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# ETERNALLY DISPLACED: AFGHANISTAN'S REFUGEE CRISIS AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR EUROPE

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## SUMMARY

- Afghans are the second-biggest group of asylum seekers arriving in Europe, and their numbers are likely to keep growing. These arrivals are a challenge for Europe, as they are a mixed group of refugees and migrants, and often come after years in countries such as Pakistan or Iran.
- This population movement is driven by deteriorating security and deep problems with the Afghan state, which mean that the country lacks the capacity to control its borders, target migrant smugglers, support the internally displaced, and resettle those who return.
- Kabul needs long-term assistance to build its capacity in these areas. Afghanistan's neighbours could help, particularly two that are rarely considered in this context – China and India.
- These countries share interests with Europe, such as training for Afghan forces, peace talks with the Taliban, and infrastructure investment.
- Europe should tackle the spike in migration by coordinating the return of refugees to safe areas of Afghanistan; supporting Kabul to develop a migration policy; targeting assistance at the internally displaced; and cooperating with Asian governments to improve the situation of Afghan refugees and migrants in the region.

The war continues in Afghanistan. Refugees are coming to Europe in ever-greater numbers. They are coming by plane; they are coming overland through Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey; they are even taking the long, hard route through Central Asia and Russia. Afghans were the second-biggest group of asylum seekers after Syrians in 2015, making up 13 percent of all first-time applicants.

European governments, squeezed by the overall influx of refugees, are increasingly pushing Afghans to return home. Germany is offering to pay Afghans up to \$2,000 to return, and has threatened to cut aid to the country if the flow continues.<sup>1</sup> In March 2016, the UK government won a court battle to declare that Afghanistan is a safe country for the purposes of returning failed asylum-seekers. In Kabul, the German Embassy launched a social media campaign (#RumoursAboutGermany) “to counter the rumours and untruths” drawing Afghans to Germany.<sup>2</sup> But all this does not stop Afghans from making the journey to Europe. One survey found that almost 70 percent of Afghans fear for their personal safety, and around 40 percent would leave the country if they could.<sup>3</sup>

The number of Afghans seeking asylum in Europe shot up after the withdrawal of foreign troops began in earnest in 2012, going from roughly 20,000 in 2010<sup>4</sup> to 26,000 in 2013,

<sup>1</sup> “Stay in your homeland! De Mazière invites Afghans”, n-tv, 2 February 2016, available at <http://www.n-tv.de/politik/De-Maiziere-laedt-Afghanen-aus-article16912151.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “#RumoursAboutGermany – Public awareness campaign in Afghanistan”, German Embassy Kabul, available at <http://www.kabul.diplo.de/Vertretung/kabul/en/03/FluchtMigrationEN/RumoursAboutGermany.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “Afghanistan in 2015: A Survey of the Afghan People”, The Asia Foundation, 17 November 2015, available at <http://asiafoundation.org/where-we-work/afghanistan/survey-2015/>.

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat Data Asylum and first-time asylum applicants, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

and around 40,000 in 2014.<sup>5</sup> Most NATO troops had left by the end of 2014, and the consequent deterioration of security triggered an even-greater flow to Europe. By the end of 2015, almost 180,000 Afghan first-time asylum applicants had been registered.<sup>6</sup> Some 42,500 Afghans travelled to Europe by sea between January and May 2016 – making up nearly a quarter of all arrivals.<sup>7</sup>

Given the current situation in Afghanistan and the region, the numbers are likely to continue to rise. This not only increases the pressure on Europe, which is struggling to cope with an influx of refugees from Syria and elsewhere, but also damages Afghanistan's prospects of rebuilding its society and economy. Although security is the most obvious issue, there are complex and diverse push and pull factors bringing Afghans to Europe. Afghanistan needs significant international support, and Kabul's partners in the EU should be on high alert.

This paper explores what the EU and its member states can do to tackle the spike in Afghans arriving in Europe, with a particular focus on working with Afghanistan's neighbours. The first three sections of the paper set out the key factors driving this wave of migration. Section one considers the worsening situation for Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, where there have been large populations for some years, which are only now being driven further afield by crack-downs and general conflict. Section two sets out the deterioration in security and governance within Afghanistan, as the Taliban regains ground and international forces retreat, while political elites fight among themselves. Section three looks at Afghanistan's failure to manage population flows, in terms of supporting the internally displaced, securing its borders, and tackling migrant smugglers.

The fourth section turns to Afghanistan's neighbours, above all two that are rarely considered in this context but that could make an important contribution – China and India. It considers their engagement with Afghanistan, and how they and other regional actors could help Europe to support security and development in the country. Finally, the paper makes recommendations for what Europe should do: work with Kabul to coordinate the return of Afghans; offer assistance to manage new population outflows; and cooperate with other Asian governments to improve the situation of Afghan refugees and migrants in the region, support peace talks, and encourage investment.

5 "Countries of origin of (non-EU) asylum seekers in the EU-28 Member States, 2013 and 2014 YB15 III", Eurostat, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Countries\\_of\\_origin\\_of\\_%28non-EU%29\\_asylum\\_seekers\\_in\\_the\\_EU-28\\_Member\\_States\\_2013\\_and\\_2014\\_YB15\\_III-de.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Countries_of_origin_of_%28non-EU%29_asylum_seekers_in_the_EU-28_Member_States_2013_and_2014_YB15_III-de.png); "Asylum statistics", Eurostat, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics).

6 "First time asylum applicants in the EU-28 by citizenship", Eurostat, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/b/bd/First\\_time\\_asylum\\_applicants\\_in\\_the\\_EU-28\\_by\\_citizenship%2C\\_Q4\\_2014\\_%E2%80%93\\_Q4\\_2015.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/b/bd/First_time_asylum_applicants_in_the_EU-28_by_citizenship%2C_Q4_2014_%E2%80%93_Q4_2015.png).

7 "Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean", UNHCR data, available at <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>.

## Migration patterns from Afghanistan

Afghans are the world's third-largest refugee population (after Palestinians and, since 2014, Syrians), with almost three million seeking refuge abroad.<sup>8</sup> Like other large refugee populations, Afghans often travel in stages, first to neighbouring countries – mainly Pakistan and Iran – and then onwards, often following the path from Pakistan to Iran, Turkey, and then Greece. As a result, a significant number of Afghan asylum seekers in the EU have come via Iran or Pakistan, some spending many years in these transit countries.

There is very little information on the numbers coming via these neighbouring countries, as the flows are complex and poorly monitored. The porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan makes it impossible to keep track of population movements, and these are mixed flows, composed of both refugees and so-called economic migrants, who are often hard to distinguish from one another. This information deficit matters to European governments, as, while many countries do not consider Afghanistan a "safe" country to which nationals can be returned, they could in theory be returned to their point of departure, as countries such as Iran or Pakistan are considered safe.

As well as the Afghans who move abroad, a huge number are displaced within the country – more than 300,000 in 2015 alone, an increase of 78 percent from the previous year.<sup>9</sup> These internally displaced people move primarily from rural areas to urban centres to escape fighting and seek a better livelihood.<sup>10</sup> The poorest often remain within Afghanistan's borders, while those with a little capital make their way to Pakistan and Iran, and it is mainly the urban, educated middle class who can afford to flee directly to Europe. The fee for a migrant to be smuggled from Afghanistan to Western Europe is between €2,000 and €20,000, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).<sup>11</sup> The middle classes often travel under full-package arrangements, going directly from Afghanistan to the destination country, while less wealthy families or individuals work to pay for each leg of their trip.<sup>12</sup>

The departure of the middle classes is a major problem for Afghanistan. Many middle-class Afghans invested heavily in education, but later realised that there were few jobs for them, and decided to leave.<sup>13</sup> Their loss is a "brain drain" of

8 Stephanie Nebehay, "Syrians largest refugee group after Palestinians: U.N.", *Reuters*, 7 January 2015, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-refugees-idUSKBN0KGAZ20150107>.

9 Kate Clark, "The Bloodiest Year Yet: UN reports on civilian casualties in 2015", Afghanistan Analysts Network, 14 February 2016, available at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-bloodiest-year-yet-un-reports-on-civilian-casualties-in-2015/> (hereafter, Clark, "The Bloodiest Year Yet").

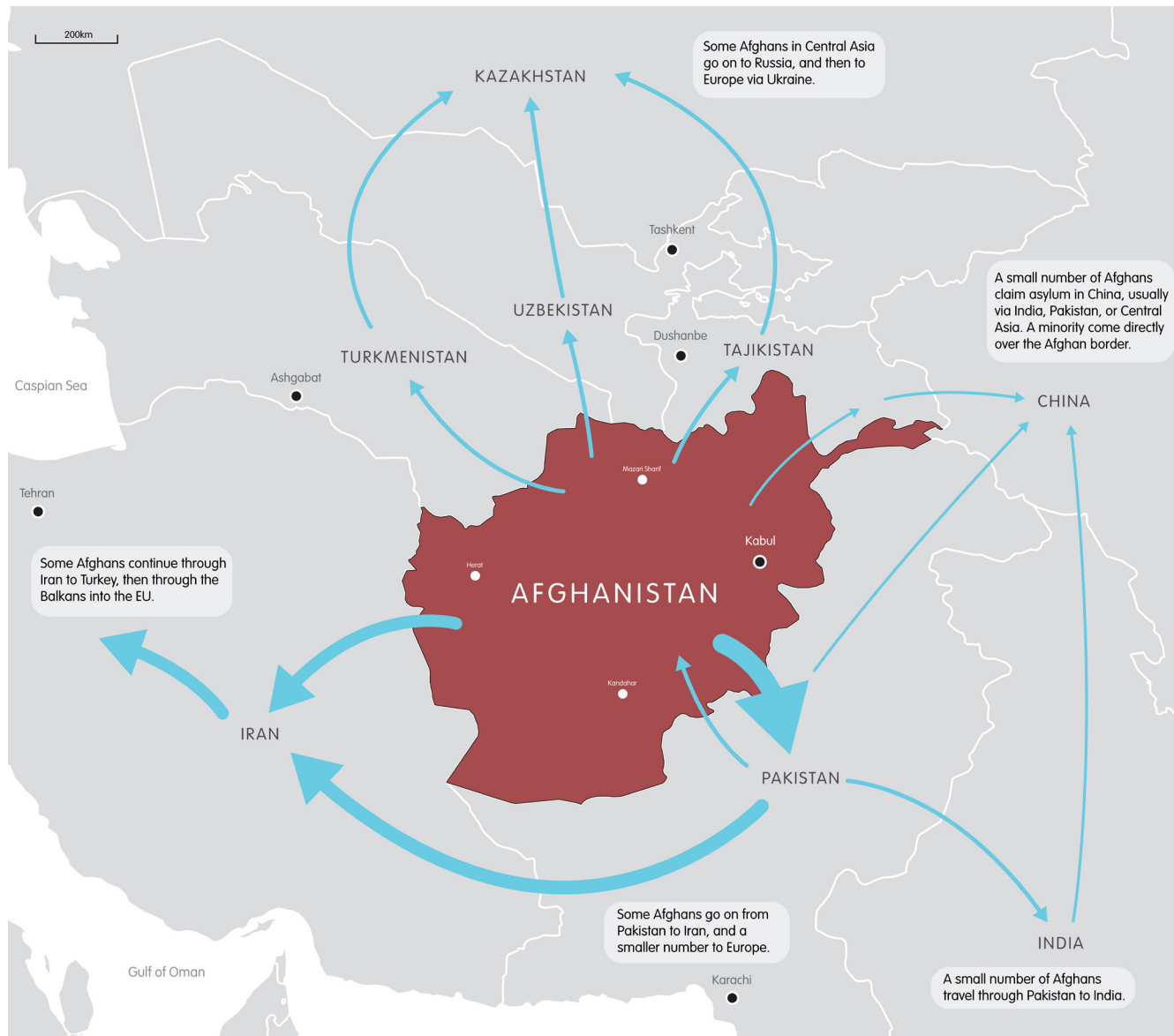
10 Anne-Kathrin Glatz, "Afghanistan: New and long-term IDPs risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies", Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 16 July 2015, available at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/afghanistan/2015/afghanistan-new-and-long-term-idps-risk-becoming-neglected-as-conflict-intensifies>.

11 "Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges", United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, April 2015, available at [https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2015/som/Current\\_Trends\\_and\\_Related\\_Challenges\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2015/som/Current_Trends_and_Related_Challenges_web.pdf) (hereafter, "Migrant Smuggling in Asia", UNODC).

12 "Can we put an end to human smuggling?", OECD Migration Policy Debates, No. 9, December 2015, available at <http://www.oecd.org/migration/Can%20owe%20put%20an%20end%20to%20human%20smuggling.pdf> (hereafter, "Can we put an end to human smuggling?"), OECD).

13 Interview with a European development aid organisation representative, February 2016.

# Migration routes from Afghanistan



the very people that Afghanistan most needs in order to develop and modernise.<sup>14</sup> The Refugee Ministry has launched a social media campaign calling on Afghans to “Stay with me”, while grassroots campaigns aim to reverse the brain drain, adopting slogans such as “Afghanistan needs you”.<sup>15</sup>

## Destination and transit countries

Both Pakistan and Iran have received large numbers of Afghan refugees since the outbreak of the Afghan-Soviet war in 1979. Population outflows continued as security in Afghanistan deteriorated during the civil war of the 1990s, followed by the arrival of the brutal Taliban regime. Afghan refugees also continued to seek asylum in Pakistan and

Iran, particularly the Afghan Hazara and other Shia Muslims. Today, Afghans in these countries are the two largest long-term refugee populations under the mandate of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR): as of June 2015, Pakistan was hosting around 1.5 million Afghan refugees, and Iran more than 900,000.<sup>16</sup> Outbreaks of instability or hostility to foreign populations in these countries could trigger an exodus of Afghans to Europe.

