



“I am not a case number, I am a human being”

The lived impacts of the February 2022 UK Ministry of Defence Afghan Data Breach

February 2026

Authors: Victoria Canning, Sara de Jong, Shamim Sarabi, Olivia Clark, Isaac Shaffer

Self check complete

Thank you for using the Defence Afghan Relocation and Resettlement (DARR) self-checker. Please check that the reference number you entered is displaying correctly.

Our records indicate that the reference supplied is likely to be affected by the data incident. It's important that you read all the information below.

Self Check - Result

Self check complete

Thank you for using the Defence Afghan Relocation and Resettlement (DARR) self-checker. Please check that the reference number you entered is displaying correctly.

Our records indicate that the reference supplied is likely to be affected by the data incident. It's important that you read all the information below.

We sincerely apologise for this data incident and understand that this news may be concerning.

[Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy \(ARAP\) scheme](#) and [Ex-Gratia scheme \(EGS\)](#) applications were held on a secure UK Government computer system. Unfortunately, some of this information was sent outside our secure systems in February 2022, meaning some of the personal data associated with this reference number is likely to have been compromised.

The data was taken from our spreadsheet of ARAP/EGS applications used at the time. This spreadsheet was subject to continual refinement and updating and as such, some of the lines of data were incomplete and inaccurate. The precise information included for individuals will vary.

The main information in the dataset related to personal details received from applicants via online application forms, which included some personal data and contact details. It did not routinely include home addresses and it did not contain any photographs. However, we recommend you assume that the affected dataset included all other information you provided to the UK government about yourself, your dependants, and anyone else who might have used your principle email address to apply for ARAP or the EGS.

While we have no evidence to suggest that the dataset has been seen or used by others that might seek to exploit the information it contains, the UK Government cannot rule out that possibility.

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted among Afghans whose data was breached by the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) after they applied for resettlement to the UK under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) or Afghan Locally Employed Staff Ex-Gratia Scheme. It is the first systematic study of the impact of the data breach among affected Afghans, documenting physical and psychological harms, as well as shortcomings with the UK Government's response.

In February 2022, a person employed by the MoD mistakenly shared a spreadsheet containing the personal information associated with 18,714 Afghan principal applicants and their family members (the Afghan Data Breach)¹. The UK Government was unaware of the breach until they were alerted by a member of the public of the data breach in August 2023. The Afghan Data Breach, and the subsequent, unprecedented, superinjunction obtained, raise serious questions about data privacy, the use of the courts and national security powers to maintain state secrecy and to evade accountability, as well as the human costs of these failures and evasions. Eventually, the UK Government commissioned an independent policy review – the Rimmer Review² – which was shared with the judge presiding over the superinjunction and partially made public in July 2025. However, apart from some interviews with so-called “Triples”³, who had already been resettled to the UK, conducted for the Rimmer Review, few efforts have been made to invite or consider the experiences of those who have been most affected: Afghans whose data was compromised, including those still in Afghanistan and third countries affected by the data breach. Indeed, affected Afghans were only

informed by the MoD of the Afghan Data Breach in July 2025, more than three years after the loss of their personal data.

This report seeks to begin redressing this imbalance. It details the results of a mixed-methods survey questionnaire that focuses on two key aspects of the Afghan Data Breach and its aftermath: firstly, the physical, psychological and relational impacts on Afghans who have been affected and secondly the UK Government's response through resettlement or lack thereof.

The survey (available in English/Dari/Pashto) was conducted by the charity Refugee Legal Support in consultation with Professor Victoria Canning (Lancaster University) and Professor Sara de Jong (University of York) and was disseminated by various Afghan resettlement stakeholders between 23 September-5 October 2025. Participation in the survey was voluntary and open to anyone over the age of 18 and affected by the Afghan Data Breach. The survey did not ask for personal information and all responses have been anonymised. It received 350 valid responses. Of the total number of respondents, 155 are currently based in the UK, 152 in Afghanistan and 33 in third countries outside Europe; 10 were in European countries or ticked “prefer not to say”.

1_UK Parliament (2025a). Afghanistan: Volume 771: debated on Tuesday 15 July 2025, available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-07-15/debates/52337725-C8E1-4D11-952A-BA4A9C1CC6E6/Afghanistan>.

2_Rimmer, P. (2025). The Independent Policy Review, available at: https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2025-0500/Rimmer_Policy_Review_003_.pdf, June 2025.

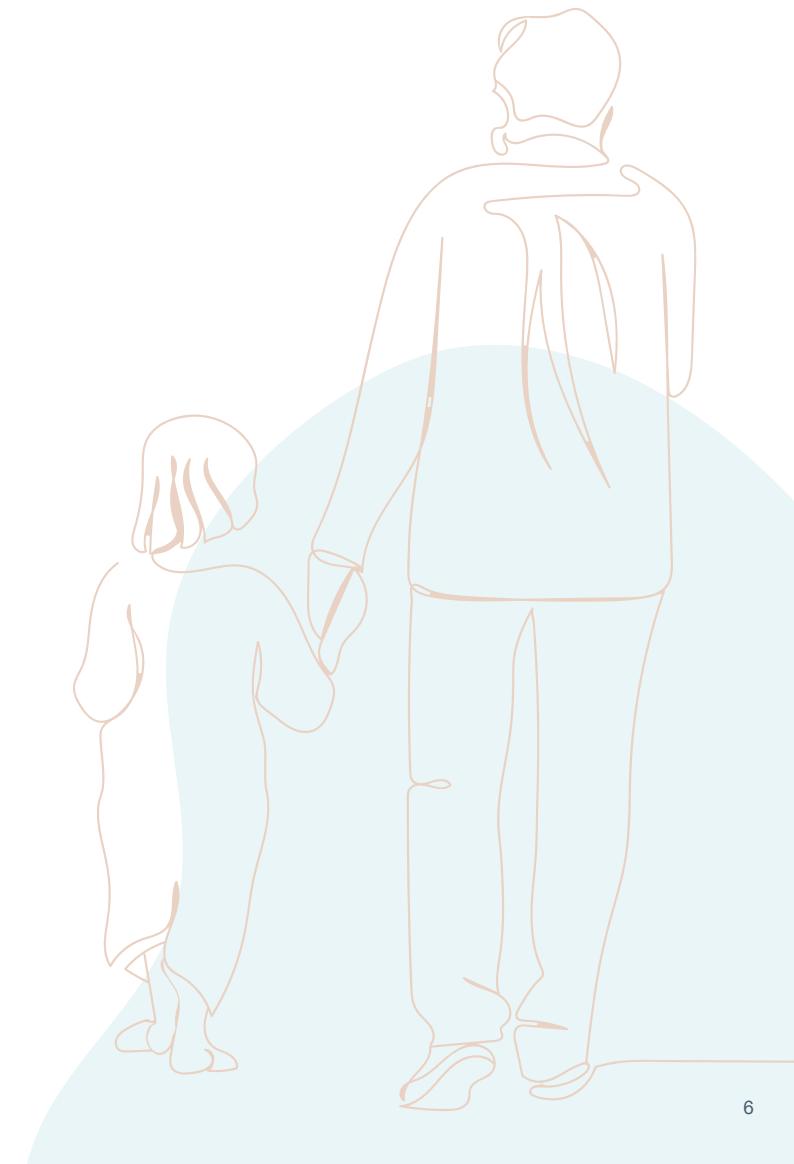
3_The “Triples” are elite Afghan special forces units (CF 333 & ATF 444) that were trained, funded, and partnered with the UK Special Forces (UKSF) in Afghanistan.

231 respondents reported receiving direct communication from the MoD that their data had been breached (hereafter called “Affected Afghans”). In terms of direct impacts, of the 231 Affected Afghans, 200 (87%) reported personal risks and/or threats to family members. Respondents reported a range of threats and risks, ranging from extreme violence, including killings, to threats, such as house searches. In terms of indirect impacts, 89% (207 out of 231) of Affected Afghans reported impacts on their own physical and/or mental health and the same number (207) reported negative impacts on their family’s physical and/or mental health.

A minority of the Affected Afghans (38%) found the security advice provided by the MoD (the MoD Security Advice) helpful. Based on the quantitative and qualitative survey results, there was a profound mismatch between the MoD Security Advice, which focused on, for example, restricting one’s use of social media accounts and advising the use of Virtual Private Networks, and the severity of the reported risks and threats, which included direct threats, violence, and displacement. The majority (63%) of Affected Afghans who had been informed by the MoD in July 2025 that their data had likely been compromised in 2023 felt that it took too long before they were informed of the Afghan Data Breach. Only 48 out of 231 (21%) thought the length of time was acceptable, with 16% of Affected Afghans responding “prefer not to say” to the survey question.

As the full report outlines, both the quantitative and qualitative data from the survey shows that the Afghan Data Breach has had devastating consequences for many individuals and families.

Beyond the failures that led to the breach itself, the UK Government has failed to act decisively to protect those affected and restore trust and confidence. As is shown in this report, many of those directly impacted and/or their families remain at extreme risk, and without other means of support or sanctuary. Responsibility must now be taken for ensuring their safety before it is too late.



Background to the Afghan Data Breach

In 2022, a “Defence official” in the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) mistakenly shared a spreadsheet containing the personal information associated with 18,714 Afghan applicants to the ARAP (Afghan Relocation and Assistance) scheme and their family members (UK Parliament, 2025a)⁴. After the UK Government was alerted by a member of the public⁵ of the data breach in August 2023 and a few individuals, including a journalist and one of the authors of this report (Professor Sara de Jong) became aware of the leak too, the UK Government sought an unprecedented injunction “contra mundum” (against the world). This “superjunction” prohibited journalists and others who were served a notice from reporting the breach and even the very existence of the injunction.

The spectacular scale and impact of the February 2022 Afghan Data Breach should not distract from the fact that it was not entirely unique. The personal data of Afghan applicants had already been exposed by the MoD in an earlier series of data breaches in September 2021 (Whannel, 2025)⁶. And on 21 August 2025, the BBC reported (Kenber, 2025)⁷ that the MoD had admitted that there have been 49 separate data breaches in the past four years in the team that has been handling the Afghan relocation applications.

An independent review⁸ into the effects of the Afghan Data Breach, commissioned by the UK Government in early 2025 and undertaken by retired civil servant Paul Rimmer (the Rimmer Review), was shared with the judge presiding over the superjunction case and was partially made public in July 2025 (Rimmer, 2025)⁹.

The Rimmer Review only obtained limited evidence from Afghans themselves, with Afghan so-called “Triples” already resettled in the UK being the only community consulted. The report’s recommendation suggested that “consideration should be given to whether there are other avenues to seek insights from Afghans who are resettling in the UK”. Subsequently, a Defence Select Committee Inquiry into the Afghan Data Breach and resettlement¹⁰ was announced in Summer 2025 to which the authors of this report responded with evidence garnered by the survey research¹¹ on which this report is based.

When the superjunction was finally lifted¹² on 15 July 2025, John Healey, the UK Secretary of State for Defence, revealed that the MoD had operated a secret resettlement scheme, the Afghanistan Response Route (ARR) for some Afghans whose data had been leaked and who the UK Government deemed to be at risk from the Taliban. At the time of the revelation, Healey confirmed that thus far 900 Afghans and 3,600 of their family members had been flown to the UK or were currently in transit via this scheme. A further 600 people and their immediate family members were still in Afghanistan, being promised evacuation (*ibid*). However, since the lifting of the superjunction in July 2025 and the writing of this report in December 2025, there has not been any third-party assisted movement of eligible Afghans from Afghanistan to Pakistan.¹³ Many thousands of others on the list were already resettled in the UK via two other official routes (Home Office, 2025a)¹⁴.

4_UK Parliament (2025a). Afghanistan: Volume 771: debated on Tuesday 15 July 2025, available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-07-15/debates/52337725-C8E1-4D11-952A-BA4A9C1CCE6/Afghanistan>.

5_UK Parliament (2025c). Defence Committee, Oral evidence: Afghan Data Breach and Resettlement Schemes, HC 1304, Private Sitting, available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/16788/default/>, 18 November 2025.

6_Whannel, K. (2025). Payout offered to Afghans hit by UK data breaches. BBC News, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1k8ww1wrwyo>, 4 July 2025.

7_Kenber, B. (2025). Dozens more UK Afghan data breaches uncovered, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp8950py1vo>, 21 August 2025.

8_Rimmer, P. (2025). The Independent Policy Review, available at: https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2025-0500/Rimmer_Policy_Review_003_.pdf, June 2025.

9_Ibid.

10_UK Parliament (2025d). Afghan Data Breach and Resettlement Schemes, Inquiry, available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/9327/afghan-data-breach-and-resettlement-schemes/>.

11_Refugee Legal Support (2025). Written evidence submitted by Refugee Legal Support, available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/149931/pdf/>, 13 October 2025.

12_Ministry of Defence vs Global Media and Entertainment Limited, Independent Digital News and Media Limited, Times Media Limited, Associated Newspapers Limited, Telegraph Media Group Holdings, The Financial Times Limited, The Press Association Limited Company, Barings Law [2025] EWHC 1806, available at: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/MOD-Judgment-No-4-final-1.pdf>, 15 July 2025.

13_Defence Committee (2025). Yesterday, journalist David Williams told us that since the super-injunction was lifted, the UK has not helped any of the ~2,000 affected Afghans still in the country to leave, despite the increased risk to their lives, X, available at: <https://x.com/CommonsDefence/status/1998704337124565053>, 10 December 2025.

14_Home Office (2025a). Guidance: Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>, 1 July 2025.

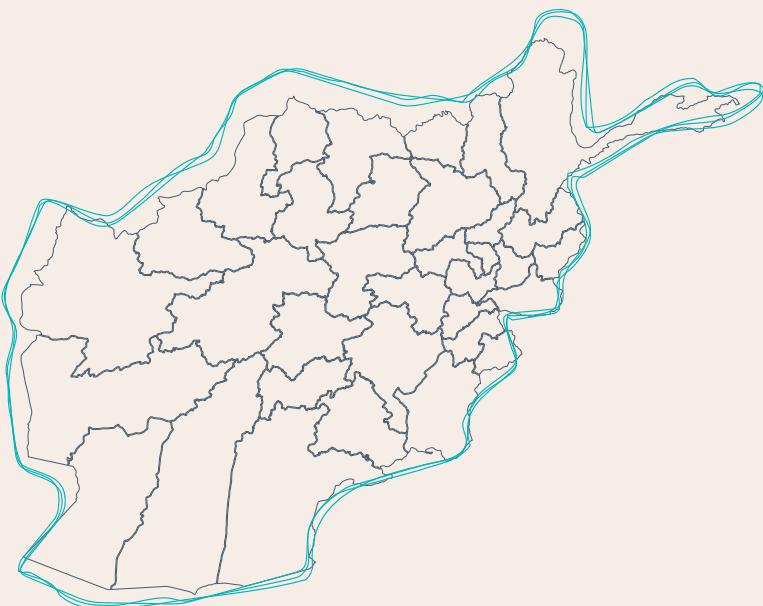
EFFECTS ON AFGHANS

Following the lifting of the superinjunction, Healey announced on 18 July 2025 that the secret ARR relocation scheme was now closed. This followed the sudden decision on 1 July 2025 to close the two official Afghan resettlement schemes¹⁵: ARAP and ACRS (Home Office, 2025b). The decision to shut down the two publicly known resettlement schemes, he claimed¹⁶, was based on “policy concerns about proportionality, public accountability, cost and fairness”, as well as a commissioned report, the Rimmer Review, on the impact of the Afghan Data Breach (Healey addressing UK Parliament, 2025)¹⁷.

Affected Afghans were only informed by the MoD of the Afghan Data Breach in July 2025, more than three years after the loss of their personal data. On the day the superinjunction was lifted, Affected Afghans were sent a notice by the MoD and a link where they could find out if their data had been compromised. The email said very little about what support the MoD could offer, instead indicating measures Affected Afghans were now supposed to take, such as using a Virtual Private Network and limiting who can see their social media profiles. Affected Afghans unlucky enough to still reside in Afghanistan were simply advised that, “If you are outside the UK, please do not try to travel to a third country without a valid passport and visa. If you do so, you will be putting yourself at risk on the journey, and you may face the risk of being deported back to Afghanistan”.

It is important to note that it is almost impossible for Afghans to travel legally¹⁸ without international assistance. Indeed, the Afghanistan passport is (at the time of writing) ranked globally as the lowest in power of all passports¹⁹ with access to only six other countries visa free (Passport Index, 2025). Since the Taliban are not recognised as a legitimate government, embassies are closed for citizens to even obtain legal travel documentation (Atkinson, 2024)²⁰.

Given that the UK Government recognises the real risk of rights violations in Afghanistan (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2025)²¹, as well as the ongoing assault on women’s rights by the Taliban, it seems contradictory – and a remarkable abdication of responsibility – to close what few routes to safety have been made available. This report outlines some of the key impacts of these combined issues from the perspectives of people who have been directly affected (see Canning and de Jong, 2025)²².



15_Home Office (2025a). Guidance: Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>, 1 July 2025.

16_UK Parliament (2025a). Afghanistan: Volume 771: debated on Tuesday 15 July 2025, available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-07-15/debates/52337725-C8E1-4D11-952A-BA4A9C1CCEE6/Afghan>.

17_Ibid.

18_Passport Index (2025). Available at: available at: <https://www.passportindex.org/byRank.php>.

19_Ibid.

20_Atkinson, E. (2024). Afghan embassy in London to shut after Taliban sacks staff, BBC News, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c70jp1yy7wjo>, 9 September 2024.

21_Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (2025). The UK unequivocally condemns the Taliban’s edict denying women their right to education: UK statement at the UN Security Council, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-unequivocally-condemns-the-talibans-edict-denying-women-their-right-to-education-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>, 23 June 2025.

22_Canning, V. and de Jong, S. (2025). Afghan Data Breach: how selective state secrecy and cover-ups can harm civilians, The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/afghan-data-leak-how-selective-state-secrecy-and-cover-ups-can-harm-civilians-261394>, 18 July 2025.

Project information and method

The evidence in this report is based on a survey (in English/Dari/Pashto) developed by RLS in consultation with Prof Canning (Lancaster University) and Prof de Jong (University of York). It was subsequently disseminated by various Afghan resettlement stakeholders and was open for responses between 23 September-5 October 2025. The survey received 350 valid responses. Of the total number of respondents, 155 are currently based in the UK, 152 in Afghanistan and 33 in third countries outside Europe; 10 were in European countries or ticked “prefer not to say”. Of the 350 survey responses received, 231 respondents reported receiving direct communication from the MoD that their data had been breached. This group is referred to in this report as “Affected Afghans”.

The mixed-methods design²³ of the survey ensured the collection of both quantitative information in relation to impacts and resettlement/non-resettlement, and centred experiences of individuals and the impacts these have had on them and their families or communities (McKim, 2015). The survey included 16 closed and open-ended questions, with open ended questions allowing for further comments (see Appendix I for survey questions). The survey responses completed in Dari and Pashto were translated into English first, and the three datasets (English, Dari, and Pashto) were then merged into a single dataset for analysis. Responses were collated and cleaned to ensure data validity. Quantitative responses were analysed using cross-tabulations methods to identify key trends and relationships within the data, such as the proportion of respondents affected by the Afghan Data Breach and those reporting safety concerns. Graphs and charts were produced from the aggregated data and visually designed in collaboration with Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP to maximise the accessibility of the findings.

2,108 qualitative responses provided by 231 respondents were analysed through thematic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2019)²⁴ in relation to three broad categories: impacts, response by the UK Government, and recommendations. Impacts were then broken down into direct impacts such as physical impacts which resulted directly from the Afghan Data Breach, and indirect impacts such as fear and risk for oneself or one’s family; emotional and psychological impacts; and impacts on family and community. Responses to the UK Government’s handling of the Afghan Data Breach were separated into positive experiences and negative experiences. Respondents were also asked what should have been done and what should happen in the future. This final section informed recommendations in this report.

Ethical guidance provided by the British Sociological Association was followed (BSA, 2017)²⁵. Respondents were informed that the survey was entirely voluntary and open to anyone over the age of 18 who has been affected by the Afghan Data Breach; that personal information would not be stored, and that no information which would allow respondents to be identified was being requested. Furthermore, RLS ensured that any comments would be anonymised and unidentifiable in relation to names and places and that responses would be data protected and securely stored by RLS.

Triples (n=134) and Interpreters (n=88) constituted the largest groups of survey respondents, with the majority of the Triples respondents still remaining in Afghanistan, and the majority of the respondents who had worked as interpreters for the British Army now residing in the UK. The below graph provides an overview of the 350 respondents’ professions and locations (*please note that some respondents have had more than one relevant profession over time*).

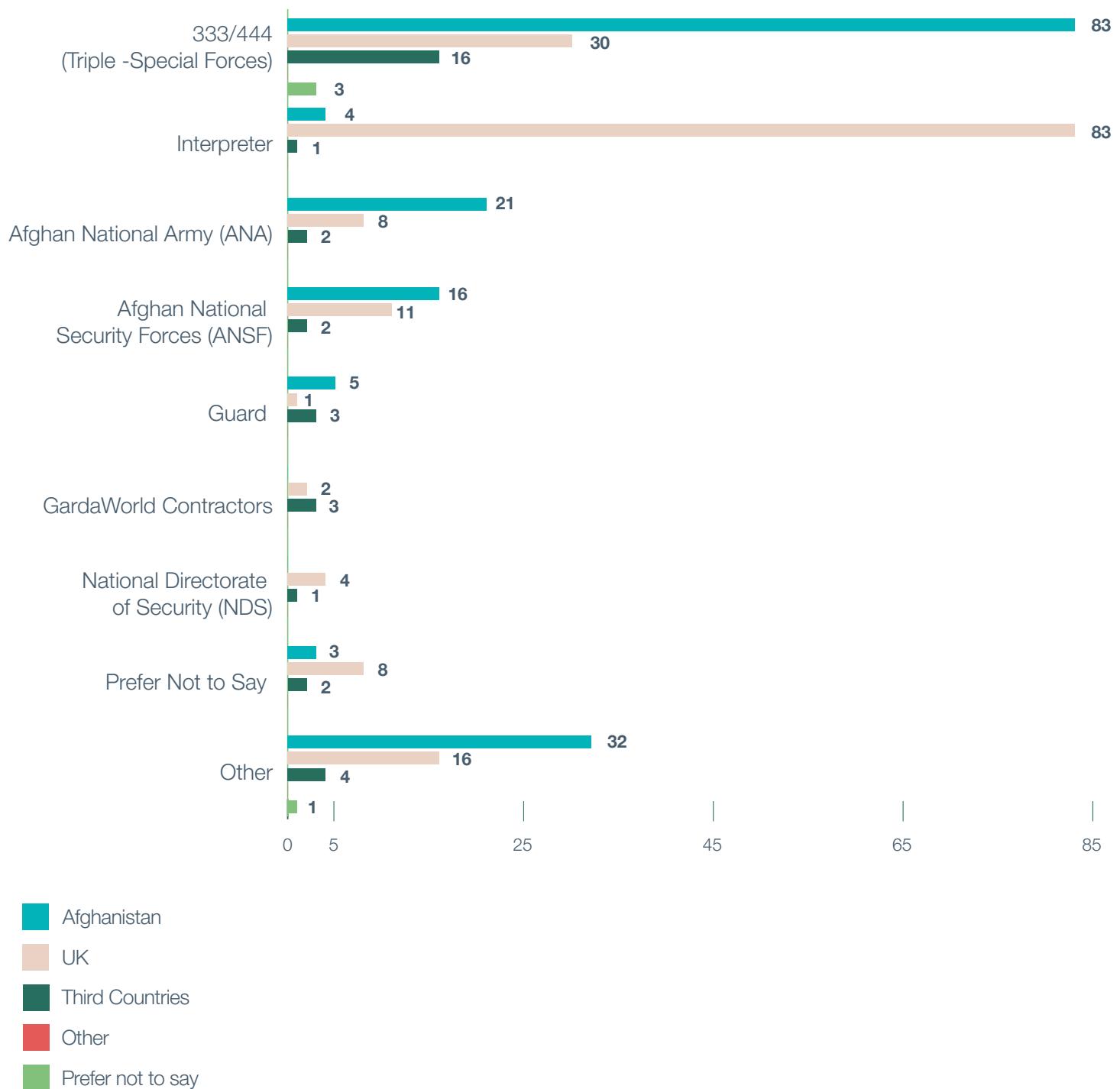
23_McKim, C. A. (2015). The Value of Mixed Methods Research: A Mixed Methods Study: A Mixed Methods Study. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 11(2), 202-222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815607096>, 30 September 2015.

24_Neuendorf, K. (2019). Content analysis and thematic analysis in Brough, P. (ed). *Advanced methods for Applied Psychology: design, analysis and reporting*. Chapter 18, P. 211-224, London: Routledge.

25_British Sociological Association (2017). Statement of Ethical Practice, available at https://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf.

Figure 1: Respondents' Professions and Locations (By Number)

Of the survey responses received, **231** respondents (81 Triple-Special Forces, 79 Interpreters, and 79 in other professions) reported receiving direct communication from the MoD that their data had been breached.



Findings Section 1: Impacts of the Afghan Data Breach

A. DIRECT IMPACTS OF THE AFGHAN DATA BREACH

This section explores the wide-ranging impacts of the Afghan Data Breach, showing how it has affected the safety, well-being, and daily lives of Affected Afghans.

Personal risks and/or threats to family member(s): Of the 231 Affected Afghans, 200 (87%) reported personal risks and/or threats to family members.

Figure 2: Personal Risks and/or Threats (By Percentage)

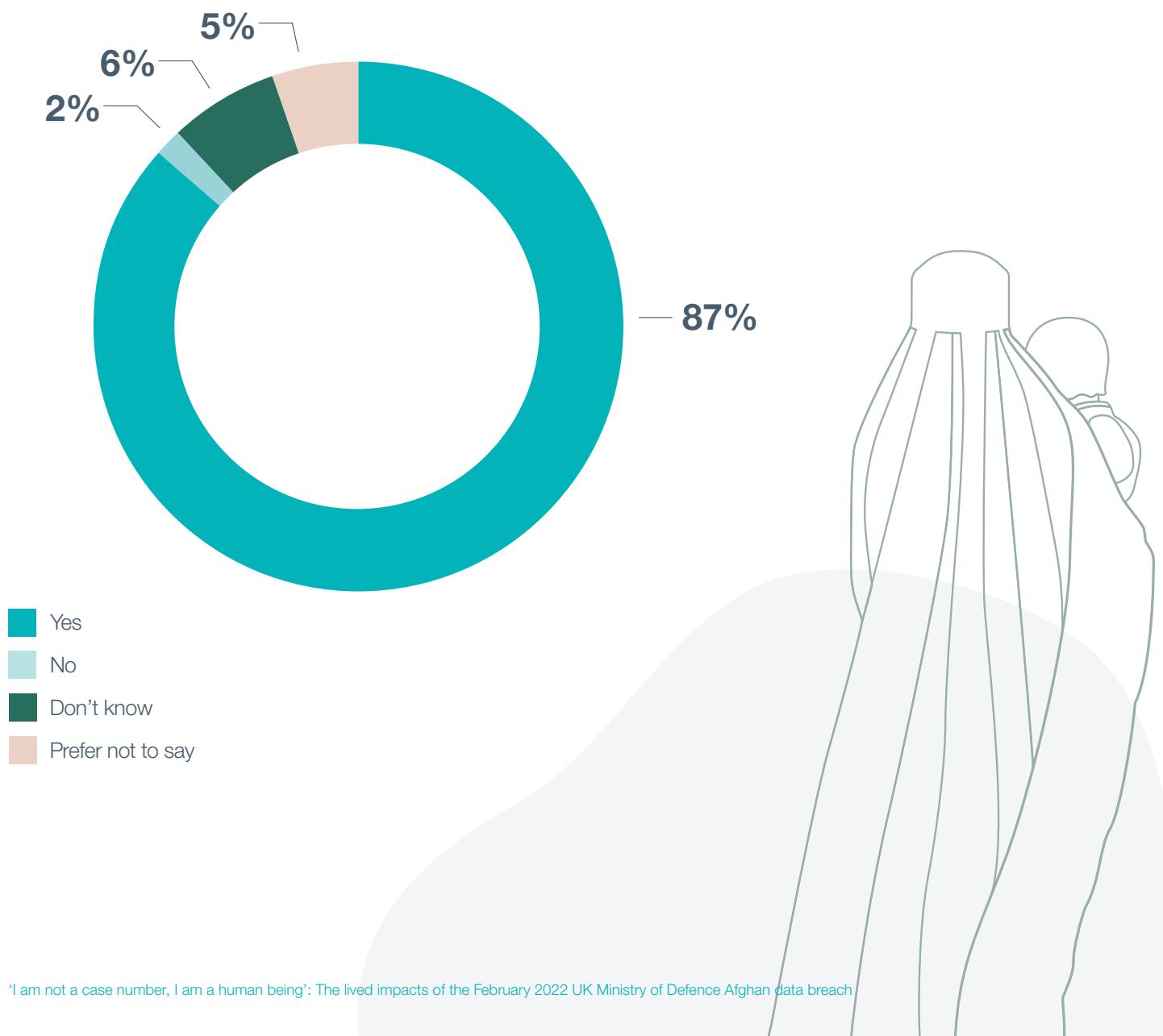
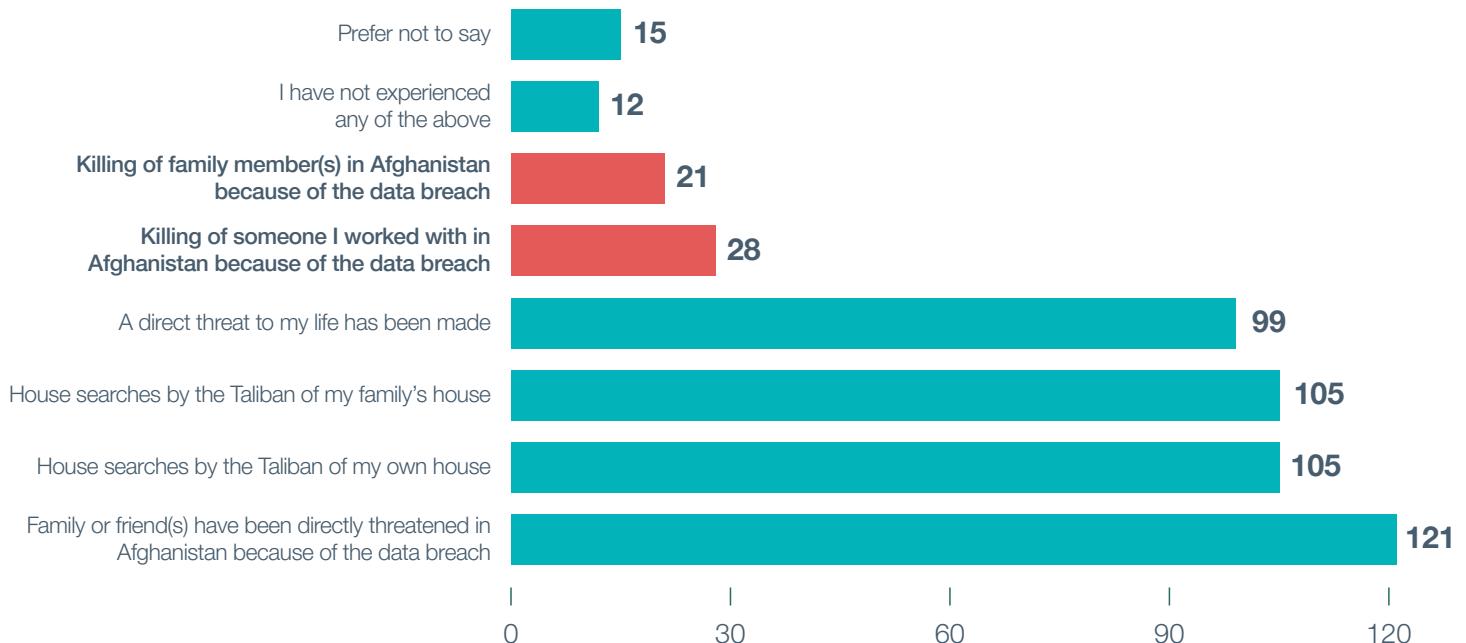


Figure 3: Type of Risks and Threats (By Number)

Type of risks and threats: Affected Afghans reported a range of threats and risks, ranging from extreme violence, including killings, to threats, such as house searches.



The survey also invited Affected Afghans to provide more detailed information on the risks and threats.

Their responses reveal the severe and often life-threatening consequences experienced as a result of the Afghan Data Breach. 28 respondents reported killing of family member(s) in Afghanistan because of the data breach and 21 respondents reported in their survey response that someone they worked with in Afghanistan had been killed because of the data breach. These findings illustrate the gravity of the situation and the devastating, and in some cases fatal, outcomes of the Afghan Data Breach.

The following quotes provide further insights into types of threats and risks that respondents and their family members have experienced:

“A couple of weeks after publication I was recognised by the Taliban and badly beaten up.”

Respondent ID 43, Afghan National Army and ANSF, currently residing in Afghanistan.

“It [data breach] has intensified the threats against my family and made them a target, exposing them to being killed without excuse by the terrorist group (Taliban) that rules Afghanistan.”

Respondent ID 78, occupation undisclosed, currently residing in Afghanistan.

“I have suffered serious harm as a result of the Afghan data breach. My personal car was taken, and our home has been searched multiple times. My father was brutally beaten to the point that his toenails were forcibly removed, and my parents remain under constant and serious threat. My family and I continue to face intimidation, repeated house searches, and ongoing danger to our safety.”

Respondent ID 117, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, currently residing in the UK.

In addition to the reports of severe violence, 121 Affected Afghans stated that they had been directly threatened in multiple ways. The below testimonies shed light on the nature of these threats:

“Following the recent data leak, the Taliban searched my family home and continue to threaten my relatives. One of my family members is still under their pressure, and they question my family about me every day.”

Respondent ID 88, Interpreter 333/444 Triple Special Forces, currently residing in the UK.

“My elder brother was arrested twice by the Taliban intelligence. This was because I was a collaborator with the British forces. My brother is absolutely innocent, a neutral civilian, but they arrested him twice in order to find me. They are doing this to persecute me.”

Respondent ID 114, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, currently residing in the UK.

These accounts show the serious and life-threatening impacts of the MoD Afghan data breach. Respondents described being directly targeted by the Taliban – through home searches, direct threats, and the arrest of family members. The evidence demonstrates that respondents deemed the exposure of their personal information to have significantly increased the dangers faced by those who had supported and protected the British Armed Forces in Afghanistan.

Open-ended responses also detailed the risks faced by Affected Afghans in Afghanistan and third countries, such as Pakistan, Iran and Turkey:

“Yes, I have been threatened. I was initially identified through social media (Facebook and Instagram), and then the individuals threatening me came to my family's residence. The severity of these threats led to the separation from my fiancé. I previously served in Special Units 555 and 444

against the Taliban. For further information about me, you may contact the commander of Unit 444, who is currently residing in the UK. I am currently living in Iran without a visa and in hiding. I was very surprised that the Taliban obtained such extensive personal information about me, considering that this information was leaked by the UK government. I kindly request your assistance, as these circumstances have caused me serious mental health issues, including depression.”

Respondent ID 98, 333/444 Triple Special Forces; currently residing in Iran.

The experience of the Affected Afghans clearly demonstrates the far-reaching and lasting consequences of the Afghan Data Breach, both within and beyond Afghanistan's borders, as well as how the Afghan Data Breach has compounded existing hardships. It also shows how direct impacts such as threats and indirect impacts such as mental health issues are interconnected. While the next section will delve deeper into these indirect impacts, it is important to note at this point that a number of reports confirm that undocumented Afghans in neighbouring countries, including [Iran \(Ghiasi, 2025\)](#)²⁶, [Pakistan \(Mohammadi, 2025\)](#)²⁷, and [Turkey \(ibid\)](#)²⁸ face limited to no legal protection with many subjected to deportations (OHCHR 2025)²⁹ and restricted access to health and psychosocial services. In these contexts, Afghans remain at heightened risk of harassment, exploitation, and many suffer with deteriorating mental health. Their precarious legal status and access to support services leaves them in a persistent state of insecurity.

Overall, the evidence underscores the urgent need for the UK Government to lead coordinated international action to provide protection, legal status, and psychosocial support for affected individuals and their families. Without such measures, the consequences of the Afghan Data Breach will continue to endanger lives and deepen the suffering of those impacted.

26_Ghiasi, K. (2025). Healthcare access for migrants in Iran: a qualitative study, available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s44250-025-00213-x>, 30 July 2025.

27_Mohammadi, A. (2025). Protection and Assistance for Afghans in Mixed Migration: Insights from 4Mi data on Afghans en route to Pakistan and Türkiye, Mixed Migration Centre, available at: https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/393_Protection-and-Assistance-for-Afghans-in-Mixed-Migration.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com, June 2025.

28_Ibid.

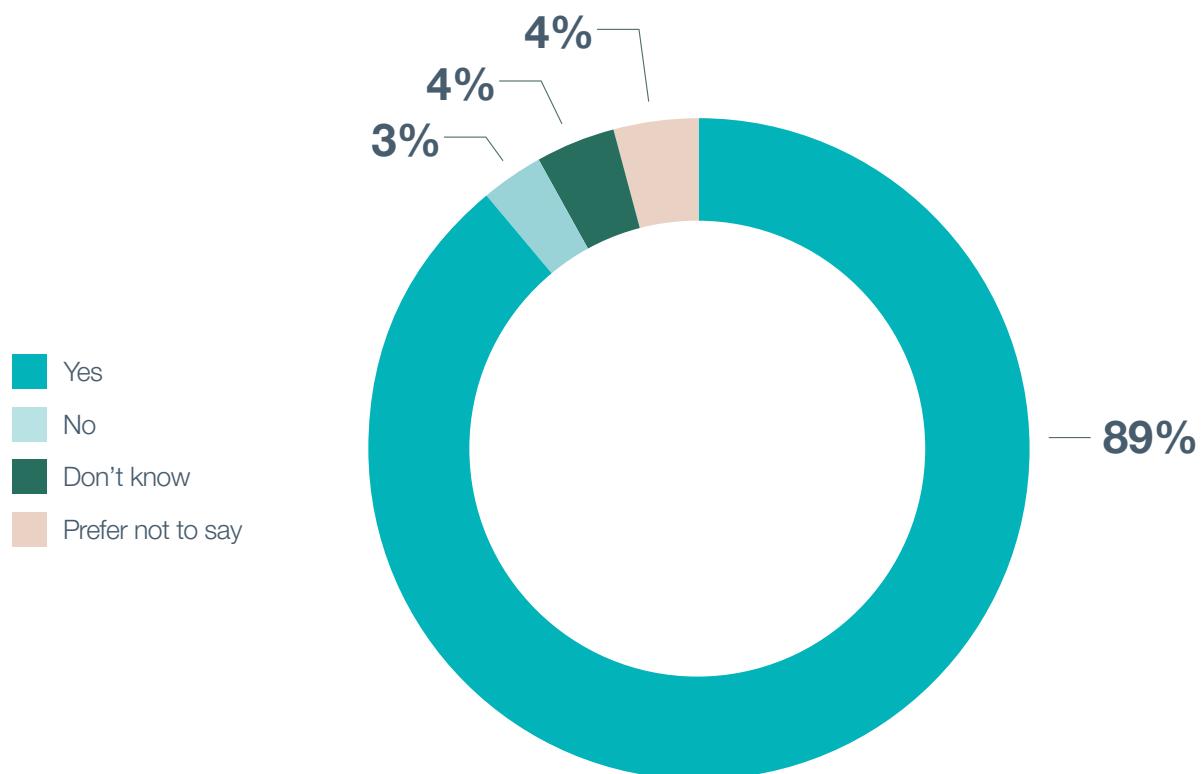
29_OHCHR (2025). UN experts sound alarm on looming deportations of Afghans from Pakistan, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/un-experts-sound-alarm-looming-deportations-afghans-pakistan>, 29 August 2025.

B. INDIRECT IMPACTS OF THE AFGHAN DATA BREACH

IMPACT ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

89% (207 out of 231) of Affected Afghans, reported impacts on their own physical and/or mental health and the same number (n=207) reported negative impacts on their family's physical and/or mental health.

Figure 4: Physical and Mental Health Impact on Applicants (By Percentage)



Open-ended responses to the survey revealed physical and psychological symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, loss of concentration and memory, and sleeplessness:

“The data breach has had a serious impact on my mental health. I have been under constant stress, anxiety, and fear for my safety and my family’s safety. It has also affected my ability to rest properly and maintain peace of mind. The pressure and uncertainty have taken a toll on both my mental and physical well-being.”

Respondent ID 27, ANSF and NDS, currently residing in the UK.

“The data breach has seriously impacted both my physical and mental health. Since learning that my personal information was compromised, I have been living in constant fear and stress. I suffer from anxiety, sleepless nights, and extreme worry for the safety of myself and my family. The threat to my life and the risk of Taliban targeting have affected my well-being and daily functioning.”

Respondent ID 229, Afghan National Army, currently residing in Afghanistan.

This data illustrates how the Afghan Data Breach has caused deep psychological harm and ongoing health consequences. Respondents consistently reported symptoms such as stress, anxiety, sleeplessness, and depression, all linked to fear for their own safety and the safety of loved ones, as expanded on in the following section. This prolonged exposure to fear and uncertainty has eroded the mental well-being of Affected Afghans and, in some cases, their physical health:

"The Afghan data breach has significantly affected my physical and mental health. I live under constant fear for my life and the safety of my family due to repeated raids, threats from the Taliban and local intelligence groups, and the risk of forced marriage for my daughter. The ongoing stress, anxiety, and fear for my family's well-being have severely impacted my emotional and physical well-being."

Respondent ID 30, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, currently residing in Afghanistan.

The above respondent's statement reflects a deep fear that is shared by many Afghan families after the Afghan Data Breach, not only for their own safety but also for the safety and dignity of their family members, especially their daughters. The mention of "forced marriage" highlights one of the most serious threats facing Afghan women today. Affected Afghans may face an increased risk of forced marriage due to increased surveillance and home searches by the Taliban. As explained later in this report, the Taliban may be watching these people more closely and conducting more frequent searches of homes. This increases the pressure and fear for these families and their safety. As a result, daughters may be at heightened risk of being forced into marriage by the Taliban, including to Taliban members and fighters. In other words, the increased monitoring by the Taliban may indirectly raise the risk that girls could be forced into marriage.

Although all girls in Afghanistan (Safi, 2024)³⁰ face the risk of forced marriage, the situation has worsened due to their lack of access to education and employment, which has further increased the risk of early and forced marriage. The Afghan Data Breach may place them at additional risk by increasing the possibility of being identified and then if unmarried, directly targeted for forced marriage.



³⁰ Safi, M. (2024). Changing social norms around age of marriage in Afghanistan, ODI Report, available at: <https://media.odi.org/documents/Afghanistan-full-report-final.pdf>, February 2024.

COMPOUNDED IMPACTS AND HARMS ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITIES

The survey's open-ended responses provided deep insight into the compounded impacts and harms experienced by Affected Afghans, who had been informed by the MoD that their data had likely been compromised. To draw from a testimonial which reflects others, Respondent ID 39 highlighted:

I am writing to share how the Afghan data breach has deeply affected me and my family—emotionally, psychologically, and in terms of our safety. I recently relocated to the UK and am physically safe here. But mentally, I live in constant fear and guilt. The breach has become a daily source of anxiety and emotional torment. My family—who remain in Afghanistan—are terrified. They ask me every day:

Are we in danger? Did you share our names, phone numbers, addresses, or photos in your emails to the United Kingdom? Could the Taliban find us because of this? I try to reassure them [family in Afghanistan], but I don't have answers. The uncertainty is unbearable.

My younger brother constantly asks, What if they come and take us as hostages? The fear is not just from the breach itself, but from the overwhelming amount of misinformation and panic spreading on social media. Even if the breach didn't expose everything, the fake news alone is destroying their mental health. [...]

I ask for your understanding, and if possible, your support. Whether it's legal advice, mental health resources, or help accelerating family reunification, anything that can ease this burden would mean the world to me."

Respondent ID 39, 333/444 Triple Special Forces; 999; NDS, currently residing in the UK.

This quote highlights how the Afghan Data Breach didn't just affect the direct individual applicant – it impacted entire families and communities. Even when principal applicants have relocated to the UK with their spouse and children, they continue to live with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty for their relatives still in Afghanistan, who they fear being targeted by the Taliban. The exposure of personal details has triggered a chain reaction: guilt, helplessness, and constant worry become part of everyday life for these families.

Affected Afghans who had included Additional Family Members (AFM) in their ARAP applications fear that the details of their family members are now also known to the Taliban. As the MoD did not communicate to Affected Afghans what precise information was compromised in each case, applicants were left in the dark as to how exposed their family members are. Many of those who had applied for AFM to join them in the UK, due to the risk they face because of association with the principal applicant or because of extreme vulnerability and dependence on the principal applicant, have not received decisions on their applications or received rejections.

C. GENDERED HARM, INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACTS, AND RISKS TO THE RELATIONS OF AFFECTED AFGHANS

As this report demonstrates so far, there have been significant psychological, physical, and emotional impacts upon who had collaborated with the British and were subsequently targeted by the Taliban, and how this has been compounded by the Afghan Data Breach.

However, in analysing the qualitative comments from survey responses, secondary findings emerged beyond the individuals affected. Many respondents indicated that their partners, families and children were also deeply affected, both by being targeted due to their relationship with the UK and the consequences of their work in Afghanistan, and in the exacerbation of physical and psychological harms and risks in the aftermath of the Afghan Data Breach. This included reporting mental health impacts on partners and children; gendered physical and psychological harms to family members; and the ongoing impact of familial separation due to fear of risk to family members who are “left behind” (see Schuster et al, 2021)³¹ in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.

For some families, the Afghan Data Breach has affected the ability to take part in everyday life safely and without fear:

“Our names are on their list, so if we are caught anywhere, our fate will be unknown. My wife has been banned from work and education. They have closed everything. My daughter and son should be able to go to school or kindergarten, but I cannot send them because they demand their father’s personal information. They are deprived of their education.”

Respondent 189, ANSF, Afghanistan.

“The threats to our safety and the loss of normal life due to the data breach have caused significant mental and emotional stress for me and my family. We live in constant fear, and my daughter has had to leave school, which has affected her well-being.”

Respondent 254, Interpreter, UK.

As this section goes on to detail, there are intersectional gendered implications for children. Risk to men and boys included torture or military targeting, an issue that the UK Government are themselves aware of and acknowledge in Country Information profile for Afghanistan (UK Visas and Immigration, 2025)³²:

“I have two daughters and one son. Me and my wife can’t sleep during the night having fear that someone will break in or someone will take my son off me or take me away from my family.”

Respondent 269, Undisclosed role, Afghanistan.

“My son suffered significant head injuries when he was previously captured and tortured and is disabled by ongoing psychological and physical difficulties as a result. He and his very young family remain in hiding and in great poverty, 5 hours from health care, due to the risk posed to them. My son’s infant daughter was at risk recently because of this, as she was required to travel for 5 hours to reach a hospital, whilst very unwell.”

Respondent 323, ANSF, UK.

As illustrated by Respondent 30 in the previous section, some girls were threatened with forced marriage and expulsion from school, both of which are regularly reported in Afghanistan (UNICEF, 2021)³³ and reflect current restrictions on women and girls’ access to education and the workplace (Azoulay, 2025)³⁴:

“Following the Afghan data breach, my family and I face serious threats to our safety. We are Shia, and I was a former government official, which has put us at high risk. My daughter had to leave school, and we currently have no work, freedom, or normal life due to these threats.”

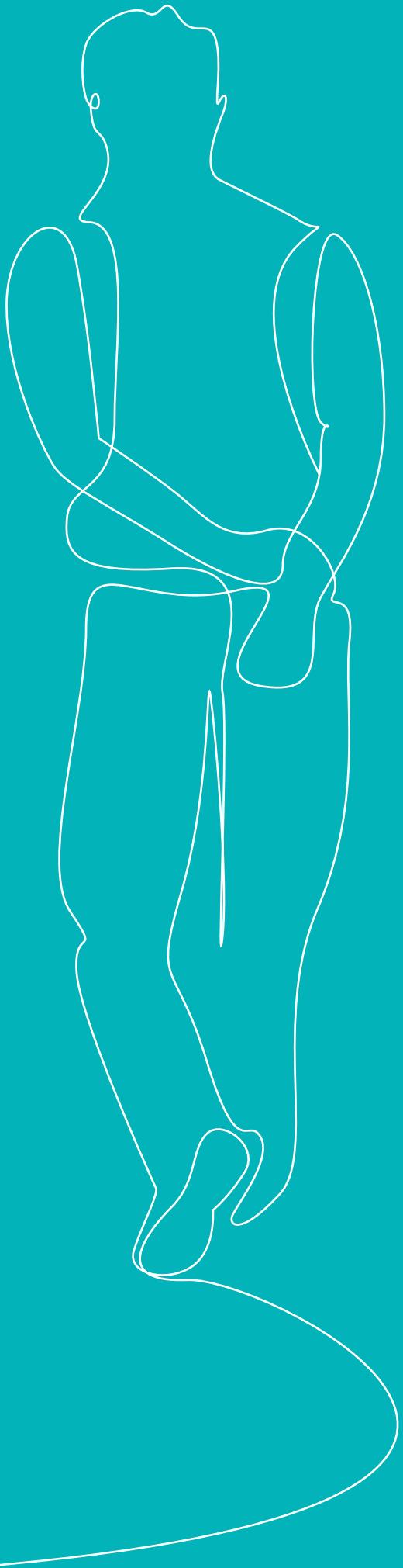
Respondent 51, undisclosed role, Afghanistan.

31. Schuster, L., Hussaini, R., Hossaini, M., Rezai, R., Riaz Khan Shinwari, M. (2021). “My beloved will come today or tomorrow”: Time and the “Left Behind” in Bhatia, M. and Canning, V. (eds). Stealing Time: Migration, Temporalities and State Violence, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

32. UK Visas and Immigration (2025). Afghanistan: country policy and information notes, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-country-policy-and-information-notes>, updated 4 November 2025.

33. UNICEF (2021). Girls increasingly at risk of child marriage in Afghanistan: Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, available at <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/girls-increasingly-risk-child-marriage-afghanistan>, 12 November 2021.

34. Azouley, A. (2025). Afghanistan: Four years on, 2.2 million girls still banned from school, UNESCO, available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/afghanistan-four-years-22-million-girls-still-banned-school>, 14 August 2025.



The MoD data breach has caused significant inconvenience, distress, and disruption to both my personal and professional life. It came as a profound shock to me, my wife, and my children—particularly as my wife and children reside in Afghanistan, a country with virtually no guarantees of safety or security and were under the full control of the Taliban. Additionally, my wife, children and family members who remain in Afghanistan continue to receive threats, being warned that I worked for the “infidels” and should have been killed. These threats have significantly heightened our fear and sense of vulnerability.

Respondent 254, Interpreter,
UK with family still in Afghanistan.

Given that many Affected Afghans who reported such targeting and exclusion of children remain in Afghanistan, the ongoing implications for child safety are profound, as Respondent 254 indicates (above).

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS ON PARTNERS AND CHILDREN

Physical targeting of family members was disclosed in multiple instances and ranged from direct threats to assault:

"I served my duty in Afghanistan in 2014. Since then, I have suffered many losses: my brother was killed, my house and property were destroyed, and my wife was shot by the Taliban, leaving her disabled. Following the recent data leak, the Taliban searched my family home and continued to threaten my relatives. One of my family members is still under their pressure, and they question my family about me every day."

Respondent 88, 333/444 Triple Special Forces and interpreter, UK.

"On August 3, 2025, the Taliban forcibly searched our home. During the raid, they confiscated our only private weapon and made direct death threats against my family. In their attempt to locate me, they physically assaulted my wife and children."

Respondent 211, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, Afghanistan.

Emotional and psychological impacts on family members, particularly wives and children, were commonly cited, which reflects wider evidence on the impacts of both witnessing threats and violence and the relationship to sustained intergenerational trauma in the lives of displaced and refugee children more broadly (see, for example, Sangalang and Vang, 2016)³⁵:

"My wife has a nervous breakdown, and we are currently living separately because we both have a nervous breakdown. My eldest son who is under arrest and ran away, his wife has a nervous breakdown and two weeks ago she miscarried a 5-month-old baby due to the same concerns."

Respondent 12, presidential capacity role, UK.

"It had a negative impact on my wife, my children, and even my wife has developed mental problems."

Respondent 16, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, UK.

"The data breach has severely affected the mental health of my family. Both my wife and I are deeply distressed and often unable to control our emotions. When I see my father's condition and the threats against him, I break down and cry; when our children see us crying, they become very upset and frightened. The situation is unbearable for me, and I struggle to cope."

Respondent 117, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, UK.

"Since that day, whenever there is a knock at the door at night, my daughter and son scream, "The Taliban have come, father!" We are now suffering from psychological and emotional trauma. We cannot sleep peacefully at night, nor can our children."

Respondent 189, ANSF, Afghanistan.

³⁵ Sangalang, C.C. and Vang, C. (2017). Intergenerational Trauma in Refugee Families: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*. June;19(3):745-754. doi: 10.1007/s10903-016-0499-7.

This is particularly important given that evidence increasingly suggests that parental trauma exposure and trauma sequelae “indirectly affect child well-being via potential mechanisms of insecure attachment; maladaptive parenting styles; diminished parental emotional availability; decreased family functioning; accumulation of family stressors; dysfunctional intra-family communication styles and severity of parental symptomatology” (Flanagan et al, 2020:1)³⁶.

Further issues for families have also arisen from the impacts of the Afghan Data Breach, as well as the wider targeting of Afghans working with the British Army, including economic impacts which have implications for family wellbeing:

“I have no work and no money for my family. You are my only hope. I am in a bad economic situation. I have three sons and two daughters. One of my daughters has a hole in the heart. She is 7 months old. I cannot buy milk and medicine for her. Please help me and my family.”

Respondent 12, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, Afghanistan.

Moreover, as one respondent highlighted, his own behaviour has negatively affected how he treats his wife and children:

“It significantly increased my distress and nightmare and my personal life as my behaviour has completely changed towards my wife and kids.”

Respondent 6, Guard, Afghanistan.

Although not a central focus of this research, this reflects wider evidence that demonstrates relational breakdowns for men who have been affected by trauma and/or conflict and is likely to have greater implications than this research can evidence (see Teten et al, 2009)³⁷. We recommend further research to investigate this issue given it has the potential to affect women and children, as well as the men affected, now and in the future and thus requires nuanced and culturally specific support.



36. Flanagan, N., Travers, A., Vallières, F., Hansen, M., Halpin, R., Sheaf, G., and Johnsen, A. T. (2020). Crossing borders: a systematic review identifying potential mechanisms of intergenerational trauma transmission in asylum-seeking and refugee families. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 11(1), available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2020.1790283>, 23 September 2020.

37. Teten, A. L., Schumacher, J. A., Taft, C. T., Stanley, M. A., Kent, T. A., Bailey, S. D., Dunn, N. J., & White, D. L. (2009). Intimate Partner Aggression Perpetrated and Sustained by Male Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam Veterans With and Without Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25(9), 1612-1630, available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260509354583>, 18 December 2009.

THE GENDERED AND RELATIONAL IMPACTS OF LACK OF ACCESS TO REUNIFICATION FOR FAMILIES STILL IN AFGHANISTAN

A final issue compounding the emotional and psychological impacts of the Afghan Data Breach is the ongoing effect of barriers to the resettlement of AFM, such as siblings or parents, who are either at risk due to association with the principal applicant or extremely vulnerable and dependent on the principal applicant. The rules for AFM were changed from 5 June 2025³⁸, leaving eligible principal applicants only 30 days from the date they respond to their offer letter to submit an AFM application. From then on, applications to relocate family members would “not be accepted outside of this period except where there are compelling circumstances which have prevented them from meeting this deadline”³⁹. This policy change, introduced while the super injunction was still active and at a time when Affected Afghans were still left in the dark about the breach of their data, now puts the onus on Affected Afghans who want to apply for resettlement of AFM due to risks associated with the Afghan Data Breach, to prove that they had “compelling circumstances” that meant that they could not meet the 30 day deadline, rather than recognising that a more lenient approach would be apt in light of the Afghan Data Breach.

It is unknown how many immediate and additional family members remain in Afghanistan or have fled to the surrounding region. However, the comments collated through this research show high levels of concern and anxiety for both immediate and additional family members who have not been resettled or reunified. The emotional impacts were demonstrable, citing stress, fear of Taliban targeting, mental anguish, sleeplessness and depression:

“When my wife and I speak with them, we hear stories of the injustices they face every day, which have negatively affected our own state of mind and even the well-being of our young children. We are deeply worried about our remaining family members, and we hold great hope that they will be able to join us.”

Respondent 10, Guard, UK.

“Even now, since my wife, daughter, and I moved to England, we are all experiencing psychological stress because of my two children and mother who are still alive in Iran.”

Respondent 25, ANSF, UK.

“My mother and my brother’s wife, with their children, are living in relatives’ houses in misery and uncertainty.”

Respondent 37, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, UK.

“My wife and children are facing an unknown fate, living in fear and anxiety. This situation is very difficult.”

Respondent 188, Afghan National Army, Afghanistan.

³⁸ Ministry of Defence, (2025a). Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy: further information on eligibility criteria and offer details, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy-information-and-guidance>, 3 November 2025.

³⁹ Ibid.

“The data breach has affected me and my wife’s family emotionally and mentally. Thinking and worrying about the lives of my wife’s family living in Afghanistan has been an endless stress for me and my wife. My wife’s family back in Afghanistan has been affected badly by this data breach, because they constantly keep worrying for their lives and have been house searched which is really scary and affecting for the girls living in that house.”

Respondent 268, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, UK.

“My wife has a mental problem after disclosing information because my son is left in Afghanistan and no one helped me to bring him here.”

Respondent 306, Employee of British Embassy, UK.

As noted earlier, although the gendered impacts of the Afghan Data Breach were not a central focus of this research, the responses above clearly indicate that there have been unseen effects on women as the partners of former employees. As wider research indicates, there is already a significant barrier to accessing psychological support for women survivors of conflict living in the UK (see Canning, 2017⁴⁰, 2023⁴¹).

Likewise, the potential for intergenerational trauma can impede educational engagement for children (*ibid*)⁴², and this is compounded by the continued threat to the security of family members who have not reached safety:

“My brother is increasingly distressed about his young daughter, wife, sisters, and father — and is now urging me to return to Afghanistan and surrender myself to the Taliban in exchange for the release of our family. After nearly four years without approval of their case, they have lost hope and now believe that my surrender is the only solution to end this nightmare.”

Respondent 276, Interpreter, UK.

“My wife in particular is experiencing depression and anxiety, and my daughter’s school is very concerned about the impact on her emotional wellbeing and capacity to learn. It is very difficult to feel settled here, to be able to focus on our studies and work, when our son, daughter in law and grandchildren are suffering so much and in constant danger. This fear has been greatly increased as a result of the data breaches.”

Respondent 323, ANSF, UK.

In all, as this section demonstrates, the cumulative effects are manifest not only in the lives of Affected Afghans who were the principal applicants, but with gendered and intergenerational effects on their children and families. This points to not only broader impacts in relation to the number of people affected beyond those who have responded in the survey, but also potentially to the depth of impacts including on childhood development.

40_Canning, V. (2017). Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System, Oxon: Routledge.

41_Canning, V. (2023). Torture and Torturous Violence: Transcending Definitions of Torture, Bristol: Bristol University Press.

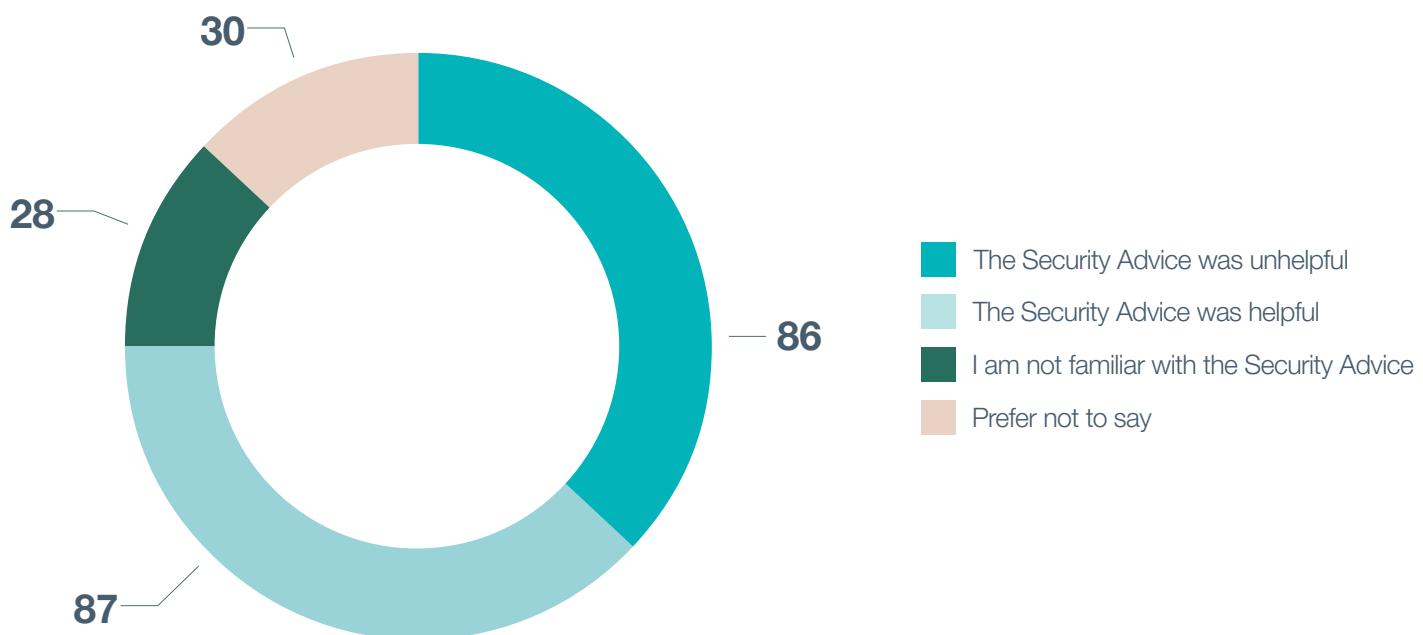
42_Ibid.

Findings Section 2: Experiences of governmental response to the Afghan Data Breach

A. QUALITY OF MOD SECURITY ADVICE

A **minority** of the Affected Afghan respondents (38%) affected by the Afghan Data Breach found the security advice provided by the MoD (the MoD Security Advice) helpful (n=87 out of total n=231).

Figure 5: Security Advice (By Number)



While 87 respondents found the MoD Security Advice helpful, the majority (49%) reported it was either unhelpful or they were unfamiliar with it (37% unhelpful, 12% not familiar with the MoD Security Advice).

Based on the quantitative and qualitative survey results, there was a profound mismatch between the MoD Security Advice, which focussed on e.g., restricting one's use of social media accounts and advising the use of Virtual Private Networks, and the severity of the reported risks and threats, which included direct threats, violence, and displacement.

The survey's open-ended responses also indicated that the MoD Security Advice came much too late, as the Afghan Data Breach had happened 3 years and 5 months earlier, in February 2022 and the advice was only provided in July 2025. Affected Afghans could not retrospectively apply the MoD Security Advice. Moreover, the MoD Security Advice was considered overly general and inappropriate for the local context of Afghanistan. Affected Afghans also indicated that the MoD Security Advice failed to provide any concrete support for those at risk:

“The security advice I received from the Ministry of Defence following the data breach is applicable to me here in the UK, and I have taken steps to follow it. However, it is not practical or fully applicable for my family members who are still in Afghanistan. The situation there is beyond their control, and due to the local environment and security risks, they are unable to implement many of the recommended measures.”

Respondent ID 56, Contractor, currently residing in the UK.

“I was expecting clear steps or assistance to prevent misuse of my personal information, but the advice was limited to basic online safety tips.”

Respondent ID 171, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, currently residing in Afghanistan.

Accessing advice can be particularly challenging for many Afghan families, as internet connectivity, email access, and other technologies required to receive and implement guidance are more limited under the Taliban rules in Afghanistan (Shires, 2024)⁴³. In September 2025, Afghanistan experienced another internet blackout which lasted several days (Aljazeera, 2025)⁴⁴.

“When our personal information is already accessible to the Taliban, the security advice provided cannot be effective. The risks remain severe regardless of the guidance offered.”

Respondent ID 21, 333/444 Triple Special Forces, current location undisclosed.

“It lacked clear guidance on how to stay safe, how our concerns would be addressed, and what concrete support was available. More detailed, timely, and tailored advice would have been helpful to reduce the risks we faced.”

Respondent ID 24, Afghan National Security Forces, currently residing in Afghanistan.

⁴³ Shires, J. (2024). The internet under attack: Insights from Afghanistan and Ukraine on maintaining a resilient internet in conflict and crisis, Chatham House, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/2024-08-23-internet-under-attack-shires-wilkinson.pdf>, August 2024.

⁴⁴ Aljazeera News (2025). The Taliban rejects reports of nationwide internet ban in Afghanistan, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/1/the-taliban-rejects-reports-of-nationwide-internet-ban-in-afghanistan>, October 2025.

B. LACK OF RISK MANAGEMENT

From the survey responses, there was no evidence that the MoD offered local risk management or follow-up with individuals outside of the UK who were affected by the Afghan Data Breach (and who were not offered resettlement). Affected Afghans who had not been resettled reported this in the open-ended survey responses, for example:

“The security advice provided by the Ministry of Defence was very general and limited. They only advised me not to answer calls from unknown numbers and to secure my emails. These instructions were insufficient given the serious threats and risks I faced, including my house being searched, my brothers being summoned by intelligence services, and direct threats to our lives. Such general advice did not provide any practical help to protect my situation.”

Respondent 210, 333/444 (Triple -Special Forces), currently residing in Afghanistan.

The MoD's official guidance on the data loss incident⁴⁵ (shared by email with Affected Afghans and via the MoD webpage) confirms this, as the only specific message for those affected by the Afghan Data Breach in Afghanistan or third countries confirmed that there was no support available in third countries unless someone was offered resettlement and was limited to a warning not to travel:

“If you are outside the UK, please do not try to travel to a third country without a valid passport and visa. If you do so, you will be putting yourself at risk on the journey, and you may face the risk of being deported back to Afghanistan. We also cannot support you in a third country such as Pakistan unless you have already received an invitation to resettle in the UK and it has been confirmed by the UK Government that you have access to support in the third country.” (MoD 2025)⁴⁶.

Overall, both the survey and MoD's guidance show that the MoD Security Advice provided to Affected Afghans was limited and insufficient to address the serious risks faced by Affected Afghans. This highlights the need for more practical and specific support.

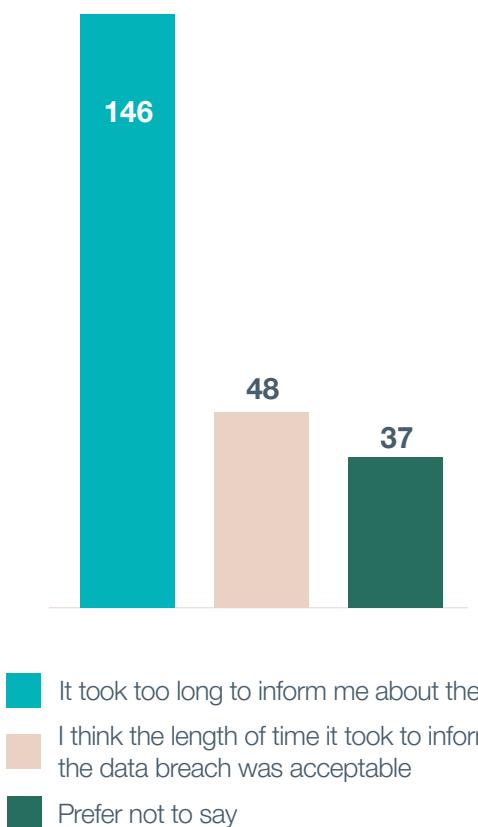
45_Ministry of Defence, (2025b). Data incident affecting applicants to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy Scheme and Afghanistan Locally Employed Staff Ex-Gratia Scheme, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/data-incident-affecting-applicants-to-the-afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy-scheme-and-afghanistan-locally-employed-staff-ex-gratia-scheme>, 15 July 2025.

46_Ibid.

C. TIMELINESS OF COMMUNICATION

The majority (63%) of Afghan respondents (n=146 out of 231) who had been informed by the MoD in July 2025 that their data had likely been compromised in 2023 felt that it took too long before they were informed of the Afghan Data Breach. Only 48 out of 231 (21%) thought the length of time was acceptable, with 37 (16%) of Affected Afghans responding “prefer not to say” to the survey question.

Figure 6: Timeliness of Communication (By Number)



The survey responses also indicated that the significant delay in the communication to Affected Afghans had a detrimental effect on the ability to take safety measures. The respondents reported an increased risk due to the fact that they could not retrospectively apply the MoD Security Advice that was provided or take any personal measures:

“I think the time it took to inform me of the data breach was far too long. The delay significantly increased the risks to my life and the safety of my family, as the data breach left us vulnerable to threats, harassment, and potential harm from the Taliban and local intelligence groups.”

Respondent ID 35, 333/444 (Triple Special Forces), currently residing in Afghanistan.

“The security advice provided by the Ministry of Defence was insufficient and delayed. They should have informed us immediately so that my colleagues would not have been at risk and I could have been aware of potential threats.”

Respondent ID 122, 333/444 (Triple Special Forces), currently residing in Afghanistan.

“Well, you should have informed me right away, I would have realized my safety. I was hiding right then.”

Respondent ID 162, 333/444 (Triple Special Forces), currently residing in Afghanistan.

“The delay between the discovery of the data breach in 2023 and the communication in July 2025 is deeply concerning and unacceptable. Waiting almost two years to inform individuals that their personal data was compromised has put many lives at risk unnecessarily. Immediate notification could have allowed us to take protective measures much earlier. This delay shows a serious lack of urgency and responsibility from the Ministry of Defence, especially considering the sensitive nature of our backgrounds and the high-risk environment we live in.”

Respondent ID 184, Afghan National Army, currently residing in Afghanistan.

The significant delay in notifying Affected Afghans demonstrates a critical failure in timely communication, leaving individuals exposed to unnecessary risk and highlighting the MoD's lack of urgency in protecting vulnerable populations.

Findings Section 3: Resettlement – positive and negative experiences

The survey also included general questions about Afghans' experiences with resettlement to the UK. Overall, a mixed picture emerged from the survey responses from those respondents who have already been resettled to the UK (n=154 out of the total number of 350 respondents) either as a principal applicant or a family member of a principal applicant.

A. SUCCESSES OF RESETTLEMENT

The testimonies of resettled Afghans reveal the profound relief and renewed hope that come with safety, legal protection, and access to opportunity. Commonly mentioned positive experiences related to a sense of security and educational opportunities for female members of the family:

“Now I can work and study and can live free with good security, and my daughters can become what they want like a doctor, teacher, etc. And the thing which I really like in the UK is that the law is same for all human. So no one can hurt anyone. I hate crimes.”

Respondent ID 104, interpreter, currently residing in the UK.

“Since I came to Britain, I have been optimistic about life and the local officials and people treated us well and explained all the cultural differences, and it was a good experience for us.”

Respondent ID 108, 333/444 (Triple Special Forces), currently residing in the UK.

“There was some difficulty but at least we are alive.”

Respondent ID 273, interpreter, currently residing in the UK.

For many, resettlement in the UK has meant the first real experience of stability after years of fear, displacement, and uncertainty. Respondents consistently expressed appreciation for equality like freedom of movement, better chance for their children – especially daughters – to pursue education and build independent futures.

These examples demonstrate not only the personal transformation that security can bring, but also the tangible success of providing safe pathways for those who risked their lives supporting British Armed Forces and other UK Government departments in Afghanistan.

At the same time, the gratitude expressed by respondents underscores the moral and practical importance of ensuring that similar opportunities are extended to their loved ones still awaiting resettlement. Their words are a reminder that the UK's responsibility does not end with relocation; it extends to ensuring long-term integration, access to psychosocial support, and continued protection for family members left behind. The positive outcomes described here provide a compelling example of how timely, compassionate, and rights-based interventions can restore dignity and hope to individuals who have suffered profound loss.

B. KEY ISSUES WITH RESETTLEMENT AND SUPPORT

While resettlement to the UK has provided safety and security, many respondents highlighted significant challenges that continue to affect the wellbeing of the resettled Afghans (see also: de Jong 2025)⁴⁷. There was evidence of long waiting times, unsuitable accommodation, difficulties entering the job market, and unevenness in the quality of resettlement support across the UK.

“The process is very slow as it took one year until they resettled me. Before I was living temporarily in a military base.”

Respondent ID 79, Interpreter, resettled to the UK.

“Housing support is also limited. Families who came here seeking safety and a better life often find themselves in temporary or unsuitable accommodation, which affects their stability and well-being.”

Respondent ID 56, Contractor, resettled to the UK.

“The agency that helped us resettle, treated us awfully.”

Respondent ID 61, Interpreter, resettled to the UK.

“My children, both boys and girls, attend school. However, me and my wife are struggling to enter the job market. [REDACTED] is a nice place with welcoming people. However with lesser job opportunities. We have tried several times to move to a bigger city so we can get more opportunities.”

Respondent ID 233, Interpreter, resettled to the UK.

“My resettlement experience has been deeply stressful despite the relief of eventually reaching the UK. The long delay 20 to 24 months after receiving the offer letter left me and my family living in constant fear and danger. The lack of clear communication and support during this period caused unnecessary hardship. While I am grateful for safety now, the process was too slow and has left lasting emotional and physical strain. Such delays should never happen again for those in urgent danger.”

Respondent ID 243, Interpreter, resettled to the UK.

Respondents also reported experiences of racism or discrimination, and even assault. Even after resettlement, some individuals feel their contributions to the UK – particularly for those who supported UK operations – are overlooked or undervalued, which adds to feelings of frustration and exclusion.

“Well it could be positive but I was assaulted unfortunately and had a bad experience.”

Respondent ID 275, Interpreter, resettled to the UK.

“While feeling safe here, there is still racism; some people don’t like migrants, but they don’t know how much assistance I did for the government of the UK [as an interpreter].”

Respondent ID 249, Interpreter, currently residing in the UK.

Very common negative experiences of Affected Afghan who have been resettled to the UK relate to family separation. This included long waiting times for a decision on AFM relocation applications, based on extreme vulnerability or threats due to association with the principal applicant.

"I'm happy to be evacuated to the UK however I'm unhappy because my family got separated. My youngest daughters including my disabled brothers have been left behind in Afghanistan who entirely rely on me both financially and physically. I was given promise that they will join me in the UK, however I'm still waiting and it's been more than a year and their application is still under process."

Respondent ID 319, Labourer, resettled to the UK.

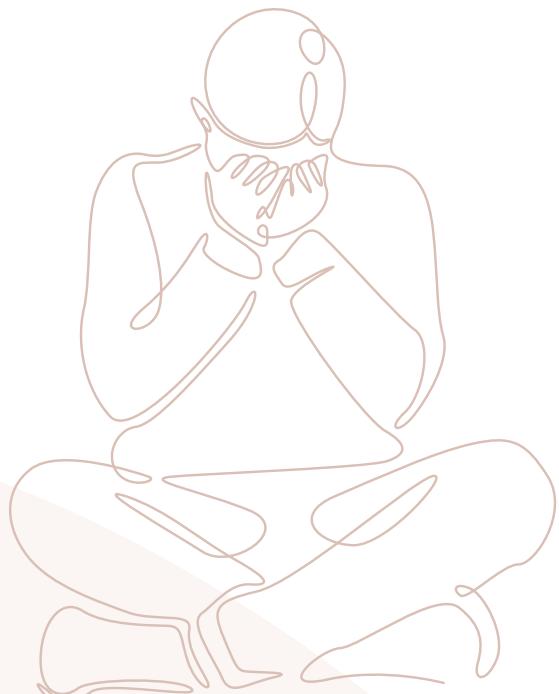
"It was better to be killed by Taliban bullet at once, instead of a gradual death in Scotland. Because last four years I am scared that my siblings are in danger but there is no ears to listen to me."

Respondent ID 276, Interpreter resettled to the UK.

This reported experience is backed up by data. For example, in February 2025, the MoD admitted in response to a Written Question that there were 1,062 outstanding Additional Family Member (AFM) applications (UK Parliament 2025b)⁴⁸ from individuals who have already been resettled under the current and previous Afghan resettlement schemes administered by the MoD. Of these, 502 had been pending for more than six months⁴⁹.

The respondents also point to the emotional and practical consequences of these delays. Many families remain separated, with some members still in dangerous circumstances in Afghanistan, creating ongoing financial and caregiving pressures for those already resettled. The lack of clear communication and guidance during the resettlement process has caused stress and fear and resulted in lasting emotional and physical strain (see also earlier reports: Refugee Legal Support 2024⁵⁰, JUSTICE 2023⁵¹).

