

Costs of family reunion: Checklist

The following is a list of likely costs during the family reunion process. Not all costs are applicable in every case. Not all costs need to be paid at the start of the process.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Description	Estimated cost
Pre-application		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Legal advice and representation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Interpretation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tuberculosis (TB) tests	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Travel/subsistence	
Collecting evidence		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Applications for passports	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Applications for certificates & other official documentation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	DNA test	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Translation	
Application		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Application fee	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)	
VAC Appointment		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Travel/accommodation/subsistence	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Printing/postage/courier	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Paid-for VAC services	

Visa collection	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Travel/accommodation/subsistence
Appeal of a refusal decision	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Appeal fee
<input type="checkbox"/>	Legal advice and representation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expert evidence
Departure preparation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Leaving costs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collection of certificates & official documentation
Travel to the UK	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Exit visas
<input type="checkbox"/>	Flight cost
<input type="checkbox"/>	Travel/accommodation/subsistence
Arrival in the UK	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Travel to/from airport
<input type="checkbox"/>	Additional living costs (food, clothing, bedding)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Moving to family accommodation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Time off work to welcome family and attend appointments
Total estimated cost:	

Please see associated tools for guidance, explanations and sources of support.

Costs of Family Reunion: Guidance to accompany checklist

Explanatory Notes

This note provides a brief explanation for the likely costs of refugee family reunion. All costs are for illustrative purposes only and correct at the time of publication. Nothing in this document should be interpreted as providing legal advice.

Pre-application

Legal advice and representation

The cost and scope of legal advice and representation varies significantly. Some charities and law clinics offer free support though the waiting period can be long, and private solicitors may charge several hundred pounds for each application. If legal fees and costs are charged, they should be clear and well-understood by the sponsor in advance. All legal advisors must be regulated by a professional body and sponsors should complain to the provider, in the first instance, if they believe the cost of the service is unfair.¹

The rules and procedures for family reunion are complicated, but there is no requirement to use a solicitor or caseworker. Some sponsors may feel able to complete the process themselves and without any support.

Telephone and email support is available for applicants and sponsors to ask questions about their application.² However, support staff do not give legal advice or speak about personal circumstances, and significant charges apply (calls cost £1.37 per minute on top of standard network charges; email enquiries cost £5.48).

Interpretation

The cost of interpretation may be charged separately. Where an interpreter is needed, the cost will depend on the language spoken and the length of time they are needed. Interpreting is usually charged at £20-25 per hour. Travel and expenses may be an additional charge.

Tuberculosis (TB) tests

All applicants from particular countries must provide a certificate to show they are free from TB before coming to the UK.³ The costs and requirements for TB tests are advertised on the

¹ For advice on complaints, for OISC regulated advisors, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/oiscs-complaints-scheme-complaints-form-english>. For SRA regulated solicitors, see <https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/problems/report-solicitor/>.

² <https://www.gov.uk/contact-ukvi-inside-outside-uk>.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/tb-test-visa>.

Home Office webpage for each country where a TB test is required.⁴ The test is valid for six months.⁵

While the cost in each country is different, TB tests typically cost around \$150 USD per person, with a reduction for children under 11 years, who typically pay around \$60 USD per person.

Applicants must only use Home Office approved clinics that are typically located in major cities only. Transport to the TB centre, accommodation and food may therefore be necessary costs.

Travel/subsistence

Sponsors should also think about the cost of getting to appointments with legal advisors and how they will manage missing work or other commitments.

Collecting evidence

Applications for passports

Typically, passports are needed for international travel. They are also regularly required for proof of ID for TB tests and to enter VACs. Consequently, applicants who can apply for them safely are expected to do so. Standard applications for passports may take weeks, although expedited services are often available, but at additional cost. For instance, a standard application for a Ghanaian passport in Ghana takes one month and costs 100 GHS (£13). An expedited application for the same passport costs 150 GHS (£20).⁶

Passports requested from an overseas embassy may cost significantly more than those requested from the country of nationality. For instance, a normal Sri Lankan passport in Sri Lanka takes 14 days and costs LKR. 3500 (£15),⁷ but a Sri Lankan passport in India costs Ind. Rs. 9750 (£103) and takes 8 weeks.⁸

Many applicants do not have passports and cannot apply for them safely. In such cases, the Home Office can issue a one-way travel document to allow the applicant to travel to the UK without a passport. There is no cost for a one-way travel document.

Applications for certificates and other official documentation

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/tb-test-visa/countries-where-you-need-a-tb-test-to-enter-the-uk>.

⁵ TB tests may need to be repeated for an appeal or a new application if it is no longer valid, incurring duplicate costs.

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ghana), Passport information, available at <https://passport.mfa.gov.gh/>.

⁷ Department of Immigration and Emigration (Sri Lanka), Issue of Passports, at http://www.immigration.gov.lk/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=142&Itemid=191&lang=en.

⁸ High Commission of Sri Lanka in India, Issuance, Renewal and Amending of Passports, at https://www.slhcindia.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=372&Itemid=137.

Applications for certificates or official documentation such as a family book, residence permit or ID cards can take time and cost money. A legal advisor can give guidance on what evidence is needed for an application.

DNA test

DNA testing is not required for family reunion applications. Nevertheless, DNA evidence may be important in cases where there is little other evidence establishing a family link.

DNA tests should only be commissioned from one of the Home Office recommended providers.⁹ Costs are published on the accredited providers' websites. Prices vary according to where in the world the samples are taken and complexity of the DNA relationship of applicants. Testing is cheaper for simple parental relationships; tests for siblings or other relatives cost more.

Generally, DNA testing for a family group of three people can cost approximately £500. Larger family groups can cost £750 or more.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, DNA testing costs are normally covered by legal aid.

Many DNA test providers ask the sponsor and the family members to attend a local clinic to provide a sample. A little additional money for travel will therefore be needed.

Translation

Where certificates and statements are written in another language, an official translation must be provided. The cost of translation may be included with legal advice or priced separately.

Birth certificates or marriage certificates contain relatively little text and may cost £50 to translate from most languages. Longer documents, such as a detailed family book are likely to cost more (£100).

Application

Application fees and Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)

The Home Office does not charge an application fee for the children and partners of refugees. However, applications for other relatives may be charged a fee. The fee for other family members of a refugee and for children of refugee relatives is £388, but sponsors do not need to pay if payment would make them unable to meet basic costs such as accommodation and food, or if there are other exceptional circumstances.¹⁰ Applications for a fee waiver are made online.¹¹

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/get-dna-test>.

¹⁰ See 'Applications for a fee waiver and refunds' at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applications-for-a-fee-waiver-and-refunds>.

¹¹ At <https://visas-immigration.service.gov.uk/product/fee-waiver>.

Applications for refugee family reunion are also exempt from paying the Immigration health surcharge.¹²

Any fee or charge that is due must be paid online by debit or credit card when the application is made.

Submission of evidence

Following submission of the application online, evidence may be uploaded onto the application website. Evidence should be collected and scanned as one electronic file. This is free of charge. Any evidence that cannot be uploaded can be taken to the VAC and scanned separately (see below).

VAC Appointment

Applicants for family reunion must attend a visa application centre (VAC) at an agreed appointment to scan their fingerprints, take their photos, and provide evidence.

Travel, accommodation and subsistence

The UK does not have VACs in all countries. Applicants might need to travel to attend an appointment in another city, or another country.¹³ There will be likely travel, accommodation, food or other costs in attending a VAC.

For instance, applicants from Togo must travel to Accra, in Ghana, for a visa appointment. The journey takes over five hours, crosses an international border and costs almost £70 per person.¹⁴ By way of comparison, applicants from the DRC can choose a visa appointment in Kinshasa. Yet Kinshasa is an expensive and dangerous city, and even if accommodation is not required, visiting the VAC may still cost around £20 per person.¹⁵

Printing/postage/courier

Applicants must take documents with them to the appointment, including an appointment confirmation email, application form and document checklist. These could be printed by the applicants, but in some cases may need to be sent by post or by courier from the UK. These documents should accompany any other evidence that is not submitted online.

The cost of sending documents (up to 0.5kg) overseas by courier (1-4 working days delivery time) can cost £40.¹⁶

¹² See The Immigration (Health Charge) Order 2015, at Schedule 2, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/792/schedule/2/made>.

¹³ A list of VACs is available at <https://www.gov.uk/find-a-visa-application-centre>.

¹⁴ Based on: Return travel by bus and taxi costs £18 pp. Exit and visa formalities on the border costs £20 pp. Food and drink cost £5 per day; budget accommodation in Accra costs £20 per person.

¹⁵ Based on: Taxi across the city £12, cheap meal £7, drink £1.

¹⁶ DHL, Service Point Size & Price Guide, at <https://parcel.dhl.co.uk/dhl-service-point/size-and-price-guide/>.

Where there is evidence on a phone or online, local print shops may also be used, adding some further cost in a local currency.

Paid-for VAC services

Applicants do not need to pay for VAC appointments. However, a range of added value (paid-for) services are available at the appointment. Applicants should not need any of these services, but they can provide greater flexibility (appointments at different times) or convenience (having documents returned by courier). Costs for added value services are listed at the time of appointment booking.¹⁷ Not all services are available at all VACs.

Visa collection

Travel, accommodation and subsistence

Applicants are informed by email/phone or letter that a decision is waiting for them. Unless the applicant paid for a 'document return' service, applicants must return to the VAC to collect the decision. Consequently, duplicate costs are likely incurred for the visa collection.

Appeal of a refusal decision

Appeal fee

Appealing a refusal decision at the Immigration and Asylum Tribunal costs £140 for an oral hearing. However, if the sponsor has little or no savings and is on certain benefits or has a low income, they may not have to pay a fee, or may get some money off.¹⁸

Legal advice and representation

If a legal adviser completes further work or collects **expert evidence** for the appeal, additional fees may be due. Exceptional Case Funding may be available in some cases to cover the cost of legal advice, representation at appeal and expert evidence.¹⁹

Departure preparation

Leaving costs

The process of closing up a house and moving is expensive anywhere in the world. Applicants may also need to pay bills and arrange for friends/family to care for elderly parents or other family that will be left behind. For some applicants, these costs will be significant.

¹⁷ See https://pos.tlscontact.com/bjl_en/index.php/added-value-services and <https://www.vfsglobal.co.uk/en> for a list of additional services and costs.

¹⁸ See 'Get help paying court and tribunal fees' at <https://www.gov.uk/get-help-with-court-fees>.

¹⁹ Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) may be available in England and Wales for refugee family reunion in cases that are complex or where the person requires additional support. For more on ECF, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/legal-aid-apply-for-exceptional-case-funding>.

Collection of certificates and official documentation

Before coming to the UK, applicants should collect as much official documentation as they can to facilitate their integration into UK life. Examples include health or hospital records and school certificates. These documents may take time to prepare and some providers can require a small administrative fee or the cost of printing.

Travel to the UK

Exit visas

Exit procedures (including formal exit visas as well as fees or penalties) vary significantly between countries. The procedure and cost may depend on a person's nationality and their immigration status in that country. Not everyone will have to go through an exit process, but if they do, the process can be complex, expensive, and take time to navigate.

Flight cost

Sponsors might have to pay for the flights to the UK themselves, though funding may sometimes be available.

Costs of flights will obviously vary enormously. By way of example, a one-way ticket from Kinshasa to Manchester costs approximately £450 per person; from Kuala Lumpur to Manchester costs approximately £350; and from Beirut to Manchester costs approximately £250.

Family reunion visas are typically issued for just 30 days and by the time the applicants receive the visa the period may be much shorter. Flights should therefore be booked as soon as possible after the visa has been issued.

Travel/accommodation/subsistence

Applicants may need to travel some distance to the departure airport. In some cases, applicants need to enter another country to travel on to the UK. However, many applicants cannot guarantee when they will be able to cross a border and therefore cannot book their onward travel in advance. If flights can only be booked at short notice, additional cost is likely and it may be necessary to stay in an airport hotel for some days until a flight can be found.

The family will typically not have any official assistance at the departure or transit airport. This may be a difficult and unfamiliar journey. Sponsors should therefore think about the cost of a friend bringing the family to the airport, and money for food and other necessities en route. At most airports, a light meal costs around £5 per person.

Arrival in the UK

Travel to/from airport

Sponsors will want to collect their family from the airport when they arrive. Flights may arrive late at night or early in the morning when the only available transport is a taxi. By way of example, a taxi from a London airport to central London costs approximately £40. Public transport obviously costs significantly less.

Additional living costs (food, clothing, bedding)

There will likely be additional living costs in the first days after the family arrive. Clothing may be inappropriate for the weather and need replacing; additional furniture and/or bedding will be necessary; extra food for the larger family group; and, if the family is used to hot weather, more heating fuel may also be needed if it is cold.

In the first week, family members should also collect their biometric residence cards at a designated post office,²⁰ register with a local doctor and place any children with a local school, which will add some additional transport costs.

Welfare benefit payments take several weeks to process. For instance, Universal Credit is usually paid around 5-6 weeks after the claim is made. Sponsors should therefore seek advice and complete benefit claims promptly after the family arrive to help make sure it is processed as quickly as possible.²¹

Moving to family accommodation

Many refugees will not have suitable accommodation before they are reunited with their family, and local authorities do not prioritise the family for council accommodation until the family group arrive. However, the local authority will provide advice and has a duty to help the family find suitable accommodation.

In most cases, there will be an urgent need to find suitable accommodation in advance of the family's arrival. In some cases, friends or family may be able to help, but for others, private rented accommodation is the only solution. Most private accommodation requires one month rent plus a deposit at the start of the contract.²²

Time off to welcome family and attend appointments

In the first few days, the sponsor will want to take time to spend with the family, if possible. There will also be important appointments to register the family with various services. Often there is no choice which appointment to take, so the sponsor may need to take some time off work.

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/biometric-residence-permits/collect>.

²¹ Turn2Us, 'Claiming Benefits - How long does it take to process a claim?', at <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/Benefit-guides/Beginner-s-Guide-to-Benefits/How-long-does-it-take-to-process-a-claim>.

²² Shelter, 'Upfront costs of private renting', at https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/private_renting/costs_of_private_renting.

Costs of Family Reunion: Sources of financial support

A number of government authorities and charitable organisations may be able to offer limited support to refugees to be reunited with their families. Eligibility requirements for each source of support varies.

Sources of State Funding

Legal Aid and Exceptional Case Funding (ECF)

Government funding (legal aid) is not available for the costs associated with refugee family reunion cases in England and Wales, although legal aid continues to be available in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Since 2019, legal aid has since been reintroduced in England and Wales for immigration cases involving unaccompanied and separated children. Where funding is available, it will likely cover the cost of lawyers' fees, as well as the cost of interpreters, translations, DNA tests and expert reports.

Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) may be available in England and Wales for refugee family reunion in cases that are complex or where the person requires additional support. For more on ECF, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/legal-aid-apply-for-exceptional-case-funding>.

Local Education Authority support

Refugees and families on low incomes are able to get help with some of the costs of sending children to school, including the cost of school meals, transport and uniform.

Applicants should contact their LEA in the first instance, to see what support is available. More information is available from the Citizen's Advice Bureau links below:

England: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/family/education/school-education/help-with-school-costs/>

Scotland: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/family/education/school-and-pre-school-education-s/help-with-school-costs-s/#h-school-clothing>

Home Office refugee integration loan

Refugees can apply for a refugee integration loan to pay for a deposit or rent, household items, or education and training for work.

Integration loans are interest-free. Refugees only pay back what they borrow, but regular payments must be made.

Applications are made using an online form at the link below. Further advice can be sought from the local Jobcentre Plus office.

<https://www.gov.uk/refugee-integration-loan>

Charitable support

British Red Cross

The British Red Cross Family Reunion Travel Assistance offers financial and logistical support to help refugees be reunited with their families, with assistance from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), including: advice on exit processes; support at departure and transit airport; and flight tickets to the UK. Some regional offices also offer a Family Reunion Integration Service to provide post-arrival support to reunited families. Policy for travel assistance was recently changed to provide support to sponsors who meet the financial criteria for the service and are bringing over unaccompanied minors and families with 3 or more travelling together. Although British Red Cross, through the IOM, does offer advice on how to manage exit processes, they are not able to pay fees or fines.

Applicants should contact their local Red Cross refugee service to see what support is available in any particular area.

<https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-help-as-a-refugee>.

Fund for Human Need

Emergency payments are made to individuals in the UK, most of whom are refugees, asylum seekers or homeless, and to those in other kinds of personal distress.

This is a very limited fund that usually makes emergency relief payments to a maximum of £120.

It is not essential, but it is better if an application is made through a recognised organisation. Fund officers meet once a month to decide on the allocation of funds.

http://fundforhumanneed.org.uk/?page_id=81

National Zakat Foundation

NZF awards one-off grants to help Muslims in need with essentials such as food, shelter, clothing and travel costs. Housing grants may also cover rent payments and deposits.

Referral partners should submit an online application with supporting documents. A decision can take up to 6 weeks.

<https://www.nzf.org.uk/Apply>

Positive Action in Housing

PAIH assists refugees to overcome crisis situations and help avoid destitution. The charity provides advice, emergency support and housing support.

A referral organisation should be registered with PAIH and an online application with supporting docs needs to be submitted. A decision is given in a couple of days after the application deadline, which is once a month.

<https://www.paih.org/information-for-caseworkers-wishing-to-refer-to-room-for-refugees/>

Prisoners of Conscience

PoC awards grants for travel, emergency documentation, medical assessment, DNA testing and legal expenses to former prisoners of conscience to enable families to be reunited.

PoC does not deal directly with individuals but only with approved organisations that apply on behalf of individuals. Approved organisations should submit an online application with supporting documents.

A decision is given in a few days.

<https://www.prisonersofconscience.org/family-reunion/>

RefuAid

RefuAid can provide refugees in the UK with an interest-free loan up to £2,000 to cover various costs of reunifying the immediate family once a person has been granted asylum in the UK.

Referral can be made online or through the British Red Cross. Further documentary evidence and an interview may be required. If a referral is being made for the first time, RefuAid will explain the process.

<https://refuaid.org/familyreunification>

Shelter

Shelter is a national charity offering people facing urgent housing issues advice and support. Shelter does not offer financial assistance, but should be among the first points of contact for any sponsor facing homelessness or destitution. A free helpline is available to talk to an expert housing adviser if a person is in urgent need of housing advice.

Shelter also describes options for persons who are unable to pay upfront costs of private rented accommodation, such as the deposit, and advice on how local authorities can help.

England: https://england.shelter.org.uk/get_help

Scotland: https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/get_advice

Together Now

Together Now supports refugees through a range of challenges involved in the family reunion process. Support is available to fund and book travel to reunite the family and further assistance is available for other essential costs such as travel to a departure airport, exit costs including visas or vaccination certificates, DNA testing to support applications or appeals, or in exceptional circumstances, travel to a visa appointment.

Referral partners must complete an online application and provide supporting documents.

<http://togethernow.org.uk/>

Sources of support in Scotland only

Refugee Survival Trust (Scotland only)

RST's Destitution Grants programme provides small one-off payments to asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland facing extreme poverty and homelessness.

Applications are made to one of the referral partners listed on the website.

<https://www.rst.org.uk/what-we-do/destitutiongrants>.

Scottish Welfare Fund (Scotland only)

The Scottish Government has committed to establishing a process for the delivery of Family Reunion Crisis Grants for refugee families, who settle in Scotland under family reunion rules. This will support the integration of refugee families arriving in Scotland under family reunion rules, who would otherwise be destitute. It will provide them with the financial support they need to meet their basic needs during their first days in Scotland, before they are able to access welfare benefits.

The pre-arrival Family Reunion Crisis Grant provides money for food, gas, electricity. A Community Care Grant may also support refugee families with money for furniture, white goods, or clothing on arrival.

Applications to the SWF should be made by the British Red Cross. Refugees should contact the BRC to arrange a meeting to complete the online SWF application form.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-statutory-guidance-2019/pages/10/>

Support Cost	Government funding			Charitable support								Scotland only	
	Legal aid / ECF	Home Office refugee integration loan	Local Education Authority support	British Red Cross	Fund for Human Need	National Zakat Foundation	Positive Action in Housing	Prisoners of Conscience	RefuAid	Shelter (advice only)	Together Now	Refugee Survival Trust	Scottish Welfare Fund
Pre-application													
Legal advice and representation	✓			✓				✓					
Interpretation	✓			✓				✓					
Tuberculosis (TB) tests						✓	✓	✓			✓		
Travel/subsistence						✓		✓			✓		
Collecting evidence													
Applications for passports						✓		✓			✓		
Applications for certificates & other official documentation						✓		✓			✓		
DNA test	✓							✓			✓		
Translation	✓												
Application													
Application fee													
Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)													
VAC appointment													
Travel/accommodation/subsistence								✓			✓		
Printing/postage/courier													
Paid-for VAC services													
Visa collection													
Travel/accommodation/subsistence								✓			✓		

Support	Government funding			Charitable support								Scotland only	
	Legal aid / ECF	Home Office refugee integration loan	Local Education Authority support	British Red Cross	Fund for Human Need	National Zakat Foundation	Positive Action in Housing	Prisoners of Conscience	RefuAid	Shelter (advice only)	Together Now	Refugee Survival Trust	Scottish Welfare Fund
Appeal of a refusal decision													
Appeal fee													
Legal advice and representation	✓												
Expert evidence	✓												
Departure preparation													
Leaving costs													
Collection of certificates & official documentation								✓					
Travel to the UK													
Exit visas						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Flight cost				✓				✓	✓		✓		
Travel/accommodation/subsistence				✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		
Arrival in the UK													
Travel to/from airport				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				
Additional living costs (food, clothing, bedding)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Moving to family accommodation		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Time off work to welcome family and attend appointments						✓			✓				