August 2025
Briefing G112
press@icjpalestine.com

# PALESTINIAN VISA SCHEMES

## Background

Since October 2023, Israeli bombardment and military operations in Gaza have killed over 71,000 people, including over 20,000 children, and have left many more injured, with thousands of unidentified bodies beneath rubble.[1] The IDF has even corroborated the figure of killing approximately 70,000 Palestinians.[2] The weaponisation of aid has driven mass starvation, while systematic strikes on health infrastructure mean thousands cannot access vital treatment. Around 1.9 million people, or 90% of the population, are now displaced.[3]

Despite the overwhelming humanitarian need, and while there are comparable UK schemes for those fleeing conflicts in Ukraine and Hong Kong, there is no bespoke visa scheme for Palestinians seeking temporary refuge in the UK. Instead, they must rely on standard immigration channels that impose strict eligibility criteria, high application fees, and documentation requirements that are impossible to meet in a war zone. The closure of Gaza's only visa application centre (VAC) prevents applicants from providing biometrics or attending visa appointments, leaving even those who qualify unable to complete the process.[4] The blockade of Rafah has made it almost impossible for Palestinians to reach Egypt to enrol biometrics, while some who have managed to flee there remain stranded without access to essential services.[5] While over 267,000 Ukrainians were granted visas on dedicated UK visa schemes by December 2024,[6] in the absence of an equivalent route only a small number of Palestinians have secured leave since October 2023.[7]

## Family reunification scheme

A 'Gaza Family Scheme,' modelled on the Ukraine Family Scheme,[8] would allow Palestinians affected by the conflict in Gaza to join family members in the UK temporarily, with the right to live, work and access public services until it is safe for them to return. Unlike the standard family reunification route, a Ukraine-style approach would not only expand eligibility, but it would also waive application fees and allow biometrics and in-person appointments to be completed in a third country or deferred until after arrival, addressing barriers that make standard routes inaccessible.

## Homes for Palestinians Scheme

Based on the Homes for Ukraine model,[9] this scheme would allow UK residents to host individuals fleeing Gaza, regardless of family ties. Sponsors would provide accommodation and basic support

[1] Al Jazeera (12th December 2025), Israel-Gaza war death toll: Live tracker
[2] Dan Johnson (29th January 2026) Israeli media cite official accepting Hamas figure of 70,000 war dead. BBC News.
[3] International Rescue Committee (1st July 2025), Crisis in Gaza: What to know and how to help
[4] House of Commons Library (10th May 2024), E-petition relating to a visa scheme for Palestinians.
[5] Scottish Government (21st November 2024), Gaza family visa scheme: letter to the UK Government
[6] GOV.UK (19th December 2024), Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data. Home Office Transparency Data.
[7] As of April 2024, only 270 Palestinians from Gaza had secured UK visas, The Lead (5th April 2024), Six months into the war, 'no plans' to offer Ukraine-style visa for Palestinians.
[8] See GOV.UK (18th February 2025), Apply for a Ukraine Family Scheme visa.
[9] See GOV.UK (18th February 2025), Apply for a visa under the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme

and receive a monthly payment from the Government in return. Those arriving through the scheme would be granted temporary leave to remain, with the right to work, study, and access public services. Visa fees would be waived, and biometric requirements deferred until after arrival, in line with the approach taken for Ukrainians. The scheme would provide a practical, community-led route for those without family sponsors, expanding safe pathways to protection.

**Child evacuation scheme**

The UK Government announced a Child Evacuation Scheme in July 2025, to provide critically injured children from Gaza with access to urgent, life-saving medical treatment that is currently unavailable in Gaza due to Israel's systematic destruction of the territory's healthcare system. The scheme includes coordination of travel permits, medical visas, and arrangements for safe transport, specialist treatment, and eventual return. However, only 55 children have been evacuated. [10]

In statistics published by the WHO on 28th October 2025, at least 10 European countries have taken in more child evacuees from Gaza, per capita, than the UK.[11] These include Norway, Romania, Malta, Ireland, Italy and Spain.

With over 33,000 children, at least, having been injured over the course of the genocide, this scheme must be expanded in scale urgently.[12] UNICEF estimated in October 2024 that around 2,500 children required complex medical care that could not be delivered locally.[13] In October 2025, UNICEF estimated a total of at least 64,000 children that have reportedly been killed or maimed across the Gaza Strip, including at least 1,000 babies[14]. Many more have died due to preventable illnesses or are buried under rubble.

**Gaza students scheme**

The UK Government announced the Gaza Scholarship Programme in August 2025, initially to assist around 40 students in Gaza to take up their scholarship places in UK universities. The scheme ended on the 31st of December 2025. Despite previous assurances from the government that the students' dependants would be allowed to follow them to the UK,[15] there remains extensive uncertainty and delay around the issue.[16]

As of January 2026, approximately 100 students have come to the UK from Gaza under the scheme, as per a parliamentary source. Per this same source, there remains no confirmed extension to the scheme and no change in policy, causing extreme uncertainty, confusion, and stress for students and their dependents, who still have no guarantee of joining scholarship students in the UK.

On the 8th January 2026, 123 parliamentarians wrote a letter to the Home Secretary urging the Government to extend the scholarship scheme beyond 31st December 2025 and calls for a review of

[10] UNRIC (30th October 2025), Gaza: Which countries are hosting patients evacuated by the WHO?
[11] UNRIC (30th October 2025), Gaza: Which countries are hosting patients evacuated by the WHO?
[12] UN News (16th July 2025), Gaza war: UN officials warn of unspeakable conditions as children bear the brunt
[13] UNICEF (25th October 2024), Dying in waiting: Gaza's children face lethal delays in medical evacuation
[14] UNICEF (8th October 2025), Two years of hellish war have devastated Gaza's children
[15] BBC News (30th October 2025), Dependants of some Gazan students can join them in UK, government says
[16] The Guardian (13th October 2025), MPs highlight plight of Gaza students unable to come to UK with children

the Government's promise that dependants of students would be allowed to follow them to the UK. Examples of this include PhD student Mohammed Aldalou, bound for LSE, who has a severely autistic child and was expected to leave him behind in Gaza. As of the time of writing, the letter has yet to receive a response from the Government.

**Public and parliamentary support**

These proposals are in step with public opinion. A recent poll commissioned by Action for Humanity in collaboration with the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) found support for a 'Homes for Palestinians' scheme modelled on the Ukraine response amongst Liberal Democrat voters (50% in favour vs 29% against) and Labour voters (56% in favour vs 27% against).[17]

There is also sustained cross-party parliamentary backing. In March 2024, dozens of parliamentarians led by Baroness Bennett wrote to the Home Secretary calling for family reunification and sponsorship schemes similar to those created for Ukrainians.[18] In June 2025, 67 parliamentarians, including Liberal Democrats Layla Moran and Tim Farron signed a similar letter urging the Government to create a 'Gaza Family Scheme' to avoid a clear double standard in the UK's response to civilians fleeing conflict.[19] Several Early Day Motions have also been tabled, including a January 2024 motion in support of child medical evacuations, signed by 51 MPs across parties,[20] and a November 2024 motion calling for a Gaza family visa scheme, backed by 41 MPs and sponsored by Liberal Democrat MP Andrew George.[21]

Members of the British Palestinian Community have also pressed for these measures. In December 2024, 80 British Palestinian families wrote to then Foreign Secretary David Cameron urging the Government to introduce a visa scheme for stranded relatives in Gaza.[22] At an October 2024 meeting with Prime Minister Kier Starmer, members of the British Palestinian Community spoke of how Palestinian families in the UK have been separated by the conflict, and called on the UK Government to urgently establish a child evacuation scheme and a family reunification route.[23]

**Legal challenges**

The Government is facing increasing legal scrutiny for its failure to offer safe routes for Palestinians fleeing Gaza. In a landmark ruling on 28th July 2025, the High Court found the UK acted unlawfully in denying consular assistance to a Palestinian family in Gaza, who had been granted entry to the UK conditional on submitting biometric data at a visa centre.[24] Noting that the family could not enrol their biometrics without help to leave Gaza, the Court found that the Government's refusal to provide assistance failed to take into account relevant legal and diplomatic considerations.

---

[17] ICJP & AFH (18th June 2025) 82% of Britons Who Oppose Israel's Actions in Gaza Say They Amount to Genocide.
[18] BBC News (12th March 2024), MPs and peers call for Gaza visa scheme.
[19] Sky News (30th June 2025), Dozens of MPs call on Starmer to 'urgently' establish Ukraine-style visa for Gazans
[20] UK Parliament (8th January 2024), EDM 254: Short-term medical evacuation of children from Gaza
[21] UK Parliament (5th November 2024), EDM 363: Gaza family visa scheme.
[22] BBC News (15th December 2023), British-Palestinians call for visa scheme for trapped relatives
[23] International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (22nd October 2024), British Palestinian family members meet with Prime Minister: Key calls for Child Evacuation Scheme, Family Reunification Scheme and UK to ensure medical aid gets in
[24] Matrix Chambers (28th July 2025), High Court Quashes United Kingdom's Refusal of Consular Assistant to Palestinian Family Seeking to Leave Gaza.

Separately, on 20 July 2025, legal proceedings were launched against the Government for its failure to evacuate three critically ill children in Gaza despite the lack of treatment options in the territory.[25] As of January 2026, the family's case status remains unknown.

**The UK Government response**

In December 2023, the Government responded to a public petition calling for a Palestinian family visa scheme by stating it had "no plans" to introduce bespoke arrangements.[26] The petition later gained over 100,000 signatures and was debated in Parliament in May 2024, but the Government refused to change its position.[27] In May 2025, two children from Gaza were granted entry to the UK for specialist care under an ad hoc arrangement.[28] On 20 July 2025, following mounting public, parliamentary and legal pressure, Keir Starmer stated that the UK would be "accelerating efforts" to evacuate critically ill children for Gaza.[29] By September 2025, 10 children had been admitted.[30] Project Pure Hope have confirmed to ICJP that 50 children have arrived under the scheme, along with their families and an additional 3 children brough via project pure hope for private medical visas.

**Right to return**

Any scheme must be underpinned by an explicit commitment to the inalienable right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, as enshrined in international law since 1948, when the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 194 stating that refugees wishing to return "should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date."[31] Without such a guarantee, there is a risk that visa schemes could unwittingly contribute to Israel's ongoing policy of forced displacement and ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The UK Government must ensure that granting temporary sanctuary to Palestinians does not come at the expense of upholding their right to return. It must pledge to protect this right, support conditions for voluntary and safe repatriation, and apply diplomatic pressure on Israel to comply with international law.

[25] The Guardian (20th July 2025), UK government faces legal action over not evacuating critically ill children from Gaza
[26] Open Democracy (4th January 2024), Home Office refuses to set up Ukraine-style visa scheme for Palestinians
[27] See Hansard (13th May 2024), Palestinians: Visa Scheme
[28] Sky News (1st May 2025), Two children from Gaza enter UK for specialist medical care for first time after months of struggle
[29] The Observer (25th July 2025), More Gazan children will come to UK for treatment
[30] André Rhoden-Paul. (17th September 2025) Ten sick Gazan children arrive in UK for treatment. BBC News.
[31] United Nations (1978), The Right of Return of the Palestinian People.