

Understanding how irregular migration may relate to insufficient social protection provision and limited access to development opportunities in the country of origin

Desk Review - Afghanistan
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INTRODUCTION

Background

Seefar was commissioned by the Austrian Ministry of Interior to conduct a large-scale research project focused on irregular migration from Afghanistan. The research explores whether and how inadequate social protection provision and the lack of access to development opportunities are linked to irregular migration. This includes first-instance movements among potential migrants in Afghanistan as well as secondary movements and intentions to re-migrate amongst Afghan refugees and returnees.

This desk review informed the second phase of the study which draws on primary data collection. Table 1 below outlines the research questions (RQs) used to guide evidence review and a summary of an assessment of the levels of existing information; where information levels are 'Low', the topic is set to receive more focus in the primary data collection.

Approach

This literature review was conducted using the Seefar Evidence Review Approach (SERA). SERA screens, reviews and scores sources for cogency, relevance, credibility and timeliness, consistent with best-practice guidance. Sources achieving minimum quality undergo systematic analysis. The aim of the SERA exercise was to:

- Identify the degree to which the research questions could be answered reliably using information in the public domain; and
- Identify conceptual parameters and critical definition elements that provide the main study some delimitations: what does social protection refer to, who engages in secondary migration, and what is included in development programming?

We focused the desk review on known sources of academic and grey literature, in addition to consulting public databases and research repositories such as Google Scholar. Known sources included key research and practice organisations, such as Seefar, Samuel Hall, Altai Consulting, the World Bank, ILO, and UNICEF.

Table 1: The research areas directing desk review

Research Area	Research Questions	Level of existing information
Situational	Macro-scale migration drivers in Afghanistan for primary and secondary irregular migration (2019–2021) such as trust levels, good governance in fragile states, conflict and war.	high
Motivations for irregular primary and secondary migration	What are the underlying personal and familial migration motivations and push factors for irregular migration? i.e. family wellbeing, unemployment, poverty, social capital, etc.	high
Linkages between development aid and/or social protection with migration intentions		
Development aid/ programming	Can development aid be a way to manage migration?	medium – with mixed findings
	Does access to and usage of development programming have any influence over migration decision making – either primary or secondary movements?	low
	Do these impacts differ between primary and secondary movements?	low
Social protection mechanisms/ programming	Can social protection mechanisms and/or national policies influence irregular migration and why/how?	medium – with mixed findings
	Does access to and usage of social protection programming have any influence over migration decision making?	medium
	Do these impacts differ between primary and secondary movements?	low

Conceptual Considerations

- **Social Protection:** Mechanisms that allow access to the human right to social security, including initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups.¹
- **Social Protection Programming:** Globally, social protection instruments can be contributory or non-contributory. Non-contributory schemes target the poor and vulnerable and can include social care and social assistance programmes such as social safety nets, social transfers and public works programmes.² Contributory schemes fall under labour market schemes or social insurance provision, such as old age pensions and health insurance.
- **Development Aid:** Financial assistance (conditional or unconditional) given by governments and other agencies to support the economic, environmental, social, and political development of low-income or developing countries. Closely related concepts include foreign aid, international aid, overseas aid, developmental aid and official development assistance (ODA). As opposed to humanitarian aid, which is short-term relief, development aid aims to achieve sustained improvement. Development aid is thus widely seen as a major way to meet the first Sustainable Development Goal (end poverty in all its forms everywhere) for developing nations.³
- **Development Programming:** Development programming is a multidimensional undertaking delivered by state and/or non-state actors to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development and environmental protection projects are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of development programming. Support can be provided to affected populations or beneficiaries that indirectly impacts household wellbeing through poverty reduction, vocational training, livelihood programming, and access to economic support (for example, micro-loans).⁴

Overall conclusions of what the research says:

- Policy makers and donor governments looking to support governments of developing countries to fulfil the dual objectives of reducing poverty and irregular migration have limited evidence on which to base investment or strategy decisions.
- The evidence suggests that though development aid can reduce migration, irregular migration can also in fact be driven by an increase in development aid and programming aiming to impact household wellbeing through poverty reduction, vocational training, livelihood programming, and access to economic support.
- Addressing any negative push factors such as youth unemployment, lack of economic prospects, insecurity or lack of educational opportunities through development aid can also “promote, rather than impede, out-migration by increasing household income”.⁵
- At the same time, research into social protection – state-led initiatives and mechanisms that allow access to the human right to social security – has failed to offer conclusive insights into how these

1 [Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung Spitzenverband, \(2017\). Social Protection as an Alternative to Migration?](#)

2 For some development actors, safety nets denote a more short-term and/or emergency-focused form of social protection, particularly to help people meet immediate basic needs in times of crisis. See [IDS, Topic Guide: Social Protection](#).

