



Home Office

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Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons
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Dear George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 October to the Home Secretary on behalf of your constituents concerning the plight of vulnerable children in the migrant camps in Calais. I am replying as Immigration Minister. I am sorry for the delay.

The Government recognises the plight of vulnerable children in Europe and we are taking action on a number of fronts to address this issue. We have made absolutely clear our commitment to bring unaccompanied children who had been resident in Calais to the UK, and we continue to work closely with the French Government and other partners to ensure children who may be eligible can be identified and transferred as soon as possible.

Since 10 October, we have transferred over 300 unaccompanied minors to the UK from France. This includes over 60 girls, many of whom were identified as being at a high risk of sexual exploitation; and more than 200 children with close family links to the UK under the Dublin Regulation, of whom over half have been reunited with their families. The Home Secretary told Parliament on 24 October that we expect several hundred more children to be brought to the UK in the coming days and weeks.

The UK Government worked very closely with the French authorities on the ground to ensure the camp clearance operation was delivered as safely as possible. Following the relocation of around 5,000 adults to reception centres, all remaining children in Calais were transferred to specialist centres across France. Home Office staff, interpreters and social workers are currently visiting these centres in France to carry out the necessary assessments to determine whether it is in the best interests of the children to be transferred to the UK. All children who have close family in the UK will be considered for transfer, regardless of age or nationality. For those who have no close family in the UK, we will be considering all those aged 12 or under, those referred to us by the French authorities, or an organisation acting on their behalf, as assessed as being at high risk of sexual exploitation, and those most likely to qualify for refugee status in the UK, focusing on the youngest age groups.

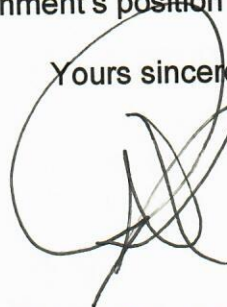
UK and French authorities on both sides of the Channel are working hard to ensure that a safe, lawful and efficient process is in place to transfer eligible children to the UK as a matter of urgency. The Government has continued to seek every opportunity to expedite this process, working closely with our French partners and with their agreement. Any children not transferred to the UK will remain safely accommodated in the care of the French authorities.

We are also working with the Greek and Italian authorities, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and non-governmental organisations to identify children from Greece and Italy who may qualify for transfer to the UK. We have seconded an expert to Greece to support these efforts, in addition to our long-standing secondee in Italy. We must ensure that we get the balance right between enabling eligible children to come to the UK as quickly as possible, and ensuring local authorities have sufficient capacity to host the children. The Immigration Act 2016 does not confer any right of entry to the UK on particular individuals. It is a duty to consult with local authorities on resources and transfer a specified number of refugee children to the UK from within Europe. We are grateful for the support of the local authorities that have stepped forward to accommodate the children, but we are clear that no local authority should be required to care for more children than its local services can cope with.

It is essential that we take action to support individuals affected by conflict in their region of origin, and do not encourage people to risk their lives by making dangerous journeys to Europe. This is why the Government has established the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme, which will resettle up to 3,000 individuals from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region by the end of this Parliament. Children will be resettled with their family or carers where appropriate. This is in addition to our commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrians to the UK over the same time period. So far over 2,800 have arrived in the UK, around half of whom are children. The Government has committed £2.3 billion to the Syria crisis, over £70 million in response to the wider Mediterranean migration crisis, and we have established a £10 million Refugee Children Fund for Europe to support the needs of vulnerable refugee and migrant children arriving in Europe.

I hope this clarifies the Government's position on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R Goodwill', written over a large, loopy circular flourish.

Robert Goodwill MP