

# Afghanistan refugee crisis FAQs

## Where is Afghanistan?

- Afghanistan is a landlocked country between Central and South Asia. It is one of the world's poorest countries.
- Afghanistan has a rich cultural heritage. Poetry has been a big part of Afghan culture for over 1,000 years, and the world's first oil paintings were found in caves in central Afghanistan.
- As of 2020, it had a population of approximately 39 million, who are mostly Muslim.
- In August 2021, a group called the Taliban seized control after international forces left the country.



## Who are the Taliban?

- The Taliban is a political movement and military organisation. They first took power in Afghanistan from 1996-2001.
- When they were in power, the Taliban imposed harsh rules over the country. Men were made to grow beards and women were made to wear a burka. Women and girls were not allowed an education or to be involved in politics, and TV, music and cinema were banned.
- After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, the United States military invaded Afghanistan. The United Kingdom supported the USA's invasion, and the Taliban government was overthrown. US forces, supported by countries like the UK, remained in Afghanistan for the next 20 years.
- In that time, a new government was established. Women and girls were allowed to go to school, have a job, and get involved in politics. After democratic elections in 2014, a quarter of seats in Afghanistan's parliament were taken up by women.

## What happened in August 2021?



- In 2021, US troops began to leave Afghanistan, in response to public and political pressure. By August, the Taliban was taking over more and more parts of the country.
  - On 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021, Taliban forces took control of the capital city, Kabul. Many people were evacuated or fled, because they feared what life would be like under the Taliban.
  - Women and girls in particular feared being banned from education and the workplace. Others, like LGBT people and civil rights activists, were also very worried.
  - The United Nations warned that up to 500,000 Afghans could become refugees by the end of 2021, and called on neighbouring countries to keep their borders open.
- Half of the Afghan population are children. Decades of conflict has meant they have grown up knowing fear and suffering. And now, the situation is desperate. Those who have fled the country need help and protection to travel safely to new countries to rebuild their lives. But millions of children remain in Afghanistan, cut off from aid supplies, out of school, facing the threat of violence and COVID-19.

### What can the UK do about it?

- The UK said it would take in 5,000 Afghan people in 2021, and hoped to help 20,000 people over the next few years. They said they would focus on those at greatest risk from the Taliban, for example women and girls.
- Lots of people think that the UK Government should actually be aiming to help thousands more refugees find a safe home in this country. Save the Children is asking the UK Government to secure safe passage for Afghan families fleeing the conflict.
- Charities have also urged the UK to give more humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to support the people who have stayed there. Even before the Taliban took control, Afghanistan was already facing a hunger crisis because of conflict, climate change and Covid-19. Now the situation is getting even worse.
- Many children are at risk from severe malnutrition, are out of school, and face the threat of violence and the approaching winter. Aid is not reaching those in need.
- Save the Children is also asking the Government to ensure humanitarian workers can access Afghanistan in the midst of ongoing conflict, to continue their vital work.
- The UK can also use its influential position with other world leaders to support an inclusive and lasting peace settlement, so that Afghan children can grow up free of the fear of violence, death and injury.

### What can we do to change this?

- We can tell Liz Truss, the Foreign Secretary, to listen to what Save the Children and other charities are calling for and act. We can ask our local MPs to speak to Liz Truss about this on our behalf.
- We can tell our MPs that we want the UK Government to increase its support to people in Afghanistan through our aid budget. We can also tell them that we want the Government to help more refugees from Afghanistan find safety in this country.
- We can raise awareness in our communities about the importance of welcoming refugees and displaced children who have had to flee their homes.