

# Written evidence submitted by UK-Afghanistan Diplomatic and Development Alliance (AFU0005)

## Executive Summary

This submission has been prepared by the UK-Afghanistan Diplomatic and Development Alliance, a network of former UK government diplomatic and development staff who worked in Afghanistan, including in Helmand Province, between mid-2000 and 2021. Our evidence on the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) is based on the support we have provided to our former Afghan colleagues and partners since August 2021, and contacts with civil servants implementing the schemes.

Our assessment is that very little has changed since the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's last inquiry. The schemes have failed to deliver rapid, fair and consistent assistance to those who worked for or with the UK government's stabilisation and development programmes, who were an integral part of the overall British mission in Afghanistan. The UK has a duty of care to former staff, partners and allies that is not being fulfilled, and lessons from past mistakes have not been applied.

- **Finding 1:** The ARAP and ACRS eligibility criteria have been too narrowly operationalised, and the ACRS ceiling of 20,000 people is too low. The schemes exclude many Afghans who worked for or with UK civilian stabilisation and development programmes, and who are facing Taliban harassment and retribution.
- **Finding 2:** The processing of ARAP and ACRS decisions is still taking too long. Many ARAP decisions have been inaccurate, inconsistent, and, as a result, unfair.
- **Finding 3:** The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has not prioritised support for its former employees, partners or contractors, even though it was responsible for £3.5 billion of official development assistance to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021.<sup>1</sup> The FCDO has either forgotten its partners, or it has been told to forget those who helped deliver the UK mission.

We make the following recommendations to improve the schemes:

*To address the exclusion of UK-funded stabilisation and development implementers:*

1. Both ARAP and ACRS should urgently prioritise Afghans who worked for or closely with the UK government towards the UK's objectives in Afghanistan; who are at continued risk of harm from the Taliban because of their association with the UK government; and who have expressed a wish to resettle in the UK to find safety.
2. The UK government should ensure that Afghans who delivered stabilisation and development programmes (either as contractors, grantees or in close partnership with the UK government such as salary supplements recipients) are properly considered under ARAP Category 4. This consideration should be based on an interpretation of UK national security objectives in line with the UK National Security Council Strategy for Afghanistan which included stabilisation and development programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Commission on Aid Impact, 2022, UK aid to Afghanistan [\[link\]](#).

3. If ARAP Category 4 continues to be narrowly interpreted, the next stage of the ACRS pathway 3 should prioritise Afghans who delivered UK- funded bilateral stabilisation and development programmes.
4. The ACRS should be expanded. It should exclude from the 20,000 cap those who were evacuated under Operation Pitting, before the scheme was launched, and only count principals and not their dependents.

*To address the delays and unfairness of the schemes:*

5. ARAP needs a more consistent approach to assessing cases, one that ensures that case workers are aware of the content and focus of the UK-funded programmes that applicants worked on and how they align with the UK National Security Council Strategy objectives in Afghanistan.
6. The FCDO should consider the ARAP approvals that have been granted and apply consistent criteria across ARAP approvals for its former staff and implementers.
7. The approach of bulk rejection of ARAP cases should be stopped as it is unfair and does not consider each case on its merits, as evidenced by the inconsistent results.
8. Outstanding ARAP cases need to be evaluated as soon as possible, but this must be done fairly. In addition, many of the cases rejected to date may unfortunately need to be reassessed to adjust for inconsistencies and unfairness in the approach taken thus far.
9. The UK government should expedite the ACRS pathway 3 process. Those who submitted expressions of interest in summer 2022 have been living in hiding for two years and have been waiting on a response for over a year.
10. There should be an ACRS review process similar to the ARAP scheme.
11. The UK government should promptly announce the ACRS pathway 3 criteria for its second year, to allow new cohorts to apply. Otherwise, the ACRS is effectively a closed scheme for those who worked for or closely with the UK government.
12. The UK government needs to allocate more staff to process the backlog of ARAP and ACRS cases and communicate more and better with those awaiting a decision or to explain the reasons for rejection.

*To enhance the FCDO's role in the schemes:*

13. The FCDO should take a more proactive role in assisting its former employees in Afghanistan obtain the ARAP Category 2 approval they are entitled to.
14. The FCDO should work more closely with both the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office to ensure that they understand and promptly process the applications of former FCDO partners and implementers.
15. The FCDO should nominate a human resources point of contact for its former Afghan staff who have been relocated to the UK under ARAP. This point person should field queries and refer former employees to appropriate resources based on need and location, including support for housing, employment, education, and health.
16. The FCDO should also facilitate the creation of an Afghan former staff association to promote mutual support within the group.
17. The FCDO should revive its buddy system that pairs FCDO and Afghan former staff to ensure that everyone arriving under ARAP is assigned an FCDO buddy.

## 1. Introduction

1. The UK-Afghanistan Diplomatic and Development Alliance is a network of former UK government diplomatic and development staff who worked in Afghanistan, including in Helmand Province, between mid-2000 and 2021. The group came together in August 2021 and wrote to the then Prime Minister to request that all those who worked in service of the British mission in Afghanistan would be safely evacuated through the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). Our group of volunteers was initially formed temporarily to support former Afghan colleagues and partners seeking help. Two years later, it remains active due to continued demand for our support and the persistent need to advocate for the UK to fulfil its duty of care to those worked with and for the UK government in roles that put them at great personal risk.

2. Our written evidence is focused on the progress of the Afghanistan Resettlement Schemes, both ARAP and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). It is based on evidence gathered through the work of the network in directly supporting former UK government colleagues and partners' applications to ARAP and ACRS since 2021, and contacts with civil servants implementing or supporting implementation of the schemes.

3. Our alliance has previously submitted written evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's (FAC) Inquiry into the future of UK policy towards Afghanistan (2021) and to the Defence Select Committee on Afghanistan Withdrawal (2021). We also provided oral evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee in September 2021 and submitted briefings to the International Development Select Committee.

4. In this submission, references to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) objectives and programmes in Afghanistan until 2021 cover the work of the then Department for International Development (DFID), the then Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the then Conflict Pool and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).

## 3. Key findings

**5. Our assessment is that very little has changed since the FAC's last inquiry. The schemes have failed to deliver rapid, fair and consistent assistance to those who worked for or with the UK government's stabilisation and development programmes.** Yet, they were an integral part of the overall British mission in Afghanistan. The UK has a duty of care to these former staff, partners and allies that is not being fulfilled, and lessons from past mistakes have not been applied.

- **Finding 1:** The ARAP and ACRS eligibility criteria have been too narrowly operationalised, and the ACRS ceiling of 20,000 people is too low. The schemes exclude many Afghans who worked for or with UK civilian stabilisation and development programmes, and who are facing Taliban harassment and retribution.
- **Finding 2:** The processing of ARAP and ACRS decisions is still taking too long. Many ARAP decisions have been inaccurate, inconsistent, and, as a result, unfair.
- **Finding 3:** The FCDO has not prioritised support for its former employees, partners or implementers, even though it was responsible for £3.5 billion of official development assistance to Afghanistan between 2001-2021.<sup>2</sup> The FCDO has either

forgotten its partners, or it has been told to forget those who helped deliver the UK mission.

#### 4. Finding 1

**6. The ARAP and ACRS eligibility criteria have been too narrowly operationalised, and exclude many Afghans who worked for or with UK civilian stabilisation and development programmes.** Given the nature of UK aid, which is mostly delivered through implementing contractors and in partnership with government, civil society or the private sector, these Afghans are considered by the Taliban as having worked for the UK government. Two years on, as a result, they continue to be at a high risk and living in hiding. ARAP Category 4 in particular has been interpreted too narrowly, given the UK's National Security Council Strategy for Afghanistan and the objectives that its stabilisation and development programmes supported.

**7. The ACRS ceiling of 20,000 people (both applicants and their dependents) is too low.** ACRS pathway 3 year 1 only includes three categories of UK government partners or contractors, and excludes others who played similar roles and face similar threats. Similar schemes from NATO allies have committed to settling more Afghans, such as 40,000 people for Canada and around 1,000 people a month for Germany.<sup>3</sup>

8. Based on our experience to date, Afghans who delivered bilateral UK stabilisation or development programmes, and who were employed or contracted by implementing organisations, have fallen through the cracks between ARAP and ACRS.