3 [Concern Worldwide. Explained: The Sustainable Development Goals \(2018\).](#)

4 [United Nations Library \(key terms\).](#)

5 [De Haas et al., \(2019\). International Migration: Trends, Determinants, and Policy Effects.](#)

mechanisms might contribute to tackling irregular migration. There is some likelihood that these sets of policies and programmes to reduce poverty and provide a safety net for the poorest and most marginalised people and communities can also increase the number of people choosing to migrate. At the same time, social protection can bring about sustainable long-term development and has great potential for counteracting the causes of flight and migration.

- The direction of impact of social protection schemes (whether they push migration or reduce migration) at individual and household levels is directly influenced by three aspects: how adequately the programming meets household needs, how frequent the benefits are and how reliable the scheme is.

What is missing from the literature that is pertinent to research design:

- Few studies have looked into the ways in which macro, meso and micro factors intersect to push migration or influence decision making at the individual or household levels.
- Few studies have included the perspectives of those who are already in transit, asylum seekers already in the EU, returnees as well as families left behind.
- There is scant qualitative research on how potential migrants view social protection programmes that address poverty and exclusion through cash assistance or social safety nets in relation to their migration decision making.
- Few studies have looked at the influence of the lack of social protection provisions and/or access to development programming offered by either state or non-state actors on migration intentions.
- The extensive research conducted in Afghanistan specifically on migration decision making has not included discussion on whether and how a lack of access or availability of development opportunities including social protection provisions influence migratory movements within and outside the country.

There is ample empirical space for research that provides a novel in-depth look into how access to development programming including social protection impacts on the lives of migrants during the different stages of their irregular migration journey to Europe, including during transit and after arrival in a destination country. Qualitative research would further provide a unique glimpse into the ways in which potential migrants perceive the effectiveness of social protection and development programming on their lives, and how access to programming may impact on their decision-making processes.

SECTION I: DEVELOPMENT AID, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Development aid/assistance as a means to manage migration

Official overseas development assistance (ODA) and development aid budgets across European Union (EU) member states have been decreasing on an annual basis for a decade. Yet, using aid to reduce poverty in less developed countries and address the root causes of migration from these countries to the EU continues to be a critical priority.⁶ In EU policy, the root causes of migration “encompass a wide range of casualties such as poverty, human rights violations, conflict, political instability, food insecurity, and a lack of access to natural resources.”⁷ According to the Institute for Economics and Peace in 2020, “more than one billion people are at risk of displacement due to rapid population growth, shortage of food and water and increased exposure to natural disasters which could lead to increased migration flows to Europe by 2050.”⁸

Despite the strong linkages between poverty and migration, it is unclear whether development aid or assistance (hereon referred to as development) can be a means to tackle irregular migrations’ root causes. Recent discussions indicate increasingly divergent views within the development community on its role in managing migration and on how to do it effectively with limited resources. Some development experts advocate for a continued focus on the root causes of poverty, while treating migrants as a particularly vulnerable group, as part of a “leave no one behind” approach.⁹ Others favour adjustments in the geographical focus of aid to concentrate more on countries of origin and transit, or for “saving the European commitment to asylum” using development as a tool to help decrease migration flows to Europe.¹⁰

6 For instance, addressing these root causes through development is one of the elements of the European Commission's proposal of November 2016 for a new European Consensus on Development as well as one of the main objectives of the European External Investment Plan. See [Brzozowski, 2020. Ecology threats likely to send more climate refugees towards Europe by 2050.](#)

7 Marco Funk, Frank Mc Namara, Romain Pardo, Norma Rose. [Tackling irregular migration through development: A Discussion Paper \(2017\).](#)

