



The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper, MP, Home Secretary, and,  
The Rt Hon Seema Malhotra, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Home Office)  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

cc: The Rt Hon John Healey MP, Secretary of State for Defence

Sent electronically

4 August 2025

Dear Home Secretary and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Immigration and Citizenship,

**Joint Letter Regarding the Afghan Data Breach**

We, the 54 undersigned organisations, write to express our deep concern at the UK government's continued abandonment of Afghan nationals, including those who served alongside British forces, and the mounting failures of your departments to provide protection to the families of those affected by the recently revealed data breach of 2022.

It is now a matter of public record that an officer of the Ministry of Defence released the personal data of, more than 18,000 Afghans and their family members, with a risk to 100,000 people's lives - a catastrophic breach that exposed interpreters, assistants, drivers, mechanics, journalists, Human Rights advocates, and many others who served UK forces to a direct risk of Taliban reprisals. Since news of the breach broke, multiple reports indicate that at least ten Afghans have already been killed, with more feared dead.

Earlier this month, the Home Office also moved without notice to shut down the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). Now, the Afghan Response Route (ARR), created precisely to mitigate the consequences of the data leak, has been closed. This leaves almost all Afghans with no safe routes to the UK.

While 34,208 people were resettled under ARAP and ACRS, with the exception of the 1,339 people resettled under ACRS pathway 2, these individuals were apparently not eligible to apply for family reunion (i.e. under Appendix Family Reunion (Protection) within the Immigration Rules). That is less than 4%. Most people were resettled during the chaos of the international withdrawal and then made applications without guidance or assistance. They had just one chance to list their relatives for resettlement. The ACRS Pathway 1 Stage 2 process was opened for referrals from 30 July to 30 October 2024 but operates with such limited scope that it barely makes a dent in the number of families separated. This has left thousands of families separated and many still unable to reunite.

It is a matter of urgency that the UK recognise the situation that these Afghans are in and ensure and confirm that they are able to apply under the Family Reunion provisions of the Immigration Rules. These routes exist to enable those in exile from their home country to be reunited with their family

members in the UK; it recognises that since they cannot safely return to their country of origin it is only right that family life should be continued in the UK.

However, eligibility for sponsoring family members is limited to those granted 'protection status' and that is narrowly defined as being Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection, and apparently excluding 96% of the Afghans resettled in the UK: 21,316 people were resettled under ARAP, 9,882 people under ACRS Pathway 1 and 1,641 people under ACRS Pathway 3.

None of them are stated as being eligible for family reunion because they were not technically granted 'protection status', despite their resettlement being a direct consequence of the UK government recognising their need for international protection.

The family reunion application process is free, and Home Office decision-makers are instructed to adopt a more flexible approach to evidence in recognition of the difficulties many families at risk of persecution face in obtaining official documents. The alternative family visa routes available to Afghans with status under ARAP and ACRS pathways 1 or 3 involve extremely costly application fees and require copious, specific documentation. Decision-makers, who are less accustomed to the situations of refugees or those currently at risk in places like Afghanistan, frequently refuse such applications on technicalities, disregarding the urgency of the families' situation and the ongoing risk/s to family members' lives in Afghanistan. This results in applications being appealed to the First-Tier Tribunal, which is subject to a heavy backlog, thus unnecessarily burdening the UK's Tribunal system with clearly meritorious cases. This subjects families to prolonged risk and suffering.

Excluding individuals with ARAP and ACRS Pathways 1 or 3 status from the entitlements of refugee protection is arbitrary and unfair. The previous government relocated these individuals from Afghanistan due to the risk they faced there; the vast majority, if not all, would likely have qualified for refugee status in their own rights. It is both unjust and dangerous to deny this cohort of individuals the ability to access a more streamlined process to reunite with their families who remain at risk in Afghanistan or neighbouring countries simply because they have not had to go through the formal process of claiming asylum. Were they to now claim asylum and seek formal recognition of their refugee status, processing these unnecessary additional claims would be a massive waste of Home Office resources.

Afghanistan remains under the control of a brutal and oppressive regime. The UK government has a moral responsibility to the Afghan people who continue to suffer including now as a result of the data leak and have no choice but to seek safety elsewhere. The 2022 data breach directly exposed Afghans still in the country to a risk of reprisals they were not even aware of, and the High Court, in lifting the Super Injunction, recognised that its imposition may have increased the risks these people face. Consequently, whilst the previous government may well have had the best of intentions in seeking the injunction, poor decision-making could yet again have exposed Afghans to serious harm, with many of these people having clear UK family ties.

It is essential that those who were resettled under ARAP and ACRS are able to live in safety and are given a fair opportunity to reunite with their families. Given the severity of the 2022 data breach, which directly exposed tens of thousands to danger, including family members of people resettled under the ARAP and ACRS schemes, it remains imperative that individuals resettled through these schemes can sponsor family members through the family reunion provisions, rather than being limited to more restrictive and complex entry clearance routes.

**In view of the UK government's full responsibility for the 2022 data breach and its obligations towards Afghans who worked alongside the British government, we, the undersigned, request that**

**you confirm that all individuals relocated under ARAP and ACRS pathways 1 and 3 have the right to sponsor family members through existing family reunion provisions.**

This call is not just about correcting a policy failure and its dire consequences. It is about recognising the UK's ongoing moral and legal obligations to those it placed at serious risk. Expanding family reunion provisions for individuals resettled under ARAP and ACRS will not undo the harm caused by the data breach or the closure of existing safe routes, but it is a necessary and practical step that will make a huge difference to affected individuals.

We urge you to act immediately.

Sincerely,

James Tullett, CEO, Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London (RAMFEL)

Alison Pickup, Executive Director, Asylum Aid

Isaac Shaffer, Legal Director, Refugee Legal Support

Brian Mitchell, Senior Immigration Adviser, Notre Dame Refugee Centre

Oliver Him, Solicitor, BHT Sussex

Leyla Williams, Deputy Director, West London Welcome

Nick Harborne, CEO, Refugee Support Group

Kiven Emmanuel, Senior Drop-in and Immigration Casework Coordinator, Refugee Support Devon

Mark Shepherd, Director, Migrant Legal Project

Jenni Regan, CEO, IMIX

William Gomes, Director, The William Gomes Podcast

Anna Jones, CEO, RefuAid

Jamie Bell, Solicitor, Duncan Lewis

Denise McDowell, CEO, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

Anna Pincus, Director, Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

Minnie Rahman, CEO, Praxis

WH Solicitors

Ramzan Sharif, Director/Solicitor, Fountain Solicitor

James Adamson, Legal Adviser and Centre Manager, Penrith and Eden Refugee Network

Huge Rodrigues, Housing Advisor, Positively UK

Beya Rivers, Public Law Supervisor, Hackney Community Law Centre

Nazee Akbari, CEO, New Citizens' Gateway

Nazek Ramadan, Executive Director, Migrant Voice

Nicola David, Founder, One Life To Live

Tim Naor Hilton, Founder, Refugee Action

Ros Gowers, Coordinator/Trustee, Evesham Vale Welcomes Refugees

Brian Dikoff, Legal Officer, Migrants Organise

Catharine Walston, Trustee, Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign

Salma Majeed, Trustee, Overseas Afghans Foundation

Zoe Bantleman, Legal Director, Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA)

Tom Nunn, Legal Director, South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice

Maddie Harris, Director, Human for Rights Network

Maya Pritchard, Head of Youth Services, South London Refugee Association

Gisela Reynolds, Executive Director, Global Link (Lancaster)

Shantele Sutherland, Director, Cheshire, Halton & Warrington Race & Equality Centre

Helen Baron, Solicitor, Deighton Pierce Glynn

Karen Bowers, CEO, Bristol Law Centre

Elaire Ortiz, Founder-director, Hummingbird Project

Lucy Parker, Advice Worker, South Day Centre for Asylum Seekers

Roger Matthews, Chair, Welcome Here Stratford-upon-Avon

Eiri Ohtani, Director, Right to Remain

Mariko Hayashi, Executive Director, Southeast and East Asian Centre CIC (SEEAC)

Juliet Vines, Coordinator, Pershore Welcomes Refugees

Liz Griffith, Head of Migration Justice, Law Centre NI

Marta Bratek, Supervising Solicitor, Kalayaan

Daniel Sohege, Director, Stand For All

Naomi Popli, Executive Director, Good Chance Theatre

Rose Bernstein, Interim Executive Director, JCWI

Steven Smith, CEO, Care4Calais

Wieke Vink, Head of Programmes, Routes Collective

Carenza Arnold, Head of Campaigns, Women for Refugee Women

Kathryn Ashworth, CEO, Solace Surviving Exile and Persecution

Maya Esslemont, Director, After Exploitation

Louise Calvey, Director, Asylum Matters