



# Keep refugee families together



**I WELCOME**

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## Page

We hope you will feel inspired to take action on all of our campaigns but remind you that all actions are optional.

This mailing is also available to download at

[www.amnesty.org.uk/youth](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/youth)

## **YOUTH GROUP ACTION**

### **In a nutshell**

Children are the only refugees in our asylum system who do not have the right to ask that close family members, such as their parents, join them in the UK. In contrast adult refugees in the UK *do* have the right to apply for their immediate family to join them. This is known as family reunion.

Amnesty thinks children should also have the right to family reunion and is asking the UK government to change the current immigration rules.

It is a good time to make this an issue for the government. The Home Office and Department for Education will soon be running a consultation on safeguarding unaccompanied children in the UK. This is a real opportunity to put this issue on the government's agenda and tell them to stop separating refugee families and start helping them stay together.

### **The details**

Today, with more people forcibly displaced than at any time since World War II, the world's shared duty to provide asylum is more important than ever. Yet the international community's response has been very inadequate, with low- and middle-income countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan, hosting 86% of refugees while the wealthy nations host the remaining 14%. The UK is home to less than 1% of the world's refugees. Amnesty is calling on all countries to accept a fair proportion of the world's refugees. In particular the richest countries of the world should take a fairer share of current population of refugees than they currently do.

Family reunion for child refugees is an obvious way the UK can do more. Family reunion applies only to people who have been given refugee status, meaning that the government thinks there is a strong chance that they would be danger if they went back to their country and are therefore allowed to stay in the UK. Expanding this right to child refugees would enable the children to rebuild their lives in the UK surrounded by the care and support that their family can provide.

Family reunion provides a safe and legal route to the UK, allowing people fleeing persecution to avoid dangerous journeys which in 2015 led to the deaths of 3,771 people in the Mediterranean. The desire to reunite is powerful motivation for many people attempting that dangerous journey today.

By denying child refugees the right to family reunion they are essentially giving them one choice: go back and join their family in a country that the government has agreed is unsafe, or never see their family again.

We need to send a strong message to the government to stop permanently separating refugee children from their families.

See page 5 for facts and figures about the current refugee crisis.

# YOUTH GROUP ACTION

## Take Action 1: Family paper chain action

This campaign action is all about reuniting children with their families, so we thought what better way to create a visual representation of our support than by making a massive paper chain of families. But we can't do this without you!

We're asking youth groups to make as many family paper chain sections as possible, which we are planning to join together and take to the Home Office whilst we hand in the petitions (see Take Action 2).

We're hoping to stretch the chain all the way between the Home Office and the Department for Education – a total of 240 metres! (See below for why we are focussing on these two buildings) Here are the instructions:

### 1. Make your paper chain families

Feel free to make your own or use the template at the end of this mailing. If making your own try different combinations of adults and children. Remember families come in all shapes and sizes and don't necessarily have one mum and one dad.

### 2. Write messages on your paper-chain families about why family is important.

We asked our Youth Advisory Group why family is important and here are some of the things they came up with:

- Stability
- Support – both financial and emotional
- Comfort
- Identity & heritage

They also said that without family, child refugees may:

- Feel alone and vulnerable
- Miss having someone to go home to
- Feel disoriented and confused
- Be worrying about their situation
- Disconnected from their culture

### 3. Collect your families and send them to us using the address below:

Community Organiser (Youth)  
The Human Rights Action Centre  
17-25 New Inn Yard  
London EC2A 3EA

**Deadline: End of spring term** (or earlier if you can)

## **YOUTH GROUP ACTION**

### **Take Action 2: Get petition signatures**

The two people in charge of overseeing the upcoming government consultation on the safety of unaccompanied children are the Minister for Immigration (in the Home Office) and the Minister for Vulnerable Children and families (in the Department for Education). We want to send them both a message that they can't ignore by collecting as many signatures for this petition as possible, calling on them to press for a change in child family reunion policy.

You'll find the petition template on page 8. Again, please return your petitions to us at the address above by the end of the spring term.

### **Take Action 3: Get writing!**

If you really want to get your point across to the Ministers in question, why not send them a letter letting them know what you think?

Mass letter writing is a tactic campaigning organisations have been using for years, as a way of forcing decision makers to stop and hear their demands.

Please return your letters to us at the address above by the end of the spring term.

You can find a template letter that you can use for inspiration on page 10 though it's always best to try and write in your own words.

## **Resources**

Stickers	REF16/002
Refugees Welcome Placards	REF16/003
Refugee Pledge poster	REF16/004

Resources can be ordered from our mailing house by contacting them on 01788 545 553 and quoting the relevant product code.

### **Coming Soon!**

**An *I Welcome* exhibition in an envelope! Includes A3 photographs and tips for putting on an exhibition.**

# YOUTH GROUP ACTION

## Factsheet

### 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 in the UK, separated from both parents and without an adult caring for her or him, and is seeking asylum.

**Family reunion:** the provision in UK law that allows adult refugees to apply for their immediate family (partner and children) to join them.

### How many refugees are there in the world?

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, there were 21.3 million refugees in the world at the end of 2015. In 2015 Syria became the world's top source of refugees. Before this Afghanistan had been the biggest source of refugees for 32 years. (These figures do not take account of Palestinian refugees, who are not the responsibility of the UN High Commission for Refugees.)

### How many refugees are in the UK?

The UK hosts less than 1% of the world's refugees. At the end of 2015, the population of refugees, people with pending asylum cases and stateless persons made up just 0.26% of the population of the UK. 32,414 people applied for asylum in the UK in 2015 – the top five countries of origin were Eritrea, Iran, Sudan, Syria and Pakistan. 3,253 of these applications were made by unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

### What happens to an asylum seeker in the UK?

Adults and children who claim asylum must go through a complex application process during which the Home Office interviews them and decides whether they meet the definition of a refugee. If they do they will be granted permission to stay as refugees ('refugee leave'). Of the decisions made on unaccompanied children's claims in 2015, 22% were of refugee leave.

## **YOUTH GROUP ACTION**

### **What do refugees in the UK receive?**

People with refugee leave are allowed to work and have access to the same health, education, housing and welfare benefits as British citizens. Adult refugees have the right to ask for their immediate family to join them. Child refugees do not.

### **How many people would a change in the child family reunion rules affect?**

In 2015, the Home Office granted asylum to 375 unaccompanied children (357 were granted refugee leave, 18 humanitarian protection). We do not know how many of them had parents (and siblings) alive that could have been located to join them.

### **How likely is it that this campaign will be successful?**

There is significantly greater recognition of the plight of children fleeing persecution in the world today because of the events of the last couple of years. But this is a longstanding policy position of the Home Office. This is no easy win, but with a lot of recent attention on child refugees and with a government consultation of safeguarding unaccompanied children, now is the time to press the government on their appalling treatment of these children. With your efforts a win could be possible.

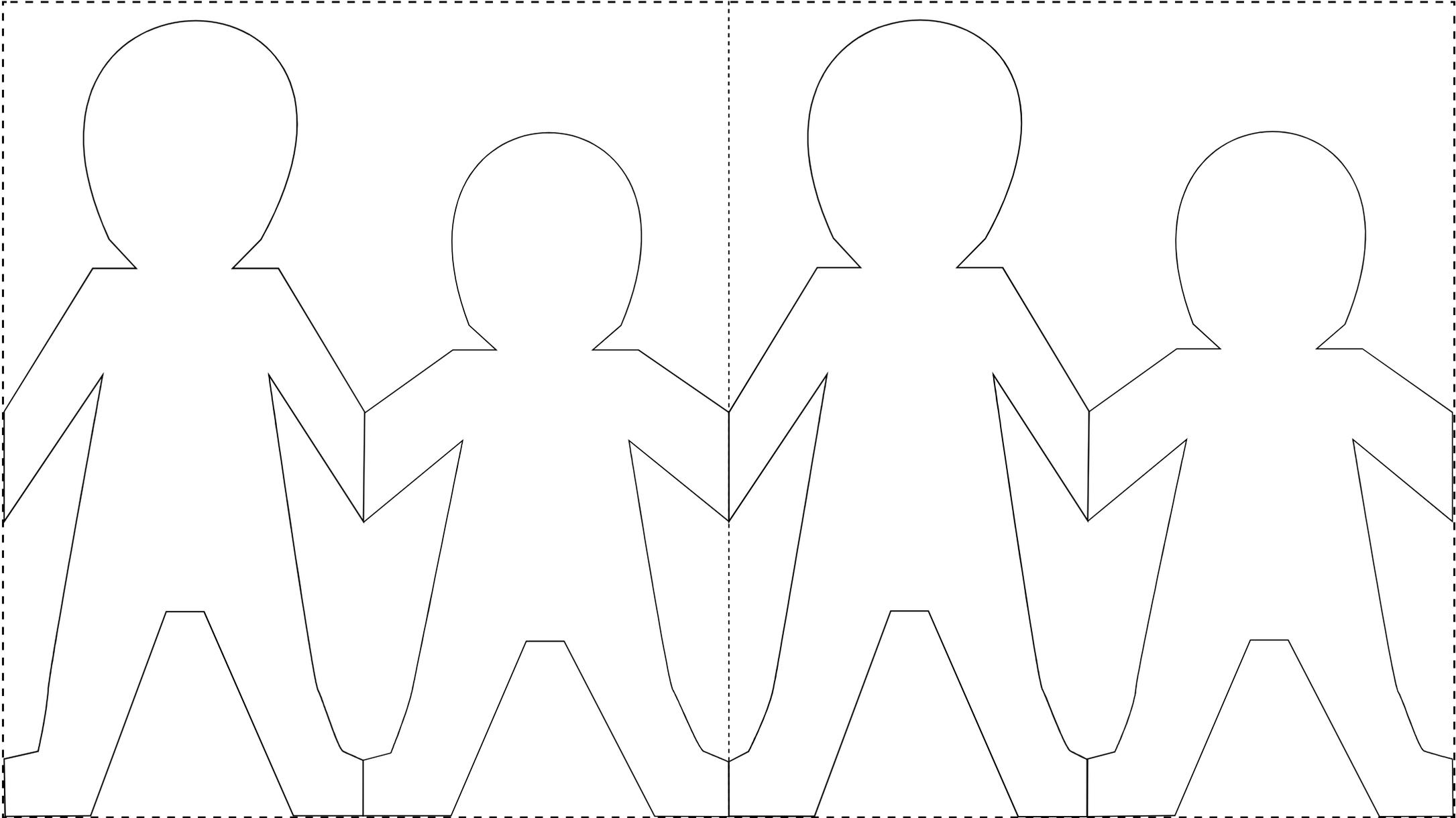
### **Would this change encourage parents to send their children alone to the UK?**

This is what the Home Office say. Time and again they have been asked to provide evidence of this, and they have produced none. Other countries in Europe provide family reunion rights for unaccompanied children recognised as refugees – including France. Many children still come here. Given the decision to grant refugee leave is both a recognition that the particular child is the responsibility of the UK and has been forced to flee to escape persecution, there is really nothing in this argument. Children who are not entitled to refugee status won't get family reunion rights, because they won't get refugee leave, so there would be no incentive for parents to send them.

### **Do other countries give refugee children the right to family reunion?**

Yes. European Union regulations require the provision of family reunion rights to unaccompanied child refugees. The UK and Denmark are the only countries to have an exemption.

# YOUTH GROUP ACTION







## **YOUTH GROUP ACTION**

Mr Edward Timpson MP  
Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families

Mr Robert Goodwill MP  
Minister of State for Immigration

Dear Ministers,

I am writing to you as I am concerned about child refugees here in the UK. I welcome your commitment to publishing a strategy on safeguarding unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children.

I believe the separation of families can have a devastating impact on the lives of child refugees, including their rehabilitation from experiences of trauma, and their integration and development in their country of asylum.

Today, with more people forcibly displaced than at any time since World War 2, the world's shared duty to provide asylum is more important than ever. Family reunion provides a safe and legal route allowing people fleeing persecution to avoid dangerous journeys, which profit smugglers and others ready to exploit people in need of finding safety with their family. However, children are the only refugees in our system denied the right to family reunion. This is despite the fact they have been through an asylum process in the same way as an adult and have as much right to international protection and to respect for their rights as refugees as any adult.

Given your department will be considering how to act in the best interests of unaccompanied children, I am writing to ask that the Department for Education and the Home Office work together to look again at the issue of child family reunion and allow children recognised as refugees the right to be reunited with their immediate family members.

Yours sincerely,