

Refugee Crisis

Report by Eibhlin McHugh, Joint Director, Health and Social Care

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report is to advise the Council of the progress made since it passed the resolution to support and assist both the UK Government and the Scottish Government in resettling refugees.

1.2 Reference is made to the motion on the Refugee Crisis which was unanimously agreed at Council of 22 September, 2015 where;

“Council expresses its grave concern at the plight of refugees trying to escape war and persecution and trying to reach the relative safety of Europe. Council believes we have a moral duty to do all we can to help people in these circumstances.

Council instructs officers to investigate and report on:

- *the likelihood of making some settled or emergency accommodation available for refugees*
- *what support the council could provide by acting as a central point for donations of essential items and practical support to these refugees*
- *how items could be delivered or via a third party.*

Council further calls on the Scottish and UK Governments to ensure that local authorities have adequate supports and resources to ensure the proper infrastructure is in place in advance of the arrival of refugees. In particular in Midlothian we need to address the shortage of affordable housing that already exists throughout the county.”

2 Background

2.1 The United Nations (UN) estimates that as of February 2015, 12.2 million people are in need of humanitarian aid within Syria. At least 7.6 million people in Syria have been forced to flee their homes and there are some 3.8 million refugees in neighbouring countries. On 29 January 2014, the Home Secretary made a statement to Parliament outlining the Government’s intention to relocate to the UK some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees displaced to neighbouring countries by the ongoing conflict.

2.2 Earlier this year the Government announced its intention to expand the existing Syrian Vulnerable Person Scheme with an intention to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection during the next 5 years. The Scottish Government has agreed to co-operate with central government on this re-settlement process and it is estimated that Scotland will re-settle approximately 2000 refugees in the next 5 years.

2.3 *The Situation for Children in Syria and Neighbouring Countries* is detailed in the attached report by Save the Children at Appendix 1.

2.4 This scheme will take people from the camps on the borders of Syria, but will not be assisting those people blocked in Calais, France or crossing into Europe.

3 Syrian Vulnerable Person Scheme

3.1 During September, 2015, the Scottish Government, in conjunction with COSLA, was in contact with all Scottish local authorities to establish the support for the project and identify the likely number of refugees each authority would be able to assist. At present all Scottish councils, including Midlothian, have indicated an interest in assisting with the resettlement of refugees and have started the process of discussing a formal agreement with the Home Office to begin the resettlement in the near future.

3.2 Midlothian's contribution has been assessed as being approximately 40 people. This figure was based on the proportion of refugees which Midlothian would expect to accept on a pro-rata basis, in acceptance of the Council's motion.

3.3 The process which will now be followed is that the Council will seek to reach formal agreement with the Home Office on the number of refugees or families they are willing to resettle. Having concluded this agreement, Councils then have access to information on the potential refugees concerned, as detailed in the Home Office briefing note, *The Syrian Resettlement Programme* at Appendix 2.

4 Accommodation

4.1 In terms of re-housing, bringing people to safety is the main focus and no decision has yet been made on any specific areas of Midlothian but it is anticipated that in relocation from the camps the Council provides the opportunity for some element of mutual support in locating refugees.

4.2 The re-housing of refugees can be established within existing housing allocation arrangements, and within the Council's responsibilities under the homelessness legislation.

4.3 Both Pentland House and Midfield House are Midlothian Council owned properties which are no longer being used by their respective services. Both are suitable properties for re-use in the provision of HMO accommodation and are of a reasonable standard. There has been Cabinet approval for current proposals to reuse of these buildings as temporary accommodation, which can otherwise be made available for this purpose and would not directly impact on the allocation of Council housing in Midlothian.

5. Support and the Care for People Group

5.1 The Care for People Group was established to comply with the Council's responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The group specifically support Scottish Government guidance, "Preparing Scotland, Care of People Affected by Emergencies". This multi-agency group includes representatives from NHS Lothian, Police Scotland, utilities, voluntary sector and faith groups and is chaired by Alison White, Head of Service, Adults and Social Care.

5.2 Clearly, the traumatic experiences in the loss of homes, livelihoods, communities and families will have an impact on individuals and result in considerable anxiety, concern and emotional distress. Having recognised the continued uncertainty that refugees are experiencing and the inevitable disruption that has occurred in their lives, the Care for People Group are focusing on the physical and mental wellbeing of those potential resettlement refugees as residents of Midlothian.

5.3 Support requirements will include access to cultural, dietary, religious facilities as well as translation and interpretation services. Some households will be particularly vulnerable and require particular additional support through the relocation process.

5.4 Integration into Midlothian communities will involve school provision requests, registering with doctors, obtaining National Insurance numbers and biometrics to be eligible to access services and benefits.

5.5 Opportunities for collection and distribution of donations of essential items are still being explored meantime.

6 Resources

6.1 The agreement with the Home Office will include the agreed costs for resettling refugee families. At present these costs are specific to a number of areas of a project such as additional Education, Housing or Health costs etc.

6.2 Negotiations continue to change the existing process to an agreement which will outline the costs covered by central Government on a cost model based on a individual payment per refugee family.

6.3 If the Council proceeds with an agreement with the Home Office, the income received from the cost model is sufficient to ensure that Midlothian Council does not incur any additional costs from this project.

6.4 Given the number of proposed refugees all of the activities can be managed within existing staff resources.

7 Risk

7.1 There is a reputational risk if Midlothian Council does not participate in the Syrian Resettlement Programme as this is considered to be humanitarian aid.

7.2 Some households will be particularly vulnerable and require particular additional support through the relocation process. Matters under review are:

- Tracking the progress with regards to the move to suitable alternative permanent homes for refugees, ensuring that this is undertaken at a pace to minimise disruption.
- Monitoring the effects of the disruption as a result of the moves.
- Ensuring the needs of children and families are met, particularly in terms of education.
- Medical matters and the proximity to health care settings.
- Ensure identified needs of each individual are fully considered.

- The maintenance of community and cultural connections.
- The provision of agreed information and support.
- Stress related issues
- Perceived impact on existing waiting list applicants

8 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- Community safety
- Adult health, care and housing
- Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- Sustainable growth
- Business transformation and Best Value
- None of the above

9 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Midlothian Council and its Community Planning Partners have made a commitment to treat the following areas as key priorities under the Single Midlothian Plan:

- Early years and reducing child poverty
- Economic Growth and Business Support
- Positive destinations for young people.

This report impacts on the delivery of the Single Midlothian Plan outcome measures in homelessness. Early intervention and tackling inequalities are key priorities for Midlothian Council and the Community Planning Partnership and these proposals meet those objectives.

10 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Addressing the needs refugees will assist in moving the balance of services and resources into preventing the need for longer term or crisis support. Early intervention and tackling inequalities are key priorities for Midlothian Council and the Community Planning Partnership.

11 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Community engagement to ascertain and address key issues will be a core part of this work, which will be addressed through the work of the Care for People Group supported by members of the Joint Health Improvement Partnership.

Continuing effective communication and transparency is vital in providing reassurance and countering perceptions of any unfairness through consistency in the advice, information and services offered to refugees:

- the provision of information regarding policies and procedures involved household appraisals and advice about financial assistance;
- advice regarding housing options including the routes into social and private rented tenancies;
- advice about grants and benefits entitlement;
- assistance in completing forms and necessary paperwork;
- advice about legal rights and accessing advice;
- advice about utilities suppliers and energy efficiency;
- providing information, advice and occasionally practical assistance relating to employment, education and training

12 Ensuring Equalities

A full Equalities Impact Assessment report has been carried out to ensure that the needs of those affected will be protected.

13 Supporting Sustainable Development

There are no issues arising from this report

14 IT Issues

There are no issues arising from this report

15 Recommendations

Council is recommended to:-

note the content of this report and agrees to the continuation of the action taken by officers to establish an agreement with the UK Government and Scottish Government to resettle up to 40 refugees over the period of the next 5 years

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Background Papers:

Appendix 1 – Save the Children Report,
Situation for Children in Syrian and Neighbouring Countries

Appendix 2 – Home Office Briefing Note,
Syrian Resettlement Programme

Appendix 1



Situation for Children in Syria and Neighbouring Countries

I. CONTEXT

The Syrian crisis continues to deteriorate leading to significant human tragedy within Syria itself and also in the context of its impact on neighbouring countries taking in displaced populations, including Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.

Refugees from Syria and internally displaced people in Syria constitute a highly diverse population in terms of religious, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. A particular characteristic of the Syrian refugee population is its vulnerability due to most being women, children and elderly and having been forced to flee their homes and country with little more than the clothes they were wearing.

In Jordan for example, close to one third of the entire registered Syrian refugee households are female headed. Furthermore, over half of all Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries are below the age of 18. Most refugees live in urban settings, and only around 15 per cent reside in camps.

Many Syrians have suffered multiple rights violations and abuses from different actors, including massacres, murder, execution without due process, torture, hostage-taking, enforced disappearance, rape and sexual violence, as well as recruiting and using children in hostile situations¹.

Indiscriminate bombardment and shelling have created mass civilian casualties and spread terror among civilians. Furthermore, parties have enforced sieges on towns, villages and neighbourhoods, trapping civilians and depriving them of food, medical care and other necessities. Parties to the conflict also have disregarded the special protection accorded to hospitals, and medical and humanitarian personnel.

Additionally, these refugees face numerous other challenges. Increasingly they have exhausted their assets and resources and face difficulties accessing: employment, adequate housing, health services, documentation and education, putting them at risk of exploitation.

The effect on children of violence, loss, displacement and violation of so many of their rights is unimaginable². "After three years of conflict and turmoil, Syria is now one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a child" concludes a 2014 Unicef report which states that

- 5.5 million Syrian children are in need of humanitarian assistance – that is 56% of all Syrian children (inside Syria and amongst displaced and refugee population);
- One in 10 children – over 1.2 million – have fled the country to become refugees in neighbouring countries. Some of these countries already host large numbers of refugees or Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) and face immense social and economic pressure;
- By the end of January 2014, 37,498 Syrian children had been born as refugees;

¹ Culture, Context and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Syrians; A Review for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Staff Working with Syrians Affected by Armed Conflict, 2015

² Mental Health and Psychosocial support for Children Affected by Syria Crisis: Regional Mapping June- December 2014: Save the Children

- Nearly 3 million Syrian children are out of school – that is 40% of all children of school age;
- The report also states that child casualty rates are the highest recorded in any recent conflict and notes that a UN estimate of at least 10,000 children having been killed is likely to be an underestimate since death and injury rates are so difficult to measure.
- The statistics demonstrate the scale of the tragedy but cannot convey the magnitude of human suffering for each individual child. Participatory work with refugee children during this mapping provided a glimpse into the ways in which the experiences of refugee children have shaped their thoughts and feelings.

2. CHILD PROTECTION, MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL DISTRESS

Child Protection and Mental Health needs/situation of children inside Syria:

A livelihoods assessment³ conducted by Save the Children in north-eastern Syria found that after years of conflict, families are struggling to meet their basic needs and are increasingly reliant on negative coping practices, putting children out to work, marrying daughters early, and allowing children to become involved with armed groups

Many women and girls, and to a lesser extent boys and men, are exposed to Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) resulting from conflict related violence, the breakdown of law and order inside Syria, increased poverty, lack of basic needs and safe services, family separation and disruption of traditional social networks and protection mechanisms.

The effects of conflict on Syrian mental health and psychosocial wellbeing are profound. Experiences of conflict-related violence and concerns about the situation in Syria are compounded by the daily stressors of displacement, including poverty, lack of basic needs and services, on-going risks of violence and exploitation, isolation and discrimination, loss of family and community supports, and uncertainty about the future.

Psychological and social distress among refugees from Syria and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Syria manifests in a wide range of emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioural and social problems. Emotional problems include: sadness, grief, fear, frustration, anxiety, anger, and despair. Cognitive problems, such as: loss of control, helplessness, worry, ruminations, boredom, and hopelessness are all widely reported, as are physical symptoms such as: fatigue, problems sleeping, loss of appetite and medically unexplained physical complaints. Social and behavioural problems, such as: withdrawal, aggression and interpersonal difficulties are also common.

Most of these phenomena among Syrian refugees, and for most people, are the result of ongoing violence, displacement and the difficult circumstances in which they currently live and do not necessarily indicate mental disorders. Difficult life circumstances often lead to demoralisation and hopelessness, and may be related to profound and persistent existential concerns of safety, trust, coherence of identity, social role and society. Symptoms related to past experiences have also been widely documented, such as nightmares, intrusive memories, flashbacks, avoidance behaviour and hyper arousal

³ Child Protection Assessment, north-eastern Syria, Save the Children-2015

Child Protection and Mental Health situation in neighbouring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey):

"One particularly striking social phenomenon that has emerged not only in Jordan, but in all countries hosting Syrian refugees, is that of child labour"⁴.

Although child labour was a fact of life in Syria prior to the war, the humanitarian crisis has greatly exacerbated the problem⁵. As a result, many children are now involved in economic activities that are mentally, physically or socially dangerous and which limit – or deny – their basic right to education. Children living or working on the street face the biggest dangers of all. A recent study in Lebanon identified 1,510 street- based children, mainly in Beirut and Tripoli, 73% of whom were refugees from Syria. The most common type of work is begging (43%), followed by street vending (37%). Incomes averaged US\$11 per day, but vary considerably, from US\$9 for begging and windscreen washing to US\$21–36 for illicit activities or prostitution. In its most extreme forms – such as child recruitment by armed forces and groups, or sexual exploitation – child labour is a grave violation of children's rights. The worst forms of child labour can cause severe psychological damage to children and will have a profound effect on a child's mental health.

An assessment conducted in Lebanon⁶ with the participation of Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian children highlights the key issues children face in Lebanon. Findings from consultations with Syrian children show that Syrian children are at high risk of becoming involved in some of the worst forms of child labour. In addition, children listed the high risk of violence and lack of security, in the family and in the community as one of the other main risks facing them. Girls in the age group 14 – 17 mentioned sexual harassment as a frequent concern, both at work and while outside their houses in general. Need for psychosocial activities is also one of the key concerns for children. Children explained that they did not have enough spaces or time to play in Lebanon. Recreational activities run by organisations are limited, and they are restricted from playing outside due to fear of harassment and physical violence from Lebanese children and adults. Girls in the 8 – 10 age group mentioned that they have less time to play than their brothers, because they have to help their mothers with housework. Moreover, children showed clear signs of anxiety and distress in relation to the unstable political situation in the region and the implications these hold in terms of security for Syrian refugees.

A Baseline Assessment of Child Labour among Syrian Refugees in Za'atari Refugee Camp, Jordan (Nov 2014) found that:

- Nearly all children stated their reasons for working were related to economic insecurity of the household and one in four households, just over 26%, stated that it was necessary to withdraw children from school to generate income.
- Three out of four working children reported health problems at work – nearly 80% suffered from extreme fatigue and a further almost 40% reported injury, illness or poor health.
- 20% reported physical abuse (beatings) and nearly 24% reported emotional abuse.

⁴ *Small Hands, Heavy Burden – How the Syria conflict is driving more children into the work force - July 2015*

⁵ *Small Hands, Heavy Burden – How the Syria conflict is driving more children into the work force - July 2015*

⁶ *Participatory assessment with children in South Lebanon -September 2014*

Adolescents and youth have particular experiences within a humanitarian context⁷, for example feeling under extra pressure, especially female youth, to abide by traditional norms and roles, to marry early and be confined within the home. The humanitarian setting exacerbates also basic needs for social services, among others. Without access to such services, youth vulnerability to poverty and violence increases, including sexual violence and sexual abuse and exploitation. Youth are obliged to assume the role of adults at an early stage without being prepared for this, in the absence of positive adult role models or support networks. This can lead to risky behaviour, including criminal activities, survival sex, violence and drug abuse.

Coping with psychosocial distress (Culture, Context and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Syrians- 2015)

Many families are able to adapt and adjust to the changes required by a new situation when provided safety and some external support. For most Syrians, the first source of support is the circle of family and friends. Displacement and the dynamics of the conflict challenge and may disrupt these social support structures. Refugees and IDPs, dealing with the effects of difficult living conditions and/or exposure to violence and adversities, consistently report high levels of distress. The efforts people make to minimise or overcome distress and to solve (inter)personal problems are often called coping. Displaced Syrians use various ways to cope with psychosocial distress. This may include individual strategies to reduce tension and stress such as praying, withdrawal, listening to music, watching TV or drawing, as well as social activities such as seeking the companionship of family and friends, engaging in social activities, attending a community activity or school, talking with a trusted person. However, negative coping strategies are also extremely common, including withdrawal, aggression, risky behaviours, smoking, alcohol and drug use among others.

Nonetheless, age, gender, language, religious and ethno-cultural diversity have an impact on refugees' experience of displacement. Specific groups may be particularly vulnerable and at risk to protection and mental health issues, such as female heads of households, adolescents, unaccompanied and separated children, children with disabilities, the elderly, and those lacking documentation.

3. EDUCATION

Education Context inside Syria

Before the war, almost all of Syria's children were enrolled in primary school and literacy rates were at 95% for 15-24 year-olds. Four years into the conflict, almost three million children are no longer in school and Syria is now estimated to have one of the lowest enrolment rates in the world. Enrolment in Aleppo is as low as 6%. Inside Syria, schools are under attack and there has never been a more dangerous time for Syrian children to try to get an education. At least a quarter of schools have been damaged, destroyed, used for military purposes or occupied by displaced people⁸.

Education in Refugee-Hosting Countries

A demographic analysis of the Syrian population that is registered with UNHCR indicates that half of the Syrian refugee population consists of children, with approximately 35 per cent of school age (5-17 years). In December 2014, more than half of all school-aged children (or more than 642,000) were estimated to be out of school.⁹ Only 340,000 are

⁷ Situation Analysis of Youth in Lebanon Affected by the Syrian Crisis -April 2014.

⁸ The Cost of War: Calculating the impact of the collapse of Syria's education system on Syria's future
⁹ http://www.oosci.mena.org/uploads/1/wysiwyg/150527_CAC_for_Syrian_children_report_final.pdf

enrolled in formal education. In some areas that figure is even worse: in Lebanon, which has taken in the largest number of refugees, 78% of Syrian children are out of school.¹⁰

For those who do get some access to education, it is often patchy and insufficient. Non-formal education programmes take different forms in each host country, with different actors involved and with varying space granted to non-state actors to provide education. Unfamiliar curricula, language barriers, overcrowding and discrimination against children from Syria are all barriers to learning. The majority of refugee children live outside formal camps and in host communities or informal settlements. Their access to education is thwarted by the already limited capacity of the public education systems in host countries and the acute financial pressures their families are facing.¹¹

In other cases, access to education is simply not an option. Refugee children have to deal with a host of issues including unfamiliar curricula, language barriers, discrimination, problems in obtaining certification, the limited legal status of their parents and the psychological impact of the crisis.

Dropping out of school puts these children at a life-long disadvantage, hindering their chances of getting decent work and escaping the cycle of poverty and exploitation.

4. KEY RESETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SUPPORT NEEDS FOR SYRIAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Orientation and support

- Orientation for arriving children and families on the culture, customs, lifestyle in the UK.
- Orientation on the UK asylum system, and the rights and limitations of children and families within it according to their status.
- Resettlement to areas with pre-existing Syrian communities so that children and families can create and maintain support networks. This should bear in mind tension that may exist between different groups.
- Establishment of mentoring opportunities for children who need additional support with integration and education, particularly separated children.
- Provision of grants to support the initial purchase of basic living equipment, clothes and education material.

Care for unaccompanied and separated children

- If receiving unaccompanied children, recruitment of culturally appropriate foster families and provision of training and support to provide foster care.
- Provision of training and support to extended families receiving children under the family reunification scheme.

Mental Health Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS)

- Identification of Arabic speaking/Syrian mental health professionals who can support with MHPSS interventions.

¹⁰ ¹⁰ [The Cost of War: Calculating the impact of the collapse of Syria's education system on Syria's future](#)

¹¹ ¹¹ [The Cost of War: Calculating the impact of the collapse of Syria's education system on Syria's future](#)

- Provision of specialist medical and MHPSS services for survivors of sexual violence and torture.

Education

- Orientation in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Turkey on the education system and curricula for school-age children who have been identified and selected for resettlement.
- Continuous Professional Development days for teachers and local education authorities on understanding the context and curricula in Syria and countries of first asylum, and how to support students with integration, education and psychosocial challenges they may face.
- Identification of options for children to continue their formal education e.g. catch-up classes in school, transitional learning programmes, mother tongue education, and provision of technical support on wellbeing and psychosocial efforts.
- Identification of qualified Syrian teachers within the UK who can support in schools as teaching assistants or teachers.

This report was produced by Save the Children, September 2015.

Please contact Neil Mathers, Head of Save the Children Scotland, for further information and updates.

Appendix 2



Syrian Resettlement Programme

How many additional people will you resettle?

- The Government will expand the existing Syrian Vulnerable Person Scheme and intends to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection during this Parliament.
- The UK is at the forefront of the response to the crisis in Syria and this expansion is part of our comprehensive approach designed as far as possible to help refugees in the region but recognising that for some vulnerable people the only solution is to bring them to countries like the UK.

How will the arrival of 20,000 be spread out?

- It will take several months to reach full capacity but when we do we would expect to bring in roughly several hundred refugees each month over the course of the Parliament, subject to continuing need and capacity.

How else is the Government supporting Syrians in need of protection?

- Our priorities are on continuing to provide humanitarian aid to those most in need in the region and actively seeking an end to the crisis. We believe this approach is the best way to ensure that the UK's help has the greatest impact for the majority of refugees who remain in the region and their host countries.
- As the brutal conflict continues in Syria, millions of people continue to be in need. Hundreds of thousands have been killed in the conflict between the Assad regime, extremist groups and moderate opposition groups. In response to the crisis, the UK has allocated over £1.1 billion since 2012 to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable people in Syria and of refugees in the region – more than any other country in the world except the United States. The UK is the only major country in the world that has kept its promise of spending 0.7% of our national income on aid and we should be proud of this. By the end of March 2015, UK support had delivered over 18 million food rations, each of which feeds one person for one month, provided access to clean water for 1.6 million people (peak month), and over 2.4 million medical consultations in Syria and the region.

How will the expansion of the programme operate?

- We already have significant experience of resettling vulnerable people and our existing domestic resettlement mechanisms provide a basis for a relatively quick increase in numbers. And we are already working with existing partners to ensure that we can begin to increase numbers as quickly as possible. Over the coming weeks and months, we will work with local authorities, the UNHCR and others to put in place the full structures to ensure we can scale up the current arrangements so that we can meet the aim of bringing up to 20,000 Syrians over the lifetime of this Parliament and deliver on the expansion that has been announced.

How long will the expansion take?

- Although we have simplified the process as much as we can the UNHCR must still assess each individual case before referring them to the Home Office. The Home Office must conduct visa checks and at the same time a place must be found in a local authority. We do all this already but it is important we get it right and scaling up a system like this in a way that protects the interests of all concerned, including local communities, will take a little bit of time.

How do you choose who comes to the UK?

- The Syrian VPR is based on need. It prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence amongst others. We work closely with the UNHCR to identify cases that they deem in need of resettlement and we will continue this work to ensure we deliver our commitment to provided refuge to 20,000 Syrians.
- 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.

How does the process work?

- UNHCR refer cases to the Home Office. We check they meet our eligibility criteria and carry out medical and security checks. We arrange exit visas from the host country and entry visas into the UK. At the same time, we pass the cases to a local authority who has asked to participate in the scheme. The Local Authority is asked to accept or reject cases. The referral forms give detail on family make up, age and specific needs. Further detail on any medical needs will follow shortly after via a full medical health assessment report. On accepting a case, local authorities then need to arrange housing, school places etc. In parallel we would agree an arrival date. We are working to make this process as quick as possible.

What if an area is new to resettlement?

- Local authorities will need to think carefully about whether they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration of these refugees. It would be worth speaking to existing resettlement areas to learn best practice. Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships can put you in touch.

How can local authorities find out more about the profiles and needs of the refugees they will be hosting?

- All cases will differ and it is very difficult to generalise. We do not have detail of the cases before UNHCR refer them to us. As soon as a local authority wants to participate, we will send these referrals that give detailed information on the individual cases. If authorities want a particular make up of cases, they should state this and we will do our best to match cases.

Will the 20,000 be on top of existing schemes?

- The Government will expand the existing Syrian VPR Scheme and we expect to resettle up to 20,000 Syrians in need of protection during this Parliament. This is in addition to those we resettle under Gateway and Mandate and the thousands who receive protection in the UK under normal asylum procedures.

How will these people be accommodated? Where will they go when they are here?

- The UK has been operating resettlement schemes for many years and we already have established and effective networks to accommodate and support resettled people. However, we recognise that the increase in numbers will require an expansion of current networks and the impact on local communities and infrastructure will need to be managed carefully. That is why we are working with a wide range of partners including local authorities and civil society organisations to ensure that people are integrated sensitively into local communities.
- Our existing dispersal policy is aimed at ensuring an equitable distribution of refugees across the country so that no individual local authority bears a disproportionate share of the burden. We are working closely with local authorities to ensure that this remains the case.

How will you ensure refugees are dispersed fairly and in a way that manages the impacts on local communities and services?

- We are determined to ensure that no local authority is asked to take more than the local structures are able to cope with. That is why we will be talking to local authorities and other partners over the coming weeks to ensure that capacity can be identified and the impact on those taking new cases can be managed in a fair and controlled way.

How will schools be supported to provide language support for refugee children?

- Financial support for English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils is a matter for local discretion. The funding arrangements enable local authorities to allocate a proportion of their funding to schools on the basis of the number of pupils in each school who have EAL and who have been in the school system for a maximum of three years. The pupil rate for this is also decided locally and can therefore reflect specific challenges in the area. Schools can also use the additional money they receive through the pupil premium to raise the attainment of disadvantaged EAL pupils.
- Local authorities have the freedom to take account of high migration in their local funding formula, to address the additional costs of having a large number (over 10%) of pupils arriving at unusual times in the school year.
- Schools can access information about good practice in meeting the needs of EAL pupils - Ofsted has published some case studies showing good practice at schools with high proportions of pupils with EAL. Resources are also available from the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum, an organisation that seeks to promote effective teaching and learning for EAL pupils in UK schools.

How will you ensure that there are enough schools places in areas where refugees are resettled?

- We have committed to investing £7bn on new school places over the next six years, and in the last Parliament funding for school places doubled to £5bn to create 445,000 additional places. Local Authorities are allocated funding for school places based on their own local data on school capacity and pupil forecasts, in which they take account of factors including rising birth rates, housing development, trends in internal migration and migration to England from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and from overseas. We continue to work with LAs to make sure that every child has a school place.

How can I become a foster carer for a refugee child?

- We are not expecting the refugees arriving in the first months of the scheme to include unaccompanied children, but if you are interested in finding out more about fostering, you might wish to contact your local authority. They can provide you with details about applying to foster for them. You can also find out more about fostering by contacting Fosterline, a government funded service providing independent advice and support for people considering becoming foster carers. In addition, you might wish to look at information about applying to foster that Fostering Network give on their website at: <http://www.couldyoufoster.org.uk/>.
- Further information for foster carers is also available on GOV.UK : <https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers>. This page sets out the process people should follow and explains how much financial support and training foster carers can get.

I am interested in adopting an unaccompanied refugee child?

- We are not expecting the refugees arriving in the first months of the scheme to include unaccompanied children. Even if we do support unaccompanied children in the future it is unlikely that adoption will be an appropriate option for these children. The United Nations and other humanitarian charities advise that no new adoption applications should be considered in the period after a disaster or from a war zone before the authorities in that State are in a position to apply the necessary safeguards. This is especially true when civil authority breaks down or temporarily ceases to function.
- It is not uncommon in an emergency or unsettled situation for children to be temporarily separated from their parents or other family members who may be looking for them. Moreover, parents may send their children out of the area for their safety. Premature and unregulated attempts to organise the adoption of such a child abroad should be avoided and resisted with efforts to reunite children with relatives or extended family being given priority. So whilst some lone refugee children may come to the UK for temporary care, we would wish to support them to be reunited with their parents or other relatives where this is possible.

How can people help now?

- People can already make donations to charities and volunteer to help local refugee support groups. We would encourage that to continue but we will also be consulting partners on options to do more - including ways to sponsor refugees alongside those supported by the government.
- People can also refer to the Government release on the GOV.UK website <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/syria-refugees-what-you-can-do-to-help-2>

The British Red Cross has created a Crisis Helpline on 0800 107 8727 to triage calls to appropriate organisations.

Key facts and statistics on resettlement

- The UK operates three resettlement routes, Gateway, Mandate and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme, working closely with the UNHCR on each. The Gateway programme has run for 10 years and has resettled almost 6,400 people in that time, and aims to resettle around 750 people a year.
- On the VPR, we are working closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to identify some of the most vulnerable displaced Syrians and bring them to the UK.
- The scheme is helping those in the greatest need who cannot be supported effectively in the region by giving them protection and support in the UK – the scheme prioritises people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of torture and violence, and women and children at risk. The current criteria for acceptance under the scheme will be expanded to ensure more of those in the greatest need are resettled in the UK.
- Since the first arrivals in March 2014 to the end of June 2015 (the last published figures), 216 people were relocated to the UK under the Syrian VPR scheme.
- Since the crisis began in 2011 we have granted asylum or other forms of leave to almost 5,000 Syrian nationals and dependants through normal asylum procedures.
- In response to the increase in asylum claims, the UK introduced a concession in October 2012 for Syrian nationals who are already legally present in the UK, allowing them to extend their leave or change immigration category without leaving the UK. This currently runs to 28 February 2016.

How does the current Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme work?

The UK sets the criteria and then UNHCR identifies and submits potential cases for our consideration. Cases are screened and considered on the papers and we retain the right to reject on security, war crimes or other grounds. Once the screening process has been completed a full medical assessment is conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in the host country. Full details of the case and medical history are sent to the local authority for assessment of need, including whether suitable accommodation and care are available locally. The local authority then provides details of the estimated costs.

Eligibility is then confirmed and IOM start the visa application process. UK Visas and Immigration International issue UK visas (3 months Leave Outside of the Rules) and on arrival, arrangements are made for Biometric Residence Permits to be issued with 5 years' humanitarian protection.

Worldwide trends

How many refugees are there worldwide?

- The UNHCR reports that by the end of 2014, the number of forcibly displaced individuals worldwide stood at 59.5 million. There are 19.5 million refugees worldwide. 51% of refugees were under 18 years old.

Where do most refugees come from?

- Syria is the world's largest source country of both internally displaced people (7.6 million) and refugees (3.88 million at the end of 2014). Afghanistan (2.59 million) and Somalia (1.1 million) are the next biggest refugee source countries. This is followed by Sudan (648,900) and South Sudan (616,200).

What are the reasons for refugee flows?

