

Afghanistan: How EU support is making a real difference

Since the fall of the Taliban, the stabilisation of Afghanistan has been a major external priority for the European Union. The European Union (EU) has been a key supporter of Afghanistan's transition, providing substantial political, military and humanitarian and reconstruction aid.

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The EU has been and continues to be one of the major donors backing the transition process in Afghanistan. At the Tokyo and Berlin conferences on Afghanistan (January 2002 and March 2004), the EU collectively pledged \$3.8 billion (€3.1 billion) for reconstruction over the period from 2002 to 2006. This accounts for 30% of the \$12.5 billion (€10 billion) in grant assistance which international donors pledged in Tokyo and Berlin in total.

Within the overall EU effort, the Commission has played a leading role. At the Tokyo conference, the Commission pledged €1 billion in reconstruction aid over 5 years (2002-2006). Key focal sectors are public administration reform; rural development, alternative livelihoods and food security; infrastructure and health. Other activities have included support for demining, human rights, civil society and media.

The Commission's aid will exceed the €1 billion pledge it made in Tokyo. Since 2002, the Commission has provided over €657 million to Afghanistan in reconstruction aid. For 2005 and 2006, at least €376 million will be delivered, taking the Commission's reconstruction aid to Afghanistan above the €1 billion pledge in 2002. These figures do not include humanitarian assistance of €216.5 million which has so far been delivered over the 2001-2004 period.

The European Commission is delivering efficiently. Funds are being committed, contracted and disbursed at a rapid rate. In 2002, 2003 and 2004, around 70% of funds were contracted within twelve months. As of mid 2005, 87% of the funds committed in 2002-2004 have been contracted and are in implementation. This is an impressive performance for the Commission and indeed for any agency.

Commission Aid To Afghanistan 2002-2004

Approved Contracts %

Reconstruction Support 657 548 83

Humanitarian ' ECHO 169,5 167,5 99

Total 826,5 715,5 87

Priorities

Capacity within the Afghan administration to deliver services remains uneven. While some Ministries have improved, others are still weak. Despite improvements in the capabilities of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, projecting government control into the regions and ensuring continued improvements in security remains another key challenge. For Afghanistan to reap the full benefit of international assistance, continuing reform efforts are necessary.

The EU is contributing to these state building efforts both through aid and military contributions. German-led efforts assist with police reform and Italian-led efforts assist in the reform the justice sector. A number of EU Member States are also contributing to improve security through the NATO-led and UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and through their Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). EU member states currently supply around two-thirds of the 8,400 troops in the ISAF.

Strengthening state institutions and improving security are critical elements in combating the continuing problem of narcotics that undermine stabilisation and feed crime. Afghanistan has once again become the largest producer of opium poppy in the world with bumper crops in 2002, 2003 and 2004. In 2004, this activity was estimated to account for as much as 60% of Afghanistan's licit GDP. This year, poppy cultivation has dropped by 20%, although opium production only fell by 2%. This is a major concern for the EU, since around 90% of the heroin on Europe's streets now comes from Afghanistan. It also threatens to undermine wider stabilisation efforts. The UK is the lead donor for counter-narcotics efforts and the EC is also making an important contribution. The Commission welcomes the renewed commitment of the Afghan Government to deal vigorously with this problem, as expressed in the Counter-Narcotics Implementation Plan adopted earlier this year and remains committed to supporting counter-narcotics efforts in the future.

The European Commission Reconstruction Programme

The European Commission has contributed substantially to international support for government reform efforts in 2002-2004

Around €125 million has been devoted to reforming the administration and strengthening the government, through reform of the public sector, capacity building within key government institutions, and continued financial support for the government's recurrent budget. This helps the Afghan government deliver services, which are urgently required by the population.

Within this envelope, the Commission has also provided significant funding to support the presidential election which took place on 9 October 2004 (€21 million for the elections themselves plus €3 million for security). The EU as a whole financed approximately half of the total budget for the Presidential election and also deployed a Democracy and Election Support Mission which assessed key aspects of the election, provided technical assistance to civil society groups and issued recommendations for future elections and for the wider democratisation process.

For the 2005 parliamentary elections, the EU has contributed €17.5 million dedicated to deploy an Election Observation Mission (EOM) and to prepare the elections and €3 million for institutional development of the new Parliament.

To assist Afghanistan in its fight against the traffic of narcotics, the Commission has provided from 2002 to 2004 €75 million to the new Afghan National Police, key component in this fight, and a further €15 million in 2005 to the Counter Narcotics Task Force (CNTF). Afghanistan also must be better able to stop smugglers on its borders if the drugs trade is to be controlled. To this end, the Commission is financing a separate €3 million project to strengthen border control on the Afghan-Iran border so that the authorities are better able to interdict and stop drug smugglers.

Three-quarters of the Afghan population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The Commission dedicated from 2002 to 2004 €175 million and a further €10 million in 2005 to develop the rural economy: promotion of food security and underpinning the growth that is necessary to provide alternative livelihood opportunities for rural communities who might otherwise depend on illicit poppy cultivation. In addition the Commission is making an important contribution to the regeneration of the national economy by helping to repair the roads network (€91 million), boost public health (€42 million) and remove mines and unexploded ordnance (€35 million).

Sectoral Breakdown (€ million 2002-2004)

Rural Public Admin. Infrastructure Health Demining Other

175 (1) 200 91 42 35 105

(1) plus €10 million in 2005

How is this aid making a difference?

The Commission's assistance programmes are making a real difference to Afghans' lives:

Infrastructure is key to Afghanistan's recovery. Reconstruction of the Kabul-Jalalabad road (142 km) is underway and has already cut travel times by up to half.

Afghanistan inherited an almost non-existent state system in 2001, which greatly hindered delivery of medical, health and police services. Assistance delivered by the Commission has been critical to supporting the restart and running of essential public services, specifically financing the return to work of 220,000 public sector workers (including doctors and nurses) and 60,000 police officers.

During 2004, 30 schools and 21 kindergartens were rebuilt and 2 fire stations were rehabilitated. Seven bridges were constructed, 97km of canals and drainage were cleared and nearly 16000 m³ of dykes, walls and barriers constructed.

Life expectancy and other health indicators in Afghanistan remain some of the worst in the world. Support for the health sector has ensured delivery of health services in six provinces, covering 20% of the population. Treatments for 400,000 people in 2004 alone and the reconstruction of 120 health clinics have been provided.

Since 2003, the take-off of the rural economy, backbone of the Afghan economy, has been supported by 57,000 metric tons of improved seed, vaccinated 200,000 animals and rehabilitated 633 irrigation structures.

Over 1.4 million days of employment were created, in 2002 alone.

After a quarter century of war, Afghanistan is one of the most mined countries in the world. 8 million square metres have been cleared from land mines, allowing families to return to their homes to restart their lives. Over 8000 people were trained in mine clearance in 2004.

A number of projects to help boost civil society and to facilitate the role played by women in Afghanistan's recovery have been financed, for instance the rehabilitation of the women's park in Kabul, plus hammans across many urban centres. For the first time women can gather together in public without being accompanied by a male family member.

Media centres and the first independent newspaper in the country have been financed. During 2004, training was provided to 615 journalists, local experts and students.

Other Commission and EU support

This reconstruction support is only part of the story. The EU has also provided significant humanitarian support for the most vulnerable. The European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) remained engaged throughout the difficult years of the 1990s, and has delivered €337 million to people affected by the Afghan crisis, in Afghanistan itself or in neighbouring countries, since 1992. €216.5 million of this has been delivered since 2001, in addition to reconstruction assistance.

In terms of political support, the EU appointed a Special Representative for Afghanistan in December 2001, immediately following the conclusion of the agreement reached in Bonn between the Afghan factions on the political transition process leading to an elected, representative government. The position of EUSR for Afghanistan has been held since June 2002 by Francesc Vendrell.

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[<<< zurück zu: News](#)
