that mostly migrate to the Middle East?

If the political sensitivities could be navigated, there is the ethical and practical challenge of running development or humanitarian assistance with targeting criteria based on propensity to migrate instead of, or alongside, need. This will lead to tensions or questionable outcomes in some cases. For example, the most vulnerable members of a community are often the ones least likely to have the resources to undertake long-distance irregular migration. These people may have a lower priority than richer and more secure people who are planning to emigrate.



## CONCLUSIONS

We need to break down the concept of conditionality if it is to have any practical benefit. When a donor considers aid-migration conditionality, they are talking about five distinct approaches:

1. **Leverage.** Use donor funding as leverage for political bargains. It does not matter where the funds go so long as they enable the donor and recipient to reach a deal.
2. **Horizon.** Take a long-term view that more development funding will lead to faster improvements in the recipient country, such that fewer people want to migrate irregularly. This does not require much change to a donor program.
3. **Immediate.** Take a short-term view that immediate assistance, such as job creation, shelter and food aid reduce acute drivers of interest in irregular migration. This does not require major changes to humanitarian or short-term development programs, although it would probably increase the need to test whether these activities actually lead to reduced irregular migration.
4. **Regulation.** Fund development assistance programs that focus on the recipient's capacity for regulating migration. For example, fund law enforcement to be better at tackling migrant smuggling, or increase the capacity of a refugee agency to manage returns. This would require increased funding for a medium-term capacity development approach.
5. **Focus.** Fund development assistance programs for communities that generate a lot of irregular migrants. Aim to change whatever it is about those communities that leads to higher-than-average irregular migration. This would demand significant changes to targeting and measurement.

Most European donors are moving towards more emphasis on items 3, 4 and 5 above. This requires much better evidence about what to do and with which populations, such as Farsight's monitoring and mapping of irregular migration demand in Afghanistan. That evidence points towards narrower targeting based on location and/or ethnicity, for the sake of efficiency and to avoid unintended consequences. Ethically and practically, that would be difficult to implement in Afghanistan, so it is likely to involve some complex compromises on objectives, targeting criteria and implementation methods. That process is only now beginning.



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