UNHCR’s response to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration’s Inquiry

1) UNHCR welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the second stage of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration’s Inquiry. Referring to Principle Three of the APPG’s Interim Report into Integration of Immigrants, namely that “Government must reassess its current “one size fits all” approach to immigration policy”, UNHCR’s submission will focus on considerations relating to persons falling within UNHCR’s mandate, namely refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons. This will include addressing issues relating to English language provision.

2) UNHCR has been entrusted with the responsibility for providing international protection to refugees, and together with governments, to seek permanent solutions to their plight. As set out in the 1950 Statute of the Office of UNHCR1 (paragraph 8(a)), UNHCR fulfils its mandate by, inter alia, ‘promoting the conclusion and ratification of international conventions for the protection of refugees, supervising their application and proposing amendments thereto.’ UNHCR's supervisory responsibility over the implementation of international instruments is also reflected in Article 35 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and Article II of its 1967 Protocol (1951 Convention),2 obliging State Parties to cooperate with UNHCR in the exercise of its functions; and is further found in European Union law.3 UNHCR has also been formally mandated by the UN General Assembly to prevent and reduce statelessness around the world, as well as to protect the rights of stateless people.4

UNHCR and Integration

3) UNHCR’s interest and involvement in integration stems from its mandate to seek permanent solutions to the plight of refugees. The 1951 Convention explicitly enumerates refugees’ social and economic rights and Article 34 obliges States, as far as possible, to facilitate the “assimilation and naturalization” of refugees.5 UNHCR has produced various materials relating to integration, including the handbook to guide reception and integration of resettled refugees,6 and several publications to facilitate refugees’ integration in the European Union.7 Additionally,

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7 UNHCR, Rights of Refugees in the
UNHCR’s Executive Committee (ExCom) issued a number of conclusions related to integration, such as UNHCR’s 2005 ExCom Conclusion No. 104 on Local Integration.\(^8\)

4) On 19 September 2016 the New York Declaration adopted by the world’s leaders recognized the need for a humane, considered and comprehensive approach to tackling the realities of displacement. The Declaration stresses the need for refugees’ integration and inclusion, “with particular reference to access to education, health care, justice and language training”.\(^9\) States signatory to the Declaration, including the United Kingdom, committed to reducing the risk of marginalization of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons, and fighting xenophobia, racism and discrimination, while globally supporting the development of national policies relating to integration and inclusion.\(^10\) UNHCR commends the abovementioned materials to the APPG for its consideration.

**Defining integration**

5) Integration is the end product of a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process with three interrelated dimensions: a legal, an economic and a social-cultural dimension.\(^11\) UNHCR fully concurs with the need for integration to be a “two way street” process, as defined by the APPG on Social Integration *Interim Report into Integration of Immigrant*, or, as UNHCR also describes it, a “social contract” between refugees and host countries.\(^12\) While refugees should evidently follow the host country’s laws and values, the host societies need to do everything possible to ensure a more effective integration of refugees, while also respecting their cultural identity. This process is thought to rely on “adaptation” of one party and “welcome” by the other. It does not require beneficiaries of internal protection to relinquish their cultural identity as integration differs from assimilation.

**A National Strategy for Integration of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Stateless persons**

6) UNHCR recognises the positive work undertaken in Scotland and Northern Ireland to implement integration strategies.\(^13\) However, while the Home Office issued strategies for

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\(^8\) UNHCR, *Conclusion on Local Integration*, 7 October 2005, No. 104 (LVI) - 2005, available at: [www.refworld.org/docid/4357a91b2.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/4357a91b2.html).


\(^10\) Ibid.


\(^13\) The Scottish Government launched their *New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland’s Communities (2014 – 2017)* strategy, available at: [www.gov.scot/Resource/0043/00439604.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0043/00439604.pdf). The initiative has been running in parallel with the Holistic Integration Service, the second interim evaluation report of which is entitled *Insight into Integration Pathways, New Scots & the Holistic Integration Service*, whilst the evaluation report of year three is titled *Rights, Resilience and Refugee Integration in Scotland* ([www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what_we_do/policy_and_research/research_reports](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what_we_do/policy_and_research/research_reports)). The 2014 Northern Ireland Assembly also commissioned the *Report on Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Northern Ireland* (available at:
refugee integration in 2000, 2005 and 2009, it has not done so on a national basis since then. There has also been no widespread systematic evaluation of the integration of refugees since the Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom, between 2005 and 2009, which was published in July 2010.

7) UNHCR underlines the importance of having a comprehensive published integration strategy and systematic monitoring and evaluation of integration. Without this the specific situation of beneficiaries of international protection and the barriers or facilitators to their integration risk being overlooked. Further, the expert support needed to assist this group in becoming economically productive, self-reliant and to help ensure dignity may be diminished.

8) Below, UNHCR identifies issues relating to asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons that the Government may wish to take into account in developing and implementing a National Integration Strategy, including those relating to the provision of English language.

**Recommendation:**

I. The UK Government, together, where applicable, with the devolved administration, should introduce a coherent integration strategy pertaining specifically to beneficiaries of international protection and systematically monitor and evaluate their integration trajectories.

**English language and schooling**

9) Knowledge of the hosting state’s language facilitates the active participation of children in school and is important for adults to access employment in the host country. Language training should ideally be provided during the asylum procedure, unless it is reasonably foreseen that the asylum-seeker will stay in the country for a period not exceeding a few weeks. To increase its efficiency, language training should be adapted to the divergent learning capacities of asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons and convey key information about the host society and its functioning.

**ESOL provision**

10) UNHCR welcomes the September 2016 announcement by the Home Office that the Government would commit £10 million in new funding towards ESOL for Syrian resettled refugees. It should, however, be recalled that this new funding will not benefit all resettled refugees or others with international protection needs in the UK; consideration should be given to strengthening English language provision more widely.
11) UNHCR’s ongoing survey of the initial reception and integration for Syrians resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)\(^\text{20}\) indicates that there are areas in the provision of English language for Syrian resettled refugees that should be improved. In the absence of available alternative child-care and/or child-friendly class times, attending classes is problematic for refugees who have children.\(^\text{21}\) Further, consideration should be given to increasing involvement in English language courses of low participation groups, specifically, women with young children, men aged between 17 and 24 years old and elderly refugees. The survey is also raising questions about the most successful format of delivery of language provision; absolute beginners, for example, appear to be facing challenges with English only immersion classes that do not provide interpretation support.\(^\text{22}\)

**English for employment**

12) Reception policies for refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons should be designed to minimize isolation and separation from host communities and should provide for effective vocational skills development, and assistance to pursue employment.\(^\text{23}\)

13) UNHCR’s ExCom has recognized that promoting the self-reliance of refugees from the outset will enhance the sustainability of any future durable solution,\(^\text{24}\) and vocational training is welcomed by UNHCR. Such courses can have an empowering effect as they enable refugees to meet the host population on equal terms rather than as recipients of services. Vocational training may also be beneficial for re-integration upon return of rejected asylum-seekers, as it can open new employment opportunities in the home country. Additionally, the workplace offers opportunities for positive socialization. Employment provides the individual not only with an income but also with independence, social status, and recognition.

**Welcoming asylum-seekers and refugees**

14) In addition to English lessons, to facilitate integration and success at school, children should also feel welcomed in their classes. UNHCR recognizes that introducing students to refugees, asylum and migration can be a challenging task and has developed teaching toolkits and education material to support teachers in explaining facts, concepts and definitions relating to asylum and migration in Europe.\(^\text{25}\) UNHCR encourages the APPG to consider the valuable role these materials may play for persons of concern to UNHCR.

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\(^\text{20}\) Due to be finalized by mid-2017.

\(^\text{21}\) In addition to childcare responsibilities, language provisions should also take into account others factors such as refugees’ employment needs and level of literacy, as it has also been pointed out also in Home Office, *English Language training for refugees in London and the region*, available at: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/rdsolr1403.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/rdsolr1403.pdf).


Recommendations:

II. More focus on and, where needed, greater enhancement of access to the quality provision of ESOL for all refugee should be facilitated. The UK Government may wish to consider broadening efforts to strengthen ESOL beyond refugees resettled under the VPRS, including for other refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons.

III. The UK authorities should re-examine what format of delivery has been the most successful in terms of ESOL attendance and learning success.

IV. English lessons to facilitate employment and vocational training should be supported and, where needed, strengthened.

Addressing the Consequences of Trauma

15) Persecution and displacement can have a serious impact on the mental and physical health of asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons. Inadequate reception and integration policies can exacerbate or perpetuate the effects of trauma. It is important to adequately address these issues, especially as incorrect actions may cause significant impairment and long-term suffering. UNHCR highlights, in particular, the importance of those working on integration with vulnerable individuals to be suitably qualified.

Recommendation:

V. Specific training should be organized for professional working in areas linked to integration, particularly in the areas of health, education and employment, to assist social workers in dealing with refugees’ psycho-social needs, reactions to traumatic experiences and pathological conditions.

Discrepancies between Official Dates of Births

16) Some beneficiaries of international protection originate from countries where birthdays are not culturally or administratively significant and the precise date of birth may have never been recorded or the persons do not possess any forms of identity which indicate a specific date of birth. In these situations the Home Office may provide that an individual’s date of birth is 1st of January of a given year. However, the Department for Work and Pensions has been known to designate the same individuals with a 31 December date of birth. The discrepancy in having two officially endorsed dates of birth creates undue hardship whilst navigation through important administrative matters. In the worst case scenario, individuals may face sanctions owing to imputed fraudulent activity by presenting with official documentation showing contrasting birth biometrics.

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Recommendation:

VI. The UK authorities should ensure that the date of birth given to beneficiaries of international protection is consistent between government departments and on official documentation issued.

Documentation and access to services

17) Requirements on schools, landlords, banks and general practitioners’ surgeries to verify the immigration status of foreigners may negatively affect the reception and integration of persons of concern to UNHCR. These types of documentation carried by asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless people as well as those with subsidiary or complementary forms of protection can be varied and complex, and could overburden service providers and create misinterpretation about the legality of the individual’s status. These challenges may result in unintended consequences such as the denial of housing and other services to asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, including those who have been resettled. In particular, access to banking facilities can be problematic for a range of reasons including those pertaining to credit history, the poor implementation of banking guidelines and unintended consequences of international sanctions.27

Recommendation:

VII. The types of documentation issued to those recognised by the UK as being in need of international protection should clearly and consistently be explained to service providers by the UK authorities. Access to banking facilities and other services needs to be monitored and acted upon where deemed appropriate.

Immigration Detention

18) Detention can have a negative impact on detainees’ integration prospects, as it may severely deteriorate the physical and mental conditions of those who experience it.28 UNHCR believes that immigration detention should apply only when necessary, reasonable and proportionate,29 and, whenever possible, alternatives to detention should be implemented.30 The Shaw Review on the Welfare in Detention of Vulnerable Persons, a report to the Home Office published in January 2016, argues that immigration detention powers are “currently being used excessively, harmfully and ineffectively”,31 and it recommends that the Home Office investigate the

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UNHCR welcomes this recommendation and encourages the Government to expand the use of alternatives to detention for refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons in the UK. UNHCR also notes that detaining stateless persons is often ineffective as their removal is subjected to extensive delays and sometime it is even impossible, due to their lack of national identity.

### Recommendation:

#### VIII. The Government should urgently explore expanding the use of alternatives to detention and ensure that detention is only used when necessary, reasonable and proportionate.

### Transition Period

19) The Home Office has responsibility for reception and support arrangements during the asylum process and for beneficiaries of international protection newly receiving status until the end of the 28 day move-on period. This transition requires the issuance of documents and the following of a complex administrative process, as well as intra-governmental co-ordination between relevant departments. Various reports have been published on coordination issues and gaps in providing support during this period, including by the British Refugee Council and the British Red Cross.

### Recommendation:

#### IX. Work to address the coordination problems in transferring individuals from Home Office support to mainstream welfare support services should continue and be concluded in a timely manner

### Family Reunion

20) It should be emphasised that family separation affects a multitude of areas relating to integration for beneficiaries of international protection. Furthermore, enduring isolation and grief in the absence of family members reduces an individuals' ability to function, while living with family members can promote integration by reinforcing the social support system of refugees. In addition, increased and enhanced family reunion channels could remove a powerful incentive for many third country nationals to embark on risky irregular travel and move onward.

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in the European Union.\textsuperscript{37} UNHCR continues to advocate for the strengthening of family reunification standards and procedures in the UK.

**Recommendation:**

X. In March 2016, UNHCR released a briefing paper on family reunion in the UK, in which there are twenty-two recommendations made that are also highly pertinent to integration and this inquiry. UNHCR recommends careful and favourable consideration of these recommendations by the UK Government.

**Challenges faced in the asylum process and statelessness determination procedure**

21) Due to their precarious legal status, asylum-seekers may experience a certain degree of uncertainty concerning the assistance from the government that they are entitled to receive while their asylum claim is processed. This is particularly evident in the case of the provision of health care assistance\textsuperscript{38} and concerning asylum-seekers’ right to rent a property.\textsuperscript{39} An additional challenge in the UK is that asylum-seekers can only apply for permission to work to fill a shortage vacancy if they have been waiting for over twelve months for an initial decision on their asylum claim.\textsuperscript{40}

22) Stateless determination procedures are an essential mechanism to help facilitate the integration of stateless persons and to reduce their risk of prolonged and arbitrary detention. Whilst UNHCR very much welcomes the introduction of the statelessness procedure in the UK,\textsuperscript{41} it should be noted that the statelessness determination procedure does not provide applicants (and their dependents) with recourse to any form of accommodation or financial assistance, and that the process is long and burdensome for some applicants.\textsuperscript{42}

**Recommendations:**

I. Work to guarantee that asylum claims are processed fairly and efficiently; ensure that asylum-seekers and service providers are adequately briefed on asylum-seeker


\textsuperscript{38} See Concluding Observations, 58\textsuperscript{th} session of the Committees on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, held in Geneva from 6-24 June 2016, available at: \url{http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%C2%12%2FGBR%2FCO%26Lang=en}


\textsuperscript{40} House of Commons Library, Commons Briefing Papers SN01908, Should Asylum seekers have unrestricted rights to work in the UK? 11 May 2016, available at: \url{http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN01908}.


rights and entitlements; consider expanding access to employment for asylum-seekers.

II. Statelessness claims should be processed in a timely manner with adequate support provided to applicants (and their dependents) during the process.

Resettlement

23) UNHCR projects that 1,190,000 individual refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2017. UNHCR has and continues to call on States to create or expand legal pathways for admission. UNHCR is extremely grateful to the UK Government, both at national, devolved and local levels, as well as civil society, for the international solidarity shown through the introduction and implementation of the various UK resettlement programmes.

24) Although the report is yet to be finalised, observations from UNHCR’s joint survey on initial reception and integration for Syrians resettled under the VPRS to-date have been positive of the coordinated and operational response of Local Authorities and regions as well as the politically backed commitment from the Home Office and other relevant government departments to deliver the VPR. The study has, however, indicated potential challenges for Syrian refugees. These include those related to possible misconceptions in relation to family reunification; in isolated cases, access to timely medical care; access to employment and adequate English language tuition.

25) Further, the level of integration support, type of legal status (refugee or humanitarian protection) and availability of travel documentation for resettled refugees varies in the UK depending on the resettlement scheme utilized. This, in turn, may contribute to expectations that are difficult to manage, create divisions between categories of resettled individuals, and between those resettled and those recognised as being in need of international protection ‘in country’ contributing to disaffection.

26) The survey and report on initial reception and integration for Syrians resettled under the VPRS will be finalised by mid-2017.

UNHCR in the UK
17 March 2017

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45 The traditional Gateway Protection Programme and Mandate Refugee Scheme (www.refworld.org/docid/54339eb45.html); as well as the expanded Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, which now also has a recently initiated Community Sponsorship component; together with the new Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme.

46 As mentioned already, UNHCR welcomes the UK’s recent announcement to commit £10m towards language tuition to help Syrians resettled to integrate into British society.