

HOW TO MEET WITH YOUR MP

United Nations Summits 2016

Meeting with your MP is a great way to show her or him that you care about refugees and the way the UK treats people. Meeting face-to-face allows you to engage directly with them and makes your MP have to think about the issues you are raising. It is a very powerful way of influencing how your MP will act in Parliament. This guide provides some tips about how to go about meeting your MP, and what kind of things you can ask them to do.

➤ Arranging to meet your MP

The first step is to arrange to meet your MP. You can contact your MP's office by phone or by email. If you don't know who your MP is or how to contact them, go to <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>. Most MPs also have their own websites that include how to contact them and news about their recent activities both in parliament and in the constituency.

If you want to write to your MP to request a meeting, the address is:

[Name of your MP], House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

You can also call the House of Commons switchboard on 020 7219 3000 and ask to speak to your MP. You might be put through to your MP, but it will more likely be their assistant or their answering machine.

The best place to meet your MP is either at their constituency office or at one of their advice surgeries. Most MPs hold at least one of these a month and are often in places such as local libraries. It's best to try and agree a time to meet, rather than just showing up, as this way your MP can make sure they are available and can prepare a bit in advance.

Fridays are usually the best day to try and meet your MP in their constituency. This is because Parliament rarely sits on a Friday and MPs will usually spend the day in their constituencies attending local events and meeting their constituents. Many MPs will also spend much of the summer in their constituencies as well while Parliament is in recess, so it's a great time to try and meet them!

➤ Requesting a meeting

If you're writing to your MPs, either by letter or by email, make it precise and brief. Explain what you want to meet your MP about and the time(s) and date(s) you'd like to meet. MPs often have very full diaries, so prepare to be flexible about when you can meet. Usually MPs will arrange to meet for around 15-30 minutes, which is more than enough time to get your message across.

MPs and their staff deal with a very large number of emails, phone calls and letters every day, so don't be offended if you don't get a reply straight away. If you haven't heard back within a couple of weeks, then you can follow up your request with a polite phone call. Ask to speak with the person who manages your MP's diary and try and confirm that they have received your request.

➤ Preparing for your meeting

The main thing to remember about meeting your MP is that there's no need to be nervous! Your MP won't expect you to be an expert about the issues, and many MPs are not experts themselves. The key thing is for your MP to see how passionate you are about the way the UK treats refugees.

Don't be party political. Try to focus on the issues and stay polite. Your MP might not agree with you, but they may still agree to act on your behalf.

Make sure that you plan what you want to say during the meeting. What are the most important points? If you are going as a group, decide who is going to say what and practise. You can divide up what you want to say and share it out.

It's up to you what you want to focus on during the meeting, but as a guide the Refugee Council will be calling on the UK to pledge to support more refugees at the September summits. Specifically, we are asking the Government to:

- **Expand the number of resettlement places for refugees.** The UK Government has said it will resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020, which while welcome can only be a first step. We want the Government to increase the number of resettlement places for refugees of all nationalities.
- **Make it easier for refugees to be reunited with family members already living in the UK.** Many refugees on the move in search of safety are prevented from joining relatives living in the UK due to the current strict rules that prevent families from being together just when they need each other the most. We think the Government should help families be reunited, including by making it easier for

adult children to join family members and letting separated child refugees in the UK sponsor their parents.

More detail about the summits and what the Refugee Council would like the Government to commit to is available here: <http://bit.ly/2aOUdIB>

A key thing to decide before the meeting is what you are going to ask your MP to do after they have met with you. It's important that you don't just ask for their 'support' but give them something to actually do! Here are some suggestions for what you might want to ask:

1. Ask a question in parliament about the September Summits
2. Write to the Prime Minister, or the Home Secretary, asking them to create safe and legal routes for refugees to reach the UK, and that families are kept together
3. Join the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees (you can check if they're already a Member here:

http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy_research/parliamentary_work/appg_on_refugees)

Getting your MP to agree to do something gives you a reason to stay in touch with her or him so that you can make sure they do what they have said they will. It also gives them a chance to let you know what they've done.

➤ **After the meeting**

Stay in touch. Write to your MP to say thank you for meeting with you, and to remind them about anything they promised they would do. If you're on twitter, you can also send them a tweet to thank them – remember to use the hashtag #refugeeswelcome.

Good luck!



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