These experiences demonstrate that safety alone is not enough; resettlement programmes must be timely, well-coordinated, and consistent, providing not only protection but also clear communication, family reunification, psychosocial support, and equitable access to economic opportunities. Addressing these issues is critical to ensuring that resettled Afghans can rebuild their lives with dignity and stability, and that the UK meets its moral and practical obligations to those who risked their lives in support of its operations.



48_UK Parliament (2025b). Afghanistan: Resettlement, Question for Ministry of Defence, UNI 30116, available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions-detail/2025-02-10/30116/>, 10 February 2025.

49_Ibid.

50_Refugee Legal Support, (2024). Still Waiting: the Afghans Abandoned by the UK, available at: <https://refugeelegalsupport.org/still-waiting-apbi-report/>, 30 October 2024.

51_JUSTICE (2023). Reforming the Afghanistan Resettlement Schemes: the way forward for ARAP and ACRS, available at: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/67becde70dae19a9e5ea2bc3/689e0a1d7a92_3b59de2833ca_JUSTICE-Afghan-Report-August-2023-1.pdf, August 2023

Conclusion

The Afghan Data Breach has had severe and far-reaching consequences for Afghan individuals and their families. The survey findings show that the exposure of personal information has directly endangered lives, with threats ranging from intimidation and harassment to killings. The Afghan Data Breach has caused intense psychological trauma, fear for personal and family safety, and ongoing emotional and physical harm for Affected Afghans and their families in Afghanistan, in neighbouring countries, and beyond.

The MoD's response, including delayed communication, limited security advice, and lack of follow-up, was inadequate to address the scale and severity of these risks. The gap between the guidance given and the severity of risk shows a serious failure to protect people, leaving them in prolonged and ongoing danger.

For those who have been resettled to the UK, experiences are mixed. While resettlement has provided critical safety, educational opportunities, and renewed hope, significant challenges remain.

Family separation, delays in processing AFM applications, difficulties accessing suitable housing and employment, and experiences of discrimination or exclusion have undermined the full benefits of relocation. These findings underscore that protection alone is not sufficient; resettlement must be timely, coordinated, and accompanied by ongoing support to rebuild lives with dignity.

The voices and experiences in this report show the human cost of the Afghan Data Breach and underline the UK Government's moral responsibility to protect those affected, those who supported and protected UK operations in Afghanistan at the cost of their lives and left their loved ones. Without coordinated action, lives will remain at risk, trauma will continue, and the UK will fail to meet its duty to these individuals.

Recommendations

The impacts of the Afghan Data Breach and how it has been handled must be understood within the broader context of significant and ongoing concerns that have bedevilled the UK's Afghan resettlement schemes throughout their operation.

The following recommendations consolidate the views of Affected Afghans in this regard. Given the severe consequences of the Afghan Data Breach, they reflect the urgent need for a proactive approach to ensure long-term support for those affected. It appears hard to avoid that many will require interdepartmental initiatives and others the allocation of additional resources for effective implementation.



a. Urgent relocation and evacuation of applicants affected by the Afghan Data Breach

Decisions on pending initial ARAP and ACRS applications (and reviews) must be expedited with individuals and their families affected by the Afghan Data Breach urgently prioritised for relocation.

The applications of all Afghans through ARAP/ACRS whose data was breached and who received negative decisions on their ARAP applications must be proactively reviewed. All applicants should be notified and provided with a reasonable opportunity to put forward evidence of the risks following the breach of their data.



b. Relocation of AFM at risk due to the Afghan Data Breach

Decisions on pending AFM applications of Afghans affected by the Afghan Data Breach must be expedited. The timeframes currently committed to under the new Key Performance Indicators still leave AFM of principal applicants who are at risk or extremely vulnerable, waiting far too long.

All Affected Afghans should be invited by the MoD to put forward evidence of risks their AFM have faced following the Afghan Data Breach and they should be automatically exempt from the restriction introduced in June 2025 that principal applicants only have 30 days from the date they respond to their offer letter to submit an AFM application. In other words, the fact that they were affected by the Afghan Data Breach, but not informed by the MoD until more than 3 years after the breach happened, should automatically be considered as "compelling circumstances which have prevented them from meeting this deadline".

AFM applications of Afghans whose data was breached and who received negative decisions on their AFM applications must be provided an opportunity to provide further evidence of the risks following the Afghan Data Breach and in any event their Decisions proactively reviewed.



c. Security and protection measures for Affected Afghans those in Afghanistan and third countries

The UK Government should work with other UK Government departments as well as regional and international actors such as UNAMA, UNHCR and neighbouring governments in order to:

- Establish a secure, dedicated communication channel for reporting threats, receiving updates and providing assistance.
- Provide security assistance, context-specific advice and support including physical protection, safe housing and relocation support for Affected Afghans who report credible threats;
- Enable access to humanitarian assistance including physical and/or mental health support;
- Secure temporary visas or other immigration protection schemes, particularly for those awaiting relocation to the UK and/or with pending applications to prevent arrests, detentions and removals/deportation; and
- Implement continuous monitoring of the security situation and the well-being of those impacted.



d. Compensation

Establish a financial compensation scheme for those who have suffered due to the Afghan Data Breach. This will significantly reduce legal costs, Court/Judicial time and other public resources in otherwise requiring individuals to make individual applications in order to seek the same.



Resources for support

If you want to learn more about the Afghan Data Breach and/or receive Refugee Legal Support's advice and answers to frequently asked questions about the Afghan Data Breach, read our [Data breach information sheet](#).

The [information sheet](#) also provides links to legal and mental health support. The [MoD has also provided information and guidance](#) for those affected by the Afghan Data Breach.

The [APBI ARAP Self Help Guide](#) – the ARAP scheme is now closed, but the updated guide remains useful for Afghans whose applications were refused and who wish to request a review. The guide is available in English, Dari, and Pashto.

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

SURVEY INFORMATION:

This survey asks questions about you and your family's experiences of the Afghan Data Breach and Resettlement and will inform the charity [Refugee Legal Support](#)'s response to the UK Parliament Defence Select Committee's [call for evidence on the Afghan Data Breach and Resettlement Schemes](#)⁵².

Select committees are groups of members of parliament from all political parties whose role is to examine a particular area, such as Afghan resettlement and the data breach. Committees publish a "Call for Evidence", because they want to hear from a wide range of people who know about the topic that they investigate. This helps committee members understand problems and make recommendations for improvements.

This survey has 16 questions and should take around 15-20 minutes to complete. It has been developed by Refugee Legal Support in consultation with Professor Sara de Jong and Professor Victoria Canning.

This survey is entirely voluntary and open to anyone over the age of 18 who has been affected by the Afghan data breach. We especially want to hear from you if the [data incident "self-checker"](#) showed red.

Your personal information will not be stored and we are not asking for any information which would allow us to identify you. Any comments will be anonymised in relation to names or places. Responses will be data protected and securely stored by Refugee Legal Support. Responses may form the basis of further reports and publications.



SURVEY QUESTIONS

Personal Information

1. Is Afghanistan your country of origin?

- Yes
- No

If no, please state your country of origin here:

2. In which country are you currently residing?

- United Kingdom
- Afghanistan
- Pakistan
- Iran
- Turkey
- Prefer not to say

Other (please state): _____

3. If you were involved working with the British Army or Ministry of Defence in Afghanistan, what was your role (tick all that applies)?

- Interpreter
- Contractor
- Afghan National Army
- ANSF
- 333/444 (triple – Special Forces)
- Guard
- GardaWorld Contractor
- I did not have a role
- Prefer not to say

Other (please specify): _____

Afghan Data Breach

The Afghan data breach involved the personal data of thousands of Afghan applicants for ARAP resettlement to the UK and their families, potentially putting these people at risk.

4. Were you directly informed by email by the Ministry of Defence in July 2025 that your data had been breached in the Afghan Data Breach?

- Yes
- No

5. Has the Afghan data breach led to any personal risks and/or threats to you or your family member(s)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Further comment(s): _____

6. In what ways has the data breach affected you?

Please tick all that apply.

- A direct threat to my life has been made
- Family or friend(s) have been directly threatened in Afghanistan because of the data breach
- Killing of family member(s) in Afghanistan because of the data breach
- Killing of someone I worked with in Afghanistan because of the data breach
- House searches by the Taliban of my own house
- House searches by the Taliban of my family's house
- I have not experienced any of the above
- Other (please comment below if possible)
- Prefer not to say

Further comment(s): _____

7. Has the data breach impacted on your physical or mental health?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

If yes, please give further details: _____

8. Has the data breach impacted on your family member(s)' physical or mental health?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

If yes, please give further details: _____

Only for those who tick YES in question 4

9. In July 2025, you were informed about the breach of your personal data that originally took place in February 2022 and was discovered by the Ministry of Defence in 2023.

What do you think about the time it took between the discovery of the data breach in 2023 and the communication in July 2025 by the Ministry of Defence that your personal data had been compromised?

- I was fine with receiving the communication about the breach of my data in July 2025
- It took too long to inform me about the data breach
- Prefer not to say

10. What do you think about the quality of the Security Advice you received from the Ministry of Defence when they informed you about the data breach?

- The Security Advice was helpful
- The Security Advice was unhelpful
- I am not familiar with the Security Advice
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Further comment(s): _____

11. What has been the impact of the data breach and its handling on your trust in the UK Government?

- My trust in the UK Government has increased
- My trust in the UK Government is unchanged
- My trust in the UK Government has decreased
- Prefer not to say

Further comment(s): _____

12. What do you think the UK Government should have done or should still do following the data breach?

Open comment: _____

Resettlement

13. Have you been resettled to the UK?

- Yes, I have been resettled as Principal Applicant.
- Please indicate the month and year.
- Yes, I have been resettled as a family member of a Principal Applicant.
- Please indicate the month and year.
- No, I have not been resettled.

Further comment(s): _____

14. If you have been resettled, how long did it take from receiving your resettlement offer letter to reaching the UK?

- 1-6 months
- 7-12 months
- 13-18 months
- 19-24 months
- 25-30 months
- 30 months +
- I have not been offered resettlement
- I am still awaiting resettlement in Pakistan
- I am still awaiting resettlement in Afghanistan
- Prefer not to say

15. If you have been resettled, how did you find the experience of resettlement?

- Very positive
- Positive
- Neither negative nor positive
- Negative
- Very negative
- Prefer not to say
- I have not been resettled

Further comment(s): _____

16. Use optional settings for this question

Please share your resettlement experiences (positive and/or negative) in more detail:

Open comment: _____

Your Consent

We greatly appreciate your participation.

Please note that your involvement is entirely voluntary and we therefore ask for your express written consent for taking part. Please click SUBMIT if you are happy with the following points:

1. I confirm that the purpose of the survey has been clearly explained to me in a way that I fully understand.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary.

3. I give permission for the survey data to be used for the Enquiry and further reports and publications, and that my personal details will not be shared with anyone external to the research team, including the other participants.

4. This privacy notice explains how Refugee Legal Support uses any personal information.

5. For further questions, please contact cases@afghanprobono.org.uk

While the lived experience you share with us can inform the Defence Select Committee's work, please be aware that the Committee does not consider or assist with individual cases.

Glossary

ACRS	Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme
AFM	Additional Family Member
APBI	Afghan Pro Bono Initiative
ARAP	Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy
ARR	Afghanistan Response Route
MoD	Ministry of Defence
RLS	Refugee Legal Support
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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