



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**Afghanistan: UK support
for aid workers and the
Afghan people**

Fifth Report of Session 2021–22

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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Summary

UK and allied forces left Afghanistan in August 2021. The Taliban takeover was rapid. The humanitarian jeopardy is extreme, and the scale of the humanitarian response required is unprecedented. At the same time, the safety of aid workers has been compromised.

Any contingency plans that the Government had for evacuating aid workers were neither apparent to the aid sector nor scaled adequately. Some Afghans who worked on projects funded by the UK Government are now reporting that their lives are at risk of reprisals from the Taliban authorities. Afghan aid workers who advocated for, with UK Government encouragement, freedoms for women and minority groups are now at risk of reprisals from the Taliban authorities. The UK Government's schemes do not adequately support those aid workers seeking safe passage to the UK. Some Afghan aid workers feel abandoned by the UK Government.

The UK Government has a long history of interventions in Afghanistan. It has a moral obligation to the Afghan people. The Government has pledged significant sums of aid since its withdrawal from Afghanistan, but the release of that aid to the people who so desperately need it has been excruciatingly slow.

A cash liquidity crisis is strangling the remaining life out of the country. Sanctions against the Taliban have stifled the provision of aid. Women, children, and minority groups have suffered disproportionately as a result of the regime change and those sanctions.

The Government has been too slow to work with its international counterparts to lift or revise sanctions, unblock the banking system in Afghanistan and unfreeze nominated World Bank funds to provide desperately needed financial support to the Afghan people.

The UK Government has called repeatedly for other Governments across the world to step up and deliver humanitarian funding for Afghanistan. However, there is scant evidence that it has been providing effective leadership on the world stage to secure that funding. 'Global Britain' feels like a hollow slogan. Meanwhile, more time passing means more lives are lost. The longer-term trajectory of Afghanistan looks bleak.

We humbly thank the people working in the aid sector, with deep gratitude, for all that they have done and do to support the people of Afghanistan. The work that they do is phenomenal. We are ashamed that the Government has not given them the support and the clarity that they need.

If the UK Government wants the people of Afghanistan, or indeed any other countries, to engage with Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) projects and programmes then it needs to be clear that people who work for UK funded aid projects will not be abandoned if conflict breaks out and a government hostile to some of the values FCDO is promoting comes into power.

More than 23 million people, over half the population of Afghanistan, are facing starvation. The Government must provide the support and the clarity that people working in the aid sector have told us that they need. The Government must do this to help the people of Afghanistan, now.

1 Introduction

Humanitarian situation

1. Following 40 years of war, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is devastating and worsening. The withdrawal of UK and allied forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 precipitated the rapid collapse of the previous Afghan Government and takeover by Taliban militants. Since then, the number of people needing humanitarian assistance has grown to 24.4 million, more than half the population. 23 million people are facing acute hunger.¹
2. The situation in Afghanistan prior to the withdrawal was already challenging. The country has been disproportionately affected by climate change.² It is experiencing worsening droughts, floods and landslides which threaten lives either directly or indirectly, when crops fail.³ A harsh winter is forcing Afghans to choose whether to feed their children or fires to heat themselves.⁴ There have been reports of young girls being sold to raise funds to buy food.⁵
3. Sanctions imposed by the West, designed to punish the Taliban, have pushed Afghanistan's healthcare system close to collapse. Six simultaneous disease outbreaks, in addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, are placing a huge strain on it and the population.^{6,7}

Our inquiry

4. We held an oral evidence session with representatives from the aid sector active in Afghanistan (the British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), Geneva Call and The HALO Trust). After which, we put a number of questions (in writing) to the Minister responsible for Afghanistan at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South and Central Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth. We received a response from Lord Ahmad on 26 January 2022.⁸

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- 1 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), [Afghanistan: Summary of Humanitarian Needs and Planned Response \(2022\)](#), 16 December 2021
 - 2 International Rescue Committee, [How climate change is compounding conflict in Afghanistan: Why world leaders must act to support countries most affected by the climate crisis](#), 29 October 2021
 - 3 National Geographic, [In Afghanistan, climate change complicates future prospects for peace Experts say warming will further fuel natural disasters, mass displacement, child marriage, and conflict](#), 3 February 2020
 - 4 Washington Post, [As Afghanistan's harsh winter sets in, many are forced to choose between food and warmth](#), 7 January 2022
 - 5 The Observer, [Starving Afghans sell girls of eight as brides: Villagers whose crops have failed after a second devastating drought are giving their young daughters in marriage to raise money for food](#), 7 January 2022
 - 6 The Guardian, [Afghan health system 'close to collapse due to sanctions on Taliban': Health experts issue dire warning as staff go unpaid and medical facilities lack basic items to treat patients](#), 13 December 2021
 - 7 The Telegraph, [Afghanistan's crumbling health service buckles under the combined strain of winter and hunger: Malnutrition, pneumonia and anaemia are now rife across the country – with children bearing the brunt](#), 4 January 2022
 - 8 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([AFG0001](#))

5. We spoke to representatives from the aid sector who briefed us on their experience.⁹ We have also drawn on written and oral evidence taken by the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Defence Committee and the Home Affairs Committee during their inquiries on Afghanistan.

⁹ Not published at the request of those representatives, as they feared publication of some of that detail could endanger colleagues, friends or relatives in Afghanistan or because they did not wish to potentially damage relations that might put their future funding at risk.

2 UK Government support for the safety and security of aid sector workers

6. Aid workers face many different threats to their safety and security in the line of their work;¹⁰ those in Afghanistan are no exception. Our predecessors inquired into violence against aid workers¹¹ and more recently we commented on the death of aid workers in Tigray.¹² Humanitarian workers may be targeted because they have resources such as food, water or medicines. Development workers may be targeted because they are working on an agenda that some local element is against.

7. In June 2021, as US troops began withdrawing, there was a surge in the number of aid workers affected by major violence in Afghanistan.¹³ James Cowan (The HALO Trust) told us that ISIS attacked and murdered 12 of his staff in a remote camp in Baghlan province, the most severe attack that the HALO Trust has had in its 30-plus years of history.¹⁴ We asked whether the UK Government provided enough support, he told us

It was a pretty searing moment. It would have been nice to have heard from the Foreign Secretary. We handled it well and we dealt with the circumstances, but I did feel that we were on our own ...

... I got a nice letter from Lord Ahmad some weeks later.¹⁵

8. The Government has options whether to accord aid workers some special status and protection. It therefore matters how the Government views and limits its moral and legal duty of care to those working to deliver its projects and programmes whether they are UK nationals or not.

Duty of care

9. Much of the UK's aid effort is governed by contractual relationships. Within them the phrase 'duty of care' has a precise, legal meaning. The UK Government's longstanding policy has been to shift any legal liability for an aid organisation's employees to the aid organisation concerned.

10. The Government's position on contracted and subcontracted employees is captured in the document entitled, 'Department for International Development (DFID): Standard Terms and Conditions—Service Contracts'.¹⁶ Under the heading 'Duty of Care', paragraph 9.1 of that document states

10 Bond, [Safety and security of aid workers: a priority for the UK's International Development Strategy and humanitarian policy review](#), 22 September 2021

11 International Development Committee, Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19, [Tackling violence against aid workers](#), HC 2008

12 International Development Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2019–21, [The humanitarian situation in Tigray](#), HC 1289, paras 19–20

13 Humanitarian Outcomes: Aid Worker Security Database Signal Alert, [Shifting security conditions in Afghanistan](#), 3 November 2021

14 Q13 [James Cowan]

15 Qq44–45

16 Department for International Development, [Department for International Development \(DFID\): Standard Terms and Conditions – Service Contracts](#), Version 1.1 October 2017, accessed 9 February 2022

The Supplier owes a duty of care to the Supplier Personnel and is responsible for the health, safety, security of life and property and general wellbeing of such persons and their property and this includes where the Supplier Personnel carry out the Services.

Paragraph 9.4 of that document states:

The Supplier acknowledges that the DFID accepts no responsibility for the health, safety, security of life and property and general wellbeing of the Supplier Personnel with regard to the Supplier Personnel carrying out the Services under this Contract.

11. Lord Ahmad confirmed to us that, following the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, the FCDO had published a Programme Operating Framework¹⁷ that required its programme teams to complete due diligence checks on any organisation in direct receipt of FCDO funding.¹⁸ He referenced a FCDO Due Diligence Framework,^{19, 20} noting that

Throughout this framework there is a heavy focus on risk management which includes assessing how partners ensure their staff security. In addition, the Framework has a specific focus on subsequent downstream delivery where the FCDO seek to gain assurance from the funded partner on how they manage this risk within their downstream delivery chain or subcontracted arrangements.²¹

12. The FCDO's position maintains that adopted by DFID in respect of UK aid funded programmes. Namely, the FCDO has put frameworks in place to ensure that delivery partners have, or are putting, measures in place to counter risks to the safety and security of its own staff, and further down the chain if it chooses to subcontract.²²

13. We understand that the FCDO has reasons for clearly defining and limiting its liability in respect of its contractual relationships with its external partners. However, we believe that events in Afghanistan have clearly illustrated that the Government's policies should encompass much more than the legal aspects of duty of care as defined in its legal relationships with its suppliers and contactors.

14. We believe that the FCDO should consider what moral obligations it has to aid sector workers who deliver UK aid and FCDO aims and objectives. We urge the FCDO to take a broader, more holistic view of its duty of care to people working in the aid sector.

17 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Guidance: FCDO Programme Operating Framework](#), last updated 7 December 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

18 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([AFG0001](#))

19 Lord Ahmad did not provide a link to a published copy that Framework, we presume it is a replacement for DFID's Due Diligence Framework

20 Department for International Development, [Department for International Development, Due Diligence Guide, Risk and Control, DFID July 2018](#), accessed 13 December 2021

21 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([AFG0001](#))

22 As the Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison MP, former Minister of State for the Middle East, Foreign and Commonwealth Office reported that DFID was doing. See Oral evidence taken before the International Development Committee on 25 June 2019, HC (2017–19) 2008, [Q55](#) [Dr Murrison]

Assessment of risk

15. James Cowan and Elizabeth Winter (BAAG) both told us that, as events escalated in Afghanistan, their experiences of the UK Government response to aid organisations was that it was chaotic.²³ Any contingency plans that the Government had for evacuating aid workers from Afghanistan were neither apparent nor scaled adequately in the face of the rapid fall of Kabul and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021.²⁴

16. Lord Ahmad told us that FCDO used its travel advice messages to warn people of the risks of travelling to or working in Afghanistan. He also said that the British Embassy in Kabul shared advice proactively with NGO partners in Afghanistan. He said that FCDO were in regular contact with partner NGOs on the implications of the UK withdrawal and monitored risks to NGO partners as part of FCDO’s programme management protocols. He said FCDO were in close contact with NGO partners through channels such as the UN humanitarian coordination meetings.²⁵

17. Elizabeth Winter described the difficulties in trying to engage with the UK Government on the risks affecting aid workers, saying:

Trying to get through to people; trying to get your people out because you knew very well that they were at major risk—whether they were people who had worked with the Government, or whether they were well-known civil society activists or journalists—and in real fear of their lives; trying to get them on a list; and then trying to get them to the airport was a major issue.

It remains a major issue. There are still people there who need to get out now, and we have provided chapter and verse more than once.²⁶

18. James Cowan expressed a view that British Embassy staff in Kabul were overly focused on Kabul and should have had a better understanding of the whole of the country. He told us:

they were not leaving Kabul or travelling around the country. They were very timid about the threat, and as a result they could not really understand the threat or see how quickly things were moving when the Taliban reached Lashkar Gah, Kandahar and Herat. They were in their ivory tower.²⁷

He identified this as a “significant cultural problem” noting that the same thing could be said about Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Somalia and Libya.²⁸

19. Lord Ahmad told us

it was quite obvious there would come a point in time where the challenges for those remaining in country in whatever walk of life, humanitarian

23 Q8 [James Cowan, Elizabeth Winter]

24 Q12 [Elizabeth Winter, James Cowan]

25 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([AFG0001](#))

26 Q3

27 Q17

28 Q18

workers included, would become that much more challenging. Certainly, we were having conversations with our partners on the ground about safety and security.²⁹

20. *We recommend that the FCDO take steps to better identify and assess the particular risks facing aid workers so that it can respond more effectively to those aid workers when they are in need of support in countries or regions where there is acute instability or signs of a rapidly deteriorating security situation. FCDO staff in embassies in such countries should better communicate any signs of a potential deterioration in the security situation in country to those delivering UK aid programmes so that they can take appropriate steps to protect the safety of their staff.*

Afghan aid workers and UK Government schemes for resettlement

21. While we heard that many aid workers (Afghan and expatriate) are committed to remaining in or returning to Afghanistan to help with the humanitarian response, it is nonetheless the case that many wanted to leave because of the threat they and their families faced.³⁰ During the withdrawal of UK and allied forces, Operation Pitting focused more generally on the evacuation of UK citizens and those at most immediate risk; it was impossible to get everyone out and some who wanted to leave could not have made the journey to the airport safely.

22. The schemes for resettling Afghan nationals in the UK have been developed at pace in response to a rapidly changing picture on the ground. In terms of aid workers, the development of these schemes has not been informed by clear information about: how many aid workers were working to deliver UK Government priorities for UK aid in Afghanistan; who among those aid workers was at risk; and who among those aid workers wanted to leave. The schemes have requirements that are difficult to fulfil in practice for those still in Afghanistan. We wanted to examine what schemes were available and how well they served the needs of aid workers.

23. All Afghan nationals wishing to leave Afghanistan potentially had two main, later three, ways in which they might seek to relocate to the UK³¹

- a) **Operation Pitting:** *a military evacuation conducted in August 2021. It evacuated British citizens and some Afghan nationals to the UK (broadly, family members of British or Afghan nationals living in the UK, people eligible under the relocation schemes for UK Government employees, and other particularly vulnerable cases)*
- b) **The ex-gratia and ARAP schemes for former employees:** *the ex-gratia redundancy and resettlement scheme (opened in late 2012 and runs until November 2022) and the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) (opened in late 2020 and is open ended). The ex-gratia redundancy and resettlement scheme caters for people who worked directly for the UK Government on 1 May 2006 and had served for more than 12 months. The Afghan Relocations and Assistance*

29 Oral evidence taken on 7 September 2021, HC (2019–21) 101, [Q166](#) [Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon]

30 Q7 [Elizabeth Winter], Q11 [Elizabeth Winter], Q13 [Elizabeth Winter, James Cowan]

31 Summary of schemes taken from *UK immigration routes for Afghan nationals*, Briefing Paper [Number 9307](#), House of Commons Library, 5 January 2022, p.4–5

Policy (ARAP) scheme is open to any current or former staff employed by the UK Government in Afghanistan since 2001, who are assessed to be at serious risk of threat to life. There is no limit or quota on the number of people eligible.

- c) **The Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS):** *launched in January 2022. It aims to resettle in the UK up to 20,000 people over the next few years.* It is currently focusing on granting status to people already in the UK (mostly Operation Pitting cases). The Government anticipates that resettlements of refugees in countries neighbouring Afghanistan will begin in spring 2022 (via referral by UNHCR). Resettlements of people at risk in Afghanistan are expected to begin later in 2022.

