



**Craig Whittaker MP**

**CALDER VALLEY**

[www.craigwhittakermp.co.uk](http://www.craigwhittakermp.co.uk)

### **Reuniting Refugees and Family Members**

Thank you for contacting me about reuniting refugees with family members.

The UK strongly supports the principle of family unity, and there are already legal routes for families to be reunited safely. Currently, family reunion policy allows a spouse or partner and children under the age of 18 of those granted protection in the UK to join them in the United Kingdom, if they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country. Under this policy, over 24,000 family reunion visas have been granted over the last five years. They will remain in force when the UK leaves the European Union and are not affected by Brexit. Furthermore, children recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as refugees can join close family members here in the UK through the Mandate resettlement scheme. In addition, the Immigration Rules provide for family reunion and allow extended family members to sponsor children where there are serious and compelling circumstances.

I appreciate the argument that the Government should expand the scheme; however, as I understand it, there are no plans to widen the criteria. The criteria are fully compliant with the UK's international obligations, and enable thousands of people each year to be reunited with their families in the UK. Discretionary resettlement schemes are also in place for recognised refugees for whom resettlement is most appropriate. These schemes are operated in partnership with the UNHCR, and include Gateway, Mandate, Children at Risk, and the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

The Government continues to work with key EU Member States to ensure the family reunification process works effectively. The UK and France have committed to ensuring that the provisions of the Dublin III Regulation are used efficiently and effectively. To assist the handling of such cases, the two Governments have established a permanent official contact group, agreed single points of contact within respective Dublin Units and the UK has seconded an asylum expert to the French administration to facilitate the improvement of all stages of the process. The Government is also providing support to the Dublin Units in Greece and Italy bilaterally and through the European Asylum Support Office.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP