

Written evidence submitted by the Afghan Solidarity Coalition (ASC).

1. The evidence is submitted by the Afghan Solidarity Coalition (ASC), a grouping of organisations that have been working on research and peacebuilding activities with local partners in Afghanistan. This group has helped evacuate at-risk colleagues and continues to coordinate activities including fundraising and resettlement assistance to Afghan human rights activists, women peacebuilders, artists, filmmakers, researchers, doctors and LGBTQI activists.
2. The members of the Coalition include:
 - [UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub](#) – an international research network based at the London School of Economics, working with over 40 partners and local and global civil society, practitioners, governments and international organisations to advance gender justice and inclusive peace. Afghanistan is a focus country for research with three key projects there
 - [LSE Centre for Women Peace and Security](#) – a research centre for scholars, practitioners, activists and policy-makers to develop strategies to promote justice, human rights and participation of women in conflict-affected situations around the world
 - Middlesex University London ([Dr Neelam Raina](#)) and University College London ([Prof Brad Blitz](#)), who are part of the GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub and lead Hub projects focusing on Afghanistan
 - [International Civil Society Action Network](#) – (Sanam Anderlini) promotes inclusive and sustainable peace in countries affected by violent conflict, extremism, militarism, and closing political space
 - [MOSAIC Lebanon](#) – a gender/LGBTQI focused organisation
 - [Open Asia Foundation](#) – an Afghanistan-based organisation that promotes democracy, human rights, justice and rule of law as well as cultural initiatives
 - [FUUSE](#) – an Emmy and Peabody award-winning company based in Norway specialising in creating music and film projects rooted in art, culture, and activism to encourage dialogue around social and political issues
 - [Women for Peace and Participation](#) – promotes the social and political inclusion of women and youth in Afghanistan in peacebuilding processes at the grassroots, national and global levels

3. Between February 2019 and June 2024, members of the Hub worked collectively on a UK government ODA-funded research programme which included three projects in Afghanistan covering empirical studies on forced displacement, return and political reintegration, culture and conflict, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention activities, principally led by Afghan women. Members continue to work independently and as separate groups on all issues facing Afghans within the country, and those outside Afghanistan.
4. The ASC was formed in August 2021 to coordinate the efforts of Hub members with other agencies who were also trying to evacuate and resettle their colleagues. Over the course of our collaboration, we have gathered names and information regarding 285 Afghans at risk, including their families, 67 of whom have applied for ARAP and all of whom meet the criteria for UK assistance. Of these, 28 have been evacuated. ARAP is designed for HMG employees and those funded through British agencies including the British Council, and the ACRS scheme for which they are eligible has not yet opened. We have also been in contact with other individuals and informal groups who have worked to support Afghans since August 2021.
5. The focus of our evidence is the evacuation and resettlement of Afghans who had worked with the UK military, the UK government and other UK-funded bodies, addressing the questions outlined by the Committee.

Use of a legal injunction

Was the Government's original application for an injunction appropriate in this case? Why were alternatives not considered adequate?

6. The stated justification for the injunction was to protect those whose data was included in the breach from retribution by the Taliban. However, this rationale was undermined by critical information gaps: the UK government had no reliable knowledge of the exact location of the individuals listed in the breach, no comprehensive risk assessment of the danger posed to individuals and families, no immediate plan to protect these individuals and bring them to safety, and no evidence regarding Taliban awareness of or access to the breached data.
7. The appropriateness of the injunction must be questioned when the government lacked essential information to justify such an extraordinary measure. Alternative mechanisms, including targeted D-Notices or confidential parliamentary briefings, could have maintained necessary operational security whilst preserving democratic accountability.

Was it right for the Government to argue for the injunction to remain in place for as long as it did, and was it right for it to agree that it should be lifted when it was?

8. The prolonged duration of the injunction raises serious concerns about political motivations rather than protection imperatives. The length of this injunction conveniently covered all eventualities surrounding the general election—loss or win—ensuring no direct implications for MPs or Ministers involved in the breach response.
9. The timing of the injunction's lifting appears more influenced by political calendar changes than by substantive alterations in risk to affected Afghans, suggesting the injunction served governmental interests rather than the protection of vulnerable individuals.

What were the implications of the injunction for public and parliamentary scrutiny, and for data protection regulation?

