

MPs Call on UK Government to Ease Visa Barriers for Gaza Students

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More than seventy UK MPs are urging the government to suspend biometric visa requirements for approximately eighty Palestinian students from Gaza who have been offered places at British universities. With the new academic year approaching, the students face losing their scholarships due to an inability to complete the necessary biometric

checks, a process rendered impossible since Gaza's visa application centre closed in 2023.

These students, many of whom have been awarded full scholarships to institutions including Oxford, Cambridge, UCL, and Edinburgh, are currently unable to meet UK visa requirements. Despite being accepted into postgraduate programmes in fields such as data science, public health, and engineering, they remain in Gaza without access to the UK's visa application system.

Parliamentarians and education advocates are urging the Home Office to introduce a temporary exemption allowing students to defer biometric enrolment and travel to a neighbouring country to complete the process. Other European nations, including Germany, France, Italy, and Ireland, have already provided similar flexibility for students from conflict areas.

Dr Nora Parr, a lecturer at the University of Birmingham who supports many of the students, noted that some applicants managed to complete exams and interviews while living in displacement shelters, under bombardment, and without stable internet access. She warned that without a prompt policy response; these students' futures could be at serious risk.

Jo Grady, General Secretary of the University and College Union, has written to the Home Secretary demanding urgent action. She criticised the current policy for effectively preventing students from taking up life-changing academic opportunities and urged the government to uphold its commitment to education access and humanitarian support.

Over 2,000 academics from UK institutions have signed an open letter backing the students, calling for biometric flexibility and the creation of a secure travel route. One student, a midwife pursuing a PhD in maternal health, shared her experience of working in hospitals under bombardment and described the urgency of securing a way out.

University leaders have echoed the calls for action. Dr Michael Spence, President of University College London, said the students' determination to pursue education under extreme hardship should be met with support, not administrative barriers.

A government spokesperson confirmed the situation is under review, but no final decision has been announced regarding exemptions or alternative arrangements.