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The responsibility to protect remains a challenge

The plight of the Afghan interpreters

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The plight of the Afghan interpreters

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT REMAINS A CHALLENGE

Ninna Nyberg Sørensen and Emma Katarina Andersen

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, a DIIS policy study explored the past and future challenges of local interpreters working alongside Danish troops in military operations (Plambech and Danstrøm, 2014). The study focused on risks faced by local interpreters in different contexts; the human, economic and reputational costs involved; the outsourcing of recruitment to private contractors; and questions of accountability. The study provided both operational and policy recommendations.

The aftermath of the evacuations that followed the withdrawal of US and NATO troops in August 2021, coupled with the expiration of the 'Danish agreement on the management of the situation for interpreters and other locally employed in Afghanistan' (Tolkeaftalen) by the end of 2022, provides an opportunity to access the role of local interpreters in military operations as well as the ethical and political dilemmas involved.

The present working paper attempts to do so. It builds on a literature review of academic analyses, policy reports, a recent joint Danish government evaluation of the evacuation from Afghanistan, and interviews with representatives from Danish ministries and NGOs, the Danish Defence Command, relevant allies and other stakeholders. A shorter Danish language policy brief presents the main findings.

Key findings

- Effective counterinsurgency is difficult to obtain without the collaboration of local interpreters
- Local embeddedness makes local interpreters indispensable at the same time as it contributes to the heightened risk they face and the special protection they may need
- The absence of internationally coordinated procedures for protection and relocation result in arbitrary case handling across countries
- The expiry of the Danish 'interpreting agreement' by the end of 2022 represents an opportunity to align with the procedures of major allies
- Alignment should be based on international labor protection rights, not national asylum legislation

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-one years after Denmark joined the fight against the Taliban, the Taliban is back in power. Afghan civilians, including locally employed civilians (LECs) who assisted the Danish presence, are desperately seeking to hide or flee from the Taliban's retaliatory actions. Their destiny—and our responsibility towards protecting them—is central to the following analysis.

Denmark's participation in the coalition wars of recent decades has led to a more 'activist' foreign policy approach (Daugbjerg and Sørensen, 2017). Increasingly directed at 'winning the hearts and minds' of local populations through a combination of military and humanitarian efforts, more diplomatic approaches have become essential to military operations (Rosendo, 2020). LECs, including locally employed interpreters (LEIs), are considered crucial for such operations. Their indispensability is connected to their intimate knowledge of the local language(s), geography, history and culture (Gómez-Amich, 2018). LEIs frequently serve as dialogue interlocutors or mediators in situations in which 'translation' may become the most effective means for ensuring stability (Sánchez, 2021). Interpreting may, therefore, be considered part of the logistics or 'kit' of war (Tesseur and Footitt, 2019).

LEIs contracted to work in conflict zones are generally non-professional linguists who play a key role in intercultural encounters between the military and civilians. Interpretation during military operations is conducted in a volatile environment in which security is pursued by means of managing instability (Monacelli and Punzo, 2001). This makes LEIs particularly vulnerable and in need of special protection (Obeidat and Mahasneh, 2018), both while the conflict is unfolding and after it is won by either of the conflicting parties.

However, protection needs and obligations are not necessarily straightforward as they are negotiated in a contested field. Just as the norms regulating the interpretation in situations of conflict are precisely the absence of solid rules that define interpreters' roles (Sánchez, 2021), there is also no overarching international protection scheme that organises the protection and, when necessary, international relocation of LEIs. At present, existing national relocation programmes are non-comprehensive and differ considerably from country to country (de Jong, 2021; de Jong and Sarantidis, 2022).

Various ethical and political dilemmas have emerged in attempts to reach national and international agreements. The dilemmas concerning the protection and resettlement of LEIs illuminate questions related to how the boundaries of a given coalition state are constructed and its responsibilities abroad negotiated (Kristensen, 2020). They also cast light on state-centric assumptions of sovereignty rooted in specific notions of how human, social and national security intersect.

Such assumptions are often paired in simplistic causal nexus-relationships (the security-development nexus, the migration-security nexus, etc.) that ultimately are used to justify certain policies and practices (Stern and Ojendahl, 2010; Sørensen, 2012; de Jong, 2021). The following analysis takes issue with some of the dilemmas concerning the duty of care owed to Afghan LEIs.

TIMELINE

2013: Adoption of the Danish Interpreter Agreement and Intimidation Policy. Danish veterans and human rights organisations criticise measures for not providing adequate support. After the closure of the Danish bases in Helmand, only 17 of 195+ LEIs turn to seek protection according to the 'interpreter package'.

2014: The Danish Armed Forces' half-year status indicates that 104 interpreters have contacted the focal point to request their case processed. A DIIS Report documents a high rejection rate, raises critical questions regarding accountability and provides recommendations for future operations.

2015: Danish media documents threats against former LEIs by Taliban. NGOs and veterans demand a renegotiation of the Interpreter Agreement and Intimidation Policy. *Norway* loosens the requirements in their agreement with the argument that this is not a matter of asylum policy but of protection of military personnel.

2017: A statement from the Chief of Defence to the Minister of Defence shows failure to comply with the guidelines in several cases, including registration of LEIs and the requirement not to use local interpreters with close ties to the area in which Danish forces operate.

2018: Acknowledging that the eligibility criteria for resettlement in *the UK* have been inadequate, revisions to the UK ex-gratia scheme are made.

2019: The status of cases processed according to the Danish interpreter package amounts to 128 cases, of which five have been granted asylum in Denmark, 23 in the UK (11 according to their own wish, 12 after being denied asylum in Denmark), and one has received the so-called 'wage package'. Eighty-five cases have been processed according to the intimidation package, of which 51 have had their applications rejected, four have been granted asylum in Denmark and 24 have received financial support for resettlement in Afghanistan.

2020: The US and Taliban enter into an agreement on a peaceful withdrawal of international troops during 2021. During the period 2013-2020, the Danish task force processed a total of 137 applications from 22 LECs and 115 LEIs. Of these, 73 are granted some sort of support and 20 are offered access to a visa with a view to seeking asylum in Denmark.

2021: *The UK* launches a new Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) in April offering relocation to any current or former employees who face intimidation or threat to life. This scheme is intended to run indefinitely, whereas

the ex-gratia scheme will expire in November 2022. In response to the Taliban takeover, the Danish Government announces a special law granting two years of temporary residence in Denmark to Afghan LECs who have worked alongside Danish troops and authorities.

2022: Definitive expiry of the Interpreter Agreement and Intimidation Policy by the end of the year. During its term, a total of 2,648 persons have approached the armed forces focal point to have their case processed. Of these, 2,091 made contact in the period from 2 October to 15 December 2021, while 316 made contact during the period 16 December 2021 to 9 June 2022. Most of the inquiries (2,402) have been considered unfounded and not processed further. Among the remaining cases, 146 have been handed over to the Defence Command. Of these, 33 cases have been dismissed, 19 cases have been referred to the British authorities, three cases have been referred to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, two cases have been referred to the Danish Embassy in Kabul, one case has been handed over to the Danish Immigration Service, and 88 cases have been negotiated under the intimidation scheme.

Most local civilians who take the job of interpreting in conflict zones thus act as much as 'cultural brokers' as interpreters, drawing on their local and cultural knowledge to facilitate the work and safety of international troops. However, their local embeddedness combined with a lack of adequate training is exactly what contributes to their own insecurity and protection needs (Moser-Mercer, 2015).

Military interpreters may approach the notion of interpreter neutrality differently from civilian interpreters. In many ways issues regarding neutrality are more complex for military interpreters than for their civilian counterparts. Therefore, military interpreters may not always be considered neutral in the sense traditionally attributed to interpreters and with regard to the established ethical guidelines of the profession in particular (Snellman, 2016).

Wartime interpreters are never just neutral translators, but rather function as key actors shaping and conveying the meaning necessary to conduct warfare. Their potential 'trans-traitor' status relegates them to an in-between place (Kristensen, 2020), mistrusted by their local communities, foreign military actors and the countries from which they eventually may seek protection.

PAST AND FUTURE TRANSLATION NEEDS

As conflict brings foreign forces and local populations face to face, language and culture mediation have historically been inherent parts of armed conflicts. Geopolitical factors condition the use of language and, by implication, the use of interpreters in different contexts. The rise in conflicts in the world—and their

wider security implications—have thus made interpreting essential (Rosendo, 2022).

Since hybrid warfare emanating from non-state actors is gaining traction globally, a future need for counterinsurgency efforts must be presumed, many of which are likely to turn into long-term capacity building (Plambech and Danstrøm, 2014). Attempts at replacing interpreters with technological alternatives have hitherto been unsuccessful which is why a future need for interpreters seems highly likely (Tălpaș, 2016).

Types of interpreters

Definitions of interpreters in conflict zones (ICZs) vary but the categories most referred to are listed and described below:

Military linguists
Trained military personnel belonging to the military institution

Professionally trained language assistants
Typically work in formal settings such as international conferences or trade negotiations

Nationally recruited interpreters
Most often diaspora members with Western citizenship or residence and roots in conflict zones

Local interpreters recruited outside military operation area
LECs, usually well-educated from larger cities and generally unknown to the local population

Local interpreters recruited in military operation area
LEIs, usually with less formal education and often known to the local population

Except for the first category (military personnel trained and acting as interpreters), the remaining four categories may be considered civilians. The first category is often preferred by the military but is not necessarily 'in stock' at the beginning of a new deployment. Also, language and inter-cultural training do not necessarily enable them to manoeuvre in contexts that require fine-grained local knowledge. Issues regarding neutrality may also be more complex for military than for civilian interpreters as loyalty to the army has priority (Snellman, 2016). The second category is generally considered more 'professional' and less likely to have any stakes in an armed conflict but rarely works in 'the field'. The third category falls in between. They are not military personnel, may or may not be trained interpreters, may consider employment a way to support their countries/communities of origin, but can—as the two first categories—leave the conflict zone upon completion of their contract (making the issue of relocation redundant). The latter two categories are non-professionals who are recruited because they speak English and one or more local languages and have knowledge of the socio-cultural context in the given conflict zone (Moser-Mercer, 2015).

The distinctions between the different types of ICZs are important to draw since the nature of each category leads to different positionalities and hence specific protection needs (Rosendo and Muños, 2017; Tesseur and Footitt, 2019).

During the military operations in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) lack of fluency in languages spoken by the Afghan Armed Forces and the local population (Pashto, Dari) made recruitment of civilians familiar with the local language(s) necessary (Rosendo, 2020). Representatives from the Danish and allied defence forces confirm local recruitment as a solution to scarce numbers and inadequate linguistic levels among the military's own language officers. In addition, the recruited LEIs not only had the linguistic levels necessary for military intervention, but they also possessed invaluable local and cultural knowledge, which set them apart from military interpreters and nationally recruited interpreters, as confirmed by Danish soldiers and veterans.

LEIs have advantages such as easier access to the local population, the capacity to read non-verbal and tacit cues, the ability to explain intentions and jokes and achieve a fuller understanding and appreciation of local language(s)/dialect(s), customs, gestures, practices and religious beliefs. However, LEIs typically lack knowledge of military procedures and interpreting skills, and they are—more often than military linguists—considered potentially biased by the armies they serve, especially in the beginning of a military operation. Military linguists or nationally recruited interpreters are often regarded as more objective and reliable by the military, and their understanding of the position and views of the local population as well as culture-specific aspects of communication may be limited in scope (Rosendo, 2020).

LEIs perform a myriad of tasks beyond what is generally considered a professional interpreter's main role, namely, to be impartial and translate as accurately as possible. Different war-related situations in which LEIs are needed may include:

- exercising gatekeeping roles by, for example, editing, summarising, omitting or adding certain details to an original message for the sake of local understanding
- interaction and mediation between the military and the local population
- accompanying foreign troops on the frontline
- participating in fact-finding and intelligence gathering missions
- detecting improvised explosive devices and staving off attacks
- interrogation at facilities set up by intelligence institutions or the military
- participating in court procedures
- influencing local population and turning them into allies

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BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: THE RISKS FACED BY LOCAL INTERPRETERS

'Ironically, the interpreters who have been hired to give voice to the parties of a conflict, rarely have a voice of their own when it comes to their working conditions and political discussions about these'
(Campbell, 2016)

The desire to seek employment as a local interpreter - despite the risks involved - needs to be considered in light of the often scarce employment opportunities in warzones. Any work opportunity brings along a chance to support oneself and one's family even when considering the dangers involved in the job as well as repercussions on the part of community and national actors. Poverty and inability to find alternative employment may prompt some to take jobs that they otherwise would not accept. Others may be motivated by the same aspirations as those who enlist as soldiers: patriotism (helping bring peace to their country), skills acquisition and adventure. Apart from possessing the obvious language skills and cultural knowledge, high salaries by local standards may motivate people to seek employment as LEIs (Moser-Mercer, 2015). In Afghanistan, a LEI would typically earn up to ten times more than a schoolteacher or police officer, for example. Other motivating factors include established labour rights, such as written contracts, the right to organise, access to protective equipment and the right to compensation for work injuries (as also recommended in the 'Military manual on international law for Danish Armed Forces in international operations', 2020).

The precarious nature of the LEI's position entails exposure to specific risks and dangers not necessarily faced by other actors. These include intimidation, ill-treatment, kidnapping and killing, all contributing to highly insecure living conditions, especially after the conclusion of the military intervention and withdrawal of foreign troops. No official study has quantified the number of local interpreters targeted or killed due to their service to foreign forces in Afghanistan, but the number is estimated in the high hundreds, if not thousands. A 2022 UN

report documents at least 100 killings of Afghan civilians cooperating with international forces by Taliban insurgents since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021 (UN Secretary General, 2022).

The risks faced by LEIs are also of a different nature as they often must remain in the military operation area after the foreign troops leave. Taking on the role of intermediaries, LEIs often experience mistrust and scepticism from all parties involved in the conflict, whether foreign or local, resulting in double exposure to danger (Gómez-Amich, 2021). This difficult and precarious position potentially relegates LEIs to being marginalised by both sides (Kristensen, 2020). LEIs are, therefore, not only indirect victims by virtue of their proximity to warfare, but also direct victims as a function of their dual embeddedness in the local area and the foreign troops. It is exactly this dual embeddedness that necessitates that LEIs be clearly and uniformly categorised for the purpose of defining specific protection and security measures, as recommended by the Red T Organisation and other actors advocating for the protection of interpreters in high-risk settings.[1]

INHERENT DILEMMAS

The need to ensure the best possible operating conditions for Danish soldiers during international missions with due regard for the safety of local employees is set out in the guidelines for the armed forces' use of interpreters and other local staff from October 2015.

As a general rule, Danish language officers should support the deployment of Danish forces. Should the capacity be insufficient or specific cultural background knowledge be needed, interpreting capacity should be sought by recruiting diaspora members resident in Denmark or, alternatively, by concluding agreements on the use of interpreters employed by military or other international cooperation partners. LEIs should only be used if no other interpreting capacity is immediately available. In the latter case, strict security measures aimed at protecting their identity must be followed. Finally, there is a requirement for registration of both the employment and/or use of LEIs.

However, it appears from the literature as well as from interviews that effective counterinsurgency is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve without the collaboration of LEIs. As previously stated, military language officers do not possess the needed local knowledge and diaspora interpreters may not be up to date with local developments.

A second dilemma concerns the outsourcing of linguistic services to Western allies or private contractors. Outsourcing makes it challenging for the Danish forces to register and keep track of the interpreters they cooperate with. It also raises

[1] See https://red-t.org/our-work/safety-guidelines/.

questions of accountability and gives rise to ambiguities regarding the responsibility to protect.

The balancing act of securing effective military operations while limiting the need for international protection or future asylum claims is further challenged by an urgency to maintain a good reputation, among LECs as well as among major allies.

GUIDELINES, COMPLIANCE, AND TRAINING NEEDS

The guidelines for the Danish Armed Forces' use of interpreters state that cooperation with locally employed interpreters—typically from the region, but not necessarily from the local area —has been an important element in Denmark's international involvement for decades. Need for interpreting capacity, including the recruitment and employment of LEIs in future missions, is predicted. In these situations, geographical, cultural, ethnic and religious conditions should be assessed, just as the security situation and the expected nature and duration of the employment must be considered.

Local interpreters should only be used when other interpreting options are not available, and contracting must be coordinated with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and be approved by the Joint Defence Command. Other measures include:

- avoid the use of local interpreters with close relations to the local area in high-intensity operations
- assess the use of a face mask in situations of exposure to the local population
- consider the pros and cons related to wearing a military uniform
- ensure job rotation where possible
- prohibit Danish soldiers' exposure of local employees on social media
- use aliases
- handle personal data confidentially
- conduct accession interviews to ensure the local interpreters' knowledge of the framework and terms of employment, hold regular security briefings and ensure resignation interviews with concluding security briefing

The guidelines' mix of safety measures and alignment of expectations obviously requires appropriate training on both sides. To avoid future failure to comply with the guidelines, current and future local interpreters should be provided specialised training corresponding to the specific roles they will perform. Additionally, deployed military personal should be trained in professional ethics, including an understanding of the professional, linguistic and cultural dimensions of interpreting as well as the principles needed for safeguarding local staff.

SERVE, HONOR, PROTECT: LESSONS LEARNED FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

During the military intervention in Afghanistan, local interpreters have served alongside troops from multiple countries. Diversity in contractual arrangements have impacted eligibility criteria for protection. Some countries, such as the United States and Denmark, have subcontracted interpreters through private companies, while other countries (e.g. Germany, France, the Netherlands and, up until 2014, the UK) have employed interpreters through direct contracts. The absence of an internationally coordinated recruitment procedure is reflected in variation in national protection/intimidation and relocation schemes.

A joint Danish government evaluation of the 2022 evacuation from Afghanistan assesses Danish protection policies and practices aimed at former Afghan staff under threat due to their employment with the Danish military, embassy or NGOs. The overall conclusion is that the Danish interpreter agreement has provided a good instrument for countering intimidation and threats at a level broadly similar to or better than the instruments provided by other like-minded countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands).

The evaluation confirms the 'robustness' of the interpreter agreement regarding 'normal situations' in which there is time to assess whether an applicant is threatened or endangered because of the Danish military efforts. However, the situation in Afghanistan in mid-August 2021 evolved to a 'special emergency, *both* in relation to the large number of applicants *and* in relation to the limited time available to consider whether the local interpreters and other representation staff currently were threatened solely by virtue of their ongoing or previous work for Denmark. Therefore, a broad political agreement was reached to deal with the new emergency evacuation situation on a special basis. The special agreement disregarded the interpreter agreement's requirement for the individual applicant's burden of proof. After evacuation was accomplished, the administration of applications again follows the original criteria of the interpreter agreement.

The evaluation conclusion states that the cooperation with local interpreters has constituted an important element in Denmark's international military engagement. Experience from the major military deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in 2015 in the preparation of guidelines for the Danish Armed Forces' use of interpreters and other local staff. The guidelines, which remain in force, are found to constitute 'a systematic approach to the use of interpreting capacity in connection with the international activities of the armed forces' (FME, 2022:235). The armed forces should therefore maintain 'a systematic application of the guidelines in all international operations with Danish participation' (ibid., 243). Special emphasis is put on the ways in which the armed forces must ensure a uniform mode for registration of local employees across areas of operation, as well as strengthen the possibility of unambiguously confirming a cooperation relationship with local partners, for example by assigning Danish ID or reference numbers (ibid., 245).

It appears from the evaluation that Denmark continuously has collected information regarding other countries' support and protection policies and practices, but also that the approach at times has been 'ad hoc', which is why the Danish authorities have not always been sufficiently updated on changes in the approaches of other countries. The Foreign Ministry was thus not aware of France having initiated evacuations already in June, that Norway had opened for transfer of representation staff around the same time, and that the UK's new support mechanism effective from April 2021 had replaced individual case management with a standard offer of relocation.

An independent analysis prepared by Sara de Jong and Dimos Sarantidis (May 2022) takes issue with the national resettlement policies aimed at former Afghan staff by comparing eight countries of the NATO-led military mission in Afghanistan in 2001-2021 (Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States). The analysis highlights that an overarching international resettlement scheme for Afghan local staff was never developed. Additionally, the lack of harmonisation has resulted in unequal treatment and a missed opportunity to learn from best practices. Interestingly, Denmark scores considerably lower in this assessment.

Regarding resettlement and protection prior to August 2021, Denmark falls short in the following areas: late and uneven introduction of resettlement routes (Canada and the US have comparatively better practices); exclusion of non-interpreters from protection resettlement (Austria, Germany and the US fare better); limited protection time (Austria, the UK and the US offer permanent relocation); high rejection rate (rejection rates in Austria, Canada, Germany and the US are comparatively lower); early expedited evacuations after the April 2021 withdrawal announcement (taken up not only by France, but also the Netherlands, the UK and the US). Already in 2019, the Dutch Parliament agreed to recognise Afghan interpreters as a systematically persecuted group which meant that they did not have to prove individual threaths anymore (de Jong and Sarantidis, 2022:7).

Regarding the evacuation phase beginning 29 August 2021, Denmark is highlighted for having quite clear criteria for evacuation. However, Denmark starts the evacuation quite late and adheres to narrow eligibility criteria (as compared to Austria, Canada, Germany, the NL, UK and US) (ibid.: 2022:12).

Regarding ongoing resettlement after August 2021, Denmark is found to provide no or only limited continuation of remaining staff (compared to all other included countries) and to continue providing only time limited protection (with Austria, the UK and the US providing permanent resident status). Only Canada seems to systematically include extended family members beyond the nuclear family (ibid.:15). The Netherlands continued resettling interpreters who worked for the Dutch forces after the evacuation ended, and unlike Denmark, they have not returned to the requirement for the individual applicant's burden of proof. Instead, they have kept the same criteria for interpreters as those employed during the evacuation.

The Afghan LEIs generally feel unfairly treated by the Danish authorities, claiming that their assessments of being in danger are not readily believed or accepted and that the authorities have not readily assisted the LEIs. Most have had to make their own, often irregular, travel arrangements exposing themselves to additional danger, and asylum has only been granted after second decisions in the Refugee Council and with the assistance of good lawyers. They perceive the treatment in sharp contrast to the kindness and good working conditions experienced while working alongside the Danish forces. A few of those who ended up obtaining asylum in other countries have the same feelings. Those entering Denmark during the evacuation also feel cheated. According to the Danish authorities, over 900 Afghans have applied for temporary residence in Denmark under the special evacuation law. Of these, 828 have been granted temporary residence for two years. Most have waited up to seven months in asylum centres after which time they feel left with 'poorer prospects than "ordinary" asylum seekers'. They cannot take asylum for granted and two years of temporary protection status is considered way to short. In mid-June 2022, around 201 evacuated Afghans decided to relocate to the US, where they were offered permanent residence.

Table 1 summarises the status for the management of Afghan Interpreters in Denmark.

Table 1.

Status for the management of Afghan interpreters in Denmark[2]	Dec. 2014	June 2021	Dec. 2021	June 2022
Inquiries by interpreters out of the 195+	151	173	248	394
Total cases handled	-	139	187	2,648[3]
Reimbursement for interpreters' expenses for self-arranged security solutions	17	23	23	-
Local solution	7	10	10	98
UK relocation	23	23	23	23+
Offered VISA to DK to apply for asylum	10	17	19	926[4]
Wage package	-	1	1	-
Rejections (interpreters not covered by the agreement on management of interpreters)	42	59	60	2,402[5]
Granted asylum in DK	6	9	9	9+?[6]

BEST PRACTICE

Below we list some country specific best practice examples that might inspire future development of the Danish operational practice.[7]

Revising procedures. The Danish Interpreter Agreement is modelled on the British Ex-Gratia Scheme and Intimidation Policy. This British model was deemed inadequate by the UK Government. In replacement of the Intimidation Policy, the ARAP scheme was implemented in April 2021 offering relocation to UK or other assistance to Afghans assisting the British Armed Forces in Afghanistan. From September 2021, Afghans relocated to the UK are immediately given permanent permission to remain in the UK (as opposed to the previous permission to stay for

[2] Numbers are cumulative. Over the years, the Ministry of Defense has changed categories registered. The present box is based on the Ministry's as well as the Danish NGO 'Refugees Welcome' registrations. Minor inaccuracies may occur.

[3] Including LECs and their eligible family members during the evacuation.

[4] Including the 631 who have been granted temporary residence after the special law, of whom 438 already have applied for asylum (but none has been completed this far). The 201 Afghans who accepted the US' offer to relocate should probably be subtracted from these.

[5] The total number of rejections include LECs, and their eligible family members handled prior to and during the evacuation.

[6] See note 2.

[7] The best practice assessment draws on De Jong and Sarantidis (2022) complemented by a telephone interview with Sara de Jong. We have also consulted the Norwegian Ministry of Defence and the InZone Project's home page.

up to five years after which Indefinite Leave to Remain could be applied for). The ARAP also allows applications from those contracted to provide linguistic services to the British Armed Forces. The Danish Interpreter Agreement does not reflect the changes subsequently made in British policy. The Danish changes made in response to the changing situation in Afghanistan during August 2021, include a special law granting two years of temporary residence in Denmark to Afghans who have worked alongside Danish troops and authorities in Afghanistan. However, this is a deterioration compared to the previous permission to stay up to five years. As argued by NGOs and veterans, humanitarian principles should guide protection models and practices.

Adequate training. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the University of Geneva's InZone Project have highlighted the need for training. Norway has implemented a formal preparation course for local interpreters that entails language preparation and indispensable skills such as self-defence training and weapons usage.

Employment administration and eligibility of contracted staff. Some countries have made efforts to avoid that the pressure is put on the applicant to prove their employment history if they have been subcontracted through private companies. In the UK, the ARAP scheme was implemented in 2021 after pressure from civil society. An expansion of the scheme allows subcontracted interpreters to apply as opposed to originally only allowing for applications from LECs directly employed by the UK. Similarly, the Special Immigrant Visa programmes in the US include all LECs who have worked on behalf of the US even though they were subcontracted.

Recognition. To recognise and honour the service of local interpreters, some countries, such as New Zealand and France, have awarded medals.[8] Awarding protection in the form of relocation remains the ultimate form of recognition.

Special treatment upon arrival. Relocation requires adequate reception, fast case processing and integration efforts. In the UK, a government funded support package named 'Operation Warm Welcome' makes various special opportunities available to relocated Afghans, including LEIs. Free English courses and 300 university scholarships are offered to Afghan interpreters and their families under the ARAP scheme.[9] The support scheme additionally offers access to accommodation, health services and employment. Similar schemes could be developed in association with civil society in Denmark.

Mentor programmes and mental health aid. In Germany, the MoD has set up a mentor programme matching active military and soldiers with relocated Afghan LEIs to provide additional support with finding housing, employment and a social network. Driven by veteran charities in the UK and the military trade union in the Netherlands, similar initiatives might be underway, with anticipated financial support from these countries' MoDs. The purpose of the initiative is to benefit

[8] See https://www.sulha-alliance.org/what-we-do/research.
[9] See : https://www.britishcouncil.org/study-work-abroad/in-uk/warm-welcome-scholarships

both Afghan interpreters and former and active military who may have experienced re-traumatisation by the fall of Afghanistan.[10]

[10] See https://www.sulha-alliance.org/about-us/partners.

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