

Access to emergency pathways for people impacted by the violence in Israel and Palestine

October 2023

Introduction

The conflict and violence in Israel and Palestine has already had severe human consequences, with thousands of lives lost. There is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Many hundreds of thousands of people have already been displaced. If, as seems likely, the conflict worsens, then that displacement will only deepen. The priority in any displacement situation is to try and make it safe for people not to have to leave their homes, or their own country. However, for those people who do cross borders, they need access to safety. While principally that is likely to occur in the countries bordering Israel and Palestine, other countries, including the UK, must be ready to play a role.

This briefing sets out some of the options that are available to the UK. They build on approaches taken by the UK Government to other conflicts of significant scale, such as those in Afghanistan and Ukraine. The proposals below are not set out in any order of priority, but together form a package of emergency measures that should be implemented at short notice.

For the measures below to be operationalised, people will need to be able to cross borders. Advocating for borders to be open to allow people to reach safety should form part of the UK's ongoing diplomatic discussions with governments in the region.

The package of measures should also form the basis of a model for the UK Government to respond to future crises. Responses to recent emergencies have often been developed following the crisis developing. This has led to the UK putting in place different schemes for different nationalities, all with different (and often complex) eligibility criteria and unclear funding regimes. Instead of this ad hoc and inconsistent approach, the measures set out below could be operationalised as and when the UK Government believes an emergency warrants such a response.

The package of emergency measures must also work alongside an asylum system that processes people's claims in a fair and effective way, and safe routes that provide refugees, no matter where they come from, with a means of seeking safety in the UK. Those safe routes should include a bold and ambitious multi-year resettlement commitment, wider family reunion pathways, and the piloting of a refugee visa that allows people to travel safely in order to apply for asylum in the UK.

Emergency measures

Medical evacuations

The UK should play a role in providing destinations for individuals in need of medical evacuation, as well as their family members. This would involve focusing on individuals in need of critical medical treatment that cannot be provided in the region, and likely to be coordinated by an international organisation such as the World Health Organisation.

Emergency Family Reunion Scheme

The UK Government should put in place an emergency family reunion scheme so people impacted by the conflict can join family members in the UK, building on the Ukraine Family Scheme.

Eligibility (full eligibility in Annex 1)

Applicant:

- Can be of any nationality
- Be applying to join a UK-based family member, or travelling with someone with permission to enter the UK
- One of the following in relation to the sponsor (or the sponsor's spouse/partner where relevant):
 1. An immediate family member:
 2. An extended family member:
 3. Immediate family of an extended family member:

Sponsor based in the UK:

- A British National
- Someone settled in the UK (e.g. indefinite leave to remain, settled status)
- Someone with pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme
- Someone with refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK

Under this scheme people would be given five years leave to remain, which can lead to settlement in the UK at the end of that period if the situation is ongoing. The sponsor would be expected to support them.

Applications could be submitted online by the UK-based family member. Security checks/biometrics would need to be undertaken. The detail of this would depend on where someone is able to get to and what the circumstances in that location.

This scheme should be alongside the broadening of eligibility to refugee family reunion.

Emergency protection visa

The UK Government should put in place an emergency protection visa for anyone in Israel or Palestine impacted by the conflict. This would allow people to apply to come to the UK. Successful applicants would be given temporary leave for five years. Emergency reception centres would be set up to support people on arrival before local authority accommodation or community sponsorship arrangement can be found.

This could be open to anyone, or a referral scheme from UN bodies/international NGOs.

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Applications would be handled online, with biometrics taken when possible.

Facilitated travel for UK nationals and others with right to enter/remain in the UK

Anyone who is in Israel or any of the Palestinian territories and who is either a UK national or has leave to enter/remain in the UK should, along with their immediate family members, have their travel to the UK facilitated by the UK Government. This would only be where someone is able to get to a location where that is possible.

For people already in the UK

Alongside the measures set out above, the UK Government should also ensure that anyone from either Israel or Palestine who is in the UK is able to regularise their immigration status or extend existing status.

This should include:

- The prioritisation of asylum applications from nationals of Israel¹ and Palestine²
- The prioritisation of refugee family reunion applications from nationals of Israel and Palestine
- Measures to allow people from, or usually resident in, Israel and Palestine to extend existing leave, or switch to other immigration pathways where appropriate.

Annex 1

Eligibility for the Emergency Family Reunion Scheme

Applicant:

- Can be of any nationality
- Be applying to join a UK-based family member, or travelling with someone with permission to enter the UK
- One of the following in relation to the sponsor (or the sponsor's spouse/partner where relevant):
 1. An immediate family member:
 - Spouse/unmarried partner
 - Child under the age of 18
 - Dependent adult child
 - Parent (if the sponsor is under the age of 18)
 - Fiancé(e) or proposed civil partner
 2. An extended family member:
 - Parent (of sponsor over the age of 18)
 - Non-dependent adult child
 - Grandparent
 - Grandchild

¹ As of 30 June 2023, there were 20 asylum applications from Israeli nationals awaiting an initial decision. Relating to 39 people. 19 of the applications had been waiting for more than six months for a decision. *Home Office Immigration System Statistics, year ending June 2023, Asylum and Resettlement – Asylum applications awaiting a decision.*

² As of 30 June 2023, there were 494 asylum applications from people from the Occupied Palestinian Territories awaiting an initial decision, relating to 647 people. 494 of the applications (85%) had been waiting for more than six months for a decision. *Home Office Immigration System Statistics, year ending June 2023, Asylum and Resettlement – Asylum applications awaiting a decision.*

- Sibling
 - Aunt or Uncle
 - Cousin
 - Niece or Nephew
3. Immediate family of an extended family member:
- Partner of an extended family member
 - Child under 18 of an extended family member
 - Parent of a child under 18 who is an extended family member
 - Fiancé(e) of proposed civil partner or an extended family member

Sponsor:

- A British National
- Someone settled in the UK (e.g. indefinite leave to remain, settled status)
- Someone with pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme
- Someone with refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK