



Home Office

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Christina McKelvie MSP  
The Scottish Parliament  
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*Dear Ms McKelvie,*

Thank you for your letter of 16 October regarding the refugee situation in the European Union.

The Government is clear about our moral responsibility to assist those who are suffering as a result of conflict in the world and we are proud of our tradition of providing protection to genuine refugees but it is important that we maintain a clear distinction between asylum and illegal migration for economic reasons. As the Home Secretary announced at the Conservative Party Conference on 6 October, a new approach to asylum will be introduced with strict new rules for people who abuse the system in the UK, and greater generosity for people in parts of the world where we know they need our help.

The Government's view is that those who have already reached Europe are no longer in immediate danger and the European countries in which they arrive have a duty to provide adequate protection and support to refugees within their territory. We are nevertheless providing significant assistance in to Member States facing particular pressures.

We believe that the best way to help the majority of the many millions of displaced individuals across the globe is through practical and political action within the affected regions. The UK is playing a leading role in pushing for action through the EU and the UN to increase support and protection for those who need it. Action of this kind offers the best hope of an effective response to the numbers of attempted Mediterranean crossings to Europe and the tragic loss of lives.

Our priorities are to continue to provide humanitarian aid to those most in need in crisis regions and to actively seek an end to the conflicts which cause people to be displaced from their homes. We believe this approach is the best way to ensure that the UK's help has the greatest impact for the majority of refugees who remain in the region and for the countries that are hosting them.

We have already committed over £1 billion in humanitarian aid to the Syrian crisis - more than any other country in the world except the United States. The UK is one of only a few EU countries to fulfil its commitment to provide 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) to international aid and we should be proud of this.

By the end of June 2015, UK support had delivered almost 20 million food rations, each of which feeds one person for one month, shelter for over 416,000 people, relief items for 4.6 million people, resulted in over 7.2 million instances when people benefited from sanitation and hygiene activities, provided access to clean water for 1.6 million people in Syria and over 980,000 people in neighbouring countries (peak month), and over 2.5 million medical consultations in Syria and the region.

We recognise, however, that not all displaced people can be supported effectively in the region. That is why the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme was expanded to resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees over the course of this Parliament. Beneficiaries of the Syrian VPR scheme are eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK on completion of their five year initial period of leave. It is also worth noting that this expansion is in addition to those we already resettle under the Gateway and Mandate schemes and the thousands who receive protection in the UK under normal asylum procedures or who join their family in the UK through our family reunion route.

We believe that families should be resettled to the UK together where possible. That is why we are working closely with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to ensure that vulnerable Syrians can, where possible, be resettled as family group. We have therefore extended the Syrian VPR scheme to include additional family members in certain circumstances


The current Syrian resettlement scheme year one costs are funded through Official Development Assistance. On 2 October, the Home Office wrote to local authorities in Scotland and throughout the UK to confirm that additional funding will be available to assist with costs incurred after year one, we continue to work through the detail of this with HM Treasury and other government departments.

The expansion of the Syrian VPR scheme is part of the UK's comprehensive approach designed as far as possible to help refugees in the region but recognising that for some vulnerable people the only solution is to bring them to countries like the UK. We have made it very clear, however, that resettlement schemes are best decided at a national level and that we will not sign up to a compulsory EU quota. We believe we can make the greatest contribution by



focusing our assistance on the most vulnerable people, rather than subscribing to a quota scheme. Our view of relocation of refugees within the EU also remains the same – it is the wrong response. Instead we will provide support to those countries facing particular pressures and maintain our focus on helping the vulnerable who remain in the region.

This is a national effort and I am aware that the Prime Minister and First Minister of Scotland have already exchanged correspondence on the matter. We will work closely with Scottish administration on the arrangements for resettling refugees and welcome engagement on whether any further responsibility can be delegated to Scottish authorities and how best to utilise our resources.

Yours ever,  


**Rt Hon James Brokenshire**