

Afghan Resettlement Briefing



**LONDON
COUNCILS**

Summary

This briefing explains how the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) works, what the expectation is of local authorities, and updates on progress with the scheme in the UK and London. It also outlines the developing picture so far on the new Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme.

With the Taliban now in control of Afghanistan, plans have been made to accelerate arrivals through ARAP, and the Government have also committed to supporting 20,000 Afghan refugees through the new Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme, also outlined in this briefing.

In the commentary section, the main challenges facing London boroughs with regards to both Afghan schemes are addressed, primarily focused on housing pressures. Following this, the briefing highlights resource and funding arrangements that London Councils and partners consider necessary to assist London boroughs in supporting Afghan arrivals.

Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)

The Government has been running a scheme to relocate Afghan former LES (locally employed staff) to the UK since 2013, but due to the changing situation in Afghanistan and consequent risk to LES, the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) was launched in April 2021.

ARAP is open to LES who have worked for the British Embassy and alongside British forces over the past 20 years, and their families.

Under this new relocation policy, Afghan LES and their families may be eligible to apply for five years 'Leave to Enter the UK' with a pathway to resettlement thereafter.

Local Authority Involvement

People who are relocated under the scheme are supported for a four-month period by a local authority who will meet the family/individual at the arrival airport and take responsibility for them from arrival. The four-month integration package includes:

- Reception arrangements upon arrival
- Accommodation
- Advice and assistance covering employment, benefits, housing, health, education and utility supply
- Registration with GPs and local Job Centre Plus including receipt of a National Insurance Number
- Assistance in securing school places for school aged children
- Cash support.

LES are not eligible for benefits until they can satisfy the Habitual Residency Test which can take up to three months, so in the meantime, the local authority provides financial support.

On 3 June, the Home Office, Ministry of Defence and MHCLG wrote jointly to all local authority Chief Executives and Leaders requesting their support to welcome Afghan LES through ARAP. The letter explained that the relocation scheme has been accelerated in response to the situation in Afghanistan, triggered by the withdrawal of international military support and advancing Taliban forces. With the letter came a Fact Sheet, including details of the funding support package available to councils who come forward with offers of support.

On the 30 July, the Government wrote to all local authority Chief Executives and Leaders again to ask for more local authorities to sign up and to inform them that integration funding has now been extended to 12 months, meaning an increase to £10,500 per person welcomed by a local authority. Furthermore, the letter also stated

New Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme

that the Government would also provide additional funding (such as for rent, travel, or other incurred costs) to cover any potential short-term period before access to benefits and services becomes available to the new arrivals.

Signing up: It is possible for boroughs to sign up to ARAP before they have housing accommodation available for Afghan arrivals. To sign up to ARAP, and to offer more accommodation for Afghan families and individuals, please contact Jack.Evans11@homeoffice.gov.uk, Eamonn.Hayes@homeoffice.gov.uk and Ayham.Alsuleman@london.gov.uk. Please feel free to get in touch with Ayham.Alsuleman@london.gov.uk, the GLA's Refugee Resettlement Coordinator, if you have any queries.

Arrivals and Property Offers

As of 19 August, roughly 2,000 individuals (429 families) have arrived in the UK through ARAP, and another 2,000 are expected to arrive by 24 August. Nationally 313 property offers have been made by local authorities, and the Home Office expect that they will need another 350 offers to house the remaining families that have arrived or have yet to arrive through ARAP.

As of 19 August, five London Boroughs have officially signed up to the relocation scheme, with several more sign-ups are expected over the next few days.

Ealing Case study - ARAP

Through ARAP, Ealing has already received a family with four children, a couple, and most recently a family with six children. Ealing, like other local authorities, is pleased to be welcoming Afghan families looking to establish their new homes and enrich the local community.

Ealing was able to source a property for the first Afghan family because a family home became available when a family from Syria didn't arrive through the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). The children have already secured school places, and the family have settled in well so far and are all registered to GPs.

The couple who arrived, an English teacher and a nurse, are keen to work (as with many other arrivals), and Ealing are helping them get accredited to work in London as soon as possible.

Many of the arrivals through ARAP speak English very well, with many having worked as translators for the British forces, which has helped link families up to key services and support networks. Although, the resettlement team at Ealing did highlight that the Afghan ESOL provision could be improved to support family members who do not speak English well or at all. They also mentioned that more welfare provision could be offered, for example to ensure families have access to wifi and can contact friends and family back in Afghanistan.

On 17 August, the Prime Minister announced the Government's commitment to resettle up to 20,000 Afghans through the introduction of a new Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme, to provide sanctuary to those fleeing the country.

The UK government's ambition is for the new Afghanistan citizens' resettlement scheme to resettle 5,000 Afghan nationals who are at risk due to the current crisis, in its first year. Priority will be given to women and girls, and religious and other minorities, who are most at risk of human rights abuses and dehumanising treatment by the Taliban.

This new route is separate from, and in addition to, ARAP, and is modelled on the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, which resettled 20,000 Syrian refugees over a seven-year period from 2014 to 2021.

The details of the scheme still need to be clarified and there are some key questions:

- Will the scheme have welfare and integration funding similar to the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)?
- Will arrivals be granted permanent leave to remain, and be given the right to work and claim benefits such as with ARAP?
- Will the scheme be voluntary in nature?
- How far in advance will councils know the details of family size, health and wider support needs?
- What is the rough timeline for the arrival of the first 5000 Afghan refugees, and then the remaining 15,000?

Commentary

One of the main barriers to London boroughs signing-up to ARAP and being able to provide support for refugees is the lack of affordable housing, and the limited availability of family-sized housing.

London Councils is working with partners to find possible solutions, such as matching up offers from providers with boroughs who are keen to support families but do not have appropriate housing supply; arrangements with Capital Letters (the collaborative accommodation procurement company for London boroughs) and the G15 group are being discussed.

London Councils is also having conversations with the Government around how we can overcome London's extremely high housing costs.

As there are currently not enough housing offers from local authorities for Afghan families arriving through ARAP, some Afghan families are being placed in hotels. The Home Office are trying to avoid using hotels in London for Afghan arrivals, however, hotels in London may still be used for future refugee arrivals. London boroughs are under huge pressure due to the significant number of asylum seekers already placed in hotels, separate to the Afghan resettlement schemes.

It is important to recognise that this current situation, alongside other pressures such as supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and conducting age assessments, may also impact London borough's ability to house and support Afghan families.

Current Lobbying

London Councils has been working with member boroughs and the GLA to identify the Government funding and assistance necessary through ARAP and the new Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme to support the health, education, housing and social integration of Afghan arrivals. This includes requesting:

- Funding of £2,600 available per head for healthcare costs across the two schemes, matching what is provided through the UKRS; arrivals may be suffering from mental health or have other health needs arising from their experiences that that require bespoke services and a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive approach.
- Exceptional case funding to meet additional costs incurred to support children with education across the two schemes, matching what is provided through the UKRS.
- For the Government to introduce a fund to meet the shortfall in rent that arises due to the benefit cap and for this fund to apply for five years for all Afghan arrivals.
- For integration funding for Afghan households to last for a least a period of five years across the two schemes, matching the arrangements under the VPRS and UKRS.

- For refugees arriving through the new Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme to be provided with permanent leave to remain with the right to work.
- For arrivals to have full access to the Adult Education Budget from day one, including additional funding of at least £850 per head for local authorities to spend on English language provision, as provided under the UKRS.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has also requested that the new Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme works carefully with local areas to take account of existing pressures on communities and local services and plan arrangements which support new arrivals in the best way possible. Some of these pressures listed include asylum dispersal, support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the use of hotels by government for compulsory quarantine.

The LGA has also argued for the Resettlement scheme to be voluntary for councils to participate in, and fully funded to ensure it does not impact adversely on areas which are already under very great strain.

Finally, London Councils also recognises that it will be important to consult boroughs throughout the implementation of the two schemes about any welfare or integration pressures they are facing once a family has arrived.

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