24. Those with family in the UK could also apply under the Refugee family reunion rules or the Family visa rules.³² However, the relevant fees and biometric information are required to be submitted in support of an application under the family rules.³³ Attaining biometric information in Afghanistan has been, for the most part, impossible with the closure of the British Embassy in Kabul, Visa Application Centres in other countries being hundreds of miles away and the Kabul Passport Office being either closed³⁴ or inaccessible due to the volume of applicants³⁵ or security issues.³⁶

25. A key question for aid agencies with staff who wished to leave because they feared for their and their family's safety was under which scheme or route would staff be eligible. We have already touched on the difficulties aid agencies had in trying to engage with UK Government representatives during the period leading up to the evacuation (see paragraph 17).

ARAP (the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy)

26. A now archived version of a Home Office Guidance document, Support for British and non-British nationals in Afghanistan, published on 23 August 2021, raised the expectations of non-British nationals working for aid agencies as it advised that the ARAP scheme was available for Afghans "who have supported British efforts in Afghanistan, for example interpreters and other personnel" (and provided a link to a factsheet on that scheme).³⁷ Guidance published on 22 August 2021 (now also archived) said other prioritised groups included "employees of charities, humanitarian organisations and NGOs", alongside Chevening Scholars, members of civil society groups for women's rights and various other groups.³⁸

32 *UK immigration routes for Afghan nationals*, Briefing Paper [Number 9307](#), House of Commons Library, 5 January 2022, p.5

33 *Ibid*, p.19

34 The Independent, [Government closes family reunification scheme for Afghan refugees in 'devastating' move](#), 14 September 2021

35 The Telegraph, [Kabul passport office forced to close after being besieged by thousands seeking to flee Afghanistan: Officials said as many as 15,000 to 20,000 people each day were camped outside, as biometric equipment breaks down under the strain](#), 16 November 2021

36 Reuters, [Suicide bomber killed at Kabul passport office gate](#), 23 December 2021

37 The National Archives, Blog: Home Office in the media, Home Office News Team, [FACTSHEET: UK support to resettle Afghan nationals - ARAP scheme](#), 16 August 2021, (archived on 21 August 2021), accessed 9 February 2022

38 The National Archives, Home Office, [Guidance: Support for British and non-British nationals in Afghanistan](#), 22 August 2021, (archived on 23 August 2021), accessed 9 February 2022

27. The Government later clarified that “Employees of UK based NGOs and UK funded projects” were not eligible under ARAP and reference was made to the Home Office “working quickly to establish the details of the Afghan Citizens’ Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)”.³⁹

28. Devex, an independent news organisation specialising in global development, published various news stories in August 2021 on the ineligibility of aid workers to the ARAP scheme.^{40, 41} Bond and BAAG published a letter, dated 17 August 2021, to the then Foreign Secretary, calling on the UK Government to expand ARAP

to include not only those Afghans who have worked directly for the UK government but those who have worked through NGOs or contractors to support the UK aid and military programmes for so many years.⁴²

Operation Pitting: Leave Outside the Rules (LOTR) scheme and the ‘Special Cases’ system

29. During the period that the UK was evacuating people from Afghanistan in August 2021 during Operation Pitting, the route out of Afghanistan to the UK for aid workers (who did not qualify for ARAP and prior to the ACRS being established) and whose lives were at risk because of their association with the UK, or the West as a whole, was under the UK’s Leave Outside the Rules (LOTR) scheme, under a ‘Special Cases’ system.⁴³

Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)

30. The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) was announced on 18 August 2021.⁴⁴ The Home Office said it would

prioritise those people who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan who face a particular risk from the Taliban, for example because of their stand for democracy and human rights, or because of their gender, sexuality, or religion.⁴⁵

31. In October 2021, Devex published a news story about Afghan nationals who had worked on UK aid funded projects and were currently at risk in Afghanistan not receiving support from the UK Government and their concerns about whether they would receive support under the ACRS.⁴⁶

39 PQ [HL2390](#) [on Afghanistan: Refugees], 2 September 2021

40 Devex, [Aid organizations struggle with UK rules for evacuating Afghan workers](#), 20 August 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

41 Devex, [Afghan aid workers targeted by Taliban but excluded from UK evacuation](#), 17 August 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

42 [Letter from Bond and BAAG to the Foreign Secretary, 17 August 2021](#), accessed 9 February 2022

43 Written evidence submitted by Mr Raphael Marshall (Desk Officer (formerly) at Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (formerly)) to the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry on Government policy on Afghanistan ([AFG0038](#))

44 Home Office, [News story, Bespoke resettlement route for Afghan refugees announced](#), 18 August 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

45 Gov.uk: Blog: Home Office in the Media, [FACTSHEET: ACRS and other routes](#), HO news team, 13 September 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

46 Devex, [‘I will be killed’: Afghan aid workers left stranded by UK government](#), 4 October 2021, accessed 22 February 2022

32. Five months after the ACRS was originally announced by the Government, the ACRS was opened formally (on 6 January 2022).⁴⁷ The Government reiterated that it planned to resettle up to 20,000 under the scheme. It announced that it was on track to exceed its aim to resettle up to 5,000 people in the first year of the ACRS. It noted that the first to be resettled under the ACRS would be people already evacuated, including under Operation Pitting, and living in the UK.

33. Concerns have been raised about the operation and timelines of the various referral pathways under the ACRS.⁴⁸ Concerns have also been raised about whether people already evacuated under the ARAP scheme or by other methods would or should be transferred into the ACRS to help fulfil the Government's pledges on numbers of people to be resettled under the ACRS.⁴⁹

34. We were disappointed about the exclusion from the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme of Afghan aid workers to whom the UK Government had clear lines of moral responsibility, either because they were sub-contracted by the UK Government or employed by aid agencies in receipt of UK aid. We are disappointed that Afghan aid workers have not been explicitly recognised in the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). We are very concerned about the time being taken by the Government to implement the ACRS and whether Afghan aid workers will receive protection under that scheme.

35. We call on the Government to accelerate without further delay all pathways of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and ensure that aid sector staff are explicitly recognised and prioritised for protection under the ACRS.

36. The Government should not consider people evacuated under Operation Pitting under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), instead it should consider those people under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme (ARAP) or other pre-existing pathways. The ACRS should be reserved for people:

- located in Afghanistan;*
- located in third countries;*
- who have travelled to the UK, without UK Government assistance, from Afghanistan.*

37. The Government should ensure transparency of reporting on the number of people resettled under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) by publishing a quarterly report on the number of people resettled under that scheme, publishing that first report by the end of June 2022.

47 HC Deb, 6 January 2022, [col 185](#) [Commons Chamber]

48 HC Deb, 6 January 2022, [cols 185–203](#) [Commons Chamber]

49 Such as the oral contribution by Jack Dromey at HC Deb, 6 January 2022, [col 128WH](#) [Westminster Hall]

Criticism of the existence of multiple schemes and lack of definitive information on numbers of eligible people

38. The existence of multiple schemes and the lack of co-ordination between the various Government departments involved in implementing those schemes has caused confusion.⁵⁰

39. Raphael Marshall (a desk officer who worked on the Afghan Special Cases team in the FCDO's Afghanistan Crisis Response from the 21st to the 24th August 2021) provided written evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, he said

I estimate between 75,000 and 150,000 people (including dependents) applied for evacuation under the LOTR scheme. The vast majority of these applicants feared their lives were at risk as a result of their connection to the UK and the West and were therefore eligible for evacuation.

I estimate fewer than 5% of these people have received any assistance. It is clear that some of those left behind have since been murdered by the Taliban.

Furthermore, he said

Avoidable bureaucratic problems significantly delayed the 'calling forward' of prioritised evacuees to the airport. Given the increasing difficulty of entering the airport, this significantly reduced the chance of evacuees being successfully air-lifted.

He provided written evidence on (among other areas): an arbitrary and dysfunctional prioritisation process; inadequate staffing; lack of urgency; lack of coordination between the FCDO and MOD; ineffective cooperation between ministers and civil servants; and lack of planning for after 31 August 2021.⁵¹

40. There is neither a definitive source of the total number people nor more specifically the number of aid workers who have either expressed an interest in, or are eligible for, resettlement to the UK under any of the various routes available. The numbers that the Government have presented, have been disputed.^{52, 53}

41. Lord Ahmad said that

It was possible to evacuate only a few Afghan staff of NGOs using the 'Leave Outside the Rules' power held by the Home Secretary.

42. He also told us that the FCDO did not have records broken down according to whether people who had sought help with evacuation from Afghanistan were aid workers.⁵⁴

50 Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 7 December 2021, HC (2019–21) 685, [Q386](#) [Chris Bryant MP]

51 Written evidence submitted by Mr Raphael Marshall (Desk Officer (formerly) at Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (formerly)) to the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry on Government policy on Afghanistan ([AFG0038](#))

52 Oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 16 November 2021, HC (2019–21) 699, [Q147–149](#) [Professor Brad Blitz, Representative, Afghan Solidarity Coalition]

53 Oral evidence taken before the Home Affairs Committee on 14 September 2021, HC (2019–21) 706, [Q7](#) [Laure-Hélène Piron, Director, The Policy Practice]

54 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([AFG0001](#))

Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit

43. There is scant information about the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit. It was first referenced in a written parliamentary question tabled on 26 October 2021. This referred to the Unit having been referenced in a letter sent to all Members of Parliament on 25 October 2021 (presumably part of the series of ‘Dear colleague’ letters that have been sent to Members in response to the number of cases which Members have been raising of Afghans seeking relocation to the UK). The FCDO confirmed in its answer to the parliamentary question that it had created a new Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit. It said that the unit would be staffed by officials of the FCDO, Ministry of Defence and Home Office officials to take forward

the UK’s commitment to resettle individuals and family members who are confirmed to be eligible.⁵⁵

44. Lord Ahmad has said

The Joint Afghan Casework Unit (JACU) is currently responsible for confirming the immigration status of Afghans already evacuated to the UK and facilitating travel to the UK for Afghans to whom a commitment to evacuation was made during Op PITTING and/or under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). It will also be involved in the administration of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).⁵⁶

45. Lord Ahmad told us that there is currently no published service standard for the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit (JACU). He confirmed that there is no breakdown available of the number of cases involving people employed as aid workers. He told us that a decision would be taken by the Treasury on whether any activities undertaken by JACU would be attributed to the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget (and at what cost).⁵⁷

46. We welcome the establishment of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit but note the lack of clarity around the cost, staffing and current workload of that Unit. We are also concerned that more than three months after it was set up there is still no clarity on whether or not any of the costs of that Unit will be counted as UK ODA expenditure. We recommend that the Government:

- *establish targets for the performance of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit and report quarterly against those targets, publishing that first report by the end of June 2022;*
- *report the number of cases involving people employed as aid workers that the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit has taken receipt of, and report the status of those cases, by the end of June 2022; and*
- *publish the costs of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit it attributes to the ODA budget.*

55 PQ [63861](#) [on Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Afghanistan], 1 November 2021

56 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([AFG0001](#))

57 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([AFG0001](#))

3 Provision of UK aid to Afghanistan

UK aid from 2001 to 2021

47. Afghanistan was highly dependent on aid, even prior to the existing humanitarian crisis. Grants financed around 75% of public spending in 2019.⁵⁸ From 2001 to 2019, members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (making up the international forum of many of the largest providers of aid)⁵⁹ provided US \$65 billion in ODA to Afghanistan (at 2019 prices). The US was the largest donor (providing over half that total). The UK provided 8% of that total.⁶⁰

48. For 2021, the UK had planned to continue providing aid to the Ghani-led Government after the UK and allied forces left, however it had intended to almost halve the aid it had previously provided (from £290 million in 2019 to £155 million in 2021).⁶¹

49. As events escalated in Afghanistan, the Prime Minister announced on 18 August 2021 that the UK would be “doubling” the UK humanitarian and development assistance it provided to Afghanistan in 2021 to £286 million.⁶²

50. On 3 September 2021, the FCDO announced that it would be releasing the first tranche of this £286 million. It announced the release of up to £30 million of funding to Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. This funding was to support people arriving in those countries from Afghanistan⁶³ ⁶⁴ and support regional stability. It announced that it would immediately make available £10 million of that funding to humanitarian partners, such as the UNHCR, to enable urgent humanitarian assistance to be despatched to the Afghan borders.⁶⁵

51. On 31 October 2021, the Prime Minister pledged a further £50 million of that £286 million funding to the UN Afghanistan appeal. The Prime Minister said

We now have a responsibility to protect the people of Afghanistan most at risk under the Taliban regime, particularly women and girls. Today's funding will provide urgent protection for the most vulnerable people. But preventing a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan and preserving the gains of the last twenty years will require a truly global effort.⁶⁶

58 *Aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan*, Briefing Paper [Number 9343](#), House of Commons Library, 23 December 2021, p.4

59 OECD, [Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\)](#), accessed 1 February 2022

60 *Afghanistan: Development, UK aid, and the future*, Briefing Paper [Number 9276](#), House of Commons Library, 2 September 2021, p.5

61 *Ibid*, p.6

62 HC Deb, 18 August 2021, [col 1259](#) [Commons Chamber]

63 In January 2022, there were an estimated more than 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees worldwide; the third largest refugee population in the world. See commentary in: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan*, 11 January 2022, p.9

64 As at 15 January 2022, the UNHCR reported that more than 2.2 million Afghan refugees were registered in Iran and Pakistan, with growing numbers of Afghan refugees arriving in Iran. Despite Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan closing their borders with Afghanistan, some Afghans continue to arrive in those countries. See commentary and map in: UNHCR, [Afghanistan Situation Update](#), 15 January 2022

65 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Press Release, [UK to provide £30 million of life-saving supplies for Afghan refugees](#), 3 September 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

66 Prime Minister's Office and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Press Release, [PM pledges £50 million to UN Afghanistan appeal](#), 31 October 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

52. On 15 December 2021, the Government reported on the funding it had so far disbursed. It announced it had disbursed over £81 million within Afghanistan and £10 million to support Afghan refugees in the region, with all humanitarian assistance channelled through UN agencies or trusted and experienced international NGOs.⁶⁷

UK aid from 2022

53. So far, in 2022 the Government has provided the following updates on the disbursement of UK aid:

- On 26 January 2022, the then Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly, said that the Government had now disbursed over £145 million of its pledge to provide £286 million in assistance in the financial year 2021–22.⁶⁸
- On 28 January 2022, an FCDO press release announced that a further £97 million of emergency UK aid had been pledged, noting

This latest allocation of vital support means the UK has now delivered on its promise to double UK aid to Afghanistan, with £286 million committed this financial year.⁶⁹

- On 9 February 2022, Vicky Ford, Minister for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, stated in response to an Urgent Question that £176 million of the total allocation of £286 million had been disbursed by the end of January 2022. She stated that the remainder of the allocation would be disbursed by the end of March 2022.^{70 71}

54. On 15 February 2022, the FCDO announced that the UK will be co-hosting a virtual pledging summit with the UN in March 2022.⁷² The main aim of that summit will be to raise the \$4.4 billion that the UN has declared it needs to deliver its Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan.⁷³

Time taken by the Government to disburse UK aid

55. Our Chair made a statement on 16 August 2021 that the UK Government should fulfil “any pledged donations quickly and completely.”⁷⁴ The Government has been very slow to disburse to aid organisations the UK aid it has committed.

67 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Written Statement, [HCWS489](#), on Afghanistan: Humanitarian Situation, 15 December 2021 (The annexes to that Written Statement include a breakdown of allocations (and a note on how much of that has been transferred to partners)).

68 PQ [106859](#) [on Afghanistan: Development Aid], 26 January 2022

69 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Press release, [Foreign Secretary pledges to support over 2.7 million Afghans with life-saving aid: Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has pledged £97 million of emergency UK aid to the Afghan people to provide life-saving food and emergency health support](#), 28 January 2022, accessed 9 February 2022

70 HC Deb, 9 February 2022, [col 943](#) [Commons Chamber]

71 On 4 February 2022, James Cleverly stated that £163 million of the total allocation of £286 million had now been disbursed. See PQ [113245](#) [Afghanistan: Famine], 4 February 2022

72 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Press release, [UK to co-host summit to address Afghanistan humanitarian crisis: The UK will co-host an upcoming United Nations virtual pledging summit to help address the growing humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan](#), FCDO, 15 February 2022, accessed 21 February 2022

73 [UN news, Afghanistan: UN launches largest single country aid appeal ever](#), United Nations, 11 January 2022

74 International Development Committee News Article, [Reaction to humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan](#), 16 August 2021

56. During our oral evidence session on 7 December 2021, James Cowan told us
the United Kingdom is being particularly slow about apportioning the £286 million that it has promised.⁷⁵

and Alain Déléroz (Geneva Call) told us

Humanitarian aid is impeded because all the pledged money has not been disbursed.⁷⁶

57. Lord Ahmad told us

We are currently working on plans to disburse the remainder of the £286 million before the end of this financial year.

FCDO programme teams and advisers continue to work closely with a variety of partners, including local and international NGOs, to ensure that funding is disbursed in a timely manner and reaches those most in need.

We are only supporting life-saving humanitarian assistance through the UN and other trusted organisations on the ground, who are continuing to ensure vital aid reaches those who need it most. All UK aid is subject to strict monitoring and verification to ensure it is only used to help the vulnerable people it is intended for.⁷⁷

58. We are very concerned about the time the Government has taken to disburse the UK aid it has pledged to Afghanistan, given the considerable and escalating humanitarian need in the country. The Government should have worked faster to disburse the UK aid it pledged to Afghanistan in 2021.

Government transparency on reporting of UK aid spending

59. The FCDO's information on Afghanistan on its Development Tracker web pages (DevTracker) is sketchy and incomplete. FCDO has added the following advisory warning to the Summary web page on Afghanistan

Due to the security situation in Afghanistan, we have temporarily removed potentially sensitive information (project title, description and channel of delivery) from DevTracker. As projects are reviewed and republished, the project and financial information will become available on DevTracker.⁷⁸

60. Information on the Active Projects web page on Afghanistan has at times been completely absent or, at the most, incomplete.⁷⁹ Furthermore, an advisory note on DevTracker states

75 Q5

76 Q6

77 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (AFG0001)

78 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Development Tracker Summary web page on Afghanistan](#), accessed 23 November 2021

79 For example, no such active projects information was available on 23 November 2021, but 10 active projects were listed on 7 December 2021 (although 9 of those projects had Start Dates prior to 2021). As at 25 January 2022, 13 active projects are listed (with 11 of those projects having Start Dates prior to 2021)

FCDO ODA allocations for 2021/22 were announced on 21 April 2021. Changes to individual programmes are underway. The information on this website may not reflect the latest allocated budgets for this year. This information will be updated in due course.⁸⁰

61. We welcome the Government's publication of 15 December 2021 showing details of the allocation and disbursement of the aid it has pledged to Afghanistan. We urge the Government to publish monthly updates on the allocation and disbursement of its aid to Afghanistan and to countries in the region.

62. We urge the FCDO to release more information on its Development Tracker web pages to better ensure the transparency of reporting on the ODA funding it has allocated to projects in Afghanistan (if necessary, redacting parts of that information to mitigate any risks to safety and security).

63. We urge the FCDO to update information on all ODA allocations (for all countries) on Development Tracker within a three-month period of those allocations having been made.

80 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Development Tracker Summary web page on Afghanistan](#), accessed 21 February 2022

4 Other factors affecting the humanitarian situation and the disbursement of aid

64. Other overlapping factors are affecting the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and the disbursement of aid to the Afghan people.

Banking crisis and liquidity situation

65. Afghanistan is experiencing an economic and liquidity crisis that is further deepening the humanitarian peril. Its national bank is unable to function because of western countries freezing Afghanistan's financial assets and imposing sanctions on the Taliban. John Simpson, reporting at the end of January 2022, said

Now extraordinary numbers of Afghans are facing starvation, largely because we won't let them have access to their own money.⁸¹

66. James Cowan explained to us that public sector workers, such as teachers and medical workers, had not been paid since July 2021.⁸² He went on to explain the complex interplay between the banking and liquidity crisis and the deepening humanitarian crisis.⁸³ Human Rights Watch said

most Afghan banks cannot cover withdrawals by private actors and aid organizations. Even when funds are transmitted electronically into banks, the lack of cash means that money is not physically available and therefore cannot flow into the country's economy.⁸⁴

67. The UK Government has acknowledged that

aid workers also face challenges as a result of the liquidity shortage, which makes payments more difficult. We are working closely with multilateral organisations, banks and NGOs to address these.⁸⁵

68. Our witnesses told us about the extreme challenges in aid agencies being able to operate in the context of the melt-down of the banking system in Afghanistan. They told us about bank accounts being frozen, bank transfers being blocked, and limits being placed on cash withdrawals / the challenges of being able to access physical cash.⁸⁶ The failure of the banking system has led some aid agencies to have to use their limited cash reserves in-country, using the hawala system,⁸⁷ to keep operating. The hawala system is an informal

81 The Telegraph, [John Simpson: I've never seen Afghanistan as desperate as it is today](#), 29 January 2022

82 Q28 [James Cowan]

83 Q4 [James Cowan]

84 Human Rights Watch, [Afghanistan Facing Famine](#), 11 November 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

85 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Written Statement, [HCWS489](#), on Afghanistan: Humanitarian Situation, 15 December 2021

86 Q4, Q5, Q6, Q11, Q28

87 The Independent, [With foreign funds frozen, Afghan aid groups stuck in limbo](#), 16 September 2021

method of transferring money, in-country and across borders, through a network of money brokers referred to as “hawaladers”.⁸⁸ Our witnesses told us that they did not have clarity from the UK Government as to whether they should be using that system.⁸⁹

69. The Norwegian Refugee Council has set out the range of financial access challenges that aid agencies are facing. Issues with payment channels are severely putting at risk the ability of aid agencies to access the aid disbursed to them and deliver that aid to the Afghan people, including in the emerging context of sanctions being eased.⁹⁰

70. Lord Ahmad has said

The UK is playing a leading role in international efforts to address the multiple causes of the crisis, including the banking and liquidity crisis, working closely with the UN, the World Bank, the US and other leading donors to find urgent practical solutions, which will allow the aid sector to access currency in Afghanistan.⁹¹

71. The Government has been far too slow to work with its international counterparts to find ways to help unblock the banking system in Afghanistan. This has put at grave risk the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. It is also deepening the humanitarian suffering of the people of Afghanistan.

72. The UK Government should be taking more urgent steps to collaborate with its international counterparts, economists, representatives of the banking sector and aid organisations to find ways to help address more rapidly the banking crisis in Afghanistan to ease the humanitarian suffering of, and enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance to, the people of Afghanistan.

Sanctions and UK Government policy on working with the Taliban

73. Governments across the world are working out how to balance responding to the dire humanitarian and development needs of the Afghan people whilst seeking not to condone Taliban policies. The UN has had long-standing sanctions on the Taliban.⁹² James Cowan told us that

this crisis was inflicted entirely by the West in order to punish the Afghan Government, but it is punishing the Afghan people⁹³

74. Early after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the UK Government was reported to have been meeting with representatives of banks, financial institutions and aid organisations to discuss finding safe, legal and transparent payment options for getting money into Afghanistan.⁹⁴ However, evidence in early December 2021 to our Committee was that those discussions had failed to deliver results. Elizabeth Winter told us in December

88 Migration Data Portal, [Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: They are needed more than ever in a time of crisis](#), posted 6 September 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

89 Q4 [Elizabeth Winter], Q5

90 Norwegian Refugee Council, [Life and Death: NGO access to financial services in Afghanistan](#), 27 January 2022, accessed 9 February 2022

91 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (AFG0001)

92 New Atlanticist, [They aren't listed, but make no mistake: The UN has sanctions on the Taliban](#), 23 August 2021

93 Q28 [James Cowan]

94 The Guardian, [UK scrambling to find way to send aid to Afghanistan without violating sanctions](#), 9 September 2021

It is sanctions that have made life almost intolerable. The Americans have issued some licences, we understand, which have helped some of their aid agencies. We have just had a reply from the Government saying that, because of a technical reason, the British are not able to provide licences.

... Humanitarian assistance should not be sanctioned.⁹⁵

75. UK Finance, a trade association for the UK banking and finance industry, told us that the UK Government had been too slow to act on mitigating the impact of sanctions on the work of aid organisations

Despite early notice of the issues encountered by the financial sector and its partners, the Government did not provide sufficient reassurances in the absence of a UN exception for humanitarian activities. The view of the industry is that innovative and temporary mechanisms could have been used to mitigate the impact of sanctions on humanitarian assistance, when other jurisdictions such as the United States of America implemented such mechanisms as early as September 2021.

Furthermore, it said

UK Finance have highlighted similar issues in other sanctions regimes where ministers or other officials are designated under sanctions regimes (e.g. Myanmar, Belarus, etc.). The problems faced in the Afghanistan crisis will be reproduced as long as the existing framework on ownership and control is not carefully considered by the Government.⁹⁶

76. The Prime Minister's policy is to work with the Taliban to get aid through to the people of Afghanistan. At the Liaison Committee's session on 17 November 2021, he said

We must also engage with the Taliban. This is slightly controversial, but I was strongly of the view, when Kabul fell and we had the change of regime, that there was no point in the UK just standing on the side-lines and failing to engage with the Taliban. They may not speak for all Afghans—far from it—but they are some kind of authority in Kabul, even if a very imperfect authority. The UK must try to engage, for the sake of the people you are talking about, if we are to get aid through.⁹⁷

UK Government representatives had visited Afghanistan on 5 October 2021⁹⁸ and returned to the country on 10 February 2022⁹⁹ to hold talks with senior Taliban officials.

77. We recognise the necessity of having to work with the Taliban. We endorse the Government's policy of developing a pragmatic working relationship with the Taliban to enable humanitarian aid to reach the people of Afghanistan.

95 Q29 [Elizabeth Winter]

96 UK Finance ([AFG0002](#))

97 Oral evidence taken before the Liaison Committee on 17 November 2021, HC (2019–21) 835, [Q113](#) [The Prime Minister]

98 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Press release, [UK officials travel to Afghanistan, 5 October 2021](#), 5 October 2021

99 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Press release, [UK officials travel to Afghanistan, 10 February 2022](#), 10 February 2022

78. *We urge the Government to maintain its policy of working with the Taliban to enable humanitarian aid to reach the people of Afghanistan.*

Women, girls and minority groups

79. Taliban policies have disproportionately disadvantaged women, girls, and minority groups.¹⁰⁰ There have been reports of Taliban restrictions preventing women from carrying out aid work.¹⁰¹ We heard a mixed picture about the treatment by the Taliban of women public sector and aid workers at our oral evidence session.¹⁰²

80. James Cowan said

We should be trying to get them [the Taliban] into a moderate position, where they are not in any way offering hospitality to Islamic extremists, from either ISIS or al-Qaeda, and in which they are behaving pragmatically towards women, allowing them to work, and towards girls, allowing them to go to secondary school. On that basis, we can come up with a workable, pragmatic relationship with the Taliban, and the sooner we get on with it, the better.¹⁰³

81. Elizabeth Winter talked about the promises, on women's rights and human rights, that the international community had made to Afghan women paraphrasing that those women are now saying

Where has all that gone? You have abandoned us. What were these 20 years of promise all about?¹⁰⁴

82. The Prime Minister said at the Liaison Committee's session on 17 November 2021

We must make our position clear to the Taliban authorities that we expect them to treat women fairly and equally, as is obviously expressly provided for in the Koran.¹⁰⁵

83. **We stand with the UK Government on seeking to ensure that the rights of women and girls are respected by the Taliban.**

84. *We call on the Government to ensure that it maintains its focus on working to try and ensure that the Taliban adopts a moderate position whereby it commits to behaving pragmatically towards the inclusion of women, girls and other minority groups in Afghan society.*

100 [Written evidence submitted by Human Rights Watch \(AFG0032\) to the Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry into Government Policy on Afghanistan, published 7 December 2021](#)

101 Human Rights Watch, [Afghanistan: Taliban Blocking Female Aid Workers](#), 4 November 2021

102 Q20

103 Q21 [James Cowan]

104 Q33

105 Oral evidence taken before the Liaison Committee on 17 November 2021, HC (2019–21) 835, [Q113](#) [The Prime Minister]

UK Government action on sanctions

85. On 22 December 2021, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution to provide exemption from previously adopted UN resolutions to allow the delivery of aid to Afghanistan to provide humanitarian assistance and support for basic needs.¹⁰⁶

86. On 28 January 2022, the FCDO announced

Earlier this week the UK government adopted into law a humanitarian exception from UN sanctions meaning aid agencies can operate without fear of undue legal repercussions. Previously, charities and humanitarian agencies trying to bring aid into Afghanistan faced legal difficulties as a result of UN sanctions against senior Taliban leaders.¹⁰⁷

The Afghanistan (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 came into force on 28 January 2022.¹⁰⁸

87. Lord Ahmad said

FCDO, working with OFSI [Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation], will ensure that changes to the legislation are reflected promptly in public documents, in consultation with banks and NGOs in the Tri-Sector Group. We welcome the engagement of banks and NGOs with regard to the guidance which will further support the important work of both the NGO and financial sectors in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹

OFSI has updated its guidance to reflect the changes made to UK legislation.¹¹⁰

88. **We welcome the adoption of resolution 2615 at the UN Security Council on 22 December 2021, notwithstanding its limitations, and the UK Government's adoption of that resolution into UK law.**

89. ***We urge the UK Government to further step up its efforts on working with the UN to ensure that aid organisations can effectively operate under the exemptions that UN resolution 2615 (and consequent UK law) permits. It should also urge the UN Security Council to extend those exemptions beyond their initial 12 months review period.***

90. ***The UK Government should consult with representatives of aid organisations to ensure that it has issued adequate guidance on how to operate further to the adoption of UN resolution 2615 into UK law.***

106 United Nations, [Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 2615 \(2021\), Enabling Provision of Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan as Country Faces Economic Crisis](#), 22 December 2021 [The adoption of resolution 2615 at the UN Security Council on 22 December 2021 provides exemption for humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs from sanctions imposed under UN resolutions 2255 (2015) and 1988 (2011), concerning individuals and entities associated with the Taliban in constituting a threat to peace, stability and security].

107 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Press release, [Foreign Secretary pledges to support over 2.7 million Afghans with life-saving aid: Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has pledged £97 million of emergency UK aid to the Afghan people to provide life-saving food and emergency health support](#), 28 January 2022, accessed 9 February 2022

108 The Afghanistan (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 ([SI 2022/65](#))

109 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([AFG0001](#))

110 HM Treasury Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, [Charity sector guidance Financial Sanctions guidance for charities and other non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#), January 2022, accessed 9 February 2022

UK Government participation in Norwegian Government hosted talks with the Taliban

91. At the end of January 2022, the Norwegian Government hosted three days of talks with the Taliban and members of Afghan civil society alongside western diplomats, including from the UK and the US. The focus of those talks was on the effect of sanctions on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The release of frozen Afghan assets and humanitarian aid was also discussed alongside western demands that the Taliban respect human rights.^{111, 112, 113}

92. A group of former senior security, defence and DFID staff and a former UK ambassador to Kabul has suggested that development aid money (such as for large-scale infrastructure projects) could be withheld to try to leverage political concessions from the Taliban.¹¹⁴

93. **We welcome the UK's participation in the Norwegian Government's talks with the Taliban at the end of January 2021.** It will be vital to develop funding mechanisms that allow the provision of humanitarian assistance while using the promise of development assistance for infrastructure and services as a lever to ensure the Taliban respect the human rights of all people in Afghanistan. ***We call on the UK Government to press for UN resolution 2615 to be extended, or further resolutions to be adopted, to provide exemptions for development assistance, closely linked to the performance of the Taliban on upholding human rights and international law.***

Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund

94. The UK Government was a major donor to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).¹¹⁵ The ARTF is a multi-donor trust fund, managed by the World Bank, that coordinated international aid to help improve the lives of Afghans. 34 donors have contributed to the fund. ARTF was the largest single source of funding for Afghanistan's development, supporting core functions of the former Government in Afghanistan.¹¹⁶

95. In August 2021, the World Bank paused disbursements from the ARTF, citing concerns about the Taliban's takeover on development prospects in Afghanistan, particularly for women.¹¹⁷ On 17 November 2021, Ambassador James Kariuki (the UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN) said

111 The Telegraph, [British diplomats meet Taliban for humanitarian talks in Oslo](#), 24 January 2022

112 The Independent, [Taliban talks in Oslo enter last day with bilateral format](#), 25 January 2022

113 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Press release, [Foreign Secretary pledges to support over 2.7 million Afghans with life-saving aid: Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has pledged £97 million of emergency UK aid to the Afghan people to provide life-saving food and emergency health support](#), 28 January 2022, accessed 9 February 2022

114 The Guardian, [Change to aid rules needed to prevent famine in Afghanistan, say UK experts](#), 23 January 2022

115 Government response to House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations and Defence report on The UK and Afghanistan, 2nd Report of Session 2019–21, [HL Paper 208](#), 13 January 2021, paragraphs 45–48

116 Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, [Who We Are](#), accessed 9 February 2022

117 Bloomberg website news article, [World Bank Pauses Disbursements to Afghanistan After Takeover](#), 25 August 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

We hope the World Bank and donors will find a way to repurpose quickly the \$1.5bn in the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, in order to support health and other basic services.¹¹⁸

96. On 30 November 2021, the World Bank took the decision to transfer \$280 million from the ARTF to support the humanitarian response and basic health services via UN agencies.¹¹⁹ On 10 December 2021, ARTF donors took the decision to transfer out that \$280 million by the end of December 2021 to UNICEF and the World Food Programme.¹²⁰

97. The UK Government welcomed the decision by the World Bank on the transfer of those ARTF funds. It said

We are also working with G7 partners to encourage the World Bank to produce options to allocate the \$1.2 billion remaining in the Fund.¹²¹

It has said it has been at the forefront in supporting the re-purposing of the ARTF.¹²²

98. In early February 2022, the Financial Times reported that the World Bank's board plans to meet to discuss releasing some of the remaining ARTF funds, through a UN intermediary, to provide payments to support teachers, healthcare workers and other public sector employees who have not been paid for months.¹²³ Gwen Hines, CEO of Save the Children UK, has called on the UK and US Governments to push to unblock the ARTF

It becomes a vicious circle with everybody waiting for everybody else. But people need to get through winter or they will starve. Parents are selling their children. We can't wait, we have to act now.¹²⁴

99. We welcome the steps the Government has taken to help free up the funds from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. However, the World Bank's progress on releasing those funds has been agonizingly slow. Political and bureaucratic wrangling is impeding the release of over \$1 billion already set aside for the Afghan people.

100. We ask the Government to do more to encourage the World Bank to swiftly release the remaining funds from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund so that aid organisations can use that money to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

118 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and James Kariuki, [Speech: Allowing Afghans to starve serves no one's interests, Statement by Ambassador James Kariuki at the Security Council briefing on Afghanistan](#), 17 November 2021, accessed 9 February 2022

119 Reuters, [Exclusive: World Bank backs using \\$280 mln in frozen aid funds for Afghanistan](#), 2 December 2021

120 The World Bank, [Press Release: Statement on the Decision of ARTF Donors to Transfer Out \\$280 Million for the Humanitarian Response in Afghanistan](#), 10 December 2021

121 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Written Statement, [HCWS489](#), on Afghanistan: Humanitarian Situation, 15 December 2021

122 PQ [92919](#) [on Afghanistan: Bank Services], 21 December 2021

123 The Financial Times, [Aid agencies call for Afghan cash flows to be unblocked to relieve crisis](#), 7 February 2022

124 The Financial Times, [World Bank under pressure to release frozen Afghan funds](#), 23 January 2022

5 Conclusion

101. The Government has a moral duty towards aid workers who have helped to deliver UK aid projects in Afghanistan. It also has a moral duty towards the people of Afghanistan. It has made military and political interventions that have affected the lives of Afghan people over a period of decades.

102. The Government has taken some positive steps. It has pledged significant sums of UK aid to help respond to the current humanitarian crisis. It has announced schemes to support the relocation to the UK of Afghans, including aid workers, who may now be in peril having supported British efforts in Afghanistan. However, it has neither acted swiftly nor with clarity of purpose. Pledges remain unpaid while Afghans in desperate need of humanitarian aid starve. Some Afghan aid workers who have delivered on UK priorities, as a direct result of that work, now feel that their lives are at risk. Some of those Afghan aid workers who have asked for the UK's help, now say that they feel abandoned. The Government must pay those pledges in full, and fast. It must deliver on its relocation schemes for those Afghan aid workers it has placed in peril.

103. The Government has failed to work effectively - or quickly enough - with international allies and financial institutions to chart a course through the challenges of sanctions, the collapse of the banking system in Afghanistan and the issue of nominated funds being frozen in the World Bank to enable much needed humanitarian aid to flow through to the people of Afghanistan. The Government must now urgently take corrective action to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people are met.

Conclusions and recommendations

UK Government support for the safety and security of aid sector workers

1. We understand that the FCDO has reasons for clearly defining and limiting its liability in respect of its contractual relationships with its external partners. However, we believe that events in Afghanistan have clearly illustrated that the Government's policies should encompass much more than the legal aspects of duty of care as defined in its legal relationships with its suppliers and contactors. (Paragraph 13)
2. We believe that the FCDO should consider what moral obligations it has to aid sector workers who deliver UK aid and FCDO aims and objectives. *We urge the FCDO to take a broader, more holistic view of its duty of care to people working in the aid sector.* (Paragraph 14)
3. *We recommend that the FCDO take steps to better identify and assess the particular risks facing aid workers so that it can respond more effectively to those aid workers when they are in need of support in countries or regions where there is acute instability or signs of a rapidly deteriorating security situation. FCDO staff in embassies in such countries should better communicate any signs of a potential deterioration in the security situation in country to those delivering UK aid programmes so that they can take appropriate steps to protect the safety of their staff.* (Paragraph 20)
4. We were disappointed about the exclusion from the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme of Afghan aid workers to whom the UK Government had clear lines of moral responsibility, either because they were sub-contracted by the UK Government or employed by aid agencies in receipt of UK aid. We are disappointed that Afghan aid workers have not been explicitly recognised in the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). We are very concerned about the time being taken by the Government to implement the ACRS and whether Afghan aid workers will receive protection under that scheme. (Paragraph 34)
5. *We call on the Government to accelerate without further delay all pathways of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and ensure that aid sector staff are explicitly recognised and prioritised for protection under the ACRS.* (Paragraph 35)
6. *The Government should not consider people evacuated under Operation Pitting under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), instead it should consider those people under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme (ARAP) or other pre-existing pathways. The ACRS should be reserved for people:*
 - *located in Afghanistan;*
 - *located in third countries;*
 - *who have travelled to the UK, without UK Government assistance, from Afghanistan.* (Paragraph 36)

7. *The Government should ensure transparency of reporting on the number of people resettled under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) by publishing a quarterly report on the number of people resettled under that scheme, publishing that first report by the end of June 2022. (Paragraph 37)*
8. We welcome the establishment of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit but note the lack of clarity around the cost, staffing and current workload of that Unit. We are also concerned that more than three months after it was set up there is still no clarity on whether or not any of the costs of that Unit will be counted as UK ODA expenditure. *We recommend that the Government:*
 - *establish targets for the performance of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit and report quarterly against those targets, publishing that first report by the end of June 2022;*
 - *report the number of cases involving people employed as aid workers that the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit has taken receipt of, and report the status of those cases, by the end of June 2022; and*
 - *publish the costs of the Joint Afghanistan Casework Unit it attributes to the ODA budget. (Paragraph 46)*

Provision of UK aid to Afghanistan

9. We are very concerned about the time the Government has taken to disburse the UK aid it has pledged to Afghanistan, given the considerable and escalating humanitarian need in the country. The Government should have worked faster to disburse the UK aid it pledged to Afghanistan in 2021. (Paragraph 58)
10. We welcome the Government's publication of 15 December 2021 showing details of the allocation and disbursal of the aid it has pledged to Afghanistan. *We urge the Government to publish monthly updates on the allocation and disbursal of its aid to Afghanistan and to countries in the region. (Paragraph 61)*
11. *We urge the FCDO to release more information on its Development Tracker web pages to better ensure the transparency of reporting on the ODA funding it has allocated to projects in Afghanistan (if necessary, redacting parts of that information to mitigate any risks to safety and security). (Paragraph 62)*
12. *We urge the FCDO to update information on all ODA allocations (for all countries) on Development Tracker within a three-month period of those allocations having been made. (Paragraph 63)*

Other factors affecting the humanitarian situation and the disbursal of aid

13. The Government has been far too slow to work with its international counterparts to find ways to help unblock the banking system in Afghanistan. This has put at grave risk the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. It is also deepening the humanitarian suffering of the people of Afghanistan. (Paragraph 71)

14. *The UK Government should be taking more urgent steps to collaborate with its international counterparts, economists, representatives of the banking sector and aid organisations to find ways to help address more rapidly the banking crisis in Afghanistan to ease the humanitarian suffering of, and enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance to, the people of Afghanistan.* (Paragraph 72)
15. We recognise the necessity of having to work with the Taliban. We endorse the Government's policy of developing a pragmatic working relationship with the Taliban to enable humanitarian aid to reach the people of Afghanistan. (Paragraph 77)
16. *We urge the Government to maintain its policy of working with the Taliban to enable humanitarian aid to reach the people of Afghanistan.* (Paragraph 78)
17. We stand with the UK Government on seeking to ensure that the rights of women and girls are respected by the Taliban. (Paragraph 83)
18. *We call on the Government to ensure that it maintains its focus on working to try and ensure that the Taliban adopts a moderate position whereby it commits to behaving pragmatically towards the inclusion of women, girls and other minority groups in Afghan society.* (Paragraph 84)
19. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2615 at the UN Security Council on 22 December 2021, notwithstanding its limitations, and the UK Government's adoption of that resolution into UK law. (Paragraph 88)
20. *We urge the UK Government to further step up its efforts on working with the UN to ensure that aid organisations can effectively operate under the exemptions that UN resolution 2615 (and consequent UK law) permits. It should also urge the UN Security Council to extend those exemptions beyond their initial 12 months review period.* (Paragraph 89)
21. *The UK Government should consult with representatives of aid organisations to ensure that it has issued adequate guidance on how to operate further to the adoption of UN resolution 2615 into UK law.* (Paragraph 90)
22. We welcome the UK's participation in the Norwegian Government's talks with the Taliban at the end of January 2021. *We call on the UK Government to press for UN resolution 2615 to be extended, or further resolutions to be adopted, to provide exemptions for development assistance, closely linked to the performance of the Taliban on upholding human rights and international law.* (Paragraph 93)
23. We welcome the steps the Government has taken to help free up the funds from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. However, the World Bank's progress on releasing those funds has been agonizingly slow. Political and bureaucratic wrangling is impeding the release of over \$1 billion already set aside for the Afghan people. (Paragraph 99)
24. *We ask the Government to do more to encourage the World Bank to swiftly release the remaining funds from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund so that aid organisations can use that money to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.* (Paragraph 100)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 1 March 2022

Members present:

Sarah Champion, in the Chair

Pauline Latham

Chris Law

Navendu Mishra

Dan Poulter

Draft Report (*Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 103 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Adjournment

[Adjourned till Tuesday 8 March at 2.00 p.m.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 7 December 2021

Alain Délétroz, Director General, Geneva Call; **James Cowan**, Chief Executive Officer, The HALO Trust; **Elizabeth Winter**, Executive Director, British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG)

[Q1–45](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

AFG numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([AFG0001](#))
- 2 UK Finance ([AFG0002](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Assessing DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 103
2nd Report	Global Britain in demand: UK climate action and international development around COP26	HC 99
3rd Report	The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 104
4th Report	International climate finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 730
1st Special Report	The humanitarian situation in Tigray: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 554
2nd Special Report	The UK's Support to the African Development Bank Group: report from the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 555
3rd Special Report	DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's First Report	HC 780
4th Special Report	Global Britain in demand: UK climate action and international development around COP26: Government response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 1008
5th Special Report	The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1021

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya	HC 259
2nd Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings	HC 215
3rd Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI	HC 260
4th Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger	HC 596

Number	Title	Reference
5th Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings)	HC 292
6th Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 535
7th Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries	HC 605
8th Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts	HC 1186
9th Report	The UK's support to the African Development Bank Group: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 1055
10th Report	The humanitarian situation in Tigray	HC 1289
1st Special Report	Follow up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee	HC 127
2nd Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee	HC 658
3rd Special Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 742
4th Special Report	Effectiveness of UK Aid: Interim Report & Effectiveness of UK Aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger: Government Response to the Second & Fourth Reports	HC 820
5th Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings): Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1160
6th Special Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1198
7th Special Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries: Government Response to the Seventh Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 1332
8th Special Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts: Government Response to the Eighth Report of the Committee	HC 1351