



An inspection of UK Refugee Resettlement Schemes

(November 2019 – May 2020)

David Bolt

Independent Chief Inspector of
Borders and Immigration

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Contents

Foreword	2
1. Purpose and scope	4
2. Methodology	5
3. Summary of conclusions	7
4. Recommendations	12
5. Background	14
6. Inspection findings: Home Office structures	30
7. Inspection findings: Gateway Protection Programme	34
8. Inspection findings: Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme	42
9. Inspection findings: Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme	66
10. Inspection findings: Community Sponsorship Scheme	86
11. Inspection findings: the future of resettlement	99
Annex A: Role and remit of the Independent Chief Inspector	110
Annex B: ICIBI ‘Expectations’	112
Acknowledgements	114

Foreword

When I began this inspection, the Home Office was on the verge of launching a new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) to replace the previous schemes: Gateway Protection Programme (Gateway), Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). It also looked set to achieve its target for VPRS, announced in September 2015, to resettle 20,000 refugees from the conflict in Syria by May 2020.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic derailed both ambitions. In mid-March 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) announced a temporary suspension of all resettlements. While UNHCR and IOM lifted this suspension in June 2020, at the time of writing (mid-September 2020), there had been no refugee resettlements under any UK scheme since 12 March 2020. And, while a good deal of work was continuing in the background to progress cases as far as possible, there was little sign from the Home Office that there would be any new arrivals in the near future.

Against this backdrop, and in anticipation of the eventual launch of UKRS, the inspection looked at how the various long-running schemes had performed up to March 2020, at the particular difficulties and issues each had encountered, and at what lessons the Home Office should be taking forward into any new scheme. This included a look at the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS).

I last inspected at VPRS in 2017-18. At that time, I commented that everyone concerned with the scheme (UNHCR, IOM, UK local authorities and their delivery partners, NGOs, the Home Office and other government departments, and CSS groups) deserved credit for what they had achieved. There was no doubting their hard work and commitment, or the very real challenges they faced. However, there were several areas where improvements were needed, some of which were directly within the Home Office's control, while others required it to be more actively co-ordinating, cajoling and incentivising other parties.

In 2018, Home Office managers and staff felt that my criticisms were unfair, so I expect that the findings from this latest inspection will equally feel blunt, particularly given the UK's recent record which has seen it resettle more refugees identified through UNHCR than any other country, except for the USA and Canada. For the record, I again found that those working on the resettlement schemes were knowledgeable, competent and highly committed. It was clear that they all derived a great deal of satisfaction from helping vulnerable refugees. Operationally, every resettlement presented a host of challenges, the greatest of which was securing the required accommodation and support. Each arrival was therefore an achievement.

Nonetheless, I found there was still considerable room for improvement, and that there was a risk the Home Office would roll into UKRS without confronting some of the fundamental concerns about the previous schemes, in particular the range of accommodation and support available and its impact on the time taken from acceptance of a refugee family to their resettlement in the UK. As I observed in 2018, while it may be the case that the UK resettlement process is quick by comparison to other international schemes, the Home Office should not regard this as fully answering concerns about

resettlement timescales, not least as these have continued to lengthen, especially for larger families and refugees with complex needs.

The report was sent to the Home Secretary on 14 September 2020. It contains ten recommendations. Together, these represent a considerable amount of work. While UKRS remains paused, the Home Office should press ahead with as much of this work as possible, so that when the new scheme is eventually launched it is as good as it can be.

David Bolt
Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1** This inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the UK's refugee resettlement schemes, focusing on how the lessons from the operation of these schemes were applied to the design of the new UK Resettlement Scheme, due to come into operation in 2020.
- 1.2** Inspectors examined the following schemes:
- the Gateway Protection Programme (“Gateway”)
 - the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)
 - the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS)
 - the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS)
- 1.3** The inspection looked in particular at:
- how well each of the schemes had met their stated aims and the particular difficulties and issues that each had encountered
 - the resettlement of unaccompanied minors through VCRS
 - the recruitment of Community Sponsors, including the processing of applications, the matching of refugee families to Sponsors, and support for refugees and Sponsors through the sponsorship process
- 1.4** The inspection did not look in detail at:
- the 'front end' elements of the resettlement process, including the selection of refugees for resettlement by UNHCR and the arrangements for travel to the UK¹
 - integration outcomes for resettled refugees²

1 These aspects of the VPRS process were covered 'An Inspection of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (August 2017 – January 2018).

2 Several reports have been produced on this issue, including a 2017 published report by UNHCR on the integration outcomes for VPRS <https://www.unhcr.org/5a0ae9e84.pdf>. In addition, the Home Office had commissioned IPSOS MORI to produce “three-year qualitative longitudinal evaluation” of VPRS/VCRS.

2. Methodology

2.1 Inspectors:

- researched and reviewed relevant open source information
- in November 2019, undertook familiarisation visits in Croydon, London and Sheffield to meet Home Office staff involved with the schemes
- issued a public ‘call for evidence’ on 18 November 2019, resulting in 56 submissions
- requested and reviewed Home Office guidance, internal documents, and data relating to resettlement schemes
- in January 2020, invited Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) groups to complete a survey about their experiences, resulting in 26 responses
- in February 2020, visited Croydon and Sheffield and interviewed staff and managers responsible for:
 - Resettlement Policy
 - Integration Policy
 - Resettlement Operations
 - Community Sponsorship
 - Evaluation of refugee resettlement
 - National Transfer Scheme – through which VCRS unaccompanied minors are placed with local authorities
- visited five local authorities and one Strategic Migration Partnership:
 - three local authorities in England, with experience of delivering both Gateway and VPRS
 - two local authorities in Scotland, with experience of resettling unaccompanied minors via VCRS
 - an SMP in England, with experience of Gateway, VPRS and VCRS
- spoke with staff from:
 - UNHCR
 - two local government organisations in England and Scotland
 - two delivery partners for Gateway
 - three NGOs helping to deliver resettlement
 - the Department for Education
 - Public Health England

- visited four CSS groups, including attending a monitoring visit by Home Office staff
- interviewed staff from organisations working nationally and regionally to support CSS groups through the sponsorship process
- held three focus groups with refugees resettled under Gateway and VPRS

3. Summary of conclusions

- 3.1** Since 2015, the UK has resettled over 25,000 refugees identified and resettled by UNHCR, more than any other country except for the USA and Canada. Around 80% have been resettled through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), accessible to refugees displaced by the conflict in Syria. Initially limited to Syrian nationals, since July 2017 VPRS has been open to all nationalities. However, 99.6% (19,686) of the 19,768 VPRS arrivals up to mid-March 2020³ have been Syrian.
- 3.2** In June 2019, the government announced that VPRS would be replaced in 2020 by a new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), which would also replace the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) and the Gateway Protection Programme (Gateway).
- 3.3** VCRS was created in 2016 with the aim of resettling “up to 3,000” refugees by 2020. By mid-March 2020, it had resettled 1,826, almost half of them Iraqi, and a quarter Sudanese. Like VPRS, most VCRS resettlements have comprised four- or five-person family groups. Fewer than 100 unaccompanied children have been resettled through VCRS, amounting to just 5.6% of the total.⁴
- 3.4** Gateway was launched in 2004 and was for refugees who had “been living in a protracted refugee situation for over five years”. Up to March 2020 Gateway had resettled almost 10,000 refugees, with two nationalities, Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia, comprising half (49.5%) of the 3,565 Gateway resettlements completed since 2015-16. Most Gateway refugees have been resettled in a small number of local authority areas in the north of England.
- 3.5** Until March 2020, VPRS had been on track to achieve its target of 20,000 resettled refugees by May 2020, the deadline originally set by ministers. The Home Office had begun restructuring Resettlement Operations (part of UK Visas and Immigration) in readiness for the new scheme. However, in mid-March, UNHCR and IOM temporarily suspended all resettlements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This also delayed the start of the UKRS and, at the time of writing (July 2020), the new scheme had yet to come into operation and the Home Office was still to publish detailed guidance explaining how it would work.
- 3.6** However, in August 2019, the Home Office had produced a ‘Note for Local Authorities’, aimed at encouraging their participation in UKRS. This said it was planning a “smooth transition”. While the new scheme did not have a “specific geographic focus”, the Home Office “anticipated that the caseloads of refugees we resettle will continue to look broadly similar to those we see under our existing schemes, with the majority coming from the MENA region.”

³ On 17 March 2020, UNHCR and IOM temporarily suspended all resettlements as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last UK arrivals prior to the suspension were on 12 March 2020.

⁴ In January 2020, in a written ministerial response to a Parliamentary Question, the government reaffirmed its commitment to relocate 480 unaccompanied children to the UK under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 (the Dubs Amendment) “as soon as possible”, noting that “over 220 children were transferred to the UK under section 67 when the Calais camp was cleared in late 2016.” The statement referred to the scheme’s dependency on the availability of local authority care placements, which was affected by the high numbers of spontaneous unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (over 13,000 between 2015 and 2018) and of resident looked-after children, but observed that “against this background, local authorities have continued to provide offers”. <https://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/commons/2020-01-08/1426>

- 3.7** This made sense on a number of levels. Practically, local authorities were familiar with and better able to support Arabic-speaking refugees. It was often much harder for them to find interpreters for other languages. In addition, the Home Office believed it might be easier for some local authorities to agree to provide accommodation and support for a Syrian family because of public awareness of the conflict and sympathy for those affected.
- 3.8** Equally important, at the beginning of March 2020, the Home Office was still working through almost 2,000 VPRS and over 1,400 VCRS refugee referrals. In late July 2020, the Home Office told inspectors that the UKRS Work in Progress (WiP) stood at 4,863, comprising 518 Gateway referrals, 2,501 VPRS referrals, 1,325 VCRS referrals, and 519 new UKRS referrals.
- 3.9** The ‘Note’ also explained that “the funding package” would “mirror that currently paid under VPRS and VCRS” and, in March 2020, the Home Office replaced the 2019-20 funding instructions for local authorities with a new (essentially unchanged) version for 2020-21, which stated it would also apply to UKRS.
- 3.10** This reflected the Home Office view that the “more generous [than Gateway]” tapered tariff payments paid over five years for VPRS and VCRS refugees had been critical in securing local authority participation in refugee resettlement. According to the department, they were “easier for local authorities to understand and access”. And, they were significantly easier for the Home Office to administer at scale (over 300 local authorities had resettled VPRS/VCRS refugees) compared to the individually-tailored grant agreements reached with the handful of Gateway providers.
- 3.11** Funding was obviously a major consideration for local authorities, along with other delivery partners, and community sponsors. In addition to the tariff payments, they were able to submit claims for “exceptional costs” for modifications to a property or the purchase of accessibility and mobility equipment, for example. However, the 2018 ICIBI inspection report on VPRS noted that only £2.4 million of the £36 million “exceptional costs” budget had been claimed. At that time, local authorities said that clearer funding instructions and greater assurances about funding levels at the referral stage would encourage authorities to accept higher numbers of complex cases.
- 3.12** In late 2019-20, a number of local authorities and NGOs told inspectors that they still found the guidance in relation to “exceptional costs” unclear and inadequate. The small number of claims received bore this out. By March 2020, just 50 local authorities and 18 Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) groups had submitted “exceptional costs” claims and total expenditure was less than £5 million, around a fifth of the revised £23.4 million budget.
- 3.13** The Home Office told inspectors it was expecting to receive further “exceptional costs” claims “for some time to come.” Nonetheless, it should have done more to publicise and make effective use of this funding stream, in particular to try to generate offers that matched those refugee families who appeared to have become stuck in the VPRS and VCRS “WiP” (WiP) queues.
- 3.14** The 2018 inspection report had highlighted that the time VPRS refugees were waiting between referral by UNHCR and resettlement in the UK was getting longer, averaging 35 weeks for refugees resettled in the second half of 2017. This trend had continued. Since 2018 Q4, the quarterly average had been above a year, peaking in 2019 Q3 at 63 weeks.
- 3.15** The Home Office had always countered the challenge that resettlements were taking too long by stating that other countries took longer, although inspectors saw no evidence that

it had conducted any comparative studies or that it had sought to understand the impact of a prolonged wait on refugee families, beyond capturing changes to family size or healthcare needs that might affect accommodation matching.

- 3.16** But, while it might be true for those who had been resettled, in March 2020 there were 1,916 VPRS refugees in the WiP. Of these, UNHCR had marked 184 as “Urgent”,⁵ 41 of which had been referred before the beginning of 2019. The Home Office had attached a “complexity marker”⁶ to 126 of the 184, including 32 of the older referrals. In total, it had marked more than a third (672) as complex.
- 3.17** The VCRS picture was worse. Of 1,425 referrals in the VCRS WiP, 1,208 VCRS referrals had been accepted by the Home Office and had reached the accommodation matching stage of the process. There were 349 that had been prioritised as “Urgent” by UNHCR, 29 of which went back to 2016, the first year of the scheme. Two-thirds (224) of the “Urgent” referrals had also been marked as complex by the Home Office, including the 29 from 2016.
- 3.18** The data indicated a growing number of families for whom it was hard to see any prospect of resettlement without some form of “game-changing” intervention to expand the volume and type of accommodation and support currently being offered by local authorities and community sponsors.
- 3.19** The same was true for unaccompanied minors. Resettlement Operations told inspectors that unaccompanied minors were “not in the submission plan” for the first year of UKRS. However, a specific objective to resettle unaccompanied minors could be added at some future date. Meanwhile, staff hoped to be able to continue resettling unaccompanied minors on an ad hoc basis. However, the figures for the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), through which unaccompanied minors were matched to a local authority had been in steady decline since 2016-17 to the point where the NTS appeared to have stopped functioning to any useful degree.⁷
- 3.20** Given all of this, it was difficult to understand how the Home Office hoped to be able to manage emergency resettlements as part of UKRS, as announced in July 2019. UNHCR defined “Emergency” referrals as those where “security and/or medical condition requires immediate removal” and “Ideally, [there is a] seven-day maximum between the submission of an emergency case and the refugee’s departure.” Hitherto, these had been expressly excluded from the UK’s resettlement schemes. The Home Office was unclear about whether it was looking to work to the UNHCR’s definition of “Emergency”.
- 3.21** The lengthening timescales were not the result of inefficiency on the part of the managers and staff who had been operating each of the resettlement schemes. Inspectors found everyone involved to be knowledgeable, competent and highly committed, and VPRS in particular had been well-resourced. It was clear that they all derived a great deal of satisfaction from helping vulnerable refugees. Operationally, every resettlement presented a host of challenges, the greatest of which was securing the required accommodation and support. Each arrival was therefore an achievement.

5 UNHCR defines “Urgent” cases as those where there are “Serious medical risks or other vulnerabilities requiring expedited resettlement within six weeks of submission.”

6 The Home Office attaches a “complexity marker” to referrals it has accepted where there are issues with mobility, serious medical conditions, psychological support, and special educational needs.

7 “In September, in its factual accuracy response, the Home Office noted: “The reason there are no unaccompanied minors in the submission plan is not directly linked to the National Transfer Scheme operation. While it is true to say that the number of transfers declined from end of 2018, that is at least in part because any places offered were given to VCRS and Dubs cases.”

- 3.22** However, assessing the overall success of the schemes was more problematic. In 2016, the National Audit Office (NAO) concluded that the Home Office needed to “have a full monitoring and evaluation framework [for VPRS] in operation as soon as possible, including defining what success looks like beyond meeting the 20,000 target.”
- 3.23** Any evaluation needs to consider how well resettled refugees have integrated into society. But this is not easily measured. Many of the inputs required to assist integration rely on other government departments (OGDs). The Home Office referred inspectors to various cross-departmental fora and exchanges but, from the evidence provided, it was difficult to assess how far and at what level it had tried to influence OGD policies and practices that impacted on refugees, and with what success. However, inspectors were told that “ethics approval” had recently been granted for a data-matching pilot, to be facilitated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which will match Home Office monitoring data with OGD data with the aim of better understanding integration outcomes.
- 3.24** While it collects data from local authorities, the Home Office has little direct contact with refugees after they have been resettled. However, in 2017, it commissioned Ipsos Mori to produce a “three-year qualitative longitudinal evaluation” of VPRS and VCRS integration outcomes. At the time of writing, the interim findings had not been published. However, it is reasonable to assume that, like previous evaluations, it will identify that the ability to speak English is a key facilitator of integration. Without English, refugees risk social isolation, long-term dependency, and difficulty in accessing services, benefits and employment.
- 3.25** The availability of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses varies significantly across the UK. This is a matter for the Department for Education (DfE). However, refugees, especially women, also faced problems accessing ESOL classes, due to poor health and lack of childcare, and here the Home Office needed to do more than simply provide funding to local authorities and trust that everything worked.
- 3.26** In 2018, ICIBI recommended providing ESOL classes to refugees accepted through VPRS while they waited to be resettled to the UK. Inspectors were told that the Home Office had decided that the logistical challenges of providing pre-departure ESOL training were “prohibitive”. However, based on the evidence it was prepared to share, it was too easily convinced that this was neither feasible nor worthwhile.
- 3.27** Since the 2016 NAO report, the department had collected more management information and data on the stages of the resettlement process. Crucially, it had managed to enlist more local authorities to accept VPRS refugees (and to a lesser extent VCRS refugees). However, the 20,000 target remained the only performance measure of any real consequence, the progress towards which was reported monthly to the Home Office Executive Committee (ExCo).
- 3.28** In reality, VPRS had benefited from having this single, simple target, and from ministerial and top management interest in ensuring that it was met. By comparison, there had not been the same drive behind VCRS reaching its looser aim of “up to 3,000”, and although VCRS resettlements were reported monthly to ExCo, this was in the form of the in-year total rather than progress towards a target.
- 3.29** In this respect, the new scheme’s stated aim to resettle “in the region of 5,000 refugees” in the first year of operation was unhelpfully imprecise. It was also smaller than the combined annual totals for VPRS, VCRS, and Gateway. While the move to exclude refugees resettled through the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) might increase the number of groups seeking to become sponsors, it was unlikely to make up the difference given the take-up to 20 March 2020. At that

point, 81 groups had resettled a total of 449 VPRS/VCRS refugees,⁸ roughly 2% of the overall figure. A further 26 groups were going through the application process.

- 3.30** The Home Office sought feedback from CSS groups both about their experiences of the application process and of resettlement itself. As a result, it had made a number of changes aimed at speeding up the application process. It had also provided grant funding of £1.5 million over three years to an NGO to ensure that CSS groups were provided with training and support. Nonetheless, to judge by the KPI (since dropped) set for the NGO, the number of CSS applications had been considerably lower than the Home Office had hoped to have received.
- 3.31** As at the beginning of 2020, around two-thirds of the CSS groups that had resettled refugees were faith-based or associated with places of worship. Christian groups made up almost 90% of this cohort. In addition, there were four Muslim groups, two Jewish groups and one multi-faith group. Two of the Muslim groups told inspectors that the requirement within the scheme's safeguarding policy for groups to sign up to PREVENT training was causing some prospective Muslim groups not to apply.
- 3.32** During the course of this inspection, two other key concerns emerged about the new UKRS. The first was its "annuality", which sat oddly with the time resettlements were taking. The Home Office will need to communicate the following year's numbers and groups well before the end of each business year to avoid creating real planning, budgeting and resourcing problems for the other parties involved in resettling refugees.
- 3.33** The second was the plan to grant five years Leave to Remain (LTR) to refugees resettled through UKRS. This replicated VPRS and VCRS, but not Gateway, where refugees were granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). The Home Office argued that it aligned refugee resettlement policy with wider asylum policy. It was unclear why this was desirable or necessary. Stakeholders raised serious concerns about the availability and costs of qualified legal advice to assist with ILR applications, and the risk that refugees could find themselves in the UK unlawfully. The notion that after five years in the UK most refugees should be able to navigate the immigration system without the assistance of local authorities or community sponsors appeared to be wishful thinking.
- 3.34** Through its regular collection of data and feedback, and through the practical experience that staff have acquired from delivering VPRS, VCRS and Gateway over a period of years, the Home Office has a good understanding of the operational challenges it will face with UKRS.
- 3.35** But, there is no reason to believe that it will find the more persistent of these any easier, and it must not allow the considerable achievement of (almost) meeting the VPRS 20,000 target, and the steady success of Gateway, to obscure the fact that there are serious issues with the range of the accommodation and support available, which impacts the time refugees are waiting to be resettled and the number of "Urgent" and "Complex" families left in the WiP. The Home Office is reliant on others to provide a solution, but it needs to ask what more it can do to incentivise them.

⁸ Some groups had supported more than one resettlement. In September 2020, the Home Office told inspectors that there had been 91 approved applications.

4. Recommendations

The Home Office should:

- 4.1** Resource and carry out (on a rolling basis) a detailed analysis of all cases in the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) “Work in Progress” (WiP) queue that have been at the ‘accommodation matching stage’ for more than 13 weeks to identify the specific reasons why, and:
 - a. produce an Action Plan for each case that addresses its particular obstacles to resettlement, with target dates for reaching solutions, for quarterly senior management review(s), and for formal reconsideration of the referral (no later than 12 months after acceptance)
 - b. produce a Strategic Plan that addresses recurring or systemic obstacles, including where the solution lies with a third party (for example, another government department, local authority, NGO, or the community)
- 4.2** Pending completion of the detailed analysis of the cases in the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) WiP that have been at the ‘accommodation matching stage’ for more than 13 weeks as at 1 August 2020, set a cap on the number of new non-Urgent UNHCR referrals that will be accepted in 2020-21, in order to ensure that older, “harder to place” cases are prioritised, in particular those marked as “Urgent” by UNHCR that were carried over into UKRS from the previous schemes.
- 4.3** Publish guidance on how the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) will handle “Emergency” cases, including clarification of whether the Home Office’s understanding of the term is as defined by UNHCR.
- 4.4** Publish a Statement of Intent in respect of the eligibility of unaccompanied minors to be resettled through the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), capturing and drawing on the lessons learned from those resettled through VCRS, and including details of the steps being taken to ensure that the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) is fully functioning.
- 4.5** As a means of encouraging greater local authority and community sponsor participation, make more effective use of the “exceptional costs” budget by identifying and actively encouraging claims where appropriate, and considering how it might be used to “unlock” cases that have been at the ‘accommodation matching stage’ for a prolonged period (12 months+).
- 4.6** In light of concerns about the practical and financial difficulties refugees are likely to face when applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) after five years:
 - a. Reconsider whether the policy decision that the refugees resettled through the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) will be granted Leave to Remain (LTR) is justified and necessary (publishing the supporting Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Assessment).

- b. Grant ILR to those refugees initially referred through Gateway and taken into the UKRS WiP, so that they are not disadvantaged because of delays in completing their resettlement under the old scheme and extend this (as a minimum) to any referral where the refugee family has “been living in a protracted refugee situation for over five years”.
- 4.7** Agree a plan with the Ministry of Justice, Legal Aid Agency and Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to ensure that refugees resettled throughout the UK are able to access affordable, good quality legal advice should they need to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) or for any other immigration-related purposes.
- 4.8** Produce a communication strategy for the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) aimed at increasing the number, geographical spread and diversity of applications, set against realistic but stretching targets. The strategy should incorporate the learning from CSS groups, resettled families and relevant NGOs, and involve them in its delivery. It should also deal directly with real or perceived concerns of prospective groups, such as the requirement for Muslim groups to complete PREVENT training or that the financial commitment and period that support will be required are understated.
- 4.9** Analyse and publish the findings to date of the Ipsos Mori “three-year qualitative longitudinal evaluation” of VPRS/VCRS with a view to obtaining stakeholder feedback to help inform the final year of the study.
- 4.10** Ensure that the resourcing of the UK Resettlement Scheme within UKVI has sufficient capacity at senior levels to manage the policy and strategy challenges, including cross-departmental dependencies, and at working level to run the scheme day-to-day, ensuring that all roles have up-to-date Job Descriptions.

5. Background

Refugee statistics

- 5.1 According to Article 1 of the 1951 United Nations ‘Convention relating to the Status of Refugees’,⁹ “A refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”
- 5.2 In 2019, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were 25.9 million refugees worldwide. Of these, 20.4 million come under UNHCR’s mandate and 5.5 million Palestinian refugees come under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Around a third (6.7 million) of UNHCR refugees were from Syria, followed by Afghanistan (2.7 million) and South Sudan (2.3 million).

Resettlement statistics

- 5.3 UNHCR also publishes annual statistics for resettlement, which it defines as “the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement.”¹⁰ The statistics show that in 2019 a total of 63,762 refugees were resettled in 27 countries.
- 5.4 According to the published statistics, in 2019 the UK resettled 5,774 refugees, the third largest number behind the USA and Canada.¹¹

Figure 1

UNHCR Resettlement Statistics for 2019 (January-December)

Resettlement country	Arrivals
USA	21,159
Canada	9,031
United Kingdom	5,774
Sweden	4,993
Germany	4,622
Other	18,147
Total	63,762

9 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/3b66c2aa10>

10 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/resettlement.html>

11 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/resettlement/5e31448a4/resettlement-fact-sheet-2019.html>

A brief overview of UK Resettlement Schemes from 1995

The Mandate Scheme

5.5 The Mandate Scheme was established in 1995. It is the UK’s longest-running resettlement scheme and “resettles recognised refugees who have a close family member in the UK who is willing to accommodate them.”¹² There is no annual quota, but the number in each year has been small and reducing. Home Office data is shown at Figure 2.

Figure 2
Refugees resettled via the Mandate Scheme to 31 March 2020

Year	Number
Pre-2010	165
2010	51
2011	29
2012	58
2013	30
2014	13
2015	19
2016	8
2017	28
2018	18
2019	11
2020 Q1	5
Total	435

5.6 Most of the refugees have come from the Middle East, with Iraqis making up the largest proportion annually since 2004, except in 2016 when there was an equal number of Somalis, and 2017 when there were more Somalis and Syrians than Iraqis.¹³

Gateway Protection Programme

5.7 The Gateway Protection Programme (Gateway) was established in March 2004.¹⁴ Initially, it set a quota of 500 refugees a year.¹⁵ This was increased to 750 in 2008. In its ‘Resettlement: policy statement’, published in July 2018, the Home Office wrote of Gateway that it:

12 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730643/Resettlement_Policy_document_.pdf

13 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8750/CBP-8750.pdf> – page 8 and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-year-ending-march-2020/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to>

14 The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 provided the legislative basis for Gateway and subsequent resettlement schemes. Section 59 states that: “The Secretary of State may participate in a project which is designed to— (a) reduce migration, (b) assist or ensure the return of migrants, (c) facilitate co-operation between States in matters relating to migration, (d) conduct or consider research about migration, or (e) arrange or assist the settlement of migrants (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere).”
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/41/section/59>

15 Answering a Parliamentary Question in October 2007, the Immigration Minister stated that, in 2004-05, 64 principal applicants and 86 dependants were admitted to the UK under the scheme, in 2005-06 the figures were 56 and 192, and in 2006-07 they were 139 and 368. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm071017/text/71017w0008.htm#07101748001090>

“... aims to resettle 750 refugees per (financial) year, generally those in protracted refugee situations.

Each year, UNHCR publish their Projected Global Resettlement Needs at the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement. The Gateway caseload is determined using this document and in discussion with other government departments and UNHCR. The caseload is then agreed at ministerial level.

Cases are accepted under UNHCR’s resettlement submission categories. Individuals resettled through Gateway must have been living in a protracted refugee situation for over five years, unless there is an urgent need for resettlement (e.g. life endangerment).¹⁶

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)

- 5.8** The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme was launched in January 2014 in response to the ongoing conflict in Syria. In her statement to Parliament,¹⁷ the Home Secretary did not refer to a quota, but a later National Audit Office (NAO) report¹⁸ noted that “the government expected that several hundred refugees would arrive in the UK over three years”. By September 2015, the Scheme had resettled 239 refugees, prioritised by UNHCR as “most vulnerable”, including those requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk.
- 5.9** In September 2015, the Prime Minister announced an expansion of the Scheme. The government intended by 2020 to resettle 20,000 Syrians “assessed for resettlement by UNHCR against their resettlement submission categories”.¹⁹ While the Home Office retained primary responsibility for the policy and operational delivery, this was to be a joint endeavour with the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (since renamed the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)).
- 5.10** In July 2017, the scope of VPRS was further expanded to include refugees of all nationalities who had “fled Syria because of the current conflict (i.e. after March 2011)” and were unable to return safely to their home country. ‘Resettlement: policy statement’ makes it clear that: “The scheme is only for 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.”²⁰
- 5.11** In September 2018, the government announced that the White Helmets (a civil defence organisation) and their families, would also be resettled under the Scheme.²¹ The Home Office informed inspectors that all of those referred for resettlement were resettled within three months.

16 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730643/Resettlement_Policy_document_.pdf

17 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/oral-statement-by-the-home-secretary-on-syrian-refugees>

18 <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-Syrian-Vulnerable-Persons-Resettlement-programme.pdf>

19 ‘Resettlement: policy statement’.

20 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730643/Resettlement_Policy_document_.pdf

21 According to the Home Office, all of them were resettled within three months.

Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme

- 5.12** The Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) was launched in April 2016.²² In a written Ministerial Statement,²³ the Immigration Minister wrote: "We will commit to resettling several hundred individuals in the first year with a view to resettling up to 3000 individuals over the lifetime of this Parliament, the majority of whom will be children." Refugees resettled under VCRS did not need to have been affected specifically by the conflict in Syria. 'Resettlement: policy statement' explains:

"The VCRS is open to vulnerable children and their families in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, where UNHCR deem resettlement to be in the best interests of the child. The scheme is accessible to all 'children and adolescents at risk' as defined by UNHCR, which encompasses unaccompanied children as well as those in families or with care-givers (an adult who UNHCR is satisfied has assumed legitimate responsibility for the child). The scheme is open to refugees of all nationalities."²⁴

Community Sponsorship Scheme

- 5.13** The Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) was launched in July 2016, when public interest in the Syrian crisis was at its peak, and after calls from the public that the Home Office provide a route for citizens to support refugees. CSS provides a route for community groups to participate in VPRS and VCRS by 'sponsoring' the resettlement of a refugee family.
- 5.14** Home Office's guidance on Community Sponsorship (first published in July 2016 and updated in December 2018) states:

"Community Sponsorship is a way for local communities, civil society organisations, faith group and businesses, to be directly involved in helping refugees settle in the UK. Community sponsors provide emotional and practical support to empower resettled families to rebuild their lives and to become self-sufficient members of their new community."²⁵

Identification and selection of refugees for resettlement

The policy intention

- 5.15** 'Resettlement: policy statement' sets out the UK government's policy intention in relation to resettlement, which is to:

"...offer a safe and legal route to the UK for the most vulnerable refugees. We purposefully target those in greatest need of assistance, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk...Our resettlement schemes are not selective on the basis of employability or integration potential."²⁶

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-scheme-launched-to-resettle-children-at-risk>

²³ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-04-21/HCWS687/>

²⁴ 'Resettlement: policy statement'.

²⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/764990/2018-12-04_Community_Sponsorship_Guidance.pdf page 4

²⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730643/Resettlement_Policy_document.pdf

UNHCR Resettlement Submission Categories

- 5.16 UNHCR’s ‘Resettlement Handbook’ sets out its ‘Resettlement Submission Categories’,²⁷ used to ensure “a coherent and transparent approach” to the identification of refugees in need of resettlement in which resettlement countries can have confidence.

Figure 3 UNHCR’s Resettlement Submission Categories
Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs of the refugee in the country of refuge (this includes a threat of refoulement);
Survivors of Torture and/or Violence , where repatriation or the conditions of asylum could result in further traumatization and/or heightened risk; or where appropriate treatment is not available;
Medical Needs , in particular life-saving treatment that is unavailable in the country of refuge;
Women and Girls at Risk , who have protection problems particular to their gender;
Family Reunification , when resettlement is the only means to reunite refugee family members who, owing to refugee flight or displacement, are separated by borders or entire continents;
Children and Adolescents at Risk , where a best interests determination supports resettlement;
Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions , which generally is relevant only when other solutions are not feasible in the foreseeable future, when resettlement can be used strategically, and/or when it can open possibilities for comprehensive solutions.

- 5.17 UNHCR considers each refugee’s specific circumstances and needs against its Resettlement Submission Categories. If one or more is met²⁸ it will consider referring the refugee for resettlement to the UK, via Gateway, VPRS or VCRS, or to another country with a resettlement scheme. In such cases, UNHCR will collect and assess relevant documentation, confirm identity and nationality, and collate all relevant information on a Refugee Referral Form (RRF), which is sent electronically to the Home Office.

Additional criteria used by resettlement countries

- 5.18 In addition to UNHCR’s Resettlement Submission Categories, resettlement countries may set their own priorities or selection criteria for their resettlement schemes. For example, Norway “gives priority to women above men, especially in cases involving women and girls at risk. It also gives priority to families with children under 18 and to men and boys who are vulnerable due to their gender identity or sexual orientation. For other cases it gives priority to those individuals considered to be able to make the best use of services for integration in the settling municipality. Individuals with education or experience relevant to the Norwegian labour market are given priority”.

²⁷ <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/resettlement/3d464e842/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-chapter-6-unhcr-resettlement-submission-categories.html>

²⁸ The Handbook notes: “These submission categories, as outlined in the following subchapters, should be seen as inclusive. In many cases, resettlement submission categories may overlap, and submissions can effectively be made under both a primary and secondary category.”

- 5.19** In Canada, “Those applying for resettlement must demonstrate willingness to become self-sufficient within the first five years. For example, on arrival skills and qualifications, evidence of in-country family/sponsor and language skills (particularly English and French) are taken into consideration by visa officers to determine such self-sufficiency.”²⁹
- 5.20** Meanwhile, in the USA: “In addition to the vulnerability and eligibility criteria outlined by the UNHCR, the US government stipulates that applicants must satisfy the following criteria:
- Qualify as a “refugee” under Section 101(a) (42) of the US Immigration and Nationality Act
 - Be of special humanitarian concern as specified by the US president
 - Adhere to the terms of refugee resettlement as stipulated by US law
 - Not have permanent residency in any foreign country (UNHCR, 2017:3).”

Home Office “partners” in the resettlement of refugees

- 5.21** In addition to UNHCR, the Home Office works with a number of partners to resettle refugees in the UK, in particular:

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Before the Home Office makes its decision about resettling a refugee referred by UNHCR, IOM conducts a Migration Health Assessment (MHA). Where a refugee has been accepted for resettlement, has been allocated to a local authority, and accommodation has been confirmed, IOM is responsible for organising visas and exit processes (in conjunction with UNHCR in particular countries) and arranging travel. IOM also delivers a pre-departure ‘Cultural orientation workshop’.

UK Local Authorities (LAs)

Local Authorities provide accommodation to refugees accepted through Gateway, VPRS and VCRS and support them in accessing the services they require. For unaccompanied minors under VCRS, local authorities become the child’s corporate parent.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

DWP is responsible for making Universal Credit payments to resettled refugees. In addition, DWP staff in Job Centres support refugees through the process of seeking employment.

Department for Education (DfE)

DfE supports English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for refugees as part of its wider strategy to improve adult literacy.³⁰ DfE has policy responsibility for the education of unaccompanied minors under VCRS, as part of a wider responsibility in relation to looked-after children in local authority care.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

A large number of NGOs are involved in delivering services and support to resettled refugees, such as housing associations who provide accommodation, or refugee charities who help with integration support and ESOL.

²⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b2373a5e5274a190383bcc7/UK_Refugee_resettlement.pdf

³⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf

Previous evaluations and inspections of the UK's resettlement schemes

Gateway

5.22 There have been three Home Office-commissioned evaluations of Gateway. The first, published in February 2009, was conducted by the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.³¹ It was based on the experiences of refugees who had arrived in the UK between 2004 and 2006. It concluded that:

“Gateway lead agencies fulfilled their grant agreements. Refugees were glad to be in the UK and planned to stay. Progress was being made against indicators of integration, but married women with children were making least progress. Key issues for all groups were access to ESOL and employment and these areas will need further facilitation.”

5.23 The report acknowledged that “the research included a relatively small sub-set of all the Gateway groups” and more might be learned about integration by looking at “culturally-distinct” groups and at other resettlement regions (the research had focused on refugees resettled in Sheffield, Bolton, Hull and Rochdale). It suggested that:

“Follow-up, perhaps at around five years (when citizenship applications can be made), would provide a picture of longer-term integration prospects, barriers and facilitators for Gateway groups.”

5.24 A second evaluation was published in December 2011 by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University.³² It was “commissioned by Home Office Science: Migration and Border Analysis (MBA) to fulfil the European Commission's funding requirements.”

5.25 Researchers looked at a sample of 146 adult refugees (105 from Iraq, 18 from Democratic Republic of Congo, and 23 Rohingya from what was then Burma) who arrived in the UK between February and May 2009, with the aim of investigating how Gateway “was being delivered by different organisations across a number of resettlement areas; and to explore the resettlement and integration experiences of refugees during their first 18 months of life in the UK.”

5.26 The findings were similar to the 2009 evaluation regarding the importance of English language training and the limited opportunities for paid employment. The report also noted “the ease with which refugees adapted to life in the UK was reported to vary between different nationality groups”. While Gateway providers did not provide “targeted support for the refugees beyond the 12-month support period ... it was common for refugees to approach their Gateway support provider for help and assistance after formal provision had ended, for example, for advice about healthcare and state benefits ... the vast majority of refugees were registered with a doctor, but 41 per cent reported problems accessing. These problems appeared to be rooted in English language issues.”

³¹ ‘The Gateway Protection Programme: an evaluation – An overview of Immigration Research and Statistics (IRS) research exploring the integration of refugees resettled under the UK's Gateway Protection Programme in Sheffield, Bolton, Hull and Rochdale’. [https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~media/bl/global/social-welfare/pdfs/non-secure/g/a/t/gateway-protection-programme-an-evaluation.pdf](https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~/media/bl/global/social-welfare/pdfs/non-secure/g/a/t/gateway-protection-programme-an-evaluation.pdf)

³² An Evaluation of the Gateway Protection Programme, commissioned by the Home Office, by Deborah Platts-Fowler and David Robinson: <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/eval-gateway-protection-programme.pdf>

- 5.27** In 2017, as part of an evaluation of the use of the EU’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), a report entitled ‘Contextual analysis of refugee resettlement’³³ was commissioned from NatCen, an independent social research institute.
- 5.28** The researchers drew attention to the inadequacy of the data and the challenges this posed to the research. The latter identified three key themes from the available literature on outcomes for Gateway refugees: employment, mental health, and learning English. The report did not make any specific recommendations but referred to the need for more assistance with employment and in accessing primary healthcare and legal support.
- 5.29** It explored the assertion that refugees in the UK tend to integrate better in locations with an established migration history and suggested matching local authorities to refugees’ needs. It also sought to identify “those Gateway local authorities that offer most favourable integration contexts for refugees” by measuring five authorities against five key indicators (accommodation, health, financial, education and social).

VPRS and VCRS

- 5.30** As at March 2020, no independent evaluations of VCRS had been published. However, there had been a number of evaluations of VPRS.
- 5.31** In September 2016, the NAO published ‘The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme’.³⁴ It examined what VPRS had achieved since January 2014; the processes in place to deliver the programme; progress against the targets set; and the risks to future delivery and mitigations. It did not look at value for money, having determined that it was too early to assess this.
- 5.32** The NAO found that the expansion of the programme had been managed successfully, the target to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 had been achieved and the Home Office was confident of meeting 20,000 by 2020; partnership working was good across central and local government, and with international partners, and 118 local authorities had volunteered to take refugees; the refugees’ experience of VPRS had been largely positive, but uncertainty about their status in the UK has caused some anxiety; there were plans to monitor and evaluate the programme and gather formal feedback from local authorities, but as yet the Home Office had no means of knowing how well it was operating at a local level.
- 5.33** The report made six recommendations. These concerned: clarifying to local authorities that there were no set requirements for what they needed to provide after year one, in order to encourage them to tailor services to refugees’ needs; clarifying to refugees their rights regarding travel within and outside the UK and to family reunion, and their status after the fifth year of the programme;³⁵ ensuring other government departments and local authorities understood and had plans in place to manage the risks to the programme, “for example finding suitable housing and school places and capacity to meet longer-term, uncertain costs”; collecting and using refugees’ characteristics to adapt programme budgets in light of any changes to initial assumptions, so that no organisation struggles to participate effectively due to cost pressures; having a full monitoring and evaluation framework in operation as soon as possible, including defining what success looks like beyond meeting the 20,000 target; and, engaging with international partners and local authorities and their service providers to ensure

³³ The report has not been made public.

³⁴ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-Syrian-Vulnerable-Persons-Resettlement-programme.pdf>

³⁵ Refugees resettled through VPRS are granted Indefinite Leave to Remain for a period of five years.

refugees' opinions are listened to and factored in to new developments, such as community sponsorship.

5.34 The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report 'The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme',³⁶ published in January 2017, reflected the NAO report and the evidence taken by the PAC from the Home Office Permanent Under Secretary and Director of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme.

5.35 The PAC report contained six recommendations:

"The Department should:

1.

- Regularly review the number of remaining pledges and work with local authorities to ensure that they are able to provide firm offers of support; and
- More clearly specify what local authorities are expected to provide to refugees to address any current disparities or confusion.

2. By the end of the financial year, make sure that there is full and clear communication with refugees about the programme—including the services they can expect, their entitlements, restrictions, and the implications of having 'humanitarian protection' status.

3. Write to us within six months to provide an update on community sponsorships.

4. By the end of this financial year:

- Analyse the evidence it has collected in order to produce a baseline for the programme; and
- Set out the outcomes against which it will judge the success of the programme.

5. Within six months, review what is being delivered by the increased funding for teaching English to determine whether it is sufficient to allow refugees to communicate independently with service providers and integrate quickly into their local communities.

6. Within six months, along with local authorities and delivery partners, undertake a full review of how victims of torture are being identified and supported to understand what more can be done."

5.36 The Treasury Minutes published in March 2017 contained the government's response.³⁷ All six recommendations were agreed. According to the Home Office, Recommendation 1 (first part) and 2 were "implemented". The remainder had "target implementation dates": Recommendation 1 (second part) by April 2017; Recommendations 3, 5 and 6 by August 2017; and Recommendation 4 by Spring 2018.

³⁶ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/768/768.pdf>

³⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/597087/58882_Cm_9429_Treasury_Accessible_pdf.pdf#page=31

- 5.37** In February 2017, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) published ‘The Syrian Refugee Crisis: a resettlement programme that meets the needs of the most vulnerable’.³⁸ This provided “an initial appraisal of the VPR programme, focusing particularly on barriers to access and effectiveness of implementation across the following sectors: housing, employment and life chances, community integration, education, and healthcare.” It made 21 recommendations, many echoing those made by the NAO.
- 5.38** In November 2017, UNHCR published ‘Towards Integration. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in the United Kingdom’.³⁹ UNHCR found that “the programme [was] working relatively well. In terms of initial reception and early integration, refugees were grateful for the genuine welcome they had received and impressed by the efficiency with which tasks were completed by central government, Local Authorities (LAs) and civil society.” The study, which had taken place between August 2016 and January 2017, “had also highlighted areas for improvement, notably in English language provision, the need for support on the road to employment and further assistance for housing.”
- 5.39** The report made recommendations under each of the areas it covered: initial reception and early integration; social cohesion; interpretation; accommodation; access to healthcare and treatment; mental health and psychosocial provision; family reunification; education; English language; employment; matching and mobility within the UK; information and orientation; legal status; monitoring, evaluation and learning, integration strategies.
- 5.40** Among the key recommendations were:
- “Consideration [of] stipulating a minimum number of hours of English language training to be given by LAs [Local Authorities] to refugees to ensure consistency in provision across the UK. The UK government is encouraged to: provide additional support for low participation groups, specifically, women with young children, youths aged 18-24, and elderly refugees; identify the reasons for low participation; and provide additional assistance to increase participation (e.g. at-home family learning).”
- “LAs should [in addition to English language training] emphasise and direct resources at employment preparation at the earliest opportunity to ensure self-reliance and mitigate any risk of dependency. LAs should explore opportunities that encourage and enable refugees to take entry-level jobs, educating employers about the work entitlements of VPRS and other refugees, and encouraging employers to provide language training alongside employment or vocational training.”
- “Central and local government [should] better coordinate their programmes for employment preparedness, to learn from best practices across the UK, but also to learn from experiences in other countries where companies are more active in integration activities including language and vocational training. A skills audit of refugees, which is recommended, provides a basis for engagement with local and national employers.”
- “LAs should ensure information about equal opportunities in UK and access to work for women fully prepares families for the work environment in the UK with the expectation that both men and women may find employment outside the home.”

38 <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Syrian-Refugee-Crisis-Final-002.pdf>

39 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/5a0ae9e84.pdf>

“Provision of affordable, secure and suitable accommodation is very important for the success of the VPRS. The cap on benefits introduced in 2016 will increasingly require councils and districts to make discretionary housing payments towards the costs of housing where housing benefit has been reduced. LAs, the church, and voluntary, social and private landlords have sought practical solutions to the housing problem but the contribution of these will always be limited. The Home Office should consider strengthening the provision of appropriate accommodation including, where appropriate, through further contributions towards the additional costs.”

- 5.41** In 2017, ICIBI inspected VPRS. The inspection report, ‘An Inspection of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (August 2017 – January 2018)’, was published in May 2018.⁴⁰ It examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Scheme, specifically:
- the progress made towards delivering the government’s target of resettling 20,000 refugees by 2020
 - the processes for selecting refugees for resettlement via the Scheme
 - efforts to integrate refugees prior to their departure for the UK and once they have been resettled
- 5.42** Upstream, the inspection looked at the Home Office’s involvement in the work of UNHCR to identify and refer refugees and of IOM in health screening and cultural orientation. In the UK, it looked at the accommodation matching process and the Home Office’s work with local authorities, directly and through Strategic Migration Partnerships, and the Community Sponsorship Scheme, and at the integration initiatives of local authorities and delivery partners.
- 5.43** The report noted that by the end of 2017 UNHCR had referred 16,981 refugees to the Home Office and just over half of the target 20,000 had been resettled. It pointed out that there were some negative consequences from this front-loading, not least the length of time refugees spent waiting to be resettled after selection, but it meant that the Home Office was on track to meet the 20,000 target.
- 5.44** Echoing the earlier evaluations, the report acknowledged that the rapid upscaling of the Scheme after September 2015 was a major achievement, for which all of those involved deserved enormous credit. At the same time, it identified areas for improvement: in the Home Office’s data collection and analysis; in its evaluation of the various stages of the resettlement process, with a view to sharing ‘best practice’ and achieving greater consistency of treatment and outcomes; in looking to learn lessons from those already resettled via the Scheme about the pre-departure period and first years in the UK that could benefit those still in the early stages of the process.
- 5.45** The 2018 report made seven recommendations, which can be found, along with the government’s formal responses, on GOV.UK.⁴¹ Where relevant, updates are included in this report.
- 5.46** In summary, the Home Office accepted two recommendations in full and partially accepted five. By November 2019, the Home Office considered all the recommendations “closed”, except for Recommendation 4 which focused on the effective use of the pre-departure period:

40 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705155/VPRS_Final_Artwork_revised.pdf

41 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705175/VPRS_Government_Response.pdf

“The Home Office should explore with IOM, and other ‘upstream’ partners if appropriate, how to make more effective use of the period between a refugee’s acceptance onto the Scheme and their departure from the ‘host’ country, to improve their integration ‘journey’ (for example, providing predeparture English language tuition), to manage expectations and improve the geographical matching process, and to reduce anxieties while awaiting a departure date.”

- 5.47** In December 2018, the Home Office published ‘The UK Government’s Approach to Evaluating the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Schemes’.⁴² This Research Report “outlines ... the strategy for evaluating [the] delivery and effectiveness [of VPRS and VCRS]”.
- 5.48** The report contained some data and analysis in relation to the 13,961 refugees resettled through VPRS and the 1,075 individuals resettled through VCRS up to September 2018.⁴³ However, it was primarily forward looking, indicating how “with the help of local authorities and community sponsors” the Home Office would collect information in seven areas (Health, Education, Employment, English language, Secondary migration, Security and Safeguarding, and Social bridges and bonds), “at two time points within each individual’s first 12 to 15 months following arrival in the UK” with the “aim [of understanding] the range of individual needs upon arrival and what has happened to refugees in the early arrival period”.⁴⁴
- 5.49** There were three further strands to the evaluation strategy: “exploring the potential of using administrative data [from other government departments] to assess long-term integration outcomes in the areas of education and employment.”; a Home Office-commissioned Ipsos Mori “three-year qualitative longitudinal evaluation” of both schemes;⁴⁵ and, an analysis of social media by region 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.”
- 5.50** There have not been any more general reports on VPRS since 2017, however, a number of reports on more specific elements of the Scheme have been published – including assessment of individual local authorities’ delivery of VPRS⁴⁶, and academic research on ESOL.⁴⁷

Community Sponsorship Scheme

- 5.51** Referring to the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS), ‘An Inspection of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (August 2017 – January 2018)’ noted that “in its first 14 months fewer than 20 sponsors had been approved, and the CSS had resettled just 53 refugees, though this did include some larger families (6+ persons).”⁴⁸

42 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/767274/uk-approach-evaluating-vulnerable-resettlement-schemes-horr106.pdf

43 Home Office Immigration Statistics – July to September 2018, published 29 November 2018.

44 In its factual accuracy response, the Home Office clarified that: The first time point at which monitoring data is collected will be in a refugee’s first 3 to 9 months in the UK. The second time point will be between 9 to 15 months after a refugee has been in the UK. It acknowledged that paragraph 5.48 accurately quoted the published ‘Approach to evaluation’ but commented that “the information in that documentation is a bit misleading”.

45 Not published.

46 ‘The Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme: evaluation of Edinburgh’s reception Arrangements’, Katherine E A Weir, Sheila J Wilson, Dermot R Gorman, November 2017, <https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/article/40/3/451/4600209> and ‘Year 2 Evaluation Of The Argyll and Bute Refugee Resettlement Programme, November 2017’, <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s121810/Year%20%20Report.pdf>

47 ‘Language Education for Forced Migrants: Governance and Approach’, Mike Chick and Iona Hannagan-Lewis, University of South Wales/Welsh Refugee Council, September 2019, <https://www.mdpi.com/2226-471X/4/3/74/htm>

48 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705155/VPRS_Final_Artwork_revised.pdf

- 5.52** The report acknowledged that the Home Office had introduced a rigorous application process for the CSS, designed to ensure that sponsors had the means and commitment to support refugees as required and that, like the 40-year old Canadian model from which it took its inspiration, CSS had long-term potential beyond VPRS. “Even so, CSS take-up looked set to fall well short of the Home Office’s relatively modest “internal ambition” for the year to July 2018” which was due, in part, to it not having staff in place early enough to capitalise on the initial public enthusiasm for such a scheme.
- 5.53** The CSS has since been the subject of various academic evaluations. ‘A comparison of community sponsorship and government-led resettlement of refugees in the UK’, a report from University College London (UCL) in partnership with Citizens UK, published in September 2018,⁴⁹ highlighted the benefits of the CSS model for both new arrivals and host communities. It recommended that “increasing communication channels, collaboration and social connection between sponsoring groups, NGOs and the local authorities will insure the sustainability, resilience and success of both schemes”.
- 5.54** In 2019, the Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham, produced two reports. ‘Community Sponsorship in the UK: from application to integration. Formative Evaluation, Interim Report’,⁵⁰ published in July 2019, found that CSS was working well with positive outcomes noted for refugees and the groups and communities who had facilitated their resettlement. The report made 56 recommendations.
- 5.55** The second report, ‘Like pebbles in a pool: the effect of community sponsorship on knowledge about, and attitudes to, refugees in less-diverse communities’, also published in July 2019, looked at two small (unnamed) towns characterised by low levels of ethnic diversity and noted positive benefits for the local community. However, it also noted that the refugees experienced difficulties with: communication, due in part to an absence of Arabic interpreters locally; a lack of local support available for refugee wellbeing; poor transport; and accessing employment.⁵¹

‘Call for evidence’ – November 2019

- 5.56** On 18 November 2019, ICIBI launched a ‘call for evidence’ via its website,⁵² inviting “anyone with knowledge and experience of the UK’s resettlement schemes for vulnerable refugees to write ... with their views and evidence regarding how these schemes are working.”
- 5.57** The invitation was “aimed at NGOs, academics, thinktanks, faith groups and representative bodies, as well as resettled refugees” and was “particularly interested in hearing about the reception and integration in the UK of those individuals and families resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), and those resettled through the Community Sponsorship Scheme.”
- 5.58** Inspectors received 56 submissions:
- 24 from NGOs and support groups
 - 11 from local authorities
 - seven from Community Sponsorship groups
 - five from universities or academics

49 https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/sites/bartlett/files/key_findings_comparisonukresettlement_schemes.pdf

50 <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/Misc/CS-UK-IRIS-June-2019.pdf>

51 <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2020/like-pebbles-in-a-pool.pdf>

52 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-evidence-uk-resettlement-schemes-for-vulnerable-refugees>

- four from religious groups
- three from Strategic Migration Partnerships
- two from umbrella bodies (e.g. Local Government Association)
- one from a resettled refugee

5.59 The majority (35) were about resettlement processes in England specifically. A small number focused on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, while the rest were not location specific. Most concerned VPRS, with eight submissions about VCRS and only one about Gateway.

5.60 The issues mentioned in these submissions, in particular in relation to integration, included ones that fell outside the remit of the Home Office. In most cases, they echoed the findings from previous reviews. The main themes were:

- Delivery partners

Local authorities were overstretched, and local caseworkers were “overworked to meet the needs of the clients”. NGOs who worked across several local authority areas noted that levels of support provided to resettled refugees were inconsistent. But local authorities were applauded for working with the local voluntary sector and fostering “a multi-agency learning experience and collaborative approach.”

Local authorities noted that SMPs were effective at disseminating information and best practice, but lines of communication between the Home Office, SMPs and local authorities were sometimes unclear.

The work of NGOs and CSS groups received only positive comments, and respondents were clear that civil society was making a significant contribution to the resettlement schemes, which they believed would struggle to function without this assistance and support.

- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Despite being consistently identified as the most important factor for integration, ESOL availability varied significantly across the UK. In many cases, poor health and childcare commitments prevented refugees from being able to access classes. Often childcare was not provided by local authorities or others (despite Home Office funding), so women were less likely to be able to access classes. Slow language acquisition meant that children, once in school, often had to translate for their parents.

- Employment

Being able to access employment, paid or voluntary, was regarded as crucial to integration, to improving mental health, and to providing a sense of stability. However, access was difficult because of the inability of refugees to speak English fluently, their general lack of formal education, and poor mental health.

- Benefits (public funds)

Universal Credit was seen as a significant issue and the benefits cap was a particular problem as many refugee families had more than two children. NGOs and support organisations suggested that the cap should be waived for resettled families, who were supposed to be being fully supported by the State. Submissions from both local authorities and NGOs referred to the complexity of the Universal Credit system and the online application tools. It was difficult, if not impossible, for many refugees to use these independently as their English language skills were insufficient.

- Education
It was acknowledged that children attending mainstream schools integrate well and learn English quickly. Three submissions mentioned incidents of children being bullied in schools, and there were mixed reports on how well this had been handled. Support for those with special educational needs was sometimes difficult to access. Education for older refugees was also more challenging. Many had received little or no education before arriving in the UK, so accessing suitable college courses was challenging.
- Housing
Accommodation, and access to suitable housing, was mentioned in 23 submissions. Finding appropriate accommodation within the price range permitted by housing benefit was reported to be an issue, especially for singletons or larger families. In many cases, local authorities or support groups were “topping up” benefit payments to enable families to pay rent, but they recognised that this was not sustainable. This was exacerbated if refugees required housing with adaptations due to disability.
- Managing expectations
Managing the expectations of refugees was mentioned in 20 submissions: negatively in 17. Refugees arrived with unrealistic expectations of their entitlements. CSS groups faced problems because refugees thought they would be “provided with everything” and that they would have support workers constantly on hand to assist them. Communication between refugees did not help this as refugees would hear what others in other areas had received and assume that they were entitled to the same.
- Funding
The tariff funding of VPRS/VCRS was raised in 19 submissions: negatively in eight, positively in four, with seven submissions having both positive and negative elements. On the positive side, local authorities were grateful for the flexibility in the funding, and the fact that they could generally choose to allocate it where the need was greatest in their area. But there was criticism of the lack of clarity about how funding should be used, and the fact that additional funding, in particular “exceptional funding”, was available but not well advertised.
- Healthcare
Local authorities and CSS groups noted that refugees arrived with complex health needs, which were not explained fully in their MHAs. Refugees needed assistance navigating the healthcare system and faced challenges with the language barrier during appointments. Twelve submissions raised concerns about mental health and access to mental health services. Many refugees arrived with poor mental health as a result of trauma; but local authorities and CSS groups were often unaware of this and caught by surprise when it became an issue. One local authority wrote, “most arrivals have complex health and mental health needs, given the long waiting lists for some NHS treatment, finding a way to handle this effectively and sustainably has also been a challenge.” Two submissions suggested that there should be a dedicated mental health services for resettled refugees, but others described mental health provision as generally poor and not an issue specific to resettlement.
- Family reunion
Nine submissions discussed family reunion. “Unrealistic expectations” were seen as a problem. One described this as “the single greatest issue facing resettled refugees. They often do not understand that family reunification will not be possible and are understandably worried about those left behind in the conflict.” It was suggested that the

UNHCR family links form often gave refugees false hope. In reality it was simply a record which could ensure that family members are connected in the unlikely event they are resettled, but many saw it as a family reunion application.

- Immigration advice
Five submissions noted concerns about VPRS/VCRS refugees having to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain after five years, in particular the levels of qualified support available to assist with applications, especially in rural areas, and the cost of advice.
- Racism/Hate crimes
Four submissions mentioned that refugee families had experienced racist abuse, and that “support workers”, such as school teachers, “did not always recognise this for what it was.”

Community Sponsorship Survey

- 5.61** In January 2020, inspectors distributed a survey to 102 Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) groups: 69 who were currently sponsoring a family; 18 whose two-year sponsorship period had concluded; seven who were approved and awaiting the arrival of a family; and eight groups whose application had been “approved in principle”.
- 5.62** The survey was sent to lead sponsors. Where this was an ‘umbrella’ organisation, inspectors requested that it was forwarded to a member of the group directly involved in the sponsorship process. Twenty-four completed surveys were received.⁵³ The results are reflected in Chapter 10 of this report.

⁵³ Several partial responses were received.

6. Inspection findings: Home Office structures

Previous findings and recommendation

- 6.1** The 2018 inspection of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) found that the Home Office had managed the challenge of resettling 1,000 VPRS refugees between September and the end of 2015 by calling on “surge staff” from Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC)⁵⁴ and other staff appointed on fixed-term, 11-month contracts.
- 6.2** The HMRC staff having been returned, over the course of 2016 and 2017, four recruitment campaigns failed to produce the required number of staff and in November 2017 the Scheme was operating with eight staff short of its funded complement. The Scheme’s senior managers acknowledged that there was a staff retention issue in Croydon, where most VPRS “operational” functions were based. This chimed with the findings from other inspections both before and since.
- 6.3** The report noted, however, that despite a relatively high turnover managers and staff appeared highly motivated. Staff told inspectors that there was a sense that they were making a real difference to refugees’ lives, and “the culture” felt different to other parts of the Home Office they had worked in. Senior managers said they were determined to create a positive atmosphere, and staff were given opportunities to visit other parts of the operation, including meeting refugees arriving on charter flights, in order to encourage this.
- 6.4** Managers were also looking for the staff to become “multi-functional” so that they could work wherever they were needed, reducing the impact of turnover and shortfalls, although the “attrition” rates and the time taken to train staff made multi-functionality difficult to achieve in practice.
- 6.5** In light of these findings, the 2018 inspection report recommended that the Home Office should:
- “Review the Scheme’s staffing, ensuring that roles are clearly defined (to avoid duplicated and/or misdirected effort) and set at the correct grade, and ensuring staff receive training that enables at least some of them to be deployed flexibly, as required.”
- 6.6** This recommendation was “partially accepted”. The Home Office responded that it believed that “roles in the team are set at the correct grade and [the department] already deploys staff flexibly within the team.” However, it stated that it would “review caseworker and senior caseworker activities in terms of case sign off and categorisation when staffing levels allow. Any changes in process/responsibilities will be reliant on securing the necessary changes to our IT systems.”

⁵⁴ Under a standing mutual aid agreement between the Home Office and HMRC.

6.7 In November 2019, the Home Office told inspectors that this recommendation was “closed” as caseworker accreditation had been implemented.

Resettlement Operations

New structure

6.8 In January 2020, Resettlement Operations, part of UKVI’s Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration (RASI) Directorate, was restructured in preparation for the rollout of the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). The new unit comprises three teams: Casework and Accommodation; Operational Strategy and Support; Arrivals, Admin and Payments. The Home Office provided a staffing breakdown which showed a total of 84 posts – see Figure 4.

Figure 4

Resettlement Operations post-restructure					
Team	Grades/Numbers				
	G7	SEO	HEO	EO	AO
Casework & Accommodation	1	2	8	19	–
Operational Strategy & Support	1	2	3	5	2
Arrivals, Admin & Payments	1	2	6	15	17
Total	3	6	17	39	19

6.9 Resettlement Operations staff working on the Gateway Protection Programme (Gateway), the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) were asked to rank their preferred roles in the new structure. According to the Home Office, all staff were given their first or second preference. Resettlement Operations senior management told inspectors that “the process was fair” and the restructure had gone well. The transition to the new roles was intended to be gradual, beginning in January 2020 and completing by April/May 2020.

6.10 Inspectors spoke to the team⁵⁵ that had been working on Gateway and was also responsible for VCRS and for Mandate. The staff said that they had been concerned about the restructuring, but confirmed that, broadly speaking, the process had gone smoothly. Some staff had not got the new role they wanted, and some said they would miss parts of their current responsibilities. However, they understood the need for the changes and felt that management had communicated them effectively and with sensitivity.

Training and Guidance

6.11 From discussions with inspectors, it appeared that Resettlement Operations staff at all grades working on Gateway/VCRS/Mandate, VPRS, and the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) considered they had been adequately trained and believed that their work had been appropriately-graded. Staff were clear about their responsibilities and confident in their abilities to administer each of the Schemes efficiently and effectively.

55 Comprising: oversight by an SEO Ops Manager, four HEOs, 11 EOs (responsible for Casework and admin), and four AOs (including one vacancy at the beginning of 2020).

- 6.12** For Gateway, staff had been trained “on the job” by “shadowing” an experienced “buddy”. By the end of 2019, some had worked on Gateway for over ten years. One said that guidance, while not regularly used, was “always there for reference ... you can always refer back to the SOP [standard operating procedure].” Another told inspectors: “I always find it useful to look at the policy document.⁵⁶ This is a way of doing a sense check.”
- 6.13** Inspectors requested a list of the staff guidance and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) used to manage Gateway but were told that: “There is not a comprehensive, single local instruction for Gateway.” However, inspectors were provided with a PowerPoint slide showing the process, dated January 2020, and local instructions for specific stages.
- 6.14** More guidance was available for staff working on VPRS, and for the most part this also served for VCRS. However, VCRS caseworkers were instructed to pay particular regard to safeguarding issues and VCRS case considerations⁵⁷ were subject to 100% assurance by a Senior Caseworker (an HEO), who was also available to provide advice on eligibility and any requirement for further information from UNHCR.
- 6.15** Staff working on VCRS told inspectors that VPRS had been the priority and this, and the fact there had been only one Senior Caseworker to sign off VCRS cases, had impacted the speed with which VCRS cases had been progressed. However, the pressure on the team had eased from May 2019 when responsibility for the allocation of VCRS cases to local authorities was passed to the VPRS Allocations Team.
- 6.16** Staff felt they had received sufficient training to undertake their VCRS roles. The training had included a course on vicarious trauma. Inspectors were told that some of the material staff read was harrowing. Some staff had requested transfers to other teams. Managers said that they were responsive to such requests, but they encouraged staff to raise issues before they reached that point.
- 6.17** Home Office Senior Management described VPRS as “well-resourced” and described the staff as “engaged”. In 2017, inspectors had found that VPRS staff were enthusiastic about the fact that their work was directly helping vulnerable refugees. This was also evident when inspectors returned in 2020.
- 6.18** Guidance for VPRS included separate SOPs for the Allocations Team, Admin Team, Caseworkers and the Duty Caseworker, plus guidance for the Senior Caseworker and for the Workflow Team. Inspectors found this guidance easy to follow. It was written in plain English, with screenshots and walkthroughs for each action. While some details had changed, the main steps in the process had remained the same since the Scheme was introduced.
- 6.19** The Sheffield-based CSS Team (of eight FTEs) told inspectors that it was generally able to cope well with its workload. However, the team was occasionally stretched when an HEO Contact Officer was unavailable to make a monitoring visit to a community sponsor and the visit was covered by a CSS Team EO caseworker.
- 6.20** The CSS Team reported that it had a good working relationship with Resettlement Operations in Croydon, with whom there was a fortnightly catch-up call.

⁵⁶ ‘Resettlement: policy statement’.

⁵⁷ Consideration of whether or not to accept the UNHCR referral.

Implementation of the 2018 recommendation

- 6.21** The Home Office “partially accepted” the 2018 recommendation to review the staff number and grades employed on VPRS. On the evidence provided, inspectors agreed that the original recommendation had been correctly “closed”.
- 6.22** Since 2018, Resettlement Operations had implemented more robust quality control of VPRS casework, with the feedback used to progress caseworkers towards accreditation, at which point they were able to approve their own decisions. By November 2019, half of the VPRS caseworkers had been accredited and there were plans to roll the process out to staff working on VCRS. It was unclear how these plans would be affected by the restructure and launch of the UKRS but the quality matrix used for VPRS was transferrable.
- 6.23** However, inspectors found an issue with Job Descriptions (JDs). Prior to the restructure, some roles did not have up-to-date JDs. Detailed up-to-date JDs will be important for UKRS as some staff will be taking on new roles. They will also help managers to evaluate the new structure and ensure it is fit for purpose. This inspection came too soon to be able to do this.

7. Inspection findings: Gateway Protection Programme

Gateway resettlements 2004 – 2020

- 7.1 The Gateway Protection Programme (“Gateway”) was launched on 1 January 2004.
- 7.2 As at 31 March 2020, Gateway had resettled 9,996 refugees. Since 2008, it had aimed to resettle 750 refugees a year (from 2004 to 2008 the annual quota was 500). Therefore, in theory, it could have resettled a total of 11,187 refugees over its lifetime,⁵⁸ and could be regarded as having fallen short of its aim. In fact, in recent years, the annual figure has consistently exceeded the quota, albeit by a small margin – see Figure 5.

Figure 5

Gateway refugees resettled since 1 April 2015

Year	Arrivals
2015-16	754
2016-17	769
2017-18	768
2018-19	762
2019-20	512
Total	3,565

Profile of resettled refugees

- 7.3 In 2005, the Immigration Minister said: “The people being resettled in the UK through this special UNHCR scheme are extremely vulnerable, having survived some horrific experiences.”⁵⁹ According to the ‘Resettlement: policy statement’:

“Cases are accepted under UNHCR’s resettlement submission categories. Individuals resettled through Gateway must have been living in a protracted refugee situation⁶⁰ for over five years, unless there is an urgent need for resettlement (e.g. life endangerment).”⁶¹

58 This assumes 187 for 2020 Q1. In practice, resettlements are not evenly spread throughout the year.

59 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2005/may/17/immigrationand asylum.politics>

60 UNHCR regards “a protracted refugee situation” as “one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile ...Using a crude measure of refugee populations of 25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years in developing countries, and excluding Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of UNRWA, it is estimated that, at the end of 2003, there were 38 different protracted situations in the world, accounting for some 6.2 million refugees in total.” <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/excom/standcom/40c982172/protracted-refugee-situations.html>

61 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730643/Resettlement_Policy_document_.pdf

7.4 Between 1 January 2015 and 31 March 2020, 3,741 refugees were resettled in the UK through Gateway. Prior to arriving in the UK, most were being hosted in Kenya, Burundi, Jordan, Syria and Egypt. They comprised 19 nationalities, plus individuals identified as either “Stateless Persons” or as “Refugees” according to Article 1 of the 1954 Convention. The mix of nationalities has varied from year to year, but Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia have accounted for almost half (49.5%) of the total.

Figure 6
Breakdown by nationality of refugees resettled via Gateway from 1 January 2015 to 31 March 2020

Country	Refugees
Democratic Republic of Congo	968
Somalia	884
Sudan	410
Iraq	377
Ethiopia	370
Afghanistan	194
Eritrea	184
Palestine	158
South Sudan	76
Pakistan	48
Uganda	21
Refugee	14
Stateless	10
Burundi	9
Yemen	6
Sierra Leone	4
China	3
Rwanda	2
Cameroon	1
Djibouti	1
Syria Arab Republic	1
Total	3,741

Providers and delivery partners

7.5 Initially, few local authorities were willing to take Gateway refugees. By January 2006, only three, Bolton, Bury and Sheffield, had taken any and the total number resettled after two years had reached only 256.⁶²

7.6 As at January 2020, the Home Office had grant agreements in place with three provider organisations, Horton Housing Association (based in Bradford), the North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (based in Manchester), and Sheffield City Council. These providers were working with eight local authorities to resettle Gateway refugees.

7.7 The agreements set out the key deliverables:

“The Recipient shall put in place arrangements to provide each Refugee with:

- Initial reception arrangements upon their arrival in the UK,
- Suitable accommodation that is affordable, sustainable and appropriately furnished, and
- Casework & orientation support to assist integration into the host community.”

7.8 They also set out seven Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

Figure 7 Gateway Grant Agreement Key Performance Indicators and Measurements	
KPI	Measurement
The Recipient shall ensure that all Refugees are met on arrival in the UK	100% of Refugees met and escorted from the arrival airport. 100% of UFFs (the Refugees travel document) to be returned to the Authority within two (2) weeks of the Refugees arrival in the UK.
The Recipient shall arrange for the provision of accommodation for a 12 Month period from arrival in the UK. The Recipient shall ensure that the accommodation meets local authority standards and is affordable and sustainable	100% of accommodation must be ready and available by the date of arrival. (Non-availability of properties will result in the Recipient bearing the costs of temporarily housing the Refugees. Any Refugee housed in an uninhabitable property will be re housed at no cost to the Authority) Accommodation to be made available for up to 5% of cases with disabilities/mobility problems (a case is a single/couple or family)
The Recipient must provide all Refugees with a briefing on their accommodation and the local area in which they are resettled	100% of briefings to be provided within 1 week of arrival

62 <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2006/01/19/few-councils-take-up-un-scheme/>

KPI	Measurement
The Recipient shall provide advice and assistance for Refugees to register for mainstream benefits and services	100% of briefing to be provided to refugees in the requirement to be registered with schools within one week of arrival – registration into school to take place as soon as possible after that. 100% Adults registering for benefits to be taken to the local Job Centre Plus office for initial assessment within three Working Days of arrival in the UK
The Recipient must agree a support plan with each family or individual Refugee to facilitate their orientation into the community	100% of initial plans to be completed within one month of arrival and reviewed on a quarterly basis
The Recipient must put in place arrangements for the provision of English language classes	100% of adults to be given the opportunity to access English language provision within one month of arrival
The Recipient must inform the Authority if a Refugee leaves the Programme and provide a forwarding address (if known)	The Authority to be informed within 48 hours of the Recipient being made aware

- 7.9** Gateway providers were given the flexibility to deliver support in whatever way worked best for them. This was reflected in the KPI measurements, which were quantitative and high-level, for example there was no target for the number of hours of English language classes to be provided over a week or month. And, there were no measurements of quality, in relation to the content of briefings, for example.
- 7.10** Providers were required to: “manage and administer the quality and level of delivery [of their] own performance and that of delivery partners” and to respond to any ad hoc requests for information from the Home Office.
- 7.11** This flexibility had resulted in a range of delivery structures. For example, the North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP), had sub-contracted five local authorities, two housing associations and an NGO as delivery partners. These delivery partners told inspectors that, from their perspective, this arrangement worked well.
- 7.12** Gateway providers were required to monitor and report expenditure and performance, including that of their delivery partners. Inspectors found that the level of detail provided varied. For example, RSMP received a grant of just over £1 million for 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 to support 260 refugees. The “direct costs” were broken down into “people costs”, “travel and subsistence”, “equipment”, “property”, “supplies and services”, but no breakdown was provided of “indirect costs”, which totalled c. £66k.

Financial support

- 7.13** According to the Home Office Gateway Team, the grant funding awarded to the Gateway providers was intended to support “accommodation, ESOL, GP and school registration”. Providers could apply for additional funding, for example where a refugee had particular healthcare needs because of a serious pre-existing medical condition, whether identified prior to or post-arrival in the UK.

- 7.14** The funding for each resettled refugee was for the first 12 months only.⁶³ Inspectors were told that the rationale for this was “in part” because Gateway refugees are given Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and “have full access to employment and benefits on arrival in the UK”.
- 7.15** The 2009 review of Gateway, ‘The Gateway Protection Programme: an evaluation – An overview of Immigration Research and Statistics (IRS) research exploring the integration of refugees resettled under the UK’s Gateway Protection Programme in Sheffield, Bolton, Hull and Rochdale’,⁶⁴ noted that “Up to 18 months after resettlement, lack of employment and limited English language skills remained fundamental barriers to progress towards integration, and an important source of anxiety and frustration for the refugees.”
- 7.16** In discussion with inspectors, delivery partners confirmed that Gateway refugees continued to need considerable support beyond 12 months. They said that they had repeatedly advocated for the financial support to continue for longer.
- 7.17** One NGO caseworker commented: “often we find that [at the end of the 12 months] there are clients that need extra support but because we have no funding, there’s nothing we can do”. Another NGO said: “we rely on volunteers, local authority or other agencies who are also struggling with funding”. Meanwhile, a local authority told inspectors that “12 months is not enough for most refugees, some manage but it really depends ... if we walked away, I’d be very concerned”. One Gateway delivery partner said that it continued to provide support beyond 12 months, but on a reduced scale. It relied on funding from other sources in order to be able to do so.
- 7.18** Another NGO caseworker explained that they frequently found they were having to “firefight” problems, commenting that GPs and Job Centres often misunderstood the rights and entitlements of refugees, even in areas with a long history of refugee resettlements, and caseworkers had to advocate on their behalf in order for them to access services.
- 7.19** As part of the support package, funding was provided for the education of Gateway children. Local authorities were required to ensure that all children, aged 3-18, were registered with relevant education providers, and to provide the Home Office with monitoring information. The funding for each school-age child (5-18) was a one-time fixed amount of £4,500. For each nursery-age child (3-4) the amount was £2,250. However, there were additional amounts where the child had special educational needs (SEN). The latter could be considerable. In one grant agreement seen by inspectors, the additional SEN funding for one child was over £50k.
- 7.20** The monitoring information template includes details of how many children are in nursery school, mainstream school, specialist school, 6th Form College, plus details of the number of children not registered with a school and the reasons why; the reasons for any additional support given to either the schools or children; any concerns or reported incidents regarding the children at nursery school, school or college; details of training provided to staff on cultural awareness and understanding of refugee children; names and addresses of all educational/ school facilities.
- 7.21** Funding was also provided to NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). Again, there was a fixed amount per refugee, £600, but this could be increased where the Migration Health

63 Some grant agreements have run over two years, but with the funding for each resettled refugee limited to 12 months.

64 <https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~media/bl/global/social-welfare/pdfs/non-secure/g/a/t/gateway-protection-programme-an-evaluation.pdf>

Assessment (MHA) indicated that a refugee had particular healthcare needs, in which cases CCGs were provided with a list of anticipated costs.⁶⁵

- 7.22** There were no KPIs for CCG grant agreements, but recipients had to agree to meet the healthcare needs of each refugee for 12 months from their arrival in the UK and to provide information to the Home Office on treatment provided for additional and serious medical conditions. The Home Office also required details of GPs with whom refugees had registered, and details and costs of appointments and operations where the CCG had received additional funding. It was not clear to inspectors how any of this information was being used. Inspectors did not explore the GDPR or patient confidentiality issues raised by this sharing of data.
- 7.23** Before 2016, the Home Office did not provide funding for Gateway refugees to attend English for Speakers of Foreign Languages (ESOL) courses. The Home Office reported that the change was made “in response to previous evaluations and to ensure consistency with VPRS and VCRS” and resettlement operations staff described it as “the biggest recent change to the [Gateway] programme”.
- 7.24** However, the funding was limited to 12 months, whereas for VPRS refugees it was available for five years. One Gateway provider told inspectors that the difference in funding for ESOL between the two groups was disadvantaging Gateway refugees: “No one can learn English in one year, it’s really frustrating. They [Gateway refugees] know they’re not getting as much as other people in the classroom and it feels wrong.” The same provider said that the wide range of first languages spoken by Gateway refugees created a further challenge: “It’s more difficult with Gateway [than VPRS/VCRS] refugees because of the language diversity. We have Arabic tutors on staff, but nobody can speak Tigrayan (sic) so they need to source interpreters [who can teach English].”
- 7.25** The Home Office’s ‘Indicators of Integration Framework 2019’⁶⁶ noted in relation to ‘Language and communication’ that “The ability to communicate is essential for all social connections including, crucially, with other communities and with state and voluntary agencies such as local government and non-government services, political processes and being able to perform civic duties.” As one Gateway refugee observed to inspectors, “people who can get by with their language are likely to get settled faster ... I was [feeling] settled within the first six months, but my mum isn’t because she can’t speak English.”
- 7.26** The Home Office told inspectors that prior to the launch of VPRS in 2014 it had concluded that the funding approach taken with Gateway, with individually tailored grant agreements, “could not be sustained working with higher volumes and much bigger numbers of local authorities”, not least because of the administrative burden on Resettlement Operations. Consequently, for VPRS it had decided on tariff payments. Inspectors were told that UKRS would follow the VPRS model as this was “easier for local authorities to understand and access”.

Working relationships

- 7.27** Gateway caseworkers told inspectors that working relationships with the Gateway providers were good and, while there were no formal mechanisms, the latter would “tell us if they ran into any issues” and these would be ironed out as they arose. Likewise, the team was able

⁶⁵ For example, one CCG’s 2018-19 grant agreement included anticipated additional healthcare costs for four refugees, relating to a variety of treatments including for rheumatology appointments and two knee replacement operations. The costs were expected to come to £21,590.

⁶⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf

to ensure that the providers were quickly informed if there was a problem, for example if a planned arrival was delayed.

- 7.28** Gateway providers confirmed that working relationships with the Gateway Team were good. One described it as “fabulous ... They are responsive, clear and accessible”. Another said that “their willingness and preparedness to talk to us has improved ... it is becoming more of a partnership rather than a commissioner and deliverer.”

Management information and data

- 7.29** Gateway providers told inspectors they believed the Home Office was gathering data and information about resettled Gateway refugees for analytical purposes. However, inspectors saw no evidence that the Home Office had made any meaningful use of this data and information, including about children’s education, beyond using it to satisfy the conditions for Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) funding.⁶⁷
- 7.30** Based on the responses received to requests for data, it appeared that Resettlement Operations itself collected minimal management information (MI) about the efficiency and effectiveness of the Gateway process. While the Home Office Executive Committee⁶⁸ received monthly reports of the number of resettled VPRS refugees against the planned trajectory (to meet the target of 20,000 by 2020), there was no requirement for Resettlement Operations to produce monthly or quarterly statistics or reports about Gateway.
- 7.31** The Gateway Team recorded reference numbers, dates of birth, language(s), and nationality of arrivals, but the data was not broken down by local authority and Resettlement Operations could not provide inspectors with details of “wait times” between acceptance onto the programme and arrival in the UK broken down by month, host country, nationality, local authority, and group size, commenting that “we do not hold this data in a reportable format” as it is “not recorded on our systems”.
- 7.32** In order to manage their cases, caseworkers “look at the internal spreadsheets and keep track that way”. Inspectors were told that the primary means of recording progress was a handwritten white board. Senior management reported that data to support AMIF funding was recorded on a “big spreadsheet” but that “nothing has been done with it yet”. Inspectors were also told that “because Gateway is ending” management had decided that resources should not be spent on data collection, however this did not explain why the data collection issue had not been addressed well before 2019.

Continuous improvement and learning from Gateway

- 7.33** Apart from increasing the annual quota from 500 to 750 in 2008 and extending grant funding to ESOL from 2016, inspectors were unable to identify any material changes to the Gateway scheme since its launch in 2004.
- 7.34** However, there had been some process improvements. After a poor start in terms of local authority support, the model of grant-funded providers with the flexibility to sub-contract local delivery partners had enabled Gateway to reach (slightly exceed) its annual quota since 2015-

⁶⁷ See https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/asylum-migration-integration-fund_en

In March 2020, in response to inspectors’ request for evidence, Resettlement Operations wrote: “On behalf of Home Office Analysis and insight we are currently collecting monitoring data on all refugees who have arrived in the UK through Gateway from July 2017 to March 2019 however this process is not expected to conclude until later in 2020. This information is required to meet EU reporting requirements as a condition of AMIF funding.”

⁶⁸ Chaired by the Permanent Secretary and attended by all Home Office Directors General.

16 (with the exception of 2019-20). Also, from the comments made to inspectors, Gateway providers were generally content with how the programme was administered, apart from the not-insignificant matter of the funding being only for the first 12 months.

- 7.35** With regard to integration outcomes for Gateway refugees, in 2009 and 2011 the Home Office commissioned studies which identified key issues, such as the importance of English language training and the limited opportunities for paid employment. However, there were no follow-up evaluations until 2017, when one was required to justify EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) funding and when researchers found that the data required for a meaningful evaluation of outcomes for Gateway refugees had not been collected. In light of the earlier reviews, it is difficult to understand why this was not done, even allowing for the absence of a bespoke IT system.
- 7.36** Resettlement Operations staff told inspectors that the Home Office’s experience of Gateway provided the foundation for the VPRS. It was a source of pride for the Gateway Team, and one caseworker commented that it was “nice knowing that VPRS was modelled on Gateway – it’s good to know its success came about from Gateway.”
- 7.37** Prior to designing the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Resettlement Operations staff were involved in numerous workshops and Gateway providers and delivery partners were interviewed to ensure that further lessons from Gateway and the other existing schemes were captured. The Gateway workshop was: “really good – they actively sought contributions from staff and the spotlight was on Gateway, what worked well, what didn’t. We are trying to replicate the good bits and understand the global needs of the new refugees”.

8. Inspection findings: Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

VPRS resettlements 2015-2020

- 8.1** The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) was launched in 2014. Prior to September 2015, when the Prime Minister announced an expansion of the Scheme and stated that it was the government's intention to resettle 20,000 refugees by 2020, 239 refugees had been resettled through VPRS. The 20,000 target was in addition to the 239 and the first 1,000 were resettled by the end of 2015.
- 8.2** By mid-March 2020, UNHCR had referred 23,691 refugees to the Home Office through VPRS. Of these, the Home Office had resettled 19,768 individuals since September 2015⁶⁹ and was on track to meet the target of 20,000 by the end of April 2020.⁷⁰

Figure 8
Refugees resettled through VPRS since September 2015⁷¹

Quarter	Number resettled in quarter	Cumulative total
2015 Q3	13	13
2015 Q4	1,091	1,104
2016 Q1	511	1,615
2016 Q2	1 047	2,662
2016 Q3	1,513	4,175
2016 Q4	1,292	5,467
2017 Q1	1,601	7,068
2017 Q2	1,228	8,296
2017 Q3	859	9,155
2017 Q4	1,151	10,306
2018 Q1	1,104	11,410
2018 Q2	1,202	12,612
2018 Q3	1,110	13,722
2018 Q4	984	14,706

69 Of the 23,691, 2,074 referred refugees had either withdrawn from the process or been rejected by the Home Office, and 39 had died.

70 In 2017, ICIBI was told that ministers had instructed the Home Office that the 20,000 target should be reached by May 2020.

71 The data in Figure 8 was provided to inspectors by the Home Office Performance Reporting & Analysis Unit (PRAU). In its factual accuracy response, the Home Office pointed out that the figures do not match official published statistics. From 2018 Q2 the figures match (both the quarterly figures and the cumulative total). However, between 2015 Q3 and 2018 Q1 some of the quarterly figures in Figure 8 vary from the published figures as the data was captured at a different point. The biggest variation is +/- 7.

Quarter	Number resettled in quarter	Cumulative total
2019 Q1	1,032	15,738
2019 Q2	1,074	16,812
2019 Q3	1,201	18,013
2019 Q4	1,101	19,114
2020 Q1	654	19,768

8.3 However, on 17 March 2020, UNHCR and IOM temporarily suspended all resettlements as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷² At that point, there were 497 refugees whose flights to the UK had been scheduled, which would have seen VPRS achieve its 20,000 target.

Profile of resettled refugees

8.4 Since July 2017, VPRS had been open to all nationalities displaced by the Syrian conflict. However, Syrian nationals accounted for 19,686 (99.6%) of the 19,768 arrivals. Of the remaining 82, 52 were non-Syrian nationals (the majority Iraqi) and 30 were Stateless.⁷³

8.5 All of those referred to the Home Office for resettlement through VPRS were being hosted in the Middle East or North Africa, almost half of them (9,564) in Lebanon. The first language for almost all (98%) of them was Arabic.

Vulnerabilities

8.6 UNHCR used its “Vulnerability Assessment Framework”⁷⁴ to decide whether a refugee should be referred to the Home Office for VPRS. ICIBI’s 2018 inspection of VPRS noted that:

“The Home Office’s recording and monitoring of the reasons for referral, and for withdrawals and rejections, lacked depth and shade. The refugees referred to the Scheme by UNHCR typically had multiple vulnerabilities. However, the Home Office recorded only the primary criterion cited by UNHCR, casting doubt on the value of the Home Office data.”

8.7 Inspectors found in 2020 that the Home Office had continued to record only the primary resettlement submission category identified by UNHCR – see Figure 9. On that basis, the percentages for the top two reasons for referral showed little change from those noted at the end of 2017.

72 The last resettlement flight to the UK arrived on 12 March 2020. On 17 March 2020, UNHCR and IOM announced the temporary suspension of resettlements as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e7103034/iom-unhcr-announce-temporary-suspension-resettlement-travel-refugees.html>

73 According to either the 1951 or 1954 Convention.

74 See ‘An Inspection of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (August 2017 – January 2018)’. The Vulnerability Assessment Framework uses the same criteria as UNHCR’s Resettlement Submission Categories, although the descriptions of the vulnerabilities differ slightly.

Figure 9

UNHCR's primary resettlement submission category for VPRS referrals according to Home Office records

Primary eligibility category	Individuals	% at 12 March 2020	% at end 2017
Legal and/or physical protection need	8,126	41.1%	41.3%
Survivors of violence and/or torture or violence	7,689	38.9%	39.7%
Children and adolescents at risk	1,948	9.9%	7.6%
Medical needs	999	5.1%	4.4%
Women and girls at risk	919	4.6%	6.4%
Family reunification	70	0.4%	0.5%
Lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions	11	>0.1%	0.1%
Total (including 6 "Unknown")	19,768		

Complexity

8.8 As part of the case consideration process, the Home Office attached complexity markers to refugees referred by UNHCR. This was done by a VPRS Senior Caseworker (SCW) and was covered in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for SCWs.

8.9 There were three categories. See Figure 10.

Figure 10

Categories of complexity

Category	Description
1	Non-Complex Case: those with no special needs or requirements
2a	Mobility Issues: people who are wheelchair users or who have other disabilities including missing limbs or who have restricted movement
2b	Serious Medical: people who require surgery or ongoing medical treatment for life threatening conditions (e.g. cancer, dialysis)
2c	Psychological: people suffering from mental illness or those where a need for immediate psychological support is specified in the HAP
2d	Special Educational Needs: children with disabilities or learning difficulties
3	Large Families: family groups made up of 7 or more people

8.10 Approximately a third of all VPRS refugees who had been resettled had a Category 2 complexity marker. Of these, 19% were categorised 2a; 25% 2b; 28% 2c; and, 28% 2d. In 2017, Home Office staff had told inspectors that complex cases were difficult to match with suitable accommodation, which meant they typically took longer to resettle. In 2020, inspectors were told that Category 3 was no longer used.

Family size

- 8.11** Home Office senior management told inspectors it was recognised that the larger the refugee family the more likely it would be vulnerable in the host country due to the number of children requiring support. Many larger families also have members with health problems. However, resettling larger families had been challenging.
- 8.12** In November 2015 the Home Office had issued an instruction to UNHCR to refer only “up to case size 6”, as it was unable to find suitable accommodation for larger families.⁷⁵
- 8.13** In 2017, the majority of local authorities and Strategic Migration Partnerships involved with VPRS who responded to an ICIBI online survey cited “sourcing suitable and affordable accommodation” as their single greatest challenge. Finding suitable accommodation for larger families was seen as problematic. To put this in context, according to the local authority housing statistics for England for 2017-18, published in March 2018,⁷⁶ properties with four or more bedrooms made up just 2.81% of the social rented stock (excluding affordable rent properties, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and hostel bed spaces). See Figure 11.

Figure 11

Local authority housing statistics for England for 2017-18

Property size	Stock	
Bedsit	38,486	2.45%
One bedroom	455, 059	28.96%
Two bedrooms	526, 360	33.50%
Three bedrooms	506, 999	32.27%
Four bedrooms	39, 772	2.53%
Five bedrooms	3,512	0.22%
Six or more bedrooms	882	0.06%
Total	1,571,070	99.99%

- 8.14** The 2018 inspection report noted that Home Office data indicated that 499 families of five or more persons had been resettled through VPRS “prior to the introduction of the Benefits Cap on 6 November 2016”.⁷⁷ At the time, the VPRS Allocations Team told inspectors that “in London and the South East the cost of accommodation meant that some local authorities were unable to take family groups of 5 or 6.”
- 8.15** The 2018 report recommended that the Home Office should “produce (and update as necessary) the Scheme’s guidance documents, ensuring they are comprehensive, coherent

⁷⁵ In its factual accuracy response, the Home Office commented that: “referrals above size 6 are considered on a case by case and a number have been received and accepted since then. As at 31 March 2020, there had been ten referrals of case size 7 and above under VCRS and 72 under VPRS since November 2015.”

⁷⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/773079/Local_Authority_Housing_Statistics_England_year_ending_March_2018.pdf

⁷⁷ The Benefits Cap, rolled out in November 2016, introduced a cap on state benefits for single claimants and for families. In London the cap was £15,410 for single claimants and £23,000 for families, and outside London it was £13,400 for single claimants and £20,000 for families. See <https://www.gov.uk/benefit-cap> In addition, changes to Universal Credit meant that families of 5 and 6 arriving after 6 April 2017 were entitled to Child Tax Credit for the first 2 children only, unless exceptions applied. In 2017, twelve local authorities told ICIBI that the Benefits Cap was acting as a disincentive to them offering larger properties for resettled refugees, as families of 5 and 6 found it impossible to manage on the capped income. Local authorities stated that they would take families of 6 only if there was “a strong likelihood of accessing disability-related benefits”, as they “did not wish to see families brought to the UK to live in poverty.”

and drive towards consistent ‘best practice’”, basing the latter on “monitoring, analysis and evaluation, and calling on the expertise of others as appropriate”. The recommendation specified a number of areas where this should be done. These included “Treatment of ‘exceptional’ cases, for example families of more than six, and cases deemed “too complex to be considered on paper”.

8.16 The Home Office responded that it did not accept that there were “no processes in place on how to deal with referrals of families over size 6 and those which are too complex or difficult to deal with on paper”. However, it did accept that “these could be clearer and more comprehensive so will make sure this is immediately addressed in the standard operating procedures”.

8.17 Since the 2018 inspection, the Allocations Team’s Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) had been amended. Under ‘Dealing with family size cases at 6 or above’ these stated:

“We accept families of case size six and below. This limit has been imposed due to restrictions on available accommodation. However, we can still consider larger families if the family composition is such that the family can be split over two or more properties. If the case size is over six, you should check that UNHCR has confirmed (usually under section 7 of the RRF)⁷⁸ that the family is willing to be split over two or more properties. This usually applies where there are adult children in the case. If all children are minors, then the case cannot be split. Such cases should be discussed with casework and allocation managers before the case is considered as it may have to be rejected if suitable accommodation is not available.”

8.18 The SOP also covered families that increased to over six “as a result of pregnancy or a new birth at the casework stage”, which would mean asking UNHCR to withdraw the case if suitable accommodation could not be found or the family was unwilling to be split over two properties.

8.19 Management Information (MI) collected by Resettlement Operations indicated that, between September 2015 and March 2020, 1,729 individuals had withdrawn from VPRS. The categories used to record withdrawals included “eligibility criteria not met” and “doesn’t wish to settle in the UK”. “family size” was not a category, so it was not possible to tell how often this was the reason.

8.20 The Home Office provided data for refugees resettled through VPRS, plus those who had been referred by UNHCR and accepted but had yet to be resettled, broken down by family size. See Figure 12.⁷⁹

Figure 12
Breakdown of VPRS families by family size as at 31 March 2020

Family size	Resettled families	% of resettled family groups	Number of resettled refugees	Families in WiP	% of family groups in WiP	Number of refugees in WiP
1	417	8.55%	417	47	8.67%	47
2	340	6.97%	680	60	11.07%	120
3	657	13.47%	1,971	106	19.56%	318
4	1,306	26.78%	5,224	156	28.78%	624
5	1,504	31.84%	7,520	93	17.16%	465
6	615	12.61%	3,690	68	12.55%	408
7	31	0.64%	217	12	2.21%	84
8	5	0.10%	40	0	0	0
9	1	0.02%	9	0	0	0
Totals	4,876		19,768	542		2,066

8.21 As Figure 12 shows, over half (57%) of the resettled family groups have comprised four or five persons, and this has accounted for almost two-thirds (64.22%) of resettled VPRS refugees.

8.22 ICIBI’s 2018 inspection report noted that the Home Office had resettled 499 families of five or more members prior to the introduction of the Benefits Cap on November 2016. At the time, a number of local authorities reported that “the Benefits Cap was acting as a disincentive to them offering larger properties for resettled refugees, as families of five and six found it impossible to manage on the capped income”. Local authorities stated that they would take families of six only if there was “a strong likelihood of accessing disability-related benefits”. According to Figure 12, between 6 November 2016 and 3 March 2020 a further 1,657 families of five or more members were resettled through VPRS.

⁷⁹ The data was as at 3 March 2020, prior to the last arrivals before the temporary suspension by UNHCR/IOM. When asked in July 2020, the Home Office was unable to provide figures for the WiP as at 12 March 2020, the date of the last resettlement flight to the UK “due to preparations for the transition to the UK Resettlement Scheme which were undertaken during the period that arrivals were suspended.”

Resettlement locations

8.23 As at the beginning of March 2020, 322 local authorities (roughly 80% of the total⁸⁰) had resettled VPRS refugees. This compared with 275 local authorities at the end of 2017. The local authorities were spread throughout all regions of the UK, with Scotland having resettled the highest number of refugees (3,238). See Figure 13.

Figure 13
VPRS resettled refugees to 3 March 2020 broken down by region and by percentage of the regional population according to Office of National Statistics data

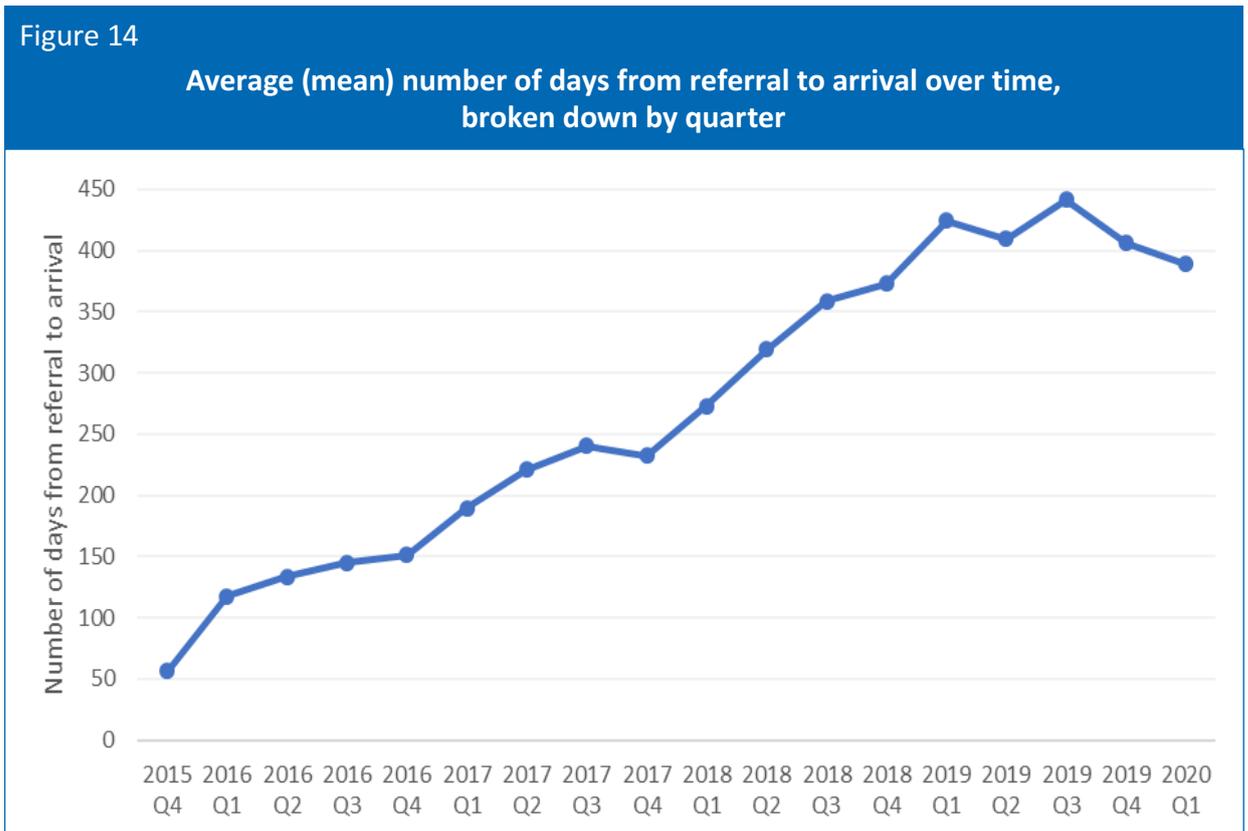
Region	Number resettled	Population	Percentage
Scotland	3,263	5,404,700	0.060%
South East England	1,945	8,724,700	0.022%
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,898	5,336,192	0.036%
West Midlands	1,825	5,713,000	0.032%
Northern Ireland	1,816	1,862,100	0.098%
North West England	1,745	7,052,000	0.025%
North East England	1,568	2,657,909	0.059%
South West England	1,541	5,339,600	0.029%
Wales	1,308	3,113,000	0.042%
London	1,004	8,908,081	0.011%
East of England	957	5,907,300	0.016%
East Midlands	898	4,804,149	0.019%
Total	19,768	64,822,731	0.030%

Resettlement timelines

8.24 The 2018 inspection report noted that the average time taken for a refugee who had been accepted onto VPRS to be resettled in the UK was increasing. This was a consequence of creating a “front-loaded” pipeline of referrals in order to ensure that the 20,000 target was met. Inspectors were told that ministers had set a deadline of May 2020 and that between Q2 and Q3 2018 the Home Office would have enough referrals in its pipeline to achieve the target, allowing for a percentage (10%) of withdrawals and rejections and giving the Home Office time in the final months to resettle any particularly difficult cases.

⁸⁰ In May 2020, there were 343 local authorities in England (made up of county councils, district councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs), 22 unitary authorities in Wales and 32 in Scotland, and 11 local government districts in Northern Ireland.

- 8.25** In April 2016, the Home Office had revised the resettlement process, extending the timescale from referral by UNHCR to resettlement in the UK from eight to 13 weeks, reasoning that this would allow refugees longer to prepare for their departure. It described this new timescale as “indicative” and the minimum time required.
- 8.26** In fact, most resettlements have taken significantly longer. In the first quarter after the extended timescale was introduced (2016 Q2 April – June) the average was 19 weeks, and by 2017 Q3 it had reached 35 weeks. The data provided for this inspection showed that the average time taken had continued to rise steadily. See Figure 14.



- 8.27** Since 2018 Q4, the average time taken had remained at over a year, peaking in 2019 Q3 at 442 days (63 weeks). Inspectors could not identify any relationship between the time taken and the numbers resettled. Between 2017 Q4 and 2019 Q4, the total number of refugees resettled each quarter remained broadly similar, except in 2018 Q4. The average over this period was c. 1,100 per quarter. See Figure 15.⁸¹

⁸¹ The averages for 2016 Q2 to 2017 Q4 are different from those quoted in the 2018 inspection report, though not materially. The 2018 inspection report contained the following figures (days/weeks): 2016 Q2 130/19; 2016 Q3 136/19; 2016 Q4 166/24; 2017 Q1 195/28; 2017 Q2 229/33; 2017 Q3 247/35; 2017 Q4 244/35.

Figure 15

**Average days taken for refugees accepted onto VPRS
to be resettled in the UK from 2015 Q3 to 2020 Q1**

Quarter	Average time Days (Week)	Numbers resettled (Quarter)	Numbers resettled (Cumulative)
2015 Q3	216 (31)	13	13
2015 Q4	57 (9)	1,091	1,104
2016 Q1	118 (17)	511	1,615
2016 Q2	133 (19)	1,047	2,662
2016 Q3	145 (21)	1,513	4,175
2016 Q4	151 (22)	1,292	5,467
2017 Q1	190 (28)	1,601	7,068
2017 Q2	221 (32)	1,228	8,296
2017 Q3	240 (35)	859	9,155
2017 Q4	232 (34)	1,151	10,306
2018 Q1	273 (39)	1,104	11,410
2018 Q2	319 (46)	1,202	12,612
2018 Q3	359 (52)	1,110	13,722
2018 Q4	373 (54)	984	14,706
2019 Q1	425 (61)	1,032	15,738
2019 Q2	410 (59)	1,074	16,812
2019 Q3	442 (64)	1,201	18,013
2019 Q4	406 (58)	1,101	19,114
2020 Q1	383 (55)	654	19,768

- 8.28** Resettlement Operations senior management told inspectors that “there is no minimum or maximum wait time, everyone will be resettled eventually” adding that “the UK is quicker than many other countries”.
- 8.29** The Senior Caseworker SOP noted that: “A reason for rejection could also be where Allocations cannot find suitable accommodation to meet the family’s needs. However, every attempt must be made to find suitable accommodation and rejection should be as a last resort”. From the data provided, inspectors were unable to determine whether any referred refugees had been rejected for this reason. In September 2020, the Home Office told inspectors that it had not to date rejected a family referred by UNHCR on these grounds.

UNHCR Resettlement Priority Level

- 8.30** UNHCR attached a “Resettlement Priority Level” to each referral to the Home Office.⁸² See Figure 16. UNHCR staff were encouraged to “Minimize the time between identification and submission so that normal and urgent cases don’t become emergency cases.”

Figure 16

UNHCR Resettlement Priority Levels	
Emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security and/or medical condition requires immediate removal; • Ideally, seven-day maximum between the submission of an emergency case and the refugee’s departure.
Urgent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serious medical risks or other vulnerabilities requiring expedited resettlement within six weeks of submission; • Ideally, cases to be submitted within two weeks of identification.
Normal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of cases, without immediate medical, social or security concerns which would merit expedited processing.

- 8.31** The Home Office did not accept “Emergency” cases through VPRS or through its other resettlement schemes. However, the June 2019 ministerial statement announcing the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), planned to replace VPRS (along with Gateway and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme), included: “A new process for emergency resettlement will also be developed, allowing the UK to respond quickly to instances of heightened protection need, providing a faster route to protection where lives are at risk.”⁸³
- 8.32** According to Home Office data, 1,316 (6.7%) VPRS arrivals had been prioritised as “Urgent” by UNHCR. VPRS caseworker guidance stated: “You should look out for any cases marked as URGENT. Urgent cases should be prioritised for consideration.” Staff told inspectors that “Urgent” referrals went to the top of the “Allocations OneList”, a spreadsheet used to match refugees with available accommodation.
- 8.33** Home Office data showed that the average number of days from referral to arrival in the UK for both “Urgent” and “Normal” cases had increased over the lifetime of VPRS (excluding 2020 Q1). The average for “Urgent” cases began at 100+ days in 2016, already more than double the “six weeks” noted in the UNHCR guidance, and by 2019 stood at 300+ days. The overall average for “Urgent” cases since 2015 was 220 days, compared with 306 days for “Normal” cases. This included 227 refugees marked as “Urgent” by UNHCR who were resettled in under 100 days (average 68 days).

⁸² <https://www.unhcr.org/558bff849.pdf>

⁸³ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-06-17/HCWS1627/>

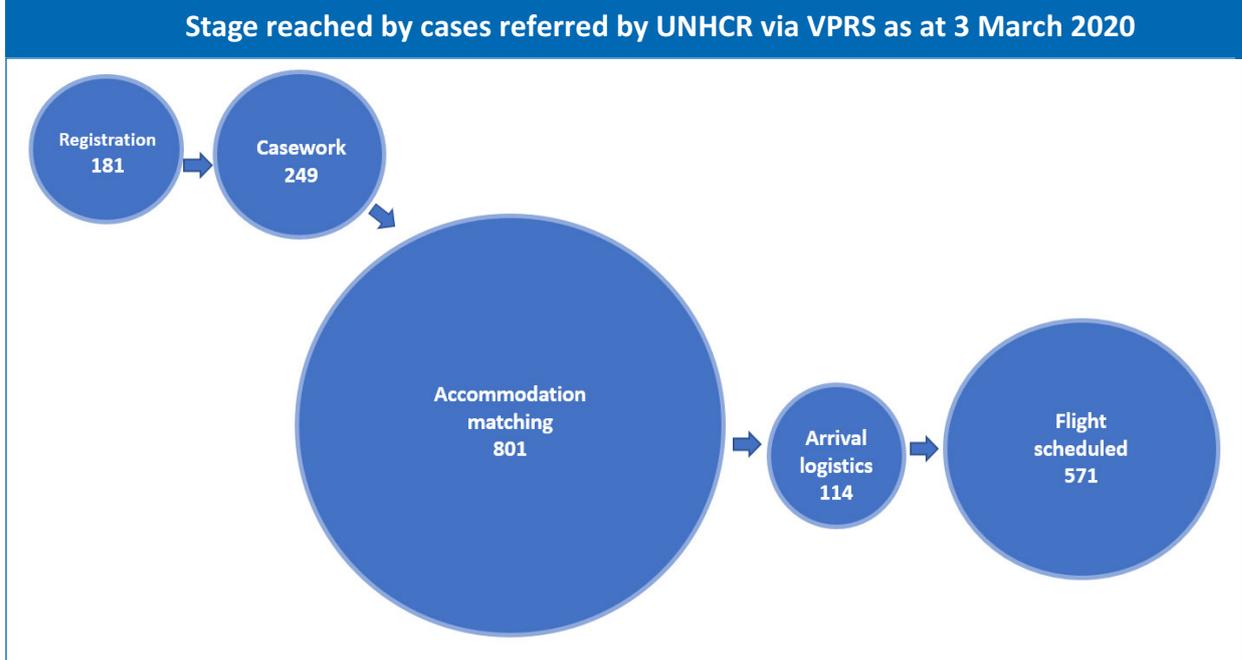
Figure 17

Average number of days from referral to resettlement for “Normal” and “Urgent” cases		
Year	“Normal”	“Urgent”
2015	58	N/A
2016	141	121
2017	219	175
2018	342	216
2019	432	310
2020	388	278

“Work in Progress”

8.34 As at 3 March 2020, 1,916 refugees had been referred to the Home Office for resettlement through VPRS and were in its “Work in Progress” (WiP) queue. The 1,916 were at different stages of the process. See Figure 18.

Figure 18



8.35 Of the 1,916 in the WiP: the 181 at the registration stage and the 249 at the casework stage had yet to be accepted by the Senior Caseworker; the 801 at the accommodation matching stage had been accepted and the Allocations Team was now responsible for finding a local authority that would take them; the 114 at the arrival logistics stage and the 571⁸⁴ with a flight scheduled had been found accommodation and, in normal circumstances, would arrive within a matter of weeks.

84 Including 74 on charter flights.

- 8.36** In 2017, the Home Office had explained that one reason for “front-loading” the selection of refugees for resettlement through VPRS (by the end of 2017, 16,981 refugees had been referred by UNHCR) was to give it time in the final months of the Scheme to resettle any particularly difficult cases. However, inspectors saw no evidence that the refugees resettled in 2020 Q1, and those with flights scheduled at the beginning of March, had more complex needs. Nor had anything changed in the final months of the Scheme to make it more likely that local authorities would be able to accommodate and support “particularly difficult cases”.
- 8.37** In early 2020, Resettlement Operations senior management told inspectors that “front-loading” the referrals and creating a large “Work in Progress” queue had made it easier to find a family that matched what local authorities were able to accommodate: “a larger WiP means we can provide local authorities with what they want”. This had enabled the Home Office to stay on track for its 20,000 target. But, the breakdown of the WiP at the beginning of March 2020 showed that some refugees referred in 2017 had still not been resettled.
- 8.38** Figure 19 shows the number of refugees referred since the beginning of 2017 who were not resettled by 3 March 2020, broken down by quarter, with the running total and the number in each quarter that were prioritised as “Urgent” by UNHCR, the number identified as “Complex” by the Home Office and the numbers that were both “Urgent” and “Complex”. In 414 instances, the Home Office had yet to determine whether the case was “Complex”. While 357 (86%) of these were from 2019 Q4 and 2020 Q1, others stretched back to 2017 Q4.

Figure 19
Breakdown of referred refugees since 2017 not resettled by 3 March 2020

Quarter	Quarterly figures				Cumulative Total
	Total	Urgent	Complex	Both	
2017 Q1	3	0	3	0	3
2017 Q2	0	0	0	0	3
2017 Q3	6	0	6	0	9
2017 Q4	69	9	42	9	78
2018 Q1	55	3	22	3	133
2018 Q2	111	6	28	6	244
2018 Q3	93	5	65	10	337
2018 Q4	181	18	50	4	518
2019 Q1	179	13	78	7	697
2019 Q2	277	28	139	28	974
2019 Q3	365	34	131	26	1,339
2019 Q4	394	51	90	23	1,733
2020 Q1	183	17	18	10	1,916
Total	1,916	184	672	126	1,916

Migration Health Assessments

- 8.39** In 2017, half of the 72 local authorities who responded to ICIBI’s online survey said they felt that the Migration Health Assessments (MHA) they received did not provide sufficient medical information, in most cases citing inaccurate information or missed, understated or underplayed medical conditions. In a number of cases, the issue was mobility, especially whether the refugee required ground-floor accommodation.
- 8.40** Inspectors had visited an IOM clinic in Amman and had reviewed over 100 MHA forms. The facilities at the former were excellent and the staff highly-skilled. While some of the MHAs inspectors reviewed were not clear and contained contradictory statements, most appeared thorough and contained specific recommendations regarding what sort of accommodation and support the refugee(s) required.
- 8.41** The Home Office had observed that the time between an MHA being completed and a refugee arriving in the UK could mean that their condition had changed. There had also been some misunderstandings on the part of IOM medical staff about the sort of accommodation that would be provided, which had affected assessments of mobility and the need for ground-floor accommodation.
- 8.42** The Home Office had provided feedback to IOM, but ICIBI concluded that it could do more, working with IOM and UK healthcare professionals to ensure that MHAs captured everything that local authorities needed to know. This formed part of a recommendation concerned with promulgating “best practice”. In August 2018, the Home Office informed ICIBI that this recommendation had been closed in respect of MHAs.
- 8.43** The Home Office had visited IOM in host countries along with Occupational Health specialists to provide doctors with a better understanding of the requirements of Occupational Health assessments, and the reality of the housing stock in the UK and the adaptations that were possible.
- 8.44** The MHA form had been improved and the Home Office had developed a ‘mobility form’ to attach to it that provided further details.⁸⁵ The Allocations Team expected local authorities to have an Occupational Therapist review these forms prior to signing off a property as suitable. The Home Office had also encouraged communication between local authorities and IOM doctors.
- 8.45** Nonetheless, local authorities still had issues with MHAs. For example, a number commented that the consideration of mental health was inadequate, so local authorities were unprepared in terms of providing the support refugees needed.
- 8.46** Inspectors were told in February 2020 that the Home Office had begun work on a pilot with Welsh Health Specialised Services (WHSSC) to develop a “health pathway” referral process. Under this process, the Allocations Team would refer refugee families where one or more member has a serious medical condition to WHSSC. WHSSC would then consider with their Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) whether treatment was possible in Wales with the resources/facilities available. Once this had been established, the Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP) would work with local authorities in the CCG’s catchment area to source suitable accommodation.

⁸⁵ The ‘mobility form’ is also used for VCRS cases, where the proportion with mobility issues is higher.

Pre-departure preparations: “cultural orientation”

- 8.47** Once suitable accommodation and support were confirmed, the case was passed to the Arrivals Team to liaise with UNHCR/IOM to arrange the arrival logistics.
- 8.48** In 2017, IOM told ICIBI that it had argued that the two-day “cultural orientation” workshops it ran for all refugees aged 14 and over who had been accepted onto the Scheme were not long enough, but the Home Office had resisted extending them. Efforts to get more detailed information from local authorities about what refugees could expect to find on arrival in the UK had met with mixed results. Meanwhile, local authorities and their delivery partners reported that they were having to manage some unrealistic expectations from the refugees they had resettled.
- 8.49** The 2018 report concluded that, given refugees were waiting at that time on average 35 weeks from acceptance on the Scheme to resettlement, a two-day cultural orientation workshop delivered two weeks prior to departure appeared to be a case of “too little, too late”, especially as refugees were arriving in the UK with little or no English.
- 8.50** The 2018 report recommended that the Home Office should:
- “Explore with IOM, and other ‘upstream’ partners if appropriate, how to make more effective use of the period between a refugee’s acceptance onto the Scheme and their departure from the ‘host’ country, to improve their integration ‘journey’ (for example, providing pre-departure English language tuition), to manage expectations and improve the geographical matching process, and to reduce anxieties while awaiting a departure date.”
- 8.51** The Home Office accepted this recommendation stating that:
- “The Department will consider whether there are any changes that could be made to make more effective use of the time between a refugee’s acceptance onto the scheme and their resettlement in the UK. Implementation of any changes, however, will depend on the establishment of a credible evidence base for changing the current process and timescales as well as an assessment of the benefits of any changes, which would need to outweigh any additional costs. The Department will review the feasibility of options to help reduce the anxieties of those waiting for an arrival date.”
- 8.52** In July 2019, Resettlement Operations had reviewed cultural orientation with UNHCR and IOM, taking account of the views of refugees. The review had looked at nine elements of the cultural orientation (CO) process:
- Trainers – ensuring that trainers had regular opportunities to update their knowledge of the UK in order to be able to answer refugees’ questions
 - Length – addressing stakeholders’ concerns that CO would be more effective if it was longer
 - Formats – refugees favoured visual formats and wanted to see more videos and pictures
 - Resources – trainers felt they needed more resources to deliver CO, such as video testimonies from resettled refugees, and more about wellbeing and mental health
 - Sign off to share the pre-departure CO curriculum with local authorities – stakeholders advocated that local authorities should receive a copy of the “Welcome to the UK” handbook so they were aware of what information refugees received prior to departure

- CO content – refugees wanted it to be balanced, including the negatives, such as the difficulties of learning English, finding employment, housing, and NHS waiting times
- Information about the local area – refugees wanted more information specific to the local area where they were to be resettled
- ESOL⁸⁶ – exploring the options for pre-departure language training
- More tailored information for young adult refugees (19-25) around education and employment

8.53 The outcomes from this exercise included: a three-day “Train the Trainer” event in 2019; the extension of the cultural orientation workshop from two to three days; development of a series of new films shown during the workshop. The Home Office had also intended making its “Welcome to the UK” guide available online, but informed inspectors in September 2020 that this had not yet been done.

8.54 Regarding ESOL training pre-departure, in mid-November 2019, Resettlement Operations wrote:

“We have further explored possibilities around English language early interventions and concluded that, at present, the logistical challenges of providing this service in refugee host countries are prohibitive. Therefore, we are currently focusing our efforts on post-arrival interventions to test hypotheses on content and delivery models that best meet the early integration needs of refugees.”

8.55 In September 2020, the Home Office provided further detail. It reported that:

“We used our position as chair of the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement in 2019 to host an event on pre-departure language training. This represents a significant commitment by Home Office to sharing best practice internationally and exploring opportunities to collaborate. It didn’t lead to opportunities as we’d hoped because other countries had come to the same conclusions as us regarding feasibility at the time. Therefore, we concluded that our findings were in line with language training offered by other host countries.

At the time of our research this area was innovative, so we were trying to understand both the feasibility and the potential impact of pre-departure language training. For this reason, much of our evidence we gathered via conversations with stakeholders and documents they shared included a great deal of commercially sensitive detail about specific products and delivery models already existing in the market. The Home Office is therefore not able to share all the details of this.

We’re conscious that Covid has driven change in the availability of digital platforms so we’re working with other government departments and with our regional ESOL coordinators to explore current offerings and we’re open to looking at this again at an appropriate time.”

8.56 Overall, the Home Office was slow to act in response to the recommendation to make better use of the pre-departure period and the extension of the cultural orientation workshop from August 2019 and revision of booklets came too late to benefit the majority of the VPRS 20,000. However, it remains equally relevant to the new UK Resettlement Scheme. Based on the

86 English to Speakers of Other Languages

evidence provided, the Home Office was too easily convinced that pre-departure ESOL training was neither feasible nor worthwhile.

Funding

8.57 The funding available to local authorities and delivery partners to provide support and services to resettled VPRS refugees was tapered from years one to five. See Figure 20.

Figure 20

Tariff payment to local authorities per VPRS refugee	
Year	Amount
1	£8,520
2	£5,000
3	£3,700
4	£2,300
5	£1,000
Total⁸⁷	£20,520

8.58 The annual amounts have remained the same since 2015. The first-year payment was accompanied with funding instructions detailing the services and support local authorities were required to provide.⁸⁸ NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)⁸⁹ also received £2,600 per resettled refugee to cover the cost of healthcare.⁹⁰ In addition, £850 was provided for each adult refugee in the first year for English Language tuition, plus £600 to cover the costs of childcare incurred to enable parents to attend classes.⁹¹ And, there was an additional education tariff (for year one only) for each child aged 3-18 years.⁹²

8.59 Local authorities were able to “pool” the money received for each of the refugees they were resettling and use it to fund wider services for refugees in the local authority area.⁹³

“Exceptional costs”

8.60 Local authorities were also able to apply for funding to cover “exceptional costs”, for example to modifications to a property (up to £30,000) or the purchase of accessibility and mobility equipment, or “void costs” for rental payments where accommodation had been secured but there were delays in the resettlement process.

87 £20,000 in Northern Ireland “as social care element paid directly to Department of Health”.

88 Local authorities are required to provide each refugee with a cash payment of £200 on arrival to cover immediate support costs prior to registration and receipt of welfare benefits. Funding Instructions are issued each year.

89 CCGs exist in NHS England, in Scotland they are known as Health Boards.

90 This compared to £600 for Gateway refugees. Funding instruction for CCGs – https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/802642/Healthcare_FI_-_2019-2020_-_final_.pdf

91 Further guidance is found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/631369/170711_Syrian_Resettlement_Updated_Fact_Sheet_final.pdf

92 The tariff was the same as for the Gateway scheme: £4,500 per child aged 5-18, £2,250 per child aged 3 or 4.

93 The factual accuracy draft contained the opening phrase “After the first year”, reflecting inspectors’ understanding, The Home Office requested that this should be deleted, stating: LAs can pool the funding that they receive from Year one, while not explicitly stated it is implied in Section three, paragraph 3.8 of the Funding Instruction – “The Recipient shall be free to determine how best to utilise the Funding...” From discussions with local authorities, it appeared that this was not well-understood and needed to be more clearly spelled out in the Funding Instructions.

- 8.61** The 2018 inspection report noted that the Home Office had budgeted £36 million for “exceptional costs” for the duration of VPRS, but that by the end of 2017 just £2.4 million had been claimed by local authorities against an allocated budget of £17.9 million. At the time, Home Office senior managers told inspectors that they had received fewer claims than expected but did not know why this was the case. Meanwhile, a quarter of the local authorities and Strategic Migration Partnerships that responded to the ICIBI’s online survey felt that the Scheme’s Funding Instructions were not clear, and that greater clarity and assurances about funding levels at the referral stage would encourage local authorities to accept higher numbers of complex cases.
- 8.62** The 2018 inspection report recommended that the Home Office should:
- “...produce (and update as necessary) the Scheme’s guidance documents, ensuring they are comprehensive, coherent and drive towards consistent ‘best practice’ [including] Financial Instructions for Local Authorities and the NHS, including use of tariff payments to ‘top up’ rents, claims for primary and secondary healthcare, and use of the ‘exceptional costs’ budgets.”
- 8.63** In “partially” accepting this recommendation, the Home Office stated that:
- “The local authority funding instruction sets clear expectations on what is expected of local authorities. We also have clear arrangements and documentation which sets out how Clinical Commissioning Groups and Public Health Boards will be funded for refugees in their respective areas. We conducted a review of year 1 finance processes and sought feedback from stakeholders on how to improve these. We will as far as possible clarify issues around, for example, exceptional costs but it is difficult to provide guidance which covers each scenario that might be raised. We will continue to deal with these on a case by case basis.”
- 8.64** The Home Office told inspectors that it considered this recommendation to be “closed”. However, a number of local authorities and NGOs told inspectors that they still found the guidance on funding, particularly in relation to “exceptional costs”, unclear and inadequate, and two local authorities were entirely unaware that funding existed for “exceptional costs”. They also felt there was a lack of clarity about the nature and purpose of funding provided to CCGs and Health Boards.
- 8.65** According to Home Office records, between 1 April 2018 and 3 March 2020 it received 136 applications for “exceptional costs” funding. A little over £1.23 million was paid to 51 local authorities and 18 Community Sponsorship groups. The applications were made in relation to 120 VPRS refugees and 16 refugees resettled through the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS).
- 8.66** The 18 Community Sponsorship groups claimed just £32,460.04 of the £1.23 million. One of these claims was in relation to a refugee with Special Educational Needs. The remainder were for “void costs”.⁹⁴
- 8.67** The local authority claims ranged from £86.62 to £82,769. The most paid to one local authority was £220,822.42, which comprised four claims, each of which related to costs incurred in relation to supporting Special Educational Needs and disability.

⁹⁴ Groups can claim six-eight weeks void property costs at LHA rates to cover the vacant property period from acceptance of the family to arrival. Further information on this can be found on the funding instruction issued by the Home Office: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/funding-instruction-on-uk-resettlement-programmes>

8.68 Figure 21 shows a breakdown of the types of claims and amounts paid.⁹⁵

Figure 21 "Exceptional costs" claims from 1 April 2018 to 3 March 2020	
Type of Claim ⁹⁶	Amount
Personal disability adaptations (scooter, wheelchair)	£8,043.00
Property disability adaptation	£38,980.09
"Void costs"	£127,400.04
Special Educational Needs	£672,161.97
Counselling	£827.40
Social care	£184,516.16
Childcare	£1,647.00
Travel	£2,425.52
Additional costs	£194,680.82
Total	£1,230,682.00

8.69 Based on the Home Office's figures, by March 2020 the total expenditure on "exceptional costs" was just short of £5 million,⁹⁷ or 14% of the original £36 million budget. In June 2020, the Home Office told inspectors:

"The original budget for exceptional costs was set at £36 million. The assumptions that were used to calculate this budget proved overly pessimistic in terms of what was required for this category of expenditure. Therefore funds were redistributed within the programme from the ringfenced total allocation and the budget revised down to £23.4 million. The VPR and VCRS will shortly come to an end in terms of arrivals but as exceptional costs can be claimed any time during the first year (and for social care issues over the course of 5 years) we are expecting to receive continuing claims under this budget for some time to come."

8.70 From the data provided, only 510 (15.5%) of the 322 local authorities who had resettled a VPRS refugee had made a claim for "exceptional costs". Twenty of these had made more than one claim. Five local authorities had made five or more claims: Bristol (10); Haringey (9); Aberdeenshire (7); Oxford (6); and Cardiff (5).

8.71 But the low take-up, together with the comments made to inspectors by local authorities about the lack of clarity, suggested that too little had been done to make local authorities aware of the availability of funding for "exceptional costs", how to access it, and what it could be used for. From the available information, inspectors were unable to estimate what effect this had had on the ability of local authorities to take more refugees or to accommodate them more quickly, or on the willingness of some local authorities to take part in VPRS.

95 In September 2020, in its factual accuracy response, the Home Office clarified that the exceptional costs figures came from "locally held data" and "did not show every claim made by every LA". It confirmed that, to 3 March 2020, 18 CSS groups had submitted a claim, and 51 (rather than 50) local authorities. Total expenditure since 2015-16 was "approximately £5 million. Home Office accounting does not easily identify exceptional costs paid".

96 The grouping of the types of claim was done by inspectors based on the original Home Office records. The latter used a range of descriptions for similar claims.

97 £4,959,217.

8.72 In September 2020, in its factual accuracy response, the Home Office provided further details about exceptional costs budgets and expenditure. Figures 22 and 23 show both for 2016-17 to 2019-20, split by VPRS and VCRS. The Home Office explained that where the budget was not spent in the year to which it was allocated, the money was not rolled over to the next year.

Figure 22

Exceptional costs budget (£) 2016-17 to 2019-20					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Totals
VPRS	15,052,174	3,811,313	1,789,508	1,789,500	22,442,495
VCRS	0	700,000	232,908	20,000	952,908
Totals	15,052,174	4,511,313	2,022,416	1,809,500	23,395,403

Figure 23

Exceptional costs expenditure (£) 2016-17 to 2019-20					
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Totals
VPRS	1,668,534	674,036	859,247	1,632,404	4,834,221
VCRS	0	3,494	65,711	55,791	124,996
Totals	1,668,534	677,530	924,958	1,688,195	4,959,217

8.73 The Home Office explained:

“When we bid for funding for the programme it was as part of the spending review process, whereby we bid for funding from April 2016 to March 2019. Within that bid we had to state what our annual requirement was which was based on an assumed arrival profile. Once our spending review bid was agreed that fixed our allocation for the spending review period and each year within it, giving no flexibility to move funds between years, or crucially, being able to carry forward any underspends in one year to the next.

The reduction in budget from 2016-17 to 2017-18 was where we re-allocated funds from exceptional costs to help fund the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme and the further reduction in 2018-19 in recognition of the still lower levels of expenditure than originally expected. All re-allocated funds were kept within the overall resettlement programmes.”

Working with others

8.74 Home Office VPRS staff told inspectors that they had a strong relationship with UNHCR. Inspectors spoke to UNHCR staff based in the UK who confirmed this. The latter spoke positively about VPRS, saying that it really was for “the most vulnerable”, since the UK did not impose any integration requirements on those being resettled, such as the potential to support themselves financially or the ability to speak English. They highlighted the UK’s success in resettling LGBTQI+ refugees as a particular strength of the VPRS programme. On a practical level, UNHCR, along with other organisations, needed resettlement countries to make long-term (“multi-year”) commitments, like VPRS, in order to be able to plan properly.

- 8.75** However, the UNHCR staff felt the Home Office could be more aware of issues affecting women and girls, such as domestic violence, and that it could do more to address inconsistencies in access to and quality of services provided by local authorities, including by sharing best practice.
- 8.76** The 2018 ICIBI inspection of VPRS had found that the Home Office’s liaison with local authorities was not working as intended, in particular in resolving difficulties with placing refugees who had specific needs. It noted that the Allocations Team and the Contact Officers (part of the Local Authority Engagement Team) appeared to misunderstand one another’s responsibilities. The report recommended that the Home Office should:
- “Maintain closer, more continuous contact with participating local authorities, either by refocusing Contact Officers or reinforcing the Allocations Team, so that time is not lost in turning firm offers of accommodation and support into arrivals.”
- 8.77** The Home Office “partially accepted” this recommendation. It stated:
- “The Department does not accept that time is lost turning firm offers into arrivals but will ensure that there is continued engagement between Contact Officers and the Allocations team to make sure that they are all clear on their roles and functions.”
- 8.78** In August 2018, the Home Office told inspectors that this recommendation had been “closed”, noting that fortnightly meetings between the Contact Officers and Allocations Team had been reintroduced.
- 8.79** Based on what local authorities told inspectors in 2019-20, relationships with the Home Office in respect of VPRS were generally good, though there was some criticism of parts of VPRS guidance. Most of the contact concerned finding places for refugee families and looking for solutions where a local authority offer did not quite match what was required. Home Office engagement with the local authority after this stage of the process was more limited, except in relation to funding.

Quality assurance, data capture and monitoring

- 8.80** Executive Officer (EO) caseworkers in Resettlement Operations were responsible for deciding whether a refugee referred by UNHCR for resettlement through VPRS met the requirements of the Scheme.
- 8.81** Until caseworkers were “accredited”, 100% of their decisions were checked and signed off by a Higher Executive Officer (HEO) Senior Caseworker (SCW). Caseworkers became accredited when managers were content that their work met the required standards of quality, accuracy and consistency. Once accredited, caseworkers could sign off their own decisions to accept a referral. However, where a caseworker or SCW was not satisfied that a refugee referred by UNHCR met the eligibility requirements of VPRS they had to refer the case to a Senior Executive Officer (SEO) Operations Manager for sign off.
- 8.82** The 2018 inspection report recommended that the Home Office should:
- “Ensure that the data required to support the efficient and effective management of each stage of the resettlement process, including the identification and referral of “the most vulnerable” and the evaluation of integration efforts and outcomes, is defined, captured, shared and processed/analysed, and the results shared with all relevant parties.”

8.83 The Home Office “partially accepted” this recommendation. It referred to “a suite of internal management information and progress reports to enable the effective management of the VPRS” and stated that it was “working with Home Office Digital, Data and Technology to develop new digital tools to enhance automation and increase efficiency of casework, allocations and arrivals processes.”, concluding:

“The management information that is collated is appropriately and securely shared with relevant bodies involved in the resettlement of vulnerable individuals under the scheme, and is used by Home Office analysts in monitoring and publicly reporting the operation of the scheme. The Department relies on UNHCR to identify and refer the most vulnerable cases and would not wish to change that approach. The Department does not believe a more granular approach to the recording of this information would make any material difference to the cases that are referred or accepted for resettlement.”

8.84 The last point was made in response to criticisms in the inspection report, including about the Home Office’s practice of recording only the “primary criterion” used by UNHCR for a referral when UNHCR typically identified multiple vulnerabilities for each referred refugee, “casting doubt on the value of Home Office data”, and using a “best fit” approach to record reasons for withdrawals rather than the precise reasons. The latter had resulted, for example, in some cases that UNHCR had identified as “too complex to be considered on paper” being recorded as “does not want to resettle in the UK” or “wishes to remain in host country”.

8.85 In November 2019, the Home Office provided inspectors with examples of the monitoring reports produced by Resettlement Operations covering the key functions of the VPRS. See Figure 24.

Figure 24	
VPRS Monitoring Reports	
Report title	Description
VPRS Daily Casework Report	Casework Manager’s report which breaks down registration and casework WiPs in more detail, including highlighting volume of cases which may be ready for sign-off by senior caseworkers
VPRS Check Point Report	Workflow report used to review and manage older cases (70 days or older) and cases which have been paused
VPRS MHA Checkpoint Report	Workflow report which details cases where the Migration Health Assessment has not been returned and is out of SLA ⁹⁸ and where valid SLA recorded but is older than 10 months (and requires recommissioning)
RRP Allocations One List	The workflow (WiP) report which is used by the Allocations Team responsible for sourcing accommodation for refugees prior to their arrival
VPRS Ready for Matching Report	A summary of cases which entered the Accommodation Matching WiP in the previous week
VPRS Accommodation Matching WiP	Delineates progress on accommodation matching and provides family size/complexity breakdowns

98 Service Level Agreement between IOM and the Home Office for the completion of an MHA.

Report title	Description
VPRS Arrivals Logistics Report	Summary report detailing upcoming flight groups and charters arrivals, including a breakdown of administrative actions outstanding
Arrivals Report	Details all arrivals under the VPR and VCR schemes, including personal data, local authority information and community sponsor details where applicable
VPRS New Progress Report	The main operational progress for the expanded VPRS, detailing WiP volumes, referrals, arrivals against trajectory and further breakdowns of local authority-level resettlements
VPRS One Pager	A summary page of key metrics used to report progress to senior managers on the expanded Scheme
VPRS Raw Data Report	A raw data file containing every referral under the expanded Scheme, key dates, outcomes and attributes – used for reporting and statistical purposes
Video Interview MI	Management summary of video interviewing activity, broken down by average duration, location, RAG rating ⁹⁹ and outages

- 8.86** All referrals were recorded on the Case Information Database (CID). On a monthly basis, Resettlement Operations produced a “VPRS Data Quality Report”, which highlighted all CID data errors and omissions, for example “Check Host Country” (highlighting where multiple host countries have been entered against the lead case) and “No submission category”. This helped to ensure that the data was accurate. However, some key details were not being captured, for example the VPRS team continued to record only the primary vulnerability criterion cited by UNHCR.
- 8.87** While the Home Office had committed resources and effort to producing regular reports for VPRS, including a monthly report to the Home Office Executive Committee of the numbers resettled against the 20,000 target, it appeared that data collection and routine reporting were designed primarily with local management in mind rather than with a view to identifying and analysing significant trends or issues and driving improvements to the resettlement process as a whole.
- 8.88** There were some exceptions. The 2018 inspection report noted that:
- “In 2016, the Home Office began tracking “sensitive cases” where these were identified post-arrival. A ‘cases of interest tracker’ (a spreadsheet) was “designed on the basis that most local authorities had no experience of supporting resettled refugees and would therefore value being able to discuss issues that presented” with the Home Office.”
- 8.89** The Home Office told inspectors in 2017 that analysis of the tracker had led to an additional session on domestic violence awareness being incorporated into the pre-departure cultural orientation classes. However, inspectors were unable to find any other examples of the data collected on the tracker having been used to drive improvements and raised concerns about the competence and remit of Home Office staff to advise local authorities on their statutory

99 Applied by the Video Interviewing Team to record any safeguarding or security issues or concerns identified during the interview.

responsibilities and appropriate actions in individual cases. The report noted that the tracker was under review.

- 8.90** In November 2019, inspectors asked for an update, seeking data for a range of issues, including: criminal convictions of resettled refugees; crimes committed against refugees, including hate crimes; and requests to be rehoused. The Home Office responded that it did “not hold complete records of the information” in relation to “cases of interest”. These matters were managed by local authorities and community sponsors and it was unable to provide inspectors with any details. However, it was able to report that, as at 6 November 2019, one resettled refugee had had their immigration status revoked.
- 8.91** In 2018, the Home Office response to the recommendation about data capture and the evaluation of integration efforts and outcomes described the work it was doing to “promote continued engagement [by Strategic Migration Partnerships and local authorities] with the underlying data collection exercise ... and encourage a focus on how services are being delivered and whether they might be adapted to further support refugees’ integration.”
- 8.92** The Home Office stated that “Service delivery is also a key focus of the comprehensive qualitative evaluation being conducted by Ipsos Mori and the Department is very keen to share the outputs of their work with partners once available.”
- 8.93** In November 2019, inspectors asked the Home Office for an update and were told that Ipsos Mori had been commissioned to complete a three-year qualitative longitudinal evaluation of the VPRS and VCRS, one of the aims of which was “To deliver good practice evidence in order to contribute to the development and improvement of the scheme and its delivery”. Ipsos Mori was using surveys, online forms, interviews and focus groups to examine:
- how VPRS and VCRS are operating
 - the variety of local authority delivery models deployed
 - the experiences of refugees and stakeholders involved in the delivery of both schemes
 - and the barriers, unmet needs and opportunities for future improvements on the outcomes for VPRS and VCRS beneficiaries/refugees¹⁰⁰
- 8.94** Ipsos Mori reported the first phase of its study to the Home Office in July 2019. The first phase looked at the different ways local authorities and community sponsors were delivering resettlement, whether pre-departure and post-arrival activities were meeting their objectives and the needs of refugees and communities, and what local or other factors were influencing outcomes. The Home Office told inspectors that it intended publishing the report. It had still not done so by July 2020.
- 8.95** The findings from the second phase were being quality assured by the Home Office at the time of this inspection. The Home Office shared the emerging findings with inspectors, which they stressed were “initial impressions”. The findings echoed familiar themes from previous research and examinations of the experiences of resettled refugees, including: the value of pre-departure English language training; the challenges of navigating the Universal Credit system; and the inconsistent provision and quality of ESOL for those who have been resettled.

100 See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/767274/uk-approach-evaluating-vulnerable-resettlement-schemes-horr106.pdf

8.96 Inspectors were told that this research had been shared with Home Office policy staff and some of the findings would feed into the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS), for example, encouraging CSS groups to promote independence. The Home Office commented:

“From Ipsos, we are trying to understand different models of resettlement support – how much support do they need before independence. Those local authorities with more experience are really good at helping with refugee independence.”

8.97 However, there had been some recognition that better use could be made of the monitoring and research. A senior policy manager told inspectors that this was a priority and an SEO was being recruited “to lead on Monitoring and Evaluation in resettlement policy”. The SEO’s role would include monitoring outcomes and continuing to ensure “we are asking questions about how monitoring can also produce the most useful data that can inform delivery partners and the Home Office.”

9. Inspection findings: Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme

VCRS resettlements 2016-2020

- 9.1** The Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) was launched in April 2016, when the UK government committed to resettle “up to 3,000 children and their families” by 2020.¹⁰¹
- 9.2** As at 3 March 2020, UNHCR had referred 3,419 refugees to the Home Office for resettlement through VCRS. Of these, 1,784 had been resettled in the UK, including 96 unaccompanied minors. By mid-March 2020, when resettlements were temporarily suspended by UNHCR and IOM because of COVID-19, this had increased to 1,826. The Home Office had a “Work in Progress” queue of 1,425 VCRS refugees on 3 March 2020 at different stages of the resettlement process.¹⁰²

Profile of resettled refugees

- 9.3** VCRS was accessible to all “children and adolescents at risk” as defined by UNHCR. They might or might not have been unaccompanied or separated [from their family] but must have had compelling protection needs, which were not being addressed in the “host” country. Eligible children in families were resettled as a family unit.
- 9.4** The Scheme was open to child refugees in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The breakdown by nationality of those resettled through VCRS to 3 March 2020 is at Figure 25.

Figure 25

Nationalities of resettled VCRS refugees to mid-March 2020

Nationality	Number
Iraq	838
Sudan	468
Eritrea	94
Afghanistan	83
Somalia	65
Palestinian Authority	61
South Sudan	61
Ethiopia	44

101 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-scheme-launched-to-resettle-children-at-risk>

102 On 17 March 2020, UNHCR and IOM announced the temporary suspension of resettlements as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e7103034/iom-unhcr-announce-temporary-suspension-resettlement-travel-refugees.html> When asked in July 2020, the Home Office was unable to provide figures for the WiP as at 12 March 2020, the date of the last UK resettlement flight.

Nationality	Number
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	42
Stateless ¹⁰³	32
Syria Arab Republic	17
Yemen	14
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2
Kenya	1
Lebanon	1
Nigeria	1
Pakistan	1
Philippines	1
Total	1,826

9.5 Almost half (45.9%) of those resettled have been Iraqi, and a quarter (25.6%) Sudanese. In contrast to the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), Syrian nationals have made up less than 1% of VCRS resettlements.

9.6 Prior to their resettlement in the UK, VCRS refugees were being hosted in one of six countries. See Figure 26.

Figure 26

Host countries for resettled VCRS refugees to mid-March 2020

Host country	Number
Egypt	503
Lebanon	435
Jordan	399
Turkey	346
Iraq	94
Niger	49
Total	1,826

103 These individuals are recorded under “Stateless” and “Refugee – Article 1 of the 1951 Convention’ on Home Office systems.

UNHCR resettlement submission categories

- 9.7 Since the primary resettlement submission category was always “Children and adolescents at risk”, the Home Office also recorded the secondary category for VCRS referrals. For those resettled to mid-March 2020, the most common secondary category was “Survivors of violence and/or torture or violence”.

Figure 27

**Resettled VCRS refugees broken down
by secondary UNHCR resettlement submission category**

Submission category	Number	Percentage
Survivors of violence and/or torture or violence	664	36.4%
Women and girls at risk	422	23.1%
Legal and/or physical protection need	386	21.1%
Medical needs	317	17.4%
Lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions	36	2.0%
Children and adolescents at risk	1	0.05%
Family reunification	0	0%
Total	1,826	

Complexity

- 9.8 As with VPRS, as part of the case consideration process, VCRS referrals were assessed against the Home Office’s complexity categories (see Figure 10). Almost half (49.7%) of the 1,826 VCRS arrivals were judged to be complex. Of these, roughly a third (32%) were marked as Category 2b (Serious medical: people who require surgery or ongoing medical treatment for life-threatening conditions (e.g. cancer, dialysis); and another third (32%) were marked Category 2c (Psychological: people suffering from mental illness or those where a need for immediate psychological support is specified in the HAP). A quarter (23%) were categorised 2d (Special Educational Needs: children with disabilities or learning difficulties); and 14% were categorised 2a (Mobility Issues: people who are wheelchair users or who have other disabilities including missing limbs or who have restricted movement).

Resettled unaccompanied minors 2016-2020

- 9.9 As at 3 March 2020, the Home Office had resettled 96 unaccompanied minors from a total of 109 referred through VCRS. By mid-March, a further three had been resettled.¹⁰⁴ Figure 28 shows the position as at 3 March.

Figure 28
Unaccompanied minors referred by UNHCR through VCRS 2016-2020

Outcome	Total
Arrived	96
Deceased	1
“Work in Progress”	8
Withdrawn / Rejected	4
Total	109

Profile of resettled unaccompanied minors

- 9.10 Figure 29 shows where these children were hosted prior to resettlement in the UK. The three resettled after 3 March 2020 had been hosted in Egypt.

Figure 29
Host countries for unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS to 3 March 2020

Host country	Number
Niger	49
Egypt	40
Jordan	6
Lebanon	2
Turkey	2
Total	99

- 9.11 In 2018,¹⁰⁵ the scope of the Scheme was extended from child refugees hosted in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to cover 50 unaccompanied minors¹⁰⁶ who had been evacuated from detention centres in Libya to an Emergency Transit centre in Niamey, Niger. The Government of Niger had agreed to host them on a temporary basis provided that cases were processed quickly and the children departed in an expedited manner.¹⁰⁷

104 It was unclear whether the three unaccompanied minors resettled after 3 March 2020 were drawn from the eight who were in the WiP. However, in July 2020, the Home Office told inspectors that there were no unaccompanied minors in the UK Resettlement Scheme WiP, suggesting that at least five of the eight had been rejected or withdrawn. In September 2020, in its factual accuracy response, the Home Office further clarified that: “The three unaccompanied minors were drawn from the eight in the WiP. The five remaining cases are in the UKRS WiP. Three of the five will turn 18 before they arrive in the UK and therefore will not be resettled under the category of unaccompanied minor. Because of the way the cases are recorded there was some confusion about what cases were in the WiP. All five are still currently awaiting placement.”

105 The Home Office was unable to say from when in 2018 the Scheme was extended.

106 One child subsequently withdrew.

107 For further details see UNHCR “Flash Appeal”, December 2017. <https://www.unhcr.org/558bff849.pdf>

9.12 More than two-thirds (c. 70%) of the unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS were 15 or 16 at the time they were referred by UNHCR, and at least one was already a parent themselves when they arrived in the UK (with their child), though still aged under 16. Of the 99 arrivals, 21 were in sibling sets: three sets of five and three sets of two, all under 18.

Figure 30
Age of VCRS resettled unaccompanied minors at time of referral by UNHCR and on arrival in the UK

Age	At referral	On arrival
0-12 months	1	0
1	1	1
2	0	1
3	0	0
4	1	1
5	1	0
6	0	0
7	1	1
8	1	2
9	1	0
10	1	2
11	3	1
12	0	2
13	6	1
14	7	4
15	13	8
16	56	34
17	6	41
Total		99

9.13 Figure 31 shows the numbers for each nationality. All but three of the 49 refugees resettled from Niger were Eritrean, with two Somalis and one Ethiopian. The Niger refugees were assessed as a group, which meant that the Home Office knew, for example, that 30 of the 49 were male; they ranged in age from 13 to 17, though most were 16; and most had had 4-8 years of schooling.

Figure 31
Nationalities of unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS to mid-March 2020

Nationality	Number
Eritrea	58
Ethiopia	11
Somali	10
South Sudan	7
Iraq	6
Sudan	3
Afghanistan	1
Pakistan	1
Syria	1
Refugee – Article 1 of the 1951 Convention	1
Total	99

9.14 One of the challenges in resettling these children was the availability of interpreters. The first languages spoken by the 99 are shown at Figure 32.¹⁰⁸ Some local authorities reported difficulties in sourcing certain languages, in sourcing certain languages, including Tigrinya (the official language in Eritrea). For example, in Glasgow, according to the local authority, there was just one Tigrinyan interpreter. This chimed with ICIBI’s findings in a separate report submitted to the Home Secretary in May 2020 covering the Home Office’s use of interpreters.

Figure 32
Languages spoken by unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS to mid-March 2020

Language	Number
Tigrinya	49
Arabic	23
Somali	10
Oromo	7
Tigre	4
Arabic-Sudanese	2
Bilen	1
Farsi	1
Turkish	1
Unknown	1
Total	96

108 For resettled VCRS refugees as a whole, the most common first language was Arabic, followed by Farsi. But, some spoke less common (in the UK context) languages, including Kikongo (Angola), Zaghawa (Chad/Sudan), Bilen (Eritrea) and Moro (Sudan). Overall, there were around 30 languages.

9.15 The primary resettlement submission category for unaccompanied minors was “Children and adolescents at risk” as for other VCRS referrals. Figure 33 shows the breakdown for the 99 resettled unaccompanied minors by the secondary category.

Figure 33
Resettled VCRS unaccompanied minors broken down by secondary UNHCR resettlement submission category

Vulnerability criterion	Number
Survivors of violence and/or torture or violence	85
Women and girls at risk	9
Lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions	3
Children and adolescents at risk	1
Legal and/or physical protection need	1
Medical needs	0
Family reunification	0
Total	99

9.16 The Home Office attached a “complexity marker” to 15 of the 99 arrivals, but there were 17 markers in total as a person may have more than one. Thirteen of the markers related to psychological needs (2c); three to serious medical needs (2b); and one to mobility issues (2a).

Family size

9.17 Figure 34 shows the family sizes resettled through VCRS as at 4 March 2020, including the family sizes in the WiP.¹⁰⁹As with VPRS, families comprising four or five persons accounted for almost two-thirds (65.76%) of the 1,793 refugees resettled through VCRS up to 4 March 2020. Given that both schemes relied on the same housing stock this was unsurprising. However, compared with VPRS, VCRS had a higher proportion of singletons (in the case of VCRS, unaccompanied minors), and proportionately fewer larger families of six or more, and none over seven.

¹⁰⁹ The Home Office was unable to provide the WiP numbers as at mid-March 2020.

Figure 34

**Family sizes of resettled VCRS refugees as at 3 March 2020
(based on data extracted from CID on 4 March 2020)**

Family size	Number of families	% of family groups	Number of persons	% of refugees	Families in WiP	Persons in the WiP
1	75	14.85%	75	5.15%	17	17
2	54	10.69%	108	6.97%	23	46
3	88	17.43%	264	9.09%	30	90
4	135	26.73%	540	25.76%	85	340
5	115	22.77%	575	40.00%	132	660
6	35	6.93%	210	11.52%	38	228
7	3	0.59%	21	1.52%	5	35
Total¹¹⁰	505		1,793		330	1,416

9.18 Management Information collected by Resettlement Operations indicated that 50 individuals had withdrawn from VCRS between April 2016 and March 2020. As with VPRS, the categories used to record the reasons for withdrawal did not include “family size” (and the difficulty of securing accommodation for larger families), so it was not possible to establish to what extent, if any, this was a reason.¹¹¹

Resettlement locations

- 9.19** Resettlement Operations managers and staff at all grades acknowledged to inspectors that VCRS had not worked as well as the Home Office had hoped. One issue had been local authority participation. As at mid-March 2020, VCRS refugees had been resettled in 114 local authority areas (roughly a third of the total), with Bradford, Glasgow, Bristol and Coventry having resettled the greatest numbers. Of the 114 local authorities, 93 had also resettled refugees through VPRS. For example, Coventry had resettled 121 VCRS refugees and 498 VPRS refugees, while Bradford had resettled refugees through VCRS, VPRS and through Gateway.
- 9.20** The 99 unaccompanied minors had been resettled in 44 local authority areas, 19 of which had resettled one child and a further 14 had resettled two. Leeds had resettled the largest number: nine. Figure 35 shows the breakdown of resettled unaccompanied minors by region. Inspectors found no evidence of the Home Office having sought to link up these local authorities or to collect and share best practice.

¹¹⁰ The Home Office explained that the reason the figure for ‘Number of persons’ did not match the number resettled (1,784) was that the data for family size was captured at the point of referral, after which family size can change, for example if a family member withdraws or dies.

¹¹¹ The categories included: eligibility criteria not met; doesn’t wish to settle in the UK; chosen alternate country/method of migration; exit permissions issues; family dependency; resubmission under different category; wishes to remain in host country.

Figure 35

Number of unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS broken down by region

Region	Number
Yorkshire and the Humber	24
East Midlands	14
West Midlands	14
East of England	10
North East England	10
Scotland	10
South East England	9
London	4
South West England	2
Wales	2
Total	99

- 9.21** Staff in Resettlement Operations believed that the smaller than hoped-for take-up by local authorities was because VCRS had had a lower profile than VPRS, which had been launched with a “big bang”. Senior management told inspectors that the purpose of VCRS had been misunderstood: “people thought it was just about children” and local authorities thought that it was primarily about unaccompanied minors, which they saw as more challenging.
- 9.22** Senior management said it had been “difficult to get the message right” as “a lot of local authorities thought they had already pledged for resettlement, having done so for VPRS” and therefore some may have struggled to make the case locally for support for another resettlement scheme. Constant media coverage of the conflict in Syria had created an awareness and sympathy for Syrian refugees, while VCRS refugees were more diverse and a harder “sell”.
- 9.23** On a practical level, many of the local authorities that had taken VPRS refugees were “set up for Arabic speakers” and not equipped to support the range of nationalities referred through VCRS, and some local authorities who had signed up for VCRS wanted to take only those who spoke Arabic. According to the VCRS Team, in some instances, “a local authority would accept the case, but then they wouldn’t have the right sort of language support in the area so they would have to reject it. So that’s why it limited the number of local authorities who were willing to take different nationalities.”
- 9.24** The Resettlement Operations’ Risk Register, which applied to VCRS, VPRS and Gateway, identified the shortage of local authority places as an Amber risk. To mitigate this, staff would “maintain engagement with local authorities”. Resettlement Operations staff told inspectors that they had been involved in engagement events where they had spoken to local authorities and NGOs about VCRS. They found in some cases that “local authorities weren’t even aware of what it was”. It was unclear whether this engagement had resulted in additional pledges.

Resettlement timelines

9.25 As with VPRS, the overall trend for VCRS arrivals by average case age per quarter increased over the lifetime of the scheme. Figure 36 shows the figures for both schemes.

Figure 36

Average time taken to resettle VCRS and VPRS refugees						
Quarter	VCRS			VPRS		
	Average time Days (Week)	Numbers resettled (Quarter)	Numbers resettled (Cumulative)	Average time Days (Week)	Numbers resettled (Quarter)	Numbers resettled (Cumulative)
2016 Q4	90 (13)	31	31	151 (22)	1,292	5,467
2017 Q1	130 (19)	60	91	190 (28)	1,601	7,068
2017 Q2	162 (24)	189	280	221 (32)	1,228	8,296
2017 Q3	215 (31)	132	412	240 (35)	859	9,155
2017 Q4	235 (34)	158	570	232 (34)	1,151	10,306
2018 Q1	244 (35)	153	723	273 (39)	1,104	11,410
2018 Q2	329 (47)	160	883	319 (46)	1,202	12,612
2018 Q3	326 (47)	192	1,075	359 (52)	1,110	13,722
2018 Q4	407 (59)	183	1,258	373 (54)	984	14,706
2019 Q1	363 (52)	152	1,410	425 (61)	1,032	15,738
2019 Q2	402 (58)	215	1,625	410 (59)	1,074	16,812
2019 Q3	484 (70)	87	1,712	442 (64)	1,201	18,013
2019 Q4	531 (76)	35	1,747	406 (58)	1,101	19,114
2020 Q1	665 (95)	79	1,826	383 (55)	654	19,768

9.26 Between 2017 Q3 and 2019 Q2 (excluding 2019 Q1) the average times for both schemes were broadly in line, with VCRS averages generally a little shorter, though the numbers resettled were much smaller. However, from 2019 Q3, VCRS resettlement numbers fell away and the average timescales lengthened significantly. Though difficult to evidence, it seems that the priority was for VPRS to reach its target of 20,000 by May 2020 and that this impacted negatively on VCRS.

9.27 Most unaccompanied minors have been resettled more quickly than other VCRS refugees. Prior to 2018 Q4, when the first of the unaccompanied minors from Niger was resettled, the quarterly average from submission of the Refugee Referral Form (RRF) to arrival in the UK ranged between 111 days (week 16) and 260 days (week 38), although the total number resettled in this period was only 28. From 2018 Q4, the quarterly average grew steadily, and in 2020 Q1 it had reached 457 days (week 66). See Figure 37.

Figure 37

**Average time between referral and arrival in the UK
for the 96 unaccompanied minors (UM) resettled through VCRS**

Quarter	UM Number resettled	UM Average Days (Week)	VCRS Averages Days (Week)
2017 Q1	1	111 (16)	130 (19)
2017 Q2	0	-	162 (24)
2017 Q3	9	260 (38)	215 (31)
2017 Q4	7	148 (22)	235 (34)
2018 Q1	3	210 (30)	244 (35)
2018 Q2	7	201 (29)	329 (47)
2018 Q3	1	140 (20)	326 (47)
2018 Q4	17	148 (22)	407 (59)
2019 Q1	26	204 (30)	363 (52)
2019 Q2	8	303 (44)	402 (58)
2019 Q3	5	408 (59)	484 (70)
2019 Q4	3	394 (57)	531 (76)
2020 Q1	12	457 (66)	665 (95)
Total	99		

- 9.28** All of the twelve unaccompanied minors resettled in 2020 Q1 were prioritised as “Urgent” by UNHCR. Five were part of a single sibling set, which was a particular challenge for local authorities. The other four were singletons, to three of whom the Home Office had attached “complexity markers”, in one case both mobility issues and special educational needs.
- 9.29** Inspectors asked about the VCRS timescales and were told that, as well as finding local authority placements, there had been other issues, including “legal problems” in the host country, and the poor health of some refugees and delays in acquiring TB certificates. The Home Office had considered whether cases should be sent back to UNHCR and re-referred when these issues had been resolved, but it had not done so, and senior management was clear that referred VCRS cases would be rolled into the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS).¹¹²

¹¹² The Home Office told inspectors that linked family cases could also delay resettlements. UNHCR’s referral process can link families where there is “evidence of dependency or a strong emotional bond between the individuals” and recommend that cases be resettled to the same country, ideally close to each other or to family members already settled in the UK. Though likely to assist with integration, this makes the task of finding suitable accommodation harder. In VPRS cases the extent to which a family needs to be resettled close to another family can be explored during the video interview. However, there is no video interview in VCRS cases, and any questions have to be referred back via UNHCR or IOM, which further slows the process. The Home Office monitors family connection cases as a distinct category on the accommodation matching ‘OneList’ using a “pause code”, though the case is not actually paused. At the time of the inspection, there were 19 such cases listed. The relevant SOP notes that families with connections in London are the hardest to place and instruct caseworkers to clarify, via the IOM, if the linked family is willing to be resettled.

“Work in Progress”

- 9.30** As at 3 March 2020, 3,419 refugees had been referred by UNHCR through VCRS. In addition to the 1,784 who had been resettled, 203 had withdrawn or had been rejected by the Home Office, and seven had died. This left 1,425 referred VCRS refugees in the Home Office’s “Work in Progress” (WiP) queue.
- 9.31** Of the 1,425: five were at the registration stage; 131 at the casework stage; 1,208 had entered the accommodation matching process; three were at the arrival logistics stage; and 78 had scheduled arrival dates.¹¹³
- 9.32** Of the 1,208 referrals that had reached the accommodation matching stage, 349 had been prioritised as “Urgent” by UNHCR. The oldest of these went back to 2016, the first year of the scheme. Two-thirds (64%) of these had also been marked as complex by the Home Office. See Figure 38.

Figure 38

**Breakdown of referred VCRS refugees
at the accommodation matching stage at 3 March 2020**

Yr Referred	Number	Urgent	Complex	Both
2016	29	29	29	29
2017	141	46	98	29
2018	613	174	347	102
2019	423	100	214	64
2020	2	0	2	0
Total	1,208	349	690	224

- 9.33** There were two unaccompanied minors in the WiP as at 3 March 2020, both were at the accommodation matching stage. Both were 16 and had been waiting for over a year since having been referred. They were both listed as “Urgent”, and one, who had been referred in December 2018, had “complexity markers” for mobility issues and special educational needs.

Managing the WiP

- 9.34** Once referrals have reached the accommodation matching stage they are added to the ‘OneList’, an Excel spreadsheet that enabled the Allocations Team to monitor progress. Referrals that had been prioritised by UNHCR as “Urgent” were reviewed every three weeks.
- 9.35** Home Office Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) provided for caseworkers, as part of the case consideration, to propose a change to the priority attached to a referral by UNHCR. This required approval from the SEO Operations Manager and discussion with UNHCR. Staff told inspectors they might need to prioritise a case if, for example, a refugee was pregnant or if the lead applicant was about to turn 18. Inspectors found one example of a referral that had been changed from “Normal” to “Urgent” because of safeguarding concerns identified by the Home Office caseworker.

¹¹³ Resettlement flights were temporarily suspended from mid-March 2020 due to COVID-19.

Comparing and contrasting with VPRS

- 9.36** VCRS caseworkers recorded referred refugees on the Casework Information Database (CID). The data collected was the same as for VPRS refugees. However, there appeared to be fewer regular Management Information reports issued in relation to VCRS compared to VPRS, although the 'One List' included both VCRS and VPRS cases and could be searched for either. Unlike VPRS, the running total for resettled VCRS refugees was not included in the monthly BICS performance report presented to the Home Office Executive Committee.
- 9.37** Above Grade 7, VCRS and VPRS were overseen by the same senior management team. Operationally, this made sense. However, inspectors were told that VCRS had "suffered from being the poor relation to the VPRS juggernaut" and the fact that VPRS had a clear "target" of 20,000 by 2020, while the VCRS commitment had been expressed as "up to 3,000", may have affected how cases were prioritised when it came to the shared 'One List' where offers from local authorities were recorded.
- 9.38** As one manager commented: "We have all been moved by the VCRS cases, but we had to balance our priorities ... When we get to the point of allocating and you have a choice between VPRS and VCRS, it can be quite challenging." The manager felt that had more accommodation been available the Home Office would have had the capacity to get the VCRS total up to 3,000.
- 9.39** The fact that VCRS and VPRS (and Gateway) were all included in the one (Resettlement Operations) Risk Register may not have been helpful to VCRS. While the two schemes were affected by many of the same issues, the greatest reputational risk for the Home Office was failing to meet the VPRS target, reinforcing the priority of VPRS over VCRS. There may also be longer-term consequences, in that issues and risks affecting VCRS in particular may not have received enough attention ahead of the final design and roll out of the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS).
- 9.40** In 2016, the Home Office began collecting data from local authorities in relation to how refugees resettled through VPRS were faring at specific intervals after their arrival. From late 2017, resettled VCRS refugees have been included in this data capture, but inspectors saw no evidence that the Home Office was interested in understanding whether their experiences differed from those of VPRS refugees. Meanwhile, the Ipsos Mori longitudinal study of integration outcomes commissioned by the Home Office has included resettled VCRS refugees alongside VPRS refugees, again without looking to differentiate between them.

Quality of VCRS referrals

- 9.41** VCRS caseworkers told inspectors that the quality of Refugee Resettlement Forms (RRFs) was variable, which they put down to the fact that some UNHCR offices were more familiar with the UK's schemes than others. They estimated that they reverted to UNHCR is around 30% of cases. They provided examples where they had reverted because information was out-of-date or because they required further clarification (such as the correct spelling of names). Nonetheless, in most cases, VCRS caseworkers found the referral received from UNHCR contained sufficient detail, including a Best Interests Determination (BID),¹¹⁴ where applicable, for them to make a decision about eligibility. This was equally true of referrals of unaccompanied minors.

114 See <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/44308/best-interests-procedure>

Use of the National Transfer Scheme to place unaccompanied minors

- 9.42** After the case consideration stage, all unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS were treated for caseworking and funding purposes as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and the case was passed to the UASC National Transfer Team (NTT), part of Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration (RASI) Directorate, to manage.
- 9.43** Under s.20(1) of the Children Act 1989, the framework governing the care of UASC, through the provision of accommodation, support, and access to services, falls to the local authority in which the UASC is accommodated for the first 24 hours. These children are entitled to the same local authority provision as any other looked-after child. At the end of March 2018, there were 75,420 looked-after children in England. The number has been steadily increasing as have the costs for local authorities.¹¹⁵
- 9.44** Because of their location, some local authorities have faced greater pressures on children’s services from UASC.¹¹⁶ In response, in July 2016, the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was launched as a voluntary arrangement between local authorities to transfer UASC in order to share the burden more evenly around the country.¹¹⁷ However, since it was launched the number of transfers completed each year have steadily declined: in 2016 (July-December) there were 231; in 2017 there were 403; in 2018 there were 239; and in 2019 there were 92. In the last quarter of 2019 only 17 NTS transfers took place, 15 of which were intra-regional within the East of England.¹¹⁸
- 9.45** NTT’s Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) Version 1, dated December 2019, required NTT staff to “analyse the forms¹¹⁹ to find any specific requirements/concerns which are mentioned. For example, any medical/mental health requirements, safeguarding concerns, specific area requests.”
- 9.46** The kinds of NTS placements offered varied according to local conditions, such as availability of foster carers and of interpreters for particular languages. NTT staff described the documents provided about the children as “very comprehensive”. The NTS protocol¹²⁰ (published on gov. uk) sets out how children are found placements. Assessing the suitability of a placement is a decision for the local authority and is based on the information provided.

Guidance for UK delivery partners

- 9.47** Inspectors spoke to two local authorities who had taken care of UASC and VCRS unaccompanied minors, and to a Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP), and received written evidence from another SMP and an NGO.

115 See the National Audit Office report ‘Pressures on children’s social care’, published in January 2019 <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Pressures-on-Childrens-Social-Care.pdf>

116 See the Local Government Association submission to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee inquiry report ‘Funding of local authorities’ children’s services’. This noted that councils “spent more than £152 million on unaccompanied asylum seeking children in 2017/18 – an increase of 95 per cent on the £77 million spent in 2014/15”. Report published 1 May 2019, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1638/163802.htm>

117 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-national-transfer-scheme-for-migrant-children>

118 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-transparency-data-february-2020>

119 Refugee Referral Form, Migration Health Assessment, Best Interest Determination.

120 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750913/NTS-Protocol-Final-October-2018.pdf

9.48 While they commented positively about VCRS, they remarked on the lack of guidance:

“We haven’t been provided with any written guidance. There is nothing unique and clear which tells us what we should be doing. We have developed working processes for us as teams and have been provided with some guidance on age assessments.”

9.49 Local authorities said that they would normally turn to SMPs for advice. SMPs played a key role in identifying and developing best practice, getting participating local authorities to share their experiences with others who were contemplating taking part, as well as acting as a conduit for information about the scheme. However, one of the SMPs interviewed told inspectors that although it had had sight of a note circulated about the Niger cohort it had not received any written guidance from the Home Office specifically about unaccompanied minors.

Pre-arrival

9.50 Before unaccompanied children arrived in the UK, the Home Office organised (through IOM) a Skype call between the child and the social worker who would have responsibility for them once they were resettled. Social workers were clear about the importance of hearing “voice of the child” and the value of children giving consent to what was happening to them. The pre-arrival Skype call meant they were able to “meet” the child. Home Office staff echoed the importance of the Skype call as the key opportunity to explore the child’s wishes, complementing the BID.

Post-arrival experiences

9.51 The same delivery partners considered that it was an advantage that unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS arrived with legal status (Leave to Remain for five years as a refugee) and with detailed Best Interests and Health assessments. One of the SMPs commented that it meant “social workers can focus on supporting the children to settle and integrate rather than dealing with a stressful asylum process”. A local authority observed that “the information that came with the young people was really thorough”.

9.52 Children in the care of one local authority had been able easily to access relevant healthcare services. The social worker told inspectors that “getting access to GPs and dentists has been great. Local provision has been right on it and been supportive.” However, as with VPRS refugees and VCRS cases in general, there had been issues with accessing mental health support:

“...if the young person has some degree of trauma or had treatment – it has been quite hard to match the need to the availability. That is not going to get any better due to the natural challenges of accessing these resources.”

9.53 Accessing the children’s educational needs had been similarly straightforward but delayed by the fact that children were able to start school only at two points during the academic year. In both of the local authority areas, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tuition had been provided to bridge the gap until the children could begin school.

9.54 However, both local authorities referred to significant delays in some of the children being provided with Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs), eight weeks in one case, and the negative impact this had had on their ability to access services. Both had dealt directly with named contacts in Home Office to resolve their issues.

Sustainability – funding

- 9.55** Long-standing issues with Home Office funding of UASC care by local authorities impacted the resettlement of unaccompanied minors through VCRS. The daily rate increased in May 2019 and again in June 2020. However, local authorities and NGOs were clear that it did not come close to meeting the costs of caring for UASC and unaccompanied minors. They were particularly concerned about the costs of supporting young care leavers up to the age of 25.¹²¹
- 9.56** Evidence provided to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee’s inquiry into the local authorities’ funding of children’s services showed that the shortfall in funding was significant. In 2016, the Association of Directors of Children’s Services “calculated that the grant funding provided by the Home Office covers on average, at best, 50% of the costs of caring for an unaccompanied child or young person”,¹²² while Devon County Council commented that “currently, Devon is having to support this [UASC] programme by £500,000 per year [and] the expectation is this situation will worsen as more of the children become care leavers where the funding gap is higher”.¹²³
- 9.57** This financial shortfall was a key reason for the limited local authority participation in the NTS. Noting that research in relation to “Dubs” children had shown that funding had a direct bearing on the ability of local authorities to offer places to children, an NGO told inspectors that the number of local authorities willing to resettle unaccompanied minors would remain small unless the funding changed. Home Office staff told inspectors that they understood this but noted that the tariff was sufficient for some local authorities and any changes to the funding were a matter for ministers and HM Treasury.
- 9.58** Neither of the two local authorities to whom inspectors spoke about unaccompanied minors was aware of the “exceptional costs” funding available under VCRS. The SMPs were aware but believed that the kinds of costs a local authority might incur in resettling an unaccompanied minor were not covered. For example, where a refugee’s planned arrival date was delayed, a local authority could claim “void” costs for accommodation but not for a Care Placement. Both SMPs said that they did not know of any local authority in their region that had made a successful claim for exceptional costs.
- 9.59** One SMP noted: “neither the UASC nor the VPRS/VCRS funding instructions provide practical guidance on how a local authority submitting a funding claim in line with the UASC funding instructions can also submit a claim for exceptional costs when that is governed by the VPRS/VCRS funding instructions”. In fact, ‘Funding Instruction for local authorities in the support of the United Kingdom’s Resettlement Programmes Financial Year 2018 – 2019’, published in June 2018, appeared to rule this out:

“Unaccompanied children resettled under VCRS will (unless in exceptional circumstances) be treated in the same way as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) for funding purposes, and local authorities who accept unaccompanied children under the Scheme will

121 In its factual accuracy response, the Home Office pointed out that “the funding the Home Office provides to local authorities supporting UASC and former UASC care leavers is not intended to cover these costs in full. It is a contribution to costs and comes in addition to the money paid to local authorities through the Local Government Finance Settlement which includes a significant element to fund adults and children’s social care.” It also pointed out that the weekly former UASC care leaver rate was increased in June 2020.

122 <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/local-authorities-childrens-services/written/94307.html>

123 <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/local-authorities-childrens-services/written/93287.html>

be reimbursed in accordance with the relevant year's UASC Funding Instruction not this Instruction."¹²⁴

Sustainability – meeting wider needs

- 9.60** The overall capacity of the care system had implications for unaccompanied minors. For example, the Fostering Network's website¹²⁵ noted that fostering services across the UK needed to recruit thousands more foster families. There was a particular need for foster carers to look after teenagers and sibling groups, while finding culturally appropriate placements was an additional challenge for resettled refugees.
- 9.61** In both local authorities to whom inspectors spoke there were teams within Children's Services to assist with resettled unaccompanied minors. Both were confident they could tailor their services to meet the needs of the unaccompanied minors in their care. However, stakeholders raised concerns about the fact that most local authority Children's Services teams were used to dealing with UASC who lacked settled immigration status, which impeded longer-term planning. They worried that VCRS children could therefore fall through the gap in terms of integration initiatives.
- 9.62** In the same vein, in October 2019, a representative from St Helens Council told the EU Home Affairs Sub-Committee that there needed to be a "more joined-up approach between the resettlement service and unaccompanied minors".¹²⁶
- 9.63** As with VPRS and VCRS more generally, local authorities were concerned about the ability of resettled unaccompanied minors to access the necessary qualified advice when they needed to apply for ILR. Local authorities believed they would need to facilitate the process in order to prevent the children being in the country illegally.

Monitoring

- 9.64** Data and analysis specifically in relation to resettled unaccompanied refugee children was limited. Most research by NGOs and academics had focused on the experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, not differentiating between those who had arrived with refugee status. As a result, little had been published about best practice or expected outcomes for resettled unaccompanied minors. Inspectors were made aware of one example involving Sudanese boys now in the United States. This assessment noted broadly positive outcomes, though with documented levels of trauma, and signs of emotional and behavioural problems.¹²⁷
- 9.65** Records kept by government departments do not differentiate between UASC and resettled unaccompanied refugee children. This includes the Department for Education (DfE), which holds the policy lead for UASC and the responsibilities of local authorities in caring for them but does not monitor resettled unaccompanied refugee children separately from UASC.

124 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/743215/Combined_local_authority_funding_instruction_2018-2019_v2.pdf

125 <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/could-you-foster/who-needs-fostering>

126 <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/eu-homeaffairs-subcommittee/immigration/oral/106842.pdf>

127 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/486045>

9.66 DfE’s guidance in relation to UASC stated:

“Local authorities should ensure that they have processes in place to monitor their policies and performance relating to both unaccompanied and trafficked children ... They should ensure that responsible managers look beyond this guidance to understand the risks and issues facing unaccompanied children ... and to review best practice in planning for the care of these children.”¹²⁸

9.67 Local authorities monitored and carried out reviews. As one told inspectors:

“After the [arrivals] assessment, there is a “looked after case review” carried out by an independent person at the following points: 6 weeks, 3 months, 6 months – they look at the care plan, suitability of the placement.”

9.68 The Home Office did not have sight of the individual Care Plans, since these were personal. The care provided by local authorities to “looked after children” fell within Ofsted’s remit but, like the DfE, Ofsted did not differentiate between UASC and other unaccompanied children.

9.69 After arrival, the Home Office did not seek any data about unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS, although NTS placement managers did receive occasional feedback from local authorities and might be contacted to solve particular issues, such as delayed BRPs. The UASC Payments Team received the information it needed to ensure that local authorities received the correct payments.

9.70 Inspectors asked the Home Office why it was not monitoring resettled unaccompanied refugee children (and UASC) and were told:

“this group are not captured in the monitoring data as they are covered by a different policy area and primary responsibility rests with DfE. It might be interesting to have the information but we can’t implement any changes required.”

9.71 In addition to the wider question of how the Home Office was able to assure itself that VCRS was achieving its purpose without some monitoring of resettled unaccompanied children, inspectors learned of individual cases that raised particular concerns about the Home Office’s ability to assess and manage risks:

- Inspectors were told of two cases where the child was assessed on arrival in the UK to be older than the age recorded in the UNHCR referral documents, and a third where they were assessed to be younger. In each case, the local authority informed the Home Office and UNHCR was told. The age of the child is directly relevant to the local authority’s decision about whether it can provide appropriate accommodation and support. Local authorities need to be able to trust the information they receive about the age of children the Home Office is seeking to resettle, otherwise they may withdraw their support for the scheme. The Home Office needed to own this risk.
- Inspectors were told of one sibling group accepted as unaccompanied minors that subsequently made two successful family reunion applications. The local authority considered this was a private family matter and had no plans to raise it with the Home Office. However, it raised questions about the selection process for those referred as unaccompanied refugee children, which again risked jeopardising the support of local authorities.

128 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656429/UASC_Statutory_Guidance_2017.pdf

UASC Governance Board

- 9.72** The UASC Governance Board is co-chaired by the Home Office and the DfE. It lists unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS within its remit. It acted as:
- “...the principal engagement forum for the Home Office (HO), Department for Education’s (DfE) and local government representatives from across the UK relating unaccompanied children and care leavers in the asylum and resettlement system, with a focus on making the system work for the children it is designed to protect and the local areas that support them.”¹²⁹
- 9.73** The Board meets quarterly. Senior managers from Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration represent the Home Office. Representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), SMPs, and Directors of Children’s Services also attend.
- 9.74** Inspectors reviewed the minutes of the meetings held between January 2018 and October 2019. The Board regularly discussed problems with the NTS, including numbers and timelines, and the ongoing pressure on the Home Office to provide additional funding to local authorities. The July 2019 Board noted that the increase in the UASC rate from May 2019 was potentially beginning to incentivise local authority engagement but there had been no movement on the NTS.
- 9.75** In October 2019, the minutes noted that finding placements for children transferring to the UK “under section 67 (Dubs)” and VCRS was an operational priority. However, it was pointed out that this was difficult for those local authorities who were already having to deal with large numbers of UASC.
- 9.76** In one submission to the Board, an SMP highlighted the risk that unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS could be worse off than UASC as the lines of communication between the Home Office, SMPs and local authorities were not as clear:
- “With the Dubs scheme and the NTS, the Home Office has a Placement Manager in UASC and Adult Transfer Operations who goes through the SMP UASC Policy Officer to communicate with LAs, but, with the VCRS, different members of the VCRS team communicate with LAs directly and have not always copied SMP into emails which has led to a few breakdowns in communication.”
- 9.77** From the context of the submission, the reference to “the VCRS” was actually a reference specifically to unaccompanied minors resettled through VCRS. What this sought to illustrate was that unaccompanied minors are at risk of falling through a gap as they are not included in the UASC “conversation” but they are also not part of the VCRS “conversation”, which is focused primarily on families and on integration.

129 UASC Governance Board Terms of Reference.

9.78 In September 2020, the Home Office clarified that the NTS Team had “included VCRS children “in the conversation” to seek placement offers” and “ultimately, all the referrals received within the team were placed”. It also explained that, contrary to inspectors’ understanding:

“Unaccompanied minors are not excluded from the UKRS. In a letter dated May 2020 we confirmed to UNHCR that the UK will accept unaccompanied children under the scheme if UNHCR determine that resettlement is in their best interests, and if the numbers of cases are in line with local authority capacity.”

10. Inspection findings: Community Sponsorship Scheme

A “new approach”

10.1 On 19 July 2016, the government announced the launch of the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS).¹³⁰ The intention was to “enable community groups including charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to take on the role of supporting resettled refugees in the UK.” Launching CSS, the Home Secretary said:

“This is a ground-breaking new development for resettlement in the UK and I wholeheartedly encourage organisations that can help to offer their support. I hope that this new approach will help bring communities together and support these often traumatised and vulnerable families as they rebuild their lives and contribute to and thrive in our country.”

CSS resettled refugees 2016-2020 (mid-March)

10.2 Between July 2016 and March 2020, community groups were able to apply to sponsor refugees referred to the Home Office through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS).

10.3 On 17 March 2020, UNHCR and IOM temporarily suspended resettlements due to COVID-19. At that point, 411 (2.08%) of the 19,768 refugees resettled through VPRS and 38 (0.21%) of the 1,826 refugees resettled through VCRS had been resettled with CSS groups. The 449 refugees comprised 91, some of which are extended families with adult non-dependants. See Figure 39.

Figure 39

VPRS and VCRS refugees resettled with CSS groups 2016 – 2020		
Year	CSS arrivals through VPRS	CSS arrivals through VCRS
2016	11	0
2017	70	8
2018	105	25
2019	200	5
2020	25	0
Total	411	38

130 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/community-sponsorship-scheme-launched-for-refugees-in-the-uk>

Family size

- 10.4** As with those VPRS and VCRS refugees resettled by local authorities, most of the families resettled by CSS groups were of four or five persons, although with a higher proportion (almost half) of five person families and a slightly higher proportion of six person families, which suggested that, in general, CSS groups might be more willing to support larger families than local authorities. See Figure 40.

Figure 40

Breakdown of CSS families by family size

Family size	VPRS	VCRS
1	5	0
2	4	1
3	4	0
4	19	5
5	44	2
6	15	1
Total	91	9

- 10.5** Inspectors sought to understand whether this was the case. The refugees resettled with CSS groups were not materially different from other VPRS and VCRS refugees in terms of the proportion that were prioritised as “Urgent” by UNHCR or had a “complexity marker”.¹³¹ One CSS group believed that the difference was that they and other groups were prepared to spend more on accommodation than a local authority and were able to use personal networks to access a broader range of accommodation and to encourage landlords to charge a reduced rent.

Pipeline

- 10.6** As mid-March 2020, 81 CSS groups had resettled a refugee family, eight of which were now resettling a second family and two more had applied to do so. Of the 91 families resettled with CSS groups, 21 had reached the end of the two-year sponsorship period.
- 10.7** As at mid-March 2020, 23 groups were going through the application process. Twelve of these were at the ‘Consideration’ stage; eleven had been ‘Approved in principle’; and three were ‘Approved’.

The application process

Guidance

- 10.8** Inspectors reviewed the guidance available to CSS groups, local authorities and Home Office staff, including:
- guidance for prospective sponsors on how to submit an application

131 For CSS-VCRS, 21% were “Urgent”, compared with 29% for non-CSS VCRS. For CSS- VPRS, 10% were “Urgent”, compared with 7% for all non-CSS VPRS.

- a process map for the CSS application process
- guidance for local authorities involved in CSS
- guidance for Home Office staff about the selection, consideration and information sharing, placement and integration of resettled refugees (part of the Standard Operating Procedures for VPRS)

10.9 ‘Guidance for prospective sponsors’, first published in July 2016 and most recently updated in December 2018,¹³² described the background and purpose of the scheme, including what CSS groups were expected to provide to refugees.¹³³ The guidance also summarised the application process and stages of approval, including checks and monitoring, and outlined the support available to CSS groups. However, there was nothing about timescales.

10.10 The 14-page application form required mostly factual information: about the group, including the “lead sponsor” and other group members, and the resettlement plan. Inspectors found the form to be clear and straightforward.¹³⁴ Guidance on how to complete it was available on GOV.UK.

10.11 In addition to the form, applicants had to provide:

- a letter of consent from the appropriate local authority¹³⁵
- a safeguarding policy¹³⁶
- a complaints policy
- evidence that £9,000 was ringfenced to support the resettled family and details of the accommodation¹³⁷

10.12 Home Office consideration of an application included checking the information supplied and making a pre-approval visit to “test the credibility of a prospective sponsoring group, seek further information if required and explore the detail of the information provided in a sponsor’s application, prior to a Decision Panel being convened.”

10.13 After the pre-approval visit, the Home Office might request revisions to the application before it was reviewed by the Community Sponsor Operations’ SEO who decided whether to approve it. Once approved, the group was informed of its contractual responsibilities in writing and required to sign a sponsorship agreement.

10.14 Inspectors received evidence submissions from seven CSS groups, and survey returns from 24. They spoke directly to three groups. Views were mixed, but groups were generally positive about the guidance and the majority felt well-supported by the Home Office.

132 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/764990/2018-12-04_Community_Sponsorship_Guidance.pdf

133 There was a detailed ‘Statement of Requirements for Sponsors’. This included the requirement to “source suitable and sustainable accommodation, available for use by the resettled family for a minimum of two years with a two-year lease”, with details of the standards required, and to “meet and greet the arriving family” and provide information and practical assistance, for example with GP and school registration, English language tuition and attendance at a Job Centre.

134 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship>

135 Should the CSS resettlement go wrong, the local authority must be prepared to take over.

136 CSS groups were expected to develop their safeguarding policy with input from the local authority safeguarding team, or failing this with the assistance of the Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration Safeguarding Lead.

137 Groups were able to obtain “Approval in principle” where their application met the other criteria but they had yet to secure appropriate accommodation or to raise £9,000. In such cases, the group was required to notify the Home Office when it had the accommodation and/or funds and provide evidence.

10.15 Groups, particularly those who had applied in the earlier years of the scheme, had found the application process was slow. One reported: “I feel there is no consistency in the screening process and with very few updates provided we are in limbo as to what is happening and when we are looking at getting a response”. Another said: “CSS takes too long from initiation to delivery of a family, trying to motivate a group of people to stick with it is challenging” and “what we are getting back isn’t great – the process is slow and we don’t know why.”

10.16 However, the Home Office responded that the length and rigour of the process was a way of ensuring the group was serious. One senior member of staff told inspectors:

“Our process is slow because we do so much assurance. Should we do all that? Probably. Is there a way to do it quicker? That’s what we’re thinking about. But it is good for a group to spend a lot of time forming – if they do it quickly then they end up not being very cohesive. We have done some talking to Reset¹³⁸ about how long it takes a group to get from deciding to apply to actually make an application. It must be pragmatic. We have got to be confident that we’re doing it right.”

10.17 Figure 41 shows the number of working days from submission of the CSS group’s application to obtaining Home Office approval and from application to the family’s arrival in the UK for the 81 CSS groups who had resettled refugee families.

Figure 41 Timescales for the processing of CSS applications and for CSS resettlements		
	Range	Majority
Working days from application to approval	24 to 366 days	79 within 100 days
Working days from application to arrival in UK	73 to 398 days	72 within 150 days

10.18 Inspectors saw evidence that the CSS Team had tried to streamline the application process:

“[we’ve] reduced the application times and have made a number of changes to speed it up – e.g. removing the requirement [that] groups have a property from the beginning, so groups can get approval in principle, [or] ... if they haven’t raised the £9,000 yet, if they have raised some money but not yet all of it.”¹³⁹

10.19 In addition, in January 2019, the CSS Team had introduced an Application Review Panel:

“This means that feedback is done at the start of the process, so comments can be raised at the pre-approval visit, which reduces back and forth after the pre-approval visit. We also start the selection of a family as soon as they get approval, so as soon as they get the signed sponsor agreement back they can send the referral, which reduces waiting times after a group has been approved.”

10.20 In December 2019, the Professional Adviser for Safeguarding in the Office of the Children’s Champion (within the Home Office) had drafted a standardised safeguarding template which could be tailored as necessary by CSS groups to satisfy the requirement for “a publicly accessible safeguarding policy”. At the time of the inspection, this was still in draft.¹⁴⁰

138 According to its website, “Reset is the UK’s Community Sponsorship training, support and advice provider. We prepare ordinary people across the UK to resettle refugees in their local areas by providing high quality training, workshops and resources.”

139 This change was introduced in August 2018.

140 In its factual accuracy response, in September 2020, the Home Office confirmed that the template “remains in draft format only”.

Local authorities

- 10.21** Guidance for local authorities provided a detailed overview of the application process, outlining the criteria local authorities should apply when considering whether to give consent to a prospective CSS group, and the forms of support that local authorities could offer to groups and refugees. Importantly, it set out what the local authority would be required to do should the sponsorship agreement between a CSS group and a refugee family break down.
- 10.22** Despite this, inspectors were told by CSS groups that some local authorities did not follow the process and there was a concern that the guidance on giving consent was unclear and effectively gave local authorities “a veto” without having to specify its reasons for refusal.¹⁴¹
- 10.23** Home Office CSS staff reported some instances of local authorities being confused about their role and recognised that the Home Office needed to “do some work with local authorities ... because VPRS refugees have not become self-sufficient in their area they are not going to participate in the local authority scheme going forward and don’t want CSS in their area either.”

Guidance for Resettlement Operations

- 10.24** Guidance for Home Office staff handling resettlements with CSS groups was contained in two Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) documents. The CSS Team told inspectors that they found the guidance clear and comprehensive, and said “we do three-monthly reviews on guidance and go through it line by line as a team and check we are still doing things. It is also an opportunity for colleagues to raise issues.”
- 10.25** The first SOP dealt with the assessment process for CSS applications, covering the receipt and processing of applications, and the post-approval monitoring processes. It gave detailed instructions on how to review documentation and how to record decisions.
- 10.26** Staff were required to complete some elements of the application process within a specified timescale, such as forwarding completed application forms for initial assessment ahead of the pre-approval visit within three working days. However, there was no agreed timescale for the overall assessment process.
- 10.27** Approved CSS applications were directed to the VPRS/VCRS Allocations Team member responsible for the region of the UK in which the CSS group was based. The caseworker was also sent the group’s application. The Allocations Team SOP stated:
- “As you will see it provides detail on the composition of the group and any particular specialist support, they can provide to a family, for example whether there are any medical professionals in the group, whether they have experience in providing mental health support etc. There is also more detail at Section 4 on the accommodation they can provide which will also help us find a suitable match. The hope is that where there are particular skills within the group, we can provide a match with a family requiring those skills/support so please ensure that you refer to the form when allocating a case.”

¹⁴¹ The guidance states that “it is open to the local authority to decide on how consent will be considered locally. Grounds on which a local authority might object are: insufficient capacity to provide certain crucial local services in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places); concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area; where they have a strong reason to believe that the community sponsor is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children; or another appropriate reason.”

- 10.28** The Allocations Team SOP was written for the VPRS/VCRS schemes and dealt with the allocations process. It stated that: “Community Sponsorship offers are more sensitive and will need to be dealt with as a matter of priority.” While refugees placed with CSS groups were drawn from the general VPRS or VCRS pool, staff were instructed which cases to prioritise in terms of host countries, and the age, urgency and complexity of the refugee referral.
- 10.29** Caseworkers were instructed to match older cases where possible, and to consider whether CSS groups were able to support VCRS cases, or cases with complex mobility needs or family connections to particular areas. Matching was done using the information provided by the group, the completed Property Offer Form, Application Form, information provided in the refugee families’ Refugee Referral Form and Migrant Health Assessment.
- 10.30** CSS groups and local authorities were jointly informed by email by the VPRS/VCRS Allocations Team when they had been matched to a refugee family and IOM was instructed to begin preparations to transport them to the UK, following the same process as VPRS/VCRS cases.
- 10.31** When inspectors spoke to the CSS Team in February 2020 it was conducting an “Accommodation Matching Pilot”, with the CSS Team doing the match rather than the VPRS/VCRS Allocations Team. Inspectors were told: “We have found that this works better because we actually know the CSS groups. When we find the family, we run it by Allocations. They might give us the details of another family who they think would be suited better. Or they will approve the decision we’ve made.”

CSS groups

- 10.32** Inspectors surveyed CSS groups and received 24 full and two partial responses. The majority (over two-thirds) had become interested in the Scheme because they had previously worked with refugees or other ‘vulnerable’ groups, or had experience of advocacy or fundraising, or a relevant skill such as Arabic language, medical knowledge, or experience of working in housing.
- 10.33** One group commented: “We wanted to make a real and lasting difference for refugees – we saw CSS as a great way to change a family’s life and our aim is to continue to keep doing that for many more families.” Another said it “liked the idea that it was backed by the Home Office and its procedures and that a detailed application process was required. We found that this was a big factor mitigating risk.”
- 10.34** “The overall ease of the process” scored five or higher (out of ten) from 18 of the respondents, while 21 respondents rated “the level of engagement with the Home Office you had during the application process” at five or higher. Based on what they had heard from local authorities, the Home Office and NGOs, some groups felt that CSS refugees had better integration outcomes than other VPRS refugees, and one group commented the family it had resettled had integrated beyond anything the group had expected.
- 10.35** Two-thirds of respondents reported that securing suitable accommodation had been challenging. This was particularly so in cities, where housing was generally more expensive. One group had worked with a local housing association to find an affordable flat, another had found housing subsidised by a religious organisation in the area, while in another case a local landlord had agreed to rent a property at housing benefit rate.
- 10.36** Twelve CSS groups reported issues with accessing services: eight had had difficulties with Universal Credit and securing benefits; five with interpreting and languages; and, two with

mental health support. There were also some concerns about the variable availability and quality of services across the UK, including ESOL, places of worship, and halal food.

- 10.37** A London-based group told inspectors it was able to draw on a large and willing supply of experience and expertise in its local area to support the refugees: “we have a great team of Syrian refugees, Arabic translators, people who work in refugee issues, mental health, and homelessness”.
- 10.38** In contrast, a group based in a small country town had had to hire an Arabic-speaking interpreter from a nearby university to help them communicate with the family. This had been “key to the integration of the children in school” but was costly, and there were concerns that the family had become dependent on the interpreter. The family had also had to rely on a network of volunteer drivers to get around, for example to attend college and the mosque.
- 10.39** Eleven groups felt that the family they had sponsored did not understand what resettlement involved when they arrived. In particular, they did not understand the benefits system. One group suggested “there should be a simplified Universal Credit model for refugee families at least in the early months after their arrival. It is unreasonable to expect them to be able to understand the complexity of the mainstream scheme.”
- 10.40** Eleven groups said that the £9,000 commitment required from CSS groups did not accurately reflect the cost of resettling refugees. Seven of the 11 said that this was primarily because of the cost of accommodation. Four of the groups had spent more than £9,000, one of which said it had spent more than £25,000.
- 10.41** While funding for “exceptional costs” was available to CSS groups, up to March 2020 only 18 had made claims, suggesting that limited awareness of this funding and how to obtain it.

Reset

- 10.42** Reset was established in late 2017 in response to a Home Office tender for an organisation to provide support, training, and information to CSS groups. It “receive[s] funding from the Home Office and philanthropic organisations” to “prepare ordinary people across the UK to resettle refugees in their local areas by providing high quality training, workshops and resources.”¹⁴²
- 10.43** Reset provided several services to CSS groups, including:
- training workshops, on topics such as cultural awareness, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, preparing for arrival, and safeguarding
 - online training
 - networking days for CSS groups to meet one another
 - an application checking service, which reviews draft applications prior to their submission to the Home Office, and provides feedback to groups
- 10.44** In April 2018 the Home Office awarded Reset two-year grant funding of £500,000 a year. In March 2020, the grant funding was extended for a further year.
- 10.45** Reset reported quarterly to the Home Office on its finances and progress. The latter was assessed against eight key performance indicators (KPIs), with five possible ‘scores’: “Of

142 See: <https://resetuk.org/about/reset>

concern”; “Limited progress”, “Some progress”, “Good progress”, or “Acceptable progress”. See Figure 42.

Figure 42	
Reset Key Performance Indicators	
KPI	Description
Applications and Family Arrivals	How many applications had been received, and families arrived
Training	Provide training and support to Community Sponsors to prepare and deliver high quality resettlement for refugees
Supporting	Support community groups to make successful applications to become Community Sponsors
Connecting	Connect people and organisations, and exploit opportunities for partnership working, to develop a Whole of Society approach to Community Sponsorship
Breaking Barriers	Identify barriers to the growth of the Community Sponsorship Scheme and collaborate with others to find solutions
Raising Awareness	Support a wide awareness of Community Sponsorship across a diverse range of UK communities
Evaluation	Support the evaluation of the Community Sponsorship Scheme to inform a better understanding of what works and why
Stakeholder Group	Provide an effective secretariat function for a Community Sponsorship Stakeholder Group

- 10.46** Inspectors reviewed the quarterly reports for April 2018 to March 2020. In 2018-9, Reset struggled with the target of attracting 120 potential CSS groups, and the roll out of the training website took too long, although the training that was delivered was well-received. The quarterly assessments also identified that the target was missed for engagement with interfaith groups and the education sector.
- 10.47** In 2019-20, the quarterly assessments noted that application numbers were “well below” target and not increasing, which was blamed on the lengthy application process. A report from the University of Birmingham, dated June 2019, noted that Reset had been successful in coordinating the CSS stakeholder forum and raising awareness of CSS, and the networking events and application checking service were described in positive terms. By the end 2019-20, Reset was assessed as having achieved ‘Acceptable progress’ against four KPIs and ‘Some progress’ against three others. The KPI for Application and Family Arrivals remained ‘Of concern’.
- 10.48** Inspectors spoke to Reset in February 2020. Referring to the quarterly oversight meetings with the Home Office, Reset staff said they were “used to monitor KPIs, but there is also a lot of conversation and sharing. The Home Office team is very responsive to change and are open to thinking about how the scheme could be improved.” Meanwhile, Home Office senior management told inspectors: “we monitor Reset’s performance and ensure they’re doing what they’re meant to be doing to honour the grant agreement.”

- 10.49** Reset told inspectors that, with effect from the start of the new contract in April 2020, ‘Applications and Family Numbers’ was no longer a KPI. While they had tried their best to raise application numbers, they were “glad” this was no longer being used as a measure of their performance since it was not something they could control.
- 10.50** From April 2019, Reset had chaired the Community Sponsorship Stakeholder group, which aimed to “bring together stakeholder expertise and experience from across the sector; provide support and challenge to enable Reset to provide the best possible service; and provide support and challenge to the Home Office on policy, evaluation, and application process for CSS.” In February 2020, this was replaced by the Community Sponsorship Council, which seeks to “represent the views of Community Sponsorship groups and feedback to the Home Office.”
- 10.51** Reset told inspectors that it had “developed a regional delivery model”, engaging with other NGOs across the UK who were working to promote and support CSS groups, and could now “draw on expertise” from anywhere in the UK. It provided support and advice to over 40 CSS groups in this way and saw the arrangement as working well.
- 10.52** Reset also told inspectors that its relationships with its delivery partners were good. However, inspectors found there was little if any coordination of what was being delivered. For example, some CSS groups had attended training sessions provided by Reset and also by a partner organisation.
- 10.53** Reset provided funds and support to Caritas¹⁴³ and to Citizens UK.¹⁴⁴ These organisations supported CSS groups, particularly those who did not wish to apply independently. Caritas and Citizens UK acted as “lead sponsor” in such cases and used their existing charitable status where groups had not yet registered as charities as required by the Home Office. They also provided advice on issues such as safeguarding and helped CSS groups build their support networks. Citizens UK staff described their role to inspectors:
- “We use links to encourage groups to do it in the first place. Once they agree to do it we are ad hoc about who we say yes to being a sponsor to, if they’re a church then they don’t need us, we sort of pick up the waifs and strays – if it’s a community group with no connection to an institution and they need a lead sponsor then we’ll say yes.”
- 10.54** In February/March 2019, the Home Office conducted a Community Sponsorship Engagement Survey. Forty CSS groups responded, 90% of which reported that they had received some training from Reset. Over half (21) said that they had found out about the Community Sponsorship Scheme via either Reset or one of its partner organisations. Groups also noted that the application checking service provided by Reset was useful. (According to the Home Office, between 7 March 2019 and 14 January 2020, Reset had checked 34 applications).
- 10.55** Reset and the organisations it funded were not the only providers of training and support for CSS groups. In the South West of England, Charis¹⁴⁵ was providing much of this. Charis reported having a good working relationship with Reset.

Monitoring and oversight

- 10.56** Home Office Contact Officers made an initial monitoring visit six to eight weeks after the date of arrival. This was followed up at six months with a telephone call and then at eight months

143 <https://www.caritas.org/who-we-are/>

144 https://www.citizensuk.org/about_us

145 <https://www.charisgrants.com/>

with another visit. The Contact Officers met separately with members of the CSS group and with the resettled family. They completed a form with standardised questions about the family's progress, covering housing, finance, health, education, benefits and employment. Inspectors accompanied the Home Office on a monitoring visit and observed that it also involved a more general discussion about how the group had found the experience overall.

- 10.57** The CSS Team told inspectors that the visits “help us learn. For example, they may tell us how well a family are accessing ESOL which can then feed into our advice to other groups”. However, inspectors saw no evidence of any systematic analysis of the completed forms. At the time of the inspection, the Home Office was considering whether to include Reset in its monitoring visits.
- 10.58** Inspectors heard mixed views about the visits from CSS groups. Groups appreciated the opportunity to share feedback, but some felt that the visits were not as productive as they could have been. One noted that the visit “didn’t tell us anything we didn’t already know,” and as such was not especially useful, while another said that the visits were time-consuming and potentially unsettling for the family, without providing a great deal of feedback.
- 10.59** It was unclear what value these visits were to the families. Where an interpreter was needed one was provided by the group, so if the family had any problems or concerns about the group it might not feel free to express them. Meanwhile, the Home Office was not able to help with some problems. In one case reviewed by inspectors, the family reported that their child had been bullied at school. While it was not within the Home Office’s power to remedy this, there was no indication that the matter had been followed up with the local authority or Department for Education.
- 10.60** In terms of routine data collection, initially, the Home Office had looked to capture data about CSS from its regular data requests of local authorities about VPRS and VCRS. As more refugees were resettled with CSS groups, the Home Office began to ask specific questions of local authorities and of CSS groups.
- 10.61** CSS groups were also offered an ‘End of Agreement’ call with the Home Office CSS Team in order to provide feedback. However, inspectors were told that take-up for this had been low.
- 10.62** In February 2019, the Home Office conducted a survey of CSS groups, which it intended should become an annual event. The survey was sent to lead sponsors. Inspectors queried with the Home Office whether the fact that certain NGOs acted as lead sponsors for a number of groups¹⁴⁶ might skew the results of the survey. The CSS Team told inspectors “we do ask lead sponsors to disseminate the survey to the key support provider, often the project manager. We just have to hope that they do that – no way of telling as it is anonymous. Some are lead sponsors in name only, whereas others are very hands on.” The survey received responses covering 40 CSS groups.
- 10.63** The Home Office provided inspectors with a document setting out the actions it was taking in response to the survey. These included assigning a dedicated Support Officer to act as a Single Point of Contact for each application and including a hyperlink in the new application form to the benefits calculator.¹⁴⁷

146 Between them, two NGOs were lead sponsors for 30 groups, while three others were lead sponsors for four groups and another for three groups.

147 <https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators>

10.64 However, the Home Office did not appear to see a solution to some of the issues raised and some recorded “Actions” were simply acknowledgements of problems. For example, against “Further support when dealing with the Charity Commission”, the “Action” was recorded as: “We are aware of delays with the Charity Commission”, and against “Co-ordination with HMRC regarding tax credits”, it noted: “This is raised at the Pre-Approval visits with the groups, not sure we can influence the HMRC on this”.

10.65 The 2018 inspection of VPRS recognised that the success of the UK’s resettlement programmes depended on a cross-government effort. However, as the Home Office had primary responsibility for the operational delivery of the various schemes, it argued that where the policies or practice of other departments were causing difficulties for resettled refugees the Home Office needed to intervene. The report recommended that the Home Office should:

“Ensure that where the Scheme is dependent on support from, or affected by the decisions of, other government departments (for example, Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care) that ministers are sighted on any misalignments, and that where these exist practical solutions are found.”

10.66 The Home Office accepted this recommendation and in May 2018 it wrote:

“The Department has good connections across government departments and engages with officials regularly on a bilateral basis and through officials’ groups. The Department is also aware of the need to engage ministers from other departments. Various inter-ministerial groups to do that have been used in the past and consideration is currently being given to the best inter-ministerial forum for these discussions going forward.”

10.67 The Home Office “closed” the recommendation in August 2018. For the current inspection, inspectors were not shown any evidence of ministerial exchanges on cross-departmental issues affecting resettled refugees. The “Actions” noted in relation to the CSS survey gave no indication of how Resettlement Operations might effectively go about raising such an issue with another government department, whether directly or through Home Office ministers, but in September 2020, the Home Office commented that this “does not reflect the numerous exchanges had with other government departments on general policy as well as on specific cases over the years”.

10.68 In August 2019, the Home Office conducted a further survey, the focus of which was forward-looking, with the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) in mind. From 37 responses, the headlines were:

- 31 said that they found the Home Office’s pre-approval visits either ‘beneficial’ or ‘very beneficial’
- 34 had received training and support from Reset, but 20 said they would have benefitted from further post-arrival support from Reset
- 19 considered that the one-year integration support they were required to provide was adequate, while 18 felt it should be longer
- 30 considered the two-years accommodation support they were required to provide was adequate, while seven felt it should be longer
- groups suggested a number of areas where additional training would have been beneficial, including in relation to mental health and trauma support, navigating the benefits system, and working with interpreters

- groups also reported that they would like a more streamlined application process, clearer milestones for the first year, and more effective monitoring visits aimed at sharing feedback rather than ‘ticking off’ achievements

Support beyond the two-year point – Indefinite Leave to Remain applications

10.69 Although CSS groups signed a two-year sponsorship agreement,¹⁴⁸ a number felt that that the “two-year period is way too short” and that refugees would continue to need support beyond this point, which groups would want or feel obliged to provide.

10.70 Home Office staff told inspectors they recognised that refugees often required support beyond two years:

“We’re conscious of volunteer fatigue – need to work more towards families becoming self-sufficient at the two-year point so that volunteers are doing less. There’s work we can do with RESET to move families along. Some groups are doing too much for families and they need to step back so it’s no wonder that there’s volunteer fatigue. The Groups shouldn’t be going to the bus stop with someone after they’ve been here for 9 months.”

10.71 One area of particular concern for CSS groups was the support that refugees might require in order to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) after five years. In June 2019, the Home Office produced a leaflet for VPRS and VCRS refugees explaining that they would need to apply for ILR. This had been shared with CSS groups for them to pass on to their refugee families. However, the CSS Team told inspectors: “it won’t be the group’s responsibility as their role ends after two years.” While technically true, CSS groups felt that this failed to recognise that it was intrinsic to the scheme that groups and families would form close and lasting relationships.

CSS groups and PREVENT

10.72 Inspectors reviewed open source information about the CSS groups that had resettled refugees. As at the beginning of 2020, around two-thirds appeared to be faith-based or associated with places of worship, with Christian groups making up almost 90% of this cohort. In addition, there was one multi-faith group and two Jewish groups. There were also four Muslim groups.¹⁴⁹

10.73 Two of the Muslim groups told inspectors that the requirement within the scheme’s safeguarding policy for groups to sign up to PREVENT¹⁵⁰ training was causing some prospective Muslim groups not to apply. One commented:

“...it is discriminatory, and many Muslim organisations worry that it would affect them if they were to apply. The Home Office starting position is that we are ‘trouble’. We have fed this back to the Home Office and were told that PREVENT training needed to be on the application, but many Muslim organisations are reluctant to do this and don’t like it. The Home Office were pragmatic and explained the reality was that we needed to signpost the PREVENT training as it is part of the process.”

148 The guidance for CSS groups states: “Your formal responsibility to support the resettled family will last for one year, with the exception of housing, for which the responsibility lasts for two years. You may choose to provide support beyond this, according to the needs of the resettled family.”

149 The Home Office does not ask groups if they are faith-based or record this information. In its factual accuracy response, in September 2020, it stated that it did not recognise nor was it able to check this finding.

150 PREVENT is a government strategy aimed at identifying and preventing terrorism and extremism. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf

Critics say that it disproportionately targets the Muslim community. <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/fundamental/prevent/>

The second group added:

“as members of the community we don’t see ourselves as under the duty of PREVENT – we would call the police if we had concerns about someone and we shouldn’t be discriminating against the Syrian refugees on this issue.”

10.74 The groups told inspectors that the Home Office had found a “workaround” to the PREVENT issue in their cases rather than a solution. CSS management told inspectors:

“We are looking at this and thinking about if there are any ways to make sure that the requirements satisfy security needs but alleviate some of the concerns around PREVENT that groups have. We will need to find something that they are happy with and will discuss it with trusted partners in the sector. It’s a difficult one but we will try to find something the majority of people are happy with.”

10.75 The Home Office also pointed out that the government was committed to an independent review of PREVENT and that the outcome of this would need to be taken into account.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile, senior management appeared to be less concerned about this issue. One senior civil servant told inspectors that they were confident that the problems with PREVENT could be overcome, but they thought that broadening the diversity of CSS groups did not rest on finding a solution to PREVENT, however the Home Office was keen to attract more Muslim groups.

International engagement

10.76 The Home Office told inspectors about the bilateral and multilateral engagement the CSS Team had had with counterparts in other countries. It provided evidence of attendance at a number of meetings and workshops throughout 2019.

10.77 According to the Home Office, it was providing support to countries who were developing and implementing their own sponsorship schemes. As one senior manager told inspectors, “they see [the UK] as world leaders. Eleven countries are doing or will be doing sponsorship and they look to us because we’re more current and recent.”

151 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/independent-review-of-prevent>

11. Inspection findings: the future of resettlement

Announcement of the UK Resettlement Scheme

- 11.1** On 17 June 2019, the Home Secretary announced that the UK would introduce a new global resettlement Scheme for the most vulnerable refugees following the conclusion of VPRS in 2020.¹⁵²
- 11.2** In a written ministerial statement,¹⁵³ the Home Secretary noted that “In every year since 2016 the UK resettled more refugees from outside Europe than any other EU member state”. He went on to explain that:

“In the first year of operation of the new scheme, the UK will aim to resettle in the region of 5000 of the world’s most vulnerable refugees. We will continue to purposefully target those greatest in need of assistance, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. A new process for emergency resettlement will also be developed, allowing the UK to respond quickly to instances of heightened protection need, providing a faster route to protection where lives are at risk. Building on the experience of delivering the current schemes and the significant contribution of our community sponsors a key part of our resettlement offer will be that those resettled through our community sponsorship and Mandate routes will be in addition to our yearly, global commitment.

We will continue to work in partnership with local authorities. Recognising that their continued support will be fundamental to achieving our ambitions, we will ensure they continue to be well-funded, supporting them to provide resettled refugees with the best possible support upon arrival. We will also continue our strong engagement with civil society as we move forward.

We will continue to support the long-term integration of refugees, empowering them to fulfil their potential and contribute positively to their new communities.”

- 11.3** Writing to the Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee the same day,¹⁵⁴ the Immigration Minister repeated the aim to resettle in the region of 5,000 in the first year of the new Scheme and the importance of local authorities and community groups to the success of resettlement in the UK. The minister ended her letter:

“Whilst over the last few years, we have made significant progress in our contribution to global resettlement efforts, it is right that we today reaffirm our ongoing commitment to supporting refugees, and to working with partners to find a longer-term approach to refugee protection – an approach that restores dignity and offers refugees a viable future.”

¹⁵² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-global-resettlement-scheme-for-the-most-vulnerable-refugees-announced>

¹⁵³ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-06-17/HCWS1627/>

¹⁵⁴ <https://old.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/home-affairs/Correspondence-17-19/190617-Letter-from-Immigration-Minister-re-refugee-resettlement.pdf>

11.4 The announcement was welcomed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who commented:

“I am delighted that the government recognises the value of communities welcoming refugees through community sponsorship, a scheme I am privileged to have been involved with. From 2020 refugees resettled through community sponsorship will be in addition to the government’s commitment. I call on faith leaders and communities to make the most of this opportunity to change the lives of more refugees and transform communities in the process.”

11.5 The GOV.UK ‘News story’ also quoted the UK Representative for UNHCR:

“We are delighted by this announcement from the UK, which is extending its commitment to offer international protection to a meaningful number of refugees from wherever the need is most acute. Resettlement is a crucial component of international solidarity for those states bearing the greatest burden and gives refugees the possibility of rebuilding their lives. We hope this serves as a signal for other countries to provide more routes to safety for those forced to flee as the international community moves to make the global compact on refugees a reality.”

Home Office work in preparation for UKRS

Restructure of Resettlement Operations

11.6 In anticipation of UKRS, starting in January 2020, Resettlement Operations began restructuring itself. The separate Gateway, VPRS and VCRS teams were consolidated into one team. The new structure assumed that, operationally, the UKRS process will mirror VPRS/VCRS in that:

- UNHCR will retain responsibility for all out-of-country casework, including identifying the refugees “most in need” of resettlement
- IOM will be responsible for Migration Health Assessments, cultural orientation and travel arrangements
- Participation by local authorities will continue to be voluntary
- Local authorities will receive the same tapered tariff funding, amounting to £20,520 for each refugee over five years.

Guidance

11.7 The Home Office published ‘Resettlement: policy statement’ in July 2018. This outlined the purpose and scope of VPRS, VCRS, Gateway, Mandate and Community Sponsorship. At the time of writing (July 2020), new guidance for UKRS had yet to be issued.

11.8 In February 2020, senior management had told inspectors that, while the broad outline of UKRS had been confirmed, because ministers had changed since the announcement of UKRS they needed to consult the new ministerial team further on some key points.

UKRS 'Note for Local Authorities'

- 11.9** In August 2019, the Home Office had published 'UK Resettlement Scheme: Note for Local Authorities'.¹⁵⁵ This encouraged local authorities, including those who had not previously participated in resettlement, to submit offers of places for refugees resettled through the new scheme. According to the 'Note', The Home Office was planning "a smooth transition, with arrivals under the new scheme expected to start once arrivals under the VPRS are completed; this is estimated to be in Spring 2020."
- 11.10** The 'Note' explained that:
- "This new scheme will be open to refugees identified by UNHCR to be in need of resettlement to the UK because of their vulnerability and does not have a specific geographical focus."
- 11.11** However, it "anticipated that the caseloads of refugees we resettle will continue to look broadly similar to those we see under our existing schemes, with the majority coming from the MENA region." After the first year, "decisions on the number of refugees to be resettled in subsequent years will be determined through future spending rounds. Year on year, resettlement volumes are likely to fluctuate according to the flow of referrals from overseas and the availability of suitable accommodation and support in the UK."
- 11.12** The 'Note' described the roles of UNHCR and IOM in selecting and preparing refugees for resettlement, and of regional Strategic Migration Partnerships and local authorities in resettling refugees in the UK, as essentially unchanged from VPRS and VCRS. It referred to the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) as "a real success" and "established now, with a broad range of experience, training and support available to community groups, through Reset".
- 11.13** Refugees resettled by CSS groups would not be included in the 5,000 aim. Stakeholders told inspectors that this was a welcome change, for which they had lobbied, as it helped to counter the argument that civil society was delivering a government function. However, "Local authorities will retain the same role in the community sponsorship process and we would ask they continue to engage positively with groups that come forward to participate in community sponsorship."
- 11.14** The 'Note' also covered the 'Funding package' available to local authorities, which will "mirror that currently paid under VPRS and VCRS" and include "additional funding ... made available, on a case by case basis, for exceptional costs incurred by local authorities, including; property adaptations, void costs for larger (4 bed) properties, special educational needs, and adult social care." Access to benefits and work, and to healthcare and English language tuition, plus funding for these, was also explained.
- 11.15** On 31 March 2020, the Home Office published more detailed instructions for local authorities (including a version in Welsh) and for healthcare providers in England. These "set out the conditions under which the funding is disbursed, the outcomes required and the processes to be followed to claim funds. They also provide more detailed definitions of eligibility."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/UK%20Resettlement%20Scheme%20Briefing%20Note%20for%20Local%20Authorities%20WEB.pdf>

¹⁵⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877261/2020-2021_LA_Funding_Instruction_v1.0_-_Final1.pdf

Risks to delivery of UKSS

Rolling the “Work in Progress” cases into UKRS

11.16 The Home Office told inspectors that the “Work in Progress” cases from VPRS and VCRS would be rolled into the UKRS. The Home Office shared details of the UKRS WiP as at 21 July 2020. See Figure 43.

Figure 43

UK Resettlement Scheme “Work in Progress” as at 21 July 2020	
Source	Number
Gateway WiP	518
VPRS WiP	2,501
VCRS WiP	1,325
UKRS new UNHCR referrals	519
Total	4,863

11.17 Depending on the outcome of discussions with the new ministerial team, it appeared that the fundamentals of UKRS would be the same as VPRS and VCRS. It was therefore unclear how the prospects of resettling the “hard to place” refugees who had become “stuck” in the VPRS and VCRS WiPs prior to March 2020 would be improved.

11.18 It was also unclear how many new UKRS referrals the Home Office would be seeking from UNHCR. ICIBI’s 2018 inspection report challenged the Home Office over its front-loading of VPRS referrals, arguing that it needed “to be alive to the effects on others of gearing its processes to ensure it can achieve this, especially on those refugees told they have been selected for resettlement but who have to wait months for further news. The fact that UK resettlement process is quick by comparison to other international schemes does not fully answer this concern.” Since then, the timescales have lengthened considerably.

11.19 In early March 2020, the Home Office told inspectors that it had a positive track record of working well with local authorities to come up with solutions, despite the length of time it takes, adding:

“UNHCR ... never raised any concerns with us around the length of our processing times. A case that has been waiting since 2016 sounds terrible to us but compared to the main players [other resettlement States] it can take five years ... there was pressure from the Chief Inspector about why we’re not resettling people faster, but we’re not an outlier in terms of our timelines. If we’ve committed to a case, we’ll move heaven and earth to find a solution.”

11.20 While it may have made operational sense for VPRS/VCRS, the absence of a multi-year commitment to a clear target number of refugees means it is no longer safe for the Home Office to assume everyone it has accepted will be resettled in time. UKRS was an opportunity re-examine the cases in the WiP and to analyse what, specifically, had made their resettlement so difficult, using this to reflect on the eligibility criteria for the new scheme and the incentives for local authorities and other sponsors, in order to prevent the WiP from simply getting bigger

with a higher proportion of hard-to-resettle families. Inspectors saw no evidence that the Home Office had done this.

- 11.21** However, to an extent, the referral process had become self-regulating. Home Office senior management believed that UNHCR understood the sorts of families that the UK was more likely to be able to resettle in terms of family size (larger families being more difficult) and medical and other needs (where the UK was better-placed than some other resettlement countries) and bore this in mind when making referrals.

Long-standing challenges to integration

- 11.22** The main integration challenges for resettled refugees had not changed since the creation of Gateway in 2004. They were well-known and had been highlighted in internal and external evaluations of the various schemes and other reports, such as the Casey Review into opportunity and integration, published in December 2016.¹⁵⁷ The first challenge was helping refugees to achieve proficiency in English. This was the key to self-reliance and to overcoming social isolation. It linked to the other major challenge: accessing employment.
- 11.23** The solutions were beyond the Home Office's remit and reach. They required action from other government departments (OGDs), in particular the Department for Education (DfE), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and, in terms of the health and welfare of refugees, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). But, while it could not compel OGDs, the Home Office was best placed to coordinate and encourage this cross-government effort.
- 11.24** The Home Office appeared to accept this responsibility at both official and ministerial level when responding to ICIBI's 2018 inspection of VCRS. Again, in February 2020, Home Office senior management told inspectors that the department's role was to take the learning from the resettlement schemes and identify the needs of refugees and "then to influence OGDs to implement this so that it benefits refugees in practice".
- 11.25** With regard to English language tuition, numerous reports have referred to the patchy and inconsistent provision of ESOL across the UK.¹⁵⁸ In March 2018, the government published its 'Integrated Communities Strategy' Green Paper, which referred to VPRS and VCRS and the joint Home Office/DfE fund of £10 million spread over five years to enable local authorities to make more tuition available, build their capacity, and improve childcare provision, to open access to English classes for those with young children. A network of regional coordinators was created to map English language provision, identify gaps, share good practice, and help local authorities to build capacity.¹⁵⁹
- 11.26** Following publication of 'Integrated Communities Strategy', the government proposed that DfE would publish a national ESOL strategy by Autumn 2019.¹⁶⁰ However, while DfE published a

157 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf

158 For example, in June 2019, Refugee Action published a report, 'Turning words into action', part of Refugee Action's 'Let Refugees Learn' campaign, calling on the Government to provide more resources for ESOL for refugees; to publish an ESOL strategy; to address barriers to participation in classes, which disproportionately affect women; to provide tuition from the point of claim for those seeking asylum; and to facilitate a national framework for community-based language support

159 In September 2020, in its factual accuracy response, the Home Office provided further details, clarifying that Home Office ESOL funding is in addition to the mainstream ESOL offer funded by DfE. "All refugees can access language tuition that is fully funded through the Adult Education Budget if they are in receipt of certain benefits. The Home Office and DfE have provided funding of £10m over five years to enable local authorities participating in the VPRS and VCRS to provide additional language tuition to resettled refugees. In addition to this, the Home Office has provided funding for childcare to allow adult refugees to attend ESOL, and for regional coordination to identify gaps and support local capacity building and good practice. In 2019, DfE and the Home Office commissioned [new resources](#) to support ESOL delivery at pre-entry level; and the Home Office commissioned [ESOL for refugees](#) resources to further support practitioners in meeting the needs of this cohort."

160 See a House of Commons Library briefing, published July 2019:

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2019-0169/CDP-2019-0169.pdf>

research report in June 2019,¹⁶¹ which looked at ESOL provision, the national strategy had not been published by the time the UKRS was due to launch in Spring 2020.¹⁶²

- 11.27** In relation to employment, DWP did not have a dedicated team focused on delivering targeted support to refugees. The Home Office told inspectors that: “All work coaches work with customers with a range of complex needs, working with relevant expert external partners to ensure the right service and support can be delivered to each customer. Employment support is delivered through local Jobcentres. The same core services are provided at each Jobcentre but there will also be support delivered by partner organisations depending on local need.”¹⁶³
- 11.28** The numbers and spread of Job Centres made it particularly challenging to achieve any consistency of support. However, Home Office senior management told inspectors that the department had influenced DWP to appoint a senior refugee champion. They had committed to promoting the refugee agenda across the Department and supporting staff who work with refugee clients, through provision of information and links to expert organisations. The senior refugee champion meets regularly with the Director of Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration and represents DWP on the Strategic Engagement Group. Nonetheless, Home Office senior management acknowledged that more work was needed with DWP at strategic and local levels.
- 11.29** In terms of access to services, such as healthcare, the Home Office was sensitive to risk that it might be perceived that refugees were being given priority. This was a particular concern where services were under pressure, such as mental health services. Securing timely access to services was challenging. Resettlement Operations senior management told inspectors, while it is “not very visible ... we have done lots of work with NHS England and Public Health England around mental health”.

Stakeholder engagement

- 11.30** In addition to its day-to-day operational-level contact with resettlement partners, including UNHCR, IOM, NGOs and Strategic Migration Partnerships, the Home Office chaired a Resettlement Strategic Engagement Group which met quarterly. There were also other quarterly fora, and ad hoc and annual meetings, covering particular areas, such as refugee mental health, or broader themes, such as integration.
- 11.31** Inspectors reviewed the minutes of the quarterly meetings of the Resettlement Strategic Engagement Forum held between March 2018 and June 2019. The meetings were well-attended by senior Home Office staff and stakeholders. Discussion appeared to focus on VPRS, with Gateway and Community Sponsorship Scheme seldom mentioned. The same issues were raised at successive meetings, including requests from local authorities for more details about UKRS.

161 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811750/English_for_speakers_of_other_languages.pdf

162 Scotland and Wales have developed their own strategies for teaching English to migrants and refugees. The Scottish Government has a website on English for speakers of other languages, which explains its policy, and has also published the ‘New Scots refugee integration strategy 2018-2022’, with language as one of its seven key themes. Welsh Government policy can be found on its website. It has also developed a strategy, called ‘Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan’, which aims to “challenge discrimination faced by refugees and asylum seekers, ensure equality of opportunity (where this is possible within UK immigration law) and promote good relations between these groups and others in society.”

163 A 2016 report by the Work and Pensions Committee described the role of Work Coaches: “Work Coaches are front-line DWP staff based in Jobcentres. Their main role is to support claimants into work by challenging, motivating, providing personalised advice and using knowledge of local labour markets. This involves conducting work-focused interviews and agreeing tailored “Claimant Commitments”. At February 2016, 11,000 whole-time equivalent Work Coaches supported nearly 745,000 out-of-work claimants across Great Britain. Each Work Coach is responsible for a caseload of around 100 unemployed claimants and conducts 10 to 20 claimant interviews per day.” <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmworpen/549/54907.htm>

- 11.32** Though no doubt important in terms of maintaining good working relationships, there was little evidence that the various stakeholder engagements had been effective at bringing about any significant improvements. It did not appear that anyone had sought to evaluate their effectiveness.
- 11.33** On 25 February 2020, the Home Office hosted a conference for local authorities to provide details of the UKRS and how it will work. UNHCR and IOM also spoke about the global resettlement picture and about lessons they had learned from VPRS/VCRS concerning Migration Health Assessments (MHA) and mobility issues, based on which they were planning to carry out pre-departure medical screenings, including pregnancy tests.¹⁶⁴

Indefinite Leave to Remain applications

- 11.34** Refugees resettled through Gateway have been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), while VPRS and VCRS refugees have been granted five years Leave to Remain (LTR), and after five years are eligible to apply for ILR. UKRS will operate like VPRS/VCRS, so all UKRS resettled refugees will need to apply for ILR after five years. Stakeholders were clear that the VPRS/VCRS refugees they currently supported would not be able to do this without help, which raised issues about access to good quality immigration advice and costs both for those who had already been resettled and for those resettled through UKRS.
- 11.35** A number of stakeholders expressed concern about a shortage of regulated immigration advisors.¹⁶⁵ Some areas of the UK were “immigration advice deserts”. An NGO based in the South West said that there were no OISC registered advisors in their local area, and they did not know what refugees were supposed to do to access these services. One stakeholder told inspectors that they “had to support Syrians [resettled through VPRS] to fill in lengthy documents for ILR because [we] could not find legal providers to do it.”¹⁶⁶
- 11.36** Applying for ILR was not the only reason why resettled refugees might require immigration advice. For example, a family might wish to apply for ‘Leave in Line’ for a new baby. Stakeholders commented that advice for such applications was costly, and often beyond what refugees could afford.
- 11.37** Home Office staff told inspectors that they understood that access to an OISC-regulated immigration advisor was a concern, but “... after five years, with the expectation of having familiarised themselves with the UK and integrated, we see this as less of an issue. The

¹⁶⁴ The 2018 ICIBI inspection of VPRS recommended that the Home Office should look at how the resettlement of pregnant women might be expedited in order to avoid delays due to “fit to fly” concerns in late pregnancy. The recommendation was rejected. In 2020, inspectors found that while the birth of a child prior to arrival could mean that suitably-sized accommodation became harder to source and therefore cause delays, there was no evidence that scheduled resettlements were delayed due to pregnancy. However, the Home Office and stakeholders cited cases of women arriving who were pregnant but the Home Office was unaware of it, which highlighted that Migration Health Assessments (MHA) were often dated by the time the resettlement took place. In September 2020, in its factual accuracy response, the Home Office commented: “As of 1 April 2019, all female refugees aged 15 to 49 undergo a pregnancy test every 6 months after their case is accepted. In addition, every 6 months whilst awaiting resettlement, refugees are contacted by UNHCR with a “keep in touch” message from the Home Office. As part of this process, UNHCR ask refugees to advise if there have been any changes of circumstances, including pregnancy.”

¹⁶⁵ Anyone providing immigration advice in relation to an ILR application must have satisfied the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) that they have reached competence Level 2. Level 1: basic immigration advice within the Immigration Rules; Level 2: more complex casework, including applications outside the Immigration Rules; Level 3: appeals <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-become-a-regulated-immigration-adviser/how-to-become-a-regulated-immigration-adviser>

¹⁶⁶ In September 2020, in its factual accuracy response, the Home Office wrote: “As long as they are not providing legal advice, there is of course no requirement for someone to be OISC registered to help complete an indefinite leave application.” OISC guidance states that registration is not required “If your work is restricted only to signposting or the provision of general information”. It is ultimately a matter for OISC, but inspectors regarded assisting with the completion of forms as more than “signposting” or providing “general information”.

policy expectation is that people would be able to navigate the system by themselves after five years.”¹⁶⁷

- 11.38** Home Office senior management told inspectors that the limited numbers of OISC Level 3 advisor was something they were looking at with the Ministry of Justice and the Legal Aid Agency. “LTR versus ILR” was something that they always “come back to” with colleagues in policy. One of the arguments for five years’ LTR was to ensure alignment with the rest of asylum policy.¹⁶⁸ Policy staff told inspectors there were “pros and cons” for both LTR and ILR, for example “granting ILR meant there was no criminality check after five years”.
- 11.39** Aside from accessing and affording the necessary qualified advice, stakeholders were also concerned about the impact of granting LTR on integration. One refugee caseworker commented: “Nobody is going to settle properly knowing after five years they might not get ILR. Where do you want to send them if they don’t get it? They’ve been in a refugee camp for years.” Another described the UKRS LTR as “a retrospective step” for refugees who may previously have been resettled through Gateway.

UKRS ‘demographic’

- 11.40** The Home Office has stated that UKRS will not have a specific geographic focus but that it expects the majority of the refugees resettled through the scheme will come from the MENA region. Senior management repeated to inspectors that there was “unlikely to be a big shift away from MENA in the first year”. This was a reasonable planning assumption, given that a third of the 20.4 million refugees under the UNHCR’s mandate are from Syria (6.7 million), with a further 2.3 million from South Sudan, and 0.9 million from Somalia. By carrying over the VPRS and VCRS WIPs, it was also all but inevitable in year one.
- 11.41** The approach played to the strengths of VPRS: the public sympathy for Syrian refugees and the availability of local authorities willing to support them. One of the lessons from VCRS was that local authorities found it harder to extend their support to other nationalities, both because of local politics and also because of practical issues such as a shortage of interpreters for non-Arabic speakers.
- 11.42** At the February 2020 conference, the Home Office sought to reassure local authorities further that the UKRS cohort would remain the same for at least the first year, and that any changes would be “gradual”, although UNHCR and IOM drew attention to other large refugee populations, such as Afghans (2.7 million). Following on from the conference, Resettlement Operations senior managers planned to attend Strategic Migration Partnership ‘Awaydays’ to raise awareness of UKRS. However, inspectors saw no evidence that the Home Office was looking for solutions to the particular challenges of resettling non-Syrian or non-Arabic speaking refugees.

¹⁶⁷ In September 2020, in its factual accuracy response, the Home Office provided additional context why this was considered less of an issue: “The LA tariff can be used to cover legal costs when deemed necessary and the expectation is that the majority of people should be able to navigate the system by themselves after five years, while acknowledging that some with particular vulnerabilities may require some assistance as part of their ongoing support provision”

¹⁶⁸ Refugees who go through the asylum system are given five years’ leave to remain.

Resourcing UKRS beyond 2020-21

- 11.43** At the time of writing (July 2020), the Home Office was waiting for the Comprehensive Spending Review to know what funding it would have for UKRS beyond 2020-21.¹⁶⁹ While this was frustrating for Home Office staff, it was a cause of real and practical concern to a number of refugee resettlement delivery partners. It created uncertainties about their ability to support refugee resettlement in the longer-term. One said that just two local authorities out of the eight with which it worked had committed to UKRS, in part because of these uncertainties.
- 11.44** UNHCR told inspectors that it found this situation particularly challenging as it worked with external partners and was unable to provide any guarantees about how long it would require their services, causing issues with the hiring and training of staff.
- 11.45** The same issues were highlighted in ICIBI’s 2018 inspection report, in that case, as a result of the front-loading of referrals for VPRS. The recommendation was that the Home Office should:
- “Review the Scheme’s communication strategy, paying particular attention to:
- a. UNHCR and IOM, clarifying as far as possible the Home Office’s requirements of both after sufficient refugees have been referred to the Scheme to meet the 20,000 target;
 - b. Local authorities, clarifying whether further pledges are required, including from ‘new’ local authorities, and dealing with concerns about the fair distribution of ‘complex’ cases;
 - c. Clinical Commissioning Groups and Local Health Boards, so that available funding is utilised to provide specialist medical provision for refugees;
 - d. Resettled refugees, providing reassurance about continued support (at least until Year 5) with their integration, especially with accommodation, English language tuition, access to employment, and any special health or educational needs).”
- 11.46** This recommendation was “partially accepted” and the Home Office told inspectors that it had been “closed”. In its response, it indicated that it was aware of the need to involve its “operational partners” in discussions and to notify them of its plans. However, it pushed back on d. commenting that:
- “The intention of the integration support provided to resettled refugees is to ensure they are empowered to be independent as quickly as possible. The tailored support is provided for a 12-month period and there is no expectation that this must be provided beyond that point.”
- 11.47** The comments from stakeholders strongly suggest that the Home Office has more to do to ensure that its communications are clear, timely, fully understood and that they meet stakeholders’ needs. Meanwhile, all of the evidence in relation to the “integration journey” for resettled refugees points to them requiring substantial support well beyond the 12-month point, not simply financial but help with signposting and accessing services.

¹⁶⁹ On 24 March 2020, the Chancellor announced that the Comprehensive Spending Review 2020 would be delayed from July to enable the government to remain focused on responding to the public health and economic emergency. A new date for the CSR would be set in due course.

Possible changes to Mandate

- 11.48** In 2018-19, just 18 refugees were resettled through Mandate. In 2019-20, the figure was 11. Resettlement Operations staff aspired to increase the number of cases resettled under Mandate, but they acknowledged that “there needs to be work to understand why we are getting so few referrals from UNHCR, it’s hard to understand why so few are coming through that route”. However, a larger Mandate programme raised questions about resourcing and Resettlement Operations also acknowledged that this could prove challenging.
- 11.49** Stakeholders have argued that allowing families in the UK to apply for resettlement of relatives with the support of CSS groups if they could not afford to support the process themselves would “improve integration as it would mean families could bring other family members”. This could also address some of the requests made by CSS groups to resettle named and/or linked VPRS/VCRS cases.

Gateway

- 11.50** Local authorities involved with Gateway told inspectors they believed that the Programme’s low public profile was one reason why more local authorities had not volunteered to take part. Greater public awareness of VPRS had led to different treatment of refugees resettled through the two schemes, for example a popular High Street retailer had donated £500 gift vouchers to refugees who had arrived through VPRS, but there had been nothing similar for those who had arrived through Gateway.
- 11.51** Local authorities, SMPs and NGOs involved with Gateway told inspectors, apart from the issue of ILR, they were pleased it was being rolled into UKRS, bringing the “two-tier” system to an end. They were satisfied that their Gateway experiences had been fed into the design of UKRS and happy that Home Office staff who had worked on Gateway would be working on UKRS.

Emergency resettlement

- 11.52** The UKRS announcement in June 2019, had stated that:

“A new process for emergency resettlement will also be developed, allowing the UK to respond quickly to instances when there is a heightened need for protection, providing a faster route to resettlement where lives are at risk.”

- 11.53** This was a departure from previous UK resettlement schemes and in February 2020, Home Office staff told inspectors they were looking at how it might be done. Implementing emergency resettlements is complicated by the fact that security checks take time and are difficult to expedite. Staff told inspectors that developing an emergency resettlement scheme was one of their “biggest priorities”. However, “it was too early in the development phase” to provide much clarity about what this would look like in practice and how it would align with UNHCR’s understanding of the term “Emergency”.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ UNHCR’s criteria for prioritising a case as “Emergency” are “Security and/or medical condition requires immediate removal; Ideally, seven-day maximum between the submission of an emergency case and the refugee’s departure.”

Unaccompanied minors

11.54 Resettlement Operations told inspectors that unaccompanied minors were “not in the submission plan” for the first year of UKRS. However, a specific objective to resettle unaccompanied minors could be added at some future date. Meanwhile, staff hoped to be able to continue resettling unaccompanied minors on an ad hoc basis.

The impact of Coronavirus / COVID-19

11.55 Since March 2020, the measures put in place to combat the COVID-19 pandemic have had significant consequences for refugee resettlement. The last resettlement flight to the UK was on 12 March 2020. On 17 March 2020, UNHCR and IOM halted their work on the ground, so there were no further referrals or preparations for departure. The same day, the Foreign Secretary advised against all “non-essential” international travel.

11.56 On 9 April 2020, Home Office senior management told inspectors “following advice received from IOM on their current capacity to operate, all arrivals up to end April had been cancelled and the transition to the UK Resettlement Scheme will be delayed. We are closely monitoring the situation and hope to resume resettlement arrivals when conditions allow.”

11.57 According to the Home Office, refugees whose resettlement had been imminent were informed of the delay as promptly as possible. Those who had been scheduled to depart and had sold or given away their possessions in preparation were being supported by IOM through a contingency fund, which the Home Office had authorised IOM to use. Home Office staff were in touch with local authorities and CSS groups, providing advice about how to communicate with and protect resettled refugees during the pandemic. Resettlement had been coordinating video calls with CSS groups to provide support, offering 1:1 advice over the phone or by email, and transitioning to offering online training.

11.58 As with much else in relation to COVID-19, the longer-term risks to refugee resettlement in the UK remained unclear at the time of writing. When restrictions begin to be relaxed in the UK, there will still need to be a careful assessment of the situation in host countries before resettlements can recommence. There is currently no new start date for UKRS.

Annex A: Role and remit of the Independent Chief Inspector

The role of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (until 2012, the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency) was established by the UK Borders Act 2007.

Sections 48-56 of the UK Borders Act 2007 (as amended) provide the legislative framework for the inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the performance of functions relating to immigration, asylum, nationality and customs by the Home Secretary and by any person exercising such functions on his behalf.

The legislation empowers the Independent Chief Inspector to monitor, report on and make recommendations about all such functions. However, functions exercised at removal centres, short-term holding facilities and under escort arrangements are excepted insofar as these are subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons or Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary (and equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland).

The legislation directs the Independent Chief Inspector to consider and make recommendations about, in particular:

- consistency of approach
- the practice and performance of listed persons compared to other persons doing similar activities
- the procedure in making decisions
- the treatment of claimants and applicants
- certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum act 2002 (c. 41) (unfounded claim)
- the law about discrimination in the exercise of functions, including reliance on section 19D of the Race Relations Act 1976 (c. 74) (exception for immigration functions)
- the procedure in relation to the exercise of enforcement powers (including powers of arrest, entry, search and seizure)
- practice and procedure in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of offences
- the procedure in relation to the conduct of criminal proceedings
- whether customs functions have been appropriately exercised by the Secretary of State and the Director of Border Revenue
- the provision of information
- the handling of complaints; and
- the content of information about conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom, which the Secretary of State compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration officers and other officials

In addition, the legislation enables the Secretary of State to request the Independent Chief Inspector to report to him in writing in relation to specified matters.

The legislation requires the Independent Chief Inspector to report in writing to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State lays all reports before Parliament, which he has committed to do within eight weeks of receipt, subject to both Houses of Parliament being in session.

Reports are published in full, except for any material that the Secretary of State determines is undesirable to publish for reasons of national security, or where publication might jeopardise an individual's safety, in which case the legislation permits the Secretary of State to omit the relevant passages from the published report.

As soon as a report has been laid in Parliament, it is published on the Inspectorate's website, together with the Home Office's response to the report and recommendations.

Annex B: ICIBI ‘Expectations’

Background and explanatory documents are easy to understand and use (e.g. statements of intent (both ministerial and managerial), impact assessments, legislation, policies, guidance, instructions, strategies, business plans, intranet and GOV.UK pages, posters, leaflets etc.)

- They are written in plain, unambiguous English (with foreign language versions available, where appropriate)
- They are kept up to date
- They are readily accessible to anyone who needs to rely on them (with online signposting and links, wherever possible)

Processes are simple to follow and transparent

- They are IT-enabled and include input formatting to prevent users from making data entry errors
- Mandatory requirements, including the nature and extent of evidence required to support applications and claims, are clearly defined
- The potential for blockages and delays is designed out, wherever possible
- They are resourced to meet time and quality standards (including legal requirements, Service Level Agreements, published targets)

Anyone exercising an immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function on behalf of the Home Secretary is fully competent

- Individuals understand their role, responsibilities, accountabilities and powers
- Everyone receives the training they need for their current role and for their professional development, plus regular feedback on their performance
- Individuals and teams have the tools, support and leadership they need to perform efficiently, effectively and lawfully
- Everyone is making full use of their powers and capabilities, including to prevent, detect, investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute offences
- The workplace culture ensures that individuals feel able to raise concerns and issues without fear of the consequences

Decisions and actions are ‘right first time’

- They are demonstrably evidence-based or, where appropriate, intelligence-led
- They are made in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance
- They are reasonable (in light of the available evidence) and consistent
- They are recorded and communicated accurately, in the required format and detail, and can be readily retrieved (with due regard to data protection requirements)

Errors are identified, acknowledged and promptly 'put right'

- Safeguards, management oversight, and quality assurance measures are in place, are tested and are seen to be effective
- Complaints are handled efficiently, effectively and consistently
- Lessons are learned and shared, including from administrative reviews and litigation
- There is a commitment to continuous improvement, including by the prompt implementation of recommendations from reviews, inspections and audits

Each immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function has a Home Office (Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System) 'owner'

- The BICS 'owner' is accountable for:
 - implementation of relevant policies and processes
 - performance (informed by routine collection and analysis of Management Information (MI) and data, and monitoring of agreed targets/deliverables/budgets)
 - resourcing (including workforce planning and capability development, including knowledge and information management)
 - managing risks (including maintaining a Risk Register)
 - communications, collaborations and deconfliction within the Home Office, with other government departments and agencies, and other affected bodies
 - effective monitoring and management of relevant contracted out services
 - stakeholder engagement (including customers, applicants, claimants and their representatives)

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