

**Press release:**

**“It was my only option”: MMC launches the first of a series of interviews with Afghans evacuated to Italy**

***As public and media attention towards Afghanistan fades, Afghan evacuees in Italy worry for loved ones left behind and contend with an uncertain future ahead***

Since the takeover of Afghanistan by Taliban forces in August 2021, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been displaced across Afghanistan and across borders. The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) has [been following the development of the situation](#) and called for [solidarity and strong commitments](#) of the European Union and other Western states to facilitate regular, effective, and accessible migration and asylum pathways for Afghans.

A group that received particular attention are the Afghans who have been evacuated to Europe. Past the summertime, public and media attention around Afghan evacuees, as well as those on the move has significantly died down, despite the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which is expected to worsen further over the winter. Thousands of evacuees remain scattered across several European countries, where they are trying to rebuild their lives, following the developments at home from afar. Many remain separated from loved ones back in Afghanistan and struggle to live a new life despite reaching safety and protection.

*“[My children] are still at home and not going to school (...). My daughter cannot even go out of the house because they are afraid of Taliban soldiers (...). My wife is a teacher (...) but she has also lost her job since the Taliban came to Mazar. I am not sure she should go back to work, because it is really dangerous. Even if [the Taliban] let the girls and women teachers go to school, few dare to send their girls to school”, said Abdul, who flew to Italy from Kabul in August.*

Italy was among the European countries receiving the highest number of Afghan evacuees since August 2021, taking in more than 5,000 people. The Italian prime minister said that helping Afghans was a “moral duty for everyone”. But what comes next for Afghan evacuees in Italy? What is it like to seek asylum or other forms of humanitarian protection? What challenges and opportunities do they face in their socio-economic integration path? What are their expectations, their future aspirations and intentions?

*“We don’t know the culture, we don’t know the rules, and I don’t know how I should learn these things.”* said Noor who left Afghanistan again after returning there from Iran in 2015

*“We want to integrate into society quickly. We don't want to be a burden on the government (...). If the country has brought us here (...) we want to contribute (...). They brought us here and they have given us this place too. So, we are staying in Italy and that's my plan”,* said Mohammed, who arrived with his wife in Italy.

Through a series of interviews, the MMC will follow the paths of five Afghan asylum seekers in Italy over the course of the next year, interviewing the same individuals every four months. The project's aim is to provide unique insights into the experiences, choices and challenges which Afghans face on their protection and integration path in Italy and beyond. It is a call to the Italian and European public and media, to uphold attention towards the protection and integration needs of Afghans who have reached safety, as well as the rights and needs of Afghans forced to undertake perilous journeys to safety.

*“(Taliban) are against women working, they are against freedom, they are against minorities. Hazara and Shia are in particular danger because they think we are not Muslim. [...] In some provinces (...) Taliban are forcing Hazaras to leave their home. And if they don't leave their home in 3 nights, they would burn their home with them inside. This is the situation in Afghanistan”,* says Noor, who was living in Kabul before she was evacuated.

*“Afghanistan will not be in peace (...). We struggled for our education, for our rights. We built our home (...). And then, after 20 years again we were back in the same situation”,* says Laila, who left Afghanistan with her three sisters.

The interviews are being conducted in parallel to ongoing surveys, through the MMC 4Mi data collection initiative, with Afghans in [Turkey](#) and [Greece](#), to better understand their experiences, specifically the protection risks and needs they face while on the move.

*“Since summer, public and media attention around Afghan evacuees, as well as those on the move seems to be fading away. Support to Afghans across Europe who are trying to rebuild their lives is still very much needed, as well as solidarity and strong commitments for regular, effective and accessible migration and asylum pathways for Afghans on the move,”* said Roberto Forin, MMC Global Programme Coordinator.

*“We commend the Italian government on its commitment to evacuation operations. Afghan evacuees who are already in Italy now need all our support and guidance on integration processes that will allow them to start new lives for themselves and their family members. Social and economic pathways for inclusion must remain a priority to allow Afghans to contribute their skills and knowledge”* said Giulia Spagna, Country Director of the Danish Refugee Council in Italy.

**For interview requests (English, French, Italian) and further information, please contact:**

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**Notes to Editors:**

*MMC conducted the first series of interviews between October and November 2021, with five people who were evacuated to Italy. Participants represent different ethnicities, religions, genders and age groups, in an effort to gain a wider overview of the Afghan displacement experience. Their identity and personal information have been treated with strict confidentiality.*