10. Prolonged state secrecy—such as super-injunctions—perpetuates unaccountable colonial-era power dynamics, marginalises affected communities (Afghan nationals in this case), and prevents individuals from claiming their rights or seeking justice. Protection of life and liberty must never become a pretext for state impunity; the rights of vulnerable individuals to information, protection, and redress should supersede bureaucratic convenience or "national security" rationales rooted in legacy systems.
11. The injunction created a scrutiny vacuum that fundamentally undermined democratic ideals and data protection principles. Data breaches disproportionately harm those already exposed to extreme violence since 15 August 2021. There is an urgent need for community-led accountability, reparative justice, and regulatory mechanisms controlled by and accountable to the most affected, not the most powerful.
12. We reject "necessary secrecy" narratives as paternalist and colonial. This inquiry should prioritise open justice, consent, and community advocacy as remedies for state wrongdoing. Only through transparency can marginalised voices be safeguarded and colonial legacies confronted and dismantled.

Information security and risk management

How was it possible for the data breach to take place? What were the systemic, cultural and other factors that enabled the data breach?

13. The breach resulted from organisational complacency, secrecy, weak regulatory culture, and marginalisation of those most affected—producing an

environment where such a catastrophic breach could occur and persist without timely rectification or transparent oversight.

14. The UK Ministry of Defence exhibited insufficient attention to safeguarding sensitive data of high-risk groups with whom they had worked closely through many years of British military presence in Afghanistan. There was a fundamental lack of robust checks and poor data governance, evidenced by a staff member's error going undiscovered for months and inadequate protocols for escalating a breach of this scale.
15. Unlike typical data breach responses where those affected are rapidly informed, many Afghans learned about the risk only years later or through informal means. Human rights voices, such as Professor de Jong of the Sulha Alliance, state that this delay amplified alarm and risk within Afghan communities, potentially increasing vulnerability to Taliban reprisals.
16. A cultural residue of secrecy, top-down control, and lack of accountability within the MoD, rooted in military and colonial practices, fostered a dangerous disregard for transparency and community engagement that cost Afghan lives and caused moral injury.
17. The response processes largely excluded Afghan voices both in the immediate aftermath and in subsequent decisions on disclosure, mitigation, and policy reform. This exclusion, highlighted by Afghan advocacy groups known to the ASC, meant the needs and lived experiences of at-risk Afghans were not central to institutional thinking at any point.
18. The government's rapid moves to conceal not only the breach but its very existence through a rare super-injunction reduced scrutiny and perpetuated impunity. These actions undermined democratic accountability and created a lack of faith in democratic instruments among the public.

What has been the impact of the data breach and its handling on trust in Government, both within the UK and among overseas partners?

19. The handling of this breach is emblematic of institutional failure, poor accountability, and disregard for vulnerable communities, fundamentally undermining trust in government transparency, accountability and integrity.
20. The trust between the UK and its overseas partners has been negatively impacted. The breach indicates inequality upon which British partnerships are based, the lack of joined-up action, the ability to obscure poor decision-making through injunctions and super-injunctions, as well as complete exclusion and marginalisation of partners overseas.
21. The concealment of the breach from Parliament and the public for over two years fuelled criticism that the government prioritised avoiding political fallout over protecting human rights and democratic oversight.

22. Within the UK Afghan diaspora and refugee support groups, there is deep distrust in government assurances, with many feeling abandoned and fearing for relatives still at risk, exacerbating feelings of alienation and insecurity.
23. The exposure and perceived government neglect have severely eroded morale and trust among Afghans who supported UK efforts, complicating ongoing resettlement, protection, and diplomatic engagement. It raises concerns among allied countries and international partners about the UK's ability to protect confidential information and manage sensitive security matters, potentially affecting intelligence-sharing and cooperative operations.

Following the lifting of the injunction, what is the risk to those individuals in the dataset who have not been resettled, and how has this risk been managed?

