



Home Office

Home Secretary
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Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper MP
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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22 September 2021

Dear Chair,

RE: Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme

Thank you for your letters of 25 and 31 August relating to Afghanistan, I thought it most useful to finalise our policy position before replying to you on the points you have raised and I know you had the opportunity to speak with the Security Minister as the situation was unfolding.

As you will be aware, the Government has published a policy statement on the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), on integration support for those two schemes and our approach to other Afghan cohorts. The policy statement can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-resettlement-and-immigration-policy-statement and a copy has been placed in both libraries in the House.

I believe the policy statement provides answers to the policy questions you had in your letter of 25 August on family reunion, ARAP and special cases and of 31 August on ARAP eligibility but I will provide further detail below.

Family reunion

You asked about how we are ensuring family members of British citizens can be reunited in the United Kingdom.

As our statement sets out, to facilitate the travel of family members of British citizens and those settled in the UK, those who were evacuated as part of Operation Pitting were given visa waivers and limited permission to stay outside of the Immigration Rules for six months. This permission enables them to access work and benefits.

Given the exceptional circumstances of their arrival and to ensure they have clarity on their immigration status, we will grant indefinite leave to remain to this group of evacuees.

We will waive the settlement fees for this group, and they will not be required to meet the usual requirements, such as English language skills or minimum income requirement.

Where necessary, we will use the *exceptional circumstances affecting a number of persons waiver* provided by the Immigration and Nationality (Fees) regulations and seek to make changes in regulations where required at the next opportunity.

This is the same approach as those evacuated under the ARAP scheme and other priority groups relocated to the UK under Operation Pitting and eligible for the ACRS. We will also give indefinite leave to remain to those who were called forward by the UK government but were not able to be evacuated or were evacuated to third countries.

For other non-UK family members of British citizens and settled persons who were not called forward as part of Operation Pitting, or who are not offered resettlement under the ACRS, they will need to apply to come to the UK under the existing economic or family migration rules. This means that they will be expected to meet the eligibility requirements of their chosen route, which includes paying relevant fees and charges, and providing biometrics.

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.

The Government's long-standing refugee family reunion policy allows a partner and children under 18 of those granted protection in the UK to join them here, if they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country. Afghan nationals recognised as refugees or in need of humanitarian protection in the UK will be able to sponsor qualifying family under this route, including those resettled here under the ACRS.

ARAP and special cases

You have asked a series of questions relating to ARAP and special cases. Under the ARAP, any current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life are offered priority relocation to the UK regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served.

Since the first ARAP flight on 22 June, around 7,000 Locally Employed Staff and their family members have been relocated to the UK in addition to 1,400 former staff and families were relocated between 2013-2021 under the previous scheme for Afghan locally employed staff.

The ARAP scheme remains open to eligible applicants. It is also possible to make an application outside of Afghanistan. Current or former staff who believe they qualify should can check our guidance at

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

The guidance is clear that Government departments can make cases for people employed via contractors to support the Government's defence outcomes. If someone has been refused a place in the ARAP scheme on eligibility grounds they are able to reapply, but I should note that if someone has been excluded following Home Office security checks, it is highly unlikely we will arrive at a different decision.

Work is underway with the MOD and FCDO to support the logistics of relocation of those accepted as eligible for ARAP who were not evacuated from Afghanistan or who are already in third countries. Where possible, we will contact those who were identified for relocation to the UK but are not yet in the UK.

Operation Warm Welcome

In your letter you asked about the interim arrangements in place in advance of the resettlement scheme. As you will be aware, through Operation Warm Welcome we have been hosting those brought to the United Kingdom in Managed Quarantine Service hotels and in bridging accommodation prior to their long-term move to local authority housing.

Health practitioners are on site in the managed quarantine service hotels to take care of any immediate health needs. Once in bridging accommodation, local authorities and local health partners are putting in place all necessary health services, including Covid vaccinations.

We continue to work with local authorities to source appropriate accommodation as quickly as possible for families already in the UK. So far, nearly 200 councils have agreed to house Afghans, and we are continuing to work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to urge every council across the country to contribute to this national effort.

UN Assistance to the Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

You asked about whether the UK responded to the "Note Verbale" from the UN about the temporary relocation of local staff. The UK did not respond to that "Note Verbale" but, as set out in our policy statement, we will work with international partners and NGOs in the region to implement a referral process for those inside Afghanistan (where safe passage can be arranged,) and for those who have recently fled to countries in the region.

Finally, in your letters you also asked about casework resource on family reunion and ARAP cases, I can assure you that colleagues in the UK and overseas continue to

work urgently in response to the Afghanistan crisis including working urgently with neighbouring countries to ensure that at-risk Afghans have options for safe passage.

I also know the Permanent Secretary and Second Permanent Secretary will be updating you on the progress on the department's response to the crisis in Afghanistan at the upcoming evidence session on the Work of the Home Office.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P. Patel', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary