



The Refugee Crises – some frequently asked questions

BACKGROUND

Refugees have been arriving in Europe over the past decade as a result of uprising and war in several countries across the Middle East and North Africa. The majority of these arrive at Greece and Italy¹. Germany is by far the most popular destination in Europe for asylum seekers and is also the European country that is taking the highest number of refugees². The conflict in Syria has forced over 4 million people to flee their country following bombing by government forces or the violence from militant groups such as Islamic State (Daesh). Another 7.5 million people are displaced within Syria.

Following huge public response in the UK to news of the Calais camp and the drowning of a three year old boy, Aylan Kurdi, in the Mediterranean, David Cameron made a commitment to provide resettlement in the UK for 20,000 Syrian refugees over a period of 5 years. Here we address some questions that are frequently asked around refugees and the UK response to the current crisis.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What has the UK pledged to do to help? Under the programme to resettle 20,000 people from camps in countries bordering on Syria by 2020, the UK is currently admitting about 100 Syrian refugees per month³. The Government has declined to opt into the EU quota system, but it should be recognized that the UK is one of the largest donors to the UN programme that provides for refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

How can the UK house 20,000 people: can we cope? Local authorities are determining how schooling and other public services for refugee families can be provided in each area. Some money is available from the European Union to support housing costs in the UK. While there is an overall shortage of affordable housing in the UK, the resettlement of 20,000 people over 5 years is a small number compared to the overall migration figures: net migration in 2014 was 318,000 people. 641,000 immigrated to the UK and 323,000 emigrated⁴. In addition, it should not be assumed that refugees will be a 'drain' on the British economy: ultimately migrants and refugees provide an overall benefit to the UK economy, boosting tax revenues⁵ and providing labour. This can be particularly helpful in areas where we have a skills shortage.

¹ <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRC%20-%20Europe's%20Refugee%20Crisis%20Policy%20Brief%20-%20September%202015.pdf>

² <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2015/aug/20/asylum-seekers-eu-comparison-germany-datablog> and <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2015/09/daily-chart>

³ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d709bb32-5581-11e5-9846-de406ccb37f2.html>

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/migration1/migration-statistics-quarterly-report/may-2015/stb-msqr-may-2015.html>

⁵ Fiscal Effects of immigration to the UK: <http://www.cream-migration.org/files/FiscalEJ.pdf>, and <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/labour-market-effects-immigration>

What criteria are being used by the UK to prioritise granting temporary resettlement to Syrian refugees? The aim of the UK Government's programme is to prioritise those who are particularly vulnerable. The key criteria include those who have suffered physical and sexual abuse, people with disabilities and special consideration for women and children.

Why are they coming to the UK? Aren't they better off nearer to their country of origin? Those gaining entry via the UK resettlement scheme will be particularly vulnerable and will be assessed as having good reason to need urgent resettlement. There are 19.5 million refugees globally: 86% of these are hosted in the developing world, with Turkey, Pakistan and the Lebanon containing the largest numbers. Currently, almost one in four of the world's refugees are Syrian, and 95% of these are hosted in surrounding countries. Many remain close to Syria because they want to see a political settlement and return home as soon as it is safe to do so.

Is this really the UK's problem? On many occasions (but not all) the UK has responded generously to the needs of those forced out of their homes because of conflict. On humanitarian grounds, the UK has a responsibility, shared with other nations, to provide sanctuary to those forced to flee their homes and their countries. In addition, we have particular responsibility to help those attempting to cross the Mediterranean, as three of the top four nationalities making this dangerous journey are Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis. These people are fleeing countries where conflict has been violent and protracted, and where the UK has played a role. The UK is not responsible for the refugee crisis, but that is not to say that our actions do not leave us with a responsibility towards those who are affected.

But aren't many asylum seekers drawn to the UK because of its generous benefit system? This is a common belief, but it is not supported by evidence. The UK is not a 'first choice' destination for refugees in Europe. The UK received 31,945 asylum claims in 2014, far fewer than Germany (202,815), Sweden (81,325) and Italy (64,625)⁶. Also, asylum seekers in the UK are usually required to live on very low levels of benefit without the option of working. In addition, they are not prioritised on social housing waiting lists, but normally housed in properties that are otherwise hard to fill⁷.

What have church leaders said about the UK government's response? Our four denominations issued a joint statement on the situation at Calais:

<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/a-statement-on-the-situation-in-calais/>

84 Church of England bishops signed an open letter to the Prime Minister

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/17/bishops-letter-to-america-refugee-crisis>

The Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Church of Scotland have issued separate statements

http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/264781/Refugee_Crisis.aspx

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news_and_events/news/recent/church_joins_faith_leaders_to_urge_action_on_refugee_crisis

Further statements can be found here:

<https://ctbi.org.uk/how-the-churches-are-responding-to-the-refugee-crisis/>

⁶ <http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migration-uk-asylum>

⁷ http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy_research/the_truth_about_asylum/facts_about_asylum_-_page_1



What is being done by charities, churches and agencies in the UK to help refugees? The Church of Scotland has appointed a Refugee Coordinator. The Coordinator's role will be UK-wide and will involve working across different denominations. Citizens UK and Caritas are coordinating a National Refugees Welcome Board. This board seeks to support the development of the grassroots movement to make #RefugeesWelcome and to enable institutions that are rising to the crisis to coordinate their plans with local authorities and others.⁸ The aim will be to demonstrate to our Government that, with the support of citizens across the country, the UK has the capacity to respond more generously than has been proposed so far.

I have a spare room in my home. Can I host refugees? Those planning refugee resettlement are seeking self-contained independent accommodation for individual refugees or refugee families coming to this country. You are unlikely to be able to provide accommodation for refugees in your own home. However some projects ask people to support destitute asylum seekers already in this country in their own homes for limited periods. See if there is a "hosting" project or similar in your area.⁹

Can my church provide sanctuary for a refugee family in its manse or independent flat? Yes - this is often feasible and churches are preparing to let out church owned accommodation at local authority housing rates to provide sanctuary for refugee families. However you need to check the arrangements with the property trustees particularly if you are proposing to let property at below market rates. For more information, please contact your own denomination to check what can be done.

What can I do next? There are various websites containing useful information about how you and your church get involved.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland has a webpage summarising what different Churches are doing: <https://ctbi.org.uk/how-the-churches-are-responding-to-the-refugee-crisis/>

Citizens UK has produced an eight step guide for those campaigning to get Councils to commit to the resettlement of Syrian refugees: http://www.citizensuk.org/8_step_guide

The National Refugees Welcome Board's website contains up to date information on the #refugeeswelcome campaign: <http://www.refugees-welcome.org.uk/>

The Church of Scotland's Refugee Coordinator is keen to hear from individuals and churches with relevant stories, suggestions or questions: dbradwell@churchofscotland.org.uk

If you wish to support refugees in the Calais camp, you can make contact with a grassroots organization such as Calaid, which can make suggestion on what aid is most needed. <http://www.calaid.co.uk/>

⁸ <http://www.refugees-welcome.org.uk/>

⁹ Eg <http://birchnetwork.org/hosting/> in Birmingham



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