

Inspirational Afghan women invited to Parliament for International Women's Day

A group of inspiring Afghan women have visited the Houses of Parliament to mark International Women's Day and tell their own unique stories of success and integration.

At a reception hosted by Minister for Afghan Resettlement Victoria Atkins, a group of 12 Afghan women shared their incredible stories of living in the UK after leaving Afghanistan.

Among the women invited to parliament were:

- **Benafsha Yaqoobi:** An Afghan disability rights activist, she was made one of the BBC 100 women in 2021. Yaqoobi who is visually impaired, founded the Rahyab Organisation in 2008 with her husband, to provide education and rehabilitation to visually impaired people in Afghanistan. Following the Taliban invasion, she was forced to leave the country but remains a vocal advocate for the rights of disabled people, who she fears will face discrimination from the Taliban.
- **Arefa Shafaei:** A Chevening scholar, (an international scholarship, funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office) she feared for her life and didn't believe that she would make it to the UK following the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. However, after securing a place to study at the University of York she made it to the UK with the help of the British embassy.
- **Zahra Joya:** Along with her sisters Sabria Joya, Sharifa Joya and Fakhria Joya, she is the founder of a media company called Rukhshana Media that shared women's voices across Afghanistan, a child in Afghanistan, she pretended to be a boy in order to get an education.

The visit to Parliament comes as the government continues its unprecedented operation to resettle thousands of Afghans forced to flee, with over 19,000 Afghan evacuees already arrived in the country.

The UK is also preparing to welcome thousands of Ukrainian families as part of a huge humanitarian effort.

Minister for Afghan Resettlement Victoria Atkins said:

It's so important that we mark International Women's Day by

recognising just some of the extraordinary Afghan women who have made the UK their home.

I have met Afghan disability rights activists, Chevening scholars, judges and journalists – all with their unique stories to tell.

I hope their uplifting tales of bravery, determination and success can shed some light on the journeys and struggles so many women and girls have had to undertake since the Taliban took control of their country.

Since August 2021, the government has been working at pace to find permanent homes for Afghan families who were brought to the UK under Operation Pitting, so they can settle and rebuild their lives in the UK. Measures to support Afghans as they start their new lives in the UK include:

- A series of cultural orientation 'Welcome Resources', for councils to share with Afghan families. They include advice and support on a range of topics including education, employment support, gender equality and the law, to help give people the best start in life. Bespoke resources were also created for women and girls on issues such as health and personal safety
- Continued support to help move people into accommodation and so far councils have pledged more than 7,000 places for families, supported by £5 million funding to help the national effort.
- Speeding up the process of matching families to property. DLUHC last month launched a housing portal which allows private landlords to put forward offers of accommodation so councils can match them to families.

As part of the UK's proud tradition for helping people in need, the UK government is now working at pace to welcome thousands of Ukrainians. These measures include:

- The expansion of the family route to enable more Ukrainian family members of people settled in the UK to come and join them here.
- Working at pace to establish a new humanitarian sponsorship scheme for Ukrainians forced to flee their homes to be matched with organisations and communities in the UK as their sponsors.
- A further £220 million committed to emergency and humanitarian support for Ukraine, alongside the 1,000 troops who are on standby in neighbouring countries to help those forced to flee.

Afghan women and girls can experience marginalisation, barriers to education, gender inequality, language skills. Once in the UK our integration Welcome Resources package gives councils, alongside the voluntary community sector, resources to tackle some of these barriers.

We are working at pace to find permanent homes for Afghan families who were brought to the UK under Operation Pitting, so they can settle and rebuild their lives in the UK. There are over 12,000 Afghan evacuees in bridging accommodation.

Finding suitable settled homes for this number of people all at once is a significant challenge, particularly given the larger average size of many Afghan families.

People are encouraged to submit housing offers via the [DLUHC housing portal](#) where offers can be signposted to the appropriate council to consider if they could support a family under the scheme using that property.

In addition to the work we are doing with councils, the government has extended the Community Sponsorship Scheme so that local community groups will be able to directly support an Afghan family resettled through the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme which will commence soon.

The government has set aside £5 million funding for councils in England, Wales and Scotland to support Afghans coming to the UK and provide top-up to help meet the costs of renting properties.

All those brought to the UK under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) will have the right to work, access to education and healthcare and be able to apply for public funds.

The government has also announced plans for a new sponsorship scheme for Ukrainians without any family ties to the UK. The scheme will allow sponsors, such as communities, private sponsors or local authorities, to bring those forced to flee Ukraine to the UK.

There will be no limit on this scheme and we will welcome as many Ukrainians as wish to come and have matched sponsors.