

**FAMILIES
TOGETHER**



Local Campaigning Toolkit

Campaigning Together To Change the Rules Keeping
Refugee Families Apart

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Welcome to the Campaign



This toolkit has been designed to support you to organise, work with others and deliver campaign activity to support the Families Together Coalitions calls to expand the Refugee Family Reunion rules. Included in the toolkit is information about why we need to act, what it is you can do and some ideas and guidance for how you can campaign to maximise your impact in your local community.

The Families Together Coalition

Families Together is a coalition of over 90 organisations who are campaigning together to change the family reunion rules in the UK. The current restrictive rules leave families with an impossible choice to either stay permanently apart or to embark on dangerous journeys in order to reunite. In 2018, we worked with Angus MacNeil MP (SNP) on a Private Member's Bill in the house of commons and through our successful campaigning it secured its second reading on 16 March 2018. Throughout the political turmoil of 2019 we targeted successive Home Secretaries, delivering a petition of more

than 75,000 signatures on 5 February 2020. Unfortunately the government blocked the bill's progress and time ran out for the bill to become law. However, the public and parliamentary support behind the bill shows there is major support for expanding the rules.

The Families Together Coalition is calling for 3 changes to the current rules

- 1** Children need their parents - Child refugees in the UK must have the right to sponsor their close family. This will allow them to rebuild their lives together and integrate into their new community.
- 2** Fair treatment for young and old - The definition of who qualifies as family to be expanded so that young people who have turned 18 and elderly parents can live in safety with their families in the UK.
- 3** Bring back legal aid - The reintroduction of legal aid so refugees who have lost everything have the support they need to navigate the complicated process of being reunited with their families

The Current Political Climate

The political climate we are campaigning in is ever changing. Yet the lives of refugees and their families remain hanging in the balance. In July 2021, the government introduced the [Nationality and Borders bill](#) to parliament. The proposed legislation outlined in the bill effectively creates a discriminatory two-tier asylum system, undermining how the UK fulfils its international obligations to those seeking asylum. The Bill will criminalise and punish refugees, depending on how they arrived in the UK, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of women, men and children who are able to access family reunion, one of the few existing safe and regular routes into the UK.

Clause 10 of the bill proposes to categorise refugees into two distinct groups, with different rights depending on how they have arrived in the UK. The bill states that refugees can be treated differently depending on which group they are in. The Bill specifically mentions one of the ways those in Group 2 (those who arrive to the UK via irregular routes such as by boat or lorry) may be treated differently is to limit their access to family reunion rights. Over the last 5 years 29,834 family reunion applications were granted, compared with 23,665 resettlement applications granted. 90 percent of the family reunion visas

granted in the last 5 years went to women and children.

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. All refugees should have full and equal access to family reunion rights, regardless of how they enter the UK. For more info on the NBB [click here](#).

Now is the time to continue to build pressure on politicians to ensure MPs are aware of the harmful impact that restrictions to family reunion rights will have on refugees. We need to keep family reunion on our MPs' agendas and that of the Home Office, so we can achieve our goal to reunite refugee families as soon as possible.



Family Reunification in the UK

Imagine fleeing war, but having to leave your mum, dad, brother or sister behind during a traumatic escape. Eventually you reach safety in the UK and are allowed to stay here. But your family is still in danger. The law means they can't join you. You worry about them constantly- the uncertainty and stress mean you're unable to rebuild your life.

Right now, this is the reality for many refugees, denied the right to be with the people they love by needlessly strict UK laws. Such rules are leaving vulnerable people isolated, traumatised and alone. This must change. You can help refugees reunite with their families and put their lives back together.

Currently adult refugees can sponsor only their very closest relatives to join them- their partners and children under 18 years old. Refugee children do not have the

right to sponsor any family members to join them. This means that mothers and fathers in the UK are unable to bring their children over the age of 18 to join them; refugee children in the UK are forced to live apart from their parents; and refugees are unable to bring elderly relatives to live with them in safety.

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.

We have an opportunity to push for change together. With the stroke of a pen, the Home Secretary could change the rules. With the proposed restrictions to family reunion that have been laid out in the Nationality and Borders bill, now is the time to campaign together. We need to put pressure on our MP's to fight against any restrictions, and push for an expansion of the current rules.

The rules keeping refugee families apart are unfair. We need your support and action to change them.

Addis's Story

Addis arrived in the UK in 2008 as an asylum seeker from Eritrea. She had left behind her husband and her 5-year-old daughter back home. She received a positive decision on her asylum case about 3 months ago, 13 years after her initial application. During the waiting period, Addis was left to rely on charities for support including housing and food and was moved frequently throughout the UK.

When asked about the impact of this prolonged waiting period she said "I waited 14 years. I am tired. Everyone has a family, everyone wants to work, this is why we need a quick decision".

Speaking about her daughter was extremely painful for Addis.

"My daughter, when I left she was 5 years old and now she is 19. I don't know where she is, that's why it was important I got the paper. It broke my mind, I have pain, a lot of pain. Every day I remember her because many times I asked for a family reunion but it wasn't possible without paper. I asked organisations for help, they have looked 3 times at the Sudan border but they haven't found her. No one knows where she is. I am tired.

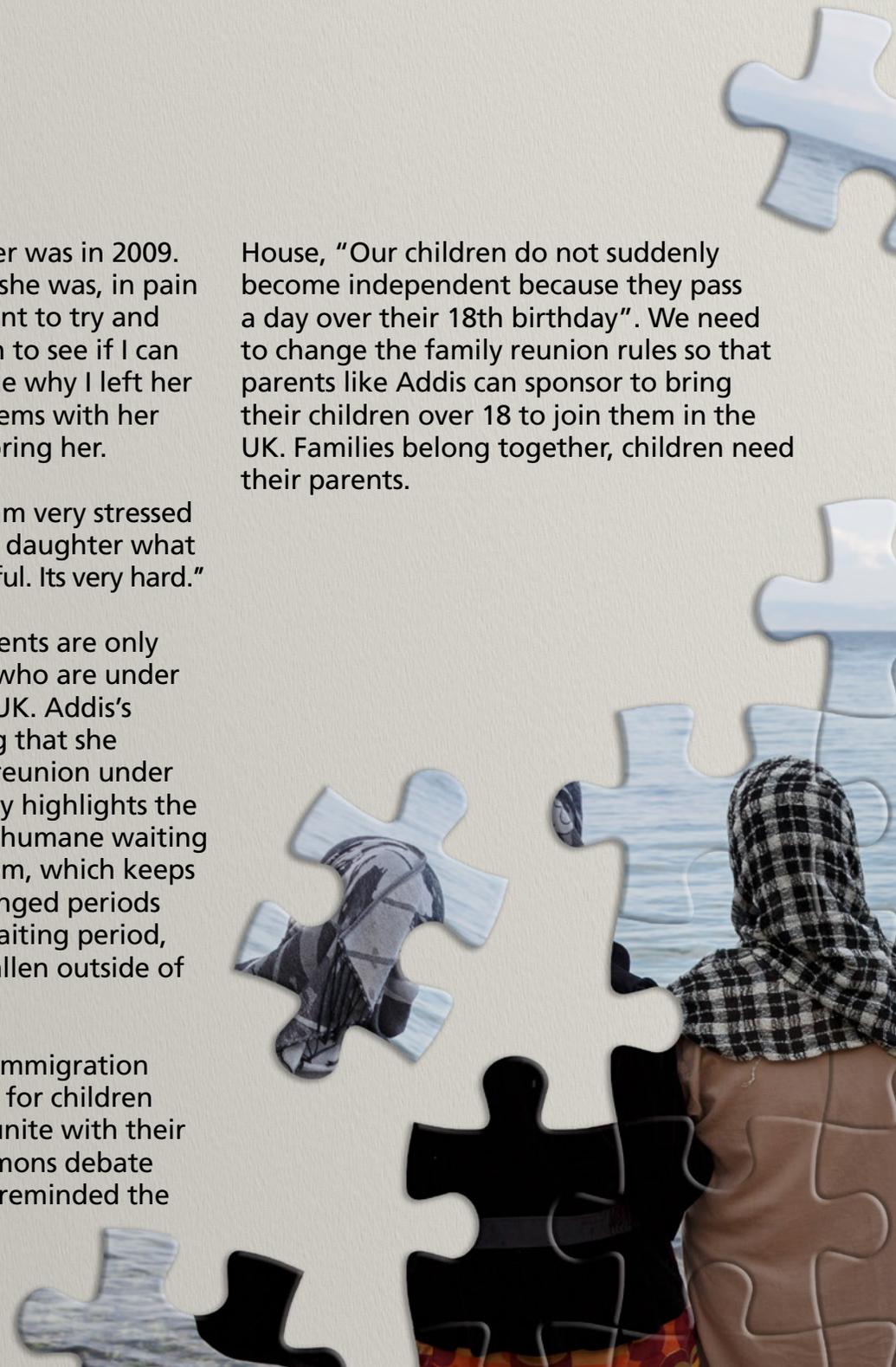
The last time I spoke with her was in 2009. My auntie told me how sad she was, in pain and crying for me a lot. I want to try and travel to Ethiopia and Sudan to see if I can find her. One judge asked me why I left her behind. She has many problems with her heart which is why I didn't bring her.

Im scared I wont find her, I am very stressed about this. If I don't find my daughter what do you do next? Its very painful. Its very hard."

Under the current rules, parents are only able to bring their children who are under 18 to join them here in the UK. Addis's daughter is now 19 meaning that she wouldn't qualify for family reunion under the current rule. Addis's story highlights the devastating impact of the inhumane waiting times in the UK asylum system, which keeps families separated for prolonged periods of time. As a result of the waiting period, Addis's daughter has now fallen outside of the family reunion rules.

MP Caroline Nokes, former immigration minister, recently advocated for children over 18 to be allowed to reunite with their family in the House of Commons debate on Afghanistan. She rightly reminded the

House, "Our children do not suddenly become independent because they pass a day over their 18th birthday". We need to change the family reunion rules so that parents like Addis can sponsor to bring their children over 18 to join them in the UK. Families belong together, children need their parents.



Take Action

Family and togetherness are at the heart of this campaign. That's why we are asking you to collect messages and stories from your community to show the community support for refugees to be reunited with their families.

1 Write to your MP

We have created a MP template letter which you can use to write to your MP and ask them to stand up for refugee families right to be reunited. The template can be found [here](#). This template is updated regularly to respond to any new policy calls or change in family reunion policy. We have also created a MP engagement pack which can be found [here](#). This pack includes key messaging and statistics as well as some tips on engaging with your MP.

To find your Local MP's contact details click here; <https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>

When writing to or emailing your MP, you will need to include your address so that the MP's office can verify that you live in their constituency.

2 Meet with your MP

Ask your MP to set up a meeting with them to discuss the importance of refugee family reunion and why the rules need to be expanded. You can do this individually or with a group of people. We are always happy to provide support prior to a meeting or to join the meeting with you. Tips on engaging with your MP and getting ready for the meeting are available in the MP engagement pack above.

3 Hold a community event

Organise an event with your local community and come together to show your support for refugee families. This could be a coffee morning, a craftivism event, a talent show, a sports day- whatever you feel. You could ask people to sign a letter to say they support refugee families and send it to your MP. There's loads of activities suitable for every age- kids could do some art around themes of family which you can also send to your MP. If you're holding a public event get in touch with us and we can see if we can support with Families Together props.

If your holding a public event

- Invite your MP to your event
- Take a photo of your MP with a campaign prop and ask them to share their support
- Share the message by inviting your local media to a photo call and share your pictures on social media

Share your messages with the hashtag [#FamiliesTogether](#)

Support for the Families Together campaign has been growing since we launched in January 2018, but to succeed, we need to show UK politicians that communities across the country care about reuniting refugee families. Support from local communities is vital in creating pressure and building public mobilisation.

Mada's Story

I am originally from Syria and came to the UK with my children through the refugee family reunion route in 2018, in order to join my husband who was then in Scotland as a refugee. Because of the conflict, my family fled Syria in 2012. I immigrated together with my mother, younger sister, husband and our two children to Egypt. My youngest child was a baby – only three months old at the time.

In Egypt life was expensive and I had to work to earn living for the family. We were living in rented accommodation, which felt very insecure. The area we lived in was very crowded, and we experienced incidents of robbery. My mother would look after the children while I was at work.

My mother is over 60 years old, we fled Syria and lived together for 6 years in Egypt. My mother would look after the children while I was at work. I worked two part-time jobs; in the absence of their father and a mother, who was mostly away from home due to work and to earn a living, for my children my mother was everything for them – she is their mother and we are a family. The current UK law does not treat elderly parents like my mother as a member of the family unit and

hence when my husband got his refugee status, we were forced to start the family reunification application process without my mother. This was really really difficult and hard decision, but we had no other option.

Our experience of family separation was terrible. Yet, we were hopeful that one day we would be reunited as a family. My husband came to the UK as an asylum seeker in 2015 and was granted asylum protection after two-and-half years of waiting. The refugee status he had allowed him to sponsor his children and wife only. This meant I had to be separated from my family – my elderly mother in her 60s, and my younger sister who is now 24 years old. We lived together as a family before fleeing Syria because of the conflict, then for 6 years we lived together as migrants in Egypt.

Although I am grateful that I was able to reunite with my husband, the effects of the separation from my other family members has been challenging and unbearable.



Getting Organised

Before you start your campaigning, be clear about what you want to achieve. Your goal is to influence your MP (or if your MP is already supportive, keep it on their agenda) and your objectives could be around building support through engaging your community and the media locally. It's important to think through what the opportunities and barriers are in your area, so you can develop your plan. Dedicate some time to thinking about what is strategic and tactical to achieve your goals and prepare and develop your own campaigning plan.

You can use this toolkit as well as mapping out your local context to work out the best way to strategically and tactically influence and build support in your area. This will help you to deliver successful campaigning and have maximum impact.

You may wish to spend some time scoping out the following

- 1** What resources do you have e.g. people who can lead, time, existing materials, supporters/volunteers or people who can speak on behalf of the campaign. We do have some materials available and can help with campaign support so please do get in touch.
- 2** What are you already doing to support refugee family reunification and is there anything happening in the wider community that you are not involved in? E.g. local community groups supporting family resettlement?
- 3** Who in your community could help build support with your MP, who are your allies, the influential people, the opposition? We are always happy to support you with MP engagement.
- 4** Who can you partner with to increase your reach and impact? Is there an organisation in your area that works directly with refugees?
- 5** What are the opportunities for influence in your area? Does an MP have a role of interest? Is the Local Authority vocal on refugee rights? Is there a Government department located in your area that could be influenced e.g. Home Office?
- 6** What audience do you want to reach and engage? Where is this audience and what channels can you use to reach them?
- 7** What are the key messages and asks you want to get across- how can you adapt the national campaign messages to your local context?

Working with Others

Partnerships and allies

There are likely to be many different types of organisations supporting refugees in one way or another in the location you are in. Whether it's a local authority department, a charity providing a service or a business who employs a higher percentage of refugees, this campaign moment is an opportunity to reach out to others and bring them together to get involved in your campaigning activities. By working in partnership, you will be able to achieve your goals more effectively as you will have more resources and be able to reach a wider audience.

Other organisations are likely to have their own priorities so identifying what is important to them, finding mutual benefits and inviting them to co-create your plan will go a long way to building healthy long-lasting relationships.

You may wish to think about the support you can provide to your partners and allies during and after the campaign moment. Whether that be a regular email to keep them up to date, regular meetings to progress plans or some training to empower them to act as multipliers.

Some examples of who your partners, allies and targets to influence might be

1 Political and officials

- MPs
- Political party associations including donors (to political parties)
- Local government and Councillors
- The Home Office

2 Public Sector

- Front line staff; trade unions, education sector- academics, schools, students
- Professional organisations, e.g. social workers, educators, doctors, voluntary orgs.

3 Business

- Local businesses
- Charity shops - Oxfam, Red Cross, Shops of Sanctuary
- Local media
- Third sector and community groups
- Refugee led and refugee supporting organisations
- Religious groups
- Arts organisations, theatres
- Local civil society e.g. the Rotary, Barnardo's grass roots group, service providers, sports teams, parents and toddler groups

General audiences

To build support and pressure you will need to think about what will motivate the people

in your community to listen, get involved and take action as part of the campaign. When thinking about activities in your local area and context, consider the following:

- Is this accessible to all audiences? E.g. adults and children
- Is it exciting enough to attract a diverse range of people?
- Is it convincing enough?
- Have you presented the problem and solution clearly and made links to what's happening locally? Is it simple, easy to understand and relatively quick to participate in?
- Do you have your counter arguments ready for those who may not agree or have opposing views?
- Does it allow people to express their power to make change happen?

Targets

The main target for this campaign activity is your local MP. What are their key interests and how can you link this campaign to them? How sympathetic are they to the cause, what power do they have to influence others, instigate/ push for change? Are there any other targets in your community who you can influence to achieve change?

