



**BRIEFING PAPER**

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# Syrian refugees and the UK response

By Melanie Gower, Ben Politowski

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## Summary

As the Syrian crisis gets ever deeper, there is ongoing pressure for the UK to accept more Syrian refugees. UNHCR is calling on the international community to provide safe and legal routes for Syrian refugees, including resettlement places for the most vulnerable.

### The UK's Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme

At the start of the Syrian crisis, the then Government's policy was to be generous with humanitarian aid to Syria's neighbours rather than to accept Syrian refugees for resettlement in the UK. However, in early 2014 it decided to establish a 'Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement (VPR) Programme' in order to provide a route for selected Syrian refugees to come to the UK.

The scheme first prioritised victims of sexual violence and torture, and the elderly and disabled. Several hundred refugees were expected to arrive in the UK through the scheme over three years, although there was no fixed quota.

The scheme was significantly extended in September 2015. The UK is now planning to resettle up to 20,000 refugees from the Syrian region over the next five years. The Government is working with local authorities and the voluntary sector to implement the scheme. It is also developing plans for a 'community sponsorship' scheme for Syrian refugees.

The resettled refugees are given five years' Humanitarian Protection status, with permission to work and access public funds. Official statistics show that 1,602 people had been resettled in the UK under the scheme by the end of March 2016.

### Other new resettlement schemes

In addition to the above, the Government has also recently announced plans to provide resettlement for up to 3,000 vulnerable children (and family members) from conflict situations in the Middle East and North Africa region, and for an unspecified number of unaccompanied refugee children currently in Europe. Neither of these schemes would be limited to Syrian nationals.

### Syrian asylum claims

It is also possible for Syrians to claim asylum upon arrival or after-entry to the UK. Syrian nationals were the sixth-largest group of asylum applicants in the year ending March 2016 (2,539 main applicants). 87% of initial asylum decisions in Syrian cases gave permission to remain in the UK. Statistics on asylum, including statistics on the Syrian refugee crisis, are available in the Library briefing, [Asylum Statistics](#).

### UK aid to Syria

The UK Government continues to commit a significant amount of [international aid](#) to assistance programmes in the regions neighbouring Syria, arguing that this is preferable to encouraging Syrian refugees to make dangerous journeys to Europe. The UK has committed over £2.3 billion to helping refugees in Syria and the region, making it the second largest bilateral donor to the Syrian refugee crisis.

# 1. The refugee crisis

The United Nations [has estimated](#) that the conflict in Syria has claimed more than 250,000 lives. Syria's development situation has regressed by almost four decades and by the end of 2013, an estimated three in every four Syrians were living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> According to the [UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance](#), as of May 2016, some 13.5 million Syrians need help in the country, of whom 6.6 million are internally displaced; 4.8 million Syrians have fled abroad.<sup>2</sup>

Syrians now constitute the largest refugee population in the world.<sup>3</sup> As at 2 June 2016, the UNHCR was aware of around [4.84 million registered refugees](#) in the region (2.1 million registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon; and 2.7 million registered by the Turkish Government).

According to [UNHCR](#), 1,003,345 asylum applications were made by Syrians in Europe between April 2011 and March 2016.

By the end of 2015, 56% (US\$4,012,098,937) of the total [Syrian crisis funding requirements for 2015](#) (US\$7,213,389,150) had been received.

4.8 million Syrians have fled abroad; mostly to neighbouring countries. Just over 10% of Syrians who have fled the conflict have sought protection in Europe.

## 1.1 UNHCR calls for help

### Refugee resettlement

UNHCR advocates [resettlement](#) in a third country when neither of its other 'durable solutions' to refugee-producing situations (voluntary repatriation or local integration) are feasible.

UNHCR has estimated that 10% of the Syrian refugee population are particularly vulnerable, and has been seeking to resettle them outside of neighbouring countries. [An initial goal for 30,000](#) Syrian refugees to be admitted to other countries by the end of 2014 (with focus on the most vulnerable), was met.<sup>4</sup> UNHCR then asked states to provide places for an [additional 100,000 Syrian refugees](#) by the end of 2016. It expected that further places would be needed in the years ahead.

States have pledged over 200,000 places for Syrians since 2013

A regularly updated [UNHCR factsheet](#) details the number of resettlement places and other forms of admission offered by the international community for Syrian refugees since 2013. As at 29 April 2016, 201,183 pledges had been made (160,628 through resettlement or humanitarian admission schemes).

States have been urged to offer places for resettlement or humanitarian admission (a faster process for those in particular danger) in addition to their normal asylum and resettlement policies, so that refugees from

<sup>1</sup> UN, [Overview: 2015 Syria Response Plan and 2015-2016 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan](#), 18 December 2014

<sup>2</sup> Syria's population [was estimated](#) be around 22 million in 2012.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR website, [Facts and Figures about Refugees](#) [Accessed 02/03/2016]

<sup>4</sup> According to the UN categories of vulnerable people include women and girls at risk, survivors of violence and/or torture, refugees with medical needs or disabilities, LGBTI refugees at risk, vulnerable older adults, refugees in need of family reunification and those who face serious threats to their physical safety.

countries other than Syria will still have a chance to find asylum. States have introduced various different types of schemes to cater for Syrian refugees, including family reunion, scholarships and labour mobility programmes. UNHCR has welcomed these as ways of supporting young Syrians' access to education and training to prevent the creation of a "lost generation".

The European Commission has also urged EU member states to do more, and says that funding is available from the Commission for each resettled Syrian refugee.

## 1.2 Calls for safe and legal routes for refugees

Refugees face practical and legal obstacles to making safe and legal journeys to other countries in search of protection. These include, for example, visa restrictions, carriers' liability legislation, border controls, and the absence of formal channels for claiming asylum whilst overseas.

Many advocates argue that the absence of legal routes exacerbates refugees' vulnerability and undermines the effectiveness of efforts to prevent them from making dangerous irregular and clandestine journeys and resorting to people smugglers.

UNHCR has called on states to develop more safe and legal routes for refugees in need of protection. It [convened a ministerial meeting](#) on 30 March to discuss "global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees". The Minister for Syrian Refugees, Richard Harrington, attended on behalf of the UK. He [did not announce](#) any new UK commitments. A related [Westminster Hall debate](#) on 'UNHCR and pathways for admission for Syrian refugees', took place on Wednesday 16 March.

UNHCR is calling on states to offer more safe and legal routes of entry for Syrian refugees

### Examples of safe and legal routes

The types of schemes which are commonly suggested are:

- Resettlement/humanitarian admission schemes
- Humanitarian visas (i.e. visas which enable the holder to travel to claim asylum overseas)
- Medical evacuation
- Family reunion
- Community based private sponsorship (e.g. sponsors taking responsibility for some of the costs associated with resettling individuals)
- Academic scholarships
- Labour mobility schemes

A [background note prepared by UNHCR](#) gives details of how such schemes can work in practice, and some examples of existing schemes.

The issue of safe and legal routes is relevant to the UK context. Asylum must be claimed upon arrival or after entering the UK. It is not generally possible to apply for asylum in the UK from overseas, or to obtain a visa with the explicit purpose of seeking asylum in the UK. A visa requirement for Syrian nationals transiting the UK en route to another

destination was [announced](#) in March 2012 and [extended](#) in March 2015, in order to “protect the UK’s national and border security”.<sup>5</sup> Some commentators have also drawn attention to the increase in the [refusal rate for visitor visas](#) for Syrian nationals since the Syrian conflict began.

[Responding to a PQ](#) in 2014, about the potential logistical difficulties in claiming asylum in the UK, the Minister for Immigration said:

**James Brokenshire:** The United Kingdom has a proud tradition of providing protection to those who need it and we will give the most careful consideration to applications by Syrian nationals seeking asylum in the UK. But we cannot undertake to consider requests for asylum from Syrians who have taken refuge in neighbouring countries and it is not our practice to grant visas or to in any other way facilitate the arrival in the UK of foreign nationals for the purpose of seeking asylum.<sup>6</sup>

The Lords EU Committee took evidence from the Minister for Immigration and various other witnesses on the issue of safe and legal routes, as part of its report on the *EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling* (published in November 2015):

58. Mr Brokenshire argued that establishing safe and legal routes, in the Government’s opinion, would only help relatively few in comparison to the number of potential refugees and irregular migrants coming to the EU. Moreover, with regard to migrant smuggling, he was concerned that such measures might be a source of propaganda to smugglers in the efforts to entice vulnerable people to put their lives at risk. In his view, this solution “can get misinterpreted and manipulated by the traffickers and therefore lead to greater exploitation”

59. The majority of witnesses, in contrast, argued that the creation of safe and legal routes would be a vital element within any comprehensive attempt to curb migrant smuggling.<sup>7</sup>

The Committee concluded that the EU should make greater efforts to develop safe and legal routes:

**66. One effective way of addressing the root causes of irregular migration would be to create safe and legal routes for refugees to enter the EU. We welcome the Commission’s recognition of this but urge that more be done at EU level to work towards the creation of such routes. It is regrettable that the Action Plan does not set out further details in this regard. We recommend that this be addressed as soon as possible. In particular, we recommend that the Commission should bring forward further initiatives to encourage Member States to create such routes, for example by making use of humanitarian visas.**

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<sup>5</sup> [HC Deb 13 March 2012 c14WS; PO 227676](#), 19 March 2015; [HC 1116 of 2014-15](#)

<sup>6</sup> [HC Deb 3 March 2014 c607W](#)

<sup>7</sup> Lords EU Committee, [EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling](#), HL Paper 46, 3 November 2015

## 2. UK Government policy on resettlement for Syrian refugees

The UK Government's policy towards providing resettlement for Syrian refugees changed in early 2014.

### 2.1 Until late January 2014

Until 29 January 2014, the UK Government's response to the crisis in Syria was to commit large amounts of humanitarian aid to the relief effort, but not to offer resettlement to Syrian refugees either as part of, or in addition to, its existing refugee resettlement schemes.<sup>8</sup>

The UK declined to participate in the UNHCR resettlement programme for Syria, arguing that it would be [tokenistic](#) given the huge numbers of refugees and that the best approach to the crisis was the provision of humanitarian aid.

It remained possible for Syrians in the UK to claim asylum. In October 2012 the Home Office also introduced a temporary concession allowing Syrians already in the UK to apply for an extension to their visa or switch into a different visa category without having to leave the UK.

### 2.2 January 2014: Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme launched

On 29 January 2014, following [considerable pressure](#) from charities, UNHCR and across the House (and prior to an opposition day debate on the issue), the Home Secretary [announced](#) that the Government would establish a programme to offer resettlement to some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. The Home Secretary said that that the "Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme" (VPR) would be separate to, but "entirely consistent" with UNHCR's Syrian refugee resettlement programme. The Government's reasons for establishing a parallel scheme were set out in answer to a PQ in June 2015:

The VPR scheme runs in parallel with the UNHCR's own Syrian humanitarian admission programme. This is because the Government believes the UK can add most value through a complementary scheme, focusing on helping the most vulnerable refugees who cannot be supported effectively in the region rather than a quota. With millions of people in need, we strongly believe that the UK can have the greatest impact by continuing to prioritise significant aid; (...). The Syrian conflict is a crisis of international proportions and we continue to play our full part in discussions with international partners.<sup>9</sup>

The VPR initially prioritised for resettlement victims of sexual violence, the elderly, victims of torture, and the disabled. The Government said

The UK launched its own resettlement scheme for vulnerable Syrian refugees in 2014

<sup>8</sup> Namely, the [Gateway Protection Programme](#) (up to 750 resettlement places per year) and the Mandate scheme (no fixed number, generally less than 100 per year)

<sup>9</sup> [PQ 1391 \[Refugees: Syria\]](#), 15 June 2015

that it expected [several hundred](#) refugees to arrive over the following three years, but that there would be no quota. The [first group](#) of resettled refugees arrived in the UK on 25 March 2014. Press reports suggested that this first group consisted of around 10 to 20 people.

## Calls to extend the scheme

From the outset, there were calls to increase the number of resettlement places on offer to Syrian refugees.<sup>10</sup> There were also some calls to extend the scope of the scheme, for example to include at-risk groups in Iraq, which were rejected.<sup>11</sup>

The Government's approach continued to prioritise spending aid in the Syrian region rather than offering large-scale resettlement in the UK.<sup>12</sup> By the end of June 2015, 216 people (including dependents) had come to the UK through the VPR.<sup>13</sup>

Agencies including Oxfam and the Refugee Council sent a joint letter to the Prime Minister in November 2014 saying that the UK should do more. It suggested that the UK's fair share would be to take 10,000 Syrians by the end of 2015.<sup>14</sup>

In June 2015 the Prime Minister announced that the Government intended to "[modestly expand](#)" the scheme, which was thought to mean providing a few hundred more spaces.

## 2.3 September 2015: Extension of the VPR scheme

On 7 September, following further criticisms of the limited number of UK resettlement places, and in recognition of the worsening refugee crisis in the Syrian region and across Europe, the [Prime Minister announced](#) a significant extension of the VPR. He confirmed that:

- Up to 20,000 Syrian refugees would be resettled in the UK over the course of this Parliament.
- The scheme would offer resettlement to Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, rather than to those who had already travelled to Europe.
- The criteria for resettlement under the scheme would be significantly expanded, including to give particular recognition to the needs of children (including orphaned children, if resettlement is recommended by UNHCR).
- Some Yazidi and Christian refugees may fall within the scheme's definition of 'vulnerability' (although the scheme would not distinguish on the basis of religion).

