

Bespoke resettlement route for Afghan refugees announced

Thousands of Afghan women, children and others most in need will be welcomed to the UK under one of the most generous resettlement schemes in our country's history.

Those who have been forced to flee their home or face threats of persecution from the Taliban will be offered a route to set up home in the UK permanently.

The UK government's ambition is for the new Afghanistan citizens' resettlement scheme to resettle 5,000 Afghan nationals who are at risk due to the current crisis, in its first year.

Priority will be given to women and girls, and religious and other minorities, who are most at risk of human rights abuses and dehumanising treatment by the Taliban.

This resettlement scheme will be kept under further review for future years, with up to a total of 20,000 in the long-term. The ambition to provide protection to thousands of people fleeing Afghanistan and the complex picture on the ground means there will be significant challenges delivering the scheme, but the government is working at speed to address these obstacles.

The government will work with stakeholders, including devolved administrations and local councils, to ensure that Afghans who will be rebuilding their lives in the UK have the support they need.

This new route is modelled on the successful Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, which resettled 20,000 Syrian refugees over a seven-year period from 2014 to 2021.

The UK is working with international partners to develop a system to identify those most at risk and resettle them, ensuring help goes to those that need it. The Prime Minister is expected to discuss this with G7 leaders in a virtual meeting in the coming days.

The new route is separate from, and in addition to, the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), which offers any current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life priority relocation to the UK. 5,000 former Afghan staff and their family members are expected to be relocated to the UK by the end of this year under ARAP.

Today the Prime Minister will address Parliament on the UK's work on the crisis in Afghanistan. The government is currently working at pace to evacuate British nationals, their families and former Afghan staff from Afghanistan. Since Saturday 520 British nationals, diplomats and former Afghan staff have left Afghanistan on UK military flights.

In his statement, the Prime Minister will outline the steps the international community must take to avert a humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan. This requires an immediate increase in humanitarian aid to the country and region, ahead of a longer-term process for supporting vulnerable refugees.

Last night, Home Secretary Priti Patel chaired an emergency meeting with her Five Country counterparts to discuss the developing situation in Afghanistan and what steps each country is taking to provide safe and legal routes for refugees.

Attendees were:

- Karen Andrews, Australia Minister for Home Affairs
- Alex Hawke, Australia Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs
- Marco Mendicino, Canada Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
- Kris Faafoi, New Zealand Minister of Justice, Immigration, and Broadcasting & Media
- Alejandro Mayorkas, US Secretary of Homeland Security

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

We owe a debt of gratitude to all those who have worked with us to make Afghanistan a better place over the last twenty years. Many of them, particularly women, are now in urgent need of our help. I am proud that the UK has been able to put in place this route to help them and their families live safely in the UK.

The best solution for everyone is an Afghanistan that works for all Afghans. That means the international community coming together to set firm, political conditions for the country's future governance. And it means focusing our efforts on increasing the resilience of the wider region to prevent a humanitarian emergency.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

The UK government will always stand by those in the world in their hour of need when fleeing persecution or oppression.

I want to ensure that as a nation we do everything possible to provide support to the most vulnerable fleeing Afghanistan so they can start a new life in safety in the UK, away from the tyranny and oppression they now face.

Our country has a proud history of offering sanctuary to those in need. We will not abandon people who have been forced to flee their homes and are now living in terror of what might come next. The Afghan citizens' resettlement scheme will save lives.

The government is clear that the new route will not compromise on national security and any person arriving on the route will have to pass the same strict security checks as those resettled through other schemes.

The speed and flexibility of delivering the new route demonstrates the government's New Plan for Immigration in action, which seeks to make the system fairer by protecting and supporting those in genuine need of asylum.

The government has also provided thousands of Afghans asylum in the UK and many Afghan nationals have come to the UK to work and study under the Points-Based Immigration system.