

Speech: Immigration Minister: Scotland should be proud of refugee support

It's a pleasure to be here with you all today. The past 2 years of resettlement in Scotland have been a wonderful journey and I'm so pleased to be able to share this celebration with you.

Scotland, along with the rest of the UK, should be proud of the way it has welcomed some of the world's most vulnerable refugees who have sought protection from conflict or persecution in their own countries. It was a real privilege to be able to meet some of these individuals earlier today and hear their stories.

Everyone in this room has played a part in making that happen, and it's with this in mind that I am pleased to have a chance to talk to you about 3 things today.

First, I want to thank you for your support for resettlement in Scotland.

Second, I will say a few words about resettlement across the UK.

And finally, I will touch on how I hope you can be part of the conversation as we consider our future plans for asylum and resettlement.

Resettlement in Scotland

I am delighted with Scotland's achievements so far and your continued support for refugee resettlement. I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to Scottish local authorities, COSLA, the Scottish Government and all other partners in Scotland involved in supporting resettlement.

These families have been welcomed by communities in every part of Scotland. From Argyll and Bute to right here in Edinburgh, you have been providing refugees with a safe environment and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

Resettlement in Scotland has been dependent on collaboration with partners from the beginning of the Scheme, and I am extremely grateful for the leadership and support that COSLA and the Scottish Government have provided so far. Across the UK, we have seen all parts of the community coming forward to resettle refugees.

UK resettlement

The incredible support we have seen here for refugees from Syria is present across the UK. Since the scheme began, we have resettled over 9,300 individuals across 263 local authorities.

This is in addition to the thousands we grant protection to under normal asylum procedures and our other resettlement schemes. In the past year, we

have also resettled over 400 at-risk children and their families through our Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme.

Thanks to you, these families receive a warm welcome as well as support to integrate into their new communities, including learning English and preparing for work and self-sufficiency. I ask you all to please continue your good work, as we are on track to meet our commitment to resettle 23,000 refugees by 2020.

Future of asylum and resettlement

As 2020 draws nearer, we must now consider what the future of resettlement should be beyond our existing commitments.

Our ability to deliver resettlement depends on your continued support in offering and providing placements for these refugees. I know the challenges this can present, especially given that this is not the only scheme which requires the support and assistance of local authorities.

I am very grateful for the contribution that Glasgow has made to the asylum dispersal scheme, particularly given the increased pressures in recent years. I am keen for more local authorities in Scotland to participate in the scheme. I would encourage those of you not participating to do so; we stand ready to work with you to plan how you can participate.

You will also have seen the news that the National Transfer Scheme will be extended to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to allow the relevant authorities in each nation of the UK to participate and ensure it is a truly national scheme. I hope that I can count on your support for the scheme, helping unaccompanied children to get settled in the areas in which they are going to be looked after as soon as possible.

As we move forward, I want us to work together as we discuss what our next steps should be. Only by taking a collaborative approach will we be able to provide the best outcomes for resettled families and the local communities they are placed in.

I would like to finish by thanking you once again for all that you have done, and congratulating you on this milestone. I look forward to continuing to work with you to welcome and provide sanctuary to more vulnerable families.