



International Development Committee

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

Tuesday 24 November 2015

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

Questions 108-153

Witnesses: **Richard Harrington MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State jointly at the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Department for International Development, gave evidence

Q108 Chair: Welcome. Thank you very much indeed, Minister, for joining us as part of our inquiry into the Syrian refugee crisis.

Richard Harrington: It is a pleasure, Mr Twigg, and thank you. I would like to just apologise to you and the Committee for not being able to attend last week. The reason was, as you are probably aware now, we had the first plane of refugees we chartered arriving into Glasgow. The only reason I did not make it public before is because we did not want it to become a media spectacle—not that you would have made it into one. That is why. I know it appeared a bit discourteous, not appearing before the Committee last week, but thank you very much to everyone—particularly to yourself—for allowing me to attend this morning.

Q109 Chair: Thank you very much for being with us. The advantage of having the second session is that it does enable the Committee to follow up some of the evidence that we took from Desmond Swayne and from officials last week.

Let me kick off. As I understand it, the Syrian refugees being resettled are to be granted five years' humanitarian protection status, but other schemes that we have participated in, like the Gateway Protection Programme, also with the UNHCR, offer full refugee status. Can you explain the thinking behind why it is this temporary humanitarian protection status rather than refugee status with indefinite leave to remain?

Richard Harrington: Yes, I can. The main difference is that once refugees are accepted onto this scheme, they immediately have the status that effectively gives them the right to work and everything that goes with it. With the general asylum systems and everything, it just takes much longer. There is a much longer process, as you are aware, and an interregnum period before they are given status. It is really expediency. The humanitarian

protection visa, as it is called, means from the moment they arrive in the UK they have all the rights and benefits that that involves.

Q110 Chair: Is there than a point at which they can be considered for indefinite leave to remain if they are settled here and clearly return is not an option?

Richard Harrington: Yes. After five years, they then apply to the Home Office, like anybody else would, if they want to, for leave to remain. It is very hard to know whether or not people will want to. A lot depends on what happens in Syria. We have the comparison of what happened in Kosovo, where there was a peace settlement and everybody wanted to go back. I am afraid I think—as we all do—that is hopelessly over-optimistic, but it does give them the five years, and we have every reason to believe, if they want to stay after that, people will be settled, have children at school and the usual things. It is an expediency to get them in through the system so there is no period of limbo.

Q111 Chair: Am I right that the Gateway Protection Programme offers immediate refugee status with indefinite leave to remain? It is not the usual asylum system that you described; it is a programme that enables that to happen straightaway.

Richard Harrington: It is in much smaller numbers, Mr Twigg. The Government have not done anything on this scale before, so it really is a question of keeping it very simple. They have the UNHCR checks, security checks, health checks, etc, but then that is it. I know one should not use administrative matters as an excuse—it is not an excuse—but we do want to get people in very quickly and very clearly. Normally, if people are settled and everything, at the end of the period, they get leave to remain. I see no reason at all why they should not, if that is what they want.

Q112 Dr Lisa Cameron: Will the intake of refugees be spread evenly across the five-year period of this Parliament, or are there any plans for a front-loading of resettlement due to the scale of the crisis?

Richard Harrington: There are no plans, Dr Cameron, to particularly front-load, but, as we are dealing with human beings, we cannot just say, “We are taking so many a month and that is it”. First of all, logistically, the UNHCR has more than 400,000 people who could qualify for this scheme—that is, they qualify on the vulnerability criteria and then they go through all the procedures. We do not want to hold people up, but, at the same time, we want it properly organised. I read this morning on my way here that the Canadians, for example, have schemes where people stay in a temporary camp, such as an RAF base or something like that, in the interim. I took the decision early on in my short time doing this job that, as people have been disrupted hugely once in their life, and they have been disrupted hugely again—although less painfully, still it is a big upheaval to come over to the UK—we could not put them somewhere temporarily. Therefore, it is on a basis where we already know, once people get to the airport in Beirut or wherever it is we are chartering the aircraft from, exactly where they are going to be staying. The idea is that that really mitigates.

The true answer to your question is it has to be fairly even. Say we could charter 20 aircraft at once. I suppose logistically we could, but it would not be at all smooth and well-organised at this end. That is the whole idea. I expect it to be fairly smooth. Your instinct, when you see people over there, is to want to get them here as quickly as possible, but, given that they are under UNHCR protection, with shelter and food, etc, it is better just to do it properly. I expect it to be broadly even, but you cannot just take a calculator, as, indeed, Mr Vaz did in the Home Affairs Select Committee, divide the total by this and say, “It is that many per month”. Human beings—it is not like that.

Q113 Dr Lisa Cameron: Given that you are saying it is human beings and given the scale of the crisis and that that fluctuates and situations can change, will there be room to review the figures at some point during the five years?

Richard Harrington: At the moment, the Government have no plans to review it. I was given the job, which was publicised, to make sure the 20,000 promised by the Prime Minister in his speech on 7 September are brought over here in a well-ordered and decent manner and treated properly when they get here. Lots of people in Parliament, in all different parties, are lobbying the Government to take more people. It is a perfectly legitimate thing for people to have that view. Those people on this Committee who know me will know I am not the sort of person who normally would say, “That is just my job” and not look outside it, but, for the moment, I know it is in everybody’s interests, not least the people from Syria, to make sure they are brought here in a proper, well-ordered and decent way.

