



Joint Committee on Human Rights

The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
[Delivered by email]

16 April 2026

'Visa Brake' – Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar & Sudan

Dear Home Secretary,

On 26 March 2026 the Home Office suspended the grant of sponsored study visas to applicants from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan and the grant of skilled worker visas to applicants from Afghanistan – a so-called 'visa brake'. The reason given for this suspension, which you have described as an "unprecedented decision", is the high number of asylum claims being made by people from these countries who have been given visas.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights recognises the UK's right to control its borders. While we also understand the desire to ensure fair access to the UK's asylum system, we would emphasise, as you recently recognised, the importance of the UK "delivering the noble intentions of the drafters of the original, 1951 Refugee Convention" and "providing safety to genuine refugees".¹ Also of great importance is the prohibition on unjustified discrimination, including on grounds of nationality, recognised by the international human rights framework to which the UK is committed.

With these principles in mind, we have concerns about the impact of the visa brake, particularly for students from the countries affected. These include countries ravaged by civil war and conflict, where opportunities for study may be extremely limited. The situation is acute for female students from Afghanistan, facing a prohibition on accessing education beyond primary level. Denying students who are already facing huge challenges at home the opportunity to further their education in the UK would appear to be an inevitable consequence of this change in policy.

We note in particular that no exemptions appear to have been made to the visa brake, meaning that Chevening scholars, potential leaders of the future, from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan will also be prevented from coming to the UK.²

¹ Taken from your [speech on immigration, delivered to the IPPR on 5 March 2026](#)

² Chevening Scholarships are the UK government's global scholarships programme. Established in 1983, these scholarships support study at UK universities - mostly one-year Masters' degrees - for students with demonstrable potential to become future leaders, decision-makers and opinion formers. See <https://www.chevening.org/>



Joint Committee on Human Rights

The stated purpose of your decision to impose this visa brake is to cut down on 'visa abuse', i.e. individuals on study or work visas claiming asylum in the UK. In this regard, we note that the overall numbers applying for student visas from these four countries are relatively low - none of the four are in the top 20 countries for applicants for study visas. This suggests to us that the numbers claiming asylum are also likely to be relatively low. *Can you please provide us with the numbers of students visas applied for and granted from these four countries in the past five years and also the numbers of asylum claims made by individuals from each country who were in the UK on student visas. Please also explain why these four countries have been chosen for the visa brake rather than other countries who have been granted higher numbers of student visas.*

We presume that, even if many students from these countries are claiming asylum in the UK, many others are not. Bearing this in mind, and also considering the acute challenges many of these students face at home, *can you explain why no exemptions to the policy appear to have been provided, such as for female students from Afghanistan or for Chevening scholars?*

As noted above, the need to avoid unjustified discrimination, including on grounds of nationality, is an important principle recognised by the international human rights framework to which the UK is committed. *Can you also explain how this visa brake complies with the UK's human rights obligations regarding non-discrimination?*

The visa brake is a response to asylum claims being made by those with student or skilled worker visas. Noting the importance of providing safety to genuine refugees, *are you able to identify what proportion of the asylum applications made by individuals holding student (or skilled worker) visas from the four affected nations are successful? In other words, what proportion of these applications are from individuals who have a well-founded fear of persecution and are therefore 'genuine refugees'?* The visa brake will prevent these individuals coming to the UK as students (or skilled workers for Afghanistan). We welcome your announcement that new "safe and legal" routes will be opened, starting with a new student refugee route under which arrivals will arrive in autumn of 2027, and look forward to hearing more details about them.³ *Can you, however, identify what alternative, safe and lawful paths are currently available to individuals from each of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan who have a well-founded fear of persecution and want to seek asylum in the UK?*

Lastly, it has been brought to our attention that, since the announcement of this brake, Sudan may be seeking to identify students who have claimed asylum in the UK, potentially putting them or their families at risk of intimidation or harassment. Indeed, it has been suggested to us that the Home Office has provided the Sudanese Embassy with figures relating to Chevening scholars from Sudan. *Please confirm (a) whether the Home Office has provided the Sudanese embassy with any information regarding Sudanese students who have sought asylum in the UK, and if so, of what that information consisted, and (b) what steps are being taken, if any, to protect Sudanese students who have sought asylum in the UK from being identified by the Sudanese authorities.*

I would be grateful for a response to this letter by Friday 1 May.

Yours Sincerely

³ Announced in your [speech on immigration, delivered to the IPPR on 5 March 2026](#)



Joint Committee on Human Rights

David Alton.

Lord Alton of Liverpool
Chair, Joint Committee on Human Rights