

REPAIR PROJECT

# FRANCE

## HIGHLIGHTS



### REPAIR

Family Reunification offers a safe route for families separated by conflict and instability to join their loved ones. Although straight-forward in concept, families often struggle with legal, administrative and logistical obstacles.

Since 2022, the three-year Reunification Pathways for Integration (REPAIR) project has bolstered practical support to families for Family Reunification, at the same time including, listening to, and learning from them to understand how the system can better meet families' needs.

### REPAIR IN FRANCE

As a REPAIR partner, the French Red Cross (FRC) has sought to develop a more holistic approach – engaging people with lived experience and diaspora communities to co-produce guidance and tools on Family Reunification, while also offering direct support before, during and after reunification.

### ACHIEVEMENTS

FRC achievements during the REPAIR project include:

- Helping reunite 75 family members from 25 families
- Supporting 15 families with post arrival case-work support
- Reaching more than 300 people with information about Family Reunification
- Training more than 50 volunteers in Family Reunification
- Creating a holistic FRC post-arrival service to meet families' immediate needs
- Creating an easy-to-follow information booklet in seven languages.
- Co-producing a video on family reunification with UNHCR Paris
- Establishing stronger links with diaspora organisations to work better together

- Building capacity and sharing learning internally and externally to support Family Reunion into the future, including through establishing an inter-agency platform on family reunification together with UNHCR.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In countries like Afghanistan and Sudan, the absence of consular posts can leave applicants stranded. Elsewhere, travel to offices can be challenging, with journeys increasing exposure to accidents or violence and a particular hardship for people with disabilities, health issues, or other vulnerabilities. In 2023, for example, conflict in Sudan forced applicants to make risky, expensive journeys to neighbouring countries. A European Court of Justice ruling (Case C-1/23 PPU | Afrin) allowed flexibility, but little has changed.

*From our experiences we recommend authorities:*

- Streamline visa processing and enable paperless visa applications.
  - Prioritize vulnerable families. People should not have to travel to collect negative decisions.
  - Delay fingerprinting and identity verification until a later stage.
  - Establish standard crisis management mechanisms for family reunification.
2. Consular appointments are vital for family reunification, but delays, inconsistent processes and outsourcing are significant barriers. In some countries (e.g. Iran, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kenya), appointments are unavailable for months, a particular issue for children who face becoming too old to be eligible. Lack of a consistent approach and requirements – telephone booking, online platforms, local bank cards, unnecessary documents – and varying fees, create confusion.



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To find out more about the achievements and findings of the REPAIR project – read our online report, and access our online toolkit using the QR Codes.



Online Toolkit



Online Report

*From our experiences we recommend that the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and consular services:*

- Ensure all consular services are genuinely accessible to all, especially those from external providers.
- Create a single point of contact for consular administration support.
- Ensure the France-Visas website is kept updated with the latest information for securing visa appointments.

3. Families seeking family reunification are often forced to transit through countries requiring exit permits e.g. Pakistan, Iran and Ethiopia. Without permits, even those with valid onward visas cannot leave. In Ethiopia, exit permits require registration with the Refugee and Returnees Service, which hasn't conducted registrations in years. Exit permits can also be costly, amounting to thousands of euros.

*From our experience we recommend authorities:*

- Engage in diplomatic dialogue with countries requiring exit permits to facilitate departures.

4. People under international protection could be in conflict zones, transit countries or be threatened by persecution. Visa applications often make requests that cannot be met: death certificates of loved ones when official records do not exist; official certification for missing family members, delegation of parental authority for mothers of children from sexual violence or forced marriage. Administration fees and other costs create further barriers, especially for unaccompanied minors.

*From our experience we recommend authorities:*

- Reduce or abolish visa and laissez-passer fees.
- Exempt unaccompanied minors from these fees.
- Give legal recognition to disappearances and allow flexibility in some civil status documentation, particularly the delegation of parental authority in cases of sexual violence or forced marriage, and where death certificates are unobtainable.
- Adapt requirements based on the realities of applicants' countries and avoid requiring refugees to obtain documents from their authorities.

5. Organizations working in reception, accommodation and integration for people under international protection or common law provisions often lack experience and knowledge about family reunification.

*From our experience we recommend authorities ensure:*

- All organisations supporting people under international protection, including child welfare services, should offer information and referral on family reunification as standard.

6. While allowing child refugees to be unified with their parents and children for whom they are responsible, French law excludes the siblings of orphans seeking refuge in France. Unaccompanied children often request reunification with siblings, but if they are orphaned or their parents missing, current legislation prevents this.

*From our experience we recommend authorities:*

- Allow children who are orphans to access family reunification with their siblings and ensure support upon their arrival.

7. Family reunification does not end on arrival. A lack of information and referral, and families' lack of awareness of their rights, can make accessing services and support – including residence permits, healthcare, housing, and education – extremely challenging and lengthy. The process is especially difficult for families without social worker assistance.

*From our experience we recommend authorities:*

- Provide information about rights and administrative steps alongside visas.
- Train local authorities on reunified families' rights and establish departmental focal points.
- Ensure reunited families receive social worker support.
- Consider creating an inter-ministerial task force to guide policy related to people arriving through legal channels including family reunification.

*Led by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in partnership with the Austrian, British, French, and Slovenian National Red Cross Societies, the REPAIR project is co-funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).*

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Restoring Family Links

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**BritishRedCross**



**+ IFRC**