

UK Government helps LGBT Afghans start new life in Britain

The first group of LGBT Afghans to be helped by the UK Government to leave Afghanistan since the end of the evacuation arrived in Britain on Friday to start their new lives.

The group of 29 arrived in the UK yesterday, following interventions by the Foreign Secretary and support from UK and Canadian organisations Stonewall and Rainbow Railroad.

Under Taliban rule, LGBT people are among the most vulnerable in Afghanistan, with many facing increased levels of persecution, discrimination, and assault.

The UK is playing a world-leading role in supporting the departure of persecuted Afghans from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Yesterday's arrival is hoped to be the first of many of LGBT Afghans who are able to start new lives in the UK.

Since the end of Operation Pitting in late August, the UK has helped more than 1,300 people, including British and Afghan nationals, to leave Afghanistan.

Foreign Secretary, and Minister for Women and Equalities, Liz Truss said:

Britain is a fierce champion of freedom and the right of all people to be themselves and love who they want free from persecution. We played a key role getting these people out and will continue to do all we can to help at-risk Afghans leave the country.

Kimahli Powell, Executive Director of Rainbow Railroad, said:

Since the fall of Kabul, Rainbow Railroad has been leading efforts to find safety for LGBTQI+ Afghans facing grave danger. In partnership with others, we have directly relocated dozens of persons to safer countries where they can live lives free of state-directed persecution. Rainbow Railroad is thankful for the strong advocacy of Stonewall UK and for the UK Government, which helped facilitate the arrival of these LGBTQI+ persons. This is just the beginning of our efforts to help hundreds of LGBTQI+ individuals we are supporting in Afghanistan relocate to safety. We look forward to continuing to work with the UK government and other governments ready to follow their lead to help Afghans at risk.

Nancy Kelley, Chief Executive of Stonewall, said:

Throughout this crisis, Stonewall and our supporters have called for international support for LGBTQ+ Afghans, and for their recognition as a priority group for resettlement in the UK. Over the last few months, we have worked around the clock alongside the UK Government, and Rainbow Railroad, to support LGBTQ+ Afghans to safety. Today, we are proud that our campaigning and collaboration has resulted in the first group of LGBTQ+ Afghans arriving here in the UK to resettle and rebuild their lives, and for LGBTQ+ people to be recognised as a priority group for resettlement. However, our work is not yet done. We will continue advocating for international support for LGBTQ+ Afghans, including those that remain in Afghanistan, and we will also continue to work with the UK Government to ensure that the LGBTQ+ Afghans who arrive in the UK are given the support they need to thrive.

Among the group are students and activists who have repeatedly stood up for equality for the LGBT community in Afghanistan.

The group will be supported by Stonewall, Micro Rainbow and other LGBT charities to set up their new lives in the UK.

Further vulnerable LGBT Afghans are expected to arrive in the UK in the coming months. The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) will provide protection for people at risk and identified as in need.

The scheme will prioritise those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law, as well as vulnerable people, including women, girls and members of minority groups at risk.

The UK is committed to working with our international partners to protect and promote the human rights of LGBT people.

In June 2022, the UK will host its first ever global conference to tackle inequality and address the safety of LGBT people around the world.