Providing a temporary home to Ukrainian refugees

A Citizens UK briefing to hosts

You have been so moved by the plight of Ukrainian refugees that you’re willing to open your home to them. This is an amazing offer, and one that will prove to be a very meaningful experience, but it is important that you know what it entails.

A word about terms

The government is using the term sponsor to refer to individuals or households who are providing accommodation to Ukrainian refugees. We think a better term is hosts and will therefore be using this term throughout this briefing.

1. THE OFFER

To be a host you must be able to provide the following:

- Space in your own home or another property you own for at least one Ukrainian refugee for a minimum of six months

Example 1: Sam and Nina have a spare double bedroom in their house in Cardiff. They feel they can accommodate a Ukrainian couple or perhaps a mother and small child. Sam and Nina are happy to share all the other facilities in their house.

Example 2: Esther and Mary own a flat in Bath which they let to Airbnb guests, but they are willing to forgo this income for six months and make the property available to a Ukrainian family.
• The minimum offer is a single bedroom in your own home, but as well as private bedrooms the refugees will need to be able:
  o to come and go as they please – having a front door key for instance
  o have reasonable access to facilities such as bathrooms and the kitchen

Example 1: For Sam and Nina, it will be a bit like having lodgers for six months. The Ukrainians who they are matched with (see below) will have sole use of the spare double bedroom, but will share the rest of the house. Sam and Nina and their guests may have some meals together, but at other times the Ukrainians will want to cook for themselves – or go out. It may be that Sam and Nina, themselves or through their support group (see below) provide things like a TV, radio and a laptop in the spare bedroom, so that the Ukrainians have some privacy.

• Hosts have to offer accommodation rent free for six months. However, you can claim £350 a month (per sponsorship, not per individual refugee accommodated) from their local authority.

2. REGISTERING YOUR OFFER

The assumption in this briefing is that hosts do not have a family or friendship connection with Ukrainian refugees. You want to help, but do not know any Ukrainians. There are two ways in which you could be matched with Ukrainians seeking to come to the UK.

(i) You may be able to join up with one of Citizens UK ‘Strategic Partners’ – institutions such as faith networks or universities – who will help to organise matches in batches, as well as providing other support. (See more below).

(ii) Alternatively, you can apply as an individual host, by registering with the Homes for Ukraine scheme via this link. [https://www.homesforukraine.org.uk/](https://www.homesforukraine.org.uk/)

In both cases, hosts will have to fill in forms of some sort, asking questions about who you are, where you live, your circumstances, the nature of the property, the rooms and shared facilities available, who it will be suitable for and who not.

3. MATCHING

Through both of these routes, you will be joined up with Ukrainian refugees who want to take up your accommodation offer and for whom it is suitable. You will be able to accept or reject the ‘match’, as will Ukrainians. It should be possible in many cases for the matching to take place
interactively, with potential hosts and guests talking to each other via phone or on-line to try to ensure as far as possible that mutual expectations are aligned and people will ‘get on’.

Each host should produce a short ‘Welcome Note’ that can be sent to the Ukrainians in their transit country to aid in matching. It should include

- Information and photos of host household (& Welcome Team members)
- Information and photos of house & refugee’s room
- Information and photos about the local area
- A welcome message

4. VISAS

Once you and the Ukrainian refugees can ‘name’ each other, the Ukrainians can apply for visas, which they will get if they were legally resident in Ukraine before 1 January 2022 and they pass a security check. You will also be checked (see more below in Sections 5 and 6). At the visa stage, you and the Ukrainian you will be hosting will apply jointly as things like Passport Information will need to be shared. Once the visa process is completed the Ukrainians will be issued with a PDF that is their Permission to Travel and will get them through the UK border. Data on Ukrainian arrivals will be passed to the Local Authority so they know who is arriving in their area.

Example 2: Esther and Mary decide to work through one of Citizens UK’s strategic partners, the Diocese of Bath and Wells. They register their spare flat in Bath with the Diocese, meanwhile a partner organisation in Poland is collecting expressions of interest from Ukrainians in Warsaw who want to move onto the UK. A potential match is made, both ‘sides’ agree to it, and the visa application is gone through. A Ukrainian couple with two children is now ready to travel and Esther and Mary know who will be living in their spare flat for six months.

5. CHECKS

Safety and security for hosts and refugees are most important issues. Both hosts and refugees will be checked against the Police National Computer before the refugees arrive. Hosts will be expected to have DBS checks https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dbs-to-support-homes-for-ukraine-scheme administered through their Local Authority. These checks will be expedited, but may not be completed before the arrival of Ukrainians in homes of hosts. It is for this reason that we suggest the initial safeguards outlined in Sections 6, 7 and 8 are put in place. Your local
authority will also pay an early home visit after the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees to ensure all is well.

6. SAFEGUARDING

The checks outlined in Section 4 are the minimal requirement to ensure safety and security. With the Strategic Partners scheme, and others like it, there will be additional training, mentoring and on-going oversight provided by organisations so that hosts feel supported, are not isolated and are alert to safeguarding issues that may arise. As an additional safeguarding element – but also to provide other benefits - Citizens UK is urging that all hosts gather around them what we call a ‘Welcome Team’.

