



Liverpool
City Council

Syria Returnees Considerations & Guidance

Background

Individuals who are repatriated to or have already returned to the UK from theatres of war, will have suffered adverse experiences, both in country and potentially as a consequence of any travel that they have undertaken or been forced to undertake.

The current March 21, experience of NGO's active in areas of conflict or of previous conflict, is that individuals who have spent time in Theatre, will have suffered considerable physical, emotional, educational and psychological damage. They will also have suffered significant trauma and have been exposed to extremist views.

It is estimated that circa. 900 UK citizens travelled to join the Caliphate, with an estimated 25% having been killed or have died, with an estimated half having already returned to the UK.

It is thought that over 11,000 people, from 62 different countries, travelled to join the Caliphate, 7,000 of which were believed to be women and children.

70% of people currently held in camps, in Syria and elsewhere are children. It is not known how many of this number are UK citizens.

Whilst the overwhelming political will, is to repatriate individuals when and wherever possible, all decisions are made on a case by case basis. The number of people having currently been repatriated is extremely small.

The appropriate sharing of information between partners is considered as the key to a successful outcome in this process.

There is a belief that appropriately Safeguarding vulnerable children who have suffered today, will preserve national security for tomorrow.

Home Office

The current Home Office advice and Government position is, that nobody should travel to Syria, this has been the governments advice since 2011.

Consular assistance is not legal right and is considered on a case by case basis.

The numbers of individuals having been repatriated to the UK, is currently extremely low.

Before any repatriation is considered, the Home Office must establish and confirm the true identity of any individual/s who are claiming that they are a British citizen. To do this the Home Office work in conjunction with partners to conduct numerous checks on those wanting to return to the UK.

There is currently, no ability to conduct the DNA testing of any individuals in country, as a consequence of the current security situation.

Repatriating individuals is an extremely resource intensive and costly undertaking, which often involves individuals being made wards of court, often requires parental consent and always involves attempts to identify suitable members of extended family in the UK with whom to place a returnee.

The Home Office currently has a contract with Tavistock Portman NHS Trust to provide assistance and support on a national basis, to families and returnees. This is a centrally funded resource and is currently based on the provision of assistance and support for approximately twenty families nationally.

It is not thought that all individuals returning to the UK from Theatre, will always be referred into PREVENT / Channel. Tavistock & Portman should be considered to assist in the first instance however, current local authority PREVENT referral pathways and advice should always be adhered to.

The deprivation of an individual's citizenship always remains a possibility for those individuals who hold dual nationality however, the date of any deprivation of citizenship will have a bearing on whether the children of that individual, have any legitimate claim on UK citizenship.

Referrals

The referral / notification of the arrival of a returnee back to the UK and into the care of a local authority is usually and is ideally made by a representative of the FCDO, to the respective local authority "front door" service. However, a referral could also potentially come from colleagues in Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP), Local Policing or another agency such as UKBA. There may well be some associated difficulties for the FCDO in respect of exactly when to inform a LA authority to expect a returnee. These reasons for this could numerous and varied, it could be political, for reasons of the safety & security of the individual or the potential for excessive media intrusion.

When the FCDO make a referral to local authorities they will often ask if there is any specific individual within the LA who deals with CT related Safeguarding referrals. It is also likely that at the point of referral, the FCDO will ask for a case to be opened on local systems i.e. Liquid Logic (LL), prior to even them being in possession of any significant amount of information or detail about the individual being repatriated having been obtained.

The repatriation of an individual often hinges on lawful authority or parental or family consent. If suitable extended family members can be identified in the destination country, then consideration will be given to placing the children in their care, if this is not possible then foster care should be considered as an option.

The planning of any repatriation is extremely time consuming and complicated and involves a large number of key stakeholders. There is an expectation that the relevant local authority will have representation i.e. Social worker/s at the port or airport when the individual arrives in the UK.

During the repatriation journey, the FCDO social worker/s will attempt to gain as much useful information in respect of the individual as they are able and they will pass this to LA Safeguarding Teams as soon as they can. They will do this utilising “words and pictures”. It may be beneficial if the LA were able to provide information in respect of the Social worker/s who will be there on their arrival, details about their onward destination and journey from the port of entry to the host City or Town, any information about the proposed foster care placement etc. etc.

Consideration must be given to the possibility that the accompanying parents of a child returnee, may be arrested and detained upon their arrival back in the UK. Under certain legislation this separation could last for from 6 hours or be as long as 14 days if certain criteria are met.

See: [Safeguarding children returning to the UK from Syria](#).

Counter Terrorism Policing

When an individual is repatriated to the UK, there may be competing objectives between LA Safeguarding Teams and colleagues from Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP).

CTP colleagues are duty bound to obtain and secure evidence of any offences that the individual/s may have committed, in order to prosecute an individual where it is deemed appropriate. There is clearly a delicate balance to be struck between securing evidence and the Safeguarding of a vulnerable individual/s. It is not the duty or responsibility of Safeguarding staff to assist CTP with the investigation and they should not be tasked or asked to do so.

If, however, Safeguarding staff do become aware of any information during the course of their Safeguarding duties that they believe may be of benefit to the investigation team, they should share this with them at the earliest practicable opportunity. Safeguarding activity or tasks should never be delayed or compromised in order to assist an investigation.

CTP colleagues will be actively trying to assess what risk does this individual / family, currently pose to the UK, what risk does the individual pose to those that they may be placed with and what risk if any do any of their associates pose etc. etc.

It may be, that upon arrival at the port or airport CTP colleagues use police powers to stop and detain the returnee/s. This could involve searches and interviews and the detailed examination of personal property such as phones, iPad etc. An individual could be detained for up to 6 hours under Schedule 7 legislation of the Terrorism Act (TACT) 2000 if certain criteria is met.

CTP colleagues may already be in possession of certain information about the individual/s that could be beneficial to the Safeguarding Team. Whilst they may have some difficulties with the disclosure of how they know this information or details about how it was obtained, where appropriate they can and should provide the Safeguarding Team with a “form of words” in respect of this information if it is deemed relevant or is beneficial to safeguarding Teams.

Local Authorities

Early and effective information sharing, communication and engagement are believed to be the key to the successful repatriation and safeguarding of any individuals returning to the UK. There is likely to be protracted relationships between CT and local police, Prevent, Home Office, schools, lawyers and health care professionals to mention just a few, in respect of any cases for some considerable time.

Whilst any and all repatriation cases come with their own unique set of challenges and bespoke requirements, it should be remembered that there should be a very much “business as usual” approach to all cases, whilst bearing in mind that there is a National Security aspect to the case. Any decisions taken, should be firmly rooted in Safeguarding principles. We should look to draw upon and utilise all current and existing skills and experience, within all LCC Directorates and those of our partners.

Firstly, consider if dedicated children’s social care teams are best suited to dealing with returning families or individuals or would adopting a “buddy system” with a colleague/s from the UASC Teams be appropriate, in order to draw upon their cultural knowledge and experience and their specific professional knowledge and contacts.

Secondly, consider involving LA lawyers at an early stage, to make them aware of all aspects and complexities around the case and the potential for legal challenges from extended families, pressure groups.

Thirdly, also consider involving colleagues from the press and media office at an early stage, as cases such as these are often high profile and attract a substantial amount of press and media interest. This can assist ensuring continuity of messaging and lead to enhancing community and partner confidence and reducing LA reputational risk.

Experience also suggests that appointing a single point of contact would potentially be extremely beneficial, to ensure continuity of communication and that the appropriate staff are always fully informed and updated.

Other than Tavistock and Portman, who are centrally funded and available to assist with cases it is not anticipated that there will be any additional resource or funding allocated to the LA, to assist with case management.

Links and Reference

[Foreign Office Travel Advice \(GOV.UK\)](#)

[Working with refugees and asylum seekers, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust](#)

IS children brought back to Britain could pose a terror threat, watchdog warns

London Evening Standard, 23/03/2021

There is no guarantee that the children of Daesh parents brought back to Britain from Syria will not pose a threat to the public in future, the government's terror watchdog warned today. Jonathan Hall QC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, said the only children who have been returned so far are aged under 10. But he warned that the growing number of domestic teenagers becoming radicalised showed the risk of extremism among the young and that it was impossible to know how children exposed to extremism in Syria will turn out. "A difficult cadre of children are those who have returned from Da'esh controlled areas," he writes today in his annual report to Parliament.