



Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP

Secretary of State for the Home Office

Subject: A call for exemption of Afghan students, in particular, women, from the visa ban announced by the Home Office in March 2026

30 July 2026

Dear Home Secretary,

We, a group of human rights and education-focused organisations in the UK, express deep concern regarding the issuance of the “emergency visa brake”, announced by the UK Home Office in March 2026 for citizens of four countries, including Afghanistan.

While we acknowledge the Home Secretary’s concerns over potential misuse of the asylum system and appreciate the new legal route for refugees announced by the Secretary in June 2026, we believe refusal of student visas based on nationality is concerning and has a devastating impact on some of the most talented and bright individuals from vulnerable contexts.

Among other countries, we would like to draw your attention to Afghanistan, whose student population forms only a small proportion of international students in the UK. According to the data from the [Higher Education Statistics Agency](#) (HESA), the UK hosted only 355 students from Afghanistan in the 2024/2025 academic year. Moreover, Afghan students have had the [highest](#) representation among the four affected countries in the prestigious Chevening Scholarship Programme, which conducts rigorous assessments, including scholars' intention to return home.

The ban is particularly devastating for Afghan women and girls, who have been barred from accessing education beyond the sixth grade for almost five years now. Despite the heavy restrictions, Afghan women and girls have fought back and found studying abroad, including in the UK, as one of the pathways to continue their education. A number of organisations in this group have closely witnessed the hard work and dedication of some of the most talented students who have secured admission to UK universities despite all the challenges. They have been disappointed by the announcement of the visa brake.

It is essential to note that the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan is exceptionally difficult and unique, which requires a united global response and solidarity instead of further restrictions.

Countries such as Denmark and Sweden have [announced](#) that Afghan women qualify for protection based on their nationality and gender.

Given this unique situation, we humbly request the Home Secretary to reconsider the decision and exempt Afghan students, especially women, from the visa ban. We also recommend that the Home Office engage with civil society organisations to create safe pathways to education for individuals from crisis-affected countries, especially Afghan women and girls.

Yours sincerely,

Signed by the following

Rawadari

Daanish

Afghanistan Education Action (AEA)

Amala

Charmaghz

HAMRAH Network

Education Bridge for Afghanistan (EBA)