8 [Brzozowski, 2020. Ecology threats likely to send more climate refugees towards Europe by 2050.](#)

9 Dennison, Fine and Gowan. (2019). [False Moves: Migration and Development Aid.](#)

10 Ibid.

The body of research reviewed suggests that while there is no straightforward answer, two dominant views direct discussions around the various ways development may impact on migration management. On the one hand, there is the logic that increased economic opportunity means increased means to migrate; migration requires some economic resources, so development programming or assistance which increases the economic resources held by a population increases their ability to migrate. On the other hand, there is the logic that increased opportunities at home means increased satisfaction at home; increased economic opportunity in the country of origin decreases the gap in economic opportunities between countries of origin and destination countries in the EU.¹¹ This may be an imperative to stay home.

Addressing root causes of migration through development programmes requires strategies that consider both premises. For example, it is not the poorest who migrate and so any increase in GDP leads to increase in migration. It is assumed that people with more skills, education, and livelihood opportunities are often motivated to migrate. Thus, practically, out-migration can be driven by both an increase in development opportunities, such as poverty reduction programmes, as well as negative development indicators such as youth unemployment, lack of economic prospects, insecurity, lack of educational opportunities, and environmental degradation. At the same time, addressing the negative development factors through development programmes can also “promote, rather than impede, out-migration by increasing household income”.¹² There is some evidence, however, that this is more the case in low income or less developed countries. As Funk, Namara, Pardo and Rose note, “While increasing development in middle-income countries can indeed decrease migration from those countries, aid to lower-income countries may actually have the unintended and opposite effect of increasing migration.”¹³ This may be due to lopsided development that often takes place in lower-income countries. Take for instance, a person who may enjoy increased education opportunities but, once graduates, had no further employment opportunities. They may then decide to migrate in order to match employment with their skillset.

There is increasing discussion around an understudied yet possibly more straightforward pathway by which development can impede out-migration. Apparently, development proposals aimed at “promoting good governance” and thus “directed toward strengthening government and civil society” is the least funded but possibly the most effective way to “eradicate less obvious push factors of migration such as political instability, corruption-induced discrimination, repression and under-representation.”¹⁴ Recent research has shown a mere 10% of global development aid is directed toward and invested in good governance, “even though it is the category of development aid best equipped to have a significant impact on emigration rates.”¹⁵

11 European Investment Bank. (2016). [Migration and the EU Challenges, opportunities, the role of EIB.](#)

12 De Haas et al., (2019). [International Migration: Trends, Determinants, and Policy Effects.](#)

13 Marco Funk, Frank Mc Namara, Romain Pardo, Norma Rose (2017). [Tackling irregular migration through development: A Discussion Paper.](#)

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

Social protection and irregular migration

There is little disagreement amongst policy makers and donor governments on the importance of social protection systems in national efforts to tackle issues of poverty, inequality and ensuring universal access to basic human rights. Access to social protection is itself considered a fundamental human right.¹⁶ The International Labour Organization (ILO), in their 2030 social protection agenda, includes the adoption of social protection policies and social protection systems and measures for all.¹⁷ The European Commission further states that “social protection systems help build a country’s resilience and capacity to respond to crises...manage disasters...and can be extremely effective in situations of extreme fragility and protracted crises, providing support to affected populations and victims of forced displacement.”¹⁸

Despite the importance of social protection, only 49.6% of the global population are effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit.¹⁹ It is clear from the evidence that developing countries have the least coverage as they face greater barriers to achieving effective social protection programming than middle-income or developed countries. These barriers include “limited budgets, weaker government institutions, audit mechanisms, and formal financial systems to deliver assistance.”²⁰ These barriers are especially noted to impact effective implementation of programming in so-called fragile states, such as Afghanistan. As Devereux notes:

“One of the main mechanisms to help build resilience and protect the poor and vulnerable is context-specific, effective social protection programming. However, it is often the case that ‘the greater the need for social protection, the lower the capacity of the state to provide it.’”²¹

To fill a lacuna in the evidence, the European Commission recently created a Guidance Package on social protection across the humanitarian-development nexus. The rationale for doing so is that social protection has the potential to “transform short-term humanitarian interventions into development processes to achieve resilience, peace, stabilisation, and economic growth in countries in crises.” The guidance aims to address an empirical gap in the existing research, namely “how to bridge the humanitarian and development interventions in crisis contexts.”²²

How exactly the availability of social protection relates to migration decision making in any context is not straightforward. It is also under-researched in light of the fundamental importance provision of social protection has in ensuring migrants’ and refugees’ access to human rights and dignity. Like the debates surrounding development, existing research has established that nuanced complexities surround the role that social protection may play in migration decision making and the results are often mixed. A

16 “The right to social protection is also a core component of global development and migration governance frameworks such as the 2012 Social Protection Floors Recommendation 202, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. As such, it is embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through Goal 1.3, which aims to substantially increase coverage of poor and vulnerable people in social protection systems.” See [UNICEF \(2021\). Improving Social Protection for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: An Overview of International Practices](#), p.4.

17 [International Labour Organization. \(2021\). World Social Protection Report](#).

18 [European Commission. \(2022\). Social Protection](#).

19 [International Labour Organization. \(2021\). World Social Protection Report](#), p. 42.

20 Hanna, R. (2020). [Social protection in fragile states](#). Harvard Kennedy School.

21 [Ovadiya, M., Kryeziu, A. Masood, S. & Zaperio, E. \(2015\). Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries Trends and Challenges](#). World Bank. (p.2).

22 [Mouawad, Z. \(2019\). European Commission Guidance Package: Social Protection Across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus](#).

recent large-scale, multi-country quantitative study suggested, for instance, that “social protection may facilitate as well as impede migration, and the extent to which it influences migration decisions largely depends on the conditions and the predominant motives for emigration and flight in the countries of origin.”²³ Social protection has been shown to influence families’ income level by replacing the income that may have been gotten through migration, thereby providing support for individuals and households in origin countries. Having increased access to income may facilitate migration or it may be an imperative to stay home, especially if the increased opportunities include enhancement of livelihood strategies and increased basic standard of living through healthcare provision, employment opportunities, etc. The lack of access to social protection can also make survival or livelihood strategies limited; putting the household or individuals at risk, and encouraging migration as a favourable strategy.²⁴

The pathways by which social protection mechanisms can influence migration

Overall, the existing research indicates that the relationship between social protection and migration is multi-faceted; there are several possible links between migration and social protection and they can be assessed through a number of perspectives.²⁵ Drawing from the evidence, these include:

- **Social protection as a preventive tool for migration in crisis contexts.** Access to social protection can provide stability and security for individuals and families, enabling them to plan for the future and making them less susceptible to destitution. This logic does not change during times of crisis. As such, some scholars have noted that, “access to forms of social protection might act as a substitute for migration, where benefits derived from a social programme can act as an alternative to remittances for potential migrants, for instance.”²⁶ This also is linked to recently emerging evidence that social protection can be used in the contexts that demand programming across the development-humanitarian nexus, as discussed above.
- **Migration as a form of informal social protection in times of shock or crisis.** Migration is or can be perceived to be a way of protecting oneself or one’s family and, thus, to be a type of informal social protection, particularly during times of shock such as natural disasters or drought whereby migration may be either internal or cross-border. Whereas formal social protection is social protection provided by the state and non-state organisations, informal social protection is understood as that provided by interpersonal networks. Either form can be bi-directional: migrants navigate formal state-bounded social protection provisions to informally provide for themselves or their families back home.²⁷
- **Social protection for migrants in destination countries.** Numerous studies have indicated that migrants from countries mainly in the Global South are rarely covered by social protection either in their country of origin or while they are in destination countries.²⁸ Yet, the need for support remain high during and after migration; though migration may be seen as a social protection strategy in situations of shock, migration is also often a process that leads to increased vulnerabilities which require access to protection measures since migrants encounter different vulnerabilities during the various stages of their migration trajectories – i.e. before departure, during transit, after arrival and upon return.²⁹ According to UNICEF, “refugees and asylum seekers often face significant challenges

23 [Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung Spitzenverband, \(2017\). Social Protection as an Alternative to Migration?](#)

24 Ibid.

25 [Da Silveira Steffens, I. \(2018\). Migration and social protection in crisis contexts.](#)

26 [Food and Agriculture Organization, \(2021. p.12\). Social Protection and Migration.](#)

27 [Mingot & Mazzucato, \(2018\). Providing social protection to mobile populations: symbiotic relationships between migrants and welfare institutions.](#)

28 [Avato, Koetti & Sabates-Wheeler, \(2010\). Social Security Regimes, Global Estimates, and Good Practices: The Status of Social Protection for International Migrants.](#)

29 [Sabates-Wheeler & Waite. \(2003\). Migration and Social Protection: A Concept Paper.](#)

in living safely and productively, and in enjoying access to basic public services, labour rights and social protection”.³⁰ Allowing migrants and refugees to access essential services acts to safeguard their economic, social, physical and emotional wellbeing.

In 2017, academics from the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences and the Institute for Political Science and Sociology at the University of Bonn conducted one of the first major studies on the linkages between social protection and migration.³¹ The main authors, Schuring and Kronenberg, concluded overall and across four different country case study contexts that the effectiveness of implementation of social protection systems and the influence the system may have on migration are directly contingent on how well designed they are.³² Specifically, migration decision making at individual and household levels is directly influenced by three aspects: how adequately the programming meets household needs; how frequent the benefits are; and how reliable the scheme is.

Other relevant conclusions/recommendations the authors detail in the study include:

- If the governments in destination countries were to direct their attention to social protection in the migrants' countries of origin, it would make a significant contribution to reducing (future) migration pressures.
- Migrants who consider returning to their home countries have a much greater likelihood to go back if a functional social protection system is in place.
- Social protection's established effect of reducing poverty and inequality by pointing out its direct and indirect impact on the factors which push migration. Social protection can have direct effects on either impeding or facilitating migration by increasing household income, reducing poverty and increasing individual's capacity to cope with life cycle risks.
- Ensuring basic living standards in the country of origin can prevent emigration under conditions of reliability, adequacy and equity.
- A lack of access to essential services such as decent health care or fair employment conditions can nudge potential migrants towards leaving their country.
- The capacities of a state including its physical and financial infrastructure, as well as external shocks like droughts or floods, influence the efficiency and quality of social protection programmes and hence the migration decisions of the population.
- Social protection has a significant impact not only on those factors which determine the decision to emigrate but also on those which affect the decision to return.

The role of trust in implementing effective social protection programming

Importantly, Schuring and Kronenberg note that “adequacy and reliability of social protection schemes in the countries of origin play an important role in migration”, since the lack of reliability can create mistrust in state and government officials and can end up boosting emigration.”³³ An older study by the ILO indicated the same: in many cases, the minimum benefit level fails to “*provide beneficiaries with the means to a life in dignity*”; in other cases, transfers which are unreliable or unpunctual will, in turn, create mistrust.³⁴

30 UNICEF (2021). [Improving Social Protection for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: An Overview of International Practices.](#)

31 Schuring and Kronenberg. (2017). Social Protection as an Alternative to Migration? An assessment of the role of social protection in reducing [push factors for migration in different country contexts.](#)

32 Ibid.

33 Schuring and Kronenberg (2017). Social Protection as an Alternative to Migration? An assessment of the role of social protection in reducing [push factors for migration in different country contexts.](#)

34 ILO. [Social Protection and Human Rights. Adequacy of benefits.](#) 2012.

Research conducted in fragile states found that trust in government may be very low to begin with, which negatively affects implementation of social protection programming: “Making tough decisions on who should receive assistance could potentially further erode trust or exacerbate existing internal conflicts.”³⁵ At the programming level, experiences where support did not meet expectations often negatively impacted migrants’ trust in organisations. According to a Seefar/IMREF study, for instance, experiences where humanitarian support did not meet expectations often negatively impacted migrants’ trust in organisations. The study also showed that some migrants experienced inappropriate behaviours from field staff including inappropriate conduct with women, threatening behaviour including insults and getting angry at aid recipients. This resulted in the migrants having decreased trust levels with the staff, especially when the available support does not meet their needs.³⁶

35 Ibid.

36 IMREF (2021). [Exploring migrants’ trust in humanitarian organisations](#), p. 12.

SECTION II: RESEARCH CONTEXT

Afghan refugees make up the second largest refugee population globally – an estimated 2.6 million people – 90% of whom are in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan.³⁷ This is also the second largest group of asylum seekers (after Syrians) in Europe. An additional 3.5 million people are internally displaced (IDPs). Over 675,000 people were newly displaced due to conflict between January and October 2021, 80% of whom are women and children.³⁸ The largest rates of displacement occurred in Bayman and Kunduz provinces.

