



BRIEFING PAPER

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# The UK response to the Syrian refugee crisis

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Contents:

1. The refugee crisis
2. UK Government policy on resettlement for Syrian refugees
3. In detail: the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme
4. Syrian asylum claims made in the UK
5. UK aid in the region



# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Summary</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>1. The refugee crisis</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| 1.1 Overview  | 5         |
| 1.2 Funding   | 5         |
| 1.3 Refugee resettlement  | 6         |
| 1.4 Calls for safe and legal routes for refugees  | 6         |
| <b>2. UK Government policy on resettlement for Syrian refugees</b>                              | <b>9</b>  |
| 2.1 Until late January 2014   | 9         |
| 2.2 January 2014: Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme launched                      | 9         |
| 2.3 September 2015: Extension of the VPRP   | 10        |
| 2.4 The Minister for Syrian refugees  | 11        |
| 2.5 2016: Additional resettlement schemes are announced   | 11        |
| Background to establishing the schemes  | 11        |
| The “children at risk” resettlement scheme  | 12        |
| Resettlement for unaccompanied children in Europe: the ‘Dubs Amendment’                         | 13        |
| <b>3. In detail: the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme</b>                        | <b>17</b> |
| 3.1 How many people have been resettled in the UK under the programme?                          | 17        |
| 3.2 What immigration status do resettled Syrians have?  | 17        |
| 3.3 Which local authorities are participating?  | 18        |
| 3.4 How does the programme work in practice?  | 18        |
| What are the eligibility criteria?  | 19        |
| What security checks are carried out on refugees?   | 19        |
| What role do local authorities have?  | 20        |
| Who covers the costs of the programme?  | 20        |
| The Community Sponsorship Scheme  | 21        |
| 3.5 Parliamentary scrutiny  | 21        |
| 3.6 Offers of assistance from members of the public: signposting constituents to useful sources | 22        |
| <b>4. Syrian asylum claims made in the UK</b>   | <b>24</b> |
| <b>5. UK aid in the region</b>  | <b>25</b> |
| 5.1 DFID Allocations to Date  | 25        |
| 5.2 Future Commitments  | 26        |

## Summary

### 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 fleeing Syrians for resettlement in the UK. However, in early 2014 it established the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (VPRP) in order to provide a route for selected Syrians to come to the UK.

The VPRP first prioritised the elderly, the disabled and victims of sexual violence and torture. There was no fixed quota, but the Government announced it expected several hundred Syrians to arrive in the UK over three years. The VPRP was significantly extended in September 2015 - it now plans to resettle up to 20,000 people from the Syrian region over the next five years. The Government is working with local authorities and the voluntary sector to implement the programme. To assist Syrians' integration into UK society a 'community sponsorship' scheme was launched in July 2016.

Resettled Syrians were first given 'humanitarian protection' status for a period of five years, with permission to work and access public funds. However on 22 March 2017 the Home Secretary announced that from 1 July 2017 all those admitted to the UK under the VPRP would be granted refugee status. The Government acknowledged that humanitarian protection status does not carry the same entitlements as refugee status, such as swifter access to student support for those in higher education and the internationally recognised refugee travel document.

According to the latest Immigration Statistics, 5,453 Syrians were resettled to the UK under the VPRP in the year ending March 2017.

### Other new resettlement schemes

In addition to the VPRP, the Government committed itself to providing resettlement for up to 3,000 vulnerable children (and family members) from conflict situations in the Middle East and North Africa region. A further scheme was introduced by section 67 of the *Immigration Act 2016* (known as 'the Dubs amendment'), which required the Government to relocate and support an unspecified number of unaccompanied refugee children currently in Europe. Neither of these schemes are limited to Syrian nationals.

On 8 February 2017 the Government announced the number of unaccompanied children to be relocated under section 67 would be capped at 350. The decision prompted criticism from Lord Dubs, opposition parties and campaigners. It was reversed two months later, with Home Office ministers blaming an 'administrative error' for their not taking up local authorities' offers to resettle a further 130 children.

### Syrian asylum claims

It is also possible for Syrians to claim asylum upon arrival or after entry to the UK. Separate to those granted humanitarian protection under the VPRP, there were 1,507 grants of asylum (or an alternative form of protection) to Syrian applicants at initial decision in the year ending March 2017. 86% of initial asylum decisions in Syrian cases gave permission to remain in the UK. This is the highest rate of recognition amongst the top ten nationalities applying for asylum in that year.

## 4 The UK response to the Syrian refugee crisis

### UK aid to Syria

The Government continues to commit a significant amount of international aid to assistance programmes in the regions neighbouring Syria. It takes the view that this is preferable to encouraging Syrian refugees to make dangerous journeys to Europe. The UK has pledged £2.46 billion to helping refugees in Syria and the region, making it the second largest donor to the Syrian refugee crisis since the start of the crisis in 2012.

# 1. The refugee crisis

## 1.1 Overview

There is no agreement on the number of deaths resulting from the conflict in Syria. In July 2013 the UN stopped counting the death toll due to a lack of confidence in its own data.<sup>1</sup> In mid-2015 it estimated that over 250,000 people had been killed and well over a million injured since the conflict in Syria began in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Since then estimates of the death toll have varied. In February 2016 the Syrian Centre for Policy Research claimed the figure was as high as 470,000.<sup>3</sup> In April 2016 the UN special envoy in Syria, Staffan de Mistura, put the figure around 400,000.<sup>4</sup>

The UN stopped attempting to count the death toll in 2013

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), there are:

- 13.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria, of which 5.8 million are children
- 6.3 million Syrians who are internally displaced, of which 2.4 million are children
- 4.9 million in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, of which 1.2 million are children<sup>5</sup>

Syrians now constitute the largest refugee population in the world.<sup>6</sup> As at 1 June 2017, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was aware of around 5.06 million registered refugees in the region (2 million Syrian refugees registered by the UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon; 2.97 million registered by the government of Turkey; and more than 30,000 registered in North Africa).<sup>7</sup>

Syrians constitute the largest refugee population in the world

According to [UNHCR](#), 937,718 asylum applications were made by Syrians in Europe between April 2011 and March 2017.

## 1.2 Funding

The financial assistance provided in response to the Syrian crisis is tracked by UNOCHA via the Financial Tracking Service.

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<sup>1</sup> [‘The Syrian war’s death toll is absolutely staggering. But no one can agree on the number’](#), *Washington Post*, 15 March 2016

<sup>2</sup> UN press release, [Alarmed by Continuing Syria Crisis, Security Council Affirms Its Support for Special Envoy’s Approach in Moving Political Solution Forward](#), 17 August 2015

<sup>3</sup> Syrian Centre for Policy Research, *Confronting fragmentation*, February 2016

<sup>4</sup> [‘UN Envoy Revises Syria Death Toll to 400,000’](#), *Foreign Policy*, 22 April 2016

<sup>5</sup> UNOCHA, [2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview](#), December 2016

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR website, [Figures at a Glance](#) (accessed on 14 June 2017)

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR website, [Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal](#) (last updated 1 June 2017)

The [Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 2016](#) received only \$1.7 billion of the \$3.2 billion requested (54%).<sup>8</sup>

The [Syria regional refugee and resilience plan](#) 2016 - the joint response of the governments of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey - received only \$2.8 billion of the \$4.5 billion requested (61.3%).<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3 Refugee resettlement

The 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.

The UNHCR estimates that 10% of the Syrian refugee population are particularly vulnerable, and seeks to resettle them outside of Syria's neighbouring countries. As of 31 October 2016 states had pledged to resettle 224,694 Syrian refugees. This is just under half of the estimated number of refugees needing resettlement.

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 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. The UNHCR has welcomed these as ways of supporting young Syrians' access to education and training to prevent the creation of a "lost generation".

### 1.4 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.

The 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 2016 to discuss "global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees". The then Minister for Syrian Refugees, Richard Harrington, attended on behalf of the UK. In his [statement at the conference](#) he did not announce any new UK

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<sup>8</sup> Financial Tracking Service, [Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 2016](#), accessed 14 June 2017

<sup>9</sup> Financial Tracking Service, [Syria regional refugee and resilience plan \(3RP\) 2016](#), accessed 14 June 2017

commitments.<sup>10</sup> A related [Westminster Hall debate](#) on 'UNHCR and pathways for admission for Syrian refugees' took place on Wednesday 16 March 2016.

### 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 the UNHCR gives details of how such schemes can work in practice, and some examples of existing schemes.<sup>11</sup>

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>12</sup>

Commentators have also drawn attention to the increase in the refusal rate for visitor visas for Syrian nationals since the Syrian conflict began.<sup>13</sup>

Responding to a PQ in 2014, about the potential logistical difficulties in claiming asylum in the UK, the then Minister for Immigration, James Brokenshire, said:

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>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> UK Mission to the United Nations Geneva, *UK Statement at the Global Responsibility-Sharing through Pathways for Admission of Syrian Refugees Conference*, 30 March 2016

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR background note, High-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees, 30 March 2016

<sup>12</sup> [HC Deb 13 March 2012 c14WS](#); [PQ 227676](#), 19 March 2015; [HC 1116 of 2014 15](#)

<sup>13</sup> ['Refusal rate for Syrian visa applications increases yet further'](#), *Free Movement*, 12 March 2015

<sup>14</sup> [HC Deb 3 March 2014 c607W](#)

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>15</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.**

In its report *Migration Crisis* the Home Affairs Committee referred to the Government's decision not to take part in current EU schemes to relocate or resettle refugees. It noted its reasoning that such initiatives 'might act as a magnet for those seeking refuge and thereby encourage them to risk taking dangerous routes to try to reach the UK'. However the Committee sought clarification of the Government approach:

In these circumstances, we would ask the Government to explain whether it is considering any expansion of safe and legal routes, such as humanitarian visas, for those from conflict regions seeking protection, as advocated by the Archbishop of Canterbury and a wide range of expert NGOs and others. The Government should also make clear how its response to the migrant crisis is providing protection for refugees other than Syrians in the UK, without provision in place for them to travel to the UK to apply for asylum.<sup>16</sup>

The Lords EU Committee received contrasting evidence on the best approach to stop people smuggling

<sup>15</sup> Lords EU Committee, [EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling](#), HL Paper 46, 3 November 2015

<sup>16</sup> Home Affairs Committee, [Migration Crisis](#), 3 August 2016, HC 24, 2016-17, para 65

## 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 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>17</sup>

The UK declined to participate in the UNHCR resettlement programme for Syria, arguing that it would be tokenistic<sup>18</sup> 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.

The Government initially viewed resettlement of Syrians as being 'tokenistic'

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

On 29 January 2014, following [considerable pressure](#) from charities, the UNHCR and members 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' (VPRP) would be separate to, but "entirely consistent" with the UNHCR's Syrian refugee resettlement programme. The Government's reasons for establishing a parallel scheme were set out in an answer to a Parliamentary Question 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

The Government created the VPRP as separate from but "entirely consistent" with the UNHCR effort

<sup>17</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>18</sup> [HC Deb 20 January 2014 c 24](#)

international proportions and we continue to play our full part in discussions with international partners.<sup>19</sup>

The VPRP initially prioritised elderly or disabled refugees and those who were victims of sexual violence or torture. The Government said that it expected several hundred refugees to arrive over the following three years, and that as the programme would focus on need no quota would be imposed.<sup>20</sup> 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 programme

From the outset, there were calls to increase the number of resettlement places on offer to Syrian refugees.<sup>21</sup> There were also some calls to extend the scope of the programme to include at-risk groups in Iraq. These calls the Government rejected.<sup>22</sup>

The Government's approach continued to prioritise spending aid in the Syrian region rather than offering large-scale resettlement in the UK.<sup>23</sup> By the end of June 2015, 216 people (including dependents) had come to the UK through the VPRP.<sup>24</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>25</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.<sup>26</sup>

The Government initially resisted calls to resettle more than several hundred Syrians

## 2.3 September 2015: Extension of the VPRP

On 7 September 2015, 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, [David Cameron announced](#) a significant extension of the VPRP. He confirmed that:

- Up to 20,000 Syrian refugees would be resettled in the UK over the course of this Parliament.

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<sup>19</sup> [PQ 1391 \[Refugees: Syria\]](#), 15 June 2015

<sup>20</sup> Home Office, '[Syria: UK helps vulnerable refugees](#)', 25 March 2014

<sup>21</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>22</sup> [PO HL2960 \[Asylum: Syria\]](#), 27 November 2014

<sup>23</sup> [PQ 1391 \[Refugees: Syria\]](#), 15 June 2015

<sup>24</sup> Home Office Quarterly Immigration Statistics, [April - June 2015](#), 27 August 2015

<sup>25</sup> Joint letter from aid agencies to the Prime Minister, 26 November 2014 ([http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/3268/Open\\_letter\\_to\\_the\\_Prime\\_Minister.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/3268/Open_letter_to_the_Prime_Minister.pdf), last accessed on 14 December 2016)

<sup>26</sup> 10 Downing Street, '[PM at 2015 Global Security Forum](#)', 19 June 2015

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

## 2.4 The Minister for Syrian refugees

In September 2015 Richard Harrington was appointed as a joint Home Office/ Department for International Development/ Department for Communities and Local Government Minister for Syrian refugees. He was tasked with co-ordinating the VPRP in the UK and the provision of Government support to Syrian refugees in the region. A ministerial group on Syrian refugees, chaired by the Home Secretary, was also established.

Upon Theresa May's appointment as Prime Minister Mr Harrington became the new pensions minister and the post of Minister for Syrian Refugees was scrapped. Mrs May's decision was criticised in Westminster<sup>27</sup> and by the Refugee Council.<sup>28</sup> Downing Street defended the move, arguing the position was necessary only to ensure resettlement "got off to a good start" and that the Home Office ministers with responsibility for asylum would see the Government meet its promise to take in 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020.<sup>29</sup>

Seven months after its creation the Government scrapped the post of Minister for Syrian Refugees

## 2.5 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 refugees of other nationality) who would not be eligible under the VPRP.

In particular, campaigners highlighted the plight of refugees who had already travelled to Europe, especially unaccompanied children. The UK had provided practical and financial support for EU partners' efforts in

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<sup>27</sup> ['Theresa May Under Fire For Axeing 'Minister For Syrian Refugees' Post; No10 Sources Defend Change'](#), *Huffington Post*, 25 July 2016

<sup>28</sup> Refugee Council, ['Minister for Syrian Refugees role scrapped'](#), 25 July 2016

<sup>29</sup> ['Theresa May criticised for scrapping Syrian refugees minister post'](#), *the Independent*, 25 July 2016

dealing with the increase in irregular immigration to the EU, but was not participating in the measures transferring responsibility for 160,000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy to other Member States.

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 resettle in the UK some of the unaccompanied children in Europe. The charity raised its concerns about the children's vulnerability to exploitation, including trafficking and prostitution. Europol warned that at least 10,000 unaccompanied children had gone missing since entering Europe and that minors are being targeted by pan-European gangs for sex abuse and slavery.<sup>30</sup> Save the Children suggested that taking responsibility for 3,000 of the unaccompanied children would be a fair contribution for the UK to make.

[Save the Children's campaign](#) attracted wider NGO and cross-party support, which intensified during the later stages of the passage through Parliament of the *Immigration Act 2016*. 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. During the ping-pong stages of consideration of the *Immigration Bill*, the Government dropped its opposition to a new clause proposed by Lord Dubs, which would require the Home Secretary to arrange for the resettlement in the UK of an unspecified number of unaccompanied refugee children in Europe.

### The "children at risk" resettlement scheme

On 21 April 2016 the Government announced it would work with the UNHCR to resettle children and adult refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In a Written Statement the then Minister for Immigration, James Brokenshire, explained the scheme will not cater exclusively 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

Save the Children and Europol drew attention to criminals' targeting of refugee children for sexual abuse and slavery

Separate to the VPRP and the Dubs amendment, the 'children at risk' scheme focusses on assisting a broader category of at-risk children and their family members

<sup>30</sup> ['10,000 refugee children are missing, says Europol'](#), *the Guardian*, 30 January 2016

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.<sup>31</sup>

## Resettlement for unaccompanied children in Europe: the 'Dubs Amendment'

Section 4.5 of the Library briefing paper [Immigration Bill 2015-16: Lords amendments and ping-pong stages](#) explains how Lord Dubs' amendment came to be included in the *Immigration Act 2016*.

Section 67 of the Act (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 2016 gave details of how the Government intended 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.

The 'Dubs amendment' to the *Immigration Act 2016* committed the Government to resettling an unspecified number of unaccompanied refugee children in Europe

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<sup>31</sup> [HCWS687](#), 21 April 2016

## 14 The UK response to the Syrian refugee crisis

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>32</sup>

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'. <sup>33</sup>

The Home Office guidance on the implementation of section 67 provides the following information on the eligibility criteria: <sup>34</sup>

### **General criteria for eligibility under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 for children in Calais**

To be eligible a child must meet one of the following criteria:

- they are aged 12 or under
- they are referred directly by the French authorities, or by an organisation working on behalf of the French authorities, to the Home Office as being at high risk of sexual exploitation
- they are aged 15 or under and are of Sudanese or Syrian nationality (these nationalities have a first instance asylum grant rate in the UK of 75% or higher, based on the asylum statistics for the period from July 2015 to June 2016)
- they are aged under 18 and are the accompanying sibling of a child meeting one of the three criteria outlined above

And they must meet all of the following criteria:

- transfer to the UK must be determined to be in the best interests of the child

The Home Office published guidance on how it will implement the Government's obligations under section 67

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<sup>32</sup> 10 Downing Street, '[Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to be resettled from Europe](#)', 4 May 2016

<sup>33</sup> Save the Children, '[Save the Children Reaction - Government announcement on child refugees](#)', 4 May 2016

<sup>34</sup> Home Office, '[Guidance: Implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 in France](#)', 8 November 2016, page 6

- the child must have been present in the Calais camp on or before 24 October 2016
- the child must have arrived in Europe before 20 March 2016

A Parliamentary Question answered in December 2016 prompted disclosure of further details on the implementation of section 67:

All children transferred here under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 will be expected to make an asylum claim in the UK, which will be considered according to normal processes. We aim to decide 98 per cent of straightforward asylum claims within six months. Where a child does not qualify for asylum and it is clear that safe and adequate reception arrangements are not available in their home country, they will be granted leave to remain under the Immigration Rules for 30 months or until they reach the age of 17 and a half, whichever is shorter.<sup>35</sup>

The Government has declined to publish the number of places pledged by each local authority area for unaccompanied refugee children.<sup>36</sup>

On 8 February 2017 Robert Goodwill, then Minister for Immigration, announced that the total number of unaccompanied refugee children to be transferred to the UK under section 67 is 350:

The UK can be proud of its record of helping refugee children and I can today announce, in accordance with section 67 of the Immigration Act, that the Government will transfer the specified number of 350 children pursuant to that section, who reasonably meet the intention and spirit behind the provision. This number includes over 200 children already transferred under section 67 from France. It does not include children transferred to UK where they have close family here. We will announce in due course the basis on which further children will be transferred from Europe to the UK under section 67 of the Immigration Act to the specified number.

As required by the legislation, we have consulted with local authorities on their capacity to care for and support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children before arriving at this number. Local authorities told us they have capacity for around 400 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children until the end of this financial year. We estimate that at least 50 of the family reunion cases transferred from France as part of the Calais clearance will require a local authority placement in cases where the family reunion does not work out. We are grateful for the way in which local authorities have stepped up to provide places for those arriving and we will continue to work closely to address capacity needs.<sup>37</sup>

In February 2017 the Government announced the specified number of children to be relocated to the UK under section 67 is to be 350

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<sup>35</sup> [PQ\\_HL3713](#), 21 December 2016

<sup>36</sup> [PQ\\_49305](#), 21 December 2016

<sup>37</sup> [HCWS467](#), 8 February 2017

Addressing the House in response to an Urgent Question tabled the following day, the Home Secretary defended the decision to set the number at 350 and denied the scheme was closed. She said the Government had consulted local authorities on their capacity to care for unaccompanied children before arriving at the number. She also warned that maintaining the scheme may act as a 'pull factor' encouraging children to undertake perilous journeys to Europe.<sup>38</sup>

Lord Dubs accused the Government of breaching its commitments.<sup>39</sup> Denouncing what he described as a "shabby approach", he challenged the assertion that local authorities were unwilling to take in more unaccompanied children.<sup>40</sup> Save the Children felt the decision fell "far short of the UK's ability and moral obligation" and "defies the spirit of Global Britain".<sup>41</sup>

