

Research Briefing
Number 9296
By Philip Loft
16 December 2021

Afghanistan: Refugees and displaced people in 2021

In August 2021, the Taliban captured Kabul as Coalition troops withdrew from Afghanistan. It [announced the formation of a government](#) in early September. Remaining opposition forces have [fled to neighbouring Tajikistan](#).

Afghanistan is one of the [world's least developed countries](#), according to UN measurements. The country now faces multiple economic, financial, and humanitarian challenges, which may worsen due to reductions in foreign aid, international trade, and the nature of Taliban governance.

Analysis published for the [International Crisis Group](#) and the [World Economic Forum](#) have warned that these crises may result in a growing numbers of Afghan refugees, impacting particularly on Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.

In August, the UN Refugee Agency warned that the “most likely scenario” for 2021 was that there would be an [additional 500,000 internally displaced people within Afghanistan](#) (opens pdf), but the “worst case” was that there would be an additional 515,000 refugees in neighbouring countries. Providing an update in December, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, warned that an economic collapse in Afghanistan [may lead to an “implosion that will cause an inflow of people”](#) both within and beyond Afghanistan’s borders.

This briefing looks at the situation facing civilians, refugees, and internally displaced people in Afghanistan, their access to border crossings, their treatment in neighbouring states, and briefly sets out the schemes in place for Afghan refugees, including the UK’s.

Foreign aid commitments to Afghanistan are described in the separate Library briefing, [Aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan](#).

1

Background: Economic and humanitarian crises

ReliefWeb's [Afghanistan page](#) provides updates on the humanitarian situation

Afghanistan faces an economic and humanitarian crisis, according to UN agencies and the IMF. In September 2021, the UN warned that [basic services in Afghanistan were facing the risk of “collapsing”](#) and the country was experiencing shortages in essential supplies, such as food.¹ The IMF estimates that Afghanistan's economy will contract by up to 30% in 2021.²

In December 2021, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimated that Afghanistan would see a [rise in people in need of humanitarian assistance from 9.4 million in 2020 to 24.4 million in 2022](#) (59% of the population).³

There are a myriad of reasons for this situation, including the suspension of much foreign aid, which had [financed around 75% of public spending](#) in 2019,⁴ the Taliban's decisions to [ban the use of foreign currency](#) and [many women from employment](#),⁵ and shortages of cash due to the demobilisation of security forces,⁶ non-payment of civil servants,⁷ and restrictions on access to [Afghan assets held abroad](#).⁸

The drivers of refugees, migrants, and those internally displaced [are complex](#), and include a mixture of factors specific to an individual or family group, the economic and security conditions of the origin country, and prospects in the receiving country or area.⁹ Citing Afghanistan's economic situation, both the [IMF](#) and [International Crisis Group](#) analysis has warned of a potential refugee

¹ UN, [UN warns of “urgent imperative” to avoid Afghan food insecurity](#), 7 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

² Reuters, [Afghanistan's economic collapse could prompt refugee crisis-IMF](#), 19 October 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

³ UNOCHA, [Global humanitarian overview 2022: Afghanistan](#), accessed 10 December 2021

⁴ The World Bank, [Afghanistan: Public expenditure update](#), 29 July 2019, accessed 14 December 2021

⁵ Al-Jazeera, [Taliban bans the use of foreign currency across Afghanistan](#), 2 November 2021; UN Development Programme, [Afghanistan: Socio-economic outlook 2021-22](#), 1 December 2021, pp1, 17-18, accessed 14 December 2021

⁶ US Institute of Peace, [After Taliban take over, can Afghanistan's economy survive?](#), 7 September 2021; International Crisis Group, [Beyond emergency relief: Averting Afghanistan's humanitarian catastrophe, 6 December 2021](#), both accessed 13 December 2021

⁷ USA Today News, [With foreign funds frozen, Afghan aid groups struggle to get emergency relief services](#), 16 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

⁸ AP News, [UN envoy: World must prevent Afghanistan economic collapse](#), 10 September 2021, accessed 9 December 2021

⁹ Migration Data Portal, [Migration drivers](#), accessed 25 August 2021

crisis in Afghanistan, impacting on its neighbours. However, neither provided an estimate of numbers.¹⁰

The movement of people may also be driven by discrimination, persecution, and human rights concerns. NGOs such as [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) have reported growing attacks by Islamic State, the execution and disappearances of those who served the Afghan government, the restriction of women and girls in education and employment, and attacks on ethnic minority groups such as the Hazaras.¹¹

For details on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, foreign aid pledges, sanctions against the Taliban and how aid is planned to be delivered, the Library briefing, [Aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan](#), provides more. On the human rights situation, the Home Office's [Afghanistan: country policy and information notes](#), summarises the situation.

2 Internally displaced people

3.5 million Afghans are now internally displaced

Internally displaced people (IDPs) are those who have [been forced to leave their homes](#), often for reasons relating to armed conflict, violence, or natural or human disasters, without crossing an international border.¹²

At the end of 2020, there were 2.9 million Afghans already displaced across the country (7% of the population). By September 2021, this [rose to 3.5 million](#) (around 9%).¹³

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said in August that the “most likely” outcome in 2021 was an additional 500,000 IDPs in the remainder of the year.¹⁴

From 1 January to 30 November 2021, around 676,000 have been internally displaced. Of these:

- 59% are under 18. Adult men and women each constitute around 21% of IDPs.

¹⁰ IMF, [Regional economic outlook: Middle East and Central Asia: October 2021](#), 19 October 2021, Box 1.2; International Crisis Group, [Beyond emergency relief: Averting Afghanistan's humanitarian catastrophe, 6 December 2021](#), accessed 13 December 2021

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, [Afghanistan](#); Amnesty International, [Afghanistan](#), both accessed 14 December 2021

¹² Internal displacement monitoring centre, [Internal displacement](#), accessed 13 December 2021

¹³ UN Population, [Afghanistan 2019](#), and UN Refugee Agency, [Afghanistan emergency](#), both accessed 13 December 2021

¹⁴ UNHCR, [Afghanistan situation: Supplementary appeal, July-December 2021](#), August 2021 (opens pdf), p5

- Almost all were displaced prior to August, suggesting conflict has been the primary driver in 2021—those displaced since then constitute 3% of the total (around 20,000).
- Around 52,000 are in the capital Kabul, but the largest numbers are in central highland and border areas (eg, 174,000 in the northeast, bordering Tajikistan).
- Around 54% had received assistance from the UN and other organisations (365,000).¹⁵

The UNHCR reports that those displaced require “urgent support” for the winter, including [provision of shelter and cash assistance](#).¹⁶ The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has said [health care and drinking water](#) are also immediate needs.¹⁷ Amnesty International previously published a report on IDPs in March 2021, which said they were in urgent need of basic services such as [sanitation and health](#).¹⁸

3 Refugees

3.1 Border crossings, numbers, and restrictions

In 2020, there were 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees

As of December 2020, there were around 2.6 million UNHCR-registered refugees from Afghanistan globally—the third highest number in the world, behind only Syria and Venezuela.¹⁹

Refugees are people who have fled violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border. They are [defined and protected in international law](#), unlike IDPs.²⁰

UN-recorded Afghan refugees are [concentrated in Pakistan and Iran](#). As of 31 December 2020, there were 1.4 million in Pakistan, and 780,000 in Iran

¹⁵ UNOCHA, [Humanitarian response: Afghanistan](#), accessed 13 December 2021

¹⁶ UN, [Avoid starvation—“immediate priority” for 3.5 million Afghans](#), 3 December 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

¹⁷ International Organization for Migration, [Afghanistan—Emergency event tracking \(12 October to 15 November 2021\)](#), accessed 14 December 2021

¹⁸ Amnesty International, [Afghanistan: Country’s four million internally displaced need urgent support amid pandemic](#), 30 March 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

¹⁹ UNHCR, [Figures at a glance](#), accessed 13 December 2021

²⁰ UNHCR, [What is a refugee?](#), accessed 13 December 2021

(totalling 2.2 million).²¹ A further 2.6 million undocumented Afghans are estimated to live in Iran (to May 2021).²² Undocumented Afghans are not included in the table below.

Afghan refugees under UNHCR mandate and asylum seekers, 2020				
	Refugees	Asylum-seekers	Total	% all refugees/Asylum-seekers
Pakistan	1,438,432	9,668	1,448,100	51%
Iran	780,000	-	780,000	28%
Germany	147,994	33,103	181,097	6%
Turkey	4,219	125,104	129,323	5%
Austria	40,096	6,473	46,569	2%
France	31,546	13,560	45,106	2%
Greece	21,456	19,706	41,162	1%
Total (all countries)	2,594,774	238,791	2,833,565	-

Source: UNHCR, [Refugee Data Finder](#), accessed 16 August 2021

Data on asylum applications to the UK can be found in the Library Briefing, [Afghanistan statistics: UK deaths, casualties, mission costs and refugees](#).

Warnings of a continuing high number of refugees

Estimates of the number of refugees expected to leave Afghanistan in the wake of conflict and the Taliban’s capture of Kabul vary.

In August, the UNHCR said it expects [500,000 to leave in 2021](#) as a “worst case scenario,” though emphasised large-scale outflows had not yet been seen.²³ Both the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) and [UNHCR](#) estimated that up to 300,000 have fled to Iran between mid-August and November 2021.²⁴

Afghanistan’s northern neighbours—Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—are also expected to receive refugees. In July, Tajikistan said it was preparing to take in up to 100,000 refugees.²⁵

²¹ UNHCR, [Operational data portal: Registered refugees from Afghanistan \(in Iran and Pakistan\)](#), 31 December 2020, accessed 15 December 2021

²² UNHCR, [Renewed commitment needed to support displaced Afghans and their hosts](#), 31 May 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

²³ Reuters, [Half a million Afghan could flee across borders—UNHCR](#), 27 August 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

²⁴ Norwegian Refugee Agency, [Humanitarian needs in Iran rise as 300,000 Afghans arrive since Taliban takeover](#), 10 November 2021; UNHCR, [UNHCR welcomes Italy’s support for Afghan refugees in Iran, 6 December 2021](#), both accessed 13 December 2021

²⁵ BBC News, [Afghanistan: Where will refugees go after Taliban takeover?](#), 24 August 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

Access to borders has been restricted

In December 2021, the UNHCR reported that Afghanistan’s land borders with Iran and Pakistan were open “almost solely” [to those with required passports and visas](#). Land borders with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are “closed entirely” to Afghans, the UNHCR said.²⁶ Since August, the UNHCR has called [for all borders to remain open](#) to allow safe passage and movement.²⁷

Note that from August to early October, the [Taliban administration did not issue passports](#), meaning those who did not have adequate documentation prior to Taliban’s capture of Kabul could not leave.²⁸

Restrictions in most neighbouring countries have remained consistent since the summer of 2021: The [Iranian border was closed on 16 August](#),²⁹ while **Turkmenistan** has not allowed pedestrian traffic at border crossings.³⁰

Uzbekistan states it will [only temporarily host Afghan refugees](#) until they are accommodated elsewhere.³¹ **Tajikistan** has said it has [no plans to host Afghan refugees](#).³² Analysts have said their main concerns relate to the infiltration of violent groups, including Islamic State.³³

Restrictions for **Pakistan** have varied over time, though crossing points have [been closed and fences constructed](#).³⁴ In October, the UNHCR welcomed a commitment by Pakistan to [ease the movement of people and goods through the Chaman-Spin Boldak crossing](#) following a three-week period where the crossing was closed.³⁵ The Chaman crossing is the second largest commercial border point between the two countries, after the Torkham crossing, which has been [tightly controlled by both the Taliban and Pakistan](#).³⁶

²⁶ UNHCR, [News comment: UNHCR: Afghans struggle to seek safety as borders remain shut to most](#), 1 December 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

²⁷ UNHCR, [Position on returns to Afghanistan](#), 17 August 2021; UNHCR, [Afghanistan situation: Supplementary appeal](#), July 2021, both accessed 13 December 2021

²⁸ CNN, [Taliban to resume issuing passports to Afghan citizens](#), 5 October 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

²⁹ UNHCR, [Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran: 19 August 2021](#), 22 August 2021, both accessed 14 December 2021

³⁰ UNHCR, [Afghanistan: Weekly border situation update September 2021](#), 16 September 2021

³¹ The Diplomat, [Uzbekistan and Tajikistan hedge on Afghan refugees](#), 31 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

³² Reuters, [Russia’s central Asian allies say won’t host Afghan refugees](#), 16 September 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

³³ Al-Jazeera, [Afghanistan’s central Asian neighbours panic, reject refugees](#), 19 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

³⁴ BBC News, [Afghanistan: Pakistan fences off from Afghan refugees](#), 19 August, accessed 14 December 2021

³⁵ UNHCR, [UNHCR welcomes steps to ease movement at Pakistan-Afghanistan border](#), 26 October 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

³⁶ Reuters, [Thousands stranded as Afghan-Pakistan border crossing stay closed](#), 25 October 2021; The Guardian, [Critically ill Afghans suffer as Taliban tighten Pakistan border](#), 13 October 2021, both accessed 14 December 2021

Although not an immediate neighbour, many Afghan refugees travel across the north of Iran to reach the **Turkish** border. In August, the Turkish Government said it could not take “an additional refugee burden.”³⁷ Turkey [hosts around 3.9 million refugees and asylum seekers](#).³⁸ Construction of a wall on Turkey’s border with Iran began in 2017. It has been [subsequently strengthened to control informal crossings](#).³⁹

Informal crossings have continued

The UNHCR report that, from January 2021 to 13 December 2021, there were 111,600 newly arrived Afghans in need of international protection in neighbouring countries. This includes 64,000 in Pakistan, 29,000 in Iran, and 13,020 in Uzbekistan.⁴⁰

Around 40% of those arriving in **Pakistan** and screened by the UN since May 2021, arrived in August, when the Taliban was making rapid advances across Afghanistan. 96% of those interviewed by the UNHCR said [violence and insecurity](#) were the main reasons for fleeing.⁴¹

Separately, in **Iran**, local media report that between 4,000 and 5,000 are crossing daily via informal border crossings. The Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that up to [300,000 have fled to Iran](#) since mid-August 2021.⁴² For Iran, the UNHCR state that of the 6,300 heads of households they approached, [100% cited the general security situation as their reason for crossing](#). 40% were from the minority Hazaras group.⁴³ Most are Shi’a Muslims, as are the majority of Iranians.⁴⁴

The number of Afghans entering Turkey via Iran is also uncertain. In October, the Turkish Interior Minister said [around 2,000 arrived daily](#).⁴⁵

Afghans are also being returned to the country

In August 2021, the UNHCR called for a [ban on forced returns of Afghan nationals to Afghanistan](#), including for asylum seekers who have had their

³⁷ Al-Jazeera, [Turkey cannot take new refugee “burden,” says FM](#), 29 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

³⁸ UNHCR, [Turkey](#), accessed 14 December 2021

³⁹ Reuters, [Turkey reinforces border to block any Afghan migrant wave](#), 23 August 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁴⁰ UNHCR, [Operations data portal. Refugee situation](#), accessed 13 December 2021

⁴¹ UNHCR, [UNHCR Pakistan: New arrives from Afghanistan updated \(13 December 2021\)](#), accessed 13 December 2021

⁴² Norwegian Refugee Agency, [Humanitarian needs in Iran rise as 300,000 Afghans arrive since Taliban takeover](#), 10 November 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

⁴³ UNHCR, [UNHCR Iran: New arrivals from Afghanistan—11 December 2021](#), accessed 13 December 2021

⁴⁴ Minority Rights Group International, [Hazaras](#), accessed 15 December 2021

⁴⁵ UNHCR, [Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran, 26 October 2021](#), 27 October 2021, p2, accessed 14 December 2021

claim rejected, following the deterioration in the security and human rights situation in the country.⁴⁶

Iran has emphasised its [intention to return Afghans](#), once conditions in Afghanistan improve.⁴⁷ The Government of Pakistan has called [upon other countries to make arrangements to accommodate refugees from Afghanistan](#).⁴⁸

On 1 December, the UNHCR estimated that:

- An average of 3,000 Afghans were sent back daily from Iran between August and November 2021.
- Deportations of around 1,800 people were reported from Pakistan in September and October.⁴⁹

The UNHCR said that it had not been possible to assess whether these returnees had met the criteria to qualify them as requiring international protection, given the speed of returns and lack of an accessible asylum system for those newly arrived.⁵⁰

The IOM separately estimates that around [1.05 million undocumented Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan](#) from 1 January and 31 October 2021.⁵¹ The IMO Director General, António Vitorino, has argued [their return “compounds” the economic and humanitarian crisis](#) Afghanistan faces and states many returnees are in need of health services, employment, and food.⁵²

To 8 December 2021, around 1,300 UN-registered refugees have returned voluntarily to Afghanistan this year.⁵³

Protections for many refugees are limited

In Iran, around 96% of registered Afghan refugees live in urban areas alongside local communities, and 4% in camps.⁵⁴ There have been reports

⁴⁶ UNHCR, [UNHCR issues a non-return advisory for Afghanistan](#), 17 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁴⁷ Al-Jazeera, [Where does the world stand on Afghan refugees?](#), 18 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁴⁸ VOA, [Pakistan refuses to host additional Afghan refugees](#), 13 July 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁴⁹ UNHCR, [Operations data portal. Refugee situation](#), accessed 13 December 2021

⁵⁰ UNHCR, [News comment: UNHCR: Afghans struggle to seek safety as borders remain shut to most](#), 1 December 2021, accessed 13 December 2021

⁵¹ IOM, [IOM Afghanistan highlights. 15 August—31 October 2021](#), 6 December 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁵² IOM, [The race against time to prevent a humanitarian disaster](#), 4 November 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁵³ UNHCR, [Operations data portal. Refugee situation](#), accessed 13 December 2021

⁵⁴ UNHCR, [UNHCR Iran: Operational update—July-September 2021](#), 9 November 2021, p1

that some Afghans [have been mistreated](#) while in camps—the Iranian Government denies this.⁵⁵

Registered refugees have access to primary healthcare free of charge, and refugee children, including some undocumented Afghans, have been enrolled at school. Iran has also been [administering coronavirus vaccinations](#) to Afghan refugees.⁵⁶ However, many refugees are in debt, according to the UNHCR, making paying for housing one of their major challenges.⁵⁷

The estimated 2.2 million undocumented Afghans in Iran are at high risk of deportation.⁵⁸

In Pakistan, around 31% live in refugee villages, with the remainder at other sites.⁵⁹ While Iran is a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, Pakistan is not. This means Afghan refugees [hold no official status and cannot work legally](#), though have access to some social services after registering for a proof of registration card.⁶⁰ The International Labour Organisation report most [are engaged in the informal economy](#).⁶¹

While most refugees in Turkey are from Syria, the country also hosts Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. Once registered, they are eligible to access basic services.⁶² However, a UNHCR survey from January 2021 found that Afghan refugees were more likely than Syrians to [struggle to access health, education, and formal work](#), suggesting challenges in accessing finance and appropriate documentation.⁶³

Human Rights Watch have also alleged that Turkish soldiers have [violently expelled some groups of Afghans](#) away from the Turkish-Iranian border.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ Al-Jazeera, [Iran deporting thousands of refugees](#), 11 November 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁵⁶ UNHCR, [Over 1.6 million Covid-19 vaccines land in Iran to increase protection for Afghan refugees](#), 16 November 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁵⁷ UNHCR, [UNHCR Iran: Operational update—July-September 2021](#), 9 November 2021, pp3-4, accessed 14 December 2021

⁵⁸ UNHCR, [Renewed commitment needed to support displaced Afghans and their hosts](#), 31 May 2021, accessed 14 December 2021; ACAPS, [Iran](#), accessed 14 December 2021

⁵⁹ UNHCR, [UNHCR Pakistan: Refugee response planning 2021 population map \(01 October 2021\)](#), 2 November 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁶⁰ Center for Global Development, [With US withdrawal, rights of Afghan refugees in Pakistan hang in the balance](#), 25 August 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁶¹ International Labour Organization, [Market systems analysis for Afghan refugees in Pakistan](#), 2018, p8

⁶² International Blue Crescent, [Initial assessment of the current situation on Afghan refugees in Turkey](#), 23 August 2021

⁶³ UNHCR, [Turkey: Inter-agency protection sector needs assessment analysis: January 2021](#), May 2021, pp3, 19, 29,43

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, [Turkey: Soldiers beat, push Afghan asylum seekers back to Iran](#), 15 October 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

3.2 The need for safe corridors

In August 2021, the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling on the Taliban to [facilitate safe passage for Afghans and others seeking to leave the country](#).⁶⁵ The UK Government has said that among the conditions the Taliban must meet to gain international acceptance, is ensuring safe passage for those entitled to go to other countries.⁶⁶

The Commons Home Affairs Committee has held two [evidence sessions on safe routes and resettlement for Afghans](#).⁶⁷ For resettlement and refugees schemes planned or established by the UK and others, see below, page 11.

3.3 Financial support for refugees

Several countries have pledged aid funding to Afghan refugees and host countries, as part of their wider pledges to the region.

This aid will not be delivered via the Taliban—instead NGOs and UN agencies will be responsible for its distribution. The Library briefing, [Aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan](#) provides more on aid commitments.

The primary host countries for refugees, namely Pakistan and Iran, are facing their own economic challenges. Iran is [currently recovering from a two-year long recession](#), though inflationary pressures remain high due to factors including US sanctions, low oil revenues and higher public spending committed in response to the coronavirus pandemic.⁶⁸ Pakistan is [also recovering from a recession in 2020](#) and is currently experiencing high levels inflation, of around 9%, mostly due to higher food price.⁶⁹

Funding specifically for refugees includes £30 million of the UK's £286 million pledge to Afghanistan in 2021. This will [support regional stability and respond to any increase in refugees](#). In September, £10 million was made immediately available to the UNHCR and other agencies.⁷⁰ Of this, £4 million was for Pakistan, £3 million for Iran, £2 million for Tajikistan, and £1 million was regional funding.⁷¹

⁶⁵ UN Security Council, [Security Council urges Taliban to provide safe passage out of Afghanistan](#), 30 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁶⁶ PQ 71331 [[Afghanistan: Refugees](#)], 16 November 2021

⁶⁷ Home Affairs Select Committee, [Afghanistan: Safe routes and resettlement](#), last updated 17 November 2021

⁶⁸ World Bank, [Iran's economic update—October 2021](#), 7 October 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁶⁹ World Bank, [The World Bank in Pakistan](#), accessed 15 December 2021

⁷⁰ FCDO, [UK to provide £30 million of live-saving supplies for Afghan refugees](#), 3 September 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁷¹ PQ 75859 [[Afghanistan: Refugees](#)], 24 November 2021

The European Commission has previously [allocated €6 billion to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#), which provides support for hosting refugees in the country and for the management of migration on its eastern border.⁷² [Turkey hosts around 3.9 million refugees and asylum seekers](#), including 3.7 million from Syria.⁷³ In August 2021, the Financial Times reported the Commission was considering a [€600 million package for Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and possibly Iran](#) to help them host refugees.⁷⁴

The Commission has subsequently [announced a €1 billion aid package to Afghanistan](#). It is uncertain what support this will provide to refugees.⁷⁵

The US has [allocated up to US\\$ 500 million](#) to support Afghan refugees.⁷⁶

3.4 Afghan refugees to the UK and Europe

United Kingdom

The Government has paused deportations and removals to Afghanistan.⁷⁷

There are two UK schemes specific for refugees and others seeking to leave Afghanistan:

- A scheme for former Afghan interpreters and other locally employed civilians—see the Library’s briefing, [Resettlement scheme for locally employed civilians in Afghanistan](#). The scheme will operate indefinitely.
- The [Afghan citizens resettlement scheme \(ACRS\)](#), which was announced by the Home Office in August.⁷⁸ Under the scheme, the UK intends to resettle around 5,000 Afghan nationals at risk in 2021, and up to 20,000 in the longer term. Priority will be given to women and girls, and religious and other minorities.⁷⁹ The scheme is not yet open.

⁷² European Commission, [The EU facility for refugees in Turkey](#), accessed 14 December 2021

⁷³ UNHCR, [Turkey](#), accessed 14 December 2021

⁷⁴ Financial Times, [EU plans €600 million package for Afghanistan’s neighbours to avert refugee crisis](#), 31 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁷⁵ European Commission, [Afghanistan: Commission announces €1 billion Afghan support package](#), 12 October 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁷⁶ White House, [Memorandum for the Secretary of State on unexpected urgent refugee and migration needs](#), 16 August 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁷⁷ PQ 51593 [[Afghanistan: Deportation](#)], 23 September 2021; PQ 63989 [[Refugees: Afghanistan](#)], 15 November 2021

⁷⁸ Home Office, [Afghan citizens resettlement scheme](#), last updated 13 September 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁷⁹ Home Office, [Bespoke resettlement route for Afghan refugees announced](#), 18 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

Further information on immigration routes for Afghan civilians can be found in the Library's [UK immigration routes for Afghan nationals](#).

During August, the UK conducted Operation Pitting, where UK nationals, Afghans and others were evacuated via Kabul airport. Around 15,000 were able to leave Afghanistan, including those most at risk such as female politicians, LGBT+ people, women's rights activists, and judges.⁸⁰

UK efforts to coordinate regional response

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has [deployed crisis response staff](#) to countries neighbouring Afghanistan to help those seeking to reach the UK. This is in support of existing teams in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.⁸¹

Several FCDO Ministers have [held discussions with countries](#) in the region, including India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Indonesia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on resettlement and safe passage.⁸²

In October 2021, the UK's High Representative for Afghan Transition, Sir Simon Gass, and the Chargé d'Affaires of the UK Mission to Afghanistan, Dr Martin Longden, held talks with the Taliban in Afghanistan. They reiterated the need for safe passage for those wanting to leave the country.⁸³

European Union

Decisions by European countries are likely to be influenced by the large number of refugees previously seen in 2015. From January 2015 to March 2016, around 250,000 refugees from Afghanistan arrived in Greece.⁸⁴ In August 2021, Greece warned the EU was "not ready" for a potential replay of events six years ago.⁸⁵

In a statement of 31 August, EU interior ministers said they [hoped neighbouring countries could provide sufficient protection to refugees](#) and expressed their commitment to provide sufficient resource to do this.⁸⁶

In December 2021, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, announced that [fifteen EU states had agreed to admit 38,000 Afghan refugees](#). These are additional to the 28,000 evacuated by EU states to

⁸⁰ PQ 71331 [[Afghanistan: Refugees](#)], 16 November 2021

⁸¹ FCDO Twitter, [News-15 crisis response staff are being deployed to countries neighbouring Afghanistan](#) [[link](#)], 1 September 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁸² PQ 84399 [[Afghanistan: Refugees](#)], 6 December 2021

⁸³ FCDO, [UK officials travel to Afghanistan](#), 5 October 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁸⁴ International Rescue Committee, [Afghan refugees and the European refugee crisis](#) (opens pdf), June 2016

⁸⁵ Reuters, [Greece says EU not ready for new migrant crisis as Afghan conflict grows](#), 11 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁸⁶ European Council, [Statement on the situation in Afghanistan](#), 31 August 2021, accessed 14 December 2021, para 4

date.⁸⁷ The new commitment includes 25,000 in Germany, 3,100 in the Netherlands, and 2,500 in both Spain and France.⁸⁸

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees had previously [asked the EU to accept 42,500 refugees over the next five years](#), but some countries refused to commit to this.⁸⁹

In August and early September 2021, several European countries, including Czechia (the Czech Republic), Denmark, Austria, Poland, Greece and Hungary [opposed accepting any further Afghan refugees](#).⁹⁰

Other countries

- The US Government has not provided a specific number on the number Afghan refugees it will accept, though it has requested funding [for the arrival of 95,000 Afghan evacuees](#) by the end of September 2022.⁹¹
- Canada intends to [resettle 20,000 vulnerable Afghans](#).⁹² No timeline has been announced.
- Australia plans to [allocate an initial 3,000 humanitarian places for Afghan nationals](#). This is within the country's annual humanitarian programme, which provides 13,750 places.⁹³

Note these are in addition to existing programmes for those who directly worked with coalition troops in Afghanistan.

⁸⁷ InfoMigrants, [EU to take more than 38,000 people from Afghanistan](#), 10 December 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁸⁸ Al-Jazeera, [EU countries agree to take in 40,000 Afghan refugees](#), 9 December 2021, accessed 14 December 2021

⁸⁹ DW, [UN targets on Afghan resettlements “doable” says EU, but without commitments](#), accessed 14 December 2021

⁹⁰ European Parliament Briefing, [Evacuation of Afghan national to EU member states](#), 8 November 2021, accessed 15 December 2021, p4

⁹¹ AP News, [States learning how many Afghan evacuees coming their way](#), 15 September 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁹² Canadian Government, [Canada expands resettlement programme to bring more Afghans to safety](#), 13 August 2021, accessed 15 December 2021

⁹³ Australian Government of Home Affairs, [Afghanistan update](#), accessed 15 December 2021

Further reading

- Amnesty International, [Afghanistan: Few routes to safety for Afghans at risk of Taliban reprisals](#), 20 October 2021
- World Economic Forum, [After decades of instability, what does the future hold for Afghan migration?](#), 28 September 2021
- Middle East Institute, [The Afghan refugee crisis. What does it mean for Iran?](#), 20 September 2021
- Human Rights Watch, [What's next for Afghans fleeing the Taliban?](#), 9 September 2021
- Council for Foreign Relations, [Where will Afghan refugees go?](#), 8 September 2021
- Karolína Augustová for IPC-Mercator Analysis, [The border landscape in Eastern Turkey after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan](#), September 2021 (opens pdf)
- Amnesty International, [Afghanistan's refugees: Forty years of dispossession](#), June 2019

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