

Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

**Re: The Home Office announcement of a ‘visa brake’ affecting students from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan**

Dear Home Secretary,

The Universities of Sanctuary network, which now includes more than one third of UK universities, writes to express deep concern regarding the Home Office decision to introduce an “emergency brake” on student visas for nationals of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan from 26 March 2026.

Universities of Sanctuary are Higher Education institutions formally recognised for their commitment to creating welcoming, safe, and accessible places of study for people seeking sanctuary. Across the UK, universities in our network have developed dedicated scholarships, fee waivers and support programmes enabling students displaced by war, persecution and political instability to continue their education.

Evidence indicates that the proposed measure is very unlikely to achieve its intended objective. Analysis published by the immigration law and policy platform [Free Movement](#) shows that students from the four countries affected make up only a tiny proportion of the UK’s overall international student population. Restricting access to student visas for these groups will therefore do little to address wider asylum pressures.

What the policy will do, however, is remove one of the few remaining official routes through which talented students from conflict-affected countries can access world class education and rebuild their futures. Students who secure humanitarian and sanctuary scholarships from UK universities are typically among the most academically outstanding applicants in highly competitive global selection processes. Preventing students from these four countries from travelling to the UK risks denying some of the brightest young people the opportunity to continue their education and contribute their skills and knowledge to society.

The policy will also have immediate consequences for universities and students who have already invested significant effort in creating and accessing these pathways. Prospective students who have secured university places - including recipients of humanitarian scholarships and even the prestigious Government-funded Chevening scholarship scheme - will now be unable to begin their studies. Institutions that have worked in partnership with civil society and

international organisations to support displaced learners will see these programmes undermined.

International students - including those from the countries affected - make invaluable contributions to academic life, scholarship, and the wider university community. Imposing nationality-based restrictions not only diminishes opportunities for these talented individuals but also undermines the quality, diversity, and richness of the learning experience of the whole university community.

Higher Education has long played a vital role in restoring opportunity and stability for those whose education has been disrupted by war and displacement. The Universities of Sanctuary network believes strongly that maintaining safe pathways to study is both a humanitarian imperative and a strategic investment in global stability, knowledge exchange and the UK's international reputation as a leader in higher education.

We therefore urge the Home Office to reconsider the introduction of this visa brake and to engage with the higher education sector on approaches that preserve access to education for those who have already overcome extraordinary barriers to reach it.

We also support [proposals from partner organisations](#) including [Refugee Education UK](#) and [Mosaik Education](#) for a sustainable humanitarian student pathway, expanded transnational education and scholarship opportunities, and clear protections for students from the affected countries already studying in the UK. We urge the Government to engage with these proposals and work with universities and civil society to safeguard access to education.

At a time of unprecedented global displacement, safeguarding access to education is not only consistent with the UK's legal and moral commitments; it is essential to building a society that remains open, compassionate and committed to opportunity for all.

Yours sincerely,  
Universities of Sanctuary Network