Q114 Chair: I take your point that simply taking 20,000 divided by the number of days in the Parliament is not the best way to approach this, but clearly the scale of the crisis at the moment does suggest an urgency that all of us will hope perhaps will not exist in three years’ time, if there is political progress.

Richard Harrington: It does, Mr Twigg. That is why we took the decision early on, at the beginning of October, to divide the process into phases. Phase one is the first 1,000. We said, “What we have been doing before is not the ideal system”. It is very bespoke. One person in the Home Office is in liaison with a family all the way through—it is quite a manual process—and then they are placed individually with local authorities. We thought, “We can stretch that for the first phase as much as we possibly can”, which is exactly what has been happening. We have eight charter flights coming in, but still it is not a bells-and-whistles system. We are hoping this phase will continue until January or February and then by March of next year we will, for example, have more detailed information about the refugee families, such as what skills they have and the sort of place they lived in Syria, to try to match them up with particular areas, with a view to employment. We do medical care very precisely now—the correct type of medical care—but there are lots of things that could be a lot more organised. If we had started to do that from scratch, it would have been months before we took anybody. Because of the point that you have so correctly made about people being there, we felt that it was necessary to get a reasonable amount of people over as quickly as possible. That is this series of flights we have from last Tuesday; there is another flight in today and there will be one or two a week until just before Christmas.

Q115 Jeremy Lefroy: Good morning, Minister. If you found that procedures were working more smoothly than perhaps you could have predicted, would you allow the process to continue in such a way that, say, the 20,000 could be reached within two years or three years and not apply the letter of “within this Parliament”, as some people have suggested? Would you let it take its natural course, if those procedures were working very well?

Richard Harrington: I am trying to be open-minded on that. The thing is to make sure the procedures are working well and to make sure that people, when they arrive here, can get individual treatment. For example, in Glasgow last week, every single person was met at the airport. I must say I am so happy that this is not party-political in any way. This was the Scottish Government, the Home Office, the Scottish local authorities and local councils. Nobody cared who was what party. It was quite an atmosphere. When they landed, people were met by individual representatives from each local authority. Yes, providing that can continue, but we have not found a way to organise a mass programme, like the Canadians are doing—I am sure they have the best intentions—on such a scale in a short time.

The political side is 20,000 over the course of the Parliament. My side of it is to make sure it is as efficient and expedient as possible, with the emphasis going on what happens to the refugees in the process. We do not want uncertainty. For example, on the plane last week, they all knew they were going to Scotland. They were told about Scotland and—I was not on it—they were asking questions about it. It was not just, “We are going to stay in some camp until they decide what to do with us”. That is at a premium, and as long as we can continue that, I would be very happy to, even if it means it takes a few more weeks for some people.

Q116 Wendy Morton: We understand that you recently went on a trip to the US with the International Rescue Committee to see the programme that they operate, which is, I believe, similar to our VPRS programme. I wonder if you could share with us some of the lessons that you learnt on that recent trip and how it might, through that, benefit our scheme here.

Richard Harrington: Yes, I certainly will. I saw one of the IRC centres in Baltimore. That was not the main purpose of the trip, but that was an important bit of it. I think in answer to your question I should answer the first bit, about the trip generally. I went to visit the State Department and the people who are involved with not just the United States-side resettlement bit, which I will come on to in a minute, which is your IRC point, but also in terms of what we are doing: selecting from all these millions of people under the humanitarian criteria and going through the health and security checks and everything like that.

The American Government have been very helpful to us. President Obama made his announcement prior to David Cameron’s and, if they had wanted to, they could have said, “We are taking all of the first batch and you sort them out afterwards”. Instead, we sat down sensibly. This was not last week; this was a few weeks ago. For example, the Americans find it more difficult to operate in Lebanon, so we said we would take more people from Lebanon and they would take more people from Jordan. We are also trying to do that with the Canadians and the Australians so it is all organised, so, for the refugees

themselves, it does not appear like everyone is operating separately. That was purpose number one of the trip.

I must say I was appalled to find on the day I arrived—I was only there for two days—that a Bill went through the first bit of Congress, the House of Representatives, trying to stop Syrian refugees being admitted on the grounds of security. That is nonsense, because in America, like here, they go through very comprehensive security checks. One should not make political points. I was shocked to find, however, that not just the right-wing Republicans but also Democrats were getting on the bandwagon. It was all hysteria. I cannot say how upset the people who work so hard for these refugees in the United States, who are officials and the senior people there who are the equivalent, say, to my opposite numbers—they are not elected, but they are politically appointed—were. They are all so committed to refugee programmes and they were so upset about it. I was there on that day.

I was there overnight, and for the second day I had asked to visit one of the resettlement centres. What they do in the United States is they divide the country into nine regions and they give an area to an organisation. Some of them are faith-based organisations—the Christian organisations. It does not affect the people they take or anything; it is just that they have the network. The convenient one to see was the IRC, because it is in Baltimore, which is just next to Washington, and time was at a premium. Baltimore is a city that has declined a lot in population over the last 20 or 30 years. They welcome refugees. There is a hub in Baltimore and they provide a caseworker system. People are looked after by an individual caseworker, who might have 10 or 20 families. They are found accommodation. This is the answer to your question. The real difference that I saw was that everything is geared towards getting people into work quickly. Having met some refugee families, that is in the interests of the family as well. They also sort out medical care and accommodation, make sure that there is a welcome pack and things available for them, and arrange the local schools and everything.

It so happens that the International Rescue Committee—when I was on this committee, I saw with colleagues here operations that they do in Africa and things—operate extensively in the United States. There is a lot to learn from them. They do not use local authorities in the way that we do. They have seen conflicts there—not in Baltimore, where the local authority is very much in favour of it. State governors are against it. A lot more political things come in. That is why I think they have decided to use these organisations.

If I could give the top lesson, as it were, it would be that a lot of thought goes into getting people into employment. Apart from that, just talking to people who do it all the time is so helpful, because it is comparatively new to us.

Q117 Wendy Morton: During your answer, you made reference to the fact that refugees from Lebanon found it difficult to be placed in America, or it was better for us to take refugees from Lebanon than for them to go to America. The point that I wanted to touch on was that during a previous evidence session, we were led to understand that there was a group of refugees that had been destined to go to America and then some of those were coming here to the UK. I am wondering if that is the connection. At the time, we were exploring whether, if those refugees who were destined for America were now coming to the UK, America was still going to take up the same number, if you see where I am coming from in a long, convoluted way.

Richard Harrington: It is not robbing Peter to pay Paul. That would be appalling. It is just that the Americans started a bit before us. The pipeline is quite complicated. First of all, people have to register with UNHCR, which most refugees, but not all, do. It is a very complex registration process. It is not just taking a name, etc; it is biometric eye testing, and a lot of questions about where you come from, circumstances, health and all this sort of thing. Within that, people can apply to come under one of the vulnerable people schemes. It is quite a complicated thing. Because the Americans were more advanced in that process, it was comparatively easy for them to say, “We have these people coming, so you can have some of the people who are more advanced in the process”. It does not mean that people are going to be stopped at the other end, further down the line, or anything like that; it was just better for all concerned.

As I said before, for the decent-minded countries—there are quite a few in the world—it makes sense to have a common system of allocation of people, because it is quicker for the refugees concerned. For example, some countries would be more appropriate for larger families. Some of these Syrian families have six, seven or eight children. In some countries, there is a lot of accommodation for larger families. Some might need specific medical care and things like that. It is really that kind of thing, rather than saying, “We are going to cut numbers off because you have taken some, so we do not have to take that many”. It is really quite the opposite.

Q118 Mr Nigel Evans: Richard, it is great to see you. I know people must have preconceived ideas before they start taking in families as to what the issues may be—the difficulties and challenges they are going to face and all that sort of stuff. In your experience now, looking at how it has operated in the United States, has there been anything that has been totally unexpected—that they have said, “Oh, gosh, we were not expecting that”?

Richard Harrington: No. I really think they are quite flexible. What I was pleased about and what we are trying to replicate is it is not a one-size-fits-all thing. To try to prevent what you have flagged as a possible fear, what the Americans have done—which is what we will be doing—is realised the more information you get at the other end, the less likely that is to happen. For example, one of the fears I had when I started was that people from opposite sides of the military and political spectrum were going to the same town or village—that people were finding they were in the same street as people from the same background as the very people they had been fighting, who had caused them to go there. That sort of thing would appear to have been avoided. Refugees from whatever background, tragically, have so much in common that I think any differences are left. You are quite right to flag that, because I did, but when asked the question in the United States they do not seem to have had that. They have a lot of information before people come—really, a lot. We are looking at that for the next phase. For example, we are looking at the possibility of doing video interviews and things like that. Again, it is tailoring where people are going to be settled to what they are like.

Q119 Mr Nigel Evans: Yes. Some of it must also be to try to find out what their interests are. Wrenching yourself from your own country to go to live somewhere else must be just a nightmare as it already is. When I went to Sweden recently—as you know, they are taking about 8,000 people a week into Sweden—they said that while they were coming into

Stockholm, they were then being moved out into other cities straightaway. One fear on behalf of the Swedes was that some of the families were being moved into areas that are so remote, where there is no work, and that even Swedes do not particularly like living in some of these areas, never mind somebody coming from Syria. I am just wondering whether enough thought has been given to where the most appropriate places would be for the families that will be coming into the United Kingdom.

Richard Harrington: I would like to point out—I know you know, Nigel—in Sweden it is not planned like we are doing it. This is a mass migration exercise of very unfortunate people who are looking for a home, rather than people who are part of a programme in the way that we are doing. We have more chance of organising exactly what you are saying; we have this chance in all the interviews beforehand. You are right. We are thinking for the second phase, for example, if people come from a farming and agricultural background, which a lot of people do in Syria, it would make sense to put them in a smaller community where there might be opportunities in that field. If people come from a large city and have never been out of an urban area, the same is also true.

