



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

21 April 2016

Dear Colleague,

Following my announcement on 28 January that the Government was looking to do more to help vulnerable children in the Middle East and North Africa affected by the continuing crisis in Syria, I wanted to let you know that we have today announced a new resettlement scheme to support children at risk in the region.

I also want to update you that the Government is today making an initial offer of practical assistance and support for implementing the EU-Turkey migration agreement.

The Government has listened very carefully to the calls from Parliamentarians, NGOs and the public to relocate unaccompanied children from within Europe. We have considered how best the UK can provide additional assistance and protection to unaccompanied refugee children from Syria and other regions of conflict, and to those in transit in Europe.

Identifying and responding to the needs of vulnerable and at risk refugee children, is a clear priority for this government. Our starting principle is that we must put the best interests of children first, and avoid any policy that places children at additional risk or encourages them to place their lives in the hands of the people traffickers and criminal gangs. In any response, we need to be very careful not to inadvertently create a situation in which families see an advantage in sending children ahead, putting their lives at risk by attempting perilous sea crossings to Europe.

I am pleased to announce the launch of a new resettlement scheme to resettle 'Children at Risk' from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. On the UNHCR's recommendation the scheme will not target unaccompanied children alone, but will be extended to all 'Children at Risk' as defined by the UNHCR and will extend to at risk groups and nationalities within the region, not limited to Syrians. Through this category we will resettle the most vulnerable children accompanied by their families where the UNHCR deems resettlement is in the best interests of the child. We will commit to resettling several hundred individuals in the first year with a view to resettling up to 3000 individuals over the lifetime of this Parliament, the majority of whom will be children. We will also review the scheme at the two year mark. This will be in addition to our commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrians under the Syrian resettlement scheme and implementation will be taken forward by Richard Harrington.

This unique initiative will be the largest resettlement effort that focuses on children at risk from the MENA region. The UNHCR are fully supportive of the launch of this new initiative and the UK's commitment to assist vulnerable children at risk through further resettlement efforts. The UNHCR Representative to the United Kingdom Gonzalo Vargas Llosa says, 'We welcome the scheme's focus on children at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children, and the UK's commitment to upholding the principles of child protection, and in particular safeguarding the child's best interest, in implementing the programme.'

I can also confirm that we have made an offer of UK support to help implement the EU-Turkey migration agreement. This is a vital opportunity to end the misery and lethal risk that smugglers and organised criminals are causing on a daily basis, to close down illegal crossings from Turkey to Greece and tackle migrant flows to the UK up-stream.

Following intensive engagement with European partners, including the Greek authorities and the European Commission, we are offering 75 expert personnel to help with processing and administration of migrants in

Greek reception centres, act as interpreters, provide medical support and bolster our existing team assisting the Commission to ensure effective and efficient co-ordination. We will also provide vital equipment and medical supplies. This is in addition to the existing UK maritime contribution, consisting of three Border Force vessels which are assisting the Hellenic Coastguard to conduct search and rescue missions, and a Royal Navy vessel as part of the NATO mission in the Aegean.

The teams we send to Greece will include experts in supporting vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and those trained to tackle people trafficking. This will help ensure that vulnerable people, including children, are identified and can access asylum procedures as quickly as possible. This is in addition to the work undertaken by the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland, to visit hotspots and assess what more can be done to ensure unaccompanied children are protected from traffickers.

On top of our significant support to frontline member states, the Department for International Development (DFID) has created a £10 million Refugee Children Fund specifically to support the needs of vulnerable refugee and migrant children in Europe. This will be used to support the UNHCR, Save the Children and International Rescue Committee (IRC) to work with host authorities to care for and assist unaccompanied or separated children in Europe and the Balkans. This includes identifying vulnerable children, providing for their immediate support, referral to specialist care, and helping find solutions such as family reunification.

It is important to use the tools available to help children reunite with family wherever possible. We have seconded additional resource into the European Asylum Support Office totalling over 1000 days of expert support to Italy and Greece to implement and streamline the process under the Dublin Regulations, including to quickly identify children who qualify for family reunion.

In addition, the recent secondment a senior asylum expert to the French Interior Ministry to improve the process for family cases has already resulted in a significant increase in the number of children being reunited with family in the UK. In the last six weeks 24 cases have been accepted for transfer to the UK from France under the Dublin family unity provisions, more than half of whom have already arrived in the UK. Once an asylum claim has been lodged in another Member State we have shown that transfers can take place within weeks.

The Government is committed to making a full contribution to the global refugee crisis, in particular by helping children at risk. We strongly believe that our approach to take action where it has the most impact in region, within Europe and at our borders will appropriately safeguard vulnerable children and prevent them putting their lives at risk.

Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP
Immigration Minister