In addition to the roughly 1.5 million Afghan refugees registered in Pakistan, a large number of migrants from Afghanistan travel to and from the country without legal status (this population is estimated at around one million).<sup>17</sup> Pakistan has changed its policy towards Afghan refugees since the early 2000s, aiming to push them to return to their home

14 Siobhan O’Grady, “U.N. Fears an Afghan ‘Brain Drain’ as Taliban Surge Sparks Mass Exodus to Europe”, *Foreign Policy*, 13 December 2015, available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/13/u-n-fears-an-afghan-brain-drain-as-taliban-surge-sparks-mass-exodus-to-europe/>.

15 Frud Bezhan, “‘Stay With Me’: Afghan Government Beggars Citizens Not to Flee”, *The Atlantic*, 22 September 2015, available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/afghanistan-brain-drain-migrant-crisis/406708/>.

16 “2015 UNHCR country operations profile – Afghanistan”, UNHCR, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486eb6.html>.

17 “Migrant Smuggling in Asia”, UNODC.

country, and to discourage new refugee inflows.<sup>18</sup> In addition, many Afghan refugees based in Pakistan have been driven to return home or move elsewhere after an increase in attacks by the Pakistani Taliban and clashes between militants and the Pakistani army during 2015. The fresh violence was triggered by the December 2014 attack on a military school in Peshawar that killed more than 150 people.

The situation of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan differs in terms of their access to education and the labour market, as Tehran has harsher policies towards refugees, placing restrictions on their movements.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the 900,000 Afghan refugees registered in Iran, an estimated 1.5 million Afghans work in the country with irregular status. Tehran is now increasingly encouraging irregular Afghan migrants and rejected asylum-seekers to return home, which has the effect of spurring some to make the move to Europe. As migration expert Angeliki Dimitriadi explains: “The continuous limbo [in Iran] caused a new group of Afghans to seek safety in Europe – safety not from protracted conflict but from pervasive insecurity linked with unemployment, marginalisation, and fear of deportation.”

Both Iran and Pakistan have intensified policies aimed at pushing out Afghans. Pakistan deported 20,000 in the first ten months of 2015, and reported that another 96,000 left of their own accord, while Iran deported nearly 200,000 in the same period, according to one study.<sup>20</sup> These policies date back some years – in 2007, for example, Iran deported 360,000 Afghans.

But, rather than returning home, many of these displaced Afghans have sought asylum in Europe.<sup>21</sup> This is due in part to the narrowing of alternative options. In Australia, hostility to refugees increased under the Abbott government, accompanied by a “stop the boats” policy. The United States also poses increasing difficulties for asylum seekers, accepting only 661 Afghans in 2013 out of a total of 70,000 people given refugee status.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Tehran has placed Afghan refugees “in a state of limbo by refusing to say whether it would allow them to prolong their stay. The uncertainty prompted many Afghans to move on, up through Turkey to the EU”, as analyst Roderick Parkes put it.

The most common routes for Afghan migrants coming to Europe are the illegal channels via Iran and Turkey. Alternative, though less popular, routes into Europe include through the Central Asian countries and Russia – via Norway, for example.<sup>23</sup> Refugee flows from Afghanistan could

18 Angeliki Dimitriadi, “Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece”, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, Background Report: Migration System 3 (Afghanistan), 2013, available at [http://www.eliamap.gr/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/IRMA-Background-Report-AFGHANISTAN\\_EN-1.pdf](http://www.eliamap.gr/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/IRMA-Background-Report-AFGHANISTAN_EN-1.pdf) (hereafter, Dimitriadi, “Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece”).

19 Dimitriadi, “Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece”.

20 Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani, “The Forced Return of Afghan Refugees and Implications for Stability”, United States Institute of Peace, 13 January 2016, available at <http://www.usip.org/publications/2016/01/13/the-forced-return-of-afghan-refugees-and-implications-stability>.

21 Dimitriadi, “Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece”.

22 Stephen Starr, “Afghan refugees in Turkey are homeless and hopeless”, the *National*, 12 February 2015, available at <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-lifestyle/the-review/afghan-refugees-in-turkey-are-homeless-and-hopeless>.

23 “Can we put an end to human smuggling?”, OECD.

become a greater problem in Central Asia, if, for example, the Taliban gained ground in northern Afghanistan, pushing populations over the border into Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The Central Asian countries have strict asylum policies with regards to Afghan refugees, but illegal migration channels circumvent their weak border controls to provide passages to Russia, and on to Europe.<sup>24</sup> Afghans also migrate not only to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, but also to India and, in small numbers, China.<sup>25</sup>

## The deterioration of security and governance

At the heart of Afghanistan’s migration crisis is its poor and worsening prospects in terms of security, politics, and the economy. As long as these show no improvement, refugees will continue to come to Europe, and resettlement will be hard to implement.

By the end of 2015, the Taliban had gained control of up to 70 districts out of the country’s 398, including the unexpected and spectacular case of Kunduz.<sup>26</sup> Though the group had to relinquish the district after two weeks, even its temporary fall was a warning. The situation is even more precarious since a local branch of Islamic State (ISIS) – known as ISIL-K – emerged in the country in January 2015.<sup>27</sup> It has carried out suicide bombings, small arms attacks, and kidnappings, mainly in eastern Afghanistan. Its targets are civilians, Afghan forces, and foreign troops (such as the September 2015 attacks against UN vehicles and Afghan forces). The Taliban’s 2016 “Spring Offensive” – a series of attacks the group launches each year after the end of winter – included a major bombing in Kabul on 19 April, which killed more than 60 people, and an assault on the Afghan parliament on 28 March. In addition, the group continued its attacks in several districts around Kunduz, as well as in the west and south of the country.

More than 13,000 foreign troops from 42 nations remain in Afghanistan, but their presence is not preventing fighting between Afghan forces, the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, ISIL-K, and other groups from increasing in intensity and frequency. More than 10,000 civilian casualties were documented in 2015, up 4 percent from 2014; there was an increased number of Afghan security forces casualties; and desertions are again on the rise.<sup>28</sup> Combined with combat casualties, the army lost a third of its personnel (170,000 soldiers) in 2015.<sup>29</sup> The year was the bloodiest on record since 2001, and most foreign NGOs as well as media have left the country. Civilian casualties were up slightly in the first quarter of 2016 compared to the same period the previ-

24 “Migrant Smuggling in Asia”, UNODC.

25 “Migrant Smuggling in Asia”, UNODC.

26 “Taliban controls or contests 70 districts in Afghanistan”, Threat Matrix blog, 16 October 2015, available at <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/taliban-controls-or-contests-70-districts-in-afghanistan.php>.

27 Bill Roggio, “State Department lists Islamic State’s ‘Khorasan Province’ as Foreign Terrorist Organization”, Threat Matrix blog, 14 January 2016, available at <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/01/state-department-lists-islamic-states-khorasan-province-as-foreign-terrorist-organization.php>.

28 Clark, “The Bloodiest Year Yet”.

29 Sayed Sarwar Amani and Andrew MacAskill, “Desertions deplete Afghan forces, adding to security worries”, *Reuters*, 18 January 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-army-desertions-idUSKCN0UWIK3>.



ous year – as of 31 March, there were 1,943 civilian casualties, including 600 deaths in 2016.<sup>30</sup>

The government is too preoccupied by the country's worsening security situation to focus on solving its other problems, ranging from economic recession to corruption, drug trafficking, weak rule of law, and poor institutional capacity. The resulting poverty, homelessness, and unemployment in the cities, and overall uncertainty about the country's future, push many Afghans to leave.

The hopes that Afghans put in the future of their country around the time of the 2014 elections have been largely disappointed, and indeed the final election results have not even been made public. The National Unity Government, formed between the rival presidential candidates Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, is more divided than united. Political deadlock has hampered implementation of the reforms – it took the government almost a year to agree on cabinet ministers, and the post of defence minister still remains open because of disagreements. This weakness and lack of leadership has in turn helped to drive the Taliban's recent military successes.<sup>31</sup>

The deteriorating security situation and revival of the Taliban is also driven by the failure to combat the drug trade, which is a major source of income for the group. Although opium poppy cultivation decreased by 19 percent in 2015 compared to the previous year – its first registered decline since 2009 – Afghanistan still accounts for roughly 80 percent of global opium production.<sup>32</sup> The decrease can mostly be attributed to poor harvest and market fluctuations, rather than the efforts of the Afghan government.<sup>33</sup> Improving security, increasing eradication, and encouraging farmers to grow alternative crops could contribute to reducing poppy cultivation significantly. These efforts have produced results in the past – in 2005, for example, cultivation fell 21 percent.<sup>34</sup>

Another domestic issue driving migration from Afghanistan is corruption, which permeates all state and public institutions, NGOs, and media, undermining the effectiveness of international development assistance to the country. In 2015, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index placed Afghanistan 166th of 168 nations.<sup>35</sup>

30 "UN chief in Afghanistan: Do more now to protect civilians – UNAMA releases civilian casualty data for the first quarter of 2016", United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 17 April 2016, available at <https://unama.unmissions.org/un-chief-afghanistan-do-more-now-protect-civilians-unama-releases-civilian-casualty-data-first>.

31 "Afghanistan: Die Gründe für den vierten Massenexodus", Afghan Analysts Network, 19 February 2016, available at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/miscellaneous/aan-media/afghanistan-die-gruende-fur-den-vierten-massenexodus/>.

32 "After six years on the rise, Afghan opium crop cultivation declines: new UNODC survey", United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 14 October 2015, available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2015/October/after-six-years-on-the-rise-afghan-opium-crop-cultivation-declines-new-unodc-survey.html>; "Afghanistan Drug Report 2015", UNODC, Kabul, 9 December 2015, available at <https://www.unodc.org/afghanistan/en/frontpage/2015/afghanistan-drug-report-2015-press-release.html>; and "UNODC Annual Report 2014", UNODC, available at [https://www.unodc.org/documents/AnnualReport2014/Annual\\_Report\\_2014\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/AnnualReport2014/Annual_Report_2014_WEB.pdf).

33 Jelena Bjelica, "One Year's Result is Not a Trend: the 2015 opium cultivation decrease", Afghanistan Analysts Network, 18 November 2015, available at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/one-years-result-is-not-a-trend-the-2015-opium-cultivation-decrease/>.

34 "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005", UNODC, November 2005, available at [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/afg\\_survey\\_2005\\_exsum.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/afg_survey_2005_exsum.pdf).

35 "Corruption Perceptions Index 2015", Transparency International, available at <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015>.

The country remains poor and underdeveloped. Despite billions in international assistance (the EU and its member states provided around €8 billion in aid from 2002 to 2010), Afghanistan lags far behind many other low-income countries in social and physical infrastructure, and its GDP growth declined from 3.7 percent in 2013 to 1.3 percent in 2014.<sup>36</sup>

## Managing migrant flows

These deep issues with the Afghan state not only spur Afghans to leave, but also mean that the country lacks the capacity to control its borders, target smugglers, and offer the displaced support so that they aren't forced to leave the country. Crucially, its neighbours often lack these capacities, too.

These shortcomings are due in part to resources – Afghanistan simply lacks the capacity and personnel to monitor and manage migration flows, control its borders, and counter the criminal networks that facilitate migrant smuggling as well as drug trafficking. The business has blossomed in Afghanistan in recent years as conflicts heightened in the country. Smugglers can charge high prices, offering direct travel and visas to Europe for up to €20,000, according to one expert,<sup>37</sup> while cheaper packages are reportedly available at \$3,000 to \$5,500.<sup>38</sup> These networks are strengthened by corruption, as well as insufficient border controls, particularly on the frontier with Pakistan, and the lack of enforcement by the police. The country will be able to fix these issues only with long-term external support.

Security is also an important part of the problem. The turbulence in the country makes it difficult to implement a strategy on return or resettlement, to enable Afghan refugees and the internally displaced to return home and ensure that they are resettled in a secure and sustainable way. There are gaps in the data that is needed to formulate such strategies, including the comprehensive identification of the internally displaced and allocation of land available for resettlement – at present, only around 20 percent of Afghanistan's land is correctly titled.<sup>39</sup>

A crucial part of solving Afghanistan's migration problem would be to improve overall security in the country. This would encourage refugees to return, and would reduce the number of internally displaced, easing the stress on urban centres. Though this remains a long-term goal, there are a number of steps the Afghan government could take in the short and medium term, with help from abroad, to increase capacity and improve the situation.

36 William A. Byrd and M. Khalid Payenda, "Afghanistan's Revenue Turnaround in 2015", United States Institute of Peace, Peace Brief 201, February 2016, available at [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB201-Afghanistans\\_Revenue\\_Turnaround\\_In\\_2015.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB201-Afghanistans_Revenue_Turnaround_In_2015.pdf).

37 Interview with Afghan migrant expert, May 2016.

38 Margherita Stancati and Habib Khan Totakhil, "Afghan People Smugglers Profit From Migrant Crisis", the *Wall Street Journal*, 14 September 2015, available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/afghan-people-smugglers-profit-from-migrant-crisis-1442215833>.

39 Anne-Kathrin Glatz, "Afghanistan: New and long-term IDP risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies", IDMC, 16 July 2015 available at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/afghanistan/2015/afghanistan-new-and-long-term-idps-risk-becoming-neglected-as-conflict-intensifies>.

