

What Can We Do?

Pray

- For an end to the Syrian Civil War; for refugees and for those who support them
- For desperate people who undertake further dangerous journeys
- That those who arrive here are welcomed and supported
- That we will not neglect other people who seek sanctuary here

Support the international relief effort by donation to charities

- There are many widely publicised charity appeals such as the British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Tear Fund, Trócaire etc.
- Only collect and donate goods if you are sure that they are needed. Most charities prefer to source clothing etc. in the countries where refugees are living.

Support for Syrian Vulnerable Refugees in N Ireland (see page 3)

Offers of help for vulnerable Syrian refugees who are being settled in Northern Ireland should be channelled through Ligia Parizzi of Bryson Intercultural. To find out more go to www.brysonintercultural.org/what-can-i-do-to-help-the-syrian-refugees-under-the-vulnerable-persons-relocation-scheme-in-northern-ireland Contact Ligia: Tel. (028) 9032 5835 Ext 208 or E-mail lparizzi@brysongroup.org. Donations of money can be made to EMBRACE.

Donate to local refugee support groups

People in the asylum system have very low incomes and may have urgent unmet needs. Unsuccessful asylum applicants who cannot be sent back to countries like Syria are not allowed to work and may become destitute. You can help by contributing to local charities such as NICRAS (028 9024 6699), Homeplus drop-in centre (028 9031 1836), your local St Vincent de Paul or the EMBRACE Emergency Fund (contact details below).

What we cannot do in the UK

People have been asking about sponsoring refugees as they do in Canada. This is not possible in the UK, although this may change. The only legal sponsors are refugees who apply to have their family join them here.

Is there a role for providing accommodation?

- Generous people have offered accommodation but the very vulnerable Syrian people who come here will need to be housed and supported close to hospitals etc. and their accommodation will be arranged for them.
- At some future point there may be a need for ethical landlords for asylum applicants and refugees, who might also help them with their integration.

EMBRACE NI

Building a Welcoming Community

Web: www.embraceni.org



48 Elmwood Avenue,
Belfast, BT9 6AZ
Tel: 028 9066 3145
Email: info@embraceni.org

EMBRACE Information Sheet 10

Syrian Refugees

Summer 2017

You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall.
Isaiah 25:4

The Humanitarian Crisis of Our Time

Not since the Second World War have we had so many refugees so close to Europe. Millions of people have been uprooted from their homes by the Syrian civil war, either displaced within Syria or seeking safety elsewhere. Most are in neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, creating huge social and economic consequences on top of the disruptive effects of the war itself. In Lebanon, for example, at the end of 2014, new Syrian refugees made up a quarter of the population, with 257 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants. Amnesty International has pointed out that the increase in the number of refugees in Lebanon is 'the equivalent of the UK taking in 16 million extra people'. (Amnesty International, 'Untold stories of Syria's most vulnerable refugees', 4 February 2015)

Some Syrians have been in neighbouring countries for years and despair for their future and especially for their children's futures and that is causing them to take desperate steps.

Deteriorating conditions in Syria and neighbouring countries are driving thousands of Syrians to risk everything on perilous journeys to Europe ... As the crisis digs deeper into its fifth year with no sign of a political solution in sight, despair is on the rise and hope is in short supply.

UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) 'News Stories', 8 September 2015
www.unhcr.org/55eed5d66.html

'I feel imprisoned here', said Hind, who lives with her husband and three young children in a storage unit in the northern Jordanian city of Mafraq after fleeing Damascus. Six months ago, their dwindling resources forced them to give up the apartment they were renting. 'We don't go out, we don't do anything... We have lost any hope we had left for the future.'

UNHCR www.unhcr.org/55eed5d66.html

Who is a Refugee?

In the UK it is someone who applies for asylum, and is successful in being granted refugee status, but 'refugee' is commonly used as a general term for all people who have been displaced from their own countries by persecution, war and civil unrest. Many people are officially recognised as refugees by the UN Refugee Agency in refugee camps.

Under the UN Refugee Convention, which the UK has signed, people are entitled to seek asylum if they fear persecution in their own country because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, social group or political opinion.

UNHCR Asks for 'Burden Sharing'

With no end to the Syrian Civil War in sight, in 2013 the UNHCR begged the international community to resettle some of the most vulnerable people in the camps. They begged the wealthier countries to host 130,000 people. Some countries were generous. Germany was the most generous, offering to take 20,000 people straight away. Others, including Ireland, were allocated a number of refugees through a European quota system. (The UK is not part of this scheme.)

The UK Response

At first the UK argued that they had already allowed Syrians whose visas were expiring to remain here, and that they were giving generous financial support to Syrians in refugee camps. Others were being hosted through the normal asylum application system (see opposite).

Following public and international pressure, however, the UK announced that a number of people would be protected under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (SVPR) Scheme (see opposite). After more public concern in August 2015, the Prime Minister said that the UK would receive up to 20,000 vulnerable people from the camps by 2020, with priority given to children.

... the World Food Programme has had to cut 229,000 refugees in Jordan from its food assistance this month [September 2015] – the latest in a series of reductions in food aid across the region this year due to severe funding shortfalls.

'I don't know how we will manage without the food vouchers,' said Abu Abdullah, 48, from Aleppo, who now lives in Mafraq with his wife and 10 children. ... We haven't eaten any meat for two months.' Three of his daughters suffered severe burns when their house in Syria was shelled.

www.unhcr.org/55eed5d66.html

Find out more about asylum issues in our *Refugees in Northern Ireland* booklet www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Refugee-booklet-January-2017-F.pdf

Refugee Protection in the UK

Applying for Asylum in the UK

Most people fleeing persecution and seeking sanctuary arrive in the UK either having arranged their own travel or using an agent or smuggler, paid to help them. They must convince Home Office officials that they are in need of protection, a difficult and stressful process, which can take a long time. At that stage they receive accommodation and a small weekly allowance and are not allowed to work. (Only a third of the 240 applications for asylum in Northern Ireland in 2012 were successful in the first instance. Others are successful on appeal.) Those who are recognised as refugees are then given leave to remain here for five years and can work or receive benefits.

Between January 2012 and December 2015, 5,850 Syrians were granted positive asylum decisions, in the first instance, in the UK. In the year ending December 2015, 85% of Syrian asylum applications in the UK were successful.

Programme / Resettlement Refugees: the UK Gateway Programme

A few people are brought to the UK directly from refugee camps abroad. A number can be welcomed each year under the Gateway Protection Programme, run in conjunction with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). (652 people were settled in the UK in this way in 2015.) Applications are forwarded to the UK by the UNHCR; Home Office officials visit them to assess their need for resettlement, if the applicants might be a security risk, their family circumstances, and their health. They are then brought to the UK, with the agreement of local authorities prepared to participate in their integration. They have immediate entitlement to work and access to benefits and an organised programme of advice and support for the first year.

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (SVPR) Scheme

The SVPR programme is very similar to Gateway (see above). In conjunction with the UNHCR, the most vulnerable of the Syrian refugees in camps in neighbouring countries are brought to the UK. By the end of 2016, over 4,000 people had been welcomed to the UK in this way. Up to the end of June 2017, 9 groups comprising 558 Syrian refugees had been resettled in N Ireland as part of this scheme.

The Department for Communities NI has produced a briefing on the Syrian VPR scheme www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/syrian-vulnerable-persons-relocation-scheme