



# Two years on: Afghans still lack pathways to safety in the EU

International Rescue Committee | May 2023



Fariba is a refugee from Afghanistan living in Greece, a client of the Rescuing Futures Citi Partnership.

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# Executive Summary

Since the shift in power in Afghanistan in August 2021, humanitarian and protection needs have continued to rise. Millions have been forced to flee their homes, often relying on dangerous routes. Afghans now represent the third largest refugee population globally, and the resettlement needs of Afghan refugees in the region have rapidly mounted, nearly tripling year on year from 96,000 in 2022 to over 273,000 in 2023.<sup>1</sup> In response, EU institutions and member states have made greatly needed and welcome commitments to help Afghans at risk access protection pathways to Europe – including through refugee resettlement, humanitarian admissions, and other complementary pathways. Each of these efforts has been crucial in supporting people to find safety and rebuild their lives.

However, nearly two years on, these efforts remain vastly insufficient, and many promised admission schemes have yet to materialise at scale. Refugee resettlement commitments in particular are falling short, with 271 Afghan refugees resettled to the EU last year, meeting less than 0.1% of current needs. Moreover, significant hurdles are preventing many Afghans in need from accessing the safe routes that have been put in place. Renewed political commitment, continued EU support, and innovative solutions are urgently needed to secure their pathways to safety.

These challenges do not end once Afghans reach Europe in search of safety. Asylum seekers and refugees often face the threat of pushbacks or forcible returns – with Afghan nationals most commonly reporting these violent practices; barriers to fair and full asylum procedures; and long periods in undignified, detention-like centres upon arrival. These policies of containment have devastating effects: 92% of Afghans

supported by the IRC's mental health teams in Greece experienced symptoms of anxiety, and 86% of depression, in the year to March 2023. Nobody seeking safety in Europe should find themselves at further risk of harm.

EU institutions and states should urgently reaffirm their commitment to protecting Afghans at risk and draw the lessons from this response. This report sets out a roadmap with recommendations both to overcome the most immediate challenges and to put in place a sustainable, longer-term approach that is better aligned with the EU's values and capacity to welcome. It calls on EU institutions and member states to:

## 1. Urgently expand safe pathways to Europe.

- A. Scale up protection pathways to facilitate Afghans' access to safety. EU states should resettle 42,500 Afghan refugees over the coming five years at a minimum; establish new humanitarian admission schemes, expanded family reunification, and other complementary pathways; and scale up and promptly implement the safe routes currently in place.
- B. Reduce hurdles to existing pathways, adopting pragmatic, flexible and humane solutions to make them more accessible.
- C. Reinforce EU coordination and operational support for safe pathways, for a truly European response to supporting Afghans at risk.

## 2. Ensure access to asylum, dignified reception, and lasting inclusion in the EU.

- A. Welcome people in need of protection in a humane, fair and effective manner.
- B. Provide clear, predictable, and durable support for Afghans in Europe.
- C. Renew investments into sufficient and dignified housing for asylum seekers and refugees.

## 3. Draw lessons from this response to build a better system for all.

- A. Put in place a structured and resourced EU-wide framework to scale up efforts on resettlement and complementary pathways.
- B. Commit to transparency, monitoring and evaluation of the existing schemes and EU efforts.
- C. Establish robust accountability mechanisms to protect fundamental rights at Europe's borders.



Children play games outside in Gayan, a remote district in Paktika province, Afghanistan, where at least 250 people died during a 5.9 magnitude earthquake that struck on 22 June 2022. At least 35 entire villages were reduced to rubble.

## I. Introduction

Nearly two years since the shift in power in Afghanistan on 15 August 2021, there has been a **severe escalation in humanitarian needs in the country**, compounding the effects of decades of conflict. In 2023, 28.3 million Afghans, two thirds of the population, need humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup> Millions have been forced to flee their homes, within Afghanistan, to the region, or beyond, often relying on dangerous routes where they risk their lives and are exposed to exploitation. Afghans' protection and resettlement needs have rapidly mounted, at the same time as domestic challenges, such as the tragic floods in Pakistan in 2022, have further strained neighbouring countries' resources and ability to offer protection.

Since August 2021, European Union (EU) member states have announced commitments to help **Afghans at risk access pathways to safety in Europe**, including pledges to expand family reunification, humanitarian admissions, and other protection pathways. However, few of these schemes have materialised at scale. Practical or bureaucratic hurdles – including narrow eligibility criteria, strict evidentiary requirements, and low processing capacity – are limiting the scale, pace, and progress of EU efforts to bring Afghans to safety.

Meanwhile, Afghan refugees who have long been displaced in the region and who face severe vulnerabilities are being neglected, with **disappointing commitments to refugee resettlement across EU member states**. Fewer than 5,000 Afghan refugees have been resettled to the EU's 27 states since 2010, a staggeringly small figure given that Afghans

represent the third largest refugee population globally. Whereas the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that 273,955 are currently in need of this durable solution, merely 271 Afghan refugees were resettled by the EU last year – meeting less than 0.1% of needs.

Even after reaching Europe, **Afghan asylum seekers and refugees continue to face obstacles to protection and lasting inclusion**. These range from 'pushbacks' and border practices that deny them access to the territory; barriers to fair and full asylum procedures, with the threat of losing their legal status or being forcibly returned; and long periods hosted in undignified, remote, and detention-like centres that prevent their inclusion and integration into European societies.

Currently, safety remains as distant as ever for many Afghans. In order to meet the ambitions expressed more than one year ago, **EU institutions and its member states should deliver on their commitment to protecting Afghans at risk**. They should open pathways to safety in Europe by reinforcing refugee resettlement programmes, expanding existing humanitarian admission schemes, and adopting flexible, humane, and pragmatic solutions to reduce barriers to access, while facilitating safe passage through neighbouring countries. Second, they should ensure refugees and asylum seekers' access to protection at borders, asylum procedures, and dignified reception and inclusion within the EU. Third and lastly, EU actors should draw lessons from this response to strengthen protection systems for all, including improving the EU's capacity to respond to future humanitarian and protection needs.



Women walking on Fouladi Valley.

## II. Growing needs in Afghanistan and the region

### 1. The evolving situation in Afghanistan

After four decades of conflict, and nearly two years since the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA, commonly known as the Taliban) took power in August 2021, Afghans are feeling the devastating consequences of the economic collapse in the country, compounded by the impacts of climate change. Humanitarian needs have climbed by 350% compared to just four years ago. GDP is estimated to have declined by 34% from 2021 to 2022, reversing all progress achieved since 2007.<sup>3</sup> Almost 20 million Afghans are acutely food insecure<sup>4</sup> – a record high for Afghanistan and the second largest number globally.<sup>5</sup>

Protection risks have been exacerbated in tandem. Reflecting the highly volatile situation in the country, UNHCR has consistently urged states to maintain a **suspension on forced returns to Afghanistan** or to the wider region since August 2021.<sup>6</sup> In early 2023, the EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) and UNHCR respectively issued new guidance on refugee protection needs in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> Both concluded that the restrictions on Afghan women and girls' rights amount to persecution, and that they are thus likely to be in need of international protection. Women and girls face restrictions on their ability to move freely, to attend secondary school, to access essential services, and to work, which were recently compounded by the December 2022 imposition of a ban on female aid workers across the country.

As a result of this deteriorating economic, humanitarian, and protection situation, many have been forced to leave their homes. As of December 2022, 3.2 million Afghans were internally displaced within Afghanistan<sup>8</sup>: around 1.8 million became displaced between January 2021 and April 2022 alone.<sup>9</sup> Beyond the country's borders, **Afghan nationals make up the third largest refugee population globally**, with 2.84 million registered refugees as of June 2022.<sup>10</sup> In January 2023, UNHCR estimated that over 1.6 million Afghans had arrived in neighbouring countries since August 2021.<sup>11</sup>

### 2. Declining access to protection in the region

The rapid rise in protection needs of Afghans has been **felt by neighbouring countries**, which have a long history of hosting Afghan refugees. Around 2.1 million registered refugees reside in these countries, 90% in Iran and Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> In total, around 7.5 million Afghans live in these two countries, including undocumented Afghans or those with other residence permits, who may also have international protection needs.<sup>13</sup>

However, long term, durable solutions for Afghans have continued to dwindle. Resettlement options for Afghan refugees in the region are all but non-existent. According to

UNHCR, 257,868 refugees would be in need of resettlement from Iran and Pakistan alone in 2023.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, only 19 people were resettled from Pakistan,<sup>15</sup> and 153 from Iran,<sup>16</sup> globally in 2022. At the same time, in neighbouring countries, complex domestic challenges have hindered governments' capacity to offer sustained and adequate support for Afghans.



In Kabul, Latifa (55) cooks lentil over open fire in the make-shift tent that serves as a kitchen to the family. The family were given refuge on a land after they were displaced from their home province of Parwan and have built a make-shift home from mud, plastic and fabric. The roof of the house collapsed last year after a heavy snowfall.



Sajida, sitting on the floor of her home in Afghanistan. Sajida makes pickles, which her husband then sells at the bazaar. The preparation and sale of pickles is their only source of income

In **Iran**, a deteriorating socioeconomic situation and severe inflation – including food prices having risen by over 50% and an inflation rate of 39% from May 2021 to May 2022 – is leaving many Afghans in precarity, forcing many into negative coping mechanisms.<sup>17</sup> UNHCR reports that new arrivals face particular risks, including refoulement, detention, and limited access to shelter, food, and livelihood opportunities.<sup>18</sup> In **Türkiye**, Afghans reportedly face restrictions on their ability to obtain legal protection and to access basic services such as healthcare and schools.<sup>19</sup> In **Pakistan**, 11 million people were in need of humanitarian aid in 2021, with Afghans making up almost 70% of those identified as most vulnerable.<sup>20</sup> The extreme rainfalls and severe flooding in August 2022 further exacerbated needs in Pakistan.<sup>21</sup> Nearly 800,000 registered refugees were estimated to be living in more than 40 calamity-hit districts, and many Afghans lacked documentation that would enable them to access essential aid and cash assistance.<sup>22</sup> Afghans in Pakistan have experienced challenges in accessing basic services, affordable accommodation, and employment.<sup>23</sup>

Worryingly, recent years have also seen an **alarming rise in forced returns of undocumented Afghans** from Iran<sup>24</sup> or Pakistan<sup>25</sup>, as well as across the Türkiye-Iran border.<sup>26</sup> The ability to enter Pakistan, Iran and Türkiye has also been restricted throughout 2021 and 2022, with governments repeatedly limiting or closing border crossings points.<sup>27</sup> Given Afghan nationals' difficulties in obtaining legal documentation needed to enter Iran or Pakistan through formal crossings,<sup>28</sup> many have been forced to cross borders using irregular means, which entail significant physical and protection risks, especially for women and girls.<sup>29</sup> Countries in the region are also **increasingly securitising their borders**, further complicating access to the territory for people in search of protection, despite calls from UNHCR to facilitate safe passage.<sup>30</sup>

These restrictions have **devastating consequences for Afghans seeking safety**. Unable to remain in or return safely to Afghanistan, yet also unable to build a new life in neighbouring countries struggling to respond without sufficient international solidarity in receiving and supporting forcibly displaced people, many people feel that they have no other choice but to embark on dangerous journeys in search of safety. As a result, resettlement from the region and other pathways to protection are more needed than ever.

### III. Safe pathways to Europe: Still a distant goal

Like most people forcibly displaced and in need of protection worldwide, Afghan refugees have historically had limited safe, regular options for reaching Europe. There are significant obstacles to securing visas for regular migration options, and resettlement places and other complementary pathways for Afghan refugees have long been extraordinarily limited.

Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the need to rapidly scale up these pathways was evident. European states participated in the emergency evacuation effort of people from Afghanistan, including of their own nationals, although most were evacuated to the US or other non-EU countries.<sup>31</sup> Beyond this immediate response, European states faced the need to **transition from ad hoc emergency evacuations into sustainable resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes from the region**, and respond to the protection needs of Afghans falling outside of these schemes.

In October 2021, the European Commission convened a **High-Level Forum on Providing Protection to Afghans at Risk**, to galvanise voluntary commitments from states to expand safe and legal pathways for Afghan nationals considered most at risk.<sup>32</sup> These would be supported by EU funding and by coordination and knowledge-sharing efforts under an Expert Platform chaired by the EU Asylum Agency.

Ahead of this meeting, the IRC, UNHCR, and other civil society organisations called on EU states to urgently expand complementary pathways to Europe,<sup>33</sup> leveraging all tools available to bring Afghans to safety (such as facilitating evacuations, expanding humanitarian visas, and setting up or expanding community sponsorship and humanitarian corridors opportunities in tandem with civil society), in addition to a widened scope and flexible application of family reunification. To meet pressing needs, these pathways should be complemented by a long-term resettlement scheme aimed at Afghan refugees. A target for Afghan resettlement should reflect a multi-year pledge, commensurate to the scale of needs and in line with past emergency resettlement schemes; UNHCR urged the EU to resettle 42,500 Afghan refugees in the coming five years, as echoed by the IRC and other organisations.<sup>34</sup>

Collectively, 15 EU member states committed to admit around **36,000 Afghans at risk between 2021 and 2022** through humanitarian admissions, and to resettle 1,111 Afghan refugees in 2022 (see Annex).<sup>35</sup> In November 2022, 17 EU states further pledged to admit a total **13,000 Afghans through humanitarian admission in 2023**, chiefly by Germany, and to resettle nearly 16,000 refugees in 2023 (across all nationalities, not just Afghan refugees).<sup>36</sup> In 2021 and 2022, several governments launched dedicated admission schemes to support Afghans to access safety and rebuild their lives. Among others:

**Germany** announced a Federal Admission Programme to admit up to 1,000 Afghans a month over the coming three years, up to September 2025.

**Italy** announced a humanitarian corridors programme in November 2021, to welcome 1,200 Afghan refugees from neighbouring countries over two years with support from civil society.

**Ireland** announced an expanded family reunification scheme, the Afghan Admission Programme, to help up to 500 Afghans join their families in Ireland, launched in December 2021. It also provided 560 humanitarian admission places for Afghans under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.

Between 2021 and 2022, **around 41,500 Afghans at risk were admitted to the EU**, many through ad hoc emergency evacuations in August 2021.<sup>37</sup> In addition, **271 Afghan refugees were resettled** to the EU in 2022, just short of 25% of their pledge.<sup>38</sup>

The IRC welcomes each of these efforts and commitments, which have been crucial in supporting people to find safety and rebuild their lives. However, they remain vastly insufficient. First, **pledges have fallen far short of rising needs**, particularly with regards to long-term refugee resettlement. Second, **practical and bureaucratic hurdles** are preventing many Afghans at risk from accessing the pathways that have been put in place. Third, opportunities for **EU support and coordination** in addressing these challenges have not yet been leveraged in full. As a result, many of these promised schemes are yet to deliver at scale.

## 1. Humanitarian admission and resettlement pledges remain insufficient

The pledges made by EU member states since 2021 continue to be **vastly outpaced by rising needs** in Afghanistan and the region and **do not reflect the EU's capacity to welcome**. At least nine EU countries have refused to make any pledge to resettle or admit Afghans at risk in the context of the EU framework.<sup>39</sup> Other countries pledged to welcome as few as 15 or 20 refugees through these pathways over two years.<sup>40</sup>

The **pledges for humanitarian admission** announced by EU governments in December 2021 also involved a great degree of **double counting**. By the time that EU member states committed to admitting 36,000 Afghans at risk in December 2021, a majority had already arrived in the context of ad hoc evacuations the previous summer. Although the exact number is difficult to determine given the lack of reporting on arrivals, up to 22,000 of these places may have been filled through evacuations as early as August 2021. As such, for the most part, these were not new protection places, as the European Commission and civil society organisations had called for at the time.<sup>41</sup> Rather, these largely covered people who were already safely in Europe, thus **limiting the overall number of places available**.

At the same time, **long-term resettlement from the region** has been overlooked as part of the response. Afghan refugees have long faced significant resettlement needs, soaring to **273,955** refugees in need of resettlement in 2023.<sup>42</sup> Yet, according to UNHCR, only **4,592** Afghan refugees have been resettled to the EU in the last twelve years.<sup>43</sup>

A commitment to strengthening these programmes has been entirely absent from recent efforts. EU states **pledged to resettle just 1,111 Afghan refugees in 2022**. Only **271** of these places were filled by the end of the year, with the remaining commitments either being wasted or eating into future programmes. The ad hoc evacuations of August 2021 came at the expense of states' long-term resettlement commitments, too, with some governments counting these arrivals as part of their global resettlement quotas and budgets.

Refugee resettlement is a distinct, tried and tested protection tool. Emergency ad hoc evacuations cannot replace a well-resourced, multi-year resettlement programme aimed at Afghan refugees in situations of particular vulnerability<sup>44</sup> and who have waited years in a third country for pathways to be made available.

## 2. Insurmountable barriers to accessing protection pathways

Numerous practical challenges and bureaucratic obstacles are preventing those Afghans most at risk from accessing the protection pathways that have been put in place. Difficulties in leaving the country act as the first hurdle for people in need of protection to access the safe pathways to the EU for which they would be eligible. Within the admission schemes set up by European governments, stringent requirements, narrow eligibility criteria, as well as gaps in information provision on the existing pathways and how to access them, are excluding countless Afghans at risk from protection. Lastly, lengthy delays in processing applications and the implementation of promised schemes mean that many remain in the country or in the region, in increasingly precarious and often unsafe situations. These challenges are discussed in turn below.

### I. Safe passage out of Afghanistan and the region remains impossible for many

The ability to physically leave Afghanistan continues to prevent many from taking advantage of the various pathways in place. With admissions directly out of Afghanistan becoming increasingly unviable, and given the lack of consular presence by almost all governments in the country, people must make their own way to neighbouring states to access the few admission schemes in place to Europe – arranging their own transportation across the land border and funding their stay while waiting for lengthy visa procedures to conclude.<sup>45</sup> This is no simple exercise, and obstacles exist at every step.

First, **passports and visas have become ever harder for Afghans to access.** Obtaining a passport can be time consuming, expensive, and potentially exposes people to further levels of risk. Since 2021, passport offices across the country have repeatedly shut down, causing backlogs and delays. Overwhelming demand, a lack of staff, breakdowns in equipment and a lack of passport booklets have led to severe shortages and forced many to turn to the black market for passports or visas.<sup>46</sup>

Second, **measures imposed by authorities have impeded people's ability to leave the country.**

This includes Taliban-imposed exit restrictions introduced throughout 2022,<sup>47</sup> as well as inconsistent access to the territories of Iran, Pakistan, and beyond, with repeated border closures since 2021. Many people have been forced to rely on informal crossings that placed them at greater risks. Increasing securitisation, the closure of official land crossings, and a lack of regular pathways have led to "increased reliance on smugglers, new routes, increased costs, and escalating protection risks".<sup>48</sup> These include mistreatment at borders, exploitation, extortion, and the dangers of crossing difficult terrain in often harsh conditions. IOM's Missing Migrants Project reported that a record 472 people died while trying to leave Afghanistan in 2021, a vast increase on 2020 and

on previous years – making movement out of Afghanistan "deadlier than ever".<sup>49</sup>

Lastly, **smuggling services have seen a sharp rise in prices,**<sup>50</sup> making informal crossings into Pakistan, Iran, or beyond inaccessible for many.<sup>51</sup> As a result, many Afghan nationals in situations of precarity and severe vulnerability have found themselves trapped. These factors amount to an "unimaginable catch-22", whereby those individuals who are most at risk are those least able to exit the territory or access the safe pathways in place.<sup>52</sup>

### II. Taxing administrative and evidentiary requirements

European governments' own admission schemes are also exacerbating barriers to access. Despite the urgency of the situation in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, European governments have continued to impose unrealistically high administrative and evidentiary requirements. While criteria vary, existing pathways tend to involve **demanding identity documentation requirements** and biometric and security screenings, at a minimum – which circumstances in Afghanistan and the region make highly difficult to obtain and conduct. People may be required to **prove their vulnerability or eligibility for specific pathways** – for example, providing certificates proving their affiliation with an EU state, educational background, language skills, or past employment that may place them at risk.

For **family-related pathways**, including family reunification and humanitarian admission pathways based on family links, notoriously complex forms and extensive documentation is often demanded to establish family ties. For family reunification, Afghan applicants may need to pay an administrative visa fee and provide visa forms, passport photos, photocopies of national ID cards and every page in their passport, proof of payment, as well as original birth and marriage certificates.<sup>53</sup> UNHCR has long warned that taxing and inflexible requirements (at times only explained in the receiving country's language), prohibitive administrative fees, as well as lengthy waiting times are preventing many refugees from being reunited with their families.<sup>54</sup>

People experiencing protection risks or forced to flee their homes **often struggle to provide these forms of extensive documentation.** Some may have been unable to retrieve this documentation when fleeing; others may have destroyed it as a precaution; or may have found it too expensive, dangerous, or impossible to source it from officials. Vulnerable people such as women, children, or LGBTQIA+ Afghans, who face additional barriers in obtaining passports and other identity documents, risk being denied access to safe pathways as a result. Humanitarian admissions to the Netherlands,<sup>55</sup> Ireland<sup>56</sup> and Italy,<sup>57</sup> for example, were held back for months due to inflexible documentation and security screening requirements.

UNHCR has urged states to simplify and prioritise procedures, to employ innovative processing methods and remote interviews, and to expand eligibility criteria.<sup>58</sup> Recognising these challenges, some EU countries initially relaxed requirements and facilitated accelerated admission procedures for Afghans. Yet, reports suggest that these have tightened again over time, and the process remains prohibitively demanding and complex.

### III. **Strict and narrow eligibility criteria for admission**

Across the pathways established by EU states, **strict and narrow eligibility criteria that fail to capture the complex and overlapping protection needs at play** preclude many people from accessing the places available.

For example, most European states have continued to apply very narrow definitions of who constitutes a **family member**, restricting access to family reunification or broader admission schemes for relatives of those at risk (see Germany case study below). With few exceptions such as Belgium or Ireland, most governments have limited these to the ‘core’ or ‘immediate’ family, namely, spouses and minor children, excluding de facto partners, adult children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, or other family members living under the same roof.<sup>59</sup> UNHCR has called on states to include extended family members in their eligibility, applying “liberal and humane criteria” and taking into account diverse family compositions and structures.<sup>60</sup>

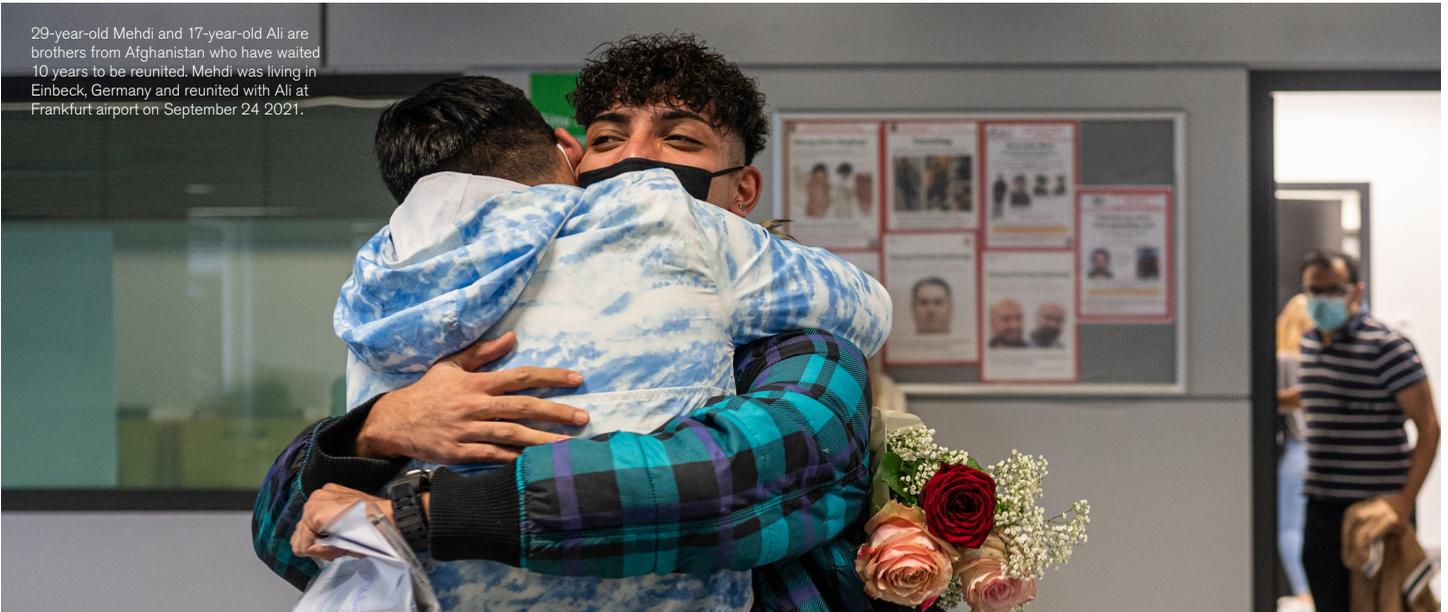
Narrow interpretations also concern **employment and links to European governments or organisations**. Many states’ admission efforts emphasised bringing people who had worked with their governments or national organisations to safety. However, eligibility criteria varied widely and were at times inconsistent or untransparent, with subcontractors, self-employed people and others lacking direct contracts being excluded from evacuation places or admission schemes, despite conducting identical work in the same projects.<sup>61</sup> Some schemes have also applied **limitations to their geographic scope** and excluded vulnerable people who had already fled to neighbouring countries and were stranded in Iran or Pakistan (see Germany case study).

Overall, it is not clear to what extent different states’ admission pathways **encompassed all relevant risk categories**. The lack of available data on arrivals and prioritisation criteria makes it challenging to determine how far people facing especially pronounced risks or vulnerabilities have been able to access support through such schemes.<sup>62</sup> No systematic assessment appears to have been conducted to this end.<sup>63</sup>

29-year-old Mehdi (with a beard) and 17-year-old Ali are brothers from Afghanistan who have waited 10 years to be reunited. Mehdi was living in Einbeck, Germany and reunited with Ali at Frankfurt airport on September 24 2021. The IRC supported Ali in Greece where we provided him with lawyers to help his case, social workers and an apartment to live in in Athens. Before he moved to the apartment, he was living in a confined camp and really struggling with his mental health. Now in Germany, he has dreams to become a mechanic.



29-year-old Mehdi and 17-year-old Ali are brothers from Afghanistan who have waited 10 years to be reunited. Mehdi was living in Einbeck, Germany and reunited with Ali at Frankfurt airport on September 24 2021.



## Case study: Germany's Federal Admission Programme

Germany has been at the forefront of EU-wide efforts to welcome Afghans at risk since 2021. In addition to different schemes to evacuate and admit former local staff and Afghans in danger, and pledges to resettle refugees from Pakistan in the coming years, the German government committed to establishing a **Federal Admission Programme** as part of its coalition agreement in December 2021. In October 2022, it announced the details of this scheme, committing to **grant admission to up to 1,000 persons a month** who face individual and concrete risks in Afghanistan, up to the end of the current legislative term in September 2025.<sup>64</sup> While the ambitions of this programme are greatly welcome, it remains too exclusive and limited in its access, and **has not yet enabled Afghans to make it to safety in Germany.**

First, the **eligibility criteria are narrow** and fail to capture all groups at heightened risk in Afghanistan. For example, children or former security forces in need of protection are not explicitly considered, and only members of the nuclear family of the main applicant are generally eligible for admission.<sup>65</sup> The programme is also, in principle, limited to persons currently in Afghanistan, **excluding those who were forced to flee on their own means**, and who remain in neighbouring countries without sufficient support, inclusion prospects, or protection from deportation.

Second, **Afghans themselves cannot apply for admission.** Only certain NGOs can submit individual cases via a governmental platform.<sup>66</sup> This leads to a pre-selection by NGOs, turning them into gatekeepers for the programme, and potentially exceeding their capacity.<sup>67</sup> Forced into this difficult position, many NGOs have decided not to publicly disclose their involvement in the programme, limiting accessibility further. The process to submit cases – a detailed questionnaire of multiple-choice questions, with little possibility to explain answers or enter free text – risks failing to capture all relevant elements of an individual case, which may lead to **unwarranted rejections.** After submission, applicants lack access to information about their case, the ability to update their information, or legal remedies to challenge the decision.

The biggest challenge, however, takes place after receiving a positive decision. After being accepted for admission, **people are required to travel to a German embassy in Pakistan,**<sup>68</sup> and apply for their entry visa and arrange their travel to Germany. However, for those without a passport, leaving Afghanistan may be almost impossible. In April 2023, moreover, the German government suspended the processing and issuing of visas for Afghans, citing isolated indications of abuse of the programme, and announced intentions to tighten security checks and restrict the ability to apply for visas.<sup>69</sup>

**As of May 2023, no person has come to Germany through the Federal Admission Programme.**

**As of April 2023, no positive admission decisions or visas have yet been issued.**

#### IV. Information and transparency on the available pathways and procedures

A **lack of transparent, official and accessible information on the pathways and procedures available** has also hindered Afghans' access to safety. Afghans forced to flee their homes consistently report facing widespread confusion and opaque information on the options available to them. This, in turn, meant that civil society organisations seeking to support Afghans at risk **were often overwhelmed** with requests for information<sup>70</sup>, and regularly themselves lacked accessible, timely and reliable information on opportunities to refer those people with whom they were in contact.<sup>71</sup>

Instead, people have been forced to rely on personal networks and informal referrals for different pathways – often receiving contradictory, insufficient, or incorrect information. In this opaque environment, and with safe routes failing to materialise at scale, **misinformation, scams, and visa frauds** targeting Afghans seeking safety have multiplied since 2021, exposing Afghans to greater risks along their journeys.<sup>72</sup>

The lack of transparency over **eligibility and prioritisation criteria** across these schemes remains a further challenge. As governments generally do not provide detailed explanations as to why applications were rejected, nor allow people to appeal these decisions, many Afghans do not understand the reasons for their rejection.

#### V. Admission programmes failed to materialise promptly and transparently

Although the precise number of arrivals across pathways is difficult to determine,<sup>73</sup> the admissions promised by states are only materialising at a slow pace. Many Afghans identified as being at risk remain in the region in precarious situations, vulnerable to exploitation, waiting for visas to be issued or travel to be arranged.<sup>74</sup>

The dedicated admission programmes established by EU states have also faced delays in their implementation (see Germany and Italy case studies). For example, Ireland's Afghan Admission Programme was launched in December 2021.<sup>75</sup> By March 2022, it had received 528 applications, but the first 22 approvals were only issued in November 2022, nearly one year after its launch.<sup>76</sup> Under the German Federal Admissions Programme, no admissions have yet taken place as of May 2023.

Backlogs have been caused, inter alia, by a lack of sufficient staff to process visas and family reunification requests, which some countries have sought to expand;<sup>77</sup> difficulties in identification, referrals, identity checks and lengthy security screenings; as well as challenges in receiving countries. Notably, the shift in Europe's focus to the Ukraine refugee response

in 2022, as well as chronically insufficient reception capacity across European countries, led to suspensions or severe delays in resettlement and humanitarian admission arrivals.<sup>78</sup>

**These delays have had devastating consequences** for people's security, livelihoods, mental health, and ability to plan for the future. Admission or family reunification procedures range from many months to several years. Upon reaching Pakistan or Iran, Afghans often find that they do not know what to do, where they will live, or how they will sustain themselves for this period. A lack of job opportunities and adequate housing, rapidly rising rents,<sup>79</sup> the prohibitive costs and difficult processes to renew their visas,<sup>80</sup> and the risk of facing precarity, arbitrary detention, or forced returns to Afghanistan if these visas expire, all contribute to making these waits unbearable for many Afghans.

This also means that, often, the only people able to make use of these admission schemes in practice are those with sufficient resources to travel into neighbouring countries, sustain themselves for long periods, and withstand the prolonged uncertainty involved – making existing protection pathways inequitable by design.



Mo lives with his little daughter in Halle (Saale). The 28-year-old had to flee his home country Afghanistan and came to Germany in 2015.

## Case study: Italy's Humanitarian Corridors Scheme

In November 2021, the Italian Interior and Foreign Ministries signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR, IOM, and several religious and civil society organisations,<sup>81</sup> launching a humanitarian corridor programme to enable the **safe and regular entry of 1,200 Afghan nationals** in need of international protection.<sup>82</sup> These included 400 recognised refugees identified by UNHCR, to be hosted within the Italian reception system, and an additional 800 people facing protection risks, whom the religious and civil society organisations would be responsible for identifying, welcoming, as well as supporting their integration.<sup>83</sup> The scheme was due to run over two years, with a possible extension, and builds on Italy's past successful experience with humanitarian corridors from Lebanon, Ethiopia, and Morocco.

Although these commitments were firmly welcomed, its implementation has been **severely delayed**, leaving vulnerable Afghans in precarious situations in transit countries, living in hiding and fearing deportation. The first group of beneficiaries only reached Italy in July 2022.<sup>84</sup> One key factor was the lack of machines required for fingerprinting at the Italian embassies in Pakistan and Iran, which were needed to register Afghan refugees prior to departure.<sup>85</sup> Despite requests from implementing partners and Members of Parliament to expedite these transfers, pragmatic and flexible alternatives such as exceptionally conducting checks upon arrival were not permitted. Civil society organisations have also raised concerns over the transparency of the scheme and the lack of legal remedies for Afghans to challenge rejections from the programme.<sup>86</sup>

**As of mid-May 2023, just under 600 people arrived in Italy through these corridors, half of the initial target.**<sup>87</sup>

### 3. Lack of Europe-wide coordination and solidarity

As EU member states developed their own pathways to safety for Afghans at risk, valuable opportunities for **EU coordination and solidarity were missed**. The establishment of the EUAA's Expert Platform on safe pathways for Afghans at risk, notably, was a crucial step in the EU's response, enabling effective knowledge-sharing and assessment of lessons learnt between states, as well as the EU Taskforce on Safe Passage established under the EU External Action Service (EEAS).

Despite these efforts, responses have not been fully synchronised. As member states developed their own protection pathways for Afghans, they established independent procedures, eligibility and admission criteria, identification and referral systems, and legal status upon arrival, with **limited coordination** between them. The **plethora of ad hoc schemes** established across different EU states, each with their own conditions, scope, and priorities, contributed to the confusion for Afghans seeking information on available pathways. No single platform was available that collated, compared and explained these different national initiatives, and helped people understand their options.

After initial emergency evacuations, governments have also been reluctant to **pool resources and scale up joint responses** – for example, by sharing admission lists, pooling flights so people could get on the first available departure to Europe and to ease admissions to smaller EU countries with fewer resources,<sup>88</sup> referring individual applicants across schemes, pointing them to the pathway for which they were most eligible, or even sharing consulate capacity.

Joint **EU operational support**, too, could unlock many pressing obstacles faced by states and discussed above, including through expanding the EUAA's mandate to provide practical support in the region – including supporting the collection of biometric data, assisting with logistics and coordination with host governments regarding transit and exit visas, delivering pre-departure orientation, centralising travel coordination, or even processing cases for EU-wide admission or resettlement.



Rahima, 45, from Afghanistan (centre), her daughter Nelofar, 17 (left), and her son Ahmad, 10 (right) stand at the beach in Lesbos, Greece in October 2020. They are overlooking the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) where they live and where Rahima works as an IRC volunteer.

## IV. Barriers to protection and inclusion for Afghans in Europe

The challenges facing those few Afghan asylum seekers and refugees who make it to Europe following perilous journeys are, however, far from over. Border violence and practices that deny them access to the territory; obstacles to fair and full asylum procedures and a clear legal status; and the lack of dignified reception with access to adequate integration support, continue to prevent people in search of safety from reaching lasting protection and inclusion in the EU.

### 1. Ongoing pushbacks and violence at borders

Across the EU's internal and external borders, **violent pushbacks and other rights abuses** continue to prevent people from accessing the territory and exercising their right to apply for asylum.<sup>89</sup> IRC teams in Greece, Serbia and Italy have heard testimonies and witnessed injuries sustained by refugees who claim that they were intercepted, attacked or pushed back by authorities when crossing borders. Several UN, EU, and Council of Europe bodies have echoed these reports and condemned this growing practice in Europe.<sup>90</sup> **People from Afghanistan are most frequently reported to be victims of pushbacks,**<sup>91</sup> amounting to 40% of the 12,400 persons reporting pushbacks to the Protecting Rights at Borders (PRAB) initiative in 2021.<sup>92</sup>

### 2. Inconsistent approaches to asylum and inclusion across Europe

Once within the EU's territory, structural shortcomings in asylum systems prevent many from accessing **fair and full asylum procedures, and a durable and clear legal status.** The protection needs of Afghans have grown, with 124,000 asylum applications made by Afghans in the EU in 2022, up from nearly 100,000 in 2021 and 48,235 in 2020.<sup>93</sup> However, the treatment and support they receive has long varied widely across states. This affects both asylum seekers who arrived in Europe by their own means, and those who were resettled, evacuated, or admitted through other complementary pathways since August 2021.<sup>94</sup>

Afghan applicants have long faced **uneven recognition rates** across European states, amounting to an unpredictable 'asylum lottery'. In 2021, while five member states had a 100% acceptance or 'recognition' rate of Afghan asylum applications, six others had a recognition rate of less than 50%, with Denmark only issuing rejections and Bulgaria rejecting over 90% of cases.<sup>95</sup>

Recently, **a number of states have taken steps to**

**facilitate some Afghans' access to a predictable legal status in Europe.** In December 2022, Sweden assessed that all women and girls from Afghanistan would risk persecution solely based on their gender and should be granted refugee status.<sup>96</sup> Finland and Denmark made similar announcements in February 2023, in line with UNHCR and EUAA guidance.<sup>97</sup> However, as of March 2023, other EU states have not yet followed suit.

On the contrary, other countries have raised further obstacles for Afghans to access protection. European governments have maintained a suspension on forced returns to Afghanistan since August 2021, in line with the UNHCR's non-return advisory and given the lack of a cooperation framework with the country's authorities.<sup>98</sup> However, throughout 2022, **several countries resumed rejections of Afghan asylum applicants.**<sup>99</sup> Recognition rates for Afghan asylum seekers have been falling since, from 66% in 2021 to 54% in 2022 in the EU and associated countries (Norway and Switzerland).<sup>100</sup> Merely two weeks before the Taliban took power, six EU states had issued a statement urging for deportations to the country to continue, raising the risk that forced returns to Afghanistan may resume long before safe and dignified return is possible.<sup>101</sup> Others have sought to return rejected Afghan asylum seekers to countries through which they transited.<sup>102</sup>

In Greece, where many Afghans first arrive in Europe, the **widespread use of the 'safe third country' concept** has severely limited people's access to fair and full asylum procedures. In June 2021, a Joint Ministerial Decision issued by Greece deemed Türkiye a safe third country for nationals from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Somalia and Syria.<sup>103</sup> Based on this policy, asylum applications of Afghans arriving via Türkiye are not examined based on their individual circumstances, unless they can first prove that they would not be safe in Türkiye. **In 2022, Greece deemed 37.6% of asylum applications by Afghans inadmissible on the basis that Türkiye would be safe for them** (1,095 of a total of 2,908).<sup>104</sup> As Türkiye has not been accepting returns from Greece since March 2020, people whose claims are rejected have been stranded in Greece in a legal limbo.

Across Europe, these practices have already **pushed countless people into irregular stays,** fearing for their futures. They are excluded from crucial services and social support systems, forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms, and risk facing detention and other protection risks as a result.

### 3. Lack of dignified reception during lengthy asylum procedures

According to the EUAA, as of January 2023, 664,000 pending asylum cases were awaiting a first instance decision, two fifths of whom had been waiting for over six months. Syrians and Afghans had the most pending cases.<sup>105</sup>

While awaiting a decision, asylum seekers from Afghanistan and beyond are too often denied access to **dignified reception that facilitates their integration and inclusion**. In Greece, the reliance on Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs)<sup>106</sup> to accommodate asylum seekers are leaving people isolated and unsupported.<sup>107</sup> As the IRC has repeatedly warned,<sup>108</sup> the detention-like conditions in these closed centres, which are EU-funded, are inconsistent with EU standards on reception and integration.<sup>109</sup> This is due to their remote location, which isolates asylum seekers from local communities and basic services;<sup>110</sup> their detention-like environment, including extensive surveillance, barbed wire fences, and strict entry-exit restrictions; limitations to legal aid and support from civil society organisations; as well as the lack of safe accommodation or protection resources for women, children, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. By contrast, community-based accommodation models, which offer greater inclusion prospects, mobility, and tailored support, have been cut back in recent years.

**This policy of containment has devastating consequences for people's wellbeing.**<sup>111</sup> Out of 64 Afghans supported by the IRC's mental health and psychological support (MHPSS) programme in Greece from April 2022 to March 2023, 58 (92%) experienced anxiety-related symptoms, and 55 (86%) depression-related symptoms.<sup>112</sup>



Fariba is a refugee from Afghanistan living in Greece, a client of the Rescuing Futures Citi Partnership.

## V. Recommendations

Despite the welcome ambition and commitments made by the EU more than one year ago, the overall picture that emerges in this report is one of staggering neglect of Afghans in need of protection. The challenges outlined above require increased attention to expanding safe pathways to protection and ensuring meaningful access, as well as renewed commitment to ensure a fair, humane, and effective welcome for those who reach Europe in search of safety. They also provide learnings that can pave the way for improved EU responses to future emergencies. **This report sets out a roadmap with recommendations both to overcome the most immediate challenges and to put in place a sustainable, longer-term approach that is better aligned with the EU's values and capacity to welcome.**

### 1. Urgently expand safe pathways to Europe

Safe pathways for refugees to reach the EU remain scarce, presenting people forced to flee with no option but to risk their lives on dangerous routes, and leaving low- and middle-income countries carrying the lion's share of responsibility. Despite efforts to expand the protection pathways available for Afghans at risk, significant hurdles are preventing many from accessing these schemes. Immediate actions the EU can take to overcome existing barriers and scale up resettlement and complementary pathways include:

**A. Scale up protection pathways to facilitate Afghans' access to safety, including through resettlement, humanitarian admissions, expanded family reunification, and other complementary pathways.**

- ▶ Make ambitious pledges to **resettle Afghan refugees**. UNHCR's calls for EU states to resettle 42,500 Afghan refugees over the coming five years should be met at a minimum.<sup>113</sup>
- ▶ **Implement resettlement quotas swiftly and in full**. Resettlement programmes must be implemented in a timely manner, minimising delays, backlogs and bottlenecks, so people are not stranded in limbo. Innovative processing modalities trialled during COVID-19 to make resettlement faster, safer, and more cost-effective, such as conducting remote interviews or dossier-based referrals, should be maximised.
- ▶ **Increase or uncap the number of places under states' humanitarian admission schemes**, to better match the scale of needs. All pledged places must be new and additional, avoiding back-counting Afghan nationals who had already arrived in Europe.

- ▶ **Establish additional humanitarian admission schemes and employ other complementary pathways for Afghans at risk** – such as education or employment-based pathways, leveraging the considerable expertise, best practices and coordination networks already established across the EU.<sup>114</sup>

- ▶ **Leverage civil society's commitment to welcome Afghan refugees and support their reception and inclusion in Europe.**

States should act on expressions of support from civil society, local authorities, the Afghan diaspora, and others to welcome Afghan refugees through community sponsorship, humanitarian corridors, or other student or labour mobility schemes.

**B. Reduce hurdles to existing pathways. The EU should adopt pragmatic, flexible and humane solutions to overcome bureaucratic barriers to safety, including actions to:**

- ▶ **Address the limitations in scope and narrow eligibility criteria of available schemes,** removing geographic limitations wherever possible. As a priority, **broaden the eligibility** for family reunification or family conditions within humanitarian admission schemes.

- ▶ **Reduce or waive documentation required** where possible, recognising the difficulties in obtaining identity documents and other certificates. States should consider waiving biometric requirements or conducting them at later stages, such as in transit or upon arrival, to minimise delays.

- ▶ **Ensure adequate resourcing, staffing and management for timely decisions and transfers of people eligible for admission,** including scaling up consulate capacity in the region to process entry visas, and expediting visa applications by Afghan nationals. Provide independent and transparent **due process guarantees** so people can challenge exclusions and rejections from various schemes.

- ▶ **Support a humane and effective regional refugee response through close engagement with Afghanistan's neighbours,** that prioritises: keeping borders open and protecting people from arbitrary detention and forced returns to Afghanistan; supporting swift registrations of newly arrived Afghans, facilitating visa renewals, clearing the backlog in processing asylum claims and interviews, and ensuring that displaced Afghans can effectively access proof of registration, documentation, services, housing and employment; strengthening access to quality services for Afghans, regardless of their

registration status; and establishing or prolonging agreements to facilitate transit and safe passage for Afghans through neighbouring countries, including those granted admission to Europe.

**C. Reinforce EU coordination and operational support for safe pathways.**

- ▶ Coordination within the EU and with other global actors on the expansion of protection pathways should be scaled up, notably by **reinforcing the role of the EUAA's Expert Platform** on safe pathways for Afghans, to strengthen coordination on solutions and best practices, ensuring the meaningful involvement of civil society.

- ▶ EU operational support would help to address pressing bottlenecks and enable a truly European response to supporting Afghans at risk, mirroring the strong EU-wide coordination of the Ukraine response. **The EUAA's role in assisting member states should be also expanded,** leveraging the agency's new mandate, with a view to further developing this in line with the provisions in the Union Resettlement Framework (URF) after its adoption. This could include:

- ▶ Fostering cooperation between EU states in the design of admission schemes, pooling resources for flights, sharing lists of people eligible for admission, facilitating referrals across pathways, and sharing consulate capacity for processing admissions, in compliance with data protection standards;

- ▶ Strengthening information provision for Afghans in the country and neighbouring states on the available protection pathways and how to access them, sharing official, verified information in accessible formats and languages;

- ▶ Operational support in identification, processing cases for humanitarian admission and other visas from the region, offering pre-departure orientation and support; and arranging flights and access to travel documents and relevant visas in a centralised manner; as well as

- ▶ Exploring the establishment of a Resettlement Support Facility in the region to facilitate states' processing of refugee resettlement cases and pooling of resources.

**2. Ensure access to asylum, dignified reception, and lasting inclusion in the EU**

Asylum seekers reaching Europe after perilous journeys, from Afghanistan and elsewhere, often find themselves facing the



threat of pushbacks or forcible return, barriers to fair asylum procedures and inconsistent recognition rates across states, and detention-like conditions upon arrival. EU member states must urgently address this situation: no-one seeking safety in Europe should find themselves at further risk of harm. Actions the EU can take to safeguard access to asylum, dignified reception and lasting support include:

### **A. Welcome people in need of protection in a humane, fair and effective manner.**

- ▶ Reaffirm the commitment to refugee protection by **immediately ending the practice of violent pushbacks** at borders, and refrain from practices that deny people on the move access to the territory, asylum procedures, humanitarian assistance, or basic services. These include mainstreamed detention at borders, the expansion of border walls and fences, the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance, and the denial of assistance at sea and other border areas.
- ▶ **Reverse the widespread use of exceptions or derogations to asylum and reception standards in Europe**, including in response to increased spontaneous arrivals, ensuring that any responses are proportionate, uphold people's human rights, and alleviate rather than exacerbate humanitarian needs at borders.
- ▶ Fulfil pledges on **voluntary relocation of asylum seekers within Europe** in a prompt and transparent way, in the spirit of responsibility-sharing with countries of first arrival. At the same time, work towards a **mandatory, permanent and predictable solidarity mechanism** between EU states, centred on relocations, in negotiations on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

### **B. Provide clear, predictable, and durable support for Afghans in Europe.**

- ▶ Maintain the **suspension on negative decisions on Afghan asylum claims** and ensure that **forced returns to Afghanistan remain formally suspended**, in line with UNHCR's non-return advisory. Returns to other countries in the region, from where there is a risk of onward deportation to Afghanistan, must also be immediately halted.

- ▶ **Afghan asylum seekers in Europe should not be left in legal limbo or forced into irregularity.** Governments should continue granting subsidiary protection where refugee status is not applicable. Where this is not possible, states should ensure other forms of legal stay or leave to remain, ensuring access to the territory and other basic rights. Afghan asylum seekers must continue being allowed to make new and subsequent applications, and have their claims assessed on their merits.

- ▶ EU institutions and agencies should closely monitor the backlog in decision-making on claims by Afghan asylum applicants, as well as the ongoing divergence in recognition rates across EU states.

### **C. Renew investments into sufficient and dignified housing for asylum seekers and refugees.**

- ▶ Fully implement the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. Crucially, **support for early integration should be mainstreamed across all policy areas**, including prioritising dignified reception from day one to enable people to access crucial services and support, and integrate into their local communities, from the point of arrival. This involves moving away from closed, containment-centred reception centres, and towards independent and community-based housing models. EU funding should be consistently leveraged to this end.
- ▶ Commit to **long-term investments in sufficient and dignified refugee reception systems**, including a permanent buffer reception capacity to prevent systems from becoming rapidly overwhelmed. A percentage of places should be **ringfenced for arrivals through resettlement and complementary pathways**, to prevent people's journeys from being cancelled last minute due to a lack of capacity.
- ▶ **Expand long-term housing solutions** to prevent bottlenecks in reception systems as people seek to transition into durable, affordable, and dignified accommodation.
- ▶ **Collaborate with civil society**, the private sector, and local authorities to facilitate access to immediate reception and housing for refugees and asylum seekers.

### 3. Draw lessons from this response to build a better system for all

Many of the challenges outlined in this report apply not only to Afghan refugees, but to people fleeing emergencies around the world. The gaps in the EU's response to the needs of Afghans, as well as the welcome innovative approaches developed as part of this effort, hold lessons that can help build a more fair, humane, and effective system that works for both refugees and the communities that receive them.

#### A. Put in place a structured and resourced EU-wide framework to scale up efforts on resettlement and complementary pathways.

- ▶ **Swiftly adopt and operationalise the Union Resettlement Framework.** The IRC welcomes the agreement reached on this legislation in December 2022 between the European Parliament and the Council, after years of deadlock. This regulation would make EU resettlement efforts more coherent, structured, and predictable, and safeguard them as a central pillar of EU migration systems.
- ▶ Invest in **sustaining, expanding and future-proofing national refugee resettlement programmes** to bring these in line with mounting global needs. As a first step, EU states should make a joint pledge at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 to **resettle 44,000 refugees from across regions in 2024**, with a view to further growing these programmes in future years.
- ▶ **Put in place an emergency mechanism to trigger and coordinate European efforts on resettlement and complementary pathways, including urgent humanitarian admissions, in response to future humanitarian or displacement emergencies.** Various existing platforms could be leveraged for such an instrument, which would enable EU institutions to respond faster and in a more predictable and coordinated manner to future rises in global protection needs.<sup>115</sup> This mechanism should establish objective criteria for humanitarian admission, a transparent triggering mechanism, and offer guidance on how to conduct admissions quickly, equitably, and effectively.

#### B. Commit to transparency, monitoring and evaluation of the existing schemes and EU efforts.

- ▶ Carry out a **transparent review of EU institutions and member states' collective response to protection needs in Afghanistan** to determine the effectiveness of the innovative schemes put in place since 2021, and improve them

going forward. This should include an assessment of the implementation of different resettlement, humanitarian admission and other schemes, efforts to address barriers to access, as well as the EU's future capability to respond to rapid rises in global refugee protection needs.

- ▶ **Strengthen monitoring and regular reporting on national resettlement and humanitarian admission pledges.** Sufficient funding should continue to be made available under the EU's AMIF budget to support states' resettlement pledges as a priority.

#### C. Establish robust accountability mechanisms to protect fundamental rights at Europe's borders.

- ▶ Establish **Independent Border Monitoring Mechanisms** to monitor pushbacks and other violations at EU borders, ensuring their effectiveness and independence, and adequate resourcing and access to perform their mandate.<sup>116</sup>
- ▶ Hold member states accountable for practices that violate EU and international law, wherever they take place in Europe. EU institutions should use all tools at their disposal to this end, including leveraging EU funding and infringement procedures where necessary.

Jamal, Hala and Attal, all participants in "Huckepack", play in the park with Annabelle watching in Essen, Germany. The aim of Huckepack (translated as "piggyback") is to actively support newly immigrated children socially, emotionally and linguistically with the transition to secondary school through a summer vacation program, based on IRC's educational "Healing Classrooms" concept.



## Annex:

2021 and 2022 EU-wide pledges for resettlement and humanitarian admission, including of Afghan nationals

Country	Pledges for resettlement in 2022 (all nationalities) <sup>117</sup>	Pledges for humanitarian admission in 2021-2022 <sup>118</sup>	Pledges for resettlement in 2023 (all nationalities) <sup>119</sup>	Pledges for humanitarian admission in 2023 <sup>120</sup>
<b>Austria</b>	0	0	0	0
Belgium	1,250	500 <sup>121</sup>	500	125
Bulgaria	0	0	50	0
<b>Croatia</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Cyprus</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Czech Republic</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Denmark</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Estonia</b>	0	0	0	0
Finland	2,647	386	1,075	0
France	5,000	2,500	3,000	0
Germany	6,000	23,833	6,500	12,000
<b>Greece</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Hungary</b>	0	0	0	0
Ireland	0	0	800	100
Italy	700	1,000	500	850
Latvia	0	99	0	0
Lithuania	20	59	0	20
Luxembourg	50	90	15	15
Malta	21	0	20	0
Netherlands	1,915	3,159	737	0
<b>Poland</b>	0	0	0	0
Portugal	300	800	300	100
Romania	100	132	200	0
Slovakia	0	42	50	50
Slovenia	0	0	50	0
Spain	1,200	2,500	1,200	TBC
Sweden	8,700	1,500	900	0
<b>Total commitments by EU27 member states</b>	<b>27,900</b> <b>(1,111 for Afghan nationals)<sup>122</sup></b>	<b>36,600</b> <b>(36,000 for Afghan nationals)</b>	<b>15,897</b> <b>(Inclusive of pledges for Afghan nationals)</b>	<b>13,260</b> <b>(over 13,000 for Afghan nationals)</b>

# Endnotes

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- 18 UNHCR. "Afghanistan Situation Regional Response Plan (RRP) January - December 2022." January 2022. [https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/afghanistan-situation-regional-response-plan-rrp-january-december-2022?\\_gl=1\\*8ut1ml\\*\\_ga\\*MzMzOTMxMjguMTY3NzA1NjM4MA.\\*\\_ga\\_E60ZNX2F68\\*MTY3NzA1NjM3OS4xLjEuMTY3NzA1NjQwNC4zNS4wLjA](https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/afghanistan-situation-regional-response-plan-rrp-january-december-2022?_gl=1*8ut1ml*_ga*MzMzOTMxMjguMTY3NzA1NjM4MA.*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY3NzA1NjM3OS4xLjEuMTY3NzA1NjQwNC4zNS4wLjA), pp. 17-18.
- 19 EUAA. "Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia." September 2022. [https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/2022\\_09\\_Afghanistan\\_Mobility\\_Trends.pdf](https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/2022_09_Afghanistan_Mobility_Trends.pdf)
- 20 OCHA. "Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2021 (April 2021)." May 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-humanitarian-response-plan-2021-april-2021>.
- 21 OCHA. "Revised Pakistan 2022 Floods Response Plan: 01 Sep 2022 - 31 May 2023." October 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/revised-pakistan-2022-floods-response-plan-01-sep-2022-31-may-2023-04-oct-2022>
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Afghans in Baluchistan province reported to the IRC lacking access to services, with only 24% of Afghan refugees reporting that women in their community could access income-generation activities. IRC, "Integrated Protection Monitoring – Baluchistan – February 2023". Other challenges include a significant backlog leading to delays in the processing of people's asylum cases before they can receive registration certificates from UNHCR, exploitative rent prices, discriminatory treatment, poor living conditions, and the expiration of visas without opportunities to extend them. Some families found themselves sleeping in public parks for prolonged periods due to the lack of access to accommodation, sometimes losing their identity documents in the process. See, for example: UNHCR. "Help Desk: Pakistan." May 2023. <https://help.unhcr.org/pakistan/new-arrivals/>; The New Humanitarian. "Pakistan steps up crackdown on Afghan refugees, adds new restrictions." March 2023. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/03/23/pakistan-crackdown-afghan-refugees>; EUAA. "Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia." September 2022 [https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/2022\\_09\\_Afghanistan\\_Mobility\\_Trends.pdf](https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/2022_09_Afghanistan_Mobility_Trends.pdf); Amnesty International. "Pakistan: Letter re: Protecting Afghans in Pakistan." December 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/6311/2022/en/>
- 24 In 2021, close to 800,000 Afghans were forcibly returned from the two countries, in contravention of UNHCR's non-return advisory. In the first three months of 2022, forced returns from Iran to Afghanistan increased by 60% each month. In June 2022, UNHCR estimated that 65% of all Afghan asylum seekers newly arriving in Iran were being deported back to Afghanistan by authorities. See Info Migrants. "Reports of abuse of Afghan refugees as Iran continues deportations." May 2022. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/40266/reports-of-abuse-of-afghan-refugees-as-iran-continues-deportations>; IOM. "Comprehensive Action Plan for Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries." February 2022. <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1481/files/uploaded-files/IOM%20Revised%20CAP%20AFG%20February%202022.pdf>, p.5; UNHCR. "Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran." June 2022. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/2848>; EUAA. "EUAA reports on the situation of Afghan refugees in Iran." January 2023. <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/euaa-reports-situation-afghan-refugees-iran>
- 25 Some 1,800 Afghan nationals were forcibly returned from Pakistan during September and October 2021 alone, and reports indicated

that restrictions on Afghans were increasing as of early 2023, including new restrictions on free movement of Afghan citizens and expanded detention for those who overstay their visas. See European Parliament. "Public hearing - Situation of Afghan asylum seekers, with focus on vulnerable groups, in particular women and children". 17 March 2022. [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/committee-on-civil-liberties-justice-and-home-affairs\\_20220317-0900-COMMITTEE-LIBE](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/committee-on-civil-liberties-justice-and-home-affairs_20220317-0900-COMMITTEE-LIBE); The New Humanitarian. "Pakistan steps up crackdown on Afghan refugees, adds new restrictions." March 2023. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/03/23/pakistan-crackdown-afghan-refugees>.

26 Türkiye has reported deporting nearly 45,000 Afghans by air to Kabul in the first eight months of 2022, a 150% increase on the first eight months of 2021. Several civil society organisations have warned about unlawful practices against Afghans seeking safety in Türkiye, including arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and pushbacks. See: Human Rights Watch. "Turkey Pushes Afghans Back at Iran Border" November 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/18/turkey-pushes-afghans-back-iran-border>; Human Rights Watch. "Turkey: Soldiers Beat, Push Afghan Asylum Seekers Back to Iran." October 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/15/turkey-soldiers-beat-push-afghan-asylum-seekers-back-iran>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/18/turkey-pushes-afghans-back-iran-border>; Amnesty International. Iran/Turkey: "Fleeing Afghans unlawfully returned after coming under fire at borders." August 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/08/iran-turkey-fleeing-afghans-unlawfully-returned-after-coming-under-fire-at-borders/>; Human Rights watch. "No One Asked Me Why I Left Afghanistan." November 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/11/18/no-one-asked-me-why-i-left-afghanistan/pushbacks-and-deportations-afghans-turkey>.

27 EUAA. "Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia." September 2022. [https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/2022\\_09\\_Afghanistan\\_Mobility\\_Trends.pdf](https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/2022_09_Afghanistan_Mobility_Trends.pdf)

28 Migration Policy Institute. "One Year On: The Situation for At-Risk Afghans in Afghanistan and Abroad." August 2022. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/events/one-year-situation-afghanistan>

29 EUAA. "Afghan Nationals in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia." September 2022. [https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/2022\\_09\\_Afghanistan\\_Mobility\\_Trends.pdf](https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-09/2022_09_Afghanistan_Mobility_Trends.pdf)

30 UNHCR. "Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan (Update I)." February 2023. <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=63e0cb714>

31 European governments participated in the overall emergency evacuation effort of over 170,000 people from Afghanistan between 15 and 30 August 2021, including Afghan and other nationalities. As many as 122,000 by the US alone. EU member states reported having evacuated around 22,000 Afghan nationals in this period, with most arriving in Germany and Italy, followed by France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Belgium. Selection criteria, documentation requirements, and the legal status provided upon arrival varied substantially across member states. Sky News "How many people have been evacuated from Afghanistan?" August 2021. <https://news.sky.com/story/how-many-people-have-been-evacuated-from-afghanistan-12395265>; European parliamentary research Service. "Briefing: Evacuation of Afghan nationals to EU Member States." November 2021. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698776/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)698776\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698776/EPRS_BRI(2021)698776_EN.pdf); European Council on Refugees and Exiles. "Afghans seeking Protection in Europe." August 2021 [https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe_FINAL.pdf)

32 European Commission Press Corner. "High-Level Forum on providing protection to Afghans at risk." October 2021. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_5088](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5088)

33 The International Rescue Committee. "Joint Statement: The EU cannot shirk its responsibilities towards Afghans in need of international protection". September 2021. <https://eu.rescue.org/press-release/joint-statement-eu-cannot-shirk-its-responsibilities-towards-afghans-need-of-international-protection>

[ment-eu-cannot-shirk-its-responsibilities-towards-afghans-need](https://eu.rescue.org/press-release/joint-statement-eu-cannot-shirk-its-responsibilities-towards-afghans-need)

34 Euronews. "UN chief 'asked EU states to take in more than 40,000 Afghan refugees.'" October 2021. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/10/07/un-chief-asked-eu-states-to-take-in-more-than-40-000-afghan-refugees>

35 European Commission. "Annexes to the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the report on the Migration and Asylum." October 2022. [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/com\\_2022\\_740\\_1\\_en\\_annexe\\_autre\\_acte\\_part1\\_v3.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/com_2022_740_1_en_annexe_autre_acte_part1_v3.pdf); European Commission. "Pledges submitted by the Member States for 2023." March 2023. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/Resettlement\\_pledges\\_submitted\\_by\\_Member\\_States\\_for\\_2023.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/Resettlement_pledges_submitted_by_Member_States_for_2023.pdf)

36 Ibid.

37 Figure provided by the European Commission in the context of the EU Asylum Agency's Expert Platform on safe pathways for Afghans at risk, 2023.

38 UNHCR. "Resettlement Data Finder. Departures of Afghan refugees for resettlement to the EU's 27 member states in 2022." March 2023. <https://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#Z1cV>

39 See annex; these are Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, and Poland.

40 See annex; Bulgaria, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia all made pledges of 50 places or below.

41 European Commission. "Commissioner Johansson's speech at the EU High-level Forum on providing protection to Afghans at risk". October 2021. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_21\\_7831](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_7831); European Commission. "High-Level Forum on providing protection to Afghans at risk", October 2021. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_5088](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5088).

42 UNHCR. "2023 Projected Global Resettlement Needs." <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/62b18e714/2023-projected-global-resettlement-needs.html>

43 Out of these numbers, more than nine out of ten were resettled by Sweden or Finland, and only 254 by other EU member states collectively. UNHCR. "Resettlement Data Finder. Country of Origin Afghanistan 2010-2022." May 2023. <https://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#z5N4>

44 For example, refugees facing protection or legal risks in their host country, survivors of violence or torture, people with medical needs.

45 For example, Italy's humanitarian corridor scheme, as well as several countries' continued evacuations after September 2021, were only available to Afghan nationals who had already reached a third country. Similarly, whereas Germany's Federal Admissions Programme targets individuals who are still in Afghanistan, after having their admission request approved, they are then required to make their own way to neighbouring states to seek an entry visa to Germany.

46 Government of the Netherlands. "General Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan, March 2022." March 2022. <https://www.government.nl/documents/reports/2022/03/28/country-of-origin-information-report-afghanistan-march-2022>; Financial Times. "Afghan black market for visas thrives as embassies stay shut." November 2021. <https://www.ft.com/content/72ab8c3d-fa23-47bd-a564-a9dfae30135c>

47 In November 2021, the EU confirmed the commitment by Taliban authorities to guarantee and facilitate the safe passage of foreign nationals and Afghans wishing to leave the country: this became one of the five benchmarks guiding the EU's engagement with authorities in the country from September 2021. In practice, this access has been inconsistent. For

example, in February 2022, authorities announced new restrictions on Afghans seeking to leave the country, and a bar on women travelling without a chaperone that continued to be enforced as of November 2022. As a result, women seeking to travel out of the country, including on evacuation flights, had to be accompanied by an immediate male relative throughout their journey. European Union External Action Service. "Afghanistan: EU held talks in Doha with representatives of the Taliban declared Afghan interim government" November 2021. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/afghanistan-eu-held-talks-doha-representatives-taliban-declared-afghan-interim-government\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/afghanistan-eu-held-talks-doha-representatives-taliban-declared-afghan-interim-government_en); The Wall Street Journal. "Taliban Halts Further Evacuations, Rejecting U.S. Precondition for Lifting Sanctions." February 2022. [https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-halts-further-evacuations-rejecting-u-s-precondition-for-lifting-sanctions-11646077567?mod=panda\\_wsj\\_author\\_alert](https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-halts-further-evacuations-rejecting-u-s-precondition-for-lifting-sanctions-11646077567?mod=panda_wsj_author_alert); AP News. "Officials: Taliban blocked unaccompanied women from flights." March 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-travel-business-pakistan-life-style-febfbef58116fd063e1a5ef780762e56>

48 Mixed Migration Centre. "The impact of the Afghanistan crisis on migration: Increasingly securitized borders will only make migration riskier and more dangerous." October 2021. <https://mixedmigration.org/articles/the-impact-of-the-afghanistan-crisis-on-migration/>; UNHCR. "News Comment: UNHCR: 'Afghans struggle to seek safety as borders remain shut to most'" December 2021. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/12/61a72ed34/news-comment-unhcr-afghans-struggle-seek-safety-borders-remain-shut.html>

49 IOM. "Missing Migrants Project, Annual Regional Review, Asia & Pacific, January-December 2021." December 2021. <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1601/files/publication/file/MMP%20annual%20regional%20overview%202021%20AP.pdf>

50 International Centre for Migration Policy Development. "Migration Outlook Silk Routes 2022, South and West Asia, five migration issues to look out for in 2022." [https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/56997/file/ICMPD\\_Migration\\_Outlook\\_SilkRoutes-SouthWestAsia\\_2022.pdf](https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/56997/file/ICMPD_Migration_Outlook_SilkRoutes-SouthWestAsia_2022.pdf)

51 Ibid, p.19

52 House of Commons Canada. "Honoring Canada's Legacy in Afghanistan: responding to the humanitarian crisis and helping people reach safety." June 2022. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/AFGH/report-1/page-ToC>

53 These are the requirements, for instance, for Afghan applicants to join their immediate family in Belgium from Pakistan, with many of these documents needing to be 'legalised' and translated. In France, civil society organisations have long reported that people face difficulties in gathering sufficient documentation proving their family ties, such as birth or marriage certificates, with information being demanded from Afghan applicants that cannot be obtained in practice either in Afghanistan or Pakistan. See Embassy of Belgium in Pakistan. "Family reunification Visas." May 2023. <https://pakistan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/travel-to-belgium/visa/long-term-visa/family-reunification>; Asylum Information database. "Country report: France." December 2021. [https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/AIDA-FR\\_2021update.pdf](https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/AIDA-FR_2021update.pdf); Forum Réfugiés. "Quelle protection des femmes Afghanes depuis la prise de pouvoir des talibans?" February 2023. [https://www.forumrefugies.org/images/s-informer/publications/rapports/0-RAPPORT\\_FEMMES\\_AFGHANES.pdf](https://www.forumrefugies.org/images/s-informer/publications/rapports/0-RAPPORT_FEMMES_AFGHANES.pdf), pp. 70-71. In Germany, applicants may have to wait for a year before getting an appointment to apply for family reunification, with procedures themselves possibly taking years. As of March 2023, approximately 12,000 persons are registered as waiting for an appointment at the German embassies in Tehran or Islamabad. In addition to needing to provide documents proving the applicants' identity and the family link, proof of basic German language skills is also required for spousal reunification. Deutscher Bundestag. "Das Bundesaufnahmeprogramm für Afghanistan." March 2023. <https://dsrserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/062/2006232.pdf>; Handbook Germany. "Afghanistan Informationen." May 2023. <https://handbookgermany.de/de/afghanistan-info?thema=familienachzug#lc-start>

54 UNHCR. "UNHCR calls on states to expedite family reunification

procedures for Afghan refugees." October 2021 <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-calls-states-expedite-family-reunification-procedures-afghan-refugees>; UNHCR. "Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan." February 2022. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/61d851cd4.html>; UNHCR. "Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan (Update I)" February 2023. <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=63e0cb714>

55 An evacuation of at least 800 Afghans planned by the Netherlands – who had committed to continue assisting some people in high danger and who had been promised evacuations – had to be suspended as of November 2021, as many women and children did not have access to passports, with Afghan national ID cards (tazkera) seemingly not being accepted. See European Council on Refugees and Exiles. "Afghans seeking Protection in Europe." August 2021 [https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe_FINAL.pdf)

56 Whereas 528 applications for admission were submitted by March 2022, each including up to four people, none of these had been accepted by October 2022, and no arrivals have yet taken place under this scheme as of February 2023. The government reported that this was due to "insufficient information" being provided. Human rights organisations supporting Afghan refugees warn that the high threshold for documentation required is impossibly high. Under the programme, people are required to provide original certified documents or notarised copies proving both their identity and their relationship with family members in Ireland, as well as, in some cases, a DNA test. The Journal. "Ireland's 'onerous' Afghan refugee programme has zero decisions in year since Taliban takeover." August 2022. <https://www.thejournal.ie/ireland-afghanistan-admission-programme-5842918-Aug2022/>; immigrant Council of Ireland. "Immigrant Council calls on Government for urgent update on Afghan Admission Programme." December 2022. <https://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/news/immigrant-council-calls-government-urgent-update-afghan-admission-programme>; The Journal. "No Afghan refugees accepted through Admissions Programme due to 'insufficient information.'" October 2022. <https://www.thejournal.ie/afghanistan-refugee-programme-ireland-5902505-Oct2022/>

57 Similarly, Italy's humanitarian corridor scheme was held back by several months due to difficulties in collecting biometric data of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, as part of a security screening pre-departure. The government declined to conduct these checks upon arrival in Italy as an exceptional and flexible measure.

58 UNHCR. "UNHCR calls on states to expedite family reunification procedures for Afghan refugees." October 2021 <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-calls-states-expedite-family-reunification-procedures-afghan-refugees>.

59 The Netherlands announced in 2021 that Afghan nationals with an asylum permit in the country could apply for family reunification for their "immediate family" – limiting this to their spouse and children, and excluding other family members living under the same roof. Germany, Sweden, and Belgium, among others, have restricted family reunification to members of the "core family". However, people seeking to join their family members in Belgium who fall outside this scope – such as de facto partners, adult children, grandchildren, or nieces and nephews – can apply for a humanitarian visa, which will be examined by the Belgian Immigration Office on a case-by-case basis. See European Council on Refugees and Exiles. "Afghans seeking Protection in Europe." August 2021 [https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe_FINAL.pdf); Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. "Family Reunification." May 2023. <https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/MigrationAufenthalt/ZuwandererDrittstaaten/Familie/familie-node.html>; Migrationsverket. "Questions and answers regarding the situation in Afghanistan." May 2023. <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/The-situation-in-Afghanistan/Questions-and-answers-regarding-the-situation-in-Afghanistan.html>; Rode Kruis Vlaanderen. "About Family Reunification." May 2023. <https://www.rodekruis.be/restoringfamilylinks/en/about-us/about-family-reunification>

60 UNHCR. "Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan." February 2022. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/61d851cd4.html>

61 These concerns related to schemes by Germany and the Netherlands, for example, with similar challenges reported with regards to the UK, the US, and other non-EU countries' schemes. See Zeit Online. "Wir haben Deutschland geholfen, aber jetzt werden wir vergessen." July 2022. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2022-07/ortskraefte-afghanistan-giz-taliban-flucht/komplettansicht>; NU.NL. "Afghaanse achterblijvers politiemissie: 'Waarom komt Nederland ons niet halen?'" July 2022. <https://www.nu.nl/strijd-in-afghanistan/6213723/afghaanse-achterblijvers-politiemissie-waarom-komt-nederland-ons-niet-halen.html>

62 The limited evidence available also suggests that highly vulnerable people are falling between the cracks. An analysis by the Women, Peace and Security NGO Working Group estimated that only 6-8% of identified, high-profile, at-risk Afghan women had been evacuated by November 2021. Moreover, the two national schemes providing detailed lists of vulnerabilities and selection criteria within the EU, namely, Germany and Italy's, indicate that gaps remain, with children's protection needs, for instance, not being specifically considered in either. See Refugees International. "Now, there is Nothing Safe": A Roadmap for Investing in Afghan Women and Girls." April 2022. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2022/3/30/now-there-is-nothing-safe-a-roadmap-for-investing-in-afghan-women-and-girls>; Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. "Monthly Action Points (MAP) for the Security Council." November 2021. <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/map/map-november-2021/>

63 Interview in February 2023.

64 Auswärtiges Amt. "Gemeinsame Pressemitteilung von AA und BMI zum Bundesaufnahmeprogramm für besonders gefährdete Menschen aus Afghanistan." October 2022. [https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/bundesaufnahmeprogrammafgghanistan/2558716?view=](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/bundesaufnahmeprogrammafgghanistan/2558716?view=;); Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat Auswärtiges Amt. "Bundesaufnahmeprogramm für Afghanistan Aufnahmeprogramm der Bundesregierung für Menschen aus Afghanistan." May 2023. <https://www.bundesaufnahmeprogrammafgghanistan.de/bundesaufnahme-de/>

65 Unless it can be established that other family members are especially dependent on the main applicant or exposed to danger due to their relationship with the main applicant.

66 These cases are then filtered through a Coordination Unit, whose approval is mandatory before cases are submitted in full to the government.

67 The initiative "Mission Lifeline", for example, reported having received 17,000 inquiries by the beginning of November 2022. See Info Migrants. "Tens of thousands of Afghans apply for evacuation to Germany." November 2022. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/44526/tens-of-thousands-of-afghans-apply-for-evacuation-to-germany>

68 Whereas issuing visas from Iran was previously foreseen, this is no longer an option.

69 ZDF Heute. "Afghanen-Visa ausgesetzt :Rechtsbruch im Baerbock-Ministerium?" April 2023. <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/afghanistan-visum-kritik-baerbock-100.html>

70 SchengenVisa. "Number of Afghans Applying for Evacuation to Germany Increases Tremendously". November 2022. <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/number-of-afghans-applying-for-evacuation-to-germany-increases-tremendously/>

71 EUAA Expert Platform on safe pathways for Afghans at risk, meeting in late 2021.

72 ICMPD reports receiving "200-300 inquiries a month about potentially fraudulent visas", which are extremely difficult to monitor and respond to. See The New Humanitarian. "Afghans targeted by surge in online smug-

gling and visa scams." October 2022. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/10/24/Visas-smuggling-Afghan-refugees-scams-Facebook-TikTok>

73 There is a lack of transparent and regular data on implementation of pledges and ongoing arrivals: there is no clear information on the breakdown of member states' pledges by pathway, by date of arrival, and by status received upon arrival, in addition to details over the eligibility or selection criteria for various admission schemes.

74 In December 2021, for example, the European Commission estimated that more than 500 Afghans who had worked for the EU and their dependants were still in Afghanistan, and called on EU member states to facilitate the issuance of visas. Germany, too, stated in June 2022 that approximately 12,000 Afghans granted approval for admission to Germany were still in Afghanistan or neighbouring countries. This included Afghans believed to be particularly at risk after working for German organisations or being active in civil society, judiciary, the media, or politics, as well as their spouses and children. More Afghan nationals still were waiting in the country in precarious situations for their admission application to be formally accepted, with thousands facing delays in receiving their family reunification visas. The Netherlands, similarly, stated in August 2022 that as many as 480 individuals who had been selected for evacuation one year earlier were still waiting in the country. See Parliamentary Question. "Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell on behalf of the European Commission." December 2021. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2021-004455-ASW\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2021-004455-ASW_EN.html); Zeit Online. "Wir haben Deutschland geholfen, aber jetzt werden wir vergessen." July 2022. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2022-07/ortskraefte-afghanistan-giz-taliban-flucht/komplettansicht>; Info migrants "12,000 Afghans still waiting for evacuation to Germany." June 2022. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/41539/12000-afghans-still-waiting-for-evacuation-to-germany>; Info migrants "Thousands of Afghans in limbo awaiting family reunification visas." September 2021. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/35056/thousands-of-afghans-in-limbo-awaiting-family-reunification-visas>; NL Times "Afghans 'arbitrarily' selected for evacuation to NL; 480 still waiting 1 year later." August 2022. <https://nltimes.nl/2022/08/15/afghans-arbitrarily-selected-evacuation-nl-480-still-waiting-1-year-later>.

75 The Journal. "No Afghan refugees accepted through Admissions Programme due to 'insufficient information.'" October 2022. <https://www.thejournal.ie/afghanistan-refugee-programme-ireland-5902505-Oct2022/>

76 Irish Legal News. "Afghan admission programme criticised after just 22 approvals." December 2022. <https://www.irishlegal.com/articles/afghan-admission-programme-criticised-after-just-22-approvals>

77 As of March 2022, 4,669 Afghans were on the waiting list to submit an application for family reunification to Germany from its embassies in Pakistan or India, with only around 100 applications processed per month. In February 2023, France also announced plans to set up a specialised support centre to provide back-up for consulates receiving the largest number of applications, whereas Finland appointed a temporary consul to receive applications and hold interviews in Pakistan. See European Council on Refugees and Exiles. "Afghans seeking Protection in Europe." August 2021. [https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe_FINAL.pdf); Ambassade de France au Royaume-Uni. "France especially attentive to Afghan journalists' situation." February 2023. <https://uk.ambafrance.org/France-especially-attentive-to-Afghan-journalists-situation>; Deutscher Bundestag. "Stand der Evakuierung gefährdeter Personen und von Ortskräften sowie des Familiennachzugs aus Afghanistan." March 2022. <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/012/2001224.pdf>

78 In the UK and US, likewise, many newly arrived Afghans have spent prolonged periods in unsuitable 'bridging' accommodation, such as hotels.

79 Deutsche Welle. "Islamabad rents rise amid influx of Afghan refugees." September 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/islamabad-rents-rise-amid-influx-of-afghan-refugees/a-63693557>

80 Mixed Migration Centre. "The Changing Dynamics of Afghan Migration after August 2021." March 2023. [https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/266\\_Changing-Dynamics-Afghan-Migration.pdf](https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/266_Changing-Dynamics-Afghan-Migration.pdf) [https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2023-01/2023\\_01\\_COI\\_Report\\_Iran\\_Afghans\\_Refugees\\_EN.pdf](https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2023-01/2023_01_COI_Report_Iran_Afghans_Refugees_EN.pdf), pp. 26, 30.

81 The organisations involved included the Comunità di Sant'Egidio, the Conferenza Episcopale Italiana (with Caritas as an implementing partner), the Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia, Tavola Valdese and ARCI, in collaboration with the National Institute for Health, Migration and Poverty (NIHMP).

82 Italian Ministry of Interior. "Protocollo di Intensa per la Realizzazione del progetto - Corridoi Umanitari Evacuazioni per l'Afghanistan." [https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2021-11/protocollo\\_corridoi.pdf](https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2021-11/protocollo_corridoi.pdf)

83 The second action targeted individuals meeting national criteria for being granted international protection, with priority for those experiencing a proven condition of vulnerability determined by their personal situation, age and health condition. The following categories of individuals could also be admitted to the programme: Family members of Afghan nationals that were regularly residing in Italy or were recently evacuated to Italy, regardless of whether they met the criteria for family reunification procedures; individuals who were particularly exposed to risks to their life, safety or freedom because of their activities, professional role or public positions held in Afghanistan; individuals who had worked with the Italian contingent in Afghanistan or with organisations related to Italian international cooperation with Afghanistan; individuals who were meant to benefit from the emergency evacuation carried out in August 2021 but were unable to leave Afghanistan on that occasion; individuals in a proven situation of personal vulnerability; individuals for whom implementing organisations had guaranteed to provide housing and livelihood support for at least one year; and individuals with stable family or social networks in Italy wishing to settle there.

84 Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. "Farnesina e Viminale impegnati per nuovi corridoi umanitari per circa 300 cittadini afghani." July 2022. [https://www.esteri.it/it/sala\\_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2022/07/farnesina-e-viminale-impegnati-per-nuovi-corridoi-umanitari-per-circa-300-cittadini-afghani/](https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2022/07/farnesina-e-viminale-impegnati-per-nuovi-corridoi-umanitari-per-circa-300-cittadini-afghani/)

85 Altreconomia. "Fuga negata dall'Afghanistan: i corridoi umanitari sono ancora bloccati per una macchinetta." June 2022. <https://altreconomia.it/fuga-negata-dallafghanistan-i-corridoi-umanitari-sono-ancora-bloccati-per-una-macchinetta/>; Atti Parlamentari /26555/ Camera dei Deputati. "Atti Di Controllo e di Indirizzo." May 2022. [https://documenti.camera.it/leg18/resoconti/assemblea/html/sed0700/leg.18.sed0700.allegato\\_b.pdf](https://documenti.camera.it/leg18/resoconti/assemblea/html/sed0700/leg.18.sed0700.allegato_b.pdf)

86 OG Zero. "L'Afghanistan e i corridoi umanitari fantasma." May 2022. <https://ogzero.org/corridoi-umanitari-dall-afghanistan-abbando-no-e-false-promesse/>

87 590 arrivals as of mid-May 2023. The first group of beneficiaries reached Italy only in July 2022, when approximately 300 people benefited from humanitarian corridors departing from Iran and Pakistan; on 24 November 2022, 158 Afghan nationals reached Italy from Islamabad; on 23 February 2023, 97 Afghan nationals arrived in Italy from Pakistan. See Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. "Farnesina e Viminale impegnati per nuovi corridoi umanitari per circa 300 cittadini afghani." July 2022. [https://www.esteri.it/it/sala\\_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2022/07/farnesina-e-viminale-impegnati-per-nuovi-corridoi-umanitari-per-circa-300-cittadini-afghani/](https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2022/07/farnesina-e-viminale-impegnati-per-nuovi-corridoi-umanitari-per-circa-300-cittadini-afghani/); Sant'Egidio. "Afghanistan, 158 profughi in salvo con i corridoi umanitari. Giovedì 24 novembre, alle 12, conferenza stampa a Fiumicino." November 2022. <https://www.santegidio.org/pagelD/30284/langID/it/itemID/51289/Afghanistan-158-profughi-in-salvo-con-i-corridoi-umanitari-Gioved%C3%AC-24-novembre-alle-12-conferenza-stampa-a-Fiumicino.html>; Caritas Italiana. "23 febbraio: a Fiumicino arrivo "corridoi umanitari" dal Pakistan." February 2023. <https://www.caritas.it/23-febbraio-a-fiumicino-arrivo-corridoi-umanitari-dal-pakistan/>

88 Since the initial emergency evacuations phase, several smaller

EU countries, such as Cyprus, Portugal, and Slovenia, stressed that they did not have capacity to evacuate or admit people independently, and requested EU coordination of these efforts. European Council on Refugees and Exiles. "Afghans seeking Protection in Europe." August 2021. [https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe_FINAL.pdf)

89 In Greece, where many Afghans first arrive in Europe, pushbacks have been terms a 'de-facto general policy'. United Nations General Assembly. "Human rights violations at international borders: trends, prevention and accountability." April 2022. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/328/57/PDF/G2232857.pdf?OpenElement>

90 These include UNHCR, the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner and its Anti-Torture Committee, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Migrants, and the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency, among others. See UNHCR. "News Comment: UNHCR warns of increasing violence and human rights violations at European borders." February 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/news-comment-unhcr-warns-increasing-violence-and-human-rights-violations>; Council of Europe. "Pushed beyond the limits. Urgent action needed to stop pushbacks at Europe's borders." April 2022. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/pushed-beyond-the-limits-urgent-action-needed-to-stop-push-back-at-europe-s-borders>; Council of Europe. "The Council of Europe anti-torture Committee (CPT) calls for an end to illegal pushback practices and for increased safeguards against ill-treatment." March 2023. <https://www.coe.int/es/web/cpt/-/the-council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-cpt-calls-for-an-end-to-illegal-pushback-practices-and-for-increased-safeguards-against-ill-treatment>; United Nations Human Rights. "A/HRC/50/31: Human rights violations at international borders: trends, prevention and accountability." April 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5031-human-rights-violations-international-borders-trends-prevention>; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. "Migration: Fundamental Rights Issues at Land Borders." 2020. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-land-borders-report\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-land-borders-report_en.pdf)

91 Protecting Rights at Borders. "Beaten, punished and pushed back. Report January to December 2022." January 2023 <https://pro.drc.ngo/media/cxihgutp/prab-report-january-to-december-2022.pdf>, p.5.

