



Caroline Lucas MP
House of Commons
London
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11 February 2021

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your email of 24 September to the Prime Minister on behalf of seven of your constituents and their extended family regarding their safety and security and of other British nationals and their families in Afghanistan. Your email has been transferred to the Home Office and I am replying as the Minister for Afghan resettlement. I am very sorry for the delay in responding to your email.

Last August, as the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated rapidly and dangerously, we worked at great speed and can be proud as a country that we helped over 15,000 people to safety from Afghanistan to the UK and offer them immediate sanctuary and support.

We have continued to bring people to the UK, with 1,500 people helped to enter since the evacuation, including female judges, human rights defenders, and LGBT+ Afghans.

The UK formally opened the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) on 6 January 2022 to resettle 20,000 Afghans. The scheme will prioritise:

- those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law;
- vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+).

In light of the success of our evacuation efforts, we will exceed our initial aim to resettle 5,000 through ACRS in the first year. This is in addition to evacuated British nationals and those relocated under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme.

Anyone who is resettled through the ACRS will receive indefinite leave to enter or remain (ILR) in the UK and will be able to apply for British citizenship after five years in the UK under existing rules.

There is no application process for the ACRS. Prioritisation and referral for resettlement will be in one of three ways:

1. Vulnerable and at-risk individuals who arrived in the UK under the evacuation programme will be the first to be settled under the ACRS. They include women's rights activists, journalists, and prosecutors, as well as the Afghan families of British Nationals. Eligible people who were notified by the UK Government that they had been called forward or specifically authorised for evacuation, but were not able to board flights, will also be offered a place under the scheme if they subsequently come to the UK. The first Afghan families have already been granted ILR under the scheme.
2. Secondly, from Spring 2022, the UNHCR will refer refugees in need of resettlement who have fled Afghanistan. The UNHCR has the global mandate to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees. Those referred by UNHCR will be assessed for resettlement by UNHCR using their established process, and in line with their resettlement submission categories. We will continue to receive such referrals to the scheme in coming years.
3. The third referral pathway will relocate those at risk who supported the UK and international community effort in Afghanistan, as well as those who are particularly vulnerable, such as women and girls at risk and members of minority groups. In the first year of this pathway, the Government will offer ACRS places to the most at-risk British Council and GardaWorld contractors and Chevening alumni, who have played a key role in supporting the UK Mission in Afghanistan. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) will be in touch with those eligible to support them through next steps. Beyond the first year, the Government will work with international partners and Non-Government Organisations (NGO) to welcome wider groups of Afghans at risk.

The focus of the ACRS will be on those people who remain in Afghanistan or the region, primarily Afghan nationals, although nationals of other countries, for example in mixed nationality families, will also be eligible. Spouses, partners and dependent children under the age of 18 of eligible individuals will be eligible for the scheme. Other family members may be resettled in exceptional circumstances.

In addition to the ACRS, the ARAP scheme will remain open for those who are eligible and the Home Office continues to work closely with the Ministry of Defence and FCDO to relocate those approved for the scheme. Those who are eligible are able to relocate to the UK with their close family members (one spouse/partner and children under 18), and at risk additional family members on an exceptional basis.

If someone believes they are eligible under the ARAP scheme, or would like more information, further details on the eligibility criteria and application process for the ARAP scheme can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy-information-and-guidance>

We are committed to providing protection for vulnerable and at-risk people fleeing Afghanistan. However, the situation is very complex with significant challenges, including ensuring safe passage for those who want to or are eligible to leave Afghanistan. As you will understand, there will be more people wishing to come to the UK than we can reasonably accommodate. I know that this will leave many disappointed, but the UK response is only one part of a wider international response to the Afghanistan crisis.

For those who were not called forward as part of Operation Pitting, or who are not offered resettlement under the ACRS or ARAP, they will need to apply to come to the UK under the existing economic or family migration rules. They will be expected to meet the eligibility requirements of their chosen route, which includes paying relevant fees and

charges, and providing biometrics. However, there is currently no option to give biometrics in Afghanistan. We therefore do not recommend making applications or paying fees at this time. Individuals who are in third countries have the option of applying for a visa to the UK. Further information can be found on the website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration>

For Afghan citizens in the UK, their close family members can apply for Family Reunion, but we recognise those in Afghanistan will face the same challenges in providing biometrics and so we do not recommend making applications at this time. Those in third countries are open to submit an application, further information on which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/settlement-refugee-or-humanitarian-protection/family-reunion>

The UK is working with international partners to secure safe routes out of Afghanistan as soon as they become available, but while the security situation remains extremely volatile, we recommend people in Afghanistan do not make applications and pay application fees at this time as they will not be considered until biometrics are provided.

For those evacuated and residing in bridging accommodation, we have provided wraparound support. Funding is available to local authorities who provide permanent accommodation and integration support to Afghans who qualify under either of our schemes. The total value of the funding package is £20,520 per person, over three years, for those people who arrived in the UK. In addition, local authorities are able to claim education funding for Year 1 of £4,500 (child aged between 5-18 on arrival in the UK); £2,250 (child aged between 3-4 on arrival in the UK). Local authorities can also claim £850 to cover English language provision for adults. Clinical Commissioning Groups in England may claim £2,600 per person during Year 1 to cover healthcare. Regarding housing, there is also an additional housing costs fund available over three years to provide a top-up to help councils meet the costs of renting properties of three bedrooms or more in recognition of the need to find larger homes for families for this cohort.

The Home Office will continue to work closely with other government departments, NGOs, charities, local authorities and other partners and relevant organisations on the development and implementation of the ACRS, and to support the Afghan community.

I am confident the ACRS will go on to symbolise the best of Global Britain, building on the success of Operation Pitking and the UK's other safe and legal routes, by offering sanctuary to people in their time of need.

Regarding British Nationals who remain in Afghanistan, we are asking them to register with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). For each case, we need to confirm the identity and eligibility and remove any fraudulent or duplicative cases. This makes it challenging to pin down a precise number at any one point in time. Currently, the FCDO advises against any travel to and from Afghanistan until safe travel routes are available.

All asylum and human rights claims, including those from Afghan nationals, will be carefully considered on their individual merits in accordance with our international obligations. We do not believe it is appropriate to prioritise claims from one nationality over another as many claimants, irrespective of nationality, are potentially vulnerable - and no one is expected to leave the UK while they have a claim outstanding. Claims are prioritised on the basis of current tasking within the department.

You ask that no Afghans are currently being held in immigration detention the Home Office publishes data on people in immigration detention in the Immigration statistics quarterly release, details of which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>.

The number of people in detention on the last day of each quarter are published in table Det_D02 of the Returns and detention datasets, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/returns-and-detention-datasets>.

The data can be broken down by nationality and place of detention. The latest data relates to the number of people in detention at the end of September 2021. For ease, as at 30 of September 2021, there were 37 Afghan nationals in immigration detention, nine of which were detained in prison.

While it is not considered that an amnesty is appropriate, I can provide reassurance that enforced returns of those who have been refused asylum and have exhausted all rights of appeal are currently paused while we consider the situation.

This said, if someone is assessed as presenting a risk to our country then we will take action. Multiple tools are available for managing in-country risks and this includes detention where appropriate.

We do not believe it is appropriate to prioritise claims from one nationality over another as many claimants, irrespective of nationality, are potentially vulnerable and no one is expected to leave the UK while they have a claim outstanding.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP