

Economic Note	Number: HO EN 1028
Title of regulatory proposal	Appendix Family Reunion: suspension of new applications
Lead Department/Agency	Home Office
Expected date of implementation	4 September 2025
Origin	Domestic
Date	02/09/2025
Lead Departmental Contact	asylumpolicysecretariat@homeoffice.gov.uk
Departmental Assessment	GREEN
Rationale for intervention, objectives and intended effects <p>The recent and continuing rise in grants of refugee status is having a knock-on effect for Refugee Family Reunion grants. These grants are placing pressure on local authorities and public services. The route is being paused with the intention of reducing these pressures and allowing time for a thorough review of family migration policy that ensures the system is both fair and manageable.</p>	
Policy options (including alternatives to regulation) <p>Option 0: ‘Do nothing’. The Home Office would continue to see many family reunion applications, grants and associated pressures on public services.</p> <p>Option 1: Pause Refugee Family Reunion and allow refugees to apply to bring family under other existing family migration routes. This is the government’s preferred option.</p>	
Costs and benefit summary <p>The Economic Note reviews existing evidence regarding the potential costs and benefits of a pause. It suggests that refugee family reunion may be contributing to increased demand on public services. The possible costs include impacts on the personal welfare of affected families, though these are not examined in detail.</p>	
Risks <p>The policy opens standard family migration routes to refugees. If sufficient numbers make use of this, and are able to argue substantiated exceptional circumstances, then we may not see a reduction in pressures.</p>	

Total Cost (£m PV)	Transition Cost (£m Constant)	Cost to Business (£m PV)	
N/A	N/A	N/A	
Total Benefit (£m PV)	NPSV (£m PV)	BNPV (£m PV)	EANDCB (£m PV)
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Price Base Year	PV Base Year	Appraisal period (Years)	Transition period (Years)
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Departmental sign-off (SCS):	Megan Jensen	Date: 02/09/25
Chief Economist sign-off:	Tim Laken	Date: 02/09/25
Better Regulation Unit sign-off:	Emma Kirk	Date: 02/09/25

Evidence Base

A. Policy objectives and intended effects

1. The number of applications under the Refugee Family Reunion (RFR) route has grown significantly and has increased notably within the last few years, making it difficult for public services, including those provided by local authorities, to keep up. A temporary pause is intended to reduce immediate pressures and allow time for a wider review of family migration and associated rules, including refugee family migration. The goal of this review is to have a system that is both fair and manageable.
2. The intended outcomes are to:
 - Temporarily suspend new applications under the RFR route, while still allowing existing applications to be processed.
 - Reduce the number of new RFR applications each month and lessen the strain on public services including local authorities.
 - Allow the use of other existing routes for families to reunite during this pause; where they meet the rules and requirements or can cite Human Rights grounds.
 - Complete a review of the wider family migration routes, including for refugees, before end of 2025.
3. During the pause, families can apply via other routes, such as the Appendix FM, Appendix Child Relative and Adult Dependent Relative routes. These routes have stronger conditions intended to reduce the burden family migration may otherwise place on public services. If someone does not meet the core requirements of these routes, a consideration of exceptional circumstances can be made.
4. There is strong public interest in ensuring the UK can maintain effective immigration controls, it is in the economic well-being of the UK that those who enter or stay in the UK are less of a burden on taxpayers and are better able to integrate into society. This is consistent with the direction outlined in the Immigration White Paper (IWP) in May 2025¹.

B. Policy options considered, including alternatives to regulation

Option 0: 'Do-nothing'

5. The Home Office would continue to see many family reunion applications, grants and associated pressures on public services including those related to local authorities' housing and homelessness duty. Doing nothing would not meet the policy objective of a pause to reduce immediate pressures on public services and allow time for a thorough review of the family migration routes.

Option 1: Preferred option

6. **The government's preferred option** is a temporary suspension of the RFR route. Applications made prior to the temporary pause will still be considered under the rules in effect prior to the suspension and therefore extant applicants would not be treated unfavourably. This suspension will apply to both the in-country and out-of-country routes.