24. The MoD's downplaying of risks, even after evidence that the Taliban targets such individuals, contrasts sharply with Afghans' lived reality. Afghans have faced threats, torture and killings based on real or suspected connections to the UK since 15 August 2021. The MoD's assertions that inclusion on the leaked spreadsheet was "unlikely" to increase risk is highly prejudiced and contradictory to what affected Afghans have documented and evidenced.
25. Afghans who worked with British forces described the breach as devastating, noting that it reignited fear and endangered family members who remained in Afghanistan. Reprisals and persistent danger, especially for women, professionals, and those seen as "Western collaborators," have been evident from the start of the Taliban's return in 2021.
26. Those who have not been resettled, over whom the UK government has little detail, sight, or indeed any intent to support, remain at highest risk due to this breach. Those who were injured and/or harmed due to this breach, who remain in hiding today, cannot counter this risk effectively. When we heard about this breach initially and suspected its occurrence, the only evidence we saw was injury and death through what appeared to be a pogrom of vindictive physical attacks by the Taliban.
27. This risk has been poorly managed by the government from the start. The rising anti-immigrant narrative and the political mileage it provides to UK politicians has created an invisible collateral of Afghans whose protection needs have been systematically deprioritised.

Planning and delivery

Were decisions on who to offer resettlement reasonably taken in light of the data breach? Were these decisions taken in a timely way? If not, why not?

28. No, decisions were not taken reasonably or in a timely manner.
29. The super-injunction and injunction made it highly unlikely that resettlement decisions would have had any adequate access to this key aspect of risk. Home Office and MoD-based evacuation and subsequent resettlement schemes were poorly resourced, poorly operated, and disconnected from the reality of the risk that data breaches by the UK and other NATO allies placed on Afghans and their families.
30. Research conducted by UCL with 54 Afghan families (232 individuals) between 2021 and 2024 revealed systematic exclusion despite apparent eligibility. Despite occupational profiles aligning with stated ARAP and ACRS criteria and having advocates with parliamentary access, none of these families succeeded in UK resettlement. Three were eventually relocated to Germany and two were under consideration with Spain—but none ever reached the UK via ARAP or ACRS. Significantly, three applicants on the UCL list had their data breached and received emails from the UK government confirming this, though others may also have been affected. Additionally, one of UCL's recent graduates, a recipient of a Warm Welcome Scholarship, was also a victim of the MoD data breach, illustrating how the breach affected even those who had successfully reached the UK.
31. The delays in processing applications for resettlement were driven by anti-immigrant rhetoric, lack of resource allocation to process applications, lack of transparent information on applications, and absence of appeal or query mechanisms for decisions and outcomes. The digitisation of the application system, combined with complete blindness to digital inequities, also caused delays for resettlement applications.
32. Many Afghans and their families waited and continue to wait in application queues for ARAP and ACRS schemes even though these are now closed. Above factors aligned with breach-related complexities indicate that there was little scope, capacity, or indeed intent to offer resettlement in a timely and just way for Afghans, especially those betrayed by breaches of information.
33. The UK government filled quotas retrospectively, closing off protection to other vulnerable Afghans. Most significantly, it backfilled ACRS Pathway 1, treating it as an amendment to ARAP even though ACRS was aimed at civilians. The 5,000 quota was quickly filled by those initially offered resettlement in August 2021, whilst other pathways came to a standstill. Exceptionally few offers were made under ACRS Pathway 2 (vulnerable women, girls, LGBTQI individuals), and delayed protection was offered under Pathway 3 (interpreters, British Council staff, Chevening alumni).
34. Selection processes exposed significant in-group inequalities and UK integration preferences. Consider the differential treatment of educators:

language instructors directly employed by the British Council eventually became eligible under ACRS Pathway 3 (though many faced years of delay); university lecturers working on UK-funded democracy programmes were rejected under ARAP Category 4 for insufficient "substantive contribution to military objectives"; and girls' education advocates were directed to ACRS Pathway 2 but faced the catch-22 of needing to be outside Afghanistan to register with UNHCR, yet lacking the means to exit safely. These inequalities reveal how selection operated less on vulnerability or contribution and more on bureaucratic categorisation and organisational relationships.

Resettlement

Has the Ministry of Defence and Government more widely made adequate arrangements for the resettlement of eligible Afghans in the United Kingdom?

35. The resettlement of eligible Afghans has been critically inadequate despite some efforts and narratives about these.
36. Under International Humanitarian Law and international human rights law, the UK has a clear obligation to protect those who have supported UK forces and vulnerable persons who face threats of reprisals. Delays, secrecy, and bureaucratic hurdles in evacuation and resettlement processes diminished protections owed to these individuals, putting many at grave risk.
37. The government's concealment of the Afghan data breach and the slow disclosure materially hindered timely resettlement. This secrecy undermined trust, denied affected Afghans knowledge of risks, and hindered advocacy and support efforts by humanitarian actors, contravening principles of transparency and accountability central to humanitarian law.
38. Human rights organisations point to inadequate and fragmented resettlement infrastructure, with the MoD and Home Office inadequately coordinating relocation, housing, healthcare, and integration support. This shortfall resulted in many eligible refugees facing prolonged uncertainty, poor living conditions, and difficulty accessing essential services, violating their rights to dignity and adequate standard of living.
39. Affected Afghan communities and humanitarian groups were largely excluded from decision-making or oversight of protection schemes. This entrenched a paternalistic, top-down approach inconsistent with contemporary human rights frameworks emphasising participation, empowerment, and self-determination.
40. Despite some successful relocations, reports of families fearing for their safety abroad continue, signalling persistent gaps in protection and durable solutions. The failure to fully address harm caused by the government's own

data breach raises questions about reparative justice obligations under human rights law.

41. Specific bureaucratic obstacles included: application system design that required selecting from predetermined occupational categories that did not include "civil society" or adequately capture roles like "women's rights activist"; documentation requirements requesting formal employment contracts and salary records that many civil society actors lacked, particularly women whose work was often conducted through informal networks for security reasons; communication opacity where the MoD claimed inability to locate applicants despite detailed contact information being provided; absence of appeal processes, where only applicants submitting pre-action protocol letters (legal threats of judicial review) ever received responses, systematically excluding those without legal resources; and pathway contradictions where ACRS Pathway 2 required UNHCR registration outside Afghanistan, yet many vulnerable Afghans lacked means to safely exit—creating a catch-22 functioning as de facto exclusion.
42. Between ACRS announcement (January 2022) and Pathway 2 operationalisation (late 2023), nearly two years elapsed. During this period, applicants remained immobile and were forced to wait; conditions in Afghanistan deteriorated dramatically, alternative protection strategies became foreclosed, and quotas were filled retrospectively. This temporal dimension represents a distinct failure of governance where delay cannot simply be attributed to administrative inefficiency but is rather an oppressive approach to refugee resettlement.
43. The breach and its aftermath exposed systemic failures in safeguarding human rights that require urgent reform and reparative action.

What are the successes of the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and what are the key issues, for affected Afghans, Defence, public services, local communities and public trust? What are the opportunity costs?

44. **Successes:** Operation Pitting brought many Afghans to safety and brought public attention to the crisis. However, the exact number of Afghan beneficiaries remains unknown since official data includes British nationals amongst stated beneficiaries, and statistics retrospectively categorise individuals under schemes that had not yet been launched. New support structures and resettlement schemes were launched, though with little operational clarity in post-Brexit Britain. Some vulnerable individuals did reach safety and begin rebuilding their lives in the UK.
45. **Key issues and challenges:** Inadequate resourcing and capacity; delays and transparency problems; impact on local communities; long-term integration and support gaps; public trust and government accountability issues; and

exacerbated gender inequalities through gender-blind policies and programmes. Official data four years after evacuations still include provisional figures and British nationals amongst stated beneficiaries, undermining transparency and accountability.

46. Official statistics suggest gender-inclusive outcomes, yet ARAP privileged politicians, military personnel, and those working directly with UK government—all male-dominated fields. Only 699 females arrived under ACRS Pathway 2, of whom 465 were over 18, suggesting that those resettled arrived overwhelmingly as wives and dependents, not as human rights defenders in their own right.
47. **Opportunity costs:** The delays and perceived shortcomings in the Afghan resettlement programme have diminished the UK's reputation as a leader in refugee protection and humanitarian responsibility, affecting its diplomatic and moral standing internationally. Failing to deliver fully on promises of protection and integration risks long-term breaches of international obligations, with human rights and legal repercussions.
48. Insufficient integration efforts can lead to social segregation, marginalisation, and alienation of Afghan refugees, which may perpetuate societal divides and undermine community cohesion. The limited resettlement of a small number of "deserving" Afghans, whilst abandoning vast populations of vulnerable individuals who met eligibility criteria, has created lasting harm to the UK's credibility and moral authority in humanitarian leadership.

Contributors

Dr Neelam Raina, Middlesex University London; Director of the Secretariat of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Afghan Women and Girls

Professor Brad Blitz, UCL Institute of Education

Ms Sobia Kapadia, Member of the Secretariat of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Afghan Women and Girls

Footnotes

1. The Afghan Solidarity Coalition was co-founded by Dr Neelam Raina in August 2021 in response to the Afghan crisis. [↩](#)

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