Shaping the future of community sponsorship in the UK and beyond: expanding pathways for refugee resettlement

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Authorship

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Glossary

Community Sponsorship: CS
Homes for Ukraine: H4U
Communities for Afghans: C4A
General Public Diverse: GPD
General Public Non-Diverse: GPND
Non-Governmental Organisation: NGO
Volunteer: V
Host: H
Policymaker: P
Local Authorities: LAs

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the *Shaping the Future of Community Sponsorship in the UK and Beyond: Expanding Pathways for Refugee Resettlement* study. The research identifies key strengths, challenges, and opportunities for evolving the UK's sponsorship models into sustainable, equitable, and scalable programmes.

Section 2: **Methods**

Our mixed-methods approach combined a systematic review of 69 academic and grey literature publications with qualitative data from 82 interviews involving refugees, volunteers, hosts, local authorities (LAs), NGOs, policymakers, international experts, and members of the public. A workshop with 16 representatives from diverse stakeholder groups enabled collaborative refinement of recommendations. The data capture diverse perspectives and experiences from the three UK sponsorship schemes: Community Sponsorship (CS), Homes for Ukraine (H4U), and Communities for Afghans (C4A).

Section 3: **Motivations and engagement**

Motivations ranged from humanitarian values, empathy, and moral duty to practical considerations such as available housing and time-limited commitments. Civic engagement, faith-based principles, and personal or family histories of displacement also shaped involvement. Public awareness of sponsorship was uneven, with H4U far more widely recognised than CS or C4A. While general attitudes were supportive, they were sometimes conditional, reflecting concerns about resources and perceptions of refugees' legitimacy. Participants stressed the need for targeted public awareness efforts to promote understanding and positive narratives.

Section 4: **Successes and good practices**

All schemes demonstrated strong capacity to deliver personalised, wraparound support that improved refugees' access to housing, healthcare, education, and employment. Clearly defined volunteer roles, pre-arrival preparation, and the involvement of refugees in delivery enhanced effectiveness. Sponsorship fostered social cohesion, mutual learning, and cost-effective integration, with H4U demonstrating that large-scale, rapid deployment is possible in emergencies. Expanded geographic reach into rural and previously disengaged areas showcased sponsorship's transformative potential for communities.

Section 5: **Opportunities for improvement**

Challenges described include complex and time-consuming application processes, especially for CS; housing shortages; and insufficient volunteer expertise in navigating welfare, education, and employment systems. Misaligned expectations, visa insecurity for Ukrainians, financial inequities, and inconsistent LA capacity also hindered effectiveness. Language learning and healthcare access were barriers to integration, while rural isolation exacerbated social and mental health difficulties. The fragmented, nationality-specific approach to schemes generated confusion and perceptions of inequity.

Section 6: **Conclusions**

Sponsorship in the UK is widely regarded as a successful model that benefits refugees, hosts, volunteers, and communities. The diversity of approaches across CS, H4U, and C4A offers valuable lessons, but also reveals disparities. The sustainability of sponsorship depends on enhanced support for volunteers, equal rights and entitlements for all refugees, clear role definitions for LAs, and strong central coordination. Public engagement remains an untapped resource for scaling participation.

Section 7: **Recommendations for sponsorship in the UK**

The evidence supports a unified, flexible, national sponsorship scheme capable of responding to both emergencies and long-term resettlement needs. Key components include:

- Equal rights, safeguarding, and pathways to permanence for all sponsored refugees
- Strong Government leadership with a national strategy, clear guidance, and sustained funding for LAs and lead sponsors
- Streamlined applications, targeted recruitment to diversify sponsors, and lighter re-application processes for experienced groups
- Expanded language provision, employment pathways, and mental health support
- Mechanisms for continuous monitoring, evaluation, and sharing of best practice.

A coherent, well-resourced sponsorship scheme, rooted in collaboration between government, civil society, and communities, offers a clear path to expanding refugee resettlement in the UK while ensuring sustainable, high-quality integration support.

Section 1:
Introduction

This report presents the findings of the *Shaping the Future of Community Sponsorship in the UK: Expanding Pathways for Refugee Resettlement* project. The study examined lessons learned from existing refugee sponsorship schemes in the UK, with the aim of informing and enhancing the design and delivery of future programmes.

The Community Sponsorship (CS) scheme was launched in 2016, bringing together a range of actors in refugee resettlement. Civil society groups, and collections of friends or colleagues, applied to sponsor a refugee family for one year, having raised £9,000 to cover costs and secured self-contained housing for two years (see Appendix 1). Two additional sponsorship schemes have subsequently been introduced. In 2022, Homes for Ukraine (H4U) was launched to enable individual households to sponsor people displaced by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. H4U provided hosts with a monthly 'thank-you' payment to help cover the costs of accommodating Ukrainian guests for an initial six months, while local authorities received funding to support integration efforts. In Wales and Scotland, 'super-sponsor' arrangements initially placed refugees in temporary accommodation before moving them to self-contained homes or hosts. Ukrainian refugees were granted three years' leave to remain, later extended by 18 months. Households continuing to host Ukrainian guests remain eligible for the thank-you payment.

In 2024, the Communities for Afghans (C4A) scheme was introduced for individuals resettled under the Afghan Resettlement Programme. Many had been living in hotels since evacuation from Afghanistan. Led by Citizens UK, C4A gave groups a monthly stipend to sponsor a family. There was no requirement to raise funds but sponsors must secure self-contained housing. Across all schemes, refugees had access to welfare, healthcare, education, and the labour market.

Despite these developments, the overall scale of refugee sponsorship in the UK remains modest; around 1,000 refugees have been sponsored under CS over the past decade, and CfA remains small.[1] By contrast, H4U has grown rapidly, sponsoring over 100,000 people in just a few years; however it is not a resettlement programme but a humanitarian visa-based initiative, which faces challenges around sustainability.[2] All three schemes were initiated under the previous Government. With a new Government in place, the Government's *Restoring Control over the Immigration System* White Paper (May 2025) and the

independently-led Commission on the Integration of Refugees have both called for further development of sponsorship models. This context created the need for systematic research to assess what works and what could be improved.

From 2017 to 2020, a University of Birmingham team conducted a formative evaluation of CS[3]. This report builds on our earlier research, presenting findings from new research which identified strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. Findings suggest sponsorship in the UK is seen as successful, offering unprecedented support to refugees and high satisfaction for volunteers, while leaving significant scope for enhancement. The report is structured as follows: Section Two outlines the research methods; Section Three explores motivations for sponsorship and public attitudes; Section Four highlights successes and good practices; Section Five examines opportunities for improvement; Section Six provides a summary of our findings; and Section 7 presents critical components for sustainable, scalable, and effective future sponsorship models.

Section 2:
Methods

The report contains data from several sources. We conducted a systematic review of existing knowledge on sponsorship in the UK. Focusing on English-language publications from 2015 when CS was introduced, the search covered academic databases[4] and grey literature sources.[5] Search terms combined population-related (e.g., refugee), intervention-specific ("Community Sponsorship", "Homes for Ukraine", "Communities for Afghans") and geographic (e.g., "United Kingdom", England, Wales, Scotland, "Northern Ireland") descriptors. We analysed 69 studies: 46 reports and briefings, 20 journal articles, two book chapters, and one PhD thesis. Most studies covered the whole UK (46), with others focusing on England or the devolved nations. Of these, 35 examined CS, 30 looked at H4U, and three explored both schemes. Further details are provided in Appendix Two. Findings from the review are integrated throughout this report.

We also conducted 82 interviews with stakeholders, including refugees, hosts, volunteers, local authorities (LAs), NGOs, policymakers, international experts, and members of the public in both diverse and less-diverse neighbourhoods. Interviewees were identified through existing contacts (see Table 1). Discussions explored personal experiences of sponsorship, successes and challenges. Members of the public were approached in locations such as libraries, cafés, parks, shops, and train stations, and were asked about their knowledge of, and views on, sponsorship. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee.

Finally, we held a workshop to share emerging findings, identify data gaps, and jointly develop and prioritise recommendations for sponsorship in general. Sixteen participants attended, representing a broad range of stakeholders: three refugees supported by CS and one via H4U; two volunteers from groups in Wales and England; two policymakers; two LA representatives; four NGO representatives specialising in sponsorship; and two international experts (IE).

The interviews yielded a large amount of very detailed information. For brevity, we cover only the main themes pertinent to our research aim in this report. We begin by exploring motivations for participation and the public perception of sponsorship schemes.

Table 1: **Interviews by group of respondents**

Scheme	Female	Male	Refugee nationality	Sub-total
CS Refugees (R)	6	4	8 Syrian, 1 Sudanese 1 Palestinian/Iraqi	10
CS Volunteers (V)	5	2		7
H4U Refugees	7	1	Ukrainian	8
H4U Hosts (H)	3	2		5
C4A Refugees	2	0	Afghan	2
C4A Volunteers	3	0		3
Policymakers (P)	2	2		4
NGOs (N)	2	2		4
Local Authorities (LAs)	4	1		5
International experts (IE)	4	0		4
General Public diverse (GPD)	6	9		15
General Public non-diverse (GPND)	9	6		15
Total	53	29		82

Section 3:
Motivations and engagement

The review of existing scholarship identified a wide range of motivations for engaging in sponsorship, with variations in how these were expressed across different schemes.

Beliefs, morals and emotions

Existing research shows that sponsors and hosts involved in CS and H4U are primarily motivated by humanitarian concerns rooted in empathy, compassion, and a moral duty to support those fleeing violence. In CS, these motivations tend to be long-standing and values-driven, while H4U participation often reflects a more immediate, crisis-driven response.[6]

In our study, sponsors described their involvement as an extension of their moral values, faith, or profession. As one CS volunteer said, "A desire to help those people who are very much less fortunate". Christian values were influential among some CS participants, who saw supporting refugees as a spiritual obligation and a continuation of community service traditions. C4A sponsors expressed a desire to act where governments had fallen short. H4U hosts were motivated by the opportunity to help in a practical, time-limited way.

Strong emotions such as outrage at government inaction, moral indignation, pride, and joy were key factors in motivating and sustaining engagement, especially within CS.[7] A few H4U hosts also expressed dissatisfaction with government policies as a driver for their involvement.[8] Positive emotions like joy and a sense of connection helped balance the frustrations volunteers often faced. Some participants were motivated by personal or family histories of displacement or professional experience working with refugees. For example, one CS volunteer referenced a family connection to the Kindertransport, while an H4U host recalled wartime stories of family separation.

Civic and political engagement and practicality

CS literature highlights civic duty and community building as important motivators. Many sponsors joined through networks such as churches, charities, or activist groups with a shared long-term political vision.[9] Our research found that civic-minded individuals, particularly within CS and C4A, saw their participation as an expression of active citizenship. As one participant reflected, "It's so hard to make a difference, isn't it, and do anything. And it felt like this was maybe the only tangible thing" (Female, CS and C4A, V).

Several H4U hosts chose to participate because the commitment was for a limited six months and they had the available space to accommodate displaced Ukrainians. Some participants were invited by people in their social networks, and many found the matching process, often via Facebook, straightforward.

Public perceptions and awareness

Scholarship on public attitudes toward sponsorship is limited but suggests growing hospitality toward Ukrainians alongside scepticism toward refugees from other countries.[10] Our research found public awareness of sponsorship schemes to be uneven but generally supportive with awareness of H4U higher than that of CS and CfA.

Public support was sometimes conditional, influenced by perceptions of refugees' legitimacy or concerns over competition for resources. As one participant noted,

> **If it's Ukrainians, I think most people would be fine with it. But the other ones? I don't think so. People already think the town's stretched – like, the doctors are full, rents are mad, can't get into the dentist. So adding more people, it just winds people up**
> (Female, H4U, GPND)

Some interviewees saw the presence of a small number of refugees in their communities as potentially beneficial, contributing global perspectives, cultural richness, diverse food, entrepreneurial activity, and fresh energy. Those in less diverse communities often focused on refugees' contributions through work. However, many felt that people lack knowledge about sponsorship and its benefits. Participants expressed a need for clear, accessible information and suggested using storytelling, peer networks, and lived experiences to share good news, raise awareness and increase engagement. One public participant said,

> **I think the more you can promote the positive nature of the programmes and give examples of how they work, the better. Try to get some media coverage so that people can say what has happened**
> (Male, GPD)

Section 4:
Successes and good practices

Our findings revealed that sponsorship was largely seen as the optimal approach to refugee resettlement and support, bringing benefits for refugees, volunteers, hosts and communities. Our work echoes findings in scholarship, which found that hosts and volunteers created a supportive infrastructure for refugee adaptation[11] often acting as cultural brokers, administrative supporters, and social connectors, providing shelter on arrival, then helping guests access healthcare, schooling and employment.[12] We identified a series of successes and good practices, which are discussed below.

Refugee access to services and personalised support

Across the schemes, refugees benefited from accessible, personalised support that addressed multiple aspects of daily life and helped overcome challenges:

> They helped us with bank registration, GP appointments, school enrolments, and even the house was ready
> (Male, CS, R)

CS volunteers and H4U hosts described applying their problem-solving skills to provide tailored support. The involvement of volunteers from diverse ages and backgrounds enhanced CS groups' ability to connect meaningfully with sponsored families. CS volunteers emphasised that thorough pre-arrival planning ensured comprehensive preparation. H4U refugees benefited from hosts' assistance with securing school places and GP registrations. Across all schemes, volunteers supported school meetings, job searches, tutoring, and social integration. CS groups delivered wraparound support that extended beyond the capacity of the state:

> If you've got a group of about 12 or 15 or 20 and there's a problem, then you've got a reasonable chance that somebody in your group will, will know how to, will have some expertise, um, to donate in the pursuit of solving that problem
> (Male, CS, V)

Research highlighted that sponsorship improved refugee wellbeing by fostering emotional connections and a sense of belonging, with many refugees developing bonds with hosts and volunteers.[13]

These relationships created joy for both parties and supported cultural integration, which reduced isolation and fostered a desire for reciprocity.[14] These findings were echoed in our interviews with CS and H4U refugees, who described feeling welcomed and well supported:

> Everything was different from the ground to the sky. They made everything easier for us. For example, they registered us for children (sic), for the Jobcentre, for the hospitals. They registered us for everything
> (Male, CS, R)

Volunteers and hosts supported refugees with daily tasks while offering friendship and social connections. One volunteer described CS as providing a 'family' for refugees, where support helped build confidence and encouraged cross-cultural interactions. H4U refugees and hosts highlighted how access to hosts' social networks helped with finding jobs, English tutors, making friends, and facilitating family reunion. As one volunteer explained, sponsorship aided integration by embedding refugees within an existing community:

> I think that whole thing about welcoming into a community is a great benefit because you become somebody to that community, you're important to that community and that community sees you as important
> (Female, CS and H4U, V)

CS groups, recognising that standard ESOL classes rarely meet refugees' needs, developed innovative solutions, providing tailored in-person and online tutoring alongside small-group or one-on-one conversational practice. They also offered childcare support to facilitate class attendance.

Local authorities described H4U and CS as 'fast track' integration schemes facilitated by sponsors' strong local connections. Hosts and volunteers expressed a desire to learn as much as possible about sponsored refugees before arrival to better meet their needs. C4A hosts found direct conversations with sponsored families in advance of arrival helpful. One NGO asked CS refugees to complete a pre-arrival questionnaire and passed the information to sponsors, enabling them to prepare homes with items appropriate to specific family needs.

Scholarship recognises the value of involving refugees in the design and delivery of sponsorship schemes, as their lived experience brings unique insights to implementation.[15] Our findings support this view, with participants across CS, C4A, and, to a lesser extent, H4U emphasising the importance of peer-led support to build trust, enhance communication, and ensure services meet refugees' needs:

> **I think the fact that sponsored families got support from other people in a similar situation must have been some kind of comfort blanket**
> (Female, H4U, V)

Roles and relationships

Scholarship indicated that sponsorship schemes were most effective when they set out clear roles for volunteers and engaged in robust monitoring.[16] NGOs described establishing specific roles and setting expectations for all stakeholders to avoid confusion and ensure high quality support. Policymakers highlighted the effectiveness of well-organised CS groups in delivering consistent high-quality support which reduced the risk of relationship breakdowns:

> **There were very few cases of sponsorship breakdowns, or issues arising from it. You know, refugees came and were well looked after, and had, you know, exceptional levels of support**
> (Male, P)

NGOs and international experts involved in CS and C4A highlighted that building volunteer groups with a shared purpose was key to ensuring sustainability. Providing safeguarding training helped create a safe and effective support system for both refugees and volunteers. Experienced volunteers played a vital role in training and supporting newcomers, easing their transition into volunteer roles.

Research has shown that refugee sponsorship can be as rewarding for volunteers and hosts as it is for refugees. CS volunteers reported that working together toward a meaningful goal strengthened existing friendships and fostered new ones, further supporting sustainability:

> **For the group, it is rewarding—not only supporting refugees but coming together as a group, meeting new people, and becoming close**
> (Female, CS, V)

Volunteers in both CS and H4U also described a sense of personal fulfilment and deeper civic engagement.[17] In H4U, relationships developed with Ukrainian guests and exposure to Ukrainian culture enriched the hosting experience.

Community and cost-effectiveness

Stakeholders argued that CS and C4A sponsorship demonstrated communities' ability to take responsibility for refugee resettlement with NGOs valuing the opportunity for civil society to take the lead. Interviewees welcomed the involvement of multiple stakeholders:

> **Up until community sponsorship arrived, more or less, this was government business, refugee resettlement, nothing to do with us… but bringing us in through community sponsorship creates a tripartite relationship between the community, civil society, government, and local authorities… working together in that way and being a stakeholder in it is really important**
> (Male, NGO)

H4U hosts described how hosting strengthened their ties with local communities, bringing people together around a shared purpose. In some areas, new infrastructures and activities, such as volunteer transport groups and social events, emerged to support Ukrainian guests while fostering stronger social bonds.

Research has found that CS fostered greater understanding and social cohesion by exposing host communities to new cultures and lived experiences.[18] This reshaped local attitudes, encouraging perspectives that positioned refugees as assets to host communities.[19] Scholarship highlights that raising public awareness of sponsorship is vital to CS's success.[20] CS volunteers noted how sponsored refugees' arrival increased local understanding and integration:

> **It educates people, local communities about what, you know, who refugees actually are. It accelerates the rate at which refugees are able to adapt to the country, the UK**
> (Male, CS, V)

Local authorities reported that the pressure on their 'over-stretched' services was eased when community groups took responsibility for housing and support. Estimates indicate that H4U generated public savings exceeding £4.4 billion by using spare rooms in hosts' homes instead of public or private sector housing,[21] a point echoed by NGOs and other stakeholders. Hosts and NGOs also argued that voluntary support for refugee integration further reduced costs:

> **Straight off... you've got support in most cases from day one... it helps with employment, schools, friendships, the whole integration process. Therefore, it puts less strain on local authorities and government**
> (Female, H4U, H)

Rapid action and scalability

Scholarship indicated that the scale and speed of the H4U scheme were unprecedented.[22] H4U's streamlined application procedures and use of digital technologies enabled refugees to arrive within days, a sharp contrast to the lengthy waits experienced by CS groups.[23] Immediate access to welfare benefits and employment opportunities accelerated integration possibilities.[24]

Our findings, especially from policymakers and NGOs, reinforced these observations. Stakeholders highlighted the ability for hosts to select their own guests and the light-touch application process as key factors enabling its scale:

> **The naming piece really allowed that scheme to deliver huge numbers far beyond I think anyone expected.**

> **So that was a massive success**
> (Male, P)

Several respondents contrasted H4U with CS, describing CS application processes as more labour-intensive. Policymakers viewed C4A as a promising approach because it combines elements of both H4U and CS. However, volunteers were more critical, highlighting low participant numbers, and limited support from LA's and NGO's. It remains early to determine whether C4A can overcome early challenges and achieve the anticipated scale. A second version of C4A is due to launch soon, which may provide further insight.

