

# Background briefing

## Refugees Welcome - General Election 2017

### Isn't the Government committed to resettle 23,000 refugees by 2020?

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When David Cameron made the commitment to extend the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, he said the UK would resettle "up to 20,000 refugees by the end of this Parliament" and then supplemented this scheme with 3,000 "children at risk" due to also be resettled directly from the region. Because of the Fixed Term Parliament Act, people assumed this meant 2020; however the snap election now calls this commitment into question. The incoming Government could choose to scrap the scheme with immediate effect.

### How many refugees have already arrived?

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To date, 5,706 people have been resettled to the UK under VPRS, and just a handful under 'children at risk'. This leaves over 17,000 refugees still to be resettled over the next three years if the Government is to meet its original promise.

### What is Community Sponsorship?

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After extensive consultation with the National Refugee Welcome Board and Citizens UK, the community sponsorship scheme was launched in July 2016. The scheme enables community groups including charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to take on the full responsibility for supporting refugees resettled to Britain. The first successful community sponsorship was provided by the Archbishop of Canterbury last Summer.

Families resettled under the scheme currently count towards the 23,000 target. However the aim is that the scheme could eventually become additional.

### Is the commitment to resettle 3,000 'children at risk' the same as the 'Dubs scheme'?

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No, the 'Children at Risk' scheme was a pledge made in addition to the Dubs scheme, as a result of the public support around the Dubs campaign. It is designed to help up to 3,000 vulnerable children and their families from the Middle East and North Africa and was also planned to run until the end of the 2015 Parliament.

### What happens after 2020?

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Currently, even if the incoming Government agrees to continue the existing resettlement commitment until 2020, that still leaves two more years before the end of the Parliament (2022). This is an opportunity for the incoming government to demonstrate Britain's global leadership and continue to build on the strong commitments already made.

UNHCR estimates that the number of people in need of resettlement globally in 2017 is 1.19 million. They suggest that the UK could expand its commitment to at least 10,000 refugees a year and consolidate the various programmes into one flexible scheme which provides a safe and legal option for refugees of many different nationalities according to need.

## Is there a difference between refugees who have been resettled and those who have arrived on their own accord?

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Currently there is a big difference between the welcome refugees receive depending on how they arrive. Refugees who come to the UK through one of the resettlement programmes are provided with housing and caseworker support. They arrive with refugee status already approved and so already have accommodation secured by the local authority. Local authorities are responsible for registering resettled refugees for health and education services, welfare benefits, and providing English language classes. Resettled refugees are allowed to claim benefits and look for work.

In contrast, asylum seekers aren't able to work on arrival and can't claim benefits but instead are granted a limited amount of cash support. Even after being granted asylum, they receive no support with housing or finding work. The APPG Refugees recently described this as a 'two-tier system of support'. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, all refugees deserve fair and equal treatment and the opportunity for protection regardless of how they arrive in the UK.

## About Safe Passage

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Safe Passage is a project of Citizens UK which evolved out of the national Refugee Welcome movement in late 2015. We exist to open access to safe and legal routes for refugees through community organising, advocacy and strategic casework. To date we have helped over 1000 unaccompanied child refugees and vulnerable adults find safe and legal routes to protection.

## What's happening with the Dubs scheme?

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In May 2016 the Government announced it would accept an amendment to the Immigration Act from Lord Alf Dubs to give protection to unaccompanied child refugees at risk in Europe. Whilst the original campaign called for 3,000 children to be relocated to Britain as our contribution to help the 90,000 unaccompanied children who arrived in Europe in 2015, the Government did not put a figure on the scheme.

In February of this year the Government announced that they would be closing the scheme after resettling 350 children, a number that was then extended to 480 after another 130 spaces were identified. To date, just 200 children have been transferred from Calais through the scheme. No children have been transferred from Greece nor Italy. In July the High Court will hear a Judicial Review on the quality of the consultation with Local Authorities on the number of spaces to be offered through the scheme.

## What about children with family in Britain?

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It is estimated that some 40% of the 30,000 unaccompanied child refugees to arrive in Europe last year have family elsewhere in Europe. Many have family here in Britain but no way to reunite. Under the 'Dublin agreement' European countries have a responsibility to reunite these children with their family members safely and legally rather than leave them to resort to people smugglers and life-threatening routes.

At the end of 2016 the Government transferred over 550 children from the Calais camp to reunite with family members in the UK. However after this 'emergency process' ended, children continue to be left with little support to reunite with their family members in France and across Europe.