



## **Testimonies from the Voices Network Ambassadors about the New Plan for Immigration**

On the 24 March 2021, the UK government published The New Plan for Immigration; a series of proposals including 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. This will include restricted family reunion rights for refugees who come to the UK via irregular routes (on a small boat or in a lorry).

We have received testimonies from the Voices Network ambassadors who were successful in their family reunion applications and have been successfully reunited with their families in the UK. The majority came to the UK via an irregular route and were then granted refugee status. This allowed them to apply for refugee family reunion, to bring their partners and children to live with them in the UK. Under the government's new proposals, many of them would not have been eligible for family reunion. This risks leaving thousands of family members of refugees with little choice but to embark on dangerous journeys in order to be reunited with their family member(s) in the UK.

We asked members of the [voices network](#) about the importance of refugee family reunion and their concerns over the new proposals.

### **Anwar**

The UK government should develop a 'safer' route for refugee families to reunite by expanding the existing Family Reunion Rules rather than introducing inhumane and penalising new immigration rules. Refugees should not be penalised and made to stay separated indefinitely from their loved ones on the basis of the route they arrived to this country to claim asylum. I was forced to flee Afghanistan because of the conflict that continues to destroy the country and the consequent persecution I faced. I made a claim for asylum protection in the UK.

Leaving my wife and children and a promising career in humanitarian work behind me, I first entered the UK by plane on a visa and subsequently because of a change in my personal situation I claimed asylum. The impact of the family separation on my mental wellbeing was enormous. I was feeling suicidal. I now live happily with my family in the UK. My family's reunification was possible because of the existing refugee family reunion route which I recommend should be further expanded, so that more refugee families are able to live together with their loved ones in the UK.

The new Immigration proposal, if implemented, would further restrict refugees' access to family reunion by granting asylum seekers a Temporary Protection visa which would then prevent them from settling and force them to stay permanently separated from their families. The UK government should avoid implementing this policy. This policy would discriminate against already traumatised and vulnerable refugees who arrive in the UK through dangerous routes such as by lorry or a boat. These people are forced to take these dangerous routes due to the absence of 'safer' routes to reach safety.

The government's refugee resettlement expansion proposal is good, but I do not think the resettlement programme alone can address the protection and family reunion needs of people fleeing conflicts and human rights persecutions. Because of the absence of safe routes people escaping persecution will continue taking any available routes to reach safety. Refugees should not be penalised on the basis of the route they arrived in the UK. The UK government should expand existing safe routes.

To read more about Anwar's story [click here](#)

### **Mada**

My husband entered the UK by boat as there was no safer route for him to come to the UK to claim asylum. At the time I was with my children in Egypt. He sponsored us on the Family Reunion visa to join him in the UK when he was granted refugee status. Only a few and very lucky people enter the UK regularly by visa. Most refugees risk their lives to enter the UK by dangerous routes. The new Home Office Immigration proposal intends to penalise all refugees who enter the country by irregular routes – e.g. by boat, lorry or other. This policy will not stop people fleeing persecution from entering the UK. The reason for this is that there are no safer and legal routes available.

The proposed Temporary Protection visa will prevent refugees from reuniting with their loved ones. It will discourage refugees' integration and push many more asylum seekers and refugees into destitution and increase mental health problems. All of these factors in turn will increase the pressure on the country's public services. The Home Office's refugee resettlement programme cannot solve the problem of refugee's protection needs. Many Syrians in the refugee camps have not benefited from the resettlement programme.

The government should therefore remove the Temporary Protection visa and improve the restrictive Immigration policy and expand the family reunion rules based on the recommendations of the Families Together coalition.

To read more about Mada's story [click here](#)

### **Aziza Rashid**

I was resettled to the UK via a refugee resettlement programme from Burundi. I sponsored my husband through the UK's existing Family Reunion Rules. The resettlement and the family reunification process were both extremely difficult. Resettlement programmes do not work effectively as the UK Government's new Immigration proposal tries to make it appear. Many refugees remain indefinitely in refugee camps, and even those who are lucky to enter the UK find family reunification services often difficult to access. I do not think the proposed refugee resettlement programme is genuine in its claim to provide a safe and legal route to the UK.

<https://famiestogether.uk/>

Access to asylum protection and refugee family reunion services are already difficult in the UK. The UK government instead should expand and improve the existing safe family reunion route.

To read more about Aziza Rashid's story [click here](#)

For further testimonial accounts by ambassadors of the voices network [click here](#)

If the government is serious in their ambition to expand 'Safe' routes, they must abandon the proposal to restrict family reunion for some refugees. Rather than restricting family reunion the government should seek to expand family reunion by changing the existing family reunion, as per our recommendations below, so that more people can access this vital, existing safe route.

### **What we are calling for**

- 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