

SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERAL

Q How is Highland responding to the refugee crisis?

In autumn 2015, the Government announced that the UK will resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees by 2020. Highland Council made a commitment to resettle 25-30 Syrian refugee families in Highland, through the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme. We are working closely with the Home Office, a wide range of public sector partners and the Highland Third Sector Interface to harness the generosity and commitment that exists in Highland to implement the commitment to resettle Syrian refugees. Five families have already been settled in the Inner Moray Firth area.

Q Who are the refugees?

The people coming to the UK under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme are in desperate need of assistance. The scheme prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin and includes women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence amongst others. They come from the areas and refugee camps around Syria, so do not include people who have made their own way to Europe.

Q When will Syrian refugees arrive?

Five families were resettled in the Inner Moray Firth last summer. We have been working closely with the Home Office over recent months in preparation to welcome further families. The right support is in place and our next families will arrive over the coming months. Those we are resettling have been through a tremendous ordeal and are vulnerable. It is vital they are given time and space to settle, with support from the professional services that we have put in place to meet their needs.

Q How long will they stay?

Refugees are granted a five year humanitarian protection visa. After five years they can apply to stay for longer, or return to Syria depending on the situation there.

Q What security checks will refugees have undergone?

When refugees arrive in the UK they have been through a thorough two-stage vetting process. The Home Office works closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) which has its own robust identification processes in place. This includes the taking of biometrics (the distinctive, measurable characteristics used to describe individuals eg fingerprints, digital photo), documentary evidence and interviews. When potential cases are submitted by the UNHCR for consideration, they are screened and considered by the Home Office for suitability for entry to the UK. This includes the taking of further biometric data. The Home Office retain the right to reject individuals on security grounds, including where there is insufficient information to undertake effective screening.

Q Local services are already under pressure - surely this will make matters worse?

The numbers of refugees who will be arriving in Highland as part of this scheme is relatively small compared to the ebbs and flows of the overall population of Highland. We considered the capacity of local services when deciding how many refugees we could offer to bring here. These numbers will not create a noticeable impact on access to local services.

Q What if the refugees cause an increase in crime and disorder?

Statistically refugees arriving to live in the UK are more likely to be victims of crime. There is no reason to expect them to behave in a criminal or disorderly way.

FUNDING

Q In light of the Council's budget pressures, who is funding the resettlement of Syrian refugees?

The Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme provides funding for the full costs of resettlement in the first year, including the cost of providing additional support required. Local authorities will also receive funding from central Government for years 2-5 of the resettlement programme.

EDUCATION

Q How will refugee children have their educational and other needs met?

Children will be placed, wherever possible, in their catchment school according to their local address. Refugee children will receive a proportionate multi agency child's plan which will include the support given by the various services as they settle into their new environment (this may include health, social care, housing and schools). Should there be specific educational needs requiring additional support, this will also be organised through the child's plan. These plans are reviewed regularly and will cease when appropriate for each child. Each child's named person will agree with other supporting service who is the lead professional.

HEALTH

Q Are refugees entitled to free NHS treatment?

Yes. Refugees are entitled to register with a GP and a dentist, and to receive treatment in NHS hospitals free of charge.

Q How will the refugees' health be assessed?

Shortly after arrival refugees will register with a local general practice and be assessed as any new patient would be on registration

BENEFITS

Q What benefits and entitlements are available for refugees?

Entitlement	Advice provided by	Advice received
Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF)	CoSLA on behalf of Scottish Government	Refugees cannot access the SWF.
Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)	Scottish Government	The Scottish Government has confirmed that Syrian refugees will be entitled to claim EMA subject to meeting the usual eligibility criteria.
Council Tax Reduction (CTR)	CTR Regulation 16(5)	CTR (Scotland) Regulations 2012 Regulation 16(5). Provided that the Home Office has granted refugee status, then a refugee must be treated in the same way as a UK National for the purposes of CTR. (Eligibility criteria apply)
Housing Benefit	HB Regulation 10 (3B)	Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 Regulation 10 (3B). Provided that the Home Office has granted refugee status then a refugee is not subject to the Immigration Status Test. This means that provided the refugee status is met their claim for HB is treated in the same way as a UK National. (Eligibility criteria apply)

HOUSING

Q Where will they live?

In order to protect the families' privacy and in line with our obligation to keep personal information confidential, we will not be sharing information about where people will be living, but it will be within the Lochaber area; we have made sure it is an area where there is suitable housing available and spaces in schools. The families will be housed within social housing stock.

Q Why has Lochaber been chosen to host families?

It is considered that the families need to be settled into an area with good transport links, access to local services and support networks. Lochaber can offer all of these, but other locations will be looked at as the scheme is further rolled out.

Q Will these people get preferential treatment for housing?

We will be awarding priority for people for housing based on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme and acknowledging the fact that people are vulnerable, destitute and homeless.

Q Why are you not doing the same to help homeless people in Highland?

We have a statutory duty for homelessness. As part of this, we offer housing options advice and support to prevent people becoming homeless. Where families are homeless we will provide accommodation. We also have a homelessness strategy and work with a range of organisations to prevent homelessness in Highland. This will not change.

Q Do you need offers of accommodation?

We would welcome hearing from owners of private properties, particularly those within reasonable commuting distance of public services. You can find out the latest information about the types of properties we are looking for and register your property at

http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/917/housing/663/syrian_refugee_resettlement .

HOW CAN I HELP?

Many people have already offered help in terms of donations of cash, clothing, goods etc.

At this time we are working with Blythswood and New Start (both Highland-based charities) to accept and distribute donations and we would encourage you to donate money or goods via Blythswood or the Red Cross - www.redcross.org.uk Donations can be made to Blythswood by texting SYRI15 £5 or whatever you can spare, to 70070 or donate at www.blythswood.org or by calling 01349 830777. New Start can be reached via www.newstarthighland.org

•Volunteer locally to support refugees – you should get in touch directly with Voluntary Action Lochaber. Help is welcome in many forms - including information you would like passed on to the families (i.e. multi-cultural events), offers of volunteer time and skills or potentially of goods or services. Email: volunteering@valochaber.org or telephone: 01397 706044

You can also contact The Highlands Supports Refugees based in Dingwall - THSR2015@outlook.com

•Offer accommodation if you are a private landlord and have a vacant building - http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/917/housing/663/syrian_refugee_resettlement

FURTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

You may find these short on-line film clips helpful in understanding more about the refugee crisis

- **European Refugee Crisis and Syria explained** www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvOnXh3NN9w
- **What is a refugee?** www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOO_zdWE6Yk