

Supporting Refugees

A Guidance Note from the Mission and Public Affairs Division

No.1 in a series to be updated as the situation develops

This note is for people who want to know how we can help to support refugees now. There is also plenty of scope for Christians to be involved in political discussion about what decisions we should make as a country about further initiatives, domestically and internationally. The information here will be updated as the situation develops.

The *Archbishop of Canterbury*, in his statement on 3rd Sept, said

‘With winter fast approaching and with the tragic civil war in Syria spiralling further out of control, we must all be aware that the situation could yet worsen significantly. I am encouraged by the positive role that churches, charities and international agencies are already playing, across Europe and in Syria and the surrounding areas, to meet basic humanitarian needs. These efforts may feel trivial in the face of the challenge, but if we all play our part this is a crisis that we can resolve.’¹

There is growing support for a suggestion that a *national board or commission* should be set up to oversee and coordinate the response around the country. This would bring in people from local authorities, faith and community groups, NGOs and charities. The C of E has already been represented at some preliminary meetings, and will take a full part as the government works out how it wishes to organise resettlement of refugees here.

Dioceses have been quick to issue statements and plans for their own areas, which is vital as they are close to the realities of local conditions. Canterbury diocese has issued some great material focussing especially on Calais, but also looking beyond: <https://www.canterburydiocese.org/refugee-crisis-five-ways-to-respond/>. Reaching across the whole UK Christian community, a new body is also being set up to organise and coordinate Christian response across the country, called ‘Syria and its Neighbours’. More details will be published soon.

Europe and the Middle East

In the Middle East, the British Government is providing very substantial aid, but many charities are also working together very effectively, and can put to good use whatever money is given to them for this purpose.

In Europe, there are tens of thousands of displaced people and families. The need is not so much for gifts in kind (though these have had real as well as symbolic significance), but for hard cash. There are plenty of suggestions below on how to give money now.

Refugees coming to the UK

In the UK, the government has committed to bring in 20,000 Syrian refugees to our country in the next five years. The inflow of people is likely to grow slowly and reach up to 400 a week by mid-2016 - there is a little time to lay some proper foundations, as long as we move now. Government is still in the early stages of working out how to operationalise the commitment. Several areas have relevant experience, for example through community

¹ Read the whole statement at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5606/archbishop-of-canterbury-on-the-migrant-crisis>. The Archbishop added to this in the House of Lords, saying that the appropriate number to be received in the UK would almost certainly exceed 20,000; that there are specific problems about the refugee camps, including for Christian refugees; and that European collaboration is vital. <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5608/archbishop-speaks-in-house-of-lords-debate-on-syrian-refugees->

involvement in the Gateway humanitarian protection scheme, the NACCOM network housing destitute displaced people, or the Home for Good charity.

What can UK Christians do to help?

1) Give money now

C of E parishes have a particular opportunity to support the Anglican communities across Europe which are stretched to the limit in providing practical help to refugees. Donations to help the Diocese in Europe provide emergency medical support, food, shelter and pastoral care for the refugees are being channelled through the 'Us' Rapid Response Fund - <http://www.weareus.org.uk/news/greece/>

Here is a list (very incomplete, of course) of charities which are working now to support refugees. The Canterbury Diocese toolkit mentioned above also gives links to a host of charities who need money, and practical involvement, to help refugees.

- **Christian Aid:** Christian Aid is the official ecumenical development agency and it is working with churches and other agencies in supporting humanitarian efforts taking place in Europe and the Middle East. <https://donate.christianaid.org.uk/refugees>
 - **Tearfund** – [The Tearfund Refugee Fund](#) has been set up to support their vital work in Europe as well as helping some of the millions who are displaced or refugees within the Middle East itself.
 - **Doctors of the World:** Doctors of the World UK is part of the global Médecins du Monde network, which delivers over 300 projects in more than 70 countries through 3,000 volunteers. They have set up an [appeal for donations](#) to help support their work. £5 could pay for bandages, £20 a course of antibiotics.
 - **Seeking Sanctuary via Caritas Social Action Network** – [CSAN](#) is the social action arm of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.
 - **Save the Children** – An [appeal](#) directly to support refugee children across Europe and in the countries they are fleeing from to provide aid and support.
 - **Migrant Offshore Aid Station** – [MOAS](#) is a registered Foundation based in Malta. It is dedicated to preventing loss of life at sea by providing assistance to migrants who find themselves in distress while crossing the Mediterranean Sea in unsafe vessels.
 - **United Nations Refugee Agency** – [official fundraising campaign](#) for the UNHCR.
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2) Build capacity on the ground. *Those coming from Syria will have leave to remain for 5 years in the first instance, and support needs to be sustainable.*

- a. **Strengthen existing community organisations** for whom refugees are core business. There are dozens of local groups around the country who have experience and skill in supporting refugees, and some national networks. Many of these began with churches concerned to help, and many have grown into cross-faith or wider local organisations. Many of them struggle for resources. Build them up.
- b. **Strengthen partnerships**, especially with Local Authorities (LAs). Government funding and administration is likely to be channelled through LAs. Many of them have already opened up dialogue with faith and community groups on the way forward.
- c. **Strengthen cooperation between faith groups** – between churches, between faith communities. The more statutory agencies can relate to cohesive alliances of

community groups, the more efficiently the work and resource allocation can be done.

- 3) **Identify resources and prepare options.** As you discuss possibilities with your LA and others, some possible resources may be identified. For example, if using existing properties might be possible, research the issues and risks of using them. In Canada, as another example, there is an established scheme for private sponsorship of refugees: we will work with government to see whether a safe and sensible framework can be established for this or other new approaches. Staff of the Archbishops' Council will gather information and issue advice on specific issues, but will also be grateful to receive information on what you discover and work out locally. Individual churches may find it useful to establish a small group of people who will take the lead for their church.
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4) **Fundraise, and also develop sustainable resourcing streams.**

Fundraising is a great way to growing local awareness of the needs and possibilities, and money is needed- for now, mainly by the charities working in this field. If you are going to be ready to step up with medium-term resourcing within local partnerships for the refugee resettlement programme, you will need to know where those resources – people, money, assets etc. - are going to come from. It is important that resources are not diverted from existing programmes supporting people in need, but that the new refugee response brings in new resources.

Mission and Public Affairs Division, September 2015

Notes:

1. The Mission and Public Affairs Division of the Archbishops' Council will gather and disseminate information as far as possible – though you are the experts on your local situation. Contacts are Malcolm Brown, malcolm.brown@churchofengland.org, or Martin Kettle, martin.kettle@churchofengland.org.
2. Christians are called to active participation in the political process. This note does not give advice on how to do that, but it is not implying in any way that the sort of action described above is an alternative to political engagement.
3. Many Christians feel a particular calling to support fellow Christians who are fleeing persecution or who are in desperate need. Some groups are offering opportunities in that area, while bearing in mind that Anglican leaders in the Middle East have expressed serious concern about the exodus of Christian populations. The assumption of this note is that, within the type of local initiative envisaged, refugees will be made welcome and supported whatever their religious or other characteristics.
4. The Mission Theology Action Group have written a theological reflection on 'Mission, migrants and refugees'. This will be available online very soon.