

ILPA information sheet

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The “Vulnerable Persons” Relocation Programme

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The Crisis in Syria

Syria is the largest refugee crisis in the world at the moment; the number of refugees recently passed 2.5 million¹ and continues to rise. The conflict has meant that Syria has now overtaken Afghanistan as the largest refugee-producing country in the world. The vast majority of these refugees are in countries bordering Syria: Lebanon, and Turkey. There are 950,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon alone, which is struggling to cope with an influx of people that is equivalent to 25% of its population.

The Push for Resettlement

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s mandate is to protect refugees, and it does so by trying to facilitate one of three 'durable solutions' for refugees and persons of concern. These solutions are: local integration, resettlement or voluntary return. Resettlement involves the transfer of a refugee from a country where s/he has sought asylum (but cannot properly integrate, for example because s/he is being confined to a refugee camp by the government of that country) to a third country. Currently 14 European Union States, including the UK, participate. Further details of the UK's resettlement programme are set out in our Information Sheet: [Gateway Protection Programme](#).

In addition to the normal resettlement programme which it administers, UNHCR has appealed to countries outside the region to accept 30,000 of the Syrian refugees most in need of resettlement. This is in addition to their quotas, as a one-off response to the crisis. So far 18 countries including Germany, France and the USA have signed up to assist.

¹ According to the most up-to-date UNHCR data, available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

The UK's response

The government has decided not to take part in UNHCR's Syria resettlement scheme, but recently announced that it take 500 Syrian refugees under its own, newly created "Syria Vulnerable Person Scheme". While the numbers involved are small (Germany, for example, is taking 10,000 Syrian refugees), the government's commitment is a change in stance from its initial refusal to assist. The UK has also pledged £600 million in humanitarian aid to the region, making it one of the larger donors.

With respect to Syrian nationals already in the UK, the government has recently announced the extension of a visa concession (see ILPA's Information Sheet: [Extension of Syrian Concession](#)).

However despite this, and its recent resettlement commitment, the government forcibly removed 23 Syrians in 2013, and is currently detaining 20 others under immigration powers². It is to be hoped that a clear policy position will emerge that is in line with our international obligations to provide sanctuary to refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict.

Updated guidance

UK Visas & Immigration updated their guidance to caseworkers on Syria last month; their new guidance (Operational Guidance Note) is available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283788/Syria_OGN_v9_21_February_2014.pdf

² HL Deb, 4 March 2014, c301W