

UK pledges more aid for Beirut crisis at global summit

1. UK package of £20 million will help provide food for the most vulnerable in Lebanon, including those affected by the Beirut explosion and its aftermath
2. As one of the biggest donors to crisis so far, UK commits to “stand by the Lebanese people”
3. This is on top of £5 million already made available to the response by the UK, including support for the British Red Cross for the emergency relief effort

The UK will step up its commitment to helping Lebanon’s most vulnerable today, by pledging a further package of £20m in urgent humanitarian support at a virtual summit of world leaders (Sunday, 9 August).

The UK is one of the biggest donors to the crisis, and at the ‘International conference on assistance and support to Beirut and the Lebanese people’, convened by French President Emmanuel Macron and UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan will pledge £20 million on behalf of the UK to the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP).

This support will help the country’s most vulnerable through the existing economic uncertainty and additional suffering caused by the explosion by going directly to those families most at risk to cover essential survival needs, including access to food and medicine.

At today’s conference, world leaders will gather virtually to support Lebanon after the explosion put the country’s already-strained economy and food security under extra pressure.

Speaking ahead of the global conference International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

The devastation we have seen in Lebanon this week has left people without homes, medical care and wondering how long it will be until the country’s food supplies run out.

Today the world is coming together to stand by the Lebanese people, and as one of the biggest donors to this crisis so far, the UK is pledging more urgent support to help all those affected by this terrible disaster.

The UK has already made £5 million available to the response, £3 million of which will go to the British Red Cross for the emergency relief effort following Tuesday’s devastating explosion, which has left over 250,000 people homeless.

A British team of specialist medics funded by UK aid flew to Lebanon on Friday to assess health needs on the ground and identify what more the UK can do to help following the devastating explosion. Humanitarian experts from the UK are also on the ground and the Royal Navy survey ship HMS Enterprise will deploy to Beirut.

Since the start of the Syria Crisis, the UK has provided over £740 million to help promote stability and support for refugees and vulnerable people in Lebanon. Since 2011, DFID has supported sustainable water and sanitation facilities to over 1.1 million refugees, provided education to 300,000 children, helped create 1,400 new jobs for both Lebanese and Syrian communities, and improved infrastructure and services in over 200 municipalities.

Notes to editors

1. The UK has provided £743m in support to the country since the 2011 outbreak of the Syria crisis, supporting some of the most vulnerable people.

[Home Secretary appoints small boat commander](#)

Press release

Dan O'Mahoney has been appointed to collaborate with the French to tackle Channel crossings.



Home Secretary Priti Patel and Dan O'Mahoney, Clandestine Channel Threat Commander.

Priti Patel has today appointed a Clandestine Channel Threat Commander – a new role leading the UK's response to tackling illegal attempts to reach the UK.

Together with the Home Secretary and Minister for Immigration Compliance, Dan O'Mahoney will have the primary responsibility of making the Channel route unviable for small boat crossings.

He will collaborate closely with the French to build on the joint work already underway, urgently exploring tougher action in France, including stronger enforcement measures and adopting interceptions at sea and the direct return of boats.

Last month a joint intelligence cell was established with France and joint investigations resulted in 11 more arrests.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

The number of illegal small boat crossings is appalling. We are working to make this route unviable and arresting the criminals facilitating these crossings and making sure they are brought to justice.

Dan's appointment is vital to cutting this route by bringing together all operational partners in the UK and in France. This is a complex problem but across Government we are working to address many of these long-standing issues.

Dan O'Mahoney said:

This role is vitally important in the fight to end the heinous crime of people smuggling across the Channel.

I look forward to working closely with the Home Secretary and Minister for Immigration Compliance as well as with law enforcement bodies in the UK and France to bring to bear every capability available to tackle this critically important issue.

Mr O'Mahoney takes up the role having served since 2019 as Director of the UK's Joint Maritime Security Centre (JMSC) where he was responsible for bringing together 15 agencies involved in Maritime Security to provide intelligence, data and situational awareness in UK waters and across the globe.

Prior to the JMSC, he has held senior positions in the National Crime Agency, and the Border Crime Command at Border Force Heathrow.

Prior to the Civil Service Mr O'Mahoney served in the Royal Marines, including operational deployments in Kosovo and Iraq.

He is also a trustee of a military charity concerned with mental health support and resettlement into civilian life which has raised close to three quarters of a million pounds since 2013.

[PM call with President Michel Aoun of Lebanon: 8 August 2020](#)

News story

Prime Minister Boris Johnson had a call with President Michel Aoun of Lebanon.



The Prime Minister spoke to President Aoun of Lebanon this morning to convey the UK's deepest sympathies to the Lebanese people following Tuesday's devastating explosion. He also passed on the sincere condolences of Her Majesty the Queen.

The Prime Minister reiterated the UK's long-standing friendship with Lebanon and commitment to stand by the country in its hour of need.

The two leaders discussed the urgent humanitarian, medical and reconstruction needs following the blast at Beirut Port and President Aoun thanked the UK for the support provided to date, including the release of £5m in emergency funding and deployment of HMS Enterprise.

With Lebanon facing threats from a financial crisis, coronavirus and the effects of this tragic blast, they agreed to work with international partners to ensure the country's long-term recovery and rehabilitation.

Multi-million-pound funding package for school transport

Thousands of students will be supported with new dedicated school and college transport to get them to school or college in the autumn term, the Education Secretary said today.

Delivering on the national priority for all children and young people to return to full-time education in September, local transport authorities will receive more than £40 million funding for the autumn term.

This funding will help them create extra capacity and allow hundreds of thousands more students to use alternatives to public transport, while social distancing measures remain in place. We will review further arrangements in the future should it be necessary.

Students and staff who have the option to walk, cycle or use a scooter are encouraged to do so, benefitting from £2 billion of government investment to increase active travel. This will be supported by a new campaign due to be launched shortly to reduce demand on public transport at peak times and minimise overcrowding.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Ahead of delivering on the national priority of all children and young people returning to full-time education in September, I am asking every staff member and student to plan now how they will get to school or college. If it is possible to walk or cycle, please do.

While our public transport system has almost returned to full service, I know thousands of people will choose to get active and find alternative modes of transport, because with distancing measures still in place it is important that we all play our part to ensure everyone is able to get to school safely, and on time.

For those that have no other option than public transport, this investment for local authorities will mean more students will be able to travel on dedicated home to school and college transport, creating even more capacity where it is needed most.

Local transport authorities will be allocated the funding to reflect the number of children and young people in the local area and how far they have to travel. This includes students travelling to education or training, as well as anyone supervising or escorting students to education provision.

Students returning to further education in September will also benefit from this investment. Local authorities should work with providers and set out

their travel arrangements for 16-19 year olds, taking into account that students in further education often rely more on public transport and travel further to get there.

Local authorities continue to have a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport for all eligible children of compulsory school age, including children who attend their nearest suitable and whose special educational needs and disabilities mean they are unable to walk there. This will continue alongside the offer of other modes of transport for more students.

The Department for Transport has also today announced further funding for the bus and light rail sectors to help increase services ahead of expected increase in public transport use in September.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Today's funding will allow local authorities to procure dedicated extra capacity in our transport system to help students get back to their colleges and schools in time for the education restart in September.

But we need everyone to do their bit and help even further by cycling or walking where they can, whether they're a student going back to school or a parent commuting into work. We're making sure people have the support they need to do that, with £2 billion of investment backing our ambitious new Cycling and Walking plan unveiled by the Prime Minister last week.

Local authorities will be provided with new detailed guidance next week which has been developed with the sector and Public Health England, which sets out details they need to plan for transport arrangements in September.

The support package announced today reaffirms that it is a national priority for all children and young people return to full-time education in September.

Gigabit broadband rollout milestone reached

- 45,000 vouchers, worth more than £90m, issued to help cover the costs of delivering gigabit speeds directly to people's homes and businesses
- New taskforce launched today to encourage further take-up of gigabit

broadband services

Almost 500,000 premises across the UK have been connected to gigabit-capable broadband since summer 2018. This is part of a £1 billion government funding commitment until the end of 2021, with a further £5 billion for the hardest-to-reach areas to be earmarked soon.

It means that, alongside commercial investment, more than 7.5 million premises can now access gigabit capable broadband, compared to around 1.4 million premises two years ago.

Nearly 45,000 vouchers, worth more than £90 million, have been issued to subsidise the cost of building faster, gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure to homes and businesses.

The figures are released as the government calls on companies and residents in rural towns and villages to apply for more than £70 million on offer immediately to take them out of the digital slow lane.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman is today urging people to take advantage of the [Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme](#) which is open until March next year and aims to future proof people's internet connections for a generation.

The scheme is being targeted at rural, hard-to-reach areas that aren't likely to be connected through the commercial rollout of gigabit networks soon.

Minister Warman is also today launching a new taskforce, led by consumer and business groups including Which?, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and Confederation of British Industry (CBI) to drive consumer take-up of gigabit speed internet connections.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

“It's fantastic to see so many people getting access to gigabit speed broadband. This is thanks to our investment alongside the sterling work of industry.

“Today I urge people in rural communities in the digital slow lane to apply for the immediate financial help available so they can seize the benefits of better connectivity – from making work easier to catching up with family and friends.

“I am also launching a new drive with business and consumer champions to make more people aware of just how beneficial better, faster broadband can be.”

Gigabit broadband carries speeds of a thousand megabits per second. These connections will not only underpin the use of smarter devices such as intelligent heating systems and internet-connected fridges, but they will allow people to download HD movies in seconds and stream TV and gaming content at 4K picture quality on multiple devices at the same time.

The speeds will pave the way for new and unexpected social benefits alongside jobs and economic growth, and revolutionise rural communities by giving people the freedom to live and work more flexibly.

To date, through the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, more than 3,500 vouchers have been issued to rural homes and businesses in Somerset, nearly 2,000 in Cumbria, and more than a thousand going to Kent, Lancashire, Hampshire, West Yorkshire and Surrey.

The vouchers are worth up to £1,500 for rural homes and up to £3,500 for rural small to medium-sized businesses (SMEs) provided they come together as a collective of two or more properties.

Rocio Concha, Director of Advocacy at Which?, said:

“It’s really important that people across the UK, including those who are vulnerable or in hard to reach locations, have a quality broadband connection that meets their needs not just for entertainment and to stay in touch with loved ones, but also to be able to work, shop and bank.

“By bringing together industry, the regulator, government as well as groups representing both consumers and businesses, this new advisory group will be able to provide recommendations on the best way to ensure everyone can take advantage of faster, more reliable internet connections as they are rolled out.

FSB National Chairman Mike Cherry said:

“Small businesses require reliable, fast, and futureproof connectivity to operate with confidence. Gigabit-capable broadband will enable firms to connect with customers nationally and internationally with ease, develop new ways of using technology to improve their performance, and conduct more business online than ever before.

“This year has forced small firms to overhaul their business models, and digital connectivity has proved to be a lifeline during this time. However, many have struggled with poor internet connections, and would be better served with a step-change in connectivity.

“That’s why this task force could not have come at a more pressing time. FSB is delighted to work with the Government, along with consumer and business representatives, to accelerate the take-up of gigabit-capable broadband.”

Felicity Burch, CBI Director of Digital and Innovation, said:

“Going for gigabit on digital connectivity is more important than ever as the UK responds to the Covid crisis. It’s great to be part of the Government’s new advisory group ensuring that the business view is heard. Bringing in expertise from across the board will spur more households and businesses to take up faster, more reliable broadband and help put tech and innovation at the centre of our economic recovery.”

Further info

Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme case studies

Gavin Keeble and his wife Belinda, who live in Grisedale, Cumbria, run a corporate training business. They were paying £115 a month for an unreliable service which would drop out every time low-flying RAF planes went overhead. They had their broadband upgraded by using one of the government's vouchers, which contributed to the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband.

Gavin and Belinda saw their speeds, as well as those of 121 homes and 56 businesses in the surrounding area, rocket from 8 Mbps to 1000 Mbps, which means they can successfully run their business.

Gavin said: "The difference that the new service has made is completely cosmic. It has given us total peace of mind connecting to the outside world and running an international business from a beautiful and remote part of the UK and dramatically improved our businesses professionalism and capability as well as transforming our family life."

Dominic Fairman, a local councillor who runs a farm and campsite on Bodmin Moor in Cornwall, has recently benefited from the scheme. He can now run digital promotion for the campsite and do his online tax returns hassle-free.

Dominic said: "The difference that this has made to our lives and our neighbours' lives has been incredible. My tax returns are seamless, I can upload photos and videos for the campsite to social media and I won't ever have to lose data again."

"Of the 5,000 people who work for Cornwall Council, around 4,000 have been working from home during the pandemic so it has really brought it home to us how important it is to have reliable connectivity these days. I will certainly be recommending this scheme to other communities in my parishes."

Gigabit Take-Up Advisory Group (GigaTAG)

Currently gigabit broadband is available to about 26 per cent of residential and business premises across the UK, but estimates show only 30 per cent of premises are taking up these services where they are available.

The new Gigabit Take-Up Advisory Group (GigaTAG) has been set up to lead a strategic review into boosting take-up as gigabit connections among consumers and businesses become more widely available.

It will be led by Which?, the FSB and CBI, with membership including Ofcom and industry representatives, to look at encouraging more consumers to engage with this new technology and to take advantage of the benefits that they will bring.

It will specifically explore increasing business take-up by promoting the benefits that gigabit broadband has brought to companies that already have it, and the role firms can play in incentivising their employees to upgrade

too.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The UK Government committed more than £1 billion on gigabit-capable broadband to the end of the financial year 20/21:
- £400 million through the Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund
- £279 million through the Local Full Fibre Networks Programme, which funded the first wave of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme
- £200 million through the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme, which is funding the second wave of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme
- At least £200 million from the existing Superfast Broadband Programme is being transitioned to specify gigabit-capable connections for all remaining procurements / change requests
- There have been 44,792 vouchers issued so far through the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, and of these 29,142 have resulted in a live connection. And as of Q4 19/20, 464,458 premises now have access to a gigabit-capable connection through the redirected Superfast Broadband Programme. Therefore almost half a million (493,600) premises now have access to or are connected to gigabit capable broadband.
- Independent figures from ThinkBroadband released this week reveal 1 in 4 premises now have access to a gigabit broadband option.

What is the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme?

- The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme is a UK-wide, supplier-led scheme offering vouchers to offset the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband to premises, i.e., homes and businesses. Vouchers can only be used when part of a group project. Gigabit-capable broadband can provide speeds of over 1,000 Mbps or 1 Gbps but beneficiaries only pay for the speed they want to use, provided it is at least double the speed they had before and more than 30 Mbps.
- Businesses and communities are encouraged to check whether they are eligible through a postcode checker on the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme website: <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>. If they are eligible they can approach any of the suppliers who are active in their

area to apply for a voucher. Registered suppliers can only use the vouchers when they are part of a group scheme that can consist of homes and businesses.

- In June, the UK and Welsh governments [teamed up](#) to boost the amount available in certain areas, due the difficulty and expense of rolling out broadband infrastructure in rural Wales. This boost doubled the vouchers' worth so that homes in rural Wales can now receive £3000 and SMEs £7000. In England, similar voucher top-ups are also available in Cumbria, Kent, Northumberland, Hampshire, Dorset, Warwickshire and West Sussex, to help connect some of the hardest-to-reach places.