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Gaza: UK must act to evacuate severely injured children, say campaigners

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Campaigners have criticised the UK government for not allowing any severely injured children from Gaza to be medically evacuated to the UK, despite calls from doctors, humanitarian organisations, and MPs.

In December 2024 more than 50 MPs signed a letter¹ to Prime Minister Keir Starmer calling for action. It said, “When the Ukraine-Russia war began, a mechanism was quickly put in place for the evacuation of injured children from Ukraine to hospitals here in the UK, to ensure that they received appropriate medical treatment. There is no reason why we should not extend the same support to the children of Gaza.”

The letter highlighted that many other countries such as Italy and Norway have accepted Gazan children in need of urgent medical attention, and said that the UK was “an outlier” by not yet implementing a similar scheme.

It added, “We cannot delay any longer—the UK must step up and demonstrate our commitment to international law by upholding humanitarian principles and providing aid to those most vulnerable and in need in Gaza. The injuries suffered by children in Gaza are extreme and require specialist care which is not available in neighbouring countries. Medics in this country are keen to offer their life saving expertise to these children.”

Severe restrictions on movement have limited children’s ability to leave Gaza for medical treatment. Those that have been able to leave have been evacuated to countries including Egypt, France, Ireland, Qatar, and Spain^{2–4} but no child has been granted permission to travel for treatment in a UK hospital. One of the barriers preventing children from being granted medical evacuation to the UK is the requirement of biometrics for temporary visa applications, something which is no longer available in Gaza.⁵

On 20 December 2024, Project Pure Hope, a humanitarian initiative supporting the provision of medical care for children affected by the Middle East conflict, submitted a proposal⁶ requesting the UK government allow for the medical evacuation of 10 injured children from Gaza to UK hospitals. As part of this proposal, which was presented in a meeting with health minister Wes Streeting, Project Pure Hope shared that it has raised over £750 000 to cover the costs of treatment and accommodation for the children. The initiative gained the support of Save the Children and major hospital trusts including University College London, Great Ormond Street, Alder Hay, Leeds, and Evelina Children’s hospitals, whose chief executives agreed to provide treatment for the children in their private wards.

Project Pure Hope said that it is still to receive a decision. Many of the 10 children are facing a deterioration in their condition, while others have died. In its press release, Project Pure Hope stated, “We are asking for an urgent decision to be taken. It has now been almost seven weeks since our formal proposal was submitted. The delay also means that treatable conditions become untreatable; where a below knee amputation was once required, a full leg amputation becomes necessary. The risks of treatment increase to become potentially fatal.”

Both the Home Office and Foreign Office were contacted for comment, but had not responded by the time of publication.

- 1 Johnson K. The UK refused entry for medical treatment to Ahmed, X, 17 December 2024. <https://x.com/KimJohnsonMP/status/1868968076966056246>
- 2 WHO. Fifteen children from Gaza to receive urgent medical care in Spain. www.who.int/news/item/24-07-2024-fifteen-children-from-gaza-to-receive-urgent-medical-care-in-spain
- 3 Ireland takes eight Palestinian children with urgent health needs for treatment. Independent. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/palestinian-children-dublin-world-health-organisation-unrwa-b2667948.html
- 4 Israel/Palestinian Territories—Injured Palestinian children taken in by French hospitals. 16 January 2025. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/israel-palestinian-territories/news/2025/article/israel-palestinian-territories-injured-palestinian-children-taken-in-by-french
- 5 Minister’s response to written question about obstacles to UK visa applications made by Gazans. www.bindmans.com/news-insights/blogs/update-on-biometric-requirements-for-those-fleeing-the-conflict-in-gaza
- 6 Children: Impact of International Conflict. Hansard HL Deb, 12 September 2024: 839:182GC. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-09-12/debates/E7D9561D-F49F-43DD-825B-1BB731141957/ChildrenImpactOfInternationalConflict>