

Government reforms intimidation scheme to relocate more Afghan staff under threat

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy will be introduced next year to reflect the changing situation in Afghanistan. It will offer relocation to current and former employees such as embassy support staff, those in political or counter-terrorism roles, or cultural advisors who could face threats related to their occupation.

The move follows the recent expansion of a separate scheme to relocate Afghan interpreters in recognition of the government's gratitude for their service.

Under the new scheme, anyone facing imminent risk such as intimidation or threat to life will be offered priority relocation regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served.

This could see hundreds of brave locally employed staff and their families come to the UK.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Nobody's life should be put at risk because they supported the UK Government to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan.

As the situation in the region evolves, it is only right we do more to protect local citizens who stood shoulder to shoulder with our armed forces.

As a former soldier I know the bond between the brothers who fight by our side. These Afghans stood by us and risked their lives to make a better country. We owe them a debt and I am proud that the Home Secretary and I can finally close this chapter and thank them for their service.

The new intimidation scheme will be administered by a specialist team based in Kabul, the Intimidation Investigations Unit, which was set up to assist and support local staff who are threatened as a result of their work with the UK. The UK is the only nation with such a permanent expert team.

The scheme will operate under a tiered approach, with high risk local staff who face imminent threat to be relocated urgently. Local staff who are in the public eye and who could be at risk as the security situation evolves will be relocated to the UK on a routine basis, and those not eligible to move will be offered other support such as security advice and relocation within Afghanistan.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to the brave individuals who have worked side by side with our Armed Forces in Afghanistan.

I am proud that through this new scheme we can provide further support and sanctuary to these courageous men and women.

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance scheme will run alongside the existing Ex-Gratia Scheme, which offers relocation to the UK for Afghan interpreters who served a minimum of 12 months on the frontline before resigning or being made redundant.

The Ex-Gratia Scheme was established in recognition of the UK Government's gratitude for the service of Afghan interpreters, rather than any risk they may face.

It will run until November 2022, at which point the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy will be the single track route for relocation.

To date, over 1,400 Afghans and their families have relocated to the UK under the Ex-Gratia scheme, while hundreds more received funding for education and training.

Legislation for the new scheme will be introduced in April through changes to the Home Office Immigration Rules.

The Ministry of Defence and the Home Office will continue to seek ways to go further to support this cohort and others who have supported the British Armed Forces.