

REPAIR PROJECT

# UNITED KINGDOM

## HIGHLIGHTS



### REPAIR

The right to family life is acknowledged in international instruments, and 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.

### THE BRITISH RED CROSS' PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

As a REPAIR partner, the British Red Cross has engaged 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.

Through the REPAIR project the British Red Cross has:

- Trained more than 20 staff and volunteers in Family Reunion.
- Reached more than 700 people with information about Family Reunion.
- Provided family reunion advice to 177 families.

- Assisted 37 families with visa applications, including 19 visa applications submitted, 18 Exceptional Case Funding applications granted, supporting a total of 86 family members.
- Built capacity and shared learning internally and externally to support the sustainable and improved continuation of family reunification into the future. We reached over 30 organisations including 4 local authorities.
- Reached 346 people through the community engagement activity to raise awareness about family reunion.

### BRITISH RED CROSS' WIDER WORK ON FAMILY REUNION

The British Red Cross has long been supporting refugee families on their journey to reunion. Our Refugee Support teams operate across 56 towns and cities in the UK and over the past three years the wider British Red Cross' family reunion service helped reunite over 2,500 families across the UK, including over 1,800 children. We also supported nearly 8,000 people with post arrival support.

The British Red Cross works across the UK and devolved nations to advocate for improvements to the family reunification process, including the expansion of the definition of family so that more families can reunite and for integration approaches across the four UK nations that seek to strengthen support for the specific needs of separated families.



This project is funded by the European Union

**BritishRedCross**

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

## SUMMARY OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Under REPAIR, the British Red Cross conducted a participatory needs assessment of the entire family reunification process with 28 sponsors and applicants from Afghanistan (18%), Iran (43%) and Eritrea (39%). Including and involving people under international protection and their families in the assessment, we aimed to identify evidence-based recommendations to improve service provision.

The needs assessment conducted with these families found that:

- Under half of participants had no understanding of the family reunion procedure at all.
- Under half of families had to apply for family reunion visas from outside their country of origin.
- Just over half of families interviewed were separated for more than two years, with some separated for more than three years with direct consequences on safety and vulnerability.
- Families emphasised how family reunion costs – including DNA testing, travel expenses, translation, notarisation fees and exit visas – were often prohibitive, commonly leading to accumulation of debt and for some, destitution.
- Over half of the sponsors interviewed were not able to arrange suitable accommodation for their family before they arrived in the UK, despite over half contacting the local authority before the family arrived. A third of families were still living in emergency accommodation at the time of the interview.
- Many respondents to the needs assessment highlighted challenges in re-adapting to life as a family unit after years of separation. A male sponsor confided: “When I left home, my wife was pregnant, so I do not know my son. I am learning to know my son”

*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).*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For detailed recommendations on the findings of the REPAIR project please see the overarching recommendations online.

The British Red Cross recommends that the UK government and devolved nations:

- 1. Expand the family reunion criteria** to make it easier for children with relatives (beyond parents) in the UK to reunite. Child relatives, i.e. siblings, nieces and nephews, grandchildren can currently reunite with a refugee ‘outside’ of the refugee family reunion rules (known as Appendix CNP). This makes the process harder and more expensive. The rules should be amended to make it easier for children to reunite with relatives.
- 2. Ensure all refugees can access legal support to apply for family reunion.** This includes reintroducing the provision of legal aid for family reunion in England and Wales and expanding accessibility and provision across the four nations.
- 3. Make the family reunion process more accessible** by reducing the number of journeys to Visa Application Centres (VAC) that families need to take, which can leave them in dangerous situations, by being more flexible in relation to biometrics.
- 4. Increase decision-making capacity in the Home Office to minimise the amount of time that families are waiting** to reunite. While positive steps have been taken in the last year, there is a need to ensure the Home Office is adequately resourced to tackle the existing backlog in cases and meet the imminent demand in family reunion.
- 5. Enhance the integration support offered** to reuniting refugee families, making sure it is available as soon as possible when they arrive, with processes starting prior to their journey to the UK and parity across other safe routes. This should include access to suitable accommodation, welfare benefits and work support as well as support to access healthcare and education.



### CONTACT

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Restoring Family Links

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