A Seefar study revealed that violence and general insecurity were principal motivating factors for migration from Kabul, including 62.3% of those en route to Europe.³⁹ Other factors were a perceived lack of rights or ability to address personal, family or economic concerns.⁴⁰ Currently, violence continues across the country, putting a strain on the population, and insecurity continues to be a major push factor for irregular migration.

Migration Context

- In the third quarter of 2020, Afghanistan constituted the second largest nation of asylum seekers arriving in Europe;
- In 2019, Afghanistan comprised 30% of the total number of unaccompanied minors registered in Europe;
- In 2020, Afghans constituted 23% of all applications received by Austria, with France, Germany and Greece being the top three destinations of Afghan migrants during that year.

Push and Pull Factors

- A lack of economic security/livelihoods such as un/underemployment and lost jobs are main drivers of irregular migration;
- Livelihood quality – not just availability – is a key dimension of migration decision making;

37 UNHCR, “Afghanistan”, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/afghanistan.html> accessed December 2021.

38 OCHA, “Internal Displacement due to Conflict” <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/idps>.

39 Seefar, *Distant dreams*, 2019.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

- Violence and insecurity also major push factors;
- COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the push factors for migration from Afghanistan.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Potential Migrants

- Unemployed or underemployed Afghan males aged 18–30 make up the vast majority of those planning to migrate; unaccompanied minors are also a large group, composed mainly of boys ages 15–17;
- Evidence with regards to the education levels of potential migrants is not so straightforward as there is not one consistent profile that may be generalised;
- Those who migrate to Iran for work also make up a portion of the potential migrants intending to go to Europe, as do internally displaced persons who reside in Herat and are migrating for work due to limited jobs in Herat city.

Development aid in Afghanistan

Though known to have one of the smallest formal economies globally,⁴¹ Afghanistan's GDP increased from USD 4.055 billion in 2002 to USD 19.807 billion in 2020, an estimated 70–80% of which came from foreign aid and investment.⁴² Prior to the 2022 Taliban takeover, an estimated USD 2 trillion was invested in Afghanistan by the USA over the last decade, more than USD 1 trillion of which went through the Defence Department budget.⁴³ Other spending included:

USD 82.9 billion invested in the Afghan Security Forces Fund

USD 89 million in USAID grants to encourage election participation in Afghanistan

USD 94.8 million invested in the American University in Afghanistan

USD 105 million invested in Economic Development

At least USD 800 million spent on gender equality campaigns

According to the International Aid Transparency Index (IATI) total reported aid as of 2019 (most recently available data) came from the United States (27%) and in particular the United States Agency for International Development (21%), United Nations Development Programme (11%), World Bank Group (5%), with other donors including EU Member States and EU institutions, the United Kingdom, and other international organisations and philanthropic foundations.⁴⁴

41 Sabga, P. (August 2021). *The US spent 2 trillion in Afghanistan and for what?*

42 World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1>; <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/8/24/investors-dilemma-abandon-billions-spent-or-work-with-taliban>.

43 Adam Andrzejewski, "10 U.S. Investments In Afghanistan That Didn't Pan Out", *Forbes*, August 2021.

44 IATI d-portal, "Afghanistan: Where does the money come from?"

Development aid in Afghanistan as of 2019⁴⁵

Top locations	Kabul, Jalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat
Top donors	USAID (38%), UNDP (9%), European Commission (7%)
Primary types of programming	Conflict prevention and resolution, peace and security (26%), Government and civil society (23%), Emergency response (7%), Basic health (5%)

Since 2002, the EU has spent over EUR 4 billion on development aid in Afghanistan.⁴⁶ Additionally, the EU has invested significantly in the externalisation of migration, with further recent promises of funds to neighbouring countries hosting Afghan refugees.⁴⁷

