

# Case Studies on the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)

*The following case studies are stories of Afghans who are unable to find safety to the UK, for themselves or their family members, despite in many cases their having worked to support the British mission in Afghanistan. These are just a few examples but illustrate the urgent need for the British Government to make changes to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) so that at risk individuals can be relocated to safety.*

## Recommendations 1 – ARAP

- Expand the ARAP scheme to ensure that all Afghans who worked alongside, in partnership with or closely supporting and assisting the UK Government or for a British-based organisation or institution founded by, funded by or otherwise connected to the UK Government, including those who made a vital contribution to the UK's national security objectives in Afghanistan, and who currently fall outside the narrow categories of the scheme, are eligible for relocation.
- Expedite all ARAP applications, provide applicants with clear timelines, and urgently relocate eligible Afghans and their family members to the UK, from both within Afghanistan and the region, committing to make decisions on new applicants and reviewed cases within 3 months.

### Case Study 1: UK-funded Afghan Government Projects in Helmand

The Afghanistan Development and Diplomacy Alliance reports one former provincial government employee, Abdul\* (not his real name), who has been in hiding with his wife and three young children since August 2021, changing location every month. Abdul worked for several years for Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development on a Department for International Development (DFID) funded and branded project under the Helmand Growth Programme. The UK government paid his salary. UK objectives in Afghanistan included governance and socio-economic development as part of a stabilisation strategy, which required working closely with Afghan government officials. UK military and security interventions provided the space for these civilian efforts to take place, with UK military and civilian officials working side by side in the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team.

One of the biggest issues Abdul faces is that no one is willing to rent houses to those in hiding from the Taliban. He also has been unable to gain employment and, as a result, him and his family are struggling for daily expenses. He fears that if they are not evacuated soon, he may have to surrender as he simply cannot afford to survive in hiding much longer. On a daily basis, he is hearing news of people who worked with foreign governments being arrested and killed. The Taliban are investigating and torturing the siblings of targeted people and going door-to-door looking for them. His home was raided late at night a few weeks ago and he narrowly escaped through the back door. A week ago, his brother was called by the Taliban who were asking his whereabouts and demanded that he bring him to the police station. His brother was warned that he himself would be detained if he did not help by providing information on his whereabouts. Every day he is writing emails and calling people he knows to try and find an evacuation route as he feels trapped, without a way out of Afghanistan and without a way to stay and earn a living. He was rejected from ARAP and has not heard back since requesting a review in September 2021.

### **Case Study 2: Contractors implementing UK-funded projects**

Another UK development consultancy contracted hundreds of Afghans on a range of UK-funded projects, working in prominent positions supporting the UK mission in Afghanistan. While some of them were evacuated during Operation Pitting, for many with similar roles, risk levels and vulnerabilities remain high in Afghanistan, and they have not heard about their ARAP application. Mohammed (\*not his real name) worked for four years on a DFID-funded tax reform project. There are many Taliban in the tribe he belongs to; they are aware that he refused to collaborate with them and consider him a traitor.

In August 2021, Mohammed received a targeted threat from a senior Taliban official and his brother-in-law was arrested. He decided to flee as he was not evacuated by the UK. He crossed the border into Pakistan without a visa, walking for hours barefoot on stones. He wrote to his former employer: "I hope you all will do something for me and my family to be accepted in UK otherwise we all will be killed by Taliban. So far, I have been pulling thorns out of my legs so that I can walk and reach Islamabad. I have not had such a dangerous and painful journey in my whole life."

He has no relatives in Pakistan and is sleeping in mosques and guest houses. He is also suffering from cancer and requires treatment. In September, the Taliban ransacked his house and asked for him. His wife, who had been there for the night, was shot in the head by a bullet. She was taken to hospital where she was in a coma and had internal bleeding, and later died of her injuries. Since Mohammed escaped to Pakistan, the Taliban have prevented his brother from working until he tells them where Mohammed is hiding.

### **Case Study 3: former DFID employee**

Fatima\* (\*not her real name) worked for 8 years as an employee of the Department for International Development (DFID) in Kabul, managing development and stabilisation programmes under the UK National Security Strategy for Afghanistan. She had grown up as a refugee in Pakistan and was one of very few women working for DFID in Afghanistan. Fatima applied for ARAP relocation in June 2021. During July, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) asked her several times to provide further information; she replied immediately with several documents to prove she had been a DFID employee, including performance assessments from her line manager. Despite this, her application was rejected as the MoD concluded incorrectly she had been a contractor.

In August 2021, Fatima resubmitted additional information to prove once more she had been a direct employee, including new reference letters. It is only in November 2021 that she received a response from the MoD indicating they didn't have a live application for her despite her two prior applications. Fatima therefore reapplied a third time. In February 2022, she was informed that her application had been successful; as of July 2022, she had received no further communications from the MoD, whereas her sibling, who had also been a UK government employee, had already relocated with their parents to the UK under ARAP.

Fatima was not considered a priority during Operation Pitting as she was living in Dubai with her husband who was employed and her two young children, 18 months and 3 years old. However, the United Arab Emirates do offer provide permanent residency to foreigners, and her husband's company has started to lay off staff due to current global economic situation. If he loses his visa, they will be expected to return to Afghanistan, where Fatima is at risk as a former UK employee. Fatima is desperate to join her extended family in the UK to start a new life. Former UK government employees have relocated from Canada and Denmark under ARAP.

## Recommendations 2 – ACRS

- Operationalise all parts of pathway three under the ACRS immediately. Remove the cap of 1,500 places available for at-risk British Council and GardaWorld contractors and Chevening alumni in the first year.
- Allow particularly vulnerable Afghans, such as women and girls and members of minority groups, to have access to a safe route to the UK now, rather than having to wait until the second year of the pathway opens in August 2023.

### Case study 4: GardaWorld contractors

On the 3rd of August 2021, the Sulha Alliance brought the case of the security guards of the British Embassy Kabul who were contracted through the company GardaWorld [to the media](#). They had been rejected for relocation under ARAP because of their subcontracted status, despite many having a long-standing employment for the British Embassy Kabul. When on the 20th of August 2021, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab finally made a U-turn and promised their resettlement, it was too late. GardaWorld tried to transport their staff to the airport but the attack on the airport forced them to turn back. The Government subsequently transferred the GardaWorld security guards from the ARAP scheme to the ACRS scheme. In June 2022, 10 months after the evacuation, the Government finally launched an expression of interest form for the GardaWorld staff for resettlement. However, there are only up to 1,500 places available in the first year under Pathway 3 which is open to not only GardaWorld staff but also British Council Contractors and Chevening Alumni. This will never be sufficient as there are already 183 GardaWorld staff members, totalling at least 1063 with children and spouses. There is very little transparency on what grounds applicants might be rejected other than the Government's desire to keep the number to the arbitrary figure of 1500.

### Case study 5: British Council teachers

Most British Council staff were evacuated to the UK during Operation Pitting in August 2021. However, more than 180 British Council English teachers across the country were not deemed eligible for ARAP on the grounds they were contractors; though some of the British Council contractors did get ARAP approval. They were arguably more at risk than British Council Kabul employees, as they were visibly teaching a foreign language, and promoting foreign values including equality, diversity and inclusion, in remote areas. They have been living in hiding ever since the Taliban took over Afghanistan.

It is only on 6 January 2022, 5 months after Operation Pitting, that the Government announced that British Council contractors would be prioritised under the first year of the newly opened Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). British Council teachers have had to wait another 5 months to be able to submit 'expressions of interest' (not applications) for the scheme. Out of 180, 85 teachers have been classified as being at "very high risk" and further 90 or so are deemed to be at "high risk".

Thanks to parliamentary pressure, the Government agreed that their expressions of interest would be processed as soon as they were received rather than wait until August once the process closed. To date, none of the teachers have been approved for ACRS...

...Even if they receive ACRS approval, the plight of British Council contractors is not over. The ACRS pathway under which they are eligible to come has a ceiling of 1,500 persons for three categories of Afghans who have close links to the UK (also including GardaWorld contractors and Chevening alumni). The 180 teachers and their families are estimated to be between 600 and 900 persons; some families at risk will therefore not be allowed to leave Afghanistan until this ceiling is removed.

In addition, while the Pakistani Government now allows Afghans eligible for ACRS and ARAP to enter the country, it is still dangerous for British Council teachers and their families to reach the border. Other Western governments have arranged repatriation flights from within Afghanistan, whereas Ministry of Defence flights depart from Pakistan.

#### **Case study 6: ACRS women at risk and UNHCR pathway**

Zaida\* (not her real name) is an Afghan female journalist living alone in Pakistan. She worked in Afghan TV news for over 10 years and was the head of the Afghan women journalists' union legal committee which investigated cases of harassment and judicial attacks in women journalists. As a result, she made a number of enemies who have attacked and killed women.

Zaida took part in the women's rights protests between September 2021 to January 2022. The Taliban infiltrated communications among women protestors and started using electric cattle prods against the women in January 2022. Because of her visibility as a journalist and her recent public activities, Zaida has received direct death threats over Twitter from the Taliban. Her brothers threatened her life, before and since the Taliban takeover, because she is a TV journalist and they wanted her to marry and stay home.

Zaida escaped to Pakistan in February 2022 and registered with a SHARP, a Pakistan NGO collaborating with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). To register as a refugee, she had her first interview with UNHCR in June 2022, after 5 months, and has to undergo a total for 9 interviews. To date, she does not yet have international protection. Her life remains in danger in Pakistan: while she came legally, she has now overstayed her visa; she is not allowed to work and has run out of funds. She is terrified her brothers will kill her and expresses suicidal thoughts to her contact from the Afghanistan Diplomacy and Development Alliance.

