



Statement by Commissioner Johansson on the situation in Afghanistan at the extraordinary meeting of Interior Ministers

Brussels, 18 August 2021

The European Commission has been following the latest developments in Afghanistan with great and increasing concern. Today, I shared my concerns on the extremely serious and difficult situation with the EU Ministers of Interior, and my view on the way forward:

Evacuation of EU staff and citizens and local staff who have been working with the EU and the Member States in Afghanistan is an immediate priority. Work on that is in progress in very difficult circumstances. I am grateful to the Member States for their commitment in granting visas to the staff and their families, and for offering seats in the departing planes. The Commission stands ready to coordinate all actions needed for them to find a new home.

The instability in Afghanistan is likely to lead to increased migratory pressure. We are therefore preparing for all scenarios. For this purpose, in line with the new Pact on Migration and Asylum, we convened yesterday an urgent Blueprint Network meeting during which we discussed with Member States and EU agencies about possible developments and the level of our preparedness. The Blueprint Network will continue meeting regularly on this topic to closely monitor the developments and take all preparatory steps needed.

We should not wait until people arrive at the external borders of the European Union. This is not a solution. We should prevent people from heading towards the European Union through unsafe, irregular and uncontrolled routes run by smugglers.

At the same time, we cannot abandon people in immediate danger in Afghanistan. Journalists, NGO staff and human rights advocates in Afghanistan are amongst those who are most at risk, women in particular.

We have to support people displaced in Afghanistan through international organisations, such as the UNHCR and the IOM, give them the assistance needed and help them get back to their homes in Afghanistan when conditions on the ground allow. Some 550 000 Afghans have now been internally displaced in the country since the beginning of the year, in addition to 2.9 million already internally displaced at the end of 2020. Since the beginning of the year, some 120 000 Afghans have fled from rural areas and provincial towns to Kabul province – including some 20 000 since the start of July. 80% of the people forced to flee are women and children.

A significant number of Afghan* nationals have already fled to neighbouring countries. We should work closely with the countries in the region and be ready to provide them with the necessary humanitarian and development assistance. We must step up our support as the situation evolves.

The EU has been engaged and has been supporting programmes linked to the forced displacement of Afghans for many years, in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries (particularly Iran and Pakistan). More than EUR 250 million in assistance has been provided to support host communities and the sustainable reintegration of returnees and internally displaced persons, and to support capacity building for the authorities. We will continue our ongoing programmes and intensify our cooperation with host communities in Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan, as well as other countries in the region such as Turkey.

As things stand, the situation in Afghanistan is clearly not safe and it will not be safe for some time. Therefore we cannot force people to return to Afghanistan.

While we continue our work to address risks of irregular migration, fight against human smuggling and manage our borders effectively, we need to offer legal, safe and organised pathways towards the EU. This reflects our comprehensive and balanced approach on migration set out in the new Pact on Migration and Asylum.

I have called on Member States to step up their engagement on resettlement, to increase resettlement quotas to help those in need of international protection and to offer complementary legal pathways. To me, it is very clear that Afghan* women and girls are in a specifically dangerous

situation: prioritising resettlement over irregular routes has also a clear gender dimension. Again, the Commission stands ready to help in the coordination between Member States and to provide the necessary additional financial support on this important work strand.

In addition, the EU will also continue to play a leading role in supporting Afghan refugees in the region. We will use our role as chair of the Core Group of the Solution Strategy for Afghan refugees and its Support Platform in 2021 to strengthen international community's response to the Afghan refugee situation in the region and consequently to spur political, financial and material commitments around the regional dimension of Afghan displacement.

The rapidly evolving situation in Afghanistan poses a global challenge, which is why we need to act together and with all partners on a global level, in a resolute and fair manner, while guaranteeing the respect of fundamental rights, the protection of our values and working in a spirit of solidarity. We will cooperate closely with our international partners and we look forward to discussing the next steps, including within the UN framework and the G7.

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