



Refugee family reunion

**Frequently
asked questions**

This information can help you if you have applied for asylum and have now refugee status or humanitarian protection, and want to know:

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Please note, these Frequently Asked Questions have been written as a resource to help refugees and their families understand the family reunion process. However, this process is complex, and it is always preferable to obtain legal advice tailored to someone's particular circumstances. You can look for an immigration advisor on the **Immigration Advice Authority (IAA)** or **the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA)** websites.

What is family reunion?

The family reunion Immigration Rules determine how family members overseas can apply to join a refugee in the UK.

Please note if you are now a British Citizen after having been a refugee, a different set of Rules apply. **We strongly encourage you to seek legal advice in this situation.**



Can you and your family apply for family reunion?

In order to meet the refugee family reunion rules, a sponsor must have protection status in the UK. Protection status means:

Refugee status; **or**

Humanitarian protection; **or**

Indefinite leave to remain (ILR) following a grant of refugee status or humanitarian protection; **or**

Been resettled as a refugee to the UK under a resettlement scheme.

Can you and your family apply for family reunion?

Which family members may get a family reunion visa under 'Appendix Family Reunion (Protection)' of the Immigration Rules?

Your spouse (wife, husband or civil partner), if:

- They were part of your family unit **before** you left your country of origin/where you normally lived to seek protection in the UK;
- You and your spouse have met in person;
- Your spouse cannot be your child, parent, sibling, uncle/aunt or niece/nephew;
- You are both 18 or over when you apply
- Your marriage is valid under the law of the country where it took place.



Or your partner (when you have a serious relationship but you are not married or in a civil partnership), if:

- You and your partner have been in a relationship together similar to marriage which is ongoing and has lasted for two years or more;
- Your relationship existed before you left your country of origin (and/or where you normally lived) to seek protection in the UK;
- You and your partner have met in person and your relationship is genuine and subsisting.
- You are both 18 or over when you apply;
- Your partner cannot be your child, parent, sibling, uncle/aunt or niece/nephew.

Your child/children and/or your partner's child/children, if:

- Yours/your partner's child/children are under the age of 18 at the date of application (or if they are over 18, there are exceptional circumstances);
- Yours/your partner's child/children must not be leading an independent life. This means the child has not formed a separate family unit from their parent(s);
- Yours/your partner's child/children were part of your family unit at the time you left your country of origin. This means that they were born or conceived before you left your country of origin (and/or where you normally lived) to seek protection in the UK.

Can you and your family apply for family reunion?

Which family members may not get a visa under Appendix Family Reunion (Protection)?

- Your husband or wife who you married **after** leaving your country of origin (and/or where you normally lived);
- Your child who was conceived **after** you left your country of origin (and/or where you normally lived);
- Children over 18 years old, **unless** there are exceptional circumstances to their situation;
- Parents;
- Siblings and adult siblings;
- Other relatives (niece, nephews, cousins).



Please note, if you wish to apply for children under 18 who are not your own or formally adopted, but are dependent on you, you may be able to do so under a different set of Rules.

If you have a family member who wants to join you but their relationship is **not spouse, partner** or your **own dependent child under 18**:

- You should get legal advice;
- Other immigration rules and costs may apply;
- If you are based in England or Wales you might need to make an application to support with the cost of legal fees (called ‘Exceptional Case Funding’). For more information, speak to your lawyer or look at [gov.uk/guidance/legal-aid-apply-for-exceptional-case-funding](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/legal-aid-apply-for-exceptional-case-funding);
- If you are based in Scotland or Northern Ireland Legal Aid may be available to help pay for legal costs associated with family reunion applications. See pg.18 for further detail.

How can you make a family reunion application?

Collect evidence to show that your family are related to you.

Make an application online and submit documents to show you are related to your family.

After the online application has been made, your family must go to an appointment at a **Visa Application Centre.**

How can you make a family reunion application?

Collect evidence to show that your family are related to you.

- Home Office documents proving your status, such as your e-Visa or Biometric Residence Permit (BRP).
- Identity documents (yours and your family members’).
- Documents that show your relationship to your family (eg marriage certificate, birth certificate/s of child/ren or adoption orders).
- Information that you have already given in interviews with the Home Office about your family (eg at the time that you claimed asylum, normally on the ‘Statement of Evidence’ form or in your screening interview). If you did not mention your family members, you should explain why, for example, because you were worried about their safety.
- Family photographs.
- Communication records (e.g. telephone records, emails, social media messages and emails) to show your family relationship continues.
- Proof of financial support (eg money transfer receipts).
- DNA tests – getting DNA tests is your choice and if you offer to get DNA tests done, you will also have to pay for the tests. The DNA tests need to be done at an **official laboratory**.
- Statements (from yourself and the applicant).



Make an application online and submit documents to show you are related to your family.

- You need to make one application for each of your family members.
- The application **forms and guidance notes** for these applications are on the Home Office website.
- You will need to submit your evidence online before your family members attend the Visa Application Centre or alternatively, they can bring the evidence with them to their appointment.

How can you make a family reunion application?

After the online application has been made, your family must go to an appointment at a Visa Application Centre.

- The nearest Visa Application Centre might be in a different country.
- At the Visa Application Centre, they will have their photograph and fingerprints taken, and they will have to give their passport/s;
- After the decision (whether it is negative or positive), your family will have to travel to the Visa Application Centre again to collect their passport/s

If it is too dangerous for your family to travel to a Visa application centre, we encourage you to seek legal advice to explore alternatives

- If your family are still in their country of origin, they must have passports because they may face issues leaving the country otherwise. If they are not in their country of origin and cannot get passports, the UK Home office might be able to provide one-way travel documents (FAV – Form for Affixing a Visa).
- Most applicants must also take a **test for TB**.
- If successful, your family must travel to the UK before the visa expires (normally within 90 days)



How long does the process take?

It takes a **minimum of 3 months** for your family reunion visa application to be processed. However it might take much longer to collect evidence to prepare the application, apply for passports etc.

You or your legal representative can contact the Home Office at at **refugeefamilyreunion@homeoffice.gov.uk** if you haven't heard back from the Home Office after 3 months and want an update on your application.

What happens if your family's application is refused?

You have a right to appeal, even if it is not mentioned in the refusal letter).

- You have **28 days from the date you receive the decision to appeal**.
- Information on how to appeal, the appeal process and the fees payable are all available online at:
[gov.uk/immigration-asylum-tribunal/appeal-from-outside-the-uk](https://www.gov.uk/immigration-asylum-tribunal/appeal-from-outside-the-uk)
- You can appeal **online** or by post or fax with **form IAFI-6**.

We strongly encourage you to seek legal advice for this process.



If your family's application is accepted, what visa do they get?

- Your family members will be given a **visa** which normally lasts 90 days. This means your family will need to travel to the UK within three months of getting their visa. If they are not able to due to circumstances beyond their control, and their visa expires, it may be possible to renew it. In order to request to renew your visa, you must contact the Family Reunion team at the Home Office via email at: **refugeefamilyreunion@homeoffice.gov.uk**.
- Once in the UK, your family will need to create an online account to be able to view their immigration status (called an 'e-Visa'). For more information visit: **www.gov.uk/get-access-evisa**.
- If you have any issues creating an account and accessing your e-Visa, you can find a list of organisation who may be able to help here: **www.gov.uk/government/publications/evisa-community-support-for-vulnerable-people/list-of-organisations**.
- When you apply for **Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)** following refugee status or Humanitarian Protection, please **seek legal advice** about options for your family's leave in the UK.
- The basis of your family's right to be in the UK is their relationship with you. If this relationship changes or breaks down, or if your status changes, this could have implications for your family.
- If your relationship breaks down, your spouse should **get independent legal advice urgently**.

Your family may be granted permission to stay in the UK for the same length as your own refugee status. The e-Visa on their UKVI online account should show the type and length of status.

How can your family members apply for family reunion if they are already in the UK?

If your family are already inside the UK and want to apply for family reunion, they can do so by visiting the GOV.UK website and using the online form '**FLR (HRO)**'.

They will be required to meet the same rules (see p.5, 6 & 7) and submit the same evidence (see. p. 9) as an applicant who is applying from outside of the UK.

They will also be invited to submit their biometrics at a Service Support Centre (SSC). Details of your nearest SSC **can be found here**.

We recommend you seek legal advice to prepare an in-country application. If the application is refused, your family members may have a right to appeal.



Who can help you apply for Family Reunion?

The process can be complicated, and we strongly encourage you to seek legal advice. You can apply for Family Reunion with the help of charities such as **The British Red Cross**, **GMIAU**, the **Sheffield Hallam Refugee Rights Hub**, **RLAP**, **Notre Dame Refugee centre** or others that might be operating in your area; or you can seek advice from private law firms.

You can look for an immigration advisor on **Immigration Advice Authority (IAA)** or **Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA)** websites. Private law firms will charge a fee, but you may be able to apply for Legal Aid (called 'Exceptional Case Funding' or ECF) if your case meets the ECF criteria and you cannot afford legal advice (see below).

If you choose to apply for Family Reunion by yourself, you can find more information in the British Red Cross guide on our **website**.

The process can be complicated we strongly encourage you to seek legal advice.

How much will your application cost?

Applying for your family to join you in the UK can be expensive. Some costs you may need to consider are:

- Legal advice
- Applying for passports and/or identity cards
- Translations of documents
- DNA tests
- TB tests
- Travel costs to the Visa Application Centre and Exit / entry visas
- Fees linked to the family reunion application
- Travel costs to the UK
- Money lost through time off work



How much will your application cost?

Legal advice:

- If you are in **England and Wales**, government funding (called “legal aid”) is not available for the legal costs associated with refugee family reunion cases. You might be able to apply for Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) to help you get a lawyer for free. For more information, speak to your lawyer or look at [gov.uk/guidance/legal-aid-apply-for-exceptional-case-funding](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/legal-aid-apply-for-exceptional-case-funding)
- If you are in **Scotland or Northern Ireland**, government funding is still available to help people pay for the legal costs for family reunion applications.
- If you are an **unaccompanied or separated child in the UK**, with protection status, legal aid is available to help pay for the legal costs of applying for your family to join you in the UK.
- Some Law Centres, Citizens Advice Bureaux are able to provide legal support in some family reunion cases. Contact your local office for details.
- The British Red Cross may be able to provide free advice in some areas of the UK. For more information please contact FRAdvice@redcross.org.uk

Applying for passports and/or identity cards and birth certificates for your family:

- This depends on the costs in the country where your family are living.

Getting translations of any documents:

- If you have documents in a language which is not English, you will need to pay for certified translations to send with your application.

DNA tests (to prove your family relationship):

- It can be very helpful to get DNA tests, especially for children where there are no birth certificates that show you are the parent. Please see the list of the Home Office approved DNA providers - Get a DNA test: If you're getting a test to use in court
 - **GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**
- DNA tests can be expensive and the process can be complicated. For example, your family will need to travel to a specific clinic for a DNA sample to be taken (likely in a large or capital city). It could cost approximately £400-£600 per person.
- DNA testing may not be available in your family's country of residence, so travel costs will also have to be taken into account. Check if your family can take their TB tests (if needed) at the same time to reduce journey costs.

How much will your application cost?

TB tests:

- If your family is living in a certain country, your family will need to get a test (an x-ray or sputum sample) to show that they do not have tuberculosis (TB) before coming to the UK. See the list of countries here <https://www.gov.uk/tb-test-visa>
- The cost of a TB test can vary from country to country.
- The TB test must have been taken before you apply for family reunion, and the result submitted with your application.
- TB testing may not be available in your family's country of residence, so travel costs will also have to be taken into account. You may be able to reduce travel costs by checking if your family can take their DNA tests (if needed) at the same time.

Travel costs to the Visa Application Centre and exit/entry visas for your family:

- If your family need to cross an international border to make the application at the Visa Application Centre, they may need to pay entry or exit visas. This depends on which country your family are living in.
- They will need to go to the Visa Application Centre twice (one time to attend the appointment, and one time to collect visas).
- Your family may also need to pay for an exit visa if they travel to the UK.

Fees linked to the family reunion application:

- The family reunion application itself is free of charge.
- UK Immigration Health Surcharge costs do not apply to family reunion.

Travel costs to the UK:

- If your family are given visas to the UK, they will most likely need to arrive to the UK within 90 days of the date of the visa.
- Your family will need to organise and pay for travel to the UK.
- In a few specific cases, the **British Red Cross** might be able to help with the costs of travel to the UK.

Remember to also consider **the money that you might lose** when taking time off work to attend legal appointments and meet arriving family members.

How can you pay for the costs of applying for family reunion?

The following charities may be able to provide some kind of financial support with other costs associated with Family Reunion (although please note that these funds are limited and may not be able to support everyone in every circumstance).



Fund for Human Need
fundforhumaneed.org.uk



Positive Action in Housing
paih.org/information-for-caseworkers-wishing-to-refer-to-room-for-refugees/



Prisoners of Conscience
prisonersofconscience.org/family-reunion/



RefuAid
Financial loans to support exclusively with the cost of travel
refuaid.org/familyreunification



Together Now
<http://togethernow.org.uk/>



British Red Cross
Travel Assistance service
www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/family-reunion/travel-assistance

Home Office
A Refugee Integration Loan may help cover some of the costs, however you will be expected to pay this money back
gov.uk/refugee-integration-loan

How can you prepare for your family's arrival in the UK?

