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Great Britain: Home Office refuses to set up Ukraine-style visa scheme for Palestinians

Wednesday 10 January 2024, by [BYCHAWSKI Adam](#) (Date first published: 4 January 2024).

The government said it has 'no plans' to waive fees or tests to help Palestinians reunite with family in the UK

The Home Office is refusing to set up a Ukraine-style visa scheme to help Palestinians stranded in Gaza reunite with family in the UK.

More than 25,000 people signed a parliamentary [petition](#) asking for the government to waive fees, salary thresholds and tests for Palestinians displaced by Israel's attacks on Gaza.

But the [Home Office](#) rejected the request in December, saying it had "no plans to introduce bespoke arrangements for people arriving from the region".

More than 22,000 Palestinians have been killed in [Israeli attacks](#) on the Gaza Strip since Hamas killed 1,200 people on 7 October, according to figures from the Gaza health ministry. The United Nations estimates 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza have been displaced.

British nationals currently need to apply for visas for their Palestinian relatives through the existing family visa route if they wish to bring them to the UK. Only spouses, partners or children are eligible for visas through the scheme. Relatives such as grandparents, siblings or parents of adult children are not eligible in most cases.

The Home Office charges £1,846 to apply to bring each family member to the UK, including dependents, and a further £1,560 healthcare surcharge for adults, or £1,175 for children.

British nationals must also earn at least £18,600 to apply for a visa for a spouse or partner or £24,800 if they also have two children they want to bring over. This minimum income requirement is set to rise to £29,000 in spring. Partners or spouses also need to prove their knowledge of the English language to get a visa.

The government waived all fees, salary thresholds and language tests under the Ukraine Family Scheme, which was set up within weeks of Russia's invasion. The scheme allows people fleeing the war in Ukraine to join their family in the UK.

It is free to apply to the Ukraine Family Scheme and eligibility is extended to parents, grandparents, adult offspring, siblings, and their immediate family members. About 71,400 visas have been issued under the scheme so far.

Announcing the scheme in the Commons, the former Home Secretary Priti Patel [said at the time](#): "We are striking a blow for democracy and freedom against tyranny. Above all, we are doing right by the courageous people of Ukraine. We will help British nationals and their families to get out of

Ukraine safely.”

Some British-Palestinians have turned to fundraising in desperation to cover the fees for visas needed to bring their relatives to safety.

Hadil Louz, a PhD student in human rights law at St Andrew’s in Scotland, is [fundraising £30,000](#) to pay for visa and travel costs for her parents, one of whom has cancer, as well as her siblings and their children.

“On Christmas Day, my family had to evacuate again from the overcrowded house they were staying at, responding to the Israeli evacuation calls in Nusirat, and are currently staying in a tent on a street in Deir Al-Balah, in the cold of the winter.

“At the moment, their survival without food and shelter in Gaza is a very tangible threat on their lives,” she wrote on the [fundraiser](#).

A group of 80 British-Palestinian families wrote to foreign secretary David Cameron in December asking him to consider setting up a similar scheme for Palestinians, [the BBC reported](#).

“While acknowledging the complexities of each conflict, it is disheartening for us, as British citizens and UK residents, to witness the disparity in our government response,” it said.

The lack of a scheme for Palestinians, the letter said, “stands in stark contrast to the swift and supportive actions taken in similar circumstances, such as in the Ukrainian conflict”.

Palestinians in the UK “are currently feeling a profound sense of abandonment and neglect” as a result, it said.

In its response to the petition, the government said its “approach must be considered in the round, rather than on a crisis-by-crisis basis”. It also rejected [a second petition](#) signed by more than 16,000 people to create a bespoke immigration route for Palestinian children on the same grounds.

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