



THE OPPORTUNITY FOR GROUPS TO SPONSOR REFUGEES IN THE UK



In a tough speech to the Conservative Party Conference in October 2015 when she was Home Secretary, Theresa May indicated a desire to limit the opportunity to apply for asylum in the UK, but one section of the speech was more positive. She said that a new community sponsorship scheme for refugees would be planned, similar to those already existing in countries such as Canada, Germany and Australia.

On 19 July 2016 the new Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, announced that a 'Help Refugees in the UK' section of gov.uk web site would be used for members of the public to submit offers of support. Nine pilot areas in England would enable community groups to sponsor a refugee family. The scheme is starting on a small scale and Ms Rudd said that 'the resettled families will be among those referred by the UNHCR [United Nations Refugee Agency] under the Syrian resettlement and vulnerable children's resettlement schemes.'

The Government has been working with prospective sponsors (who must be registered charities or community interest companies) already and Lambeth Palace (the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury) is the first group to be approved. Amber Rudd launched the scheme alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, Most Rev. Justin Welby, who said

The full community sponsorship scheme presents churches and other civil society groups with the opportunity to provide sanctuary to those fleeing war-torn places.

Refugees, like all people, are treasured human beings, made in the image of God, who deserve safety, freedom and the opportunity to flourish.

It is an enormous privilege to welcome a family to live in a cottage in the grounds of Lambeth Palace.

Read more www.gov.uk/government/news/community-sponsorship-scheme-launched-for-refugees-in-the-uk

Northern Ireland is not part of the pilot scheme but there are indications that a scheme may be available here in the near future.

Christians Call for Concerted European Action on the Refugee and Migrant Crisis

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), Eurodiaconia (network of Christian social and healthcare organisations), EU-CORD (network of Christian Relief and development NGOs), and ACT Alliance EU (association of development and humanitarian aid groups pursuing rights-based development from a faith perspective), have called jointly on European governments to fulfil their promises and obligations towards refugees and migrants under international law, in a letter sent to political leaders in March 2016.

They first called for safe passage, not just through better search and rescue but also by creating more safe and legal routes.

Secondly, they urged more ambitious targets for numbers of refugees resettled in Europe, a speeding up of the process, and for states to assist each other in allowing faster family reunification for people who already have family members living in Europe. Reception centres should be improved and access to an asylum application process guaranteed.

The letter also covered co-operation with other host states and the importance of conflict resolution and concluded

We are aware of the opposition against refugees in European societies and observe the controversies in public debate with considerable concern. Yet, based on Christian and European values, we wish to encourage you to also consider the views of the many people across Europe who are tirelessly extending their hands and sharing their property and talents with refugees. ... They are living the Europe of solidarity, and the policies could and should build on these examples more courageously.

Read the full text:
www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20_Areas_of_Work/01_Refugee_Protection/2016-03-16-EU_Refugee_and_Asylum_Policy_final_150316.pdf

'And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt'
Deuteronomy 10:19

About EMBRACE

EMBRACE is a group of Christians from different denominations working together to promote a positive response to people who are seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority-ethnic backgrounds living in Northern Ireland.

Contact Us

48 Elmwood Ave, Belfast BT9 6AZ

Tel: 028 9066 3145

Web: www.embraceni.org

Email: info@embraceni.org

Registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland NIC100294

Syrian Resettlement Refugees Arrive in NI

In 2015, the Prime Minister announced that the UK would receive up to 20,000 vulnerable people under a Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme. They come from refugee camps and priority is given to refugees who: have medical needs; have survived violence and torture; are women at risk; vulnerable children; have legal or physical protection needs; or are vulnerable and elderly.

The first group of 51 people (10 families) arrived in Northern Ireland on 15th December 2015. They included Muslims and Christians and are being settled in the Belfast area.

The second group arrived in April 2016, and most were housed in the North-West. Derry Strabane Civic Action for Refugees has prepared a helpful guide for local people outlining ways of responding. The booklet, *Help Them Live Again* can be accessed at

www.derrystrabane.com/refugees

The third group, 57 people, arrived on 28th June and they are being accommodated largely in the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon council areas. Further small groups should arrive, to be settled in different locations every few months. The final total for Northern Ireland will not be more than 2,000.

Update on Families Who Arrived in December

The Department for Communities NI has issued a document about the scheme and how it is operating here, including information about how the first families are settling in.

The families who arrived in Northern Ireland during December have told us that they are very appreciative of all the support, advice and guidance provided to help them adjust to life in Northern Ireland.

The families continue to miss their homeland and way of life and sometimes they feel a little isolated. However, they say that from the outset they have felt secure, comfortable and welcomed in Belfast.

The families have settled into their accommodation and all of them remain in the same houses that were identified for them. Each family has been allocated a key worker who has helped them settle into their new lives in Northern Ireland. In the first few months, the focus has been on helping the Syrians learn how to navigate our local systems, including: how to use public transport, familiarity with shops and leisure facilities, how to use and manage the cost of their utilities.

There has been a good uptake of English classes on offer in local communities. The adults have a great desire to learn their new local language in order to find work and talk with their neighbours.

Children too have embraced school and most are managing well. The lack of English and cultural differences present challenges for the children's education, but these are being overcome with the support of the schools and the key workers.

There have been no incidents of race hate attacks on any of the families. All of the families report that the local communities where they live have been very welcoming and supportive.

www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/syrian-vulnerable-persons-relocation-scheme

Guide for Syrian VPR refugees

On 18 July the Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness launched a guide to help refugees to understand life in NI and their rights and responsibilities as Syrian VPR refugees. It was compiled by the Law Centre NI and the NI Human Rights Commission.

<http://lawcentreni.org/news/recent-news/38-featured-slideshow/1361-guide-for-syrian-vpr-refugees-formally-launched.html>

Offers of Assistance for Syrian Refugees

Bryson Intercultural co-ordinates the consortium responsible for the welcome and integration of Syrian resettlement refugees (see Col. 1) and can receive offers of help from the public. Contact the co-ordinator Ligia Parizzi, Tel: (028) 9032 5835.

MPs Meet Refugee & Asylum Forum Members

With the focus on Syrian resettlement refugees it is easy to forget the issues faced by people seeking asylum here. So it was valuable for NI Members of Parliament to meet members of the local Refugee and Asylum Forum. An account of their meeting at the Law Centre states that the issues raised included 'destitution and homelessness, family reunion, travel difficulties, immigration detention, difficulties encountered during transition from asylum seeker to refugee status'.

<http://lawcentreni.org/news/recent-news/38-featured-slideshow/1353-refugee-week-mps-meet-refugee-asylum-forum-at-law-centre-ni.html>

Refugees Welcome NI

After putting safeguarding and other protocols in place, Refugees Welcome is now asking people who have a room to spare to come forward so that they can be linked with someone in the asylum system who needs somewhere to stay. Find out more at <http://refugees-welcomeni.co.uk/> or Email: bethwatbrad@gmail.com

Hate Crime in NI

The level of racist incidents and crimes rose each year between 2011/12 and 2014/15 before falling in the year 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, when there were 1,221 reported incidents, including 853 crimes.

www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/hate-motivation-statistics/2016/q4/quarterly-hate-motivations-bulletin-period-ending-mar16.pdf

Other parts of the UK have experienced recent rises in racist incidents around the time of the referendum vote last month. Initial reports do not indicate a similar situation here, but Patrick Yu Executive Director of the NI Council for Ethnic Minorities has written an open letter to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister conveying the sense of fear and uncertainty in the local migrant community following the decision to leave the European Union. <http://nicem.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Text-open-letter-FM-and-DFM-migrant-concerns-post-brexite.pdf>

At Least 16 Separated Children Missing in NI

An answer to a question in the NI Assembly indicates that 67 separated or unaccompanied children, from other countries, are known to have come to NI since 2006. Of the 22 who subsequently went missing, between 16 and 20 have not been found. <http://lawcentreni.org/news/recent-news/1-news/1350-at-least-16-separated-children-still-missing-from-northern-ireland.html>

EMBRACE Events

From Syria (and Elsewhere) to Northern Ireland

On 28 January 2016, as part of the Four Corners Festival, over 100 people attended an information evening on the Belfast City Hall on the Syrian refugee crisis and the provision of welcome for people seeking refuge here. Speakers included Jasper Rutherford, who had recently visited refugee camps abroad; Rev. Richard Kerr on the biblical response; Denise Wright on what is happening locally; Norma Nyamambi on her personal experience of the asylum system; Margaret McNulty gave an overview on destitution among people seeking asylum; and Dave Smith, of the GB-based Boaz Trust, explained how they had developed a network of accommodation for people in the asylum system who had nowhere else to live.

On 11 April 2016 a group of people from churches in the Derry~Londonderry area attended a similar EMBRACE event just prior to the arrival of a group of VPR refugees in their area (see page 2). They heard a biblical perspective on migration from Rev. Richard Kerr and got an understanding of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme from Denise Wright, EMBRACE Chairperson. Sue Divin, Good Relations Officer, Derry & Strabane District Council, described how the local response was being handled and the support that the refugees would receive. Margaret McNulty provided information about the process experienced by people who apply for asylum in N Ireland.

Willowfield Church of Ireland Engage event

At Easter 84 people engaged with refugee issues at Willowfield, in East Belfast. There were 8 table hosts, including refugees and people seeking asylum. Denise Wright and Scott Boldt of EMBRACE also led short workshops on integration and refugee awareness.

Spring Meeting: Finding Refuge in Northern Ireland

In addition to the EMBRACE AGM at Edgehill College, Belfast, on 12 May 2016, there was a Small Worlds event, facilitated by Dr Stephanie Mitchell of the Belfast Friendship Club. People were able to move from table to table, hearing personal accounts from people in the asylum system here. Denise Wright, Chairperson of EMBRACE, updated the gathering about the first group of Syrian resettlement refugees who had been welcomed to N Ireland and about the background to their arrival. (See also pages 1 and 2.) She spoke about the needs of the refugees when they arrive here. What they require is 'not charity but solidarity' 'These are people

Stormont Presbyterian Church

The Small Worlds technique (see Col. 1) was also used at an event on 8 May, 2016, at Stormont Presbyterian Church when some members of the congregation came to the hall to hear the experiences of migrants and refugees as part of their morning service.

Sorina Toma Describes the Lives of Romanian Roma People in Belfast at the Stormont PCI Church event

Welcome Fest in Belfast Cathedral

St Anne's C of I Cathedral gave a warm welcome to the organisers of Welcome Fest, the Red Cross, Belfast Friendship Club and the NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS). This Refugee Week event on 23 June, included music and dance performances and stands displaying the work of refugee support organisations. See <http://focusonrefugees.org/welcome-fest-in-belfast-cathedral-thu-23-june/>

New EMBRACE Resource on Refugees

EMBRACE information officer, Margaret McNulty prepared a booklet for the group's AGM (see page 4), entitled Refugees in Northern Ireland 2016; Some Basic Facts. It covers both people who arrive here and apply for asylum and the process they have to undergo, as well as the background to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (see also page 2) and the resettlement refugees who are arriving here. www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Refugee-booklet-10.3.pdf

News in Brief

New CTBI web site 'Focus on Refugees'

Churches Together in Britain & Ireland has launched a web site with news, suggestions for practical action, policies and faith resources concerning refugees. The NI section: <http://focusonrefugees.org/northern-ireland/> includes information about the Small Worlds events format (see opposite), the Belfast Friendship Club and EMBRACE events.

Christian Aid campaign to alter perceptions of refugees

'Change the Story' aims to get Christians writing to newspapers, talking and praying about refugees in order to get the media to portray refugees in a more humane way.

<http://focusonrefugees.org/christian-aid-invite-you-to-change-the-story-in-word-in-speech-and-through-prayer/>

Racial Justice Sunday moves to February 2017

Racial Justice Sunday is to move from the 2nd Sunday in September to the 2nd Sunday in February to avoid a clash with Education Sunday in England and Wales. <https://ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-change-of-date/>

Justin Kouame of the NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers talks about his experiences at the Spring Meeting

Funding

Aneta



EMBRACE AGM

Chairperson's Report

Denise Wright spoke about the primary role of EMBRACE in providing information for individuals and churches to enable them to support people seeking refuge in NI and make this a more welcoming place for migrants and minority-ethnic people. The reduction in funding and staff hours (see above) had led to a reduced capacity to do outreach work but committee members and Development Worker, Aneta, had managed to undertake quite a number of workshops, speaking engagements and events in relation to the refugee crisis (see page 3.) A number of new or updated information sheets have been added to the web site and regular prayer letters provide information to inform members' prayers. (See www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-prayer-letters/) Generous donations from churches and individuals had assisted in the integration of Syrian VPR refugees by contributions towards gas and electricity and equipment for babies and children, as well as the usual crisis grants for other foreign nationals (see opposite).

Financial Report

Treasurer, Scott Boldt explained that the format of the accounts had changed in order to conform to the Charity Commission NI regulations. The group had assets of £34,601 at the 31 March 2016.

Committee Elections

The committee were sorry to say goodbye to longstanding committee member **Paddy Donnelly**, who has retired after over 12 years, as well as **Rev. John Mbayo** and **Sr Rosaleen Murray**, who did not stand for re-election. The committee election was facilitated by Rev. Jim Campbell and the following were re-elected: **Dr Scott Boldt**, **Patricia Carty**, **Irene Jovaras**, **Rev. Richard Kerr**, **Margaret McNulty**, **Denise Wright**. **Sr Noreen Christian**, who is a founder member of EMBRACE, was elected to the committee for the first time.

At a later committee meeting the following office bearers were elected: **Denise Wright**, Chairperson; **Scott Boldt**, Vice Chair; **Irene Jovaras**, Treasurer; **Noreen Christian**, Secretary; and **Margaret McNulty**, Information Officer. **Noel McCune** of Contemporary Christianity and **David Smyth** of Evangelical Alliance NI were co-opted onto the committee as representatives of their organisations.

Safeguarding the Privacy and Dignity of Refugees

The Department for Communities briefing document about Syrian VPR refugees (see page 2 Col.1) contains a useful Good Practice Charter including guidance on safeguarding the privacy and dignity of vulnerable people, including refugees.
www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/syrian-vulnerable-persons-relocation-scheme

EMBRACE Emergency Fund

The fund continues to assist foreign nationals in crisis situations, who have no recourse to public funds. Denise Wright said in her annual report

Changes to benefit entitlements have caused significant hardship to EU migrants ... We have been able to work with support organisations to support them short term while they find work or by providing flights back to their home country. Many asylum seekers have been supported with food, travel costs, short-term accommodation and baby equipment.

The financial report indicates that £3,554 was spent on travel; £1,759 on accommodation; £760 on food; £50 towards the cost of a funeral; and £309 on legal and professional support; in the year ending 31 March 2016.

Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

If you are not already a member of EMBRACE please consider joining us. Subscriptions are £10.00 annually per person and £20.00 for groups. Please write to us at the address below. If you would like to make a donation towards our work please send a cheque, payable to EMBRACE.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

EMBRACE

48 Elmwood Ave, Belfast BT9 6AZ

Tel: 028 9066 3145

Web: www.embraceni.org

Email: info@embraceni.org