

Afghan locally employed staff

Introduction

The UK has been running a scheme to support locally employed staff (LES) in Afghanistan. This is in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK forces since 2013.

The scheme has two elements:

- The ex-gratia scheme which will close in November 2022
- The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy launched in April 2021

Both schemes are intended to support current and former LES who have worked for British Forces. The schemes provide a range of in-country packages of assistance in Afghanistan and, for those who meet the criteria, relocation to the UK with their dependants.

Those who qualify and choose to relocate to the UK with their families are not expected to return to Afghanistan. After completing five years limited leave they can apply for permanent residence in the UK.

Arrival information

The individuals and their families began arriving in the UK on 22 June 2021, the final flight arrives in August 2021. In total there are 3000 individuals, around 700 families. On arrival, they will be placed in the care of the Local Authority (LA) to which they have been allocated.

Local Authority support

Once allocated to a Local Authority, individuals/families will be offered the following support:

- appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of the family
- a package of advice and assistance covering employment, welfare benefits, housing, health, education and utility supply
- introduction to jobcentre offices, including support to attend Universal Credit and work related interventions
- assistance in securing school places for school aged children
- ESOL support where necessary
- cash support: this will cover housing and personal / family living expenses, and will be paid for 4 months following their arrival. This support will end when one or more of the following occur:
 - individual leaves the LA provided accommodation
 - individual/partner secures employment
 - claims Universal Credit

- a lump sum resettlement payment may be given to each family unit, amounts will vary depending on the make-up of that household and length of service.

Welfare entitlement

Once landed in the UK, individuals will be given immediate right to reside, the right to remain and recourse to public funds by the Home Office. They will be able to work straight away if they choose to seek out employment.

These individuals are **not** categorised as refugees, and will have/be given a Biometric residence permit (BRP) by the Home Office, but this will **not** include a National Insurance number.

Afghan LES will need to establish factual habitual residence before they can access Universal Credit which can take up to 3 months. During that time the local authority will provide financial support to those who arrive under the relocation scheme for up to 4 months. This is unless their circumstances mean they need to make the claim sooner than this if for example they have secured employment.

Once in receipt of Universal Credit, their support from the local authority which includes cash support and accommodation will cease immediately.

Afghan locally employed staff claim Universal Credit

The following applies to locally employed staff (LES):

- Habitual Residence Test (HRT) must be satisfied in all cases, before any Universal Credit can be paid
- unless already allocated for employment purposes, eDCI1 process must be followed for National Insurance number allocation for adults in the Universal Credit household. This needs to be done **after** the HRT decision has been made
- any LA support will be taken into account and classed as unearned income
- lump sums received will be treated as savings and will reduce Universal Credit according to current instructions
- Benefit cap rules will apply to all cases where high rent is evident.