

FAMILY REUNION FOR REFUGEES IN THE UK UNDERSTANDING SUPPORT NEEDS

Research report | Research, Evaluation & Impact



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SUPPORT NEEDS**

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Executive Summary

“When they first came, it was like a miracle. Like heaven was open for me... It’s really my children! I didn’t believe it. I just cried”

**British Red Cross
family reunion client**

Background

Family reunion work has long been a key activity of the British Red Cross and is recognised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as a key role for National Societies. Growing out of the British Red Cross’ Restoring Family Links (RFL) work, the organisation has been a key provider of Family Reunion Travel Assistance in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) for fifteen years. Following a decision by the British Red Cross senior management team in September 2010, family reunion was changed from a ‘could do’ to a ‘must do’ in the British Red Cross corporate plan and organisational funds were allocated to underwrite the costs of the travel assistance programme. This decision was made in response to the announcement by UNHCR at the end of 2009 that they would no longer be funding the service.

In 2010, a British Red Cross research study was commissioned to investigate anecdotal reports that refugees were finding it difficult to exercise their family reunion rights because of the lack of quality support and legal provision.

Findings

The study highlighted evidence of need for family reunion support. Almost 5000 visas for dependents of individuals with refugee status or humanitarian protection were issued in the UK in 2010. The British Red Cross, the main provider of family reunion travel assistance in the UK, supported just over 100 family members through this programme. We also supported individuals by providing general advice and signposting to other services. Although addressing a relatively small proportion of the overall need, the British Red Cross is nonetheless a major player in providing support to people who are granted leave to have their families join them in the UK.

It is not entirely clear how or by what means the remainder of those granted family reunion rights (that is, other than those supported by the Red Cross) actually exercise these rights. What we do know is that some people use their own personal resources – including networks of family and friends, and formal and informal money lending sectors – to exercise their rights. There is also evidence to suggest that others, who have no means and no access to any means of support, are with all probability unlikely to exercise these rights and may not in fact bring their families over.

This study also evidenced the complexity of the family reunion application procedure, particularly for individuals who may not have support from their wider family, friends or community, advanced English language skills, a formal education or an understanding of administrative processes. Findings suggest that in the majority of cases refugees are unable to exercise their family reunion rights unless they do have some form of support – from filling application forms to coping with the stresses of prolonged family separation to the actual funding of flights for family members. Additionally, finding such support is becoming increasingly difficult, and will be further limited with the proposed upcoming exclusion of legal aid for refugee family reunion in UK legislation.

An analysis of government policy and provision in the UK, Austria, Canada, Finland, Norway and Sweden suggests that the UK offers comparatively inclusive eligibility criteria relative to some countries. However, the UK government does not provide travel assistance, nor funding for organisations to deliver support as is the case in countries such as Sweden and Finland. The research showed that refugees in Sweden, Austria,



and Finland receive a greater range of support for family reunion than those in the UK.

The general paucity of official data relating to refugees who apply for family reunion makes it difficult to determine the extent of need for family reunion support. Key factors that can facilitate or hinder refugees from exercising their family reunion rights include finding accurate information, lack of appropriate legal advice, limited or no assistance in completing forms, financing the reunion process, language barriers, proving family relationships/lineage, emotional support, liaising with officials, and a lack of integration support.

Conclusions & recommendations

The main conclusion of this research is that the vast majority of refugees are unable to exercise their family reunion rights unless they have some form of support to do so, and that the current scope of provision is inadequate both in coverage and content. The seven main recommendations made are:

- > **To stabilise the budget of the travel assistance programme.**
The degree of humanitarian need addressed by this programme, coupled with the increasing shortfall in family reunion support in the wider sector constitute compelling reasons to mainstream this work within the British Red Cross.

- > **To grow the British Red Cross family reunion programme.**
An expansion of the eligibility criteria for the travel assistance programme, an expansion of the range of support provided via family reunion, and the development of staff training in this area are recommended in this study.
- > **To grow the coordination aspect of our family reunion work.**
The study highlights a strong need for collaboration across agencies and the pooling and sharing of knowledge/practice captured via a centralised database.
- > **Advocating on family reunion issues in the UK.**
The British Red Cross should use these findings to develop internal advocacy positions and/or add weight to those of other agencies.
- > **Feeding into international advocacy and collaboration work.**
In a similar vein, a recent invitation to work with the EU and the Italian Refugee Council should be used to strengthen British Red Cross supported key policy positions.
- > **Feeding into UK policy.**
British Red Cross Refugee Services staff in Scotland are currently arranging to meet with the UKBA to discuss issues with the form, particularly where improvements could be made. Other opportunities to affect UK policy may arise as our family reunion services develop.
- > **Conducting further research.**
The integration needs of reunited families emerged as an area of concern – and is being investigated by other national societies. Follow up work in this area is recommended.





1 Background

“Really, I want my daughter. It has been six years now...”

Male refugee from Sudan

Armed conflict, internal strife, natural disasters, and persecution can all lead to separation of family members (*Platform for European Red Cross Cooperation on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants [PERCO], 2001*). This separation could be unintended (for example as a result of forced migration) or intended (for example to help a child escape military recruitment, or send someone into hiding) – but is generally not intended to be permanent (*Sample, 2007*).

Family reunion refers to the process of bringing separated family members across international borders to be reunited (*Staver, 2008*). Under current United Kingdom legislation, refugees¹ who have been granted status in the UK are entitled to request family reunion from the UK Border Agency.

Family unity is considered a fundamental human right (*Canadian Council for Refugees [CCR], 2004; Jastram & Newland, 2003; McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford, 2009*), and the right of the

¹ In accordance with Tait (2011), the term 'refugee' is used in a broad sense to refer to those who have sought, and been granted, refuge from persecution. For the purposes of this research, this includes people in the UK who have been granted refugee status, humanitarian protection, or indefinite leave to remain.



family to be united and to be protected by society and the state is expressed in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is widely accepted that the family is important for individual and societal wellbeing. For example, concern about family is associated with poor psychological health, such as depression, anxiety, and somatisation (McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford, 2009). Similarly, being separated from family members was identified as a key barrier to accessing and maintaining good health for refugees in New Zealand (ChangeMakers Refugee Forum, 2011). In terms of societal wellbeing, the presence of family has been found to be important for integration into society (Bogenschneider, 2006; European Council on Refugees and Exiles [ECRE], 2000), and united families can support each other and thus reduce the burden on the state (McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford, 2009).

Family reunion is a core pillar of the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement:

“National [Red Cross] Societies have a common responsibility to advocate for and actively support the right to reunification of families separated by armed conflict, or as a result of persecution, or natural or man-made disaster.”

PERCO, 2001, p5

Family reunion work has long been a key activity of the British Red Cross and is recognised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

as a key role for National Societies. Growing out of the British Red Cross' Restoring Family Links (RFL) work, the organisation has been a key provider of Family Reunion Travel Assistance in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) for fifteen years.

Following a British Red Cross senior management team (SMT) decision in September 2010, family reunion was changed from a 'could do' to a 'must do' in the British Red Cross corporate plan, and British Red Cross organisational funds were allocated to underwrite the costs of the travel assistance programme. This decision was made in response to the announcement by UNHCR at the end of 2009 that they would no longer be funding the service. Historically the programme has supported approximately 100 family members per year.

In 2010, SMT also commissioned the current research study to investigate anecdotal reports that refugees were finding it difficult to exercise their family reunion rights because of the lack of quality support and legal provision. This formed part of a wider strategic commitment to test assumptions underpinning the corporate strategy *Saving Lives, Changing Lives* and strengthen the evidence base of our work and decision making through social research.





2 Research aim

“If you’ve got someone to support you, and to lift you up, then you think everything is easy”

Female refugee from Somalia

The purpose of this research is to investigate whether the needs of refugees seeking to exercise their family reunion rights are being met by existing humanitarian support and provision. Our aim is that these findings will give us a greater understanding of the humanitarian needs arising from family reunion in the UK and overseas.

The main objectives of the research were:

- > To understand the profile and characteristics of refugees that access family reunification rights in the UK.
- > To evaluate and identify variables that may hinder and/or facilitate access to family reunification rights and related support.
- > To understand and compare national governmental policies and legal provisions relating to family reunion.

The research also sought to assess the need for a British Red Cross family reunion service, to produce action recommendations from the findings, and to identify potential service development, policy and advocacy opportunities around family reunion.



3 Research methodology

“Without help I can't do it. How can I do it? I can't read English. When I came here I couldn't even say 'yes' and 'no'”

Male refugee from Sudan

The current research employed a mixed-methods approach, including a literature review, a telephone survey of refugees, interviews with staff from humanitarian organisations and legal aid support services, sister National Societies and the British Red Cross. Each method is discussed in more detail below.

3.1 Literature review

An initial literature review of European family reunion legislation and policy was conducted at the outset of the project (*Shahab, 2011*), with further literature sought as the research took shape. Whilst this review of existing literature exposed the lack of official statistics on the UK refugee population, it did identify a body of advocacy work from other organisations working with refugees in the UK.

We believe that this research study contributes to the current body of knowledge on refugee family reunion in the UK by exploring a range of family reunion issues in detail and across a wide population, and offering an international comparison on governmental policy and support

available for individuals seeking to exercise their family reunion rights.

3.2 Telephone survey

A telephone survey of refugees was carried out to measure perceptions about the family reunion application process. In response to the difficulties of establishing a representative refugee sample frame (Tait, 2011), and because the aims of the research did not require a probability sample (Bloch, 1999), the research employed a convenience sampling approach.

Around 600 invitations were sent to the following:

- > individuals on the internal British Red Cross travel assistance database
- > British Red Cross clients put forward by Area staff
- > individuals who had enquired to the organisation about family reunion but were not clients
- > via other refugee organisations to their own clients.

The research team conducted 66 complete interviews with individuals who agreed to take part in the study. Of these, 15% were clients of other refugee organisations (n=8) or had enquired to the British Red Cross but were not family reunion clients (n=2).

The survey collected a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data measured factors such as how easy or difficult respondents found different aspects of the family reunion application process and sources of support to help with the process. The qualitative data explored the reasons why aspects were seen as easy or difficult, as well as overall impressions of how respondents found the process. The interview questions can be found in the appendix.

3.2.1 Strengths

20 surveys were conducted in a second language using an interpreter (5 in Arabic, 2 in Farsi, 8 in French and 5 in Swahili). This made the research more inclusive by including those who do not speak English – potentially a highly vulnerable group with regard to accessing vital information. It has also enabled us to draw out some of the particular issues around language barriers.



On the whole, people contacted for the research were keen to give their views. Only four individuals who we made contact with did not want to participate, and this was generally because they had sought but not received travel assistance support from the British Red Cross in the past.

In addition, the high number of interviews achieved demonstrates the willingness of beneficiaries to feed into British Red Cross research and programme development.

3.2.2 Limitations

Given the nature of convenience sampling, we do not know how representative the sample is of the population of refugees eligible for family reunion in the UK. Therefore, we must be cautious in generalising the findings to the wider population. Because the vast majority of the sample had previous contact with the British Red Cross (and in many cases were clients of the travel assistance programme) or another refugee organisation, it may be the case that this sample has received greater support than the wider population, and have therefore found the family reunion process generally easier than others who have not had this support.

In addition to the risk of interviewer bias arising from the use of several interviewers (where the opinion or practice of the interviewer affects responses), the use of interpreters introduces another level of subjectivity to the findings. As

discussed by Temple and Edwards (2011), words and concepts can have different meanings across languages and sometimes word-for-word translations are not possible. There is also the risk of interpreters imposing their own perspectives on responses. Nevertheless, the advantages of insights gained from being able to interview those who do not speak English in this case outweigh such risks.

3.2.3 Ethical considerations

The researchers took care to emphasise that participation in the research was voluntary. At the outset, respondents were sent a letter which explained the research and invited them to participate. It was also made clear throughout the subsequent interview that responses were voluntary and that individuals did not have to answer a question if they did not want to and could stop the interview at anytime. However, all respondents were happy to answer all questions.

In line with ethical considerations cited by Temple and Moran (2011), the researchers also took care to explain that participation would not affect any support they may have been receiving from the British Red Cross or another refugee organisation.

At the end of the interview, respondents were offered a follow-up letter which included a list of agencies that they could contact if they

wanted more support or wanted to talk about any of the issues raised in the interview. In several cases it was apparent that a greater level of follow-up support was necessary, and these respondents were referred to the Refugee Services team.

3.2.4 Respondent demographics

- > **Country of origin:** Respondents came from 20 different countries. The majority (82%, n=53) were from Africa, with 15 different countries represented. The main African countries of origin were Sudan (n=9), Democratic Republic of the Congo (n=9), Somalia (n=7) and Zimbabwe (n=7). 15% (n=10) were from Asia (Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran). There was also one person each from Eastern Europe and the Caribbean.
- > **Age:** Ranged from 22 to 73 years, with an average of 42 years.
- > **Sex:** 58% male, 42% female.
- > **Territory:** Respondents came from all four British Red Cross territories, with just over one-third (37%) from Northern, and the rest evenly spread amongst Scotland, Northern Ireland and Isle of Man, South Eastern, and Wales and Western (20% to 21% each).



- > **Immigration status:** Over half (59%) of respondents said they had Refugee Status, followed by a quarter (25%) with Indefinite Leave to Remain. The remainder said they had Humanitarian Protection (8%), Citizenship (5%), or Limited Leave to Remain (3%).²
- > **Length of time in the UK:** Date of arrival in the UK ranged from 1998 to 2011, with two-thirds (65%) having arrived in the UK from 2006 onwards.

Family reunion applications

Almost all (92%) respondents had applied to be, or had been, reunited with family members from overseas. Of those who had not applied, all agreed that they wanted to be reunited but had not applied because they did not know how, were not eligible, or were planning to but had not yet started the process.

Three-quarters (76%) had applications that were complete and successful. Of these people, four also had other applications that were either still underway, under appeal, or had been unsuccessful. One in five (20%) had applications that were still underway. Nearly one in ten (8%) had applications that were unsuccessful. Where a reason was given for this, it was generally because they were applying to bring children aged 18 years or older, or nieces and nephews. One woman was currently appealing a negative decision on her application as she had been successful with two of her children, but not the other three.

Of the interviewees with complete and successful applications, three-quarters (75%) had been successful the first time around, while the rest (25%) had been successful after an appeal.

The most common family members that people applied to be reunited with were children aged less than 18 years (72%) or spouse/partners (54%). People had also applied to be reunited with children aged 18 years or older (12%), nieces or nephews (10%), siblings (7%), and parents (4%).³

Several respondents noted that they had wanted to be reunited with adult children or parents, but had been advised that they would not be able to, so had not applied.



3.3 Interviews with humanitarian and legal agencies

The aim of the interviews with the humanitarian and legal agencies (hereafter referred to as 'external agencies') was to explore the family reunion support services provided by other organisations. They were also conducted to investigate the extent of unmet need in terms of support for family reunion and to identify factors which help or hinder refugees in accessing their family reunion rights.

External agencies working in the field of family reunion contacted for the research were identified from the British Red Cross website, through consultation with Red Cross staff and from searching the internet. Contact was attempted with 28 agencies and interviews were arranged with 11.

These agencies were: Asylum Aid, Haven, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), Legal Services Agency (LSA), the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, Prisoners of Conscience, Refugee Welcome Trust, the Scottish Refugee Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Welsh Refugee Council. Initial contact was made with the Immigration Advisory Service (IAS), however the IAS went into receivership before an interview could be arranged.

2 For immigration status, we occasionally got the impression that people were not clear about what their immigration status was, and this impression is supported by feedback from British Red Cross staff.

3 These percentages add up to more than 100% as respondents were able to give more than one response to the question. This is also the case elsewhere in the report where multiple responses were allowed.



JCWI also invited the research team to post a feature about the family reunion research on their blog, and this received several useful responses regarding issues that support workers and agencies are facing.

The external agencies included in this research include a mix of local (n=5), national (n=4) and international (n=2) agencies. Family reunion services provided by these agencies include:

- > Legal advice and/or assistance with the application form (n=3).
- > Signposting on to other agencies who can provide legal advice and/or assistance with the application form (n=5).
- > Financial, including grants for travel to the UK and necessary documents and travel costs for family to get to the embassy to submit their applications (n=2). However, of the agencies providing funding for travel and necessary documents, one only operated at a very small local scale and both had a specific client base (women and children in vulnerable circumstances).
- > Logistics of travel for family overseas (n=2), including assistance getting to embassies or the airport and access to travel documents.
- > Integration (n=4), although these agencies tended to be local organisations providing

specific integration assistance such as access to healthcare or help with arranging schools rather than a comprehensive integration programme.

3.4 Interviews with British Red Cross staff

Interviews with British Red Cross UK Office (UKO) and Area staff (n=15) were conducted with the aim of increasing our understanding about internal perspectives of the BRC's current role in supporting individuals with the family reunion process, for example through the travel assistance programme. These interviews also informed the wider exploration of whether the needs of individuals seeking to exercise their family reunion rights are being met by current overall provision and support.

The Areas represented in the interviews were: UKO (n=2); Bristol (n=2); Glasgow (n=1); London (n=3); Luton (n=1); Northern Ireland (n=1); Nottingham (n=1); Yorkshire (n=4). Staff from Devon and Peterborough also provided insightful information.

These Areas were selected to ensure a range of geographic locations as well a spread of different levels of refugee population density.

3.5 Interviews with sister National Societies

The National Red Cross Societies of Austria, Canada, Finland, Norway, and Sweden were selected as case studies for the research, with the aim of developing an evidence base for national and international advocacy work.

The four European societies were selected as a result of their expression of interest in the research at the Platform for European Red Cross Cooperation on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants (PERCO) meeting in May 2011. The Canadian Red Cross was approached following consultation with the Refugee Services department about incorporating a non-European perspective.

Each case study was developed through desktop research on governmental policy followed by an interview with a National Society representative.



4 Findings

“My children, they are here today and have a happy life, and it’s because of the people who supported me. I still say thanks for everything”

Female refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

4.1 Evidence of need

Almost 5000 visas for dependents of individuals with refugee status or humanitarian protection were issued in the UK in 2010. The British Red Cross, the main provider of family reunion travel assistance in the UK, supported just over 100 family members through this programme. We also supported individuals by providing general advice and signposting to other services. Although addressing a relatively small proportion of the overall need, the British Red Cross is nonetheless a major player in providing support to people who are granted leave to have their families join them in the UK.

It is not entirely clear how or by what means the remainder of those granted family reunion rights (that is, other than those supported by the British Red Cross) actually exercise these rights. What we do know is that some people use their own personal resources – including networks of family and friends, the formal and informal money lending sectors – to exercise these rights. There is also evidence to suggest that others, who have no means and no access to any means of support, are with all probability unlikely to

exercise these rights and may not in fact bring their families over.

The main findings from this study suggest that in the majority of cases the refugees interviewed were unable to exercise their family reunion rights unless they did have some form of support – from filling application forms to coping with the stresses of prolonged family separation to the actual funding of flights for family members. For example, almost all (90%) of survey respondents who had applied or were applying for family reunion said that they had received support in filling out the application form and of these, 9 out of 10 said they would have found it difficult without help. Finding such support is becoming increasingly difficult, and will be further limited with the proposed upcoming exclusion of legal aid for refugee family reunion in UK legislation.

The section below, structured around the key streams of the study, outlines some of the other important findings from the research.

4.2 Reinforcing the importance of reunification

The views of UK based refugees, British Red Cross staff and representatives from external agencies all reinforce the importance of family reunion.

Separation from family members is traumatic and can have both physical and psychological effects on the separated individual. Physical effects cited in the research include worsening of medical conditions as well as an inability to sleep or eat. Psychological effects include depression, anxiety, and feelings of guilt for leaving family members behind often in dangerous situations. Emotional stress was also heightened by worry about family left behind and concerns about the dangerous situations they might be exposed to.

“It was very hard for them. Alone, no parents. They were poisoned.”

Female refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

“Once in Sudan, they go to the refugee camp... and there is no shelter there. The climate is really hot... It is hard for the babies and the children, they suffer a lot.”

Male refugee from Eritrea

Other negative effects of separation from family cited in the research include having to send remittance to support family overseas,

difficulty settling into life in the UK and a feeling that life was on hold.

These negative impacts tended to be compounded by the length of the family reunion process, thus highlighting the need for a speedier process.

4.3 Governmental policy and legal provision relating to family reunion

Refugees who have been granted status in the UK are entitled to request family reunion from the UK Border Agency. Individuals with refugee status or humanitarian protection are eligible to apply to be reunited with members of their nuclear family, which is defined as a spouse/registered partner⁴ and children under the age of 18. Individuals with indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK can also apply for reunification if they can meet maintenance and accommodation requirements. Other family members, including parents of an unaccompanied minor, can also be considered for reunification on compelling and compassionate grounds (UKBA, 2011).







An analysis of government policy and provision in the UK, Austria, Canada, Finland, Norway and Sweden suggests that the UK offers comparatively inclusive eligibility criteria relative to some countries. In the UK, there are no time restrictions for when individuals can apply for reunion, there are no maintenance requirements (except for ILR), there is an option to apply to be reunited with non-nuclear family members on the grounds of compelling and compassionate circumstances, and individuals have the right to appeal.

However, the UK government does not provide travel assistance, nor funding for organisations to deliver support as is the case in countries such as Sweden and Finland. The research also highlighted that refugees in Sweden, Austria and Finland receive a greater level of support for family reunion than those in the UK.

Table 1 compares the government policy and provision for family reunion for refugees in UK, Austria, Canada, Finland, Norway and Sweden. More detailed case studies on family reunion for refugees in each comparison country can be found in the appendix.

⁴ Includes same sex partners.

TABLE 1 INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PROVISION FOR REFUGEE FAMILY REUNION

	AUSTRIA 	CANADA 	FINLAND 	NORWAY 	SWEDEN 	UK 
No maintenance required	✓	×	✓	~	✓	~
No time restrictions	~	✓	✓	×	~	✓
Age of dependency	18	22	18	18	18	18
Humanitarian exceptions or dependency criteria	×	✓	✓	~	✓	✓
Appeal possible	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Good access to support (including advice, help with forms as well as legal assistance)	✓ RC, NGOs	~ NGOs	✓ RC, Govt NGOs	✓ NGOS	✓ RC, NGOs	× ~ NGOs
Travel assistance provided	~ RC	~ Govt loan	~ Govt	~ Govt	✓ RC, Govt	~ RC

Note: A tick means yes, a cross no, and the tilde means yes under certain conditions. The text regarding access to support and travel assistance refers to whether the service is delivered by the Red Cross National Society (RC), the government (Govt) or a non-government organisation (NGO).



4.4 The profile and characteristics of refugees who access family reunion

There is a general paucity of data relating to refugees who apply for family reunion, and this makes it difficult to determine the extent of need for family reunion support. From the general refugee data that is available we can make inferences about the profile and characteristics of people who exercise their family reunion rights in the UK. For example, in Quarter 4, 2010, 78% of asylum applications came from single adults (as compared to family groups) (*Home Office, 2010*). While we don't know how many of these would have family overseas, most refugees in the UK fall into the 18-58 years age bracket and are therefore of marriageable/child bearing age (*UNHCR, 2009*). Therefore, one could expect that many may have a spouse and/or children under 18.

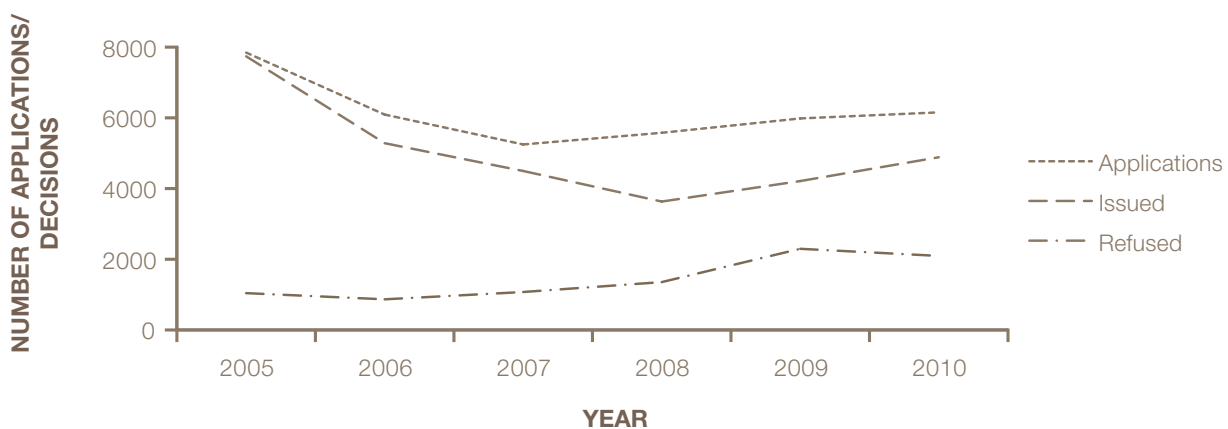
There is also available data on the number of dependents applying for, being issued and refused visas to the UK through the family reunion process (*HC Hansard 2010; Home Office, 2011*). Figure 1 shows the number of, and outcome of decisions on, family reunion entry clearance applications from dependents of those granted refugee status or humanitarian protection.⁵ As shown, the number of family members applying

for family reunion currently sits at around 6,000 per year. The number of sponsoring refugees in the UK going through the family reunion process will be significantly fewer than this, as many seek reunification with more than one family member.

Of the 7055⁶ decisions made on family reunion applications in 2010, the successful grant rate was 69% (almost 5000 people). This suggests, as earlier indicated, that the travel assistance programme, which currently funds travel for approximately 100 family members a year, is reaching a small number of those individuals who have been given permission to join their families.

While the refusal rate has been increasing, at least up until 2009, it is interesting to note that the rate of applications approved following a successful appeal has also been steadily increasing during this period, although this is still a very small minority in relation to the total number (increasing from less than one percent of approved applications in 2005 to 1.3% in 2010). The fact that negative decisions can be successfully appealed suggests there are mitigating circumstances not initially known or indeed errors in the initial process that could be addressed to increase initial success rates. There may well also be others who are not getting their applications right even at appeal.

FIGURE 1 FAMILY REUNION ENTRY CLEARANCE APPLICATIONS FROM DEPENDENTS OF THOSE GRANTED REFUGEE STATUS OR HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION



⁵ 2005-2009 data sourced from HC Hansard (2010), and 2010 data sourced from Home Office (2011). However, we are confident that these sources are consistent and comparable.

⁶ Note that this figure has been rounded to the nearest 5, and may relate to some applications made in earlier years as well as the current year.



4.5 Overview of existing family reunion support services

Current sources of legal advice and support on family reunion in the UK include solicitors, refugee organisations such as Asylum Aid and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, charitable law centres such as the Legal Services Agency, as well as advisory bodies such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

The study suggests that existing support and legal provision is very limited, with British Red Cross staff and representatives from external organisations reporting that they are struggling to signpost individuals to information and support. As two British Red Cross staff members reflected:

“We try to give them the names of solicitors but as in most places we’re really struggling.”

“We’re already seeing that where previously solicitors would help with filling out the visa application, more and more we’re seeing clients who have said their solicitor won’t help with that because of time constraints.”

This was perceived to have been exacerbated by two of the biggest providers, Refugee Migrant Justice and Immigration Advisory Service, going into receivership over the past twelve months. The Scottish Refugee Council also reported that they still have organisations signposting individuals to

them despite the fact that they are no longer able to provide case support.

The proposed upcoming exclusion of legal aid for refugee family reunion will further limit access to legal support and provision, and widespread concern was expressed about this. The concern is founded on the view that without legal aid, many refugees will not be able to afford to access needed legal advice and support and will consequently find it harder to realise their family reunion rights.

Of the respondents to the telephone survey, more than half (55%) had received support from a solicitor. Of these, about a third (35%) said they had found it difficult to find a lawyer, citing a range of reasons including lack of information, a cessation of support from a previous solicitor, dissatisfaction with solicitors causing them to seek new representation and the lack of solicitors who specialise in the field due to its relatively unprofitable nature.

In addition, about one in ten (13%) said that they were dissatisfied with the service they had received from their solicitor, offering a range of reasons including difficulties in getting appointments, lack of help in filling in the form, slow progress with their case and overall poor quality support.

Of the refugee organisations interviewed, some felt they would be stretched if they had more

cases. Encouragingly, others, including two that provide legal assistance, said they had some current capacity to accept more referrals. For example, Asylum Aid said that they would be able to take referrals from the Red Cross, although they have a relatively small legal team and it is unclear exactly how many referrals they would be able to accept.

The British Red Cross was identified as the main provider of travel assistance for family reunion in the UK. Whilst several other organisations provide travel assistance, these tend to be at a very local level (e.g. one organisation reported that they only have two clients so far) or for a specific client base such as Prisoners of Conscience, who work with individuals who have been persecuted because of their beliefs.

The research suggests that a range of organisations and solicitors are offering emotional support implicitly within their family reunion services, such as providing a listening ear, encouragement and emotional reassurance where needed. The study highlighted one organisation, Freedom from Torture, who offer their clients counselling, as well as helping them with family reunion applications where necessary.

4.6 Understanding whether needs of refugees seeking to apply for family reunion are being met by existing support

This study highlighted the complexity of the family reunion application procedure, particularly for individuals who may not have support from wider family, friends or community, advanced English language skills, a formal education or an understanding of administrative processes, or are applying outside of the generic immigration rules and need to demonstrate compelling and compassionate circumstances.

British Red Cross staff and representatives from external agencies generally agreed that, on the whole, individuals with refugee status require professional support for their family reunion applications to be successful. This is because the process is complex and people do not know how to go about applying, how to sufficiently evidence their claims, or what options are available to them. Staff described a most complex process:



“The complexity of the form, differences depending on which family members people want to bring, differences depending on immigration status etc mean that in reality it’s not simple.”

BRC staff member,

and

“Not just because the issue is legally complex, but just because of the absence of understanding what it is you need to show and how you are able to evidence that.”

External agency representative

More than one in three (36%) refugee survey respondents said that overall they found, or were finding, the family reunion process difficult. To illustrate, one refugee explained:

“Because it is a legal process it should be easy, it shouldn’t be that difficult, but I found it difficult and complicated, you know?... It’s really a long complicated process, because we don’t know the system, you know, that made a problem.”

Male refugee from Iran

Of those who found or were finding the family reunion process easy (38%), most said that they had good support from a solicitor or a humanitarian organisation and many agreed that it would be difficult if they did not have this support.

Two quotes in particular clearly illustrate the importance of this support for refugees, and the gratitude of those receiving it:

“If you’ve got someone to support you, and to lift you up, then you think everything is easy.”

Female refugee from Somalia

“Because my children, they are here today and have a happy life, and it’s because of the people who supported me. I still say thanks for everything! Every organisation, people who supported this case...For everyone who works with family reunion, I am just grateful. They have good hearts.”

Female refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Family reunion literature also highlights the complexity of the family reunion process in the UK and the need for support. For example, Connell, Mulvey, Brady and Christie (2010) contend that refugees generally lack awareness and understanding of the process and would not be able to realise their family reunion rights without professional support.

The key factors that can facilitate or hinder refugees from exercising their family reunion rights are discussed below.

4.6.1 Finding accurate information about the family reunion process

Finding clear and reliable information was seen as an important first step in the family reunion process, as one respondent explained:

“If you know the system and have information then it is easy to apply. But before you have the information it is difficult. You don’t know



what you’ve got to start from, where you’ve got to start.”

Female refugee from Eritrea

The research showed that it can be difficult for refugees to find out information about the application process, and this emerged as an important area of need for applicants. Of the majority who had applied or were applying for family reunion, around half said they had got information or advice about the family reunion process from a solicitor (55%) or the British Red Cross (50%). Around 3 in 10 received information or advice from friends or their community (29%) or another refugee organisation (26%), while 13% found information on the internet. Almost everyone (89%) sought information or advice from more than one source.

One in five (21%) refugees said that they had found it difficult to get information about the family reunion process for reasons such as lack of English language skills and not knowing where to go or who to ask. Those who said it was easy to find information (49%) often said it was because they had received support from organisations like the British Red Cross or from a social worker.

Similarly, staff from several external agencies noted that the official information provided is often unclear and can be difficult to find. As one representative explained:

“If somebody was looking to do it [the UKBA website] would be the best place to start but the guidance is not great in my opinion and it is certainly not easy to find unless you know it is there.”

In the literature, Jastram and Newland (2003) cite access to information about the family

reunion process as a common issue internationally.

When individuals with refugee status were asked what information would have been useful, the most common responses included more information about **rights to family reunion**, which **application form** to fill in and **accurate information about relevant fees**. Several respondents commented that they had contradictory or insufficient information about what fees they would need to pay, for example:

“I remember when I started, I was told that I’m going to pay a lot of money, but the people didn’t know that the category, if you are a refugee [it is free].”

Female refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

4.6.2 Legal advice

Legal advice was identified as a critical factor in the family reunion process. Where refugees reported an easy experience of the process (38%), quality legal support was frequently cited as a

reason. Frequent and clear communication, timely assistance and accurate information about the criteria and the evidence that is required for the application were all deemed to be important. As one respondent said:

“I went through my lawyers who did everything for me. I got two lawyers who were really good through the Refugee Legal Centre. They really know how to help people.”

Female refugee from Zimbabwe

Similarly, for the more than one in three refugees who reported a difficult application experience (36%), poor quality of legal support was often mentioned. One respondent explained:

“The first [solicitor] I paid, and all he did was fill out the forms but nothing else. If I asked him something he would say ‘no I can’t do that’. He wasn’t very good, even when the UN contacted him and even the Red Cross, he never did anything. I phoned him so many times and he never did anything.”

Male refugee from Sudan

CASE STUDY

O, from Somalia, is 42 years old and was granted refugee status in the UK in 2007. He has successfully been reunited with his two children – aged 16 and 17 years. O found the family reunification process easy because of the advice and support he received from his solicitor, who gave him information about the process, helped with the form, arranged DNA tests and liaised with the embassy in Nairobi where his children made their applications. O commented:

“The law makes it easy for me. The law allows me to have a lawyer, and the lawyer is paid by the government, so that’s a blessing. Good system.”

Like many of the refugees interviewed as a part of the research, O thought it would have been very difficult to go through the family reunion process without the support of a lawyer.

“Without legal aid it would be tough. [Legal aid is] very important, very useful... Without it, I don’t think I would have my kids... If you

don’t have a lawyer, nothing goes on. That’s from my experience.”

To illustrate, O explained how when he first applied for reunification, embassy staff in Nairobi insisted he had to pay a fee until his solicitor intervened on his behalf.

“I explained to [the embassy]. I told them ‘listen, these are my kids and I’m a refugee and it’s free’. They said ‘no’. My lawyer, he sent a letter explaining that [they are] not supposed to charge... Without a lawyer, no one listens to you.”

When asked if he would have been able to afford legal support without legal aid, O was emphatic that he, and others, would not have been.

“I wouldn’t have been able to pay. I had no place to sleep, nothing to eat, so I could not pay the bill of a solicitor... The people in a refugee situation, they cannot afford to pay a lawyer’s bill.”



Legal support is particularly important for those who have complex family reunion cases as they are applying outside of the general immigration rules. For example, applying for reunification with adopted children where the adoption was made in a country whose adoptions are not recognised by the UK.

The British Red Cross and external agencies frequently get requests from refugees asking for help to find a solicitor for their family reunion application. More than one in three (35%) refugee respondents who had a solicitor to help with their family reunion application said that legal support had been hard to find. Lack of English language skills, knowledge about the legal sector, and geographical location were all cited as reasons which made it more difficult to find a solicitor. One respondent reflected:

“It was very difficult, because when you don’t know English very well and you don’t know how to speak and you don’t know how to make appointments and everything, you know it’s very hard.”

Female refugee from Somalia

The lack of specialist legal advice and support for refugees going through the family reunion process has also been identified as a barrier to family reunion in the literature (Connell *et al.*, 2010).

Furthermore, the upcoming exclusion of legal aid for family reunion applications is likely to make legal support even more difficult to find.

4.6.3 Assistance with completing forms

This research suggests that under the right conditions refugees are able to complete the family reunion application forms themselves without help, but that in most cases some form of support is required. Family reunion applicants often encounter a range of barriers when attempting to complete the form without support.

Respondents reported difficulties in knowing which paperwork to fill out, understanding technical wording that was “*confusing sometimes*”, understanding what supporting evidence was required, undertaking the process in a second language and completing the form online. Several respondents said that because there is no specific family reunion form it was “*hard to know which form to fill out, and understand what you need to evidence*”, and that it is not clear that family members need to specify ‘settlement’ as the reason for coming to the UK.

The vast majority (90%) of interviewees who had applied or were applying for family reunion had sought help with the application form. Several respondents commented that they had initially wanted their solicitor to help with the form, but the solicitor had refused so instead they did it themselves or asked a friend. In one case, a refugee said that his solicitor would not help fill out the form, and as he did not speak English he asked friends to help, however they ended up making a mistake which took time to be rectified.

Of those respondents who had help with the form, 90% said that they thought it would be difficult to complete without help. The small number of respondents (10%) who said they had filled the form out themselves without support had good levels of English and education, dedicated significant time to research the process, and in at least one case, advice from a solicitor was sought about certain aspects of the form.

Family reunion literature has identified similar issues with the application form (Connell *et al.*, 2010). Following the completion of a research study on family reunion last year, the Scottish Refugee Council sent a list of identified issues with the application form to the UKBA, who agreed to consider them. British Red Cross Refugee Services staff in Scotland are also currently arranging to meet with the UKBA to discuss issues with the form where improvements could be made.



4.6.4 Financing the reunion process

The research suggests that many refugees need support to help them meet the costs associated with applying for family reunion. Finances were raised as a key concern, with many respondents reporting a struggle to cover costs associated with travel, remittance to support families back home, sourcing, translating and posting documents and application fees for family members classed as ‘other dependents’. As one respondent said:

“We had to pay for my wife and children to go to Islamabad by car and they had to wait there. It was a lot of money I spent there, for food for my family. I sold some property I had in Islamabad and I borrowed a lot from friends. I have to return the money as soon as I get a job.”

Male refugee from Afghanistan

Around half of respondents (51%) who had applied or were applying for family reunion said that they had to pay for documentation and related costs including translation, postage, and getting new passports. Many reported difficulties in covering the costs. Finding the money to pay for these costs can often put refugees in even more vulnerable positions. For example, British Red Cross staff reported that they had spoken to clients who had paid travel expenses by using a credit card which they were then unable to pay off and had borrowed from people who subsequently threatened their family when they could not pay.

Similarly, refugees sometimes put themselves in vulnerable positions by using their benefit money to pay for family reunion costs rather than food for themselves. For example, 41% of those who had to pay for documentation had saved the money from their benefits and often noted that this was difficult to do. Several mentioned that they skipped meals in order to save their benefit money to pay for documents. For example, one respondent said:

“I used my benefit. I was eating bread. Maybe eat just bread for a week. Just eat £10 and save the rest. It was not easy. My friend helped me too, because I couldn’t save the money so she said she’d add some money.”

Female refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

One British Red Cross staff member noted that refugees need assistance to find employment so they can more easily save the money themselves, as well as advice on debt and debt management to help those who are planning to or have borrowed a significant amount of money. Collaboration with other British Red Cross services, such as community-based first aid training, may increase employment opportunities, as previous British Red Cross research found that first aid training can be an employment facilitator for refugees (White & McNulty, 2011).

4.6.5 Overcoming language barriers

Conducting interviews in a second language via an interpreter enabled the research team to draw out some of the particular issues around language barriers. Finding information about the process, as well as communicating with legal providers and other organisations were cited as key barriers for refugees who have limited or no English language skills. As one respondent said:

“Without help I can’t do it. How can I do it? I can’t read English. When I came here I couldn’t even speak ‘yes’ and ‘no’. I needed a translator everywhere; when I went to the GP, when I went to the solicitor...The English is very difficult for me, it is very hard.”

Male refugee from Sudan

Several respondents who did not speak English said that they wanted to be reunited with family but had not yet applied because they were finding it extremely difficult to find information about the family reunion criteria and how to apply.

4.6.6 Proving relationships

To be granted family reunion, foreign nationals need to prove their relationship to their family member with refugee status living in the UK. Such relationships can be hard to prove if people do not have the necessary documentation, and this documentation can sometimes be difficult to source. As one respondent explained:

“My wife brought the documents through a very harsh environment. She had to travel by foot, by camel, by donkey, by all that... They had to sneak through the border... So on the way they lost all the documentation.”

Male refugee from Eritrea

Thirty-nine percent of respondents who had applied or were applying for family reunion said that they found it difficult to get the documentation required to submit with their applications. Factors that made it difficult include not having them in the UK and having trouble finding someone to source them in the country of origin, and difficulty paying to replace passports that were lost or no longer valid.

Relationships outside of the ‘nuclear family’, such as adoptions, can be particularly difficult to prove without the correct documentation and legal support is generally needed for this.

DNA tests are used to provide proof of relationship when documentation is missing, and also provide a measure of protection against child trafficking. A key issue raised about DNA testing is the lack of overseas embassies able to carry out DNA tests. This means that it can be difficult for people to arrange them. The time taken for the tests to be organised and for the results to come back were also cited as being problematic.

Some of the interviewees from external agencies expressed concern about the reliance on DNA testing where a negative result means automatic rejection of family lineage, and therefore rejection of a family reunion application. As one interviewee said:

“It jeopardises the family unit. The family unit notion in Europe is not the same as in Africa. For example, I worked on a case with a family from Somalia who immigrated to India and they had four kids. One was not their child. It was a child from a distant relative who gave [the child] to him to raise as he was well off, which is normal. They were requested to do DNA testing and the child had no papers so



one day they all left and went to London and left the kid [behind].”

Similar concerns around DNA tests were also raised in the literature, for example ECRE (2000) and Taitz, Weekers and Mosca (2002) who argue the need to ensure that DNA tests help rather than hinder the family reunion process.

4.6.7 Emotional support

Both the literature (CCR, 2004; McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford, 2009) and the findings from this study suggest that separation has an impact on physical and mental wellbeing. Indeed, family reunion literature stresses the importance of addressing the mental and emotional health needs of refugees during the family reunion process (Connell et al., 2010).

The survey respondents reported symptoms such as sleeplessness, anxiety, fear and depression. As one respondent explained:

“I miss my family a lot and this makes me very depressed.”

Male refugee from Zambia

Some respondents spoke about the fear for the safety of their family members, while others reported that their life was on hold while they waited for news of their application.

The research also suggests that long periods of separation can lead to suspicion and the breakdown of relationships. A representative

from an external agency spoke of a case where a wife, still overseas, had begun to think that the delays in the process were due to her husband not wanting her to join him:

“She is getting upset as she thinks he doesn’t want her to come over, so it is causing tensions for them.”

For individuals whose family members are missing or are not eligible for reunion (for example, because their children are over 18 or their relative is a sibling) the picture is particularly bleak. For example, a young man from Iraq who had been granted refugee status in the UK because of fears for his life spoke about his worry for his two disabled siblings whom he could not bring over to the UK to care for because they are over 18.

However, there was also an extraordinary amount of resilience displayed amongst families, with many people speaking about hope and taking each day as it comes. As one respondent reflected:

“You have to be patient... And be confident in yourself. If you lose confidence you think nothing’s going to happen. But if you stay confident, be patient.”

Female refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

4.6.8 Liaising with officials

Many respondents reported difficulties in liaising with officials and finding out about the progress of their applications, despite the fact that the majority (87%) of those who had applied or were applying for family reunion said that they had some sort of support to help them communicate or stay in touch with the embassy overseas where their families were submitting their applications. The main sources of support were a solicitor (25%), friends or someone in the community (15%), family (often in the country of origin) (15%), the British Red Cross (11%) or another refugee organisation⁷ (11%).

Reported difficulties included: communicating with or staying in contact with the embassy overseas; embassy offices moving locations within country or even to different countries as a result of conflict and unrest; the logistics in reaching embassies; unhelpful embassy staff; lack of contact information; corruption; and not having a postal address to send documents to.

Of those respondents who had tried to find out about the progress of their application, 39% said that it had been difficult to do so. Reasons included not knowing who to contact and not getting a response to enquiries. As one respondent said:

“They either did not respond to my phone calls and when they did they would tell us

⁷ These other refugee organisations were commonly the Scottish Refugee Council or the Immigration Advisory Service, neither of which now offer such support.

CASE STUDY

M came to the UK as an asylum seeker from Sudan in 2004, and was granted indefinite leave to remain in 2006. Since then, he has been desperately trying to be reunited with his daughter, who was 14 when he first made the application, but is now 18. M feels his “case is stuck” but has not been able to find out why.

“It is very difficult for me to find out about the progress... I have something in my head that my daughter’s case is just under the desk and I can’t find someone to follow the case properly. You can’t get through to the Red Cross even. When I phone the UN they don’t let me speak to the managers. Nobody has tried to talk to me.”

M does not know the reasons why his application has not been successful – “I don’t know the reasons, they didn’t tell me the reasons” – and he said this is deeply frustrating and upsetting for him.

M was very stressed throughout the interview, and it was clear that he needs support to find out about the progress of his application, even if it is just help to understand why it has not been successful.

to keep waiting. We ended up waiting for 9 months and then we were refused.”

Female refugee from Eastern Europe

In the literature, Connell et al. (2010) also cited the need for support to help refugees liaise with staff at embassies and other organisations throughout the family reunion process.

4.6.9 Difficulties for family members

One in three (35%) refugees thought that their family members overseas had found it difficult to apply for reunification. The main difficulties cited involved getting to the embassy (especially when they had to go to another city or third country), logistics of transporting unaccompanied minors, and not knowing how to register family members with UNHCR to get exit visas.

Of the 48% who said it was easy for their families to apply, the main reasons were because the family member with refugee status in the UK had helped them with aspects of the process such as filling out the application form and liaising with the embassy. British Red Cross staff members noted that the UKBA website states that someone else can fill out the form on your behalf, but that you must sign and accept responsibility for everything that is on it. Therefore, the family member with refugee status in the UK can fill it out on behalf of family members, as long as the family member signs and submits.

4.6.10 Issues with current government policy and legislation

The research also exposed issues with current UK government policy and legislation which are barriers to refugees realising their family reunion rights. The key issues identified are discussed below.

Maintenance requirements for refugees with indefinite leave to remain

In order for individuals with indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK to be eligible for family reunion, they must meet maintenance requirements to show they can support their family without recourse to public funds. This makes the separation longer, and in some cases permanent.

Family reunion is even more difficult, if not impossible, for people with ILR who are on the disability benefit. One British Red Cross staff member noted that in addition to being unable to work, and therefore unable to meet the maintenance requirements, individuals on the disability benefit “*have no scope whatsoever to bring family over as the amount received on benefits is insufficient to pay for visa and travel costs*”.

Austria, Finland, and Sweden do not have such maintenance requirements, and in Norway refugees are able to use disability benefits to count towards proof of maintenance.



Age of dependency

Under UK immigration rules, children aged 18 years or over are not considered dependent. If such children are not granted a visa on compassionate or humanitarian grounds they must stay behind, so in some cases the family will be further split. There is also then an obligation to send money back to support that child. This issue was raised by both British Red Cross staff as well as representatives from external agencies.

Nearly one in ten (8%) refugees had family reunion applications that were unsuccessful, and this was often because they were applying to bring children aged 18 years or older. In addition, several more noted that they had wanted to be reunited with adult children, but had been advised that they would not be able to, so had not applied. In some cases this had further split families, for example, one refugee had successfully been reunited with one child in the UK, was in the process of reuniting with another, but had not applied to bring the third as she was over 18 years.

Family reunion literature also proposes that dependency does not end at 18, and that in many cases young people over the age of 18 are still deemed a primary part of the family (*McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford, 2009*). Several other countries profiled as case studies in this research are more flexible around the age of dependency. For example, age of dependency in Canada is 22,

and in Norway unmarried children over the age of 18 are eligible for reunion if they would have been left behind by themselves overseas or are medically dependent on support from the family unit.

Cultural definition of 'family'

Several representatives of external agencies explained that the perception of the 'family unit' in the UK is often different from other cultural perceptions. As one interviewee said:

"Different kinds of family structures in different parts of the world... People take in relatives as their own – for all intents and purposes and culturally they are dependents, but they might not be seen in the same way in all cultures."

Restricting reunification to the nuclear family (that is, spouse/partner and children under 18) means that in many cases those considered family by the individual with refugee status in the UK are not eligible to come unless they can demonstrate compassionate humanitarian grounds. And even if they are granted reunification, such 'extended' family members are subject to application fees.

This restrictive definition of family, therefore, can result in further separation. A British Red Cross staff member offered an example of this:

"We have seen families separate through family reunion...some children have been

CASE STUDY

K, from Zimbabwe, was granted indefinite leave to remain in 2009. K and her husband have four children; all aged less than 18 years of age. K is blind and therefore unable to work, while her husband works as her caregiver. This means that, in accordance with the maintenance requirements of her ILR status, she is not able to sponsor her children to come to the UK for reunification.

"I went to three lawyers to get help, and wherever I go they told me 'you can't, you can't bring your children because you don't go to work'. How am I going to work? I am blind!"

K has approached the UKBA on several occasions, in the hope that the requirements have changed so that she might be able to apply for family reunion.

"And then I go there again for the second time. It was last year I go there again, I thought that things might have changed. [They were] discouraging me, 'even if you did find the £3500 [to pay the application fee] you can't bring your children to this country'... I was unhappy, very unhappy because it's not fair to people like me."

