



Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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10 June 2021

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 12 May to the Home Secretary on behalf of your constituents about child refugees. I am replying as the Minister for Immigration Compliance and Justice.

Your constituents call upon the Government to enable unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) to reunite with family in the UK. I am determined to continue the UK's proud record of providing safety to those who need it most and protecting vulnerable children remains a key priority.

Our existing Immigration Rules ('the Rules') enable UASC with family members in the UK to apply to join eligible sponsors such as those with refugee or humanitarian protection leave, British citizenship, or settled status.

UASC can be reunited with a parent in the UK, depending on the immigration status of the parent, under the Refugee Family Reunion Rules or via Appendix FM. There are no financial requirements for applications under the Refugee Family Reunion Rules.

Further, paragraphs 319X and 297 of the Rules are extremely flexible provisions which allow children to apply to join a wide range of adult family members who are not their parents, providing there are serious and compelling considerations which make exclusion of the child undesirable, suitable arrangements have been made for the child's care, and relatives can support and accommodate the child without recourse to public funds. Under these Rules, we do not restrict the range of those family members.

In the year ending March 2021, we issued 4,973 refugee family reunion visas under the Refugee Family Reunion Rules alone and over 36,000 since 2015. Around half were for children. In 2020, the UK received the second highest number of asylum applications from UASC out of all European countries (27 EU Member States, EEA states, Switzerland, UK) and accounted for approximately 14% of all reported UASC claims.

As the UK is no longer bound by the Dublin Regulation, we took steps to ensure Dublin Regulation family reunion cases which entered the system before the end of the Transition Period at 23.00 GMT on 31 December 2020 would still be processed, as set in the Savings Provisions of the Immigration, Nationality and Asylum Act [EU Exit] (2019).

We continue to make arrangements with sending Member States for the transfer of people accepted under the Savings Provisions, though it is important to be clear that arrangements to complete a transfer are the responsibility of the sending State.

In addition to the existing Rules, we continue to welcome refugees from conflict zones through the global UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Community Sponsorship, and the Mandate Resettlement Scheme. In each year between 2016 and 2019, the UK resettled more refugees than any other European country. Overall, since September 2015, we have resettled over 25,000 refugees - around half of whom were children.

We also recognise the significant pressure placed on local authorities caring, at present, for 5,000 UASC in England alone and it is important we focus on ensuring we can care for those children already here before we agree to taking more.

I note the concerns your constituents have raised about children going missing in Europe and the dangers of exploitation and trafficking. We are working with our French counterparts to stop channel crossings and crack down on the organised criminal gangs facilitating them. The French are stopping increasing numbers of migrants leaving their beaches but to end these crossings we need a long-term approach and a tougher stance towards illegal entry, as well as the criminals behind it.

For the first time in decades, the Government will address the challenge of illegal immigration through comprehensive reform of our asylum system. We will deliver a new firm but fair system to break the business model of criminal trafficking networks and deter illegal entry into the UK.

The Government committed to review safe and legal routes to the UK and is meeting its statutory duty to conduct a public consultation on family reunion for UASC in the EU. We will encourage asylum through safe and legal routes, while taking steps to discourage people coming here illegally to claim asylum.

The New Plan for Immigration, as announced on 24 March 2021 by the Home Secretary (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>), outlined the Government's intentions to build a fair but firm asylum system. To inform our proposals and ensure we can deliver effective legislative change across the system, the Government carried out a comprehensive public consultation and engagement process which concluded on 6 May 2021.

The consultation considered the future approach to safe and legal routes, including for UASC family reunion. Now the consultation has closed, we are considering responses carefully, including the method for reporting on its findings in line with our duties.



**Chris Philp MP**