

## GENERAL SYNOD

### The Migration Crisis

#### The scale of displacement

1. Pope Francis recently said that the refugees fleeing to Europe are the "tip of the iceberg". A report released by the UNHCR in June 2015 confirms the point. Called World at War, the report documents what Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, describes as "an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before."
2. For most of the past decade displacement figures were relatively stable ranging from 38 million and 43 million persons annually. Since 2011 these numbers have grown to the current recorded levels of 59.9 million by end of 2014. This is a 40% increase within a span of just three years, equating roughly to the population of Italy or the United Kingdom. Persecution, conflict, generalised violence<sup>1</sup> and human rights violations have formed what UNHCR call a 'nation of the displaced' that, if they were a country would be the 24th largest in the world.
3. Behind these figures are a record number of simultaneous civil wars: from Syria, Iraq, Eritrea and Afghanistan to South Sudan, Yemen, Ukraine, Central African Republic, and Somalia. Many of these conflicts have been continuing for a decade or more. Refugee movements and the forced displacement of people across the Middle East and North African are a familiar and ancient story, but the unprecedented growth and acceleration in forced displacements has placed immense pressure and a wholly new level of strain on the global humanitarian system.

#### The Syrian crisis

4. The civil war in Syria is now in its fifth year. In addition to the eight million displaced in Syria, over four million people have fled the country as refugees, as the civil war has deepened into an effective division of the country's territory between the forces of Bashir Assad, rebel groups, and IS. Most of the refugees are in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. Many of those displaced, or their parents, were themselves refugees from earlier displacements, whether the sectarian civil war in Iraq or the 1948 Palestinian war.
5. The British government has committed the very substantial sum of £1bn to aid for refugees in the region, with an additional £100m channelled through NGOs and charities for the same purpose. There is a clear priority in government policy, that the UK should help displaced people to be able to live in as decent conditions as possible relatively close to the homes from which they have been driven.
6. For many years Christian Aid has funded organisations working with refugees and the displaced in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, providing communities with food, bedding, hygiene kits and health services. In Lebanon and Iraq, their partners are also working to provide

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<sup>1</sup> Defined within UNHCR as encompassing 'situations characterised by violence that is indiscriminate and sufficiently widespread to the point of affecting large groups of persons or entire populations compelling their flight'.

psychosocial support to children and women in need. Tear Fund and many Christian and other aid agencies are also making a vital contribution.

7. *Christian refugees.* Before 2011, about 10% of the Syrian population was Christian. Many Christian refugees are not in the camps, for a variety of reasons. Some can draw on limited savings and family networks to provide an alternative to the hopeless future they see in the camps. However, the Archbishop of Canterbury in September commented that selection of vulnerable and at-risk people for resettlement from within refugee camps is likely to disadvantage Christian refugees, since 'within the camps there is significant intimidation and radicalisation, and many, particularly of the Christian population who have been forced to flee, are unable to be in the camps'. It is important that religious vulnerability, including the risk or reality of persecution, is given full weight in assessment of need and risk, so that religious minorities, including Christians, are not disadvantaged in terms of access to humanitarian programmes including resettlement for those at greatest risk. At present, the identification of the people most urgently needing resettlement is made by UNHCR.

## **Europe**

8. Over half a million people have crossed the Mediterranean and Aegean so far this year, fleeing war, persecution, deprivation and suffering in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and other countries. Nearly 3,000 people have drowned or gone missing, while the number of people arriving in Europe continues to rise. The British government has opted not to be involved in EU-wide planning for resettling Syrian refugees, chiefly in order to avoid the risk of encouraging others to begin a journey towards Europe.
9. Chaplaincies across the Diocese in Europe have taken their full part in providing practical support to displaced people. Us, the church-based charity working with Anglican churches around the world, is channelling gifts for these ministries, such as the Lighthouse Project in Greece, and the Anglican Alliance for Relief, Development and Advocacy are helping to build the Diocese in Europe's capacity to respond. More widely, Christian Aid and its partners in the Act Alliance - a global coalition of more than 130 churches and church-related organisations that work together in humanitarian assistance - are providing emergency relief in Greece, Serbia and Hungary.
10. There has also been a great response to the needs of those stranded in the Calais area; the Canterbury diocese has taken a lead here, and CalAid is channelling gifts: now that organisation has been put in place, gifts of money have been the most appropriate contribution.
11. The Archbishop of Canterbury has said 'I am encouraged by the positive role that churches, charities and international agencies are already playing, across Europe and in Syria and the surrounding areas, to meet basic humanitarian needs. These efforts may feel trivial in the face of the challenge, but if we all play our part this is a crisis that we can resolve.'

## **Resettlement in the UK**

12. There is a *vigorous tradition of British hospitality to refugees.* In recent years, 19,000 of the Vietnamese 'boat people' were resettled here, about 4,000 from Bosnia from 1993 onwards, and a similar number from Kosovo from 1999 onwards. In each case, many

more arrived independently and applied for asylum. In different circumstances, about 28,000 expelled Ugandan Asians were welcomed to the UK in 1972. The current scale of displacement dwarfs each of those tragic events. One lesson from these resettlement projects was that a minimum of 50 people in one area gives sufficient scope for mutual support.

13. *The scale of resettlement*: since the civil war in Syria began in 2011, Britain has accepted 5,000 Syrian refugees. 215 have been resettled under the Vulnerable Person Relocation scheme, since March 2014. In the UK, the government committed on 7th September to bring in 20,000 Syrian refugees to our country in the next five years. The inflow of people is likely to grow slowly and reach up to 400 a week by mid-2016. The Archbishop of Canterbury described this as ‘a slim response’. The letter sent by 84 bishops to the Prime Minister on 10th September asked for a minimum of 50,000 people over the five-year period.

### **Government action**

14. A joint ministerial committee has been set up, with ten departments involved as well as the two lead ministries, the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government. There is now a Minister with responsibility for Syrian Refugees, Richard Harrington MP. He is a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State jointly at the Home Office, the DCLG and the Department for International Development, and is responsible both for government support to refugees in the UK, and for support to those in the region.
15. The Home Office has established a team to lead and coordinate and support resettlement, ‘the ‘resettlement gold command’. This team and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) are working with local authorities and the Local Government Association, as well as with faith and community organisations, charities and NGOs. The shape of the Syrian refugee resettlement programme follows the outlines of the Gateway Protection Programme, which has been going in the UK since 2004 and takes 750 per annum. Refugees are identified and referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Vulnerable Person Relocation scheme (VPRs) prioritises survivors of torture and violence and women and children ‘at risk’ from Syria only. It took its first refugees in March 2014, and about 215 had been received when the new target of 20,000 was announced.
16. The present scheme is an upscaling of VPRs. It provides humanitarian protection for 5 years. Local authorities have been told that costs will be met in full for the first year, out of the overseas aid budget. Paul Morrison of RGC has promised that further funding will be available (as has the Prime Minister), but details are not yet available. The costs (including privately rented accommodation) have been estimated at up to £23,000 for an adult depending on benefit (including the cost to LAs £8,520, and for medical care £2,200).

### **Civil society**

17. Independently of government but working in close liaison with the Home Office, the National Refugees Welcome Board has been set up to oversee and coordinate the response around the country, bringing in a wide range of stakeholders. This board has met, and is in the early days of defining its role and building cooperation with government. The Bishop of Durham is a Co-Chair of the Board, and other bishops are

working with him. There is a website, [refugees-welcome.org.uk](http://refugees-welcome.org.uk), maintained by CitizensUK.

18. At least 63 local groups have been set up, and church groups and individuals are encouraged to link up with these, as well as to start their own local group if there is none in their area. Cities of Sanctuary and other key groups are part of this network. Details are on the Refugees Welcome website.

## **Christian involvement in supporting refugees in the UK**

### **19. *Building on current community engagement***

Christian churches in the UK have been very actively involved with other community groups in providing practical help, including accommodation, to refugees and those seeking asylum. A recent brief survey found such projects, for example, in Bournemouth, Bradford, Birmingham, Darwen, Derby, Greater Manchester, Newcastle and Tyneside, Nottingham, Sheffield, Southampton as well as several in London; many of these were started by faith groups, and have grown to include wider community involvement. A regional organiser said of their own region: ‘I would say that well over 50% of voluntary work undertaken with asylum seekers and refugees is done either by churches or by Christians working in voluntary organisations. Many of the City of Sanctuary groups are run by Christians, or have significant numbers of Christians involved in them.’ Several other faith groups have relevant experience, for example through community involvement in the Gateway humanitarian protection scheme, the NACCOM network housing destitute displaced people, or the Home for Good charity working with unaccompanied children.

### **20. *Sharing information and practice.***

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is making engagement with refugee issues and refugee support its major focus. One of the earliest activities of its predecessor body the British Council of Churches, in the 1940s, was its Ecumenical Refugee Committee. The long-standing Churches Refugee Network of CTBI, chaired by the Bishop of Croydon, is at the heart of liaison between churches on these issues.

21. In addition to the structures already mentioned, a network of Christians engaged in refugee support has developed from a pre-existing group which focussed on Syria and Iraq. A meeting in Westminster in late October established this as a network whose aim is not to coordinate or organise, but to be a forum in which Christian groups of many kinds can share ideas and lessons about practice.

### **22. *Dioceses***

Coventry is one of the three ‘early adopter’ locations already receiving Syrians under this scheme (the London borough of Kingston, and Perth are the others). The Diocese has applied for change of use of Offa House, its former diocesan retreat house, and is investigating its possible use as short-term welcome accommodation with the city, county and district councils. Many other dioceses have taken action by identifying possible properties, appointing individuals or groups to lead on refugee support, and providing information and training. They are building links with LAs and other relevant bodies in their locality – for it is at this level that the hard and sustained work will be needed, ensuring that commitments to receive vulnerable refugees include housing, education health and all the other services needed. The Church of England’s national safeguarding team has published guidance on the complex issues of ensuring that any refugees resettled

with church involvement are kept safe. General guidance from MPA on local church response to the refugee crisis has been posted on the website, and MPA with the Legal Office have prepared a briefing on the use of parsonage houses to accommodate refugees.

23. ***Unaccompanied minors***

There is a serious shortage of trained foster carers in this country. Many of the children coming on their own under this programme will have suffered severe trauma. Home for Good is a Christian charity which promotes and informs fostering and adoption; it is working with LAs to establish sound fostering arrangements for unaccompanied minors. Coram is a leading adoption service in this country, and the Migrant Children's Project at Coram Children's Legal Centre is a great source of information and training.

24. ***Private Sponsorship***

The Home Secretary announced in October 2015 that a private sponsorship scheme would be initiated. In Canada, such a scheme has been working since 1979, resettling 250,000 people. Individuals, groups, churches, businesses etc. make an agreement to give material and emotional support for a period of time. No details have yet been given, but one way in which churches could demonstrate that they are committed to the UK taking more than 20,000 people would be to show, and in due course register, their interest in being involved in such a scheme – recognising the significant commitment of money, time and care that will be involved. The National Refugees Welcome Board has already done substantial preparatory work for a sponsorship scheme.

25. ***Additional Note:*** Safe and legal routes for those who must leave their home country.

A group of over 350 judges and lawyers called on 12th October for the establishment of safe, legal routes into the European Union. It asked not only for resettlement schemes, but for humanitarian visas, issued in the country from which the person is beginning their journey so that they can seek asylum on arrival (France and Canada, for example, issue such visas); and for better family reunion policies. This letter also called for a relocation scheme for destitute refugees who are currently elsewhere in Europe, and for suspension of the 'Dublin' system under which a person has to seek asylum in the first European country in which they arrive.

+Paul Dunelm  
Philip Fletcher, Chair of the Mission and Public Affairs Council