

More than 500 Afghans resettled in Australia after helping Defence Force

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More than 500 Afghan nationals who helped Australia's mission in Afghanistan have been resettled in Australia under a "discreet" relocation program, the Government says.

Defence Minister David Johnston said the employees and their families, including interpreters, were assessed to be at risk of harm after providing critical support to the Australian Defence Force and Australian Government agencies in Afghanistan.

"Many of these employees were placed at significant risk of harm by insurgents in Afghanistan, due to the highly visible and dangerous nature of their employment," Mr Johnston said in a statement. The majority of those already settled in Australia arrived over the latter part of 2013 and early 2014. The statement said the Government had wanted to conduct the process "with a high level of discretion, given the sensitivities and risks involved for the applicants and their families".

It is understood the Afghan employees and their families were keen to settle in Australia and said they were eager to start new lives and establish themselves as soon as possible. The families were provided with accommodation, health services and household assistance. "Many have already commenced employment or vocational training opportunities and their children are enrolled in school," Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews said in the joint statement. Following the completion of Australia's mission in Uruzgan and the departure of Australian Defence Force personnel from the province, Australia will continue to provide training and advisory support to the Afghan National Security Forces.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-01/afghan-refugees-who-helped-defence-resettled-in-australia/5492380>

Afghan interpreters who worked alongside coalition troops are being resettled in Australia

A group of Afghan interpreters who supported coalition troops in their fight against the Taliban are being resettled in Australia. About 280 translators who worked alongside Australian forces will settle in Newcastle, north of Sydney, with their families. The civilian interpreters were involved in all aspects of the war in Afghanistan, from raids to meetings of regional chiefs. Afghanistan veteran and military fellow at the Lowy Institute for International Policy James Brown says the interpreters offered critical support to Australians troops.



"They were able to effectively allow our forces to communicate with Afghan civilians, police, the army ... they've been involved in every part of what the Defence Force has done in Uruzgan," he said.

Mr Brown says he supports Australia's decision to grant 800 visas to the translators and their immediate families.

"I'm very much in favour of giving these interpreters a safe place to raise their families, thanking them for the dangerous work they did.

Making sure that they'll have ongoing connections to the Australian Defence Force as well," he said. "I think that's particularly important now that we've brought them back to live in Australia."

Out of danger but challenges remain. Sister Diana Santleben from the Josephite Refugee Support Network says many of the interpreters lived in fear of revenge attacks by the Taliban after coalition troops left the region. "When the Australian military are leaving, these people are left behind to face the music with what's left behind which is the Taliban," she said. "Their lives would be at risk if we didn't evacuate them." While the interpreters and their immediate relatives are being relocated, Sister Santleben says members of the translators' extended family remain at "extreme risk". "That is the greatest anxiety of all of the people who are now here," she said.

"There is no plan that we know about for evacuating those people, even getting them out of Afghanistan to another country where they would be safer than they are currently." Sister Santleben says 250 of the translators have settled in Australia, where they face challenges including finding long-term accommodation, jobs and pursuing education opportunities. "The housing is going to be the biggest challenge by far ... finding rental accommodation in NSW is always a big challenge," she said.

Efforts likened to Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. Sister Santleben believes the interpreters, who began arriving before Christmas, should be given Defence housing. "I just think it's disgraceful if we just say, 'you're out of danger, now cope'," she said. She likened the efforts of the interpreters to those of the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels during World War II.

"It took us 50 years to realise that we had a big responsibility to them and that they need to be very seriously compensated for their contribution to the Australian war effort," she said. "I think it's the same thing with these people." Abdul Bari fled Afghanistan 20 years ago and now lives in Newcastle. He says cultural differences will be one of the biggest hurdles facing the city's new residents.

"When I see them playing soccer in one of the parks I go and see them," he said. "We share information and I pass on my experience." An engineer by trade, he says the interpreters may

find it challenging to have their skills recognised in Australia. He says plans are underway to establish a community support association to assist the new residents.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-03-11/afghan-translators/5313602>

Displaced Afghan translators make NSW Hunter Valley their home

Giselle Wakatama Wed 12 Mar 2014

The Hunter Valley is again opening its arms to people displaced by war, with hundreds of Afghan translators being resettled in Newcastle. The Australian Government, acknowledging the risks faced by Afghan translators helping Coalition troops in their fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan, has previously announced the provision of 800 special visas for translators and their families. The ABC can reveal that as part of a wider resettlement program, about 280 of those visas are earmarked for Afghans due to resettle in Newcastle.

It is understood around 200 have already arrived in the region but housing them all is proving a challenge. The ABC also understands there are fears for relatives left behind with reports already of attacks by the Taliban as payback for the help provided to Coalition troops. The Hunter region is no stranger to helping people displaced by war.



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**Sister Di Santleben,
Josephite Refugee Support
Network**

Under Operation Safe Haven, Singleton Army base housed 500 people displaced from Kosovo in 1999.

