



Dame Diana Johnson,
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

Dear Chair,

Oral evidence: Afghanistan: safe routes and resettlement

I want to, first of all, congratulate you on being appointed Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee and to thank the committee for inviting me to provide evidence on such an important matter.

There were a small number of questions the Directors General and I committed to follow up on, which I've set out below.

How many family reunion applications have been put on hold due to a lack of biometric data?

The Home Office has received 156 applications to the Family Reunion route from Afghan nationals between 1 Aug 2021 and the evidence session, on 15 November 2021. This figure does not, however, include any from Afghans who have recently lodged applications online and are awaiting an appointment to register their biometric details.

Unfortunately, we are not able to determine how many applications to the Family Reunion route from Afghans are on hold, due to a lack of biometric data.

This is because the Home Office caseworking system operates in a way that requires biometric data to be submitted **before** it can import the application form. Only when the application requirements have been met in full, can officials access application forms and understand where the applicant is resident.

Family Reunion applications only become workable once applicants have attended a Visa Application Centre (VAC) and register their biometric details. Afghanistan does not have a VAC, so all applicants are, at this time, required to travel to a neighbouring country to complete this essential element of the application process.

Further information regarding the treatment of Afghan nationals arriving in the UK across the Channel (including through illicit means).

Those who enter the UK illegally, including via Channel crossings, will have their asylum claim processed in the normal way.

They are eligible to claim asylum support if they would otherwise be destitute. As you will be aware, the package of support provided by the Government includes free accommodation (with utility bills and

council tax paid) and a weekly cash allowance to meet their other essential living needs. Free healthcare and education for their children is also provided.

Request for a proportion/figure of children now in school/not yet in school. (and by local authority, if possible)

I can confirm that, as of 6 January 2022, all school aged children and young people evacuated **during Operation Pitting**, are now enrolled into schools – and those children who have joined us since then are either in school, or being placed in schools as quickly as possible.

There are a small number of local authorities where we know there are issues with capacity and the projected timescales for getting the children into school places are too long. The Department for Education (DfE) is engaging with senior council officials in these local authorities, to better understand their situation and how DfE can help them identify school places for the children in bridging hotels as quickly as possible.

We are also working to ensure that the availability of school places in each local authority is taken into account as new families arrive and are settled into the country.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Victoria Atkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Victoria" and the surname "Atkins" clearly legible.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP