



# Sharing the responsibility: The UK's contribution to hosting refugees

*Policy background on CARE's call to action for the UK Parliament*

As we mark International Women's Day this year, women across the globe make up millions of the refugees and displaced people fleeing war and insecurity, often taking perilous journeys with children or even while pregnant. At a time when the UK decision to reverse its commitment to help unaccompanied refugee children is being debated in Parliament, it should be noted that unaccompanied child refugees represent the desperation of mothers, fathers and families everywhere to ensure their children escape conflict and have a chance of a future. While the global figure of people displaced by conflict and insecurity – already standing at 65.3 million – continues to grow, global leadership on refugees has never felt more under threat. CARE International is calling on the UK government to do more to assist people fleeing crises around the world, to host vulnerable refugees in the UK, and to show global leadership on this issue. This briefing paper outlines our priority asks to the UK government to deliver on this. Our recommendations to the UK government are:

1. Take more refugees from Europe, including
  - a) delivering on our commitments under the Dublin Regulation to reunite families, with a priority on children and vulnerable or pregnant women stranded in Greece and Europe with relatives living in the UK
  - b) extending the Dubs Amendment to allow unaccompanied children safe passage to the UK for an additional year, rather than prematurely capping and ending it as recently announced.
2. Take more refugees from outside Europe and rapidly scale up from the 4,414 Syrian refugees currently resettled in the UK, bring forward to 2018 the deadline for resettlement of 20,000 Syrian refugees, and maintain this annual level of resettlement for refugees from outside Europe.

## Why are displaced women and girls vulnerable?

Of the millions of displaced people around the globe, women and girls face specific threats, including sexual violence and trafficking. Assessments over the past year in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Greece and the Balkans have found consistent and worrying trends in terms the failure to prevent or respond effectively to the risks of gender-based violence faced by women and girls.<sup>1</sup>

Access to sexual and reproductive healthcare for displaced women is also inconsistent. Women of childbearing age comprise a significant proportion of every displaced community. Many of these women are pregnant or will become pregnant during their time on the move. Every day, some 500 women die in pregnancy or childbirth in humanitarian settings. Sixty percent of preventable maternal deaths and 53 percent of under-five fatalities take place in countries affected by conflict, forced displacement or natural disaster.<sup>2</sup> Yet for many pregnant women refugees, having even a warm bed for the night, nappies or baby milk formula are rarities.

A recent study in Greece found that refugee women are being traumatised by their experiences of giving birth, as understaffed hospitals perform medical procedures without consent or translators and with partners banned from the birth. Of pregnant women interviewed by Hellenic Action for Human Rights, none of them received any special care, but were instead placed in refugee camps with other migrants. Problems reported include low quality food – uncooked, stale and dirty food items – resulting in malnourishment, anaemia and low blood pressure. Less than half had received dietary supplements (eg vitamins and iron) and the ones who did had to pay for them. Absence of pre-natal health monitoring has been another challenge cited. The majority only visited a doctor once or twice during their pregnancy, and some did not see a doctor at all.<sup>3</sup>

## Global leadership on refugee rights under threat

In principle, governments have agreed and committed to implement a range of international political frameworks to protect and assist refugees, including displaced women and girls. Yet in reality, actions of governments fall increasingly short of the commitments made.

At the heart of the international legal and political framework framing how governments are supposed to protect and assist refugees is the UN Refugee Convention, adopted in the aftermath of World War II in 1951 (sometimes referred to as the Geneva Convention), and a follow-up Protocol agreed in 1967. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was first created in 1950 to help with resettling millions of people displaced or left homeless in World War II. It is sad and ironic that the UK government and other governments in Europe falsely claim that levels of displacement in Europe today are unprecedented and beyond their means to respond, when much poorer European governments dealt with more complex challenges of post-conflict transition and displacement after the Second World War. Indeed, CARE International itself was born from the ashes of that war; as a response by citizens in the USA who sent assistance to Europeans displaced by the violence.

