



National Audit Office

Report

by the Comptroller
and Auditor General

Home Office

The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme

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Home Office

The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act

Sir Amyas Morse KCB
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

8 September 2016

This report examines the achievements of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (the programme) to date, the processes in place to deliver the programme, progress against the targets set, and the risks to future delivery of the programme and whether these are being addressed.

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Key facts

20,000

government’s target of the number of Syrian refugees to resettle in the UK by May 2020

2,659

number of refugees resettled in the UK through the programme to the end of June 2016: 13% of the 20,000 target

£1,112m

our estimate of the total cost of the programme to the UK government to the end of 2019-20

September 2015	month the then-Prime Minister made a commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees through the programme by 2020
248	average number of Syrian refugees resettled in the UK each month between September 2015 and the end of March 2016
348	average number of Syrian refugees resettled in the UK each month since the programme’s relaunch in April 2016
55%	percentage of people resettled in the UK through the programme who are survivors of torture or violence, or both, up to the end of June 2016
£421 million	total allocated from the UK’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget to fund all refugees’ costs for their first year in the UK, up to 2021 (up from the initial budget of £404 million announced in the 2015 Spending Review)
£126 million	total amount the Home Office expects to give to local authorities up to 2020 as a contribution to their costs for refugees’ second to fifth years in the UK (down from the initial budget of £129 million announced in the 2015 Spending Review)

Summary

1 Since it began in 2011, the civil war in Syria has caused mass movement of Syrians, both within Syria and to neighbouring countries. Syrians now make up the largest refugee population in the world, with almost five million having fled to neighbouring countries to escape the conflict. Many countries currently hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees are developing countries and cannot afford to support such large numbers. As a result, the United Nations estimates that one in ten Syrian refugees in the Middle East and North Africa region needs to be resettled elsewhere.

2 In January 2014, the UK government announced that it would establish a Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (the programme) to allow selected refugees to resettle in the UK. The Home Office was responsible for the initial programme. It prioritised people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. The programme was small in scale, resettling 239 refugees up to the end of September 2015. In September 2015, the then-Prime Minister announced that the programme would be expanded to resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees in the UK by May 2020. The government later added a milestone to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees before Christmas 2015.

3 The programme's eligibility criteria were extended to include all those recognised as vulnerable by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It became the joint responsibility of the Home Office, the Department for International Development and the Department for Communities and Local Government, who established a joint team to manage the programme located in the Home Office (the programme team). Other bodies involved in the programme include international organisations, other central government departments, local authorities and third sector delivery partners.

4 The programme team and its partners achieved the target to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees in the UK by Christmas 2015. They have resettled a further 1,561 Syrian refugees since then, taking the total number to 2,659 by the end of June 2016, 13% of the overall target.

Our report

5 This report examines the achievements of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme to date, the processes in place to deliver the programme, progress against the targets set, and the risks to future delivery of the programme and whether these are being addressed. This is a progress review of a live programme. We have not reached a judgement on whether the programme has achieved value for money as it is too early to assess this. The report has four parts:

- Part One provides an overview of the Syrian conflict and the need to resettle Syrian refugees;
- Part Two focuses on the establishment and delivery of the programme, the processes in place and the organisations involved;
- Part Three analyses the achievements of the programme to date, the experiences of delivery partners and refugees, and the scale of the remaining challenge; and
- Part Four identifies the risks to successful delivery of the programme and the extent to which these are being managed.

6 The programme is only open to Syrian refugees registered in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey. This report does not cover the UK's support to Syrians still inside the country, Syrian refugees within Europe, or refugees from other countries. The report also does not cover the government's commitment to resettle vulnerable children from the Middle East and North Africa region, or unaccompanied refugee children in Europe.

7 We invited written submissions from a sample of local authorities involved in the programme, and visited two further local authorities to understand their experiences in more detail. We also undertook research on the approaches taken by Canada and Germany to resettling Syrian refugees (available on the National Audit Office website). Full details of our approach and evidence base are in the appendices.

Key findings

Progress to date

8 The programme team successfully expanded the original programme at speed to achieve a new target. The target to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees by Christmas 2015 was achieved. There was good partnership working across central and local government, strong working relationships with international partners and a concerted effort by all involved. There was a general consensus among those we spoke to that the programme had been delivered quickly between September and December 2015 using unsustainable labour-intensive processes. The programme team recognised that delivery had relied on processes designed for a smaller-scale programme. It deliberately scaled back the programme between January and April 2016 to redesign it in light of experiences so far. The target number of refugees to resettle in the UK over this period reduced in line with this (paragraphs 3.2, 3.3 and 3.7).

9 Local authorities have worked hard to provide resettlement places, but have not always understood central government's expectations of them after the first year of the programme. Participation of local authorities in the programme is voluntary. The number involved has increased considerably from three to 118 since the programme expanded in September 2015. The programme team has specified what local authorities are responsible for providing during refugees' first year in the UK. They have not done so for refugees' second to fifth years to allow local authorities to tailor services according to local circumstances. Some local authorities we spoke to were concerned about this, and said they were unclear about what they needed to provide (paragraphs 2.12, 2.13, 3.5, 3.10 and 3.11).

10 The programme team are confident they are on track to meet the 20,000 target. An average of 248 Syrian refugees were resettled per month between September 2015 and the end of March 2016. If this rate had continued, the overall target would have been missed by 6,160 people. This period, however, factored in a slowing down of the number of refugees resettled between January and April 2016 to allow space to redesign the programme. Between April 2016 and the end of June 2016, 1,044 refugees were resettled against an internal target of 1,030, which has increased the average to 348 refugees per month. The programme team have secured enough indicative pledges from local authorities to resettle 20,000 refugees by 2020. It is essential that these pledges materialise into firm offers of support as more refugees will need to be resettled each quarter during the remainder of the programme than have been so far (paragraphs 3.21, 3.22 and 4.2 to 4.5).

11 Refugees we met told us that their experience of the programme has been largely positive, but uncertainty about their status in the UK has caused some anxiety. Refugees told us that the process of being resettled to the UK had gone well and they had received a warm welcome from their new communities. However, information provided to them about where they were being resettled can be patchy. Many are unsure of their rights in the UK and what they are eligible for, including their ability to travel abroad, whether they can apply for family reunion, or what will happen to them at the end of the five-year programme. We also heard that refugees selected for the programme were unable to claim some benefits, such as Carer's Allowance or Personal Independence Payments, because they do not meet the required residency test. Given that the programme selects refugees based on vulnerability criteria, such as disability, this mismatch may cause difficulties for some participants (paragraphs 3.15 to 3.20).

Managing risks to delivery

12 The future of the programme could be put at risk by local authorities' lack of suitable accommodation and school places. Local authorities told us that this was the main reason they may not be able to participate in the programme in future. The programme will need an estimated 4,930 houses or flats over its lifetime. Local authorities will need to secure an estimated 10,664 childcare and school places over the same period. The programme team have asked Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships to manage these issues in consultation with local authorities, but they remain risks to meeting the 20,000 target (paragraphs 4.6 to 4.8).

13 The programme provides funding to local authorities to support refugees beyond their first year in the UK, unlike other resettlement programmes, but it is not clear what this will cover. Some of the programme budget will be used to pay local authorities a total of £20,520 per refugee over their five years on the programme: £8,520 for the first year and diminishing amounts each additional year the refugee is in the UK. Local authorities are free to spend the tariff as they see fit. Some local authorities we spoke to were unsure whether the tariff was expected to cover all costs for refugees' second to fifth years, or how much they would be expected to contribute from their own budgets. Local authorities also told us they were concerned that refugees would need substantial support after their first five years in the UK, particularly those with specific physical or mental health needs. Support for these needs is not covered by existing programme funding, but would come out of normal departmental budgets (paragraphs 2.10 to 2.13 and 4.9).

14 There is no estimate of the total cost of the programme to the UK. Costs fall to different central government departments and participating local authorities. Most of the costs of each refugee's first year in the UK are covered by the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget. This changes in year two, after which costs for health and education fall to the relevant department, as they do for all citizens. The cost of the programme to the UK is uncertain as it depends in large part on the characteristics of those entering the country. The local authority tariff is the only major fixed cost. Departments told us that analysing all costs would be time-consuming. Using the departments' assumptions, we estimate the indicative total cost of the programme to the UK could be up to £1,112 million to the end of 2019-20 (paragraphs 2.14 to 2.17).

15 While some elements of the programme's redesign are not yet operational, overall the programme team has made progress in redesigning the programme to improve refugees' experiences. The programme team has made plans to monitor and evaluate the programme. It also plans to gather formal feedback from local authorities, but has yet to do so. This means it does not know how well the programme is operating at a local level. Plans for adding new features to the programme are further advanced but are not yet operational. It has piloted a scheme to collate information on refugees before they arrive. It has also introduced a community sponsorship initiative (individuals, charities, faith groups and businesses directly resettling refugees in addition to local authorities). It told us these developments were not essential to achieving the 20,000 target, but should contribute to improving the experience of refugees and their ability to integrate quickly into the UK. Addressing refugees' concerns about limited English language provision would also help them to integrate more quickly (paragraphs 3.12 to 3.14 and 4.10 to 4.18).

Concluding remarks

16 The programme team, other central government departments, local authorities and delivery partners performed well in the pre-Christmas 2015 period in meeting the commitment to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees. They achieved a great deal in a short amount of time, resettling much larger numbers of refugees than previous programmes. Success was due in large part to the dedication and goodwill of those involved.

17 The programme team sensibly reduced internal targets and expectations of the programme in the first quarter of 2016 to allow time to redesign it in the light of lessons learned. This redesign considered crucial aspects of the programme, such as improving process efficiency and communication and designing a monitoring and evaluation framework. While progress has been made, not all developments are operational yet.

18 The programme team has identified and considered the main risks to delivering the programme in future. As the programme develops, the organisations involved need to ensure the goodwill of all involved is turned into actions to mitigate the risks to meeting the 20,000 target, such as finding suitable accommodation and school places. The characteristics of the refugees arriving in the UK will become clearer over time and with this new information, the programme team will need to ensure that budget assumptions are revised accordingly and that local authorities are not faced with costs that they struggle to meet. Local authorities continue to face budget cuts and if higher than predicted costs impact local authorities' ability to deliver quality services, the chances of refugees integrating successfully into the UK will be at risk.

Recommendations

- 19 The programme team needs to:
- a **Make it clear to local authorities that there are no set requirements for what local authorities need to provide during refugees' second to fifth years in the UK** so as to encourage local authorities to tailor services to refugees' needs.
 - b **Clarify what refugees are entitled to in respect of travelling within and outside the UK, family reunion and their status after the fifth year of the programme.** The departments should disseminate this information to all local authorities and providers involved in the programme.
 - c **Ensure other government departments and local authorities understand the risks to the wider success of the programme and have plans in place to manage these risks,** for example finding suitable housing and school places and capacity to meet longer-term, uncertain costs. This could include encouraging local authorities not yet participating in the programme to join.
 - d **Ensure refugees' characteristics are collected and used to adapt programme budgets in light of any changes to initial assumptions,** so no organisation taking part in the programme struggles to participate effectively due to cost pressures.
 - e **Ensure a full monitoring and evaluation framework is operational as soon as possible.** This includes defining what success looks like beyond meeting the 20,000 target.
 - f **Engage with international partners and local authorities and their service providers to ensure refugees' opinions are listened to and factored in to new developments,** such as community sponsorship, to enhance refugees' experiences of the programme and life in the UK.

Part One

The Syrian conflict

1.1 This part of the report provides an introduction to the Syrian conflict, the international community's response and how the UK has responded.

The war in Syria

1.2 The civil war in Syria began in 2011 and is estimated to have claimed more than 470,000 lives up to 2015.¹ By the end of 2014, almost 6% of the population were estimated to have been killed, injured or maimed.² The crisis has had a detrimental impact on the Syrian economy, with four out of five Syrians now living in poverty. The United Nations estimates that 13.5 million Syrians are now in need of humanitarian assistance, including six million children.³

1.3 More than half of the Syrian population have left their homes since 2011 to escape the conflict and Syrians now constitute the largest refugee population in the world. Around 6.5 million Syrians are internally displaced within Syria. Almost five million Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries. At 1 June 2016, 4.8 million Syrians were registered as refugees in neighbouring countries, including: 2.1 million in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon; 2.7 million in Turkey; and more than 29,000 in other North African countries.^{4,5,6} The number of Syrians seeking asylum in Europe continues to rise but remains low compared to Syria's neighbouring countries (**Figure 1** overleaf).⁷ Around 1.1 million Syrian refugees claimed asylum in Europe between April 2011 and June 2016, including around 750,000 in the European Union.⁸

¹ Syrian Centre for Policy Research, *Confronting fragmentation*, February 2016.

² Syrian Centre for Policy Research, *Alienation and violence report 2014*, March 2015.

³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Syria: Regional Crisis Overview. Available at: www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/syria-country-profile/about-crisis

⁴ A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution, is outside the country of their nationality (see 1951 UN Refugee Convention).

⁵ Since January 2016, the Lebanese government has stopped allowing refugees to be registered.

⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Syria Regional Refugee Response: interagency information-sharing portal. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

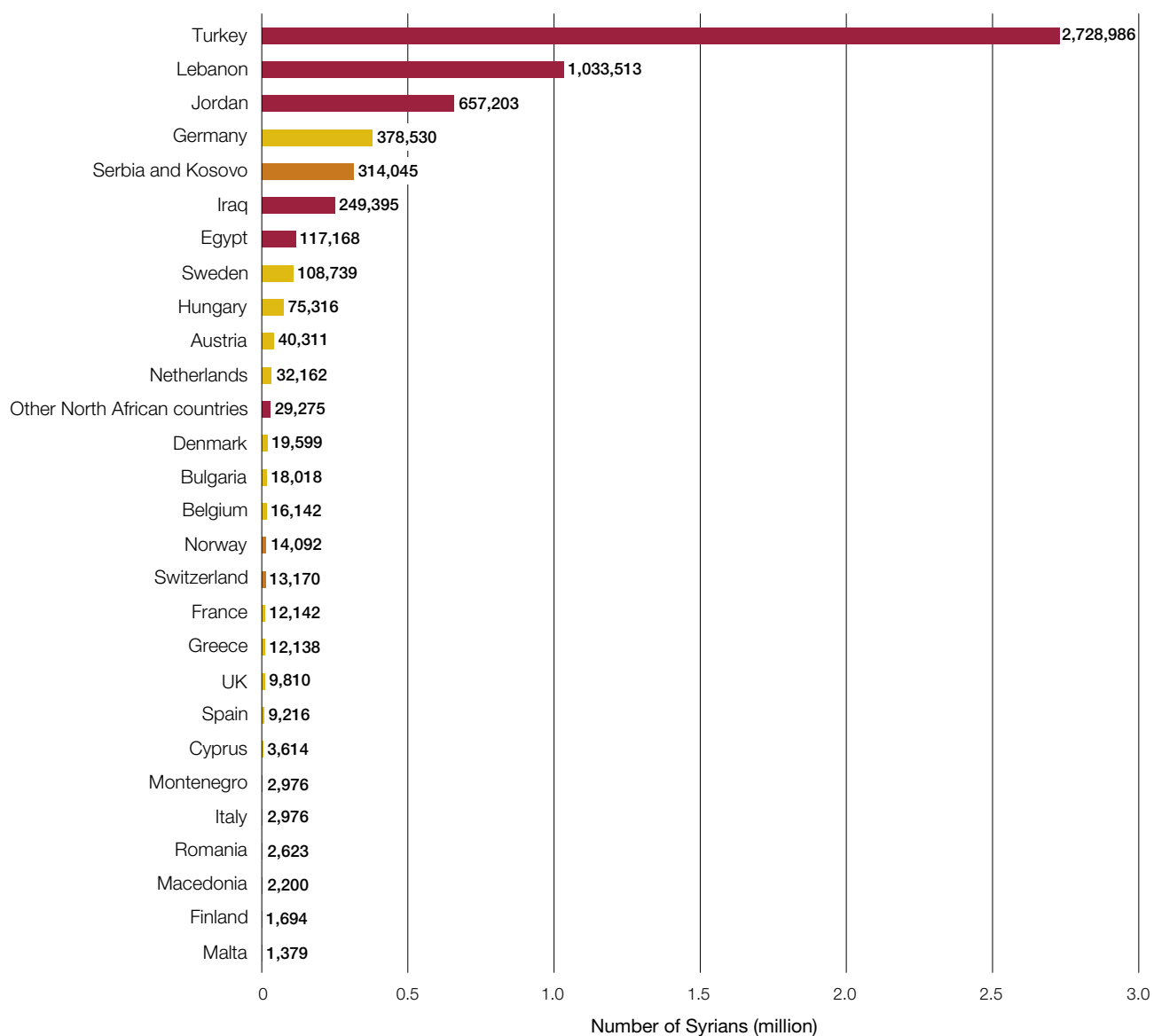
⁷ An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country of origin by their own means and applied for asylum in another country.

⁸ See footnote 6.

Figure 1

Number of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and in Europe

Fewer than 10,000 Syrians have sought refuge in the UK



- Middle East and North Africa countries
- European Union countries
- Non-European Union countries

Notes

- 1 The number of Syrians in European countries is those who have claimed asylum between April 2011 and June 2016 and are awaiting a decision. The number of Syrians in neighbouring countries is those registered by UNHCR (or the government of Turkey) at the end of July 2016.
- 2 Luxembourg, Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia, Portugal, Ireland, Albania, Latvia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have received fewer than 1,000 asylum applications. Slovakia, Estonia and Lithuania have received fewer than 100 asylum applications.

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Syria Regional Refugee Response: interagency information-sharing portal

1.4 The financial burden for supporting refugees traditionally falls on neighbouring countries. Many of these do not have sufficiently developed economies to support such large numbers of refugees. At the end of 2015, the 30 countries with the most refugees per gross domestic product (purchasing power parity (PPP)) per capita (a measure of national economic development) were all in developing regions. Jordan and Lebanon, both currently hosting large numbers of Syrians, had a GDP (PPP) per capita of \$10,900 and \$13,900 respectively in 2015, compared with \$41,300 in the UK.⁹

The international community's response

1.5 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) searches for durable solutions for refugees, of which resettlement is one option.¹⁰ It considers all three options before identifying the most appropriate. It currently estimates that one in ten Syrian refugees in the Middle East and North Africa region needs resettlement before 2018. The international community has so far pledged to resettle just over 220,000 Syrian refugees. This is 250,000 fewer than the total number estimated to need resettlement and not all pledges are due to be fulfilled by the end of 2018.¹¹

1.6 The approach adopted by the international community varies greatly between countries. There are differences in the criteria for selecting refugees, status granted to refugees, the referral process, rights to benefits and duration of support. Two countries in particular have resettled substantial numbers of refugees to date:

- Canada: the new Canadian government set a target to resettle 25,000 Syrians between November 2015 and February 2016. It exceeded this, resettling 29,700 refugees at 1 August 2016. Canada is still processing resettlement applications in 2016. It expects an additional 8,500 refugees to arrive by the end of the year.
- Germany: as well as processing more than 370,000 asylum claims made by Syrian migrants on German territory, the government launched three successive programmes to resettle a total of 20,000 Syrians between 2013 and 2015. To date, the government has issued more than 20,000 visas.

The UK's response

1.7 The UK's initial response to the Syrian situation was to provide humanitarian assistance. The UK is one of the largest bilateral donors to the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan.¹² The UK initially committed £1.12 billion between 2011-12 and 2015-16 to cover food rations, clean water, medical consultations and relief packages. Half of the funding was allocated to Syria, with the other half split between neighbouring countries. In February 2016, the then-Prime Minister announced that funding would double over the next four years to a total of £2.3 billion. The funding is allocated to more than 30 partners, including United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organisations.¹³

⁹ World Bank, International Comparison Program database. Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD>

¹⁰ The other two are local integration or voluntary repatriation.

¹¹ UNHCR, *Resettlement and other admission pathways for Syrian refugees*, July 2016.

¹² The UK contributes to the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan, but not to the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan.

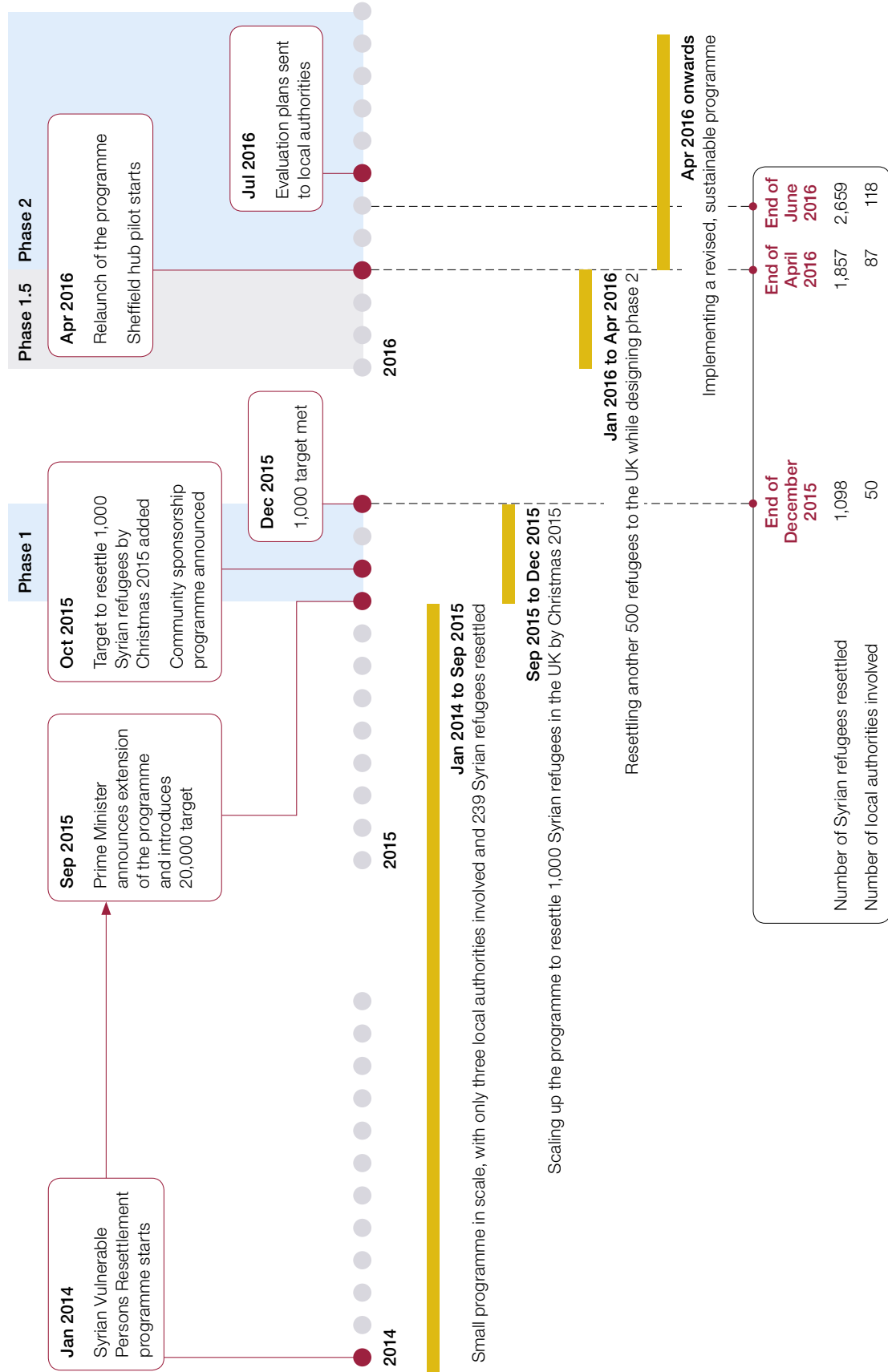
¹³ Department for International Development, *Syria Crisis Response Summary*, April 2016.

1.8 In January 2014, the government announced that it would establish a Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (the programme) to allow selected refugees to resettle in the UK. The initial programme was small in scale and prioritised people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. The government expected that several hundred refugees would arrive in the UK over three years, although there was no fixed quota. The Home Office resettled 239 refugees in the UK up to September 2015. Most were families and more than half (53%) were children.

1.9 In September 2015, the then-Prime Minister announced that the programme would be expanded in order to resettle up to 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees from the Middle East and North Africa region in the UK by the end of 2020. The government later added a milestone to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees before Christmas 2015 (**Figure 2**). The 20,000 target is equivalent to around 0.4% of registered Syrian refugees in this region, but is a large increase compared to previous UK resettlement programmes.

Figure 2

Timeline of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme



Source: National Audit Office

Part Two

Establishing the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme

2.1 This part of the report looks at how the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (the programme) has been delivered, including how the programme was set up (its objectives and the organisations involved), the resettlement process and financing.

How the programme was set up

2.2 Following expansion in September 2015, the programme became the joint responsibility of the Home Office, the Department for International Development and the Department for Communities and Local Government who established a joint team to manage the programme located in the Home Office (the programme team). It was previously the sole responsibility of the Home Office. A new ministerial post was created to oversee the programme. The minister reported to the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, as the chair and deputy chair respectively of the ministerial group on Syrian refugees. A minister was not re-appointed after the Cabinet reshuffle in July 2016. Responsibility for overseeing the programme now lies with the Minister of State for Immigration. Ministers in the Department for International Development and the Department for Communities and Local Government retain interest and the programme reports to a cross-government inter-ministerial group. The Home Office programme director is responsible for programme delivery and reports directly to the Home Office Second Permanent Secretary, who is responsible for the programme budget.

2.3 The programme aims to resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees from Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey by May 2020 in a way that:

- secures and protects the refugees and the UK;
- has the well-being of the refugee and the welcoming communities at the centre of decision-making; and
- delivers value for money for the UK taxpayer.

The programme aims to support those resettled by giving them access to education, healthcare, social care and, where possible, employment.

2.4 The programme involves a large number of organisations beyond the three central government departments responsible, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other government departments.¹⁴ Local authorities are responsible for resettling and integrating refugees once they arrive in the UK. They may sub-contract this to third sector organisations (**Figure 3** overleaf). The programme is UK-wide, including devolved administrations.

The resettlement process

2.5 UNHCR is responsible for identifying refugees eligible for the programme from the total refugee population in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt. UNHCR staff register refugees and link information gathered to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria. In Turkey, a government agency registers refugees and passes cases for resettlement to UNHCR. UNHCR then carries out an assessment against its own vulnerability criteria. Resettlement officers select and interview those thought to be suitable for resettlement. UNHCR refers between 500 and 600 cases to the Home Office every month. Decisions are based on the UK's criteria for the programme, as well as the refugees' family connections, language skills and individual needs.

2.6 The UK accepts referrals from UNHCR through an electronic referral form. This process is different from some other countries, which have established teams within host countries to interview refugees. UNHCR told us that the UK's approach is more flexible as it can process cases from less secure regions that government staff would find it difficult to access. However, the decision not to place staff in host countries means the Home Office's central programme team often has to follow up queries with UNHCR. This can be time-consuming.

2.7 The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme is one of two current resettlement programmes in the UK to target support for refugees on the basis of clearly defined vulnerability criteria. Until September 2015, the programme prioritised people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. The eligibility criteria have been expanded. The programme is now open to all Syrian refugees registered in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey who meet one or more of UNHCR's criteria for vulnerable groups:¹⁵

- women and girls at risk;
- survivors of violence or torture, or both;
- refugees with legal or physical protection needs, or both;
- refugees with medical needs or disabilities;
- children and adolescents at risk; and
- refugees with family links in resettlement countries or Humanitarian Admission Programme countries.

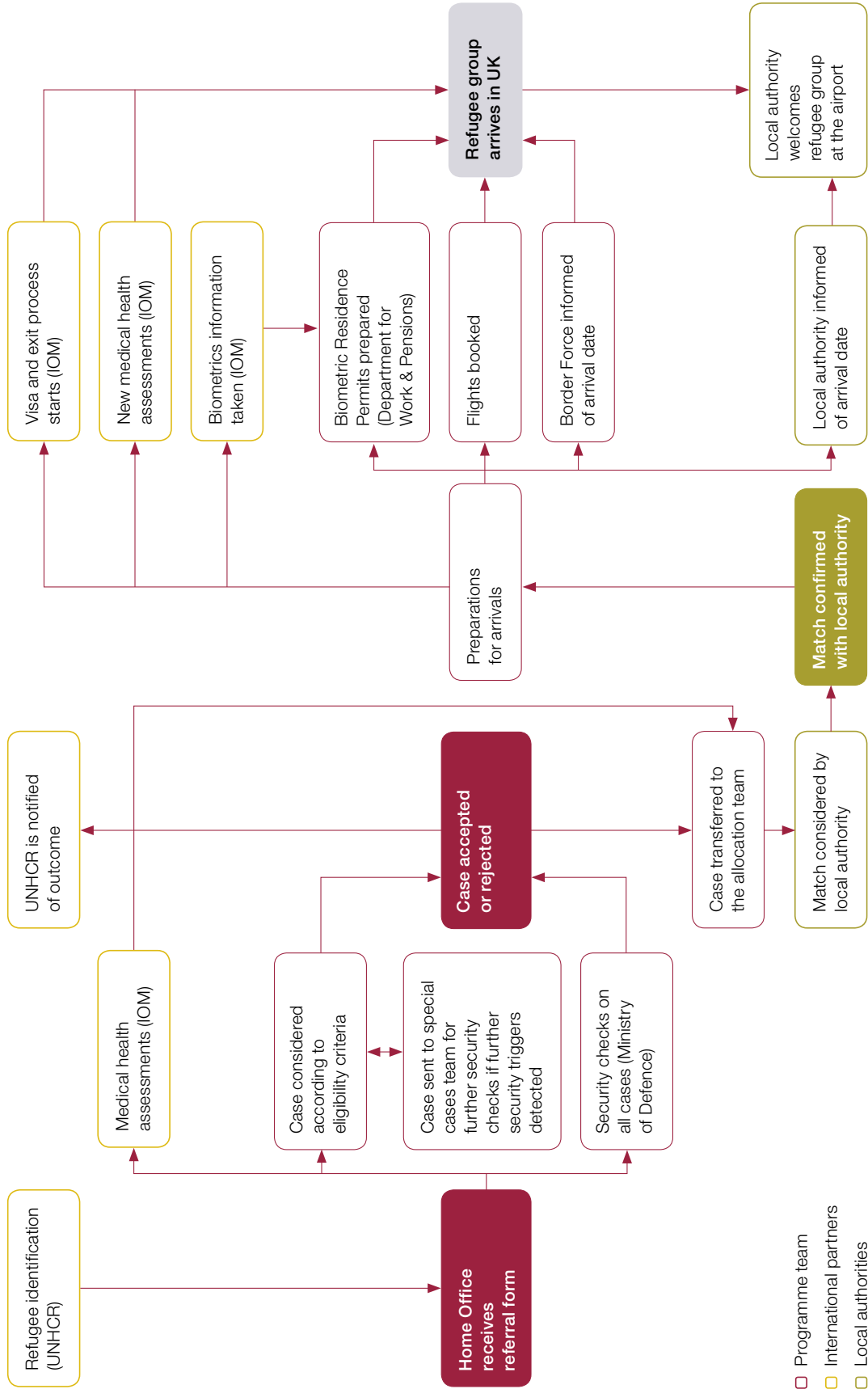
¹⁴ The Department for Education, the Department of Health, NHS England, the Department for Work & Pensions and HM Revenue & Customs.

¹⁵ This excludes the UNHCR's criteria "lack of a foreseeable alternative durable solution", which is not a primary criteria for selection onto the UK programme.

Figure 3

Process map: UNHCR identification to arrival in the UK

The programme involves a large number of organisations beyond the three central government departments responsible



Source: Home Office

2.8 The Syrian Resettlement Operations team, consisting of 40 staff, assess each referral according to detailed operating procedures. Security checks are included as part of this process. The caseworking team, a sub-team of around six staff, aims to decide whether a case is suitable for resettlement within six weeks of referral. When a case has been approved, it is passed to the engagement team, who work with Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) at a regional level or directly with local authorities to identify a suitable local resettlement offer. This can be time-consuming. Once a potential match is identified, local authorities have one week to consider a case, or up to three weeks if the resettlement is being organised at a regional level. Local authorities' involvement is voluntary and they are free to reject a case or request an alternative case. For each SMP, £60,000 is available in 2016-17 to coordinate refugee arrivals and match them to local authorities across their region. By early July, six SMPs had signed up. After a local authority has accepted a case, the IOM prepares travel documents and conducts pre-departure cultural orientation with refugees. Refugees due to be resettled undergo a medical health assessment, also carried out by the IOM, prior to departing for the UK. Caseworkers have to update the Casework Information Database (CID) manually at each stage of the referral process. Lots of information is stored on spreadsheets, making it difficult to transfer and match data.

2.9 Local authorities are responsible for securing accommodation for those they have agreed to resettle, meeting refugees at the airport and transporting them to their accommodation, registering them for health and education services and welfare benefits, and providing English language classes. Refugees receive a welcome pack of groceries on arrival, as well as an allowance of £200 per person from local authorities to ensure that they have sufficient funds while they wait for their benefit claims to be processed.

Financing the programme

2.10 Refugees are entitled to the same level of financial support from central and local government regardless of when they enter the programme. This means the costs of the programme will continue beyond 2020. The funding arrangements to cover this are complex. The cost of the programme is split between refugees' first year in the UK and their second to fifth years, each of which are funded differently and fall across central and local government.

2.11 The cost of support and services during refugees' first year in the UK will largely be paid for using Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding. The cost of refugee support is not eligible for ODA funding after their first year in the UK. The programme team expects to give local authorities £126 million up to 2020 to contribute to refugees' second to fifth years in the UK. Arrangements for covering the costs of the programme to other government departments vary according to the services provided and the length of time refugees have spent in the UK. The expected cost of the local authority tariff includes £36 million over the lifetime of the programme to cover exceptional costs incurred by local authorities.

Funding for local authorities

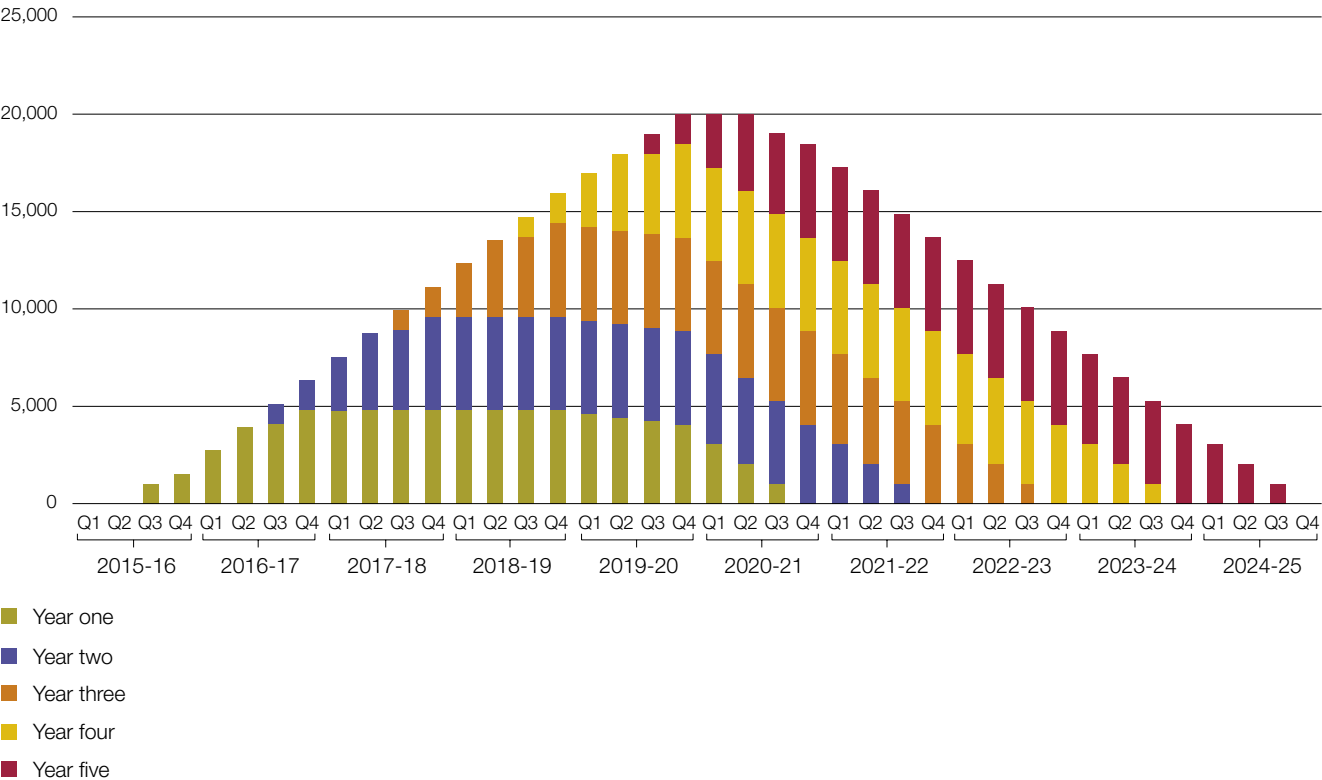
2.12 The programme is the first in the UK to provide financial support to refugees after their first year in the UK. Local authorities can claim a total of £20,520 per refugee over their first five years in the UK regardless of when they enter the programme (**Figure 4** and **Figure 5**). This funding is expected to cover local authorities’ costs of providing support and services to refugees during their first year in the UK, and to contribute to these costs during the refugees’ second to fifth year. The tariff is split by year and reduces each year the refugee is in the UK:

- Year one £8,520 per refugee;
- Year two £5,000 per refugee;
- Year three £3,700 per refugee;
- Year four £2,300 per refugee; and
- Year five £1,000 per refugee.

Figure 4
Number of refugees expected to be supported by local authorities, by year of support

Refugees will continue to receive support until 2025, depending on their date of entry to the UK

Number of refugees resettled in the UK



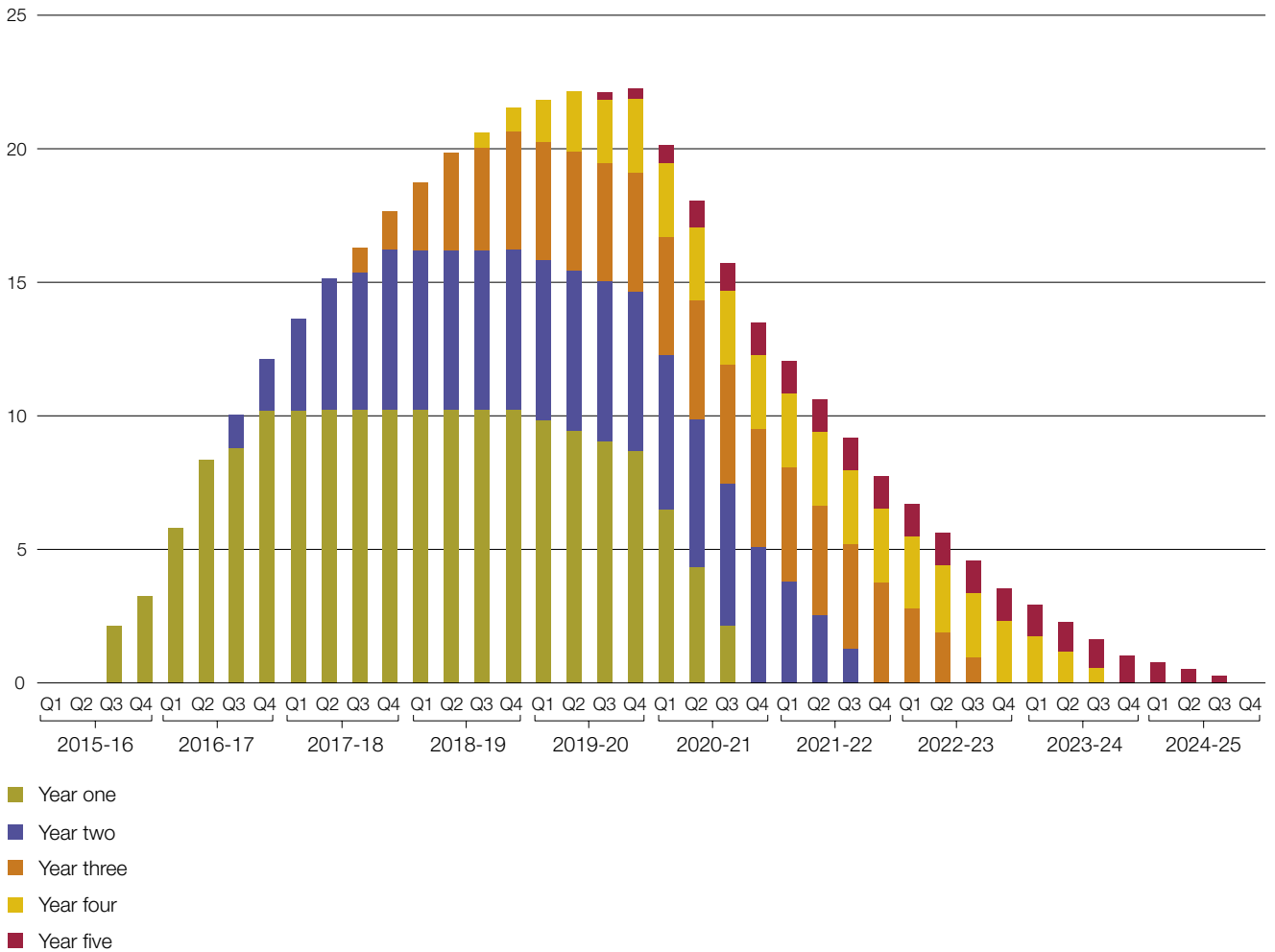
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office data

Figure 5

Estimated cost of local authority funding by year of support

Funding will reduce each year the refugee is in the UK

Cost of local authority tariff (million)



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office data

2.13 Local authorities, particularly those with previous resettlement experience, told us that this funding was welcome, but it was too early to say whether the first-year tariff or the new funding provisions would cover their costs. The Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government have written to local authorities to confirm the levels of funding that they will receive during refugees' second to fifth years in the UK, including a special cases fund for exceptional costs, and how this will be provided. This information is also available through the Local Government Associations' Knowledge Hubs. Local authorities are not sure, however, what they will be expected to provide during refugees' second to fifth years in the UK and how much of this they will be expected to fund. The Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government have deliberately not specified this; they have left it to local authorities to determine what support or services to provide as required. To allow this, the local authority tariff is not ring-fenced, but some local authorities still expressed concerns about the lack of clarity. In the face of continued budget cuts for local authorities, uncertainty about future costs is a concern.

Costs of refugees' first year in the UK

2.14 The programme team has been allocated £421.2 million up to 2021 from ODA funding to pay for refugee costs during their first year in the UK. This includes the local authority tariff, as well as the cost of services from the IOM and UNHCR, and the costs of accommodation, healthcare, education, social care, processing documentation and caseworking. It has allocated a further £17.3 million for costs incurred by the Home Office that are not covered by ODA funding, such as additional English language classes, qualification checks and IT systems and contracts, plus some costs incurred by other departments, taking the total expected cost of first-year funding to £456.4 million.

2.15 The funding allocated by the programme team does not, however, cover the full costs to government of providing support and services during refugees' first year in the UK. For example, welfare benefits and tax credits are expected to be paid through the Department for Work & Pensions and HM Revenue & Customs' budgets respectively. Many of the departments involved in the programme have not estimated the likely cost of providing support or services to Syrian refugees as the numbers involved are very small compared to the number of individuals or cases they work with. For example, if each adult Syrian refugee expected to resettle in the UK claimed housing benefit, this would equate to less than 0.2% of the 4.73 million adults who claimed housing benefit at the end of February 2016. Based on the programme team's budget assumptions and estimated unit costs, we estimate that the total cost to the government of providing support and services to Syrian refugees during their first year in the UK will be £569.9 million. This is one-quarter (£113.5 million, 25%) higher than the amount currently in the programme budget.

Full programme costs

2.16 The programme team and its partner departments have not yet estimated the full costs of refugees' second to fifth years in the UK, or the cost of the programme as a whole. HM Treasury has agreed to give local authorities up to £129 million (via the Home Office) to the end of 2019-20 towards refugees' second to fifth years in the UK, of which the programme team expects to spend £126 million. Funds for local authorities after this time are subject to agreement in the next Parliament. Other services, such as health and education, will be paid for by other government departments through normal funding routes direct to service providers. This is not expected to cause an undue burden on the departments involved. The estimated cost of healthcare for those in the programme in 2016-17 equates to around 0.02% of the amount allocated by the UK government for healthcare in the same year.¹⁶ The expected cost of the local authority tariff includes £36 million over the lifetime of the programme to cover exceptional costs incurred by local authorities.

2.17 The total cost of the programme to the UK is uncertain as it depends in large part on the characteristics of those entering the country, the extent to which refugees need medical treatment or welfare services, and the extent to which they can gain employment and become self-sufficient. It is a humanitarian programme driven by the need to ensure the safety and protection of the individuals involved. The only major fixed cost is the local authority tariff. Based on departments' assumptions about the characteristics of those entering the programme, the services or level of support they will require and unit costs, we estimate the programme could cost the UK up to £1,112 million to the end of 2019-20 and up to £1,734 million over its lifetime (**Figure 6** on pages 24 and 25). The estimated cost of the programme over its lifetime equates to £17,340 per refugee per year on average for their first five years in the UK. This compares to £29,000 to £33,000 per year on average for a child's foster place or £36,026 to keep an individual in immigration detention.^{17,18}

¹⁶ Figures are provided to give an indication of the scale of costs and are not directly comparable owing to differences in funding arrangements within and between devolved nations. The cost of primary and secondary medical care, as well as the programme's fund for exceptional costs, is expected to be £30 million in 2016-17. The total UK health resource budget for 2016-17 is £132 billion.

¹⁷ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Children in care*, Session 2014-15, HC 787, National Audit Office, November 2014.

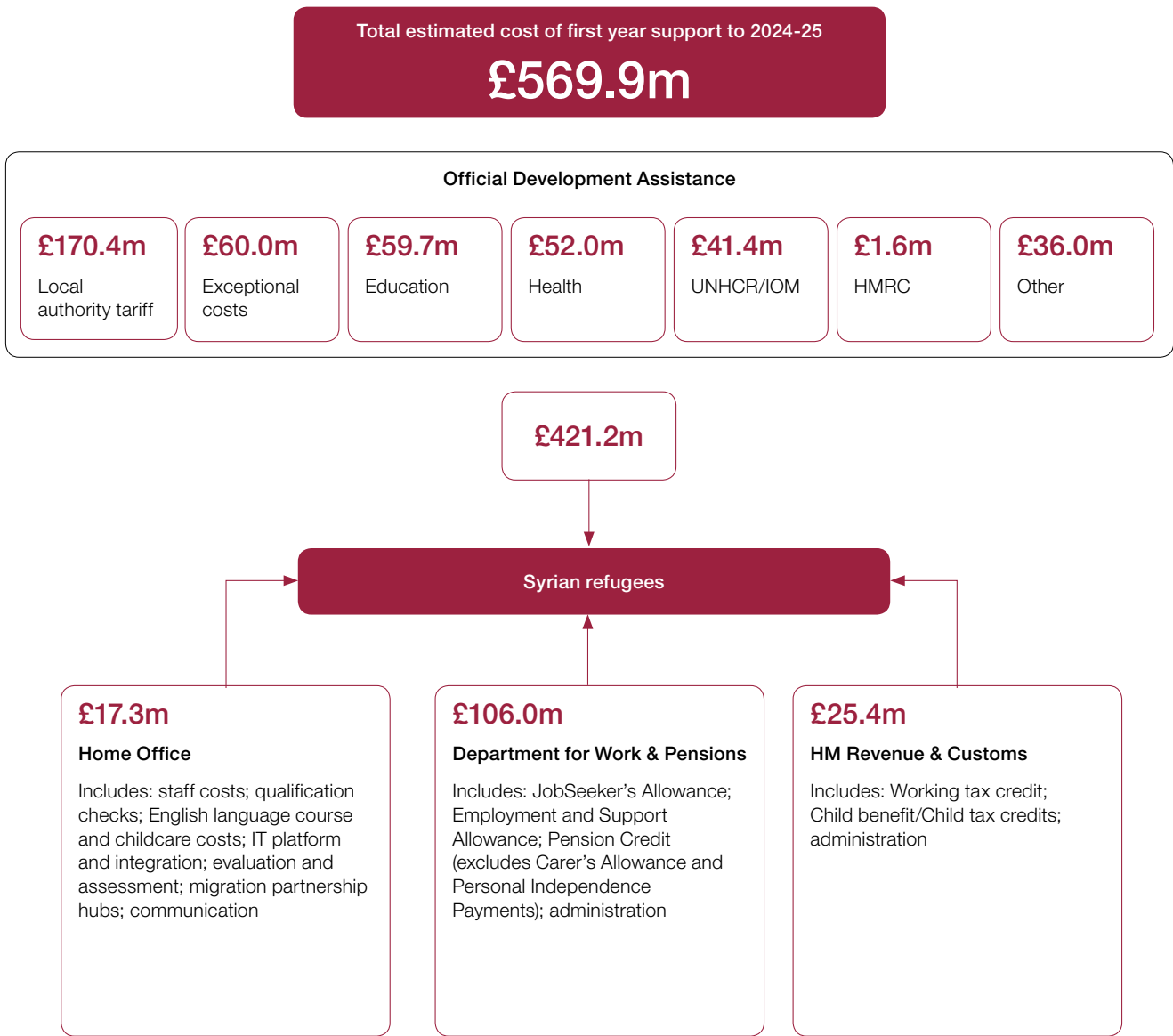
¹⁸ House of Commons Library, *Immigration detention in the UK: an overview*, briefing paper 7295, 7 September 2015.

Figure 6
Estimated costs of the programme

The programme could cost the UK up to £1,734 million over its lifetime

Estimated cost of the programme over its lifetime

First year support



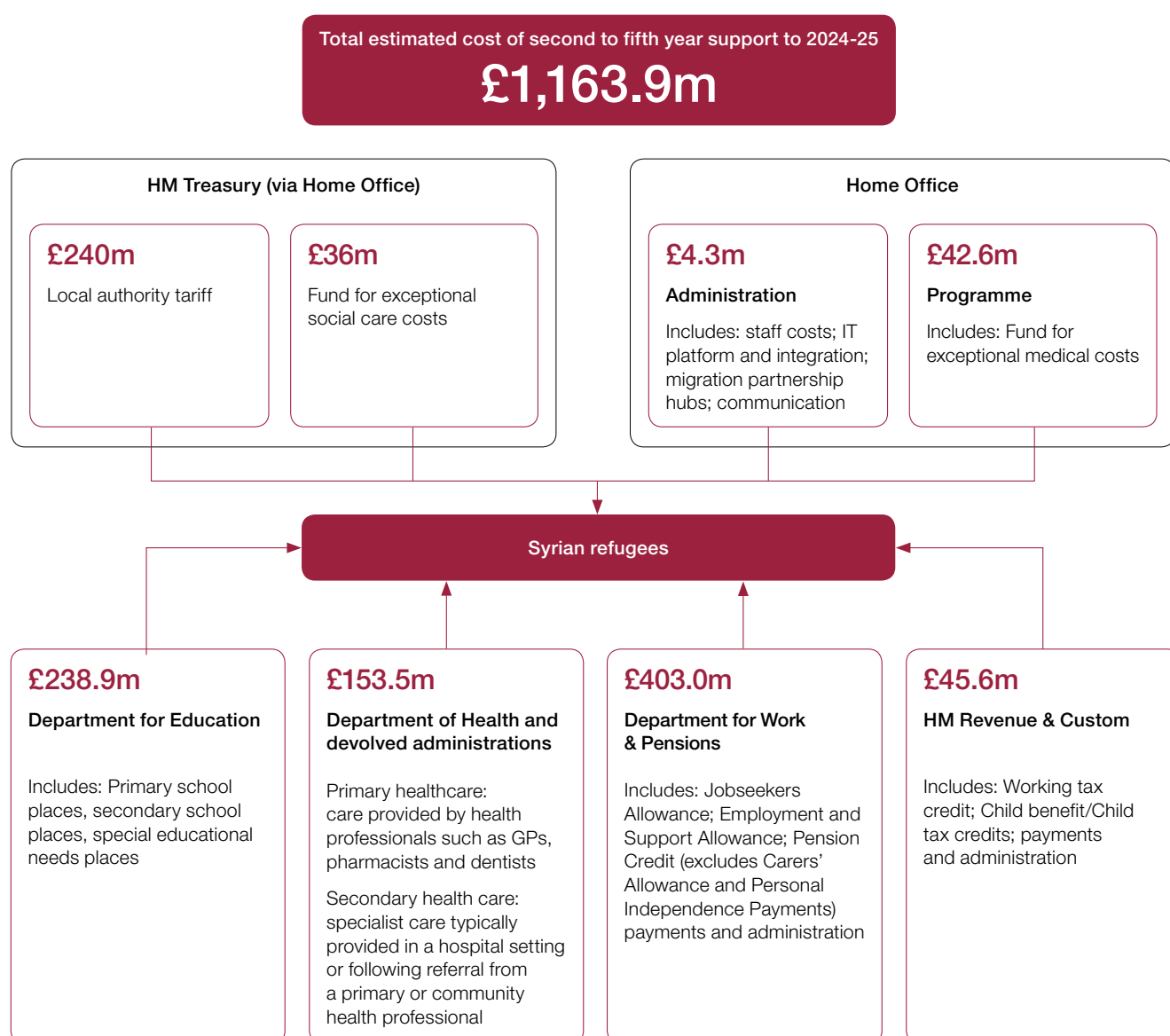
Note

1 Costs are estimates based on discussions with the departments responsible. Actual costs will depend on the characteristics of those resettled and the extent to which they access services. Local authority tariffs are the only major fixed cost.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office budget assumptions

Estimated cost of the programme over its lifetime

Second to fifth year support



Part Three

Progress to date

3.1 This part of the report looks at progress made to date in delivering the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (the programme), including: the programmes' achievements; the experience of local authorities; the experience of refugees; and the scale of the remaining challenge.

3.2 Since September 2015, when the programme changed in scale, design and operation, the three departments in the central programme team have divided delivery of the programme into three phases:

- phase 1 (September to December 2015): scaling up the existing resettlement programme to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees in the UK by Christmas 2015;
- phase 1.5 (January to April 2016): resettling another 500 refugees to the UK while designing phase 2 by building on phase 1 learning, developing IT tools and piloting new programmes; and
- phase 2 (April 2016 – April 2020): implementing a revised, flexible and sustainable programme, including more digital services and introduction of a community-based sponsorship scheme.

3.3 The success of the programme to Christmas 2015 was a substantial achievement given limited time and a lack of formal processes and available staff. The programme team was established in the weeks after the then-Prime Minister's September 2015 announcement. This aimed to design and implement plans to deliver the new commitment. Good partnership working and team spirit has meant that staff are positive about their experience and proud of their achievements. Early success was largely due to the goodwill and determination of all organisations involved. An 'all hands on deck' approach was necessary to achieve the Christmas 2015 milestone, but was recognised by all we spoke to as unsustainable. As a consequence, the programme team took a step back in January 2016 to design a more efficient programme.

Achievements of the programme

3.4 The programme team and their partners met the target to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees by Christmas 2015, exceeding it by almost 10%. A further 1,561 Syrian refugees have since been resettled, taking the total to 2,659 by the end of June 2016, 13% of the overall target.

3.5 To date, refugees have been dispersed across 118 local authorities in the UK, up from just three before September 2015. The number of refugees resettled in each local authority varies, from two refugees in Test Valley, Tonbridge and Malling and Basingstoke and Deane to 138 refugees in Coventry. Two local authorities have resettled more than 100 refugees and 35 have resettled fewer than 10 refugees. Local authorities also vary in the extent to which they are both participating in the programme and have wider involvement in supporting asylum seekers. Glasgow and Nottingham City Councils, for example, are both active participants in the programme and also asylum dispersal areas.¹⁹ Other local authorities have not yet participated in either arrangement (**Figure 7** on pages 28 and 29).

3.6 Most refugees who have been resettled in the UK as part of the programme have been family groups of four to six members. Just under half (49%) are children under the age of 18. More than half (55%) were accepted onto the programme because they are survivors of torture or violence, or both (**Figure 8** on page 30).

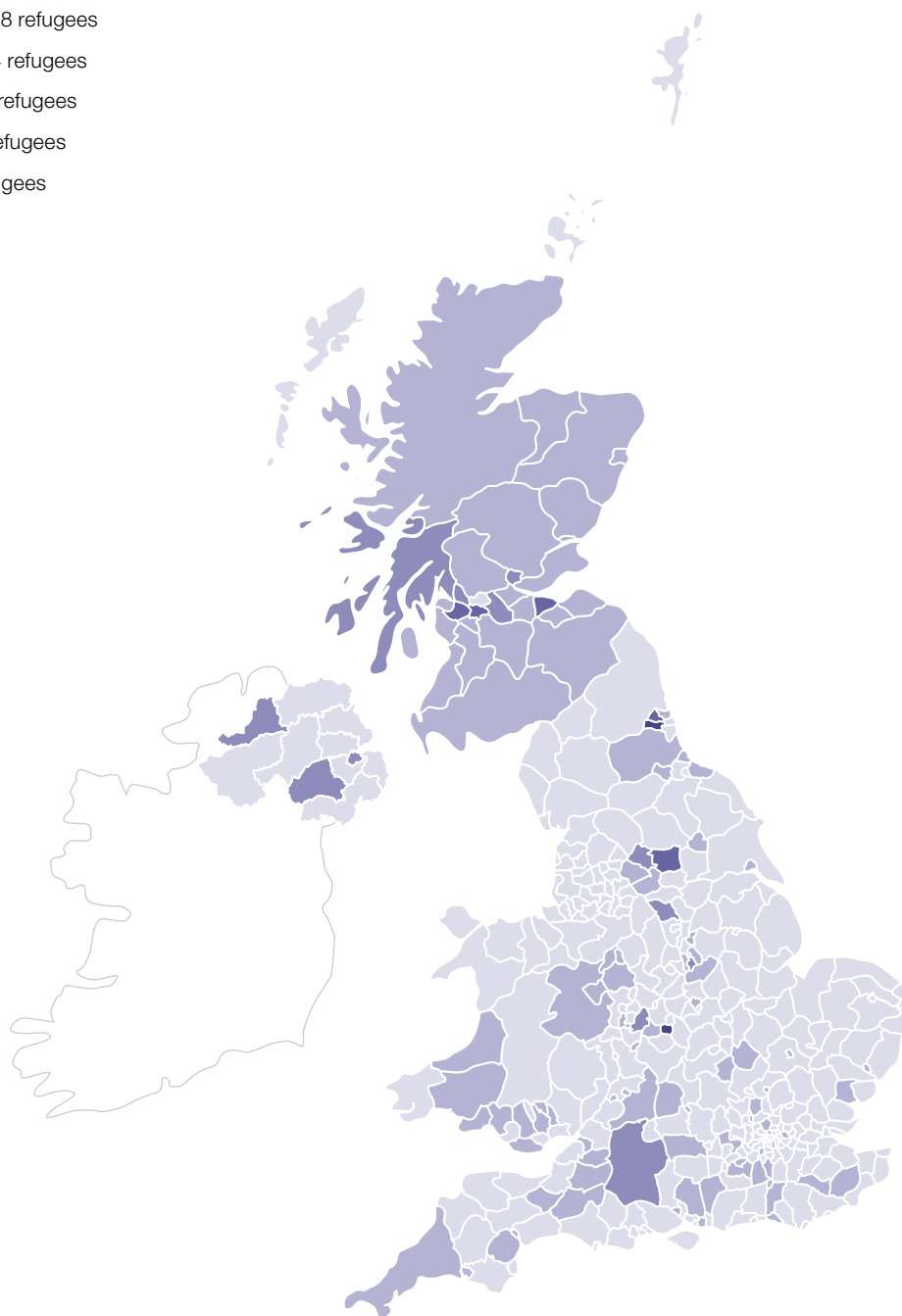
¹⁹ An asylum dispersal area is where a local authority has agreed to house asylum seekers up to a pre-defined limit. Not all local authorities participate.

Figure 7

Where Syrian refugees have been resettled across the UK as part of the programme

So far in the programme 118 local authorities have taken part

- 104–138 refugees
- 70–104 refugees
- 36–70 refugees
- 2–36 refugees
- No refugees



Note

- 1 There are some errors in the data, with dispersion not always correctly recorded after registration at the central hub on arrival. These recording errors are being corrected, but updated data are not yet available.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office statistics

Where asylum seekers of all nationalities have been resettled across the UK

- 31,880–42,507 asylum seekers
- 21,253–31,880 asylum seekers
- 10,626–21,253 asylum seekers
- 1–10,626 asylum seekers
- No asylum seekers

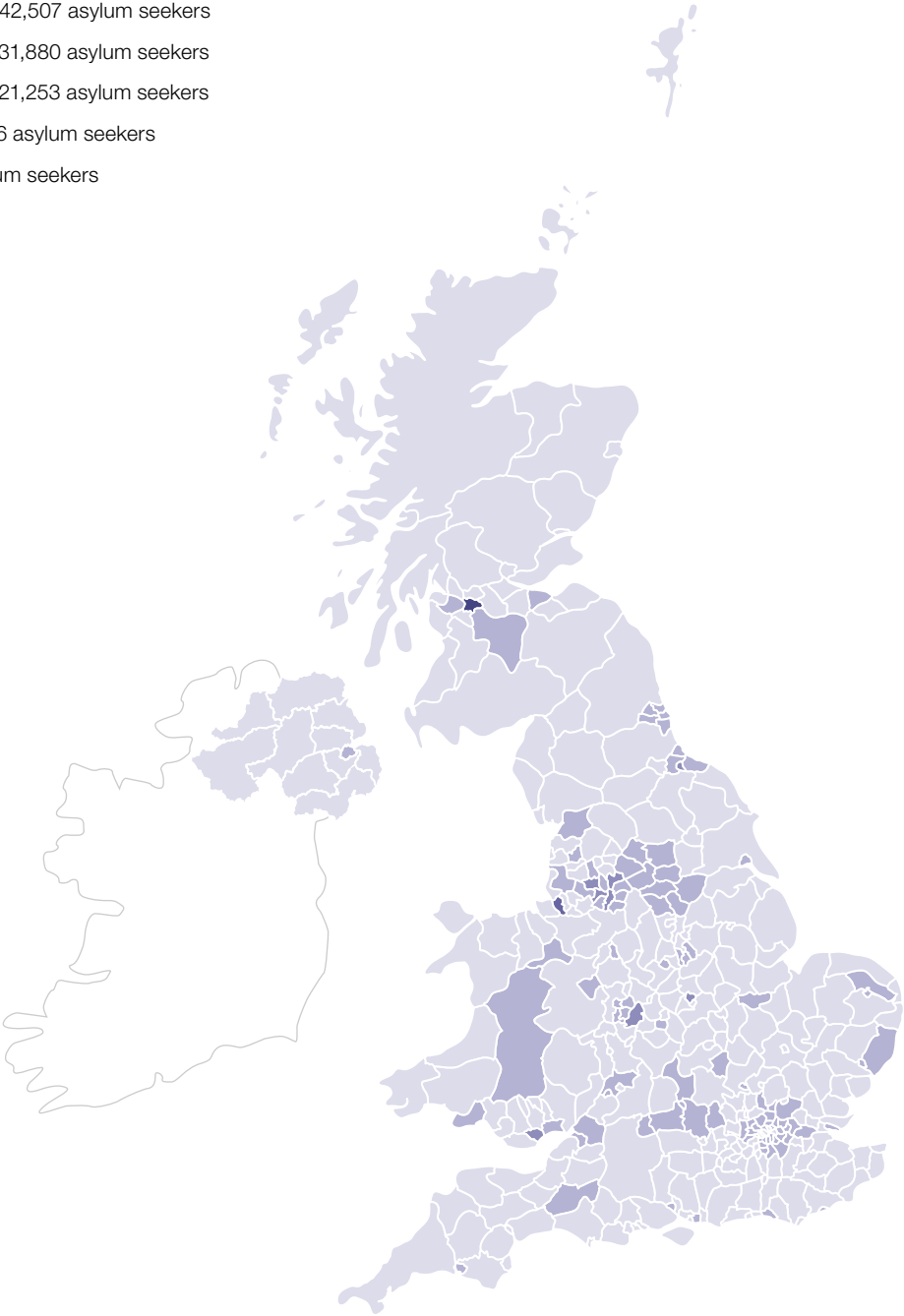


Figure 8

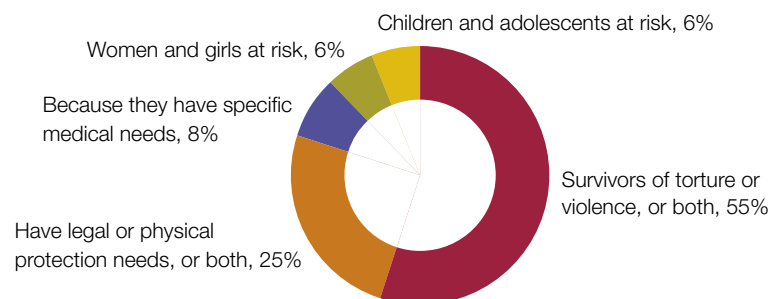
Characteristics of resettled Syrian refugees to end June 2016

2,659

Refugees resettled in the UK as part of the programme



Primary reason for acceptance onto the programme



Notes

- 1 The UK accepts families of six or fewer, only considering larger families on a case-by-case basis. Six families of more than seven members had been resettled by the end of June 2016; 143 were rejected because of family size.
- 2 Refugees may meet more than one of the UNHCR's criteria of vulnerability, but this is not recorded by the programme team.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Home Office data

Local authority experiences

3.7 Local authorities we spoke to were very supportive of the programme as a whole, but felt changes could be made that would improve the way it worked and the likelihood of success. They agreed that phase one of the programme was carried out at speed and labour-intensive processes were not sustainable. They also recognised that the programme team had taken steps to respond to some of their concerns, such as giving them more time to find suitable accommodation.

3.8 Local authorities with previous experience of resettlement programmes were more positive than those who were new to resettlement (**Figure 9** overleaf). Many local authorities with previous experience of resettlement programmes already had established networks and told us that they were able to deliver the coordinated support needed for the programme more quickly as a result.

3.9 Local authorities with less experience of resettlement programmes were not as positive. Several requested more information about the health needs, employment, skills, training and qualifications of refugees to allow them to match refugees with services available. Local authorities did, however, recognise that the support and guidance from central government had improved, with queries answered at a faster rate.

3.10 Some local authorities told us that they had not received enough information from the programme team about best practice in the programme or lessons learned so far. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) have set up an interactive platform to share this information. These Knowledge Hubs include resources for local authorities and information for refugees, such as copies of materials translated into Arabic. They are also working with the programme team to share case studies. The Associations, Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships and local authorities have also established events and networks to support local authorities participating in the programme, which have been well received. More experienced local authorities have offered support and advice to those new to resettlement.

3.11 The programme team specifies what local authorities are responsible for providing during a refugee's first year in the UK. It is up to local authorities how they deliver this. For example, local authorities are responsible for arranging accommodation that meets local authority standards, and is affordable, sustainable and furnished appropriately. However, local authorities have interpreted this differently, resulting in refugees being provided with different levels of accommodation and furnishings.

Figure 9

Local authority feedback

“The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme has more structure, a much clearer position on funding, an invaluable case referral process and several of the processes have been much smoother.

Central government colleagues have been engaged and proactive but at times it has been difficult to keep up with the many different people who have contacted us from different government functions, in particular in the November–December 2015 period.

The case referral process in general has been a significant improvement over previous programmes and we have held multi-agency case review meetings to consider individual cases referred to us ... This has proved invaluable in preparing for the arrival of families. The quality of information has been very good.”

Local authority with experience of the Gateway Protection Programme, the Iraqi Locally Engaged Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme and the Afghan LES Relocation Scheme

“Communication with the Home Office resettlement team ... was very helpful and ... every effort was made to share case information with the Council. This process has improved significantly and information is available much more timeously.

There were issues after Christmas in terms of contact with the Home Office resettlement teams, as there seemed to be a significant increase in personnel, with multiple contacts for different issues, for example allocation of families, travel arrangements, follow-up discussions on integration. Communication was fragmented as a result; however, issues have now been resolved.

In terms of the cases allocated and information available, generally there have been no issues experienced by the Council, with the exception of a few cases where health information was not available at the point where a decision had to be made to accept the case for resettlement. This requires to be addressed as it is both prudent and fair for health services to have access to this information in advance.”

Local authority with experience of the Kosovan Evacuation Scheme

“Guidance and support have developed over time. There was limited and incoherent information for the first few months. There have been considerable periods of uncertainty in relation to specific issues such as: provision of biometrics, arrangements for national insurance numbers, and so on. It has also taken time for a clear picture of available funding to emerge.

The process to receive refugees prior to Christmas was quite rushed and this resulted in a short period of time to receive and consider cases. This also impacted on the quality of information provided both to us and the refugees.

The pre-arrival information that had been developed for the refugees did not always appear to have reached them. There were some issues with the health information provided in advance, for example there were incorrect names and dates of birth. It has (understandably) taken time for a clearer picture to emerge and for processes to be formally established.”

Local authority with no previous experience of resettlement programmes in the UK

Source: Local authorities' feedback to National Audit Office

Interpretation and English language skills

3.12 Most resettled Syrians do not have a high enough level of English to be self-sufficient in the UK. Local authorities, or third sector organisations acting on their behalf, are responsible for ensuring interpretation services are available. However, it is not clear how this should work in practice, for example whether government departments, local authorities or their delivery partners should provide interpreters for routine appointments relating to health, welfare, social care or employment. Many local authorities and third sector organisations rely on informal networks to provide interpretation services, such as volunteers or refugees with better English.

3.13 Local authorities are also responsible for arranging access to English language classes within one month of a refugee's arrival, for up to 12 months. Local authorities and refugees told us that the local authority tariff is being used to fund around four hours of tuition per week. Both groups told us this was insufficient to learn English quickly and not detailed enough to allow refugees to properly integrate into communities or access services without interpreters. The programme team provides separate funding of up to £500 per refugee for additional English language courses to further improve their skills with a view to getting employment, plus an allowance for childcare so those with pre-school children can attend classes.²⁰ It is not clear whether this is known about or being used. There is currently no requirement or provision for English language classes after refugees' first year in the UK.

3.14 While we heard examples of success, for example individuals securing places on apprenticeship schemes or voluntary work as interpreters resulting in full-time employment, language remains a major barrier to getting refugees into employment. Investing in language training and supporting services can be beneficial in the longer term. In May 2016, the Tent Foundation and the Open Political Economy Network found that investing €1 in welcoming refugees in the European Union (EU) could yield nearly €2 in economic benefits within five years.²¹

Refugees' experiences

3.15 We met two groups of refugees who had been resettled in the UK, in Bradford and Nottingham. Those we spoke to told us that their experience of the programme had been generally positive, that the process appeared to have run smoothly and they had received a warm welcome from the communities they have resettled in.

²⁰ On 4 September 2016, the Home Secretary announced that £10 million had been pledged for English Language tuition to help refugees integrate, in addition to the local authority per person tariff. Up to £4 million over the next four years will be provided by the Department for Education. The remaining funding, which is expected to be around £6.5 million, is included in the £17.3 million described in paragraph 2.14 allocated for costs incurred by the Home Office and other government departments that are not covered by ODA funding.

²¹ Philippe Legrain, *Refugees work: a humanitarian investment that yields economic dividends*, Tent Foundation and Open Political Economy Network, May 2016.

3.16 While experiences were positive overall, a lack of clarity about the programme and living in the UK has caused anxiety. Refugees told us that information provided before their arrival in the UK can be patchy, for example where they are being resettled and what to expect in terms of surroundings, local community and services. Many had experienced conflicting advice on what benefits they can access. Refugees we spoke to asked for clarification about their immigration status, for example whether they were able to travel outside the UK or apply for family reunion. Most importantly, they were worried about their status at the end of the five-year programme and whether they would be forced to return to Syria.

Refugees' status in the UK

3.17 Although referred to as refugees, those resettled in the UK as part of the programme are granted humanitarian protection status rather than refugee status. Humanitarian protection is a form of immigration status granted by the Home Office to a person who does not meet the criteria for refugee status but would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if they returned to their home country.²²

3.18 Neither refugees nor those with humanitarian protection status are entitled to disability benefits such as Carer's Allowance or Personal Independence Payments, as they do not meet the required residency test. Organisations and charities involved in supporting Syrian refugees told us that this has not been consistently or clearly explained to refugees. Given that some refugees have been resettled in the UK specifically because of a disability or medical condition, this inconsistency could cause difficulties to some refugees and have a negative impact on their experiences.

3.19 Humanitarian protection status affects whether and how those in the programme can travel abroad and visit family members. Those in the programme who do not have, and are unable to obtain, a Syrian passport need a certificate of travel (COT) to go abroad. Those with refugee status need a convention travel document (TD). There are differences in the cost and in what a COT entitles someone to compared with a TD.²³ This was also not clear to all refugees we spoke with.

3.20 Both those granted refugee status and those granted humanitarian protection status are given a UK residence permit. This is valid for five years and renewable.²⁴ After five years, the individual (and their dependants) can apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Refugees resettled under other programmes, such as the Gateway Protection Programme, are given indefinite leave to remain on arrival in the UK. Those participating in the Syrian programme can apply for both family reunion for immediate family members and asylum status in the UK, in accordance with the UK's immigration rules. This does not appear to be well understood by refugees or those supporting them.

²² See Home Office immigration rules, updated 14 July 2016.

²³ Some EU countries do not accept COTs, whereas a TD is more widely accepted. A COT is more expensive and is only valid for the length of the journey, whereas a TD is valid for 10 years.

²⁴ See footnote 22.

The scale of the remaining challenge

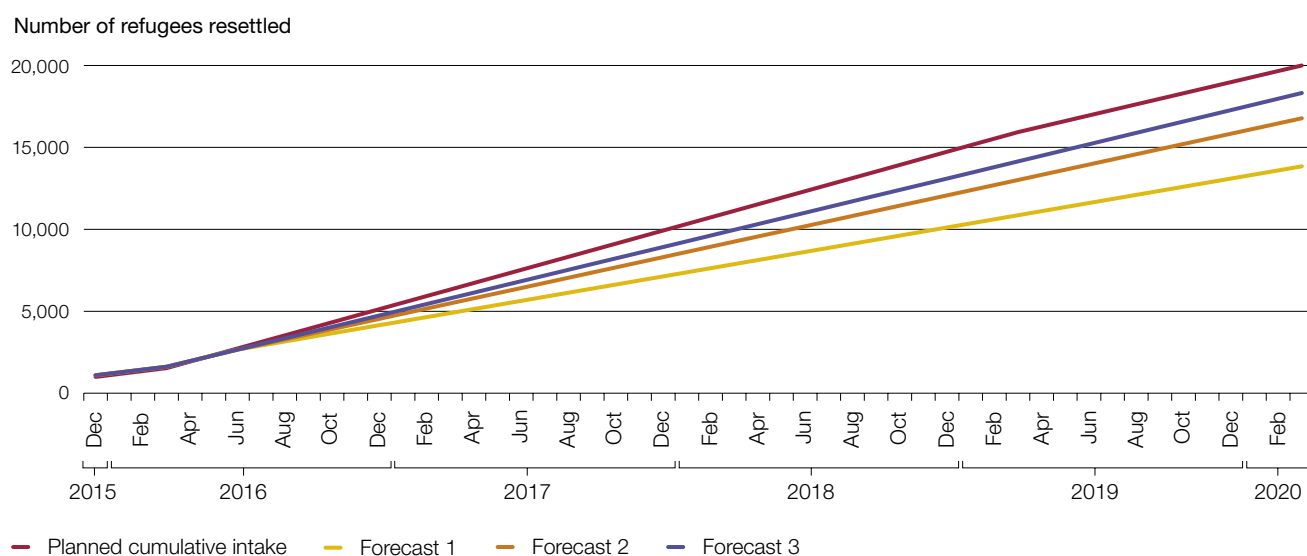
3.21 The programme team has set quarterly internal targets to help it reach the overall 20,000 target by 2020. It told us it was on track to meet this. The scale of the remaining challenge, however, is substantial. It needs to resettle more refugees each quarter than it has resettled so far.

3.22 The programme team and partners resettled an average of 248 Syrian refugees per month between September 2015 and the end of March 2016. If this average had continued, the team would miss the target by 6,160 people. This period, however, deliberately included a slowing down of the flow of refugees after Christmas. Between April and June 2016, the programme team and partners resettled a further 1,044 refugees, which was above the quarterly target of 1,030. This represents an increase in the average number of refugees resettled to 348 refugees per month. This is better than earlier performance, but if sustained would result in the overall target being missed by 1,680. The programme team and partners will need to continue to increase the number of refugees resettled each quarter, which it told us it is confident it will do (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10

Cumulative refugee intake – actual and forecast

The programme team needs to resettle more refugees each month than it has to date in order to achieve the 20,000 target



Notes

- Forecast 1: performance to June 2016 and estimated future performance based on the average number of refugees resettled in the programme before the relaunch (September 2015 to end of March 2016).
- Forecast 2: performance to June 2016 and estimated future performance based on the average number of refugees resettled in the programme during phase 1 (September to December 2015).
- Forecast 3: performance to June 2016 and estimated future performance based on the average number of refugees resettled in the programme during phase 2 (April to end of June 2016).

Source: National Audit Office analysis

Part Four

Managing delivery risks

4.1 This part of the report looks at how risks to deliver the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (the programme) successfully in future are being managed, including: factors that may mean the 20,000 target is not met; and whether planned developments for the programme are likely to be successful.

Meeting the 20,000 target by 2020

4.2 Meeting the target to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 depends on:

- receiving enough referrals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for resettlement, and processing these in a timely and efficient way; and
- securing enough offers from local authorities to resettle refugees.

The Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for International Development (the programme team) have so far managed the first of these potential barriers well. However, securing enough offers from local authorities remains a concern.

UNHCR referrals and processing

4.3 UNHCR referred 6,596 potential people for resettlement to the UK between September 2015 and the end of June 2016. Less than one in ten cases where a decision has been made have either been rejected (183) or withdrawn (368).²⁵ If this attrition rate continues, the UK will need to receive more than 22,000 referrals in order to meet the 20,000 target. The programme team and UNHCR have agreed a target number of referrals of 500 to 600 per month, or 7,000 per year. Even allowing for an attrition rate of around 10%, this should be enough to meet the government's overall target for the programme. Both parties are in regular contact and were positive about their capacity to provide the required number of referrals.

²⁵ The main reason for rejecting cases is family size (more than six members). Only 17 cases have been rejected for security reasons.

4.4 UNHCR faces a number of pressures as it is also responsible for referring refugee cases to other countries. UNHCR told us that it supported the UK's decision to increase the number of refugees that would be resettled through the programme, but that meeting the 1,000 target before Christmas had been challenging as it had been given short notice at a time when other governments were also asking for more and quicker referrals. UNHCR welcomed the programme team's decision to deliberately reduce the number of referrals in the first quarter of 2016 to allow it time to recover and support referrals to other countries.

Local authority capacity

4.5 Local authorities can make indicative pledges to resettle refugees. These become firm offers once the local authority has secured appropriate accommodation, support and services. The programme team currently has enough indicative pledges to meet the 20,000 target, but has a potential shortfall of firm offers. It had received 3,661 firm offers from local authorities to resettle refugees by the end of June 2016. Of these offers, 97% had been filled by a refugee arriving in the UK (2,659) or allocated to a potential arrival (877). It therefore had only 125 remaining firm offers to cover the 1,078 cases that had been accepted for resettlement but were yet to be matched to a local authority. While recognising this risk, the programme team told us that it was confident that the current conversion rate of pledges to firm offers was enough to ensure that this shortfall would not materialise.

4.6 Local authorities told us that one of the greatest barriers to their participation in the programme is their capacity to secure enough suitable and affordable accommodation. The programme has so far required 655 houses or flats and will need around 4,930 over its lifetime based on the average family size resettled to date. Some local authorities, particularly those with previous resettlement experience, have established successful partnerships with the private rental sector. However, others are struggling to do so. Local authorities were also concerned that the cap on housing benefit could mean that privately rented accommodation would not be affordable to many refugees, especially in London and the South East where only 11% of refugees in the programme have been resettled so far.

4.7 Local authorities are also responsible for ensuring that Syrian refugee children are registered with local schools. They told us that securing school places was one of the main challenges to participating in the programme after housing. Just under one-third (31%) of refugees who have been resettled so far have been of school age. The programme team currently estimates that 7,655 of those coming to the UK through the programme will be of school age, and that 3,009 will be below school age, but will enter the education system during the programme. Local authorities will therefore be expected to secure a total of 10,664 school places during the programme, equivalent to 0.1% of the total number of school-aged children in the UK. School places, however, are in short supply: our study of capital funding for new school places found that 20.4% of primary schools were full or over capacity.²⁶ We also heard from Bradford Council and Nottingham City and County Councils of difficulties with finding services in the same areas: schools with available places were not in the same area as suitable accommodation.

4.8 Securing places for children with special educational needs is an additional challenge for local authorities. Around 20% of children in the programme are expected to have special educational needs, meaning that local authorities will need to provide more than 1,500 special educational needs places. Nottingham City and County Councils have already had to turn away cases because they were unable to provide the required special educational needs places.

4.9 Local authorities were also concerned that refugees, particularly those with physical or mental health needs, would need substantial support after five years in the UK. This support would not be covered by existing funding arrangements. Freedom from Torture, a registered charity that provides rehabilitation services to survivors of torture, confirmed that it can be difficult for a survivor to disclose that they have been tortured. As a result, those most in need risk being either identified too late or missed entirely. Good access to mental health services matters. Many people can make a full recovery if they receive appropriate, timely treatment. However, a high proportion of people with mental health conditions do not have access to the care they need. Our report on mental health services across the UK found that in 2014-15 more than one-third (39%) of Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) did not meet the target for referring and treating patients referred to psychological therapies.²⁷ Comparable yearly data for 2015-16 has not yet been published, but in April 2016 over three-quarters of CCGs met the target. The programme team plans to review the tariff provided to local authorities after the programme has been operational for a year. But it is not yet clear whether it will consider these issues. The Department of Health told us that it is working with the programme team and other partners to determine whether more effective assessments of mental health can be built into the health assessments that refugees undergo before they leave for the UK to allow issues to be identified earlier and access put in place to appropriate treatment. As part of this, it plans to conduct a pilot of 200 refugees in Lebanon to examine what conditions are being diagnosed pre-departure and whether treatment is then available when they arrive in the UK, although this has not yet been established.

26 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Capital funding for new school places*, Session 2012-13, HC 1042, National Audit Office, March 2013.

27 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Mental health services: preparations for improving access*, Session 2015-16, HC 492, National Audit Office, April 2016.

Prospects for future developments

The Sheffield hub

4.10 The programme team established a pilot in April 2016 to test the practicality of interviewing refugees remotely to improve the information it holds about them before they arrive. This could allow it to better match refugees with resettlement offers, and allow local authorities to put support and services in place on a more informed basis.

4.11 The pilot used existing Home Office video interviewing infrastructure in Sheffield and Jordan. By 22 June 2016, 80 individuals had been interviewed. Initial feedback suggests the opportunity to talk to a UK-based officer is highly valued by refugee families. The programme team conducted a formal evaluation of the pilot in July. This focused on the impact of the information provided on the allocation process and the programme team's ability to match resettlement offers with refugees' needs and provide better information for refugees before their arrival in the UK.

Community sponsorships

4.12 The UK only considers referrals from UNHCR, whereas countries such as Canada and Germany make extensive use of schemes which allow individuals and organisations to privately sponsor Syrian refugees. In October 2015, the then-Home Secretary announced that the UK would develop a community sponsorship scheme to allow individuals, charities, faith groups and businesses to directly support and resettle Syrian refugees in the UK. The scheme was launched in July 2016. Lambeth Palace was the first community group to be approved as a community sponsor.

4.13 Many local authorities we spoke to prior to the launch of the scheme were unaware of the programme team's plans to introduce community sponsorship. Those who were aware of it told us there was a risk that refugees would miss out on locally provided support and integration services, potentially creating inequalities within the programme. For example:

- Sponsors are expected to provide the same resettlement services as local authorities, but have to fund £9,000 per family – less than the £8,520 per person provided to local authorities for a refugee's first year in the UK.
- Sponsors do not have to provide the five-year support package offered by local authorities. There is no requirement for sponsors to fully support refugees beyond their first year in the UK, at which point local authorities were concerned that they would have to pick up the costs of support and services without the support of the local authority tariff.²⁸

The programme team has since confirmed that local authorities will be able to claim for additional funding through the exceptional cases fund if they incur significant social care costs that cannot be met by the sponsor. At the end of refugees' sponsorship, claims for the local authority tariff to cover refugees' second to fifth years in the UK will be determined on a case-by-case basis following an assessment of the needs of the refugees.

4.14 Those we spoke to thought that it would make sense to target community sponsorship in an area with less experience of resettlement or where local authorities are struggling to offer resettlement places to avoid duplication of effort. The programme team told us it will only introduce community sponsorship in areas where local authorities confirm they have no objection.

Monitoring and evaluation

4.15 The programme team told us that it would develop its plan to monitor and evaluate the programme, including identifying the benefits to the UK, during the redesign phase. It planned to have this in place by April 2016. The programme team has put in place strong arrangements to actively monitor progress against the 20,000 target as part of its delivery of the programme as a whole. Its plans to evaluate the benefits of the programme and ensure that funding delivers the desired outcomes, however, have been slower to develop.

²⁸ Sponsors are required to provide accommodation for a minimum of two years.

4.16 The programme team has consulted local authorities, academics and others on what to include in its evaluation of the programme. It plans to focus on:

- refugees' progress in English language classes, education and employment;
- involvement in voluntary work and community activities as a measure of self-sufficiency;
- secondary migration;
- security and safeguarding issues; and
- health outcomes.

The programme team has shared evaluation plans with local authorities to allow them to start collecting data. These data, alongside information from other departments, will allow it to analyse how different factors have impacted on refugees' experience and outcomes. However, plans do not yet specify targets against the measures identified, or criteria for success. It is not clear when, or if, these will be developed.

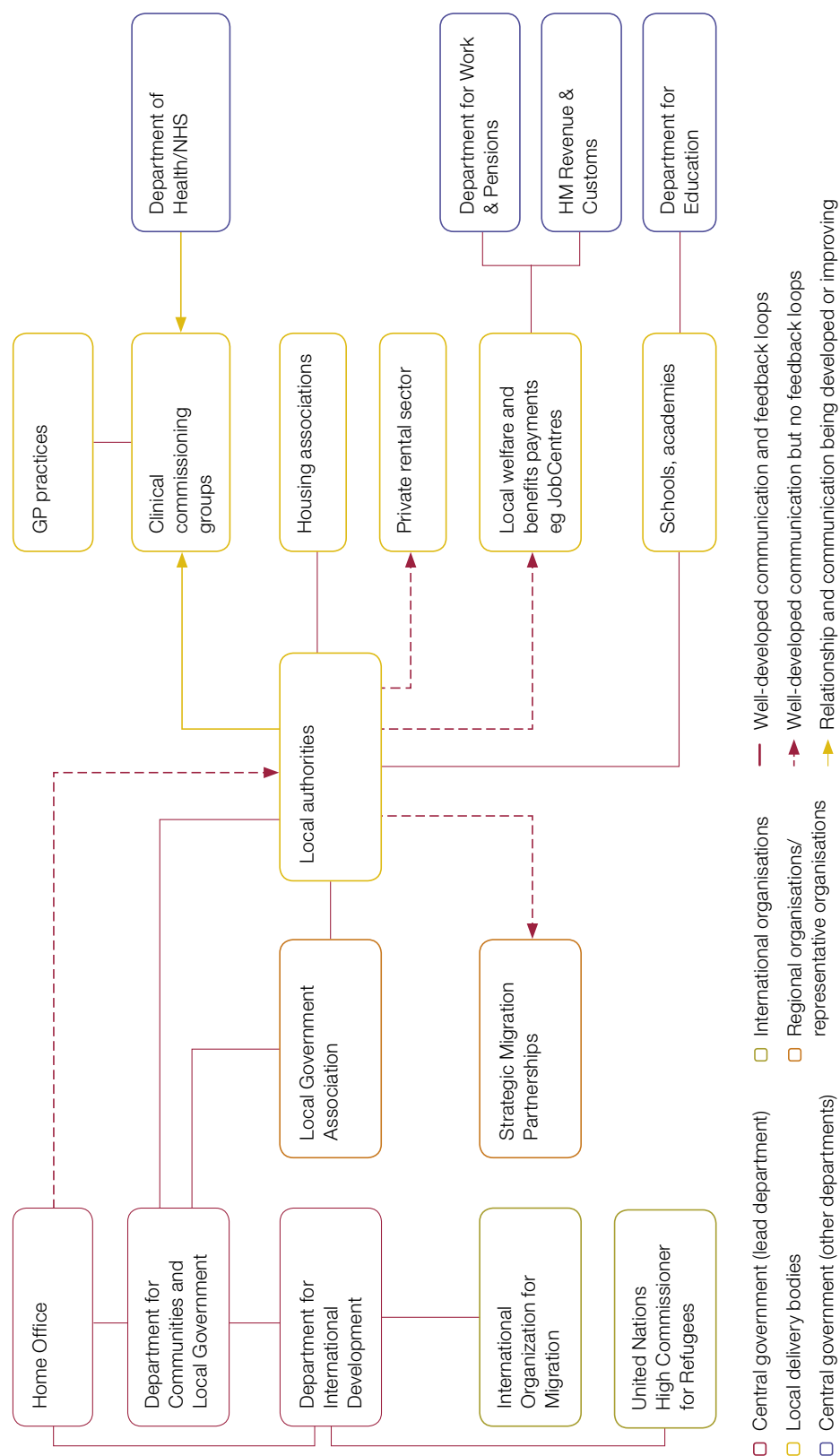
Learning from experience

4.17 The Home Office has previous experience of resettlement through the Gateway Protection Programme. It commissioned an evaluation of the programme in 2011. This concluded that the Home Office should extend refugee support beyond 12 months, provide more English language training and promote shared learning between support providers. The Syrian programme has extended refugee support and is starting to share lessons, but has not incorporated the recommendations about English language provision.

4.18 The programme team has not yet requested formal feedback from local authorities, partners or other government departments about how the programme has worked or to identify lessons learned. While some organisations involved in delivering the programme already have established networks for sharing information and lessons learned, this has not yet developed in other parts of the programme (**Figure 11** overleaf). Without this information, any further redesign of the programme will not be fully informed and risks may not be fully identified and managed.

Figure 11
Information sharing and learning networks

Some organisations have established networks for sharing information and lessons learned, but this has not yet developed in other parts of the programme



Source: National Audit Office analysis

Appendix One

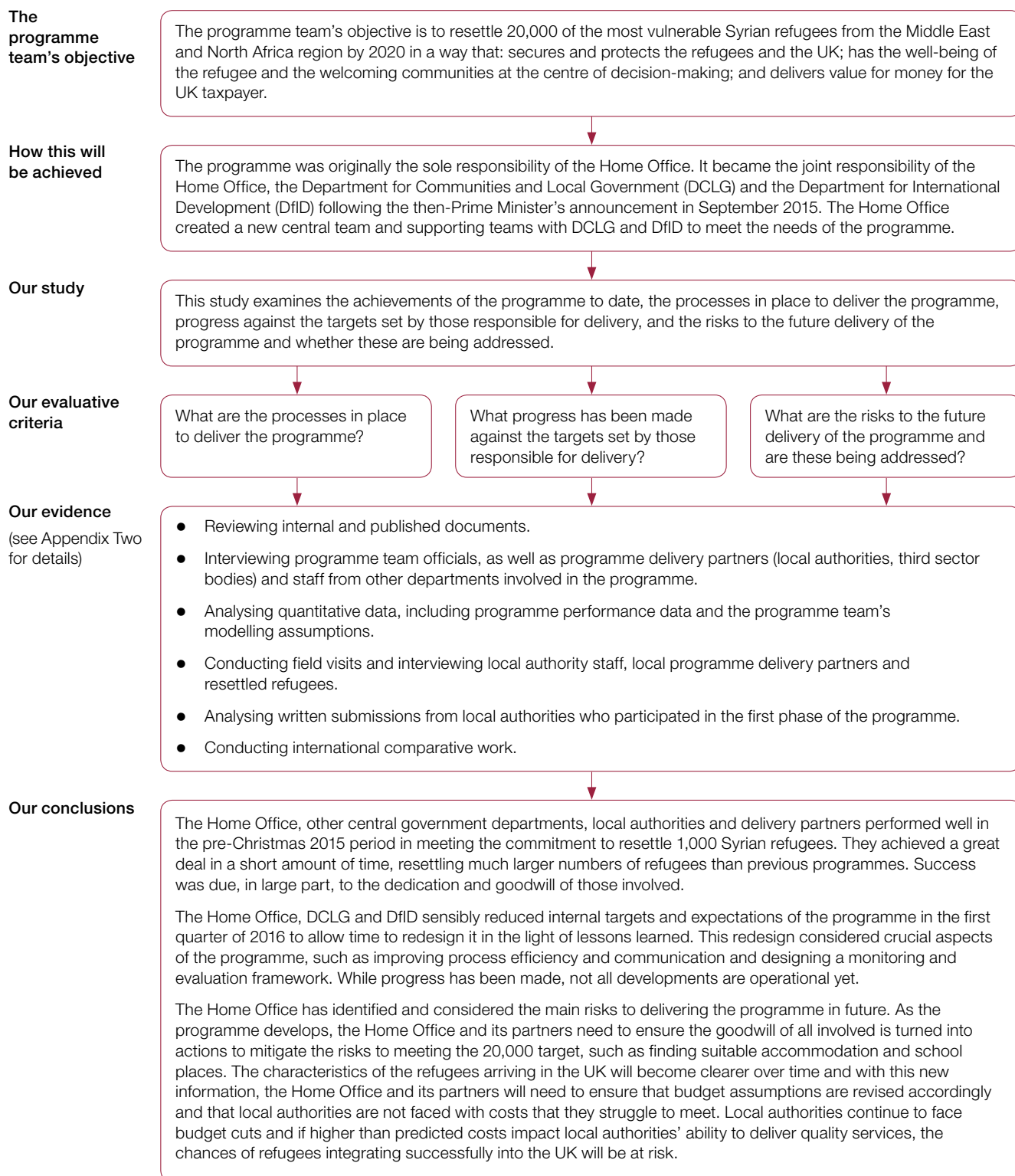
Our audit approach

1 This report was a progress review of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (the programme). It did not seek to reach a judgement on whether the programme has achieved value for money as it is too early to assess this. We looked at the programme as a whole, highlighting the risks and challenges to successful delivery. We have assessed how well the Home Office understands and is reacting to these risks, given that it relies on others to help implement the programme.

2 We examined the achievements of the programme to date by assessing:

- the processes in place to deliver the programme;
- progress against the targets set by those responsible for delivery; and
- the risks to the future delivery of the programme and whether these are being addressed.

3 Our audit approach is summarised in **Figure 12** overleaf. Our evidence base is described in Appendix Two.

Figure 12**Our audit approach**

Appendix Two

Our evidence base

1 We reached our independent conclusions on the achievements of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (the programme) following our analysis of evidence collected between April and June 2016. Our audit approach is outlined in Appendix One.

2 We assessed the processes in place to deliver the programme.

- We conducted interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in the programme, including:
 - senior officials and other members of staff from departments responsible for delivering the programme (the Home Office, Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for International Development);
 - senior officials and other members of staff from government departments responsible for delivering elements of the programme (Department for Work & Pensions, HM Revenue & Customs, Department for Education and Department of Health); and
 - international organisations involved in the programme, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- We conducted a walk-through with the Home Office operations team of the processes involved in delivering the programme (from receiving referrals from UNHCR through to arrangements to ensure refugees arrive in the UK).
- We reviewed internal documentation, including programme documents, programme guidance and operating procedures, casework data, board minutes, performance reports, evaluation plans and draft documents and guidance relating to pilots.
- We analysed financial data from the central programme team within the Home Office and data from other government departments and local authorities to estimate the total cost of the programme to government.

3 We examined the achievements of the programme to date and the experiences of those involved within central and local government and refugees.

- We analysed Home Office performance data on the programme, which we supported with a review of internal performance reports and board minutes.
- We reviewed written submissions from 19 local authorities that participated in the programme between September and December 2015 (79% response rate from our sample of 24 local authorities). We analysed our data using specialist qualitative data analysis software.
- We conducted two case study visits to local authorities, which were selected as they have resettled a significant proportion of Syrian refugees to date but had different levels of experience of previous resettlement programmes. We interviewed:
 - senior officials and other members of staff within local authorities involved in the decision to participate in the programme, securing offers of resettlement and resettling refugees;
 - representatives from bodies responsible for delivering housing, health and education services and welfare benefits;
 - local third sector partners responsible for providing support to refugees; and
 - Syrian refugees who were resettled in the UK as part of the programme.
- We conducted interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in the programme, including:
 - representatives of local authorities in England and Scotland – the Local Government Association and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and
 - third sector organisations responsible for supporting or campaigning on behalf of refugees, including the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Oxfam and Freedom from Torture.

4 We considered the risks to the future delivery of the programme and whether these are being addressed.

- We discussed the capability of the departments responsible for delivering the programme, and of the local authorities, to deliver the programme as part of our interviews.
- We reviewed internal documentation, including programme documents, programme guidance and operating procedures, board minutes, evaluation plans and draft documents and guidance relating to pilots.
- We undertook a literature review of reports by other bodies, including academics, think tanks, charities, international organisations and published government evaluations.
- We conducted international comparator work with Canada and Germany to assess different approaches to resettlement of Syrian refugees.

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