



MP Engagement- Briefing Pack

This briefing pack has been designed to support you to engage with your MP on the Nationality and Borders bill. It contains information on the bill, the potential impact of the proposals around refugee family reunion, some key statistics and case studies.

The Nationality and Borders bill was introduced to parliament on the 6th of July, with the second reading of the bill concluding on the 20th of July. At the close of the final debate, 366 MPs voted in favour of the bill, with 265 MPs voting against it.

What happens now

Parliament is in recess until Sunday September 5th, returning on Monday the 6th of September. Committee stage will commence sometime after the 21st of September running until November 4th at the latest. The exact dates are yet to be announced..

The Committee stage is the first opportunity to amend the bill and undertake line-by-line scrutiny of the bill.. Committees usually take the form of public bill committees, where a small group of MPs whose make-up reflects that of the Chamber debate the bill.. Public bill committees will usually take evidence in the way that a select committee does. In a public bill committee, MPs have to agree to each clause remaining in the bill. Each clause is debated in turn. Amendments are also debated and, if needs be, voted on

During parliamentary recess, some MPs may have more time to meet their local constituents. Regardless of availability, we would strongly recommend you to reach out to your MP now and try and arrange a meeting with them- even if this meeting is after the summer recess.

As the Families Together Coalition, we will be putting forward an amendment to the bill to ensure that **all** refugees, regardless of how they've entered the UK have full access to family reunion rights. More details about this amendment will be announced in due time.

Engaging with your MP

You can find the contact details for your local MP here;
<https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>

MP Template Letter

We have a template letter which you can use to contact your local MP, which outlines our concerns about the proposed changes to refugee family reunion outlined in the Nationality and Borders bill. We have also included 2 key asks in the letter- for a meeting with your MP and for them to sign the open letter to the Immigration Minister asking for clarity over the restrictions to refugee family reunion for group 2 refugees and expressing concerns over the impact any restriction to family reunion will have on refugees.

If you have personal experience of family reunion, feel free to add your own story to this template and describe how you were affected by the UK family reunion rules.

Arranging a Meeting with your MP

- When you send a letter to your MP, you may not receive a reply straight away. You can always follow up with your MP's constituency office by phone - check out their website for up to date contact details.
- If you know other organisations or groups working with refugees in your local area, you can always join forces and write to your MP together! Collective approaches can be very powerful when trying to persuade your MP to meet you.
- If you are still struggling to arrange a meeting with your MP, check out whether your MP is holding open 'surgeries' that you can attend. Surgeries are allocated times where MPs meet with their constituents to discuss any local concerns. Check out your MP's website to see if they have any surgery sessions coming up.

For more information on engaging with your MP and tips on meeting them please check out the Together With Refugees campaign pack here;

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1aEypSi4fqxtme1pFTwhZYgzthHnyNSIF>

Proposed Changes to Family Reunion

Clause 10 of the bill categorises refugees into two groups, Group 1 and Group 2. Group 1 refugees are those who arrive in the UK directly from a country or territory where their life or freedom was threatened, have presented themselves to the authorities without delay or where a refugee has entered or is present in the United Kingdom unlawfully, they can show good cause for their unlawful entry or presence. There is no further detail provided on what a 'good cause' would be.

Group 2 refugees are those who don't fit into the above category. This includes those arriving via irregular routes such as by lorry or by boat or those arriving after travelling through what the Government considers to be "safe" third countries."

The Bill gives the Secretary of State or an immigration officer the power to treat Group 1 and Group 2 refugees differently with regards to family reunion rights. It does not provide full details on what this will look like in practice. However it does state that this may include whether leave to enter or remain is given to members of the refugees family, the length of any period of limited

leave to enter or remain, the requirements to be met in order to be given indefinite leave to remain and whether a no recourse to public funds condition is attached to the leave.

Further, clause 59 of the bill would permit the Secretary of State to suspend, cancel or refuse family reunion visas by persons of a specific nationality on the basis that their country of origin was not in her view cooperative in receiving removals.

Key Statistics

In the last five years, over 29,000 people have arrived in the UK through existing family reunion routes, 90% of whom were women and children.

More people are able to safely come to the UK via family reunion than resettlement routes. Over the last 5 years 29,834 family reunion applications were granted, compared with 23,665 resettlement applications.

Impact of Proposed Changes

Family reunion is currently the most accessed safe and legal route. The majority of people who come to the UK on a family reunion visa are joining a sponsor who came to the UK irregularly. Restricting access to family reunion for those arriving irregular will leave thousands of women and children in more vulnerable and precarious situations.

Restrictions to family reunion rights laid out in the Nationality and Borders bill, will leave families who have been separated by war, violence and persecution facing dangerous journeys in order to be together again.

Family members are often left living in precarious and dangerous situations whilst they wait to be reunited with their sponsor. For the vast majority of those people, there is no viable alternative for them to be reunited with family members. Limiting this route therefore risks incentivising more dangerous journeys – made by people seeking to live with their family members – rather than reducing them.

If this clause (clause 10) succeeds, the number of family reunion visas issued will decrease substantially, and a vital safe route to the UK would be weakened.

Key Messages

Refugee Family Reunion is one of the key issues facing refugees in the UK. Many people who come to the UK seeking sanctuary want to be reunited with their family members. Refugee-led community organisations and organisations working directly with refugees have raised the issue of the UK's restrictive family reunion policies numerous times. The Nationality and Borders bill

sets out to restrict access to family reunion rights even further, which will make it incredibly difficult for families to reunite.

All refugees should have full and equal access to their rights regardless of how they enter the UK in accordance with the Refugee Convention which makes no allowance for such discrimination and in accordance with international human rights law which in principle prohibits such inequality. **This includes full and equal access to family reunion rights.**

Studies show that family reunion boosts integration outcomes and allows those who've come to the UK seeking safety to rebuild their lives here, together. Research has highlighted that mental health struggles including anxiety, depression, guilt and social isolation are reported amongst those who are separated from their families. Being reunited with family members leads to positive integration outcomes and provides a support system which is vital when integrating into a new community.

As previously stated, 90% of family reunion visas are granted to women and children. The government proposals would prevent thousands of vulnerable women and children from entering the UK, removing a safe and legal route from some of the most vulnerable persons.

Any restriction on family reunion rights will result in family members being left with the heartbreaking choice to either stay permanently apart, or risk their lives on treacherous journeys in order to reunite.

Case Studies

I came to the UK with my children through a family reunion visa when my husband was granted refugee status. I am originally from Syria. Together with my family because of the conflict in our country we were forced to flee to Egypt. My husband, after spending 3 years with us, continued his asylum journey to search for a safe place for his family. Our vulnerability further increased when he left. In Egypt we lived in constant fear; there were times where thieves broke into our house, and some people tried to kidnap my son. At the our son was very young. We increasingly felt insecure both at home and in the Streets.

My husband came to the UK by sea. He was granted refugee status after about 3 years waiting in the asylum system. I am grateful for the family reunion process which has enabled us to be a family again.

Being separated from my husband heavily impacted our relationship. In the three years we spent away from each other, I worked overtime and my kids would spend most of the day without me, and a big part of their childhood lacked their parents. Our children also didn't understand why their father had to be away from us for so long. That added to their feelings of abandonment and lack of safety.

The family reunion had a great impact. We felt a type of safety we haven't experienced before. My kids walked comfortably in the street; my son didn't squeeze on my hand the

entire time when we're in public. You can see from their behaviour that they felt how safe their house and environment is now.

The UK government should do more to expand the family reunion policy and increase safe routes for people escaping persecution to seek sanctuary. The new Immigration plan, if implemented through its Temporary Protection visa, is going to separate refugee families for an indefinite time and will negatively affect children and their parents.

- Mada, Voices Network Ambassador

Since my wife came to the UK my life has changed and I am able to plan and have focus in life. I am now working part-time at a hotel in Bradford and I have applied for another job at East Side. I am taking driving lessons to help with my employment. I also study at college to improve my English. When my wife first arrived, she felt very depressed. Being alone had been very difficult for her.

I started taking her to college with me and now she is much better. We are now expecting a baby and are looking to move to another house.

- Justin, Voices Network Ambassador

This plan will destroy the families and badly damage the future of refugee's children and bring a negative impact on the families' mental health. I want to ask the government and the Home Office when they put this plan if they have thought about these people? How can they integrate in the community if they are separated from their families and their loved ones?

Because of these plans asylum seekers and refugees will face lots of mental health issues and their integration hindered. All these in turn will have negative impacts on the UK society as well and I want to ask the UK government to develop a better and humane policy that sees asylum seekers and their families as humans and with dreams.

- Lucy, Voices Network Ambassador