Refugee advocates have applauded moves to resettle the translators in Newcastle but are concerned about a lack of housing. Sister Di Santleben from the Josephite Refugee Support Network says Newcastle has a history of welcoming refugees. "It's a huge honour," she said. "I mean these people have given up their lives for us, the Australians.

"They've interpreted for the Australian Army and other people in places that we know were deadly, dangerous places to be. "But finding private rentals is going to be a challenge for this many families." She says the translators are happy to be in Newcastle but fearful for the fate of relatives left behind.

"I've asked them can they think of a day when we'll be able to publish their photographs and the folks said if you publish my photograph tomorrow my brother will be dead," she said. "That's just the truth of it. "They're not hiding, but they've left behind brothers and parents and their families and while they're now safe, their families are by no means safe."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-03-11/hunter-valley-providing-safe-haven-for-afghan-translators/5311590>



Scott Morrison 'monitoring' resettlement program after reports Afghan interpreter killed

Sun 15 Dec 2013 ABC

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison insists he is closely monitoring an Afghan resettlement program, following reports an interpreter waiting to come to Australia was killed by the Taliban. Fairfax newspapers have reported that an interpreter who worked with the Australian Army has been killed by the Taliban in an apparent revenge attack.

It has been reported that he was waiting for resettlement in Australia under a program designed to provide refuge to Afghans who work with Coalition forces. Mr Morrison has previously announced plans to provide 800 visas to Afghan nationals and their families.

A spokesman said the Government would not comment on individual cases given the security risks, but said the Minister has been receiving weekly updates to ensure the program delivers help to those who have risked their lives. "[The program] is being closely monitored to ensure, as promised, we help those and their families who have risked their lives to aid our diggers," the spokesman said.

"For operational security reasons and to protect the privacy of the LEE (Locally Engaged Employees), the Government does not reveal details about the way in which protection is provided." The Government says the program is not just limited to interpreters. According to the Fairfax reports, other interpreters are mostly in hiding while they wait for their visa applications to process.

Greens say visa delays 'mean death'. In October, Mr Morrison announced the 800 Afghans would be accepted through Australia's current annual humanitarian intake which the Coalition has cut to 13,750. He said the Australian Government was "not going to leave these people behind". The Greens have called on the Government to speed up the issuing of protection visas for interpreters.

"It's too dangerous for us to leave these interpreters in the hands of the Taliban," immigration spokesperson Sarah Hanson-Young said in a statement. "After they supported our troops in the war this is the least we can do. "We need to get on with it because, in this situation, delay means death."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-15/morrison-monitoring-program-to-resettle-afghan-interpreters/5157608>

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison says no changes to border protection despite softer language from PM

political reporter Eliza Borrello Fri 4 Oct 2013

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison says there will be no change to Australia's border protection policies despite an apparent softening in the Prime Minister's language around the issue earlier this week. Some media had questioned whether Tony Abbott's comments in Indonesia signalled the Coalition was abandoning its plan to buy asylum seeker boats from Indonesian fishermen. Questions had also been raised about whether the Government was still committed to turning asylum seeker boats back to Indonesia.



"I wish to stress that the full arsenal of measures represented in the Coalition's policies to stop the boats remain available to be deployed by the Government," Mr Morrison said. "As the Prime Minister himself said everything remains on the table. "Despite the wishful thinking and projection by some that I saw in some media reports there is no change to the Government's policy on border protection." Calls to better support Afghan, Iraqi interpreters' settlement into Queensland

Afghan and Iraqi interpreters who worked alongside coalition troops are being resettled in Queensland, but many who work with them claim not enough is being done to assist the men as they transition into their new lives. Simon Quaglia is a former soldier who served in Afghanistan and says most of the work the Australian soldiers did would not have been possible without the translators. "They've proved their loyalty, I'd be dead a hundred times over if you couldn't trust these guys," he said.

Mr Quaglia worked alongside an interpreter known as Abdul, and now he wants to him build a life in Australia. "I couldn't have done anything without him, I may as well not have got up in the morning," Mr Quaglia said. In Afghanistan and Iraq, those who worked with coalition forces were targeted by terrorists. When Australian forces withdrew from Afghanistan, 800 protection visas were given to Afghan interpreters and their families. In 2008, 557 were given to the Iraqi contingent. Overwhelmingly, the interpreters are grateful to be safe but they are still in limbo.

Fears for family members left behind are fuelled by ongoing attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq and there are constant reminders of the threats. A recent photo posted on social media shows the mutilated body of an interpreter brutally murdered by the Taliban. "Not only do they worry about their families, I worry about their families," Mr Quaglia said. "You're constantly hearing of people that have just been executed, a knock on the door [from] someone just blows your heart out."

He says Australians do not understand the Afghan sense of family. "We talk about extended families and think that they just want to get some shonky family over here, but Abdul's father was killed when he was three, taken by the Taliban."

Support services call for more assistance. In Newcastle, Sister Diana Santleben from the Josephite Refugee Support Network, is helping more than 200 Afghan interpreters and their families resettle there. She says the Government is not doing enough.

When a country commits to go to war it takes responsibilities with it and this is one of the responsibilities we should have our hand up for. Peter Mapp

"We need Australia to be much more compassionate for these families because these guys have earned this," she said. Sister Di is angry that the interpreters are getting the same assistance most refugees receive. She says the statistics show that those refugees will still be struggling to find permanent work, jobs and stability after five years and she says, in this case, that is not acceptable. "These gentlemen wore the Australian uniform, these gentlemen wore flak jackets because their lives were in danger, simply because they worked with Australian Defence Force (ADF)," she said.

In Darra, south-west of Brisbane, 17 of the 60 members of the RSL sub-branch are Iraqi interpreters. Sub-branch member Peter Mapp, who is also a vice-president of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia, says the interpreters have been badly let down. "Those fellows have done enough for Australia for them to have those benefits," he said. He has files of documents which detail the plight of the men and their families who came to Brisbane in 2008. The files include copies of their contracts which show they were paid about \$600 per month and had no paid annual leave.

The interpreters also have letters signed by Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston which expresses "deep gratitude for your invaluable service". Mr Mapp says most of the interpreters are highly qualified in their country and lost their homes and livelihoods because they assisted Australian troops. They still have no permanent housing or jobs. One of the interpreters is a former aircraft engineer who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and Parkinson's disease. He holds grave fears for the safety of three married daughters he had to leave behind in Baghdad. Stress makes the tremors caused by Parkinson's much worse and his whole body shakes when he talks about the risk.

Advocates urge recognition as ADF veterans. Mr Mapp says if the interpreters had access to the Veterans' Entitlements Act they could apply for top level medical assistance. "When a country commits to go to war it takes responsibilities with it and this is one of the responsibilities we should have our hand up for," he said.

People risk their life to help the Australians and in some cases there was a lot of self-interest in that ... but Australians stick by their mates, we stick by our allies. Neil James from the Australia Defence Association

Advocates also want a war housing program and assistance with finding work and reunification with families. Sister Santleben is calling for the Government to recognise the time served in Afghanistan towards expedited citizenship, so those who want to, can apply to join the ADF.

For the interpreters to be recognised as veterans there would have to be changes to legislation, which requires veterans to have been members of the ADF. Neil James, executive director of the Australia Defence Association, says there are moral, operational and strategic arguments for doing exactly that.

"People risk their life to help the Australians and in some cases there was a lot of self-interest in that you know, but Australians stick by their mates, we stick by our allies," he said. "Considering that we might need similar interpretation support in the next war we have to fight, you need to be able to prove to those people that you will help them afterwards." According to the association, the Whitlam government did not give protection visas to the people who helped the ADF in Vietnam and most of them were sent to camps or killed when the Australians withdrew, to the great distress of the Aussies who served with them.

Diggers like Mr Quaglia want the Government to get this right. "The amount of stress that they've suffered, the family members that have been killed, the constant fear of being killed, the constant fear of being identified, look they've done it hard and they make perfect Australians," he said. Statements from the offices of Defence Minister David Johnston and Immigration Minister Scott Morrison said the contribution of the Afghan interpreters is highly valued and is recognised through the visa system and everything possible is being done to help the interpreters resettle.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-12/translators-resettled-in-queensland/5448312>



Australia to provide refuge for Afghan interpreters and families

Mr Morrison has also announced the Government will provide refuge to 800 Afghan interpreters and their families. The interpreters have been assisting Australian troops in Afghanistan. "That's a high priority for the Prime Minister and I and we're working through that and we should have that dealt with by the end of the year," Mr Morrison told Fairfax Radio.

The previous Labor government had flagged the move. Mr Morrison says the 800 people will be accepted through Australia's current annual humanitarian intake which the Coalition has cut to 13,750. "They are all at risk and we've been working through that process now for sometime ... we're not going to leave these people behind," he said. Yesterday the Government announced it would resettle 500 Syrian refugees.

Mr Morrison says that decision should not be interpreted as an encouragement for asylum seekers to get on boats. He says the Government will work with the United Nations to decide which asylum seekers are resettled and that they will target highly vulnerable people in urgent need of protection.

The Greens say the 500 places should be in addition to the annual humanitarian intake given it has been cut. "Giving with one hand while taking away with the other isn't the Australian way of doing things," Greens Immigration spokeswoman Sarah Hanson-Young said. "Offering safety to Syrian refugees is essential but as a wealthy, generous nation Australia can and should be doing more to help those in our region."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-10-04/government-refuge-afghan-interpreters-families-scott-morrison/4998990>