

Advice from Liverpool Friends of Bil'in for Palestinians wishing to visit the UK

Please be aware that the advice in this document is informal. It is based however on advice from several reliable and experienced sources, including official ones. We have done our best to check that all information is accurate. It is meant to help you apply for a visa, but it is not official guidance. You must read the more detailed guidance and instructions given by the UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) service on this website:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-rules-appendix-v-visitor-rules

1. Applying for a Visa

- a) It is essential to get a letter of invitation from your UK host group who is sponsoring you. This letter must be signed and may then be scanned and sent to you electronically for you to print out. It will not be accepted if it is emailed, photocopied or faxed. The letter needs to say who is inviting you, for what purpose, and what costs they are guaranteeing to cover. The host group should also send you a similar personal letter of invitation, plus a brief letter from each of the people who will be providing you with accommodation during the visit. They must also send a bank statement showing they have enough money to cover the costs of your visit.
- b) Make an appointment with the Visa Application Centre nearest to you (Ramallah, East Jerusalem or Gaza City) 6 - 8 weeks before you plan to come to the UK.
- c) Complete the visa application form on-line. The form and all other advice can be found on the UKVI website which you should read carefully. Apply for a Standard Visitor Visa which is typically given for 6 months.

Remember: You will not meet the Entry Clearance Officer (ECO) who will make the decision about your visa. Nor will you have the chance to answer questions s/he may have. So the application form and your supporting documents need to be really clear and written in English.

You must pay the fee on-line by credit card only.

The visa will be valid only for travelling to the UK. You will not be able to visit any other country with it.

2. Your appointment at the Visa Application Centre

Take:

- a) printed copy of your completed application form
- b) your passport, which should have an expiry date at least 6 months after you return to Palestine
- c) all supporting documents.

You will be finger-printed.

All your papers and documents will go to the United Kingdom Visa and Immigration (UKVI) office at the British Embassy in Amman for consideration. Your passport will be returned to you only after the decision on your visa application. It can take several weeks for a decision to be made.

3. Getting visa approval

You should read the website of the UKVI (above) to see what the ECO in Amman is looking for. S/He needs to be convinced of 3 things:

a) That you will not be a charge on public funds; that is, you will not try to claim money from state benefits or public health care during your visit. You therefore need to show that you have enough personal money to cover the cost of your visit and accommodation in the UK – even if you have a letter of invitation from a group in the UK who are guaranteeing they will cover all your costs. You should attach recent bank statements in English showing that you do indeed have enough money to cover your stay. We advise you to submit bank statements from the last 6 months with your documents. If you don't have a bank account we advise you to open one without delay and start to use it. It should demonstrate your ability to save money.

b) That you are only coming to visit the UK and not for any other reason like for study, work or medical treatment.

c) That you will leave the UK before your visa expires.

You need to convince the ECO that you will definitely return home to Palestine and that you will do so before your visa runs out. In this section you can describe your family ties and if you have any members of your family who are dependent on you give details. Say that you will definitely be rejoining your family after your visit.

If you have employment or are studying attach a letter from your employer or your college/university in English, making it clear that your job / place on the course is being kept for you. They should give their approval in the letter for your visit to the UK. Provide full details of your work / studies.

The information you put on your application form and in your supporting documents should be as full and as comprehensive as possible. The more you can paint a picture of your normal life and its family and work/study responsibilities the better will be your chances of getting a visa. It may be a good idea to provide photos of your family or work colleagues.

Finally, if you have travelled abroad before, especially to a European country, you should include this information and say that you always returned home as planned.

All of these points are indicators that you will not become dependent on the UK state or try to stay here.

Important Warning: Never give false information even if you feel you don't have enough evidence. This is likely to be discovered and it will lead to investigations into fraud and a 10 year ban on entry to the UK.

4. If your application fails

If your visa is refused then re-apply straight away. The appeal process can take several months with no guarantee of success. A fresh application, paying the fee again, is often the best way forward. Look carefully at the reasons given in the letter from the ECO which will be sent back with your passport. Those reasons must be addressed and answered fully in the re-application.

The visa application form contains a question "Have you ever been refused a visa to the UK?" It is essential to answer "Yes" to this question if a visa has previously been refused, for whatever reason. Answering "No" will lead to a 10 year ban on entry to the UK, as mentioned previously.

You should understand the wider political climate in the UK regarding visitors from abroad. Public pressure on our politicians is leading to the tightening of all UKVI decisions so that the rules for applying for entry into the UK, whether as a temporary visitor or permanently, have become progressively more restrictive, whatever country you live in. If for any reason your first application is unsuccessful, do not take it personally. The issue is with the application, not with you. Instead, read the ECO's explanation carefully and make sure that your next application answers all the points in that letter. The British government and the British people welcome valid visa applicants and the vast majority of Palestinian visa applicants are successful because those applicants understand the rules and submit applications with a lot of accompanying documents to support them.

We wish you every success!

Written in September 2015 by Liverpool Friends of Bil'in