

Syrian refugees: Highest proportion resettled in Northern Ireland

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A language class at All Saints College in Belfast

Northern Ireland has resettled proportionately more Syrian refugees than any other part of the UK.

The figure comes from analysis from the Migration Observatory at Oxford University.

It found that 0.08% of Northern Ireland's population is made up of refugees resettled from the conflict in Syria.

That is higher, as a share of population, than Scotland, Wales or any region of England.

In Scotland, the number of resettled refugees makes up 0.06% of the population.

In Wales, the figure is 0.04%, while the north east is the area of England with the highest share at 0.06% of the region's population.

The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) was announced by the UK government in 2015.

It aimed to resettle 20,000 refugees from the **conflict in Syria in the UK by 2020.**

The first group to come to Northern Ireland **arrived in December 2015.**



Anas is taking four A levels at All Saints College and plans to study biomedical sciences

By 17 October 2019, 1637 Syrian refugees had arrived in Northern Ireland under the VPRS scheme.

That is around 9% of the total settled in the whole of the UK under the scheme.

Belfast, Antrim and Newtownabbey Council and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council are the areas with the highest numbers of Syrian families.

English classes

According to the Department for Communities, almost half (46%) of those resettled in Northern Ireland under the scheme are children under the age of 18.

Many have suffered disruption to their education due to the Syrian conflict and have spent time in refugee camps.

Many also come to Northern Ireland knowing little or no English.

In west Belfast that has led to **the Full Service Community Network, Greater Falls Extended Schools and International House Belfast** combining to enable some staff in the area's schools to get an enhanced Certificate in English Language Teaching.

That helps them to help Syrian refugee and other newcomer children learn English more quickly and effectively.

Anas, who is taking four A-Levels at All Saints College, is one of the pupils to benefit.

"There were two bombs which hit my city so after that we travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan and we lived in a camp for three years," the 17-year-old told BBC News NI.

"Our life got hard and we wanted to go to somewhere better."

"We came to Northern Ireland in August 2016 and we really enjoy it here.

"Education is perfect and the schools are perfect, and we got a lot of help.

"The weather was a bit challenging but I'm used to the weather now."

He wants to go to university in Northern Ireland to study biomedical sciences.

His fellow A-Level student Rawan also wants to work in the health sector.



Her family fled Aleppo when the war in Syria began and she arrived in Belfast in 2016 having not been to school for three years.

"Everything changed and I started to go to school again," she said.

"The people were so nice and helpful.

"When I came here I was very nervous with no language and it's so, so hard, but they tried to make it easier for us.

"I remember my first week in school as it was so, so hard. But we had extra classes to learn English and the teachers were so nice as they kept talking with us even if we didn't understand.

"Now, it's a big change as I can understand and speak a lot compared to three years ago.

"Now I really like the weather too."

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