



House of Commons
Home Affairs Committee

Migration Crisis: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report

**Seventh Special Report of Session
2016–17**

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Home Affairs Committee

The Home Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Home Office and its associated public bodies.

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The following were also members of the Committee during the inquiry:

[Victoria Atkins MP](#) (*Conservative, Louth and Horncastle*)

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Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/homeaffairscom and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Carol Oxborough (Clerk), Phil Jones (Second Clerk), Harriet Deane (Committee Specialist), Adrian Hitchins (Committee Specialist), Andy Boyd (Senior Committee Assistant), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Assistant) and Jessica Bridges-Palmer (Committee Media Officer).

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Seventh Special Report

The Home Affairs Committee published its Seventh Report of Session 2016–17, *Migration Crisis* (HC 24), on 3 August 2016. The Government's response was received on 3 February 2017 and is appended to this report.

In the Government response the Committee's recommendations are shown in **bold** type; the Government's response is shown in plain type.

Appendix: Government Response

The Home Office would like to thank the Committee for its report on the Migration Crisis published on 3 August 2016. The Government's response is below.

UK exit from the EU

Since we concluded our evidence for this inquiry and began to consider our findings, there has of course been a seismic change in the UK's relationship with the EU, following the EU Referendum on 23 June and the decision to leave the EU. However, EU policy on migration and refugees will remain crucial to the UK and the future arrangements for dealing with migration will form a central part in the negotiations for the UK's exit from the EU. In the meantime, the current arrangements will continue to operate for the two years or more that that negotiation process is likely to take. This report therefore sets out our assessment of the challenges which Europe and the UK face in dealing with the migration crisis, and our recommendations for how the UK unilaterally, and Europe collectively, should respond. We will consider the major implications of EU exit for justice and home affairs issues, including immigration and asylum, in more detail in forthcoming inquiries. (Paragraph 12)

We start our discussions with a number of clear principles. In particular, as the Prime Minister has said, it must be a priority to increase control over the number of people who come here from Europe—whilst also allowing British companies to have the widest possible access to the single market. At this point it would be wrong to set out further unilateral positions ahead of the start of negotiations. At every step of the process we will work to ensure the best possible outcome for the British people but, as the Prime Minister has also made clear, we will not be giving a running commentary on negotiations.

Juxtaposed border controls

Since the EU Referendum, there have been reports of some politicians in France calling for the trilateral Le Touquet agreement on juxtaposed borders to end, and for the UK border to be moved back from Calais and other Channel ports to the Kent coast. Such comments are unproductive and are likely to encourage more migrants to travel to Calais. There are clear advantages to the UK from a facility that allows UK authorities to identify and carry out security checks on travellers, and examine passenger and freight vehicle Missing child migrants, on the continental side of the Channel. We believe that the arrangements for juxtaposed borders and the co-operation which exists between police and border agencies on both sides of the Channel must continue.

This is not just in the interests of the UK, but also France. Those involved in terrorism and criminal gangs do not respect borders and both countries need to be vigilant in confronting these ever-present threats. Maintaining the Le Touquet agreement should be acknowledged as a priority for the UK Government. (Paragraph 17)

We share the Committee's view. The Governments of both the UK and France have committed to continue to work together to keep the border secure at the juxtaposed ports and to resolve the migrant situation in northern France. The bilateral agreements underpinning the juxtaposed controls are not directly affected by the UK's membership of the EU, and both Governments have ruled out any renegotiation of the Le Touquet treaty. The Prime Minister and the French President have reinforced this position since the UK's vote to leave the EU. The French Interior Minister set out in his meeting with the Home Secretary on 30 August that removing the juxtaposed controls would not be in the interests of France. We agree that changing the existing border arrangements would worsen the situation in Calais by encouraging more migrants to travel there, compromising border security and undermining the economic benefits the juxtaposed controls bring to both countries.

Steps to tackle illegal migrants crossing the Channel

The situation in Calais and elsewhere on the French side of the Channel coast is a manifestation of the wider problem across Europe. The number of migrants in Calais is relatively small compared to the flows entering Europe and being managed by other countries. However, there is a potential threat to UK security, and the ongoing challenge to migration controls which this aspect of illegal migration presents remains of serious concern to us. The Home Office must continue to adapt its response to cross-Channel illegal migration to reflect changes in methods and routes used by migrant smugglers. It must also work actively with EU countries and agencies to tackle the root causes of people gathering in the Calais area with the aim of crossing to the UK. (Paragraph 26)

We agree with the Committee's conclusions that our response to illegal migration and the criminal groups that perpetuate it must continually evolve to keep pace with the threat.

It is in the UK's interest to resolve the situation in Calais and to reduce the overall pull factor for migrants seeking to enter the UK illegally. The French Government has confirmed that the operation to clear the camp in Calais has been successful and that the camp is now closed. We worked very closely with the French to ensure the clearance was delivered as safely as possible. We will continue to work closely with the French Government to keep Calais clear and prevent displacement to other ports.

Our determination to keep our border secure and prevent illegal entry into the UK by any route is clear. We are taking action with France and other international partners to detect and prevent attempts to do so. As part of our work to keep our families, communities and country safe, the British and French Governments have made significant investments in bolstering security at the ports in northern France. This includes the recent installation of state of the art motion detection technology, which is proving highly effective in detecting concealed migrants. The Joint Declaration signed in August 2015 committed the UK and France to a package of measures to improve physical and personnel security at the ports. This includes wider intelligence-led activity to tackle criminal gangs involved in people

trafficking and to prevent migrants from entering the UK via clandestine and illegal means. Investment has continued this financial year following the commitments made at the UK/France Summit in Amiens in March 2016, and was reaffirmed by the Home Secretary and the French Interior Minister at their meeting on 30 August in Paris.

The Joint Declaration also committed the UK and France to regularly review security at the juxtaposed ports in northern France. Joint Security Reviews are taking place at the ports, led by Border Force and involving UK and French officials and commercial operators. We are continuing to implement actions identified in these reviews to enhance security, including work to secure the Calais approach road with the construction of a new wall which has now been completed.

We are taking all necessary steps to protect the security of our border and are working closely with both the Belgian and Dutch Governments to clamp down on illegal immigration. As part of this joint approach, the UK signed an agreement with Belgium and the Netherlands in November 2015 to strengthen port security and tackle organised immigration crime.

The UK Government is also making a further contribution of up to £36 million to support the camp clearance in Calais and to invest in the longer term security of the juxtaposed controls. As the Home Secretary made clear in her statement to the House on 24 October, this contribution is not made unconditionally, and we will continue to work with the French Government to ensure that the clearance operation is full and lasting.

The UK is playing a leading role in tackling organised immigration crime and increasing joint intelligence work to target gangs that exploit people for their own gain. We are working closely with the French authorities and other international partners to share intelligence to monitor the movement of migrants in areas outside the juxtaposed ports and the tactics of migrant smugglers. In June 2015, the former Prime Minister announced the creation of the Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce, which brings together officers from the National Crime Agency, Border Force, Immigration Enforcement and the Crown Prosecution Service to exploit every opportunity at source, in transit countries and in Europe to identify and tackle organised crime groups. Working closely with French and other international partners, the Taskforce has already successfully disrupted crime groups involved in immigration crime by participating in intelligence development and sharing, as well as arrests and prosecutions. Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016, Immigration Enforcement achieved 185 disruptions against criminals involved in organised immigration crime—compared to 143 in 2014/15. Immigration Enforcement has made 43 disruptions of organised criminal gangs since the beginning of the year as a result of joint working between the UK and France.

In November 2015, the then Immigration Minister signed a joint declaration with his Belgian and Dutch counterparts covering six areas of cooperation including carrying out joint port level operations, exchanging higher levels of tactical and strategic intelligence, tackling organised crime groups with closer collaboration, sharing operational expertise and the uses of different technology as well as increasing the use of strategic communications to deter migrants from travelling to the UK via illegal means. This work is being progressed by senior officials through operational engagement as well as through Ministerial meetings.

Co-operation on intelligence sharing with both our Dutch and Belgian counterparts has continued to develop. We have made significant improvements in tactical and strategic intelligence flows and agreed joint cooperation measures to secure our ports and tackle organised criminal groups. This is proving effective in countering organised criminal activity and the threat of displacement from ports in northern France to Dutch and Belgian ports.

Borders and coastal security

When the Director General of Border Force, Sir Charles Montgomery, gave evidence to us in December 2015, he had not been informed what his budget for 2016–17 would be. When we asked the then Second Permanent Secretary about this in oral evidence in April 2016, after the current financial year had begun, he was unable to tell us whether Sir Charles had yet been told what his budget was. The then Home Secretary subsequently confirmed in writing that Sir Charles had been informed about his budget. This initial confusion was unacceptable—when select committees request information, it should be provided in a timely way. (Paragraph 31)

Each command within the Home Office was aware of their indicative budget in advance of the financial year. Following discussion of the department's transformation plans, the former Home Secretary formally confirmed the core 2016/17 budget for each command on Monday 11 April. It is not unusual for this process to carry over the beginning of the financial year, given the department's spending envelope is set and indicative allocations within that are able to change.

Parliament was then provided a detailed view of the department's budget, including the Border Force budget, when the Treasury presented the Main Supply Estimates on 20 April.

Border Force has been given a key role in implementing strengthened coastal security measures but it clear that it is experiencing problems in gaining access to a sufficient number of patrol boats: only four of the new vessels are currently deployed and the remaining four will not be available for more than a year. Maritime patrols are an essential element of border security for an island nation. Border Force needs to be given all the necessary equipment, including vessels, to enable it to carry out its responsibilities effectively. The number of Border Force vessels in operation appears to be worryingly low. Royal Navy vessels should be made available to Border Force to make up for shortfalls, where necessary. (Paragraph 32)

Taken with:

In relation to our work on counter-terrorism, the then Minister for Security, John Hayes MP, acknowledged that tightening security at larger ports and airports risks displacing “malevolent attention” to smaller points of entry. This is equally true in relation to displacement of illegal migration and small ports are now being used by criminal gangs to move people between the Continent and the UK. Moreover, whilst the Government can be commended for its efforts to secure Calais, it has not heeded warnings, including from this Committee, that migration flows would be displaced to Belgium and the Netherlands, and most recently to Germany. Security must be tightened at small ports and airports which are being used as entry points from these new departure points on the continental coast as a matter of urgency. The Government

should inform us what progress has been made on the “urgent work” that it says it is carrying out to protect small ports and airports, in addition to the increase in Border Force vessels, which is itself delayed. (Paragraph 33)

With over 11,000 miles of British mainland coastline, this Government recognises the importance of protecting our shores. Border Force is focused on coordinating resources, the timely sharing of intelligence, and ensuring it has the right tools for the job. Since the start of this year there have been a number of instances of migrants crossing the Channel in small boats. Whilst the numbers are low in comparison to other modes of transport, this risk is taken very seriously.

The UK operates a layered approach to coastal defence, which includes on-shore resources and intelligence and surveillance capabilities, to detect efforts to facilitate illegal entry into the country. It includes an integrated command structure, working with other government departments and near-Europe partners supported by the Border Force cutter fleet. In addition, Border Force has purchased new capability, in the form of coastal patrol vessels (CPV).

These new boats have been purchased by Border Force to complement the work being done by its cutters and are being introduced in a phased approach. The first was deployed in early October. They are smaller than the cutters and far more nimble and responsive. The CPVs' unique capabilities, speed and size, will allow them to provide an enhanced level of responsiveness in cross-Channel, Channel Islands and estuarine areas, releasing the cutters to complete longer-range operations around the coast. The purchase of this additional capability forms part of Border Force's long term strategic planning which will enable it to support operations in the maritime sector. This has helped ensure that Border Force and its partner organisations are well prepared for any increase in attempts by migrants to use small boats to circumvent border security and enter the UK illegally.

Border Force and operational partners are conducting intelligence-led activity on a number of fronts to prevent migrants from entering the UK via clandestine and illegal means. Building an effective intelligence picture and understanding is essential to combat both opportunistic individuals and Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) who would seek to circumvent UK entrance procedures and requirements. Border Force is investing in better lines of communication with commercial maritime partners and improving the methods by which vessels can report concerns or issues, including the provision of databases and registers of small ships and their movements.

Border Force has also established a Maritime Information Bureau, attached to the National Maritime Information Centre (NMIC), and a General Aviation Information Bureau to coordinate all maritime and GA intelligence flows respectively and to inform multi-agency operational responses aimed at securing the UK border.

This is supported by public facing intelligence work. Project Kraken, a joint initiative, led by Border Force and supported by the NCA, the police, the Marine Management Organisation and others, encourages the commercial and leisure shipping industry and the public to report suspicious activity in the general maritime domain, whilst Project Pegasus fulfils a similar role in the general aviation domain. Both projects will raise

awareness in local communities to the threat of illegal immigration, draw stakeholders together via an engagement strategy, and develop a more effective methodology for intelligence sharing, so that assets and resource can be deployed to deliver greatest effect.

Border Force, the NCA and other law enforcement organisations are also working together with international partners to disrupt and prosecute the OCGs that facilitate most attempts by migrants to enter the UK illegally. This is supported by new operational command structures with our French, Belgian and Dutch counterparts to deliver real-time sharing of intelligence focussing on the disruption of OCGs and cross-Channel illegal migration. This activity includes, for example, work with the French authorities to dissuade opportunistic migrants from attempting to cross the channel and close working with Belgian and Dutch authorities to ensure ports such as Zeebrugge and Hook of Holland are secured. Word of mouth advisors in the camps in Calais and Dunkirk inform the migrant population about the dangers of the Channel and the likely consequences. And Border Force has developed enhanced intelligence pathways with French, Dutch and Belgian law enforcement partners over the summer and again in preparation for the Calais camp clearances. The pathways have now been embedded as business as usual. For instance, there is a live chat line between Cherbourg coastguard and the NMIC to exchange intelligence in real time

Very little irregular migration has been detected via General Aviation, but Border Force is confident it is appropriately managing the risk. All small aircraft should inform Border Force of their route and arrival time, and work is in hand to mandate the submission of data exclusively by electronic means.

Humanitarian conditions in Calais camps

The initial prompt for our inquiry was the issue of border security in relation to Calais and Dunkirk that arose in summer 2015. However, our concerns range much more widely than that. That there are unofficial migrant camps at the border of two of Europe's wealthiest nations is a matter of serious regret and concern. A wide range of the evidence submitted to us by experts and volunteers confirms that the conditions in the camps are absolutely atrocious and are directly causing suffering and ill health for many residents. In a letter to this Committee in July 2015, the then Immigration Minister confirmed that the information he had from France was that the most common five nationalities of migrants at Calais were Syrian, Eritrean, Sudanese, Iranian and Iraqi. Written submissions highlighted the number of camp residents, including children, who have family members in the UK or other ties to this country. It is clear that there are many people in these camps entitled to humanitarian protection or refugee status, including some who should have their claims processed in the UK. (Paragraph 34)

Taken with:

We require much more information on the work the French and UK governments are undertaking to improve conditions at the camps, and to ensure all who are entitled to humanitarian protection or refugee status obtain it—and are able to do so swiftly. The Government should set out what fraction of the sums invested in Calais have been used in this way, as opposed to strengthening border security. Ultimately, we are yet to

see any evidence of a strategy designed to deliver a long-term solution to the presence of these camps, and both governments must work together urgently to deliver one.
(Paragraph 35)

The French Government has confirmed that the operation to clear the camp in Calais has been successful. The clearance was a necessary humanitarian operation and we have supported the French in their objectives to clear the camp. We have long agreed with the French Government that no one should live in those conditions.

We have been working closely with the French authorities to bring children eligible to come to the UK under the Dublin Regulation and the wider criteria of the Immigration Act since the clearance of the camp. Our focus has always been to transfer these children as soon as possible and ensuring their safe arrival.

In 2016, we transferred over 900 unaccompanied minors to the UK from Europe, including more than 750 from France as part of the UK's support for the Calais camp clearance. This was almost half of the unaccompanied children who were in the camp at the time of the clearance. Many of the children have been reunited with family members already in the UK, while others are being cared for by local authorities across the UK. The remaining children are in the care of the French authorities. More eligible children will be transferred from Europe, in line with the terms of the Immigration Act, in the coming months and we will continue to meet our obligations under the Dublin Regulation.

During the operation to clear the camp, French authorities moved children from Calais to over 60 specialist facilities across France. Home Office staff liaised with the French authorities during this process and were on the buses that left Calais. Specialist UK staff, along with social workers and interpreters, were deployed to centres across France to resume assessments under the Dublin Regulation or the wider criteria of the Immigration Act 2016 (Dubs Amendment).

As a key part of the operation to clear the camp in Calais, the French Government, with support from the UK, provided migrants in Calais, including women and children, with alternative accommodation elsewhere in France. This includes more than 160 new centres away from Calais to help migrants with their asylum options. During the operation to clear the camp, over 5,000 adults departed from the camp to reception centres across France.

We have invested tens of millions of pounds as part of our joint strategy to resolve the situation in Calais. Under the Joint Declaration of 20 August 2015, the UK is providing €5 million (£3.6 million) per year for two years towards providing migrants with alternative accommodation in France. In addition to this, on 3 March 2016, the then Prime Minister announced that the UK would contribute £17 million towards management of the migration situation in France, including for the provision of reception facilities.

The UK Government is also making a further contribution of up to £36 million to support the camp clearance in Calais and to ensure in the long term that the camp is kept closed. This funding will also be used to help keep children safe in France. As the Home Secretary made clear in her statement to the House on 24 October, this contribution is not made unconditionally, and we will continue to work with the French Government to ensure that the clearance operation is full and lasting.

Managing migration flows

Migration into Europe has been a long-standing challenge for EU countries, including the UK. However, the situation has now become a crisis, in large part because of the Syrian war, and the continuing instability in Libya and other parts of North Africa. Although current migration flows are a continuation of patterns that have ebbed and changed over many years, the current numbers of people seeking to move into Europe are unprecedented in modern times. The Archbishop of Canterbury has described the scale of the crisis as “colossal”. Syrian refugees present the most acute and numerous challenge, but there are other countries from which migrants continue to flow in large numbers. (Paragraph 46)

Taken with:

The EU and its Member States failed to anticipate the scale of migrant flows, and did not have the structures and mechanisms in place to cope. As a result, the EU has been too slow to respond in a coordinated way. The EU's March 2016 agreement with Turkey on return of migrants is arguably a first step towards a meaningful response but it has come far too late and is itself highly controversial for a number of reasons. Further action is urgently required to ensure that vulnerable people seeking refuge do not suffer further exploitation by criminals, accompanied by fear, harm and the current high risk of death. (Paragraph 47)

The Government recognises the significance of the recent flows, and the impacts of both the Syrian conflict and the situation in Libya on these. We also agree on the particular challenge and the acute importance of addressing flows from Syria and the region. The Government's prioritisation of this issue is clear, and includes our leading role in providing humanitarian aid and in ensuring a coordinated international response, with a UK commitment of £2.3 billion in response to the Syria conflict.

The UK regards the EU–Turkey agreement, which aims to break the people smugglers' business model and reduce the number of illegal border crossings from Turkey to the EU, as a key element of the EU's approach to migration in that region and is committed to its successful implementation. To date, the Statement has been instrumental in reducing the flow of migrants across the Aegean and stemming the loss of life. However, the EU–Turkey deal is not the first step towards a meaningful response to the situation in the Mediterranean. The UK has been working with EU and other international partners on an enhanced, coordinated response to flows since the deaths off Lampedusa in October 2013, following which the EU brought forward its first coordinated response (the ‘Task Force for the Mediterranean’). Since that time we have played a significant practical role in supporting and shaping that response, in particular by working upstream with countries of origin and transit to address the drivers of migration, and supporting efforts at the EU's external borders.

The Government believes that practical and political action within the affected regions remains at the heart of helping the majority of the many millions of displaced individuals across the globe. That is why we have prioritised humanitarian assistance in affected crisis regions: an effective and sustainable solution relies on coherent efforts to reduce the push factors behind refugee and migrant journeys; build stability; create livelihoods; support first countries of asylum; and break the business model of the criminal gangs and

trafficking networks profiting from human misery. The UK has led the way in seeking such a comprehensive and sustainable response, which will provide the greatest impact to the most number of people in need, and shaping a new approach to protracted crises, including through the London Syria Conference.

Alongside these efforts upstream, the Government is also providing significant assistance to EU Member States facing particular pressures. The UK has already provided more resource to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) than any other EU country, in addition to bilateral support to countries such as Italy and Greece to help build their asylum capacity. We also continue to provide significant practical support to Frontex operations, including through our Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce, and are providing £70 million to the Mediterranean Migration Crisis response. This humanitarian response—to which the UK is the largest bilateral donor—provides life-saving aid to migrants and refugees, including shelter, water and sanitation, food, medical care, and protection services for the most vulnerable; and builds the capacity of host governments to manage arrivals.

Support to source countries

We strongly endorse a coordinated approach to the provision of support to those countries around Syria, which are doing so much to fulfil their moral obligation to take in large numbers of refugees, including Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. In the absence of realistic prospects of the impacts of the conflict coming to an end in the near future, the UK's contribution to humanitarian relief is warmly welcomed, and maintaining it is essential. However, providing such aid does not absolve the UK from also providing more direct support for the thousands of Syrian refugees who have already arrived in Europe, particularly those whom the UK Government, in different circumstances, would consider to be vulnerable and therefore deserving refuge. (Paragraph 50)

The UK has been at the forefront of the response to the crisis in Syria and the region. At the February Syria conference in London on 4 February, the UK announced we will more than double our support in response to the Syria crisis from £1.12 billion to over £2.3 billion, our largest ever humanitarian response to a single crisis.

This support will also give people a chance for the future. Commitments made at the conference in London will create an estimated 1.1 million jobs for refugees and host country citizens in the region by 2018, and ensure that, by the end of the 2016/17 school year, 1.7 million children—all refugee children and vulnerable children in host communities—will be in quality education with equal access for girls and boys.

Across the world we are using our aid programmes to reduce the drivers that force people to move irregularly and harness the development benefits of migration. Our focus on tackling the root causes of migration in Africa includes opportunities that better managed migration presents for reducing poverty, creating jobs and improving the investment climate, and supports our ambition to lead a new international approach to handling protracted crises. We believe that our offer will increase the benefits of migrating within Africa, and provide hope for forcibly displaced populations, which may in turn reduce the incentives to migrate irregularly to Europe.

Resettlement of Syrian refugees

The UK Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme has started well, and there are signs that the co-operation necessary between central Government, local authorities, and the various agencies involved is working efficiently. We reiterate our support for the Government's commitment to receive 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 and our appreciation of the efforts of all those who worked to achieve the target of 1,000 arriving by Christmas 2015, and we commend the then Minister for Syrian Refugees for achieving this. (Paragraph 57)

Taken with:

However, it is clear from the recently published statistics that more local authorities need to contribute to providing asylum accommodation, including for Syrian refugees. There is now a two-tier system among local authorities, with some providing support to Syrian refugees and others not doing so. A similar two-tier system applies in the level of support local authorities provide for other asylum-seekers. The Government needs to be much more proactive in encouraging a fair distribution of asylum seekers throughout the country and Ministers should take the lead on this, by encouraging their own local authorities to take their fair share of refugees. (Paragraph 58)

Taken with:

Those who come to the UK under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme are only given humanitarian protection for five years. We are concerned that the Government appears to be moving towards a system of limited time periods for providing refuge, which may not wholly meet its obligations under the 1951 UN Convention on the status of refugees. The situation in Syria should be reviewed comprehensively once the five-year point is approaching for any refugee. (Paragraph 59)

The Government remains firmly committed to meeting our target of resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. A total of 4,414 people have been resettled since the Syrian VPRS began, including 4,162 arriving since October 2015. We welcome the Committee's acknowledgement of the progress made. We remain on track to meet the commitment to resettle 20,000 by the end of this Parliament.

We continue to work with local authorities to identify opportunities to resettle Syrian families as part of the VPR scheme as well as vulnerable children and their families as part of the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme. Some authorities have not resettled any refugees in the initial stages but have committed to resettle people in the future. We are determined to ensure that no local authority is asked to take more than the local structures are able to cope with. For this reason we ask local authorities to consider carefully whether they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration of these refugees before telling us how many individuals they believe they are able to resettle. We want to ensure that capacity can be identified and the impact on those accepting families under this scheme can be managed in a fair and controlled way. Between the start of October 2015 and the end of September 2016 175 different local authorities had resettled Syrian refugees. To date more than 200 have made firm offers of places with additional local authorities signed up in principle to support the scheme over the course of this Parliament. The level of support provided to individuals arriving via

our resettlement schemes reflects the fact that they have been referred for resettlement to the UK by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on account of their particular vulnerability.

We are working closely with local authorities and Strategic Migration Partnerships on plans to expand the number of local authorities who participate in the dispersal arrangements for asylum seekers. Asylum seekers are currently accommodated in over 110 areas across the UK, but some local authorities are accommodating a larger share of the asylum seeking population than others. We have made a good deal of progress, with a number of new local authorities having signed up in recent months, but there is still more to do.

Those who are resettled under the Syrian VPR scheme are granted limited leave for five years and can apply for settlement in the UK once they have completed that initial period of leave. This is the same for individuals who are granted asylum or humanitarian protection in the UK. In all such cases when they apply for settlement we will review their case to assess whether or not they still need international protection. For Syrian VPR cases this review will involve an assessment of the situation in Syria. Those who still need protection will normally be granted settlement. This fully complies with our international obligations under the Refugee Convention to provide protection for as long as it is needed.

Safe and legal routes into Europe

The Government has said that it will not take part in the current EU schemes to relocate or resettle refugees. This is because it does not wish to participate in any initiative that might act as a magnet for those seeking refuge and thereby encourage them to risk taking dangerous routes to try to reach the UK. We accept this approach. In these circumstances, we would ask the Government to explain whether it is considering any expansion of safe and legal routes, such as humanitarian visas, for those from conflict regions seeking protection, as advocated by the Archbishop of Canterbury and a wide range of expert NGOs and others. The Government should also make clear how its response to the migrant crisis is providing protection for refugees other than Syrians in the UK, without provision in place for them to travel to the UK to apply for asylum. (Paragraph 65)

Taken with:

The Chair of Migration Watch, Lord Green of Deddington, accepted in evidence to us that the UK is not yet “full” in relation to migration. The Archbishop of Canterbury agreed that the UK was not full and believed that, with “careful preparation and good policy”, including the necessary resources being provided to local communities, the UK had the capacity to fulfil its moral obligation to accept more refugees fleeing war zones and catastrophes, as well as asylum-seekers. We share this view. (Paragraph 67)

The Government firmly believes that our focus needs to be on providing support to countries facing particular pressures through humanitarian aid to help the large numbers of refugees who remain in the region. We believe this is the best way to provide much needed support to the majority of those facing persecution, whilst offering resettlement for the most vulnerable.

We operate several safe and legal routes into the UK through our resettlement schemes, working closely with the UNHCR to resettle the most vulnerable refugees who cannot be supported in the region. There are four specific resettlement schemes in operation: Gateway, Mandate, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement scheme.

Through the Syrian VPR scheme we are helping those in greatest need, including people who need urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. We have committed to resettle 20,000 Syrians during this Parliament and are working closely with UNHCR to identify vulnerable Syrians that they deem in need of resettlement whose particular needs can only be met in countries like the UK.

The Vulnerable Children's Resettlement scheme has been designed with the UNHCR to resettle children at risk from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The Government has committed to resettling several hundred individuals in the first year with a view to resettling up to 3,000 over the lifetime of this Parliament. Children will be resettled with their parents or carers where relevant. We have followed the UNHCR's advice not to focus solely on resettling unaccompanied refugee children as this is likely to create a pull factor and may encourage families to send their children across alone.

In addition, we have resettled over 7,300 refugees under the Gateway resettlement programme since 2004 and the Mandate refugee scheme is also open to refugees who have close family members in the UK who are able to support them here. Whilst the Syrian VPR scheme is focussed on Syrian nationals, our other resettlement schemes are not restricted by nationality.

We will continue with our approach of taking refugees from the region. This provides refugees with a more direct and safe route to the UK, rather than risking hazardous journeys into and across Europe. But those in need of protection must first register with UNHCR or claim asylum with the national authorities in the first safe country they reach. We continue to use the established UNHCR process for identifying and resettling refugees.

We also support the principle of family unity and have several routes for families to be reunited safely. Our family reunion policy allows a spouse or partner and children under the age of 18 of those granted protection in the UK to join them here, if they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country. Under this policy we have reunited over 22,000 refugees with their immediate families over the last five years.

However, we are under no obligation to consider asylum claims lodged outside UK territory or allow people to travel here to claim asylum and it would not be appropriate to do so. All asylum claims lodged in the UK are carefully considered on their individual merits and we grant protection to those who need it, in accordance with our international obligations under the Refugee Convention. Signatory states are under no obligation to consider claims lodged outside their territory. Those who need international protection should claim in the first safe country they reach, by approaching the relevant national authorities or the local office of the UNHCR for help—as that is the fastest route to safety. Encouraging refugees to claim asylum in the first safe country means that vulnerable people will receive help more quickly rather than risking their lives on dangerous journeys into and across Europe or falling victim to criminal gangs exploiting the situation.

Control of EU external borders

Control of the EU's external borders is critical to an effective approach to the migration crisis, which is resulting in such high migratory flows. Large numbers of unregistered migrants moving into the Schengen area exacerbates existing security threats and risks undermining migration controls in other countries, including the UK. Members of the Schengen area need to agree whether control of external borders is the responsibility of the frontline state or is a collective EU responsibility to which they all contribute. We have noted that some Member States have implemented their own passport controls within the Schengen area, in breach of the Schengen principles and no doubt due to a lack of faith in the integrity of the external Schengen border. (Paragraph 77)

Taken with:

We welcome the proposals put forward by the European Commission to reform Frontex, the agency charged with protecting the EU's external borders. We believe these reforms would have a positive impact in empowering the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency to take effective action when individual Member States are unable or unwilling to do so. This would not affect the UK's role directly, even while it remains in the EU, as it is not a full member of Schengen. However, the UK does provide staff and equipment to work with Frontex and its support for the EU's Rapid Intervention Border Teams (RABIT) has always been welcomed. The Government should make clear how it intends to engage with the new EU border agency and how its engagement will differ from its current relationship with Frontex once the UK leaves the EU. We also recommend that the UK remain a key player in Europol from outside the EU, as the US is now. (Paragraph 78)

On the security and integrity of the Schengen Area, the Government supports work by the Schengen States to strengthen the EU's external borders. Schengen States and the Commission place great emphasis and resources on initiatives such as the new European Border and Coast Guard, and Smart Borders, which includes a proposal for an Entry Exit System at the external Schengen border. Further proposed amendments to the Schengen Borders Code will allow for the strengthening of checks at the external Schengen border.

Pending these new measures being in place, five Schengen States have reintroduced their border controls. They have exercised their right to reinstate their internal borders through the legal mechanism contained in the Schengen Borders Code, for security reasons. These Schengen States have made clear that EU citizens can still move freely but checks are being conducted on all people crossing these borders for security reasons. Therefore while migrants are already required to be identified, checked and processed according to agreed EU asylum procedures, they are now also subject to Schengen Area security checking processes. In compliance with the mechanisms in the Schengen Borders Code, the controls have been extended to November this year with the agreement of the Commission and all Schengen States. France has also reinstated its border controls with its neighbours as a result of the Paris attacks and ongoing security threats, again under the legal mechanism contained in the Schengen Borders Code. The UK is not part of the Schengen Area but will continue to watch all of these developments closely.

The UK has supported plans for the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency which replaced Frontex in October. The UK will not take part in the European Border and Coast Guard as it is a Schengen building measure however there is provision for the UK to cooperate with the new agency as we do currently with Frontex. The UK continues to provide resource to Frontex operations on an ad hoc basis by mutual consent. Rapid Border Interventions (RABITs) are now provided for as an integral part of the new Regulation, removing the obstacle which has led to recent difficulties for the UK taking part in RABITs. The UK sees cooperation with Frontex and the new agency as an important part of our work with European partners to tackle the migration crisis and improve the security of the EU's external border. We remain committed to ensuring this cooperation is effective and in preparation for the UK's withdrawal from the EU, we are considering the UK's position in respect of our future cooperation with the new Agency.

The Government is committed to continue law enforcement cooperation when the UK is outside the EU and will do what is necessary to keep our people safe. We are exploring options for cooperation arrangements with Europol once the UK has left the EU but it is too early to speculate at this stage what future arrangements may look like.

Tackling migrant smuggling across sea borders

The Government has supported both Frontex search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and NATO operations aimed at disrupting migrant smuggling in the Aegean by deploying Royal Navy, Border Force and other vessels. We welcome these deployments although, given the low number of Border Force vessels in operation, it is important that this does not detract from their crucial role in policing the Channel. It is not acceptable for EU Member States to leave these essential tasks to the countries most affected, including Italy, Greece and Turkey. All EU national governments should share the burden and contribute to disrupting the activities and destroying the boats and equipment of criminal elements who are the source of much of the migrant crisis, and who are the only party in this crisis to have gained from the suffering of vulnerable people. (Paragraph 85)

Taken with:

Although the deployments to date have saved lives, it is clear that they are not yet achieving their primary task of deterring migrant flows and disrupting smuggling networks. The response has been too slow and more robust and urgent collective action by EU countries is needed, with a clear mandate to deal with high-level criminality. Libya has now become the main departure point for illegal migration across the Mediterranean and the focus should be on preventing boats leaving north Africa in the first place. For the action to be limited to rescuing people from the sea and collecting drowned bodies, as it seems to be at present, is wholly unacceptable. (Paragraph 86)

Taken with:

As we enter high summer, the then Prime Minister's announcement in May that a Royal Navy vessel was being sent to address migrant flows from Libya appears to have stalled. Moreover, the approach taken by the then Foreign Secretary in respect of Libya, where a reported 500,000 people are waiting to cross the Mediterranean illegally, is complacent. Given the UK's involvement in the Libyan civil war and in the rebuilding

and reconciliation efforts which have followed, the EU should be able to offer Libya a deal, with substantial funding provided to tackle people smuggling at the points of departure, and access to Libyan territorial waters for European country vessels agreed in return. (Paragraph 87)

We share the Committee's view that it is essential to disrupt the activities of the criminal gangs responsible for putting so many lives at risk. For that reason, the Government remains committed to ensuring that Operation Sophia meets its primary task of deterring migrant flows and disrupting smuggling networks. That is also why the Foreign Affairs Council refreshed the operation's mandate in June 2016 to include training the Libyan Coastguard. This training has now commenced. We, and the EU, are working closely with the new Government of National Accord to tackle migration from Libya, and to deliver security and stability for the Libyan people. Multinational Libyan Coastguard capacity building under Operation Sophia commenced on 27 October, delayed by the late nomination of Libyan personnel by the Libyan authorities, and the UK is committed to provide staff to help deliver this training. We have also provided military planners to the operational headquarters in Rome. Enhancing the capabilities of the Libyan authorities will allow them to take more effective action against the smuggling networks. We continue to work with Libya on expanding our cooperation, but it is important to note that inviting foreign naval vessels to operate inside its territorial waters is politically sensitive within Libya.

