

'Operation Warm Welcome' underway to support Afghan arrivals in the UK

A significant cross-government effort is underway, dubbed 'Operation Warm Welcome', to ensure Afghans arriving in the UK receive the vital support they need to rebuild their lives, find work, pursue education and integrate into their local communities.

As part of the New Plan for Immigration, the government announced that those coming to the UK through resettlement routes would receive immediate indefinite leave to remain, and today (September 1) the Home Secretary has announced that this will apply to Afghans who worked closely with the British military and UK Government in Afghanistan, and risked their lives in doing so, meaning they can now stay in the UK without any time restrictions.

People already relocated to the UK under the Afghanistan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) will be able to apply free of charge to convert their temporary leave into indefinite leave. This will give Afghans the certainty and stability to rebuild their lives with unrestricted rights to work and the option to apply for British citizenship in the future.

To give children and young adults the best start in life the government is making at least £12 million available to prioritise additional school places so children can be enrolled as soon as possible, and to provide school transport, specialist teachers and English language support to assist with learning.

Further funding will be provided for up to 300 undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships for Afghans at UK universities and adults will also be able to access English language courses free of charge. While many will speak English through their work with the UK Government and British Forces, and as translators, language classes will ensure all their family members can fully integrate into their local communities.

Families who need support navigating the system will also have access to liaison officers who can work with local authorities to help them get set up with a GP, National Insurance number, school place, accommodation and more tailored support, as required.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

We owe an immense debt to those who worked with the Armed Forces in Afghanistan and I am determined that we give them and their families the support they need to rebuild their lives here in the UK.

I know this will be an incredibly daunting time, but I hope they will take heart from the wave of support and generosity already expressed by the British public.

The support for Afghan arrivals follows the largest and most complex evacuation in living memory. It includes:

- £3 million of additional NHS funding so that Afghans arriving under the Afghanistan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme can access healthcare and register with a GP once they leave quarantine;
- all are being offered the COVID-19 vaccine and so far more than 700 arrivals under the ARAP scheme have left quarantine and received their first vaccination, with more leaving and receiving a jab each day;
- £5 million funding for councils in England, Wales and Scotland to support Afghans coming to the UK via the ARAP scheme and provide a top up to help meet the costs of renting properties;
- the government is already working with more than 100 councils across the UK to meet the demand for housing, with over 2,000 places already confirmed;
- the Communities Secretary will convene a roundtable with council leaders from across the country in the coming days;
- to harness the generosity of the British public and make sure those who want to help know where to turn we will launch an online portal to allow people to submit offers of support for people arriving from Afghanistan;
- this portal is already available to submit offers of housing and work is now underway to expand this to further offers, such as job opportunities, professional skills training or donations of items like clothes or toys; and
- £200 million has been committed to meet the cost of the first year of the Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme, which aims to welcome up to 20,000 Afghans.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

We owe a great deal to the brave Afghans who worked alongside us and we want to make sure they have certainty and stability to be able to thrive in the UK.

As part of the New Plan for Immigration, I committed to providing refugees who make their home here the ability to rebuild their lives in the UK with essential support to integrate into the community, learn English, and become self-sufficient. By providing immediate indefinite leave to remain we are ensuring that those who have fled their homes have every opportunity to look to the future with stability and security and make a success of their new life in the UK.

Afghan Resettlement Minister Victoria Atkins said:

Operation Warm Welcome is a huge effort across government to make sure that those fleeing Afghanistan are able to make a success of a new life in the UK.

The stability of indefinite leave, the security of access to

healthcare and the opportunity of education are the foundation upon which those resettled to the UK can build.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

This support package will help Afghan evacuees start a new life in the UK and I'm proud we are providing £3 million to ensure they receive the healthcare they need. This includes access to prescriptions, wound care and dressings, maternity care, mental health support and screening for infectious diseases. We will also offer the protection of a COVID-19 vaccination as they settle and rebuild.