Despite substantial aid investments provided by international development organisations and donor governments, Afghanistan is considered one of the world's ten most fragile states and remains one of the world's poorest countries, with the poverty rate having reached 72% across 38 million inhabitants⁴⁸ by the close of 2020.⁴⁹ It has been affected by decades of conflict and chronically poor public services, environmental fragility, swelling urbanization and high levels of unemployment.⁵⁰ 21% of young people between the ages of 15–24 are unemployed.⁵¹ In the months prior to the collapse of the Western-backed Afghan government, the Afghan economy was already in collapse due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, severe drought, conflict and investor pull out.⁵² The chaos in the aftermath of the Taliban seizing power in Afghanistan has led to a catastrophic economic collapse, further impacted by sanctions imposed against the Taliban.⁵³

Similar to the debates in policy making circles more generally, the role or effectiveness of development aid in addressing migration push factors in Afghanistan is unclear. Much of the research suggests that state fragility and the conditions noted above—such as severe drought, investor pull-out—have impeded progress to a significant degree. Further, as a fragile state, Afghanistan has weaker and more unstable public and private institutions, making the process of designing and implementing durable systems for development and economic growth more challenging. Especially now under the new Taliban regime, they may also have non-inclusive political or social service systems leaving the most vulnerable – including women – outside the priorities of the government.

45 [IATI Database - Afghanistan](#).

46 [European Commission, "Afghanistan"](#).

47 [Reuters, "As war rages, EU weighs more funds to limit Afghans fleeing to bloc"](#), July 2021.

48 65% of which are children. See [UNHCR \(2021\). "Afghanistan emergency"](#).

49 [World Bank Group. \(2020\). *Surviving the Storm: Afghanistan Development Update*](#).

50 [Human Rights Watch \(2020\). *Afghanistan: Events of 2020*](#).

51 [UNFPA \(2016\). Herat: Socio-economic and demographic survey](#).

52 <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/brink-enabling-urgent-financial-flows-afghanistan>.

53 [Rose, Pisa and Lowcock.\(2021\). *On the brink: Enabling urgent financial flows to Afghanistan*](#).

Social protection in Afghanistan

The priority of the Afghan government and international actors delivering on development aid funding over the last five years was to implement humanitarian-development-peace ‘triple nexus’ policies and programmes. There was keen interest within the international community and donor governments to identify ways in which social protection can be developed for use across both humanitarian and development responses throughout the country.

Yet, as it stood prior to the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan barely had a government-led social protection system. Although, the previous government did agree that there is a vacuum there to be addressed.⁵⁴ According to the former Afghan Ministry of Finance:

Social protection comprises a set of public policies and intervention aimed to increase the capacities, opportunities and security of extremely poor and vulnerable Afghans through a process of economic empowerment in order to reduce poverty and increase self reliance. Social protection policies and intervention will provide support to the critically poor, and help vulnerable Afghan Groups better manage risks, targeted investments in Afghanistan. A standard rural development program is required for those who fall below poverty line and those who can not benefit from community-based and self-help groups and groups in remote areas. Social protection policies will also strengthen the targeting of current investment such as food-aid and employment-based public works programs.⁵⁵

The most recent former government had appointed the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) and the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) to manage the country’s social protection plan. Their projects addressed:

- rural social development;
- a cash transfer programme (in partnership with the World Bank);
- basic health insurance for groups with the greatest needs (e.g. people living in poverty, people living with disabilities, women and children etc.);
- a child protection response mechanism.⁵⁶

While a social protection system has still not been developed in Afghanistan, the country had developed some social transfer programmes which the previous government had committed to.⁵⁷ Yet, by 2020-2021, only a minority of the workforce was covered by social protection programmes, while “non-humanitarian, non-contributory, flagship social assistance programmes targeting the individual or household level only covered an estimated 0.9% of the population, with local initiatives lacking government support.”⁵⁸ Most programmes were supported by international development actors and donor governments (see Table 2 below).

Like any fragile state, Afghanistan is a challenging context to implement programmes effectively.

