



BRIEFING PAPER

Number 9017, 28 January 2021

Refugee resettlement in the UK: recent developments

By Melanie Gower

Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted the UK's refugee resettlement activities and led to uncertainty over its future resettlement plans.

Resettlements to the UK were put on hold in March 2020 and only began to resume at the end of the year. The Government has recently confirmed that the remaining small number of people due to be resettled in the UK from the conflict in Syria are expected to arrive in early 2021.

The Government has also reaffirmed its intention to launch a new resettlement scheme after the end of the Syrian scheme. The timescale for the new scheme, number of places to be offered, and funding arrangements, remain unconfirmed. Local authorities and other stakeholders are warning that without certainty of the Government's intentions and

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).

funding commitments, they may have to scale back their own commitments in respect of resettled refugees.

This short briefing gives an overview of recent Government statements on the resumption of resettlement in the UK and its plans for a new UK Resettlement Scheme. Commons Library briefing [Refugee Resettlement in the UK](#) (6 March 2020) has more detailed information about the development of refugee resettlement programmes in the UK over the past five years, including the background to the new scheme.

1. Covid-19: Resettlement is suspended for most of 2020

The UK's various refugee resettlement programmes were put on hold from March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Over the course of summer/autumn 2020 many refugee rights campaigners, [including UNHCR](#), were calling on the Government to resume resettlement activities. UNHCR urged states to resettle as many refugees as possible in 2020 and to maintain quotas for 2021. It warned that 2020 was [a record low](#) for refugee resettlement globally.

In early November, the Government [confirmed](#) that work to resettle refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme will resume "shortly". It expects that most people will come arrive from early 2021. The scheme has an overall target to resettle 20,000 people. 19,768 had already been resettled by March 2020, so around a couple of hundred more people might be expected to enter the UK through the scheme in 2021.

The Government [had previously identified several factors](#) which it said would affect the timing of the resumption of activities. Namely:

- Flights restarting from the refugee-hosting countries
- Lifting of travel and other Covid-19 restrictions in the UK and partner countries
- UNHCR and IOM's ability to operate
- The re-opening of UK visa application centres
- The capacity of local authorities and other public bodies to receive resettled refugees, in light of Covid-19
- The UK asylum system's recovery from the impact of Covid-19 disruption

[The Government said](#) that it was continuing to closely monitor the situation and that it maintains regular dialogue with international and domestic stakeholders. It stated that "When the ... conditions have been satisfied we will engage with our local authority partners on their readiness and appetite for restarting resettlement."

Critics contended that local authorities and other stakeholders had been ready to resume participation for some time. [Writing in The House magazine](#) (September 2020), Kate Osamor noted that other aspects of the UK's asylum system, such as removals of unsuccessful applicants, had already resumed in spite of Covid-19. She argued that "The government only seems willing to take the risks of Covid-19 into account when it allows them to pursue anti-refugee policies."

2. The new UK Resettlement Scheme

A new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS, sometimes referred to as the 'global resettlement scheme') had been due to launch in 2020 after the commitments made under the Syrian scheme had been fulfilled. It was due to consolidate and replace most of the UK's previous resettlement programmes.

The Home Office had said (before Covid-19) that the new scheme would aim to resettle around 5000 refugees in its first year of operation. It said that decisions on the number of refugees to be resettled in subsequent years would be determined through future spending rounds.

As with previous schemes, the UKRS was due to prioritise the most vulnerable refugees. There were plans for it to develop a broader geographical coverage than previous schemes.

Local authority involvement

An August 2019 Home Office [note for local authorities](#) gave a broad overview of the then Government's intentions, and encouraged local authorities to submit their offers of places as soon as possible.

It said that an updated policy statement setting out the details of the new scheme would be published before its launch. It is expected to operate broadly in line with the processes established for the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes.

A [Home Office letter to the Lords EU Security and Justice Sub-Committee](#) (September 2020) gave an overview of engagement with local authorities and other stakeholders on the development of the new scheme. In terms of the likely funding available to participating local authorities to cover housing costs, it confirmed:

We will continue to provide a generous funding package which enables local authorities, schools and health partners to provide vulnerable refugees with a safe environment and the chance to rebuild their lives. Additional funding is also made available to help local authorities to address some of the challenges they face; this can be used for exceptional costs incurred by local authorities, including for property adaptations and for sourcing larger properties.

On securing local authority participation in refugee resettlement programmes, the letter noted:

It is important that local authorities consider carefully whether they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration support is provided to resettled refugees and appreciate this may not be possible in all areas across the UK.

We have already had a positive response to our request for pledges for the new scheme and look forward to welcoming more commitments from local authorities in the coming months. We are keen to secure the ongoing support and participation of local government across the UK. We also continue to warmly welcome interest from those authorities who have yet to take part in resettlement and we are working through regional Strategic Migration Partnerships to encourage new authorities to do so.

Current uncertainties

When will the new scheme launch and what will it look like?

Since the advent of Covid-19, there has been uncertainty over the Government's plans to launch the UKRS, and it is unclear whether the previous ambition to resettle 5,000 refugees in the first year of operation still stands.

Towards the end of 2020, answers from the Home Office generated some uncertainty about the Government's future plans. The department said that "Decisions regarding resettlement beyond the completion of [the Syrian scheme] scheme are yet to be made and will need to take account of the impact of COVID-19 and the ongoing pressures on the asylum system ([PO UIN HL 10217](#), answered on 25 November 2020).

Ministers have since confirmed that the Government does still intend to launch a new resettlement programme, although it has not confirmed the timescale for doing so, or the number of places it will offer:

We will continue to honour our commitment to those who have been invited to the UK and we will roll out a new global resettlement scheme in the future, along with a new firm and fair asylum system which will welcome people through safe and legal routes. ([PO UIN139041](#), answered on 21 January 2021)

Reset, the lead organisation for community sponsorship in the UK, [has said that it is not yet known](#) whether the Government's plans will resemble the model for the UKRS previously outlined.

Local authorities and other external stakeholders were already concerned that the Government had not committed funding beyond the scheme's first scheduled year of operation. They [have been calling for](#) a long-term government funding commitment.

The Government had previously indicated that plans for subsequent years would be considered as part of a cross-government spending review. However, the multi-year spending review was subsequently replaced by a one-year spending review, which did not detail the Government's intentions for future refugee resettlement.

Stakeholders [continue to warn](#) that without clarity of the timing of the launch of the UKRS or a long-term funding commitment, they are unable to plan their services to resettled refugees and may have to scale back their existing operations.