As the current ILR maintenance requirements stand, K is never going to be able to be reunited with her children.



left behind if they are over eighteen... I also know one case where a man in the UK wanted to bring his family over and he actually had four wives and 10 or 11 children. This case is quite concerning because on the one hand he had been separated from the other wives, but it also meant that the children who had been brought over were also separated from their mothers.”

Family reunion literature also commonly cites the restrictive cultural definition of family as a key barrier to family reunion, and notes that the mismatch between policy and personal meanings of family overlooks important social relationships (Connell et al., 2010; ECRE, 2000; McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford, 2009; Staver, 2008).

Unaccompanied minors

Several external agency representatives also brought up an issue relating to unaccompanied minors, who have to apply for reunification with their parents on compassionate grounds (that is, as extended family members). This is seen as being “prejudiced against the child” as it is therefore more difficult for children than adults to be reunited with family. However, this issue has already been raised in the advocacy arena⁸ and did not emerge as an issue for the refugees or British Red Cross staff interviewed.

4.6.11 Integration

Whilst the central focus of this research study has been on the needs of individuals seeking to exercise their family reunion rights as opposed to the experiences of integrating new family members, it is clear that support is needed beyond the arrival of family members in the country.

Some of the key challenges that were highlighted include finding suitable accommodation and furnishings (families often live in overcrowded accommodation when they first arrive), registering children for school, and supporting family members to adjust to being back together as a family and adapting to a new cultural environment.

Delays in benefits were also raised as a particular concern, with several interviewees reporting situations where their large families had to survive on Jobseekers Allowance for over six months while they waited for child benefits to take effect. As one father reported:

“I get just £45 to feed me, my partner and children. When I go to the supermarket, you have to be skilled to use it. My daughter’s uniform costs a lot. Her jacket is £32. The school kept calling and I said I didn’t have the money so I kept my daughter from school for three days. I’m worried.”

Male refugee from the Caribbean

4.7 The British Red Cross’ role in supporting family reunion

4.7.1 Travel assistance

The British Red Cross funded travel assistance programme was praised by external organisations as well as many refugee clients. Reported strengths of the current programme include the clarity of the application form, the regularity of progress updates and the helpfulness and approachability of the team. The speed of the process was also reported to be faster since it has been managed and funded by the British Red Cross.

Beneficiaries who had successfully applied for family reunion often spoke about the tremendous difficulties they would have faced in finding the money for travel costs if the travel assistance programme didn’t exist. As one respondent said:

⁸ See for example the Scottish Refugee Council’s policy briefing *Refugee Family Reunion and Unaccompanied Minors*.

“It would be very difficult, because the first thing is I don’t know this country – I wouldn’t know who to ask... Without the British Red Cross, I don’t think everything would be as it is now.”

Male refugee from Eritrea

In addition, British Red Cross staff themselves felt the service was working well and were pleased to be able to offer this to clients. As one staff member commented:

“It’s a lovely thing. We are very happy to be able to offer this to clients. A lot of the work we do in this office is quite difficult as a lot of it is around destitution so this is a nice service to be able to offer. And people are very happy and no matter how long they’ve waited they are always very happy and thankful to the British Red Cross... Then they come into the office with the children and say ‘hello!’ and it is a really nice and positive thing to be doing.”

However, the research did highlight two key factors that were still deterring some individuals from applying for assistance. Some interviewees reported that the documentation that is required can be difficult to obtain and the application timescales (whilst improved) were still deemed to be too long for some individuals, particularly when people were anxious about the safety of

their family members. As one respondent reflected:

“When your family are in Sudan you can’t wait, because they have no one to support them in Sudan and they are in the refugee camp. That was the most difficult part of the process because the children were ill, and they lost their appetite... They were very, very vulnerable in that situation.”

Male refugee from Eritrea

Some British Red Cross staff also reported cases where individuals who needed financial support in bringing their family members to the UK were not able to apply for travel assistance from the British Red Cross because they didn’t meet the current eligibility criteria. For example, they had indefinite leave to remain (ILR) rather than refugee status or humanitarian protection or sat above the current financial thresholds.

Of those individuals whose family reunion applications were still underway, about two-thirds (64%) said they hoped to get travel assistance from the British Red Cross, 18% said they would get the money from friends or other relatives, 9% said they would pay themselves from their jobs, and 9% said they did not know. The level of uncertainty amongst individuals who are looking to fund their travel costs was illustrated by one respondent who said:



“I don’t have the money, so am scared about that. I can’t find work because if I try and get employment I need language skills, so I’m thinking about asking the Red Cross.”
Male refugee from Sudan

4.7.2 Wider support

There was positive feedback - from both staff and clients - on the pilot that is currently being run in Glasgow where the British Red Cross is working in partnership with the Legal Services Agency (LSA) to support people applying for family reunion. The pilot scheme provides practical assistance in sourcing documents, liaison with officials, and emotional support. As one client commented, *“what the Red Cross has done for me, it means a lot”*. A separate evaluation of the pilot project is planned for 2012.

The research highlighted several other examples of successful partnerships with external organisations. For example, British Red Cross services in Peterborough and Norwich have an arrangement where a legal centre provides legal advice in BRC offices on a weekly basis, which minimises travel for clients. However, these partnerships were limited to a small number of Areas.

Staff in British Red Cross Areas said that they were increasingly receiving a range of enquiries for help with family reunion. In addition to travel assistance, requests for help include: finding a solicitor, completing the application, proving contact between family members, DNA test arrangements and reimbursement of debt after paying for travel costs. Many respondents reported that they came to the Red Cross largely because of its reputation and because they did not know where else to go for help, or because they were already British Red Cross tracing or orientation clients.

The need for a more joined up approach across the refugee sector was also identified in this study. For example, more mechanisms for sharing knowledge and a centralised database on family reunion related information and support practices were identified as crucial factors. Overall, it is clear that not all family reunion needs are currently being met by existing provision, and there is a compelling need for greater coordination and collaboration between organisations that support refugees in exercising their family reunion rights.





5 Conclusion and recommendations

“I can’t forget that night [my children arrived]. To me, it meant the world, that night. It was amazing. All my tiredness went away”

Female refugee from Somalia

The key conclusion of this research is that the vast majority of refugees are not able to exercise their family reunion rights unless they have some form of support to do so, and that the current scope of provision is inadequate both in coverage and content. The recommendations which follow are therefore made with this in mind.

The main recommendation is that the British Red Cross should use the findings of this study to consider whether there is a greater role it could play in improving levels of support for refugee family reunion. More specifically, the options proposed to address the issues outlined above are:

> **To stabilise the budget for the travel assistance programme.**

The research suggests that by financing travel costs relating to family reunion, the British Red Cross is playing a key sector role in enabling families to realise their rights and be reunited as a family following periods of separation caused by conflict and persecution. In many cases the programme funds UK travel costs for children who have been left in the care of friends, relatives or a

single parent in countries where there is ongoing conflict or other security risks.

The travel assistance programme is currently being financed by temporary funds which were agreed following the termination of programme funding by UKBA and UNHCR in late 2009 and it is not yet clear whether or how this work will be funded in the future. The degree of humanitarian need addressed by this programme, coupled with the increasing shortfall in family reunion support in the wider sector, arguably support the case to mainstream this work within the British Red Cross.

> **To grow the British Red Cross family reunion programme.**

On the basis of the evidence from this research, the British Red Cross may want to consider expanding the travel assistance programme, for example, by broadening its criteria to include people with indefinite leave to remain, raising the thresholds and financing other costs such as exit visas.

The British Red Cross may also want to consider widening the support provided for family reunion beyond travel assistance. The current collaborative pilot in Glasgow between the British Red Cross and the Legal Services Agency highlights a role the British Red Cross can play in providing practical assistance in **liaising, interpretation, tracing documents and relaying messages**, as well as providing **emotional support** during the family reunion application process. This has been very positively received by clients and could potentially be expanded elsewhere in the UK.

In light of the range of enquiries that the British Red Cross receives about family reunion, the organisation may want to explore the development of staff training on family reunion practices and procedures to increase the confidence and ability of Refugee Services teams to effectively respond to queries and signpost individuals to information and support.

> **To grow the coordination aspect of our family reunion work.**

The research highlights areas where the British Red Cross could expand its collaborative work with other agencies to reach more people in need of family reunion related support. For example, 'hosting' more legal advisors within



our centres to make it easier for clients to access support, and developing our signposting practices to contribute to a more joined up approach across the sector. One such potential collaborator is Asylum Aid which has indicated that it has some capacity to take on referrals from the British Red Cross.

There may also be the potential for collaboration outside of the refugee sector, such as with disability groups who could advocate on behalf of clients with disability who appear to face even greater difficulties in accessing their right to family reunion.

Furthermore, the British Red Cross could consider taking the lead to encourage greater sharing of knowledge and the development of a centralised database on family reunion related information and support practices.

> **Advocating on family reunion issues in the UK.**

The research has highlighted a number of issues relating to both the process of family reunion (e.g. **difficulties in obtaining information and documentation**, as well as **accessing quality support**) and the eligibility criteria (e.g. **people in vulnerable situations excluded from family reunion because of their legal status, the definition of family as a nuclear biological construct, and the age of dependency**).

The British Red Cross could consider using these findings to develop our own advocacy

positions and/or add weight to existing advocacy work being undertaken by other refugee organisations such as Asylum Aid and the Scottish Refugee Council.

> **Feeding into UK policy.**

British Red Cross Refugee Services staff in Scotland are currently arranging to meet with the UKBA to discuss issues with the existing application form, and specifically where improvements could be made. In January 2012, case studies drawn from the research which demonstrated the necessity of legal aid and representation as a prerequisite for successful family reunion were provided to the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, to be included in their Parliamentary briefing calling for the inclusion of legal aid for refugee family reunion in UK legislation. Other opportunities to affect UK policy may arise as our family reunion services develop.

> **Feeding into international advocacy and collaboration working.**

The Red Cross European network for refugee work, PERCO, has expressed an interest in working collaboratively on the issue of family reunion and building on the findings of this research. Working in collaboration with the Red Cross EU office, PERCO is planning to respond to the **European Commission Green Paper on family reunion, expected in November 2011**, and have indicated that

the findings of this research will inform their response. The ICRC is also planning on undertaking work into DNA testing next year and they are keen to draw on our research findings in this work.

The British Red Cross has also signed up, in November 2011, as the **British partner for a European Union project led by the Italian Refugee Council** with the purpose of developing the research approach and advocacy positions on family reunion of refugees to influence EU decision makers. If the funding bid is successful, the work is due to start in April 2012.

> **Conducting further research.**

This study has highlighted particular challenges for adults and children who come over to the UK through the family reunion process, for example, adjusting to life as a family, accessing benefits and entitlements, and finding accommodation and employment. The Research team recommends that the British Red Cross undertakes follow up research to investigate how the integration needs of reunited families can be more effectively met.

The study also provides an evidence base for the Refugee Services department to actively seek and apply for more operational funds to support this programme in the medium and longer term.





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Appendix A International comparisons

Table 2 Comparison of family reunion for refugees in different countries

	AUSTRIA	CANADA	FINLAND
Right to family reunion			
Maintenance requirements	None	None, providing application is for nuclear family and submitted within one-year timeframe	None
Time restrictions	No time restrictions for convention refugees. Must wait one year before applying if have subsidiary protection	Must apply within one year of gaining residency otherwise have to use general immigration route	None
Definition of family unit			
Nuclear family unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex) > Dependent children (under 18) > Parents of unaccompanied minors > Siblings of unaccompanied minor if also bring parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex) > Dependent children (under 22) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex) > Dependent children (under 18) > Parents of unaccompanied minors
Other family members	No humanitarian exceptions for other family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Children who are married or over 22 IF have been continuously enrolled in school OR are financially dependent and unable to be self-supporting due to medical condition > Other members IF emotionally or economically dependent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Minor siblings of unaccompanied minor if parents missing/deceased > Other members IF physically, emotionally, and financially dependent on sponsor
Application procedure			
Place of application	Application must be lodged by family members overseas EXCEPT for unaccompanied minors, for whom a parent/attorney in Austria can lodge application on their behalf	Application must be lodged by family members overseas	Application must be lodged by family members overseas
Can appeal	No	Yes	Yes

Support provided			
Application (including advice, help with forms, legal support)	Support provided by Red Cross and other NGOs***	Support provided by NGOs. Red Cross involved on ad hoc but increasing basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Red Cross gives basic advice, counselling on family reunion issues, and makes practical travel arrangements > NGOs and local municipalities provide legal advice and help with form
Travel assistance	No official funding, but Red Cross funds if case meets criteria	Govt loans available	Govt funds travel expenses for family of resettled refugees. Others must pay costs themselves
Integration	Comprehensive programme provided by Red Cross	Support provided by NGOs	Comprehensive programme provided by Red Cross

	NORWAY	SWEDEN	UK
Right to family reunion			
Maintenance requirements	None, providing application is for nuclear family and submitted within one-year timeframe	None	None for nuclear family, except for individuals with indefinite leave to remain
Time restrictions	Must apply within one year of gaining residency otherwise must meet financial requirements	Except for nuclear family, should apply within limited period after granted permanent residence, but not enforced	None
Definition of family unit			
Nuclear family unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex) > Dependent children (under 18) > Parents of unaccompanied minors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex) > Dependent children (under 18) > Parents of unaccompanied minors > Siblings of unaccompanied minor if also bring parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex) > Dependent children (under 18)
Other family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Unmarried children over 18 IF do not have close family overseas OR medically dependent > Minor sibling IF do not have close family overseas AND dependent > Single parents of adult IF over 60 AND do not have close family overseas 	Other members IF members of same household AND mutually dependent	Other members IF exceptional compelling and compassionate circumstances

Application procedure			
Place of application	Application must be lodged by family members overseas. In exceptional cases, may also be lodged at Danish or Swedish embassy	Application must be lodged by family members overseas	Application must be lodged by family members overseas
Can appeal	Yes	Yes	Yes
Support provided			
Application (including advice, help with forms, legal support)	Support provided by NGOs	Support provided by Red Cross and other NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Limited support provided by NGOs > Pilot service provided by Red Cross in Glasgow
Travel assistance	Govt funds travel expenses for nuclear family providing arranged through official channels. Others must pay costs themselves	Govt funds travel for nuclear family of Convention refugees. Red Cross funds travel those with subsidiary protection if meet criteria	No official funding, but Red Cross funds if case meets criteria
Integration	Comprehensive programme provided by Red Cross and municipalities	Support provided by NGOs	Limited support provided by Red Cross and NGOs

* Convention refugee protection: Any non-EU national or stateless person who is located outside of his/her country of origin and who is unwilling or unable to return to it owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group is a refugee.

** Subsidiary protection: Applicants who do not qualify for refugee status, but who cannot return to their country of origin due to a real risk of suffering serious harm (torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, death penalty or execution, serious individual threat to the life or person as a result of indiscriminate violence) have the right to subsidiary protection.

***Non-government organisations.

Table 3 Main facilitators and barriers for refugees accessing family reunion in comparison countries

COUNTRY	FACILITATORS	BARRIERS
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Costs of DNA tests refunded if positive result > Good coordination between Austrian Red Cross and other agencies, so people can get help from either or both where necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No chance to appeal negative decision > No latitude for admission of dependent but non-nuclear family members > Difficult to prove relationship without documentation, and especially difficult for people from Somalia and Afghanistan as marriage certificates not recognised by Austrian authorities > Limited access to embassies overseas > Most family reunion applicants have to pay travel costs and many struggle to do this
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Expansion of concept of 'nuclear family' to include children up to the age of 22 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Family members not identified when the sponsor immigrated to Canada cannot ever be sponsored for family reunion > 'Age out' of process, so must be under age of dependency at time of decision rather than application > Unaccompanied minors not able to reunite with parents or siblings > Short timeframe for 'one year window' provision > Limited access to embassies overseas > Many struggle to pay application costs > Medical clearance requirements can lead to further family split
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Refugees in Finland have right to three years integration support from municipalities, and this includes support with family reunion applications and access to interpreters > Application form is available in Finnish, Swedish, and English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Difficult to prove relationship without documentation, and especially difficult for people from Somalia and Afghanistan as marriage certificates not recognised by Finnish authorities. Current backlog of applications from Somalia > 'Aging out' recently introduced, so must be under age of dependency at time of decision rather than application > Limited access to embassies overseas > Many struggle to pay application costs

Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Family reunion information on government websites available in different languages, including English, Arabic, French and Somali > Disability benefits can be used to count towards maintenance requirements > Refugees in Norway have right to five years integration support from municipalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > One-year timeframe where applications can be submitted without sponsor having to meet maintenance requirements can be difficult to meet, as it takes a long time to gather and present necessary documentation > Maintenance requirements for those who miss the one-year timeframe can be difficult to meet, especially for women > Can be difficult to prove relationship with fostered or adopted children
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Application form available in different languages, including Arabic and Somali > Sponsor in Sweden can receive decision as well as family members overseas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Difficult to prove relationship without documentation, and especially difficult for people from Somalia and Afghanistan as marriage certificates not recognised by Swedish authorities > Very strong evidence required to demonstrate mutual dependence > Children overseas need legal custodian to apply on their behalf, but do not always have one > Limited access to embassies overseas



Appendix B International case studies

AUSTRIA

Government policy and legislation

Austria is a signatory of the EU Council Directive on the right to family reunion, and the relevant national Austrian legislation is the Austrian Asylum Act 2005.

Right to family reunion for refugees

Convention refugees⁹ and individuals with subsidiary protection¹⁰ are entitled to family reunion, and are exempt from financial or accommodation requirements. However, people with subsidiary protection can only apply for family reunion after their first temporary residence permit has been renewed, which usually happens after one year of residence.

Definition of family

Family reunion in Austria is restricted to dependent nuclear family members. The nuclear family consists of:

- > spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex)
- > unmarried minor children (under the age of 18)
- > parents of unaccompanied minor children.

Unaccompanied minor children can bring siblings if they are also bringing their parents. If the parents are dead, it is not possible to be reunited with siblings.

There are no humanitarian exceptions for other family members.

Application procedure

The application for family reunion can be made at any point after the sponsor has been granted refugee status or had their subsidiary protection renewed.

The application must be lodged by the family members overseas at an Austrian embassy or consulate. However, in the case of unaccompanied minors, a parent or attorney in Austria can lodge an application on their behalf. The unaccompanied minor will still have to go to the embassy to collect their visa and in some cases to have their identity checked.

There are no application fees.

It is very difficult to have relationships recognised in the absence of documentation or DNA test results.

The procedure generally takes about 6 to 12 months, from time of application to time of entering Austria.

A negative decision cannot be appealed against. Reapplication is possible, but will not be successful unless new evidence is provided.

Support provided

Application

The application forms are not considered difficult to complete, and on the whole people do not need professional support. If, however, people do need support with the application, the Austrian Red Cross can explain the application procedure and how to complete the form, as well as give legal advice. Solicitors are not needed unless the application is denied and a complaint is lodged.

For other aspects of the process, the Austrian Red Cross can help liaise with Austrian and overseas authorities, organise travel (including visas, exit permits and travel documents), and organise DNA tests. The Austrian Red Cross also does a limited amount of special lobbying work on particularly complex cases, for example they are currently working on finding out how to reopen cases, in the absence of appeals, when a negative decision has been made.

The Austrian government does not fund the Austrian Red Cross or other organisations to provide support for refugee family reunion. Legal aid is being introduced for asylum applications, but is not available for family reunion as it is considered a visa application rather than an asylum act.

⁹ Convention refugee protection: Any non-EU country national or stateless person who is located outside of his/her country of origin and who is unwilling or unable to return to it owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group is a refugee.

¹⁰ Subsidiary protection: Applicants who do not qualify for refugee status, but who can not return to their country of origin due to a real risk of suffering serious harm (torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, death penalty or execution, serious individual threat to the life or person as result of indiscriminate violence) have the right to subsidiary protection.

Travel assistance

Government funding for travel assistance ceased in 2009, and there is now no official source of funding. In special hardship cases, the Austrian Red Cross can provide travel assistance if the case meets certain criteria, such as income requirements or ability to save to pay for travel, safety of family members, and comparison of ticket prices with other hardship cases. The Austrian Red Cross provides travel assistance to about 10 families a year.

Integration

Since the start of 2011, the Austrian Red Cross offers a 'Family Integration Counselling' service for people who have come to Austria through refugee family reunion. This service includes professional counselling support, integration, and orientation via volunteer 'buddies', and topics include financial safety, health, housing, work and education. The service is funded by the European Refugee Funds and the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and will continue to be funded in 2012.

Austrian Red Cross advocacy work

The Austrian Red Cross is currently working on finding out how to reopen cases, to address the lack of an appeal process.

can get help from other organisations as well as from the Austrian Red Cross if necessary.

- > No 'aging out' of the procedure, as the decision is based on the age of the child at the time of application rather than at the time of the decision.

Main difficulties in the procedure

- > No chance to appeal a negative decision. It is possible to lodge a complaint with the High Court, but a solicitor is needed for this and the process can take several years. The Austrian Red Cross is currently working on trying to reopen cases, but this is proving difficult.
- > No latitude for admission of dependent but non-nuclear family members. The definition of family, which excludes children aged 18 and over, often does not fit the requirements (for example, a child aged 21 with a disability). The policy on this is strict and does not leave room for exceptions.
- > Difficult to prove relationships without documentation, and especially difficult for people from Afghanistan and Somalia as marriage or birth certificates from these countries are not recognised by Austrian authorities. Whilst Austrian authorities look at the things people say in their interviews in their original asylum application, such as whether they mentioned a wife (and name, age, how got together etc), and compare this to interviews conducted for the family reunion process, it is very difficult to prove a marriage this way. In the end, if a couple do not have a child who can provide DNA evidence of their relationship, it is almost impossible to satisfy Austrian authorities of the relationship in the absence of a recognised marriage certificate.
- > Can be difficult for people without education to fill out the application form, collect necessary documents, and understand the decision. The Austrian Red Cross can help with this.
- > Limited embassies overseas that can process family reunion applications or conduct DNA tests.
- > Most family reunion applicants have to pay travel costs, and this can be difficult without support from local community or for those who are unemployed.

Factors that make the procedure easier

- > Support provided by the Austrian Red Cross helps individuals go through the family reunion process and be successfully reunited with family.
- > The Austrian Red Cross has good relationships and contacts with the Austrian authorities and can effectively liaise with these authorities on behalf of family reunion applicants.
- > Introduction of DNA testing to prove relationships where there are doubts about family membership. Previously, many visas were denied because the authorities did not believe what people had said. While there are still issues with negative test results, the Austrian Red Cross believes that on balance DNA testing is an improvement on the previous process.
- > Money for DNA testing is refunded if the test comes back with a positive relationship.
- > Good coordination between the Austrian Red Cross and other organisations, so that people

- > The decision on the family reunion application goes to the family members overseas, and it can be difficult for sponsors in Austria to find out about the decision, or the justification of the decision, without help from the Austrian Red Cross who can liaise on their behalf.
- > Lack of knowledge about right to family reunion, resulting, for example, in people not finding out about family reunion until their children have turned 18 and are no longer eligible. The Austrian Red Cross is trying to improve the knowledge of other support organisations so they can signpost individuals to the Austrian Red Cross as soon as possible.

Source of information

Information on family reunion for refugees in Austria was sourced from discussion with the Austrian Red Cross, as well as reference to the following document:

- > European Council on Refugees and Exiles (1999). *Survey of Provision for Family Reunification in the European Union*. Retrieved May 31, 2011, from <http://www.ecre.org/topics/areas-of-work/integration/190.html>

CANADA

Government policy and legislation

Under Canada's Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, the "one-year window of opportunity" regulations allow separated family members to apply for reunion within a year of the sponsor being granted residency in Canada. Applications made outside of the one-year timeframe must be made under the more restrictive general "family class" provisions.

Proposed legislation: Bill C-4

In October 2010, proposed legislation was presented in Canada's parliament called *An Act to Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act and the Marine Transportation Act* (short title: *Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act or Bill C4*). The Bill was later reintroduced in June 2011. The Bill aims to address large-scale irregular migration to Canada, particularly where human smuggling is involved.

Under the Bill's stipulations, a new category of foreign national, "designated foreign national",

has been proposed for any member of a group deemed as an "irregular arrival". The Bill's restrictions on the applications of 'designated foreign nationals' for permanent residence have serious implications on family reunification in two ways:

- > Under the Bill, applications or requests for permanent residence from a "designated foreign national" will not be considered for at least five years after they have been given this designation.
- > Applications or requests from foreign nationals (persons who have not been given a designation) will be suspended if the foreign national is deemed a "designated foreign national" after his or her application request has been made.

These provisions would have a direct impact on the length of time taken to reunite families. In order to sponsor a family member(s) to come to Canada, individuals must have permanent residence status. This means that family reunification will be delayed for 5 years, in addition to the time taken for processing a permanent residence application. This is a departure from current legislation, where foreign nationals who obtain the status of refugee or person in need of protection, must apply for permanent residence within 180 days of obtaining the status. Persons are then able to sponsor families after receiving permanent residence.

Right to family reunion for refugees

Convention refugees and people with subsidiary protection are entitled to family reunion. There are no maintenance requirements under the "one-year window" provisions.

Definition of family

For the purposes of Canada's family reunion policy, reunion is granted with the following family members:

- > spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex)
- > dependent children, who are
 - > unmarried minors (under the age of 22)
 - > married or over the age of 22 but who have been continuously enrolled in school
 - > married or over the age of 22 but who are financially dependent and not able

to support themselves due to a medical condition.

Other family members can be considered for reunion if they are emotionally or financially dependent on the family unit.

Application procedure

To utilise the one-year window provisions, applications must be submitted by family members at a Canadian visa office overseas within a year of the sponsor being granted residency in Canada.

Family members must pass a medical examination to show they do not pose a risk to Canadian public health.

Support provided

Application

In Canada, there are NGOs and groups that can help with applications or appeals. The Canadian Red Cross does not list family reunion as a service, but do get involved on an ad hoc basis, especially for complex cases. The Canadian Red Cross is finding they are increasingly getting drawn into family reunion support, and are planning to put together a working group to look at gaps in family reunion support in Canada and assess whether any gaps should be filled by the Red Cross.

Travel

Government loans are available to cover the cost of travel. There do not appear to be any NGOs that provide travel assistance, and instead travel is often funded by community groups.

Factors that make the procedure easier

- > Expansion of concept of ‘nuclear family’ to include children up to the age of 22.

Main difficulties in the procedure

- > Family members not identified when the sponsor immigrated to Canada fall into the category of “excluded family members” and cannot ever be sponsored for family reunion. This is exacerbated by bad advice which leads to refugees not including family members on their immigration applications. In addition, according to the Canadian Council for Refugees, there is a greater impact for women and girls as they may be pressured to not

mention children born out of wedlock, or be unaware of what is being put in their immigration application as the paperwork may be completed by others on their behalf.

- > ‘Age out’ of the process, so that if children turn 22 before the decision is made they are no longer considered minors. In comparison, in other countries such as the UK, age is considered at the time of application rather than decision.
- > Unaccompanied minors are not able to reunite with parents or siblings due to fears that adults will send their children ahead as ‘anchors’ to claim refugee status. However, there is widespread concern that this is contrary to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- > Short timeframe for “one-year window” provision means that many miss the timeframe and must instead apply under the more restrictive general “family class” which requires the sponsor to prove maintenance.
- > Limited access to embassies overseas.
- > Many struggle to pay application costs.
- > Medical clearance requirements mean that some family members may be granted visas but not others, leading to further family separation.

Source of information

Information on family reunion for refugees in Canada was sourced from discussion with the Canadian Red Cross, as well as reference to the following documents:

- > Béchar, J. (2011). *Bill C-4: An Act to Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act and the Marine Transportation Security Act*. Social Affairs Division, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Publication No. 41-1-C4-E.
- > Bradley, A. (2010). Beyond borders: Cosmopolitanism and family reunification for refugees in Canada. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 22(3), 379-403.
- > Canadian Council for Refugees (2004). *More than a Nightmare: Delays in Refugee Family Reunification*. Retrieved May 31, 2011, from <http://ccrweb.ca/nightmare.pdf>

- > Canadian Council for Refugees (2007). *Submission on 117(9)(d)*. Retrieved June 6, 2011, from <http://ccrweb.ca/documents/excludedfam.pdf>
- > United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2011). *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, Country Chapter: Canada*, July 2011 revision, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3c5e55594.html> [accessed 11 October 2011]

FINLAND

Government policy and legislation

Finland is a signatory of the EU Council Directive on the right to family reunion. The relevant national Finnish legislation is Section 114 of the Aliens Act which allows residence permits to be issued on the basis of family reunion, and Section 86 of the recently launched Integration Act which defines eligibility for government-sponsored travel.

Right to family reunion for refugees

Family reunion is granted to Convention refugees and people with subsidiary (including humanitarian) protection. There are no maintenance requirements attached.

Definition of family

In Finland, family reunion is granted with the following 'core' family members:

- > spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex)
- > unmarried minor children (aged under 18 years)
- > parents/guardians of an unaccompanied minor.

Other family members are eligible for reunification under certain conditions:

- > unmarried minor foster are eligible for reunification IF there is evidence that the child's parents or guardians are missing or deceased and the relationship was established before the sponsor arrived in Finland
- > minor siblings of unaccompanied minor IF they lived together in their country of

origin and their parents are missing or deceased and it is in their best interests

- > other family members IF refusing reunion would be unreasonable because the family member is fully dependent on the sponsor and they intend to continue their close family life in Finland. In such cases, dependency must be physical and emotional, as well as financial.

Application procedure

There is no specific timeframe in which the application must be submitted.

From the beginning of 2012 applications for family reunion must be submitted by family members overseas at a Finnish embassy. Finnish embassies will only accept applications from people who can present a document showing they have a legal right of residence in the country.

The application will be refused without the required documentation.

In general, the processing time takes about one-and-a-half years, although it can take over two years for Somali cases. If a negative decision is appealed, the process may take around three or four years.

There is an application cost of 100-200 Euros per family member, and 100-200 Euros for the sponsor in Finland. This is not subsidised by the government.

There is an appeals procedure.

Support provided

Application

The Finnish Red Cross gives basic advice and counselling on family reunion issues, and makes practical travel arrangements for family members of resettled refugees. The Finnish government provides funding to the Finnish Red Cross for their family reunion work.

Advice and counselling with the application form is provided by the guardians of unaccompanied minors and by non-government actors and local municipality social services.

Refugees are entitled to interpreters, who are funded by local municipalities.

Legal aid is available at the appeals stage.

Travel

Since 2011, the Finnish government only pays the travel costs for the family members of resettled refugees. Other refugees and people with subsidiary protection must pay the costs themselves. There is no financial travel assistance service provided by the Finnish Red Cross.

Integration

The Finnish Red Cross provide a government-funded integration programme to help refugees, including reunited families, when they arrive in Finland. This programme includes support people to provide guidance, homework support for children, language training and community networking. All activities are organised by volunteers and differ across the country.

Finnish Red Cross advocacy work

The Finnish Red Cross has advised the government of their concerns around; the introduction of 'aging out' for minor children (who lose entitlement if they turn 18 during the procedure); travel costs for non-resettlement refugees; the introduction of biometric testing which means that family members must now submit their applications overseas and the associated risks of travel to embassies to do so.

Factors that make the procedure easier

- > Refugees in Finland have the right to three years integration support from municipalities, and this includes support with family reunion applications.
- > The application form is available in Finnish, Swedish and English.

Main difficulties in the procedure

- > Type and extent of documentation required is unrealistic, and is a considerable barrier to reunion for people who come from countries where official documents do not exist or are hard to access such as Somalia and Afghanistan. In such cases, DNA testing is required to give the family the opportunity to prove their biological kinship. The cost of DNA testing is covered by the Finnish government.
- > There is a backlog of family reunion applications from Somalia due to a rapid increase in the number of applications and the absence of verifiable documentation.

- > 'Aging out' has recently been introduced into legislation, so that children must be under 18 at the time the decision, rather than the application, is made.
- > Difficult to access some Finnish embassies due to where it is situated or security concerns. There is also a lack of trained staff at embassies.
- > People struggle to find the money to pay the application costs.
- > Cultural differences in the definition of family.

Source of information

Information on family reunion for refugees in Finland was sourced from discussion with the Finnish Red Cross, as well as reference to the following documents:

- > European Council on Refugees and Exiles (1999). *Survey of Provision for Family Reunification in the European Union*. Retrieved May 31, 2011, from <http://www.ecre.org/topics/areas-of-work/integration/190.html>
- > United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2011). *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, Country Chapter: Finland*, July 2011 revision, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3c5e57f07.html> [accessed 11 October 2011]

NORWAY**Government policy and legislation**

Norway does not appear to be a signatory of the EU Council Directive on the right to family reunion.

Right to family reunion for refugees

Convention refugees and people with subsidiary protection (including protection against refoulement) are entitled to family reunion. There are no maintenance requirements if the application is from nuclear family members (spouse/cohabitant/partner or minor child) and is submitted within one year of the sponsor in Norway gaining their residency permit. However, if the one-year timeframe is missed, the sponsor in Norway must be able to document an income

of at least £22.5k per annum, as well having registered a similar income in the preceding year.

Definition of family

Norway distinguishes between ‘close’ and ‘other’ family members, who all must meet certain conditions to be eligible for family reunion. The attached conditions are considered by the Norwegian Red Cross to be complex, and examples are as follows.

‘Close’ family consists of:

- > spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex)
- > unmarried minor children (under the age of 18)
- > parents of unaccompanied minor children.

‘Other’ family can include:

- > unmarried children over the age of 18 IF would otherwise be left without close family members in home country and who will continue to be a part of the parent’s household in Norway OR for medical reasons is completely dependent on personal care provided by the parents
- > unmarried minor foster or adopted children IF have valid documentation
- > full sibling under the age of 18 IF do not have close family members in home country and sponsor in Norway is suited to be a carer
- > single parents of adults IF are over the age of 60 and do not have close family members in home country.

Application procedure

The application for family reunion must as a general rule be made within one year of the sponsor gaining residency or they must meet maintenance requirements.

The application must be lodged by the family members overseas at a Norwegian embassy. In exceptional cases, applications may also be lodged at Danish or Swedish embassies.

There are no application fees for minor children.

80% of applications are processed within six months.

There is an appeals procedure.

Support provided

Application

There are some non-government organisations in Norway that provide advice and support for refugees going through the family reunion process, including assistance with writing applications, contacting government offices and free legal advice. The Norwegian Red Cross does not play any role in the family reunion process beyond offering tracing services.

Travel

The Norwegian government funds the travel expenses of pre-flight spouse/cohabitant/partner and unmarried minor children, providing the journey is arranged through the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

However, because of the financial requirements attached to family reunion applications submitted more than a year after the sponsor was granted residency, there is not the same need for travel assistance as in other countries.

Integration

The Norwegian Red Cross provides integration support for refugees and reunited family members, which includes language courses and orientation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that individuals who come to Norway through the family reunion process have less access to provisions and support than those who come as refugees.

Norwegian municipalities receive funding from the government to provide settlement and integration support for refugees and their reunited family members during the initial five years after arrival.

Norwegian Red Cross advocacy work

The Norwegian Red Cross has engaged in some advocacy work, mainly by writing consultation papers to the government on family reunion related issues.

Factors that make the procedure easier

- > Information on the UDI website is available in different languages, including English, Arabic, French and Somali.
- > Disability benefits can be used to count towards income requirements.

- > Can contact UDI information services by telephone for a case update at any time. However, the waiting time for calls to be answered can be long and applicants are not able to speak directly with case workers.
- > Refugees in Norway have right to five years integration support from municipalities.

Main difficulties in the procedure

- > The one-year timeframe where family reunion applications can be submitted without having to meet maintenance requirements can be difficult to meet, as it can take a long time to gather and present the necessary documentation from Norway and abroad. The timeframe, therefore, is of great concern to Norwegian aid agencies.
- > Maintenance requirements for those who miss the one-year timeframe can be difficult to meet, and are especially difficult to meet for women in particular.
- > Can be difficult to prove that relationship with fostered or adopted children is genuine.

Source of information

Information on family reunion for refugees in Norway was sourced from discussion with the Norwegian Red Cross, as well as reference to the following documents:

- > United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2011). *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, Country Chapter: Norway*, July 2011 revision, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3c5e59835.html> [accessed 11 October 2011]
- > Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) website, available at <http://www.udi.no/Norwegian-Directorate-of-Immigration/Central-topics/Family-immigration/> [accessed 19 October 2011]

SWEDEN

Government policy and legislation

Sweden is a signatory of the EU Council Directive on the right to family reunion, and the relevant Swedish legislation is the 2005 Swedish Aliens Act.

Right to family reunion for refugees

People with permanent residence permits including Convention refugees and people with subsidiary protection are entitled to family reunion. There are no maintenance and income requirements attached for refugees and people with subsidiary protection.

Definition of family

Family reunion for refugees and people with subsidiary protection in Sweden is granted with the following family members:

- > spouse/cohabitant/registered partner (including same sex)
- > unmarried minor children (under the age of 18)
- > parent of unaccompanied minor children
siblings of unaccompanied minor children if accompanying a parent.

Other relatives, including parents of unaccompanied minor children, are eligible for family reunion only if they were members of the same household in their country of origin and can demonstrate an extraordinary dependence, or other strong ties and extraordinary circumstances.

Application procedure

Except for nuclear family (spouse/cohabitant etc and biological minor children), the application should be submitted within a certain timeframe of the sponsor being granted their residence permit (in practice about 10 months). However, if the application is made later than this it is difficult to predict whether it would have an effect in the case of other family members.

The application is lodged by the family members overseas at a Swedish embassy.

It is very difficult to have relationships recognised in the absence of documentation. DNA analysis is offered if relationships cannot be otherwise proved, and expenses are then covered by the state. Since 2010, establishment of identity is also now required, and again this is very difficult to achieve in the absence of documentation or documentation accepted by Swedish authorities. A legislative process is taking place at the moment on the matter.

The procedure generally takes around six months, with an additional ten months if an appeal is required.

There is an appeals procedure.

Support provided

Application

The Swedish Red Cross provides information and advice, help with applications, counselling, legal support, and assistance with appeals. At present, the major family reunion work of the Swedish Red Cross concerns legal representation for appeals and general counselling.

The Swedish government provides funding for the administration of the Swedish Red Cross' family reunion services as part of the restoring family links services and based on the Red Cross mandate.

There is no legal aid for family reunion cases, however free legal advice is provided by other non-government organisations in addition to the Swedish Red Cross.

Travel

The Swedish government funds travel for the following family members of Convention refugees: spouse/cohabiting partner; unmarried children under the age of 20; and parents and siblings of an unaccompanied minor under the age of 18.

The Swedish Red Cross provides assistance with travel costs and arrangements for the nuclear family separated by war or conflict or other violent situations, although a fee must be paid for this service (currently 800 Euro/600 Euro for unaccompanied minor, regardless of number of family members). The Swedish Red Cross acknowledges this fee is high, but necessary within current budget constraints. The Swedish Red Cross does not provide financial travel assistance for extended family members.

Integration

While the Swedish Red Cross runs integration activities, there is no specific family reunion integration service.

Swedish Red Cross advocacy work

The Swedish Red Cross has represented family reunion cases at the Supreme Court to highlight the issues around lack of documentation and use of DNA tests for kinship but not identification. The Swedish Red Cross has also sent a demarche to the Swedish Migration Minister to highlight that there are currently at least 2-3,000 people who have been granted residence permits but have difficulty meeting identity requirements and therefore have not yet been granted family reunion.

Factors that make the procedure easier

- > Application forms are available in different languages, including Arabic and Somali.
- > The sponsor in Sweden can receive the decision as well as the family members overseas, if the family members have authorised them to act on their behalf.

Main difficulties in the procedure

- > Issues around lack of documentation leading to difficulty proving identity. This is a problem for refugees from Somalia and Afghanistan in particular, as their documentation is not recognised by Swedish authorities. The Swedish Red Cross has represented cases in court to highlight this issue, and has sent a demarche to the Migration Minister.
- > Very strong evidence required to demonstrate mutual dependence, and such dependence must be considered extraordinary.
- > For parents and extended family, dependency must have existed prior to the sponsor's flight from country of origin.
- > Children overseas need a legal custodian to make an application on their behalf, but cases often fail because the child does not have a legal custodian.
- > Embassies can be difficult to access, and some countries do not have a Swedish embassy at all. Even if accessible, not all embassies accept family reunion applications (for example, Baghdad, Kabul, Uganda).

Source of information

Information on family reunion for refugees in Sweden was sourced from discussion with the Swedish Red Cross, as well as reference to the following documents:

- > European Council on Refugees and Exiles (1999). *Survey of Provision for Family Reunification in the European Union*. Retrieved May 31, 2011, from <http://www.ecre.org/topics/areas-of-work/integration/190.html>
- > United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2011). *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, Country Chapter: Sweden*, July 2011 revision, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3c5e5a219.html> [accessed 11 October 2011]

Appendix C Telephone survey interview questions

Introduction

Hello, I'm [your name] and I'm calling on behalf of the British Red Cross. We recently wrote to you about an important study we are carrying out to understand the experiences of refugees in the UK when applying to be reunited with family members. You very kindly got in touch with us to say that you would be interested in helping us with this research.

I want to reassure you that your responses are voluntary, and will be kept private. We know that for some people talking about family can be a positive experience, but for others it can be difficult. If there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, or you want to stop at any time, that's fine, just tell me.

Would you be able to spare 10 or 15 minutes now to tell me about your thoughts and experiences of family reunion for refugees in the UK?

- Yes → *start interview*
- No → is there another time that would suit for me to call you again?

Opening questions

Before we start, I just have a few things to read to you about the interview.

First, we are just looking at ways the British Red Cross, or other organisations, could help people with family reunion in the future. This is a research study, and your participation will not affect the support you may currently receive from the British Red Cross or other organisations.

Second, do you mind if I record this interview to help me with my notes? The recording will stay private and will never be associated with you. You can ask me to stop recording at any time.

- Yes → *turn on digital recorder*
- No → ok, that's fine, I will not record this interview

1. What is your immigration status? Is it Refugee Status, Humanitarian Protection, Indefinite Leave to Remain, or something else?
2. And when were you granted this status?
3. How long overall have you been in the UK?
4. What country were you from originally?
5. And what town in the UK do you live in now?
6. And do you mind me asking how old you are?
7. *Interviewer to record whether male or female. Ask if necessary and appropriate*
8. Which, if any, organisations have you had support from since coming to the UK as an asylum seeker?
9. Did you have a lawyer to help you with your asylum application?
10. *[For those with Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection]* Do you know that people who have been granted Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection in the UK can apply to be reunited with the family members they left behind when they came to the UK?
 - Yes → *Go to Section A*
 - No → *Go to Section C*
11. *[For those with Indefinite Leave to Remain]* Do you know that people who have been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK can apply to be reunited with the family members they left behind when they came to the UK, if they are able to support their family themselves without relying on money from the government?
 - Yes → *Go to Section A*
 - No → *Go to Section C*

Section A

For people who DO know about family reunion.

12. Have you applied to be, or been, reunited with any of your family members from overseas? *Includes both if application was successful or unsuccessful, or still underway*
- Yes → Go to Section B
- No → Go to question 13
13. Do you have family members in other countries that you would like to be reunited with in the UK?
- Yes → Go to question 14
- No → Go to End
14. Which family members would you like to be reunited with? *If say 'children', clarify age.*
15. Why have you not applied to be reunited with your family members?

Go to End

Section B

For people who have been, or applied to be, reunited with family members

16. What is the status of your family reunion application? Is it still underway, complete and successful, complete and unsuccessful, or under appeal?
- Still underway → Go to question 18
- Complete and successful → Go to question 17
- Complete and unsuccessful → Go to question 18
- Under appeal → Go to question 18
17. *[For those who answered 'complete and successful']* Was your family reunion application successful the first time around, or did you have a negative decision which you then appealed?

18. Which family members did you apply/are you applying to be reunited with? *If say 'children', clarify age.*
19. Where did you find out information about the family reunion process?
20. Who, if anyone, gave/is giving you advice about the family reunion process? *Mark all that apply. Go to question 21 if people say 'lawyer' (regardless of other options they give too), go to question 24 if not.*
21. *[Only those who said 'a lawyer']* In your opinion, how easy or difficult was/is it to find a lawyer to help you? Was/Is it easy, just ok, or difficult?
22. *[Only those who said 'a lawyer']* How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the help that you got/are getting from your lawyer? Are you satisfied, just ok, or dissatisfied?
- Satisfied → Go to question 23
- Ok → Go to question 24
- Dissatisfied → Go to question 23
23. *[Only those who said 'a lawyer']* Why are you satisfied/dissatisfied with the help that you got/are getting from your lawyer?
24. Overall, how easy or difficult was/are you finding it to apply for family reunion? Was/Is it easy, just ok, or difficult?
25. In your opinion, how easy or difficult was/is it to find information about the family reunion process? Was/Is it easy, just ok, or difficult?
26. What kind of additional information about family reunion, if any, would have been/be helpful to you?
27. Who, if anyone, helped/is helping you fill out the family reunion application form? *If say no-one, go to question 28, otherwise go to question 29*
28. *[Only those who answered 'no one' to previous question]* In your opinion, how easy or difficult was/is it to fill out the application form? Was/Is it easy, just ok, or difficult?

- Easy → Go to question 30
- Ok → Go to question 31
- Difficult → Go to question 30
29. *[Only those who DID get help with form]*
In your opinion, how easy or difficult would it have been/be to fill out the application form without help? Would it be easy, just ok, or difficult?
- Easy → Go to question 30
- Ok → Go to question 31
- Difficult → Go to question 30
30. What made/makes it easy/difficult to fill out the application form?
31. Who, if anyone, helped/is helping you communicate or stay in contact with the embassy overseas where your family applied/are applying for their family reunion visa?
32. In your opinion, how easy or difficult was/is it to communicate or stay in contact with the embassy overseas where your family applied/are applying for their family reunion visa? Was/Is it easy, just ok, or difficult?
- Easy → Go to question 33
- Ok → Go to question 34
- Difficult → Go to question 33
- Someone else liaised with the embassy on my behalf → Go to question 34
33. *[Only those who did NOT say someone else liaised]* What made/makes it easy/difficult to communicate or stay in contact with the embassy?
34. In your opinion, how easy or difficult was/is it to get hold of the documents you needed/need to submit with your family reunion application? Was/Is it easy, just ok, or difficult?
- Easy → Go to question 35
- Ok → Go to question 36
- Difficult → Go to question 35
35. What made/makes it easy/difficult to get hold of the documents you needed/need to submit with your application?
36. Did/do you have to pay for any documents you needed/need to submit with your application?
- Yes → Go to question 37
- No → Go to question 38
- Don't know → Go to question 38
37. *[Only those who answered 'yes' to previous question]* Where did/will you get the money to pay for the documents you needed/need to submit with your application?
38. In your opinion, how easy or difficult did your family members find/have your family members found it to submit their family reunion applications? Was/Is it easy, just ok, or difficult?
- Easy → Go to question 39
- Ok → Go to question 40
- Difficult → Go to question 39
39. What made/makes it easy/difficult for your family members to submit their applications?
40. Were you given information about how long you would have to wait until you got/get a decision on your application?
41. In your opinion, how easy or difficult was/is it to find out about the progress of your application in the system? Was/Is it easy, just ok, or difficult?
- Easy → Go to question 42
- Ok → Go to question 43, or next applicable question
- Difficult → Go to question 42
- I did not try → Go to question 43, or next applicable question
42. What made/makes it easy/difficult to find out about the progress of your application in the system?

43. *[Only ask those whose application is complete]* About how long did it take, from when you lodged your application until you received a decision?
44. *[Only ask those whose applications were complete and successful]* Have your family members arrived in the UK?
45. *[Only ask those whose family members have arrived]* How did you get the money to pay for your family's flight tickets?
46. *[Only ask those whose application is underway or under appeal]* If your family reunion application is successful, how will you get the money to pay for your family's flight tickets?
47. Do you know how other refugees applying for family reunion have got the money to pay for their family's flight tickets to the UK?
48. What were/are the biggest challenges that you yourself found/are finding in applying for family reunion?
49. What were/are the biggest challenges that your family found/are finding in applying for family reunion?
50. *[Only ask those whose family has arrived]* Once your family arrived in the UK, did you try and get any support to help them settle in to life here? Support could be emotional, practical such as accommodation/furnishing/signing up for allowances, or something else.
- Yes → did you manage to get any support, to help them settle into life in the UK?
What? _____
- No
51. *[Only ask those whose family has arrived]* What were the biggest challenges your family encountered while settling in to life in the UK?

Go to End

Section C

For people who do NOT know about family reunion.

52. Do you have family members in other countries that you would like to be reunited with in the UK?
- Yes → Go to question 53
- No → Go to End
53. If you are interested, you can find information about applying for family reunion from Citizens Advice Bureau, Immigration Law Practitioner Association, Office of the Immigration Service Commissioner, and UK Border Association websites. Would you like me to send you the details of these websites?

Go to End

End

That's all the questions. Thank you very much for helping us with our research. I'd like to assure you that the information you have given will be kept private and confidential.

We know that talking about family for some people can be a positive experience, while others can find it difficult. If any of the things that we've talked about today have upset you, and you would like to talk to someone about it, we have a list of agencies that you can contact. Would you like me to send you this list?

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