

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

FOR THE BENEFIT

OF ALL

POLICIES & PRACTICES SUPPORTING SAFE, REGULAR AND ORDERLY MIGRATION

Family Reunification is one of the most important aspects of safe, orderly, and regular migration. The principle of family unity is recognized and protected under international law, amongst others through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In practice, families that have been separated face many obstacles in the reunification process, leading to prolonged separation, which negatively affects the ability of migrants in destination countries to integrate and thrive. The obstacles that families face include restrictive eligibility criteria, onerous financial and evidentiary requirements, lack of information and support, as well as logistical barriers.

Destination countries should therefore make more effective use of facilitated migration, so that vulnerable families do not feel compelled to resort to (dangerous) irregular channels. Through its extensive migration management expertise, IOM stands ready to assist Member States as they take measures to facilitate family reunification.

ELEMENTS OF A DIGNIFIED APPROACH TO FAMILY REUNIFICATION



MINIMAL FEES

In addition to visa fees, migrants often face financial obstacles such as high procedural costs for obtaining the required documents, DNA testing, document translation and verification, and travel costs. National governments should strive to reduce these barriers, particularly for migrants in vulnerable situations.



REALISTIC DEADLINES

Short deadlines to apply for reunification often mean that potential applicants have only three months to gather all the required documents once their family member has obtained a residency permit in the country of destination. This is a particularly significant obstacle for those in vulnerable situations.



REASONABLE REQUIREMENTS

Requirements related to the income level, accommodation, and health insurance of sponsors are often impossible to meet, especially since the sponsors have often only recently arrived themselves.

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

Family migrants, mostly women, account for a large part of migrant populations: about 25%-50% in OECD countries! *



NON-DISCRIMINATORY AND TIMELY PROCESSING

Long processing times impede families from realizing their right to reunification and can even lead to family members, including children, taking dangerous irregular routes. In some cases, processing times take so long that minor children become adults and are no longer eligible for family reunification. The processing of applications should take place in a non-discriminatory manner within a reasonable time frame for all applicants, with the possibility of expediting vulnerable cases, such as children.

Staff responsible for processing applications and assisting families should come from multi-cultural backgrounds and receive up-to-date training on family reunification rights and procedures. The training should include country-specific cultural awareness, so that bona fide family relationships are duly recognized.

Throughout the process, families should receive information in their own language on the status of their application and have access to legal advice.



FACILITATION OF SAFE MIGRATION

Obtaining travel documents and other documentation is often challenging for applicants. This is particularly true in countries of origin where there is conflict, instability, or political repression.

Governments should take measures to facilitate the logistical aspects of family reunification, such as travel and access to embassies/consulates.

Too often, family members have no choice but to cross international borders irregularly to reach the nearest consulate where they could apply for reunification. Once the request has been approved, it is particularly important to provide travel assistance to vulnerable migrants such as unaccompanied minor children and those requiring medical support.



TRANSPARENCY

National governments should publish information regarding the right to family reunification and related data, including the average processing times for each country of origin.



SUPPORT TO INTEGRATION OF FAMILY MEMBERS

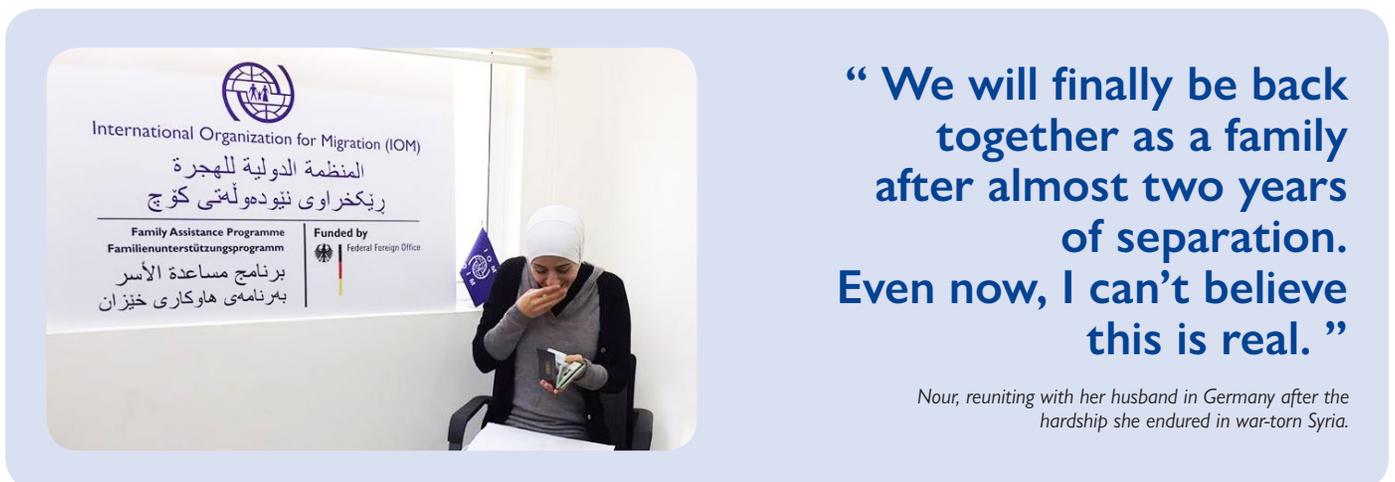
Host societies should take measures to better prepare migrant families for their arrival and successful integration into host societies. This includes integration trainings covering language courses and information about rights and responsibilities in the country of destination. Upon arrival, family members should receive the support necessary to access meaningful employment opportunities.



THE DEFINITION OF 'FAMILY' SHOULD BE SUFFICIENTLY BROAD

Narrow national definitions and requirements on proving family links do not reflect the reality of family reunification applicants. The right to family reunification should not be limited to formal spouses and minor children, but also to non-formal life-partners and non-dependent family members, where appropriate.

Immigration services should take cultural and individual factors into account when verifying bona fide relationships.



“ We will finally be back together as a family after almost two years of separation. Even now, I can't believe this is real. ”

Nour, reuniting with her husband in Germany after the hardship she endured in war-torn Syria.

