

## Afghans Offered Compensation After UK Defence Data Breaches

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Afghans whose personal details were mistakenly exposed by the UK Ministry of Defence during the 2021 evacuation from Afghanistan are being offered up to £4,000 each in compensation, the government confirmed on Friday.

The breaches affected 277 people, many of whom had worked with British forces and were in hiding from the Taliban at the time. Their names and email addresses were inadvertently shared in mass communications during the final stages of the UK's withdrawal, as the Arap relocation scheme worked to identify those eligible for resettlement.

The most serious error occurred in September 2021 when an email was sent without using the blind carbon copy (Bcc) function, allowing recipients to see each other's identities. Two similar mistakes were later found during an internal review. Given the risks many faced, the breach raised immediate concerns about their safety.

Defence Minister Luke Pollard acknowledged the impact of the error, saying he could not undo what happened but promised the compensation would be issued "as quickly as reasonably practical." The total cost is expected to reach £1.6 million, separate from the £350,000 fine the Ministry later received from the Information Commissioner's Office.

The compensation offer comes after sustained legal pressure and concerns raised by advocacy groups and legal teams representing those affected. Sean Humber, a lawyer with Leigh Day, said the announcement lacked detail and that affected individuals had not been consulted in advance. One of his clients reportedly spent five months in hiding in Kabul with his family, fearful that the Taliban had learned of his cooperation with UK forces.

The government said the payments are intended to recognise the distress caused and form part of a broader effort to improve internal data

practices. Pollard stated that the Ministry is focused on better training and systems to avoid future breaches.

In 2023, the Information Commissioner, John Edwards, said the breach had “let down those to whom our country owes so much.” While the original fine was £1 million, it was later reduced in light of mitigation efforts and a revised approach to penalising public sector bodies.

Earlier this week, the government announced the closure of the Arap scheme to new applicants, saying it had fulfilled its purpose after resettling over 21,000 Afghans in the UK. Resources, it said, would now shift toward other national security priorities.