We are also tackling the criminal gangs through our Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce, exploiting every opportunity to identify and tackle organised crime groups at source, in transit countries and in Europe. The Taskforce is currently operating in 17 countries and has already successfully disrupted crime groups involved in immigration crime by participating in intelligence development and sharing, as well as arrests and prosecutions.

We do not agree that EU Member States are leaving the essential tasks of disrupting migrant smuggling to the most affected countries. For example, 21 countries participated in Op Sophia, with Belgium, Germany and Spain each committing a frigate, and Spain, Luxembourg and France providing maritime patrol aircraft. The UK has also made a substantial contribution: HMS Enterprise has been deployed to Operation Sophia since July 2015; HMS Richmond was deployed during a surge of assets in October and November 2015; and RFA Mounts Bay has been deployed since 27 July 2016 and will remain committed until November 2016. The common costs of the operation, which total €11.82 million for the one-year mandate, are split amongst all Member States. To date October 2016, Operation Sophia (Op Sophia) has destroyed over 300 smuggling boats on the high seas, apprehended over 95 suspected smugglers and successfully saved over 29,300 lives.

In addition, we have also provided significant resource to the EU's Operation Triton, including two Border Force cutters from May 2015 to September 2015, saving 1,650 lives. More recently, Border Force have deployed a chartered ship in the Central Mediterranean, which has saved a further 695 people to date. Since late November 2015 Border Force has also deployed a chartered ship in the Aegean, supplemented by the deployment of the cutter HMC Protector from March 2016. To date Border Force operations in the Aegean Sea have saved 8,163 people. During these deployments, Border Force has still maintained a three vessel capability in UK waters, supported by Royal Navy and Royal Navy Reserve crew.

Dublin regulations

Application of the provisions of the Dublin Convention has a direct impact on UK migration controls because many of the migrants and refugees who arrive illegally in Calais with the aim of making an asylum claim in the UK will have passed through another EU state. The existing Dublin regulations were not designed for a crisis such as the present one, and the European Commission has proposed to improve them with a revised scheme designed to ensure that responsibility for processing asylum claims does not rest disproportionately with frontline states but instead, when required, is shared by EU members. The UK indicated that it would oppose any such changes to the Dublin regulations, even putting aside the question of its exit from the EU. Regardless of whether these changes proceed, proper systems for registering and tracking migrants need to be in place as part of the Dublin arrangements and an effective fingerprinting system is crucial for this. However, it is unfair for EU countries that are distant from the current points of arrival in the EU to criticise the main arrival countries for not implementing fingerprinting requirements effectively, given the vast numbers that they have been left to cope with, with inadequate support. (Paragraph 94)

The Government's position remains that we support the existing principles of the Dublin Regulation, particularly the underlying principle that an individual should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach. We are considering the European Commission's proposal to amend the Regulation, and as with other Justice and Home Affairs measures, we have an opt-in decision to take on UK participation. The Eurodac Regulation exists as the fingerprint database to ensure proper registering and tracking of migrants as part of Dublin arrangements. It is important for all EU Member States to fully comply with the Eurodac Regulation.

We believe that Member States at the external border experiencing large volumes of migrant arrivals should be expected to comply with the obligations that they have agreed to collectively in the area of freedom, security and justice. Member States under particular pressure are supported extensively by the European Commission, European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and NGOs. The UK continues to provide bilateral support to countries such as Greece and significant resource to EASO as part of the collective effort to build asylum and border capability in Member States under pressure.

EU hotspot initiative

If it can be made to work effectively, the EU's hotspot initiative will go some way to recognising that individual frontline countries cannot be left to bear the brunt of vast migration flows. For the hotspots to be a success, commitment and practical support is required from all EU members, and from the UK, for staff, equipment and other necessary resources. Greece and Italy cannot be blamed if the hotspots remain understaffed and under-resourced. We welcome the practical support provided by the UK to date. It should be noted that the UK has opted out of the EU scheme for dealing with the migration crisis and that its unilateral commitments are currently limited mainly to the 20,000 Syrians refugees it has agreed to accept by 2020. (Paragraph 104)

As noted in the report, the Government does not support relocation of asylum seekers between EU Member States as we believe it is the wrong response to the unprecedented

migratory pressures. It undermines the important principle that asylum should be claimed in the first safe country, does not address the causes of illegal migration and simply seeks to move the problem around Europe. The Government remains of this view.

The Government supports the principle of border hotspots and, although the UK is not participating in relocation mechanisms, swift and effective implementation of hotspots remains a priority. In our view the hotspots should contribute to better management of the EU's external border with more focus being given to the rapid return of those without a legitimate asylum claim and reducing secondary movement. We believe it is important that hotspots do not focus exclusively on facilitating relocation but fulfil this wider border security objective. They also have an important role in supporting delivery of the EU-Turkey agreement to return asylum seekers from the Greek islands to Turkey where it safe to do so.

To assist in dealing with migrant influx the UK will continue to provide support to Italy and Greece bilaterally and through EASO. We have already provided resource in response to EASO's original call for Member State support in hotspots. In addition to deploying staff to specific hotspot sites, UK personnel have also been deployed to the Dublin units in both Greece and Italy. The UK has offered 75 expert personnel to support the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal including staff to help with the processing of migrants and acting as interpreters. We are one of the largest contributors of resource to the Greek islands, providing both interpreters and expert staff to help process migrants.

EU border security and terrorist attacks

In the context of the current intense security threats to EU countries, it is clearly in the interest of all countries for there to be effective security checks at EU external borders. Although the measures taken by the UK since the Paris attacks are welcome, no country can expect to be able to protect its borders alone against those who wish to do harm. The UK needs its European neighbours, and the countries on the EU external borders, to take equally rigorous steps. Terrorists do not see national borders as a barrier to their barbarism and people with illegal or lethal intent will continue to try to find ways through any security system. Cooperation and continued vigilance are necessary. (Paragraph 114)

Taken with:

The Greek Ambassador to the UK told us that one of the Paris terrorists crossed from Turkey to Greece and was then able to travel on within the EU, and that another had a Syrian passport. The additional checks against security databases which the European Commission has proposed are welcome. These should be enforced, in addition to passport checks, for both EU and non-EU nationals. Equipment should be available at all EU external borders for the fingerprinting of migrants on arrival and then for background-checking to be carried out before they cross the border. Any increased delays at border crossings which this may cause may just have to be accepted, in the face of the continued threat of terrorists managing to evade EU border checks, as two of the Paris attackers appear to have done. (Paragraph 115)

Increasing the security of the EU external border is of direct benefit to the UK and we have been strongly supportive of the European Commission's proposals in this area.

The proposal to strengthen checks carried out on those crossing the external border will bring the level of checks in line with those already conducted at the UK border. As this is a Schengen building measure, the UK will not participate in this proposal; however EU Member States in the Schengen zone will be obliged to conduct systematic entry and exit checks at the external Schengen border on EU nationals and their families and also on third country nationals on exit (third country nationals are already checked on entry). These checks will apply to all external air, sea and land borders. The UK agrees that equipment should be made available at all EU external borders for the fingerprinting of migrants on arrival and then for conducting background checks. An Entry Exit System has been proposed by the Commission as part of the Smart Borders package, to modernise the Schengen Area's external border management. The proposed system will electronically collect data and register entry and exit records. This will include the collection of biometric data. Again, while the UK will not be part of the new Entry Exit System due to our position outside of Schengen, we support this proposal as a further step towards increasing the security of the external Schengen border.

Additionally, following the Paris attacks in February last year, the Commission produced informal recommendations on checks of travel documents, including phasing out non-machine readable national ID cards. The UK welcomes these recommendations and has urged the Commission to take urgent action in supporting the Member States to update their identification documents in line with recommendations from the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

The EU Agreement with Turkey

The EU–Turkey agreement reached in March 2016 has resulted in a 90% decrease in the numbers of migrants arriving in Greece. However, concerns about the humanitarian, human rights, logistical and legal implications should not be ignored and the challenge for both Greece and Turkey in processing and moving the large numbers of people who have already reached Greece remains considerable. It is only just and fair that the EU countries which supported the agreement with Turkey should assist by providing staff, financial support and equipment. The UK Government has already provided some support to Greece in the form of personnel and equipment. It should set out the ongoing contribution it plans to make, both through EU agencies while it remains a member of the EU, and bilaterally. Turkey got a good deal from the agreement with the EU and it would receive even greater credit from EU states if it did more to stop migrants crossing to Greece in the first place. (Paragraph 123)

The EU–Turkey migration agreement is making a genuine difference to managing the flows of migration, preventing people from dying in attempting the crossing or putting themselves in the hands of smugglers. The number of migrants arriving on the Greek islands has significantly reduced, from an average of 2,000 per day in February 2016 to an average of 81 per day now.

The UK has played a leading role in supporting Greece to implement the Statement. In May, the previous Home Secretary announced a package of UK support to Greece consisting of up to 75 expert staff to interview arriving migrants, act as interpreters and to support co-ordination through the European Commission team in Athens. Our teams

include experts in supporting vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and those trained to tackle people trafficking. The first UK staff arrived in Greece in early June, and this offer will be fulfilled in January 2017.

The UK welcomes the Greek Government's decision to trial the admissibility process with Afghan, Iraqi and Eritrean nationals to accelerate processing on the islands and increase returns to Turkey, and continues to encourage its application in full. The UK has offered an additional package to Greece under the EU–Turkey deal to support this trial. Up to 40 extra staff—including flow management experts, caseworkers and interpreters, and returns experts—will be deployed over the winter period to support the admissibility process and ease overcrowding on the islands

Border Force has also been participating in Frontex operation POSEIDON in the Aegean, a separate operation which pre-dates the EU–Turkey deal. HMC PROTECTOR is currently deployed amid the Greek islands and since May 2015 has been providing direct support to rescue operations in the Aegean. In response to Frontex calls for more support in the region, we are sending an additional cutter HMC VALIANT to the Aegean. She is currently en route to the Mediterranean and expected to commence operations in mid-January.

The UK remains committed to ensuring the EU–Turkey deal is implemented in an effective and sustainable way in full accordance with EU and international law requirements. Turkey has modernised its legal framework for the protection of refugees and is now ably hosting over 3 million refugees, 2.7 million of whom are from Syria.

It was inevitable that the agreement to deport migrants back to Turkey from Greece would lead migrant smugglers to find other routes in the region which avoid Greece, and this has proved to be the case. There were hundreds of deaths of migrants making the crossing from North Africa to Italy during April and May and more deaths are likely during the high summer months. The EU needs to take immediate, collective and comprehensive steps to tackle the new problems created by the displacement of migrants to other routes avoiding Turkey and Greece, which were entirely foreseeable. Ultimately all action to close off irregular routes will be no more than partially successful, and sometimes counter-productive, particularly in the absence of sufficient safe and legal routes. We give some consideration to this issue in the next chapter in relation to protecting vulnerable groups, but the recommendations there are also more widely applicable. (Paragraph 124)

We are constantly monitoring the situation, but so far the figures do not suggest any significant route displacements. Whilst arrivals from North Africa to Italy were slightly higher in 2016 than 2015, the Central Mediterranean Route is not indicating displacement following the EU–Turkey deal. Migrants using this route are largely from Sub-Saharan Africa, whereas migrants that used the Eastern Mediterranean Route (Turkey to Greece) were largely from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. We do not see these nationalities arriving in Italy via North Africa in significant numbers.

The Government is clear on its moral responsibility to assist those affected by the migration crisis and is taking action to address irregular migration at multiple levels. The UK believes it is better to prioritise interventions upstream in countries of origin and transit in ways that reduce the need of migrants to leave their home country or move on from a safe third

country in their region. We provided £4 billion in aid for Africa in 2015/16, including £540 million for economic development and £500 million on humanitarian support. In November 2015, the UK announced a further £200 million in bilateral aid to Africa to tackle the root causes of migration. Our priorities are increasingly focused on jobs and livelihoods. The UK has recently, together with the Ethiopian Government, launched a 'jobs compact' that gives opportunity and access to services and education to refugees in Ethiopian refugee camps.

At the Valletta Summit in November 2015, European and African leaders agreed a comprehensive Action Plan aimed at jointly tackling the migration crisis. Currently the UK is the Chair of the Khartoum Process, which considers the Horn of Africa under the Valletta Action Plan, and is focused on combating people smuggling and trafficking, and bolstering sustainable regional protection for refugees.

The UK has also sought to engage positively with the EU's new 'Partnership Frameworks' on upstream migration, which look at Ethiopia, Nigeria, Niger, Mali and Senegal. This aims to improve coordination between the activities of the EU and Member States in key migration source and transit countries.

Family reunion and unaccompanied child migrants

We accept the Government's concern that allowing unaccompanied children to join family members already in the UK might create a "pull factor", resulting in more vulnerable young people making dangerous journeys to try to reach the UK. We appreciate that these are sensitive and complex matters and that proper account needs to be taken of the legal and safeguarding requirements in the countries where unaccompanied children are currently located. We also acknowledge that some progress is being made on this. However, we agree with the Bishop of Durham that the 157 unaccompanied children already in Calais who have family members in the UK "should already have arrived" in the UK. The Government should, as a one-off action, accept all of these children into the UK now. (Paragraph 131)

Taken with:

Large numbers of women and child migrants are making dangerous illegal journeys across the Mediterranean, in the hope of being reunited with family members in the EU. We welcome the UK Government's recent announcement of schemes to resettle unaccompanied children, both from the Middle East and North Africa, and some who have already reached Europe. However, it is important that the local authorities who are required to take responsibility for unaccompanied refugee children are properly funded and supported to take on this additional burden, particularly given the high concentration of arrivals in a very small number of locations, particularly in Kent and the Heathrow airport area. The Government should include steps to ensure the fair distribution of unaccompanied children across local authorities as part of the action we have called for in relation to dispersal of asylum-seekers. (Paragraph 134)

Taken with:

Family reunion of migrants has been shown to have benefits in terms of integration and support networks, in addition to the human rights requirements of allowing families

to be together, and there is clear scope for further measures to facilitate women and children joining husbands, fathers and other male relatives who have reached the UK. We recommend that the UK Government increase its use of family reunion visas for refugee asylum cases, to make it easier for applications to be made in countries of origin and to help avoid women and children feeling obliged to attempt high-risk and illegal travel to Europe in order to be reunited with male relatives. We also recommend that the UK broaden the scope of family reunion rules, and work with expert NGOs to make it easier (including through provision of legal aid) and speedier for applications for family reunion visas to be made, particularly in countries of origin or their vicinity. (Paragraph 135)

The Government is genuinely concerned that the wrong kind of family reunion measures will lead to more children setting out unaccompanied on journeys that will put them at risk and welcomes the acknowledgement of this by the Committee.

The Government has considered policies in support of the principle of family unity. Several routes are in place for families to be reunited safely without the need for children to travel illegally to the UK. Our existing family reunion policy allows those granted refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK to sponsor their spouse or partner and children under the age of 18, who formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country, to reunite with them in the UK. Under this policy, we have granted around 22,000 family reunion visas over the past five years—reuniting many refugees with their immediate family.

The Immigration Rules also allow those with refugee status or humanitarian protection to sponsor adult dependent relatives living overseas to join them here where, as a result of age, illness or disability, that person requires long-term personal care that can only be provided in the UK by their relative and without recourse to public funds. Where family members cannot meet the requirements of the Rules, such as in the case of an 18 year-old applying to join their refugee parents in the UK, we consider whether there are exceptional circumstances or compassionate reasons to justify granting entry clearance outside the Rules. This not only caters for extended family members of refugees in exceptional circumstances, but also for family members of British citizens unable to meet the financial requirements of the Rules.

In addition, we now have dedicated resettlement schemes that serve to provide a safe and legal route to the UK for the most vulnerable refugees who are referred to us by the UNHCR.

We have noted the points made by the British Red Cross and others about the need to make it easier for genuine family reunion applications to be lodged and in response we have revised our family reunion guidance to provide greater clarity for applicants and their sponsors. This should help overcome the difficulties with clarity, so that applicants now understand the process and what is expected of them, making the process easier from their point of view. The revised Home Office guidance was published on 27 July and is available on Gov.UK at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-reunion-instruction>

Our family reunion policy meets our international obligations and strikes the right balance between reuniting families and ensuring that our Rules are not more generous than other European countries, as this would encourage more people to risk their lives trying to reach the UK rather than claiming in the first safe country they reach.

In 2016, we transferred over 900 unaccompanied minors to the UK from Europe, including more than 750 from France as part of the UK's support for the Calais camp clearance—almost half of the unaccompanied children who were in the camp at the time of the clearance. Many have been reunited with family members already in the UK, while others are being cared for by local authorities across the UK. The remaining children are in the care of the French authorities. The current phase of transfers following the camp clearance has been concluded. This was a planned process, done in conjunction with the French authorities. UK and French authorities on both sides of the Channel ensured that a safe, lawful and efficient process was in place to transfer eligible children to the UK as a matter of urgency. The Government continued to seek every opportunity to expedite this process, working closely with our French partners and with their agreement.

More eligible children will be transferred from Europe, in line with the terms of the Immigration Act, in the coming months and we will continue to meet our obligations under the Dublin Regulation. The process and criteria for the transfer of children from Europe under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 will be published in due course.

In response to the sharp increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) arriving in the UK, particularly in Kent, the Government has worked closely with that local authority and with others since last summer to deliver a more equitable distribution of UASC across the country, whilst ensuring that the welfare of vulnerable children continues to be safeguarded.

As a result, on 1 July, the Home Office and the Department for Education launched a new voluntary transfer arrangement between local authorities for the care of unaccompanied children who arrive in the UK and claim asylum. This National Transfer Scheme seeks to encourage all local authorities to volunteer to support UASC so there is a more even distribution of caring responsibilities across the country. It is based on a regional model and no region is expected to look after more UASC and unaccompanied refugee children than 0.07% of the total child population in their area.

These new arrangements were created after consultation with the Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and local authorities. In support of the transfer arrangements the Government also significantly increased the amount of funding that it provides to local authorities caring for UASC. For UASC aged under 16 the funding increased by 20% and for UASC aged 16 and 17 funding increased by 28%. Each UASC aged under 16 therefore attracts £41,610 per annum and each UASC aged 16 or 17 attracts £33,215 per annum. We also increased the funding provided to local authorities for those former UASC who then go on to attract leaving care support by 33%.

The scheme is underpinned by powers in the Immigration Act 2016, which include a provision for the Secretary of State to impose a mandatory scheme for transferring UASC. However, we very much hope that the scheme remains a voluntary and a collaborative effort across central and local government.

Missing child migrants

Europol estimates that there are 85,000 unaccompanied minors amongst the migrant population in the EU. We were astonished to hear reports that large numbers of these children go missing from reception centres shortly after arrival and that they then face abuse, sexual assault and discrimination. At least 10,000 minors are estimated to have gone missing since arriving in Europe. EU countries must do more to protect these highly vulnerable young people. The Government has announced a £10 million Refugee Children Fund for vulnerable children in the EU. This should be used, and if necessary augmented, to ensure that effective support and protection are provided, and that this extremely serious problem is properly addressed. (Paragraph 140)

The UK has provided £70 million to the Mediterranean Migration Crisis response and pledged more than £2.3 billion in aid for the humanitarian crisis in Syria and the region, making us the largest bilateral contributor to the response. Over £60 million was allocated to Europe to provide life-saving aid to migrants and refugees including food, water, hygiene kits and infant packs, and protection for the most vulnerable, as well as support to organisations helping governments build their capacity to manage arrivals in Greece and the Balkans.

The Refugee Children Fund for Europe (RCFE) is a one year £10 million programme which aims to prevent and mitigate protection risks faced by vulnerable separated and unaccompanied refugee and migrant children in Europe. It will be implemented by three main partners (IRC, Save and UNHCR) and their sub-partners with a particular focus in Greece and limited activities in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, FRYOM and Serbia. The programme will provide immediate, sustainable protection and support (shelter, medical and psychosocial support, educational needs assessment and training), and will help children to access durable solutions to their predicaments, including alternative shelters and placement in foster homes, relocation to another EU country, asylum in Greece, or family reunification. We have no current plans to extend this programme beyond a year; however, we will monitor ongoing needs and ensure an exit strategy is in place.

We are entering the next phase of our response to the crisis across the Mediterranean region with new humanitarian support to save lives and meet the needs of the most vulnerable, both in transit to and arriving in Europe. For example, DFID is committing £4 million of initial funding for a new Women and Girls Protection Fund, to help safeguard women and girls from all forms of trafficking, violence and exploitative behaviours along their migration routes.

Working through a consortium of partners across the Mediterranean region, this fund will provide vulnerable women and girls with alternative safe shelters and appropriate protection (including medical care) and legal support (e.g. female translators and legal representatives etc.), as well as with carefully targeted cash grants for protection, and to reduce the need for risky income generating activities such as informal labour, domestic work, or survival sex.