



## High-Level Forum on protecting Afghans at risk (07.10.2021)

### Intervention by Jean Asselborn, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Minister for Immigration and Asylum

Ylva, Josep, let me begin by warmly thanking you for organizing this Forum. The situation in Afghanistan calls for an imminent and coordinated response from all of us. We need to find both short-term and long-term solutions and put in place different kinds of protection pathways for the most vulnerable Afghans.

The sad reality is that the list of people that are at risk has become far too long (and is not exhaustive): single women, children, judges and prosecutors, artists, activists, human rights defenders, sportsmen, former collaborators of international, European or non-governmental organizations, law enforcement officers...

Regional protection of the most vulnerable should be the centerpiece of our engagement. Neighboring countries, like Iran and Pakistan, have been welcoming refugees from Afghanistan for many years. Let us also not forget the millions of internally displaced persons inside the country. With this in mind, the international community needs to show its solidarity in addressing the dramatic consequences of the situation in Afghanistan. As the European Union, we should be on the forefront of these efforts.

It goes without saying that we must support UNHCR, a key protection actor and indispensable in the context of resettlement activities, as well as IOM and other actors working in the field, so that they can build necessary capacities and needed resources. They have the boots on the ground!

As a Minister of a Member State, small in geographical terms, but less so with regard to welcoming vulnerable people, I would like to share some of our recent experiences.

Welcoming people from diverse backgrounds certainly poses challenges. The situation in Luxembourg is not perfect. However, Luxembourg invests a lot in order to become a good example, believing that diversity is enriching to a host society. It is clear that people who arrive in a Member state face challenges when starting a new life, such as getting accustomed with the local culture and language or becoming independent. This can take several years, and therefore a support network needs to be in place.

As an example for successful integration, the case of a young man from Yemen immediately comes to my mind. He arrived three years ago in Luxembourg. As he speaks farsi, he is now actively engaged with newly arrived asylum seekers, including many from Afghanistan, to help them integrate into our society as well.

Between 2015 and 2020, we succeeded in doubling our reception capacities, from 2.000 beds offered in 2015 to 4.000 beds available in 2021. An enhanced cooperation with our municipalities (even if those municipalities are not obliged to host applicants for international protection on their territory) and the Public Building Administration has been key. This cooperation, and a future implication of non-state actors in providing integration support, is the right way forward.

Since mid-August, we have made continuous efforts to assist Luxembourgish residents of Afghani origin and vulnerable Afghan nationals in distress. In cooperation with our European partners, and particularly our Benelux partners, whom I would like to thank, we managed to evacuate more than 40 people, 30 of whom have already started a new life chapter in our country. Among those evacuated are also staff from the European Union Delegation in Kabul and NATO, along with their family members. We are also processing the admission of further 30 people. I am glad that the next arrivals are already planned for the end of this week. In total, we are ready to accept as a first step globally 50 additional Afghans at risk. We will focus on family reunification.

In order to step up coordination, I can fully subscribe to the idea to quickly set up a European coordination for vulnerable people identified by Member States based on national lists. We need a European inventory that brings together the different requests addressed to Member states. The assistance of EU agencies in providing operational support, but also with the screening of cases is of importance as well.

Ylva, I would like to fully support your initiative to establish a multi-annual Support Scheme for Afghans at Risk and to equip it with sufficient financial and operational assistance outside the classic resettlement scheme. For some countries, including Luxembourg, it is indeed important that this support is not only provided for all types of admissions, such as humanitarian admission and family reunification, but also for integration support and building new infrastructures. This will incentivize those who want to participate, but are struggling with fully crowded capacities.