

April 5th 2020

Dear Ishita

Thank you for contacting me about family reunification for child refugees, and my apologies for the delay in responding to you. As you can imagine, my inbox has been overflowing with emails relating to coronavirus these past few weeks.

With regard to refugee family reunion, I agree with you on this important issue. Families belong together. We should be doing everything we can to help reunite those families who have been separated after experiencing the trauma of war, persecution and conflict.

Our country has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees and I believe that reforming the refugee family reunion rules would be a simple but important step towards addressing the anomalies in our refugee system.

I believe that the parents or carers of a child granted the right to be in the UK should also be granted this right. And for those children who are brought up by parents or carers with a right to be here, they should keep that right even after turning 18.

At present, a child refugee in the UK is not permitted to sponsor relatives to join them - even their parents. The Government has stated its opinion that if children were allowed to sponsor parents, it would risk creating incentives for children to be encouraged or forced to risk hazardous journeys to the UK.

In my view, as long as "push factors" such as war, conflict and violence exist, children will be forced to leave their homes and be separated from their families. We have a humanitarian duty to ensure that any child who makes it to the UK has the best shot at making a better life for themselves, including being surrounded by their family.

I want to allow refugees to live fulfilling lives in the UK and to avoid the perverse situation where children are brought up in our care system instead of being reunited in the UK with close family who currently live in danger abroad.

Providing safe, legal routes to family reunion prevents dangerous journeys - it is when people feel they have run out of options that they take the huge risk of making their own way to the UK.

I supported an amendment on 8 January to protect the right for unaccompanied child refugees to be reunited with their families in the UK after Brexit. Unfortunately, it was defeated by 348 votes to 252.

An amendment was then successfully made in the House of Lords to this effect but unfortunately when the amendment returned to the House of Commons, and despite my support, it was once again removed by 342 votes to 254.

I am concerned that removing access to safe and legal routes for refugee children will increase the risk of trafficking. This proposal would have protected some of the most vulnerable children we can imagine and I am very disappointed that it was not accepted.

The Government has said it remains committed to seeking a reciprocal agreement with the EU regarding the family reunion of unaccompanied children - I will ensure the Government is held to account on this.

I can assure you I will continue to press for the UK to live up to its moral and legal obligations to child refugees and their families. Thank you once again for contacting me and for sharing your views on this important issue.

I hope that you and your family stay safe during this difficult time.

Kind regards,

Rupa

Rupa Huq MP