



House of Commons  
International Development  
Committee

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**Afghanistan: UK support  
for aid workers and  
the Afghan people:  
Government response  
to the Committee's Fifth  
Report of Session 2021–22**

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**First Special Report of Session  
2022–23**

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## The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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# First Special Report

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The International Development Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2021–22, [Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people](#) (HC 919) on 4 March 2022. The Government response was received on 5 May 2022 and is appended below.

## Appendix: Government Response

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1. We understand that the FCDO has reasons for clearly defining and limiting its liability in respect of its contractual relationships with its external partners. However, we believe that events in Afghanistan have clearly illustrated that the Government's policies should encompass much more than the legal aspects of duty of care as defined in its legal relationships with its suppliers and contactors. (Paragraph 13)

2. We believe that the FCDO should consider what moral obligations it has to aid sector workers who deliver UK aid and FCDO aims and objectives. We urge the FCDO to take a broader, more holistic view of its duty of care to people working in the aid sector. (Paragraph 14)

3. *We recommend that the FCDO take steps to better identify and assess the particular risks facing aid workers so that it can respond more effectively to those aid workers when they are in need of support in countries or regions where there is acute instability or signs of a rapidly deteriorating security situation. FCDO staff in embassies in such countries should better communicate any signs of a potential deterioration in the security situation in country to those delivering UK aid programmes so that they can take appropriate steps to protect the safety of their staff.* (Paragraph 20)

The Government stands by its duty of care obligations to those whom it employs directly. The FCDO publishes travel advice to reflect the security situation in each country. This is updated frequently and reflects the FCDO's best advice in light of all the circumstances. It is available to all, including all FCDO's external partners.

The FCDO has made a commitment, including to Parliament, that advice on matters of safety and security given to any HMG staff or other individuals or groups, such as local British communities, businesses or NGOs, overseas will always be consistent with the advice made available to the wider public in FCDO travel advice on GOV.UK. This is to ensure that the FCDO meets its public commitment of 'no double standards' in our travel advice.

4. We were disappointed about the exclusion from the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme of Afghan aid workers to whom the UK Government had clear lines of moral responsibility, either because they were subcontracted by the UK Government or employed by aid agencies in receipt of UK aid. We are disappointed that Afghan aid workers have not been explicitly recognised in the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). We are very concerned about the time being taken by the Government to implement the ACRS and whether Afghan aid workers will receive protection under that scheme. (Paragraph 34)

**5. We call on the Government to accelerate without further delay all pathways of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and ensure that aid sector staff are explicitly recognised and prioritised for protection under the ACRS. (Paragraph 35)**

The Home Office retains overall responsibility for immigration and visa policy, and considering applications to enter and stay in the UK. The capacity of the UK to resettle people is not unlimited, and difficult decisions about who should be prioritised for resettlement are therefore unavoidable, if we are to help anyone in this way.

The Government has already begun resettling families under the 'first pathway' of the ACRS. This includes vulnerable and at-risk individuals who arrived in the UK through our military evacuation in August 2021, and eligible people who were notified by the Government they had been called forward or specifically authorised for evacuation whom we have been able to help reach the UK since then.

From Spring 2022, under the 'second pathway' of the ACRS, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will refer to us Afghan refugees who are in need of resettlement. And the Government is working to launch the 'third pathway' of the ACRS as soon as possible, under which, in the first year, the government will consider eligible at risk-British Council and GardaWorld contractors and Chevening alumni for resettlement. Beyond the first year, under the ACRS 'third pathway', the Government will work with international partners and NGOs to welcome wider groups of Afghans at risk. The Government is working amidst a complex and changing picture to establish this pathway in future years. Further detail will be published in due course.

**6. *The Government should not consider people evacuated under Operation Pitting under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), instead it should consider those people under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme (ARAP) or other pre-existing pathways. The ACRS should be reserved for people:***

- ***located in Afghanistan;***
- ***located in third countries;***
- ***who have travelled to the UK, without UK Government assistance, from Afghanistan. (Paragraph 36)***

As the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated rapidly, the Government worked at pace to evacuate eligible people to the UK. This included Afghans who had been approved for resettlement under ARAP, as well as British Nationals and their eligible family members who had remained in Afghanistan despite our advice to leave, and other vulnerable people at risk. We believe it is right that those we evacuated were offered immediate sanctuary and support in the UK, and so some of these individuals are the first to be resettled under the ACRS. This includes women's rights activists, journalists, and prosecutors, as well as Afghan families of British Nationals.

The Government is opening two further referral pathways under the ACRS. And the ARAP programme remains open and continues to bring eligible individuals and their families to the UK. All those who come to the UK under ARAP and ACRS will have the

right to work, access to education and healthcare and be able to apply for public funds. They will also receive comprehensive integration support as they start their new lives in the UK.

**7. *The Government should ensure transparency of reporting on the number of people resettled under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) by publishing a quarterly report on the number of people resettled under that scheme, publishing that first report by the end of June 2022.*** (Paragraph 37)

Statistics on the number of people relocated under the scheme will be included in upcoming editions of Immigration Statistics.

**8. We welcome the establishment of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit but note the lack of clarity around the cost, staffing and current workload of that Unit. We are also concerned that more than three months after it was set up there is still no clarity on whether or not any of the costs of that Unit will be counted as UK ODA expenditure. We recommend that the Government:**

- *establish targets for the performance of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit and report quarterly against those targets, publishing that first report by the end of June 2022;*
- *report the number of cases involving people employed as aid workers that the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit has taken receipt of, and report the status of those cases, by the end of June 2022; and*
- *publish the costs of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit it attributes to the ODA budget.* (Paragraph 46)

As part of HMG's relocation and resettlement effort, we support those eligible to come to the UK from Afghanistan to do so. The Government has made clear that the initial target of resettling 5000 people during Year 1 of the ACRS will be exceeded, and that the scheme is expected to resettle up to 20000 people in total. The Government will publish statistics on the numbers of people relocated under the ACRS and ARAP in Immigration Statistics.

We do not have a detailed breakdown of cases on the basis of employment category and do not collate data on whether people were employed as aid workers.

Under the funding arrangements put in place during the crisis, the costs incurred in the financial year 2021/22 by the FCDO's network of Posts of supporting eligible individuals under the schemes have fallen to the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office, to be reimbursed centrally by the Treasury. For this financial year, 2022/23, these costs will fall to the FCDO and include an ODA element where they meet the OECD DAC Reporting Directives. The level of costs will depend on the number of Afghan citizens supported.

### **Provision of UK aid to Afghanistan**

**9. We are very concerned about the time the Government has taken to disburse the UK aid it has pledged to Afghanistan, given the considerable and escalating humanitarian need in the country. The Government should have worked faster to disburse the UK aid it pledged to Afghanistan in 2021.** (Paragraph 58)

We agree it is imperative that humanitarian funding in crises globally is disbursed as efficiently as possible to meet urgent needs with proportionate measures in place to ensure funding is spent responsibly. The FCDO has done this in Afghanistan.

The FCDO's approach has been to ensure that aid is phased against developing needs, partners' capability to implement, and to respond to aid agencies' appeals such as the UN (September 2021, January 2022), the Disasters Emergency Committee (December 2021) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (February 2022).

Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, many humanitarian partners paused programming to reassess whether they could continue operations given heightened security risks, widespread departure of international and national staff and the need to pivot work towards life-saving assistance. Thorough engagement with partners started weeks before funding was transferred. This included Lord Ahmad's direct engagement with UN agencies and international NGOs including the World Food Programme, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross following the fall of Kabul. Seeking assurances our partners had the necessary safeguards to mitigate against risk and could utilise funds effectively was imperative.

Of the £286 million pledged by the Prime Minister in August, we disbursed 50% by the end of December 2021; 90% by the end of February 2022; and 100% by the end of the financial year.

**10. We welcome the Government's publication of 15 December 2021 showing details of the allocation and disbursement of the aid it has pledged to Afghanistan. We urge the Government to publish monthly updates on the allocation and disbursement of its aid to Afghanistan and to countries in the region.** (Paragraph 61)

We recognise the importance of keeping Parliament updated on our activities, and delivering on our transparency commitments. In addition to the detailed Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) laid by Lord Ahmad on 15 December, a second WMS published [w/b 25 April] provides full details of our disbursement of £286 million to partners in financial year 2021/22.

This will supplement the timely publication of financial disbursements on Development Tracker (although currently without full partner details for security reasons, as mentioned in the report). Contributions by the UK to the UN Humanitarian Response Plan and any UN Flash Appeals can also be tracked on the UN's Financial Tracking System website.

**11. We urge the FCDO to release more information on its Development Tracker web pages to better ensure the transparency of reporting on the ODA funding it has allocated to projects in Afghanistan (if necessary, redacting parts of that information to mitigate any risks to safety and security).** (Paragraph 62)

Information and documents relating to the majority of funding in 2021/22 has been redacted and re-uploaded to Development Tracker – owing to security concerns and requests from our partners. New or recently amended programmes are currently being redacted, and will be published on Development Tracker as soon as possible.

**12. *We urge the FCDO to update information on all ODA allocations (for all countries) on Development Tracker within a three-month period of those allocations having been made.*** (Paragraph 63)

The Development Tracker is directly linked with the FCDO's financial systems so all financial contributions to partners will be published on the website within three months, and in most cases much more quickly with any potentially sensitive information redacted.

#### **Other factors affecting the humanitarian situation and the disbursement of aid**

**13. *The Government has been far too slow to work with its international counterparts to find ways to help unblock the banking system in Afghanistan. This has put at grave risk the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. It is also deepening the humanitarian suffering of the people of Afghanistan.*** (Paragraph 71)

**14. *The UK Government should be taking more urgent steps to collaborate with its international counterparts, economists, representatives of the banking sector and aid organisations to find ways to help address more rapidly the banking crisis in Afghanistan to ease the humanitarian suffering of, and enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance to, the people of Afghanistan.*** (Paragraph 72)

We do not accept the Committee's conclusion. We have been discussing this at senior level with the US and other bilateral partners, and directly with the UN, including key agencies, the World Bank, and other relevant institutions since September 2021. The Government used its diplomatic network to ensure the successful passage through the UN Security Council (UNSC) of UNSCR 2615 [2021], which provides a humanitarian exception to the UNSC's 1988 Taliban sanctions regime. We acted promptly to ensure that this exception was passed into domestic legislation. We worked with Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI) partners to ensure UK guidance was updated and worked to provide assurance to financial institutions. This has provided assurance to NGOs and financial institutions in their urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan.

In addition, both the FCDO and OFSI are bringing together NGOs and UK banks in a Trisector Group, and to ensure that we remain well sighted on developments on the ground as well as where we can be of assistance in overcoming barriers to aid delivery.

There was not a strong pre-existing relationship between Afghan and Western banks, which is making resolving the banking crisis difficult. Western banks need to make commercial decisions on whether to engage with Afghan banks. There are currently significant risks, in part caused by the manner in which the Taliban seized power, their appointments to senior leadership positions in the Afghan Central Bank, the loss of key qualified staff, and uncertainty around the implementation of anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing legislation in Afghanistan.

The UK has been influential in the establishment of mechanisms to help ease Afghanistan's liquidity crisis. This includes co-leading a working group with the World Bank on Payment System Modalities for Humanitarian Aid Delivery in Afghanistan. This was a significant coordination meeting by the international community to find a resolution to Afghanistan's liquidity crisis. We continue to play a key coordination role, including working to find solutions.

**15. We recognise the necessity of having to work with the Taliban. We endorse the Government's policy of developing a pragmatic working relationship with the Taliban to enable humanitarian aid to reach the people of Afghanistan.** (Paragraph 77)

FCDO officials continue to engage in pragmatic dialogue with the Taliban. Pending our being able to restore a diplomatic presence in Kabul, we have opened a temporary UK Mission to Afghanistan in Doha to lead our diplomatic engagement. Senior officials have visited Kabul, and we have taken opportunities to meet Taliban representatives in third countries. Our engagement aims to address the humanitarian crisis and to ensure that aid committed by the Government can reach the most vulnerable Afghans, as well as to pursue our other priorities, including human rights, inclusive governance, and counter-terrorism. The FCDO continues its strong engagement with UNAMA, including when FCDO officials met Deborah Lyons' during her visit to London on 23 November. Lord Ahmad has also retained a close working relationship with SRSG Lyons, in particular to discuss the humanitarian situation and their engagement with the Taliban. They met in London on 23 November 2021 and again in Doha on 17 January. Nick Dyer, the UK's Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, visited Kabul on 10 February with Hugo Shorter and Hester Waddams (Chargé d'Affaires and Deputy Head of Mission respectively at the UK Mission to Afghanistan).

**16. We urge the Government to maintain its policy of working with the Taliban to enable humanitarian aid to reach the people of Afghanistan.** (Paragraph 78)

We are committed to ensuring the principled delivery of humanitarian assistance and we regularly make clear to the Taliban this requires, among other things, no interference with humanitarian operations, unconditional access for aid workers, and the full access for women and girls to services.

**17. We stand with the UK Government on seeking to ensure that the rights of women and girls are respected by the Taliban.** (Paragraph 83)

We regularly press the Taliban to respect the rights of women and girls, including the right of access to education, jobs, and freedom of movement. The Government has made clear its condemnation of the Taliban's 23 March decision not to re-open girls' secondary schools, including through statements from the G7+, from women Foreign Ministers, and from the UN Security Council. We will continue to press the Taliban to allow all girls to attend school. Afghan women, including at home and in the diaspora here in the UK, have demanded that girls' right to education be upheld, and we will support that.

We continue to call publicly for women's rights to be respected, including at the UN where we co-chair the UN Group of Friends of Women of Afghanistan. On 17 March, we supported a resolution renewing the mandate for the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) with a strengthened focus on gender mainstreaming as well as human rights reporting.

**18. We call on the Government to ensure that it maintains its focus on working to try and ensure that the Taliban adopts a moderate position whereby it commits to behaving pragmatically towards the inclusion of women, girls and other minority groups in Afghan society.** (Paragraph 84)

We will continue to prioritise women and girls in our humanitarian and development assistance. We regularly consult with Afghan women to inform our policy and programming response; on March 24, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad, Minister for South Asia, convened an advisory group of prominent Afghan women leaders. We are also committed that at least 50% of those we reach with our aid should be women and girls. We fund child protection support and support access to gender-based violence services. UK Ministers and officials will continue to meet Afghan women to understand their concerns and ensure that the Government's work on Afghanistan is aligned with their needs.

**19. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2615 at the UN Security Council on 22 December 2021, notwithstanding its limitations, and the UK Government's adoption of that resolution into UK law. (Paragraph 88)**

***20. We urge the UK Government to further step up its efforts on working with the UN to ensure that aid organisations can effectively operate under the exemptions that UN resolution 2615 (and consequent UK law) permits. It should also urge the UN Security Council to extend those exemptions beyond their initial 12 months review period. (Paragraph 89)***

***21. The UK Government should consult with representatives of aid organisations to ensure that it has issued adequate guidance on how to operate further to the adoption of UN resolution 2615 into UK law. (Paragraph 90)***

We continue to consult with aid organisations in the Tri-Sector Group, including on the issue of guidance for NGOs working in countries such as Afghanistan. The Tri-Sector Group comprises NGOs, banks, and government departments and regulators, and provides a platform for dialogue aimed at addressing the challenges of delivering aid in high-risk contexts. As Lord Ahmad noted in his response to the IDC, the FCDO welcomes the engagement of banks and NGOs with regard to the guidance on sanctions, and we will continue to engage with the group to ensure it further supports the important work of NGOs and the financial sector in Afghanistan.

**22. We welcome the UK's participation in the Norwegian Government's talks with the Taliban at the end of January 2021. We call on the UK Government to press for UN resolution 2615 to be extended, or further resolutions to be adopted, to provide exemptions for development assistance, closely linked to the performance of the Taliban on upholding human rights and international law. (Paragraph 93)**

Resolution 2615 provides a humanitarian assistance 'exception' to para 1 (a) of Resolution 2255. It also includes an 'exception' for other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan. Resolution 2615 will be reviewed within a year of it being adopted on 22 December 2022. At the point of review, the UK will have an opportunity to propose appropriate edits to the Resolution. Any edits will need to be negotiated with other members of the Security Council and adopted without a Permanent Member veto, at the time of the review.

**23. We welcome the steps the Government has taken to help free up the funds from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. However, the World Bank's progress on releasing those funds has been agonizingly slow. Political and bureaucratic wrangling is impeding the release of over \$1 billion already set aside for the Afghan people. (Paragraph 99)**

The UK has been, and continues to be, a leading voice supporting the repurposing of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. We were instrumental in supporting the announcement of 10 December 2021 transferring out \$280 million of available funds to support the World Food Programme and UNICEF. We were equally instrumental in paving the way for the repurposing of the remaining funds in support of health care, education, agriculture and community development, announced on 1 March.

**24. *We ask the Government to do more to encourage the World Bank to swiftly release the remaining funds from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund so that aid organisations can use that money to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.*** (Paragraph 100)

The UK is supportive of funds being released as soon as possible. We have worked consistently with international partners to support the World Bank in unlocking and repurposing existing funding to maintain the provision of basic services in support of the Afghan people. We continue to support the project development process governing the release of funds and identifying suitable ways to ensure our funding supports all Afghans, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion.