Family Reunion: Emerging Trends

The Afghan Pro Bono Initiative (**APBI**) in its new report, "Still Waiting: The Afghans Abandoned by the UK", explores the challenges that Afghan clients face when making family reunion applications. These relate to those with refugee status who want to reunite with their families, but these challenges are also relevant in some circumstances to those who have been resettled under ACRS or ARAP and now wish to apply for family members to join them.

Delays in Family Reunion Processing

Family reunion applications are often delayed beyond the advertised 12-week processing time, with many applicants waiting over a year for a decision. This could be avoided if the decision-making process was streamlined and the backlog was cleared. The long waiting times coupled with ineffective decision-making mean it is unsurprising that Afghans account for the largest nationality of those crossing the Channel by boat.

Inefficiencies in Decision-Making

The Home Office frequently issues poorly reasoned decisions that overlook key facts or evidence, causing unnecessary appeals. Appeals not only prolong the stress and uncertainty for applicants but also add significant costs for the Home Office. These inefficiencies further contribute to the backlog of family reunion cases, making an already difficult process even more time-consuming and stressful for applicants.

Biometric Enrolment Challenges

Afghan applicants are required to travel to visa application centres (VACs) in Pakistan or Iran to complete their biometric enrolment, as there are no VACs in Afghanistan. The costs and dangers of these journeys are significant, particularly for those without legal permission to stay in these countries. The risk of detention or deportation from Pakistan or Iran adds further complexity, making the process dangerous, expensive, and in some cases, impossible for the most vulnerable, such as unaccompanied children and women.

A little girl is walking on Spice Selling Street. Kabul, Afghanistan (2022). Photo Credit: ©Kayhan

Sunset in Pol Sokhta, Kabul, Afghanistan (2023). Photo Credit: ©Kayhan.

*"On 3 October 2023, the authorities in Pakistan announced that all Afghan nationals without the right to remain in Pakistan would be expelled from the country after **1 November 2023**, under the so called 'Repatriation Plan'. This has led to an increasingly hostile environment for Afghans. Police abuse, including harassment, assault, and arbitrary detention, **has risen**. These hostilities have made it hard for Afghans waiting for relocation to find safe accommodation in Pakistan as many owners are fearful of being seen to help Afghans. This is yet another reason why the UK Government needs to improve the efficiency of all routes for Afghans in order to reduce the time they spend in limbo in dangerous situations."*
(Pg32 of the Report)

"There are more restrictions for people like my wife and my daughter who could not leave Afghanistan because now the Taliban do not allow women to leave the country without a Mahram (a male chaperone). I had to pay a £1000 bribe to someone in the Kabul Airport to allow my wife and daughter to take their flight to the UK."

Nawab, an APBI client (not their real name).

The lengthy delays in processing family reunion applications cause significant emotional distress, deepening isolation and mental health challenges for families who have already faced severe trauma.

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