



## **Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill 2017-19**

### **The Purpose of the Bill**

To make provision for leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom to be granted to the family members of refugees and of people granted humanitarian protection; to provide for legal aid to be made available for such family reunion cases; and for connected purposes.

The Bill calls for:

- 1)** Child refugees in the UK having the right to sponsor their close family so they can rebuild their lives together and help them integrate in their new community
- 2)** An expansion of who qualifies as a family so that young people who have turned 18 and elderly parents can live in safety with their families in the UK
- 3)** The reintroduction of legal aid so refugees who have lost everything have the support they need to afford and navigate the complicated process of being reunited with their families.

### **Why it is important**

Around the world more than 65 million people – half of them children – have been forced from their homes due to conflict, violence and persecution. Although international law states that families are entitled to protection, displacement and flight are forcing them apart. Refugee family reunion is often the only way to ensure that a refugee's right to family unity can be realised. Not only is refugee family reunion a way to reunite divided families, but it is also a tool that governments can use to offer refugees a safe and legal way to escape danger, and access protection from conflict in countries such as Syria, South Sudan, and Afghanistan.

In the UK, restrictive family reunion rules are keeping families apart. Adult refugees can sponsor only their very closest relatives to join them – their partners and children under 18 years old. Refugee children do not have the right to sponsor any family members to join them. This means that mothers and fathers in the UK are unable to bring their children over the age of 18 to join them; refugee children in the UK are forced to live apart. From their parents; and refugees are unable to bring elderly relatives to live with them in safety.

The lack of opportunities for refugees to reunite with family members in the UK not only forces them to turn to smugglers, but also exacerbates the humanitarian crises in European countries like Greece and Italy, where displaced people arrive by sea in an attempt to join their families and instead end up trapped, living in squalid conditions and unable to exercise their rights. For refugees already living in safety in the UK, the forced separation from their families and constant anxiety about their wellbeing can be devastating, preventing them from rebuilding their lives and

undermining their successful integration into their new communities. By ensuring refugee families can stay together, the UK government can:

- make an important contribution to addressing the biggest global displacement crisis since the Second World War
- help make families more resilient in the face of displacement
- prevent people from embarking on dangerous journeys, and
- support the integration of refugees in the UK.

### **Private members Bill**

This is a Private Members' Bill. We understand that for many MP's Fridays are often spent in their constituency. However, one hundred MPs need to be present to vote in favour for this Bill to proceed. There have been some encouraging remarks from Government Ministers so with enough support there is a real chance to raise the issue and effect change.

### **Definitions**

- **Refugee:** A person who is forced to leave their country of origin and seek protection in another country because of 'a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' (the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees).
- **Asylum seeker:** A person who has fled to another country, has made an application for protection as a refugee and is waiting for that country to decide if they will be recognised as a refugee.
- **Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child:** Anyone under 18 years of age who is separated from both parents and without an adult caring for them, and is seeking asylum.
- **Refugee family reunion:** A process by which refugees can be reunited with their family; it is a right attached to being recognised as a refugee. In the UK, only very few family relations qualify; currently, the sponsor has to be an adult refugee in the UK and can only apply for a partner and children under the age of 18 to come to join them.