

Rural Refugee Network Statement on the closure of Afghan resettlement schemes.

The UK government has abruptly closed both official schemes that provided safe and legal routes for Afghans to resettle to the UK. Both were created following the seizure of Kabul by the Taliban in August 2021; they have enabled [34,000 Afghans](#) to find safety in the UK since their creation.

These schemes include:

- The **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)**, which supported Afghans who worked for or with the UK forces or government in Afghanistan, as well as their immediate families. This scheme has resettled [21,316](#) individuals to the UK.
- The **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)**, a referral-based scheme for a wider group of vulnerable Afghans including women, ethnic and religious minority groups, LGBT+ individuals, those who stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and the rule of law, and others who supported UK efforts in the country. The ACRS has resettled [12,800](#) individuals to the UK, 64% their initial stated target of 20,000.

As of Tuesday 1 July 2025, new applications are no longer accepted for either scheme. This decision was enacted quietly as part of a 138 page update to the UK's immigration rules with, it seems, no prior public warning or opportunity for consultation. The government's [Explanatory Memorandum](#) on these changes justifies the closure of ARAP by stating that it has "fulfilled its original purpose": "the majority of those who would be eligible have now applied" and 95% of applications are ineligible or duplicates. This document does not provide a justification for the closure of the ACRS.

This document also stated that that the 21 days of notice conventionally provided to Parliament before changes to Immigration Rules were not observed in order to prevent a spike in applications, "further increas[ing] the backlog of ARAP applications and, in turn, risk[ing] increasing the time it will take to process existing applications."

The closure of both ARAP and ACRS have been criticised by the International Rescue Committee UK (IRC UK) and other leading refugee organisations as a "[concerning abandonment](#)" that exposes vulnerable Afghans to ongoing danger and leaves them "no clear pathway to safety".

Though the government has confirmed that [referrals or eligibility decisions already made under ACRS are protected](#) and all ARAP applications received before 1st July, [numbering 20,000, will be processed](#), the security situation in Afghanistan remains dangerous, particularly for those associated with Western forces. Every person waiting for a decision remains at risk. Many others continue to face persecution or are in hiding, meaning that many deserving applicants may not have had the opportunity to register. Closing these schemes eliminates safe, legal pathways for those still at risk.

The government's decision is directly tied to our charitable purpose of providing essential support to those arriving in the UK as refugees and asylum seekers. Many of our beneficiaries are from Afghanistan; their lives will be directly impacted by this decision. Many have family members who are now trapped in Afghanistan in limbo and had no notice about this sudden destabilisation of their routes to safety.

Without safe routes to resettlement and asylum, more individuals in vulnerable and desperate situations will undertake dangerous journeys in the hopes of finding safety. [Afghans are already the most-represented nationality arriving to the UK in small boats](#), showing the scale of need for schemes such as ARAP and ACRS. In this context, [Right to Remain comments](#):

“This move makes little sense, given the Government's commitment to curbing 'irregular' migration, whilst removing the very safe routes that could have prevented it”.

IRC UK have called on the UK Government to expand the [UK Resettlement Scheme \(UKRS\)](#). This offers a safe and legal route for refugees assessed for resettlement by the UNHCR, in accordance with the UK's commitment to global resettlement initiatives under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

RRN will be making these points to Members of Parliament who cover the area in which we work, and otherwise doing what we can to challenge this step. If, having read this, you feel motivated to take action, RRN would be grateful if you could also contact your local Member of Parliament.

Sources and further reading

- <https://www.rescue.org/uk/press-release/closure-afghan-resettlement-schemes-representing-concerning-abandonment-uks-commitments>
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy-information-and-guidance>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-of-changes-to-the-immigration-rules-hc-997-1-july-2025/explanatory-memorandum-to-the-statement-of-changes-to-the-immigration-rules-hc-997-1-july-2025-accessible>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/how-many-people-come-to-the-uk-irregularly>
- <https://righttoremain.org.uk/closure-of-safe-routes-for-afghans-changes-to-the-immigration-rules/>