



Thousands of Afghans were moved to UK in secret scheme after data breach

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A major security lapse within the UK government has been brought to light, revealing how the personal details of nearly 19,000 Afghans who applied for relocation were accidentally leaked in 2022. The breach, which exposed individuals at risk of Taliban reprisals, prompted the creation of a secret resettlement program that has already relocated thousands to Britain. The details of the leak and the covert scheme only emerged after a High Court lifted a gagging order, sparking questions about accountability and the handling of sensitive information during one of the UK's most complex evacuation efforts.

Thousands of Afghans have moved to the UK under a secret scheme which was set up after a British official inadvertently leaked their data, it can be revealed. In February 2022, the personal details of nearly 19,000 people who had applied to move to the UK after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan were leaked. The previous government learned of the breach in August 2023 when some of the details appeared on Facebook.

A new resettlement scheme for those on the leaked list was set up nine months later and has seen 4,500 Afghans arrive in the UK so far. But the existence of the leak and relocations were kept secret after the government obtained a super-injunction stopping it from becoming public.

Details of the major data breach, the response and the number of Afghans granted the right to live in the UK as a result only came to light recently after a High Court judge ruled the gagging order should be lifted.

The leak contained the names, contact details and some family information of people potentially at risk of harm from the Taliban. Downing Street would not confirm whether the official responsible for the leak had faced disciplinary action, with a spokesman saying they would not comment on individuals.

The government also revealed on Tuesday:

- The MoD believes 600 Afghan soldiers included in the leak, plus 1,800 of their family members, are still in Afghanistan
- The scheme is being closed down, but relocation offers already made to those who remain in Afghanistan will be honoured
- The secret scheme - officially called the Afghan Relocation Route - has cost £400m so far, and is expected to cost a further £400m to £450m
- The breach was committed mistakenly by an unnamed official at the MoD
- People whose details were leaked were only informed this week.

Speaking in the House of Commons, Defence Secretary John Healey offered a "sincere apology" to those whose details had been included in the leak, which came to light when some appeared on Facebook. He said it was as a result of a spreadsheet being emailed "outside of authorized government systems", which he described as a "serious departmental error" - though the Metropolitan Police decided a police investigation was not necessary. Healey said the leak was "one of many data losses" related to the Afghanistan evacuation during that period, and contained the names of senior military officials, government officials and MPs.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch apologized on behalf of her party. She told LBC: "Somebody made a terrible mistake, and names were put out there... and we are sorry for that. That should not happen."

In a 2024 High Court judgement made public on Tuesday, Mr Justice Chamberlain said it was "quite possible" that some of those who saw parts of the leaked document in a Facebook group "were Taliban infiltrators or spoke about it to Taliban-aligned individuals." It had earlier

been feared the number of people at risk of death or serious harm because they appeared on the list, or because their family member did, could be as high as 100,000.