Yasmin's Story

Yasmin came to the UK through the resettlement scheme as a cancer patient from Erbil, Iraq. She arrived on the 6th of June 2017 with her 3 sisters and lives in Wrexham. Her parents are still in Iraq, unwell and isolated, with no one to help them with their care needs where they are currently living.

Her father had a heart attack in the past and suffers from high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Her mother has early stage dementia and is diabetic.

Yasmin and her sisters are desperately worried about them and would love to bring them to live safely in the UK, so that they can look after them. However, the immigration rules do not allow refugees to bring over their elderly parents. Yasmin finds it hard to concentrate on her language studies, for worry and her sisters attempted suicide.



Messaging and Storytelling

Telling the key campaign messages around the problem / solutions and the authentic stories of refugees and their experiences being separated should be at the core of all you do.

How you do this depends on who your audience is and what will be the 'hook' that is most engaging to them. You can think creatively about how to present the message. It may be that an emotionally focused message would work for a particular audience. It may be showing how refugees settle and contribute to society- and the positive impact of family reunion on integration outcomes. The message should lead back to the core messages around the causes and solutions.

What do you want your audiences to know, think, feel and do as a result of the campaign? Being clear from the beginning will help you build your conversations and any content you need for your campaigning activities.

Examples of 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.



Media

Are there any media opportunities around your campaigning work? For example, there are a number of ambassadors of the Voices Network who have shared with the media their personal experiences of refugee family reunion. Providing a platform for those with lived experience is really important- but make sure you carry out a risk assessment before you do any media work.

There are many different ways to engage the media. A standard press release would be the usual route to have your story published. Invite your local media contacts along to your event (especially at the same time your MP visits). But you may wish to think of doing some of the following in addition

- Refugee columnist in local paper (please contact the coalition if you'd like support and advice about sharing your story)
- Blog / article from a refugee in a local magazine
- A celebration of families in your community

Social media

Whatever type of campaigning you decide to deliver, social media channels can help you promote your events, amplify the campaigning you are doing in the real world and reach further audiences to build support.

You can also aim your posts at your targets, for example including your MPs twitter handle in your message and use social media as a channel for influencing.

It's worth developing a plan for your social media so you can make sure you can use it to promote your event prior to it happening and collect the right content from your event which you can use during and afterwards.

Use the hashtag [#FamiliesTogether](#) to tie in with the activity of the coalition and so we can all share each other's messages.

We have 2 social media platforms for the coalition which you can also tag.

 Twitter: <https://twitter.com/FamTogetherCo>

 Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/familiestogethercoalition/>

Additional Campaigning Ideas

We have collated a menu of ideas you could use to campaign in your community to collect messages for the public display, and or to run in addition to this activity or if you have time for a longer term campaign plan

- 1** A local storytelling social media campaign with pictures/videos sharing what is happening at the local level and what inspires you to take action in the community
- 2** Action boards/public displays by setting up a stall for others to join the actions
- 3** Letters to MPs about why family is so important, personal stories from across the community
- 4** A community food exchange / recipe swap event between refugees and local residents
- 5** tea/ coffee mornings
- 6** A creative stunt to get across a specific message e.g. this could be some street theatre
- 7** Refugee cook out - using local shops produce



legal requirements and other practical considerations

When putting on events, there will be some things to consider

- You will need to undertake a risk assessment of any venues you use
- If you are using the personal data of people, you will need their consent to comply with GDPR regulations
- Establish who holds insurance (is it you or the venue?)
- If working with children or vulnerable adults you will need to make sure there are safeguards in place to protect people

For advice and guidance on the above, please speak to the organisation you are connected with



and finally...



Our power to change things comes from a collective voice and the unity of coming together. It would be great to join up with the rest of the coalition where possible, let others know about your event so they can promote you and promote others where you can.

Don't forget to let us know what you are doing and the response you get.

Support- get in touch

The coalition team would love to hear from you and support you with your plans. If you would like to arrange a one to one phone or zoom call to discuss your plans or seek advice and support, please contact us on the email below to schedule a call with one of the team.

 You can contact the coalition:
familiestogethercoalition@gmail.com

 Share your activities on social media
[#FamiliesTogether](https://www.instagram.com/FamiliesTogether)

 Visit our website at:
<https://familiestogether.uk/>