

Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS)



Information for Schools



www.eani.org.uk/ies





What is the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme?

The VPR scheme prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence.⁷

If accepted under the scheme, individuals will be granted five years humanitarian protection status, access to employment and public funds and rights to family reunion comparable to other refugees. At the end of five years, if individuals are not able to return to Syria they may be eligible to apply for resettlement in the UK.⁵

The programme is only open to Syrian refugees registered in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey. It does not involve the relocation of refugees who have arrived from other EU countries.

- The Syrian refugees coming to Northern Ireland will be resettled under the Government's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS).
- The Northern Ireland Executive offered to receive groups on a phased basis from early 2016.
- As of December 2019 24 groups of families had arrived via the VPRS. The scheme was due to end in April 2020 with Group 26, but is likely to be extended until April 2021.

How does the VPRS programme work?

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees assesses applications from refugees in countries bordering Syria. The Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme identifies vulnerable groups who will be given priority. Current priority groups are refugees who:

- have medical needs;
- have survived violence and torture;
- are women at risk;
- are children in a situation that makes them particularly vulnerable;
- have legal or physical protection needs;
- do not have local integration prospects; or
- are elderly in a situation that makes them particularly vulnerable

Persons admitted under the VPRS are entitled to:

- access to public funds
- entitlement to work
- housing benefit
- healthcare
- admittance to school
- an integration loan: an interest free loan that covers rent, household items education and training for work
- family reunion – certain family members can apply to resettle with the person granted humanitarian protection
- permanent settlement in the UK (if they cannot return home after five years)
- freedom of movement and the right to resettle within the UK

NB: A visa must be obtained if travelling outside the UK. Travelling to the Republic of Ireland on a school trip would require a travel visa for the pupil.



The School System in Syria

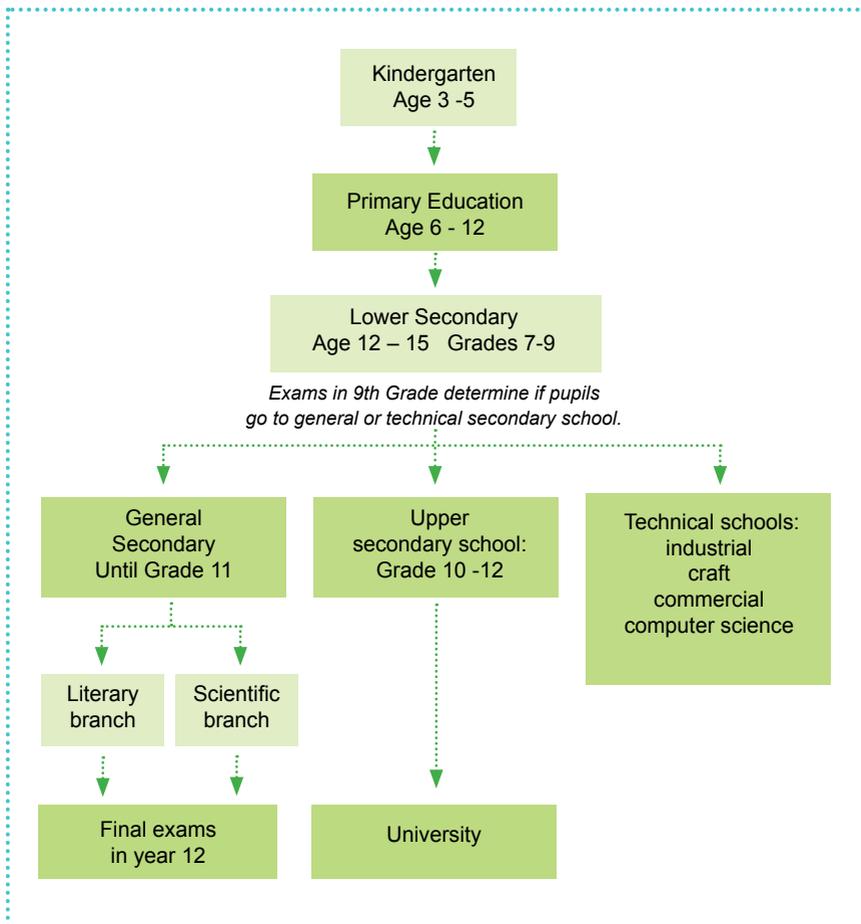
Education is compulsory and free for Grades 1-6.

Subjects are taught in standard Arabic.

English and French are taught as second languages from grade 1.

Exams in the 9th grade will determine if the pupils go to 'general' secondary school or 'technical' secondary school.

Children coming from refugee camps may not have had the opportunity to participate or complete their education.