However, on 26 April 2017 Mr Goodwill announced that the government would, in fact, take an extra 130 unaccompanied child refugees from within Europe. He blamed an 'administrative error' that had led to the Home Office overlooking one region's pledge of 130 places. He assured the House that the Government remains fully committed to meeting its commitment under section 67 and that no eligible child was refused transfer to the UK as a result of the error.<sup>42</sup>

The Home Secretary denied capping the number of children at 350 amounted to closing the scheme

Following the discovery of an administrative error a further 130 spaces were identified

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<sup>38</sup> [HC Deb 9 February 2017 c637](#)

<sup>39</sup> [HL Deb 9 February 2017 c1859](#)

<sup>40</sup> ['Lord Dubs condemns 'shabby' government decision to scrap child refugee programme'](#), *PoliticsHome*, 8 February 2017

<sup>41</sup> [Save the Children press release](#), 8 February 2017

<sup>42</sup> [HCWS619](#), 25 April 2017; ['UK to take 130 more lone refugee children in Dubs scheme climbdown'](#), *the Guardian*, 26 April 2017

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

The following section largely draws on information in Home Office [guidance for local authorities and partners](#), published on 28 October 2015, and the Local Government Association's webpage on [refugees and unaccompanied children](#).

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

A total of 7,307 people have been granted humanitarian protection under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (VPRP) since the programme began. 5,453 people were resettled under the programme in the year ending March 2017 (of whom 50% were children).<sup>43</sup>

Updated figures are regularly published through the Home Office's [quarterly statistical releases](#).

### 3.2 What immigration status do resettled Syrians have?

Resettled Syrians have been given **humanitarian protection status** for a period of five years. This confers eligibility to apply for support from public funds and access to the labour market.

On 22 May 2017 the Home Secretary announced that from 1 July 2017 those admitted under the VPRP will be granted **refugee status**.<sup>44</sup> All those resettled under the programme before that date will be given the opportunity to request to change their status from humanitarian protection to refugee status.

Changing to refugee status will likely benefit Syrians resettled in the UK. Humanitarian protection status was granted so as to bypass the lengthier procedure for claiming asylum and allow for quicker assistance and resettlement. However the Home Secretary recognised that while humanitarian protection recognises an individual's need for international protection, it does not carry the same entitlements as refugee status, such as access to particular benefits, swifter access to student support for those in higher education and the internationally recognised refugee travel document.

Those resettled are eligible to apply for family reunion with immediate family members, in accordance with the Immigration Rules. The

From 1 July 2017 those resettled under the VPRP will be granted refugee status

<sup>43</sup> Home Office Quarterly Immigration Statistics, [January to March 2017](#), 25 May 2017

<sup>44</sup> [Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme – Arrangements: Written statement HCWS551](#), 22 March 2017

Government has indicated that at the end of the five years, resettled refugees will be eligible to apply for permanent settlement in the UK.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.3 Which local authorities are participating?

In the year ending March 2017, 235 different local authorities had accepted refugees under the VPRP.<sup>46</sup>

Local authorities' participation in the VPRP is voluntary.

Details of the number of Syrians resettled in each local authority under the programme 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.

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 led on implementing the scheme, with involvement from relevant public agencies, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations. Accommodation is arranged through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. An April 2016 briefing by the Department for Communities provides detailed information on the implementation of the VPRP in Northern Ireland.<sup>47</sup>

Local authorities' participation is voluntary

The devolved administrations are coordinating local responses

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

Suitable cases are identified from the UNHCR caseload of registered refugees. When registering with the UNHCR refugees have an opportunity to indicate an interest in being resettled under the VPRP. UNHCR staff identify those 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 local authority.

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<sup>45</sup> [HC Deb 7 September 2015 c44](#)

<sup>46</sup> Home Office Quarterly Immigration Statistics, [January to March 2017](#), 25 May 2017

<sup>47</sup> Department for Communities, ['Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme'](#), 27 April 2016

## What are the eligibility criteria?

An answer to a Parliamentary Question in November 2015 set out the 'vulnerability criteria' used by the 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>48</sup>

The VPRP relies on UNHCR identification of those suitable for resettlement

## What security checks are carried out on refugees?

There is a two-stage process for screening refugees being considered for resettlement. It was described in evidence received by the International Development Committee:

(...). 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 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>49</sup>

The UNHCR carries out extensive screening of those deemed potentially suitable for resettlement in the UK

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<sup>48</sup> [PQ 15220 \[Refugees: Syria\]](#), answered on 17 November 2015

<sup>49</sup> International Development Committee, [Oral evidence](#), *Syrian refugee crisis*, 17 November 2015, HC 463 2015-16, Q74

## What role do local authorities have?

The VPRP matches resettled Syrians with a local authority before their arrival in the UK. Participating local authorities have a central role in Syrians' 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. These include 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 refugees' 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 play a central role in the resettlement of Syrian refugees

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

## 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 previously provided the following detail:

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.

## Who covers the costs of the programme?

The Government committed itself 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. The Government will also provide around a further £130 million by 2019-20 to local authorities to contribute to the costs of supporting refugees beyond their first year in the UK.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Home Office and HM Treasury, '[Home Office's settlement at the Spending Review 2015](#)', 25 November 2015

Further information was provided by an answer to a Parliamentary Question in April 2016:

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>51</sup>

The overseas aid budget covers the costs of a resettled refugee's first 12 months in the UK

## The Community Sponsorship Scheme

On 19 July 2016 the Home Secretary and the Archbishop of Canterbury launched a 'full community sponsorship scheme' with the purpose of empowering and enabling community groups to welcome and support a refugee family resettled in the UK.<sup>52</sup>

[Government guidance for prospective sponsors](#) makes the point that a resettled family's relief at arriving in a safe place will be countered by its grief over what has been left behind, and possibly by survivors' guilt. It is hoped that community sponsors can help by making the refugees feel welcome and helping them to build new lives and to support themselves in the UK.<sup>53</sup>

The Government argue that the successful integration of resettled refugees into UK society can be aided by their new local communities

## 3.5 Parliamentary scrutiny

The International Development Committee published its report [Syrian Refugee Crisis](#) on 5 January 2016.<sup>54</sup> The Committee commended the Government's support in Syria and the surrounding region. At home it urged the Government to urgently explore how to harness offers of support from local community groups and to reconsider cuts to the funding of English languages courses for speakers of other languages (ESOL). It also urged the Government to act on the recommendation of Save the Children to resettle 3,000 of the unaccompanied children in Europe in addition to the 20,000 refugees from the region.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> [PQ HL7797](#), answered on 27 April 2016

<sup>52</sup> Home Office, '[Community sponsorship scheme launched for refugees in the UK](#)', 19 July 2016

<sup>53</sup> Home Office and Department for Communities and Local Government, Full Community Sponsorship Guidance for prospective sponsors, 20 September 2016, page 6

<sup>54</sup> International Development Committee, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), 5 January 2016, HC 463 2015-16

<sup>55</sup> International Development Committee, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), 5 January 2016, HC 463 2015-16, para 63

The Government's response, published in March, confirmed that participating local authorities are required to provide ESOL training to resettled Syrians for twelve months and that there is funding for this. The Government did not accept the Committee's proposal that the UK take 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children from within the EU.<sup>56</sup>

In August 2016 the Home Affairs Committee published its report [Migration Crisis](#) following a year-long inquiry into the challenges presented by the situations in the Mediterranean and in Calais.

The Committee 'warmly welcomed' the UK's contribution to humanitarian relief and described the maintenance of such aid as essential. However it stressed that the UK was 'not absolved' from also providing more direct support for the thousands of Syrian refugees who have already arrived in Europe.<sup>57</sup>

The Committee found a 'two-tier' system among local authorities, with some supporting Syrian refugees and others not doing so. It called on Ministers to take the lead in encouraging a fair distribution of asylum seekers throughout the country by encouraging their own local authorities to take their fair share of refugees.<sup>58</sup>

The Committee also warned that the limited time frames of grants of humanitarian protection may not meet the UK's obligations under the UN Refugee Convention of 1951.<sup>59</sup>

The Committee awaits the Government's response.

The Home Affairs Committee highlighted the unequal contribution between local authorities

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

The following may be useful sources for those interested in providing assistance to resettled Syrian refugees:

- 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.

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<sup>56</sup> International Development Committee, [Syrian refugee crisis: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16](#), 9 March 2016, HC 902 2015-16, page 2

<sup>57</sup> Home Affairs Committee, [Migration Crisis](#), 3 August 2016, HC 24, 2016-17, para 57

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, para 58

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, para 59

- [\*How you can help refugees coming to the UK\*](#) - this page links to charities and relief agencies helping refugees in the UK and abroad.
- [Refugees Welcome Board](#) – The website of a network of faith groups, educational organisations, unions and other civic institutions. The Board was established in response to the current migration crisis across Europe, with a view to supporting refugee resettlement schemes in the UK. Its 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

Separate to those granted humanitarian protection under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme, there were 1,507 grants of asylum (or an alternative form of protection) to Syrian applicants at initial decision in the year ending March 2017. 86% of initial asylum decisions in Syrian cases gave permission to remain in the UK.<sup>60</sup> This is the highest rate of recognition amongst the top ten nationalities applying for asylum in 2016.

All asylum claims are considered on an individual basis and in line with the UK's international obligations.

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 again until 28 February 2018.<sup>61</sup>

The UNHCR has published some [comparative information about Syrian asylum applications](#) made in Europe since April 2011 (as at March 2017). 884,461 applications have been made in Europe: 65% in Germany and Sweden; 21% in Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Bulgaria; and 14% elsewhere.

The Library briefing paper '[Asylum Statistics](#)' includes some general information on the number of Syrian asylum requests received in the EU in recent years.

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<sup>60</sup> Home Office Quarterly Immigration Statistics, [January to March 2017](#), 25 May 2017

<sup>61</sup> Home Office, [Guidance for Syrian nationals in the UK on how to extend their visa](#), last updated 1 March 2017

## 5. UK aid in the region

According to the Department for International Development (DFID), the UK is the third largest bilateral contributor to the humanitarian response in Syria in 2016, and the second largest overall since the start of the response in 2012.<sup>62</sup>

Since 2012 the Government has committed over £2.46 billion in response to the crisis in Syria. This includes allocations to over 30 implementing partners, including UN agencies, international NGOs and the Red Cross. It also includes £46 million allocated under the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) to support local capacity and build stability in the region.<sup>63</sup>

Regular [updates on the UK's response to the Syrian refugee crisis](#) are posted on the GOV.UK website.

On 4 February 2016, the UK, Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the United Nations co-hosted a conference in London on responding to the crisis in Syria. 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>64</sup>

### 5.1 DFID Allocations to Date

By 18 April 2017 DFID had allocated £1.98 billion in response to the Syria crisis. The largest single country destination for the funds is Syria itself (£698 million spent prior to 2017). The other two big destinations are Jordan, where £327 million has been spent and Lebanon, where £337 million has been spent.<sup>65</sup>

The UK's aid so far has supported the provision of:<sup>66</sup>

- 24,996,383 individual monthly food rations
- 9,504,220 relief packages
- 7,140,448 vaccines

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<sup>62</sup> Department for International Development, '[Britain sends lifesaving aid to the people of Aleppo](#)', 16 December 2016

<sup>63</sup> Department for International Development, '[Syria Crisis Response Summary](#)', 18 April 2017

<sup>64</sup> '[Co-hosts declaration from the Supporting Syria & the Region Conference](#)', London, 4 February 2016

<sup>65</sup> Department for International Development, '[Syria Crisis Response Summary](#)', 18 April 2017

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

- 7,919,676 medical consultations

## 5.2 Future Commitments

Following the 'Supporting Syria and the Region' conference in February 2016, then Prime Minister David Cameron announced an extra £1.2bn to be spent between 2016 and 2020, taking the UK's total investment to more than £2.3bn. He gave further details of how UK aid will be spent in the region:

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>67</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>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Prime Minister's Office and Department for International Development, [UK to invest an extra £1.2 billion supporting Syria and the region](#), 4 February 2016

<sup>68</sup> International Development Committee, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), 5 January 2016, HC 463 2015-16, page 29

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