



Home Office



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government



Department  
for International  
Development

# Community Sponsorship Guidance for Local Authorities



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# Refugee Resettlement

## An overview

In the last decade, conflicts across the Middle East and North African (MENA) region have left millions in need of protection. The UK, in the shape of local authorities, with the support of community groups and the voluntary sector, has played a vital role in helping those arriving here to feel welcome and able to adjust to a new life in the UK.

The UK has been supporting some of the most vulnerable refugees for many years through the Gateway Protection and Mandate resettlement programmes. In 2014 and in response to the conflict in Syria, the UK launched the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS). This was expanded in September 2015 with a pledge by the government to resettle 20,000 individuals by 2020. In 2017, the scheme was opened up to all nationalities affected by the Syrian conflict and renamed the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) was launched in 2016, with a view to resettling up to 3,000 individuals. VCRS is open to all children deemed to be "at risk", and their families, within the MENA region.

### UNHCR Vulnerability Criteria

At least one member of each resettled household will have met one or more of the following UNHCR criteria:

#### Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)

- survivors of violence or torture, or both
- women and girls at risk
- refugees with legal or physical protection needs, or both
- refugees with medical needs or disabilities
- children and adolescents at risk
- persons at risk due to sexual orientation/gender identity
- refugees with family links

#### Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS)

- child carers
- children in detention
- children with specific medical needs
- children with disabilities
- child survivors of (or at risk of) violence, abuse or exploitation including sexual and gender based violence
- children at risk of harmful traditional practices (e.g. child marriage and FGM)
- children without legal documentation
- children at risk of refoulement
- children at risk of not attending school
- children associated with armed forces or armed groups
- children at risk of child labour or already working

Those recognised as refugees by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) are referred to the UK's Resettlement Team, a joint unit between the Home Office, the Department for International Development, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Hereafter referred to as simply "the Home Office". Refugees resettled through these schemes are granted five years' refugee leave on arrival in the UK.

Support from local authorities for refugee resettlement, which is voluntary, has grown significantly over the last few years in response to the real need of those fleeing conflict and persecution. The local authorities involved receive funding which contributes towards the costs of delivering support to refugee families.

More information can be found in the LGA guide for local authorities:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/syrian-refugee-resettlement-guide-local-authorities>

## Community Sponsorship

### A complementary approach

Community sponsorship enables local community groups to welcome and support refugees directly in their local communities. It was introduced by the Home Office in response to the desire from civil society to play a greater role in refugee resettlement, and with the expectation that the community-led approach will lead to positive integration outcomes for refugees and communities.

*“Oxford City Council wants to support Community Sponsorship groups and have been very pleased to have worked closely with the Home Office and a Community Sponsorship group who have been approved and are getting ready to welcome their first family. Community sponsorship groups can bring a range of skills and community opportunities for the refugee family they are supporting. They also provide a great way for the family to make links in their community from day one which can help them settle in quickly and integrate into life in the UK.”*

**Naomi Winnifrith, Oxford City Council**

The Community Sponsorship Scheme which was launched in July 2016, complements the resettlement undertaken by local authorities. Under community sponsorship, the people responsible for finding a property and delivering resettlement support to a refugee family from their arrival are not local government officers; they are members of the local community. It is the community sponsor's responsibility to support the resettled family from the moment of arrival in the UK. This will include:

- meeting the family at the airport;
- providing a warm welcome and cultural orientation;
- providing housing;
- supporting access to medical and social services;
- English language tuition; and
- support towards employment and self-sufficiency.

Community sponsors provide integration support for a family for the first 12 months of their time in the UK, and accommodation for the first two years.

When local groups deliver this kind of support, and liaise with local authorities, often community members with untapped skills and resources are discovered and are able to contribute to successful resettlement using the wide range of skills and experience and goodwill that is present in all our communities. Community sponsors, for example, often use their own networks to encourage landlords previously unknown to local authorities to offer a property at a lower rate. In this way, Community Sponsorship can be a vehicle to catalyse communities to participate in supporting vulnerable people, to volunteer and to engage with public policy in new ways.

Bringing communities together around a common cause and mobilising large numbers of people into action can also play a part in facilitating some underrepresented groups develop stronger links with the council, and each other. It can help to identify local leaders, strengthen local capabilities and encourage stronger communities.

## International Approaches *Who else does sponsorship?*

While there is great variation between each of the sponsorship models below, the concept of communities becoming directly involved in the resettlement of refugees began over 40 years ago.

### **1976 Canada begins Private Sponsorship of Refugees**

Over 300,000 refugees have been resettled through Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees.

### **2013 Australia begins Community Support Programme**

Australia has now resettled 2,000 refugees.

### **2013 Switzerland pilot**

Swiss nationals sponsored Syrian families by providing accommodation and living costs for one year.

### **2013 Germany's federal work**

15 of Germany's 16 federal states have private sponsorship programmes. Refugees must have a humanitarian need, links with Germany, and an ability to help with the eventual reconstruction of the country of origin.

### **2014 Ireland pilots Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme**

Ireland's pilot focused on resettling vulnerable persons who had fled to surrounding countries, and also those still residing in Syria.

### **2016 Italy pilot**

The Italian government and a consortium of religious associations piloted a scheme in which volunteers travel and make direct contact with refugees in relevant countries, preparing a list of potential beneficiaries, and then supporting them on arrival.

### **2016 UK launches Community Sponsorship**

The UK's scheme was launched on 19 July 2016.

### **2017 New Zealand pilot**

The Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category is being piloted in 2017/18 for 25 refugees.

## 10 Steps to Community Sponsorship

Community groups considering sponsoring a family must apply to the Home Office for approval. This process is managed by the Home Office. The local authority's only involvement in this process comes in at **steps 2, 5 and 8**. Groups are encouraged to begin discussions with local authorities early in the application process to help build a positive working relationship.

### To become a community sponsor a community group must:

1	<p><u>Be a registered charity or Community Interest Company (CIC)</u> Groups can secure charitable status in their own right, or work with an existing charity as a "lead sponsor", such as a local faith group or a national organisation.</p>
2	<p><u>Have secured a suitable self-contained property with a 24-month tenancy</u> The rent should ideally be set at or below the Local Housing Allowance rate to enable the family to afford it with the social welfare income they receive. Where the LHA rate does not meet the full rental cost, groups would need to show that they had considered the available funds and potential expenditure, and had budgeted accordingly. Groups can seek 'approval in principle' prior to securing a property to help avoid long void periods.</p>
	<p>Sponsor groups are required to invite the local authority to inspect the property and <b>local authorities</b> may wish to assist the community sponsor by visiting the proposed property to assess its health and safety, i.e. whether or not it complies with local authority guidance on occupation levels, is in a proper state of structural repair, has safe electricity and/or gas supplies, adequate ventilation and lighting, etc. Groups are also asked to contact the Police Safer Neighbourhood Team to ensure it is appropriate to house a refugee family in the area.</p> <p><i>"Our Environmental Services team inspected the property, as they would for any property on the private rental market. In this case some minor issues were raised These were passed on to the Letting Agent who will address them before the property is rented out. We (the Local Authority) had translated the Tenancy Agreement, Refuse/Recycling advice and Fire notices into Arabic and copies of these were given to the groups to help support the tenancy."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Ceredigion LA on Accommodation</b></p>
	<p><i>"A key factor for us has been that the Salvation Army is housing the family for two years in a property it owns. London Borough of Merton does not participate in the VCRS programme for local authorities because of the pressures on social housing, but the community sponsorship scheme has</i></p>

	<p><i>helped us to find a housing solution.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>London Borough of Merton on Accommodation</b></p>
<b>3</b>	<p><u>Be able to prove that they have funds available</u> This is a minimum of £4500 <b>per adult</b>, so at least £9000 for a family with two adults.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><u>Put together a proposal of how they will support a refugee family</u> This includes completing a 10-section application form and providing a detailed resettlement plan. The group must also draw up a safeguarding policy and procedures ensuring that appropriate reporting and escalation procedures are in place. Sponsor groups are required to invite the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) to comment on their safeguarding policy and the local authority may wish to facilitate engagement between the group and the LSCB to enable this to happen.</p> <p><i>“The community group held an initial meeting with us (the local authority) to run through their plans. We gave them feedback, made some suggestions and also advised the group on their safeguarding policy and procedures. We drew up a report that assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the plan and carried out an Integrated Impact Assessment. The resulting paper was then taken to Scrutiny Committee with a request to recommend that Cabinet approve the group’s application to undertake Community Sponsorship of refugees in Ceredigion.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Ceredigion LA on Resettlement Plans</b></p>
<b>5</b>	<p><u>Have consent from the <b>local authority</b> that their application is approved in principle.</u> Further information on this step can be found below on page 9.</p> <p><i>“We supported the Salvation Army’s application to the government every step of the way. I have been really impressed by their commitment and willingness to anticipate the family’s needs.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Yvette Stanley, London Borough of Merton</b></p>



6	<p><u>Apply to the Home Office formally, and have their application considered.</u> As part of this process, the <b>Home Office</b> will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verify the group’s charitable status</li> <li>• Perform a series of security checks on the lead sponsor</li> <li>• Ensure that the group has in place a robust and organised structure with clear lines of accountability, i.e. in terms of decision-making, safeguarding the family</li> <li>• Consider the organisation’s suitable experience</li> <li>• See evidence that housing is available for a minimum of two years</li> <li>• Examine the quality and content of the group’s resettlement plan which explains how they will deliver support and integration</li> <li>• Be satisfied that the group has a safeguarding policy in place</li> <li>• See evidence that the group has met the financial criteria</li> <li>• Conduct a pre-approval visit to question the prospective sponsor group on their application (note that the <b>local authority</b> is invited to attend</li> <li>• Confirm that representatives of the group have attended a mandatory Community Sponsorship Induction Workshop</li> <li>• Ensuring DBS checks are completed for group members where needed</li> <li>• Be satisfied that appropriate English language tuition and interpreters will be available</li> <li>• Sign a legally-binding Sponsor Agreement with the community group to deliver resettlement as a community sponsor.</li> </ul>
7	<p>If approved, <u>receive details of a potential family from the Home Office</u>, to be jointly considered by the community sponsor and the local authority (see next step).</p>
8	<p><u>Accept the family.</u> The <b>local authority</b> is consulted for their agreement to accept the family for resettlement based on whether the proposed family’s needs can be met in the local authority area. Depending on each individual case, individuals from key statutory agencies can be called on to inform this decision. The <b>local authority</b> is asked to accept each and every family. This decision cannot be made by the community sponsor alone.</p>
9	<p>Review and confirm acceptance of the family to the Home Office.</p>
10	<p>Welcome their family.</p>

## Local Authority Involvement

### Where do you come in?

Local authorities play an important role in the success of the scheme, but the responsibility for assessing applications and managing the community sponsorship process lies with the Home Office. For example, a local authority **will not** be asked to:

- Assess any community sponsorship applications
- Assess the community group's ability to deliver effective refugee resettlement
- Consider if the group has suitably trained or vetted volunteers

Local authorities **will** be asked to support community groups by:

- Putting groups in contact with the LSCB to advise on the group's safeguarding policy;
- Arranging an inspection of the proposed accommodation;
- Supporting engagement of relevant partners, e.g. police, education providers, Prevent, DWP, CCG, etc.;
- Providing local authority consent that the group can operate as a community sponsor in the area, and
- After approval of the group, agree to accept the refugee family.

### Local Authority Consent 1: The Community Group

The prospective sponsor must obtain written evidence from the local authority (the format to be determined by the local authority area e.g. may differ between unitary and two tier authorities) that they consent to the approval of the application. Typically, this consent is provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Director or Councillor with the authority to consent on behalf of the local authority.

Grounds on which a local authority might object are:

- insufficient capacity to provide certain crucial local services in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places);
- concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area;
- where they have reason to believe that the community sponsor is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children; or
- another appropriate reason.

### Local Authority Consent 2: The Refugee Family

Once approved, the Home Office will provide the local authority and the sponsoring group with case and medical notes about a proposed family via the secure IT system MOVEit. Liaison with key partners may be necessary to make an assessment of whether the family's needs can be met. For example, there may be some medical conditions which require treatment better served in certain areas. The local authority will also want to take into consideration any interventions that the sponsoring group themselves might be able to put in place.

# The Sponsor Arrangement

## The first two years

Community Sponsors are responsible for supporting a refugee family for a minimum period of 12 months after their arrival in the UK, and providing accommodation for a minimum period of 24 months.

*“The Salvation Army has taken the lead in co-ordinating support for the family; drawing on resources within its own congregation [...] they have also followed up on all the links that we have made for them to ensure support is there for the family from day one.”*

**London Borough of Merton**

Sponsorship placements are currently reviewed by the Home Office at 1, 3 and 9 months after arrival through monitoring visits.

At the 9-month review meeting, the Home Office decides with the sponsor and the local authority about on-going support needs of the family, and how they will be met from 12 months onwards.

If the sponsoring group end their support after one year they must have a suitable transition plan for the family at the 12-month point and the local authority may need to liaise with the sponsoring group at the end of 12 months to consider if the family requires additional support. Direct funding is available for local authorities to claim for years 2-5, determined on a case-by-case basis.

Funding may also be available in the event that new support needs arise which cannot be met by the sponsoring group, or the sponsoring group feels unable to sustain support, or the sponsorship arrangement breaks down (also see below).

### **How does funding work?**

- Neither community sponsors nor local authorities receive year one tariff funding for community sponsorship cases. The sponsoring group takes full responsibility for resourcing and delivering the family's needs according to a statement of requirements, similar to that for local authorities.
- Local authorities will be entitled to claim funding in year 1 towards education costs in line with council-led resettlement schemes. This amounts to £4,500 for children aged 5 to 18 and £2,250 for children aged 3 to 4. Authorities are also entitled to claim £850 ESOL funding for each adult refugee arriving through community sponsorship and must ensure that those refugees supported by community sponsors benefit.
- Funding for years 2 to 5 may be available to local authorities. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis following a review of the needs of the resettled family and how they will be met. LAs can make a business case to the Home Office to apply for the money. Local authorities should contact the Community Sponsorship Team for more information. See below for contact details.

## What about housing after 2 years?

Housing is to be provided by sponsors for a minimum of two years. Sponsors are expected to work with the family to secure a smooth transition to sustainable accommodation if required. A meeting between the sponsoring group and local authority in advance would allow housing issues and options to be discussed. In the unlikely event that a family becomes homeless the local authority would be expected to consider housing for the family in accordance with their normal procedures.

### **How will the local authority and group work together to communicate and mitigate these issues?**

*"In 2016, it was clear that there was significant interest in Community Sponsorship Schemes in Pembrokeshire and when Cabinet pledged support to the SVPRS programme in November 2016, it directed a close working relationship with the various Croeso groups to develop this. Representatives from Croeso Arberth and Croeso Abergwaun were invited to attend the multi-agency meeting process which looked at the implementation of the programme from a strategic perspective but which also prepared the way for the arrival of the first LA family. This in turn helped the Community Sponsorship groups prepare for their first families. It was agreed that the matching panel process would be the same for LA and community sponsored families with a coordinator of the Croeso groups attending each panel.*

*By working closely together, the Local Authority and Croeso groups are able to share what has worked with their families, what hasn't gone so well, and how things can be improved. They have been able to share the ESOL provision and interpreter support. With the anticipated approval of Croeso Hwlfordd, the success of the project has been demonstrated by the mutual support between the Croeso groups and the LA."*

**Pembrokeshire Case Study**

## Sponsor Breakdown

### **What happens in the case of sponsorship breakdown?**

A sponsorship arrangement could breakdown because the resettled family chooses to leave the community sponsorship arrangement and live elsewhere. This scenario is the same for the wider resettlement scheme – where in such cases, the family will no longer benefit from the additional support provided under the Programme.

In the event that sponsorship breakdown occurs due to the sponsor being unable to deliver their commitments, the care for the resettled family would fall to the local authority. Our priority would be to continue support to the family and the Home Office would support the LA with this transition.

The combination of a robust approval process, sponsor induction, and on-going monitoring of sponsors should substantially reduce the risk of sponsorship breakdown. Nevertheless, although we consider the risk to be very low, there may be rare occurrences of sponsorship breakdown.

### **What about costs falling to Local Authorities?**

In the event that a sponsorship arrangement breaks down, an appropriate level of funding will be made available to the local authority, within the existing tariff structure, to provide the necessary support to the resettled family. It is intended that the local authority will not suffer financially.

### **What happens when sponsorship breaks down in an LA area which does not support the main scheme and therefore doesn't have the necessary skills/experience?**

Local authorities will have consented to each community sponsorship arrangement in their area. Those local authorities who do not support the wider resettlement scheme and may not have the necessary skills or experience to support the resettled family, will want to consider how to mitigate this risk in advance, such as identifying another local authority, or a local organisation, with relevant expertise whom they could turn to for support if required. In some cases, it may be possible for another community sponsor group to take over. If this happens sponsors will be expected to ensure a smooth transition to local authority support or another community sponsor in the event of breakdown.

## What Next?

### Where to go for more information

If you have not already done so, please visit the Community Sponsorship page at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship> where more guidance can be found.

If you would like to contact the Home Office about the Community Sponsorship Scheme, please email [communitysponsorship@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:communitysponsorship@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk).

The Home Office team are ready to provide you with further information and respond to any questions that you may have about the Scheme. They are also willing to attend local authority meetings to provide further information about sponsorship.

Regional leads on refugee resettlement can give advice and connect local authorities with other councils who have been through the process.

<b>Regional Strategic Migration Partnership Contact List</b>		
East of England	Gosia Strona	<a href="mailto:Malgorzata.Strona@eelga.gov.uk">Malgorzata.Strona@eelga.gov.uk</a>
East Midlands	Sarah Short	<a href="mailto:Sarah.Short@emcouncils.gov.uk">Sarah.Short@emcouncils.gov.uk</a>
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North West	Katie Jones	<a href="mailto:Katie.Jones@manchester.gov.uk">Katie.Jones@manchester.gov.uk</a>
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Wales	Anne Hubbard	<a href="mailto:Anne.Hubbard@wlga.gov.uk">Anne.Hubbard@wlga.gov.uk</a>
West Midlands	Dally Panesar	<a href="mailto:Dalvinder.Panesar@birmingham.gov.uk">Dalvinder.Panesar@birmingham.gov.uk</a>
Yorkshire and Humberside		<a href="mailto:admin@migrationyorkshire.org.uk">admin@migrationyorkshire.org.uk</a>