

# 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. The Highland Council made a commitment to resettle 25-30 Syrian refugee families in Highland, through the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement 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. Seventeen families have already been settled across Highland area.

#### **Q Who are the refugees?**

The people coming to the UK under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme (SVPRS) are in acute 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 among other vulnerability criteria, defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR). They come from five countries in the regions of Syria where they have sought asylum, are not necessarily from refugee camps, though mostly reside in unsuitable, temporary accommodation; the scheme does not include people who have made their own way to Europe.

#### **Q When will Syrian refugees arrive?**

Six families were resettled in the Inner Moray Firth in summer 2016, and four more in Lochaber during 2017. A further 7 families arrived in Dingwall in early 2018. We are working closely with the Home Office and COSLA in preparation to welcome more families to Highland. The right support is in place and our next families will arrive over the coming months. Those families being resettled in the UK 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?**

Resettled refugees are now automatically given Refugee status and granted five years Leave to Remain from the date of their arrival. After five years their need to stay longer will be assessed depending on the situation in Syria. It is possible that resettled families will have

the opportunity to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain, given that for many families there is currently no prospect of a safe and sustainable return to Syria

**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, e.g. 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 very 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 can offer to accommodate. These numbers will not create a noticeable impact on access to local services and experience has shown that refugees have had a positive effect on local communities.

## **FUNDING**

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

The UK 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. The scheme is funded jointly by the Home Office and the Department for International Development. Local Authorities also receive funding for years 2 – 5 following resettlement, with per capita funding reducing year on year as families become self-sufficient. All additional support services for refugees are funded by the UK Government and do not draw on The Highland Council's budgets.

## **EDUCATION**

**Q How will refugee children have their educational needs met?**

Children will be placed, wherever possible, in their catchment school according to their local address and will be integrated into the life of the school as quickly as possible. Experience of placing Syrian children into Highland schools has been very positive overall, and children typically acquire English quickly and integrate well with their classmates.

## **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. Refugees will also have undergone Migration Health Assessments with doctors from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) prior to departure.

## **BENEFITS**

### **Q. Can refugees claim benefits?**

Yes. They can claim most benefits. They will also be subject to the same restrictions as other residents, so they can be sanctioned and are subject to the benefit cap.

## **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 is within the Inverness area; it is an area where there is suitable housing available, spaces in schools, and there is sufficient capacity within the local health facilities. The families will be housed within social housing stock.

### **Q Why has this area 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 which Inverness can offer.

### **Q Will these people get preferential treatment for housing?**

We will be awarding priority for people for housing based on the criteria for referral to VPRS and acknowledging the fact that these families are vulnerable, destitute and homeless.

### **Q Will their houses be furnished?**

Their homes will be furnished to the same void standard as all other potential council tenants' homes. Any soft furnishings and other household items will have been donated by the third sector and local communities.

**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.

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Q Can they work?**

Yes, they have the right to work. Our experience has shown that they come with a wide variety of skills and specialisms, and are very keen to work as soon as possible as this helps them integrate and improve their English. Initially, to help them gain the skills, experience and knowledge to operate in the British workplace, we are keen to find voluntary work placements for them. Intensive English language classes, oriented towards employability, are provided for all adult learners who arrive under the scheme. **If you have a business and would be interesting in hosting one or more individuals for a short placement, please get in touch.**

**HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

**The most important thing you can do to help is giving your time to welcome the Syrians into their local community - even just a smile and saying 'hello' goes a long way to make them feel welcomed.**

If you are able to volunteer more of your time you should get in touch directly with **Highland Third Sector Interface**. 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: email info@highlandtsi.org.uk or telephone: 01349 864289

We are working with **The Highlands Support Refugees** and **In This Together** to accept and distribute donations of goods. Please see:

**The Highlands Support Refugees:**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/thehighlandssupportrefugees/>

**In This Together**

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/InThisTogetherInverness/>

They are particularly looking for donations of equipment, toys and furniture.

We are also working closely with **Inverness Mosque** (<http://invernessmasjid.co.uk/>) to support the Syrian families' holistic integration.

**Highland Migrant and Refugee Advocacy (HiMRA)** (<https://himra.org/>) also provide ongoing drop-in support sessions and other activities for Syrian families, among others.

**If you have a business and would be willing to offer a voluntary work placement, please get in touch.**

For general enquiries and offers of support, please email:

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For all media enquiries, please email:

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