

Discussion paper

The future of community-led welcome: the case for a single UK refugee sponsorship scheme

About Reset

Since 2018, Reset, alongside other charities, faith institutions and non-profits has worked with communities across the UK to grow community-led welcome. We've supported more than 300 Community Sponsorship groups to welcome 815 refugees. We've worked alongside the NHS and Talent Beyond Boundaries to provide community support, Neighbours for Newcomers, for 98 refugee nurses who came to the UK and work in the NHS. More recently, we have developed a matching service to enable Ukrainian nationals to identify UK sponsors to be welcomed under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, as well as offering much needed training and support to hosts.

Context

The outpouring of support from the public for the Homes for Ukraine scheme has demonstrated that people want to engage with refugee protection when it is planned and organised. To date 186,500 visas have been issued and thousands of people across the UK have stepped forward to host a Ukrainian. We know from our own matching service that the UK public believes we have a duty to help those fleeing conflict and persecution, and where they can't open their homes, they want to know what they can do to support integration in their community.

The Nationalities and Borders Act and the New Plan for Immigration outline ways in which the UK government will enable managed migration to the UK and commits to offering safe and legal routes to this country for those in need of protection. Central to this, must be a sustainable and scalable system of sponsorship, including the widening of valuable complementary pathways, and a commitment to resettlement for the world's most vulnerable refugees.

There have been very few safe routes to the UK for refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, but over recent months the Government has implemented the Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) visa, the Homes for Ukraine campaign, and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. All schemes which enable refugees fleeing conflict or persecution to find safety are welcome, and the public supports them. However, in terms of sponsorship, research has shown that the best outcomes for refugees and communities happen when those welcoming feel prepared and are given adequate training and community support. We also hear from sponsors that multiple schemes are highly confusing and do not maximise public engagement. We believe that we can build upon the successes and learn from the lessons from schemes to date and develop a single sustainable system of sponsorship providing an on-going safe and legal route for refugees with strong integration outcomes, which can be scaled up in a crisis to act quickly and safely to respond to the needs of all refugees.

This discussion paper intends to start an important conversation about the future and natural development of community-led welcome.

What is community-led welcome?

Community-led welcome is rooted within towns, cities, and villages across the UK. At its core are trusted volunteers with the drive, commitment, and skills to positively support the integration of refugees within their own communities. The key strengths of community-led welcome are:

- **Sustainability:** a system which empowers communities to welcome refugees is one where people are given the power to shape and strengthen their own communities

- **Scalability:** communities are willing and able to step forward, and a new scheme, with flexibility to respond in a crisis could be scaled quickly and with community support
- **Benefits to refugees and communities:** the benefits of community-led welcome are felt by both the refugees and the welcoming community, as civil society comes together to create stronger, more cohesive communities

A future sponsorship scheme for the UK

We believe we need to see a single future sponsorship scheme that is sustainable and properly resourced. It must provide sponsor-motivation through the ability to identify specific refugees, be open to all those in need of sanctuary and be effectively managed through a cross-departmental government structure. Such a scheme would be a sustainable part of the UK's commitment to provide safe and legal routes, providing welcome through both the UNHCR protection-led resettlement route and complementary pathways. Through adaptations to its processes, it could be swiftly and effectively scaled up to respond to future refugee crises.

Maximising community support

From Community Sponsorship we've seen the power of large groups of community members coming together to enable strong integration outcomes for refugees. From Homes for Ukraine, we've seen the scale that individual sponsorship has allowed. We think there is powerful middle ground to be struck. We would like to see an individual sponsorship model continue, but with a requirement for the host to demonstrate additional community support for the welcome they offer. This might include naming a neighbour who will provide support to the host and refugee family, or affiliation with a local community group or association, from a place of worship to a sports club, to a local business.

We would also like to see mandatory training. As well as ensuring hosts carefully consider the commitment they are making, such training would also help hosts connect to all that their local community can offer them and the refugees they welcome.

Who should be welcomed?

One key feature of the Homes for Ukraine scheme has been the ability for sponsors to identify or 'name' the refugee(s) who are welcomed. This has given more control to the community welcoming refugees and more certainty for the person being sponsored. We believe that naming should be included as a feature in any future sponsorship model, alongside the traditional approach of UNHCR-identified refugees with high protection needs. Reset has consistently maintained, that if developed as a feature of sponsorship, a naming policy has the potential to provide a range of motivations for sponsors, from familial and personal, to addressing skills shortages. This motivation will lead to an increase in scale and reach of the scheme and increase the diversity of sponsors; meaning employers could use the route as a labour pathway and universities could offer scholarships to refugee students.

Whilst naming is a crucial policy lever, a future single sponsorship scheme, harnessing the groundswell of support for community-led welcome, would enable support and integration of refugees through both a UNHCR-protected route, and complementary pathways. For the most vulnerable refugees, we know that sponsors wish their efforts to be in addition to government targets of welcome, and therefore we support a sensible and achievable target of 10,000 UNHCR-selected refugees per year to be resettled to the UK.

Role of Local Authorities

Local authorities have a crucial role to play in local welcome and integration, including in local authority-led welcome of refugees through the UNHCR-selected resettlement pathway. In terms of

sponsorship, we believe that the role of local authorities should be in commissioning of tailored local services, rather than in providing consent, which can provide a significant barrier to swift welcome and a demotivating factor for communities. Relevant local infrastructure, commissioned by local authorities may include ‘Welcome Hubs,’ which have been successful in supporting newcomers from Hong Kong.

Housing

Recognising that all refugees should be able to move to property with ‘their own front door,’ we acknowledge that the national challenge around lack of housing is a preventative factor in welcoming refugees. We believe that there should be flexibility in how people are hosted, for example in peoples’ homes and temporary accommodation, while ensuring that necessary safeguards and plans for move-on to more sustainable accommodation are in place. The period and criteria for such hosting is a key question for consideration but should be flexible to context.

Payment to sponsors

To widen participation of a future scheme, it must be recognised that the £9000 fundraising target of Community Sponsorship can be a barrier for many potential sponsors. The Homes for Ukraine scheme introduced the idea of direct support to people hosting refugees and it is hard to see a future scheme without this element. We know that many hosts have handed this money directly to the refugee, while others have used it to make sure there is plenty of food on the table for those they are hosting. This payment might not convince someone to host, but it makes it easier for people to step forward, which is in stark contrast to the fundraising that Community Sponsorship groups must undertake.

Crisis response

Learning from the Homes for Ukraine scheme we believe that more can be done to prepare for emergency response. With an established sponsorship scheme in place, policy levers could be adapted to allow rapid scale-up of community response, as under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. For example, the scheme could temporarily switch back to accepting single hosts without community connections, or a longer period of in-house hosting.

Scheme management

We recognise the significant role that the Home Office plays in immigration, and its experience in developing Community Sponsorship, as well as the expertise and connections of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in their namesake areas. We believe a future sponsorship scheme needs a cross-governmental structure and clear lines of command between departments, to ensure coherence across government and effective delivery of the scheme.

Recommendations

We propose a single, all encompassing, sponsorship scheme which is accessible to all refugees, which welcomes refugees through the UNHCR-selected protection pathway and complementary pathways, which harnesses the power of communities to support refugees and is an important plank of the government’s commitment to safe and legal routes to this country. Importantly we believe this scheme does not replace the need for a fair asylum system.

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