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Resettling to the UK: The Gateway Protection Programme

What is the Gateway Protection Programme?

The Gateway Protection Programme is the name of the UK's new resettlement programme. The first refugees on this resettlement programme arrived in the UK March 2004. The UK hopes to receive a quota of up to 500 refugees every year through the Programme.

What is resettlement?

Resettlement is one of three durable solutions advocated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and a means of addressing the special needs of refugees. It involves an assessment by the resettlement state against specific criteria, leading to permanent resettlement if accepted. It can be a long and difficult process for the refugees, ultimately leading to full integration into a new community. Some countries have long-established resettlement programmes. Those with the largest quotas in 2001 were the United States (80,000 refugees), Canada (11,000), and Australia (10,000). The other durable solutions advocated by UNHCR are voluntary repatriation and local integration (see www.unhcr.ch).

Is this the UK's first resettlement programme?

No. The UK already operates two informal resettlement programmes: the Mandate Refugee Scheme and the Ten or More Plan. The UK has also received refugees through specific programmes in response to emergency situations, including 42,000 Ugandan Asians expelled from Uganda from 1972-74, 22,500 Vietnamese displaced persons from 1979-92, over 2,500 Bosnians in the early 1990s, and over 4,000 Kosovars in 1999.

Who is involved?

The Gateway Protection Programme is funded by the Home Office and involves international organisations such as UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), other government departments, local authorities, eight non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and various community organisations. The eight NGOs deliver services on the Programme. They are the British Red Cross, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Migrant Helpline, Refugee Action, Refugee Arrivals Project (RAP), the Refugee Council, Refugee Housing Association, and the Scottish Refugee Council. In the early stages of the Programme, these organisations came together to form the Resettlement Inter-Agency Partnership (RIAP), as a cost-effective way of pooling resources, maintaining a national overview, and representing the best interests of refugees.

How are refugees selected?

UNHCR refers applications for resettlement to the Home Office. The Home Office interviews all principal applicants and their dependants. Cases are assessed and decisions made by the Home Office individually on their merits. Individuals referred to the UK for resettlement are considered by UNHCR to be eligible for recognition as refugees according to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Their life, liberty, safety, health, or other fundamental human rights

must also be at risk in the country where they have sought refuge; or, they must be facing no possibility of long-term security in that country. The UK conducts further checks including health and security checks.

What support do resettled refugees receive?

Refugees on the Gateway Protection Programme receive information, advice and support from the NGOs involved, through a pre-arrival cultural orientation programme, on-arrival information sessions, regular home visits, individual case-plans and drop-in sessions. The support and advice provided by RIAP organisations is designed to help resettled refugees access mainstream services and benefits for which they are eligible – an important aspect of minimising dependence and easing integration. Housing is provided, although the refugees themselves are responsible for paying rent.

Within two weeks of arriving in the UK, resettled refugees are often receiving benefit payments, looking for work, taking English language courses, and looking at other education and training opportunities; they have their children enrolled in school, are registered with a doctor and are regularly using public transport. Support is funded for 12 months.

What should I do if a resettled refugee asks for advice?

When resettled refugees arrive in the UK, they are free to choose whether they accept the support being offered. A resettled refugee may have friends or relatives already resident in the UK and may choose to live with them outside an area where support is being provided. Such people may need extra assistance getting a national insurance number and applying for benefits as their local Jobcentre Plus may not be advised of the appropriate procedures. Alternatively, a resettled refugee may have received support in a particular area before choosing to move on. It is important to find out which refugee agency has been providing assistance since their arrival in the UK. This agency will know the refugee and may be able to provide assistance. In all instances it is advisable to make enquiries through the relevant refugee organisation or through the Resettlement Inter-Agency Team, based at the Refugee Council, London.

How does the Programme relate to other areas of asylum and refugee policy?

On 29 October 2001, upon proposing the scheme, the Home Secretary David Blunkett, made a commitment to operating the scheme in conjunction (“bilaterally”) with UNHCR and “in addition to current UK asylum determination procedures”. The Refugee Council welcomes this and believes that the UK programme must be founded wholly on the principle of resettling those in greatest need of protection and that resettlement must be viewed as additional to the UK’s obligations to refugees who make their own way. The refugee sector continues to advocate good integration practice and a parity of rights and entitlements between all refugees.

Where can I get further information?

For further information about the Gateway Protection Programme, visit the following websites:

The Home Office at: www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

The Refugee Council at: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/refugeecouncil/what/resettlement.htm

UNHCR at: www.unhcr.org.uk/resettlement/index.html

For further information contact the Resettlement Inter-Agency Team at the Refugee Council on 020 7840 4458.