9. ARAP should prioritise those Afghans who worked for or closely with the UK government towards the UK's objectives in Afghanistan; who are at continued risk of harm from the Taliban because of their association with the UK government; and who have expressed a wish to resettle in the UK to find safety.

10. Though the language evolved over the campaign, the UK's National Security Council Strategy for Afghanistan aimed to help the Afghan Government to:<sup>4</sup>

- build capable Afghan national security forces;
- make progress towards a sustainable political settlement; and
- support the building of a viable Afghan state.

11. The last two objectives were as crucial as the first one, and were led by FCDO (then FCO and DFID). All of its expenditures (either through DFID or CSSF budgets) were aligned accordingly.

12. The operation of ARAP does not seem to properly reflect the UK's national security objectives in relation to Afghanistan and the way it engaged Afghans to deliver on the UK

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<sup>2</sup> Independent Commission on Aid Impact, 2022, UK aid to Afghanistan [\[link\]](#).

<sup>3</sup> Canadian schemes [\[link\]](#). German scheme [\[link\]](#).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Foreign Secretary statement to Parliament, 9 February 2012, representing the combined views of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Department for International Development (DFID) [\[link\]](#).

strategy. In this sense, the FCDO remains missing in action in showing poor leadership with regard to its legacy on critical areas of UK Afghan strategy and in its coordination with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) who hold the operational lead on ARAP.

13. Throughout the period of the UK presence in Afghanistan, the UK's endeavour was characterised as a 'comprehensive approach' which brought together defence, diplomacy and development efforts to deliver these national security objectives.<sup>5</sup> It was delivered through integrated civil-military UK structures – especially in Helmand via the Helmand Plan.

14. Almost all of the UK's £3.5 billion official development assistance was delivered through implementers, such as through grants with non-governmental organisations or contracts with private sector companies. These UK programmes, whether funded through UK aid or non-official development assistance, worked closely with Afghan partners in government, civil society, and the private sector.

15. ARAP Category 4 should have helped the UK fulfil its obligation to Afghans who worked (as staff or contractors) for organisations funded by the UK. They delivered the UK mission and have therefore put themselves at risk, without being directly employed by the UK. Indeed, in August 2021, the then Prime Minister had made it clear that the UK government had a duty to help *"those to whom we have direct obligations, by evacuating UK nationals together with those Afghans who have assisted our efforts over the past twenty years"*.<sup>6</sup> The FCDO has either forgotten its partners, or it has been told to forget those who helped deliver the UK mission.

16. The UK government's July 2022 response to the FAC's report stated that the UK could not offer resettlement to all its national implementing partners at risk in fragile and conflict-affected countries.<sup>7</sup> However, it is the very specific, political nature of the UK twenty years' effort following a United Nations mandate and through a comprehensive approach under a NATO mission in Afghanistan which justified dedicated resettlement schemes. The UK was at war, delivered through a combined military-civilian strategy. The UK has a moral duty of care towards those Afghans who delivered UK stabilisation and development programmes and were visibly against the Taliban, who now threaten those they associate with the UK.

17. ARAP is led by the MOD. The FCDO has not engaged with the MOD sufficiently to ensure that Afghans who delivered stabilisation and development programmes (either as contractors, grantees or in close partnership with the UK government such as salary supplements recipients) are properly considered under ARAP Category 4. Many ARAP rejections suggest that 'national security objectives' do not appear to have been interpreted in a manner consistent with the National Security Council Strategy for Afghanistan, which was implemented through the UK's comprehensive approach, and involved Afghan civilians who worked on Provincial Reconstruction Team or British Embassy Kabul programmes (funded through the Conflict Pool/CSSF, DFID or FCO).

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<sup>5</sup> Government Response to the House of Commons Defence Committee: The Comprehensive Approach: the point of war is not just to win but to make a better peace, 28 July 2010 [\[link\]](#).

<sup>6</sup> Prime Minister's opening statement to Parliament on Afghanistan, 18 August 2021 [\[link\]](#).

<sup>7</sup> Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee: Missing in action: UK leadership and the withdrawal from Afghanistan, 29 July 2022, paragraphs 76-77 [\[link\]](#).

18. The Afghanistan strategy showed that national security objectives were not only delivered through programmes labelled as ‘anti-corruption’, ‘counter-narcotics’ and ‘counter-terrorism’, the three illustrative themes listed for Category 4.<sup>8</sup> The Immigration Rules do not appear to rule out other sectors, but the operation of ARAP appears to have largely excluded other sectors.

19. What is being overlooked? A wider set of initiatives that delivered on UK national security objectives that were aligned to help bring about a sufficiently viable Afghan state to help ensure that Afghanistan could not be retaken by the Taliban and again become a secure base for AQ and latterly ISIS. In this regard:

- Programmes on themes such as sub-national governance, tax reform, public financial management, service delivery, economic development or livelihoods often contributed to anti-corruption, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism objectives in addition to the goal of fostering a viable Afghan state, critical to the UK mission.
- Stabilisation and development programmes also developed Afghan state, business and civil society structures to support national security objectives of a stable, viable Afghanistan to off-set future UK national security threats.

20. In addition, Category 4 decisions have been slowed down by the need to set up specific panels and seek Ministerial approval on a case-by-case basis, unlike other ARAP or ACRS decisions. This slows down decision making processes.

21. In addition to ARAP weaknesses, ACRS also does not adequately provide for development and stabilisation implementers or partners. This was raised by the International Development Committee: *“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)”*.<sup>9</sup>

### **Case study of FCDO implementers**

22. Even in cases where the implementers of FCDO-funded projects clearly meet the narrow interpretation of the criteria for ARAP Category 4, very few approvals have been granted. This is despite clear evidence of threat to life and persecution. A very common story among former staff on FCDO-funded programmes is that they are in hiding and have heard that their lives are at risk. As with the directly employed FCDO staff case studies below, it does not have to be that way. There is clear evidence of similar cases being treated differently.

23. S was a project staff member who worked on a number of major FCDO-funded programmes, including in central government ministries and on counter narcotics activities. He applied for ARAP and eventually was able to obtain pro bono legal support from the UK. While he played a significant and public-facing role, he was far from being the most senior or most prominent Afghan staff member. Eventually his case was approved for ARAP. His case

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<sup>8</sup> Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy [\[link\]](#).

<sup>9</sup> The House of Commons, International Development Committee, Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people Fifth Report of Session 2021-2022, (HC 919) (4 March 2022) [\[link\]](#).

is similar to dozens more in terms of role and level of risk, who have either not yet had their cases accepted or have been rejected already.

24. A was one of the most senior and prominent staff members on one of the UK's most significant and strategic programmes supporting state-building and anti-corruption in Afghanistan. During the takeover by the Taliban in August 2021, he was pursued by the Taliban. A close family member was murdered, and A fled the country. He has been forced into hiding, continues to be pursued by the Taliban and is suffering from a very serious illness. He applied to ARAP in 2021 and was rejected without a clear explanation. He is currently seeking a review of the rejection.

25. R had a leading and public role on a major FCDO anti-corruption and state-building programme. Following the Taliban takeover, he was accused by family members of being a traitor due to his work for the UK. He was tortured and denied the right to work. He cannot leave his house on Taliban orders. He applied to ARAP in 2021 and his case was rejected in August 2023 with an unclear explanation.

26. In both the latter two cases, A and R were told by the MOD that *"From the information you have provided, you are not eligible under Category 4 of the ARAP scheme because you do not meet the following criteria: You were directly employed in Afghanistan by the UK government, or provided goods or services under contract to the UK government, or worked in Afghanistan alongside a UK government department, in partnership with or closely supporting it."* This is demonstrably untrue in both cases, as outlined above.

### **Case study of British Council teachers**

27. There are clear inconsistencies between ARAP and ACRS criteria, and both fail to appreciate the role of FCDO programme partners and implementers, who are falling between the cracks of the two schemes.

28. For example, all British Council managers and office staff were approved for ARAP and relocated to the UK prior to or during Operation Pitting. Further to this, ARAP approval and relocation was also granted for:

- 15 teachers who worked on the British Council Afghan National Army Officers Academy programme
- 13 other teachers were also relocated at this time (two who worked on the English for Afghans programme, one who was a part-time temporary teacher, and ten from the Connecting Classrooms programme).

29. At least 109 teachers were left behind, with no explanation as to why a small number were ARAP approved and relocated during Operation Pitting, while the vast majority were left behind (including 11 teachers from the Connecting Classrooms programme).

30. In 2022, the ACRS Pathway 3 was created, and some additional British Council contractors were eligible to submit 'expressions of interest', in addition to GardaWorld contractors and Chevening Scholars. This was a welcome development, as these groups visibly supported UK objectives and were initially eligible for ARAP. (Some were even on their way to the airport during Operation Pitting but not allowed to evacuate). However, the reason for the prioritisation of these groups is not self-evident. Some individuals within these

cohorts had a shorter collaboration or less visible public roles than other UK implementing partners rejected to date under ARAP and not included in ACRS pathways.

***Recommendations to address the exclusion of UK-funded stabilisation and development implementers:***

1. Both ARAP and ACRS should urgently prioritise Afghans who worked for or closely with the UK government towards the UK's objectives in Afghanistan; who are at continued risk of harm from the Taliban because of their association with the UK government; and who have expressed a wish to resettle in the UK to find safety.
2. The UK government should ensure that Afghans who delivered stabilisation and development programmes (either as contractors, grantees or in close partnership with the UK government such as salary supplements recipients) are properly considered under ARAP Category 4. This consideration should be based on an interpretation of UK national security objectives in line with the UK National Security Council Strategy for Afghanistan which included stabilisation and development programmes. This ARAP Category should be used for those with the closest association with UK objectives, with the FCDO reviewing stabilisation and development contractors and partners' applications to ARAP as it will have a better understanding of the roles they played. To speed up and broaden Category 4 decisions, these should no longer be signed off at Ministerial level.
3. If ARAP Category 4 continues to be narrowly interpreted, the next stage of the ACRS pathway 3 should prioritise Afghans who delivered UK-funded bilateral stabilisation and development programmes. For greater consistency, ACRS pathway 3 in future years should capture not only democracy, freedom of speech, women's rights and rule of law (themes explicit in the description of ACRS, and which mostly reflect former FCO's priorities) but the full range of stabilisation and development priorities which included economic development, building institutions (governance, security) and basic services (which reflect former DFID's other priorities).
4. The ACRS should be expanded. It should exclude from the 20,000 cap those who were evacuated under Operation Pitting, before the scheme was launched, and only count principals and not their dependents.

**5. Finding 2**

**31. The processing of ARAP and ACRS decisions is still taking too long. Many ARAP decisions have been inaccurate and inconsistent, and, as a result, unfair.** Many ARAP applicants had already been waiting for months for a response before the Operation Pitting evacuation started in August 2021. Two years on, many are still waiting for responses to applications and review requests. At the moment, a fairly consistent and deeply depressing picture remains of extreme delays to assessing ARAP applications, arbitrary decisions which are not consistent with current or past criteria, and blanket rejections of cases irrespective of their details to meet internal deadlines.

32. The UK's Afghan resettlement schemes and evacuation effort have been significantly under-resourced, including in terms of staff available to process applications. In comparison, the Ukrainian schemes have been better resourced and quicker.



33. The stated deadline of clearing the backlog of ARAP applications by the end of August 2023 has not been met. Instead, we have seen rushed decisions, with unclear justifications and errors. ACRS pathway 3 has also been extremely slow in processing a much smaller number of expressions of interest, and the window for the pathway's second year has been indefinitely postponed since June 2023.

34. We are aware of cases of Afghans directly employed by the UK government in public-facing roles whose applications have been rejected even though they were fully eligible under ARAP Category 2 which caters for direct HMG employees in public-facing roles which puts them at risk due to their association with the UK. Similarly, we have evidence of cases of inconsistent decisions regarding Afghans who played similar roles on UK aid programmes that meet Category 4 criteria. Some were accepted and others rejected, with no clear justification.

35. Since August 2021, one contractor who managed a large number of FCDO programmes is only aware of less than five ARAP cases being approved, despite multiples of this being evacuated at the time of Operation Pitting. This contractor has several hundred staff all with similar roles to those who were evacuated and many of whom have been rejected, seemingly almost at random.

36. It is notable that ARAP and ACRS applications seem more likely to be approved when legal support is available. But this is not for the overwhelming majority of cases given the costs and financial situations of Afghan applicants who are frequently in hiding and unable to work, or do not have contacts who could reach out to UK pro bono legal expertise. Despite having very similar or in many cases stronger cases, a tiny fraction of those unable to access legal support have had their ARAP cases approved. The relative success of legal support to some ARAP cases indicates that a much higher proportion of applicants are eligible for and deserving of UK protection and support than are currently receiving it. In addition, the ACRS does not have an internal review scheme, whereas ARAP does. Those whose expressions of interest are rejected can only challenge decisions through judicial review. However, this requires legal expertise that is out of the reach of most. The UK legal community has been remarkable in the support it has provided to Afghans who had close associations with the UK, but it cannot meet the scale of the need on a pro bono basis.

37. Since December 2022, evacuation flights to the UK for those eligible under ARAP or ACRS have been suspended. Principals and their families are being supported by the British High Commission in Islamabad, but they report to us that they face extreme difficulties. They are unable to renew their Pakistan Visas. They fear arrest and deportation if they leave their hotels. They have no way of successfully communicating with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or other contracted providers of food/ accommodation/ healthcare etc. They cannot flag concerns associated with their living conditions, or get issues reviewed and addressed. They have limited or no access to healthcare and medication. They have no access to education for themselves or their children. They receive poor quality food, with no fruits or vegetables.

#### ***ARAP case studies ex HMG staff***

38. T was a directly employed DFID programme officer in a publicly exposed, recognisable role which puts him at risk. He fits the criteria for ARAP Category 2. He applied first in May 2021 but reapplied in June 2022 after the first application could not be traced. Yet, after many months, in August 2023, he received a generic rejection letter where the reason for rejection was not clear. This is despite the MOD having evidence of his direct UK government employment, and statements from his former line managers that outlined his public facing role delivering UK Aid in the British Embassy in Kabul. The FCDO Afghanistan team had been informed of the case many months prior to the ARAP rejection and made no attempt to clarify any issues of employment or role with him or his former line managers. T and his family remain under threat in Afghanistan and will submit a request for review to the MOD ARAP team using their online form.

39. N was directly employed in a public facing role by DFID, putting him and his family at risk. He applied to ARAP in January 2022 and is still waiting for a decision after more than 20 months. Again, the FCDO Afghanistan team were made aware of his case but have not engaged with him or his former line managers to unlock the case and potentially save the lives of their former employee and his family.

#### ***ARAP case study: HMG partners in Helmand***

40. FCDO programmes were also delivered through Afghan government officials, in Kabul or Helmand.

41. H is a former provincial government employee who has been in hiding with his wife and four young children since August 2021, changing location every month. He worked for several years for Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development on a DFID-funded and UK aid branded project under the Helmand Growth Programme. The UK government paid his salary. UK objectives in Afghanistan included governance and socio-economic development as part of its stabilisation strategy, which required working closely with Afghan government officials. UK military and security interventions provided the space for these civilian efforts to take place, with UK military and civilian officials working side by side in the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team.

42. This government employee and implementer of a high profile, frontline UK aid programme has faced life threatening challenges in trying to keep his family safe, from being refused to rent accommodation, unable to gain employment and having to sell all of his possessions to survive, having his family questioned and threatened including one family member having his arm broken during Taliban questioning. H has failed to find an alternative, safe evacuation route for his young family and as a consequence feels trapped and increasingly desperate, without a way out of Afghanistan and without a way to stay and earn a living. He was rejected from ARAP and has not heard back since requesting a review in September 2021. He has received two holding emails since, simply apologising for the delay in processing his application due to the volume received, and stating that his application is active and he must take no further action. The last one was received in July 2023.

43. H said to us: *"The second most important thing to security is my children's future, education and freedom, which are unknown and in the dark. Not only is there no security*

*here but we also have no job, or source for earning, that is, we are insecure from every side. We [those who worked visibly on UK objectives] are called “spies” and we fear those of the locals too who have lost their families in bombardments, search operations and clashes, as they can take revenge at any time”.*

### **ACRS case studies: British Council teachers left behind**

44. At present, five (of a cohort of 109+) former British Council teachers have been relocated to the UK under pathway 3 of ACRS. The five who have been relocated have integrated into their new communities, either in Northern Ireland or Scotland. They have settled into their accommodation, their children are in school, and some are even employed.

45. However, over 30 teachers remain in hiding in Afghanistan and over 50 remain stuck in hotels in Islamabad. Of those in hiding in Afghanistan, some have received ACRS rejections, while others are still waiting for responses to their ‘Expressions of Interest’. All the teachers in Pakistan are suffering as a result of being stuck in their hotels, unable to go out because they have expired visas. Many have been waiting in Pakistan for 8 months now, their lives on hold and no indication of when they will be relocated.

46. Still no Response from ACRS: G was a British Council English Teacher and Teacher Trainer (2012 – 2016). She submitted her ACRS expression of interest back in 2022 along with all other teachers but has still received no confirmation from ACRS. She has repeatedly contacted them for an update, but no update has been offered. She is living in hiding and fearful for her safety and the safety of her children. There are a number of other teachers like G who have submitted their expressions of interest, but have not received confirmation, despite repeated inquiries. The FCDO have offered no explanation as to why some applications are taking so long. G and others like her meet the ACRS criteria and are at risk.

47. Unfair Rejection from ACRS: D is former ‘English for Afghans’ teacher and Study Centre Manager (2019 – 2020) who applied for ARAP in 2021. He was eligible according to the criteria but received no response. He was receiving threats in Afghanistan as a direct result of his work for the British Council, so in 2022 he fled to Iran and then Azerbaijan. He checked with the British Council whether he could apply for ACRS from Azerbaijan, and received an email response stating that it was fine. He has since been rejected, with ACRS’s justification that he had applied from Azerbaijan. He is now back in hiding in Afghanistan. The ACRS application page now states: “If you move somewhere that is outside Afghanistan and its neighbouring region, this could affect your eligibility for a place in the first stage of Pathway 3.” The ‘neighbouring region’ is not defined. The applicant was specifically advised by the British Council to apply from Azerbaijan. The ARAP scheme does not operate under the same rules, welcoming applicants from any location (which is logical as many applicants have had to flee Afghanistan). The ACRS team have now told D they will not review the case further. There is no internal review procedure for those rejected from ACRS, whereas it exists under ARAP.

48. Heavily Pregnant teacher in Pakistan: P is a former English for Afghans teacher and Master Trainer. She is heavily pregnant with a due date in November 2023. She is still waiting to receive her UK visa. She has been advised to stay in her hotel by the IOM, because, like most Afghans in Islamabad, her Pakistan visa has expired. On 2nd October, she was unable to go to out to see the doctor due to IOM advice to stay in the hotel. At this

advanced stage of pregnancy, this is a highly concerning situation. The FCDO are not responding to her emails.

***Recommendations to address the delays and unfairness of the schemes:***

5. ARAP needs a more consistent approach to assessing cases, one that ensures that case workers are aware of the content and focus of the UK-funded programmes that applicants worked on and how they align with the UK National Security Council Strategy objectives in Afghanistan.
6. The FCDO should consider the ARAP approvals that have been granted and apply consistent criteria across ARAP approvals for its former staff and implementers.
7. The approach of bulk rejection of ARAP cases should be stopped as it is unfair and does not consider each case on its merits, as evidenced by the inconsistent results.
8. Outstanding ARAP cases need to be evaluated as soon as possible, but this must be done fairly. In addition, many of the cases rejected to date may unfortunately need to be reassessed to adjust for inconsistencies and unfairness in the approach taken thus far.
9. The UK government should expedite the ACRS pathway 3 process. Those who submitted expressions of interest in summer 2022 have been living in hiding for two years and have been waiting on a response for over a year.
10. There should be an ACRS review process similar to the ARAP scheme.
11. The UK government should promptly announce the ACRS pathway 3 criteria for its second year, to allow new cohorts to apply. Otherwise, the ACRS is effectively a closed scheme for those who worked for or closely with the UK government.
12. The UK government needs to allocate more staff to process the backlog of ARAP and ACRS cases and communicate more and better with those awaiting a decision or to explain the reasons for rejection.

**6. Finding 3**

**49. The FCDO has not prioritised support for its former employees, partners or contractors.** The FCDO is not leading in the implementation of ARAP, but has also not proactively assisted several former employees who have faced difficulties with ARAP. As for Afghans who worked for the FCDO and who relocated to the UK under ARAP, we have found that the FCDO does not respond to their queries and has neglected their welfare. As described in detail under Finding 1, the FCDO has not assisted a broader interpretation of Category 4 to include Afghans who implemented its programmes and are at risk. The FCDO leads on ACRS together with the Home Office, but has not been able to prioritise former FCDO implementing partners. The FCDO has either forgotten its partners, or it has been told to forget those who helped deliver the UK mission.