Last year, heads of state met for two major global summits aimed at agreeing ways to deal with contemporary refugee and migrant flows. At the UN headquarters, they endorsed the New York Declaration at the heart of which is the principle of responsibility-sharing. Rich countries need to provide aid, trade and technical support to the poorer countries that host the vast majority of the world's refugees. In addition, they need to share some of the responsibility for hosting refugees too. Take Lebanon, for example, where one in four people in the country is a refugee. No amount of additional aid or business investment can make the levels of refugees that Lebanon has to host sustainable politically or economically in the longer term.

Yet in practice, most governments – with a few honourable exceptions like Germany – have failed to step up and help poorer nations with refugee-hosting. Indeed, the failure of other European governments – including the UK – to help relocate refugees from Greece, Germany or further afield, is threatening to unravel the wider global consensus on protecting people fleeing crises. If the UK and other wealthy nations refuse to host refugees, then other states – much poorer countries which have hosted refugees for much longer – ask why should they? Recent examples included Kenya, which started returning Somali refugees from Kenyan refugee camps back into Somalia, and Pakistan which has threatened to push 200,000 Afghan refugees back into Afghanistan.

This March sees the one-year anniversary of the EU-Turkey Deal which the UK and other European states negotiated with the government of Turkey to prevent refugees from reaching Europe, and to facilitate forced returns of those that reached European shores back to Turkey. This month also brings the start of forced returns of migrants from across Europe back to Greece as EU policy dictates they can be returned to their 'first country of entry' in the EU. The reality is, however, that the conditions in refugee camps in Greece are miserable and inhumane. CARE supports a local Greek organisation called Praksis providing financial and housing assistance to the most vulnerable refugees, and an association of migrant women's networks called Melissa. Through their work, we witness the inhumane and desperate circumstances that refugees, including vulnerable children and young women, are forced to inhabit. In the words of one volunteer in the refugee women's centre in Athens: "It is like European governments are trying to deliberately trap these poor refugees in misery, hunger and unsafe conditions to make them lose all hope. It is a shame on the world's supposedly civilised continent that we treat the world's most vulnerable people this way."

## UK government response to recent refugees arriving in Europe

The UK government's response to the refugee crisis has emphasised the UK's contribution to funding global aid efforts to support refugees elsewhere, notably in countries neighbouring Syria (Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey). In doing so, the responsibility of the UK to also host refugees has been downplayed, and the legal opportunities for refugees to reach the UK – including those with family here – have become ever more constrained.

One of the more worrying results of this approach by the UK government has been the shift to use aid funding to incentivise countries of origin and transit for refugees to prevent them reaching the UK or elsewhere in the EU, and to force those states into accepting the forcible returns of refugees denied asylum in Europe.

One example of this is the new aid package that the UK government and other donor nations agreed with the Afghan government in October 2016. The aid was made conditional on Afghanistan accepting the forced returns of an unlimited number of Afghan asylum seekers. A document leaked in advance of this deal revealed that EU officials recognised “the worsening security situation and threats to which people are exposed” and that Afghanistan is suffering “record levels of terrorist attacks and civilian casualties”. Yet the leaked memo went on to state: “Despite this, more than 80,000 persons could potentially need to be returned in the near future.”<sup>4</sup>

Another example is how the UK has contributed to wider EU efforts since Summer 2016 to negotiate new ‘Compacts’ with developing countries that are countries of origin or transit for refugees. As with the Afghan aid deal, the primary purpose of these Compacts is to stem the flow of migrants to Europe. A special Trust Fund has also been created to fund migration control projects in countries like Niger and Mali. How this plays out in reality remains to be seen. UK officials indicate they are keen to ensure investments respect the human rights of refugees and migrants. Yet if funds are used to close borders and the routes that those migrants currently use, then the fear is this will push them into ever more dangerous paths. Recent experience in Niger is a case in point with 34 people having died, most likely from dehydration, after choosing to take a longer, more dangerous migration route towards Europe from Tahoua, rather than the shorter route via Agadez.<sup>5</sup>

By any measure, the UK is not hosting its fair share of the global refugee population. Sadly, misinformation and xenophobic fears have dominated the political, media and public debate. A wider debate over immigration, including the flows of migrants from across the EU to the UK, has impacted on the government’s willingness to offer a place of sanctuary for the world’s most vulnerable refugees.

The UK government has the opportunity to transform what has been a divisive political and media discourse on refugees and migrants, and to promote a more honest and positive discussion. The question is one of political will, more than a lack of knowledge or evidence about the issues at stake. For now there are three key areas of UK government policy which demand attention and action to promote a more rights-based approach to refugees by the UK:

- Extending the Dubs Amendment to offer a place of sanctuary in the UK to unaccompanied minors stranded across Europe.
- Scaling up opportunities for vulnerable refugee adults and children to be reunited with their families in the UK under the EU Dublin Regulation.
- Scaling up other safe and legal routes for refugees outside of the EU globally to reach the UK, including – but not limited to – the Syrian refugee resettlement programme.

As attention from the media, public and politicians to the plight of children in the so-called Jungle camp outside Calais in France grew, parliamentarians and members of the House of Lords responded to the outcry that something must be done to help. As a result, the so-called Dubs Amendment was passed as part of a new Immigration Act<sup>6</sup> which calls for the UK to offer a home to unaccompanied minors who had arrived in Europe before 20 March 2016 (the date that the EU-Turkey Deal came into effect).

The Amendment got its name as it was championed by Lord Alfred Dubs, who had himself been rescued as a child during the Second World War by the then UK government. Originally, the government rejected Dubs’s amendment on the grounds that France, Greece and Italy are safe countries to host child refugees, until Lord Dubs argued that there was a responsibility to share the burden between countries. The then immigration minister, James Brokenshire, acknowledged: “We have a moral duty to help.”<sup>7</sup>

The passing of this Amendment was a major victory for efforts to promote a more humane policy by the UK government. Yet by the time the French authorities came to demolish the Jungle in autumn 2016, barely

any children had been processed. While the British and French authorities pointed fingers at each over the responsibility for this, Lord Dubs stated at the time: “It is a disgrace. A piece of legislation was passed with enormous public support, and the government has done nothing discernible about it.”<sup>8</sup>

To date, it was only in the final stages of the closure of the Jungle camp in Calais – following concerted advocacy by civil society – that the UK deployed staff to help assess the cases of individual children seeking transfers under the Dubs Amendment. Approximately 700 were transferred to the UK. Plans have also been announced to deploy over 70 Home Office staff to Greece to assist with processing the applications of other unaccompanied minors located there, and further outreach has happened to the local prefecture authorities in France to identify other eligible children.

Another way for the UK government to offer a place of sanctuary for refugees who make it to Europe is under the EU Dublin Regulation. ‘Dublin’, as it is known, is an EU agreement on how responsibilities are shared (or not shared) in relation to asylum seekers across different EU member states (and associated countries). While there are some problematic aspects of Dublin from a human rights perspective, one of the important principles within the agreement is that of family reunification – the idea being that it is ethically right that families should be kept together. While the scope of family members who can be reunited under Dublin is generally quite narrow, the agreement allows for government to exercise some discretion and flexibility. Thus while the agreement is explicit that the UK government should reunite a pregnant refugee woman with her husband if he’s based in the UK, there is also scope to allow them to be reunited with brothers, uncles or other relatives on a discretionary basis. This is important as in many cases the pregnant refugee women or mothers with very young children have lost their husbands in the conflict they are fleeing, but they might have other family in the UK who could look after them. Yet, at this point, getting information from the UK government about their willingness to reunite refugees that are pregnant or have new-borns with their family in the UK is difficult.

Of course, the vast majority of refugees are located not in the EU, but elsewhere globally. One of the main initiatives underway to resettle refugees from elsewhere globally is the UK Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (VPRP). In early 2014, the government committed to resettle an unspecified number of “several hundred” Syrian refugees. In September 2015, the government scaled-up their commitment to 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020.<sup>9</sup> The government is working with local authorities and the voluntary sector to implement the programme. To assist refugees’ integration into UK society a ‘community sponsorship’ scheme was launched in July 2016. The resettled refugees are given five years’ Humanitarian Protection status, with permission to work and access public funds. By September 2016, a total of 4,414 people had been granted humanitarian protection under the VPRP.<sup>10</sup>

The UK government needs to do more to share the global burden of resettling refugees outside of Europe. We believe the government should dedicate political will and budget commitment for the long term to resettle 6-7,000 refugees annually from the world’s most desperate displaced communities. This means starting with Syria and then continuing with wider refugee populations. This is less than 3 percent of the UK’s annual net immigration figure and less than 0.0001 percent of the global figure of displaced people who have been forced to flee from their homes by conflict and insecurity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, UNFPA and Women's Refugee Commission, Initial assessment report: Protection risks for women and girls in the European refugee and migrant crisis, 20 Jan 2016, [www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/operations/569f8f419/initial-assessment-report-protection-risks-women-girls-european-refugee.html](http://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/operations/569f8f419/initial-assessment-report-protection-risks-women-girls-european-refugee.html);

UNFPA et al, Evaluation of implementation of 2005 IASC guidelines for gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian settings in the Syria crisis response, 11 Oct 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Evaluation%20of%20implementation%20of%202005%20IASC%20Guidelines%20Gender-based%20Violence.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA website, 507 maternal deaths take place every day in emergencies, fragile settings, flagship report says, 3 December 2015, [www.unfpa.org/news/507-maternal-deaths-take-place-every-day-emergencies-flagship-report-says](http://www.unfpa.org/news/507-maternal-deaths-take-place-every-day-emergencies-flagship-report-says)

<sup>3</sup> Hellenic Action for Human Rights, Preliminary findings on antenatal, perinatal and postnatal care of refugees in Greece, 20 Oct 2016, <http://hellenicaction.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/hric-europe-summit-report-greece.html>

<sup>4</sup> Guardian website, EU's secret ultimatum to Afghanistan: accept 80,000 deportees or lose aid, 28 Sept 2016, [www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/sep/28/eu-secret-ultimatum-afghanistan-accept-80000-deportees-lose-aid-brussels-summit-migration-sensitive](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/sep/28/eu-secret-ultimatum-afghanistan-accept-80000-deportees-lose-aid-brussels-summit-migration-sensitive)

<sup>5</sup> BBC News website, Niger says 34 migrants found dead in Sahara Desert, 16 June 2016, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36545015](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36545015)

<sup>6</sup> Immigration Act 2016, Section 67, [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/19/section/67/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/19/section/67/enacted)

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in: There is no excuse for turning our backs on these refugee kids – we're their last hope, opinion piece by Lord Alf Dubs, Mirror website, 9 Feb 2017, [www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/no-excuse-turning-backs-refugee-9789968](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/no-excuse-turning-backs-refugee-9789968)

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in: 'It is a disgrace to Europe': former child refugee Lord Dubs on the Calais camp, Guardian website, 5 September 2016, [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/05/disgrace-to-europe-former-child-refugee-lord-dubs-calais-camp](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/05/disgrace-to-europe-former-child-refugee-lord-dubs-calais-camp)

<sup>9</sup> BBC News website, UK to accept 20,000 refugees from Syria by 2020, 7 Sept 2015, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34171148](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34171148)

<sup>10</sup> House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06805, The UK response to the Syrian refugee crisis, 16 February 2017, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06805>. Figures released by the UK government in a Home Office press release on 23 February 2017 updated the figure for people who "have been given refuge" to 5,454: see [www.gov.uk/government/news/5000-refugees-arrive-since-syrian-scheme-expanded](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/5000-refugees-arrive-since-syrian-scheme-expanded)