



Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

DECS Reference: MIN/0120832/20

7 October 2020

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 11 September to the Home Secretary on behalf of a number of your constituents regarding the migrant camps on the Aegean islands. I am replying as the Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts.

We were very concerned by the reports and images emerging from the Moria camp on the island of Lesbos following the devastating fire. We understand that the majority of the migrants affected have now been moved to a new temporary site in Kara Tepe and Greece has announced that migrants will be moved from this temporary site to a new purpose-built permanent facility by Easter 2021. We are working across government and with our Embassy in Greece to actively monitor the situation as it develops.

The UK and Greece have a strong relationship and we had already raised concerns about these conditions directly with Greek ministers and senior officials and will continue to do so when necessary. The UK is also responding to requests by the Greek Government to provide specific humanitarian goods and are urgently making plans for the delivery of these goods. We will work with our partners to ensure these supplies are fairly distributed and reach those most in need.

Protecting vulnerable children in particular remains a key priority of this Government and you will be aware of our proud record of doing so through our asylum system and our resettlement schemes. The UK has granted protection to over 44,000 children since 2010 and has done more than most EU countries to help vulnerable children. In 2019, the UK received 3,755 asylum applications from unaccompanied children. This means that the UK received more asylum applications from unaccompanied children in 2019 than any country in the EU and accounted for approximately 20% of all UASC claims made in the UK and the 27 EU Member States.

In July the Government announced it has successfully completed the transfer of 480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Greece, France and Italy under Section 67 of the 2016 Immigration Act – known as the ‘Dubs’ scheme. Under this commitment we transferred 110 unaccompanied children from Greece. Parliament was clear this was a one-off scheme which is now complete. We are pleased to see other countries are following our example and now stepping up to support Greece by taking in unaccompanied children, and we stand ready to offer advice and guidance to Member States who wish to develop their own schemes.

We remain fully committed to ensuring eligible individuals seeking asylum in Europe who have family members in the UK can continue to be transferred under the Dublin III Regulation until the end of the transition period. This commitment was clearly demonstrated on 11 May when, as a result of close cooperation between the UK and Greece, 50 asylum seekers arrived in the UK from Greece by plane in order to unite with family members who were already lawfully present in the UK. In 2019, 60% of transfers of unaccompanied children under the Dublin regulation came from Greece.

The UK remains open to receiving transfers into the UK under the Dublin III Regulation and remains fully committed to meeting our obligations under the Regulation. We continue to process Dublin cases as far as the current restrictions in place across Europe permit and remain in regular contact with sending Member States, including Greece, who are responsible for arranging transfers. We have also committed to continue to process transfer requests under the Dublin family reunion provisions which were received before the end of the transition period.

Furthermore, individuals who have been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK will continue to be able to be joined by family members under the refugee family reunion Rules as well as Part 8 and Appendix FM of the family Immigration Rules. These routes are unaffected by our exit from the EU.

The UK also continues to be one of the world's leading refugee resettlement states. Once we have delivered our current commitments under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, we will consolidate our main schemes into a new global UK Resettlement Scheme, starting in 2021. Our priority will be to continue to identify and resettle vulnerable refugees in need of protection, as identified and referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The UK has a proud record of providing protection to those who need it, and we will continue to do so in accordance with our international obligations. Thank you for rightly recognising the importance of this issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Philp', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chris Philp MP