7. A WELCOME TEAM

Officially, hosts can ‘go it alone’. But in our experience, welcoming refugees new to this country is best done at the community level. We therefore urge hosts to form around them a small, neighbourhood ‘Welcome Team’. Such a team has a number of benefits for all concerned:

- Share out the tasks (particularly in the first two weeks) that need to be done to welcome and orientate new refugees to their new neighbourhood (See below)
- Widen the circle of welcome so that hosts and guests are not so isolated
- Ensure that the hosting arrangement is visible beyond the immediate household, thereby enhancing safeguarding arrangements

The ‘Welcome Team’ only needs to be about 4 or 5 people and they don’t need to be in any sense experts in resettling refugees. Their expertise – which will be invaluable – will be in knowing how things work in the local community. This knowledge will supplement the knowledge you have as hosts. If you can find people with some of the following skills, it will be helpful, however

- Ukrainian or Russian language proficiency
- Safeguarding
- Working with refugees
- Links to local schools, health services, Job Centre etc

Example 1: Sam and Nina let their local neighbourhood WhatsApp group know that they plan to be hosts to a young Ukrainian woman, Natasha, and her toddler daughter, Yulia. They ask for a few people to join their informal ‘Welcome Team’ and between them they work out who will do what tasks when the mother and daughter arrive. As well as specific
tasks, the Welcome Team say they will help out with befriending and ‘respite’ – giving Sam and Nina and the Ukrainians a break from each other from time to time.

8. PRE-ARRIVAL TRAINING AND ON-GOING MENTORING

For hosts working through a Strategic Partner, Citizens UK will be offering on-line training sessions and setting up a mentor scheme made up of volunteers with experience of welcoming refugees to their local communities. Downloadable resources will also be made available. In this way, we hope to provide hosts with sufficient information and back-up to ensure that their ‘sponsorship’ of Ukrainians is a success.

9. PREPARING FOR ARRIVAL

In most cases, hosts will be providing only a bedroom or bedrooms (and perhaps a bathroom) for their Ukrainian guests. In preparing the accommodation, it will be important to consider the following:

- Access – ability of Ukrainians to come and go from the property (providing a key)
- Privacy - how to ensure the Ukrainians have as much time and space to themselves as they want (Also important to consider privacy factors for hosts)
- Connectivity – access to wifi (+ laptop or tablet, if required), TV & radio in their room
- Child friendly and safe – assessment of the guest rooms and other rooms to ensure they are suitable for small children.
- Shared facilities – particularly bathroom and kitchen (cupboard spaces etc)
- Meals - ability for Ukrainians to cook for themselves as well as sharing meals with hosts
- House rules – consideration of what ‘rules’ hosts will want to be clear about. Smoking, late-night hours, noise etc
- Provision of bedding, towels,
- Welcome Pack – of toiletries, treats, children’s toys, Eastern European food stuffs

Ukrainians arriving under this scheme will be entitled to claim benefits (though not housing benefit as long as they are housed rent free in the host’s property). This means that in time they will have an income of their own. However, experience suggests that it may take a matter of weeks for benefit income to flow into bank accounts (see more in Section 13) so we suggest that hosts/Welcome Teams establish a small cash fund of £50 per adult for the first 4 weeks in the UK to tide them over.
10. TRAVEL TO THE UK

Different arrangements will be made in different cases. Certain bodies and organisations may organise flights to bring over Ukrainian refugees in big groups, in other cases, sponsors and hosts can jointly arrange for travel and the costs of travel. In some cases, airlines and other travel operators, are offering free travel. As long as the travelling Ukrainians have valid documents, visas and Permissions to Travel they will have no trouble getting through the UK Border.

Example 2: Esther and Mary’s Strategic Partner organisation arranged for the small family they will putting up in their separate flat to come on a flight jointly organised by a British and a Polish NGO. At the airport in Britain, coaches are arranged to take a number of Ukrainians to various drop-off points. Esther and Mary meet the Shevchenkos at their local drop-off point and drive them back to the flat.

11. DAY OF ARRIVAL

The arriving refugees will probably be tired and disorientated when they first get to their new accommodation. Hosts should keep the welcome simple and low-key, showing them around, giving them space to get used to your home, leaving them – or helping them – to communicate with loved ones left behind to say they’ve arrived safely. Hosts might offer tea or a simple meal, but the guests might not want or feel comfortable having anything to eat or drink. The refugees may just be keen to get to their room, relax in safety and privacy and sleep.

Most of the things that the Ukrainians will need to know about the house or the local area can be left for another day. Nobody outside the hosting household should be involved on Day 1.
12. DAY AFTER ARRIVAL

On the day after arrival, and depending on how the Ukrainians feel, it is time to explain how the house works – things like cooking and washing facilities, how to lock the house, the heating etc. It is a good idea to have prepared, ideally translated into Ukrainian or Russian, a ‘Welcome Pack’ which contains all essential information about the house and the area. It could also contain the ‘house rules’ – explaining your preferences on things like smoking, music and late-night returns. Perhaps with members of the Welcome Team also involved, some orientation of the local neighbourhood could take place – showing the Ukrainians where the shops and local facilities and explaining how local transport works. Finally, you could some briefing on the various registrations and sign ups that will take place in the coming days.

At all point, consideration should be given to not overwhelming the newly arrived Ukrainians with too much information or experiences. A simple walk around the local park might be appreciated more than anything.

Example 1: Having left Natasha and Yulia to enjoy a quiet, private evening the night before, showing them how to use the bath, the following morning Sam and Nina suggest that their Ukrainian guests have breakfast with them, having bought in some foods from a local Eastern European shop. After breakfast, they show Natasha how things work in the house, while Yulia plays games on the laptop she brought with her from Poland. (She was quick to ask for the wifi password). One of the Welcome Team, a friend and neighbour called Karen, comes around and is introduced to Natasha and Yulia. Karen explains, using her basic Russian and Google Translate, that she will help Natasha sign up for a doctor etc in the coming days. In the afternoon, the five of them plus another member of the Welcome Team go to the local park so that Yulia can play in the children’s play park. On the way back ‘home’ they show Natasha the local general store and the specialist Polish store, so that she can do some shopping of her own.

13. First week/second week – registrations and sign-ups

In the first couple of weeks after arrival, the refugees will need to complete a number of tasks so that they can settle in, use services they are entitled to and gain some independence. Almost certainly, they will need help from their hosts and the Welcome Team as they won’t be familiar with UK systems and may struggle with the language barrier. The following is a list of tasks, in rough order of priority, which should be gone through.
14. LOCAL AUTHORITY AFTER CARE AND VISITS

Your local authority has statutory responsibility for ensuring that the hosting arrangement is safe for both parties. It is through your council that (Disclosure and Barring Service) DBS checks will be carried out. A representative from the local authority will also come round in the early days of the hosting to do an accommodation check. Hosts will want to establish a link to their local authority in the unlikely event of a break-down of the hosting arrangement and for help in facilitating the ‘move-on’ as the six-month period of hosting/sponsorship comes to an end.

15. BOUNDARIES AND ON-GOING SAFEGUARDING

It is very likely that a warm and friendly relationship will develop between hosts and the Ukrainians living with them. But it is important that you maintain clear boundaries and that the Ukrainians are not overly dependent on you or feel beholden to you. This advice from the experts Refugees at Home is important
Hosts need to be very aware of the power differential, and consider how this might affect their relationship with the guest. Particular care should be taken about developing any relationship beyond that of host and guest and to think through what consent might mean to the guest. This is particularly important in terms of sexual relationships, which are never appropriate.

This also extends to business relationships or any financial agreements (we believe that these are highly unlikely to be appropriate and there are significant legal risks if hosts accept any rent or payment which might be construed as rent from guests) or even very intense friendships. A host might be making a very genuine offer of help or friendship but the guest may well feel very powerless and obliged to agree as a result.

Hosts will need to guard against burn-out and ensure that they can lead their lives normally while they are hosting the guests. If you are hosting through a Strategic Partner organisation linked to Citizens, you will get on-going support and oversight, and help if there is a breakdown in the hosting arrangement.

In the event of a major safeguarding issue, hosts (or Welcome Team) should not try to sort things out themselves but should refer the matter to the statutory authorities.


Safeguarding training at Stage 6 (above) will provide guidance.

16. BEYOND THE FIRST WEEKS

Once the Ukrainian refugees are settled in, receiving benefits, with children going to school, life should settle into some sort of rhythm. It is very likely that if the situation in the Ukraine improves your guests will look to return as soon as it is reasonably safe. Alternatively, they may quickly settle here, find work and move into their own accommodation. The hosts are only signing up to provide six months of free accommodation, so by around Month 4, both you and the refugees you are housing should be thinking about the ‘move-on’. Support will be in place through local authorities and the government to ensure that alternative accommodation and support is provided to Ukrainians if after six months they cannot go back and you don’t want them to continue living in your house.

Example 2: The Shevchenkos who were living rent free in Esther and Mary’s Airbnb flat settled well in Bath and the father found work after three months. Although they thought about going back to Kyiv when the ceasefire was agreed, they decided to stay on. After four months, Esther and
Mary said they would have to take back their flat as they needed the rental income. There was a discussion about whether the Shevchenkos could stay on after the six months, but start paying rent, but in the end the family found their own place on the private market. Esther and Mary joined with their Welcome Team and other friends and neighbours to raise some money to help the Shevchenkos to furnish and equip their new home.

We hope this briefing provides you with helpful information about hosting Ukrainian refugees through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, but there are other resources available. Here are some links

https://resetuk.org/assets/Homes-for-Ukraine--Sponsor-Toolkit_v1_FINAL-1648486743.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2yDkbp4YCpBKwvfQaIWL0L5GBbsHoRP3x7yzctpkYFbGGTLubXmptsvk54

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-frequently-asked-questions