The scheme was extended in autumn 2015, to offer resettlement in the UK to up to 20,000 refugees over the following five years

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Refugee Council News, [Faith leaders call for more Syrian refugee resettlement](#), 28 January 2015; [Joint letter from aid agencies to the Prime Minister](#), 26 November 2014

<sup>11</sup> [PO HL2960 \[Asylum: Syria\]](#), 27 November 2014

<sup>12</sup> [PO 1391 \[Refugees: Syria\]](#), 15 June 2015

<sup>13</sup> [Immigration statistics, April - June 2015](#), Home Office, 27 August 2015

<sup>14</sup> [Joint letter from aid agencies to the Prime Minister](#), 26 November 2014

- The costs of resettlement for the first year would be met from the international aid budget, in order to ease the pressure on local authorities.

Richard Harrington [was appointed](#) as a joint Home Office/DfID/DCLG Minister for Syrian refugees, with responsibility for co-ordinating the resettlement scheme in the UK, and a [ministerial group on Syrian refugees](#), chaired by the Home Secretary, has been established. The Government works on the practical details of the scheme with UNHCR, NGOs, local authorities, and the devolved administrations.

The increase in the number of places was broadly welcomed, although the Government continues to receive calls to further expand resettlement opportunities. In October 2015, 84 Church of England Bishops wrote to the Prime Minister calling for the UK to offer at least 50,000 places to refugees.<sup>15</sup> [Over 300 lawyers, academics and retired judges](#) have also criticised the Government's response as inadequate.

The [Refugee Council welcomed the extension of the scheme](#), but called for the response to be "frontloaded", in recognition of the urgency of the situation.

## 2.4 2016: Additional resettlement schemes are announced

### Background to establishing the schemes

The Government continued to come under pressure to provide additional routes of entry for Syrians (and other nationalities) who would not be eligible under the VPR programme.

In particular, campaigners have highlighted the plight of refugees who have already travelled to Europe, especially unaccompanied children. The UK has been providing some practical and financial support for EU partners' efforts to deal with the increase in irregular immigration to the EU, but it is not participating in measures to transfer responsibility from Greece and Italy to other Member States for 160,000 asylum seekers.

The Government argued that people should claim asylum in those European countries, and that offering resettlement in the UK risked creating unintended consequences or perverse incentives for people to make dangerous journeys to Europe.

In summer 2015, Save The Children began calling on the UK Government to establish a scheme to resettle 3,000 unaccompanied children in Europe. The charity raised concerns about the estimated number of unaccompanied children in Europe and their vulnerability to exploitation, including trafficking and prostitution. [Europol has warned](#) that at least 10,000 unaccompanied children have gone missing since entering Europe. Save The Children suggested that taking responsibility for 3,000 unaccompanied children would be a fair contribution for the UK.

Resettlement will also be offered to an additional 3,000 vulnerable children (and family members) in the Middle East and North Africa, and to an unspecified number of unaccompanied refugee children in Europe

<sup>15</sup> BBC News, '[Syrian refugees: Bishops urge David Cameron to do more](#)', 18 October 2015

[The campaign](#) attracted wider NGO and cross-party support, which intensified during the later stages of the passage of the *Immigration Bill 2015-16* (as then was).

In response, the Government announced a new commitment to resettle 3,000 vulnerable children (and family members) from conflict regions in the Middle East and North Africa.

However this did not put an end to calls to make additional provision for some of the unaccompanied children already in Europe.

At a late stage during ping-pong stages of the *Immigration Bill*, the Government dropped its opposition to a new clause spearheaded by Lord Dubs, which required the Home Secretary to arrange for the resettlement in the UK of an unspecified number of unaccompanied refugee children in Europe.

Neither of these schemes are operational yet. It is anticipated that local authorities will have a central role in providing support to children resettled under either of the schemes. The Local Government Association's website has some initial information about the [implications for local authorities](#), including funding arrangements. Some additional basic information about the likely scope of the schemes is set out below.

## The "children at risk" resettlement scheme

In addition to the Syrian VPR programme, the Government intends to offer resettlement to up to 3,000 'children at risk' in the Middle East and North Africa region, over the course of this Parliament.

The Government confirmed that it was considering the possibility of introducing a relocation scheme for children in conflict regions [in January 2016](#). A Written Statement of 21 April gave further details of the proposed new scheme ([HCWS687](#)).

The scheme will not exclusively cater for unaccompanied children or Syrian nationals:

On the UNHCR's recommendation the scheme will not target unaccompanied children alone, but will be extended to all 'Children at Risk' as defined by the UNHCR. This broad category encompasses unaccompanied children and separated children (those separated from their parents and/or other family members) as well as other vulnerable children such as child carers and those facing the risk of child labour, child marriage or other forms of neglect, abuse or exploitation.

Through this category we will resettle the most vulnerable children, accompanied by their families, where the UNHCR deems resettlement is in the best interests of the child. We will commit to resettling several hundred individuals in the first year with a view to resettling up to 3000 individuals over the lifetime of this Parliament, the majority of whom will be children. We will also review the scheme at the two year mark. This unique initiative will be the largest resettlement effort that focuses on children at risk from the MENA region and will be over and above the commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme. It will be open to all at risk groups and

nationalities within the region, with the best interests of the child at the heart of the scheme. The UNHCR are fully supportive of the launch of this new initiative and the UK's commitment to assist vulnerable refugee children at risk through further resettlement efforts which uphold the principles of child protection.

## Resettlement for unaccompanied children in Europe

Section 67 of the *Immigration Act 2016* (in force from 31 May 2016) provides:

### **67 Unaccompanied refugee children: relocation and support**

(1) The Secretary of State must, as soon as possible after the passing of this Act, make arrangements to relocate to the United Kingdom and support a specified number of unaccompanied refugee children from other countries in Europe.

(2) The number of children to be resettled under subsection (1) shall be determined by the Government in consultation with local authorities.

(3) The relocation of children under subsection (1) shall be in addition to the resettlement of children under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

A [news release issued by Number 10](#) on 4 May gave some details of how the Government intends to implement this provision:

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children will be resettled from Greece, Italy and France, in an initiative announced today following discussions between the government and [Save the Children](#).

(...) The government has always adopted a twin-track approach to dealing with the migrant crisis: helping the most vulnerable while not encouraging new perilous crossings to Europe.

That approach will continue through this initiative, by restricting resettlement to children registered before the EU migration agreement with Turkey came into force on 20 March.

The retrospective nature of the scheme will avoid creating a perverse incentive for families to entrust their children to people traffickers.

And it will mean that the UK can focus on the most vulnerable children already in Europe without encouraging more to make the journey.

The government will work closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to deliver this scheme, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Save the Children. It will be separate to any EU-administered resettlement schemes.

Those at risk of trafficking or exploitation will be prioritised for resettlement. And existing family reunion routes will be accelerated. (...) <sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> GOV.UK/Number 10, *press release*, '[Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to be resettled from Europe](#)', 4 May 2016

The number of children to be resettled under the scheme will be determined in consultation with local authorities. The Government expects the first arrivals to come before the end of the year.

The announcement was immediately [welcomed by Save the Children](#):

The Prime Minister has today offered a lifeline to these vulnerable children and we will work with the government and the UN to ensure that these commitments are rapidly implemented so that thousands of lone, vulnerable children can reach safety in the UK in the coming months. Helping to resettle children already in Europe and in desperate need will provide vital humanitarian support. Under this scheme there can be no lingering anxieties about whether sanctuary represents a 'pull factor'.

## 3. In detail: the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme

The following section largely draws on information in a [Home Office guidance document](#) for local authorities and partners, published on 28 October 2015, and the Local Government Association website [page on Refugees](#).

### 3.1 How many people have been resettled in the UK under the programme?

As at the end of March 2016, 1,854 Syrians had been resettled in the UK under the VPRS.<sup>17</sup> 1,667 Syrians were resettled in the year ending March 2016. Updated figures are regularly published through the Home Office's [quarterly statistical releases](#).

1,854 Syrians have been resettled in the UK since the scheme began in 2014.

### 3.2 Which local authorities are participating?

As at the end of May 2016, 71 local authorities had accepted refugees under the scheme.

Local authorities' participation in the VPR scheme is voluntary.

Details of the number of Syrians resettled in each local authority under the scheme began to be published by the Home Office in May 2016, as part of the quarterly statistical release.

#### Involvement of devolved administrations

In **Scotland**, the Scottish Government has established a special taskforce to coordinate Scotland's response. It includes representatives from the Scottish and UK governments, and local authorities, public bodies and the voluntary sector in Scotland. Around half of Scotland's local authorities have received resettled Syrian refugees. The [Scotland Welcomes Refugees website](#) has some further information.

The Scottish Government and local authorities have indicated a willingness to resettle at least 2,000 Syrian refugees in Scotland.<sup>18</sup>

In **Wales**, a [Syrian Refugee Taskforce](#), chaired by the Minister for Communities, works with local authorities and voluntary sector partners to prepare for the arrival and resettlement of refugees.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Northern Ireland Executive is leading on implementing the scheme, with involvement from relevant public agencies, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations. Accommodation is arranged through the Northern Ireland Housing

<sup>17</sup> Home Office Quarterly Immigration Statistics, [Q4 October to December 2015](#), 25 February 2016

<sup>18</sup> Scottish Government, '[Scotland stands ready to welcome refugees](#)', 13 September 2015; COSLA, '[Scotland's councils ready to take at least 2,000 refugees](#)', 2 October 2015

Executive. A [briefing on the VPR scheme in Northern Ireland](#), published in April 2016 by the Department for Communities, has more detailed process information and some information about the cases resettled in Northern Ireland thus far.

### 3.3 How does the programme work in practice?

Suitable cases are identified from UNHCR's caseload of registered refugees living in host communities in the region. As part of the registration process with UNHCR, refugees are given an opportunity to indicate an interest in being resettled under the VPR programme. UNHCR staff identify cases potentially suitable for resettlement in the UK and refer them to the Home Office. The Home Office makes further checks on the person's eligibility and then seeks to match them with a place in a local authority.

#### What are the eligibility criteria?

A PQ answered in November 2015 set out the 'vulnerability criteria' used by UNHCR for identifying refugees in need of resettlement:

The UNHCR identifies people in need of resettlement based on the following criteria: women and girls at risk; survivors of violence and/or torture; refugees with legal and/or physical protection needs; refugees with medical needs or disabilities; children and adolescents at risk; persons at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; and refugees with family links in resettlement countries. Individuals are not specifically identified for resettlement based on their membership of Yazidi, Druze, Christian or other communities but members of those communities may well meet one of the other vulnerability criteria set out by UNHCR.

The UNHCR identifies and proposes Syrian refugees for the Vulnerable Persons Scheme scheme from among the whole of the registered refugee population in the region, over 4 million people. This includes people in formal refugee camps, informal settlements and host communities.<sup>19</sup>

#### What security checks are carried out on refugees?

The two-stage process for screening refugees being considered for resettlement was outlined in evidence to the International Development Committee by a Home Office official:

(...). The UNHCR does an awful lot, notwithstanding the fact that it is not an intelligence agency, to invite the individuals to interview, to take their biometrics, to look at the documentary evidence that they provide and also to go out into communities in the region to understand who this person in front of them and applying is. They will, at that point, screen people out on the basis of criminality, combatants and war crimes.

They then refer to the UK Government, which will then re-register biometrics, including taking other biometric details and bio-data that UNHCR will not have taken. As the Minister said, we will then run further checks, which check for all of those similar

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<sup>19</sup> [PQ 15220 \[Refugees: Syria\]](#), answered on 17 November 2015

things, and we will also look through the papers to identify any risk factors associated with people who may be combatants, so the whole checking process has two levels. (...) All of this, I should be clear, is before we accept the referral and certainly prior to any arrival in the United Kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

## What immigration status do resettled refugees have?

The resettled refugees are granted five years' Humanitarian Protection status and have access to public funds and the labour market. They are eligible to apply for family reunion for immediate family members, in accordance with the Immigration Rules. The Government has indicated that at the end of the five years, they will be eligible to apply for permanent settlement in the UK.<sup>21</sup>

## What role do local authorities have?

The scheme matches refugees with a local authority before their arrival in the UK. Participating local authorities have a central role in refugees' resettlement post-arrival in the UK, as detailed in a [statement of requirements](#). They are required to ensure a range of services for resettled refugees, including a meet and greet service at the airport, accommodation, and assistance in accessing welfare benefits, education, employment and other integration services in accordance with a personalised support plan for the refugee/family's first 12 months in the UK. Local authorities may make use of accommodation in the private rented sector, within local housing expenditure rates.

Local authorities' participation in the programme is voluntary

The [Local Government Association website](#) has more detailed information for local authorities about the requirements of the scheme.

## How is the caseload shared between local authorities?

Information gathered prior to the refugee's arrival in the UK is sent to participating local authorities, who must then confirm whether they accept the referral. The LGA website gives further details:

The Home Office pass the cases to a local authority who has asked to participate in the scheme. The referral forms give detail on family make up, age and specific needs, including medical information. The Local Authority is asked to consider the cases in consultation with their partners and inform the Home Office of acceptance within one week. The Home Office expect local authorities to take a mix of case types.

On referral the Home Office will send the local authority detailed information from UNHCR about the family and a full medical health assessment report. On accepting a case, local authorities then need to arrange housing, school places etc. In parallel an arrival date would be agreed.

(...) The Home Office has indicated that it will seek to ensure an equitable distribution of refugees across the country so that no individual local authority bears a disproportionate share of the burden.

Resettled refugees are matched with areas with available accommodation and appropriate support structures

<sup>20</sup> International Development Committee, Oral evidence, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), 17 November 2015 HC 463, Q74

<sup>21</sup> [HC Deb 7 September 2015 c44](#)

Resettled refugees are allowed to move away from the area where they are resettled, but will not be eligible for resettlement support in the new area.

## Who covers the costs of the programme?

The Government has committed to covering most of the costs of resettled refugees' first year in the UK (excluding economic integration activities) from the international aid budget. Over £460 million has been allocated across the statutory sector for this purpose by 2019-20. It is providing some additional funding to contribute to costs incurred during refugees' following four years in the UK.<sup>22</sup> A PQ answered in April 2016 gives further details:

The first 12 months of a refugee's resettlement costs are fully funded by central government using the overseas aid budget. At the Spending Review, the Chancellor announced an estimated £460 million over the spending review period to cover the first 12 months' costs under the scheme. The costs which can be covered from the aid budget include, for example, any education, housing, medical or social care the refugees might need immediately on arrival.

At the Spending Review the Government committed £129 million to assist with local authority costs over years 2-5 of the scheme. This will be allocated on a tariff basis over four years, tapering from £5,000 per person in their second year in the UK, to £1,000 per person in year five.<sup>23</sup>

The Local Government Association is calling on the Government to commit to reviewing costs after 18 months.<sup>24</sup> The Government is considering how funding flows might be affected in the event that refugees move away from the area where they were resettled.

## Are there plans for private/community sponsorship schemes?

The Government has confirmed that it is developing a "community sponsorship scheme", which would enable individuals, charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to support refugees directly.<sup>25</sup> It has not yet confirmed further details or a launch date for such a scheme.

## 3.4 Parliamentary scrutiny

The International Development Committee published a report of its [inquiry into the 'Syrian Refugee Crisis'](#) on 5 January 2016, which included some recommendations in relation to the VPR scheme.<sup>26</sup> It urged the Government to urgently explore how to harness offers of support from local community groups, and to reconsider cuts to ESOL funding. The [Government's response](#), published in March, confirmed

Central government is providing funding to assist local authorities with associated costs

<sup>22</sup> GOV.UK, news, '[Home Office's settlement at the Spending Review 2015](#)', 25 November 2015

<sup>23</sup> [Written Question HL 7797](#), answered on 27 April 2016

<sup>24</sup> LGA, press release, '[Councils respond to Syrian refugees funding announcement](#)', 25 November 2015

<sup>25</sup> [Written Question 23578](#), answered on 26 January 2016

<sup>26</sup> International Development Committee, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), HC 463, 5 January 2016

that participating local authorities are required to provide ESOL training to resettled Syrians for twelve months and that there is funding for this.

The Home Affairs Committee is also conducting an [inquiry into Europe's migration crisis and the situation in Calais](#).

### 3.5 Offers of assistance from members of the public: signposting constituents to useful sources

The following may be useful sources to direct constituents interested in providing assistance to resettled Syrian refugees to:

- GOV.UK, '[Syrian refugees: what you can do to help](#)' – this page identifies various ways in which members of the public can offer support to refugees. The Government is not seeking offers of spare rooms in private households to accommodate resettled Syrian refugees, but local authorities are registering offers of assistance from registered landlords.
- [Refugees Welcome Board](#) – a network of faith groups, educational organisations, unions and other civic institutions. It was established in response to the current migration crisis across Europe, with a view to supporting refugee resettlement schemes in the UK. The website identifies various ways in which members of the public can help, including lobbying and campaigning activities, volunteering, donating money or goods, and offering housing.
- [Scotland Welcomes Refugees](#) – a website supported by members of Scotland's taskforce for coordinating Scotland's humanitarian and practical response to the refugee crisis, which includes information for members of the public on how they can get involved.

## 4. Syrian asylum claims made in the UK

Syrian nationals were the sixth-largest group of asylum applicants in the [year ending March 2016](#) (2,539 main applicants). 87% of initial asylum decisions in Syrian cases gave permission to remain in the UK. This is the highest rate of recognition amongst the top six nationalities applying for asylum in that year.<sup>27</sup>

All asylum claims are considered on an individual basis and in line with the UK's international obligations. As discussed in section 1.3 of this briefing, there are practical obstacles to accessing asylum in the UK.

Separate to the asylum route, a [temporary concession](#) allows Syrians who are already in the UK to apply for an extension to their visa or switch into a different visa category, without having to leave the UK. The concession was first introduced in October 2012, and has been extended until 28 February 2017.<sup>28</sup>

The UNHCR has published some [comparative information about Syrian asylum applications](#) made in Europe since April 2011 (as at March 2016). 1,004,345 applications have been made in Europe: 62% in Serbia (and Kosovo) and Germany; 27% in Sweden, Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, and Denmark; 11% elsewhere. The separate Library briefing on [Asylum Statistics](#) includes some general information on the number of Syrian asylum requests received in the EU in recent years.

87% of initial asylum decisions for Syrians gave permission to remain in the UK (in the year ending March 2016)

Germany, Serbia, Sweden, Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands and Denmark have registered the most Syrian asylum claims in Europe since 2011

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<sup>27</sup> [Immigration statistics](#), January to March 2016, 26 May 2016

<sup>28</sup> Home Office, [Guidance for Syrian nationals in the UK on how to extend their visa](#), 29 February 2016

## 5. UK aid in the region

The UK is the second largest bilateral donor to the Syrian refugee crisis. According to the Department for International Development (DFID), the [UK has committed over £2.3 billion](#) to help refugees in the region, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, since 2012. This includes allocations to over 30 implementing partners, including UN agencies, international NGOs and the Red Cross. In addition, DFID has allocated £9.5 million from the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund to support local capacity and build longer-term stability.<sup>29</sup> Regular [updates on the UK's response to the Syrian refugee crisis](#) are posted on the GOV.UK website.

The UK has committed over £2.3 billion to helping refugees in Syria and neighbouring countries

On 4 February 2016, the UK, Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the United Nations co-hosted a conference on the Syria crisis in London. The 'Supporting Syria and the Region' conference involved world leaders, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and civil society, with the aim of raising significant new funding to meet the immediate and longer-term needs of those affected. The conference raised over US\$11 billion in pledges - \$5.8 billion for 2016 and a further \$5.4 billion for 2017-20 to enable forward planning. The conference also set goals on education and economic opportunities to transform the lives of refugees caught up in the Syrian crisis, and to support the countries hosting them.<sup>30</sup>

### 5.1 DFID Allocations to Date

By September 2015 the Government had committed more than £1.12 billion in response to the Syria crisis.<sup>31</sup>

The largest single country destination for the funds is Syria itself (£498 million spent). The other two big destinations are Lebanon, where £231 million has been spent, and Jordan, where £177 million has been spent. The UK's aid so far has included supplying: 20m food rations; clean water to 1.6m people; 2.5m medical consultations; 4.6m relief packages; and help with sanitation and hygiene to 7.2m people.<sup>32</sup>

### 5.2 Future Commitments

As a result of the '[Supporting Syria and the Region](#)' conference in February 2016, the Prime Minister announced an extra £1.2bn to be spent between 2016 and 2020, taking the UK's total investment to more than £2.3bn. The Prime Minister gave further details of how UK aid will be spent in the region:

<sup>29</sup> DFID, [Factsheet, The UK's humanitarian aid response to the Syria crisis](#), 11 February 2016

<sup>30</sup> [Co-hosts declaration from the Supporting Syria & the Region Conference](#), London, 4 February 2016

<sup>31</sup> DFID and the Prime Minister, [UK pledges £115m as PM calls on EU to provide more aid for Syrian conflict](#), 23 September 2015

<sup>32</sup> Prime Minister's Office and DFID, [UK to invest an extra £1.2 billion supporting Syria and the region](#), 4 February 2016

With hundreds of thousands of people risking their lives crossing the Aegean or the Balkans, now is the time to take a new approach to the humanitarian disaster in Syria.

Today's pledge of more than £2.3bn in UK aid sets the standard for the international community – more money is needed to tackle this crisis and it is needed now.

But the conference I am hosting today is about more than just money. Our new approach of using fundraising to build stability, create jobs and provide education can have a transformational effect in the region – and create a future model for humanitarian relief.

And we can provide the sense of hope needed to stop people thinking they have no option but to risk their lives on a dangerous journey to Europe.<sup>33</sup>

The International Development Committee has commended the Government for setting an exemplary standard in its commitment to funding humanitarian assistance to address the Syrian crisis.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Prime Minister's Office and DFID, [UK to invest an extra £1.2 billion supporting Syria and the region](#), 4 February 2016

<sup>34</sup> International Development Committee, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), 5 January 2016, HC 463, page 29

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