

# Local Government Association briefing

## Debate on the experience of new refugees in the UK

### 19 July 2017



#### Key messages

- Local government have an excellent track record in welcoming asylum seekers and refugees. Councils and their partners will be helping some of the most vulnerable families access ongoing support services to help them cope with injuries, disabilities and recover from the severe trauma they may have experienced.
- Councils continue to work hard to support the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme alongside all the other schemes in current operation. Over 5,453 Syrians were resettled in under the scheme by March 2017 across 235 authorities.<sup>1</sup> We are confident that there will be sufficient pledges to support the Government's aim to resettle 20,000 people by 2020 and the focus should be now on ensuring families are well supported.
- We welcome the funding announced to contribute to local activity to resettle Syrian refugees and the recent announcement of additional funding for English as a Second Language (ESOL) for the Syrian programme, given access to ESOL is crucial to resettlement.
- There are multiple different schemes in operation for supporting refugees and there are also thousands of asylum seekers who are not housed by councils, but who rely on council services. Clear links need to be made across all the programmes that resettle asylum seekers and refugees to make sure there is enough funding and support available.

#### Further information

##### Local authority support for the Resettlement Programme

Local authorities are the primary point of engagement for identifying where refugees are to be resettled, and lead on work with local partners and communities to help families settle into their new homes. As outlined in the recent Public Accounts Committee report building on the positive National Audit Office report on the Syrian Resettlement programme has been broadly a positive experience for local authorities.<sup>2</sup>

On 3 July 2017 Government announced<sup>3</sup> that it was expanding the remit of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme to include the most vulnerable refugees in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region whatever their nationality. The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme will no longer focus

<sup>1</sup> Immigration statistics, January to March 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2017>

<sup>2</sup> Public Accounts Committee, *The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme* <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/768/76802.htm>;  
National Audit Office, *The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme* <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-syrian-vulnerable-persons-resettlement-programme/>

<sup>3</sup> Resettlement: Written statement – HCWS23, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-07-03/HCWS23/>

just on those with Syrian nationality with immediate effect, but will include those who have fled the Syrian conflict and cannot safely return to their country of origin. The commitment to resettle the 23,000 refugees via the previous schemes will remain, as will the current tariff.

The LGA and local authorities will continue to work with central government as the resettlement programme develops. Local authorities are working hard to ensure that resettlement offers match people's requirements, including for any housing, care and health needs, and for school places. They work with the health sector to help those who will need ongoing support to cope with injuries, disabilities and any trauma they have experienced. Local authorities also work with businesses, faith, community and voluntary sector leaders to support access to employment and integration into new communities.

We have welcomed the more regional approach to resettling refugees, rather than a case-by-case model controlled centrally. As well as a more effective use of resources, regional coordination can help facilitate the exchange of good practice both within the UK and internationally, particularly around supporting integration and helping people into employment. Ensuring refugees achieve self-sufficiency will be crucial, both for their own wellbeing and because the funding package for their support reduces in each of the five years.

The views of refugees themselves will be crucial in assessing the effectiveness or not of the programme. The developing evaluation process will also involve case workers and refugees directly and should look at outcomes achieved for refugees both integration immediately post arrival and in the long term.

There are multiple schemes in operation for supporting refugees and there are also thousands of asylum seekers who are not housed by councils but who rely on council services. Clear links need to be made across all the programmes that resettle asylum seekers and refugees to make sure there is enough funding and support services available. It is vital that all schemes are fully aligned, and funded, to ensure councils are able to offer proper support and are able to continue to provide vital services for their community.

Learning from the experiences of those people recently resettled and integrated could be benefit other programmes and other groups of refugees and asylum seeking families: recognition of local authority leadership; letting regions and local areas decide the arrangements that work best for them; securing access to ESOL and mental health services; and the importance of long term funding.

## **Funding**

Councils will receive a contribution to their costs for five years. The Chancellor announced that over £460 million of the overseas aid budget will be used by 2019-20 across the statutory sector to assist with first year costs. The Government will provide around a further £130 million by 2019-20 to local authorities to contribute to the costs of supporting refugees up to their fifth year, including an 'extreme cases' fund that will assist with high cost cases. Other statutory services will receive funding via the normal routes after year one.

In September 2016 the Home Office also announced a £10m funding package to increase the existing English language tuition for those arriving under the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The additional funding for English language training will mean all adults arriving through the scheme will receive an extra 12 hours a week of tuition for up to six months. Regional

Strategic Migration Partnerships will also be funded support this aspect of the programme.

We welcome the funding announced to contribute to local activity to resettle Syrian refugees and the recent announcement of additional funding for English as a Second Language (ESOL) for the Syrian programme, given access to ESOL is crucial to resettlement. The flexibility in how both of these can be spent will allow for newly resettled and newly recognised refugees to integrate and have their differing needs met.

### **Support for unaccompanied children**

Councils, working with central government, national partners and regional bodies, have shown great leadership in building additional capacity for unaccompanied children seeking asylum. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was introduced to ensure each region takes a proportion of unaccompanied children in order to achieve a more equal distribution across the UK.

A report by the Association of Directors of Children's Services' found that the higher funding rates available from July 2016 cover on average just 50 per cent of the cost to councils of caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).<sup>4</sup> This funding only contributes to the cost of the actual placement and leaves little or no money for the local authority's statutory duties towards the child.

The ongoing challenges facing local government include the availability of foster care placements, school places, therapeutic services, places to learn English, legal advice, and translation services. We need joined up communication across government and other partners to enable access to these services. More information in advance on the needs of individual children will allow for effective matching with the placements available.

### **Asylum Seekers**

Those who claim asylum after they arrive in the UK go through a different process and receive a different immigration status than those settled under resettlement schemes. Those unable to support themselves are dispersed into accommodation throughout the UK and given an allowance to live on while their claims are considered, both funded by the government. The decision by a local authority to become a dispersal area is voluntary and there are agreed 'cluster limits' in terms of the number of asylum seekers per population that can be placed in any area. The majority of decisions are made in favour of granting asylum but support for those given status to stay in the UK and integrate in communities is limited.

The Home Office is designing, developing and procuring the future model for asylum accommodation and support, replacing the existing COMPASS arrangements. The offers a chance to develop an 'end-to-end process, including the provision welfare services and 'move on' support and a more strategic role for local authorities as community leaders.

### **Syrian resettlement programme**

It was announced on 7 September 2015 that Britain would resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the rest of the Parliament.<sup>5</sup> The UK has been involved in an

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<sup>4</sup> Association of Directors of Children's Services, *Thematic report on unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children*, <http://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/adcs-thematic-report-on-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-and-refugee-children>

<sup>5</sup>Syria: refugees and counter-terrorism – Prime Minister's statement  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/syria-refugees-and-counter-terrorism-prime-ministers-statement>

existing scheme to resettle Syrian refugees for a couple of years. Quarterly Immigration Statistics outline the numbers of arrivals under the scheme.<sup>6</sup> Refugees will be taken from the camps in the countries neighbouring Syria.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will continue to refer people to the scheme. The UK sets the criteria. It currently prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women, children and young people at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence, refugees with legal and/or physical protection needs; refugees with medical needs or disabilities; persons at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; and refugees with family links in resettlement countries.

Refugees will be granted refugee status for five years. This will entitle them to access to public funds, access to the labour market and the possibility of a family reunion.

### **Sharing best practice**

We are sharing information and best practice via our refugee resource page on our website,<sup>7</sup> through funded regional events, by setting up a 'Knowledge Hub'; and by commissioning a 'how to' resource on supporting the refugee resettlement.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Home Office, migration statistics <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/migration-statistics>

<sup>7</sup> LGA, Refugees and asylum seekers, <https://local.gov.uk/topics/communities/refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

<sup>8</sup> LGA, Syrian refugee resettlement: A guide for local authorities, <https://www.local.gov.uk/syrian-refugee-resettlement-guide-local-authorities>