I will not even call this a problem—it is a good thing—but you have a kind of conflict. Expediency would say to concentrate refugees in a few areas, because you have facilities and because they are used to taking refugees. For example, Bradford and Glasgow have been doing this sort of thing—and congratulations to them—for a long time. At the same time, you have really decent local authorities from up and down the country, from the tip of Cornwall up to the islands in Scotland that want to take refugees. They are decent communities and decent people, and they would be very welcoming to refugees. This is not importing a commodity; these are human beings. It seems to me the overriding thing—we might be wrong, because nobody knows—is that a community wants to take people and the local authority is happy to. By the way, I have phoned up lots of leaders of councils across the country, and they all say, “Oh, yes, we had a vote on it. Everybody voted for it.” They always say “except one idiot”, but I will not go into that. Why say, “You cannot have them because you are too small and too rural”? It would not be the right thing to say. We are working our way through that. You are right to flag it—you really are.

At the end of the day, we cannot force people to stay where we are putting them. This is a free country, and once they are here, they have the same rights as you have and we all have. History shows refugees tend to concentrate in areas. Because the welcome is going to be so strong and there are employers who want to take on refugees, I have just an instinct in me that people will settle in areas that you normally would not think of in this context.

Q120 Mrs Helen Grant: I have a couple of quick clarification points. I think you have answered the first one. In the American situation, are the families housed in proximity to each other? Are they in, for example, the same block of flats or the same road or the same village, subject to being on opposing sides and having differing views? Is there a clustering?

Richard Harrington: No, there is not a clustering, but they will cluster in as much as there are a lot of people in one large city, a bit like, say, Bradford or Glasgow. They have a rule in America, which seems very sensible to me, that they are a maximum of an hour from a refugee centre—they do it in miles, but it is equivalent to an hour on public transport—so they have a place to come, but, no, they are spread out.

Q121 Mrs Helen Grant: You mentioned a number of our charter flights were coming in here. How many refugees are on each flight?

Richard Harrington: It varies, but typically 100 to 120. We have to have extra space for medical staff and people like that.

Q122 Mrs Helen Grant: But pretty much we are filling up the planes.

Richard Harrington: It is three figures, usually, but not packed.

Q123 Chair: Are they mostly from Lebanon so far?

Richard Harrington: Jordan and Lebanon.

Q124 Fabian Hamilton: Richard, welcome. Last week, Paul Morrison, who is the director of the Syrian refugees resettlement programme, told us that he has seen quite a lot of local authorities actively harnessing their own networks. You have touched on that, but I am thinking particularly of faith groups and NGOs. Indeed, one of the questions I asked him was about the families that have contacted me and said, “The children have left. We have spare bedrooms. We have enough income to support refugee families. We would be happy to take them into our own homes and pay for all the costs.” I am sure every other Member in this room has had the same experience. I wondered how you are engaging with those local authorities and maybe those informal networks that would help so hugely in resettling Syrian refugees.

Richard Harrington: I will do my best, Fabian, to answer it quickly, but I could talk for hours on it. Yes, a lot of people come and—rather like my mother was evacuated in the war—say, “We have a spare bedroom; we will do anything”. We cannot do that, because these are families, predominantly. Not wanting to turn away these fantastic people, the system we are working on for the second phase would be that each Syrian family would be twinned up or mentored—the *Daily Telegraph* said “adopted”, which has different connotations—so they will have a family in that town or village that will call them and invite them to lunch, and their children will play together. I hope that will lead to employment and general integration into it.

No one is being turned away. We are doing the whole thing through local authorities. This is not central. We do not even have the power—we do not want the power—to say, “You have to take people. You have to do this; you have to do that.” The local authorities, as an umbrella, are organising this. It seemed to me that in America the faith groups—I have seen every brand of every religion, from extreme Reform Judaism right the way through to extremely Orthodox, and the same with all the other religions—are good umbrellas for this, and certainly with the mentoring thing. That is a top priority to work on, so that just because we cannot use people’s spare bedrooms, we are not then saying, “You are of no help to us”, because they will be.

Q125 Fabian Hamilton: Let me give you an example. I know you know the city of Leeds. On the Roundhay Road in Leeds, there is a volunteers’ café called Toast Love Coffee.

Richard Harrington: It was not there in my day, Mr Hamilton.

Fabian Hamilton: It was not there, I am sure; it is only fairly recent. I went there on Thursday and I was told by the volunteers, “We would like to do much more for Syrian refugees. Can you please tell the Government that we are here, willing and ready to do that?” They use recycled food and donations from local bakeries and so on.

Richard Harrington: You are absolutely right. There is this pent-up demand. I am trying to do it in an ordered way. As I said at the beginning, for the first phase, we have not really had the luxury of dealing with the volunteers as we want to, but we are going to be sending a model example out to the local authorities. Dave Green, the Leader of Bradford Council—I say that because it is near Leeds—has offered to go and speak to all councils about the way they do it. This mentoring/twinning/adopting system is top priority. I could not do all things at once, and on the volunteer side of it we have not done as much as we could.

Q126 Pauline Latham: If I could come in on that, everything you have said has been incredibly positive, which is really good. Unfortunately, Derby City Council is playing very silly political games about this. They are saying in the paper, in headlines, “We are going to settle them”—they do not say “in all the Conservative areas”, but—“in all the Conservative wards”, which is getting people pretty exercised by this. Sadly, they are doing this, which is really stupid, yet Derby city has a fantastic record of resettling refugees. We have a huge number of former refugees in Derby who have settled, and it is pretty peaceful considering there are so many different cultures, faiths and nationalities. My view for Derby and Derbyshire is that every authority in Derby and Derbyshire ought to be able to take some, using the expertise that Derby city has. How are you going to persuade Derby City Council that it ought to share its expertise and work with you and with the refugees and harness the various church and faith groups who desperately want to provide that support network for the refugees, because they lose their support networks when they leave their country? How do you think you can do that?

Richard Harrington: It is a good question, Pauline. I cannot force them to. At the end of the day, they are a separate local authority and, if they do not want to do it, they do not have to. You also used the word “persuasion”. It might be political—I do not even know the political complexion of Derby City Council—but I have found the best way of persuasion is to try to use other similar councils that they might have connections with to say, “Look, we have done it. It is not bad. It has worked out well. It is a good thing to do.” From a lobbying point of view, as many members of the public who contact their council and say, “We would like you to do this”, faith groups are very well placed, because they all work with them in so many different areas—homeless people, people with other problems—and it is the same kinds of groups that want to help in this. Between us, I hope we can do it, but I do not believe there is a magic solution. At the end of the day, if they do not want to do it, this is voluntary. Yes, we could go over the heads of the local authorities. We could as a Government, or we could get a church group to rent properties and put them in them. There is no law to say we cannot do that, but we want to do it with the local authorities, because we want all the facilities that go with it.

Q127 Jeremy Lefroy: We were told by DFID—you have mentioned this already—that by UNHCR definitions there are 400,000 vulnerable refugees in the region. Given that 20,000 is 5% of that, how do you ensure that the UN processes capture those who are most in need?

Richard Harrington: They are pretty comprehensive, Jeremy. I was quite impressed with how comprehensive they are. In the end, we cannot, because UNHCR are dealing with such huge problems, but I have seen the systems and they seem to me as good as you could possibly get. If you were to believe what you read in the papers, you would think someone just turns up at the airport with a stolen Syrian passport and gets on a flight, but it is so much more complicated than that. From what I have seen, in these countries like Lebanon and Jordan they have this network of fieldworkers and they know what is going on. It is a most impressive organisation. I had seen it from the surface on visits with you when I was on the Committee, but, when you look at what they do, it is so much more complex than I thought.

Also, within UNHCR, or at least under their umbrella, we have British NGOs working in different fields—education, medicine, etc, as well as helping to feed people. A lot of them are British NGOs. DFID has eyes and ears as well. We took the decision, which I hope the Committee would understand, to use UNHCR. At the moment, we are just taking people who are registered with UNHCR. There are people who are not registered with UNHCR. For example, they are not registering people in Lebanon at the moment, not because they do not want to, but because the Lebanese Government are so overwhelmed they do not want them to. We are still encouraging them. We are asking the Lebanese Government if they will allow renewal of registration. If people are not registered, we do not want them to be discriminated against because they are not registered.

I asked the Americans this question: “Are there other organisations that you have used as an alternative to UNHCR?” They said they have had lots of people who do good presentations, but they have not found anyone who has anything near the reach and robust and professional attitude. It is not that they are not well meaning. For the moment, we would rather encourage non-registered people to become registered and use that. All refugees are vulnerable, almost by definition; it is a shame we have to make that categorisation, which is “extra vulnerable”, because to go through what they have been through, anybody is vulnerable, and who is more vulnerable than the people still in Syria? We just have to have a way of doing it. At the moment, I have not yet heard of a suitable alternative to UNHCR. When other organisations have come and said, “What about this group or that group?” I have asked them to do a proposal to me to say, “Yes, there are these people. This is how we could decide who is most vulnerable,” but as yet I have not received anything.

Q128 Jeremy Lefroy: Thank you very much. If I may say, your commitment to this personally shines through, and we really welcome that.

Richard Harrington: Jeremy, that is very kind of you.

Q129 Jeremy Lefroy: If I may follow up on that, the Prime Minister—

Richard Harrington: Now it is the difficult question.

Jeremy Lefroy: Hopefully it is not. The Prime Minister, when he made his very welcome statement that we would take 20,000, said that one of the reasons for this was that taking people who are registered with the UNHCR who are vulnerable would, in turn, mean that people would be less likely to try to flee from the area through Turkey and across the Mediterranean. Are you seeing any indication that that message is getting over and that because countries such as the United Kingdom are taking people directly from the camps it is stopping some people from taking that very risky voyage that they might otherwise have done?

Richard Harrington: All these things are by story; there is no study that says that. What I did learn on a trip over to Jordan was that these people communicate with people all the time. They all have smartphones. Even if they have hardly any possessions, they have phones. Word gets around on everything. Even unfortunate choices of words, such as, for example, talking about taking refugees from “camps”—as this Committee knows full well, most people are not in camps; what well-meaning people mean by “camps” is people under UNHCR auspices—can cause people to come towards the camps in the hope that they can get on these schemes. If you add all the countries together, these refugees know that it is a safe and legal way to come. Because they know everything that goes on, I am certain—I cannot give you empirical evidence, because it is too early to tell—people now know that to register on these schemes is a very good thing to do. As you know, the battle is against people traffickers. People come on these boats. You know this all better than I do. I do think it will work from that point of view. They have to be vulnerable. They have to be families. It is not just saying, “I come from Syria; therefore, I am vulnerable.” There are arguments that that should be, but we have to control it in some way. It seems to me these vulnerability criteria are good working criteria and are broad enough that they are not just one area of vulnerability; there are the seven criteria, as I am sure you are aware.

Q130 Mrs Helen Grant: Does the whole family have to be vulnerable, or is it just one vulnerable person—perhaps a little girl with disabilities—and then the whole family are allowed to go?

Richard Harrington: Just one person. It is not to spilt families up.

Q131 Pauline Latham: Your enthusiasm comes through. I would like to think it is because you were on this Committee and that you did enjoy your time here, albeit fairly brief.

Richard Harrington: It is from travelling around with you, Mrs Latham.

Q132 Pauline Latham: Clearly, you have a job where you can make a real difference to people.

Richard Harrington: I believe so.

Pauline Latham: Given that these refugees, as you said, are highly vulnerable, they are going to need some specialist care. You have touched on it, but how are you able to specifically match their needs to a particular local authority area that has a specialism? As I say, Derby has a specialism, but they do not at the moment want to use it. How can you be

sure that the local authorities, who are always saying “cuts, cuts, cuts”, can satisfy those needs and have the capacity?

Richard Harrington: We can give them some financial assurance. There probably is not time to go into detail, but we have confirmed that we are assisting in years two to five, and year one has never been in question. It is the knowledge that the Home Office has developed over the years about which local authorities are specialist in things. For example, Bradford, which I mentioned, has very good specialist medical practice and a specialist housing association. We have that knowledge. For the second phase, the more comprehensive information we get over there, the more detail we can do—what you say. What we do not want is a local authority just simply having the names of people who are coming, their ages and where they come from. We are well beyond that now, but if I was asked to come before the Committee, say, six months from now, I hope it will be so detailed that they will know exactly and that the real specialisms can come through—the same for employment, education, etc. I presume you are thinking of medical particularly.

Q133 Pauline Latham: Medical and vulnerable children who need very safe spaces because they have been so traumatised. When we were out in Zaatari, we came across some children who were very traumatised; all they could draw were guns and bullets and people being killed.

Richard Harrington: And even the human being walking towards them—

Pauline Latham: Yes, is threatening.

Richard Harrington: Quite. We are very aware of that, but it will become more sophisticated.

Q134 Pauline Latham: What I am really encouraged about is that you are doing such a good job, but this surely is a forerunner for the way we should be behaving whenever we have a refugee issue. The foundations you are putting in place now should be used as a blueprint for future crises, which there always will be at some point, somewhere. We will have to take more refugees from somewhere else. I hope this is being set in stone so that we know exactly how best to do it.

Richard Harrington: It is. That is why, particularly for the second phase, we really want this to be a bells-and-whistles type of operation. As I said before, the premium at the beginning was to get a reasonable amount of people over here to show that we could do it and because people wanted it. I hope we will be getting a lot more sophisticated.

Q135 Pauline Latham: What about language skills? They do not naturally speak English. You are very keen to get them into employment. How are they going to do that without the language skills?

Richard Harrington: English lessons are a priority when they get here. One of the things I learnt in my first couple of weeks when I went to Bradford was that there were not enough English lessons. There were English lessons. They are top priority. Speaking to commercial sponsors, many companies have offered assistance to design a specific English language process. I had an idea, which UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration cannot do, which was to give them English over there. I

thought they could have three weeks' English before they came, but they are so dispersed I am afraid it proved impossible. I am trying to work on an electronic way of doing that. It is absolutely top priority, for employment, integration, kids at school—everything. What happens is the children become the interpreters for the parents, because they pick it up like that.

Q136 Wendy Morton: You have talked a lot about vulnerable families. We have heard there are some concerns about specific groups of vulnerable people—for example, members of the LGBT community, some of the Christian groups and some with disabilities. We are concerned they may be under-represented in the refugees coming to the UK. Will you be monitoring the numbers from these groups that are coming into the UK? What sort of action will you be taking if you do feel that those groups are under-represented?

Richard Harrington: In terms of monitoring, we have a daily report going down the people who are going through the system and what categories of vulnerability they are from—for example, as you say, LGBT. In the end, we cannot force people to come. For example, I have received a lot of representations—I was with the Coptic archbishop yesterday—about Christians coming. We welcome Christians like we do anybody else. Comparatively few have registered to come. I can really just take people who are registering, but I am monitoring it very carefully. No one is going to say, “We have hardly any category ones and no category threes”. They are all vulnerable. Providing they are one of the seven categories, which—

Q137 Chair: Can we have a list of the categories, Minister?

Richard Harrington: Yes. They are published. I will happily let you have one, but I am sure the illustrious Clerk to the Committee, David Harrison, has all that stuff to hand, with his experts. I think it is even on the website. They are very well publicised.

Q138 Wendy Morton: Following on that point of Christians, we have been told that the Canadian and Austrian Governments have allowed the Syriac church in their countries to choose small numbers of Christians from the Middle East to go as refugees to their countries. Would you meet members of the Syrian churches in the UK to discuss the possibility of adopting this approach in the UK?

Richard Harrington: First of all, I have had a meeting for the Syrian diaspora, including the Syrian churches. I had a meeting of them all, and I have asked them to set up an umbrella organisation, which they have done. I do not want to either profile people from a certain background or discriminate against people from a certain background. What I think you are really talking about, Wendy, is marrying up people with the right families. That is exactly what we have been talking about, about making it more sophisticated, so, absolutely, yes.

Q139 Wendy Morton: Yes, it is the marrying up, but we are really trying to establish whether we have made sure we are reaching out to all the different vulnerable groups that there are.

Richard Harrington: We are trying to, but in the end they have to register.

Q140 Wendy Morton: Yes. I appreciate that. You cannot force people to register, as you said.

Richard Harrington: Yes.

Q141 Dr Lisa Cameron: We have heard in some previous evidence that it is particularly difficult for people who have disabilities to get to camps, and that they tend to be more dispersed outwith camps due to their vulnerabilities. I wonder if there is any particular way of ensuring that these people are able to become registered if they do not reach the camp—outreach or something to help them.

Richard Harrington: People with disabilities are registered with UNHCR. I had not heard the point you made that they do not live in the camps themselves, but they certainly are, and people with disabilities are given priority. One of the reasons we do not pack out the aircraft full is precisely that some people need medical attention on the way over here. UNHCR are very good; they have these fieldworkers everywhere. For all of us, unless we have lived there and experienced it ourselves, we do not know, but it seems to me a comprehensive system of finding these people. I just say publicly if people—specialist NGOs and things—think it is to the contrary, we want to hear. We have a good relationship with UNHCR and I believe they really are doing their best, but if there are gaps in it, it is not like they are going to tell us to go away. Apart from the fact they are really decent people, we are very influential there; I think we are the second biggest donor. These people will not be ignored. If you come across examples, we would be very pleased to hear them.

Chair: Minister, we are making good progress. We have three more questions and we are keen to finish at about quarter past 11 so that colleagues can go to Foreign and Commonwealth Office Questions this morning.

Q142 Fabian Hamilton: Richard, in their written evidence to this inquiry, several organisations have mentioned that it is not only Syrian refugees that are vulnerable, but also refugees elsewhere. I know your specific brief is Syrian refugees, but I wonder how you would respond to this point, given that the focus of the programme is entirely on the Syrians.

Richard Harrington: I cannot respond to it, Fabian, because my job is for Syrian refugees. As a person, I am sure like yourself and many people here who come from refugee stock ourselves—many of us on both sides of the family—I want to reach out to all refugees. The programme is for Syrian refugees. We have to do that as well as we possibly can, and then it is up to governments to decide what they want to do in the future. I have to try to separate this job, because this job is clearly defined for Syrian refugees, but, yes, I agree with you: a refugee is a refugee.

Q143 Fabian Hamilton: I wonder if you could just perhaps mention to the Prime Minister that a lot of the organisations, including Save the Children, are very concerned about the children from other refugee areas who are also extremely vulnerable.

Richard Harrington: You mean from Africa and other places like that.

Fabian Hamilton: Yes.

Richard Harrington: Absolutely. I am sure the Prime Minister is aware of that. I cannot quite separate my personal from my job persona, but I think you know.

Q144 Chair: Minister, to echo what others have said, your personal passion about this shines through in the evidence that you are giving and your conduct of this work. Can I talk about a more difficult issue? The Government have focused on refugees who are in the region rather than those who have come to Europe. A number of organisations, most notably Save the Children, have drawn attention to children from Syria who have made their way to Europe. Save the Children have made a proposal for us to take around 3,000 of these children. The Prime Minister was asked about this some time ago and he said the Government have “looked at Save the Children’s proposal about the 3,000 Syrian children already in Europe, and we will continue to discuss that”. Is it something that is under active consideration?

Richard Harrington: It is under discussion.

Q145 Chair: Any sense of how that discussion is going?

Richard Harrington: At the moment, I cannot report any further progress on it, but we are very aware. We have met with Save the Children, as have lots of other people in Government, and it is under discussion. At the moment I am trying to concentrate on getting the most vulnerable people out from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Chair: We would certainly, as a Committee, welcome that it is under consideration and the sense that we may perhaps, at some stage, hear further about how that discussion is going.

Q146 Albert Owen: Sorry I was late arriving and missed the first few questions, but I have certainly got a taste of where you are coming from and echo what colleagues have said about your enthusiasm and knowledge on the subject. With regard to this consideration, you are not going to go into detail today, and I understand that—and the Prime Minister was defensive when he was asked this question—but are we looking at over and above the allocation that you have talked about, if there is going to be a decision with these children, or are we going to see them displacing others from Syria?

Richard Harrington: I cannot speculate on that, but what I can say is that at the moment we have 20,000 people from Syria who we have agreed to admit into this country. There are other things in addition to that. For example, the family reunion programme continues. It has gone on for some years and it continues. Quite a few people from Syria are coming over from that side. There is no point me speculating on the children. I do not know. No decision has been made.

Q147 Albert Owen: The discussion is broader than just the 20,000.

Richard Harrington: We have a huge thing on our plate. We have to get 20,000 of the most vulnerable over here.

Q148 Albert Owen: These are vulnerable as well, Minister.

Richard Harrington: So many people are vulnerable. We saw people when I went with the Committee to South Sudan—that is vulnerability. They have nothing. I have been given this job for these 20,000 from Syria. At the moment, given that we started more or less from scratch, we hope to have 1,000 in by the end of the year and a proper programme for the balance of the 20,000. I do know about these 3,000 children. There is no point me commenting either way, because it is not the priority at the moment. I have to find a way of getting these 20,000 in quickly and efficiently.

Q149 Chair: On that, do you have a sense, for those who have come so far or been accepted to come in the next few days and weeks, what the mix is between people from camps and people from host communities?

Richard Harrington: I do not know the answer to that. Of the general population, fewer than 30% are in camps, so I am sure it will reflect that. Although they are not in camps, as I say, UNHCR, with the registration system, have them pretty well organised. In Lebanon, they are typically in fields or small villages, or they are renting rooms, often in very overcrowded situations. If it was not for UNHCR, we really would have no way of assessing people, so I am very grateful to them.

Q150 Jeremy Lefroy: I would like to ask about ODA and how that is categorised within your particular area of resettling refugees. If we look at the figures, in Sweden, 18% of their ODA was spent in-country on refugees in 2013. In the UK it was 0.8%. We in the UK have a pretty narrow definition of what can be counted as ODA, even within the OECD rules, compared with other countries. I would just like to know what exactly is going to be counted as ODA spending and what is not.

Richard Harrington: Certainly. I was amazed when I read the same as you. The definition of ODA is comparatively narrow. It is easier to say what it does include; it is all the resettlement costs. It includes the first year accommodation and suchlike. It does not, for example, include anything to do with the economic side—getting people into work. You could argue from a humanitarian point of view, “If that is not settling them, what is?” There are clear rules, and we are sticking by them. I cannot speak for other countries. There is an argument that things have changed and it should be expanded, but I know for the Swedes it is exponentially greater than what we are doing. The basic resettlement cost includes, for example, chartering aircraft, medical assessments, security and all that sort of stuff, but anything that has an economic attachment to it is not allowable. We call it ODA; it is ODA, but it is just different pockets from the Exchequer. It does not mean that we are not doing those programmes. One might be with DWP, but it still costs the taxpayer money. I am sure the taxpayer is very happy to spend it. I hope most people are. We are not trying to bend artificial definitions and all this sort of thing.

Q151 Jeremy Lefroy: As you say, we have a relatively narrow definition, which, perhaps, is going to be looked at at some point, since it is compared with other countries, but if we use the definition we have at the moment and there is non-ODA expenditure, even within the first 12 months, as you are implying there is—

Richard Harrington: That is correct.

Jeremy Lefroy: Where does that come from, given that local authorities are not going to be required to bear that expenditure?

Richard Harrington: It varies. For example, some are from a direct payment from the Home Office to the local authority. Accommodation would be a good example of that. For some things, like education and medical things, local authorities are reimbursed on a per-head basis, which they would be anyway, whether they were refugees or not. The incremental amount for, say, Syrian children would come through that system—so many thousand pounds per student per year, or whatever it is. We are providing additional funds for exceptional hardship cases. For example, in Bradford, there was a case of someone who had cancer. Certain things cannot be just put onto an average basis. What I wanted to avoid, Jeremy—I am sure you would have every sympathy with this, as a constituency MP as well as knowing the development side—is thousands and thousands of individual invoices and individual payments. I learnt that in the first week in Bradford. They have fantastic people in the accounts department there, who are giving up their weekends to do this. I have had to come up with a system where it is an average amount, with exceptional cases, rather than each individual case nuanced.

Q152 Jeremy Lefroy: Do the Government have any view on what will happen after the first 12 months?

Richard Harrington: I confirmed in writing that we will assist with years two to five. I wrote to those local authorities that had had experience in this to ask what their costs had been. They were hugely different—200% or 300% different. We have tried to work out exactly what the costs are, and negotiations are still going on, but I am going to be writing in the next few days to local authorities telling them exactly what the deal is. To give them credit, most of them are saying, “You have said you will assist us with it”. We will come out with the deal, but you cannot just pluck a number out of the air. It is more difficult than I had imagined working out what the number is. Some things, like accommodation, you can have a really good stab at. For most of them—the big councils, for example—this is a comparatively small amount of money, because it is a comparatively small amount of people compared to what they are doing, but it is coming up with a fair and suitable system. I am hoping to be able to write to them by the end of this week or early next week saying, “This is exactly what the deal is”.

Q153 Jeremy Lefroy: Can I just throw in one thing? I fully understand if you cannot give me an answer on this, but I do think it is important. Quite rightly, we are looking at English language training for refugees, but, at the same time, English language training for people who are already here who really need it is being cut in many parts of the country, which is detrimental to integration. I wondered if you could take up with colleagues the importance of this ESOL. It would seem very strange that we are providing for new refugees this English language training and yet it is not available to people who have come to this country under previous schemes or by other ways. It is such a vital part of integration.

Richard Harrington: I was not aware of the point that you are saying, but I take your word for it and will look into it. Certainly as far as these refugees are concerned, English language training is paramount.

Chair: Minister, thank you very much indeed for an hour in which we have covered a lot of ground.

Richard Harrington: Stephen, it is an honour and a pleasure, and I would be delighted to come back at any time.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.