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### Changes to our resettlement schemes

I am writing to update you on two changes to our resettlement schemes. However before I do I would like to express my gratitude for the ongoing support of local authorities across the UK for the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme.

On 3 July the Home Secretary announced in the House of Commons that she is amending the scope of the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) with immediate effect to enable UNHCR to refer the most vulnerable refugees in the MENA region who have fled the Syrian conflict, regardless of their nationality. We are committed to an effective response in the affected regions and to resettling the most vulnerable. We will continue to rely on UNHCR to identify and refer the most vulnerable refugees but will no longer limit the scheme to those with Syrian nationality.

The expansion on the Syrian VPRS to help those most at risk demonstrates that the UK will continue to lead from the front in addressing the unacceptable unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life that those in the region face. That is why this Government is undertaking one of the largest resettlement schemes in the nation's history and by the end of this Parliament we will have resettled 23,000 people from Syria, the Middle East and North Africa. We have also pledged £2.46 billion to the humanitarian crisis. This support has reached hundreds of thousands of people in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. By meeting basic humanitarian needs and helping to create new opportunities we aim to help Syrians to build a life in neighbouring countries.

As part of our comprehensive approach to the Syria Crisis, the Syrian VPRS was launched in January 2014 and expanded in September 2015. This scheme sees us working closely with the UNHCR to identify individuals who are most at risk and whose particular needs can only be met in countries like the UK. Up to the end of March 2017, 7,307 Syrian nationals had been resettled under the Syrian VPRS, half of whom are children, and we are on track to meet our commitment of 20,000 refugees by 2020. This is in addition to our Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme which will see us resettle up to 3,000 of the most vulnerable children and their families from the Middle East and North Africa region by

2020. We remain committed to resettling the overall number of refugees previously announced on both schemes.

When the Syrian VPRS was launched, it was focused on Syrian nationals because they formed an easily identifiable cohort of vulnerable refugees who had fled the conflict and whose needs were clearly evident. This enabled us to provide a quick and effective response to the crisis. However, whilst the Syrian VPRS targets the most vulnerable Syrians, there are additional groups in the region who have fled Syria and are also extremely vulnerable but who may not be able to access one of our resettlement schemes. UNHCR's advice is that a diversified resettlement quota is needed in order to address the needs of the most vulnerable refugees from all refugee populations in the region. It is thus right that the Scheme is amended to help these vulnerable groups, (such as Palestinian refugees who were resident in Syria prior to the conflict) who have fled from Syria and cannot safely return to their country of origin, regardless of nationality. This change will also mean that mixed family groups are eligible for resettlement under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.

The same tariff will be paid to local authorities supporting those resettled under the VPRS, regardless of nationality. In addition local authorities will be able to include non-Syrians within their existing VPRS pledge. We do not expect that this change will significantly impact on how the scheme is delivered at a local level as the majority of non-Syrians resettled under the scheme will speak Arabic and will need the same kind of support. However we will want to work with the LGA and Regional Strategic Migration Partnership to support participating local authorities should they need it.

In March, it was announced that anyone resettled in the UK (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) through the VPRS or Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) would soon be granted refugee status instead of Humanitarian Protection. At the beginning of the scheme, individuals being resettled in the UK were granted Humanitarian Protection in order to quickly assist and place the most vulnerable. This was the right decision at that time. However, while Humanitarian Protection recognises the need an individual has for international protection, it does not carry the same entitlements as refugee status, in particular, access to certain benefits, swifter access to student support for Higher Education and the same travel documents as those granted refugee status.

The Home Secretary has also confirmed that vulnerable refugees arriving on these schemes from now on will automatically be granted refugee status and five years' limited leave to remain. For those already resettled in the UK, the change will not happen automatically as some individuals may prefer to retain Humanitarian Protection status. Officials are working to finalise the means by which individuals who have been resettled here can request to change their status.

We can be proud of the contribution the UK is making to support refugees. We are grateful for your contribution to this effort. We believe both of these policy changes will help us to continue to focus our support on the most vulnerable refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict and help them make the best start to their life in the UK.



**Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP**  
**Minister of State for Immigration**