

REPAIR PROJECT

RECOM **MEND** ON FAMILY REUNIFICATION ATIONS

Combining contributions from diaspora communities, insights from families with lived experience of separation and reunification, and inputs from REPAIR project partners and other organisations engaged in family reunification, this document sets out 15 key recommendations for addressing challenges in the family reunification process.





FROM THE OUTSET

**Address and
remove barriers to
family reunification**

While family reunification should be both accessible and achievable for people with refugee status or International protection, the REPAIR project has found barriers such as inaccessible income thresholds and demands for documentation, and a lack of basic information in appropriate languages, can make reunification impossible. The narrow definition of the nuclear family, excluding children who have been fostered or informally adopted, is a further obstacle, while people granted subsidiary protection often face painfully long waiting periods before they can apply.

REPAIR partners call on authorities to: _____

1 Ensure families are supported to access legal assistance. 55% of interviewed family members reported problems understanding the procedure due to language barriers and legal complexities. Trustworthy advice and representation must be available for families to fairly access family reunification.

3 Expand the definition of family beyond spouses and children under 18. Subsidiary protection holders should have the same access to family reunification as other beneficiaries of international protection. Children should not be excluded from reunification when they are siblings, have been informally adopted, or reach adulthood while an application is in process.

2 Strengthen the capacities of consular services managing family reunification applications. Vulnerable and at-risk families, including unaccompanied children, people with disabilities, and those exposed to unsafe situations such as active conflict areas or insecure refugee camps should be prioritised.

4 Tackle financial barriers to reunification. REPAIR found that costs – obtaining evidence, travel, translation and exit visas – can total thousands of euros, putting families in debt or making reunification unattainable. To cut costs, sponsors should be allowed to submit documents in original languages, and visa administration fees reduced or removed. Unaccompanied minors should be exempt from these charges.

REPAIR partners call on authorities and organisations to work together to: _____

5 Pro-actively engage in inclusive co-delivery with people with lived experience and diaspora organisations. Collaboration with people with lived experience and diaspora communities across the REPAIR project has shown they represent vital repositories of knowledge, expertise and connections. Systematically engaging with and including them throughout the process as equal partners is essential.

6 Unlock access to information. REPAIR sponsors and family members reported a lack of guidance available in their native languages. Translated information should be directly communicated with family members and shared via digital platforms or explanatory videos. Applicants should have access to digital tools to monitor the progress of their case online.

DURING THE PROCESS

**Address the needs of
families in countries
of origin and transit**

The REPAIR findings showed that the reunification process can take a heavy toll on those waiting to join loved ones. Around 50% of interviewed family members needed to travel to another country to attend embassy appointments, a journey which often put them at risk of violence or exploitation. Several families faced the risk of illegally overstaying in transit countries due to visa issues, leading to additional obstacles and potential fines. Travel costs, living expenses in transit countries, and securing necessary documentation all added to families' financial burden.

REPAIR partners call on authorities to: _____

7 Expedite decisions on family reunification applications. Over 50% of families interviewed were separated for more than two years, with direct consequences on safety and vulnerability. Decision-makers should strive to reduce delays in processing applications and set achievable standards for decision making.





TOGETHER AGAIN

Support reunited families

Reunited families need to reconnect emotionally, at the same time as adjusting to the practical challenges of life in a new country. This can be overwhelming, with family members feeling lost or isolated. To facilitate successful integration, it is crucial to involve local stakeholders – including local authorities and administrators, service providers, educational communities, NGOs, employers, and religious organizations – in the planning and implementation of integration activities.

REPAIR partners call on authorities and organisations to: _____

11 Engage with families as soon as they arrive.

Less than 10% of families interviewed understood what steps they had to take on arrival. Helping families navigate their new lives and access services is vital and can include producing videos on how to access health care, education or state financial support; creating handbooks in people's preferred languages; organizing workshops with diaspora organizations; and engaging family members to develop tailored support plans.

13 Offer specialised support for women. Women arriving through family reunification are often reliant on their sponsor for their right to stay in their new country, which can exacerbate power imbalances and vulnerability. Helping women find employment and make connections in their new communities can help foster independence and autonomy.

15 Enhance coordination between authorities and stakeholders. As REPAIR showed, partnerships and collaboration between government agencies, local authorities, diaspora organizations, refugee groups, and the voluntary sector, are far more effective in identifying gaps, mobilising capacity, and developing integration initiatives, than individual organisations working alone.

12 Provide integration support with focus on housing and employment.

43% of interviewed families reported facing accommodation issues on arrival. Solutions should be sought between relevant authorities and housing providers to ensure stable and secure accommodation is accessible to arriving families. Funding should be made available for language classes and employment training to access the job market.

14 Offer adequate psycho-social support. Many REPAIR sponsors and family members highlighted challenges in re-adapting to life as a family unit after years of separation. Adequate psychosocial support, tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of family members, should be available.

8 Make the family reunification process safer. Paperless visa applications should be accepted to reduce dangerous journeys, especially during crises or for people at risk. Negative decisions should be communicated without families having to physically attend embassies, and biometric information should be taken just before visas are issued. Where possible, family members should be accompanied to and from airports to provide protection against harassment or fraud.

9 Employ diplomacy to facilitate journeys to countries of destination. As REPAIR found, many family members find themselves stuck in countries of departure due to complex and costly exit requirements. Receiving countries should pursue diplomatic dialogue to prevent this impacting vulnerable family members.

The REPAIR partners call on authorities and organisations together to: _____

10 Collaborate with partners in countries of departure.

Relying on locally based actors to assist family members enabled REPAIR partners to share consistent, reliable information about the process and safely support families. Funding and training should be made available to establish networks of trusted partners on the ground.

REPAIR in numbers



193

families supported to reunite through the reunification process and post arrival support.



771

family members in total supported through the reunification process.



120

volunteers and staff trained in family reunification.



1,450

people reached with information about family reunification.



Built capacity and learning through dozens of events reaching scores of internal and external partners, supporting the sustainable development of family reunification.



Family Reunification offers a safe route for families separated by conflict and instability to join their loved ones in Europe. Although straight-forward in concept, all too often families struggle to overcome legal, administrative and logistical obstacles thrown up during the Family Reunification process.

Since 2022, the three-year Reunification Pathways for Integration (REPAIR) project has sought to not only support families going through the family reunion process, but also to listen to them and amplify their voices.

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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



BritishRedCross



FRENCH RED CROSS

