

Syrian Refugees: Resettling them to and supporting them in the UK

General Recommendations

- The ultimate solution for solving the refugee crisis is to protect Syrian civilians from the Assad killing machine which, through its indiscriminate air attacks, is the primary driver behind the refugee crisis.¹
- The UK should maintain its commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees.

Resettlement of Syrian Refugees

- The UK should work with Syrian organisations to identify vulnerable Syrian refugees for resettlement to the UK.
 - Resettlement to the UK should not be limited to refugees in UNHCR camps, as the most vulnerable Syrians often reside outside these camps. Case example: Khaldoon Sinjab, a quadriplegic Syrian refugee who can only move his tongue and depends on electricity to survive, was in Lebanon although not in a refugee camp.²
 - Syrian refugees within Europe are also in need of protection. They face considerable hardships including hunger, cold, and police brutality.
- The UK should support Syrian charitable and non-profit organisations that work with Syrian refugees in the UK. Such organisations should be given priority (for example, in funding) over non-Syrian organisations since they better understand the needs of Syrian refugees and can provide cost-effective support in culture and language-specific contexts.

Asylum Process

- Reduce the wait times for asylum claims. Asylum seekers are unable to work, enrol in free English courses, or file for reunion with their immediate family members, many of whom remain in immediate danger in Syria.
- Allow asylum seekers to enrol in free English courses.

Family Reunion Process

- Reduce the wait times for family reunion claims.
- Family reunion should extend to applicants' parents who are in many cases solely dependent upon their children.
- Child refugees under the age of eighteen are also in great need of their parents' support and should be permitted to apply for them to rejoin them in the UK.
- There are many UK nationals who were living in Syria before the conflict started and married Syrian nationals. These UK nationals have moved back to the UK during the course of the conflict, although they have faced additional barriers in bringing their spouses to the country due to financial and other restrictions imposed on UK nationals who want to apply for family reunion for their spouses. The Government should make an exemption for this category of UK nationals in applying for reunification with their spouses on the basis that their spouses are in a conflict zone.

- The war situation should be taken into account as limiting the amount or types of evidence that refugees can provide as support for their applications:
 - Official documents presented in family reunion applications are often excessively scrutinised by UK authorities, and their authenticity is unfairly questioned.
 - Syrian refugees sometime find it difficult to provide official documents proving their relationships with their spouses and/or children, either because they fled their homes without such documents or because they lost them en route to the UK.
- Cultural differences should be taken into account while evaluating family reunion applications:
 - While the majority of Syrians register their marriages and their children's birth, they do not usually immediately obtain official marriage or birth certificates. This is because such documents in Syria are valid only for three months. Therefore, many of the marriage or birth certificates submitted with family reunion applications have recent dates. This is not indicative of their lack of authenticity.
 - Family reunion should also extend to applicants' unmarried daughters who are, in Syrian culture, usually solely dependent upon their fathers. This minimises risk for abuse and exploitation
 - It is normal for a Syrian couple to be engaged and/or married after only a short courting period or to be married through religious rather than court ceremonies.

Supporting Syrian Refugees in the UK

- English language: Asylum seekers are not able to sign up for free English courses until they have received refugee status. This overlooks critical time and potential in which they could be learning English which will help them better integrate with society.
- Obtaining housing after receiving refugee status is extremely difficult, whether privately or through the Councils. Refugees have 28 days to leave their NASS accommodation and to obtain an integration loan to secure new accommodation. This timeframe is very short, often leaving refugees without effective accommodation. Additionally, many private rentals are unwilling to rent to refugees since most of them are on housing benefits in the beginning of their tenancy.
- Job centres:
 - English courses provided by job centres are very basic and insufficient to meet the needs of refugees. Refugees are expected to search for and find jobs even if they do not know a single word of English.
 - Translators are often not provided
 - Job seekers may be skilled or have degrees, although they are pushed towards unskilled jobs
- Continuing education and finding work in line with refugees' previous professions:
 - Conversion process for secondary school degrees should be standardised, clear, and efficient
 - Transferring university credits should be made easier for refugees who had their studies interrupted due to the war
 - Effective integration schemes should be instated which allow Syrians to take up professions and careers in line with their qualifications, thus allowing them to better contribute to wider society.
 - Training programmes can allow refugees to obtain certificates and work in areas of their expertise.

Rethink Rebuild Society is a Manchester-based non-profit organisation established in 2011 to campaign for Syrian issues within the British landscape. We have established ourselves as the leading Syrian advocacy group within the UK, working with policy makers and the media to affect Syria-related decision-making at all levels of government and to shape the Syrian narrative as it is understood by the wider British public.

¹ 'Care about refugees? Listen to them'. The Syria Campaign, 9 October 2015. <https://diary.thesyriacampaign.org/what-refugees-think/>.

² 'Quadriplegic Syrian refugee pleading for safety of the UK'. Rethink Rebuild Society, 17 August 2015. http://rrsoc.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2015-08-17_Khaldoon_Sinjab.pdf.