



## Key messages on Syrian Humanitarian Crisis

January 2015

### Syria & Iraq

This briefing provides important background information, advice and guidance on safe ways to support Syrian people during the current humanitarian crisis.

### Contents

1. Introduction
2. Key messages
3. Risks to travel
4. Why people may wish to travel to Syria or Iraq
5. Support to Families regarding missing persons who may have travelled to Syria
6. How can individuals help?
7. Syria Crisis Charities

#### 1. Introduction

The humanitarian crisis in Syria has inspired many people within the UK to contribute to the aid effort, and in some cases to travel to Syria, either to help deliver aid or to support the rebels. British people can help by fundraising and donating their time to registered charities, however the UK Government strongly advises against travel to Syria.

#### 2. Key messages

The whole of Syria is unsafe. The UK advises against all travel to Syria. Anyone who does travel is putting themselves in considerable danger.

The UK Government is donating £600m alleviate human suffering in Syria and the region this is the largest total sum the UK has ever committed to a single crisis.

Visitors to Syria only add to the burden on limited resources and make life harder for ordinary Syrians. The quickest, most effective way to help the Syrian people is by contributing to a registered charity in the UK. A number of well established UK charities with experience in providing humanitarian assistance in high risk, insecure and dangerous environments are running campaigns to alleviate the crisis in Syria.

#### 3. Risks to travel

## **Syria is unsafe**

Individuals may wish to help the Syrian people by travelling there to be part of the humanitarian aid effort. However, anyone who does travel is putting themselves in considerable danger - the whole of Syria is unsafe. Groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Al Nusrah Front (ANF) are now able to operate in the large areas of ungoverned space that have been created by the conflict.

There is a risk that UK nationals who travel to Syria may be kidnapped. They could also come into contact with groups that are in Syria to promote violence and extremism, and it might be very difficult to avoid involvement in their activities. Terrorist groups attack opposition members as often as they attack the Assad regime. Humanitarian and medical workers are also seen as legitimate targets by terrorist groups and have been killed.

The FCO advises against all travel to Syria and says that British nationals in Syria should leave now by any practical means. The FCO is not able to provide consular services, and won't be able to help with evacuation from the country. The FCO also advises against all travel to the towns of Akcakale and Ceylanpinar and against all but essential travel to areas within 10km of Turkey's border with Syria.

## **Other risks to travel**

Would-be travellers should be aware that in June 2013, the Syrian government issued a new law stating that individuals who enter Syrian territories illegally will be punished by a prison sentence of 5 to 10 years and/or a fine of 5 to 10 million Syrian pounds (approximately £20-40,000).

On a practical level, the availability of medical support is very limited throughout the country, and there are regular disruptions to phone, internet, electricity and road networks. In addition, people face difficulties accessing cash.

The experience of traumatic events, the kind of which are seen in theatres of war, has meant that some people are returning home from Syria with severe mental health problems such as post traumatic stress disorder.

## **4. Why people may wish to travel to Syria**

There is a range of reasons why UK nationals may feel the need to travel to Syria, including taking part in humanitarian efforts and supporting opposition groups. Those who travel to Syria often have the support and endorsement of friends and family, whatever their motivation.

### **Humanitarian concern**

A major reason for travel is humanitarian concern. People have seen the suffering of millions of ordinary Syrians in the media over the last two years and feel compelled to help. A lack of awareness of what the UK is doing in terms of aid, and of suitable means of supporting charitable efforts from home may increase the desire to travel.

### **British fighters**

Syria is now the number one destination for jihadists anywhere in the world. It is believed that the number of UK-linked individuals fighting in Syria is in the low hundreds. The concern at

UK Government level is that individuals who may have been trained in Syria may seek to carry out attacks against the West. Those who have travelled to Syria – even with humanitarian motives – may return radicalised. Anyone who becomes involved with fighting in Syria could be prosecuted under UK law on their return.

The UK Government does not want to criminalise genuine humanitarian efforts. Therefore it is advising communities that the best way to help Syrians is to donate or volunteer with UK registered charities that have ongoing relief operations – not to travel.

## **5. Support to Families regarding missing persons who may have travelled to Syria**

**If you come into contact with individual/s who have concerns that a family member or friend may have travelled to Syria for any reason what should you do?** If the person is under 18 this would be considered a Safeguarding/Child Protection matter or missing persons report. As a result of their age the young person would be considered vulnerable therefore it is essential that details of the missing young person/s are reported immediately to the Police by dialing either 101 or 999 (in the case of emergency). The Police will investigate and liaise with Haringey's Children and Young People's Service 'First Response' Team who will provide support and advice to the family in conjunction with the Community Safety Team.

For further information on Safeguarding and Child Protection contact the First Response Team on 020 8489 4592 / 5652 / 5762 / 4582 during office hours (Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5pm; Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm) 020 8489 0000 Out of Office hours (including weekends)

### **In the case of an adult e.g. over the age of 18**

If the individual is considered to be 'vulnerable' e.g. *any adult over the age of 18 "who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation"*. Details of this person should be reported immediately to the Police by dialing 101 or 999 (in case of emergency). The Police will liaise with Haringey's Safeguarding Adult's Team who will provide support and advice to the family and individual concerned in conjunction with the councils Community Safety Team.

For further information on support to vulnerable adults Haringey's Safeguarding Adults Team can be contacted on the following numbers Safeguarding Adults Referral and Advice Line on 020 8489 1400 (office hours) or 020 8489 0000 (out of hours).

If the individual/s is not vulnerable you can still report the incident to the Police using the numbers above or at your local Police station. Alternatively you can contact The Senior Community Safety Officer on 0208 489 3884 who can sign post to most appropriate support agencies.

## **6. How can individuals help support Syrian People?**

The quickest, most effective way to help the Syrian people is by contributing to a registered charity in the UK. A number of well established UK charities with experience in providing humanitarian assistance in high risk, insecure and dangerous environments are running campaigns to alleviate the crisis in Syria.

A lot is also happening in local communities, including fundraising, sponsorship and awareness-raising. The Charity Commission website should be checked to ensure a charity is registered with them. If a charity isn't registered, it is not possible to be sure donations will be used as intended. The Charity Commission strongly advises against transporting money in person.

## 7. SYRIA CRISIS CHARITIES

### Charities Providing Humanitarian Support in the Syrian Crisis

**Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)** brings 14 leading UK aid charities together in times of crisis: Action Aid, Age International, British Red Cross, CAFOD, Care International, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Islamic Relief, Merlin, Oxfam, Plan UK, Save the Children, Tearfund and World Vision; all collectively raising money to reach those in need quickly.

DEC launched its Syria Crisis Appeal in March 2013 to provide aid such as food, clean water, emergency shelter and medical care. [www.dec.org.uk](http://www.dec.org.uk)

Refugees will rely on a **UNHCR** (UN High Commission for Refugees) assistance programme in the region to survive the winter. The UNHCR has been able to provide life saving shelter, blankets and hygiene kits, as well as mattresses and basic domestic items to families in need. <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/>

**UNICEF UK** is working in Syria and the surrounding countries to provide children with clean water, food and medical care. It has given more than 10 million people access to safe water and provided psychological support for nearly 470,000 children. <http://www.unicef.org.uk/>

**Save the Children** teams have so far helped 600,000 refugee children and family members including 230,000 children and family members inside Syria with food, safe water, medicine, and shelter. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/>

**Islamic Relief** is distributing food and medicines deep inside Syria, and helping hundreds of thousands of refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. Islamic Relief provided assistance to 1.1 million Syrians in 2012 and over a million people in 2013. <http://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/>

The **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** has been providing humanitarian support in Syria and the region including healthcare, emergency relief, and livelihoods support. <http://www.ifrc.org/en/>

**Hand in Hand for Syria** is a UK registered charity that was established in 2011 at the start of the Syrian uprising. It is a non-political organisation funded by individual donations. Its aim is to provide medical and humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the uprising in Syria; this includes people still inside Syria as well as those who have fled to neighbouring countries. [www.handinhandforsyria.org.uk](http://www.handinhandforsyria.org.uk)

**Syria Relief** is a non-political, non-denominational, non-governmental organisation, set up to co-ordinate a number of charitable activities that are taking place in the UK. It provides help and support to Syrian families and individuals in need, in Syria and outside it, irrespective of religion, geographical location, or political persuasion. [www.syriarelieff.org.uk](http://www.syriarelieff.org.uk)

**Human Care Syria** is the working name of UK-registered NGO, Human Care Foundation

Worldwide, which delivers aid to affected communities in Syria and neighbouring countries. It was set up by members of the Syrian community in the United Kingdom in 2011. Since its establishment, it has worked to send food, medicine, and winter clothing to Syria. This aid is transported to Syria by a dedicated team of volunteers. Its mission is to deliver aid to those who need it most in an efficient and effective way. [www.humancaresyria.org](http://www.humancaresyria.org)

For more information on support on this matter you can contact:

Leon Joseph

**Senior Community Safety Policy Officer**

Tel: 0208 489 3884/Mobile: 07870 157 669

[leon.joseph@haringey.gov.uk](mailto:leon.joseph@haringey.gov.uk)