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The plans will help women tricked into marriages abroad

Potential victims of forced marriages will be issued with pocket-sized lists of support telephone numbers under a new action plan unveiled by the government.

The small cards - which are designed so they can be hidden under clothing - will carry the numbers of consulates, police and charities who can help the victim overseas.

Other measures include a £250,000 programme to improve liaison between British and overseas police forces and training for Foreign Office staff to help them deal with victims.

The initiatives were published by the Foreign Office and Home Office in a drive to curb forced marriages of British nationals overseas.

At least 1,000 young women - many in their teens - are thought to enter marriages in other countries without their consent every year.

'Child abuse'

The proposals, contained in the document A Choice by Right, follow a Home Office report published in June, which recommended that forced marriages be treated like domestic violence or child abuse.

It was drafted by a working group which consulted widely with ethnic minority communities, voluntary and statutory

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Multicultural sensitivity
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Home Office Minister
Mike O'Brien

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organisations, and victims of forced marriages.

Women with families from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India are most likely to be affected, but the practice is also found among those with African and Middle Eastern roots.

Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien said forcing young people into marriage was a "breach of their fundamental rights" and would not be tolerated by the Government.



Mike O'Brien: forced marriages are a breach of rights

'No excuse'

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme he said: "Multicultural sensitivity is no excuse for moral blindness. The Government needs to look at the issue with entry clearance, dealing with visas."

The action plan also sets out the possibility of interviewing both parties in a newly married couple on the point of entry into the UK to see if consent has been freely given by both sides.

But Mr O'Brien said this measure had to be enforced carefully to ensure it was not seen as an extra immigration control.

Chaired by Baroness Uddin of Bethnal Green and Lord Ahmed of Rotherham, the Choice by Right group discovered that factors such as protecting family honour or religious and cultural ideals are the reasons for many forced marriages.

In June, Baroness Uddin said a change of attitude both in communities and bodies such as the police in trying to combat the problem was already taking place.

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