UNHCR are not able to expedite her processing and resettlement to a country that offers protection to victimized women. In response to queries, UNHCR has explained that it will not prioritise recent arrivals of women who are at risk from Taliban reprisals under ACRS. UNHCR will refer to ACRS Afghans from within the 2.5 million refugee population in the countries bordering Afghanistan. They will apply UNHCR criteria; they have not confirmed how many of those who have recently left Afghanistan will be potentially prioritised.

The UK has announced that UNHCR will only be given 2,000 places for ACRS year 1; there is no information about the number for future years. As UNHCR is using its established resettlement system, this pathway is clearly inadequate to offer protection to women who have supported UK objectives of promoting freedom of expression and women's rights in Afghanistan.

## Recommendation 3 – family reunion

- Establish a family reunion scheme for Afghans who are settled in the UK, on similar terms to the Ukraine Family Scheme, to allow Afghans in the UK (including dual British citizens, those settled in the UK, and those with refugee status and/or humanitarian protection) to bring extended family members over who will be able to live, work and study in the UK and access public funds.

### Case study 7: former judge in Pakistan

Minority Rights Group have reported the case of Abobakar Fazil, a 21 year old refugee from Afghanistan. He arrived in the UK at the end of October through ARAP scheme, on a flight organised by NGOs who were aware of his high-profile work to promote sexual health, family planning, HIV/Aids prevention and women's empowerment vis-a-vis gender and reproductive rights, which put him at risk after the Taliban takeover. He travelled alone leaving his father, mother and 4 younger sisters and 2 brothers in Afghanistan.

Abobakar's father, Faziullah Fazil, was a senior judge. He tried notorious terrorism and anti-corruption cases that other judges were not willing to take on. Abobakar spent his childhood aware of the very real risk of retaliation from those sentenced by his father, threats were made against not only Abobakar's father but also the whole family. Prior to the Taliban takeover, these threats became attacks with two bomb blasts occurring at their house and one attack on their car when Abobakar and his father were in it together with their driver. Alongside his judicial work, Faziullah was active in civil society, promoting civil rights and human rights, including the rights of women and minorities and he presented a weekly human rights show on a radio station from 2020 – 2021.

Faziullah Fazil has letters of support attesting that he is at risk from the Chief of the Rule of Law Unit at the UN mission in Afghanistan, from a civil rights NGO, from the radio station that he worked for. The day before the Taliban arrived in Kabul, Abobakar's father went into hiding. He stayed in hiding from August until April 2022 when he finally managed to leave Afghanistan and reach Pakistan where he is now.

Family reunion is not just about the mental health and wellbeing of those who have arrived in the UK. In the case of families such as this, family reunion has the potential to save the lives of those who are risk, either because of the activities of the individual now in the UK or, as in this case, because of a family tradition of respect for democracy and human rights which has meant that several members of one family have been active in support of similar causes.

### Case study 8: former interpreter in the UK.

The Sulha Alliance has reported that the family of Hamidi (\*not his real name), a former interpreter resettled to the UK, have received regular threats from Taliban members communicated through the local mosque, stating: 'Your son worked for infidels, he has become an infidel himself and is now persuading other Afghans to change their religion'. His father has become a target because of his son's former employment. The family has had to stay in other provinces for several weeks at a time to evade the Taliban. This means that his mother, who has been a teacher for 17 years, can no longer work at the school, because she must stay away from the area and her travel would compromise the safety of the rest of the family...

...The situation escalated last summer when on the 16th of August the family had to flee their home in the middle of the night because the Taliban was searching for them. One of the neighbours spotted them and helped the family to escape. They spent 2 days and nights on the streets of Kabul, and eventually left to try to cross the border to Iran. They did not manage to cross and are now changing location every few weeks as they cannot return to their village as the imam is supporting the Taliban. The former interpreter applied for Leave Outside The Rules (LOTR) for his family members who are at risk on the basis of the association with him, but has not heard anything about his application since December 2021.

#### Case study 9: Hazara family separated during evacuation

The Hazara Committee in the UK have reported one Shia Hazara family who were divided during the Taliban takeover. The parents and oldest (adult) daughter and her husband were successfully evacuated under the ARAP scheme, however they do not have any immediate right of family reunion. Six children/younger siblings, all of whom are under the age of 18, were left behind in Afghanistan, where they are still living without any adult male guardian. The individual received a call from a 'consultant/ advisor' telling her to make her way to the airport with her parents and her husband. Despite her effort in making the caller understand that she has underage siblings, the caller specifically told her not to bring her siblings with her. Life for any Hazara Shia is difficult in Afghanistan and managing the hardship and risks of this situation as a minor is extremely challenging. The family have been advised by lawyers in the UK that they don't have any immediate or straightforward option to bring their children/younger siblings over to the UK, due to the extremely limited rights afforded to people in their situation to reunite with their family members. Establishing a family reunion scheme for Afghans who are settled in the UK would allow families such as this one to be reunited, but also has the potential to protect the lives of minority groups, who are at obvious risk under the Taliban.

*These cases were provided by The Afghanistan Development and Diplomacy Alliance, the Sulha Alliance, Minority Rights Group International and the Hazara Committee.*



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