***Case study of how the FCDO can assist its former employees***

50. The FCDO seems to have abandoned some of its former Afghan employees who remain at risk in Afghanistan still awaiting a positive outcome from ARAP. But it does not have to be that way, as one case demonstrates.

51. K worked for DFID and applied to ARAP in July 2021 as his family were under threat. His younger brother had been killed when the Taliban came looking for him. By February 2022,

he had still not received a response from the MOD ARAP team. Current FCDO staff heard about his plight and found that his employment records were missing. They reached out to former FCDO staff who managed K. On confirming his employment, we understand that they informed the MOD ARAP team and in June 2022 he received an ARAP offer. Though it took a long time, he and his family were successfully evacuated from Afghanistan. Since April 2023, he and his family are now in limbo in Islamabad like many others under the care of the British High Commission. He has been informed that relocation to the UK will only occur when accommodation is available and has been advised to look for his own housing in the UK. FCDO staff action saved lives in this case, but UK Government policy means he has still not resettled in the UK.

52. But K's case does not appear to reflect policy in relation to their former direct employees who remain at risk, as other cases demonstrate. W was directly employed by the FCO in the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team in a publicly exposed role which put him at threat. Yet his ARAP application of June 2021 was rejected in July 2022 for "not being directly employed by HMG", despite the MOD having evidence of his FCO employment and role at hand. He appealed over 14 months ago and is still to hear. The FCDO were notified of the case but have not reached out to his former line managers and may not have contacted the MOD ARAP team about his case. The Taliban continue to look for him. He is in hiding and separated from his family, to help keep them safe.

#### ***Case study of ex FCDO staff requiring assistance in the UK***

53. Many of the families relocated to the UK are traumatised by continued threats to their loved ones in Afghanistan, and also struggle to understand the local services of which they can avail in the UK. Although the FCDO issued a "welcome pack" to former locally engaged staff, we believe the FCDO has a duty of care to do more in this distressing and unusual situation. This includes providing support when they seek family reunification.

54. We are also concerned about evictions. We are aware of instances of former HMG Afghan staff who arrived under ARAP and now are at risk of being evicted from their hotels. In some cases, we are aware of distrust of Afghans among private landlords, who want evidence of regular monthly income before they will sign leases. Many ARAP arrivals are not yet in a position to provide this evidence. Evictions will force former HMG Afghan staff and their families to register as homeless with local authorities.

55. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. The UK's former Afghan personnel are not familiar with the UK's domestic governance and policies, services and charitable organisations. They are also spread around the country and so do not have an immediate local support network. They need a support system that can sign post to them where to go for help. They are tenacious and resilient people who will be on their feet fast with this help.

56. B worked for DFID and the British Embassy Kabul for many years. He and his family were evacuated to the UK in 2021. Since then, B was placed in housing but it was substandard. Damp and mould caused respiratory health problems in his young children. In addition, some of his relatives in Afghanistan remain in extreme physical danger, which places an emotional and mental strain on B and his family. B needs help from the FCDO to

understand the rules for ARAP and for family reunification. He also needs to be connected with the resources available to support his family's health and housing situation, and to apply to employment opportunities.

***Recommendations to enhance the FCDO's role in the schemes:***

18. The FCDO should take a more proactive role in assisting its former employees in Afghanistan obtain the ARAP Category 2 approval they are entitled to.
19. The FCDO should work more closely with both the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office to ensure that they understand and promptly process the applications of former FCDO partners and implementers.
20. The FCDO should nominate a human resources point of contact for its former Afghan staff who have been relocated to the UK under ARAP. This point person should field queries and refer former employees to appropriate resources based on need and location, including support for housing, employment, education, and health.
21. The FCDO should also facilitate the creation of an Afghan former staff association to promote mutual support within the group.
22. The FCDO should revive its buddy system that pairs FCDO and Afghan former staff to ensure that everyone arriving under ARAP is assigned an FCDO buddy.

**3 October 2023**