¹ Restoring control over the immigration system: white paper - GOV.UK:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper>

7. Potential applicants can use alternative pathways such as Appendix FM, Appendix Child Relative (Protection) and Adult Dependent Relative routes – routes which have conditions intended to reduce potential burdens on public services. We are making changes to Appendix FM rules to enable the partner and child of someone with protection status to apply on the family routes, including lone children separated from their parent sponsor with protection status. Amendments to the relevant guidance are also being made.
8. Where an applicant under Appendix FM is unable to meet the core eligibility requirements, a consideration of exceptional circumstances will be made. There are also fee waivers available that prevent fees being imposed on those who cannot afford them.

Non-regulatory options

9. Immigration rule changes are required to pause applications to and grants of family reunion. Non-regulatory options cannot meet the policy objectives.

C. Past evaluations and rationale for government intervention

10. Recent data reveal a rise in RFR applications and grants, driven by increased asylum grants and efforts to clear the asylum case backlog. In the year ending June 2025, a record 20,817 RFR visas were issued—a 30 per cent rise over the previous year—with women and children constituting the majority of arrivals, mainly from Syria, Iran, and Afghanistan. Applications have risen sharply post-pandemic, with around 23,000 received in 2024, reflecting a 71 per cent increase from 2023 and 127 per cent increase from 2022.
11. This escalating demand places strain on public services and local authorities, who report challenges in providing housing, schooling, and other local services for newly arrived families.
12. Given these pressures, there is a case for a temporary pause in refugee family migration. The measure aims to reduce immediate pressures on public services and allow time to develop a more fair and sustainable approach to family migration.

D. Appraisal

13. The policy is to apply a temporary pause to reduce immediate pressures on public services and allow time for a thorough review of family migration policy. The Home Office intends to collate and obtain more evidence as part of that review. There is uncertainty about behavioural responses and insufficient evidence to conduct a formal appraisal. Specifically:
 - There is uncertainty about how would-be refugee family reunion applicants shift to alternative routes, such as Appendix FM, and where an applicant under Appendix FM is unable to meet the core eligibility requirements, whether a consideration of exceptional circumstances will be made; and
 - there is not a full understanding of the costs and pressures that refugees and their families place on public services.
14. As such, rather than a formal appraisal, a review of the available evidence including reasonable inferences is made here. Specifically, this looks at:
 - Trends in asylum grants and refugee family reunion;
 - pressures faced by local authorities as a consequence of granting refugees and family reunion.

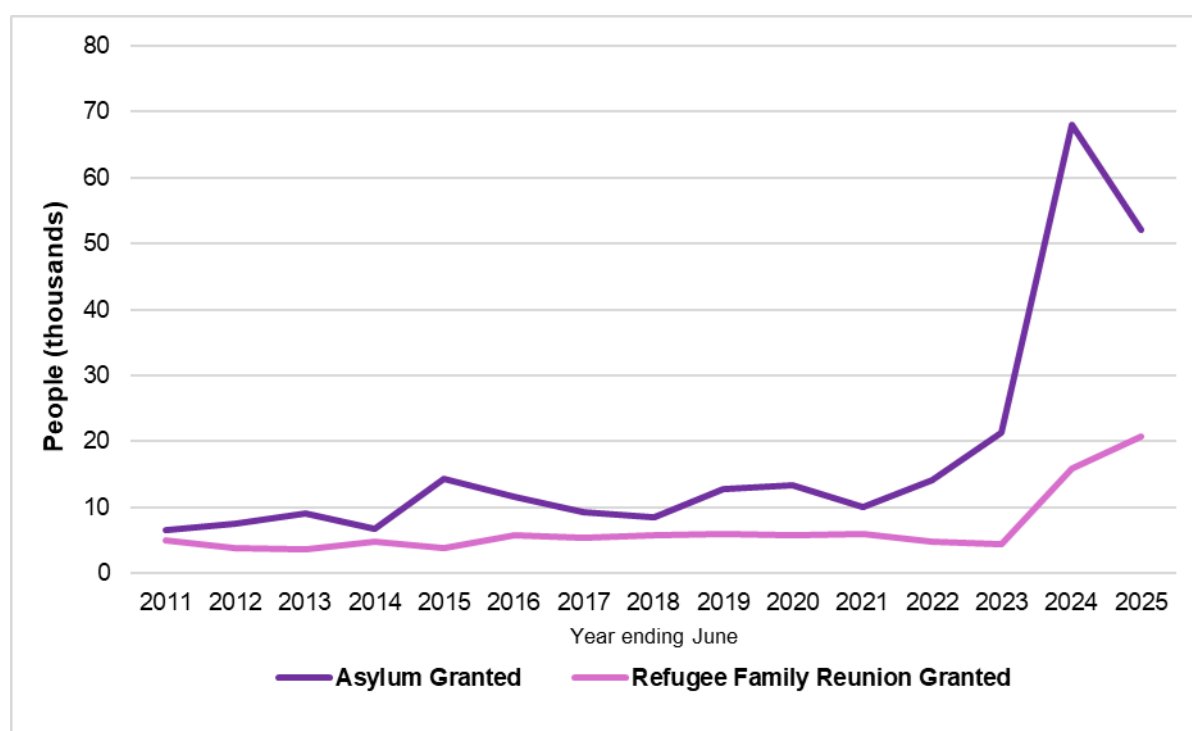
General assumptions and data

15. This section sets out general trends in asylum and family reunion grants highlighting the growing scale of the problem under consideration.

Overview of asylum and refugee family reunion

16. The number of people claiming asylum has almost doubled (+90%) since 2021. In the year ending June 2025, 110,000 people received initial decisions on asylum claims, a higher number of decisions than every year between 2003 and 2022. Almost half of these decisions, around 52,000, resulted in a grant of protection or other leave².
17. Half of asylum seekers arrived through irregular routes, while a further 37 per cent of claimants had previously arrived in the UK on a visa in the year ending June 2025³.
18. Over the same period, the number of refugee family reunion applications per year has been increasing. By the year end of 2024, the total number of applications was 22,677, approximately a 71 per cent increase from 2023 and approximately 127 per cent increase from 2022⁴.
19. In the year ending June 2025, a record 20,817 refugee family reunion visas were granted, representing a 30 per cent increase on the previous year as grants of protection and case backlog clearance fed into higher demand (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Trends in Asylum Grants and Refugee Family Reunion Grants, Year Ending June 2011 to 2025⁵



² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/summary-of-latest-statistics>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/summary-of-latest-statistics>

⁴ Applications for RFR is available from the Entry clearance tables, Vis_D01: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables>
Grants for RFR is available from the Family Reunion data tables, Fam_D01, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables>

⁵ Immigration system statistics, year ending June 2025, Family Reunion visa grants, Fam_D01 and Asylum initial decisions Asy_D02, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables>

20. More than 90 per cent of those granted are women and children, primarily sponsored by refugees from Syria, Iran and Afghanistan⁷.
21. Against this backdrop, a pause to new refugee family reunion applications is being introduced to stabilise the system and protect frontline public services while longer-term capacity measures are developed.

Costs

22. Costs, in this framing, relate to those borne by the families in terms of an increased difficulty in obtaining family reunification. These costs are likely to be the personal wellbeing impact derived from the increased difficulty of achieving family reunion. The Migration Advisory Committee considered these types of wellbeing impacts as part of its 'Family visa financial requirements review' report⁸. This includes consideration of emotional, behavioural and physical wellbeing.
23. These impacts are difficult to assess, and it has not been attempted here. This policy represents only a pause of the refugee family reunion route (in lieu of a more comprehensive review). Refugees will also be able to apply for family reunion through alternative routes, for which there is uncertainty as to behavioural responses.

Benefits

24. The benefit of this policy is presented in terms of its potential to reduce pressure on public services. Intelligence on local authorities is considered in terms of the direct pressure family reunion may be placing on their services.

How our family reunion policy is impacting local authorities

25. As set out in the Immigration White Paper⁹, high levels of migration have added extra demand to our public services and our housing supply during a decade when both are already stretched, adding to pressure on public services and the housing market.
26. In line with homelessness legislation (Part 7, Housing Act 1996, owned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)), local authorities have a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent and/or relieve homelessness for any individual or household that is homeless or at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days, provided they are eligible for social assistance. A person with refugee protection status is eligible for assistance. Under these duties the local authority must provide assistance to the household, however they will only be required to provide temporary accommodation if the household has a 'priority need'. Priority need includes someone who is pregnant, has dependent children, is a victim of domestic abuse, or is considered to be vulnerable. A person with refugee protection will be entitled to temporary accommodation if they are homeless and they or a member of their household have a priority need.
27. A single individual with refugee protection status may not be initially entitled to temporary accommodation if they are not considered vulnerable. However, if they then bring their family, including dependent children, to the UK under the family reunion route, and are unable to secure suitable accommodation that is capable of accommodating their family, they will be homeless and have priority need (due to the presence of dependent children in the household) and therefore the local authority must provide temporary accommodation.

⁶ Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables>

⁷ Immigration system statistics, year ending June 2025, Family Reunion visa grants, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables>

⁸ Family visa financial requirements review (accessible) - GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-visa-financial-requirements-review/family-visa-financial-requirements-review-accessible#chapter-2-economic-wellbeing-and-family-life>

⁹ Restoring control over the immigration system: white paper - GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper>

28. The cost of homelessness is a growing pressure for councils, with the net cost of temporary accommodation to local authorities in 2023/24 being over £1 billion¹⁰. In 2023/24, 14,750 households were owed a homelessness duty after being required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support.¹¹
29. The cost of meeting the statutory duties of family reunion homelessness is exacerbated by the minimal advance notice local authorities receive to plan for family reunion homelessness. A large family presenting as homelessness with reduced notice may necessitate the use of more expensive forms of temporary accommodation, for example Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
30. MHCLG data on homeless households does not distinguish those who have arrived via the family reunion route. MHCLG do not presently have any data directly which measures the impact of refugee family reunion grants on local authorities.

NPSV, BNPV and EANDCB

31. Not applicable.

E. Wider impacts

32. This appraisal has not considered the Home Office costs associated with the measure. A pause on the Refugee Family Reunion route will likely reduce the processing costs associated with that route. If individuals then make use of alternative family migration routes this may raise fee income, or to the extent that fee waivers are granted lead to further costs.
33. As these behavioural and downstream impacts are not known they have not been monetised in this Economic Note.

F. Sensitivity

34. The measure does not have any direct cost to business and therefore a full Impact Assessment was not deemed to be required.

G. Risks

35. The main risk is that this policy does not deliver on its objective of reducing immediate pressures on public services and it does not lead to a reduction in refugee family reunification. While the refugee family reunion route is paused, individuals may apply down the standard family migration route and claim exemptions under Article 8 of the ECHR.
36. While the Home Office expect that both the conditions and additional friction associated with the route may lead to a reduction in applications there is the risk that this does not materialise.

¹⁰ Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2023 to 2024 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2023-to-2024-individual-local-authority-data-outturn>

¹¹ Statutory homelessness in England: financial year 2023-24 - GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2023-24>

H. Annex

Mandatory specific impact test - Statutory Equalities Duties	Complete
<p>The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) considers the impacts on various protected characteristics, including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, maternity and pregnancy, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. It concludes that while there may be differential impacts, these are proportionate and justified to achieve the legitimate aim of reducing pressure on public resources and maintaining effective immigration controls. The EIA will be reviewed regularly to ensure compliance with the public sector equality duty and to monitor the impacts on affected groups.</p> <p>It is important to note that analysis of the RFR cohort confirms that the majority (56%) granted under RFR are children aged under 18 years (with 37% adult females and 7% adult males). Data is from the latest published statistics, for year ending June 2025. Therefore, any pause or suspension of the route will have implications for children who would have otherwise been eligible under the existing route.</p> <p>The SRO has agreed these findings.</p>	Yes