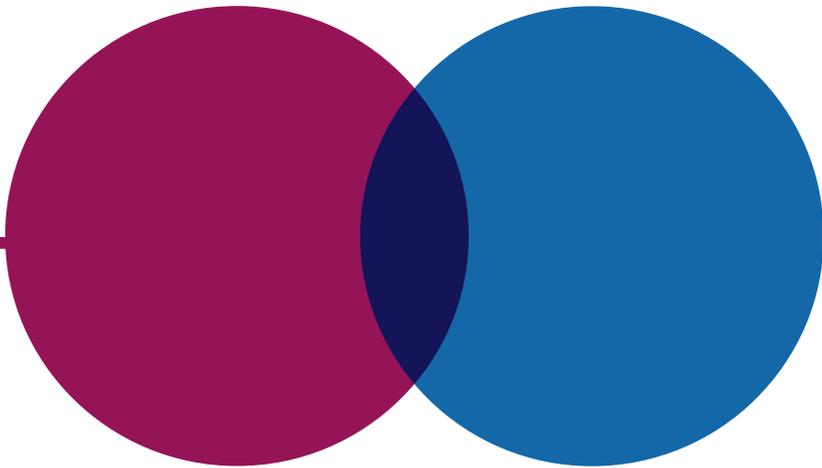




National Audit Office



REPORT

Investigation into the Afghan resettlement schemes

Cross-government

SESSION 2024–2026
18 MARCH 2026
HC 1646

Key facts

37,950

the number of people resettled in the UK through the Afghan schemes since 2021, as at December 2025

**46,582
to 47,691**

the government's estimate of the total number of people who could ultimately be resettled in the UK through the schemes, as at February 2026

£5.7bn

the estimated total cost of Afghan resettlement activity between 2021-22 and 2032-33

£3.1 billion

the amount that the government had spent on the Afghan resettlement schemes since 2021-22, as at December 2025

54

percentage of people resettled in the UK through the Afghan schemes since 2021, as at December 2025, who were under 18 when they arrived

80

percentage of those resettled in the UK living in settled accommodation, as at December 2025

**December
2029**

date by which the government intends that all eligible persons (including principal applicants and their family members) on the Afghan resettlement schemes will have moved to the UK and moved out of transitional accommodation

Summary

1 Between October 2001 and late August 2021, the UK had a military presence in Afghanistan. During this 20-year period, the UK government employed local Afghan citizens. This work sometimes came with significant risk to those Afghan citizens and their families, who feared reprisals from the Taliban. From 2010, the UK offered the possibility of resettlement to certain groups of Afghan citizens in specific circumstances.

2 During 2021, the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated and the government adapted its resettlement approach to reflect the increased risk to people, introducing two new resettlement schemes. The new schemes, summarised in **Figure 1** overleaf, were the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). Under both schemes eligible people were also entitled to bring their families, where they were deemed eligible and suitable for relocation.

3 In autumn 2023, after discovering a significant data breach which had occurred in February 2022, the government began work to establish a further Afghan resettlement scheme, the Afghanistan Response Route (ARR). This was designed for people whose details were in the compromised dataset and who were not eligible for the ARAP scheme but were at high risk of reprisals by the Taliban as a result of the data breach. The ARR, which was launched in April 2024, was covered by a super-injunction granted by the High Court which prevented disclosure of the data breach and the existence of the ARR, until the super-injunction was lifted on 15 July 2025. The High Court accepted the Ministry of Defence's (MoD's) assessment that, if the existence of the data loss became widely known, the Taliban would be highly likely to obtain the data, which would put the safety and lives of many individuals and their families at risk. Although the ARR was a new resettlement route, the process for resettling people once eligibility had been assessed, and the resettlement offer, were the same as the ARAP scheme.

4 On 1 July 2025, the government closed the ARAP and ACRS schemes to new applications and referrals. On 4 July, the government decided to also close the ARR. It announced this on 15 July following the lifting of the super-injunction. There are still large numbers of people going through the resettlement process and the government anticipates that resettlement and integration activity will continue until 2032-33.

Figure 1

Overview of Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and Afghanistan Response Route (ARR)

The government had relocated 37,950 people to the UK through these schemes by 31 December 2025, and expects to relocate up to 9,741 more

Scheme	Resettlement route available to	People relocated by 31 December 2025	Estimated remaining number of people to be relocated	Total
ARAP	Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles.	19,795	6,584–7,221	26,379–27,016
ACRS	Those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy and human rights, and vulnerable people at risk.	13,884	884	14,768
ARR	Those whose personal information was included in the February 2022 data breach, who were at the highest risk as a result of the breach and not eligible for other schemes.	4,241	685	4,926
'Non-progressive' cases	This mainly comprises people who are eligible but have not responded to the government's attempts to contact them.	0	509–981	509–981
Total		37,950¹	8,632–9,741¹	46,582–47,691

Notes

- 1 The figures do not sum because there are 30 people in the Home Office immigration statistics whose resettlement route was not recorded.
- 2 The figures for people relocated by 31 December 2025 are taken from published Home Office statistics. The figures for the estimated remaining numbers of people to be relocated are calculated based on Ministry of Defence (MoD) management information, dated 2 February 2026. Work is ongoing to cleanse this data so the numbers should be considered estimates and may be subject to change. Final figures will only be available when relocations are complete.
- 3 In September 2025, we reported that the MoD had estimated the total number of people eligible for the ARR as 7,355. Since then, following the ongoing 'Triples' review of previously rejected applications from people in the Afghanistan special forces, and other work to cleanse the data, the MoD has revised this figure to 4,926. The MoD told us that this reduction is mainly because people originally found eligible for ARR have now been found eligible for ARAP, and it expects the numbers will continue to change until its ARAP casework is complete.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office immigration statistics and Ministry of Defence management information

5 Responsibilities for different elements of the resettlement schemes are spread across several different departments and have changed over time. The main departments are the MoD, the Home Office, the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). Other bodies involved include local authorities, international organisations and community sponsor groups.

Our report

6 Following the lifting of the super-injunction, we committed to publishing two reports relating to the Afghan resettlement schemes. Our first report in September 2025 specifically focused on the MoD and the ARR. This second report looks across government at all the Afghan resettlement schemes that have operated since 2021. It provides transparency on the resettlement of eligible people to date, at a point where the schemes have been closed to new entrants but many people have yet to complete the resettlement process. It does not seek to examine and report on the overall value for money of the schemes.

7 This report is set out as follows:

- Part One provides an overview of the background to the schemes, the process for resettling people in the UK, and the governance and programme management arrangements.
- Part Two reports on the progress made by government departments in resettling people to date and outlines the work required to bring the resettlement schemes to completion.
- Part Three sets out funding for the schemes, the costs incurred to date, and expected future costs.

8 The government also operates other resettlement routes, including the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) and the Homes for Ukraine scheme, which are separate from the Afghan schemes and not included in this report.

Key findings

The schemes' set-up and evolution

9 **The context and scale of the schemes changed following the fall of Kabul in 2021.** From 2010, the UK offered the possibility of resettlement to certain groups of Afghan citizens. In 2021, reflecting concerns about the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and the potential risk to life, the government broadened its approach, establishing two new schemes that offered the possibility of resettlement to a wider range of people. At the point the first scheme was established the government anticipated that around 4,000 people would be eligible for resettlement. Following the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan, the number of people applying and being considered eligible has been considerably greater than envisaged. Numbers eligible for resettlement increased further because of the 2022 data breach and the government's decision to establish the ARR (paragraphs 1.1 to 1.3 and 2.2, and Figure 2).

10 Multiple departments had to work together at pace in challenging circumstances when establishing the schemes, with the result that their design and delivery became complex and inefficient. The need to respond quickly to an operationally complex and high-pressure situation, and the decision to run two separate schemes across four departments without clear cross-government coordination, meant that the schemes were delivered in a way which was sub-optimal for efficiency and the outcomes for people. Stakeholders told us that this was understandable in the initial stages but that the “chaotic” arrangements went on for much longer than was necessary. Government officials said this was in part because the super-injunction restricted communication about the schemes. As at September 2025, officials were revising the strategic objectives for the programme, developing a programme plan and finalising governance arrangements. The departments involved have collected data on various stages and aspects of the resettlement process but there has not been a single, shared data system that provides an overview of performance and supports risk management and decision-making (paragraphs 1.29 to 1.30 and 2.29 to 2.30).

11 In December 2024, more than three years after the Taliban takeover, the government brought together ARR, ARAP and ACRS into a single programme, to improve delivery of the schemes and outcomes for resettled Afghan citizens. In May 2024, the government appointed a senior responsible owner (SRO) with cross-government responsibility for the schemes. The government announced the combined Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) in December 2024 and the accommodation element of the programme began operating in March 2025. Significant changes introduced under the ARP included establishing a single process for individuals once they arrive in the UK, rather than separate routes for the MoD-led ARAP and ARR, and the Home Office-led ACRS; introducing a limit of nine months in transitional accommodation; and improving the funding provided to local authorities to improve integration outcomes (paragraphs 1.31 to 1.32 and 1.35).

Progress to date

12 Between April 2021 and December 2025, 37,950 people arrived in the UK under the resettlement schemes, of which 54% were under 18 when they arrived. Of these 19,795 arrived through ARAP, 13,884 through ACRS, and 4,241 under the ARR. The largest annual number of arrivals was in 2021, when the Operation Pitting evacuation took place and officials recorded the arrival of 16,429 Afghan citizens in the UK through ARAP and ACRS. As at February 2026, the government estimated that it would need to resettle a further 8,632 to 9,741 Afghan citizens, taking the total number who could be resettled to an estimated 46,582 to 47,691 (paragraphs 2.3 and 2.9 and Figure 1).

13 By December 2025, 30,392 people were living in settled accommodation through the schemes. The government provides accommodation for Afghans arriving through the schemes. They are first housed in transitional accommodation and then move into settled accommodation. As at December 2025, of the 37,950 people who had arrived under the schemes, 4,004 (11%) were living in transitional accommodation, 26,225 (69%) in settled accommodation sourced by government and local authorities, 4,167 (11%) had secured their own housing in the private rental sector, and the accommodation type for 3,554 people (9%) was unknown. People who have arrived under the schemes are being accommodated in 347 out of 361 local authority areas and in every region of the UK, with the highest concentration being in the south-east of England (paragraphs 1.19, 2.10 to 2.12 and Figures 8 and 9).

14 As at November 2025, 29,655 people were waiting to hear the results of their eligibility assessment. Eligibility assessments are undertaken by different departments depending on the scheme. By the end of November 2025, the MoD had received 215,029 applications for those resettlement schemes which are application-based, of which it estimated 67,963 were duplicates, reapplications or other applications. By November 2025, there were 25,538 applications awaiting a decision. The MoD is aiming to complete its eligibility decisions by no later than March 2027. The FCDO has completed the eligibility assessments for the ACRS cohorts for which it is responsible, but by November 2025 the Home Office had 4,117 eligibility assessments to complete (paragraphs 2.6 to 2.8 and Figures 4 and 7).

15 The government will need to overcome challenges to deliver on its planned timetable for completing the ARP and has not yet put in place all the appropriate programme arrangements. The government aims to have brought all eligible Afghan citizens to the UK by March 2029, and to have moved those citizens out of transitional accommodation by December 2029. As at September 2025, the delivery confidence for the programme was Amber / Red meaning delivery confidence was in doubt with urgent intervention required. Significant risks included the following: insufficient resource for case handling; the deportation of potentially eligible Afghan citizens from Pakistan to Afghanistan; and a lack of good data on the pipeline of people requiring resettlement and their needs, together with a lack of appropriate and affordable property, resulting in greater than anticipated levels of homelessness. The MoD told us that, at the time of this report, additional caseworker support had been secured. The government still needs to set key performance indicators for the programme, develop a single source of management information, and finalise its programme plan (paragraphs 2.27 to 2.30).

The costs of the schemes

16 The government anticipates spending a total of £5.7 billion on the schemes between 2021-22 and 2032-33. Of this, the most significant costs are expected to be: the provision of transitional accommodation (£1.6 billion); integration costs (£1.3 billion); support before arriving in the UK (£1.2 billion); and settled accommodation (£0.8 billion). Between April 2021 and December 2025, the government spent £3.1 billion on the schemes. Therefore, although the schemes have closed to new applicants, a significant proportion of the costs have not yet been incurred. The 2025 Spending Review process confirmed funding from 1 April 2025 of £2.54 billion RDEL (Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit, which is day-to-day resource and administration spending) to 31 March 2029, and £0.9 billion CDEL (Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit, or capital spending) to 31 March 2030 (paragraphs 3.3, 3.11 and Figures 12 and 13).

Concluding remarks

17 Between 2021 and 2025 the government resettled around 38,000 Afghan citizens in the UK, including many people who worked with British forces during the UK's military presence in Afghanistan. The government closed its Afghan schemes in 2025 but still expects to resettle around 9,000 more people who were already in the resettlement system, by 2029.

18 Departments worked together to respond to a complex and high-pressure situation, taking on responsibilities for different groups of people and for the various stages of the resettlement process. However, the response lacked overall clear governance, shared information and performance measurement, producing inefficiency which is likely to have increased costs and worsened outcomes for resettled people, compared with taking a more coordinated and planned approach earlier.

19 In 2024, the government recognised the need for a more effective delivery model and developed the ARP to combine the previously separate schemes. While progress has been made, important elements of effective programme management for the ARP are not yet in place. These will be vital to how government manages remaining risks, including processing outstanding cases, managing the flow of individuals into the UK and into settled accommodation, and minimising the risk of people becoming homeless.

Recommendations

20 In completing the delivery of the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP), government should focus on:

- a** urgently finishing establishing the key elements of effective programme management, including a programme plan, key performance indicators and a single source of cross-departmental management information;
- b** undertaking scenario analysis to understand the potential barriers to completing the relocation of all eligible people to the UK and moving them out of transitional accommodation by December 2029, and how these can be overcome;
- c** monitoring the effect of the 2025 policy changes under the ARP, particularly the introduction of a nine-month limit for transitional accommodation;
- d** using the results of current pilot approaches, in which local authorities and community organisations play a more prominent role from earlier in the resettlement process, to identify innovative approaches and spread good practice; and
- e** identifying measures of successful integration for Afghan resettled people and using these to assess outcomes.

21 The government should consider how it can feed the lessons from its experience on the Afghan schemes into the design and operation of future resettlement schemes, and how it can retain the expertise it has built up.