

APPG on Social Integration Roundtable

Developing a Sustainable Plan for Refugee Accommodation

Summary Note

The APPG for Social Integration hosted a roundtable event in November 2023, co-convened by British Future as the APPG Secretariat along with the British Red Cross. The event brought together key stakeholders in housing policy and refugee integration to discuss a sustainable plan for refugee accommodation.¹ This note outlines the context for the discussion, key challenges in obtaining secure housing for refugees, promising approaches to overcoming these barriers, and priorities for a sustainable plan for refugee accommodation.

A brief thematic summary of the discussion can be found below. For those interested in further details, please contact heena@britishfuture.org.

1. Context

The UK has offered welcome schemes in response to displacement in Ukraine and Afghanistan, alongside existing safe routes such as the UK Resettlement Scheme. The Afghan and especially Ukraine schemes have offered safety to an unprecedented number of people fleeing persecution and conflict, amounting to over 225,000 collectively,² which is more than the total number of people granted refugee protection from all nationalities between 2014 and 2021.³

However, new arrivals have faced challenges in securing suitable housing. While the UK has offered over 200,000 Ukrainians safety, many of this group are also facing a precarious housing situation underpinned by cost-of-living pressures, short-term commitments from hosts, relationship breakdowns between Ukrainian guests and their sponsors⁴. Some Ukrainians are even facing the risk of homelessness. Research commissioned by the British Red Cross revealed displaced Ukrainians are more than four times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population and that homelessness is forecast to rise among this group by the end of this financial year⁵. With other groups, such as Afghans, also having faced challenges in securing stable housing, there is a need to identify a more coordinated and sustainable approach to refugee accommodation.

Temporary accommodation settings do not meet the needs of people who have been displaced from their homes in the long term,⁶ with extended stays affecting mental health and wellbeing, as well as

¹ The event was chaired by Peter Gibson MP, chair of the APPG on Social Integration and speakers were: Olivia Field, Head of Policy, British Red Cross; Sunder Katwala, Director, British Future; Guy Arnold, Strategic Lead on Refugee Communities, Camden Council; Rose Grayston, housing policy consultant; Stephanie Wauthier-Albrand, UNHCR UK; Rachel Chiu, Business Director, Spring Housing, one individual with lived experience of refugee accommodation and displacement from Ukraine, one British Red Cross caseworker, one housing representative from the Ukrainian Collective in Scotland.

² Over 200,000 people displaced from Ukraine have so far arrived in the UK (Home Office, [Ukraine scheme visa data](#), updated 29 February 2024). While 25,042 Afghans have arrived to the UK under the Afghan ARAP and ACRS schemes up to September 2023 ([Home Office, Afghan Resettlement Programme: operational data](#), updated 29 February 2024).

³ By June 2022, the number of those who arrived on the Ukraine Visa Schemes alone was equivalent to the total number of people granted refugee protection from all nationalities between 2014 and 2021. See House of Commons Library, [Asylum statistics](#), September 2023, pp. 17-19.

⁴ Until recently, many displaced Ukrainians have also faced challenges due to the short-term nature of their visas. On 19 February 2024 the Home Office [announced](#) the [Ukraine Permission Extension \(UPE\)](#) scheme, which grants a 18-month visa extension to displaced Ukrainians who have been given permission to be in the UK under one of the Ukraine visa schemes. This means that most displaced Ukrainians, whose visa was set to expire in spring 2025, will now be able to apply to extend their stay in the UK until September 2026. At the same time, the government reduced leave to remain in the UK from 36 to 18 months for new arrivals on the Homes for Ukraine scheme, in addition to closing the Ukraine Family Scheme with immediate effect and announcing the future closure of the Extension scheme on 16 May 2024.

⁵ British Red Cross, [Ukraine Homelessness Findings](#), 2023.

⁶ See British Red Cross, [Fearing, fleeing, facing the future](#), February 2023.

often preventing individuals from pursuing employment and education opportunities.⁷ Delays in providing long-term accommodation, and the reliance on short-term solutions such as housing people in hotel accommodation, can also lead to excessive costs for government and local authorities. For instance, the Home Office stated that it had spent around £1 million a day on bridging hotel accommodation for Afghans arriving through the resettlement and relocation schemes before their closure in August 2023⁸. Learning and good practices from recent initiatives provide an opportunity to reflect on strategic direction and policy solutions for the future. Many of these promising initiatives are focused on enabling more displaced people to access the private rented sector and acquiring more housing stock that is decent and affordable, ultimately reducing pressures on already stretched local authorities and social housing.

Challenges in the provision of secure housing for refugees

Some refugees have experienced barriers to integration, including finding safe, secure and affordable housing from which individuals have a stable basis to integrate into the community.

While securing housing in the private rented sector could provide displaced people with a more independent living solution, as well as ease pressures on the limited social housing stock available to local authorities, barriers were identified throughout the discussion. A testimony given by a British Red Cross service user called Nataliia, who arrived in the UK from Ukraine on the Homes for Ukraine scheme with her two children in spring 2022, outlined the challenging experience of finding housing in the private rented sector. These barriers include:

- *Lack of guarantors, credit history, references and issues with up-front costs and affordability*
- *Lack of trust and discrimination from landlords to rent to refugees and those on benefits*
- *Temporary visa in the UK as a further barrier to secure tenancies⁹*

Other underpinning challenges to achieving safe, secure and long-term accommodation discussed included:

- *The disparity of government support across various refugee schemes – which make it difficult to achieve a fair and coordinated approach to refugee accommodation for local authorities and central government.*
- *A wider context of unmet need for, and undersupply of, affordable and social housing¹⁰.*

Innovations, best practice and proposals to overcome barriers

While the UK does not have a national integration strategy, there are examples of best practices in facilitating access to secure housing for refugees at the local level.

- **Spring Housing** procures accommodation for refugees from the private rented sector for up to five years, liaising with landlords on behalf of refugees. Through this model, Spring Housing aims to address key of barriers for refugees to access private rented accommodation, by providing rent deposit schemes, communicating with landlords on behalf of refugees, and acting as guarantors. Spring Housing also employs a “turn-key approach” so that the homes provided to refugees are equipped with food, furniture, and utilities to support refugees when they first arrive in their properties. It also works with other voluntary organisations and local

⁷ See Ager and Strang, “[Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework](#)”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 21, Issue 2, June 2008. Collyer, Morrice, Tip, Brown, Odermatt “[A long-term commitment: integration of resettled refugees in the UK](#)”, *University of Sussex*, December 2018. Ruiz and Vargas-Silva “[What Works for Improving Refugee Outcomes in High-Income Countries? Policy Insights for the UK](#)” The Centre on Migration, Policy & Society (COMPAS) Report, January 2021.

⁸ [Data](#) submitted by the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to the Home Affairs Select Committee, Annex D, Cost of Hotels, p. 11. March 2023.

⁹ As footnoted above, on 19 February the Home Office [announced](#) a further 18-month visa extension for those granted permission on the Ukraine visa schemes and specified that the application process to obtain the extension will open in early 2025, in addition to making changes to current Ukraine visa schemes for new arrivals after 19 February 2024 (see footnote 4).

¹⁰ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), 2022, Work Rights Centre, [On the Frontline](#), 2023, Shelter, Alert Briefing, [Homelessness and the Cost of Living](#), 2023.

authorities to help refugees achieve good integration outcomes, identifying key areas for further support, including on childcare support and tailored employment support.

- **Camden Council** has secured longer-term homes for displaced Afghans who had been living in bridging hotels in the borough since August 2021. It has done so by acquiring new housing stock and through supporting Afghan families to access key services to achieve self-reliance and labour market integration. In February 2023, the Council delivered on its original pledge to resettle 20 displaced Afghan families from bridging hotels into longer-term homes¹¹. All families are being helped with tenancy sustainment, welfare benefits advice, employment training and education, English for Speakers of Other Languages, GP and school registration support. The council is now working to deliver an expanded pledge offer for up to 42 families from bridging hotels in Camden. To achieve this, the Council has employed an innovative refugee housing acquisition programme. Through this initiative, properties intended for sale on the open market have been purchased and taken back into the Council's housing stock by repurposing underspent Afghan grants and utilising new grants through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF)¹². This approach resulted in a viable and cost-effective alternative to placing families in temporary accommodation, due to the current lack of affordable refugee move-on accommodation in central London. This scheme will increase housing available for refugees, now and in the future, without creating pressure elsewhere in the housing system.
- **Housing experts' proposal to increase supply of decent and affordable housing stocks** Given the elevated costs and the unsuitability of temporary emergency accommodation, housing specialists have proposed more sustainable ways for central government to invest in asylum and refugee accommodation. One such proposal made by a group of housing experts¹³ is for central government to repurpose the current revenue spend on asylum¹⁴ and refugee emergency accommodation and invest it in capital subsidies for local authorities and local housing associations to borrow to buy properties from the market. These properties would subsequently be let to refugees at Local Housing Allowance rates. In the longer-term, these properties could be retained by local authorities and local housing associations and converted into permanent homes for other residents with housing needs, which would in turn bring additional homes into the stock of decent housing, affordable to people with low to modest incomes for future rental at below market rates.

Priorities for a long term, sustainable and workable plan for refugee accommodation

The discussion highlighted a pressing need to promote a more consistent, cross-governmental and long-term approach to refugee accommodation, across different protection schemes and nationalities. This approach would lead to a more sustainable response and contribute to the overall resilience of the national refugee system. The final intervention from a UNHCR participant reiterated the need of long-term housing plans, identified factors affecting refugee's access to housing and shared initiatives that can help facilitate access to long-term and affordable housing, namely:

- (i) Increasing housing stock by building and/or renovating old and vacant properties.
- (ii) Enhancing access to affordable housing, by for example investing in social housing and maximising partnership with various actors who may hold housing stock and would like to work in partnership with the local authorities to provide financially sustainable tenancies.

¹¹ For more information see Camden Newsroom: "[Camden to provide safe haven homes for refugees](#)", March 2023.

¹² The Local Authority Housing Fund is a capital fund offered by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support local authorities in England to obtain housing for those on resettlement and protection schemes. [Round 1](#) of the funding provided 500 GBP of funding for families with housing needs who have arrived in the UK via Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes, while [round 2](#) provided £250 million of funding aimed to house those on Afghan resettlement schemes currently in bridging accommodation and the rest to ease wider homelessness pressures. In the Autumn Statement, the government has announced a further £450 million for a third round of the Local Authority Housing Fund to deliver 2,400 new housing units to house Afghan refugees and those in temporary accommodation to ease wider housing and homelessness pressures. [Autumn Statement 2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), November 2023, p. 108.

¹³ Unpublished research from Wareing, K., Grayston, R., Lloyd, T. and Eckley, B., November 2023

¹⁴ While the focus of this briefing has so far been on the provision of accommodation for refugees with leave to remain in the UK, the proposal outlined suggests alternative ways for the government to invest in accommodation supply for both asylum seekers and refugees. It is important that such proposal is considered, given the current high demand on the asylum accommodation estate.

- (iii) Promoting initiatives which can support displaced individuals and families to access the private housing market – including for example brokerage services that act as guarantor for refugees, rental subsidies to meet the 'up-front' costs of private rental, as well as awareness raising activities among private landlords and rental agencies to clarify concerns such as refugees' right to rent and work¹⁵.

It was pointed out strategies need to be adapted to the local context and engage all relevant actors in the planning process. At the same time, it was highlighted that these initiatives need to include wraparound support such as language and employment training to ensure their long-term efficacy.

¹⁵ For more information on UNHCR's recommendations on achieving safe, secure and affordable housing see UNHCR, [Integration Handbook](#), accessed November 2023.