



## **Families Together coalition responds to alarming Home Office plans to restrict family reunion rights for refugees**

Today the Home Office has published [alarming new plans](#) for the UK asylum system which seek to restrict family reunion rights for some refugees. The plan proposes sweeping changes that undermine how the UK fulfils its international obligations to those seeking asylum, most notably by proposing differential treatment according to the way a refugee arrived in the UK.

Currently, any person granted refugee status or humanitarian protection has the right to apply for their close family members to join them in the UK under existing Immigration Rules.

The announcement today seeks to restrict access to family reunion rights for some refugees, depending on how they originally entered the UK. This new plan effectively creates a two-tier system where some refugees are punished for the way they travelled to enter the UK.

The proposals are deeply alarming as refugee family reunion provides the only safe and regular route for refugee families, who have been forced to separate because of persecution or conflict, to reunite.

The vast majority of the 5,400 visas issued in 2020 were granted to women and children, often living in insecure and dangerous places. Restricting access to this vital safe route will result in families being left with the harrowing choice of staying permanently separated from their loved ones, or embarking on treacherous, expensive, unregulated journeys to reach them in the UK.

The government must urgently reconsider this alarming proposal to ensure all refugees can access full family reunion rights, regardless of how they entered the UK. Rather than restricting family reunion rights for some refugees, the government should be seeking to increase access to family reunion for all refugees, regardless of how they entered the UK.

The [Families Together](#) coalition brings together over 50 organisations including Amnesty International, British Red Cross, Oxfam, Refugee Council, Student Action for Refugees and the Voices Network. The coalition calls on the government to change the current rules, which are already too restrictive, prior to the proposal published today.

If the government are serious in their ambition to expand 'Safe' routes they should change the existing family reunion rules, as per our recommendations below, so that more people can access this vital, existing safe route.

- **Expand the criteria of who qualifies as a family member for the purposes of refugee family reunion** allowing adult refugees in the UK to sponsor their adult children and siblings who are under the age of 25; and their parents;
- **Give unaccompanied refugee children in the United Kingdom the right to sponsor their parents and siblings who are under the age of 25** to join them under the refugee family reunion rules;
- **Reintroduce legal aid for all refugee family reunion cases.**