



Home Office

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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 3 February to the Home Secretary on behalf of a number of your constituents about the plight of unaccompanied refugee children. I am replying as Immigration Minister.

The subject of orphaned or unaccompanied children is an emotive one. Protecting and supporting children is a clear priority. The Government is committed to doing all it can to support refugee communities in regions of conflict and dissuade migrants from making perilous sea crossings into Europe. Resettlement of the most vulnerable cases, including children at risk, can play a part in that. It is extremely important that we always act in the best interests of all children.

As announced on 28 January the Government has carefully considered how best to provide assistance and protection to unaccompanied refugee children from Syria, other regions of conflict, and those in transit in Europe.

Firstly, the Government will work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to lead a new initiative to resettle unaccompanied children from conflict regions, where it is in their best interests. The UK has asked the UNHCR to assess the numbers and needs of these children.

Secondly, the Government will provide further resources to the European Asylum Support Office including to help in border "hotspots" in Greece and Italy to identify and register children at risk on first arrival in the EU. We will continue to meet our obligations under the Dublin Regulation.

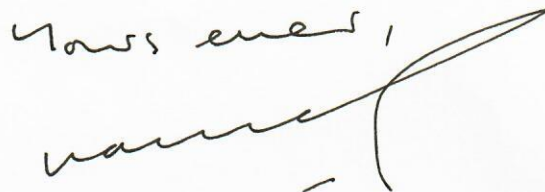
In addition, the Home Secretary has asked the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland, to visit the hotspots in Italy and Greece to make an assessment and provide advice on what more can be done to ensure unaccompanied children and others are protected from traffickers.

The Department for International Development is creating a new fund of up to £10 million to support the needs of vulnerable refugee and migrant children in Europe. The fund will include targeted support to meet the specific needs of unaccompanied and separated children who face additional risks. The support will include identifying children who are in need, providing safe places for at risk children to stay, data management to help trace children to their families, and services such as counselling and legal advice. This fund is in addition to the substantial funding, £46 million, that has already been given to non-governmental organisations such as Unicef and the UNHCR to provide shelter, warm clothes, hot food, and medical supplies to support vulnerable people, including children, on the move or stranded in Europe or in the Balkans.

These additional initiatives will complement the significant existing aid and assistance the UK has given in response to the Syrian conflict and migration crisis; including our resettlement programmes. On 4 February 2016, the Prime Minister announced that the UK will more than double our total pledge to the Syrian crisis from £1.12 billion to over £2.3 billion. This is our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme has already provided safe haven to more than 1,000 vulnerable Syrians – around half of them children – and overall we expect children to make up a significant proportion of the 20,000 resettlement places we are providing to this group.

We have been clear that the best approach is to make it possible for the majority of refugees to stay safely in their region of origin and to identify and resettle only the most vulnerable directly from the countries surrounding Syria. This provides these refugees with a more direct and safe route to the UK, rather than risking the hazardous journey to Europe in the hands of traffickers which has tragically cost so many lives. The addition of a separate arrangement for exceptional cases of unaccompanied children complements that approach.

I hope that your constituents find this information useful and reassuring.



Rt Hon James Brokenshire