



Home Office

# **The UK Government's Approach to Evaluating the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes**

Research Report 106

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December 2018

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# Overview

This paper outlines the UK Government's approach to resettling refugees under the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement (VPR and VCR) schemes and the strategy for evaluating their delivery and effectiveness. It sets out features and characteristics of the intake, and then outlines the structures in place to respond to arrivals, including policy initiatives. Findings from a small pilot study using UK geo-located social media posts are used to explore public discourses on the Syrian refugee intake. The paper concludes with theoretical reflections underpinning the approach to evaluating the delivery and effectiveness of the schemes at integrating refugees into UK society.

# Introduction

In response to the ongoing war in Syria and the mass displacement of Syrians, the UK Government announced the establishment of a Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme in January 2014. Between March 2014 and June 2015, 216 refugees were resettled with prioritisation given to:

- those requiring urgent medical treatment;
- survivors of violence and torture; and
- women and children at risk.

In September 2015 the then Prime Minister announced that the scheme would be expanded to resettle up to 20,000 vulnerable Syrians by 2020. In July 2017 the scope of the scheme was extended to include other nationalities who have fled Syria due to the current conflict.

The scheme aims to offer a safe and legal route to the UK for the most vulnerable refugees. The scheme purposefully targets those in greatest need of assistance. The scheme is not selective on the basis of employability or integration potential.

The UK Government's approach is to take refugees directly from non-European countries where resettlement may be the only durable solution, often from the region bordering countries with conflicts. In the case of the VPR scheme, this means those currently in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. This provides refugees with a direct and safe route to the UK.

The UK Government is working closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to identify vulnerable refugees who have fled Syria, whom the UNHCR deems to be in need of resettlement and whose particular needs can only be met in countries like the UK. The UNHCR is responsible for identifying refugees for potential resettlement and referring them to the Resettlement Operations team in the Home Office.

The scheme is open to:

- those determined by the UNHCR to be refugees in accordance with the definition in the UN 1951 Refugee Convention;
- refugees still in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (i.e. in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey), not those who have travelled to Europe;
- refugees who fled Syria because of the current conflict (i.e. after March 2011); and
- is now open to refugees of all nationalities.

Refugees are assessed for resettlement by the UNHCR against their resettlement submission categories:

- legal and/or physical protection needs;
- survivors of violence and/or torture;
- medical needs;
- women and girls at risk;
- children and adolescents at risk;
- family reunification;
- lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions.

If the UNHCR considers that an individual should be referred to the UK for resettlement, they will send a resettlement registration form (RRF) to the Home Office Resettlement Operations team. This confirms that the individual has been determined by the UNHCR to be a refugee according to the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The RRF is a summary of both the refugee status determination and the resettlement consideration. This is processed by casework team members, who determine whether the case should be accepted for resettlement to the UK.

Caseworkers manage the inward flow of referrals from the UNHCR, assessing the eligibility of referrals through a case-working process and commissioning relevant screening and security checks. Caseworkers do not reassess vulnerability. The UNHCR and the individuals on the case will then be informed whether they have been accepted, subject to securing appropriate accommodation.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) plays a key role in resettlement, working in the region to provide health assessments, document handling and travel assistance before refugees are resettled to the UK. Migration health assessments (MHAs) conducted by the IOM are provided to local authorities and community sponsors in order that the appropriate care can be arranged for the refugees concerned on arrival; they may also inform where an individual is resettled, for example, if they have mobility issues or have a health condition that requires specialist treatment.

The IOM is also commissioned to provide refugees with the assistance they need so that they can depart for the UK on the agreed resettlement date. This includes:

- applying for a UK visa;
- accompanying refugees to UK visa application centres so that biometrics can be enrolled;
- booking flights;
- arranging exit permits from the host country in liaison with the UNHCR; and
- confirming that the refugees are fit to travel.

Refugees are invited to attend a pre-departure cultural orientation session delivered by the IOM, which gives them the opportunity to acquire information that they will need when they arrive in the UK.

The Vulnerable Children's Resettlement (VCR) scheme is an additional commitment from the UK to resettle up to 3,000 children and their families from the MENA region by 2020. It is open to vulnerable children and their families in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, where the UNHCR deems resettlement to be in the best interests of the child. The scheme is accessible to all 'children and adolescents at risk' as defined by the UNHCR, which encompasses unaccompanied children as well as those in families or with care-givers (an adult who the UNHCR is satisfied has assumed legitimate responsibility for the child). The scheme is open to refugees of all nationalities. Whilst there are differences in scheme selection criteria (the VCR scheme does not specifically target refugees displaced by the Syrian conflict), the schemes operate through the same delivery model and they are both therefore included within the scope of the resettlement evaluation. Further details of how the VPR and VCR schemes operate can be found in the resettlement policy statement.<sup>1</sup>

Resettlement is one part of the UK's response to the refugee crisis and is complemented by a significant humanitarian aid programme and diplomatic efforts to end the Syrian conflict. To date, the UK has committed £2.71 billion in response to the Syria crisis, its largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. Since 2012, across Syria and the MENA region, this has included the provision of over 27 million food rations, over 13 million medical consultations, nearly 11 million relief packages, and over 10 million vaccines.

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/730643/Resettlement\\_Policy\\_document\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730643/Resettlement_Policy_document_.pdf)

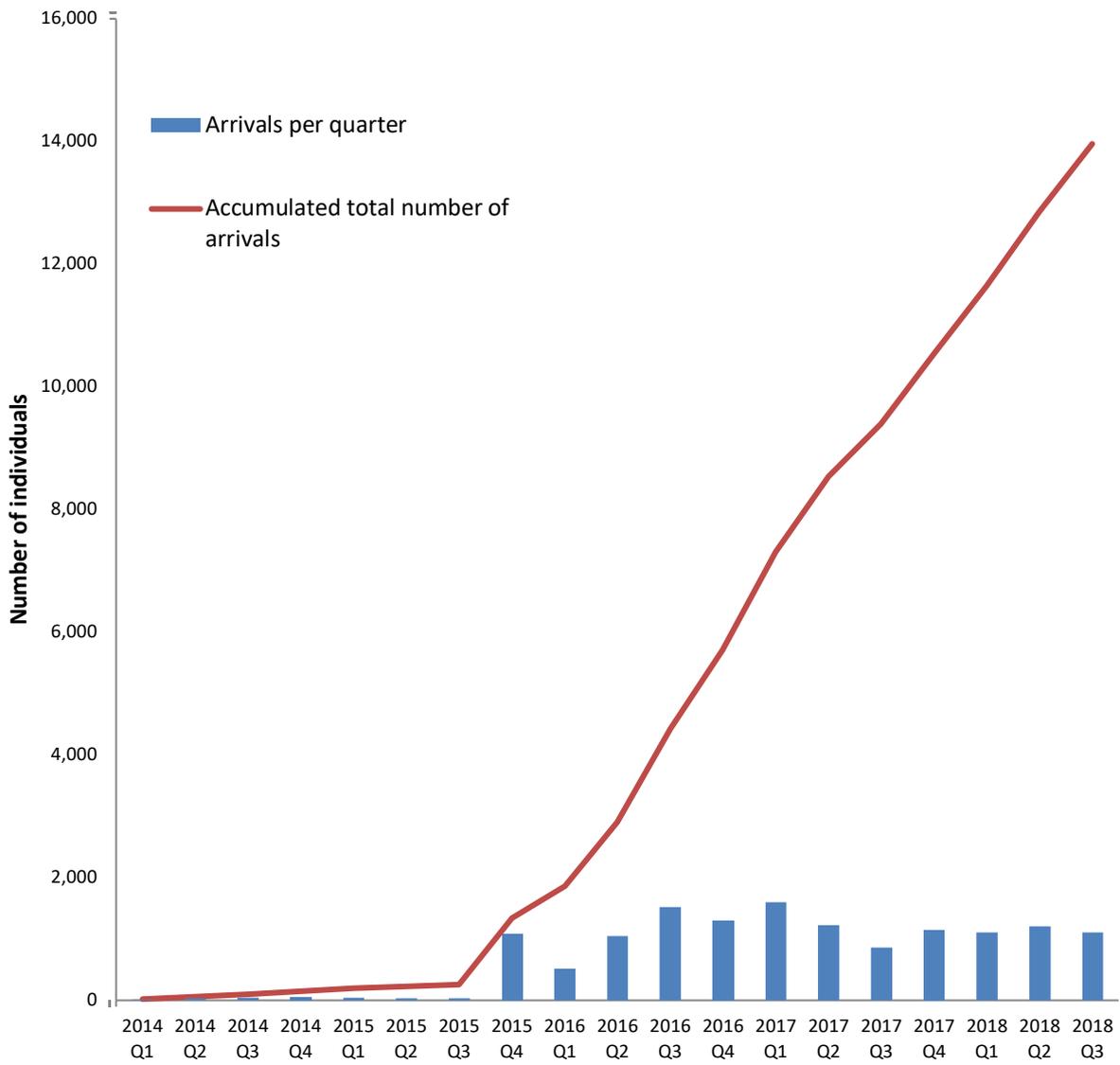
# Features of the Intake on Arrival

Since the beginning of the scheme in 2014, 13,961 refugees have arrived in the UK through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme from Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt and have been resettled across 297 local authorities. This includes 13,709 since its expansion in September 2015. Figure 1 shows the VPR arrival numbers over time. In addition, 1,075 individuals have been resettled through the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement (VCR) scheme.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Home Office (2018) *Immigration Statistics – July to September 2018* (published 29 November 2018).

Figure 1: VPR scheme arrivals over time



Source: Home Office (2018), *Immigration Statistics – July to September 2018* (published 29 November 2018)

# Characteristics of the VPR and VCR Intake on Arrival

## English Language Levels

Early monitoring data capturing those who recently arrived through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement (VCR) schemes between January and December 2017 indicated generally low levels of English language among new arrivals:

- approximately 2 in 3 individuals aged 16 years and over were at beginner's level on average across the four domains (listening, speaking, reading and writing);
- 1 in 7 had intermediate levels; and
- 1 in 100 had advanced English levels.<sup>3</sup>

## Health

The VPR and VCR schemes purposefully target those in greatest need of assistance, including people requiring urgent medical treatment and survivors of violence and torture. Early data on those who arrived between January and December 2017 indicated that just under one in five self-reported a long-term health problem or disability that limits their daily activities. Since arriving to the UK, 44% reported an improvement in health.

## Legal Status

At the beginning of the VPR scheme, early arrivals were granted five years' humanitarian protection in order to assist and quickly resettle the most vulnerable. In March 2017 this was amended to five years' refugee leave to remain on arrival. This granted refugees access to additional entitlements including particular benefits; swifter access to student support for higher education; and access to travel documents in order to assist with the integration process.

Once individuals resettled through the VPR and VCR schemes have been in the UK for five years, they may apply for settlement (indefinite leave to remain) as a refugee free of charge. Resettled individuals are not subject to the knowledge of language and life requirement when applying for settlement.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the remaining 18% of data returns for this age cohort had incomplete information on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) levels.

# Responses by Authorities on Arrival

The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement (VCR) schemes are operated by the Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration Directorate (RASI) in UK Visas and Immigration in the Home Office. The expansion of the schemes was run by a tripartite team of officials from the Home Office, Department for International Development (DfID) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This reflects the fact that successful delivery relies on knowledge of the humanitarian situation, the local government model, and immigration functions.

The majority of refugees resettled through the VPR and VCR schemes are done so in partnership with local authorities. Offers of accommodation come either directly from the local authority, or on a regional basis through the regional Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP). Refugees will be matched to suitable accommodation based on their assessed needs. Local authorities from across the UK (including all devolved administrations and regions) participate in the scheme on a voluntary basis and pledge resettlement places in advance of need. These pledges then need to be translated into firm 'offers' of places.

Local authorities are responsible for providing:

- initial reception arrangements;
- casework support; and
- facilitating access to education (including language skills), health care and social care.

They can claim up to £20,520 per refugee over their first five years in the UK towards the cost of these services.<sup>4</sup> The funding is administered through tariff payments, which decrease over time. This reflects the fact that refugees are expected to require less support over time as they become settled, access mainstream services and are integrated into UK society. Some local authorities may deliver services directly, some may rely upon third-party delivery partners to provide aspects of integration support, and others may use a combination. Engagement with the charity and voluntary sectors may also vary by local authority.

## Central Government Initiatives

- Community Sponsorship

A Community Sponsorship scheme was launched in July 2016 to complement the local authority mechanism for delivering the commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees by 2020. The

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<sup>4</sup> Resettlement Programme (2017) Funding instruction for local authorities in support of the UK's Resettlement Programmes: Financial year 2017–18.

scheme puts in place the Government's commitment to develop a scheme to allow community groups to support refugees directly rather than through a local authority. The UK Government has worked closely with the Canadian Government (which pioneered the refugee sponsorship model with its inclusion in the Canadian 1976 Immigration Act<sup>5</sup>) and representatives from the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative in developing the UK Community Sponsorship scheme.

Community sponsors provide housing for the refugee families, as well as helping them to integrate into life in the UK. They help to arrange access to medical and social services, English language tuition and support towards employment and self-sufficiency. Supporting a resettled family is a significant responsibility and the UK Government carefully assesses every sponsoring organisation. The approval process ensures that each prospective sponsor:

- has sufficient resources (housing, financial and personnel);
- has a credible plan for supporting a resettled family for their first year, backed by relevant experience; and
- does not present a risk to the resettled family.

Since the launch of the Community Sponsorship scheme, many community groups from across the UK have come forward to express an interest in becoming sponsors. This new approach to resettlement enables civil society to support traumatised and vulnerable families to recover and thrive in the UK. As of June 2018, a total of 138 refugees had been settled under the Community Sponsorship scheme across 24 community groups.

The Government has invested £1 million in Reset, an organisation dedicated to building the capacity of community groups, which want to become community sponsors, through training and support.

- Introduction of Remote Video/Telephone Interviewing

All adult family members of refugee families referred by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Jordan and Lebanon are invited to attend a video interview before departure. In Egypt, Iraq and Turkey these interviews are conducted over the phone by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM). Refugees are asked about their family circumstances, whether they have any family in the UK, about their religion, educational background and work experience. The information gained at this interview will help the UK authorities to plan their resettlement and find suitable accommodation for them in the UK, if they are accepted for resettlement.

- English Language

The Department for Education (DfE) supports English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) as part of its wider strategy to improve adult literacy in England. Adults who are resettled in the UK are eligible for the same skills funding as any other UK resident and are not subject to the normal three-year qualifying period in England.

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<sup>5</sup> Lanphier (2003).

In addition, the Government has pledged up to £10 million over 5 years for a jointly funded DfE and Home Office programme to enable adults resettled through the VPR and VCR schemes to access language tuition and integrate into British society. The additional funding for English language training will mean that all adults arriving through the schemes anywhere in the UK will receive a minimum of eight hours' tuition a week in their first year.

- Global Mental Health Assessment Tool

The Global Mental Health Assessment Tool (GMHAT) is a computerised clinical interview tool developed to assess and identify a wide range of mental health problems in primary health care settings. It consists of a series of questions that lead to a comprehensive yet quick mental health assessment. The tool was developed to help staff in any primary care setting to make a standardised and convenient, yet comprehensive mental health assessment and to provide a means to help people in bringing relief from the sufferings of their mental health problems.

At present, all those who are accepted onto the schemes undergo a pre-departure health assessment carried out by the IOM. This does not currently (as at 2018) include any systematic screening of mental health issues.

A validated version of the GMHAT tool has been piloted with 200 refugees by the Home Office and the IOM. A mixed methods evaluation is currently underway to assess:

- the tool's utility in identifying mental health issues and assisting with prompt referrals in the UK;
- its acceptability to those who are assessed; and
- the feasibility of using the tool across all UK referrals.

# Resettlement Locations

Before committing to offering resettlement places, local authorities are asked to consider whether they have, or can put in place, the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration of people in need of help. It is also recommended that areas that are new to resettlement speak to experienced resettlement areas to learn about best practice.<sup>6</sup>

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) arrivals have been resettled in 297 local authorities across all 12 regions and devolved administrations as outlined in Table 1.<sup>7</sup>

<b>Table 1: Resettlement Locations</b>		
<b>Region/devolved administration</b>	<b>No. of participating local authorities</b>	<b>No. of VPR arrivals</b>
East Midlands	22	592
East of England	22	627
London	23	717
North East	8	1112
North West	28	1166
South East	52	1267
South West	32	992
West Midlands	27	1345
Yorkshire and The Humber	21	1663
Northern Ireland	9	1092
Scotland	31	2495
Wales	22	893
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>13,961</b>

Source: Home Office (2018) *Immigration Statistics – July to September 2018* (published 29 November 2018).

The numbers resettled in a particular period depend on a range of factors including the flow of referrals from the UNHCR in the field and the availability of suitable accommodation and support care packages in the UK.

<sup>6</sup> Local Government Association and Migration Yorkshire (2016) *Syrian refugee resettlement: a guide for local authorities*. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/syrian-refugee-resettleme-229.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Note that published regional breakdown figures are not yet available for the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement (VCR) scheme.

# Public Discourse and Responses to Syrian Refugee Intake

To date the UK Government has received numerous expressions of interest from various groups wanting to support the schemes from across the UK, and the numbers are still growing. Volunteers and communities around the UK have banded together to welcome and support refugees, often in partnership with local authorities. The response of the British public has been, and continues to be, extremely positive.

Social integration and community cohesion also form facets of the evaluation strategy. This draws upon the Home Office 2004 publication *Indicators of Integration* and its emphasis on the importance of relationships to the understanding of the integration process and how people experience it in their day-to-day lives.<sup>8</sup>

The Home Office has been exploring whether social media analysis could add value to the monitoring and evaluation of the social integration aspects of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme. A small pilot study has been undertaken using UK geo-located social media posts to examine how host community attitudes towards Syrian resettled refugees change over time. Initial findings suggested that this approach might potentially provide a proxy indicator for the level of social integration and community cohesion among active users of social media at a regional level over the lifetime of the resettlement scheme. This has the potential to be used as one measure (alongside others) for evaluating the social integration of resettled refugees over the lifetime of the VPR scheme.

An analysis of tweets focused on sentiment prior to the launch of the VPR scheme expansion and changes in sentiment over the initial year and a half. Spikes in twitter activity appeared to be related to key events during the time period – such as the drowning of the Syrian child refugee Aylan Kurdi, and the then Prime Minister’s commitment to expand the VPR scheme to 20,000 refugees. Sentiment analysis also indicated that the majority of tweets during the initial pilot were positive towards the idea of Syrian refugees being resettled in the UK (54%). A small minority (15%) displayed a negative sentiment, and the remaining tweets were neutral (31%). Analysis by location suggested that the volume of relevant sample tweets varied considerably by region, reflecting differences in:

- regional population densities;
- social media usage; and

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<sup>8</sup> Ager and Strang (2004) *Indicators of Integration*, p.4. This report investigated different understandings of ‘integration’ as a concept, and established a framework for a common understanding to be used by those working in the field of refugee integration in the UK.

- levels of engagement with the specific topic on social media.

The balance between positive and negative sentiment also varied. However, negative tweets were in the minority, regardless of region.

# Theoretical Reflections

The evaluation of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement (VCR) schemes has drawn upon Ager and Strang's indicators of integration framework (*ibid.*), which was commissioned by the Home Office, and a variety of stakeholder consultations. These included a conference organised by the Home Office in London in January 2016 to discuss best practice and desirable outcomes.

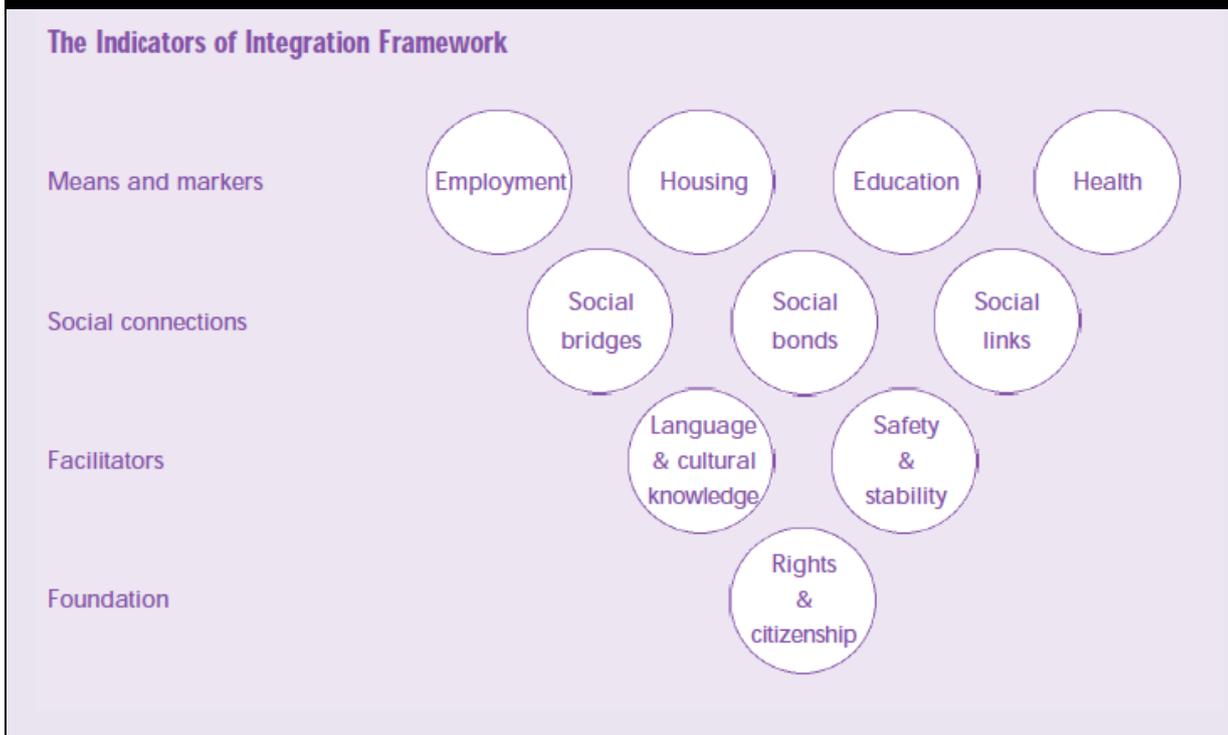
The *Indicators of Integration* report:

- investigated different understandings of 'integration' as a concept;
- established a framework for a common understanding to be used by those working in the field of refugee integration in the UK; and
- offered a practical tool to assist local projects and policy makers in planning and evaluating service provision for refugees (*ibid.*).

This framework conceptualises integration into:

- means and markers (including employment, housing, education and health);
- social connections (social bridges, social bonds and social links);
- facilitators (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability); and
- a foundation in rights and citizenship (*ibid.*).

Figure 2: The Indicators of Integration Framework



Source: Ager and Strang (2004) *Indicators of Integration*.

More than a decade after it was introduced, this tool has been used widely both nationally and internationally in monitoring and evaluating refugee integration interventions.<sup>9</sup> Between 2017 and 2018, a series of workshops were held with key stakeholders from across the Government, academia and non-governmental organisations to discuss updating these indicators.

Alongside drawing upon this framework, a range of key stakeholders have been consulted to help to identify the most relevant monitoring and evaluation outcomes for this cohort of arrivals – this has included:

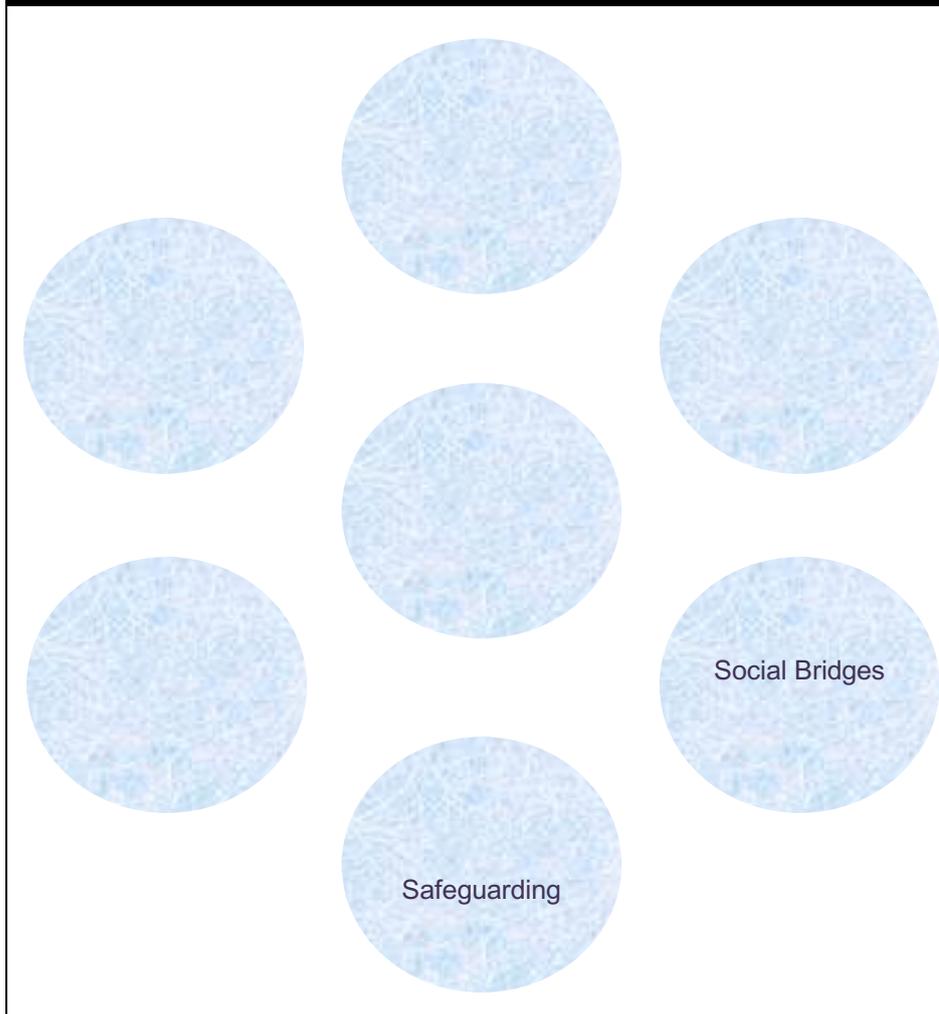
- academics;
- non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
- local authorities, the Local Government Association, the Welsh Local Government Association, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and
- European partners.<sup>10</sup>

Seven main outcome areas have been identified for this evaluation, see Figure 3.

<sup>9</sup> Smyth *et al.* (2010).

<sup>10</sup> This included staging a conference in January 2016 with the support of the European Migration Network focused on learning from the past to design a sustainable resettlement programme for Syrian refugees in the UK. This conference involved representatives from local and central government, the third sector, the Syrian community and academia along with other European government representatives to discuss best practice on the resettlement process, from selection, to pre-arrival orientation and post-arrival integration.

**Figure 3: The Seven VPR and VCR Schemes Monitoring and Evaluation Outcomes**



### a) Monitoring information

Six of the seven main outcome areas have been selected to form the first strand of the evaluation strategy. With the help of local authorities and community sponsors, the following information is being collected at two time points within each individual's first 12 to 15 months following arrival to the UK. The aim of this data collection exercise is to understand the range of individual needs upon arrival and what has happened to refugees in the early arrival period.

- English language – information on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) levels, class attendance and any barriers to attending; at two time points within the first 12-15 months following arrival to the UK;
- education – educational attendance and any barriers to attending;
- employment – economic status and period of time from arrival to securing first employment opportunity;

- health – general practitioner registration, number of visits and self-reported health measures;
- social bridges and bonds – volunteering, participation in a group/club/organisation, perceptions on local community cohesion; and
- secondary migration – rates of moving from first assigned accommodation.

## b) Administrative data

The second strand of the evaluation strategy involves exploring the potential of using administrative data to assess long-term integration outcomes in the areas of education and employment. Migration and Border Analysis are currently discussing data sharing agreements with other government departments and the technical solutions necessary to facilitate this strand of work.

## c) Qualitative research

In order to unpick some of the local complexities in post-arrival support and explore the experiences of those involved in resettlement in the UK, the Home Office has commissioned Ipsos Mori to undertake a three-year qualitative longitudinal evaluation of the VPR and VCR schemes with fieldwork taking place between 2018 and 2020.<sup>11</sup> The evaluation is examining:

- how the schemes are operating, including what works well and less well;
- the variety of local authority delivery models deployed;
- the experiences of refugees and stakeholders involved in the delivery of the schemes; and
- the barriers, unmet needs and opportunities for future improvement of outcomes for scheme beneficiaries.

This will involve qualitative longitudinal research including surveys, online forums, interviews and focus group discussions with:

- refugees;
- those involved in the delivery of the schemes and services to refugees, including representatives from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs), central and local government, community sponsors and NGOs; and

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<sup>11</sup> The VCR scheme is a separate scheme that aims to resettle up to 3,000 vulnerable and refugee 'children at risk' (including family members) from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region by 2020.

- members of the receiving community.

Findings from this evaluation will inform the development of the VPR and VCR schemes and potentially other UK resettlement and integration schemes.

#### d) Social media analysis

As discussed above, social media analysis is being used to explore whether it might identify changes in sentiment towards resettling refugees in the UK over time and place as one proxy measure for assessing the level of social integration and community cohesion.

Next steps for this pilot study will involve triangulating regional sentiment findings with other sources of attitudinal data in order to assess the representativeness of views expressed by social media users to wider demographics (as reflected in other opinion polls, the Community Life Survey and the British Social Attitudinal Survey). Migration and Border Analysis also propose to explore how these findings relate to regional characteristics. For example, whether there are any relationships between regional patterns of asylum and resettlement arrivals, levels of deprivation, local job market conditions and online sentiment towards refugees being resettled in the UK.

# Next Steps

The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme is on track to deliver its commitment to resettle 20,000 vulnerable refugees by 2020. Interim findings from across all strands of the evaluation strategy will continue to feed into the development and improvement of the VPR and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement (VCR) schemes.

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ISBN: 978-1-78655-762-9

ISSN: 17350 3666



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