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UK Afghan Relocation Scheme Approves Just 2% of Applicants in 2025

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The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), designed to offer sanctuary to Afghan nationals who risked their lives aiding British forces, has come under intense scrutiny as new data reveals a shockingly low approval rate for 2025. According to figures released by the Ministry of Defence, only 66 of the 17,103 primary applications submitted between January 1 and June 30, 2025, were approved, a success rate of 0.39%. This stark statistic raises troubling questions about the accessibility and fairness of a programme meant to honour the UK's debt to its Afghan allies.

The ARAP scheme, launched in April 2021, was intended to provide relocation and protection to Afghan citizens who served alongside British troops during the UK's 20-year military involvement in Afghanistan. These individuals, often interpreters or support staff, faced significant personal risk to assist British operations.

In 2024, of the 27,491 applications received, 310 out of 6,481 first-time applications reviewed were deemed eligible an acceptance rate of 4.78%. The trend of stringent assessments continued into 2025, with appeals offering little reprieve. Of 91 rejections reviewed in the first half of 2025, just six were overturned, underscoring the rigidity of the process.

Critics argue that the low approval rates reflect overly narrow eligibility criteria and bureaucratic inefficiencies. In a recent interview with the UK Defence Journal, MP Mary Glindon pressed Defence Minister Luke Pollard on the issue, highlighting the plight of Afghans left in precarious situations due to delays and rejections. Pollard acknowledged the complexity of cases but offered little reassurance, stating, "Each case is assessed on its merit and, as such, some may take longer than others to process."

Human rights advocates and MPs have been vocal in their condemnation. Gunes Kalkan, head of campaigns at Safe Passage International, described the Government's move to stop accepting new ARAP applications from 1 July 2025 as "shutting down a lifeline" for Afghans facing Taliban reprisals. He warned that the decision leaves "people, including children and families, in dangerous situations with no hope of rescue." The High Court recently ruled that "defects" in decision-making processes, including inadequate access to payment records for Afghan special forces applicants, have led to wrongful rejections, further exposing systemic flaws.

With over 30,000 Afghans relocated under the scheme by February 2025, the programme has shown some success, but the low approval rates for new applicants suggest a tightening of the reins that many view as a betrayal of trust. As one former British soldier remarked in a parliamentary debate, "The west running away from Afghanistan shames us all, as is the fact that those who served us and put their lives at risk have been brushed aside."

With mounting pressure to reform the process, the question remains whether the government will act to honour its moral obligations or continue to leave Afghan allies in

limbo. The current trajectory suggests a policy falling short of the gratitude owed to those who served Britain's cause.

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