



Home Office

UK Refugee Resettlement: Policy Guidance

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Introduction

Purpose of document

This document gives an overview of the Home Office's resettlement policies and resettlement schemes and replaces the previous guidance dated July 2018.

Background

The UK operates three resettlement schemes: The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Community Sponsorship Scheme, and Mandate Resettlement Scheme. Other safe and legal pathways to the UK which are not covered in this document include, but are not limited to, [Family Reunion](#) and schemes to provide support to current and former locally employed staff in Afghanistan ([further information is available](#)).

Policy intention

Our resettlement schemes play a key role in the global response to humanitarian crises: saving lives and offering stability to refugees most in need of protection. We work closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the global refugee agency, to identify those living in formal refugee camps, informal settlements and host communities who would benefit most from resettlement to the UK. Our resettlement schemes are not selective on the basis of employability or integration potential. Apart from the criteria we set for each scheme (see below), we do not seek to influence which cases are referred to us by UNHCR.

Our approach is to resettle refugees in line with the global need identified by UNHCR, typically from countries hosting large populations of refugees such as those bordering countries with conflicts, where resettlement may be the only durable solution. This provides refugees with a safe and legal route to the UK.

Legal Framework

The 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees ([full text](#)) is the framework which underpins international refugee protection. It, along with the 1967 Protocol, clearly sets out the definition of a refugee, along with the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights a refugee is entitled to receive. It also highlights the obligations of refugees towards their host country.

The Convention defines a refugee as someone who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.' This is the definition used by both UNHCR and the UK when determining whether somebody is a refugee.

The UK will only resettle those determined by UNHCR to be refugees in accordance with the definition in the Convention. All resettlement to the UK is at the government's discretion.

Selection process

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR is the internationally recognised and UN mandated agency for dealing with refugees. It has a global presence and more than 70 years' experience in handling refugee crises. We rely on UNHCR to help us to identify and process vulnerable refugees who would benefit from resettlement.

UNHCR has responsibility for all out-of-country casework activity relating to our resettlement schemes.

They will:

- verify identity and family composition;
- interview registered refugees to determine their experiences and current circumstances in the host country;
- identify refugees with potential resettlement needs and assess their vulnerability;
- conduct a full Refugee Status Determination (RSD); and
- conduct a resettlement interview and assess that refugees meet the criteria for resettlement, in accordance with UNHCR's resettlement handbook before referring them to the UK for consideration.

Our resettlement criteria

UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)

The UKRS reaffirms the UK's ongoing commitment to refugee resettlement, which continues to be an important component of the UK's humanitarian response. Under the UKRS, the UK will continue to offer a safe and legal route to vulnerable refugees in need of protection.

It is accessible to refugees who have been assessed for resettlement by UNHCR against their resettlement submission categories:

- Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs;
- Survivors of Violence and/or Torture;

- Medical Needs;
- Women and Girls at Risk;
- Family Reunification;
- Children and Adolescents at Risk;
- Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions.

The caseload of those we resettle is determined in discussion with UNHCR and in line with their projected global resettlement needs. Local authority capacity in the UK is also taken into account to ensure that the types of cases referred can be resettled in the UK.

The number of refugees we resettle every year through the UKRS depends on a variety of factors including future government funding commitments and local authorities' capacity for supporting refugees.

Unaccompanied children

The vast majority of children resettled through the UKRS will arrive with their parents or other carers. UNHCR will always seek to find local solutions and reunify unaccompanied children with parents or family members within the region or wherever those family members may be. It is often in the child's best interest to remain in the region where they are more likely to be reunited with family. However, unaccompanied children are eligible under the scheme if UNHCR determine that resettlement is in their best interests.

Community Sponsorship Scheme

The Community Sponsorship Scheme enables community groups to directly welcome and support a resettled family into their local community. The Scheme was established in response to the desire of civil society to support refugees and is an example of effective government and civil society collaboration.

Community Sponsorship is accessible to refugees under the same criteria as the UKRS (see above). Refugees resettled through the Community Sponsorship Scheme complement those resettled to local authorities through the UKRS.

[More information on the community sponsorship scheme is available](#), including the criteria for community sponsor groups.

Mandate Resettlement Scheme

The Mandate Resettlement Scheme is a global scheme and resettles recognised refugees with a close family member in the UK who is willing to accommodate them.

Beneficiaries of the Mandate scheme must have been recognised as refugees by UNHCR and judged by them to be in need of resettlement. The refugee must be a minor child, spouse, or parent or grandparent aged over 65 of someone settled in the UK, or who has limited leave to remain in a category leading to settlement, who is willing to accommodate and support them. The UK relative does not need to hold refugee status. We will only consider wider family members (e.g. adult siblings) in exceptional circumstances.

Casework

UNHCR will conduct a full Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and resettlement consideration as they are mandated to determine whether an individual meets the 1951 Convention definition of a refugee and are best placed to assess their protection needs. Once they have determined that an individual is a refugee, UNHCR will then consider whether resettlement is the right protection solution for them, and the most appropriate country to refer them to.

UNHCR are internationally recognised experts in assessing vulnerability and by referring a case they are recommending that a person falls into one of their resettlement submission categories and have protection needs which mean they should be resettled in the UK. UNHCR have access to detailed case information – which is gathered during interviews conducted during the different stages of resettlement processing – and they have a detailed knowledge of the circumstances refugees face in host countries.

If UNHCR consider that an individual should be referred to the UK for resettlement, they will send the Home Office a Resettlement Registration Form (RRF) which confirms that the individual has been determined by UNHCR to be a refugee and details the reasons why that person is in need of resettlement. This is reviewed by the Home Office casework team, who determine whether the case should be accepted for resettlement to the UK. Home Office caseworkers manage the inward flow of referrals from UNHCR, assessing the eligibility of referrals through a case working process and commissioning relevant screening and security checks. Caseworkers will also consider other aspects of the case, including medical and safeguarding needs, at this stage.

Security checks

We take security extremely seriously in cases referred to us for resettlement. UNHCR screens out cases for resettlement consideration in accordance with the safeguards built into the 1951 Refugee Convention (i.e. the applicant has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity; committed a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge; or has been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations). When potential cases are submitted by UNHCR for consideration they are screened and considered for suitability for entry to the UK: we retain the right to reject individuals on security or other grounds. We will not resettle individuals who have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity or other serious crimes, in line with the Convention. Caseworkers will pay particular attention to the following:

- military service;
- involvement with the government authorities including any arrests or periods of detention;
- past involvement in the conflict they are fleeing from;
- links to terrorism/extremism;
- certain occupations;
- travel history.

Allocation Process

The UKRS is delivered in close partnership with local authorities. We receive offers of accommodation either directly from a local authority, or on a regional basis through a regional Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP). Refugees are matched to a local authority that can provide suitable accommodation and the appropriate support for those being resettled.

Through Community Sponsorship, refugees are allocated to a suitable community group who has been formally approved as a sponsor. Local authorities must consent to each Community Sponsorship application and agree to the group accepting the proposed refugee family.

Refugees resettled through the Mandate Resettlement Scheme are accommodated and supported by a family member living in the UK.

Unaccompanied children who are resettled to the UK will be placed with a local authority via the National Transfer Scheme. [Further guidance on the procedure is available.](#)

Funding

The Home Office provides tariff funding for local authorities for the first year, including education and health funding, using the Official Development Assistance budget. For years 2-5, tapered tariff funding is provided to local authorities, while education and health funding flows through the normal per capita funding routes.

There is also an exceptional cases fund which local authorities can use to assist the most vulnerable refugees, for example by making accessibility adjustments to homes for individuals with mobility issues.

For Community Sponsorship cases, the community sponsor group is responsible for providing support to the resettled family in the first year. Neither the community sponsor group nor the local authority receive funding in the first year for these cases. Tariff funding for years 2 to 5 is not normally paid to local authorities unless there are exceptional circumstances, following an assessment of the needs of the resettled family.

For individuals resettled through the Mandate Resettlement Scheme, the Home Office may fund travel and medical costs incurred by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), but no funding is provided after a refugee arrives in the UK.

Travel and Arrival

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

IOM plays a key role in resettlement, working in the region to provide health assessments, document handling and travel assistance before refugees are resettled to the UK.

Health assessments

Migration Health Assessments (MHAs) conducted by IOM are provided to local authorities so that appropriate care can be arranged for refugees on arrival; they may also inform where an individual is resettled, for example if a refugee has mobility issues or a health condition which requires specialist treatment. A refugee who has Tuberculosis will not be resettled until their condition is assessed as being latent.

IOM, Public Health England and the Home Office have produced a [health protocol document](#) as guidance on the aim, objectives and scope of pre-entry health assessment for refugees who are resettled in the UK.

Travel assistance

IOM are commissioned to provide refugees with the assistance they need to depart for the UK on the agreed resettlement date. This includes applying for the UK visa; accompanying refugees to UK visa application centres so that biometrics can be enrolled; booking flights; arranging exit permits from the host country in liaison with UNHCR; and confirming that refugees are fit to travel.

Cultural orientation

Refugees aged 14 and above who are being resettled through the UKRS and Community Sponsorship Scheme are invited to attend a 3-day pre-departure cultural orientation session delivered by IOM which gives them the opportunity to acquire information they will need when they arrive in the UK. Children and young people aged 5-18 are invited to attend at least 2 hours of age-appropriate pre-departure child cultural orientation. This is complemented by further briefing on arrival in the UK, including provision of a welcome guide and local authority/community sponsor factsheet.

Biometric residence permit (BRP)

Everyone resettled in the UK (including children) is issued with a biometric residence permit (BRP). These can be used to confirm identity, immigration status, and right to work or access to public funds. The card will include the holder's National Insurance number if they are over 16 on the day of arrival. Bio-metric enrolment (fingerprinting and photograph) takes place as part of the visa application process. The BRP is sent to the local authority or community sponsorship group for distribution shortly after arrival.

Arrival in the UK

Our arrivals team will arrange for families resettled through the UKRS and Community Sponsorship Scheme to travel to the UK six to eight weeks after they have been allocated accommodation (depending on the host country exit permit process). This can be on a scheduled or chartered flight. IOM will send an escort to accompany families to the UK and they will be greeted by representatives from their receiving local authority or community sponsor group on arrival.

For those on the Mandate Resettlement Scheme, the Home Office will cover the cost of flights to the UK where the individual cannot afford to do so, and IOM will provide an escort for particularly vulnerable individuals or families. Refugees will be greeted by their relatives at the airport on arrival.

Leave granted to resettled individuals

Resettled refugees are issued six months' [Leave Outside of the Rules](#) visas prior to departure from the region. These are handed to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), for use in obtaining exit permits from host countries and making departure arrangements. Resettled refugees are then granted Indefinite Leave to Remain and refugee status on arrival in the UK¹.

¹ The granting of Indefinite Leave to Remain on arrival in the UK for those resettled through the UKRS and Community Sponsorship commences in October 2021. Those already resettled since March 2021 have the option to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain free of charge.

Life in the UK

Access to support and benefits

Resettled individuals have an immediate right to work and to access welfare benefits, dependant on their circumstances and whether they meet the relevant Department for Work and Pensions criteria for the specific benefit for which they are applying.

Further guidance on refugee entitlement to NHS services can be found [here](#).

Local authority support

Individuals who are resettled through the UKRS are provided with initial reception arrangements, casework and orientation support including English language provision by the receiving local authority. Accommodation is also provided, but refugees are required to pay rent through a tenancy agreement.

Upon arrival, the local authority will assign a caseworker to every resettled family or individual. The caseworker will maintain close contact with the family for the first 12 months to support their well-being and integration. The caseworker will help the family to register with local schools or ESOL classes, attend Job Centre Plus appointments for benefit assessments, register with a local GP, provide advice and referral to appropriate mental health services and to specialist services for victims of torture, and assist with access to employment. This support is funded by central government and reflects the fact that they have been referred for resettlement to the UK by the UNHCR on account of their particular vulnerability.

Community sponsor support

Refugees arriving through Community Sponsorship are provided with housing by the sponsorship group for 24 months. Refugees will typically pay rent through a tenancy agreement. The group are also responsible for providing integration support for 12 months akin to the support provided to individuals resettled through the UKRS. This includes meeting the family at the airport, providing them with a warm welcome and orientation to the local area, supporting access to medical and social services, English language tuition (to the same requirements as the UKRS), supporting attendance and appointments at the local Job Centre plus, assistance with

navigating social welfare provision and support towards employment and self-sufficiency.

Where a Community Sponsorship breakdown occurs and the group or family are no longer able or willing to continue to offer and accept support, the lead sponsor will make efforts to identify a new support network. Where this isn't possible, the local authority will become responsible for supporting the refugee family.

English language

Refugees can access mainstream English language provision, which differs across the devolved nations. In addition, the Home Office provides funding to supplement mainstream provision to enable adults resettled through the UKRS and Community Sponsorship schemes to access language tuition and integrate into UK society. All adults arriving through the UKRS and Community Sponsorship Scheme anywhere in the UK should receive a minimum of eight hours' English language tuition a week in their first year.

Welsh language

Families may be resettled to areas of Wales where the local schools teach in the medium of Welsh. We work with the local authority or community sponsorship group to ensure that resettled children receive additional support to learn both Welsh and English at school in these circumstances.

Higher education

Resettled individuals have access to higher education in the UK.

Resettled refugees are eligible for the home fee status for tuition fees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are also eligible for living cost support if they are on an eligible higher education course and meet all other eligibility criteria.

In Scotland, further/higher education fees are free for eligible students resettled through the UK's resettlement schemes who have been ordinarily resident in the UK at all times since being granted leave to remain and are ordinarily resident in Scotland on the relevant date (the relevant date for autumn start courses is 1 August).

Travel

Individuals with refugee status should no longer use their national passport to travel as it could affect their refugee status. Instead, they can apply for a 1951 UN Convention Travel Document (also known as a Refugee Travel Document). If they

do so, they must submit their national passport (if held), which will be retained by the Home Office for as long as the applicant has the Refugee Travel Document.

Refugee Travel Documents will normally be valid for travel to all countries (including the country from which the individual was resettled) but will be closed to the country of origin and/or the country from which refuge was sought. Individuals should check whether visas are required for the countries they wish to visit or travel through.

Whether or not refugees are granted a visa, allowed to enter that country and allowed to leave is entirely the decision of the country they wish to visit. If someone who has been granted refugee status obtains a national passport from the national authorities of the country from which they sought refuge and/or travels back to that country their case will be reviewed to consider whether it is appropriate to revoke their refugee status on the basis that they no longer need international protection.

More information on [Home Office travel documents](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

Criminality and leaving the scheme

Our policy towards resettled individuals who commit a serious crime or who lose their refugee status for any other reason is the same as for those granted protection after arrival in the UK. There is guidance on the [revocation of refugee status](#), and [restricted leave](#) on GOV.UK.

In the event of criminality, a resettled individual's refugee status will be reviewed, in accordance with these policies, and revoked if the individual is deemed to be a danger to the community after having been convicted by a final judgment of a particularly serious crime. Cases will be considered individually, taking into account the sentence together with the nature of the crime, the actual harm inflicted and whether most jurisdictions would consider the offence a serious crime.

If the criminality is sufficiently serious and the individual constitutes a danger to the community but the individual cannot be removed from the UK because it would contravene the UK's obligations under the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), their current leave will be revoked and replaced with a form of limited leave (Discretionary or Restricted Leave). Conditions will be imposed according to the individual's situation and the nature of their crime.

Dependants will be allowed to retain their status (unless they have themselves been convicted of a particularly serious crime and are judged to be a danger to the community). If the individual is removed to another country, their dependants will be given the option of residing in the UK with the status they have been granted or returning to their country of origin when the individual is deported.

Local authority funding will be reviewed on a case by case basis following revocation of status, but we anticipate that it will continue unless the family leaves the local authority area.

Voluntary withdrawal

Where resettled individuals/families choose to move to another area, it is for local authorities to agree at a local level whether funding already committed in year 1 could be transferred to another local authority. Local authorities may agree a partial transfer of funding if resettled individuals/families have moved away but are still accessing local services. In years two to five a local authority will be able to claim funds if resettled individuals/families move into their area and they can provide evidence that they are actively providing support to them. If resettled individuals/families leave the country on a permanent basis, they will be considered to have left the scheme.

It is for local authorities to determine whether the accommodation they provide is suitable and, if not, to provide alternative accommodation. Resettled individuals/families that choose to leave accommodation deemed suitable by the local authority will be considered to have voluntarily withdrawn from the scheme unless the move has been agreed with, and has the support of, the local authority.

We expect local authorities to inform us as soon as possible when resettled individuals/families are absent from their accommodation for a period of time, so funding requirements can be reviewed. The implications for individuals will be determined by their access to benefits or policy of the local authority (e.g. they may be unable to claim housing benefit after a certain time). If resettled individuals/families have been or are likely to be absent from their accommodation for 8 weeks or more, are not meeting their rent obligations, and the local authority considers they are unlikely to return, they will be considered to have left the scheme. This may be extended where it is not practical for resettled individuals/families to return within that period, for example a medical emergency whilst overseas.

Resettled individuals/families considered to have 'left the scheme' will no longer be entitled to the package of support under it. Their leave and immigration status will not be affected. Where refugees are no longer accessing support under the scheme, funding to the local authority will also cease.

Processing personal data

We have a data sharing protocol (DSP) in place with local authorities, which provides a set of principles for the secure processing of resettled individuals' personal data.

The DSP can be found in the funding instruction for local authorities. It allows us to share the UNHCR Resettlement Referral Form, Migration Health Assessment form and Best Interest Assessments and Determinations with local authorities so that they can provide necessary support to resettled families, whilst ensuring that this information is used appropriately and securely.

For Community Sponsorship a similar DSP exists and is contained within the sponsor agreement which is a contract signed between the Home Office and the sponsoring organisation. The DSP allows us to share personal data to inform the sponsor of the specific needs of the refugees they are supporting and ensures that this information is processed and stored securely.