



Home Office



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Lord Richard Harrington
Minister for Refugees

**Home Office and Department for Levelling
Up, Housing and Communities**
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

16 June 2022

Dear Clive,

Thank you for your letters of 4 and 24 May. I apologise for the very late reply. You raised a number of queries regarding the support being provided for those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, and I have provided a response to each of these below and would be happy to provide further detail at the select committee hearing later this month

Funding

What assessment has been made of the impact of providing funding for the Homes for Ukraine scheme and not the Ukraine family scheme?

This government cares deeply about helping those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. We have implemented two different visa schemes which both support the integration of Ukrainian refugees and provide them with full entitlement to work and access to benefits in the UK for up to three years.

The Ukraine Family Scheme is based on family visa routes that existed before the Ukraine conflict, where public services are funded out of council budgets and the same principle is applied here. The UK-based family member is expected to provide support and accommodation for those coming to join them, who in turn benefit from the wider integration advantages in joining an existing family network.

Homes for Ukraine on the other hand is a unique scheme that has been set up specifically to support those escaping the conflict in Ukraine who are not able to rely on family support. The government is providing additional funding to local authorities which includes resource to enable them to carry out sponsorship-specific functions such as safeguarding checks and property checks, administering payments, as well as providing support such as English language training to help their integration into communities.

Family Scheme

Can you confirm whether data on arrivals from the family scheme are now being shared with local authorities?

We are sharing Homes for Ukraine data regularly with local authorities. Applicants to the Family Scheme are not required to provide their address/location where they will stay in the UK, so this data isn't available for us to share with local authorities. We know from analysing Biometric Residence Permits (BRP) data that the correlation with census data shows that Family Scheme members are going to areas where there are existing Ukrainian diaspora as we would expect. We recognise that the local authority may be approached in relation to their statutory duties by those who have come to the UK on the Family Scheme, as they would for other refugee groups, but it is not otherwise the remit of the local authority to support in the way that they are required to support those coming under Homes for Ukraine scheme.

I strongly urge you to rethink this policy and allow refugees on the family scheme to be matched with a sponsor after arrival in the UK if their family is unable to provide accommodation.

Only those who received a visa through the Homes for Ukraine visa route are eligible for rematching, to ensure that those without family links in the UK are prioritised. Councils' statutory homelessness duties will apply where the family is unable to provide accommodation. Local authorities can use their existing homelessness prevention funding to assist households in these circumstances. The issue of rematching, however, is being kept under review.

To ensure you are aware of our new policy for rematching by local authorities where the sponsorship arrangement under Homes for Ukraine Scheme fails, I include further details on this scheme.

Expression of interest (EOI) data is available via Foundry so that local authorities can see information about people in their area who are interested in becoming sponsors. This allows councils to:

- compare the personal information of potential sponsors with other safeguarding data sources;
- identify people who may be unsuitable to become sponsors;
- as well as in due course to identify potential sponsors for re-matching in the event of sponsorship breakdown.

Local authorities have been provided with the functionality to facilitate rematches through the Foundry system. This allows councils to use Expression of Interest (EOI) information to assess and identify the suitability of new sponsors. Alongside the EOI information, local authorities will also be able to source new hosts locally. Prospective hosts from the EOI information will be informed that local authorities may be in touch for matching opportunities within their area.

Rematching will focus initially on those who have travelled to the UK on a visa secured via the sponsorship route. Rematching should only be used where it is unviable or

unsafe for the sponsorship relationship to continue. Only those who received a visa through the Homes for Ukraine visa route are eligible for rematching, to ensure that those without family links in the UK are prioritised. Rematching should only take place if one of the following applies:

- A. When the local authority determines it is genuinely not viable or safe for the Ukrainian guest(s) to stay where they are.
- B. Because of failed DBS or accommodation checks.

We will consider whether, and how, we can broaden the scope of rematching over time.

Matching

I would be grateful if you could provide timescales for the “alternative model” being developed by Reset.

Since our last communication, we piloted a model developed by Reset. However, we were not able to scale this model as we would have liked. We recognised the work the voluntary and community sector organisations were doing to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme and wanted to build on this work. The government has since published a list of Recognised Providers – voluntary and community sector organisations running schemes which provide support for and help match people coming from Ukraine with sponsors in the UK. This will help more people from Ukraine find safe and sustainable matches with sponsors in the UK. We have also published new guidance for voluntary and community sector organisations interested in developing a matching service. We are working with other organisations to increase the number of Recognised Providers soon and will keep the list updated.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-matching-organisations>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/recognised-providers-organisations-who-can-help-guests-from-ukraine-find-sponsors-in-the-uk>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/recognised-providers-organisations-who-can-help-uk-citizens-become-sponsors>

Approach to refugees

I strongly urge you to begin planning for a joined-up approach to welcoming refugees sooner rather than later.

Our uncapped Ukraine Schemes were set up in record time and are some of the biggest visa schemes in UK history, helping Ukrainians forced to flee from their home country to come to safety in the UK to live, work, study and find stability here. The UK has also made one of the largest commitments to resettle Afghan refugees of any country and so far, we have moved – or are in the process of moving – over 6,000 Afghan evacuees into homes. Setting up, and running, these schemes is something we continue to work tirelessly on, and that we can learn from in the future.

Data

Can you inform us how many refugees have arrived before DBS and accommodation checks are completed and how many have arrived after the checks are completed?

Sponsors and all adults in sponsors' households, as well as those arriving under the scheme, are subject to standard security checks against the Police National Computer (PNC) and Warnings Index (WI) by the Home Office before visas are granted. Accommodation and DBS criminal record checks are undertaken by local authorities as soon as possible. Councils must make at least one in-person visit prior to the arrival of guests wherever possible and we have asked councils to confirm that they have checked that the accommodation exists as part of their data return to the Department. However, the majority of checks happen after arrival.

The level of DBS check to be undertaken on the sponsor and adult members of the sponsor's household is determined by the age and needs of the guests and will inform the Local Authority's decision on the suitability of the sponsor. DBS checks are the responsibility of Local Authorities who will report that the checks have been carried out but do not report on the sequencing of the checks and whether these are pre or post guest arrival.

Following the guests' arrival councils should confirm as soon as possible that the guest is well and that there are no welfare concerns or needs for care and support. Councils have a statutory duty to promote the welfare of adults and children at risk and reserve the right to check in on guests and inspect accommodation once they have arrived.

There are some differences to the checks process for rematches as these checks are happening outside of the visa system when beneficiaries are already safely in the country and in contact with local authorities. These sponsors will therefore not necessarily have been subject to the same checks at visa application stage. Because the rematching will be local authority-led and in-country, all safeguarding checks will be the responsibility of local authorities and they will be required to undertake relevant DBS and accommodation checks in advance of move-in.

Can you outline what steps the department is taking to address local authorities' concerns about the data being shared with councils, in particular to speed up data sharing and ensure that data is accurate and complete?

We are holding regular sessions for local authorities to ensure they are aware of the data available to them through Foundry and how to access this data. Guidance is available on setting up users and extracting data. Data has been expanded to include sponsor data about people in a local authority area who are interested in becoming sponsors, allowing comparison of personal information of potential sponsors with other safeguarding data sources, to identify people who may be unsuitable to become

sponsors and to identify potential sponsors for rematching. The visa process (from which data for Foundry is drawn) asks for necessary information to progress the application. Local Authorities are asked to conduct in person visits to the accommodation to ensure all information provided is accurate and complete.

What legal cover for councils (in a light-touch regime around safeguarding and accommodation checks) is the department considering and how will the Government ensure this is in place as quickly as possible?

As you know, there are robust safeguarding controls in place on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. One of these controls is that the Home Office check named sponsors and their adult household members against the Police National Computer (PNC) and Warnings Index (WI) before a visa is issued to any applicant. Accommodation and DBS checks are then conducted by local authorities as soon as possible.

Local Authorities have existing duties under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 to inspect properties for hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This is the legal duty that the Homes for Ukraine scheme accommodation checks are largely based upon.

Councils also have existing statutory duties to promote the welfare of adults and children at risk and reserve the right to check in on guests and inspect accommodation once they have arrived. Following the guest(s)' arrival, councils should confirm as soon as possible that the guest is well and that there are no serious safeguarding or welfare concerns or needs for care and support. Where it is suspected that the adult may have care and support needs, a needs assessment should be undertaken in line with the requirements of the Care Act 2014.

I hope this response has provided an update on the work we are doing to ensure the Homes for Ukraine scheme evolves and meets the requirements. We are keeping our approach and guidance under review to improve the support and information we provide councils, sponsors, and guests.

With all my very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard".

**Lord Richard Harrington
Minister for Refugees**