



BRIEFING PAPER

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Refugee resettlement in the UK: recent developments

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Summary

A new 'UK Resettlement Scheme' was due to come into effect in 2020, to replace most of the UK's existing programmes for resettling recognised refugees in the UK.

The Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted refugee resettlement activities and delayed the launch of the new scheme.

This short briefing gives an overview of recent Government statements on the likely timing of a resumption of resettlement in the UK and plans for the new UK Resettlement Scheme.

Commons Library briefing [Refugee Resettlement in the UK](#) (6 March 2020) has more detailed information about the development of refugee resettlement programmes in the UK over the past five years, including the background to the new scheme.

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1. Covid-19: When will resettlement resume?

The UK's various refugee resettlement programmes have been on hold since March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Refugee rights campaigners are calling for them to resumed.

The Government [has highlighted several factors](#) which it says will affect the timing of the resumption of activities. Namely:

- Flights restarting from the refugee-hosting countries
- Lifting of travel and other Covid-19 restrictions in the UK and partner countries
- UNHCR and IOM's ability to operate
- The re-opening of UK visa application centres
- The capacity of local authorities and other public bodies to receive resettled refugees, in light of Covid-19
- The UK asylum system's recovery from the impact of Covid-19 disruption

[The Government has said](#) that it is continuing to closely monitor the situation and maintains regular dialogue with international and domestic stakeholders. It states that "When the ... conditions have been satisfied we will engage with our local authority partners on their readiness and appetite for restarting resettlement."

Critics contend that local authorities and other stakeholders are ready to resume participation. In a [recent article for The House magazine](#), Kate Osamor noted that other aspects of the UK's asylum system, such as removals of unsuccessful applicants, have resumed in spite of Covid-19. She argued that "The government only seems willing to take the risks of Covid-19 into account when it allows them to pursue anti-refugee policies."

UNHCR is keen for the UK to resume its activities, as its Special Representative to the UK [recently confirmed](#) to the Home Affairs Committee:

...we are talking with the Government because we would like now to be able see how we can restart the process as quickly as possible, considering that 11 out of the 23 resettlement countries have already been able to restart their procedures. There are challenges. There is no need to talk too much about that, but we also believe that it is possible to restart the process.[Q245]

2. The new UK Resettlement Scheme

The new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS, previously referred to as the 'global resettlement scheme') will consolidate and replace the UK's main existing resettlement programmes. As with those schemes, it will prioritise the most vulnerable refugees. Over time it is expected to develop a broader geographical coverage than the existing schemes.

The UKRS was due to launch during 2020, after the UK's commitments under existing schemes were fulfilled. The temporary cessation of resettlement activities has delayed the transition to the new scheme.

An August 2019 Home Office [note for local authorities](#) gave a broad overview of the then Government's intentions, and encouraged local authorities to submit their offers of places as soon as possible.

The Government has said that it will publish an updated policy statement setting out the details of the new scheme before it launches. It is expected to operate broadly in line with the processes established for the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes.

A recent [Home Office letter to the Lords EU Security and Justice Sub-Committee](#) gave an overview of engagement with local authorities and other stakeholders on the development of the new scheme. In terms of the likely funding available to participating local authorities to cover housing costs, it confirmed:

We will continue to provide a generous funding package which enables local authorities, schools and health partners to provide vulnerable refugees with a safe environment and the chance to rebuild their lives. Additional funding is also made available to help local authorities to address some of the challenges they face; this can be used for exceptional costs incurred by local authorities, including for property adaptations and for sourcing larger properties.

On securing local authority participation in refugee resettlement programmes, the letter noted:

It is important that local authorities consider carefully whether they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration support is provided to resettled refugees and appreciate this may not be possible in all areas across the UK.

We have already had a positive response to our request for pledges for the new scheme and look forward to welcoming more commitments from local authorities in the coming months. We are keen to secure the ongoing support and participation of local government across the UK. We also continue to warmly welcome interest from those authorities who have yet to take part in resettlement and we are working through regional Strategic Migration Partnerships to encourage new authorities to do so.

How secure is the future of the scheme? Funding commitments

External stakeholders have expressed concerns that the Government has not yet committed funding to the scheme beyond its first scheduled year of operation.

The Home Office has previously indicated that the new scheme would aim to resettle around 5000 refugees in its first year of operation. It said that decisions on the number of refugees to be resettled in subsequent years would be determined through future spending rounds.

Local authorities [have been calling for](#) a long-term government funding commitment to the scheme. The issue was raised in [Home Office questions on 28 September](#). The Minister's response referred to the ongoing spending review:

Gill Furniss: ... the Government have still not allocated any funding for these schemes beyond September 2021. What assurances can the Minister give me that the UK will continue to provide safe sanctuary to those fleeing war and persecution after that date?

Chris Philp: The hon. Member will know that we are going through a spending review process, where questions of funding will be considered. Although the resettlement programme is currently paused owing to coronavirus, it is our intention to appropriately recommence it when circumstances allow.