# UK family reunification efforts for Gaza academic hindered by bureaucratic delays amid escalating conflict



The silence of the early hours in Bassem Abudagga's Manchester flat was deafening, akin to a deepening tragedy that mirrored the continuous turmoil unfolding in Gaza. Abudagga, a lecturer in business studies from Al-Azhar University, anxiously awaited news of his family, who were sheltering amid relentless bombardments near Khan Younis. His connection to them, maintained through a WhatsApp group of 800 relatives, was his only link to their safety. On that particular night, as missiles struck nearby, his wife Marim and their two young children, seemingly out of reach, did not answer his desperate attempts to contact them.

“Every single minute, I am with them 24 hours a day,” he explained, articulating the emotional strain of living in a constant state of fear for his family's well-being. The strain of receiving urgent messages only to be met with silence gnawed at him; when he finally received a brief communication from his mother confirming they were safe, it was a moment laden with both relief and resignation. Yet, the stark reality remained: they were still trapped in a precarious situation, living with the looming threat of violence.

The predicament of the Abudagga family is emblematic of the broader humanitarian crisis impacting many in Gaza. As the UK Foreign Office and Home Office grapple with the complexities of immigration law, the crux of Abudagga's circumstances hinges on decisions made three years ago. He had opted to leave his family behind during his scholarship in the UK, believing he could reunite with them in time. However, this decision now haunts him as bureaucratic hurdles prevent their evacuation amidst escalating conflict.

With the war ravaging Gaza, over 250 members of Abudagga’s extended family have perished, compounding the trauma and urgency of their situation. While UK policies ostensibly allow foreign students to bring their dependents, the reality for Abudagga is starkly different. His pleas for expedited action have been echoed by Labour MPs, yet they have not yielded tangible results.

The parliamentary response to Abudagga's plight embodies a frustrating paradox. Rachael Maskell, the MP for York Central, highlighted the exceptional circumstances of his case, asserting that the government’s bureaucratic approach fails to align with the dire human needs presented by families like his. Though the British Council claims to be prioritising Abudagga's case, the necessary infrastructure to process family reunification requests in Gaza has been obliterated by conflict, leaving him in an agonising limbo.

In a heart-wrenching update sent to supporting MPs, Abudagga described his children as “in critical conditions,” grappling with trauma, hunger, and the constant threat of violence. This emotional burden is compounded for Marim, who remains in Gaza, trying to provide care amid overwhelming challenges. The scenario is not unique to Abudagga; many families are similarly fragmented by war and political decisions, raising urgent questions about the moral responsibilities of governments in such crises.

The British government's approach has come under scrutiny, especially as public awareness grows regarding the struggles of UK citizens and dual nationals trapped in Gaza. Around 200 individuals have sought assistance, and though measures have been introduced for repatriation, families express disappointment over the slow progress and the lack of much-needed support.

Meanwhile, academic communities, like that of York St John University, stand in solidarity with Abudagga. His supervisor, Dr Alexandra Dales, remarked on his resilience in the face of adversity, noting that his dedication to studies has remained unwavering despite the harrowing circumstances affecting his family. This resilience is a testament not only to Abudagga but to many who find themselves navigating crises while striving for education and stability.

As the situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, calls for the UK government to establish safe routes for evacuation grow louder. Advocates urge for urgent policy reforms akin to the Ukraine Family Scheme, thereby expanding opportunities for families facing separation due to conflict. Until tangible changes emerge from the government, families like Abudagga's remain caught in a precarious balance of hope and despair, longing for a resolution to their plight.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/05/when-they-are-at-risk-they-text-me-gaza-academic-in-uk-powerless-to-rescue-family), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/05/when-they-are-at-risk-they-text-me-gaza-academic-in-uk-powerless-to-rescue-family)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/05/when-they-are-at-risk-they-text-me-gaza-academic-in-uk-powerless-to-rescue-family), [[6]](https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2025-03-19/latest-israeli-assault-leaves-gazans-unsure-where-to-turn)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/14/nobody-could-help-us-families-tell-of-gaza-trauma-after-return-to-uk), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/26/about-200-uk-or-dual-nationals-say-they-are-in-gaza-no-10-says), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/nov/20/uk-government-repatriation-guidance-british-citizens-gaza-conflict-egypt)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/05/when-they-are-at-risk-they-text-me-gaza-academic-in-uk-powerless-to-rescue-family), [[7]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/call-establish-safe-routes-people-fleeing-gaza-letter-uk-government/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/05/when-they-are-at-risk-they-text-me-gaza-academic-in-uk-powerless-to-rescue-family), [[6]](https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2025-03-19/latest-israeli-assault-leaves-gazans-unsure-where-to-turn)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/05/when-they-are-at-risk-they-text-me-gaza-academic-in-uk-powerless-to-rescue-family> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/05/when-they-are-at-risk-they-text-me-gaza-academic-in-uk-powerless-to-rescue-family> - This article tells the story of Bassem Abudagga, a Gaza-born academic studying in the UK, who is unable to reunite with his wife and children in Gaza due to UK immigration policies. Despite his scholarship and the UK's responsibility, his family remains trapped in Gaza amid ongoing conflict. The piece highlights the bureaucratic challenges and the emotional toll on families separated by war and policy.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/14/nobody-could-help-us-families-tell-of-gaza-trauma-after-return-to-uk> - This article discusses the experiences of families returning to the UK after fleeing the conflict in Gaza. It highlights the trauma faced by individuals, including children, who have survived Israeli bombardment and the challenges of rebuilding their lives in the UK. The piece also touches on the difficulties in accessing support and the emotional scars left by the conflict.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/26/about-200-uk-or-dual-nationals-say-they-are-in-gaza-no-10-says> - This article reports on the UK government's response to British and dual nationals trapped in Gaza. Approximately 200 individuals have registered with UK authorities, expressing their desire to leave. The piece details the government's efforts, including sending Border Force officials to Egypt to facilitate evacuations, and the criticisms from families regarding the delays and lack of support.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/nov/20/uk-government-repatriation-guidance-british-citizens-gaza-conflict-egypt> - This article examines the UK's repatriation guidance for British citizens and dual nationals fleeing Gaza. It highlights the criticism faced by the government for advising families to temporarily split and apply for reunification from the UK, causing shock and distress among those affected. The piece also discusses the financial burdens and logistical challenges imposed on evacuees.
6. <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2025-03-19/latest-israeli-assault-leaves-gazans-unsure-where-to-turn> - This article provides an account of the ongoing conflict in Gaza, focusing on the experiences of families like that of Ramez Abu Daqqa, who have been forced to flee multiple times due to Israeli military operations. It describes the challenges of finding safety, the impact of the conflict on daily life, and the uncertainty faced by residents amid the violence.
7. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/call-establish-safe-routes-people-fleeing-gaza-letter-uk-government/> - This official letter from the Scottish Government calls on the UK Government to establish safe routes for people fleeing Gaza. It highlights the plight of over 350 Palestinian families in the UK seeking to bring their close family members to safety and urges the creation of a Gaza Family Scheme similar to the Ukraine Family Scheme to facilitate reunification.