## Boost capacity of the migration ministry

One of these steps is to increase the capacity of the key Afghan ministry for migration, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations. The recent report from the Budapest Process, a multilateral forum on migration, found that the ministry was “still not adequate in terms of setting policy framework, planning and coordinating activities in this area, due to several interrelated factors such as the poorly developed current system and lack of sufficient human capacity”.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the ministry, like so many others, lacks the resources, staff, skills, and experience to identify, register, and coordinate the internally displaced and refugees returning to or leaving the country.

## Improve infrastructure

Afghanistan should improve infrastructure and access to resources – specifically water, food, and healthcare – in urban centres and areas where the displaced are resettled. Refugees who have returned or been repatriated from Iran, Pakistan, or Europe often settle in urban areas, as these are generally safer. This puts more pressure on cities such as Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Kandahar to provide resources, infrastructure, and employment for the urban population, which is growing on average 6 percent per year (one of the highest rates in Asia).<sup>41</sup> In general, they fail to meet this challenge, making it more difficult for returned refugees to settle.<sup>42</sup> As one European government official stated, “around 75 percent of Afghans have never seen a city that functions”.<sup>43</sup>

## Cooperate with neighbours to manage migration

A central step in tackling the crisis is for Afghanistan to establish mechanisms to manage migration and reduce refugee flows to its neighbours. This would require coordinated and humane management of cross-border migration, registration of entries and exits, and close cooperation with destination and transit countries, in particular Iran and Pakistan. Enforcing border control and cooperating with neighbouring countries’ police on organised crime poses a major challenge, but is crucial.

For their part, destination countries such as Iran and Pakistan should improve access to legal channels of migration, facilitating access to education and the labour market. If combined with stricter control on the illegal labour market, this would make legal migration more attractive. Beyond Iran and Pakistan, this approach could also be implemented by other destination countries, such as Turkey – and those in Europe.

Cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours to manage refugee flows has largely fallen short. Afghanistan

40 “Migration Country Report: Afghanistan”, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), 2013, available at <https://www.budapestprocess.org/projects/silk-routes-project> (hereafter, “Migration Country Report: Afghanistan”, ICMPD).

41 “Migration Country Report: Afghanistan”, ICMPD.

42 Dimitriadi, “Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece”.

43 Interview with a European development ministry representative, March 2016.

is involved in several multilateral dialogues on migration and refugee issues, such as the Budapest Process and its Silk Routes Partnership for Migration project, which involves more than 50 participating countries, including all European countries; and the Almaty Process, a dialogue on migration issues with the Central Asian countries, Turkey, and Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> These formats are important as they engage Afghanistan and its neighbours in a regular dialogue on migration issues, but a stronger push, from the top down, is needed to translate common interests and concerns into action.

## Resettle returning Afghans

There have been many efforts to reverse the outflow of people from Afghanistan, particularly by UNHCR, which has helped to repatriate and resettle Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan,<sup>45</sup> facilitating the voluntary repatriation of almost four million refugees from Pakistan between 2002 and 2012. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has run programmes since 2001 to organise the return of Afghans with skills in areas such as education or health, working in cooperation with the Afghan government. As of 2014, around 1,500 Afghan experts from 31 countries had been recruited and assisted to return to work in ministries, international institutions, or the private sector.<sup>46</sup> However, voluntary repatriation has decreased, particularly since 2010, due to general insecurity and the lack of help to integrate those who return.<sup>47</sup>

Afghanistan has reached agreements with some countries that host Afghan refugees, in part to reverse the phenomenon of “brain drain”. There is, for example, a 2011 agreement with Australia on the forced return of unsuccessful Afghan asylum seekers. Agreements with Norway (2011) and Sweden (2007) outline the terms for the voluntary repatriation of Afghans (either permanent residence permits, pending or rejected asylum applications). This includes assistance for returnees facilitated by UNHCR, financial support for travel, and options for resettlement. Germany is currently in the process of negotiating an agreement on repatriation with the Afghan government.<sup>48</sup>

There is as yet no such agreement with the EU as a whole, but, since member states are struggling to accommodate the large numbers of refugees from Afghanistan, this is increasingly a topic of discussion. As the influx of refugees has affected Germany in particular, Berlin has been pressing the EU to negotiate a repatriation agreement with Afghanistan.

44 “A study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries”, European Commission, DG Migrations & Home Affairs, Final Report, September 2015, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/study\\_on\\_smuggling\\_of\\_migrants\\_final\\_report\\_master\\_091115\\_final\\_pdf.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/study_on_smuggling_of_migrants_final_report_master_091115_final_pdf.pdf).

45 “Afghan Refugees in Iran & Pakistan”, European Resettlement Network, available at <http://www.resettlement.eu/page/afghan-refugees-iran-pakistan-0>.

46 “Return of Qualified Afghans (RQA)”, IOM Afghanistan, Factsheet 2014, available at [https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/migrated\\_files/2014/11/IOM-Return-of-Qualified-Afghans-Factsheet.pdf](https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/migrated_files/2014/11/IOM-Return-of-Qualified-Afghans-Factsheet.pdf).

47 “Voluntary Return to Afghanistan”, UNHCR, Volrep and Border Monitoring Monthly Update, March 2014, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/50ab463b6.pdf>.

48 Erin Cunningham, “Europe wants to deport Afghan migrants, but Kabul is reluctant to accept them”, the *Washington Post*, 19 March 2016, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/europe-wants-to-deport-afghan-migrants-but-kabul-is-reluctant-to-accept-them/2016/03/17/8b2d9e6a-e54e-11e5-a9ce-681055c7a05f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/europe-wants-to-deport-afghan-migrants-but-kabul-is-reluctant-to-accept-them/2016/03/17/8b2d9e6a-e54e-11e5-a9ce-681055c7a05f_story.html).

This would involve agreeing on a number of asylum seekers and refugees to be returned to Afghanistan, and setting the level of EU and Afghan assistance to the returnees, both in financial and other terms. The debate on whether repatriation of Afghan refugees should be encouraged given the precarious security in the country is becoming increasingly heated, both within Europe and between the Afghan government and EU member states.<sup>49</sup>

## Afghanistan's neighbours

Actors in the region – especially China, India, Iran, and Pakistan – will play a crucial role in determining Afghanistan's future. These countries share with Europe an interest in Afghanistan's stability: in averting civil war, economic collapse, massive refugee flows, and displacement. The security and development they can help to deliver is an essential part of any long-term effort to manage the flow of migrants to Europe. It is therefore worth exploring the areas in which Afghanistan's neighbours can be partners to Europe in tackling the country's current deterioration.

To ensure long-term security and development in Afghanistan, Europeans should strengthen cooperation with two of the country's crucial partners in particular: China and India. As the two largest countries in Asia, they will need to be part of any long-term solution in Afghanistan. And, though they have increased their involvement in recent years, this still does not reflect the degree of their interest in Afghanistan.

China in particular is rapidly emerging as a close partner of Afghanistan, and has the potential to play an important role in tackling the refugee crisis thanks to its close ties to Pakistan. China and India are increasingly concerned about the threat of a descent into disorder that could impact the region as a whole. The current situation reminds their leaders of the late 1990s, when terrorists used Afghanistan as a base to plot against Indian targets, and Islamist radicals began to support the Uighur opposition movement in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. Although India, and particularly China, are not directly affected by Afghanistan's migration crisis, they have a great interest in the country's stability, even more so after the withdrawal of most international troops.

### *China in Afghanistan*

China's concerns about its neighbour are reflected in its increasing efforts to contribute to development assistance and investment projects, and in its more recent and less typical contribution to peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

China significantly increased its contributions to Afghanistan's development in the last two to three years: it provided roughly \$240 million in development aid to the country between 2001 and 2013, and around \$80 million in 2014 alone, and has pledged an additional \$240 million by 2018.

49 James Bennett, "European Union drafts plans to return 80,000 Afghan asylum seekers and refugees", *ABC News*, 31 March 2016, available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-31/eu-examines-plan-to-return-80000-afghan-refugees-asylum-seekers/7286272>.

Beijing has also announced 500 scholarships for Afghan students to study in China, and training for 3,000 Afghan professionals in fields including anti-drug trafficking, agriculture, counterterrorism, and diplomacy.<sup>50</sup>

In terms of security, China could do more. It has been training small numbers of Afghan police officers in collaboration with the US since 2012, but its contribution is small compared to that of the US, Europe, and even India. Afghanistan urgently needs finance for its security forces, which will cost \$5.1 billion to keep at their current size until 2017. RUSI pointed out in a recent paper that China's contributions on this front were "minimal", as were India's, consisting mostly of in-kind support.<sup>51</sup>

China is reluctant to make large investments in Afghanistan, especially compared to its investments in Pakistan (notably the promised \$46 billion China–Pakistan Economic Corridor). The single largest foreign investment in Afghanistan to date would have been the planned \$3 billion lease of the Mes Aynak copper mine in 2008 by a consortium of Chinese state-owned companies, but the project never launched due to security issues and disagreement over the terms. The second biggest, by Chinese energy firm CNPC, includes oilfield exploration, but is facing similar difficulties in implementation. If the security and domestic situation improves, Afghanistan could become an important link in China's One Belt, One Road infrastructure initiative, which includes Afghanistan in theory, but not yet in practice. The benefit for Afghanistan would lie in more Chinese-funded infrastructure projects, improving its connections with other countries, such as Iran and those of Central Asia, and giving new impetus to its trade relations.

In recent years, Beijing has increased its efforts to provide support to Afghanistan in the form of diplomacy and mediation. The idea of leveraging China's close relationship with Pakistan to pressure it to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table is not new. US efforts to involve China began in 2009, when the Obama administration launched its "AfPak" strategy (a term coined by then-Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke). China has remained reluctant to interfere in the internal affairs of other states, particularly those of Pakistan. It is also concerned about becoming a target of terrorist groups such as the Taliban. Its stance changed slightly, however, when Afghanistan's stability seemed threatened by the planned withdrawal of foreign troops. The eruption of insecurity and strengthening of the Taliban in Afghanistan could impact its neighbours, such as Pakistan, but also some Central Asian countries – most of all Uzbekistan. This could endanger Chinese investments, especially in Pakistan, as well as the security of its border province, Xinjiang.

50 Zhao Huasheng, "What Is Behind China's Growing Attention to Afghanistan", Carnegie Middle East Center, 8 March 2015, available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/03/08/what-is-behind-china-s-growing-attention-to-afghanistan>.

51 Shisheng Hu, Raffaello Pantucci, Ravi Sawhney, and Emily Winterbotham, "Communication, Co-operation and Challenges: A Roadmap for Sino-Indian Engagement in Afghanistan", RUSI, 4 February 2016, available at <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/communication-co-operation-and-challenges-roadmap-sino%E2%80%93indian>.

Motivated by such concerns, China is now working to create an Afghan peace process, and has been holding talks in Islamabad since early 2016 along with Afghanistan, the US, and Pakistan.<sup>52</sup> So far the Taliban has refused to negotiate,<sup>53</sup> but it is important to keep the effort alive, because it reduces mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan. China's role as a mediator and confidence-builder is crucial, as it appears that only constant pressure from Beijing will keep Pakistan engaged. Bringing the Taliban to the table may require a combination of increased pressure from China on Pakistan, and military defeats of the group in Afghanistan. However, China is unlikely to push Pakistan hard or consider sending its own troops to Afghanistan.

### *India in Afghanistan*

India has contributed much more than China to Afghanistan, including development aid and training for security personnel. The two traditionally share deeper cultural connections – some high-level Afghan politicians live in New Delhi, and each year India provides 1,000 scholarships for Afghan students to study in the country.

India is Afghanistan's fifth-largest trading partner and its largest regional donor, having provided some \$2 billion in development assistance between 2001 and 2015.<sup>54</sup> This assistance includes infrastructure projects: roads, communication networks, buildings (such as the parliament's new building), and transport.<sup>55</sup> In 2011, a group of public and private Indian companies formed a consortium to make a large investment in the Hajigak iron ore reserves. Though the project has not yet developed much due to insecurity, it illustrates Afghanistan's attraction for foreign investors, particularly in terms of its mineral resources. If the security situation improved and the Afghan government's capacity expanded, Afghanistan could be the big winner of competition for resources and transportation networks between China and India, and could secure more large investment deals in mining and infrastructure.

Afghanistan and India signed their first bilateral strategic partnership in 2011, but before Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power, New Delhi had been reluctant to upgrade its relationship, in particular in the security field, wary of provoking Islamabad. In the face of deteriorating security in Afghanistan, New Delhi donated attack helicopters (Mi-25) to Afghan forces in December 2015. Shortly after, Modi's visit to Kabul signalled a new willingness to increase engagement. Indeed, in March 2016, India pledged an extra \$20.4 million in development aid.<sup>56</sup>

52 "Joint Press Release of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on Afghan Peace and Reconciliation", US Department of State, Washington, DC, 11 January 2016, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/01/251105.htm>.

53 Thomas Ruttig, "In Search of a Peace Process: A 'new' HPC and an ultimatum for the Taleban", Afghanistan Analysts Network, 26 February 2016, available at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/in-search-of-a-peace-process-a-new-hpc-and-an-ultimatum-for-the-taleban/>.

54 "European Union, Trade in goods with Afghanistan", European Commission DG Trade, available at [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc\\_114134.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_114134.pdf).

55 "Indo-Afghan Relations", Embassy of India, Kabul, Afghanistan, available at <http://eoi.gov.in/kabul/?0707000>.

56 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury "India and Afghanistan sign 12 MoU as Delhi pledged \$20.4 million fresh aid to Kabul", the *Economic Times*, 10 March 2016, available at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-and-afghanistan-sign-12-mou-as-delhi-pledged-20-4-million-fresh-aid-to-kabul/articleshow/51346374.cms>.

India has an interest in accessing new trade and energy supply routes through Afghanistan. For example, it signed an agreement in December 2015 with Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan on a natural gas pipeline (TAPI), scheduled to go into operation in three years. A road network is being built that would link Iran's Chabahar port to the iron ore mines in Hajigak, Afghanistan, and would also enable India to develop more transport links via Afghanistan to Central Asia. In addition, Chabahar presents a direct sea route from India to Iran, circumventing Pakistan.

Modi will have to take the interests of Pakistan and China into account as he develops his Afghanistan policy, as any strengthening of New Delhi's relations with Kabul, especially with regard to security, will arouse suspicion. The Pakistani army, for example, traditionally views India's actions in Afghanistan as a move to increase its influence relative to that of Islamabad. If Modi fails to balance his policies, the competitive engagement of the three players risks creating even more tension within Afghanistan.

### *Regional approaches*

There is a broad agreement among Afghanistan's neighbours that there should be a regional approach to the country's challenges. This includes on security and institutional capacity-building in Afghanistan, but also cooperation on the region-wide challenges mentioned above, such as border control, fighting criminal networks, and counterterrorism. This understanding has been reflected in several multilateral organisations. The most important example is the Heart of Asia process, initiated in 2011, which engages countries including China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkey to encourage regional security and economic cooperation in and around Afghanistan.

The issue of Afghan refugee flows in the region, specifically to Iran and Pakistan, has been discussed at Heart of Asia conferences. Notably, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif raised the issue of the increasing numbers of Afghan refugees crossing the border to Pakistan, during the December 2015 conference. The forum has made some efforts to tackle the issue, though these have so far had little impact. The 2012 conference declaration called for the establishment of a "Confidence-Building Measure" (CBM) working group on refugees, which never materialised.<sup>57</sup> The current plan for the education working group includes "Preparing refugees for re-integration in their homeland", which refers to the education of Afghan refugees.<sup>58</sup> This mechanism that could be built upon to become more effective, but it would need a push from Iran, the leading country in the education working group, possibly with the help of supporting countries, including Poland and the UK.

57 'Heart of Asia' Ministerial Conference – Kabul, Conference Declaration, 14 June 2012: "We recommend that the CBM on refugees, already mentioned in the Istanbul Process Document, should be prioritized for implementation in the next phase." See [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/site\\_media/html/heart-of-asia-ministerial-conf-declaration.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/heart-of-asia-ministerial-conf-declaration.pdf).

58 "Implementation Plan for 'Education' CBM", Adopted in the Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia Countries, Almaty, 26 April 2013, available at <http://www.heartofasia-istanbulprocess.af/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Education-CBM-Implementation-Plan-Adopted-in-Ministerial-Conference-in-Almaty-26-April-2013.pdf>.



Afghanistan has had full observer status since 2012 of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a group that promotes regional cooperation on economics, politics, and security, including the One Belt, One Road initiative, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and joint military and counter-terrorism exercises. China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are also members, with India and Pakistan due to join soon. In early 2016, the Afghan government asked for China's support to become a full member.<sup>59</sup> However, the SCO's members have so far been reluctant to increase the group's engagement in Afghanistan or admit Kabul as a member.

## Recommendations

Since 2001, international efforts in Afghanistan have combined military intervention with a political process to rebuild the state. This has been marked by mistakes, setbacks, and disappointments – but Afghanistan is not Syria or Libya. The government is still in place and the Afghan forces still operate. This makes it still more important to continue Europe's engagement and to make it more effective.

The EU is in the process of signing the first official framework between the EU and Afghanistan: the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development. It is the legal basis for the Union's assistance to, and cooperation with, Afghanistan over the next ten years, covering economic and political issues such as rule of law, health, rural development, and education, as well as fighting corruption and organised crime. But member states still need to determine the form and substance of the agreement.

This is an opportunity for the EU and its member states to reinforce their long-term commitment to Afghanistan, and to think about new ways of engaging. Europe cannot solve all of Afghanistan's problems, but work on migration issues in and around Afghanistan is necessary to improve the situation in the country, and of the refugees in Europe. Some of the key elements that should inform Europe's policy in Afghanistan are outlined below.

### *Coordinate return of Afghans*

Within the European policy community there is broad agreement that some Afghans should return to their country, not only to relieve the stress on European countries already burdened with Middle East refugees from current war zones, but also to halt the country's brain drain.

The EU and its member states should develop an informed position on the problem and coordinate their approach to the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. Europeans face a dilemma: in principle, the Afghan government and the EU agree that Afghans should return to their country, but as security worsens, Afghans are more reluctant to return, and the Afghan government is more re-

luctant to receive forced returnees. The EU should carry out a careful assessment of the return of refugees to Afghanistan in terms of numbers and timing.

The next step should be to work towards an agreement with the Afghan government on repatriation to safer areas inside the country. This agreement should include some flexibility on the timing and numbers of returning and repatriated refugees. The security situation can change rapidly – as seen in 2015 – even in provinces that are considered stable, such as Kunduz, and “safe zones” can only be identified through dialogue and cooperation with the Afghan government.

### *Cooperate with the Afghan government to manage refugee flows*

The agreement between the EU and Afghanistan should include cooperation to control new refugee flows. At present, international efforts, including those of the EU, are mostly channelled through financing migration projects by international organisations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. There is scope to increase direct cooperation between the EU and the Afghan government.

This could include providing European views on how an Afghan migration policy should look (at present, there is no such policy); holding regular dialogue between EU institutions and Afghan ministries on migration issues; and the reallocation of assistance to the Afghan government towards capacity-building in migration. The EU should broaden its development assistance to include more aid to the internally displaced. This could include improving resettlement facilities, by providing financial resources and infrastructure, and integration programmes for returning Afghans. In addition, the EU should assist Afghanistan to develop comprehensive programmes to identify the internally displaced, and provide the financial resources and expertise to put these into place.

The EU should also consider developing legal migration avenues for Afghans. This could be extended to Afghan refugees already in Europe, and include training in professional areas that are currently in low supply in Europe. There is a similar project in Germany called “Triple Win”, which aims to recruit nurses from outside the EU.<sup>60</sup>

59 “Afghanistan Asks China For Full SCO Membership”, TOLONews.com, 27 January 2016, available at <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/23484-afghanistan-asks-china-for-full-sco-membership>.

60 See “When everyone's a winner”, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), available at <https://www.giz.de/en/workingwithgiz/11666.html>.

## Deepen dialogue with Afghanistan's neighbours

China, India, Iran, and Pakistan are crucial partners to Afghanistan. Although none of these countries is a straightforward partner for the EU, they are vital to Afghanistan's long-term stability. The EU and its member states should deepen the dialogue on Afghanistan with their contacts in these countries, in order to identify common interests in terms of stability, and possible areas of cooperation.

The EU should also support regional approaches and cooperation frameworks, such as the Heart of Asia process, that build confidence within in the region. A more active role for Europeans would give these regional frameworks a new impetus. This could include boosting existing areas of regional cooperation, such as counterterrorism, border control, and fighting criminal networks, all of which would help to reduce and control refugee and migrant flows. In addition, destination and transit countries could work on improving documentation of Afghans moving across borders. This would also help the EU and Afghanistan on the issue of returning Afghans – both rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants – as some could be returned to third countries of departure or transit, which might also be safer than returning to Afghanistan.

### *Pakistan and Iran*

It is important to include these countries in any discussion on security and stability in the region. The EU should seek a political dialogue with them to explore means to improve the conditions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and a coordinated approach with the EU on their repatriation.

Iran in particular could play a positive role in Afghanistan given its potential as an investor, and the EU should involve Iran in dialogue on Afghanistan's development. The European External Action Service (EEAS) has called for Iran to participate in the next Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, in October 2016, and member state governments should back this request.<sup>61</sup> In the framework of the EU and its member states' intensifying relations with Iran, cooperation could include education and training of Afghan refugees, as well as more effective border control. In the long term, the EU should develop a regular dialogue with Tehran on its role in Afghanistan.

### *China*

There are several areas of common interest for the EU and China to explore in Afghanistan, including joint training and professionalisation programmes for Afghans and infrastructure projects – both areas that China is already beginning to develop. As China holds the 2016 G20 presidency, it has additional momentum to highlight these issues on the international agenda. For example, the EU could make sug-

gestions for how the G20 development agenda for the year could focus on Afghanistan.

While Beijing remains reluctant to consider a security role in Afghanistan (or elsewhere), it does have the means to increase economic and humanitarian assistance to the country. The EU and its member states should encourage China to provide more funding, and offer help to frame Beijing's contributions to Afghanistan so that they have the greatest possible impact. This could include training and education programmes, or housing projects in urban centres. Even simply increasing its financial contributions to the UNHCR would be an improvement, as China's current contributions make up a mere 0.0003 percent of the agency's annual requirements.<sup>62</sup> China should provide more funding to specific projects in Afghanistan, such as financially supporting Heart of Asia working groups (CBMs) that lack continuous funding.<sup>63</sup>

China might be willing to invest more if prospects in the country are good enough to include Afghanistan as a core part of One Belt, One Road. This would mean that China invested heavily in Afghanistan's infrastructure, for example via its Silk Road Fund or the newly established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Given Afghanistan's geographical position at the heart of Asia, an improved and enhanced infrastructure network (roads, railways, etc.) could turn Afghanistan into a regional transport and trade hub.

The EU and its member states should continue to endorse the peace process and China's continued engagement, especially given Beijing's close ties with Pakistan, one of the key players in the talks. Although it is not easy to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table, and might require patience, it may not be impossible. European member states could play a role as facilitator between the different parties.<sup>64</sup>

Berlin could play a key role, as it is not considered to have a hidden agenda, and enjoys a special relationship with China. It has already facilitated secret talks between Taliban and the US, around 2010–2011; and, in 2012, then-Afghan President Hamid Karzai reportedly approached the German government for mediation in talks.

62 Richard Gowan, "China's incomplete investments in the UN", European Council on Foreign Relations, 9 February 2016, available at [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_chinas\\_incomplete\\_investments\\_in\\_the\\_un5094](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_chinas_incomplete_investments_in_the_un5094).

63 S Reza Kazemi, "Will the 'Heart of Asia' start beating? A review of the regional cooperation process", Afghanistan Analysts Network, 29 August 2015, available at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/will-the-heart-of-asia-start-beating-a-review-of-the-regional-cooperation-process/>.

64 Nils Wörmer, "Exploratory Talks and Peace Initiatives in Afghanistan: Actors, Demands, Germany's Role as Mediator", SWP Comments, December 2012, available at [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2012C44\\_wmr.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2012C44_wmr.pdf).

61 "EU Wants Iran in Conferences on Afghanistan", Afghan Online Press, 9 February 2016, available at <http://www.aopnews.com/eu-afghanistan-relations/eu-wants-iran-in-conferences-on-afghanistan/>.

## India

The EU should work with the Indian government to explore options for increasing its engagement. India is affected by migrant flows in the region, and although there is no immediate refugee crisis in the country, it has trouble accommodating and integrating those it already hosts. If Europe's asylum policies become stricter, India might face a migration crisis of its own. The 13th EU–India Summit in March acknowledged migration as a shared concern, but this statement has yet to be translated into plans for concrete cooperation. The EU could help with India's migration issues, by providing financial resources and assistance to Indian migration institutions, and India in turn could provide its migration expertise to Afghanistan. The next EU–China and EU–India meetings should include the question of increased engagement in Afghanistan, and that of migrant flows in the region.

The flow of Afghan refugees from Afghanistan and the region is a long-term problem, and it will likely get worse before it gets better. If the EU doesn't want to face a crisis of Afghan refugees every year, it will need to think about putting in place strategies to encourage Afghans to stay in their country – and to return there.

In the first instance, this means that the EU and its member states should commit to maintaining humanitarian aid, development assistance, and military presence in the long term. This is a signal to Afghans that they will not be abandoned – the importance of which should not be underestimated – and also to militant groups such as ISIS and the Taliban. Not least, it is also a signal to those in Afghanistan who are at crossroads in deciding whether to join militant groups, to leave the country, or to stay and help rebuild.

But Europe also needs to engage proactively with Afghanistan's neighbours, including China and India, to build cooperative frameworks that can reduce the incentives for Afghans to migrate. Whether the neighbours recognise it or not, they share a common interest with Europe in managing flows of Afghan migrants into and through their territory. It is time for Europe to identify those common interests, and work to promote them.

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## Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my interlocutors from different EU member states and institutions for taking the time to provide me with valuable information and input to this publication. In particular, I am very thankful to Angeliki Dimitriadi for her indispensable advice on the complex aspects of migration. I owe special thanks to my colleagues in the Asia programme, François Godement, Mathieu Duchatel and Abigael Vasselier, for sharing their ideas on the draft and for providing their valuable support. Other colleagues at ECFR also require particular thanks, especially Jeremy Shapiro, Hannah Stone, and Gareth Davies for their thoughts that helped to shape the argument and their editorial work.

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ISBN: 978-1-910118-70-2

Published by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR),  
7th Floor, Kings Buildings,  
16 Smith Square, London,  
SW1P 3HQ, United Kingdom

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