

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people



 **UNHCR** | Nordic and Baltic Countries
The UN Refugee Agency

Find more information on UNHCR's recommendations for improving access to family reunification, including the UNHCR Report "Families Together" on family reunification in Europe.

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A photograph of a man from behind, wearing a dark jacket, carrying two young children on his shoulders. The child on the left is a boy in a light blue shirt looking forward, and the child on the right is a girl in a yellow jacket smiling. The background shows a residential street with a brick building and trees.

FAMILIES TOGETHER

5 FACTS ON FAMILY REUNIFICATION

5 Facts on Family Reunification



1 War, persecution and conflict tear families apart

The world is currently witnessing record high numbers of people forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, persecution and human rights violations: 79,5 million (by end-2019) and almost half of them are children. When forced to flee, sometimes immediately and in midst of chaos, many families are torn apart. Children, parents and other family members are also left behind for a variety of reasons, such as the risks and hardships of the journey and insufficient funds to enable all to escape. The desire to be reunited with family is a major driver of secondary movements of refugees.



The Syrian Mansour family, Ahmad, Sara and their three sons left the horrors of war behind and are now safely living in Gaweinstal, Austria. The family was reunited with orphaned nephews, Abdallah and Mostafa, after their parents were tragically killed in a bomb attack.

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2 Family unity is a fundamental human right

Family life and family unity is a fundamental human right, recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which applies to all people, including refugees and asylum-seekers. It is set out in several international and regional legal instruments. Following separation caused by forced displacement, and where family members have sought protection in other countries, family reunification is often the only way to ensure refugees' right to family unity. The Global Compact on Refugees, adopted by UN member states in 2018, highlights family reunification as an important and vital pathway to protection and more global responsibility-sharing.



4 Family reunification could be more straightforward

A greater use of family reunification channels would allow more people to travel legally without having to resort to dangerous journeys. UNHCR believes that safe and legal pathways for people in need of protection – including through family reunification – should be increased. This could happen if countries make family reunification more straightforward, flexible and accessible. Concrete steps to achieve this include, for example, applying a broader definition of family, limiting restrictions and time constraints, being more flexible with documents that may have been lost and ensuring that fees are kept moderate.



3 Families are kept apart due to obstacles to family reunification

Many refugees and their families may be eligible for reunification, but often numerous obstacles are preventing them from being reunited – obstacles of a practical, legal, and financial nature. These barriers include, for example, the application of a narrow definition of family in national legal frameworks, mandatory waiting periods, high application fees, demanding documentation requirements and limited access to embassies.



5 Family reunion is vital to make refugees thrive

Imagine what you would do if you were kept from your children, your husband, your wife or other close family – how long you could withstand it? The separation of families when people flee can have devastating consequences on family members' wellbeing and their ability to rebuild their lives. UNHCR believes that providing refugees access and the possibility to reunite with their families is imperative – this will help them integrate, become self-sufficient and contribute to their new societies. And moreover, it will help them thrive and lead as normal lives as possible.