

ISIS teen bride begs for return to Britain

Should she be allowed back?

Four years ago, Shamima Begum fled Britain to join Islamic State. Now, with the caliphate in ruins, she wants to return. Her plea has caused division and uproar.



Exodus: Shamima Begum is one of 150 women and children to leave Britain for ISIS.

"I'm not the same silly little 15-year-old schoolgirl who ran away from Bethnal Green four years ago," claims Shamima Begum — one of **three schoolgirls** who left their families in East London to join Islamic State (ISIS) in 2015.

Now, with ISIS strongholds destroyed, and the terrorist group all but **defeated**, she wants to return to Britain.

"The **caliphate** is over," she told Anthony Loyd — a *Times* journalist who found her in a Syrian refugee camp. "I know what everyone at home thinks of me as I have read all that was written about me online. But I just want to come home."

Begum's urgency to escape is heightened by her being nine months pregnant. She gave birth to two other children in Syria, but both died. Her **husband**, an ISIS fighter, was also imprisoned and tortured.

Yet, for all this, she refuses to denounce ISIS. "I don't regret coming here," she insists. "Mostly it was a normal life in Raqqa, every now and then bombing and stuff. But when I

saw my first severed head in a bin it didn't faze me at all. It was from a captured fighter seized on the battlefield, an enemy of Islam."

Around **850** people fled Britain to join up with the caliphate, including 150 women and children. Many died, but those who want to return present a dilemma for authorities.

"I'm not putting at risk British people's lives to go and look for terrorists or former terrorists in a failed state," declared security minister Ben Wallace, saying that "actions have consequences".

"Instinctively it feels [hard] to say we should bring her back to her home in the United Kingdom — especially given her apparent lack of remorse," writes Michael Segalov in *The Guardian*. "And yet, is she not still a victim of **grooming**? Still a British citizen we should be looking to help?"

Even if she did make it back to the UK, Begum would be subject to intense interrogation and examination, and would possibly face **prosecution**.

There is a precedent for this. In 2016,

she were still under 18, the government would have a duty to take her and her unborn child's "best interests" into account when deciding what to do — however, this no longer applies.

Q: What do we not know?

A: How the government will respond to the situation. There has been some suggestion

26-year-old Tareena Shaki became the first British woman to be imprisoned after returning from Islamic State.

Should Shamima Begum be allowed to return to Britain?

Homecoming

This would be extremely controversial. Having chosen to renounce Britain for ISIS, many claim she must live with her choice — particularly given her lack of regret. But, as a British citizen, does the government still have a duty towards her? Should we at least offer her the opportunity of rehabilitation?

Much depends on our personal feelings. Does Begum deserve pity? After all, she was only a child when she was radicalised. How much should we blame her for what happened? Should she be punished as a criminal, or considered a victim of forces beyond her control?

that security services will want to use her to gather intelligence on the region. As a non-combatant, she has an ambiguous position in relation to the law. It is not guaranteed that she would be prosecuted if she was returned to Britain.



Q: What do we know?

A: According to figures by The Times, at least 45 of those Britons that have joined ISIS are under the age of 17. Shamima Begum was legally a child when she joined Islamic State. If

YOU DECIDE

1. Should Shamima Begum be allowed to return to Britain?
2. Do you have sympathy for her?

ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine you were sent to interview Shamima Begum. What would you ask her? Share your thoughts with the class.
2. The bigger story going on here is the collapse of Islamic State. Find out more about this by watching the second link in Become An Expert. Then write a paragraph in response to this question: Will ISIS ever be truly defeated?

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."
Mahatma Gandhi

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WORD WATCH

Three schoolgirls – Her and two others, Kadiza Sultana and Amira Abase, left in February 2015 to join a fourth schoolgirl in Syria. Kadiza Sultana was killed two years ago.

Defeated – Two years ago, ISIS controlled vast areas of Syria and Iraq. Now, the group's last stronghold consists of a couple of villages in

the north-east of Syria.

Caliphate – An Islamic state ruled by a leader with the title of Caliph.

Husband – A 27-year-old Dutch convert called Yago Riedijk. Their marriage was arranged 10 days after Begum arrived in Raqqa.

850 – According to figures compiled by *The Times*.

Grooming – When someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purpose of exploitation.

Prosecution – For more detail on what could happen to Begum now, see the *Sky News* link in Become An Expert.

BECOME AN EXPERT

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 Notes

