



In Brief: Syrian refugees and the UK

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1 The crisis

In July 2013, the United Nations estimated that more than 100,000 people had been killed. Since then the UN no longer makes estimates. More than 9 million Syrians need help in the country, 6.5 million of whom are internally displaced. 2.4 million Syrians have fled abroad. 2 million Syrian children [cannot go to school](#).

The [UNHCR estimates](#) there will be 4.1 million refugees from Syria by the end of 2014, the largest refugee population in the world, with 1.6 million in Lebanon (the total Lebanese population is about 4.5 million) and 800,000 in Jordan (total population 6.3 million) 1 million in Turkey and 400,000 in Iraq.

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

2 The United Nations High Commission for Refugees calls for more help

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, has [set a goal for 30,000](#) Syrian refugees to be admitted to other countries by the end of 2014, with focus on the most vulnerable.

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 security, especially due to their political opinion or belonging to a minority group.

He urged states to offer places for resettlement or humanitarian admission (a faster process for those in particular danger) in addition to their normal asylum policy, so that refugees from countries other than Syria would still have a chance to find asylum. Many countries have signed up to the programme, but the number of places offered still falls 10,000 short of the UN target.

In a newspaper interview in January, António Guterres called on EU countries to accept far more than they have so far, and in an [open letter](#) to the Prime Minister, 25 charities including Oxfam and Amnesty International praised the UK's efforts but called on the Government to participate in the programme:

The UK deserves credit for its leadership in providing assistance to refugees in the region, including £600m in aid, helping millions of families survive. However, given the scale and the gravity of the humanitarian crisis unfolding across the region, we would urge the UK to join the 18 other states participating in UNHCR's global resettlement programme.

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

The UNHCR has requested \$4.2 billion for its [2014 regional response plan](#), to help support Syria's neighbours in handling the refugee crisis. So far, [4% of this has been funded](#).

3 UK Government policy

Up 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 (around £600 million), but not to offer resettlement to Syrian refugees either as part of, or in addition to, its annual resettlement quota. 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, however, possible for Syrians in the UK to claim asylum and, since the crisis began in 2011, the UK has accepted nearly [3,500](#) Syrian asylum seekers, the fourth highest in the European Union. Around 1,100 Syrian nationals were also recognised as refugees in the year to September 2013. In October 2012 the Home Office also introduced a temporary concession allowing Syrians in the UK to apply for an extension to their visa or switch into a different visa category. This concession has been [extended](#) until 28 February 2015.

On 29 January 2014, following much pressure from across the House (and prior to an opposition day debate and vote 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 "[vulnerable person relocation scheme](#)" would be separate to the existing UNHCR resettlement programme but was described by the Home Secretary as "[entirely consistent](#) with the wider UNHCR programme". Those resettled under the scheme would be granted five years Humanitarian Protection and would have access to public funds and the labour market. Victims of sexual violence, the elderly, victims of torture, and the disabled would receive highest priority. The Government said that it expected [several hundred](#) refugees to arrive over the next three years, but that there would be no quota. [Press reports](#) suggested that the scheme would cater for around 500 refugees.

The [Shadow Home Secretary](#) welcomed the Government's change of policy and the scheme's focus on victims of sexual violence but questioned the decision not to join the existing UNHCR programme and to establish parallel scheme.

On 25 March 2014, the [first group](#) of refugees to be resettled under the scheme arrived in the UK. Press reports suggested that this first group consisted of around 10 to 20 people. The next group is expected to arrive in April.