



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

المنظمة الدولية للهجرة  
رێكخراوی نێودهوڵهتی كۆچ

Family Assistance Programme  
Familienunterstützungsprogramm

برنامج مساعده الأسر  
بهرنامهی هاوکاری خێزان

Funded by



Federal Foreign Office



IOM's Family Assistance Programme

Facilitated Migration Services

## IOM'S FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

### Background

As the number of Syrians and Iraqis seeking protection shows no signs of abating, in addition to resettlement schemes, states continue to be called upon by the international community to offer additional safe and legal pathways for them to re-build their lives in third countries, including through family reunification visa schemes. Such schemes offer new beginnings and save lives by providing an alternative to unsafe, irregular and covert journeys, often facilitated by people smugglers.

Since 2015, according to the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), more than half a million Syrians and Iraqis have registered for asylum in Germany, of whom approximately 320,000 have already been granted refugee status and qualify for Germany's family reunification visa scheme. Every recognised refugee has the right to family reunification. It is therefore estimated that a high number of family members will be eligible for reunification with a recognised refugee in Germany.

### Establishment of the IOM Family Assistance Programme

In June 2016, as a result of the unprecedented number of German family reunification visa applications being submitted to the German Consular Offices in Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq, at the request of and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO), IOM established and operates five Family Assistance Programme (FAP) service centres in the cities of Istanbul and Gaziantep (Turkey), Beirut and Chtoura (Lebanon) and Erbil (Iraq).

These service centres offer a wide range of support to Syrian and, only in Erbil, Iraqi families applying for a German family reunification (FR) visa. By providing administrative pre-screening of FR visa applications, German Consular Officers are able to make more informed decisions with complete information from the first instance.

### Family Friendly Facilities and Services in Arabic and Kurdish

The IOM service centres are situated in close proximity to the relevant German Consular Offices and public transport, and are capable of assisting in-person, a high-volume of families in a safe, empowering, migrant friendly, Arabic and Kurdish language environment. The sites are outfitted to international standards, offering comfortable waiting rooms, dedicated service desks, photo booths, call/contact centre facilities, integration classrooms, prayer rooms, as well as child care and child friendly play spaces.

All IOM staff have been carefully selected, security cleared and trained to provide empathetic and culturally sensitive services and to identify and prioritize the most vulnerable, including unaccompanied minors and those with medical conditions. To further facilitate access to the centres, IOM offers dedicated escort and shuttle bus services from the relevant German Consular Offices. IOM also has representatives posted at German Consular Offices including in Izmir, to provide immediate support prior to interview.

## Information Services

A key component of the FAP is to provide Syrian and Iraqi families with accurate, timely and topical information on the German FR visa process and related matters, including relevant news from Germany, with a focus on integration related services being offered before and after arrival. Information is disseminated in the Arabic and Kurdish language via multiple channels including outreach by phone, helplines, email, website and social media platforms.

The IOM service centres share a dedicated Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/IOM.Family.Assistance.Programme/>) and Twitter account (@IOM\_FAP) to broaden outreach and access to information. IOM also monitors relevant social media to dispel rumours and misperceptions about the Germany's family reunification process.

## FR Visa Application Completeness Checks

GFFO data indicates that the majority of Syrian and Iraqi families arrive for their long awaited German FR visa interview, unprepared and ill-informed, with most submitting incomplete applications, often lacking the required supporting documentation. This creates undesirable delays. IOM assists by providing comprehensive support to ensure that applications are complete prior to interview. Services include:

- Completion and printing of the required online visa application forms (see: <https://fap.diplo.de>);
- Visa application completeness checks;
- Facilitation of contact with recognised refugee sponsors in Germany (Skype, phone, email);
- Assistance with scheduling/re-scheduling visa interview appointments;
- Passport photos, printing, photocopying and translation referral assistance.

## Facilitation of Biometric Enrolment to Manage Identities

In select centres, IOM also facilitates the enrolment of biometrics to further streamline visa processing. All biometrics data is captured and transferred in full compliance with the strict data protection policies of the Federal Republic of Germany and IOM.

## OBJECTIVES

- To dissuade families from seeking unsafe and irregular means to join their recognised refugee sponsor in Germany;
- To protect families from misinformation and exploitation by unscrupulous visa brokers and smugglers;
- To empower families with Arabic and Kurdish language information and visa support services;
- To facilitate efficient visa processing with German Consular Offices;
- To better prepare families for arrival and integration into German society.

## Facilitation of DNA Collection to Verify Family Relationships

In cases where insufficient documentation is available to verify relationships, including between parents seeking to be reunified with unaccompanied minor children, and in cases where documentary evidence is insufficient for a visa decision, IOM facilitates on-site DNA collection and testing at accredited, ISO certified laboratories in Germany.

## Delivery of Integration Classes

At the two centres in Turkey, IOM also provides voluntary, Arabic language integration classes free of charge, to better prepare Syrian families for their arrival and successful integration into German society. Specific objectives of the integration classes include:

- Providing participants with accurate and up to date information on the process of joining an approved family member granted asylum in Germany and what happens upon arrival;
- Living in Germany and developing realistic expectations;
- Rights and responsibilities and German law;
- Assisting participants to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for successful adaptation into German society.

An Arabic language handbook has also been developed in support of the integration classes and is distributed at all FAP service centres whether or not applicants choose to attend a class.

## IOM'S FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME - CONTACT DETAILS

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