



SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES

HELP for
HEROES

Rt Hon Sir Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration
Home Office
Direct Communications Unit
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11 August 2023

Dear Sir Robert Jenrick MP,

Help for Heroes and The Refugee Council have come together to express our shared concerns over the failure to resettle eligible Afghan citizens in the UK under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), particularly those Afghan citizens who are seeking to reunite with family members who have already come to the UK under the schemes.

In 2021, the Government made a covenant with Afghan citizens, who had served our nation's interests by working with our Armed Forces and diplomatic services, that they would be resettled with their family members in the UK.

The right to bring close or dependent family members was one of the central tenets of our promise; recognising the risk that the Taliban would hunt down and carry out retributive actions against those associated with the UK's presence in the country.

Under these schemes, an eligible Afghan citizen could include a partner, dependent children, and additional family members who they were separated from during the evacuation in their application, with the expectation that, within a reasonable timeframe, those family members would be granted clearance to enter the UK and assisted in travelling via a safe route to do so.

Two years have passed since that promise was made and many families are still separated. Some sources suggest that of those employed by the British Army and their families and awaiting resettlement from hotels in Pakistan under the ARAP scheme, only two have come

to the UK in the past three months. A further eight are thought to have come from other destinations over that same time. This is a shamefully small number.

Figures from the start of June suggest there are approximately 260 principal ARAP applicants and 1,210 family members, including those seeking reunification with family already in the UK, being supported in Pakistan and a further 10 principals and 30 family members being supported in other third countries.

We hope this number has significantly reduced since then, but, given the rate of relocation over the past few months, that seems unlikely.

There are a further estimated 100 British embassy guards or British Council workers and 380 family members, who are eligible under the ACRS scheme, awaiting clearance in Islamabad, who are unlikely to be resettled in the UK or join family members here in the immediate future. However, exact numbers are hard to determine as there is no application process for Pathway 1 of the ACRS scheme, so the Home Office has not kept records of whether eligible family members are in Afghanistan, Pakistan or elsewhere.

The problem is becoming more dangerous, as those who fled to Pakistan have come to the end of their visa terms in the country and will face the risk of being sent back to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan or will have little choice but to seek to travel via irregular means.

By contrast, the USA's equivalent scheme, the Special Immigrant Visas Programme, resettled more than 11,000 Afghans between October 2021 and September 2022 according to official figures from the State Department. This includes those who boarded chartered flights from within Afghanistan itself.

Our joint call to you is for the Home Office to:

1. Honour the Government's commitment and implement a mechanism to reunite Afghan evacuees with their family members. The dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan means that prompt action is vital.
2. Set up a process to systematically collect information on the number of family members still eligible under both schemes and what their locations are. Until it is known what percentage of family members are in Afghanistan and what percentage are elsewhere, it won't be clear what is the best mechanism to get them to safety.
3. Increase staffing and resources to the ARAP and ACRS team at the Home Office, to clear the backlog of applications and establish clear means of travel for those eligible.

Too many Afghan evacuees have now spent two years separated from their loved ones, worrying every day for their safety under an oppressive regime. Children have lost interest in playing, have lost weight, and become quiet and withdrawn. This is not the warm welcome that we promised.

Ultimately, these are the brave men and women who served our country at a time of war. They served alongside our troops and diplomats, risking their lives in many cases to ensure our mission in Afghanistan could continue. The least we should do as a nation, in return for their service, is to protect their loved ones.

We do hope you give this matter your immediate attention and would be very happy to meet to discuss it with you.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Needham', written in a cursive style.

James Needham
CEO, Help for Heroes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enver Solomon', written in a cursive style.

Enver Solomon
CEO, The Refugee Council

CC: The Rt Hon Johnny Mercer MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs