



BRIEFING PAPER

Number 06805, 7 March 2016

Syrian refugees and the UK

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Summary

As the Syrian crisis gets ever deeper, there is ongoing pressure for the UK to accept more Syrian refugees. Some 13.5 million Syrians need help in the country, of whom 6.6 million are internally displaced. 4.6 million Syrians have fled abroad, mostly to neighbouring countries in the region.

UNHCR is calling on the international community to provide safe and legal routes for Syrian refugees, including resettlement places for the most vulnerable. It hopes that a ministerial conference on 30 March will result in increased opportunities for Syrian refugees to be admitted to other states, through resettlement and other types of scheme.

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

The scheme first prioritised victims of sexual violence and torture, and the elderly and disabled. The Government initially expected that several hundred refugees would arrive in the UK through the scheme over three years, although there was no fixed quota.

On 7 September 2015, the Prime Minister announced a significant extension of the scheme. The UK is now planning to resettle up to 20,000 refugees from the Syrian region over the next five years. The Government is working out the logistics of the extended scheme with local authorities and the voluntary sector. The Government also announced, on 28 January 2016, that it would work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to lead a new initiative to resettle unaccompanied children from conflict regions. However, the Government does not intend to offer resettlement to refugees already in Europe, or to participate in the refugee relocation schemes being developed by the EU. It argues that it is better to take the most vulnerable refugees directly from the region.

The resettled refugees are given five years' Humanitarian Protection status, with permission to work and access public funds. Official statistics show that 1,337 people had been resettled in the UK under the scheme by the end of December 2015.

It is also possible for Syrians to claim asylum upon arrival or after-entry to the UK. Syrian nationals were the fourth-largest group of asylum applicants in the year ending December 2015 (2,609 main applicants). 85% of initial asylum decisions in Syrian cases gave permission to remain in the UK.

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

A separate Library briefing discusses [The UK's family reunion policies](#). The briefings on [Migration pressures in Europe](#) and [The EU's response to the migration crisis: recent developments](#) discuss the EU's general response to current migration flows to Europe.

Statistics on asylum, including statistics on the Syrian refugee crisis, are available in the Library briefing, [Asylum Statistics](#).

1. The refugee crisis

The United Nations [has estimated](#) that the conflict in Syria has claimed more than 250,000 lives. Syria's development situation has regressed by almost four decades and by the end of 2013, an estimated three in every four Syrians were living in poverty.¹ According to the [UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance](#), as of February 2016, some 13.5 million Syrians need help in the country, of whom 6.6 million are internally displaced; 4.6 million Syrians have fled abroad.²

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

Syrians now constitute the largest refugee population in the world.³ As at 3 March 2016, the UNHCR was aware of around [4.81 million registered refugees](#) in the region (at 17 November 2015: 2.1 million were registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon; and 1.9 million were registered by the Turkish Government).

Lebanon, with its fragile politics and overwhelming refugee flow, is a particular worry.

According to [UNHCR](#), 897,645 asylum applications were made by Syrians in Europe between April 2011 and December 2015.

By the end of 2015, 57% (US\$4,079,683,937) of the total [Syrian crisis funding requirements for 2015](#) (US\$7,213,389,150) had been received.

1.1 UNHCR calls for resettlement help

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.

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

States have pledged over 170,000 places for Syrians since 2013

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. UNHCR has welcomed these as ways of supporting young

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

² Syria's population [was estimated](#) to be around 22 million in 2012.

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

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

Syrians' access to education and training to prevent the creation of a "lost generation".

The European Commission has also urged EU member states to do more, and says that [€6,000 are available](#) from the Commission for each resettled Syrian refugee.

1.2 International responses

A [UNHCR factsheet](#) details the number of resettlement places and other forms of admission offered by the international community for Syrian refugees since 2013 (as at 10 February 2016):

Confirmed pledges (persons) since 2013:	129,418
Additional places/visas granted under Other Legal Forms of Admission:	14,871
Resettlement submissions to the USA:	26,622
TOTAL places made available to date:	170,911

1.3 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 such measures exacerbates refugees' vulnerability and undermines the effectiveness of efforts to prevent them from making dangerous irregular and clandestine journeys and resorting to people smugglers. UNHCR has called on states to develop more safe and legal routes for refugees in need of protection.

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

Examples of ways to provide safe and legal routes

The type of schemes which are commonly suggested are:

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

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

The issue of safe and legal routes is relevant to the UK context. Asylum must be claimed upon arrival or after entering the UK. It is not generally possible to apply for asylum in the UK from overseas, or to obtain a visa with the explicit purpose of seeking asylum in the UK. A visa requirement for Syrian nationals transiting the UK en route to another destination was [announced](#) in March 2012 and [extended](#) in March 2015, in order to “protect the UK’s national and border security”.⁵ Some commentators have also drawn attention to the increase in the [refusal rate for visitor visas](#) for Syrian nationals since the Syrian conflict began.

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

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

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.⁷

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

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

⁶ [HC Deb 3 March 2014 c607W](#)

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

encourage Member States to create such routes, for example by making use of humanitarian visas.

UNHCR ministerial meeting on 30 March

UNHCR [has convened a ministerial meeting](#) on 30 March to discuss “global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees”. It hopes that states will pledge to provide opportunities for the admission of at least 10% of Syrian refugees over the next three years.

The Minister for Syrian Refugees, Richard Harrington, is reportedly attending on behalf of the UK.

A [background note prepared by UNHCR](#) describes the purpose of the meeting as follows:

The primary objective of the event on 30 March 2016 will be to secure pledges for increased opportunities for admission of Syrian refugees. Such pledges would build on the significant efforts that have already been made by a number of States, and the meeting will showcase innovative initiatives that have been developed to provide pathways for the safe and dignified admission of refugees.

Against this background, States may pledge to:

1. Create or expand *humanitarian pathways* for admission, which are specifically designed to provide protection to refugees with compelling needs. Humanitarian pathways for admission may include resettlement/humanitarian admission, private sponsorships, humanitarian visas, and medical evacuation;
2. Facilitate access to *additional pathways* for admission, by creating or expanding opportunities for Syrian refugees to access safety and protection through admission of relatives, academic scholarships and apprenticeships, and labour mobility schemes, or by relaxing or removing certain legal barriers or administrative requirements for admission.

Building on existing pledges, the target is to secure pathways for at least 10 per cent of the Syrian refugee population over the next three years.

The Refugee Council [is calling on its supporters](#) to contact their MPs, to ask them to encourage the Government to offer refugees safe and legal passageway to the UK, “by issuing humanitarian visas, by allowing more refugees to reunite with their loved ones already in Britain and by resettling more people”.

A Westminster Hall debate on ‘UNHCR and pathways for admission for Syrian refugees’, sponsored by Caroline Lucas, will take place on Wednesday 16 March.

2. UK Government policy on resettlement

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

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

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

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

2.1 January 2014: Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme launched

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

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

The VPR initially prioritised for resettlement victims of sexual violence, the elderly, victims of torture, and the disabled. The Government said that it expected [several hundred](#) refugees to arrive over the following three years, but that there would be no quota. The [first group](#) of

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

⁸ 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)

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

resettled refugees arrived in the UK on 25 March 2014. Press reports suggested that this first group consisted of around 10 to 20 people.

Calls to extend the scheme

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

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

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:

While we applaud Britain's generous aid contribution to the crisis, it is clear that aid alone is not enough. Syria's neighbours are struggling under the weight of this unprecedented crisis and it is time we stopped asking of them what we are not doing ourselves.

We are therefore calling on rich and developed countries to agree collectively to resettle at least 5% of the total Syrian refugee population by the end of 2015. This is a modest but proportionate contribution and Britain's fair share of that would involve offering hope for up to 10,000 Syrians in that time. That's less than 0.3% of all the refugees, but would transform, even save, lives.¹⁴

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

2.2 September 2015: Extension of the scheme

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

- Up to 20,000 Syrian refugees will be resettled in the UK over the course of this Parliament.
- Resettlement will be offered to Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, rather than to those who have already travelled to Europe.
- The criteria for resettlement under the scheme will be significantly expanded, including to give particular recognition to the needs of children (including orphaned children, if resettlement is recommended by UNHCR).

Campaigners continued to call on the Government to provide more resettlement places

The scheme is being extended, to offer resettlement in the UK to up to 20,000 refugees over the next five years

¹⁰ 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

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

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

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

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

- Some Yazidi and Christian refugees may fall within the scheme's definition of 'vulnerability' (although the scheme will not distinguish on the basis of religion).
- The full costs of resettlement for the first year will be met from the international aid budget, in order to ease the pressure on local authorities.

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

The Scottish Government and local authorities have offered to resettle at least 2,000 of the Syrian refugees in Scotland.¹⁵

The Home Secretary gave a brief update on progress in an [oral statement on 16 September](#). She confirmed that plans were proceeding "at pace", and that the first wave of new arrivals were expected to arrive in the coming days.¹⁶ Regular [updates on the UK's response to the Syrian refugee crisis](#) are being posted on the GOV.UK website, alongside guidance on [how members of the public, local authorities and other parts of civil society can help](#).

The Scottish Government and local authorities have offered to resettle at least 2,000 Syrians in Scotland

Reactions to the extension of the scheme

The increase in the number of places available to Syrian refugees has been broadly welcomed, although the Government continues to receive calls to further expand the number of resettlement places on offer. In October 2015, 84 Church of England Bishops wrote to the Prime Minister calling for the UK to offer at least 50,000 places to refugees.¹⁷ [Over 300 lawyers, academics and retired judges](#) have also criticised the Government's response thus far as inadequate.

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

The programme needs to be frontloaded as the crisis is now and the expansion must happen as a matter of urgency as people are living in desperate situations in the region and cannot wait until 2020 to reach safety.

It also called on the Government to provide other routes for refugees seeking safety in the UK:

Today's announcement will not, however, help those who are standing on the shores of Libya, contemplating boarding a rickety boat, in a desperate attempt to reach family members already living in safety in the UK. We call on the Prime Minister to

¹⁵ Scottish Government, '[Scotland stands ready to welcome refugees](#)', 13 September 2015; COSLA, '[Scotland's councils ready to take at least 2,000 refugees](#)', 2 October 2015

¹⁶ HC Deb 16 September 2015 c1050

¹⁷ BBC News, '[Syrian refugees: Bishops urge David Cameron to do more](#)', 18 October 2015

introduce other ways to allow refugees to reach the UK without having to put their lives in jeopardy.

2.3 Unaccompanied refugee children

The Government has faced pressure from Save The Children and across political parties to resettle 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children already in Europe. [EDM 666](#) supports this call. The International Development Committee also raised concerns about the plight of unaccompanied children in Europe, and said it would welcome a decision to resettle 3,000 unaccompanied children, in addition to the Government's commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees from the region.¹⁸

Government announces new initiative to resettle unaccompanied children from conflict regions

[James Brokenshire](#), the Minister of State for Immigration, confirmed via a [written statement on 28 January](#) 2016, that the Government would work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to lead a new initiative to resettle unaccompanied children from conflict regions:

We have asked the UNHCR to make an assessment of the numbers and needs of unaccompanied children in conflict regions and advise on when it is in the best interests of the child to be resettled in the UK and how that process should be managed. The UNHCR has already been clear that these are likely to be exceptional cases.¹⁹

He also announced a new fund of up to £10 million to support the needs of vulnerable unaccompanied refugee children in Europe. The support will offer safe places to children at risk, counselling and legal advice, and help with tracing children to their families.

In responding to the Government's announcement the Local Government Association (LGA) emphasised the importance of ensuring sufficient capacity to support vulnerable children:

Councils have a strong track record of supporting vulnerable children, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and stand ready to provide care and support to those who need it.

However, it is vital that any increased resettlement programme is phased over time and planned in full partnership with councils across the country to ensure that services are able to cope with this additional demand. Any scheme would also need to provide sufficient funding and be aligned to existing schemes for resettling refugees and asylum seeking children to ensure there is sufficient capacity to support vulnerable children. In particular, we need to ensure local areas can recruit and train enough foster carers to provide the support and care needed by this particularly vulnerable group.²⁰

James Brokenshire hosted a [roundtable event](#) for NGOs and local authorities on 11 February 2016 to discuss how best to provide support for unaccompanied refugee children.

¹⁸ International Development Committee, [Syrian Refugee Crisis](#), 5 January 2016, HC 463, para 63

¹⁹ [HCWS497](#) [Resettlement of unaccompanied refugee children], 28 January 2016

²⁰ ['LGA responds to government announcement on unaccompanied asylum seeking children'](#), Local Government Association, 28 January 2016

2.4 The UK's decision to 'opt-out' from the EU's relocation proposal

The European Union is also trying to develop an appropriate response to the refugee crisis, against a backdrop of significant migration [pressures in the Mediterranean](#) and across the EU. Syrians were the largest group of irregular migrants seeking entry to the EU in 2014, according to the EU's external border agency (Frontex).²¹

The measures proposed by the European Commission include:

- An emergency relocation scheme over the next two years, which would move 160,000 asylum seekers of specified nationalities (including Syrians) from Italy, Greece and Hungary to other Member States; and
- An extension of EU refugee resettlement schemes, so that over the next two years, Member States resettle 20,000 people from outside the EU who are recognised by UNHCR as being in need of international protection.²²

The UK Government has consistently said that it will not participate in the EU's relocation proposal. Library briefing, [The EU's response to the migration crisis: recent developments](#), provides an update on recent developments in the EU's response to the migration crisis.

²¹ FRONTEX, '[FRONTEX Publishes Annual Risk Analysis 2015](#)', 28 April 2015

²² European Commission, *press release*, '[European Commission makes progress on Agenda on Migration](#)', IP/15/5039, 27 May 2015

3. In detail: the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme

A [Home Office guidance document](#) for local authorities and partners, published on 28 October 2015, and the Local Government Association's website [page on Refugees](#) (which much of the following section draws on) give some more detailed background information.

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

Shortly after announcing the extension of the scheme in September 2015, the Government indicated that it was aiming to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees in the UK before the end of 2015.²³ As at the end of December 2015, 1,337 Syrians had been resettled in the UK under the VPRS.²⁴ Updated statistics are published quarterly, in the Home Office's [quarterly statistical releases](#).

The Government met its commitment to resettle 1,000 refugees by the end of 2015

3.2 How does the programme operate in practice?

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

What are the eligibility criteria for consideration under the VPR programme?

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

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

²³ [HC Deb 19 October 2015 c661](#)

²⁴ Home Office Quarterly Immigration Statistics, [Q4 October to December 2015](#), 25 February 2016

The UNHCR identifies and proposes Syrian refugees for the Vulnerable Persons 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.²⁵

What security checks are refugees subject to?

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

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

They then refer to the UK Government, which will then re-register biometrics, including taking other biometric details and bio-data that UNHCR will not have taken. As the Minister said, we will then run further checks, which check for all of those similar 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. UNHCR does get into quite a lot of detail, but we do not leave it at that and the UK Government will then follow up with a further round of checking. All of this, I should be clear, is before we accept the referral and certainly prior to any arrival in the United Kingdom.²⁶

What immigration status do resettled refugees have?

The resettled refugees are granted five years' Humanitarian Protection status and have access to public funds and the labour market. They are eligible to apply for family reunion for immediate family members, in accordance with the Immigration Rules. The Government has indicated that at the end of the five years, they will be eligible to apply for permanent settlement in the UK.²⁷

What role do local authorities have?

Local authorities' participation in the VPR scheme is voluntary. Those that do participate have a central role in refugees' resettlement post-arrival in the UK, as detailed in a [statement of requirements](#). They are required to ensure a range of services for resettled refugees, including a meet and greet service at the airport, accommodation, and assistance in accessing welfare benefits, education, employment and other integration services in accordance with a personalised support plan for the refugee/family's first 12 months in the UK. Local authorities may make use of accommodation in the private rented sector.

Local authorities' participation in the programme is voluntary

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

²⁵ [PO 15220 \[Refugees: Syria\]](#), answered on 17 November 2015

²⁶ International Development Committee, Oral evidence, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), 17 November 2015 HC 463, Q74

²⁷ [HC Deb 7 September 2015 c44](#)

How will refugees be resettled across the UK?

The VPR programme seeks to match refugees with a local authority before their arrival in the UK. Information gathered prior to the refugee's arrival in the UK (such as medical history and specific needs) is used to inform decisions as to where they will be resettled (e.g. in order to ensure suitable accommodation and care will be available).

Pressed for details on the criteria that will be used to determine the resettlement of refugees across the UK, the Home Secretary said on 16 September 2015:

Mrs May: There will be a balance between the offers of accommodation and the availability of the appropriate support for individuals. It is a careful process to ensure that individuals are placed where their needs can be best met. For example, it might be appropriate for somebody with a particular medical need to be in the vicinity of a hospital with such a specialty. It is not a question of allocating on a quota basis across the UK It is important to fit the offers of support to the needs of the individuals.²⁸

Resettled refugees will be matched with areas with available accommodation and appropriate support structures

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

Who will cover the costs of the programme?

The Government has committed to covering the costs of resettled refugees' first year in the UK (excluding economic integration activities) from the international aid budget. Over £460 million of the overseas aid budget has been allocated across the statutory sector for this purpose by 2019-20. An additional £130 million will be provided to local authorities by 2019-20, to contribute to costs incurred during refugees' following four years in the UK.²⁹ This will include an 'extreme cases' fund to assist with high cost cases. The Local Government Association is calling on the Government to commit to reviewing costs after 18 months.³⁰ The Government is considering how funding flows might be affected in the event that refugees move away from the area where they were resettled.

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

How might the programme be further extended in the future?

The Government's response to the Home Affairs Committee report on [The Work of the Immigration Directorates \(Q2 2015\)](#) reports that:

Our teams continue to work with local authorities and international partners to focus efforts on the most vulnerable people and ensure they are resettled in the UK properly. Plans are also being made to significantly increase arrivals next year. The scale of the expansion needs careful planning to ensure we get it right, for the refugees and local communities.³¹

²⁸ [HC Deb 16 Sep 2015 c1065](#)

²⁹ GOV.UK, news, '[Home Office's settlement at the Spending Review 2015](#)', 25 November 2015

³⁰ LGA, press release, '[Councils respond to Syrian refugees funding announcement](#)', 25 November 2015

³¹ Home Affairs Committee, [Government Response to the Home Affairs Committee's Second Report of Session 2015-16](#), 21 December 2015, HC 693, page 6

The Government's response also confirms that offers of assistance from members of the public and civil society organisations will be incorporated into the programme:

The generosity shown by British organisations and families who have offered to shelter Syrian refugees in their own properties over the last few months has been both typical of the British spirit and extraordinary in its sentiment. To help turn these acts of humanity into reality, the Home Secretary has announced that we will be establishing a register of people and organisations that can provide houses for the settlement of refugees.

We will also develop a community sponsorship scheme, learning from similar schemes in Canada and Australia, to allow individuals, charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to support refugees directly. We will use the aid budget and other funds to take the pressure away from local services and make sure councils have the money they need.³²

3.3 Parliamentary scrutiny

The International Development Committee published a report of its [inquiry into the 'Syrian Refugee Crisis'](#) on 5 January 2015.³³ The Committee makes several recommendations including, with regard to resettlement in the UK:

The Government should be prepared for the possibility that the speed of resettlements may take on greater urgency. The Government should also explore urgently how to better harness the substantial goodwill and offers of support for Syrian refugees, from local community groups within the UK seeking to support refugees settled here. (Paragraph 65)

We support the Minister's proposal of a skills matching scheme to help refugees transition into working life in the UK, but we are concerned about cuts to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) funding. The long waiting lists are evidence that demand already outstrips supply. We urge the Government to reconsider the cuts to ESOL funding as we believe that they are counterproductive to integration plans. (Paragraph 67)

The Government has not yet formally responded to the Committee.

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

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

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

- GOV.UK, '[Syrian refugees: what you can do to help](#)' – this page identifies various ways in which members of the public can offer support to refugees. The Government is not seeking offers of

³² Home Affairs Committee, [Government Response to the Home Affairs Committee's Second Report of Session 2015-16](#), 21 December 2015, HC 693, page 7

³³ International Development Committee, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), HC 463, 5 January 2015

spare rooms in private households to accommodate resettled Syrian refugees, but local authorities are registering offers of assistance from registered landlords.

