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# Afghanistan: Exiting Forces Should Protect Interpreters

## NATO Members, Australia Should Expedite Relocation of Local Staff



Former Afghan interpreters hold placards during a protest against the U.S. government and NATO in Kabul, Afghanistan on April 30, 2021. © 2021 AP Photo/Mariam Zuhaib

(Washington, DC) – Countries with troops departing [Afghanistan](#) should accelerate programs to resettle former Afghan interpreters and other employees who are increasingly at risk from Taliban

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“Afghans who worked with foreign troops or embassies face huge risks of retaliation from the Taliban,” said [Patricia Gossman](#), associate Asia director. “Departing countries should commit to assisting Afghans who reasonably face danger because of their work with foreign forces.”

The Taliban, in a June 7 [statement](#), denied that former interpreters and others who worked for foreign forces were at risk, but warned them that they should “show remorse for their past actions and ... not engage in such activities in the future that amount to treason against Islam and the country.” But the Taliban have long [targeted civilians](#), particularly those they accuse of working for the Afghan government or foreigners. In January, Taliban insurgents reportedly [killed](#) one interpreter who had worked for the US for 12 years and had been waiting for a visa. Other former interpreters have said they have received [death threats](#).

As of June 1, the US Defense Department was [still developing](#) options to possibly evacuate Afghans deemed to be at risk from the Taliban because of their work with US forces, but the Biden administration has not yet authorized any expedited plans. About [18,000 Afghan applicants](#) are awaiting a decision on their US Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applications.

Like the US, the UK [has announced](#) that it will expedite relocating Afghan staff who worked for the British government in Afghanistan and their families. However, advocacy groups have raised concerns that the program is proceeding too slowly and [may not adequately](#) cover all former Afghan employees who may be at risk.

On June 1, the [Sulha Alliance](#), which advocates for former Afghan employees with the British armed forces, [said that](#) all NATO members should adopt relocation policies to protect former interpreters and other Afghan employees. It noted that NATO has been divided in its approach, with some members, such as Canada, offering no relocation plans. Australia and Germany have not expedited resettlement.

In April, 41 Afghan interpreters who worked alongside Australian soldiers [pleaded](#) with the Australian government for humanitarian visas, fearing they will be killed by the Taliban after Australian troops withdraw. “We sincerely request the Australian government to re-prioritise and accelerate our visa applications and treat us under exceptional circumstances due to the extreme threats we are exposed to,” the interpreters wrote.

Australia’s Foreign Minister Marise Payne [told](#) a senate committee on June 1 that the assessment of visas for Afghan employees will follow the normal “Special Humanitarian Visa” process, not a rapid resettlement plan. Guards and other contractor staff at the Australian embassy have [reportedly](#) been

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process for Afghan support staff.

While the Netherlands [agreed in 2019](#) that interpreters who worked for the Dutch army should be granted a visa and allowed to apply for asylum, [processing these applications](#) has been slow. Applicants must complete a 20-page form that includes questions [such as](#): “How do you know you are in danger because of your work for Dutch soldiers?” and “Could you live safely in another part of Afghanistan?” Few could definitively answer such questions. Out of concern about the government delay, [on June 3](#) the lower house of the Dutch parliament submitted a motion to expedite the process, but its passage is uncertain. “Time is ticking on and these people are being threatened with death,” [one member of parliament said](#).

About [450 Afghan staff](#) who have worked with German troops have sought relocation. However, a German advocacy organization has reported that that [process has suffered delays](#) and places an unrealistic burden on applicants to prove that they face a risk. One Afghan interpreter who worked for the German military for 10 years [said](#): “If we don’t leave the country, they’ll kill us.” The German group ProAsyl [has called on](#) the government to expedite resettlement for Afghan interpreters, saying “Leaving these people behind now would be life-threatening for them and their families.”

“The countries now withdrawing from Afghanistan have been far too slow in developing evacuation, relocation, and resettlement plans for their former Afghan employees,” Gossman said. “They should recognize that normal pathways will be too slow and that expedited timetables are needed for Afghans and their families who could be hunted down because of their work for coalition forces.”

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