**Families Together Action Brief**

**What?** A collaborative national day of action for the ‘Families Together’ campaign

**When?**15th March 2019

**Where?**Universities across the UK!

**The Problem**

Refugees in the UK often find themselves separated from family members following experiences of conflict and/or persecution. The reunion of these families, who have been torn apart by circumstances out of their control, can be life changing moments.

The Home Office are keeping these families apart, through the UK’s restrictive refugee family reunion rules. Child refugees are unable to sponsor their parents to join them in the UK, and adult refugees are only able to sponsor their closest relatives: their partner, and children under 18 years old. This isolates already vulnerable individuals fleeing conflict and violence.

**The Solution**

The Home Secretary can sign off on bills that:

* Give child refugees in the UK the same rights as adult refugees in the UK: the right to sponsor their close family members to join them, enabling them to rebuild their lives as a family and help them integrate into their community
* Expand who qualifies as family, so that young people who are 18+ and elderly parents can join their family in the UK

The government should also reintroduce legal aid for refugee family reunion cases, so people who have lost everything have the support they need to finance and navigate the complicated process of being reunited with their families.

The Government is aware of the momentum building with this campaign. The Families Together Coalition, which is coordinated by Amnesty International UK, British Red Cross, Oxfam, Refugee Council and the UNHCR, is backed by 28 different organisations. In March 2018 the Coalition worked closely with Angus MacNeil MP on a Private Members Bill to change the rules, which passed its 2nd reading with the support of 131 MPs from across the main political parties. Thousands of people have signed a [petition](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/home-secretary-reunite-refugee-families?from=issue) to the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, calling for the change. The Home Secretary has the power to change the rules with the stroke of a pen and we want him to hear this message from MPs across the political spectrum.

There are also two parliamentary processes, which could create the change we seek:

1. The Government recently published the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, which empowers the Home Secretary to remove EU free movement rights from UK law. We are working with politicians across the political spectrum to try and secure support for an amendment on refugee family reunion.
2. The Refugee Family Reunion Bill is still on the agenda but remains in stuck in a Parliamentary process. We need your help to press Parliament to get it passed into law.

The amendment we are seeking to make to the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill would try to:

* Expand the criteria of who qualifies as a family member for the purposes of refugee family reunion allowing adult refugees in the UK to sponsor their adult children and siblings that are under the age of 25; and their parents.
* Give unaccompanied refugee children in the United Kingdom the right to sponsor their parents and siblings that are under the age of 25 to join them under the refugee family reunion rules.

The Government is trying to push the Immigration Bill through parliament before 29 March 2019, so it’s important they hear from as many as their constituents as soon as possible.

**The Action:**

1. Letter writing: Write a letter to you MP, making three requests:
* Ask them to contact the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, raising the concerns you have highlighted.
* Ask them to raise the issue of refugee family reunion during the passage of the upcoming Immigration Bill, and support amendments if the opportunity arises.
* Ask them to support the passage of the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Private Members’ Bill including by asking the Government to ensure the Bill is granted proper time for debate.
* You can tailor your letter depending on whether your MP has already supported the campaign. You can find a list here of the 131 MPs who have backed the Private Members Bill here: <http://refugeestogether.uk/>.
1. Photo campaign:
* Allocate one person the job of photographer. If you have a camera, great, if not, a phone is fine! Find a busy location on campus (e.g. outside the library) and stand outside with signs calling on the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, to both allow refugee children to sponsor their families to join them and to expand who qualifies as family. Approach and encourage as many students as possible to have their photos taken with these placards. Feel free to use our templates, or make your own!
* Allocate one person to manage social media – share the photos taken on your social media accounts, and please either send them to our Facebook page (@AIUKstudents) or email them to stan@amnesty.org.uk. We plan to collate images from across the UK and present them to parliament as a visual petition.

**Additional information**

* Please remember to post the letters to your MP, and to send us the photos that you take! To stay up to date with the campaign, follow @amnestyukstudents on Instagram and like @AIUKstudents on Facebook.
* We understand that different groups will have different levels of involvement of members and time to give to an action: if possible, please attempt both, however if only one if feasible then this is fine!
* This action can be at any point in the day, depending on when campus spots are busy and when members are available. For the photo campaign, we recommend making a rota before the action allocating a few people to specific time slots. For the letter writing, booking a room and setting a 2-hour slot that students can drop in and out of is a more casual way of getting people involved.
* Other societies will be interested in this campaign – if your university has a STAR network or a similar refugee-based network, invite them along! The more people involved, the better. Facebook is a good way to achieve this – make an event, message other societies, and post about it on your society’s page.
* Templates for letters to MPs can be found here: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/families-together-action> - please try to use your own words where possible!
* Further information on the Families Together coalition: [http://refugeestogether.uk](http://refugeestogether.uk/)