



International Development Committee

Oral evidence: [Syrian Refugee Crisis](#), HC 463

Thursday 29 October 2015

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [International Rescue Committee](#)
- [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#)
- [Save the Children](#)

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Fiona Bruce; Dr Lisa Cameron; Mr Nigel Evans; Fabian Hamilton; Pauline Latham; Jeremy Lefroy; Wendy Morton; Albert Owen

Questions 1-47

Witnesses: **Sanjayan Srikanthan**, Director of Policy and Practice, International Rescue Committee UK, and **Francois Reybet-Degat**, Deputy-Director, Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, gave evidence

Q1 Chair: Good morning and welcome. This is the first oral evidence session as part of the International Development Committee's inquiry into the Syrian refugee crisis. We have an hour and a half, and we have two panels of witnesses. I am delighted to welcome Francois and Sanj for the first panel. We have 45 minutes and we have quite a lot of ground to cover in that time, so we are going to go straight into questions. Perhaps I could ask our witnesses, when they answer the first question directed at them, just to say a little bit about themselves and their organisation, as well as answering the question. My first question is to Francois: could you describe the processes that UNHCR uses to identify vulnerable refugees, and perhaps as part of that answer say what the UK can do to help to ensure that this is as efficient as possible?

Francois Reybet-Degat: Good morning. I am the Deputy-Director of the Middle East and North Africa Bureau. I was based for two years in Jordan, where we outposted the office of the Director to support the region—the Middle East. Two months ago I moved to Geneva, and I work for UNHCR. I do not think I need to describe what UNHCR does as the refugee agency in the United Nations system.

In terms of the process—and I assume we are talking about resettlement—resettlement is one of the three durable solutions along with voluntary repatriation and local integration. It is a very important durable solution insofar as it targets the most vulnerable. It is a

sensitive one not just because of the vulnerability, but because it is one that is only available to a minority of the refugees.

There are today 14 million refugees in the world. We estimate the needs as being around 1 million resettlement places, and UNHCR annually submits 100,000. This places on us and the Governments we work with a very strong moral responsibility to make sure that this selection is done in the most rigorous way. The way the selection takes place is through referrals from UNHCR and our NGO partners. Our NGO partners will not refer a case and say, "This person ought to be resettled". Our NGO partners will say, "This person is deserving of a specific protection attention", and UNHCR will determine if this attention leads to a resettlement need. Through our regular monitoring work as well, we will identify a need for resettlement. The third element is through interviews: people contacting directly UNHCR offices.

These are the three entry points to processing with the first step of selecting candidates for resettlement. When I was walking to this place this morning, I was thinking if UNHCR were a Government there would be, probably, either a Minister or Secretary of State of Resettlement. It is a very important function and it is one for which UNHCR, working very much with its partners, meaning Governments and NGOs, has established standard operating procedures.

There is a resettlement handbook, which is available for all, which specifies the manner in which the selection process is taking place. It specifies the grounds and the criteria that are being used. We have dedicated positions within the Ministry of Resettlement. We have resettlement officers who are trained and who have a specific set of skills to do this work, including interview techniques. It is very important because of the elements I mentioned before.

For the Syria operation, there is a special framework, which is the Syrian Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Programme. It is supported by a core group, which is a governing body including a number of resettlement states, including the UK. There is a special set of procedures in terms of first interview and also refugee determination and determination for resettlement. They are streamlined in a way to ensure that we are able to gather and to process the required number of resettlement submissions.

To manage the process there is a dedicated skillset in the organisation. There are procedures that are known, and, according to the situation, as is the case for the Syria situation, there are frameworks that are worked together with the required level of consultation with Governments to make sure that this process is taking place in as rigorous a fashion as possible.

I will stop there because I want to be fair to my fellow co-panelist, and there are so many related questions, but that is my first element of response.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much. I would like to ask a follow-up to you, Francois, and then I am going to bring colleagues in with questions for both of you. The UK Government have said that we will take 20,000 under resettlement over a five-year period. My understanding is that the British Government have said that we want to try to have 1,000 by Christmas. Could you tell us a bit about how that is being done? I understand that 500 of those 1,000 will be

taken from a list that has been put together for resettlement in the United States. Is that the case, and if so will the Americans take a different 500 to replace the 500 that are going to come here?

Francois Reybet-Degat: Allow me to backtrack. What I omitted to do that I should have done is to start by thanking you as Members of the Parliament for what the UK has done, which is remarkable, in support to Syrians. Your Government—and I want to particularly highlight DFID but also the Home Affairs Committee—have played a lead role from the onset in trying to garner, with the international community, the support that the region deserved. I wanted to express this sincere appreciation, the most recent evidence of which is the announcement of the 20,000.

The Prime Minister announced the 20,000 on 7 September, if my memory serves me right. On 2 October UNHCR was required to look into the possibility of having 1,000 resettlement cases in the UK by the end of the year. On 26 October we had presented 1,300 resettlement submissions. I do not, as a manager, ask my colleagues where the cases are coming from. I will always make sure that the cases are deserving of resettlement attention, and that is what matters.

The resettlement is a very complex machinery, whereby from the first instances of the first interview and the monitoring work to the person arriving in the country of resettlement, there are many steps. Of course, there is a process of interviews that relate to potentially different countries, but my concern and what we want to be accountable for is when we come to the UK Government we say, “These are the 1,300 submissions. We are fully accountable, and we are telling you this has been done in the most rigorous fashion.” If you go to my engine room, they will tell you, “All this was this, and this was planned for that.” For me, I want to know: can I say to all these countries, without any doubt, “This has been done in the most rigorous fashion and these are the most vulnerable according to our criteria”?

Q3 Chair: Am I correct that 500 of those 1,300 were due for resettlement in the US?

Francois Reybet-Degat: I do not know, and in a sense for me it is not the most important thing. There may have been an amount of which—but for me this is not the most important thing.

Q4 Wendy Morton: Can I come back on something? You said that 1,300 individuals were identified. The UK Government said that we would take 1,000. Does that mean that there is a cut-off point at 1,000, or do we take 1,300, or will the other 300 be the next priority to be resettled somewhere?

Francois Reybet-Degat: The announcement was for 20,000, out of which there was a joint commitment to have 1,000 as a symbolic and important gesture, for the Government to say, “We have responded”. That is the way we interpreted the Government’s request. They were saying, “This is important. This is an important commitment, but it is not just over X number of months. By the end of the year, we want to start in an efficient manner with 1,000.” To reach this 1,000, we have submitted 1,300, because since we started this programme with Syrians there has been a small rejection rate. We cannot exclude that the Government has the prerogative to make the final decision as to whether they will admit a case or not.

Q5 Wendy Morton: Thank you. That is very helpful. Moving on to my question, I wanted to ask you whether there are any host Government restrictions that might be impeding UNHCR conducting quality registration and identification of cases for resettlement.

Francois Reybet-Degat: I would say, by and large, no. What happens, which is inevitable and part of our work, is that, throughout the resettlement journey for an individual from a point of location in a host country to a country of destination, there are regulations that may cause issues in a host country along this process. This is part and parcel of our work, and we deal with these questions as we did with the UK Government when it came to receiving and having a dialogue on receiving those who have been accepted for resettlement. It exists; it is part of our daily work. There is nothing today in the region that would be a major obstacle.

Q6 Albert Owen: You mentioned, Francois, that resettlement is a complicated system and that there are a number of players involved in it. How do you, as UNHCR, and other actors work with local NGOs? When resettlement happens in this country, there is obviously a burden on local areas and local authorities, so where is that link? You said that you are the Secretary of State, so you are right up there; you are the Government.

Chair: He did not actually say that.

Albert Owen: He said it hypothetically, and I am viewing it in those terms as well, but that is the status of your body. How do the local bodies, the local resources and the local NGOs get involved into the whole process?

Francois Reybet-Degat: We work extremely closely with our NGO partners in the area of protection. NGOs may be involved in working on protection monitoring, but also an NGO providing shelter may come across protection issues. There is a constant dialogue, and NGOs are very important stakeholders in the protection work. When it comes to resettlement cases that are referred by UNHCR, UNHCR take the onus of making these determinations before submitting to a Government.

I have no doubt that you appreciate how sensitive it is for local NGOs. If they start to be perceived that they are bringing people for resettlement while they are implementing a shelter programme, that becomes a major issue for them. We have a very good understanding, and it is in this fashion that we work with local partners; they will refer to us cases deserving of protection attention. We take on the work of prime identification for interviews and then refugee determination and interview for the purpose of a final decision on whether or not to submit cases. The process is very much within UNHCR, but there is a whole range of factors that may bring people deserving protection attention, and then from that we will filter, according to our procedures and criteria, those who will be submitted. Did I answer your question?

Q7 Albert Owen: You do, but many local NGOs have offices around the world, close to localities. If a number has been allocated to this country, I am basically asking how you are filtering all of that through to local communities.

Chair: Francois, please do respond, but also Sanjayan might want to come in on this one.

Francois Reybet-Degat: For instance, Germany has X number of people coming under resettlement and they have a distribution key. We do not use a distribution key at all, because the process is based on individuals, individual assessment, needs and vulnerability.

Q8 Chair: Sanjayan, do you want to comment broadly on that question?

Sanjayan Srikanthan: Thank you. I am Sanjayan Srikanthan. I am the Director of Policy and Practice for the International Rescue Committee. We work in all of the countries hosting the 4 million refugees in the region, as well as Greece and now the Balkans. I am speaking on behalf of IRC UK, which is part of the global International Rescue Committee. In response to your question, which I think is about how we find those 20,000 when we are talking about 4 million refugees in the region, not to be trite but we do it very carefully, in the sense that it creates hope for so many when so few are going to be taken. I am not sure that local NGOs are the way to go in terms of identifying them; that is what Francois's point is. We do need to manage expectations. We do need to be clear on how we communicate throughout all the countries hosting Syrian refugees, in terms of what criteria are being set out and who is going to be selected, so that there is not a situation where thousands are descending on resettlement centres in the Middle East, which will be set up to process this, without any hope of being resettled. That needs to be part of the plan and the consideration. It is a very good thing to keep asking as the plan goes forward.

Q9 Fiona Bruce: Can I just clarify? You recommend to our Government, and presumably the Home Office, a number of refugees for resettlement. Is my understanding correct that at that point our Government would take over where to place these people within the UK? Your responsibility would end at the point of the recommendation. The reason I am concerned to ask this question is because, as I understand it, in this country the Government have said that local authorities around the country should register an interest to take refugees. According to my understanding from a meeting I have had in the last week, certainly in my area the local authorities are not registering quickly. Is this something that you are aware of? Maybe, Chair, this is something that we need to take up from our end. Certainly, our local communities—the people who live in our constituencies—very much want to support the refugees and are keen to encourage it. However, if there is a procedure here that is causing a form of logjam, we need to unlock it.

Chair: Do either of you want to respond on that?

Sanjayan Srikanthan: I can just say a few things. First of all, I would like to take the opportunity to recognise that the 20,000 commitment is recognised as a significant step for this Government. It is on the back of excellent work by the Department for International Development in giving over £1 billion to the response in the region, which makes it one of the largest donors in this. We are a partner of the Department for International Development. With respect to that number, 20,000 against 4 million is 0.001%, so it is not a lot. If we are thinking about how we distribute them amongst constituencies in the UK, that 20,000 figure would equate to six people per constituency. It is hardly a big strain on the system. Our experience as an agency is in the US, where we annually resettle 10,000 as part of the US Government federal programme of resettlement, and not in the UK. While I cannot speak to the specificities, what I can say is that the US model is very successful and has been tried and tested for many years now, and in fact for decades. That is a federal programme. It is not local states, counties or whatever offering up numbers. It is a federally distributed system of allocation amongst those states.

Q10 Chair: On the question that I raised with Francois earlier, are you aware of this point that of the 1,000 that the UK is going to take by the end of this year, 500 will come off a US list, which is presumably the one that you have worked on?

Sanjayan Srikanthan: That is the first I am hearing about the 500 taken from the US list.

Q11 Chair: You may not be able to answer this, but would your understanding be that that would not be a net loss of 500 to the US, but would just be a rejigging, or do you not know?

Sanjayan Srikanthan: I know the US is contemplating increasing its quota. It is not going to be either/or. It hopefully will be an increase overall.

Chair: That is reassuring.

Francois Reybet-Degat: I just wanted to say from our perspective that, absolutely, in this long resettlement journey, UNHCR remains concerned because of its mandate for international protection for the fate of refugees, even after resettlement. In terms of processing, the responsibility then passes on to the Government of the UK when it comes to reception and where these people would go. On the question of the different countries, you have a number of countries that are very closely engaged on the resettlement front. The UK has made a very significant step. The US is another important resettlement partner. I have no doubt that in these countries there is no issue of competition. These countries together want the right things to happen and are working together, so I would not be concerned.

Q12 Fabian Hamilton: Last year the previous Committee, many members of which are still on the Committee, went to the Middle East. We went to Lebanon and Jordan. We went to Zaatari camp, where our Chair has just been, we went to Sidon in Lebanon, and we saw refugees that had been living and settled in host communities. I wondered whether, in your view, they faced different challenges to those in the camps, because clearly we saw some huge differences. I wonder what differences there were in your approaches to the different groups—to the groups living in the camps specifically set up and the groups living amongst the community. In Mafraq, Jordan, near the Zaatari camp, we actually met people living in the communities as well. I wonder, Sanj, if you could give us your view on this?

Sanjayan Srikanthan: It is absolutely right to focus on urban refugees, who are the majority of the 4 million. In Jordan alone, as you know, there are 80,000 or so in Zaatari, but over 600,000 outside of camps. The reason refugees select urban settings where they are less visible is very much that reason of dignity, and about trying to return to some sort of normality as they had before the conflict, and also to look for livelihoods and opportunities. The risk, particularly for the most vulnerable, and particularly for women and girls, is that they are often forgotten when it comes to aid and risks of exploitation. The IRC's 2014 report "Are We Listening?" highlights failings in the humanitarian system going back to 2012, in terms of addressing the needs of women and girls specifically, many of whom have experienced sexual torture, violence and abuse inside Syria, but who continue to be exploited by systems such as landlords, by access to services and also psycho-social support when they get to these host countries. Living in urban settings, at least they can often have some dignity and not have to show their lives out in the camp setting, but they also have to hide from those who might wish to exploit them. These are some of the reasons why so many are in urban settings.

The stories of urban refugees need to be told again and again. It is good that visits to the region do not just focus on Zaatari, where of course needs are also acute, but also focus on urban settings. The recent shortages in funding to the UN appeal have meant that those in urban settings are getting less than those in camp settings. WFP rations have been cut.

There are stories now of Syrians taking the least rotten vegetables from bins to feed families. They either do that or go back to Syria and try to rebuild a livelihood in the middle of a war, or make a journey on a boat. That is not to mention women and those with young girls being forced to get dowries for those women and young girls to be sold into early marriage, because they simply cannot be supported. All of these things are happening. That is not to mention the fact that Syria has an urban population, and this is where a lot of the bombing and the violence is being targeted, but is also where services are available for the 7.6 million displaced inside the country.

Q13 Fabian Hamilton: Francois, it is UNHCR, of course, that has played a crucial role in the camps. Are you doing anything in the urban setting amongst those who have settled there?

