

16 January 2019

Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
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Secretary of State

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 2nd January 2019 on the repatriation of forced marriage victims following articles in *The Times*. As I outlined in my letter of 8th January, I have decided that, from now on, none of those who are assisted by the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) - and would previously have been offered a loan - will have to cover the costs of their repatriation. This is to recognise that victims of forced marriage will often have travelled abroad against their wishes, or under false pretences. Our treatment of vulnerable Britons abroad should always be guided by compassion.

The joint Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) provides support and advice for victims, those at risk, and relevant professionals. Support offered ranges from providing information and guidance to organising rescue and repatriation to the UK for victims overseas.

Since 2010, the Government has significantly strengthened the law by introducing a specific criminal offence of forced marriage, lifelong anonymity for victims, and criminalising the breach of a Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO). To date, almost 1,600 FMPOs have been issued to safeguard those at risk and assist with repatriating victims.

I am writing now to respond to your more detailed questions. You asked:

- “How many women in such circumstances have been charged in each of the last five years?”
- What the average costs charged in each year were; and what was the highest amount charged in each year?
- How many women currently owe money relating to these charges, and what the average amount is of such debt?”

The table below provides the figures for emergency loans, issued as a last-resort to victims of forced marriage, or potential victims at risk of forced marriage, since 2013 (male and female).¹ These figures are based on best available data:

¹ On average, 20% of the cases the FMU encounter involve male victims

Year	No. Of Loans	No. Of Outstanding Loans (Pre 9th Jan announcement)	Value Of Loans (£)	Outstanding Amount (£) (Pre 9th Jan announcement)	Average Loan Amount (£)	Highest Loan Amount (£)
2013	8	3	3,945.46	1,009.50	493.18	826.00
2014	5	1	3,044.27	107.00	608.85	1,376.10
2015	5	0	2,684.25	-	536.85	701.00
2016	17 (out of a total of 1,428 cases ²)	5	9,850.29	3,517.15	579.43	1,203.40
2017	9 (out of a total of 1,196 cases)	2	6,453.15	1,480.00	717.02	922.96

From the 2013-2017 data available, we estimate 11 individuals, potentially at risk of forced marriage, had outstanding loans. But as a result of my decision to change this policy, previous forced marriage victims who had outstanding loans will have no further cost fall to them and future victims who would previously have been offered a loan will have no debt to the Government.

You also asked:

- “What costs the charges cover?”
- What the FCO’s policy is on the entering into of loan agreements to cover repatriation costs for victims of forced marriages and what the terms are of those agreements?
- What the FCO’s policy is on support for repatriation in circumstances where the victims are not able to pay and are not willing to enter into a loan agreement?
- Whether it is the policy of the FCO to confiscate the passports of those who owe it money for repatriation following forced marriages; if so, how many passports have been so held in each of the last five years; and how many are held currently?”

Until my recent announcement, the FCO’s policy on financial assistance, emergency loans, and the terms of loan agreements, has been the same for Forced Marriage Victims as for all other British nationals seeking consular assistance. I will respond with full details of the FCO’s financial assistance policy and the terms of emergency loans in my response to your other letter of 2nd January, regarding our policies on services and loans.

I can confirm however that when a British national requests consular assistance to return to the UK, emergency loans are only offered as a last resort. Our staff go to significant lengths to help individuals find other means of funding their return. We will always find alternative means of funding for those who lack capacity to agree to a

² Data for the total number of cases is only available from 2016 onwards

loan, including those who are under 18. In many cases the family cover the cost of the repatriation. For victims of forced marriage this has included the use of Forced Marriage Protection Orders to ensure the perpetrator is obliged to bear the cost where possible.

Where a loan is offered, these can be used to pay for costs directly relating to repatriation, including flights, travel documents and basic food and accommodation while waiting for a flight. The cost of each repatriation varies and is dependent on the individual's circumstances, including their age and the country that they are returning from.

When the FCO issues an emergency loan, the FCO informs Her Majesty's Passport Office, and they record that a replacement passport should not be issued until the loan is repaid in full.

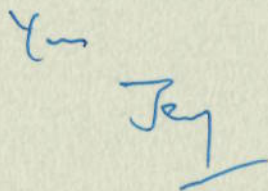
Where a loan is less than £200, the individual can retain their passport, if they have it. Where the value of the loan is over £200, the individual's passport is retained and sent to Her Majesty's Passport Office until the loan is repaid.

Where a loan is over £200, or the individual does not have their passport, the FCO issues an emergency travel document valid for a single journey to their country of residence and the cost of this document is added to the loan.

The use of Royal Prerogative to prevent a person from benefitting from the possession of a passport in these circumstances was most recently set out by then Home Secretary Theresa May in a Written Ministerial Statement in 2013 (Annex B).

As a result of my decision, I am pleased to confirm that the passports of those individuals affected will also be unblocked.

I hope I have been able to address your concerns.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J Hunt', with a horizontal line underneath.

THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP