

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL
EQUALITY ANALYSIS/ IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EQIA)

Directorate/ Service: Strategic and Corporate Services.

Name of decision, policy, procedure, project or service: Refugee Resettlement.

Responsible Owner/ Senior Officer: Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education, Kent County Council - Matt Dunkley.

Version: 1

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Future pathway of Equality Analysis:

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) Steering Group;
Corporate Lead Equality & Diversity;
Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance;
Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee;
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education.

Summary and recommendations of equality analysis/impact assessment

What this report will consider

Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions Kent County Council must have regard to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- Take steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people.

The protected groups/characteristics are those based on:

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender identity and transgender
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and Civil Partnerships
- Caring responsibilities

This EQIA (Equality Impact Assessment) is the assessment of the above duties with reference in particular to the way KCC is proposing to commission major elements of the support to be provided to refugees settling in Kent and the specification prospective

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providers are expected to bid against. It is a live document and will be updated as more analysis and consultation take place in advance of finalising the service specification for the proposed tender.

Context

The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) is part of the UK Government's humanitarian relief programme supporting Refugees for whom resettlement is considered the appropriate response. The VPRS was launched in January 2014 and in September 2015, the then Prime Minister announced that the scheme would be expanded to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection by mid-2020. In July 2017 it was announced that eligibility for the VPRS would be extended to all those refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria, regardless of their nationality.

Housing authorities (the district/borough/city councils in Kent) are responsible for decisions on the number of refugee families to be resettled in their area and for the housing to be used. With regard to the resettlement support, it was agreed that KCC should co-ordinate and commission a service in partnership with those districts/borough councils that wished to take part. Ten districts have opted to use the KCC scheme. Ashford Borough Council and Canterbury City Council decided to provide the support directly themselves.

In order to respond in a timely manner to the need to resettle refugee families, KCC entered into agreements with providers that we were already working with and/or were aware of and that were able to provide the required support. Currently Migrant Help, Rethink and Clarion Housing Group work in partnership with KCC and the housing authorities to provide the support. The support providers are paid using a Grant agreement.

The number of families resettling in Kent depends on the commitments made by each district housing authority, the flow of referrals from the Government Resettlement Team (joint Home Office/MHCLG/DFID) and the availability of suitable accommodation in the county. As at September 2019 there are 87 Syrian families resettled in Kent under the scheme (across all 12 districts), with 48 supported by KCC and the organisations referred to above (paid currently by Grant agreement).

Individuals resettled under the scheme are given five years Refugee status and as such can work, rent, claim benefits and other public funds from day one. The Government Resettlement Team has specified in the Funding Instructions what support needs to be in place for the families resettled under the scheme. The support provided is expected to be intensive in the initial weeks following arrival and then to decrease gradually as the family integrates into their local community and settles into their new home. Accommodation is normally provided in the private rented sector. The families can claim Housing Benefit/Universal Credit for housing costs and benefits for daily living costs, depending on their circumstances. If they can take up employment these benefits will reduce over time, depending on levels of earnings.

The organisations currently providing support to refugees under the scheme are already working to a detailed specification as part of the terms of their Grant agreement.

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However it was always the intention to eventually formally commission the support provision in order to put this on a firm contractual basis, to give all potential providers the opportunity to bid and to ensure the specification covers all current and future refugee resettlement schemes, particularly now the new UK Resettlement Scheme is due to come into force from Spring 2020.

At present the service is solely focused on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS). However, it is the intention to include in the tender the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (almost identical to the VPRS) for any arrivals up to Spring 2020 and from then the new UK Resettlement Scheme which will absorb and extend the existing resettlement schemes going forward. Any future similarly arranged and funded schemes will also be covered by the tender. The proposed contract with providers will allow additional local authorities to be added if needed.

Aims and Objectives

The proposed commissioned support service will provide immediate assistance to families upon their arrival in the UK with settling into their accommodation and with accessing the immediate services and support deemed necessary. Further to this, the service will provide casework support to the families for a three-year period from their arrival in the UK, with the possibility of a further two years support if required for individual families. This would include the development and implementation of an individual support plan for each family, enabling them to access all the services and support they require (either from mainstream services or bespoke provision under the scheme).

It is proposed to commission support services from the private and voluntary sector which meets the aims and objectives described above. The key elements of the planned commissioned support service shall comprise property set-up and resettlement support based on the Government Funding Instructions, a detailed specification developed by KCC, assessment by the public agencies and the support plan drawn up by the provider.

It is the intention to retain within KCC the coordination and management of the scheme and for the district housing authorities to remain, as now, responsible for decisions on the number of refugee families to be resettled and for the housing to be used.

Summary of equality impact

It is believed that the basis of the scheme (bringing vulnerable refugees straight from the countries surrounding Syria to resettle in the UK), settling them in specific locations that, as far as possible, reflect their needs and, further, the way the scheme operates in Kent to assess and meet individual needs (many of which are based on the protected characteristics) means that the equality needs of individual are met in as thorough way as possible. The service specification being developed for the commissioning exercise takes account of these needs, experience to date managing the scheme and consultation with refugees and partners. The adverse impact is therefore assessed as nil with the potential for a high positive impact. However, the situation will be constantly monitored and reviewed as the scheme develops.

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Adverse Equality Impact Rating: None

Attestation

I have read and paid due regard to the Equality Analysis/Impact Assessment concerning the proposals for the Refugee Resettlement Scheme in Kent, including the external commissioning of the support provision. I agree with the risk rating and the actions to mitigate any adverse impacts that have been identified.

Head of Service

Signed:

Name: David Whittle

Job Title: Director Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance

Date:

CMT Member

Signed:

Name: Matt Dunkley

Job Title: Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

Date:

Part 1 Screening

Could this policy, procedure, project or service, or any proposed changes to it, affect any Protected Group (listed below) less favourably (negatively) than others in Kent?

Could this policy, procedure, project or service promote equal opportunities for this group?

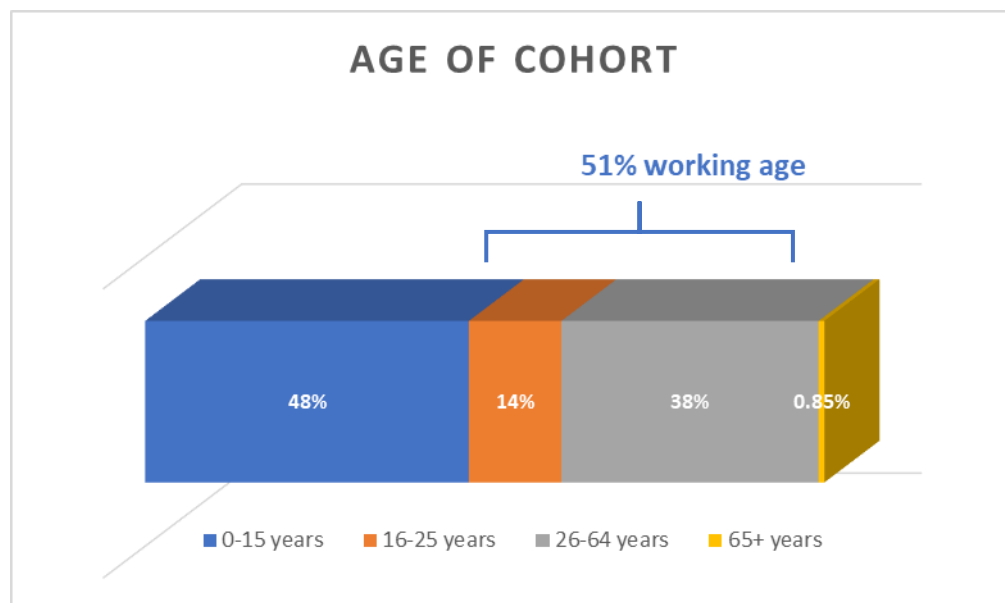
Protected Group	Please provide a <u>brief</u> commentary on your findings. Fuller analysis should be undertaken in Part 2. (See below for commentary)			
	High negative impact	Medium negative impact	Low negative impact	High/Medium/Low Positive Impact
Age				Medium/high
Disability				Medium/high
Sex				Medium
Gender identity/ Transgender				Medium/High
Race				Low
Religion and Belief				Low
Sexual Orientation				Medium/High
Pregnancy and Maternity				Medium
Marriage and Civil Partnerships				Nil/Low
Carer's Responsibilities				Medium/high

Summary Commentary

Because of the ongoing conflict in Syria and the precarious existence of refugees in the surrounding countries (where they have sought refuge) very many of the needs of refugees are not being met prior to their arrival in the UK, including those based on the Protected Group characteristics. Therefore, being relocated to the UK under one of the official Government resettlement schemes dramatically improves both the assessment and the meeting of these needs. This is true of all the protected characteristics. Great efforts are made between the Government Resettlement Team, KCC and the housing authorities (in liaison with Health and other partners in Kent) to ensure that refugees are placed in the most suitable location for their specific needs. Once they have arrived a further assessment of needs is carried out and every effort is made to meet these needs, using statutory, private sector and voluntary sector agencies.

Age – medium/high positive

The age breakdown of the families that have been resettled as at September 2019 is shown below.



The above breakdown indicates that access to education and employment are two of the factors that would matter most to the families, with the needs of elderly relatives, albeit a smaller number, also important. These needs are taken fully into account in the services and support that are provided to the refugees. For example, school age children are able to access education, whereas their previous experience prior to arrival may have led to gaps in schooling, with some young people having had to work to support their family. Great emphasis is placed on helping adult refugees learn English and access support to gain employment and the specification places a high expectation on providers in this regard. The age related needs of elderly refugees are

addressed, for example by adaptations to the home, referrals to health and social care, home English tuition where necessary (helping individuals access classes outside the home being preferable where possible to reduce isolation).

Disability – medium/high positive

A significant number of refugees (about 10%) have physical and mental health needs that meet the threshold to be classed as a disability, although many more have some health problems, often associated with the conflict in Syria. A lot of information is provided to the local authority about these needs prior to arrival and therefore referrals for appropriate support are able to take place immediately a family arrives. Interpreters are provided either by the scheme or the NHS/other services and individuals are supported by their key worker. Individuals are supported to access Disability benefits where appropriate, including help with appeals should this be required.

In terms of physical disabilities, pre-arrival information enables appropriate properties to be sourced (e.g. level access) and, where appropriate, adaptations can be made using funds from the scheme. Examples include stairlifts, downstairs bathroom, wheelchair access.

The biggest challenge concerns mental health. All the refugees have experienced traumatic events and displacement and a significant number are psychologically affected by these experiences. Only a small number receive psychological support before arriving in the UK. The scheme aims to refer individuals to appropriate services (e.g. Educational psychology, GPs, community mental health services) where required and to build a relationship between individuals and key workers such that help will be requested where needed. However, this is a difficult issue, exacerbated by the cultural attitudes to mental health and the reluctance to accept support. The specification requires providers to constantly monitor and regularly review these needs and to ensure that any response is adaptable to individual preferences.

Sex – medium positive

The available information as at September 2019 shows that the split between male and female is almost even standing at 50.2% and 49.8% respectively. The scheme operates in a way that, whilst taking into account cultural expectations, provides opportunities for both male and female refugees. For example, help is provided to access childcare so that both parents can attend English classes. Where necessary English language tuition is provided in the home, although this can be challenging due to the shortage of tutors. Much help is also provided by volunteers with English language in the home and other informal settings.

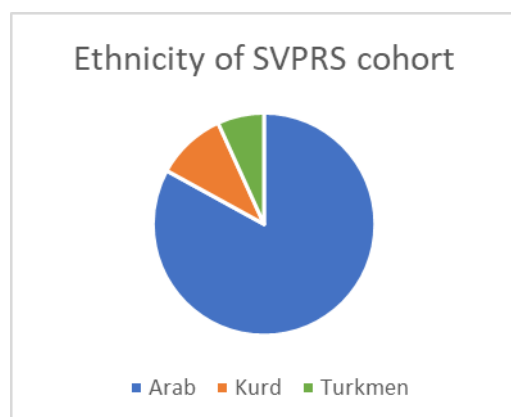
Where necessary, specific cultural needs associated with being female are taken into account when arranging services, for example requests to see female only health professionals.

Gender identity/ Transgender – medium/high positive

Although to date, the issue has not arisen, there is the potential for a high positive impact in terms of gender identity/transgender due to the great difference in societal attitudes between the area of origin and the UK. The specification the providers will be working to makes it clear that key workers should attempt to develop a good relationship with all members of a refugee family so that individuals feel more able to raise issues of this sort. Providers are expected to uphold strongly the principles of confidentiality with regard to information revealed to them and to arrange, where requested, further support for individuals. Further, as part of cultural orientation, providers are expected to ensure all families are aware of the law and societal attitudes to such issues.

Race – low positive

The ethnicity of the Syrian refugees currently resettled in Kent is shown in the diagram below. As can be seen the overwhelming majority are Arab, with others being Kurds or Turkmen.



The specification the providers work to expects them to develop an understanding of the different needs of the above groups and to adjust services where necessary. To date this has mostly concerned the provision of interpreters. Arabic is the main language of Syrians but those from a Kurdish or Turkmen background often have a different language as their main, first language and it cannot be assumed that they can understand Arabic.

Related to the above, the provision of English language training is seen as the crucial factor in enabling integration and the better meeting of needs. The specification the providers are now working to contains the requirement to facilitate up to 16 hours a week of English language teaching until individuals reach Entry level 3 proficiency. This is double the minimum Government

requirement of 8 hours. Provision in the home for those unable to access formal classes is also arranged where possible, often with significant support from voluntary organisations.

Within Kent those identifying as “Arab” comprise only 0.1% of the population, with Kurds and Turkmen are even lower, unspecified percentage (2011 Census). Refugee families may therefore feel themselves very much in a minority and providers are expected to facilitate both interaction with others of similar background and people from other ethnic backgrounds in order to foster good relations and improve community cohesion.

When placing families, the scheme also aims to take into account existing community tensions and monitors this for individual families once they have arrived. A few individuals have experienced harassment possibly based on race or religion and the providers assist the families in reporting this to the police and taking other appropriate steps (e.g. automatic sensor lights and in one case a camera being installed at the front door).

Religion and Belief – low positive

Currently 98% of the resettled families are nominally Sunni Muslims and the scheme takes great care to take into account their needs (e.g. in relation to places of worship, halal food, prayer times, requests for female professionals in certain contexts). However, it is the case that being resettled in Kent, an area where Muslims are a minority (just less than 1% of the population of Kent), may mean that certain facilities are not as readily available as in the countries the families have been resettled from. Further, wider societal understanding of Islam and the willingness of people and organisations to adapt (e.g. during Ramadan) will be much less than they are used to before resettling in the UK. The providers are expected to work with the families to firstly understand their religious needs (which do vary greatly from family to family) and to address these where possible. This starts at the pre-arrival stage where, for example, information from families on the importance of being housed near a mosque, enables an appropriate location to be found if required and possible.

Once they are settled into their new home, discussions are had with the family about their religious/cultural needs and every effort made to accommodate these, where reasonable and possible. For example, they are shown where the nearest Mosque is and where to purchase halal food. Depending on their views and, where this is possible/reasonable, appointments will be organised in order not to clash with Friday Mosque attendance. If adherence to daily prayers is important this will be accommodated where possible.

Assistance and encouragement is provided to families (from both the official scheme and local voluntary groups) to facilitate social gatherings with other families with the same cultural background and also to meet and get to know people from other backgrounds, particularly from the many voluntary organisations set up to support refugees. English language classes enable

people to mix both with people from their own religion and other groups for whom English is not their first language. Employment and voluntary work in the community is also encouraged. In this way good relations are fostered between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not, thus helping to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

It is recognised that some individuals may be impacted by issues arising from the combination of several protected characteristics, for example, sex, religion and race.

Providers are expected to continually develop their understanding of the religious and wider cultural needs of the families they are supporting, for example by attending cultural awareness sessions put on by resettlement agencies and by regularly consulting the families they are supporting.

Sexual orientation – medium/high positive

Although to date, the issue has not arisen, there is the potential for a high positive impact in terms of sexual orientation due to the great difference in societal attitudes between the area of origin and the UK. The specification the providers will be working to makes it clear that key workers should attempt to develop a good relationship with all members of a refugee family so that individuals feel more able to raise issues of this sort. Providers are expected to uphold strongly the principles of confidentiality with regard to information revealed to them and to arrange, where requested, further support for individuals. Further, as part of cultural orientation, providers are expected to ensure all families are aware of the law and societal attitudes to such issues.

Pregnancy and maternity – medium/high positive

Refugees are supported by the scheme to access appropriate health and social services in a way that is culturally appropriate. This includes access to contraception, sexual health services and vaccinations. Interpreters are provided plus additional support from key workers and volunteers. Where necessary, English language support (paid tutors or volunteers) will be arranged in the home for mothers unable to attend outside classes because of pregnancy and maternity.

In addition, as part of wider cultural orientation, providers are expected to facilitate education on the above issues for both female and male refugees, in single sex sessions where appropriate. It is recognised that more needs to be done in this regard and the specification providers will be bidding against makes this very clear.

Marriage and civil partnerships – nil/low positive

The marriage/civil partnership status of the refugees has no bearing on the support provided and no adverse impact has been identified in relation to this protected characteristic. The majority of families resettled in Kent comprise a

married couple and their children (including adult children) but there are a few single parent households and a few with an older grandparent also in the household.

The scheme may have a positive impact in that support can be provided to ensure single parents and other non-married adult refugees are not treated less favourably than married couples. In addition, support would be given to assist individuals going through relationship problems, for example by referring to counselling services and providing interpreting.

Carer responsibilities – low/medium positive

Resettled family members with caring responsibilities would be identified during the multi-agency assessment, this in turn would inform the support plans developed by the service providers. Once settled in the UK the scheme assists carers to access assistance to support their role. This can prove challenging as some carers and those cared for are reluctant to accept support from a non-family member, particularly where such support has been provided by the family member for many years. In some circumstances children and young people may have taken on the role of a carer or be expected to interpret for adult relatives. These issues will be addressed with families, with the involvement of health and social care professionals and specialist voluntary agencies where appropriate. Interpreters will be provided, thus reducing the need for family members to assist in this regard. Cases where support is declined will be constantly monitored and revisited.

Part 2

Equality Analysis /Impact Assessment

Protected groups

The actual changes to the support provision that will be brought about by the proposed commissioning exercise are only expected to have a positive impact. Every effort will be made in the service specification to take into account needs based on the protected characteristics. Further, the monitoring and review process (which will continue to be carried out by KCC and which includes meetings with the resettled families) will ensure that the issue is under constant review. Changes will be made where required.

Information and Data used to carry out your assessment

The sources of data used to carry out this assessment include:

- Detailed information on each refugee provided pre-arrival and collected afterwards following thorough assessments and review meetings.
- Statistics on the refugees already settled in Kent – age, sex, disability, health, ethnic group, pregnancy, marriage, caring responsibilities.

- Information from Government and other sources about the situation in the areas of origin for the refugees.
- Statistical information derived from the last UK Census – see link below <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/Facts-and-figures-about-Kent/equality-and-diversity-data#tab-5>
- There is a potential gap around sexual orientation and transgender due to attitudes in the cohort of refugees being resettled (i.e. the scheme may not be aware of these issues in relation to individuals).
- There is also a potential gap around disability/health issues due to mental health issues not always being revealed or identified.

Who have you involved consulted and engaged?

- Refugees currently settled in Kent under the scheme (in groups and individually)
- Syrians in the UK other than those resettled under Government schemes
- Current support providers
- Voluntary sector groups
- Government and UN agencies

What did your stakeholders, including protected groups tell you?

In general the feedback we have received is that needs are being met much more fully than in either the country of origin (Syria) or in the countries the refugees initially sought refuge in and from where they were resettled (Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq).

The main issue of concern for the refugees is the desire to learn English as quickly as possible, the problems with communication whilst their English is insufficient, the low income they experience whilst on benefits, the difficulty in finding employment and the time sometimes taken for NHS referrals to come through.

With regard to religion, views and expectations differ, often quite markedly. For example, some people like to be located near a Mosque, but many others are happy to pray at home and attend a Mosque only occasionally or not at all. Some appreciate the ability to stop for one of the five daily prayers at the appropriate time, whilst others would not expect (or even want) activities to be interrupted in this way. Some female refugees prefer to only deal with female medical practitioners, but others are not concerned by this. This highlights the need for an individual assessment of all needs and tailored support to meet these needs.

Other feedback (from all stakeholders) confirms the need for very intensive support in the first year in order to facilitate quicker integration and independence in the long run, and for the need for providers to be very

flexible in the support they are able to offer. Other feedback includes the need for more intensive work on cultural orientation, preferably in group sessions.

JUDGEMENT

- **No major change** - no potential for discrimination and opportunities to promote equality have been taken. However, this will be constantly monitored and reviewed and reassessed including before the service specification is finalised.

Please forward a final signed electronic copy and Word version to the Equality Team by emailing diversityinfo@kent.gov.uk

If the activity will be subject to a Cabinet decision, the EqIA must be submitted to committee services along with the relevant Cabinet report. Your EqIA should also be published .

The original signed hard copy and electronic copy should be kept with your team for audit purposes.