92 Protecting Rights at Borders. "Report 2021." [https://pro.drc.ngo/media/4khkkgs/prab-factsheet-2021\\_final35.pdf](https://pro.drc.ngo/media/4khkkgs/prab-factsheet-2021_final35.pdf)

93 EUAA. "Almost 1 million asylum applications in the EU+ in 2022." May 2023. <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/almost-1-million-asylum-applications-eu-2022>; Eurostat. "Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex - monthly data [MIGR\_ASYAPPCTZM] - Custom dataset (2020 figures)" [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR\\_ASYAPPCTZM\\_custom\\_5572010/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZM_custom_5572010/default/table?lang=en) [accessed 28.03.2023]; Eurostat. "Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex - monthly data [MIGR\_ASYAPPCTZM] - Custom dataset (2021 figures)." [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR\\_ASYAPPCTZM\\_custom\\_5571920/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZM_custom_5571920/default/table?lang=en) [accessed 28.03.2023].

94 As ECRE has documented, the support and legal status provided for Afghans admitted to Europe through resettlement or humanitarian admission programmes since August 2021 is not equal across EU member states. See ECRE. "Afghans seeking protection in Europe." December 2021. [https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe_FINAL.pdf). In several countries, access to dignified reception and integration support has been severely compromised for resettled or admitted Afghans. These include Belgium, where thousands of asylum seekers and recognised refugees were forced to sleep on the street due to systematic deficiencies and shortages in the national reception system, as well as delays in the registration and processing of asylum applications. In the Netherlands, Afghan evacuees were initially stationed in large camps that faced criticism due to their inadequate facilities, lack of privacy, and absence of financial support for residents. In Italy, as of February 2022, only 20% of the evacuees were being hosted in the Reception and Integration System, while the majority of those arrived in August 2021 were staying in emergency or extraordinary reception centres

that were not considered adequate to host them. See European Council on Refugees and Exiles. "Reception Crises: Belgium Leaves Afghans in Legal Limbo, Asylum Seekers Including Minors & Families with Children are Left Out Without Shelter in Europe's Capital, A New Law in the Netherlands to Accommodate Refugees Is Approved by the Right." November 2022. [https://ecre.org/reception-crises-belgium-leaves-afghans-in-legal-limbo-amid-plans-to-refuse-their-asylum-claims-asylum-seekers-including-minors-families-with-children-are-left-out-without-shelter-in-europe/#:~:text=Around%205000%20Afghans%20are%20likely,accommodating%20asylum%20seekers%20and%20refugees](https://ecre.org/reception-crises-belgium-leaves-afghans-in-legal-limbo-amid-plans-to-refuse-their-asylum-claims-asylum-seekers-including-minors-families-with-children-are-left-out-without-shelter-in-europe/#:~:text=Around%205000%20Afghans%20are%20likely,accommodating%20asylum%20seekers%20and%20refugees;); European Council on Refugees and Exiles. "Belgium: Failure to Deal with Persistent Reception Crisis is 'Attack on Rule of Law' Human Rights Institutions Say, Situation in the Building of Palais des Droits is 'Worse than that in Libya's Camps' Underline NGOs As Authorities Find No Solution." <https://ecre.org/belgium-failure-to-deal-with-persistent-reception-crisis-is-attack-on-rule-of-law-human-rights-institutions-say-situation-in-the-building-of-palais-des-droits-is-worse-tha/>; MYRIA. "Crise de l'accueil : des institutions pour les droits humains tirent la sonnette d'alarme." December 2022. <https://www.myria.be/fr/publications/crise-de-laccueil-des-institutions-pour-les-droits-humains-tirent-la-sonnette-dalarme>; Dutch Council for Refugees. "Overview of the main changes". April 2022. <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/overview-main-changes-previous-report-update/#:~:text=Reception%20of%20Afghan,to%20its%20hosts>; State Secretary for Asylum and Migration, Belgium. "Letter to the Commissioner." December 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/letter-to-state-secretary-for-asylum-and-migration-of-belgium-by-dunj/1680a974ea>

95 EUAA. "Afghan nationals seeking international protection in the EU." August 2022. [https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-08/2022\\_factsheet10\\_Afghanistan\\_protection\\_EU\\_EN.pdf](https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-08/2022_factsheet10_Afghanistan_protection_EU_EN.pdf)

96 Migrationsverket. "Women from Afghanistan to be granted asylum in Sweden." May 2023 <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/Nyhetsarkiv/2022-12-07-Women-from-Afghanistan-to-be-granted-asylum-in-Sweden.html>

97 Finnish Immigration Service. "Refugee Status to Afghan Women and Girls". February 2023. <https://migri.fi/en/-/refugee-status-to-afghan-women-and-girls>

98 UNHCR. "UNHCR issues a non-return advisory for Afghanistan." August 2021 <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2021/8/611b62584/unhcr-issues-non-return-advisory-afghanistan.html>

99 Whereas Belgium had suspended the issuance of negative decisions from August 2021 to March 2022, it then reversed this suspension, while Denmark's Refugee Board determined in February 2022 that Afghanistan was safe for returns. Greece has also maintained a widespread use of the 'safe third country' concept to deny asylum to many Afghan nationals who transited through Turkey. See Knack. "Een 'kleine ramp' in de maak: duizenden Afghaanse asielzoekers dreigen dakloos te worden." November 2022. <https://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/een-kleine-ramp-in-de-maak-duizenden-afghaanse-asielzoekers-dreigen-dakloos-te-worden/>; Berlingske. "Ny central afgørelse vækker stor frustration: »Vi undrer os meget." February 2022. <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/ny-central-afgoerelse-vaekker-stor-frustration-vi-undrer-os-meget>

100 EUAA. "Latest Asylum Trends - Annual Overview 2022." May 2023 <https://euaa.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends-annual-overview-2022>.

101 Euractiv. "Six countries urge EU to continue Afghan deportations." August 2021. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/six-countries-urge-eu-to-continue-afghan-deportations/>

102 The European Commission's Draft Action Plan on Afghanistan from September 2021 itself stated that, while returns to Afghanistan were not possible, readmission into safe third countries should be considered. See Statewatch. "Council doc. 10472/1/21 REV 1, LIMITE." September 2021. <https://www.statewatch.org/media/2726/eu-council-afghanistan-com-draft-action-plan-migration-10472-1-21-rev1.pdf>

103 Joint Ministerial Decision 42799/03.06.2021. "Gazette 2425/

B/7-6-2021." June 2021. <https://bit.ly/3zbSojR>.

104 Refugee Support Aegean. "The Greek asylum procedure in figures in 2022, Analysis of main trends in refugee protection." March 2023. [https://rsaagean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023\\_03\\_RSA\\_AsylumStatistics2022\\_EN.pdf](https://rsaagean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023_03_RSA_AsylumStatistics2022_EN.pdf)

105 These figures are for the EU and associated states. Syrians and Afghans had 90,000 and 71,000 pending cases respectively. EUAA. "Latest Asylum Trends 2023." February 2023. <https://euaa.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends-asylum>

106 Europe Must Act. "Samos Situation Report: March 2022." June 2022. <https://www.europemustact.org/post/samos-situation-report-march-2022>

107 According to Greek law, asylum seekers have the right to access employment only six months after filing their application for international protection, which makes them reliant on government-provided accommodation. Staying in state-funded accommodation also entitles them to modest cash assistance. This accommodation overwhelmingly consists of Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs) on the islands of Samos, Kos, Leros, and soon on Chios and Lesbos, as well as similar closed and closely surveilled facilities on the mainland. These centres are funded through the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and became operational in Greece after September 2021.

108 The International Rescue Committee. "Contribution to the Ombudsman's Strategic Inquiry relating to respect for fundamental rights in EU-funded migration management facilities in Greece." February 2023. <https://www.rescue.org/en/submission/ombudsmans-inquiry-fundamental-rights-ccacs>

109 EUR-LEX. "Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)." June 2013. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013L0033>

110 Refugee Support Aegean. "Massive protests by islanders are challenging the government's narrative on new prison structures in the Aegean." January 2022. <https://rsaagean.org/en/new-prison-structures-in-the-aegean/>

111 The International Rescue Committee. "The Cruelty of Containment." December 2020. [https://eu.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/IRC\\_Cruelty\\_of\\_Containment\\_FINAL.pdf](https://eu.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/IRC_Cruelty_of_Containment_FINAL.pdf); Oxfam. "Stories from Samos. A collection of Testimonies." December 2021. [https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/Stories\\_from\\_Samos\\_A\\_collection\\_of\\_Testimonies.pdf](https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/Stories_from_Samos_A_collection_of_Testimonies.pdf)

112 Data provided by the IRC's programmes in Lesbos and Athens in April 2023.

113 The International Rescue Committee. "7 things to know about refugee resettlement into the EU." September 2022. <https://www.rescue.org/en/artikel/7-dinge-die-man-ueber-die-aufnahme-von-gefluechteten-wissen-sollte-eu>

114 Schemes should prioritise groups facing heightened risks, identified by UNHCR and the EUAA: See UNHCR, "Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan (Update I)." February 2023. <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/nwmain?docid=63e0cb714>; EUAA. "Country Guidance: Afghanistan 2023." May 2023. <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-afghanistan-2023>

115 For example, the Council's Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanism, the Commission-led Solidarity Platform, which proved highly valuable coordination mechanisms in the Ukraine refugee response, the EUAA's Expert Platform, or the Commission-led Resettlement and Humanitarian Admissions Committee envisioned under the Union Resettlement Framework, could act as possible fora for this mandate.

116 For further details on this recommendation, see The International Rescue Committee. "For A Europe That Truly Protects: Joint NGO Policy Brief on the Screening Regulation Proposal", <https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/europe-truly-protects-joint-ngo-policy-brief-screening-regulation-proposal>; The International Rescue Committee. "Mapping potential elements of an Independent Border Monitoring Mechanism in Greece", <https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/mapping-potential-elements-independent-border-monitoring-mechanism-greece>.

117 European Commission. "Annexes to the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the report on the Migration and Asylum." October 2022. [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/com\\_2022\\_740\\_1\\_en\\_annexe\\_autre\\_acte\\_part1\\_v3.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/com_2022_740_1_en_annexe_autre_acte_part1_v3.pdf)

118 Ibid.

119 European Commission. "Pledges submitted by the Member States for 2023." March 2023. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/Resettlement\\_pledges\\_submitted\\_by\\_Member\\_States\\_for\\_2023.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/Resettlement_pledges_submitted_by_Member_States_for_2023.pdf)

120 Ibid.

121 425 for Afghan nationals. See European Migration Network. "Main developments in migration and international protection, including latest statistics. Belgium 2021." August 2022. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/EMN\\_factsheet2021\\_BE.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/EMN_factsheet2021_BE.pdf)

122 These consisted of 610 pledges by Finland, 500 pledges by Sweden, and 1 pledged place by Malta. See European Commission. "Overview of pledges for resettlement and humanitarian admission of Afghans, 2021-2022." April 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/questions/reponses\\_qe/2022/001707/P9\\_RE\(2022\)001707\(ANN01\)\\_XL.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/questions/reponses_qe/2022/001707/P9_RE(2022)001707(ANN01)_XL.pdf).



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