

Introductory Guide

For refugees welcomed through Community Sponsorship

Introduction

Before reading this guide, please read the *Welcome to the UK* booklet, which gives a detailed overview of the UK and different services you will access now that you have been resettled. In this guide, we have tried not to repeat information between the two documents. Instead we've focused on Community Sponsorship groups and how your Community Sponsorship group will work with you to access main areas of support.

Community Sponsorship groups are made up of volunteers who have worked for months or even years ahead of your arrival to secure your housing, research how to help you access services and plan how they will help you reach independence. These groups have gone through a rigorous application process and are approved by the UK Government to be your main supporters. They work with the UK Government and your local council to plan for your arrival and will support your family for at least one year. They have secured your housing for at least two years.

Community Sponsorship groups sign an agreement with the UK Government to provide you with support. They agree that they will:

- Provide initial funds of £200 per person in your family. This may be given to you in instalments until your benefits are received.
- Provide integration support for up to 24 months.
- Find accommodation for you that is available for 24 months.
- Help you register for your benefits, register with your GP, and contact utility companies for your heating, water, electricity, and gas provision.
- Ensure children are registered at school.
- Provide the opportunity for adults to access 8 hours of English language learning per week for 12 months.
- Offer you local orientation opportunities, and assistance with searching for jobs or volunteer opportunities.
- Provide access to an interpreter for the initial week of your arrival.

These are not the only things that the Community Sponsorship group will do to support you, but it is what they are obligated to do.

Reset Communities and Refugees is a charity. Reset receives funding from the UK Government department, the Home Office, to create resources (like this guide) and

train Community Sponsorship groups about how to best support you and your family. Reset will also meet with you and your group separately a few times after your arrival to make sure you are settling in and let you ask questions about resettlement to someone outside your group. These meetings will be conducted with a professional interpreter over the internet or a phone call.

We welcome you to the UK, and as part of the growing number of people welcomed through Community Sponsorship. We wish you every success in your life here.

Interpreters

As part of their Community Sponsorship application, your group will have fundraised money, and part of this money may be used for interpreting costs. This may be to pay for in-person professional interpreters, telephone, or online interpreters. Interpreting services can be expensive, and so groups will only be able to book you an interpreter when really needed, due to limited funds.

Many groups are also able to use volunteer interpreters. Sometimes volunteer interpreters are actively part of the group or members of the local community who speak your language. Volunteer interpreters are not paid and may not have a professional interpreting background.

Many service providers can book interpreters for your appointments. For example, the GP surgery can access telephone interpreters, but you will need to tell them that you require an interpreter when booking an appointment. If you have a hospital appointment, then you must tell them in advance if you require an interpreter. Most hospitals can book in-person interpreters to join the appointment, but again, you will need to let them know in advance if you require an interpreter of a particular gender. And at the Jobcentre, the group may pay for an in-person interpreter to join you for the first few appointments, after which the Jobcentre will need to start booking an interpreter for your appointments. The Jobcentre will only book an interpreter if you or the group ask them to do this.

Interpreting is a paid-for service, and the relationship an interpreter will have with you is that of a professional one. If you do not feel comfortable with an interpreter, then you can let the group know. Depending on the situation, they can then look to access a different interpreter for you.

Education

Children's Education

All children in the UK are required to attend school from the age of 5 (4 in Northern Ireland) to 16, and in England, all individuals aged 16-18 must either attend school or work with an education component. Most schools are mixed where boys and girls sit side by side in classes. School is free until the age of 18, however, some private schools charge tuition. Most schools are secular, but there are also free, religiously affiliated schools that children can attend.

Before your arrival, your group will have found at least one school in your area that has space for your children. This may not be the closest school to your home, as schools have limited spaces available in each year group. The group members will alert the school prior to your arrival so that they can plan to give your children the extra help they need to catch up to their classmates.

In the UK, parents are expected to be involved in their child's education and even young children may be assigned homework assignments. Someone in your group will help you communicate with the school initially, so you know what is expected of you as a parent.

Adults' Education

As an adult accessing welfare benefits you and the other adults in your family will be required to attend eight hours of English languages classes, also referred to as ESOL, each week until you are ready to look for work. Your group will arrange these classes for you, and they may come from different teaching sources. For example, one day you may attend classes at a local college and another day you may have private lessons at home. Your teachers will assess your language skills. If you need help with literacy skills, your group will help connect you with the resources you need.

Learning languages, especially as an adult, can be very difficult. Take your time and don't be discouraged if you don't progress as quickly as you'd like!

If you have academic or professional qualifications from your own country, work with your group to find out if they are transferable to the UK. Unfortunately, for some professions only qualifications received in the UK are accepted. Many refugees have been able to requalify in their professions after some time in the UK, so ask your group for help if this is something you would like to pursue.

Healthcare

In the *Welcome to the UK* booklet, you'll find information about the National Health Service (NHS) in England, Wales and Scotland, or Health and Social Care (HSC) in Northern Ireland and which services you can access for free. Your Community Sponsorship group will already know where and how to register you and your family members with a local doctor, called a GP, and will facilitate this process for you. One or two members of the group have also received information about your family members' medical conditions in your Migrant Health Assessment, carried out by IOM prior to coming to the UK. They will not share this information with anyone other than the doctor you are registered with. You will have been given this information prior to your departure to hand to the GP when you meet them.

If you have a non-urgent medical issue, you can ask your group to help you make an appointment with your GP who will prescribe medicine or refer you to specialist services if needed. Since the pandemic began, some GPs prefer patients to do their initial consultation online or on the phone instead of in person. Many newcomers are surprised by how long it can take to receive medical help for a non-urgent condition. Be assured that all British people accessing healthcare in the UK also face the same wait times.

As you will be a new patient arriving to the UK, you may find that you receive invitations to regular check-ups. For example, women are invited for cervical screening every three years between the ages of 25-49. Do speak to your group or GP if you have any questions relating to these appointments.

For emergency medical help, you should call 999 and for medical issues that cannot wait for a GP appointment but are not an emergency, you can call 111 and they will help get you the help you need. For smaller issues, such as a cold, you can ask your local pharmacy for help, but they are unlikely to give you antibiotics for a common cold.

As mentioned in the Interpreters section of this guide, medical services in the UK, except for pharmacies and dentists, are required to provide you with an interpreter. However, this is likely to be over the phone. They may not be able to provide an interpreter when making appointments, so until you are comfortable doing this yourself, members of your group can help you.

Dental care is subsidised but not free in the UK. Your group will help you and your family register with a dentist and will speak with you about how this will be paid for. There are long waiting lists for dentists in the UK at present.

Housing

As part of the Community Sponsorship programme, your group has secured a house or flat for your family for the next 24 months. This means that you do not have to move, unless you want to, for at least two years.

Housing in the UK can be very expensive, so most groups struggle to find affordable properties for the families they support – this may be the case for your group as well. If you are not satisfied with the property, you can raise your concerns with the group or your landlord, and they will do their best to make changes within reason. It can be helpful to note that the local council has approved your property to ensure it is in good condition and appropriate for your family. If you wish to move, the group is not obligated to help you find other accommodation.

Although you were not involved in finding it, the property where you are staying is your family's home, and you are responsible for upholding the conditions of your lease including paying rent and abiding by the landlord's rules, such as not smoking in the property. This also means that you can make yourself at home. You and your family will add personal touches and make your own rules (e.g., shoes off). The group will help you speak with your landlord through an interpreter regarding repairs or questions until you are comfortable doing this by yourself.

Until you get a job, you will pay rent using money you receive from the UK Government alongside your benefits payment that is specifically designated for housing payments. The amount of money you receive for rent from the government may not fully cover the cost of rent, in which case the group may pay the difference with the money they have fundraised for 24 months, which we call a housing top up.

As part of their support, the group will:

- Provide basic furnishings for the home
- Explain your tenancy agreement in your native language
- Teach you how to search for housing beyond 24 months
- Help you communicate issues with your landlord
- Help you build skills to look for accommodation after 24 months

The group will not/is not obligated to:

- Pay your utility bills, including internet
- Help you find another property to move into if you are not satisfied
- Come to your home unannounced – if they do, you have the right to tell them not to do this.

Legal Status

When you arrive in the UK as a resettled refugee, you and each of your family members are given indefinite leave to remain (ILtR). This means that you are legally allowed to stay, work and claim benefits in the UK. You can stay in the UK as long as you and your family choose to – however if you leave the UK for extended periods of time, you may lose your right to stay in the UK. Five years after your arrival in the UK, you and your family can apply to become UK citizens and receive UK passports.

As proof of your legal status, you and each of your family members will be issued a Biometric Residency Permit (BRP). This is a card which can be used as proof of identity, and to confirm your right to study in the UK and the right to access any public services or benefits you're entitled to. However, it is not sufficient documentation for travel abroad. Someone in your Community Sponsorship group will receive these cards soon after your arrival and give them to your family members immediately. If you lose your BRP card, or your details change, you must inform the Home Office.

If you and your partner have children born in the UK, they will have the same legal status as you. Once they are born, you must register their birth with your local council and then inform the Home Office. Your Community Sponsorship group will help you with the process.

If you have questions about family reunion or bringing family members from abroad to live with you in the UK, please be aware that this is extremely difficult with current immigration rules. The group cannot decide or influence who is resettled to the UK – this is only decided by the UK government. The group is also unable to give you immigration or legal advice, but they can connect you with professional advisors, however, they are not obligated to pay for these services.

Benefits

When you first arrive in the UK you will need to make an application to receive welfare benefits from the UK government; the Community Sponsorship group will help you do this and make an appointment for your family with your Jobcentre. The first benefit payment usually arrives within six weeks of making the application, but it at times takes longer than this.

Most people in the UK get most of their benefits from Universal Credit – it is one, monthly payment that covers the cost of rent, living and allowance for children (if you have them), but depending on circumstances you may be eligible for other benefits – you can ask at the Jobcentre about that.

The Jobcentre will ask you to fulfil certain criteria to continue getting benefits if you are of working age. This is called your claimant commitment. Initially it may be learning English, but with time you will be asked to look for voluntary and paid work. Your benefits may be stopped if you do not fulfil those conditions or miss appointments with the Jobcentre without a good reason.

The amount you receive from benefits will depend on your personal circumstances, so the amounts differ from one family to another. You are not treated any differently because you are refugees – British families have access to exactly the same benefits as your family. Your group cannot influence how much you receive in benefits as this is determined by the government. Budgeting on benefits can be difficult, and many families are surprised by the very limited amount of money they receive from Universal Credit. Your group can help you with budgeting and advise you on how to make sensible financial choices.

When you start working you will have to tell the Jobcentre immediately and your benefits will be slowly reduced for each additional pound you earn. You can, however, earn a certain amount of money through paid work without it affecting your benefits. For information on this, you can speak to the group or the Jobcentre.

Employment

You have the right to work in the UK from the first day you arrive and have your BRP, however, you will not be provided with work automatically. Nearly all jobs in the UK will require you to speak English, so many newcomers choose to focus on improving their language skills through English classes and volunteer work before looking for paid work so they can find higher paid jobs.

Certain jobs will require you to have a qualification or certificate which you will need to pass in the UK. Many qualifications are not transferable from one country to the next. If you have a particular profession which you would like to continue to pursue, then make sure you ask your group to identify what you will need.

The process of getting a job in the UK may be different to what you are used to. It is standard for an employer to ask for a CV and sometimes also for a cover letter or an application form. The most suitable candidates are then invited for a job interview where they are asked to talk about themselves and why they are suitable for that particular role. Your group can help you learn more about the process or point you to local organisations that can.

Remember that when you start to work you will have to let the Jobcentre know. You will earn more money in full time employment than relying on Universal Credit, but you are encouraged to focus on learning English at first to have better employment prospects in the future.

Keeping Safe

Everyone in the UK has a right to be safe and free from abuse – if you or someone you know is not safe or is suffering abuse, you can speak to your group. Your group's volunteers will speak with you about taking action and reporting the issue so you can get the help you need. If you report abuse, they cannot keep this to themselves, but they can help you handle the issue as discretely as you feel comfortable with.

Members of the Community Sponsorship group supporting you volunteer under an umbrella of a charity and therefore they are required to report to the charity if they think anyone is at risk.

If you are in immediate danger, call 999 – tell the operator which language you speak, and they will be able to get an interpreter on the line.

We hope that all people in the UK will welcome you with respect and dignity, however, if you experience racism or discrimination, you can report it to the police or ask your group to help.

If you would like to make a legitimate complaint about a member of your group, the group has a complaints policy to escalate and deal with any complaints in a structured way. The group will give you this policy in your own language.