It is vital to find out about the educational background of Newcomer pupils and to discuss aspirations: Had they not left their home country, what would they have hoped to achieve from their education? It is important to offer the opportunity to fulfil these aspirations in the new country, as far as possible.

It is also very important to explain the school system in NI, as this will be culturally unfamiliar. Ages for starting school, transferring from primary to post-primary and possibly from junior to senior high school will probably be different. It is also important to explain that there are various pathways into university from all post-primary schools. Choices for post-primary end of KS3 and KS4 can be particularly confusing. It is important that parents and their children understand the choices and consequences, for example, that some choices offer a vocational route and others a more academic route. For end of KS3 and KS4 choices, it is important to consider whether or not more or less text based subjects will be accessible to Newcomer pupils.



Culture and Society

Syria is a diverse country, both ethnically and religiously. Most Syrians are ethnic Arab and follow the Sunni branch of Islam, but there are also ethnic and religious minorities such as ethnic Kurds, Christian Arabs and Jewish Arabs.

Syrian life centres on the extended family and usually the father or grandfather has the ultimate authority in the house. It is also the norm for several families or generations to live together in the same house.

Children are highly valued and are seen as a blessing from God.

Syrian names are based on the child's first name followed by the father's first name (used as middle name). The family name or surname is usually the paternal grandfather's family name.

Religion

90% of the Syrian population follow the Islamic faith with 10% Orthodox Christian. Islam originated over 1,300 years ago in modern-day Saudi Arabia.

A Muslim is someone who submits to the will of Allah (God). Muslims follow the five basic duties reflected in the Five Pillars of Islam.

The Qur'an (Koran) is the holy book of the Islamic faith. It is believed to be a record of the exact words that Allah delivered to the Prophet Muhammad by the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) over 1,300 years ago. The Qur'an is written in Arabic.

The most important day of the week is Friday, when Muslims gather to pray in the mosque led by a religious leader called an *Imam*.

The Five Pillars

1. **The profession of Islam faith** or **shahada**
2. **Daily prayer** or **salat**
3. The giving of alms to the poor or **zakat**
4. **Fasting** during **Ramadan** (ninth Islamic month) or **sawm**
5. **Pilgrimage** to **Mecca** or **Hajj**

Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Some Muslim pupils may practise fasting (Sawm in Arabic) during the month of Ramadan. The month of Ramadan changes each year because Muslims follow the lunar calendar.

The date for Ramadan 2020 in United Kingdom will begin in the evening of Thursday 23rd April and ends in the evening of Saturday 23rd May.

Eid al Fitr 2020 will begin in the evening of Saturday 23rd May and ends in the evening of Sunday 24th May

Muslims can participate in the fast from the age of 12-14. Fasting during Ramadan means that Muslims will not eat or drink anything, including water during daylight hours. As Ramadan may fall during exams time, staff should be made aware of the pupils who are fasting. You may wish to discuss the exam timetable with parents and, if necessary, the possibility of deferring the fast until after the exam period. Some families or individuals may choose not to fast during Ramadan. It is important to ask whether or not the pupils are expected to fast.



The Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church is one of the three main Christian groups (the others being Roman Catholic and Protestant). Around 200 million people follow the Orthodox tradition in Syria. The Holy book of the Orthodox Church is the Bible – The Old and New Testaments.

The word ‘Orthodox’ takes its meaning from the Greek words orthos (‘right’) and doxa (‘belief’). Hence the word Orthodox means correct belief or right thinking.

Orthodox Beliefs and Practice

The Scriptures - Orthodox Christians believe the Holy Scriptures are of equal value and importance.

Baptism - Orthodox Christians believe in baptism. The Orthodox Church practices baptism by full immersion.

Eucharist - Orthodox Churches believe that the Eucharist, the bread and wine are objectively changed and become in a real sense the Body and Blood of Christ.

Jesus Christ - Orthodox Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He died, resurrected and ascended to heaven. He will return.

Mary - Orthodox Christians believe Mary has supreme grace and is to be highly honoured. They do not accept the Immaculate Conception.

Saints - Orthodox Christians regard and worship saints.

The Trinity - Orthodox Christians believe in God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit as distinct and equal.

The intercultural resource “Ways of Seeing II” is available from the Intercultural Education Service and provides lesson plans and resources for teachers and students to develop their understanding of World Faiths. It will enable all members of the school community to develop their knowledge and understanding of the Islamic and other faiths.

Areas for Consideration

Trauma

Syrian refugees have overcome great obstacles and adversity in their journey. They have faced delays and prolonged time periods in refugee camps which have resulted in interrupted education, poor healthcare and emotional trauma.

The following are common behaviours manifested by children from a refugee background who have experienced trauma⁹:

- difficulty in concentrating and completing tasks
- avoidance of particular activities or situations
- tiredness because of lack of sleep
- irritability or hyper-alertness

Adjustment Process

It is common for new arrivals to go through four stages of adjustment¹⁰:

1. Honeymoon: the refugee family may be quite excited and hopeful about what to expect, happy to be out of immediate danger.
2. Culture Shock: individuals begin to understand that the adjustment will be difficult. This period may be marked by anger and frustration, or depression and withdrawal.
3. Initial adjustment: the refugee may take more measured and realistic steps towards adjusting to life in the new culture. Learning English is key in helping this process.
4. Integration: the refugee family feels part of the larger society, able to meet the various demands of life.

School-Home Communication

Refugee parents might have limited or no ability to speak English. They will also be unfamiliar with the N.I school culture: the routines; the uniform; the food; homework. It is important to establish approaches to communicate effectively between the school and the home. For example, schools can use pre-translated sample letters available from the Intercultural Education Service and are entitled to interpreters for parent-teacher meetings.

See the advice on the IES website: www.eani.org.uk/ies

A few things to consider when communicating information to Syrian parents:

- Provide parents with translated materials or written in simple English or with visuals.
- Remember that, although parents may speak Arabic fluently, they may not be able to read it.
- Simplify your language, avoid jargon and use gestures to explain where necessary.

Vaccinations

As some vaccines may contain pork substances, it is advisable to discuss options with the school nurse and parents. Some parents may be very reluctant to give permission for school vaccinations.

Visits to churches and religious celebrations

Permission should be sought from Syrian parents if your school is planning a visit to a church. Some parents might not want their children to take part in such visits or in celebrations within school such as Christmas plays and assemblies. The general advice is to always ask!

School Dinners

VPRS pupils in Northern Ireland are entitled to free school meals.

If the pupils are of the Islamic faith it is important that the school consider the food available in the canteen. Will the school offer Halal food or a greater choice of vegetarian food? **Halal** - is meat that Muslims are allowed to eat according to Islamic law. The laws require that only certain types of meat can be eaten and that meat must be prepared in a certain way.

Meat from pigs is not allowed, so there is no such thing as Halal pork and Halal meat must never come into contact with pig meat.

Muslims should not consume any kind of alcohol therefore Halal food cannot be prepared with alcohol (or other intoxicants) or include alcohol in sauces.

It is important that Halal food is not prepared with non-Halal food as there is a risk of cross contamination.

No gelling agent ingredients (Gelatine from pork) should be used but gelatine derived from vegetables is acceptable.

Orthodox denominations traditionally observe a meat-free day, especially during Lent.

School uniform

Pupils in Northern Ireland as part of the VPRS are entitled to school uniform grants.

It is important to explain the reason for the school uniform as this may be culturally unfamiliar to Newcomer parents. As some Muslim women may choose to cover their head, arms and legs, it is important to discuss the following for Muslim girls:

- a veil (Hijab) – you may wish to suggest a colour that matches the school uniform
- trousers or a long skirt to cover the legs
- suitable alternatives to the PE uniform
- the importance of swimming lessons as part of the PE curriculum. An alternative swimming costume, covering arms and legs, might be preferred by some parents.



Prayer

It is important to consider accommodation for Muslim pupils who wish to pray during the day.

The Early Morning Prayer – This will take place before school.

The Noon Prayer - This prayer may be offered any time after 12.00.

The Mid-Afternoon Prayer - This may begin after school.

The sunset Prayer - This prayer begins immediately after sunset.

The Evening Prayer - This starts 1 and a half hour after sunset prayer

The only time that pupils may need to pray at school will be **the Noon Prayer which may be offered any time between 12.00 and 3.30**. Choice of when to pray during this time is decided by the individual.

Buddies / Mentors

Some Muslim pupils may prefer to have a buddy or mentor of the same gender.

Curriculum

Some areas of the curriculum may be unfamiliar to Newcomer pupils. It is important to explain the curriculum carefully and to find out about previous schooling and whether or not pupils are literate in their home language. If possible, a reduced curriculum may be useful, particularly in post-primary. Avoiding text-heavy subjects is also worth some consideration. Newcomer pupils in post-primary often do very well in languages because they are already learning an additional language (English) and may be able to communicate in several languages. The language lesson is the one lesson where they are working on a par with peers as all are learning the language. If possible, consider offering the opportunity to study for a qualification in the home language. The Intercultural Education Service has a list of qualifications in home languages and the examination boards that offer these.

The Intercultural Education Service can also offer advice and support for curriculum access.

According to information from the Popularity and Participation and Sports in the Middle East and North Africa 2011, the **most popular sports in Syria** are as follows:

- football (soccer)
- basketball
- motor sports - (a student interested in this sport may be interested in motor vehicle and road user studies)
- swimming
- athletics

Boxing and volleyball were ranked the 9th and 10th most popular sports. Consider the possibility of offering some of these subjects / sports either through the curriculum or through clubs in the school or in the local community. Clubs offer an excellent opportunity for Newcomer pupils to get to know other pupils in a social context and to improve their English.



Parent/teacher meetings

It is important to ensure that at least one female and one male member of staff is available during individual parent teacher meetings, especially if the mother is attending the interview on her own. To avoid any uncomfortable situations it may be preferable that male members of staff do not offer to shake hands with a woman of the Islamic faith and that female members of staff do not shake hands with men who follow the Islamic faith.

An acceptable method of acknowledging each other is to put your right hand on your heart and give a small nod of the head.

If it is necessary for a member of staff to go on a home visit please be aware that it may be necessary to take your shoes off in the hallway. Shoes already in the hallway are a good indication that this is the custom in a particular home.

When meeting with pupils and parents for the first time we would suggest that the Intercultural Education Service data capture form is used during the initial interview. This sheet offers suggested questions that the school may ask parents and pupils during the interview to develop a greater understanding of educational experiences and aspirations as mentioned earlier.

Guidance regarding initial meetings and parent-teacher meetings throughout the year may be found in the Primary Toolkit for Diversity, pages 17-23 and 127. The templates mentioned on these pages may be found on Equella. Guidance for post-primary may be found in the Toolkit for Diversity in the Post-Primary school, pages 11 - 14.

The Intercultural Education Service also offer an Interpreting service and user guidelines are available through this link:

www.eani.org.uk/ies

Support from the Intercultural Education Service

The Intercultural Education Service (IES) provides advice and support for schools in the following areas:

- Developing an intercultural ethos in the school
- Welcome procedures for Newcomer families
- Assessment and planning (monitoring Newcomer pupils' progress and planning for language learning)
- Curriculum access
- Exam preparation

The IES has many templates and resources that are freely available to schools to help provide for the needs of Newcomer pupils in each of the above areas. If an IES officer is already working in your school, he/she can advise you. If not, you can request a visit for support from the Intercultural Education Service by contacting the Helpdesk on 028 9448 2210 and an officer will be assigned to your school.

The following resources are available through 'Equella' which is on the C2K 'My School' dashboard in schools:

- translated letters and guidelines about school policies
- documents outlining features of different languages
- resources to help schools to develop pupils' intercultural competence
- 4 toolkits providing advice on all areas of provision for Newcomer pupils in various settings
- documents to assist staff to monitor and plan for language learning
- benchmarking kits for English and Maths



Glossary

An asylum-seeker is someone who has asked the Government for refugee status and is waiting to hear the outcome of their application. They are allowed to stay whilst they are waiting. They are not allowed to work and often have very little money to live on.

A refugee is a person who ‘...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...’. Someone with refugee status has leave to remain and the right to work or to claim benefits.

An unaccompanied child is under 18 years of age, separated from both parents and without any adult care. They may stay with extended family members, be placed with a foster family or be put in a children’s home.

A displaced person is someone who has been forced to leave their job and home often due to armed conflict. Natural disasters, famine, development and economic changes may also be a cause of displacement.

A migrant is someone who has moved to another country for many different reasons. Economic migrants move to find work or better living conditions.

A newcomer pupil is a pupil who does not yet have the language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher.



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6. Home Office National Audit Office - The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme 2016
7. Department for communities 'Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme 2017
8. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs
9. "PTSD in Children and Adolescents" and "Survivors of Natural Disasters and Mass Violence," National Centre for PTSD, August 11, 2009
10. "Cultural adjustment, Mental Health, and ESL: The Refugee Experience, The Role of the Teacher and ESL activities", Adkins, Birdman and Sample; Spring Institute 1999.

Photographs:

Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan, 20 August 2013, 10:11:30, Flickr, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Russell Watkins/Department for International Development, 28 August 2013, 07:44, Refugee children from Syria at a clinic in Ramtha, northern Jordan, DFID - UK Department for International Development

Russell Watkins/Department for International Development, 8 July 2014, 11:39 Working together to help Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, DFID - UK Department for International Development

Russell Watkins/Department for International Development, 5 November 2013, 14:47, Muhanad and Ahmad, refugees from Syria in school in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, DFID - UK Department for International Development



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