There is a lot to think about, including:

e-Visas

The Home Office are no longer issuing physical documents to prove your family's immigration status in the UK. Instead, your family will need to each create a UKVI online account, where they will be able to:

- view their immigration status (the type and length of their permission to stay).
- get a 'Share Code' so that others can check their immigration status (for example, landlords or employers).

More information is available at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/online-immigration-status-evisa

Housing

Will you need to get a bigger house?

Do any of your family members have special requirements (for example: difficulty with stairs; requirement to be near a hospital, park or school?). Housing in the UK is complicated, and your options can depend on where in the UK you live in and your family's situation.



You can contact your local council about housing here:
[gov.uk/homelessness-help-from-council](https://www.gov.uk/homelessness-help-from-council)

Or for further housing advice you can contact Shelter:

- **Shelter England** 0808 800 4444 | **england.shelter.org.uk**
- **Shelter Scotland** 0808 800 4444 | **scotland.shelter.org.uk**
- **Shelter Wales** 08000 495 495 | **sheltercymru.org.uk**
- **Housing Advice NI** 028 9024 5640 | **housingadviceni.org**

How can you prepare for your family's arrival in the UK?



Education

Will older family members need English classes?

'ESOL' (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes are often offered in colleges, community centres, local charities and even libraries across the country. There is no one provider of ESOL across the UK. You can find the provider that is nearest to you by searching for "ESOL + your area" in an online search engine.

If you have children you will need to register them with a local school.

- Under UK law, both boys and girls must attend school. It is important that you make sure that your child goes to school.
- If you are not sure how to apply for a school place for your child, ask at your Local Authority education department who can give you information.

Government benefits

Are there any benefits that you will be eligible to apply for once your family has arrived in the UK?

(If you are already receiving benefits, this should not affect your family's visa applications.) Universal Credit, and other welfare benefits can be complicated to understand. If you have questions about benefits and how to apply, you can call:

Universal Credit helpline 0800 328 5644

Citizens Advice: Adviceline (England) 0800 144 8 444

Citizens Advice: Help to Claim (Scotland) 0800 023 2581

Citizens Advice: Advice link (Wales) 0800 702 2020 / 08000 241 220

Advice NI (Northern Ireland) 0800 915 4604

How can you prepare for your family's arrival in the UK?

Health

You should register your family member(s) at your doctor.

Do any of your family have any special medical issues that need to be checked immediately after arrival? The **National Health Service (NHS)** provides health services to people living in the UK. Most of these services are free.

Recreation activities

Where would you want to take your family, and where could they meet other people who might become their friends?

Family Reunion Integration Service

That might be able to help families after they have arrived in the UK. The service runs in ten locations across the UK: Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Leicester, London, Manchester, Plymouth and Sheffield. However, if you do not live in one of these areas BRC may still be able to help. For further info please contact your nearest Refugee Support team: **redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-help-as-a-refugee/contact-your-local-refugee-service**

Remember that you and your family might experience different emotions when you see each other again. It might take time for you to get used to being together again.



Further resources

The British Red Cross has a range of digital resources for refugee women to help them find out about life in the UK. They have been translated into 9 different languages.

They can be found here: **redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees/digital-empowerment-of-refugee-women**

Do you want to know more information about the family reunion process?

- See the **Guide to Refugee Family Reunion by the British Red Cross on our website**
- Contact the **Family Reunion Enquiries Service** run by the British Red Cross – **Fill in our Referral Form**
- Or email **FRAAdvice@redcross.org.uk** (Monday to Friday between 9am – 5pm).

What does the Family Reunion Enquiries Service do?

- We can give you information about:
 - Who can apply for family reunion
 - How to make the application
 - How much the process costs
 - How long it takes
- We can refer you to British Red Cross Immigration Advisers (subject to capacity)
- We can give you details of other organisations who might be able to support you to make the application.
- We can respond to your email Monday to Friday between 9am – 5pm
- We use interpreters if you need one

What can't the Family Reunion Enquiries Service do?

- We can't make the application for you
- We can't replace your lawyer or give you legal advice
- We can't give you money to help you make the application

The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949), Scotland (SC037738), Isle of Man (0752), Jersey (430).

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Family Reunion Enquiries
Service, referral form:

