

## The UK's role in the international refugee protection system

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At the end of 2014 the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide had risen to 59.5 million, 8.3 million more than at the end of 2013, and 14.3 million more than at the end of 2012. The increased numbers reflect the on going crises in Syria, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia but also in 2014 conflicts in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ukraine and Iraq, among others. The combined number of refugees and internally displaced persons protected or assisted by UNHCR rose by 11 million, reaching a record high of 46.7 million by the end of 2014.

Within the overall total 14.4 million were refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in addition to 1.8 million asylum seekers worldwide. The figure for refugees does not include Palestinian refugees, of whom 5.1 million are registered with UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency).

Most refugees flee to neighbouring countries and remain in their region of origin. At the end of 2014 Africa and the Middle East hosted about 46% of all refugees (6.65 million refugees) while Europe hosted about 22% (approximately 3.1 million refugees). The number of refugees in Europe increased by 74% during 2014. This is largely due to the continued influx of Syrian refugees who account for 55% of the refugees in Europe (1.7 million people). Ukraine and Iraq together account for a further 367,000. An additional 79,700 Syrian asylum seekers were granted international protection on an individual basis in European countries.

Turkey has risen to 1<sup>st</sup> in the rankings of refugee hosting countries, having been 59<sup>th</sup> just three years ago, because of the number of Syrian refugees entering the country. There are now 1.59 million refugees in Turkey. During 2014 there were 1 million Syrian refugees newly registered in Turkey. Lebanon and Jordan remain high in the rankings, again because of the impact of the conflict in Syria. Pakistan is the country hosting the second largest number of refugees (1.51 million) followed by Lebanon (1.15 million), Iran (982,000), Ethiopia (659,500) and Jordan (654,100).

In comparison, according to UNHCR, the UK hosts about 153,560 refugees and asylum seekers. UNHCR has revised this figure downwards by a considerable amount since 2011 when they quoted a figure of 208,000. The change reflects a fall in the UNHCR estimate of the number of refugees in the UK from 193,600 to 117,161.

More than half of all refugees worldwide came from just three countries; Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia. For these countries the numbers of refugees at the end of 2014 were: Syria (about 3.9 million), Afghanistan (about 2.6 million), and Somalia (about 1.1 million). Sudan (about 0.66 million), South Sudan (about 0.62 million), and Democratic Republic of the Congo (about 0.52 million) were the next highest numbers. Syria has replaced Afghanistan as the main country of origin, having been 36<sup>th</sup> in the list just three years earlier. Afghanistan has been the main country of origin for over three decades, until 2014.

Women and girls accounted for just under 50% of the world's refugee population in 2014, a proportion that has remained fairly constant over the past decade. 51% of the refugee population in 2014 were children under the age of 18, the highest figure in a decade. Over 34,000 asylum applications were made in 2014 by unaccompanied or separated children, mainly from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Syria, and Somalia. This is the highest number since UNHCR started collecting this data in 2006.

Globally about 1.8 million individual asylum claims were pending determination at the end of 2014, according to UNHCR. Across the EU there has been a gradual rise in the number of asylum applications since 2007, with 2010 being an exception to the trend. Total new applications, including dependants, to the EU28 countries have risen from 153,385 in 2008 to 562,265 in 2014. Some Western European countries, such as France and Germany, have seen a steady increase in asylum applications over the period. In Germany, for example, numbers have risen from 21,365 in 2007 to 173,070 in 2014.

In the UK the number of asylum applications has remained relatively stable since 2005, compared with the very large changes in some countries, ranging from a low of 17,916 in 2010 to a high of 25,932 in 2008. In 2014 there were 24,914 applications in the UK (all of these UK figures exclude dependants). There were significant increases in the number of applications from Eritrea (3,239 main applicants in 2014 compared with 1,387 in 2013) and Sudan (1,449 main applicants in 2014 compared with 743 in 2013). The number of applicants from Syria rose again in 2014 by 26% compared with 2013.

UNHCR data also examines the number of refugees per 1000 population. The effect of the Syrian crisis can again be seen. Lebanon has 232 refugees per 1000 population and Jordan 87 per 1000. These figures do not include Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA. When the 447,000 refugees registered with UNRWA in Lebanon are included the figure for Lebanon rises to about 1 in 4 of the population. The last time a country was in a similar situation was in 1980, when Somalia hosted 2 million refugees from Ethiopia, giving a ratio of over 300 refugees per 1000 inhabitants. The comparable figure for the UK is less than 2 per 1000.

In 2014 the EU28 (EU member states) granted protection to 160,080 asylum seekers, an increase from 107,625 in 2013. The largest national group was from Syria (65,450). In the UK the three largest national groups granted protection were from Eritrea, Syria, and Iran.

## **Resettlement**

Under the Gateway Protection Programme the UK has set a quota of up to 750 refugees to settle in the UK each year. This is separate from the standard procedure for claiming asylum in the UK. Applications are made via UNHCR offices in other countries, which then refer them to the UK Home Office. At present 15 local authorities are participating in the Gateway programme. During the first year a refugee is in the UK the local authority is given funds by the Home Office to cover accommodation, benefits, and access to health and education services. In 2014 there were 630 refugees, including dependants, resettled via

the Gateway programme in the UK, the second largest number since the programme began in 2004. The European share of resettlement places is modest; the United States, Australia, and Canada together accounted for almost 90% of those resettled in 2014. Globally only 105,200 were resettled in 2014.

The Mandate Resettlement Scheme is designed to resettle people who have been recognised as refugees by UNHCR and have a close family member who is willing to accommodate them. The numbers are considerably lower than in the Gateway Programme. In 2014 the UK accepted 14 people through the Mandate scheme.

In January 2014 the Home Secretary announced a programme to provide emergency protection in the UK for displaced Syrians who are particularly vulnerable. The Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme is targeted at individuals for whom evacuation from the region is the only option. Priority is given to survivors of torture and violence, and women and children at risk or in need of medical care. This programme is additional to the Gateway and Mandate schemes. No quota was set for this scheme although the Home Office anticipated that several hundred people would be relocated and supported in the period 2014-16. The actual number in 2014 was 143.

### **Interception measures**

The UK has a network of Immigration Liaison Managers overseas. They focus on locations which have been identified as major sources, or transit points, for inadequately documented passengers. ILMs have no legal powers when working overseas; they cannot arrest anyone, and cannot instruct an airline to refuse to allow a passenger to board. However their advice will lead to airlines taking action such as this. All carriers, airlines and shipping companies are liable to a charge of £2000 for every inadequately documented person they carry to the UK. Immigration officers based at Dover are also posted to rail and ferry ports in France and Belgium as part of the measures to control irregular migration.

Frontex, the EU external borders agency, also plays a role in intercepting irregular migrants. Frontex constitutes a development of the Schengen agreements, so the UK is not bound by the regulations governing it. However the UK has been involved in a number of Frontex-led operations, including within the UK. In 2014 Frontex detected about 280,000 illegal border crossings, the highest ever figure. This was a large increase from 2013 (107,000). According to Frontex most detections occurred in the Central Mediterranean area. The situation in Syria, and the continued volatility in North African countries are highlighted by Frontex as major factors in the flow of migrants from North Africa risking the crossing of the Mediterranean. A further increase in the first half of 2014 was reported at the land border of Hungary with Serbia.

Frontex does not provide a breakdown of whether those intercepted wished to seek protection, although their Annual Risk Analysis 2015 specifically says that many migrants move to the EU with the intention of claiming asylum and to escape the violence in their own country.

## Sources of Statistics

UNHCR Global Trends 2014:

<http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>

Eurostat:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/statistics-illustrated>

Home Office Statistics:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2014>

Frontex:

<http://frontex.europa.eu/publications/>

## About the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is one of the leading organisations in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. We give help and support to asylum seekers and refugees, and also work with them to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed by decision-makers.

British Refugee Council, (commonly called the Refugee Council) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales, [No 2727514] and a registered charity, [No 1014576].

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