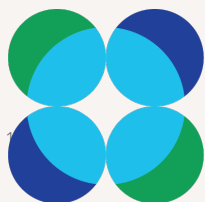


March 2022

HOMES *for* **AFGHANS**

*The start of a new era of
welcoming in Britain*



**More in
Common**

**British
Future...**

HOMES FOR AFGHANS

The start of a new era of welcoming in Britain

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ABOUT MORE IN COMMON

More in Common is an international initiative set up in 2017 to build societies and communities that are stronger, more united, and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarisation and social division. Our teams in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the United States work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, media, and government to connect people across lines of division.

ABOUT BRITISH FUTURE

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

Executive Summary

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has inflicted horrors and atrocities on people in Europe, that many thought were consigned to the history books of the last century. Right across the country, **Britons have been united in their disgust at the terror the Ukrainian people are enduring – and out of that has come something else, a determination that Britain has a responsibility to step up to play its part in both helping the Ukrainian people and punishing the Putin regime.** Support for sanctions against Russia, the supply of arms to Ukraine, and pressure on the Government to do more to help refugees have been steadfast.

But Britons don't just see helping Ukrainians as the Government's responsibility, they want to do their bit too. There has been no better demonstration of that than the surge of kind offers to participate in the Homes for Ukraine programme. Already well over a hundred thousand families have stepped forward to share their homes and offer sanctuary to those fleeing Ukraine. That level of generosity and previously untapped commitment towards refugees represents an enormous opportunity – not just in terms of how we play our part in helping Ukraine, but also in reshaping our approach to welcoming refugees in the future.

In the short term, the most pressing priority will be to match British hosts with Ukrainians. For some that will be easy – especially for those with existing links to the country and its people. For others the process will take longer, as diaspora organisations work to create new connections, and in the second phase of the scheme as businesses and civil society organisations create opportunities for larger groups to come to the UK. Many of those who have offered their home will find a match. But some will not, as it is likely that ultimately the offers of help pledged by Britons will surpass the number of Ukrainians who can, or who want to, seek refuge in the UK – after all many will want to stay closer to their home in central and Eastern European countries.

If those who are not needed immediately to host Ukrainians see their offer go to waste – it would represent a huge missed opportunity. That is not least because support for sponsorship goes beyond those who feel able to play an active or direct part – in fact our polling finds that across the UK support for taking in refugees increases by 12 points when framed through the lens of community sponsorship. That is why this is the right moment to build on this extraordinary wave of goodwill from the public and to enable more of those who want to support refugees to do so.

The simplest and most common-sense way of doing that would be to extend this welcoming spirit to other groups – and most urgently to those people struggling in the Afghan Warm Welcome Scheme. Seven months after the fall of Kabul, it is truly damning that 10,000 Afghan refugees remain stuck in hotels, unable to put down new roots, restart their lives or integrate into British communities. For those with families, it has meant more than half a year of raising their children in hotel rooms designed for short stays and weekend breaks. What's more, the cost of paying for these hotels is a staggering £1.2 million

a day – or put another way more than five times the average cost of renting housing for these refugees.

The success of the Homes for Ukraine scheme gives us an opportunity to get this scheme back on track. That means offering those who have not been matched with a Ukrainian refugee the opportunity to take part in a wider programme that will allow them to help get Afghan families out of hotels and into communities. Not all those who signed up to help Ukrainians will want to, but undoubtedly there are many who will. And whilst a direct replica of the Ukrainian scheme will not be appropriate for Afghan families – who need more than just to be hosted in a spare room – public support in finding the right housing and getting established in communities across the UK is exactly what they need.

This short paper sets out options for how we can make the most of the British public's offer of help, time and support for refugees with the response it deserves – and gives as many people as possible the opportunity to play their part. None of that is to suggest that the Government should feel able to abdicate their responsibility to urgently deliver on its commitments to those who risked their lives working with us in Afghanistan. Instead, we believe the Government has an opportunity to seize this moment to shift Britain's approach to refugees and build solid and sustained foundations for a new era of welcoming refugees in Britain.

Homes for Afghans – Eight Recommendations:

I. Invite those who have volunteered to host a Ukrainian refugee but not matched to join a new Homes for Afghans sponsorship programme: The scheme should be introduced by summer 2022 and in the first instance should work with existing Community Sponsorship groups who have capacity to train up new volunteers. Over time, a new Sponsor training scheme should be rolled out, providing those who have volunteered to house Ukrainians with the training and support to become accredited sponsors for Afghans within 3 months, rather than the current 12 months.

II. Create a New Home for Afghans Taskforce chaired by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up: The taskforce should be focused on developing workable solutions that can be rapidly deployed to house Afghans – including redirecting funding currently being spent on inappropriate short-term options to community sponsorship groups and institutions. The taskforce should have a mandate to hold officials to account in ensuring that Afghan refugees currently stuck in hotel accommodation are properly housed within 100 days.

III. As the second phase of Homes for Ukraine (enabling institutional sponsorship) goes live, a parallel scheme for supporting Afghans should be introduced: institutional sponsors (such as faith institutions, universities, and businesses) should be encouraged to participate in both schemes. In particular, the taskforce should work with refugee groups,

employers, faith groups, military charities, children's charities, local councils and Afghan communities and individuals themselves to encourage support.

IV. The Scottish and Welsh governments should be invited to extend their 'Super Sponsor' role in Homes for Ukraine into the new Homes for Afghans scheme.

V. Local councils should be helped to adapt the super-sponsor model pioneered in Scotland and Wales, so that groups of 5-10 Afghan families can be taken in groups by city-regions and local authorities. This would allow local authorities to settle groups of families together with the benefit of wider community support –helping to address concerns about accepting offers of accommodation in a town that they have not heard of. Involving former Afghan interpreters (who resettled in Britain 5 or 6 years ago) as community liaison workers would be another useful route to providing information and reassurance to the newly resettled about specific local areas.

VI. Turn the welcoming wave of 2022 into a sustained social norm. The Government should establish a multi-million-pound Welcoming Britain Fund which can resource and build capacity in civil society to underpin welcoming for years to come. The fund would help support and strengthen charities that provide training and assistance as well as ensuring safeguarding standards are met. This new welcoming agenda should provide an opportunity for those with a long track record of working with refugees and communities to support others.

VII. Continue regular engagement with all Homes for Ukraine volunteers: Everyone who has registered interest in the Homes for Ukraine initiative need to be engaged with regularly sharing advice, information and options to stay involved – that should include ways to:

- Be part of local welcoming efforts working with Ukrainians and other group
- Join existing local Community Sponsorship groups or to receive training and support to create their own
- Be connected to charities organising refugee hosting
- Help co-design and shape new welcoming networks and offers more broadly.

VIII. Make community support an essential feature of all of those given protection in the UK: Community support – whether it be with health and well-being, language, employability or community contact – are not only important steps to helping people rebuild their lives (rather than depending on the resettlement route or a particular group) but will also lead to better integration within British communities. Work needs to be done to ensure that community support becomes the norm for all those given protection in the UK, through sponsorship or Government managed routes, over the long term.

1. THE WELCOMING CHALLENGE

Opportunities and challenges of the 2022 Welcoming Wave

There has been an extraordinary public response to the first phase of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, with 150,000 people registering their interest in hosting Ukrainian refugees. An even greater section of the public – around 5 million people – are interested and could be engaged in wider welcoming activities. This has the potential to be the start of a new era for welcoming in the UK. But there are some short term challenges to be overcome if opportunity is to be taken

There is an immediate challenge of matching British hosts with Ukrainians as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The government has changed the rules for the family migration route for Ukrainians. Close and extended family members will likely choose this route to the UK. For those without a family connection to Ukrainians, there is the Homes for Ukraine scheme (otherwise known as the new humanitarian sponsorship pathway). Initial surveys of applicants show around nine in ten of those coming forward aren't yet sure how to find those that they will host or how to do so safely.

It is not known how many Ukrainians will seek to come to Britain now or over a longer period. Ukrainians who can leave the country safely have many options across continental Europe, through the EU Temporary Protection Directive. All European Union countries, including Ireland, have agreed to provide visa-free, three-year status with full residency rights (effectively a three-year legal stay with access to public services and jobs). While constructed differently, the new UK scheme is now much more accessible to Ukrainians at a time when the scale of the humanitarian consequences of Putin's invasion are growing.

As such, while many of those who have offered their home will find a match, some will not, as it is likely that ultimately the offers of help pledged by Britons will surpass the number of Ukrainians who can, or who want to, seek refuge in the UK. Many will take advantage of that offer from other European countries, not least because they want to stay closer to their home in central and Eastern European countries.

If those who are not needed immediately to host Ukrainians see their offer go to waste – it would represent a huge missed opportunity. That is not least because support for sponsorship goes beyond those who feel able to play an active or direct part – in fact our polling finds that across the UK support for taking in refugees increases by 12 points when framed through the lens of community sponsorship. That is why this is the right moment to build on this extraordinary wave of goodwill from the public and take advantage of the biggest opportunity to get welcoming right in a generation. To do that it is crucial that their offers of help are acknowledged and put to good use, in ways that are right and safe for them and those seeking sanctuary in Britain.

This new wave of public engagement coincides with three new significant Welcoming Schemes. The Ukraine crisis has coincided with the UK embarking on more concerted and proactive welcoming efforts – representing a real step-change in approach. The UK government will now be engaged in three major welcoming programmes simultaneously: the Ukraine humanitarian routes; the Hong Kong welcoming programmes for Hong Kongers with BNO visas; and the recently established Afghan Warm Welcome scheme. There are significant short-term pressures to get these schemes up and running, alongside sequencing challenges, but together they present an opportunity to develop a new, comprehensive, UK welcoming strategy and to shore up on the commitments made by successive governments to global resettlement schemes for refugee crises around the world.

2. GETTING AFGHAN WARM WELCOME BACK ON TRACK

There is real urgency to get Afghan resettlement back on track. During the fall of Kabul around 15,000 people were evacuated from Afghanistan and even before that more had already been welcomed to the UK under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP). Alongside ARAP, the Government established the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) with a commitment to resettle more than 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years. The first people settled under the ACRS included vulnerable and at-risk individuals who arrived in the UK under the evacuation programme. The scheme prioritises those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan, as well as groups such as ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+ people.

In the Afghan schemes, many participants and their families have a direct connection with UK military forces, diplomacy and other fields – including a significant number of interpreters and “locally employed civilians” (i.e. those that worked for British forces). They have, on average, higher educational and professional skills and human capital than some of those resettled under a Syrian scheme that specifically sought to recruit the highly vulnerable. However, the progress made in establishing the Afghan Warm Welcome scheme (including the accommodation model used) has been too slow.

“Integration starts when someone is living in a community, not a hotel room”

Sabir Zazai, Head of Scottish Refugee Council to Social Integration APPG, 15th March 2022

Over 10,000 Afghans are currently being accommodated in 80 ‘bridging hotels’. These medium to long term stays in hotel accommodation prevent Afghan refugees from restarting their lives and putting down new roots in communities across the country. For those with families, having to spend more than half a year raising children from a hotel room is clearly inappropriate.

The lack of availability of suitable rental accommodation and poor Whitehall co-ordination has led to a situation where this use of ‘bridging hotels’ model is costing the taxpayer £1.2 million per day. Shifting from hotel accommodation to finding rental homes for Afghans will not only let them start settling more in the UK, but will have positive cost implications too. It is estimated that the cost of relocating 10,000 Afghans from hotels into rented homes would be around £240,000 per day – a fifth of the cost of the current model. Part of these savings could be put at the disposal of the Homes for Afghans task force so that the log-jam can be broken leading to better outcomes at similar or lower costs.

3. HOMES FOR AFGHANS: OPTIONS FOR DEVELOPING PRACTICABLE MODELS

Welcoming and sponsorship programmes can take many forms. For example, Canada – the country with the most experience in sponsorship models – has multiple schemes, offering hybrid programs for different groups in different situations. In a country with a population not much more than half of the UK, groups have now sponsored over 300,000 refugees since the programme was set up. The Homes for Ukraine scheme has a particularly light-touch design, in order to boost short-term capacity to accommodate people in the UK, while putting in place necessary safeguarding protections and support services. The different profiles, needs, and experiences of different cohorts mean that simply extending or duplicating the Ukraine scheme to Afghans would be difficult. However, there are several ways in which offers of support could be made to extend the scheme to other groups.

This paper calls for a taskforce or ‘Policy Action Team’ to be established under the aegis of Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, comprised of both officials and external expertise (including safeguarding, accreditation, and integration support), should convene and produce a “whole-of-society” and “whole-of-government” action plan on welcoming within 30 days of formation.

The action plan should then report to a new, expanded Cabinet Committee to secure cross-governmental agreement. Specifically, the narrowly constructed Cabinet committee called “Afghanistan Resettlement Committee” should be given an expanded remit and renamed as the “Welcoming and Resettlement Committee”.

The taskforce should build on existing structures in place including:

- The cross-departmental work in Whitehall on the Homes for Ukraine scheme (including the appointment of Lord Harrington as Minister for Refugees)
- The existing cross-departmental work on Operation Warm Welcome
- Previous cross-departmental work on Syrian resettlement

The taskforce could explore three routes to develop a new Homes for Afghans offer at greater pace.

(i) Introduce a parallel institutional sponsorship scheme for Afghans as phase two of Homes for Ukraine goes live. Institutional sponsors from businesses and charities to universities and faith groups should be encouraged to participate in both streams. Having dedicated tracks for Afghans who came to the UK in 2021 is likely the most effective and fastest way to use this moment to revive the Afghan Warm Welcome Scheme.

For example, **military and veterans' charities** could play a central role in helping to support sponsoring groups for Afghans, as well as helping to champion participation by other civic and business groups. The major **children's charities** would be able to develop safe and secure models that could be rolled out in partnership with other organisational sponsors. Drawing on their experience of mental health services and trauma-informed service provision could also help to provide training for hosts and their circles of support. **Employers who offer accommodation**, for example in the hospitality and social care sectors, might be encouraged to make offers which can also include training.

It will be essential to ensure the scheme is co-designed with Afghan families and Afghan civic groups to ensure the key issues of status, access and rights are fully honoured and that this is seen as a renewed effort to meet our commitments to Afghan people in the UK.

Individual hosting is unlikely to be especially relevant or attractive to most of the Afghan cohort, since they have been in the UK for some nine months and typically have families, other extended kinship networks, and are looking to build a long-term future in the UK. However, it is possible that there are some Afghans (for example, individuals and couples without a family) for whom this model could appeal, so it might not be ruled out as one possible option in a few cases.

(ii) Extend the Devolved Nations “Super-Sponsor” route to the Afghan Warm Welcome scheme and expand the idea of “super sponsors” to regional and local government.

The Scottish and Welsh governments should be invited to propose how their new **super-sponsor** model (quickly devised within Homes for Ukraine) could now be extended to Afghans. This may involve a focus on institutional housing offers, rather than individual hosting, in the Homes for Afghans scheme, with the Scottish and Welsh government playing a coordinating role as super sponsors. In addition, the Northern Irish executive could be invited to consider participating on a similar basis at an achievable scale in both Ukraine and Afghan schemes.

The UK government could also consult City-Region Mayors to create similar schemes where city-regions develop the convening and matching capacity to engage with institutional sponsors in their area. These would then act as super-sponsors for groups of 5-10 families. Expressions of interest should be invited to pilot how such an approach could work in practice at the Local Authority level. Settling several families, within the wrapping of a wider community welcome, could be one route to help address fears of isolation. This has, to date, been one factor restricting settlement, with families unsure about whether to accept offers of accommodation in a town they may not have heard of.

(iii) A new sustainable community sponsorship model pioneered through Afghan Warm Welcome.

The UK has welcomed 700 refugees (around 100 each year) through community sponsorship schemes since it launched in 2016. It has typically taken 12-24 months for community sponsorship groups to be approved to host a family. There continues to be active interest in becoming community sponsors. The scheme was a major policy innovation in response to the Syrian refugee crisis and has continued to iterate and grow with more than 200 sponsor groups in all four nations of the UK. Over time, there has been a growth of charitable support for sponsor groups, while the Government has also clarified that the scheme is both uncapped and additional to the Government's own resettlement targets.

Unlike in Canada and Australia, which ran analogous schemes, the primary beneficiaries of UK Community Sponsorship have been vulnerable Syrian families, unknown to sponsor groups prior to their arrival, and selected by the UNHCR. The scheme design was influenced by the UK's commitment to prioritising some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, such as survivors of torture, people with serious medical conditions, as well as women with children.

In addition to the community sponsorship scheme, the government has also introduced a small pilot called the "Displaced Talent Mobility Visa". Working with charities and employers to identify suitable candidates, the scheme –part of the work permit system– brings in refugee nurses and other areas of specific talent to the UK. Charities also provide wraparound community support and welcome (called Neighbours for Newcomers) to help with integration.

The UK community sponsorship scheme 2016-21 and the Displaced Talent Mobility visa have proved successful in building a community of practice with experience. Nonetheless, to operate at greater scale, there is a strong consensus that the 2016-21 model needs to be improved –to make the system simpler and more accessible, alongside giving communities a greater say in identifying and selecting people known to them.

High barriers to entry have made it difficult for refugee and migrant-led groups to participate and have limited the participation of those from all social classes and ethnic groups in the UK. Furthermore, the conclusion of the Syrian VPRS scheme, along with the disruption of the Covid pandemic, means that the community sponsorship levels are low. In partial recognition of this, the government has committed in principle to extending community sponsorship to the Afghan programme.

However, we now have an opportunity to bring together the experience of previous schemes, the rapid start-up of a radically simplified model (Homes for Ukraine) and international learning, to develop a new community sponsorship model that can be designed for and with Afghans on a long term basis.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme has a completely different design: once 10,000 people are matched to come to the UK, it will represent a hundred-fold increase in the scale of UK refugee sponsorship policy. It also offers funding and support locally on a per capita basis and combines individual (phase one which is live at the time of writing) and institutional (phase two) sponsor models. However, it is a short-term scheme, in response to the specific circumstances of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, developed at pace to surge temporary accommodation capacity.

Government should now develop a new **Homes for Afghans Sponsorship model**, to be opened within 3 months, and which can lay the basis for future hybrid models. As a first step, the government could invite existing (already accredited) Community Sponsorship groups to help support and house an Afghan family. This could include an offer of financial resources for 3-6 months, perhaps drawn from the hotel accommodation budget.

It should invite those who have volunteered to host a Ukrainian refugee but not matched to join a new Homes for Afghans sponsorship programme: This in the first instance should involve connecting existing Community Sponsorship groups to new Homes to Ukraine volunteers in their area where current local sponsorship groups would like to broaden their capacity and reach to be able to do more and providing new potential welcomers with the training and advice to support refugees in other ways.

The following features form our proposal for a Homes for Afghans Sponsorship model:

- Invite "Sponsor Circles" of six to twelve people (primary responsibility), while encouraging this core group to establish broader community welcoming circles.
- A target timeline of three months to approve a sponsor circle to start hosting (down from the current twelve), by reviewing and streamlining existing processes and barriers. One of the most significant is the Local Authority Approval process. Going forward Local Authorities should not hold a veto.
- Alongside this streamlined induction and approval process with a new offer of on-going advice and support from welcoming network hubs for sponsors.
- Seek a minimum commitment of 6 months support, with the ability to support for 12 months encouraged where groups have the capacity to make that extended offer.
- Government should be prepared to make an increased government contribution to housing costs, drawing from the current hotel accommodation budget.

This would not address all the issues of securing appropriate housing, and matching families, but it will help reduce delays. Given the high cost of hotel accommodation, these measures would also enable the government to use its current spending in a more effective way. Moreover, it would acknowledge and respond to the wave of both public and civic engagement in Homes for Ukraine, providing other ways for people to offer their support. Longer term, this approach will help to make community sponsorship a key feature in UK global resettlement efforts and make offers of community contact a new norm in all offers of protection in the UK.

4. A NEW VISION FOR WELCOMING

How to bridge the welcoming schemes

Inspired by the British public's response to Homes for Ukraine, the UK government should **set ambitious goals for the development and scaling up of community sponsorship and welcoming efforts in the UK over the next 3-5 years.** A government Green paper should be produced in 2023 to develop a strategy for *A New Era for Welcoming* – drawing on the lessons from Homes for Ukraine and its new Afghan pilot schemes, with a commitment to scaling up and ensuring community support is at the heart of resettlement.

The government has stated repeatedly its commitment to a UK Resettlement Scheme that builds on the expansion of resettlement since the Syrian crisis. Civil society has called for relatively modest growth in resettlement to a target figure of 10,000 refugees per year – as set out in Lord Kirkhope's (former Conservative Immigration Minister) amendment to the current Nationality and Borders Bill and supported by the British Red Cross and politicians from all parties. Currently, the government do not seem minded to be tied to a target of 10,000. But our view is that an aim of 10,000 people for government resettlement provides the foundation, onto which new and existing schemes of community sponsorship can be built on top without a cap (as exists now with community sponsorship). This puts the power of community at the centre of building scale.

Community support should also be a new norm for resettlement. To start with an increasing proportion of resettled refugees are made a Community Sponsorship offer. That will require proper investment in community capacity and networks so that this offer can be properly tailored to specific needs. There are already dozens of committed charities and local groups seeking to support refugees. A new norm would amplify their contributions.

Over time, the aspiration should be to develop meaningful community contact and support offers to those waiting for an asylum decision and to everybody granted protection in the UK, across all routes. This might include:

- Well-being and health support countering isolation and loneliness
- Ensuring sufficient supply of English language classes at an appropriate level, and volunteer-led conversation clubs for people to practice and gain confidence in speaking English.
- Schools and early years settings planning an active programme of welcoming for new arrivals and their families
- Involving young volunteers in welcoming, including through the new National Youth Guarantee Volunteering
- Welcoming and befriending programmes in universities

- Information, advice and guidance about employment and training, along with on-going career mentoring and the involvement of employers in this provision
- Using sport, environment, and cultural activities to welcome newcomers.

Community contact and support offers require capacity and training support from civil society and effective partnership with government, especially local government. Civil society should help expand learning and training networks for newcomers. The effective use of Community Sponsorship experience to help advise, train and navigate the large numbers of new offers to be part of a welcoming movement is key to equipping those both those welcoming and being welcomed.

Civil society and government need to work together to develop the schemes, support people and manage risk. One option is to move to a place-based funding partnership. Strategic Migration Partnerships exist in regional government and already include “Welcoming Hubs”. The government should facilitate and support efforts for learning across the programmes. There are a range of opportunities for collaboration on issues of: employability; health, well-being and mental health support; appropriate English language provision, while also tailoring offers to the needs of specific groups. The Adult Education budget should be reviewed to see what requirements can be eased for access to formal learning such as residency requirements and no recourse to public funds.

Welcoming Hubs provide an important way for ongoing learning and practice to be captured and shared. Given the government’s current Ukraine and Afghan policies have been developed at pace to meet pressing needs in real-time, government and other key convening groups should consider how to institutionalise the learning to inform a broader welcoming strategy. The Home Affairs Select Committee could hold a rapid inquiry to support the development of the Ukraine and Afghan welcoming schemes, and to encourage strategic thinking across schemes.

5. ENGAGING THE WELCOMERS

How to grow Britain's new welcoming movement and empower it in shaping what happens next.

Polling by Opinium and YouGov in recent weeks suggests that around one in five people are interested in and open to hosting a refugee in their home. That means that around 5 million people are interested in engaging in welcoming efforts at a high level of commitment.

It is therefore a realistic goal to recruit a movement of over a million active welcomers across all nations and regions of the UK over 5 years. This would take a sustained approach to both growing networks of local engagement and community sponsorship; more broadly it would promote welcoming as a new social norm.

Achieving an active culture of welcoming would integrate refugee inclusion and contact into a broader agenda across the places we live, work and study. This would benefit all those who come to the UK as well as people already here.

Engaging with those involved in the great welcoming wave of 2022 (particularly around Homes for Ukraine) should be a strong foundation for developing the new and broader welcoming agenda. Both government and welcomers are naturally prioritising the challenge of matching Ukrainians with hosts. As well as ensuring that those who do become hosts are given support and advice, it is equally important that those who have not yet, or who do not ultimately, become hosts have opportunities to participate in welcoming efforts, whether with Ukrainians or other groups, as part of the broader drive towards building Britain's new welcoming movement.

The following proposals reflect some of our thinking on what it will take to set up Britain's new welcoming movement on the back of the great welcoming wave of 2022:

i. Roll out Welcomer Engagement programme

To sustain interest among those interested in welcoming, a structured programme of engagement connecting with potential welcomers should be established at scale by the early summer 2022. As well as keeping those who have volunteered engaged, it will also enable future offers to be shaped by feedback about the types of initiatives and offers that welcomers would like to be available and to participate in.

ii. Understand potential welcomers insights

More work needs to be done to explore the range of reasons why people are motivated to help a particular group. These might include personal family history or networks, faith links,

military service in a specific country. A particular moment of mobilisation like the tragedy of Alan Kurdi in 2015. Some groups will make distinctions between crises and some groups will not – but what is key is understanding the starting points of different groups who are interested to be welcomers and shaping the design and communications of the Welcoming efforts accordingly.

Good insights and evidence also need to be gathered on how potential welcomers approach the different ways to welcome. Some may be interested in helping with any task, others may want to make specific contributions related to their professional or personal expertise/experiences. These insights should be gathered at pace to shape ways to people can be involved in the future.

iii. Connect local welcomers

Participants in the Homes for Ukraine scheme should be invited to indicate if they would specifically like to be linked to others to develop sponsorship schemes in their own local areas. These could be led and convened by existing sponsorship groups, regional and local leadership and civil society groups, other kinds of institutions (like schools, workplaces, businesses and services) could have a welcoming champion to lead welcoming efforts in their institution.

iv. Establish Welcoming Britain Fund

The government should introduce a **multi-million-pound Welcoming Britain Fund** to resource and build capacity in civil society to underpin welcoming for years to come. The fund would help:

- Expand civil society infrastructure, working alongside local, regional, and national government, to engage with those interested in the welcoming agenda and to inform ways to grow public engagement in welcoming efforts across the nations and regions of the UK.
- Strengthen the organisations that provide the backbone to local welcome, provide core support to ensure groups can share good practice to encourage welcoming and ensure safeguarding standards are properly addressed.
- Support community groups taking on sponsoring and welcoming commitments for Ukrainians, Afghans, Syrians and Hong Kongers to the UK – particularly those organisations who are best placed to incubate, seed and support local action - from groups of individuals, street-level groups, small charities, faith institutions or others interested in welcoming and supporting.
- Resource research to help inform the future of the welcoming agenda, alongside national and international evidence.

The Welcoming Britain Fund would work most effectively as a public-private fund and should be co-designed between the government and charitable trusts and foundations with experience of working in partnership with refugees and community groups. Government support for such a fund would encourage additional matching resources from trusts and foundations, corporations, and others. This approach would allow the Fund to benefit from existing learning – where there is deep expertise and experience in supporting newcomers and developing good practice, as well as ensuring any monies are effectively directed to innovation and long-term sustainability of welcoming and integration support.

v. Reduce barriers to entry

Alongside funding, engagement and insight, a key step in growing Britain's new welcoming movement will be in lowering barriers to entry for hosting and broadening the range of opportunities for potential welcomers to participate. This appears to have the opportunity to more than triple or quadruple the scale of a welcoming movement and would take the potentially engageable audience from around 5 million to over 20 to 30 million people.

The key to maximising scale is in communicating the offer as a 'ladder of engagement' in which a small proportion of people want to play a leadership role in organising and coordinating networks, with many others playing their part within that in different ways that best suit them, their lives, interests and experiences.

6. SUPPORT FOR THE HOMES FOR AFGHANS PLAN

"I fully support the proposed Homes for Afghans Plan. I have spoken to many Afghan refugees evacuated since Aug 2021 most of whom are still in the hotels in different cities of the UK. Afghan refugees are going through trauma and anxiety. There has been a big change in their lives, housing a larger group of Afghan refugees in close proximity to each other will help them to quickly adjust and integrate into the UK society, this will also help in reducing the anxieties they have and feel more protected. In the long run, it is very helpful for their mental health as Afghans are very good at keeping each other company and supporting each other when a member of the community needs help and support".

- **Rafi Hottak, former British Forces Interpreter**

"In my first tour in Afghanistan in 2006, I commanded a company of 32 Afghans. I persuaded them to fight. We went there as part of a UK mission, serving British interests and the British government. I cannot stress this enough: we owe a duty of care to provide clear routes for refugees and a warm welcome when Afghans get here. More urgency is needed from the British Government, and I welcome this important initiative. I have no doubt that the British public will back this".

- **Johnny Mercer MP, Conservative MP for Plymouth Moor View**

"The outpouring of solidarity with Ukrainians since the beginning of the Russian invasion has been wonderful to see, and many of my constituents have been in touch to ask how they can get involved with the Homes for Ukraine scheme. It seems common sense to me to think about how we can utilise this moment to get the ball rolling again on the relocation of Afghan families. It is worrying that thousands of Afghan refugees are still stuck in temporary hotel accommodation. This is costing them precious time to start rebuilding their lives in the UK and settle into the community. Therefore, efforts to work with civic and faith groups, businesses, and charities to broaden the Community Sponsorship scheme are welcome. However, I strongly believe that this must go hand-in-hand with proper investment in local services including education, housing, and mental health care".

- **Olivia Blake, Labour MP for Sheffield Hallam**

"Plaid Cymru has long called for a compassionate and generous response to every human being fleeing persecution and wars. Wales has shown in recent months that we can offer a welcome embrace to refugees, with families fleeing Afghanistan provided with sanctuary and support by Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Wales's largest youth organisation, at their residential

centre in Cardiff. The people of Wales have already shown our willingness to welcome refugees into our communities. All schemes to enable us to extend this welcome deserve the utmost support”.

– **Liz Saville-Roberts MP, Group Leader of Plaid Cymru in the House of Commons and Shadow PC Spokesperson (Home Affairs)**

“Permanent housing and community connections are key to the Sulha Alliance's aim to enable Afghan former local staff to thrive in the UK, not just survive. We support this initiative because we witness every day the difference that social capital can make for the employment prospects, mental health and wellbeing of resettled Afghan interpreters and their families”.

– **Dr Sara de Jong, co-founder of the Sulha Alliance**

“We must build on the goodwill and generosity shown by so many individuals in Britain. The UK government could and should be helping to form a global refugee coalition focused on countries such as Afghanistan as well as Ukraine. And to do so in a way that creates a reliable, predictable and sustainable annual target for receiving refugees that could be shared with other countries in the developed world from Europe to Canada.”

– **Rory Stewart, former Secretary of State for International Development**

“We are a generous nation and it is heart warming to see the way people have opened up their homes for those fleeing the devastation in Ukraine. Let us continue to display our welcome for people escaping persecution and war, whether they come from our doorstep or further afield. We should be vigilant that we do not forget our commitment to Afghan refugees, especially when the attention of the world is - rightly - turned to the suffering in Ukraine. Every life is precious and deserves our help”.

– **Dilwar Hussain, New Horizons in British Islam**

“I feel proud of my country, seeing the generous outpouring of love by the British people towards Ukraine. We now need to manage this properly to match need with the help which is being offered - both to Ukrainians needing help and other groups too. We all share an interest in ensuring that the Afghans evacuated from Kabul last summer now get the support they need to rebuild their lives and contribute to our communities”.

– **Julie Siddiqi MBE, founder Together We Thrive**

Relevant resources and links

[Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative: international experience](#)

[University of Birmingham: Community Sponsorship Evaluation in the UK](#)

[Reset/Refugee Council: Breaking the barriers to participation in community-sponsorship for refugee led organisations](#)

[Migration Policy Institute: overview of private sponsorship in Canada](#)

[Migration Policy Institute: Global Overview of refugee sponsorship](#)

[Migration Policy Institute: How to improve monitoring and evaluation of refugee sponsorship](#)

[British Future: National Conversation on Immigration final report](#)

[Together Coalition/British Future: Talk Together report](#)

[Canada's community sponsorship portal](#)

[US Sponsor Circles programme](#)



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