- [Refugees Welcome Board](#) – a network of faith groups, educational organisations, unions and other civic institutions. It was established in response to the current migration crisis across Europe, with a view to supporting refugee resettlement schemes in the UK. The website identifies various ways in which members of the public can help, including lobbying and campaigning activities, volunteering, donating money or goods, and offering housing.
- [Scotland Welcomes Refugees](#) – a website supported by members of Scotland’s taskforce for coordinating Scotland’s humanitarian and practical response to the refugee crisis, which includes information for members of the public on how they can get involved.

4. Syrian asylum claims made in the UK

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

Syrian nationals were the fourth-largest group of asylum applicants in the [year ending December 2015](#) (2,609 main applicants). 85% of initial asylum decisions in Syrian cases gave permission to remain in the UK. This is the highest rate of recognition amongst the top five nationalities applying for asylum in that year.³⁴

As discussed in section 1.3 of this briefing, there are practical obstacles to accessing asylum in the UK.

Separate to the asylum route, a [temporary concession](#) allows Syrians who are already in the UK to apply for an extension to their visa or switch into a different visa category, without having to leave the UK. The concession was first introduced in October 2012, and has been extended until 28 February 2017.³⁵

The UNHCR has published some [comparative information about Syrian asylum applications](#) made in Europe since April 2011 (as at December 2015). 897,645 applications have been made in Europe: 59% in Serbia (and Kosovo) and Germany; 29% in Sweden, Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, and Denmark; 12% elsewhere. The separate Library briefing on [Asylum Statistics](#) includes some general information on the number of Syrian asylum requests received in the EU in recent years.

85% of initial asylum decisions for Syrians gave permission to remain in the UK (in the year ending December 2015)

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

³⁴ [Immigration statistics](#), October to December 2015, 25 February 2016

³⁵ Home Office, [Guidance for Syrian nationals in the UK on how to extend their visa](#), 29 February 2016

5. UK aid in the region

The UK is the second largest bilateral donor to the Syrian refugee crisis. According to the Department for International Development (DFID), the [UK has committed over £2.3 billion](#) to help refugees in the region, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, since 2012. This includes allocations to over 30 implementing partners, including UN agencies, international NGOs and the Red Cross. In addition, DFID has allocated £9.5 million from the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund to support local capacity and build longer-term stability.³⁶ Regular [updates on the UK's response to the Syrian refugee crisis](#) are posted on the GOV.UK website.

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

On 4 February 2016, the UK, Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the United Nations co-hosted a conference on the Syria crisis in London. The 'Supporting Syria and the Region' conference involved world leaders, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and civil society, with the aim of raising significant new funding to meet the immediate and longer-term needs of those affected. The conference raised over US\$11 billion in pledges - \$5.8 billion for 2016 and a further \$5.4 billion for 2017-20 to enable forward planning. The conference also set goals on education and economic opportunities to transform the lives of refugees caught up in the Syrian crisis, and to support the countries hosting them.³⁷

DFID Allocations to Date

By September 2015 the Government had committed more than £1.12 billion in response to the Syria crisis.³⁸

The largest single country destination for the funds is Syria itself (£498 million spent). The other two big destinations are Lebanon, where £231 million has been spent, and Jordan, where £177 million has been spent. The UK's aid so far has included supplying: 20m food rations; clean water to 1.6m people; 2.5m medical consultations; 4.6m relief packages; and help with sanitation and hygiene to 7.2m people.³⁹

Future Commitments

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

³⁶ DFID, [Factsheet, The UK's humanitarian aid response to the Syria crisis](#), 11 February 2016

³⁷ [Co-hosts declaration from the Supporting Syria & the Region Conference](#), London, 4 February 2016

³⁸ DFID and the Prime Minister, [UK pledges £115m as PM calls on EU to provide more aid for Syrian conflict](#), 23 September 2015

³⁹ Prime Minister's Office and DFID, [UK to invest an extra £1.2 billion supporting Syria and the region](#), 4 February 2016

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

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

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

And we can provide the sense of hope needed to stop people thinking they have no option but to risk their lives on a dangerous journey to Europe.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Prime Minister's Office and DFID, [UK to invest an extra £1.2 billion supporting Syria and the region](#), 4 February 2016

⁴¹ International Development Committee, [Syrian refugee crisis](#), 5 January 2016, HC 463, page 29

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