Francois Reybet-Degat: Absolutely. The majority of the refugees, some 90%, are residing outside camps in urban and rural areas. Yes, the circumstances are different and there is huge vulnerability. We are conducting very large vulnerability assessments with our UN and NGO partners in Lebanon, where there are no camps. You visited Lebanon. Also in Jordan, we have conducted over 100,000 home visits, and we have a vulnerability assessment framework, whereby we are predicting expenditure levels of households, and determining that those below a given ceiling are deemed vulnerable. In terms of resettlement, again the assessment is for individual needs and is vulnerability-based. The question of the location of the refugee does not come as a prime criterion. Actually, a minimal amount of submissions for resettlements come from people residing in camps.

Chair: Francois, thank you very much. We are going to move on now to some questions around funding of these programmes. As Fabian said, I have just come back from a visit to Jordan with Oxfam. It struck me that one of the big challenges is those changes to the World Food Programme support for families. The position of those who are not registered, especially those who are not registered as refugees and living in the urban settings that were described is also a challenge.

Q14 Fiona Bruce: I would like to ask you what the barriers are to filling this funding gap, and what can the UK do to help to close it. We had some statistics from Oxfam showing that the UK, certainly in terms of its funding contribution, is contributing around 220% of its actual contribution, whereas other countries are contributing much less, and that the overall funding gap is increasing year on year. What can be done to fill that gap?

Francois Reybet-Degat: Thank you very much. I want to backtrack a bit; it relates to funding. Today, what is happening in Syria and to the Syrian people is unbearable. It is unbearable to see this with a country that has been the centre of such a sophisticated civilisation. It was the first country where I worked back in 1988. Half of its population has had to move, as displaced or as refugees, and the country is being completely destroyed. Thanks to the support of the international community, but, more importantly, thanks to the support of the Syrians themselves and the communities in the host countries, together we have been, up to 2015, able to offer a first line of safety for the Syrian refugees. It was a remarkable endeavour. Since 2011, we have co-ordinated over \$6 billion worth of assistance.

However, because of this unbearable situation in Syria this is not enough. The UK has been very influential and has had a very important role. It has really stepped up to the plate

to give more. However, this more is not enough, because of the situation in Syria and because of the scope and scale. There are 19 million people displaced in the region: Syrian refugees, Syrian IDPs, Iraqi IDPs, and 5 million Palestinian refugees—19 million people displaced in the Middle East. In a sense, the evolution of the situation and the needs are outstripping the generosity. What can be done? This unbearable situation is also starting to lead to unbearable consequences, including in Europe. There is a need for an awakening—first, a political one. We have said for five years, “We need a political solution”, but it is like a sound that we have got used to. We cannot get used to, “We need a political solution”. There must be a political solution, and what it means—and I go as far as I can, as a humanitarian organisation—is that all those countries and all the powers that have an influence on possibly solving the conflict have to be around the negotiation table. First is the political awakening.

Secondly, we have to recognise that for two years we sent a signal that if we were not doing better with the first line of response to the crisis in host countries, people will come out. I think people were looking at us sceptically saying, “They are humanitarian actors. They are exaggerating. It is part of the fundraising strategy.” I am afraid we have been proven right. More needs to be done in supporting the host countries. It is no coincidence that one of the key triggers of the current movements to Europe through the western Balkan route was very much the situation in which the WFP found itself, having to reduce what was the bare minimum. That was really the straw that broke the camel. To do that, when we look at who is giving, the top 10 donor countries are contributing over 80%. Countries like the UK are in the lead, in terms of giving more, but more is required. Also, working together, we have to expand the donor base. We have to continue to work and look at the gulf. Today, in October, the 3RP—the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan—that UNHCR is co-ordinating in the region is just 45% funded. It is \$2 billion against an ask of \$4.5 billion.

The last point is that this is a subset of a much wider problem for which, as a Committee, you have a key role to play. Today, the global aid architecture is unfit for purpose for what we are witnessing. \$20 billion of global wealth spent on a humanitarian response is not sufficient. In a sense, the Middle East is a subset of this global issue. There are also modalities. The modalities for structural, more longer-term financial aid are no longer fit for purpose. The fact that Jordan and Lebanon are not receiving that type of support, because they are middle-income countries, is a major issue. The World Bank is currently very actively pursuing a revisiting of its modalities. These discussions are taking place at the level of the board of the World Bank. We are not specialists, but we welcome these discussions taking place, and we welcome such institutions looking at ways to provide structural support to Jordan and Lebanon under the most favourable terms.

Chair: We have got 10 more minutes with you both and three big questions.

Q15 Jeremy Lefroy: Following up from what you have just been saying, Francois, we have raised this question before, in the last Parliament, particularly in relation to DFID’s humanitarian budget. Humanitarian aid has tended to be done on a year-by-year basis, but typically two thirds of humanitarian assistance from DAC donors goes to countries that have been receiving it for eight years or more, so it is not short-term. Are you saying, therefore—and perhaps some of us would agree—that in fact short and medium-term humanitarian aid

and rebuilding needs to be hardwired into budgets rather than saying, “These things come along once in a while. We will cope with them on a case-by-case basis”?

Sanjayan Srikanthan: On both questions, one of the first stories I came across with a local NGO in northern Syria, in 2012 when I was there, was of a group of engineers that were risking their lives to pick up rubbish in Aleppo, which was the least glamorous programme you could do. They were after some money for spare parts for the vehicles that were breaking down, because no one was providing that anymore. That is a microcosm of the appeal. Six of their colleagues were shot, picking up rubbish, by snipers. The reason they were doing it was to prevent the spread of infection and disease. That is the spirit of the Syrian people. If you think the regional appeal is under-funded at 45%, as Francois said, it is 35% inside Syria. It is even worse there. That is down from 74% for the regional appeal in 2013 and 64% in 2014, and is now less than 50%. It is going down and down as the numbers are climbing above 13 million in terms of total need.

I agree that a lasting, peaceful, political solution is what we all want, but it seems to be as far away as ever. In the absence of such a solution, we do need all countries—and the UK has been leading in terms of contributions—to do more for this. I feel that the UK Government should do more with other donors, both DAC and others, to give more to this appeal. It is also about finding sustainable solutions, not just aid. I am reminded by the interview this morning on Radio 4 about a UK charity that has gone badly wrong. One of the questions the Department for Education has raised about it is, “Were they operating sustainably?” We need to find sustainable solutions for those refugees.

A final important point to make is this. Aid is there for aid’s sake, because that is a common, human, dignified thing to do as a country. It is not going to solve the displacement crisis that Europe is going to face. When you are fleeing the kind of primal terror and evil that is operating inside Syria today, border fences and guards and more aid is not, in itself, going to stop people looking for solutions and safety for their families in Europe. That is what driving people, under the 1951 convention, to claim refugee status in Europe. We do need to separate out those two things.

Q16 Pauline Latham: Syrian refugees are not allowed to work, as otherwise they have sanctions against them. They are a very educated population; they are not uneducated, so they need to work. How important do you think it would be for Syrian refugees to be able to earn a livelihood?

Francois Reybet-Degat: It is fundamental. I first would like to recognise that Turkey has passed a temporary protection resolution that foresees the right for refugees to work. It has to be followed by secondary legislation. Governments would admit people are working informally. It is a debate that needs to continue, and it is fundamental in the long run. European countries are also part of this debate. We talked about resettlement, but there are other forms of admission. There can be scholarships, there can be private community sponsorships, but who says that there cannot be temporary work permits? There is no doubt that when someone is in exile for five years, access to income is one of the major issues. There has to be a debate that includes everybody and not just the countries on the frontline. People are working informally, in a lot of instances. There are discussions taking place, and it is important that these discussions continue to take place, but in a way that is in a spirit of

solidarity and burden-sharing. The centre of gravity of this discussion cannot just be in one place.

Q17 Pauline Latham: Britain is funding health and education in these places. Would it be a good idea, do you think, for Britain to be paying the doctors, nurses and other medical professionals, that must be in those camps, and the teachers, to either work in the host community, to help with the health and education crisis that they are suffering, or within the camps, to educate the children that are there and to help with the health needs of those people? If we funded that, because we are already funding it in a different way, they would be able to get a livelihood, and that would help them and keep them in the community in the area, so they could be resettled eventually in Syria.

Francois Reybet-Degat: As you know, it is a complex issue, because it is not just the Government. If it were in the UK, you are talking about the employers' unions and you are talking about the workers' unions, so you have many constituencies that will have a say. What is important is that we have seen that there are more and more of these discussions taking place, but the premise of that discussion has to be, "What can we do all together to make access to income for refugees in a dignified way a possibility?"

Q18 Pauline Latham: Surely that would be a dignified way, if we were paying these professionals to do their job and keeping them in the region? We know that Jordan and other places are struggling under the burden of extra healthcare and extra education costs. Surely these people who are educated could do that job and fulfil that, if we were paying them?

Francois Reybet-Degat: I understand. I would refrain from discussing in public a specific and precise case, but many stakeholders would have a view on this prospect. What is important is to manage to find common ground with, first and foremost, the Governments, but also all the key stakeholders, on a situation that also is in the interest of the country. There are many different examples. There are discussions around industrial zones, and these are the right discussions.

Q19 Dr Lisa Cameron: The final question is really about the very vulnerable groups. CAFOD and Save the Children have expressed some concerns, raising incidents of behaviours such as begging, child labour, commercial sex work and enforced early marriage. I was wondering about your response to that in terms of the funding required.

Sanjayan Srikanthan: Thank you for raising it. It is an important issue and it just speaks to the wide range of vulnerable persons that I have also mentioned. It is important, under the UN appeal, that protection programming, and also specifically around child protection and also violence against women and girls prevention programming, is fully funded. Often it is recognised that it is something that is very difficult to do. Donors are often questioning of protection funding versus something they see as more obvious, such as water and sanitation, where it is so tangible to see, or shelter, which is again a very tangible thing and something that donors like to fund. They do so without recognising that the intangibles of protection programming all cost money, whether it is psycho-social support for sexual assault survivors; whether it is prevention of domestic violence, which is one of the biggest issues now in the response; or whether it is specific programming under all the other things, including WASH—water, sanitation and shelter—that look at the needs of vulnerable groups such as women and girls. They may not be as visible to see but they are all the more important

because, as Francois has mentioned, 75% of those 4 million in the region are women and children, not men. They are the needs that need to be discussed and met.

Q20 Dr Lisa Cameron: Do you think that the UK, given that we have a prioritisation of women and girls in terms of our strategy, could be doing things in a slightly different way, or focusing more on this particular region?

Sanjayan Srikanthan: One of the most important things I would urge the UK Government to do is to have a consistent approach to how they determine vulnerability. If it is DFID and the FCO then there are criteria they use, which we all accept, to identify that vulnerability. If it is the Home Office, it should be the same set of questions that are asked, and the respondent should be treated with the same dignity we afford them in the Middle East if they are making claims to be resettled in the UK. Those are important, as is recognising who those vulnerable people are. Just to reiterate, the most vulnerable are not necessarily just those 4 million. It is those making the journey as well. Just because they are making the journey through Europe does not mean they are not vulnerable. Recent evidence has shown that.

Q21 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We are running out of time for your evidence. I would just like to ask one final question of Francois. When I was in Jordan this week, we were told about around 4,000 Syrians who are currently just inside Jordan, in the north-east part of the country, who are in a desperate situation and do not yet have an indication that they will be able to come into Jordan. Are you able to tell us anything about this situation, and also anything that the UK can do to press for these people to be admitted into Jordan?

Francois Reybet-Degat: It is a situation of concern that we are discussing with the government—and you met our representative, Andrew Harper, in Jordan—on a daily basis. There is an environment where these countries, which see themselves at the forefront of fighting against terrorism and which have hosted very large refugee populations, are extremely concerned about who may be coming. Our daily discussion is about making sure that any partner, whether it is UNHCR, ICRC or any NGO partner, has access to these people and that the most vulnerable are attended to. It is a matter of continuous concern, and you are absolutely right about the figures, and it is one we are trying to address with the Government of Jordan.

Chair: Thank you, both, very much indeed. We have covered a lot of ground in 45 minutes and are very grateful to both of you, and to both organisations, for the brilliant work that you are doing. The dialogue between us, I am sure, will continue. Thank you.

Francois Reybet-Degat: Thank you for your support and interest.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Zoe Smith**, Head of Advocacy, Open Doors UK, **Haley Bobseine**, Lebanon Researcher, Human Rights Watch, **Aleema Shivji**, Director, Handicap International UK, and **George Graham**, Head of Conflict and Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy, Save the Children, gave evidence.

Chair: Welcome to the four of you. Thank you very much indeed for coming here today. We again want to cover a lot of ground in the remaining 45 minutes. I apologise that a couple of the members of the Committee will have to leave before the end to attend another committee meeting.

Q22 Fiona Bruce: Thank you for coming. We are going to ask each of you briefly—that is for two minutes each, please—to describe the obstacles that are faced by minority groups of refugees and others seeking the support of the UN and other organisations in the region. If you could, please, restrict your comments to two minutes about these obstacles that minority groups face.

Chair: Thanks, Fiona. I will go around the table, starting with Aleema, if you can briefly introduce yourselves and say where you are from. I really beseech you to stay to the two minutes because then we can cover all of the other questions that we have planned.

Aleema Shivji: My name is Aleema Shivji, and I am the UK director for Handicap International. We are an international charity that works with disabled and vulnerable people in 60 countries. Many of you will have heard us giving evidence on the disability inquiry a few years ago. My background is actually as a physiotherapist, and I spent many years working in the frontlines with the organisation.

In terms of answering the question on the vulnerabilities and specific barriers, first of all there should be a broad look at what “vulnerability” actually means. In this crisis, as you have just heard from the panellist, it is not a straightforward answer. What we find is that there is quite a lot of intersection between vulnerabilities. People spend a lot of time focusing on women and children, who obviously are very visible because of the percentages, but behind that you have got disabled women and disabled girls who are then doubly and sometimes triply discriminated against, particularly if they have got intellectual impairments. They are hidden, they are not visible and they are not picked up in registration systems. There might be an older person who also has specific needs and has impairments of different kinds. What we find is the people that we work with—disabled people, older people and people with chronic diseases—are often not in centres, camps and so on, and so are out in the communities. The barriers that they face are not knowing what is happening, not having access to the services, and not being able to be mobile to be able to get to places where cash or information is being distributed and where health services are. Those are some of the specific obstacles that we certainly see. What else would I add?

Chair: You have done your two minutes. That is brilliant.

Haley Bobseine: My name is Haley Bobseine. I am the Lebanon researcher with Human Rights Watch and I am based in Beirut. Prior to joining Human Rights Watch I worked at a small legal organisation and we provided legal assistance to refugees seeking resettlements. Many of our clients were lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender refugees, and we also ran protection programmes for those refugees in their countries of first asylum, notably in Beirut.

Just to highlight some of the vulnerabilities of the LGBT refugee population, inside Syria there are many different minority groups that are being targeted. Generally, there are some areas where people can seek asylum. There are safe enclaves within the country, or they may flee to neighbouring countries and get some sort of protection. For LGBT refugees

that, unfortunately, is not the case and they are being targeted by various different groups inside Syria, and then when they move to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and other places they continue to face persecution, often from members of the refugee community and from their families. On top of that there are laws in Lebanon, Jordan and other countries criminalising, for example, unnatural sexual acts, and they are often used to prosecute refugees in those countries. It is definitely getting better, but there are barriers to accessing services within those countries. When I speak with refugees they talk about discrimination when accessing health services and clinical management of rape. Housing is also a big issue. For these individuals living within refugee camps they are often discriminated against. There are physical attacks, either by their host communities or the refugees as well. It is a very difficult situation, so resettlement is often the only option for these individuals.

Chair: Thank you. We are going to return to some of those issues in further questioning, so thanks, Haley.

Zoe Smith: I am Zoe Smith. I am head of advocacy at Open Doors UK, which is part of an international NGO supporting Christians who face persecution for their faith in over 50 countries around the world. We predominately work, through partner organisations inside Syria, to bring relief to those who are either choosing to stay to serve their communities there, or who cannot flee for various reasons. We have found that Lebanon in particular is a country that Christians often flee to, because there is a large Christian population there. Jordan is much less common. Turkey is geographically closer to some predominantly Christian areas, but Lebanon is the preference. Christian-born individuals generally face similar obstacles to non-Christians, although there is a strong concern about faith-based discrimination. We have heard that people are nervous to register with UNHCR for that particular reason. They are also nervous because they are scared of the reach of the Assad Government, and registering as a refugee in Lebanon could be perceived as being anti-government, which could then have ramifications for their families who are presumed to be pro-Assad, whether they are or not. What we are particularly concerned about is Christians who have converted from a Muslim background. They do face particular obstacles accessing faith-based organisations, because they have to admit that they have converted, so Islamic organisations are out of the question because of the strong emotions around conversion and apostasy. Also, traditional churches sometimes view converts with suspicion. They are not sure if they are trying to create discord. They also are nervous about, again, admitting conversion to UNHCR staff due to the serious ramifications of apostasy in that part of the world.

George Graham: I am George Graham. I am the head of conflict and humanitarian policy at Save the Children. From our perspective, the forms of vulnerability of child refugees include child labour, which has shot up, with more than 50% of working children working six or seven days a week, which has huge implications for their health, education, abuse and exposure to criminality. Early marriage is another phenomenon that has shot up, which exposes girls to violence, sexual abuse, risk of early pregnancy and dangerous births. Other vulnerabilities include prostitution, all forms of abuse, lack of services—in particular, of course, lack of education, which is affecting hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of child refugees—recruitment back into fighting forces in Syria and trauma as these children have been through hell and many of them are clearly suffering as a consequence. The causes of these vulnerabilities include poverty in their families, the

inability of their parents to work to support their children, the fact that they are under the radar and often are not registered, either because their families are poor or because of the reasons that Zoe has given: fear around registration. One of the consequences of this is that tens of thousands of babies have been born as refugees, but tens of thousands of those babies have not been registered. They are effectively stateless. There is also a particular group, the Palestine refugees from Syria, who are doubly marginalised and in particular are very unlikely to be able to be registered. They and their children are particularly vulnerable.

Chair: George, thank you, and thanks to all four of you for your discipline in staying to the two minutes.

Q23 Jeremy Lefroy: Yesterday, in questions to the DFID Ministers, our colleague Caroline Spelman asked, “Are persecuted Christians and other religious minorities able to get into the camps, and will they be able to remain within them and take winter refuge?” The Minister, Mr Swayne, replied that he had visited camps that were specifically for Christians, something most of us were unaware of until then. Could anybody shed some light on that, and are they aware of that and how these camps, specifically for Christians—or indeed for other minorities who may have been outside the system—are being supported?

Zoe Smith: Did the Minister specify which country he was talking about?

Jeremy Lefroy: He did not, no.

Chair: One would imagine Lebanon, I guess.

Jeremy Lefroy: It could be Lebanon or Jordan. I do not know.

Zoe Smith: Our general understanding is that in Lebanon, particularly, there are some official camps, but some of them do spring up spontaneously. People often segregate themselves quite naturally. Syrian society, whilst it was rightly celebrated for its pluralism, was also quite structured and there were quite a lot of conflicts between the different groups in society. People are used to staying with their own. When you have fled everything that you know, when you are nervous about your neighbour because they may have turned on you or you do not know what their political affiliation is, the tendency is to stay together. Also, we are not aware of Christians being within UN registered camps. They often go straight to churches for the lack of registration because, as I previously mentioned, of the fear of the unknown—the other—because camps are relatively homogenous. The UNHCR camps generally have a Sunni majority, so they tend to dictate the culture of the camps, which is not a bad thing per se, but if your culture is different then you stand out and you are more easily a target, which makes you nervous to go there. The dress code is different, for instance. We find they tend to focus more around churches, going to community-based organisations, local NGOs and church organisations. They often camp in their grounds.

Q24 Fiona Bruce: I have just a very quick question, Zoe. Are these informal camps that you have described therefore being supported financially through donations rather than UN resources? Is that how you see it?

Zoe Smith: Our understanding is that the majority of Christians do focus on community-based organisations, yes. In Lebanon, those who register with UNHCR have done so for humanitarian aid, but they have referred to the system as being broken. We have already

heard that the World Food Programme is drastically under-funded, so the majority of aid comes through either faith-based or non-faith-based organisations such as churches and the like.

Q25 Fiona Bruce: What about the big camps in Jordan?

Zoe Smith: Jordan is not a popular destination for Christians. We have, again, not found Christians in camps in Jordan. They tend to focus around areas where there are churches. Again, they go with what they know. They go with where they feel safe, where they are more likely to mingle in with the general population, stand out less and have some form of support.

Q26 Wendy Morton: Some of my question actually has been touched upon, but hopefully this gives a chance to explore it a little bit more and be a bit more specific. Can you tell me how much evidence is there to suggest that Christian and LGBT refugees are avoiding the camps? If they are doing so, what impact does this have on their ability to receive support?

Haley Bobseine: I have worked with a number of LGBT refugees who have gone to the camps in the beginning, because that is the only place where they knew to go. However, due to physical attacks and discrimination within the camps they have had to flee. Housing is definitely a really big issue for these individuals within Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and northern Iraq. There are some organisations that provide them with financial assistance for them to do emergency relocations from the camps after certain attacks. However, as the resettlement process can take a while, getting emergency cash assistance for one or two months helps but it is not the solution until they are resettled. The issue is there are no safe shelters. For lesbian women, they can be referred to women's shelters, and there has been a varying degree of success in how they have been able to integrate those women into the shelters, because there have been attack by other women on these lesbian women in the shelters. Otherwise, it is really difficult because they really have no place to go, and a lot are forced into survival sex and living on the streets. They do not have any places to go.

Q27 Chair: Haley, I know that your focus is Lebanon. Are you able to say anything about the situation for LGBT refugees in Jordan or Turkey?

Haley Bobseine: Yes, I can cover that as well. My understanding from colleagues in Jordan, and from my work in Jordan as well, is that maybe some are able to live in the camps, but others prefer to leave the camp. They might be worried about family members, such as distant cousins who have come over, and their own family members in the camps might attack them. They would leave the camps and try to integrate in other areas where they would be less likely to face those problems. There have been some initiatives by organisations or ad hoc groups that help assist these people in finding housing, but that is again a big issue. In Turkey, with the satellite city system, especially for these LGBT refugees who are sent to very rural areas, it is extremely hard for them to access support there. If there are any LGBT-friendly organisations, those tend to be in the capitals, and not in these small rural towns where they are being sent.

Q28 Mr Nigel Evans: I have been to visit camps in Turkey and in Jordan. Jordan was more of a tented community, with thousands living there, and in Turkey, as Wendy and I saw, they were smaller but there were lots of them all over the place. I guess, in those sorts of communities you are going to know everybody very quickly. I am just wondering, whether it is Christians or whether it is LGBT, is there not, can there not be, or do you think the British Government should be doing more to ensure that there is, somebody for them to go to if they feel that they are being discriminated against, being bullied or indeed intimidated and threatened?

Zoe Smith: That would be fascinating. My question would be how to get that message out to people. There is a great nervousness about political authorities in Lebanon. For instance, the political system is a bit of a mess and you would not necessarily go to any authorities there if you wanted help. It would be a fascinating idea to look into, but a lot of consideration would have to go into how the message was spread, so that it was in a way that was clear that it was going to be a non-partisan, really trustworthy person. I am thinking of the issue of confidentiality, for instance.

Q29 Mr Nigel Evans: Have you been to any camps where you can see that there is best practice operating, and where you know that everybody is getting fair protection?

Zoe Smith: The camp that I visited in Lebanon I think was majority Sunni. We then went to visit Christians in pockets. My experience is that they do often go to the churches, they go to mosques and they go to local organisations that they know. They look after them locally. I am not sure if there is any higher reporting structure in place. Our recommendation, if you wanted to find particularly vulnerable Christian groups, would be to go through church leaders. I know of one church that has built a specific refugee room on the side of their church just to cope with the vast flux of people coming through, Christian and non-Christian alike, to assess their needs. They will have a very good understanding of their local community and of who would be particularly vulnerable, such as those who have been in areas controlled by Daesh or those who have converted from a Muslim background, whose neighbours may not know that fact, but the church leader may well do.

Mr Nigel Evans: I go to a church in my constituency, and I know a lot of churches do a lot of fundraising for these camps. It would be rather perverse if Christians in these camps were then persecuted.

Haley Bobseine: There already are some mechanisms in place that I have seen within Lebanon, especially the GBV department at UNHCR, which has been working with some local organisations to reach out into these communities, so that they can come forth with their complaints and for discussion group sessions to be arranged. That is really good, but again, as I mentioned before, those tend to happen in Beirut, in Amman and in Istanbul. It is not reaching out beyond the main capital areas, to reach people who are more vulnerable cases, potentially, in the more rural areas.

Q30 Pauline Latham: This is probably more directed at George. We are talking about discrimination, but women and girls are discriminated against, persecuted, raped, forced into early marriage and all sorts of things. We know that DFID has funded and put a lot of resources in to helping women and girls in the area, particularly tackling violence. How

do you think this expertise can be better deployed to protect the women and girls, both inside the camps and outside the camps within the communities?

George Graham: The first thing to say is actually to give a lot of credit to what DFID has done, and its commitment to tackling the particular issue of violence against women and girls. It is really out in front in doing that. My understanding is that, in terms of the experts that they recruited as part of the sexual violence initiative, those people have been deployed primarily with a focus on supporting actors inside Syria itself, where the very worst abuses are continuing to happen. I do not know the answer to this, but it would be interesting to explore whether that group could also provide a similar role within the neighbouring countries, in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey and so forth.

If you think about the underlying drivers for some of the abuses that girls in particular, from my point of view, are facing, it does link very easily and quickly to these bigger issues. Why are girls being married off when they are far too young? It is because their parents are desperate and because they see that as a way to “keep them safe”, or, frankly, to have one less mouth to feed. It is not an easy answer, because it brings us back to all of the big challenges that we have got, which are, “How do you get to a state where families are able to survive, able to feed themselves, where they are not sending their girls out to work where they are hugely at risk, or sending them off to be married off?” I would come to all the points that you would expect me to make about the importance of really identifying those families and those children who are not registered, and quite proactively recognising that registration is a problem, and that those people are hiding and yet they are the most vulnerable. That really needs to be a core part of what the British effort and the collective effort looks like.

You talked, in the earlier session, about the issue of the right to work. It is obviously a hugely sensitive issue, but this crisis has grown and grown and grown, and people are now talking in terms of a new deal for refugees. We should look at that seriously. There is a world humanitarian summit in May next year. I know that it is a relatively long way off, but there is a moment to say, “Hang on, let’s not have a situation where children’s lives and their families’ lives are turned upside down, and girls are exposed to these sorts of risk, for years on end, simply because we cannot make the political/technocratic decisions needed to ensure that people can work, can access services and are not at the extreme edge of vulnerability”.

Q31 Pauline Latham: If you have got a lot of boys who are teenagers, or in their early 20s who have never worked, because they have been in camps for a very long time, and are testosterone fuelled, there is going to be a problem with girls. It is inevitable. There has to be a solution to try to help these boys and girls get work, so that they are occupied and their energies are not channelled into violence but into something much more constructive.

George Graham: For the younger ones, for the children, there is the need for education.

Pauline Latham: And for role models.

George Graham: Exactly. To my mind, and to everybody’s mind, it is madness that this crisis has been going on for nearly five years, so there are children who have not been in school for nearly five years, and that has just destroyed a generation. Five years is too long. If any of us had lost five years of education we would not be sat round this table

today having an intelligent conversation. We would be struggling. It is pretty critical, and I agree also with your point about working for older youths.

Q32 Pauline Latham: One of the problems must be because people feel that refugee status is temporary, and of course all the people in Syria thought they were going back to Syria, but there is nowhere for them to go back to very often. We have to look more maturely about a long-term situation and not just a temporary situation.

George Graham: Exactly.

Q33 Dr Lisa Cameron: This is a question for Aleema. In terms of ensuring that no one is left behind, and particularly really vulnerable refugees with disability, what should DFID be doing in terms of programmes and support for a disability sensitive approach?

Aleema Shivji: There are a few things. First of all, DFID has already been doing some things. DFID now has a disability framework. It is one of the only donors in the world, and definitely the only large donor in the world, that has such forward-thinking policies on disability that are really being put into action. There is a lot more that can always be done. The framework is less than a year old, but that is something that is happening. Aligned with that, and one of the outcomes of that, is that we have worked together with DFID and with HelpAge to develop guidance for DFID's humanitarian teams on how to practically include older and disabled people in humanitarian responses. What is really important now is that that gets disseminated and used by the teams, and used particularly for the Syrian crisis. DFID is also funding a project where we have just launched a pilot version of minimum standards of inclusion with older and disabled people in disasters. It is co-funded by DFID and the American Government, and that is going to be launched officially in December, but we have pre-launch work happening already, including in the Syrian crisis.

In terms of what more DFID can do within its own work, it can connect the different agendas. There is a really strong agenda, led by the Secretary of State, on women and girls. What we need to encourage DFID to do is really look at the intersectionality amongst vulnerabilities. Every context is going to be different, and the different vulnerabilities are going to be different, and they are going to be influenced by a number of different factors. The stronger that DFID can make its disability criteria, particularly because it is such an influential donor, the stronger the global criteria will become. DFID is one of the major donors of the UN system, and one of the weaknesses we see, for example in this crisis, is though UNHCR has a system for reporting, what we find is disability is grossly under-reported. Very visible things, such as somebody in a wheelchair or somebody who has an amputation, are picked up because you can see those and you do not need a lot of training. However, somebody who has intellectual impairments, mental health problems or a hearing impairment might not get picked up, and that is what is often happening. DFID can use its clout and weight, really, in the global system to influence the actors that it funds, particularly the multilaterals, to do a lot more. Those are a couple of things that I would say.

Q34 Fabian Hamilton: In its evidence to us, DFID said that their primary objective was to deal with the refugee crisis by providing aid directly and immediately to people in the

region. They also went on to say that they recognised that for some vulnerable people, the best solution to their protection needs was to bring them to countries like the UK. We saw this for ourselves when we visited the region last year. Perhaps George could start off on this, but if anybody wants to add anything that would be helpful. My question is about what you think the balance should be between assisting refugees in the region and resettling them in other countries such as the UK?

George Graham: I should confess I feared this question would be raised, because I do not have the perfect answer. There clearly is a balance to be struck. I do not want to go into a numbers game. Broadly, everybody seems to be welcoming the 20,000 commitment. I know there are a few people hoping for more. I do not really want to get into that. Clearly, as UNHCR has made very clear, there are a group of refugees whose vulnerability is such that resettlement has to be the durable solution that works for them. It is to the Government's credit here that the focus has been very much on vulnerability. That shows that this is very much a humanitarian effort on the part of the UK. That is quite important.

I do not like this phrase, but there is also a burden-sharing element that is important. It is very difficult to say to the Jordanian Government, for example, "You should let refugees work" if we are not at least trying—even if it is relatively at the level of a gesture, given the numbers, as I have said earlier—to share the burden, which is an unfortunate phrase.

All of that said, clearly it is in the interests of the majority of refugees to stay relatively close to where they come from because they would ideally like to go back to where they came from. Nobody should be in the business of organising mass transfers of everybody around the world. There are 4 million refugees and millions more displaced inside Syria. Clearly, a large weight of the effort needs to be in the region, and inside Syria, again as Sanj pointed out.

That is quite a woolly answer to your question. There is not a perfect figure. I have one final thought, however. I understand that UNHCR has said—and I do not think I heard this in the earlier testimony—that 10% of the current caseload is eligible or should be considered for vulnerability. That would be 400,000 worldwide, which is many more than currently. That is the sort of figure that people need to consider.

Q35 Fabian Hamilton: Thank you, George. I wonder if I just may, Chair, ask Aleema. When we were in Zaatari last year we certainly met Handicap International and we met a lot of the victims of the violence. There were some very traumatised people, not just physically but also mentally. I wonder if you felt that those were the people we should be concentrating upon bringing to the UK, in the hope that we might be able to assist them more easily here, before they are able to go back to their own country one day in the future?

Aleema Shivji: Again, I do not have a straightforward answer. It really depends. Some people will definitely flourish coming to a country that has more facilities and more services. If you take somebody who has a spinal injury and is now in a wheelchair, just simple things like going to the doctor or going to school, if it is a child, are obviously much easier here where there is infrastructure. If that happens, what is important is that caregivers and family members are also brought across, which today is a huge problem. To give a concrete example, we work with Syrians that have fled because of their injuries; their entire families have been left behind in Syria because they are not allowed to cross the border. The family separation piece is really important. There are others that would

flourish better in their own communities. It is similar to something that Zoe said earlier, in that people need support networks and a support network might be better in the region than it is were they to resettle in another country. There is not a right answer; it depends on the needs of the individual. From our perspective, we also welcome, obviously, the announcements by the UK Government, but we really call on the UK and all Governments around the world to resettle more refugees, and to really uphold our obligations under international law, which is to protect people fleeing from violence and conflict, and give them safe places to live. There is not a straight answer. It really does depend on the individual, their community dynamics and their needs.

Q36 Chair: Can I ask a follow-up question to that? Probably we ought to bring all of you in on this, and we will draw towards a close, unless colleagues have further questions. Zoe earlier made the point that a lot of Christians are reluctant to register, and there is an issue about under-registration that I think particularly affects the vulnerable groups that we have been hearing about during this session. Also, there is an issue, I discovered in Jordan this week, of under-registration simply because of a lack of resources to get everyone registered. What do you see as the interface between that issue and then the resettlement challenge? My understanding is that if people are not registered they are not going to even be considered for resettlement. Perhaps I will go to Zoe first and then work around the panel.

Zoe Smith: I really like the discussions about getting a robust understanding of what vulnerability is, taking into account all different reasons for people's vulnerability. In some cases, people will not be vulnerable because of their particular religion; in other cases it will be the real cause of their vulnerability. There may be room for a creative approach, and I am aware that there are constraints with budgets. If you accept that not all of the most vulnerable people will be in the camps, then there is some work to do to dig them out, and then perhaps walk them through the registration process. I do not know if that is feasible, but some creativity needs to be brought to this because, from what we have been hearing today, it does not seem an adequate response to just go with currently registered UNHCR refugees, although there are a lot of those already and a lot of them are incredibly vulnerable.

Chair: That is a really helpful answer, thank you.

George Graham: We would encourage the UK to look into whether it might be possible, as part of the UK scheme—which is slightly separate to the UNHCR scheme—to resettle refugees who have not been registered by UNHCR. That may pose huge practical challenges, but, as we have all articulated, the most vulnerable are not registered, so we are missing the target if we are not aiming for those people. I wonder if the idea of having unofficial targets for embassies in Beirut and Amman could at least be looked into, in order to address that problem directly.

Q37 Chair: Have you said that to the British Government?

George Graham: No.

Q38 Chair: Has the Home Office been in touch with you around the criteria for the 20,000?

George Graham: We have been talking to the Home Office, but we have not made that point, partly because we have been developing it as a team only in the work up to this meeting. We will do. I will have that dialogue and see what is possible.

Q39 Mr Nigel Evans: Can George just indicate what does he think an unintended consequence of doing that might be?

George Graham: That is definitely one of the issues. You do not want in any way to disincentivise the registration process. However, it is already massively dis-incentivised for all sorts of political reasons, with the cost being one of them.

Q40 Chair: My understanding is that the 1,000 by Christmas will be based solely on UNHCR criteria, but that there is then potential for there to be different criteria for the subsequent 19,000. I have not seen the full set of categories, but my understanding is there is very big focus on disability within those categories, which in a sense is obviously very welcome. Aleema, do you want to respond on this question, including on whether the Home Office have been in touch with your organisation?

Aleema Shivji: No, they have not. Just to pick up on your last point, though it is great that they have a focus on disability I just want to give you a statistic. It is a little bit old and I know UNHCR is doing a lot to improve it, but I highly doubt it has changed significantly. In 2013, when we did a survey on vulnerable Syrian refugees, we found that in the UNHCR database only 1.4% of their registered refugees were disabled, against our study which showed 22%.

Q41 Chair: Is that partly because they would use a definition that would be quite narrowly focused on physical disability?

Aleema Shivji: It is not so much the definition. It is a number of factors. One is people not being trained, so the staff members not been trained. Again, it is like what I said: you do not need to really be trained to pick up somebody who can see visibly. However, you do need to be trained for something that you cannot see visibly and that you actually have to ask a few questions about. That is a challenge. There are also challenges depending on the influx of refugees you get. If you have too many coming in at one time, which we have seen many times at the Jordanian border, for example, then you just do not have the capacity to ask all of the questions, so they do basic registration and they do not always go back. People at that point might leave the camp.

Some of you have seen our work in Zaatari. Zaatari is probably one of the most accessible camps in the world, but it is one of the only accessible camps in the region. There is a lot more that can be done. People leave the camps before they even get fully registered. A woman who is disabled in her shelter in a camp will leave because she cannot even get to the water point, which is 100 metres or 200 metres away. There are lots of problems in the registration system.

The other thing that we are actually seeing from our work inside Syria is that people are fleeing Syria directly. They are bypassing the registration system. The most vulnerable are not necessarily being registered, some of them by choice, because they do not see a solution. They know that Jordan and Lebanon are bursting. The countries cannot host any more people, and so what they are doing is they are trying to get straight to Turkey and

straight to Europe. They are not going through the system, so focusing just on registered refugees is going to pose challenges. Is it actually going to resolve the problem of people who are fleeing directly? You could look at it one way and say yes, but in another way it is not really going to the heart of where the problem is.

Q42 Chair: Do you think, therefore, the Government are wrong not to take anyone from Europe and only to take from the region?

Aleema Shivji: It is important that they look at all the different factors, absolutely.

