

UK Secretly relocates Afghans after major data breach



Published on July 15, 2025

Document Date: Sun, Apr 26 2026 04:01:16 am

Category: ,English,International - ,Snippets

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LONDON, July 15 – The British government has confirmed that over 4,500 Afghans were quietly relocated to the United Kingdom under a classified resettlement scheme following a major data breach in 2022.

The breach occurred when a Ministry of Defence (MoD) official mistakenly emailed a spreadsheet outside secure government systems. The document contained names, contact details and family

information of nearly 19,000 Afghans who had applied to move to the UK under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (Arap), placing many at potential risk from the Taliban.

The previous government only became aware of the breach in August 2023 when leaked details surfaced on Facebook. A special relocation programme, known as the Afghan Relocation Route, was initiated in response but kept entirely secret under a court-issued super-injunction. This legal order also prevented public knowledge of the injunction itself.

Details became public only after a High Court judge lifted the gagging order, citing serious concerns about government transparency and democratic accountability. Justice Chamberlain noted the risk that Taliban affiliates may have accessed the leaked data.

Defence Secretary John Healey issued an apology in Parliament, calling the incident a “serious departmental error.” The government confirmed that affected individuals were only notified this week and urged to take digital safety precautions.

The MoD acknowledged that approximately 600 Afghan soldiers and 1,800 family members named in the breach remain in Afghanistan. Although the scheme is now being wound down, existing relocation commitments will be honored.

The secret programme has already cost £400 million and is projected to reach nearly £850 million.

A government review described it as a significant humanitarian effort despite limited evidence

that the leak directly led to harm.

Legal and political criticism continues to mount, with experts calling the breach a grave failure of responsibility and data protection.