

Local Government Association briefing

Local Authority support for the Syrian Resettlement Programme

January 2017



Key messages

- Councils have an excellent track record in welcoming asylum seeking and refugee children, as well as their families, and continue to work hard to support the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme alongside all the other schemes in current operation.
- Over 4,000 Syrians were resettled in under the scheme in the 12 months to the end of September 2016. We are confident that there will be sufficient pledges to support the Government's aim to resettle 20,000 people by 2020.
- The focus should be now on ensuring families are well supported. 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.
- The LGA has supported the announcement of funding to contribute to the costs of supporting refugees up to their fifth year to support 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 services available.

Background

It was announced on 7 September 2015 that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the rest of the Parliament.¹ Quarterly Immigration Statistics outline the numbers of arrivals under the scheme.² Figures published on 1 December indicated that a total of 4,414 Syrians have been resettled under the scheme since it began, 4,162 of these arriving in the 12 months to the end of September 2016.³

Refugees will be taken from the camps in the countries neighbouring Syria. The UK has been involved in an existing scheme to resettle Syrian refugees for a couple of years.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/syria-refugees-and-counter-terrorism-prime-ministers-statement>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/migration-statistics>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-july-to-september-2016>

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 a five year humanitarian protection visa. This will entitle them to access to public funds, access to the labour market and the possibility of a family reunion.

Local Authority support for the Programme

Local authorities are the primary point of engagement for identifying where refugees are to be resettled, and the lead on work with local partners and local 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.⁴

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. Local authorities work with partner organisations in the health sector to help those who will need ongoing support to cope with injuries, disabilities and any trauma they have experienced; and with local 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 tapered funding package that contributes to the costs of 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.

The LGA and local authorities will continue to work with central government as the resettlement programme develops in 2017 and beyond.

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

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<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/768/76802.htm>;
<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-syrian-vulnerable-persons-resettlement-programme/>

provide vital services for their local community.

There is learning from the resettlement and integration of this cohort that could be usefully shared across other programmes and for 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. Government will provide around a further £130 million by 2019-20 just 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.

The Home Office also announced in September 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.

The LGA has supported the announcement of funding to contribute to the costs of supporting refugees up to their fifth year to support 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 also will allow for newly resettled and newly recognised refugees to integrate and have their differing needs met.

Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Programme

The Minister announced on 21 April 2016 that an additional 3,000 children would be resettled in the UK from the Middle East and North Africa region over the lifetime of this Parliament. Government's intention is to resettle several hundred as part of this programme in its first year. This programme will include refugee 'children at risk' as defined by UNHCR and if UNHCR deems the resettlement is in the child's best interest.

Following recommendations from UNHCR, the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Programme (VCRS) will not just target unaccompanied children deemed at risk, but also include children to be resettled with their family members or carers where appropriate. The 3,000 figure thus will include any adults resettled with children. It is expected that only a small number of this cohort will be unaccompanied children.

Local authorities have been asked to confirm with their Regional Strategic Migration Partnership whether they would be able to settle these families, and the offers of accommodation they would be able to make.⁵ Local authorities may decide to see this group as part of its existing pledges or be seen as a new commitment that will need separate pledges.

⁵ <http://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/uasc-and-refugee-children-letter-from-immigration-minister>

The key difference between this scheme and the SVPR is that this scheme is open to all nationalities in the region in need of protection, due to the vulnerability of a child or children. Cases will be resettled from the existing host countries for the Syrian scheme: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.

Children arriving in families will receive the same funding levels as the current Syrian scheme, with the access to the exceptional circumstances fund; will be granted five years 'Humanitarian Protection', with the same rights to family reunification; and will arrive and then be supported via the same process as the Syrian families.

Further information

The LGA is sharing information and good practice via our refugee resource page on the LGA website,⁶ funded regional events, set up a 'Knowledge Hub' to share good practice; and commissioned a 'how to' resource on supporting the refugee resettlement.⁷

⁶ <http://www.local.gov.uk/refugees>

⁷ http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/publications/-/journal_content/56/10180/7875053/PUBLICATION