



# In-depth Briefing

## Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme

### What has the government announced?

The Prime Minister announced to the House of Commons in September that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years. The refugees will be taken from the camps in the countries neighbouring Syria using the established process. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will refer people to the scheme. The Home Office and Department for Communities and Local Government will be working with local authorities and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales to agree details of the arrangements to house and support the refugees.

### Background

The UK Government works in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to operate three resettlement programmes. These programmes operate in addition to the normal asylum process.

- The Gateway Protection Programme offers a route for up to 750 refugees to settle in the UK each year.
- Mandate is designed to resettle individual refugees who have a close family member in the UK who is willing to accommodate them.
- The Syrian Vulnerable Persons scheme was launched in January 2014 and targets support for refugees specifically on the basis of their vulnerability. Between March 2014 and the end of June 2015 (the last published figures), 216 people were relocated to the UK under the Syrian VPR scheme.

In September 2015, the Government announced that the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons scheme would be expanded with the intention of settling up to 20,000 Syrians in need of protection during



this Parliament. This is in addition to those resettled under Gateway and Mandate and those who receive protection through normal asylum procedures. The Home Office will seek assistance from the devolved administrations to engage local authorities around possible participation in the current resettlement scheme with a view to many more refugees arriving before the end of the year.

## **The Welsh Context**

Wales does not currently take part in the Gateway Protection Programme. In response to the current call for Britain to accept more numbers of Syrian vulnerable refugees, the Welsh Government has set up a Syrian Refugee Taskforce chaired by Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, to lead on a Wales-wide approach by co-ordinating the work of all organisations to ensure that Syrian refugees are resettled in Wales as efficiently as possible.

An Operations Board which brings together a coalition of organisations from across the sector has also been formed to work on the ground to identify and provide support needs.

It is understood that a number of local authorities in Wales have registered their interest to resettle refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. Details of this are being worked out through the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership which is coordinating the process with local authorities.

## **How does the programme work?**

The Syrian Vulnerable Persons scheme is targeted at people living in refugee camps in the region. The humanitarian criteria will be broadened to include other vulnerable categories previously excluded. It still will continue to focus on the most vulnerable. The expanded scheme will include those already placed and to be placed under the existing scheme. It is focused on helping those in greatest need and prioritises people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of torture and violence, and women and children at risk.

The aim of the scheme is to place vulnerable people as quickly as possible in the areas that can best meet their needs. Government are working with the Local Government Association (LGA), local authorities, UNHCR (the UN's refugee agency) and others to simplify and quicken the means in which families and individuals are processed through the current scheme and to minimise any impacts on existing communities.

The cost of supporting the refugees in their first year in Britain will be funded from foreign aid spending. To ensure that local authorities can plan ahead and continue to respond, Home Office will



also provide additional funding to assist with costs incurred in future years.

Based on the criteria set by the UK Government, the UNHCR identifies and submits potential cases for consideration and screening. Selected families are brought directly to the UK with their documentation already arranged.

Further details can be found in this Home Office factsheet:

<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11411/Home+Office+Syrian+Resettlement+Fact+Sheet/a f2652cc-238a-4bd4-9c2a-ef23ef52662e>

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.

### **What is the status of those arriving under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons scheme?**

Refugees will be granted a five year humanitarian protection visa. This will entitle them access to public funds, access to the labour market and the possibility of a family reunion. This scheme will continue to run alongside other resettlement schemes and other asylum procedures. Refugees arriving in the first months of this scheme are unlikely to include unaccompanied children. Unaccompanied children will be resettled through a scheme designed specifically for their needs.

### **What should local authorities who are interested in resettling refugees do?**

In Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) sits on the strategic coordination Task Force, and Wales Migration Partnership will coordinate offers from councils. As such, offers of council support should be communicated to Wales Migration Partnership who will pass on relevant information to the LGA for a central record. Any housing associations who may want to participate in the scheme can contact their local councils.

### **What if an area is new to resettlement?**

Local authorities are encouraged to think carefully about whether they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration of refugees. It would be worth speaking to existing resettlement areas to learn best practice. The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) can put you in touch.



## **How can local authorities find out more about the profiles and needs of the refugees they will be hosting?**

All cases will differ and it is very difficult to generalise. As soon as a local authority wants to participate, Home Office will send these referrals that give detailed information on the individual cases. If authorities want a particular make up of cases, they should state this and efforts will be made to best match cases.

## **What offers of help are needed?**

Between March 2014 and the end of June 2015, 216 people were relocated to the UK under the Syrian VPR scheme. A significant scaling up of existing arrangements is needed in order to resettle up to 20,000 refugees over the next five years. The Government expects that when the scheme has reached full capacity, several hundred refugees will be brought into the country each month.

The Home Office and Department for Communities and Local Government are working with local authorities and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales to put in arrangements in place to house and support refugees. Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) are taking the lead on coordinating offers of support.

The types of help and support needed will vary in different parts of the country and the SMPs will be able to advise of specific local needs. The types of housing support which are likely to be needed include:

- Temporary housing – it is likely that additional temporary housing, to offer initial reception accommodation and facilities, will need to be found to support the arrival of higher numbers of refugees.
- Access to accommodation which can be offered furnished on fixed-term tenancies.
- Access to accommodation which is affordable under current benefit rules (e.g. the benefit cap).

In addition to helping to meet accommodation needs, housing associations may also be able to offer other support, such as working with local communities or supporting refugees to access employment. Refugee Action has set out its view on what a success resettlement programme looks like; this may help housing associations think about where they could provide additional support. Refugee Action states that a successful programme must:

- Fund all essential costs such as health, education, community care and English classes
- Provide expert support to refugees to enable them to overcome traumatic experiences



- Provide information and support dialogue with the host communities where people will be settling
- Help refugees to become independent, in particular through finding employment
- Enable local people to play a part in supporting refugees, with appropriate training and support

### Who to contact?

Wales Strategic Migration Partnership  
Anne Hubbard at WLGA - [Anne.hubbard@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:Anne.hubbard@wlga.gov.uk)

### Sharing Experiences

We know that many housing associations are already providing housing and support to refugees and we want to help share examples of good practice across the sector. We are also interested in hearing about any barriers you may have come across which prevent or make it harder for you to offer support.

If you are interested in providing further information or a case study, please contact Selina Moyo on [selina-moyo@chcymru.org.uk](mailto:selina-moyo@chcymru.org.uk).

### Some organisations offering support to refugees in Wales:

- Welsh Refugee Council - <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/>
- OXFAM Cymru - <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/cymru/blog>
- Oasis - <http://oasiscardiff.org/meet-the-team/>
- Bethel Community Church - <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/build-partnerships/bethel-community-church>
- British Red Cross - <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/build-partnerships/british-red-cross>
- Cardiff Destitution Network - <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/build-partnerships/cardiff-destitution-network>
- City of Sanctuary - <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/build-partnerships/city-of-sanctuary>

Members of the Community Housing Cymru Group:  
Aelodau Grŵp Cartrefi Cymunedol Cymru:



- DPiA - <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/build-partnerships/dpia>
- [Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group](#)

### Useful links

- Government announcements - <https://www.gov.uk/government/world/syria>
- Local Government Association - <http://www.local.gov.uk/refugees>
- CIH blog - [http://www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/Syrian\\_refugees - what can social landlords do to help](http://www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/Syrian_refugees_-_what_can_social_landlords_do_to_help)
- CIH publication - [http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/Housing and migration A UK guide to issues and solutions](http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/Housing_and_migration_A_UK_guide_to_issues_and_solutions)
- Housing Rights website - <http://www.housing-rights.info/index.php>

### Community Housing Cymru Group October 2015

Members of the Community Housing Cymru Group:  
Aelodau Grŵp Cartrefi Cymunedol Cymru: