



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

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 had accepted nearly [3,500](#) Syrian asylum seekers, the fourth highest in the European Union (as at 29 January 2014). 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.

Another group arrived in April. As at 24 June, 50 people had come to the UK under the scheme.

The Government has not published further details, such as which local authorities are participating in the scheme. Central government is meeting the full costs of the scheme for its first year.

4 The operation of the scheme up to September 2014

Up to the end of September 2014 90 people had been granted 'humanitarian protection' under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, according to the latest quarterly release.¹

The government says that there is no quota for the scheme and does not consider the number admitted to be a shortfall. An answer to a Parliamentary Question from November 2014 set out the government's position:

The scheme was launched in January 2014. It is based on need rather than fulfilling a quota; however, we expect it to help several hundred people over three years.

The first beneficiaries of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme arrived in March, and by the end of June 50 Syrians had been relocated to the UK. This is the latest publicly available figure, as numbers are released as part of the publication of Home Office official statistics each quarter; arrivals up to 30 September 2014 will be published on 27 November. Groups of Syrians continue to be brought to the UK on a regular basis under the scheme.

The VPR scheme is a bespoke programme designed to help particularly vulnerable Syrian refugees displaced by the Syrian crisis who cannot be supported effectively in the region, particularly survivors of torture and violence, women and children at risk and those in need of medical care. We have no plans to extend the scheme to include Iraqi refugees. The Government believes that humanitarian aid and actively seeking to end the conflict in Iraq are the most effective ways for the UK to help the majority of those affected by the crisis. However, the Government has separately, under the Gateway Programme, resettled a number of Iraqi refugees who have sought refugee in countries surrounding Iraq.

[...] The number of displaced people resettled under the VPR scheme and Gateway Programme are in addition to asylum seekers who lodge applications in the UK; the Government continues of course to consider asylum claims, including applications from Syrian and Iraqi nationals, under our normal rules.²

The PQ did not include the latest figures, having been answered on the day that the new figures were released.

During the year there were also 1,802 asylum applications from Syrians, the fourth biggest nationality for asylum applicants after Eritreans, Pakistanis and Iranians.³ 84% of the decisions relating to Syrian applicants were to grant asylum.

On 17 November the subject came up during Topical Questions. James Brokenshire for the government defended the UK's record:

¹ [Immigration statistics, July to September 2014](#), Home Office, 27 November 2014

² [Written question - HL2960](#), 27 November 2014

³ [Immigration statistics, July to September 2014](#), Home Office, 27 November 2014

The contribution of the UK stands up to scrutiny and our overall contribution bears comparison with any international country. We are providing £700 million in aid, which is assisting hundreds of thousands of people each month. The vulnerable persons relocation scheme deals with the most vulnerable individuals, and I underline the fact that we have granted asylum to 3,000 people from Syria since the start of the conflict.⁴

Charities have not been satisfied with the situation, however, and agencies including Oxfam and the Refugee Council sent a joint letter to the Prime Minister on 26 November saying that the UK should do more:

Figures released today will show that Britain has only so far resettled around 100 Syrian refugees, a woefully inadequate number compared to the scale of the crisis.

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.⁵

On 9 December there is a pledging conference is to be held by the UN High Commission for Refugees in Geneva.

⁴ [HC Deb 17 November 2014, c12](#)

⁵ [Joint letter from aid agencies to the Prime Minister, 26 November 2014](#)

Syrians granted asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave since July 2012

More detailed figures (not including the latest quarter but including discretionary leave) were given in a PQ answer to Ian Lucas MP on 25 November:⁶

	Grants of asylum	Grants of Humanitarian Protection	Grants of Discretionary Leave	Other forms of grant	Total grants
2012					
July	71	1	1	0	73
August	100	0	0	0	100
September	111	10	0	0	121
October	131	16	0	0	147
November	131	1	0	0	132
December	90	5	0	0	95
2013					
January	167	2	0	0	169
February	135	0	0	0	135
March	134	1	1	0	136
April	102	0	1	0	103
May	125	2	0	0	127
June	112	0	1	0	113
July	115	1	0	0	116
August	106	0	0	0	106
September	132	0	0	0	132
October	168	1	0	0	169
November	102	0	0	0	102

⁶ [Written question – 215041](#), 25 November 2014

December	46	1	0	0	47
2014					
January	79	1	0	0	80
February	66	0	0	0	66
March	64	0	0	0	64
April	107	1	0	0	108
May	108	0	0	1	109
June	90	4	0	0	94
Figures include dependants					