



Home Office

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Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Lord Jay of Ewelme
Chairman, House of Lords EU Security
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22 September 2020

Dear Lord Jay,

Thank you for your letters of 18 February and 20 May about refugee resettlement. I apologise for the delay in my response, which is due to ensuring that this letter fully reflects the situation during the current COVID-19 situation. The Home Secretary has asked me to reply on her behalf.

I am delighted to hear of the many positive comments from the witnesses that participated in the Committee's evidence sessions and the clear commitment of those local authorities, strategic migration partnerships and the Local Government Association in the successful, collaborative delivery of the UK's resettlement schemes.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, arrivals to the UK under our resettlement schemes are currently paused. This came about as we neared the conclusion of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and ahead of the start of our new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). We hope to recommence resettlement activity once conditions allow. Resumption is dependent on a number of factors including: the restarting of flights from refugee hosting countries; the lifting of travel and other COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the governments of those countries and in the UK; the ability of our international partners (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organisation for Migration (IOM)) to operate; the reopening of the UK's visa application centres; the capacity of local authorities and other public bodies to receive resettled persons in light of COVID-19; and the recovery of the asylum system from the impact of COVID-19.

Refugees already resettled in the UK continue to receive support, however the scope of that support is limited by social distancing requirements. We are asking local authorities to use other channels such as phone, email and skype to keep in contact with and provide support to the families.

I have also noted your question on how the current immigration bill will affect the answers given below. I would like to emphasise that the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill is narrow and primarily focused on ending the EU's rules on free movement of persons. It does not deal with general immigration or asylum matters.

With the above in mind, I set out below the responses to the Committee's questions, some of which have been grouped:

- 1. If the UK does not conclude a deal with its EU partners on asylum and migration matters by the end of the transition period, will the Government seek to negotiate an interim agreement to support refugee family reunion?**
- 2. Is the Government seeking to maintain all routes to family reunion currently available under the Dublin System in a new legal framework for asylum and refugee cooperation?**

At the end of the Transition period, the UK will no longer be bound by the Dublin Regulation. This is an EU instrument, and as the UK is no longer a member of the EU, it would not be right for the UK to seek continued access to the Regulation. I can confirm that we have no plans to do so.

This Government is committed to the principle of family reunion and to supporting vulnerable children. We recognise that families can become separated because of the nature of conflict and persecution and the speed and manner in which people are often forced to flee their country. We have been clear that we will continue to process those transfer requests under the family reunion provisions of the Dublin Regulation which entered the system before the end of the Transition Period.

The UK has presented a genuine and sincere offer to the EU on a future reciprocal arrangement for the family reunion of Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in either the EU or the UK, with specified family members in the UK or the EU, where it is in the child's best interests.

On 19 May, the UK published its detailed draft legal texts for proposed future agreements with the EU including on family reunion for UASC. We made the texts public as a constructive contribution to the negotiations. We will not provide a running commentary on those negotiations.

There is no intention to negotiate new arrangements to replace the family reunion provisions of the Dublin Regulation for adults and accompanied children. The routes currently available under our domestic provisions are sufficiently broad for adults and families and are not impacted by our exit from the EU.

Our family reunion policy enables those granted refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK to sponsor pre-flight, immediate family members to join them here. Where appropriate, our policy includes scope to allow extended family members to reunite with refugees in the UK; this may be on an exceptional basis or simply under a different route. In the year ending March 2020, 7,482 family reunion visas were issued to partners and children of those previously granted asylum or humanitarian protection in the UK. This was 37% more than in the previous year.

Additionally, Appendix FM to the Immigration Rules provides for family members wishing to enter or remain in the UK on the basis of their relationship with a family member who is a British citizen or settled in the UK, and those who are post-flight family of a person granted protection in the UK.

- 3. Is the Government committed to ensuring minimum standards for refugee protection in a future agreement with the EU on asylum and immigration? If so, can you give details of the minimum standards you are seeking; how the Parties' adherence to these minimum standards would be supervised; and, how and by whom they would be enforced?**

The UK has a long and proud history of providing protection to those who need it, in accordance with our international obligations, and this will not change.

The UK will no longer be subject to EU directives or be part of the Common European Asylum System at the end of the transition period. This includes having our own standards on asylum procedures and reception arrangements. The UK already has high standards in how we operate our asylum system and we will continue to be a world leader in this area. The UK will of course continue to be subject to the ECHR.

4. Does the Government plan to replace the support provided by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund?

The Home Office recognises the important role of AMIF funded projects and is considering the implications of the funding ending in 2022/23.

5. Can the Government indicate when it will be providing a detailed summary to local authorities of how the new global resettlement scheme will operate and what that information will include?

Resettlement continues to be a critical protection tool, providing a pathway to safety for refugees who can no longer remain in their host-countries. Local authorities play a vital role in helping those arriving here to settle into a new life in the UK.

Local authorities were consulted in the development of the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) and we continue to engage with them; both directly and through the regional Strategic Migration Partnerships. This engagement has included the development of a briefing note, to which you refer in your letter, that sets out the principles of the new scheme and the expectations of local authorities who wish to be involved. In general, our processes under the UKRS will remain largely the same as under Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes, meaning there will be little practical change to the working arrangements local authorities are familiar with.

While ongoing work is currently paused due to the impact of COVID-19, a series of events were organised by the Home Office and regional Strategic Migration Partnerships around the country to discuss the new scheme with local authorities and other partners. These were attended by senior Home Office officials to discuss details of the scheme and answer questions. Working alongside UNHCR and IOM, officials from the Home Office also organised a workshop in February which focused on the detail of the new UKRS. This provided an opportunity for local authorities to learn more about how the scheme will work, including additional insight on the profiles of refugees from outside the Middle East and North Africa region who will be resettled as part of this scheme.

Before the start of the new scheme, the Home Office plans to publish an updated policy statement setting out the detail of the new scheme on the gov.uk website. We will continue to work through regional Strategic Migration Partnerships, and directly with local authorities, to ensure they have the information they need to enable their continued successful participation in the new scheme.

6. Can the Home Secretary therefore provide information how the new global resettlement scheme will promote the benefits to communities of participation by their local authorities in the scheme?

7. Can the Home Secretary also say how the new scheme will support local authorities to undertake effective communications to explain the operation and benefits of the scheme to their local populations?

I am pleased you have heard of the positive work going on around the UK to engage with local communities on refugee resettlement. These communities have played an integral role in welcoming tens of thousands of refugees.

I know that engaging people in resettlement plays an important role in garnering support for our schemes. Local authorities are well placed to understand the needs of their communities; including how best to communicate with them about resettlement. Local authorities already participating in resettlement are able to use that experience to promote the benefits of continued involvement.

Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships, including those with whom you spoke, play a key role in supporting local authorities to engage with their communities; including through encouraging and facilitating the sharing of good practice. We will work closely with the regional Strategic Migration Partnerships to engage with local authorities as we resume resettlement when conditions allow following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government will continue to support local authorities and Strategic Migration Partnerships in these efforts and remains committed to enabling community groups, charities and faith groups to support refugees directly. Our Community Sponsorship scheme, launched in 2016, provides a clear mechanism for doing so, and since its launch, over 70 community groups from across the UK have welcomed 424 refugees through this route.

8. Can the Home Secretary explain how the new scheme will encourage and promote the sharing of learning and best practice between agencies participating in the new global resettlement scheme, specifically what mechanism(s) it will employ to achieve this?

9. Further, can the Home Secretary set out what learning and best practice was identified by agencies involved in the VPRS and VCRS and how that learning has influenced the development of the new scheme?

10. Can the Home Secretary also confirm that the scheme will facilitate learning not just between agencies local to each other but, where necessary, between authorities and partnerships that are geographically diverse and set out how this will be accomplished?

We support local authorities through funding regional Strategic Migration Partnerships who coordinate identifying and sharing of good practice across their regions; they are linked into the most appropriate mechanisms for doing so within their regions and will bring together partners involved in delivering resettlement through various fora. As you have found out through your engagement, local authorities, supported by regional Strategic Migration Partnerships, are already working together to share learning, provide support, ensure best value in the services they provide and to deliver efficiencies.

At a national level, the Government has facilitated the sharing of good practice through generating, identifying and sharing examples of how local authorities have addressed common challenges related to resettlement. Officials have worked with the Local Government Association to host this on their 'Knowledge Hub', which is available to all local authorities.

The Refugee Employment Network is another example of the work that is ongoing in this area. Established in 2017, this network has a membership of over 80 organisations, including NGOs and local authorities, with a shared aim of ensuring refugees are able to gain appropriate, fulfilling, paid employment or self-employment. The Network encourages collaboration across the refugee support sector and the sharing of good practice and a number of local authorities and Strategic Migration Partnerships are already members.

These strands of work will continue as we transition into the new UK Resettlement Scheme, and we will look for new opportunities to support refugees and local authorities in the work they do.

11. Can the Home Secretary confirm whether the new global resettlement scheme will include any provision to support local authorities to meet the housing needs of the refugees they resettle?

We will continue to provide a generous funding package which enables local authorities, schools and health partners to provide vulnerable refugees with a safe environment and the chance to rebuild their lives. Additional funding is also made available to help local authorities to address some of the challenges they face; this can be used for exceptional costs incurred by local authorities, including for property adaptations and for sourcing larger properties.

12. Can the Home Secretary confirm whether the government has plans to address the question of the recognition of resettled refugees' academic and professional qualifications?

We recognise the difficulties faced by refugees in trying to access the job market. We work closely with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that all refugees - including those whom we resettle and those whose refugee status is recognised following a successful asylum claim - are aware of, and receive, the support they are entitled to.

As reflected in the evidence to the Committee, one of the challenges facing those looking for employment, or wanting to continue their education, is providing evidence of the qualifications they have, and their equivalence in the UK education system.

UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC) performs the function of recognition and comparison of international qualifications on behalf of the UK Government. As the National Agency, UK NARIC provides the only official source of information on international education and training systems and qualifications and skills attained outside the UK.

As part of our effort to support refugee employment, the Home Office has partnered with the UNHCR, IOM, Business in the Community and the Department for Work and Pensions to produce the 'Tapping Potential' guide for employers. These guidelines encourage and support businesses in recruiting and employing refugees, including by involving their existing workforce, and continuing to develop their potential after initial employment.

We previously funded part of the pilot Specialist Employment and Training Programme, which offers tailored and bespoke employment support to refugees resettled through the VPRS, including referral to UK NARIC for support with qualification recognition when appropriate. Evaluation of the pilot was positive and we will add the learning from this project to other evidence that will inform future approaches to help refugees overcome this and other barriers they encounter when seeking employment.

As referenced above, we continue to work with the Refugee Employment Network as it develops a co-ordinated approach across the refugee employment sector to support refugees on employability and finding work. In October 2019, we awarded grant funding of £120k over 18 months to the Network to enable it to develop structures and activities that ensure its long-term sustainability and promote its coordinated approach including more effective engagement with the business sector.

13. Can the Home Secretary confirm therefore whether the government will take steps to ensure that all recognised refugees in the UK will receive equality of support, no matter how they arrive in country?

Our resettlement schemes offer a safe and legal route to the UK for the most vulnerable refugees. These schemes prioritise those in greatest need of assistance, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. The level of funding we provide enables local authorities to support refugees effectively, providing them with a safe environment and the chance to rebuild their lives.

While the support arrangements for refugees brought to the UK through our resettlement schemes and the arrangements for those who make their own way here to claim asylum are different in some respects, this is because the first group have already been recognised as refugees. They therefore have immediate access to the labour market and are eligible to substantively the same welfare benefits as British Citizens.

Asylum seekers, in contrast, are not eligible for these entitlements when they arrive in the UK because they need to be assessed to determine if they qualify for refugee status. Each asylum claim is assessed on its own merits and many who lodge a claim will be required to return to their country of origin because the assessment process will conclude that they do not have a well-founded fear of persecution upon return and are not therefore refugees. The Home Office nonetheless ensures that they are not left without support, pending the resolution of their asylum claim and any appeal, by providing free accommodation and a cash allowance to cover their other essential living needs if they would otherwise be destitute.

The Home Office remains committed to helping the most vulnerable, especially during these exceptional times. We have worked with Public Health advisors throughout the coronavirus outbreak to inform a national approach to support asylum seekers, adjusting our procedures to take account of local concerns.

Through this approach we continue to ensure that those who are unable to support themselves are moved to free accommodation, with those placed in hotel accommodation entitled to receive free meals, toiletries and other support. Those who were already in the support system and accommodated in houses and flats will continue to receive cash payments to cover their other needs.

We recognise the challenge of managing coronavirus within our accommodation estate, while ensuring that people can continue to access essential services. A wide range of measures have been implemented to ensure their guidance on social distancing and self-isolation is properly applied. People accommodated in hostel-based accommodation receive translated guidance in relation to social distancing, potential symptoms, self-isolating and hygiene requirements, for example, hand washing. Onsite assistant and guidance are provided by support staff.

We are also allowing individuals who would ordinarily be asked to move on from their Home Office supported temporary accommodation after their claim is determined, to remain in situ. This position is under review as the lockdown eases.

All those with refugee status in the UK have access to the labour market and to mainstream services that support their integration, including benefits and healthcare; refugees who are unemployed and in receipt of certain benefits are also eligible for fully funded English language tuition through the Adult Education Budget. We are working across Government to ensure these services meet the needs of refugees. Wherever appropriate, we strongly encourage refugees to get into work. Having a job is what makes refugees feel most integrated and has a positive impact on their long-term prospects.

In the Integrated Communities Action Plan, which was published in February 2019, we have committed to increase integration support for all refugees in the UK. We have focussed on supporting refugees with English language, employment and entrepreneurship, and wellbeing and social capital. For instance, we have launched, via the Education and Training Foundation, new online resources to support English language teachers working with refugees who arrive with the lowest levels of English language. We also published a new Welcome Guide for non-resettled refugees to provide information to support their cultural orientation and integration. This builds on the Welcome Guide for resettled refugees.

- 14. Can the Home Secretary first explain their understanding of why many local authorities did not participate in the schemes and whether they expect those reasons to apply to involvement in the new scheme?**
- 15. Secondly, can the Home Secretary explain what steps the Government will take to encourage all local authorities to participate in the new global resettlement scheme and whether this will include highlighting the inarguable humanitarian and ethical duty to support those genuinely in need of refuge and the concomitant benefits to individuals and communities of doing so?**
- 16. Thirdly, can the Home Secretary set out how they anticipate local authorities will be involved in the new scheme?**

It is worth reflecting that over 320 local authorities across every region of the UK have voluntarily welcomed resettled refugees into their communities.

It is important that local authorities consider carefully whether they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration support is provided to resettled refugees and appreciate this may not be possible in all areas across the UK.

We have already had a positive response to our request for pledges for the new scheme and look forward to welcoming more commitments from local authorities in the coming months. We are keen to secure the ongoing support and participation of local government across the UK. We also continue to warmly welcome interest from those authorities who have yet to take part in resettlement and we are working through regional Strategic Migration Partnerships to encourage new authorities to do so.

17. Will the Government ensure that agreements with third countries on readmission or cooperation are subject to formal human rights assessments? If so, which human rights standards will you apply? And will the Government's assessment be subject to independent verification, if so, by which body?

All returns cases are considered on a case by case basis in line with the Country Policy Information, published on the gov.uk website, and any relevant caselaw. Our country policy and information notes are based on evidence taken from a wide range of reliable sources, including reputable media outlets; local, national and international organisations, including human rights organisations. We regularly monitor and review the situation in countries of origin, working closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The UK continues to be subject to the ECHR.

Last year, the UK received 3,775 UASC – more than any country in the EU and accounting for 20% of all such claims lodged in the EU and UK. Since 2015, we have resettled more than 25,000 vulnerable refugees and are proud of our ambitious commitments and achievements – this is more than any other country in Europe and is in the top five countries worldwide. Last year, the UK offered protection to over 20,000 people, and the UK is the only G7 nation to meet the commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid, which is enshrined in UK law. I am sure that you will agree that this is a record to be proud of.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Philp', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris Philp MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Immigration Compliance and the Courts