54 Samuel Hall & UNICEF. (2014). *Social Protection System. (2014). An Afghan Case Study. Analysing the Potential of a Child-Focused Social Protection Cash Transfer Programme in Balkh.*

55 See Ministry of Finance, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. No date provided.

56 Samuel Hall. (2014). *Social Protection System. (2014). An Afghan Case Study. Analysing the Potential of a Child-Focused Social Protection Cash Transfer Programme in Balkh.*

57 WFP. (2019). *Afghanistan: Developing a Strategic Framework of Action for Social Protection.*

58 The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (2020). *COVID-19 and social protection in South Asia: Afghanistan.*

Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework 2017–2021 highlighted the challenges in developing social protection in the context of Afghanistan regardless of the commitment of government offices to implementation. Specifically, Afghanistan's state technical and financial capacity remains weak and the tax base is still emerging, rendering effective implementation with adequate coverage highly unlikely.

However, recent debates indicate that there may be space within humanitarian and development responses to accommodate social protection principles and programming. According to the World Food Programme prior to the Taliban takeover, "With the focus of the government and UN actors on the humanitarian–development–peace 'triple nexus' guiding policy and programming there is interest to identify ways in which social protection can be developed, for use across both humanitarian and development responses."⁵⁹

To our knowledge, there has been no further development on this, and no study has looked at how or whether any such programming would deter migration.

Table 2: Some key actors involved in social protection

Government Ministries and Departments	Ministry of Finance, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Refugees & Repatriation Ministry of Women's Affairs Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs & Disabled Ministry of Border, Tribal Affairs Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority ⁶⁰
International Donors and NGOs often working in partnership with the government	World Bank In 2013, the World Bank designated USD 12.3 million to Afghanistan for the Safety Nets and Pension Support Project. ⁶¹
	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan The SCA has been in operation in Afghanistan for over 30 years and their programmes focus on health, education, rural development and rehabilitation projects for people living with disabilities. ⁶²
	International Labour Organization The Afghan government developed the National Child Labor Strategy and Action Plan 2018–2030 which focuses on poverty reduction as a pre-requisite towards the elimination of child labour using several mechanisms including the improvement of social work and social protection mechanisms. ⁶³

59 Ibid.

60 See [Ministry of Finance, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan](#). No date provided.

61 [World Bank. \(2013\). Emergency Project Paper on a Proposed Additional Grant and Project Restructuring in the Amount of SDR 8.3 million \(US\\$ 12.5 Million Equivalent\) to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the Safety Nets and Pensions Support Project.](#)

62 Ibid, p. 32.

63 [ILO/Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan \(2018\). National Child Labour Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2030.](#)

National/Civil Society Organisations**Afghan Women Social Welfare Organization (AWSWO)**

AWSWO is an Afghan women's social welfare network founded by Afghan women for Afghan women and youth. They are committed to empowering and improving the livelihoods of Afghan women and youth through education, social and economic participation,⁶⁴ political empowerment and awareness.⁶⁵

Social Safety and Social Protection Organization (SSSPO)

Founded in 2007 is an Afghan non-governmental, non-patrician and non-profitable humanitarian organisation whose core objectives are to provide services that contribute towards long-term sustainable peace and development in Afghanistan. SSSPO is mainly involved in the sectors of education, health, community development Programs, capacity building, humanitarian assistance, peace and democracy promotion, rehabilitation, and human rights. SSSPO has been supported by local organisations, international organisations and governmental institutions.⁶⁶

64 <https://areu.org.af/social-protection-and-livelihoods/>

65 AWSWO has started training Young Energetic Lawyers under Young Lawyers in Training Program (YLTP) to take active part in advocacy for women and children. AWSWO has recently started the Youth Empowerment Program where they have signed tens of Memorandum of Understandings (MoU) with Universities in Kabul and Provinces according to which the universities will enrol students with over 75% discount for the whole educational period. For those returnees and internally displaced youth who have less chances to go for their higher education, AWSWO paves the way with providing dormitories and higher education opportunities with maximum discounts with the help of its partner universities. However, in accordance with these MoUs, those at the top of the classes will receive 100% scholarships each semester. Through its Training Unit, AWSWO will provide capacity building programs to these students. After graduation, they will be referred to fellowship programs where they will get on-the-job training and experience. AWSWO will make sure to get them job opportunities after graduation through job fairs and linkage with the private sector.

66 Development Aid: Organisations (N.D.) SSSPO.

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