- The humanitarian situation in **Syria** continues to deteriorate. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance now stands at 12.2 million, and four in every five Syrians live in poverty. Flagrant human rights violations, indiscriminate attacks against densely populated areas and targeting of civilian infrastructure, in particular aerial bombardment by the Assad regime, continues in violation of international norms.
- **Afghanistan** remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with 1 in 3 people living below the poverty line and without access to basic services or opportunities to support their families. The ongoing insurgency across many parts of the country means people are facing violence as part of their daily lives and has given rise to a sharp increase in population displacement. As of December 2014, UNHCR listed over 2.5m Afghans as refugees and over 800,000 Afghans are internally displaced.
- **Somalis** are the third largest group, following Eritreans and Sudanese, arriving in Europe from the East African region. They make up 9% of migrants to Europe. The main causes of migration from Somalia are understood to be spikes in insecurity and humanitarian need (driven by conflict and Al-Shabaab activity). There are also likely to be a significant number of 'economic migrants' looking for better economic opportunity than exists in Somalia. Large diaspora communities in the UK (thought to be 3-500,000) and elsewhere in Europe create a pull factor.
- We believe that **Sudan** is primarily a country of transit, though there are refugees fleeing conflict in Darfur. Numbers of economic migrants from Sudan are unknown - if someone claims to be from Darfur it is difficult to prove otherwise. The security services have periodic clamp-downs on Eritreans in Sudan (usually in Khartoum) with some forcible returns for not having the correct paperwork.

General Asylum Statistics

- There were 25,771 asylum applications (main applicants) in the UK in the year ending June 2015. (Including dependants, there were 32,508).
- In recent quarters, we have seen fewer applications from some countries with traditionally higher refusal rates (Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria), and more from countries with higher grant rates (Eritrea, Syria, Sudan).
- In the year ending June 2015, the highest numbers of applications came from Eritrean (3,568), Pakistani (2,302) and Syrian (2,204) nationals (main applicants only). Including dependants, the largest number of asylum applications came from Eritrea (3,624), Pakistan (3,276) and Iran (2,533).
- Compared to the year ending June 2014, the number of initial decisions on asylum applications (main applicants) increased by 107% in the year ending June 2015, to 28,538 from 13,795. (Including dependants, initial decisions increased by 117%, to 38,373 from 17,697).
- The total number of outstanding initial decisions has fallen in recent quarters (main applicants only – Q3 2014: 18,149, Q4 2014: 17,067; Q1 2015: 12,878, Q2 2015: 12,368; main applicants and dependants – Q3 2014: 24,369, Q4 2014: 22,898; Q1 2015: 16,879, Q2 2015: 16,163).
- We are certifying more cases, thus refusing clearly unfounded cases a right of appeal in the UK. In the year ending June 2015, 14% of all refusals for main applicants were certified, unchanged from the year ending June 2014. (Including dependants, 15% of refusals were certified, compared with 14% in the previous year).

Support

- We currently support a total of over 36,000 asylum seekers (main applicants and dependants; sections 95, 98 & 4). At the end of June 2015, 30,457 asylum seekers and their dependants were being supported under Section 95.
- There are over 26,000 asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation, in over 200 local authorities. Our dispersal policy ensures a reasonable spread amongst those local authorities.

UASCs

- There were 2,168 asylum applications from Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs) in the year ending June 2015, an increase of 46% from the year ending June 2014 (1,488). These applications represented 8% of all main applications for asylum.
- Despite the recent increase in UASC applications, they remain below the peak of 3,976 in 2008.

Resettlement

- In the year ending June 2015, 166 Syrians were relocated to the UK under the VPR scheme (216 since the scheme began in March 2014). This is in addition to almost 5,000 Syrians (including dependants) who have been granted protection under our normal asylum rules since the crisis began in April 2011.

- In the year ending June 2015, we resettled 640 refugees under the Gateway Resettlement Programme. Since 2004, we have resettled 6,380 refugees under the programme and we met our target in the last financial year (April 2014 to March 2015), resettling over 750 refugees.

Removals

- In the last two years (July 2013 to June 2015) there were over 8,500 enforced removals of people who had sought asylum at some stage (including dependants). In the same period there were over 5,500 voluntary departures of people who had sought asylum at some stage.

International comparisons

- The number of asylum applications to the EU in the year ending June 2015 was the highest it has been since 2002.
- There were an estimated 754,700 asylum applications by main applicants and dependants to the 28 EU countries in the year ending June 2015 (an increase of 65% on the previous year). Of these, the UK received 32,600 (4% of EU asylum intake) compared to 259,300 in Germany, 92,600 in Hungary and 78,400 in Sweden. In 2010, the EU received 241,100 applications for main applicants and dependants, and of this the UK received 22,600 (9% of EU asylum intake).
- The UK had the seventh highest number of asylum applications within the EU in the year ending June 2015 (fifth in year ending June 2014). In the year ending June 2015, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Italy, France and Austria received more asylum applications than the UK.
- Asylum claims in Germany were eight times those in the UK (259,300 vs 32,600) in the year ending June 2015. Hungary had the second highest number of applications in the year ending June 2015 after being ranked ninth during the previous 12 months.
- When the relative size of resident populations of the 28 EU countries is taken into account, the UK ranked 16th in terms of asylum seekers per head of the population in the year ending June 2015 (it was also 16th in the previous year).