

Sponsoring Ukrainians – briefing for faith communities

The Homes for Ukraine scheme

On 18 March the Government opened a new 'humanitarian support pathway' which will enable Ukrainians who do not have family connections in the UK to be sponsored to come to the UK by local communities, charities, and businesses in the UK. This scheme, called 'Homes for Ukraine', is led by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. **If you would like to consider sponsoring a Ukrainian family through this scheme you can find useful information on the [Homes for Ukraine FAQ page](#).** It includes details on the length of time you are required to host, how to sign up to the scheme, and what your role as a sponsor would be.

If you do not have a direct connection to a Ukrainian person or family to sponsor you can register with Reset who are seeking to enable a matching service: <https://www.homesforukraine.org.uk/>

Reset has also compiled a [comprehensive toolkit for sponsors](#) who would like more guidance on questions like how the programme works, how it links to your local authority and how you might be able to set safe boundaries.

Introduction to sponsoring

This brief guide¹ aims to address some key questions that anyone who is thinking of sponsoring should consider before agreeing to open up their home or property to individuals or families from Ukraine.

Before you commit to sponsoring, it's incredibly important that you think through carefully what this will mean for you, your family and your faith community. What does it mean to have someone stay with you for 6 months or longer? Hosting is a serious commitment that may not be the right choice for everyone.

It is important to think about sponsorship as a holistic scheme, rather than simply offering a spare room or empty building. As well as providing a safe, temporary home, hosting can give people vital stability that enables them to access the support they need to move forward with their life.

It can also be a rewarding experience for both guests and hosts; an opportunity to learn about different backgrounds, cultures and world-views, a chance to make new friends and connections, and to help with integration for people who are new to the UK.

The expert hosting network [NACCOM](#) advises that hosting works best when the right time, support and consideration has been given to facilitating a positive and safe hosting arrangement, particularly as many people in need of hosting may have experienced trauma, conflict or persecution.

If you would like to offer a vacant property of your faith community to sponsor a Ukrainian family, the [guidance written by the Church of Scotland Law Department](#) includes some useful pointers.

Introductory training on the role a church can play in welcoming Ukrainians is provided by [Welcome Churches](#).

Things to consider before you sponsor under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme:

Consider your motivation

- Hosting is a significant commitment, particularly if it is going to be for more than a few months. It is important that all members within a household, including children, take time to properly reflect together, and come to agreement, before taking on such a responsibility. Think about the different ways that hosting might impact on your life.
- What would you want from a hosting situation? Imagine you had suddenly been forced to leave behind your home, your loved ones, your job, your country and everything that was familiar to you. We know it can be difficult to imagine the trauma that many people seeking support from hosting will have experienced, but try to think about what kind of support you might need if you were in this situation. It's also important to remember that people are individuals, so their support needs will vary considerably.

Consider the support available to you

- Do you know what statutory or voluntary sector support is available to you and your guest(s) in your area? Are you able to respond to the varying support needs of the individual(s) you may host? Hosting arrangements are more likely to be successful where the host receives appropriate support and training on topics such as boundaries, power and ethics, trauma, safeguarding and building meaningful relationships. It's vital for the safety and wellbeing of both guests and hosts that consideration is given to what support might be needed for both parties, and how to access it, not just at the outset of the hosting arrangement but throughout.
- Consider what role your local faith community and community could play in offering some of this support.

Consider your location

- Are you living in a remote area? Access to public transport or a car would be essential to enable independence. What if your guest doesn't have a driver's license, which might be likely?
- Which services are available in your local area? Are schools and services easily accessible? E.g. access to dentist, GP, job centre, etc.
- Would the location of your house present a barrier to the individuals you are hosting?

Consider your living situation

- Do you have a spare bedroom(s) that is private? Does it enable rest and recovery?
- Are you willing to share your living spaces with someone you don't know? Your living room, kitchen, bathroom.
- How many people can live in your home without it becoming overcrowded?
- Are you happy to give guests a copy of your house key?
- Are you comfortable for social workers to visit your house to do checks and home assessments?
- Communication (telephone, internet) is vital for someone seeking sanctuary. If you don't have Wi-Fi in your home or the property you are offering, are you in a position to have it installed?
- Are you happy for your guest to store and prepare food independently?
- Will you be comfortable allowing people to stay in your home if you go on holiday?
- If you are considering hosting a family with children, is your house suitable for children? If so, what ages can you suitably accommodate?
- Mobility – is your house safe and accessible for people who may have mobility issues?

Consider your personal preferences

- Will you be comfortable allowing people to stay in your home if you go on holiday?
- If you have pets, have you considered how will this affect your guest(s); what if they have allergies and fears? What if they have pets? Will their pets get on with your pets?
- Are you comfortable hosting someone who may have different dietary requirements (e.g. I am a vegetarian, am I comfortable hosting someone who eats meat?)
- How do you feel about hosting someone who smokes?
- Are you comfortable living with people who might have a different parenting style?
- Will you feel comfortable living with people who have a different age, disability, culture, sexual orientation, religion, or world view to yourself?
- Are you happy living with someone who might not have been vaccinated?
- Have you thought about how you, or your guest, would feel about staying with someone of a different gender? Is it appropriate for you to host someone of a different gender?
- Do you have a physical or mental health condition that may be affected by having guest(s) living with you for a long period of time?

Financial impact

- How will hosting impact on your financial outgoings e.g. utility bills, council tax or rent, etc?
- Will you be able to provide food and other basics whilst arrivals wait for their benefits claim to be processed? N.B. Local authorities will be providing one off payments to people on arrival but this might not be enough to cover all their immediate needs whilst they wait for benefits.
- If you don't have Wi-Fi, are you in a position to have it installed?
- Consider the potential financial impact for your faith community (e.g. costs that might arise in preparing a vacant property like checking electrical appliances, etc.).
- Is there any financial support you or your guest could access to help with any associated hosting costs?

