

Frequently asked questions (FAQ) on the protection of Afghan journalists

As of February 2022

Is Germany currently taking in journalists from Afghanistan?

RSF Germany welcomes any announcements by the EU and the new German government to plan to set up further admission programmes for people in Afghanistan who are in danger. RSF Germany will continue to work hard to ensure that these programmes include journalists at risk, and that they are swiftly implemented. Unfortunately, at this stage we cannot say how long it will take for these programmes to begin, or what form they will take. Please check our website regularly for updates. However, until the German government clearly communicates what the priorities of these programmes will be and how the relevant authorities can be informed about those who are particularly at risk, it is not possible for us to deal with individual enquiries or offer advice on individual cases.

What is the "human rights list" ([Menschenrechtsliste](#))?

After Kabul fell to the Taliban on 15 August 2021, the German Foreign Office began receiving notifications about people in danger and started compiling a list of persons identified by the German government as being particularly at risk, referred to as the "human rights list". When the international forces withdrew at the end of August, the authorities stopped adding names and the list was closed. Then in September the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) issued approvals for admission to Germany to 2,600 human rights activists, artists, scientists, journalists and other persons deemed to be at risk. These 2,600 people and their families are to be granted a humanitarian residence permit in Germany, which means they will not have to apply for asylum. It is not yet clear how many journalists are on this list.

How can I, or journalists I know, get on the list?

The German government "closed" the human rights list at the end of August. It is therefore no longer possible to have further persons added to the list. RSF Germany is intensively lobbying the new German government to persuade it to set up additional admission and protection programmes. However, the decision lies with the government.

Can RSF Germany evacuate me?

Unfortunately, RSF Germany cannot issue approvals for admission and therefore cannot evacuate people from Afghanistan. Only the state authorities can issue visas. However, the organization will continue its intense efforts to lobby the new German government for the creation of new humanitarian admission programmes.

I received an approval for admission. What happens now?

If the Federal Government has already allocated you a reference number or if you have concrete indications that such a number is available, the RSF Germany Assistance Desk team can offer you advice and support regarding the next steps for coming to Germany. So

far, the German Government has made it possible for only a few persons on the list to leave Afghanistan; a coalition of various civil society organisations and actors has assumed responsibility for this task since August. As soon as journalists and their families arrive in a third country the visa procedures can be initiated and the onwards journey to Germany planned. The respective foreign missions and, depending on the third country, the German development agency GIZ are now also involved in this process. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) manages the reception and distribution of those evacuated from Afghanistan after their arrival in Germany, assigning them to certain municipalities where they are provided with accommodation and funds to cover their basic needs for up to three years. Humanitarian admission in accordance with Section 22 of the German Residence Act grants those who have been admitted access to work, language and integration courses and freedom to travel, as well as a free choice of place of residence as soon as they are able to finance themselves independently.

What is RSF Germany doing to support the evacuation of at-risk journalists?

RSF Germany does not evacuate journalists on its own but works with various civil society partners, the Federal Foreign Office and federal government and regional authorities, offering advice, support and mediation. An important part of its work is screening and verifying the calls for help that reach RSF Germany via email, social media, WhatsApp and other communication channels. The number of calls for help is increasing on all channels – by the end of 2021 we had received around 15,000 requests via the dedicated email addresses alone. Those journalists who have been evacuated to Germany continue to receive support and advice from RSF Germany once they are here. Despite the recruitment of new members of staff, the Assistance Desk team is working at the limit of its capacities and is therefore not able to provide individual counselling for new enquiries.

What has RSF Germany achieved so far?

147 Afghan journalists who were particularly at risk, as well as their families, have received concrete approvals for admission from the German government. RSF Germany forwarded these cases to the German Federal Foreign Office at the end of August as part of a list of names compiled over a two-week period. Five months after the fall of Kabul, with the support of RSF Germany more than half of these people and their immediate family members have already been able to leave Afghanistan and enter Germany. Once here, they continue to receive advice and guidance from RSF Germany. Other journalists and their families are currently in transit countries, mainly Pakistan and Iran, but also Qatar, Turkey and Albania.

Who is paying for all this?

So far, the German government has not supported the evacuate of those identified as particularly at risk on its "human rights list". Of all the cases of journalists who have already been able to leave the country managed by RSF Germany, only two people and their families were evacuated from Afghanistan with direct help from the German government: a journalist as part of the military airlift in August and another family at the end of November, with the help of GIZ.

RSF Germany, in cooperation with the [Kabul Luftbrücke](#) initiative, finances the journey to Pakistan, either on a civilian or chartered flight or by land, as well as the subsequent stay in

Islamabad. The rest of the journey is then supported by GIZ. Other journalists have fled to neighbouring countries on their own initiative. Once in Iran, Tajikistan or Turkey, they are provided with the essentials and then flown to Germany at the expense of RSF Germany and its partner organisations. Other people who have received support from RSF Germany were evacuated with the help of international NGOs or the US military and then provided with logistical and in many cases financial support to continue their journey from third countries such as Qatar or the United Arab Emirates.

By the end of 2021, RSF Germany had spent around 150,000 euros on emergency aid for Afghan journalists. About two-thirds of this sum was financed by donations. At around 91,000 euros, airfares were by far the biggest expense; another 40,000 euros went towards covering personnel costs. Faced with an enormous number of requests for help, RSF Germany quickly expanded its Assistance Desk team and focused on recruiting staff with relevant language skills and knowledge of the country. Payments to cover the living costs of at-risk journalists on their way to Germany made up only a relatively small portion of the overall costs.

In view of the increasingly dangerous humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, it is vital that international media advocacy NGOs coordinate their efforts with aid organisations as quickly as possible. Providing direct support to employees of the country's collapsed media sector, who have now been out of work for several months, exceeds the capacities of organisations whose main mandate is to protect press freedom, freedom of information and journalists who are in danger specifically because of their journalistic activities.

What is RSF Germany calling on the new German government to do?

- The federal government must organise the safe evacuation of journalists by issuing approvals for admission, implement these operations and cover the costs this incurs. The responsibility for this process must not be shifted onto civil society organisations such as Reporters Without Borders.
- Information about further evacuations and details of the procedures must be made available to those at risk and to the organisations supporting them as quickly as possible. Civil society actors must have fixed contact persons.
- In negotiations with the Taliban and in consultation with the international community, the German government should work to protect journalists in Afghanistan and to ensure that those who are particularly at risk are brought to safety. Furthermore, agreements with Afghanistan's neighbouring countries are needed to enable journalists at risk to enter these countries and continue their journey to Germany. To facilitate admissions from the neighbouring countries to Germany, consular sections must be provided with sufficient staff and resources, additional chartered flights must be organised, and visas issued on arrival in Germany.
- Admission pursuant to [Section 22 sentence 2 of the Residence Act](#) for reasons of international law or on urgent humanitarian grounds must also be open to people who have not yet been able to register with the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office must continue to compile lists of persons particularly at risk, i.e. the granting of approvals for admission to this group of persons must continue.
- A federal admissions programme for journalists at risk and other vulnerable groups according to [Section 23 \(2\) of the Residence Act](#) must be put in place. The individual *Länder* of Germany should support this process by declaring their willingness to take in these people.
- With the Taliban in power, anyone in the country who has relatives living in the West is at risk. According to reports from Afghanistan, targeted searches for people belonging to this group have already been carried out. The government must

therefore simplify and accelerate family reunification procedures so that, for example, also unmarried adult children and parents can receive an approval for admission.

- To facilitate the admission of relatives of Afghans living in Germany irrespective of the latter's residence status in Germany and the degree of kinship, the governments of the German *Länder* should set up their own *Land* admission programmes in accordance with Section 23 (1) of the Residence Act – as they did for the relatives of Syrian refugees – and the Federal Ministry of the Interior should approve these programmes.
- RSF Germany is constantly receiving calls for help from people of the Afghan diaspora living in Germany who are worried about relatives who are journalists in Afghanistan and can no longer work there safely. In these cases, persons beyond the immediate family should be considered for travel to Germany.
- At the same time, it is also vital to offer Afghan journalists living in Germany secure prospects for the future. To this end, an indefinite ban on deportations as well as provisions regulating their right to stay are needed. Funding should also be made available for exile media programmes, which both provide career opportunities and give the people in Afghanistan as well as Afghans living in exile in Germany access to information.