Haley Bobseine: I just wanted to mention that last spring UNHCR ceased registering Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and that was because the Lebanese Government basically told them that that is what they needed to do. There are a number of refugees that I have come across who are extremely vulnerable, have protection issues, but they are not registered with UNHCR because they came after that cut-off date, or something changed within Syria or within Lebanon, and now they have urgent protection concerns because they are not registered. That is something that is really important to keep in mind about the Lebanon situation: that there are a lot of vulnerable refugees who have not been registered because they are not doing registration right now.

Q43 Wendy Morton: Obviously the focus of our inquiry is very much on Syrian refugees, but just while we have Aleema here, we have had a discussion around disability, and we know that there are many people displaced within Syria. Is there any indication of numbers of people who, through vulnerability or disability, have not been able to flee for that reason? Is there any indication of how easy, difficult or challenging it is to get aid and assistance to those people?

Aleema Shivji: I cannot give you a number but I can give you an indication of the context. We did a study last year on the impact of explosive weapons inside Syria, so that is anything that explodes, basically, including banned weapons like landmines and cluster munitions, but also lots of weapons that today are not banned. 80% of the incidents affecting civilians by weapons are by explosive weapons, and 75% of explosive weapon incidents are in densely populated areas. Just to give you a sense, most of these weapons are exploding where there are a lot of people. From our estimates—and we have taken data sets from Human Rights Watch, UNHCR and a number of partners, as well as our own data—you are looking at 5 million people inside Syria that are living in highly contaminated areas, of whom 2 million are children.

In Kobani today, we are doing clearance operations, where we are clearing the weapons. Our experts have never seen, in any crisis since we have existed, so 30-odd years, a city as damaged by weapons, as dangerous, as Kobani. It does not give you specific numbers, but it gives you a sense of the impact of this conflict on normal civilians, the number of children we see who are just trying to cross the road to buy some bread, trying to go to school, if it is functioning. You pick up something; you step on something; a bomb lands on you. It happens day in and day out, and the services are limited because it is hard for people to move around. We work in different parts of Syria, but it is very hard, if you are in one area, to move to another area, depending on who is running that part of the country and where the frontlines are, which are always shifting as well.

Q44 Dr Lisa Cameron: Some of the information we have been given is also about children who have been travelling by themselves, and high proportions of those children appear to have disappeared from registration or from countries they have managed to get to. I am wondering about what more could be done in that regard, in order to protect vulnerable children who are travelling by themselves.

George Graham: That is a good question. I realised, as I went through my list of reasons why children are vulnerable, that I had missed out that quite big one, which is that they have lost their parents; they have lost their older brothers and sisters, a sadly very common phenomenon and not an easy thing to address. One of the things that we and others do is to run child-protection programmes, which look like a rough and ready version of what you would have here if there are orphans or unaccompanied children in the UK. As part of that, we would be looking to trace family members of those children, to try to reunite them with their families.

The guiding principles of this are, first, that you always do what is in the best interests of the child, and then, beneath that, normally what is in their best interests is that they are reunited with a family member, to the extent that is possible, but there are some, in fact very many, for whom that will not be possible. It is very hard to say what the answers are. I would hope and expect—and we are calling—for them to be considered as part of the resettlement, but we are not saying there should be a target number of unaccompanied children brought to the UK, because it might be that for none of them is it appropriate for them to be taken to a completely different context.

What we are saying, which may be related to what you are thinking, is in the context of the very many children who have made it to Europe, among whom there are very many unaccompanied solo children who are exposed to another set of pretty serious risks of being trafficked, put in the drugs trade, sex trade, etc. I know in Parliament yesterday there was some discussion about the proposal that we have made for the UK to offer to relocate up to 3,000 of those children. That is a very important call for us. It is not specifically about Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan; it is about vulnerable children in Europe, but it is important to see the connection between those two.

Q45 Jeremy Lefroy: Some of the countries that are seeing refugees come into them in Europe, particularly in the Balkans, have income levels not very different from the income levels that exist or existed in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere. Particularly with winter coming on, I wondered what your views were on how many refugees are at risk within those countries, particularly in the Balkans and particularly those who are in higher-altitude areas.

Chair: Who would like to take that?

George Graham: I can have a stab at it. We have teams working in many of those countries in eastern Europe. In fact, just this morning I got an alert from that team talking about—I may get these countries wrong—two new countries for us. I want to say Bulgaria, but I would probably need to check before this goes on the record. Those working in the western Balkans, in Greece, in Serbia, in Croatia and so forth are really expressing concern about this. What everybody had hoped, I guess, if that is the right word, is that the numbers would drop off, because the seas would be too choppy, basically, which is what in the past has happened. Of course, the numbers fleeing Syria has gone up in recent months, for reasons that we know about: bombing in northern Syria.

People are coming. People are still getting on those boats from Turkey to Greece in large numbers, and the conditions, as you mention, are getting worse and worse. It is only October now, but it is getting colder. There is a big job to do, to manage that situation from a humanitarian point of view, leaving aside all the other issues.

Q46 Jeremy Lefroy: Are those countries, which are perhaps struggling and, as I said, are middle-income countries, getting the support they need from elsewhere? We have seen a lot of UK support go directly into the countries surrounding Syria, and indeed into Syria itself, but presumably they rely on the European Union for support when it comes within the European Union area. I am wondering if that support is sufficient and if it is holding, because what you have said to me just then worries me. It would worry all of us.

George Graham: Others may know more, but my understanding is that people now get the problem. For the first few months of this refugee crisis period, in the last few months, when we talked to the UK Government and DFID about this, they were understandably not jumping up and down to be spending aid money in eastern Europe. My understanding also was that UNHCR did not want to be throwing its resources too heavily at these very much developed countries. Then the EU, at the western Balkans conference last week, pledged a few hundreds of millions for Syrian refugees, but my understanding is that they are including within that support for two countries in the western Balkans.

I do not know if this is Save the Children's view or my personal view. I am in two minds about that. First, there is clearly humanitarian need, and our humanitarian teams are in those places now doing what, in this ghastly phrase, is called winterisation, which is making people safe for winter. I do not know who invented that word, but they did. It is a straightforward humanitarian imperative to do that, but, if an aid budget is finite, then there is a judgment to be made about where you spend it.

Jeremy Lefroy: This inquiry is into the Syrian refugee crisis; it is refugees wherever they are. Therefore, this is definitely something for the UK to take up with European partners in terms of the support that is going through the EU. After all, we make a very substantial contribution to the EU budget. We should be insisting that that gets spent in that area. Just very finally—no, I have had my final question.

Q47 Chair: I have to confess, I have a “finally” as well. Can I thank you all? I just have one last question to George. I have been in Jordan and Zaatari this week, visiting families living in urban settings. It struck me in both that the one quite optimistic thing was the children getting the chance to go to school, but, as Pauline said earlier, the schools are bursting. Do you have a view, as Save the Children, as to what we could do to really get an expansion in the places in education—I have been Jordan, so I am thinking about Jordan, but I am sure it applies in Lebanon and Turkey as well—so that the Syrians get that education, but also so it is not to the detriment of the local children? You have 30 seconds.

George Graham: First, let us not forget it is possible to provide schooling in basements inside Syria. Secondly, the G20 are meeting in Turkey in three weeks' time. There is an opportunity for people to say, “Let us fix this refugee crisis and, as part of that, let us make sure that no children continue to be out of school.” Finally, you have your World Humanitarian Summit in May. That is the moment to say that no child should be out of

school for more than a month as a consequence of the crisis, because it is just a technical problem; it is fixable.

Chair: Thank you so much. You have been brilliant witnesses in keeping to time and covering an enormous amount of ground in a very short space of time, so thank you very much indeed for coming to give us evidence today.