Emotional impact

Having a trauma-informed approach is important to ensure a safe and successful hosting arrangement for both you and your guests. Established hosting projects will typically cover the following questions and considerations as part of an in-depth training. You might want to consider accessing training before sponsoring a family.

- People fleeing war and persecution are often traumatised. Some people may need specialised treatment or support, making them unsuitable for hosting. People suffering from trauma can feel very depressed, hopeless and angry. It's important to consider how you are best able to support someone who has complex mental health problems including PTSD? It's important that you have access to support and training in order to take a trauma-informed approach to hosting that ensures you don't retraumatise your guests or become vicariously traumatised yourself.
- Sponsors will not be provided with medical history about a guest.
- Having a guest in your house will impact your day-to-day life and they might not behave in the way you expected. How resilient are you to change? How do you deal with frustration or conflict?
- Guests who have experienced trauma may tell you about very distressing experiences, or they may not want to say much at all about what they have been through. Are you able to set boundaries to look after yourself? And are you able to respect other people's boundaries, including if a guest chooses not to share their time or their 'story' with you?
- What are you expecting from a guest? How are you expecting them to behave? What if they are very different to this expectation?

- Have you thought about opportunities for you and your guest(s) to connect with others going through the same experiences? Are there local support networks in your community that you can join?

Thinking about your guests

- Have you started to think about how you will welcome your guests and how you will enable them to feel at home?
- Could you put together a house guide including rules, boundaries, and information about your daily routines?
- Do you already have links to voluntary sector organisations/faith groups supporting people seeking asylum, refugees, or other migrants?
- Do you have the time to support people to register with GPs, dentists, schools, etc? If no, who can support your guest with this?
- You may host someone who cannot speak English. Can you help someone navigate a new town/city and new systems without interpretation or translation support?
- It may take time for your guest to gain the confidence to go out of the home to socialise or find employment. Are you happy for someone to spend a lot of time in your shared space?
- Some people can have serious or long-term health conditions, or a disability. What kind of impact would this have on you and your household? Are you able to support people who may have debilitating conditions to access the appropriate and ongoing health care that they need?

Wrap around support that empowers

- How would you support and empower your guest(s) to live independently here in the UK? Successful hosting fosters independence and does not create dependency, so spend some time thinking through ways that you can empower your guest(s) to rebuild their lives in the UK.
- Are you able and willing to provide comprehensive wrap-around support to the people you hope to host? We believe in two-way integration that involves both the hosting community and newcomers. Integration involves every area of life: setting up bank accounts, registering with a GP, registering for benefits, finding employment, finding your way around, children settling in school, learning a language, helping with homework, building friendships, recreation, etc. Think about how you can help build people's self-agency from day one.
- Do you have time and energy to support people with this? Do you have a community around you who could help with this?
- Think about the organisations near you that you could link up with in preparation.
- You may host someone who cannot speak English – can you help someone navigate a new place and new systems without interpretation or translation support?

Moving on

- Think about what happens after the 6 months hosting arrangement. How can you help people move on to other accommodation and be self-reliant?
- The minimum commitment is 6 months, but if the person hasn't found anywhere else to go in that time, would you be able to let them stay longer than the agreed period? Will you feel comfortable asking your guest to leave?
- What move-on support will there be for people to leave the hosting arrangement and settle independently in the community? How could you plan a positive transition with the guests, people and services in the community?

- We know that things don't always work out and relationships break down. How would you manage a breakdown in the host/guest relationship? Think about what you would do in this situation, what support you might need and where you and your guest would go to get help to ensure a safe resolution.
N.B. If the hosting relationship breaks down, your guest will be able to apply for homelessness assistance and social housing, however, depending where you are living, the availability of temporary accommodation may be limited, and it could take longer to find permanent housing.
- Good hosting schemes offer support to hosts and/or guests through roles such as a guest support worker or host co-ordinator. These roles offer a point of contact and support. Who would be your point of contact in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, which isn't an established hosting scheme, who could offer dedicated staff support?

Safeguarding

We believe that safeguarding and risk management are key components of a successful sponsorship arrangement.

- Have you thought about potential risks to you or your family of having an unrelated person(s) living in your home?
- What ongoing support would the guest and host need to ensure an appropriate and trauma-informed response to minimise the risk of, at best, relationship breakdown between host and guest and, at worst, exploitation and harm?
- Do you know how to identify safeguarding concerns? And how and where to go to report it?
- Are you comfortable with Social Workers and other people visiting your home to undertake checks?
- Are you comfortable with safeguarding and Disclosure Scotland DBS checks being undertaken on you and all other adults in your household?

Known unknowns

- We all know that life doesn't always go as planned. Think about unexpected things that might happen within a period of 6 months that could severely impact this hosting arrangement. Do you have an elderly relative who might fall unwell and need to stay with you? Are you wanting to call a new minister and will need the manse? Might you be in a different financial situation yourself in 6 months' time?

If you don't think you will be able to offer the levels of support, friendship, patience and privacy that are needed, do not worry – hosting is not for everyone.

The key as you make your decision is to place a refugee's needs and agency at the centre.

There are also other ways you can offer support. Have a look at [the Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees blog and 7 ways you can support Ukrainians](#). You might also want to consider how you can connect with and support other sponsors in your local area.

ⁱ This guide has been put together by [Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees](#) with the support of [NACCOM](#) and some of their members.