

Rev Lynn Green and Co-signatories
The Joint Public Issues Team

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22 April 2026

Dear Rev Lynn Green and Co-signatories,

Thank you for your joint letter of 25 March to the Home Secretary about the suspension of the refugee family reunion route. I am replying as the Minister for Border Security & Asylum.

I want to acknowledge the importance of family life, human dignity, and protection for the vulnerable are not only central to many faith traditions but are also principles that have long shaped this country's approach to refugee protection. Nothing in the Government's approach diminishes our recognition that family unity plays a vital role in refugees' wellbeing, resilience and ability to rebuild their lives after persecution and conflict.

I thought it might be helpful to explain why we are making these changes. In recent years, the number of people seeking asylum has increased, placing pressure on housing, public services and communities across the UK. I know many people are worried about how the system operates and whether it is supporting those who truly need protection.

At the end of December 2025 there were 48% less people awaiting an asylum decision than at the end of the year prior. We returned a total of 58,539 people between 1 July 2024 and 31 January 2026, who had no right to remain, including foreign offenders who should never have been here. But we also recognise our responsibility to protect people fleeing genuine danger. That is why our new reforms will:

- Improve safe and legal routes, including community sponsorship and new capped humanitarian programmes.
- Provide more structured and targeted support for refugees, helping them rebuild their lives and contribute to society.
- Speed up decisions through a simpler appeals process so people are not left waiting for years in uncertainty.
- Tackle exploitation, including illegal working and visa abuse, which harms both vulnerable people and local communities.

These changes are designed to restore confidence in the system, reduce strain on local services, and ensure help is focused on those who most need it, while maintaining the UK's long-standing tradition of offering refuge.

Refugee Family Reunion

I would like to assure you and your fellow Co-signatories that the Government upholds the core principles of family unity and recognises that families can become fragmented because of the nature of conflict and persecution, and the speed and manner in which those seeking asylum are often forced to flee their country. While family unity is a key priority under this route and other family routes, the Government also has a duty to ensure that public services are not placed under unreasonable pressure.

We have temporarily suspended this route to ease the pressures that public services have been placed under due to the significant increase in visas issued on the route in recent years. The lack of any requirements for sponsors with protection has inevitably led to a significant strain on local authorities and public services. Between 2015 and 2022 there were approximately 5,500 individuals granted under refugee family reunion each year. In 2024, there were 19,258 individuals who arrived under this route. That represents a 107% increase on grants in 2023 and a 368% increase from grants in 2022. In the year ending June 2025, this reached the highest on record. We expect these to continue to increase if the Government does not take the necessary action.

I am aware of the argument that refugees represent a relatively small proportion of overall migration to the UK, and I want to be clear that refugees should not be scapegoated for wider pressures faced by communities or public services. Refugees make valuable contributions to society and the Government recognises the compassion and solidarity shown by communities across the country in supporting those fleeing persecution and conflict. However, it is also right that the Government considers the cumulative and localised impacts of individual routes, particularly where there has been a sharp and sustained increase in demand.

You also refer to the Government's position in 2017, when Ministers urged the extension of family reunion rights so that unaccompanied refugee children in the UK could be joined by their parents. That position reflected the circumstances at the time, including patterns of demand and the operational impacts associated with the route. Immigration and asylum policy must be kept under regular review to ensure we have a fair and properly balanced system, which could then be placed on a more sustainable footing.

I would like to assure you that outstanding applications will continue to be considered under the family reunion rules in place prior to the commencement of the suspension, including those that are at appeal. Those with protection status can use other family routes should they wish to reunite with their family and consider that they meet the relevant Immigration Rules.

We consider the suspension of the refugee family reunion route to be proportionate and in accordance with the principles set out in section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009.

I understand your concerns about the impact of this suspension on children, and I want to reassure you that we take our legislative duties towards children extremely seriously. We consider the suspension of the refugee family reunion route to be proportionate and in accordance with the principles set out in section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 and our international obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Children will continue to be able to apply to join a parent or close relative on alternative family routes, such as the Appendix FM child route which has been amended to allow applications from a partner and dependent child of a person with protection status in the UK.

Where a child does not meet the core requirements of the Appendix FM child route rules, consideration will be given to the child's best interests (in accordance with the section 55 duty) and whether refusal of the application would breach Article 8 of the ECHR. For adult children, where they do not meet the core requirements (including the requirement to be under 18), consideration will be given as to whether there are exceptional circumstances which would render refusal a breach of Article 8 of the ECHR.

I understand that children have specific rights due to their vulnerabilities, and we recognise our legal duties when developing policies that impact them. You can be assured that we will work with external stakeholders as policy development continues, and policy teams will assess the impact on children including by completing Children's Impact Assessments.

I acknowledge your important point raised about pull factors. However, the evidence and way this route is being used has changed and smuggler gangs can use the promise of family reunion to promote dangerous boat journeys to the UK. We cannot have the system being misused by criminal gangs, using it as a way of encouraging people to pay to get here.

I am grateful for your continued engagement on this issue, and for the role that faith communities play in advocating for compassion, welcome and social cohesion. As this work progresses, we will continue to listen carefully to stakeholders, including faith leaders, and to weigh the impacts of policy choices on families, children and communities.

Once again, thank you for writing to the Home Secretary.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Alex Norris MP
Minister for Border Security & Asylum