

Background and Context

Israel launched an assault and blockade on Lebanon after Hezbollah fighters captured three of its soldiers on 12 July 2006. As a result, Israel carried out a massive artillery and air barrage of Lebanon in an attempt to destroy Hezbollah.

Thousands of Lebanese people, as well as foreign nationals, were caught up in the resulting conflict; this triggered a major evacuation of British Nationals by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 18 July 2006, named operation HIGHBROW. Evacuation of a number of the most vulnerable, by air and sea, took place first. The evacuees were taken to Cyprus by Naval Warships, where they were processed and flown back to the UK.

London Gatwick (LGW) was initially nominated as the receiving airport. This was later extended to Stansted (STN), East Midlands Airport (EMA) and Manchester (MAN).

How the Topic was Handled

Foreign and Commonwealth Office announced a phased evacuation of British Nationals from Lebanon.

Resilience Teams in the four Government Office regions (East, East Midlands, North West, South East) were alerted by Communities and Local Government that a number of British and dual nationality evacuees may present themselves at various British airports.

Resilience Teams contacted the appropriate councils to invoke their emergency plans and co-ordinate the overall response.

A total of 11 flights containing over 2,000 evacuees landed at the four English regions' airports over a five day period. Around 300 adults and children required overnight accommodation, with a handful needing immediate social care. Two needed immediate medical attention and were transported to hospital. Over 300 required help with onward travel, and some still remain under council assistance.

Roles and Responsibilities

Many different organisations assisted with the arrival of the evacuation flights at the airports. An indication of the organisations involved and their roles is shown below [Note: this response sometimes varied between airports, eg. in the types of voluntary organisations involved]

Who?		What?
LOCAL AUTHORITY	Emergency Planning teams:	Provide staff, resources and rest centre and co-ordinated the overall response in their respective areas. Activated a range of services and provided resources (beds, logistics etc).
	Crisis Support Team	Provided push chairs and wheelchairs for evacuees to take on their onward journey.

	<p>Social Services:</p> <p>Housing teams</p>	<p>Provided emergency transport from airport to railway station.</p> <p>Provided a range of care and counselling services to the evacuees.</p> <p>Assisted with vulnerable people who may require care and support. Provided escorts for minors to other cities.</p> <p>Co-ordinated and provided accommodation (Hotels were used near airport locations) and onward transport.</p> <p><i>Indicative Resources</i></p> <p>465 man hours - Essex Council £30,000.00 - Leicestershire County Council £15,000.00 - West Sussex</p>
Airports		<p>Co-ordinated the response at airport level and acted as a source of information.</p> <p>Provided accurate arrival times for aircraft and provided pastoral care.</p>
Primary Care Trust		<p>Provided GP's to the rest centre (hotel) advice and information.</p>
Ambulance NHS Trust		<p>Provided paramedics to the scene as and when necessary.</p>
Regional Resilience Teams		<p>Relayed central government information and compiled situation reports. Attended Gold meetings / airports to provide liaison with government. Contacted government departments / agencies, ie. JobcentrePlus to provide assistance. Assisted with the provision of special train service.</p>
British Red Cross		<p>Provided basic medical assistance, welfare and emergency logistics along with an ambulance.</p>
St John Ambulance		<p>Provided basic medical assistance.</p>
WRVS		<p>Provided refreshments and basic provisions along with comfort and a shoulder to cry on.</p>
Job Centre Plus		<p>Assisted with travel warrants and offered a range of financial services.</p>
University Campus		<p>Provided student accommodation as short-term accommodation for the evacuees.</p>
Hotel		<p>Hotels were used as a rest centre in the immediate response.</p>
Salvation Army		<p>Provided resources in the aftermath of Operation Highbrow.</p>
Passenger Transport Executive		<p>Provided travel advice.</p>
Central Government		<p>Central Government arranged interdepartmental meetings to plan the next stages of the evacuation. Guidance was provided on 20/07/06.</p>

Police (Special Branch)	Checked evacuees documentation on a selected basis.
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Lessons Identified

- **Horizon scanning** - This situation could have been pre-identified, given the state of international tension. This would have provided an opportunity for an agreed plan, via the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Regional and Local Resilience Forum framework to ensure a resilient plan was in place to receive potentially large numbers of evacuees/refugees and manage their needs appropriately.
- **Early warning of anticipated numbers** - Initially advised that few evacuees would require assistance, though a significant number required some assistance, transport accommodation, etc. Early warning would have provided a more resilient response. Any further evacuees would have exhausted local resources, ie. people, accommodation, transport, etc. Early warning would have allowed a Regional response to be established through the LRF. Quality of information passenger manifest not received until one hour before arrival.
- **Review of evacuation plans** - Many of the lessons learnt have not been addressed from earlier exercises and operations; therefore they need to be integrated into the plans, or greater training and exercising are required to overcome these issues. There is a need to review LRF evacuation plans, including infrastructure demands to address influxes of people into the country during different times of the year. This incident happened during summer months when many hotels were full. Some hotels did not have any rooms suitable for those with disabilities. For rest centres, there needs to be a separate planning team to the ones who run it. When staffing resources are too low to run multiple rest centres, hotels should be used to accommodate those affected. Humanitarian Assistance Centres should be established, rather than trying to cope 'hand to mouth' at airports. All regions need to identify their capability to provide emergency accommodation, at varying scales and durations. This would have other benefits in other evacuation situations, eg. flooding.
- **Language assistance** - Assistance from Foreign & Commonwealth Office was required. Practitioners 'on the ground' had to communicate with the German and Spanish consulates to facilitate repatriation of their citizens.
- **Media and public information** - To make use of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) working groups to guide and assist in dealing with the media. Identify an individual to take the role of liaising and communicating messages, who does not get involved in the decision making.
- **Financial aid** - DWP should be informed/ involved from the outset. This was done in the East Midlands and North West and worked well. Evacuees with credit cards could not be given travel warrants by Job Centre Plus. Other Agencies need to be aware of this.

- **Voluntary sector** - Recognition of the capabilities of the Red Cross - from an established international symbol and organisation in the initial reception, to orientation visits for evacuees.
- **Arrivals** need to be planned to ensure that there is sufficient time between flights to allow the teams to rest, recover and review the reception process.

	Recommendation	Further guidance and support needed
1	Lead Government Department needed for non combat evacuation operation.	A focal point for acquiring and cascading information to government (at all levels), the media or the public.
2	National plan required.	Identification of reception capacity and capabilities at national airports. Introduce a template or checklist for reception & should form part of an integrated plan to build upon regional estimates and plans.
3	Closer links with other organisations.	Develop closer links and plans with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to improve intradepartmental communication.
4	Repatriation issues.	Nottingham East Midlands Airport received 195 passengers, nine required repatriation to Germany, three required repatriation to Spain. The German Consulate was very unco-operative; they did not want to receive evacuees with valid German visas. Eventually they were persuaded to accept nine evacuees, but did not pay their transfer
5	Flight information routes.	Talk directly to the MOD may be the preferable route for accurate information during a NEO. Speaking to the aircraft directly is an option when information not forthcoming via other means. Give consideration to when is the best time of day to have the evacuees arrive; most airport and transport functions are minimal overnight.
6	UK official escorts.	UK official escorts should accompany each flight to gather info from the evacuees and to respond to any in flight developments, eg. to manage evacuees if flight diverted en route.
7	Provision of housing.	Immediate guidance from Central government is needed in anticipation of a similar emergency to determine status upon arrival. Statute legislation meant refugees did not meet the housing criteria, causing a delay in housing and financial need. Some London Boroughs refused to accept further evacuees, even though they wished to be situated there, as there is a small but significant Lebanese community. Doesn't a Borough/District Council have the duty to address housing needs wherever they present as 'homeless'?
8	Provision of benefits.	The issue of security and ID. Passports to be stamped with individual's status to ensure entitlement to benefits can be considered.
9	Short and long term	Issues of both general and trauma support for the evacuees over the long

	psychological support.	term.
10	Reimbursement for local authorities.	Little information/guidance has been provided to Local Authorities on how to claim reimbursements relating to this incident.
11	Practical support	No information provided on wheelchair requirements or the provision of pushchairs - this was difficult to resolve at 03.00 hours
12	Airport arrangements	The provision of facilities at the airport would become an issue if there were a prolonged period of evacuation, the timing of flight arrivals and what time of year would also add to the issue of availability of reception areas.

Additional Documents

- [Leicestershire LRF debrief](#)
- [Uttlesford District Council \(Essex\) Aug 06](#)
- [GOSE Op HIGHBROW Lessons learnt](#)
- [Op HIGHBROW Multi Agency debrief GOE](#)
- [Magazine Article on the Manchester Evacuation Flights](#)