

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair and a gold watch, embracing a young child with curly brown hair. The woman's eyes are closed, and she has a gentle smile, conveying a sense of relief and affection. The child is leaning into her, and the background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting with other people.

Refugee Family Reunion

Understanding Support Needs

The Red Cross and Family Reunion

- > Family Reunion is a core pillar of the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement
- > The British Red Cross (BRC) has been a key provider of Family Reunion Travel Assistance for 15 years.



Why Assess Family Reunion Needs in the UK?

- > Feedback on difficulties with accessing rights
- > Withdrawal of funding for Family Reunion Travel Assistance programme,
- > Key providers of free legal advice shutting down
- > Threat to Legal Aid for Family Reunion



Methodology

- > Literature review and document analysis
 - > Lack of official data on family reunion, incl. with regards to resettled refugees
- > 66 telephone interviews with refugees
- > 11 interviews with staff from refugee organisations and legal aid support services
- > 5 Case studies of sister National Red Cross Societies
- > 15 interviews and focus groups with Red Cross staff and volunteers



Key Findings



The Importance of Family Reunion

- > Basic human right: Refugee Convention states unity of the family is “an essential right of the refugee”.
- > Family important for wider societal wellbeing and separation can affect integration
 - UNHCR resettlement handbook: *“[Family separation] may also create serious obstacles to a refugee’s integration in a new country, and the realization of family unity is considered an important aspect of all durable solutions”*.
 - Concern about family associated with poor psychological health



What support do people need to realise their family reunion rights?

> Access to accurate information

“You don’t know what you’ve got to start from, where you’ve got to start”

> Affordable legal advice, help with forms and follow-up

“I can tell you, honestly sister, that the language, if you don’t speak the language, you are lost.”

> Financial support

“I was eating bread. Maybe eat just bread for a week. Just eat £10 and save the rest”

“



What support do people need to realise their family reunion rights? (cont'd)

> Proving relationships

“My wife had to travel by foot, by camel, by donkey... So on the way they lost all the documentation”.

> Emotional support to deal with separation

> Integration

> Advocacy re: current legislation / policy

“We have seen families separate through Family Reunion... some children have been left behind if they are over 18”



What would enable support organisations to deliver an effective family reunion service?

> Collaboration

- > Providing complementary services
- > Partnerships e.g BRC collaboration with the Legal Services Agency in Glasgow

> Clear, consistent, and centralised information

- > Currently lacking

> Official statistics

- > Currently lacking



International Case Studies



UK



Sweden



Austria



Finland



Norway



Canada

No maintenance required	~	✓	✓	✓	~	✗
No time restrictions	✓	~	~	✓	✗	✓
Age of dependency	18	18	18	18	18	22
Humanitarian exceptions or dependency criteria	✓	✓	✗	✓	~	✓
Appeal possible	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Possible without docs	✓	~	~	~	~	✓
Good access to support (including advice, help with forms, as well as legal assistance)	✗ ~ NGO	✓ RC, NGO	✓ RC, NGO	✓ RC, govt, NGO	✓ NGO	~ NGO
Travel assistance	~ RC	✓ RC, govt	~ RC	~ govt	~ govt	~ govt loan

International Case Study - Finland

- > Finnish Red Cross provides: advice and counselling, practical travel arrangements for resettled refugees, integration support to newly arrived families
- > Local municipal case workers help with form
 - *BUT new procedure beginning of 2012*
- > Barriers
 - *Backlog of applications from Somalia*
 - *Age out*
 - *Getting to embassy*
 - *Admin costs*
- > Enablers
 - *3 years integration support*
 - *Many actors involved*
 - *Support funded by government*



Next Steps for BRC

- > Maintain Travel Assistance Programme
- > Use findings of this research to consider whether there is a greater role we could play in improving levels of support.
 - > Consider providing or funding legal support
- > Advocate on family reunion issues in the UK
 - > Lobbying UKBA on the application form
 - > Contribution to lobbying on Legal Aid Bill
- > Feeding into international advocacy and collaboration work



Family Reunion and Resettled Refugees

- > What have you learnt from your experience in working with resettled refugees?
- > How can we take this work forward together?
- > Learning and sharing
- > Further research needs
- > Information support needs

