

A Citizens' guide to private sponsorship of refugees

The following is a summary of <http://www.refugees-welcome.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Citizensguide-to-private-sponsorship-in-the-UK.pdf>

The site <http://www.refugees-welcome.org.uk/sponsorship/> has more information and updates.

What a private refugee sponsorship scheme in the UK might look like?

For private refugee sponsorship to happen the following two essential things need to be in place

- The government needs to be willing to allow refugees to enter the country via this route and to have set up a system
- Private individuals or groups need to be organised and have sufficient funds to support the sponsored refugees who are allowed in

On the first of these, there is already a commitment from the Home Secretary and the Home Office is actively working on implementing it. And if the second was in place it would go a long way to turning that pledge into a reality.

How much?

The sums for UK sponsors could be something like the following: £10,000 to £12,000 for an individual £ Up to-20,000 for a family

This doesn't necessarily mean that sponsors would have to demonstrate up front that they had this sum of money in a bank account. But they would have to demonstrate to administering authorities that they could provide this level of support either through direct cash support or support in kind (free accommodation, for example) over the 12 month period of sponsorship.

On top of this financial and material support there are other forms of support sponsors need to provide.

Following the example of other countries the following is likely:

- Accommodation
- Household utilities
- Food
- Clothing
- Furniture
- Other household goods
- Other day-to-day living expenses

This assumes – and it is reasonable assumption for what might be termed 'full sponsorship' (see alternatives below) – that the sponsored refugee is not entitled to access any benefits such as jobseekers' allowance, disability allowance, tax credits, or housing benefit in the first 12 months they are in the UK and so would be dependent on their sponsor. (In this sense they would differ from other resettled refugees who are entitled to benefits). We can assume that private sponsored refugees would be able to use public services such as the NHS and schools free of charge.

So, private sponsors would be providing all financial and material support to the sponsored refugee for the first 12 months.

Support could be provided in kind rather than paid for by the private sponsor. So, for instance, the private sponsoring group might include a landlord whose contribution would be to provide furnished accommodation free or at low rent to the refugee individual or family.

However, private sponsorship is not just a financial transaction. It is much more than that and this is what makes it such an attractive proposition. It should be truly relational: individuals directly helping other individuals with whom they have or develop a personal bond. So, as important as the money are things like:

- Helping with language issues (acting as or finding interpreters, accessing English lessons, helping to practice English)
- Helping to register with a doctor and dentist
- Helping to enrol children in school
- Providing orientation for local transport, shops, banks, leisure facilities, places of worship etc
- Being a friend and a person the refugee can always call on
- Helping in the search for employment or enrolment for study

Who can be a sponsor? The Home Secretary in her conference speech listed the following

- individuals, charities, faith groups, churches and businesses

As this implies, the scope is likely to be quite wide. We could envisage in the UK a structure along the following lines:

- **Lead sponsoring organisations** – institutions like national faith bodies, church dioceses, established NGOs which sign agreements with the government department running sponsorship (see below) and which both sponsor some refugees themselves and provide guidance and support to smaller sponsoring group
- **Community sponsors** – community organisations, local groups etc who maybe only sponsor one refugee family a year and who raise the money and provide the person to person support but who themselves are supported by a lead sponsoring organisation
- **Groups of individuals** – most likely a particular family or collection of families (perhaps with back-up from friends and neighbours) sponsoring a particular refugee or refugee family, probably on a oneoff basis, and probably because they are family members or known to them. Again they register with and are supported by a lead sponsoring organisation

Finally, there is the issue of: What happens after the private sponsorship period ends?

The assumption of private sponsorship in other countries is that after 12 months of support sponsored refugees will be able to support themselves in their new home country through work. Official evaluation in Canada suggests that this is largely what happens. However, in the UK context we would assume that any sponsored refugee who was not able to support themselves after 12 months would be entitled to access the same benefits as other resettled refugees if they needed such support.

Checklist of benefits of private sponsorship

- Transformative for refugees who enter in this way
- Another way to reunite refugee families
- A way to increase the number and diversify the range of refugees coming to the UK through resettlement (private sponsored refugees may not have to meet such strict criteria for entry as other resettled refugees in terms of vulnerability for instance)
- Huge personal, emotional, spiritual rewards for sponsoring groups and individuals. It is a step up from just giving money or clothes to unnamed refugees or asylum seekers
- Increases positive refugee awareness in communities where privately sponsored refugees settle (In Canada, private sponsoring organisations say sponsorship has had a huge effect on public sympathy for refugees among the Canadian public)