Expanded geographic reach

Scholarship identified that H4U facilitated refugee resettlement in many more LA areas than previous resettlement schemes.[25] Scholars suggested that the scheme's reach was enabled by combined efforts from LAs, civil society, and faith-based groups, which provided support across diverse settings.[26]

Our findings revealed that participation in H4U by areas and households with little prior experience hosting refugees was unprecedented. In some cases, involvement sparked further engagement, with H4U hosts volunteering in other initiatives, including support for newly granted refugees who had arrived as asylum-seekers. This expanded the community's capacity to support and host refugees beyond those displaced from Ukraine.

NGO stakeholders argued that CS also extended the reach of refugee resettlement into parts of the UK where affordable housing was scarce and in rural or politically conservative areas which did not tend to participate in refugee resettlement:

> **The local authorities there would never have resettled refugees in those particular locations. The sponsor groups made that happen, and did it really well...that has had a really important impact on those communities beyond the sponsor groups**
> (Male, NGO)

Some CS groups partnered with private landlords or launched housing investment schemes, allowing them to purchase homes dedicated to sponsored refugees for five years, enabling sponsorship in areas where other groups had broken down after failing to secure housing.

Section 5:
Opportunities for improvement

While largely seen as successful, sponsorship continues to evolve in the UK and respondents identified several areas where schemes could be improved, which are discussed below.

Application processes

Scholarship identified that administrative complexity makes some groups reluctant to proceed with CS as the application process requires completion of detailed forms while raising funds, which discourages smaller groups and refugee community organisations from engaging.[27]

Our findings reinforced existing knowledge. CS volunteers described the application process as complex and time-consuming. In contrast, H4U was experienced as relatively more straightforward. However, there were some challenges, including errors requiring resubmission, unclear travel instructions, and disparities in visa issuance within family groups. While some were able to access online support, others encountered delays and confusion.

Housing

Access to appropriate, affordable housing remained a significant and persistent challenge, particularly for CS and C4A groups, who faced the task of securing suitable accommodation with limited resources in highly competitive housing markets. CS volunteers identified housing as the greatest obstacle encountered. Many reported difficulty finding landlords willing to rent to refugees dependent on Universal Credit:

> " It's very difficult to find landlords who are going to guarantee a house being available for a full two years, to a family they don't know, who are going to be on benefits
> (Male, CS, V)

The ongoing struggle to secure housing discouraged some groups from sponsoring additional families. NGOs reported that several groups disbanded after prolonged and unsuccessful property searches, with the Local Housing Allowance rates being insufficient to cover private rental costs. Additionally, NGOs highlighted that limited awareness of CS within the broader refugee-support sector hindered opportunities to leverage existing housing expertise.

Complex institutional systems and overwhelm

Scholarship identified the importance of adequate training for volunteers and the need for additional expertise to help volunteers improve refugee support especially around engaging with institutions.[28] Volunteers were found to struggle to help refugees in relation to work, welfare benefits, education, and mental health systems.[29]

In our study, volunteers and hosts frequently reported feeling unprepared for the logistical and administrative complexities, as well as the emotional demands, associated with sponsorship:

> " I don't think I was ready for how hard it was going to be…how incredibly difficult and how many obstacles there are for resettled families and individuals
> (Female, CS, V)

CS volunteers reported challenges in securing suitable school places for children with special needs. Without formal guidance, they had to navigate these complex systems independently:

> " It's a challenge getting any child, let alone a refugee child, into the right kind of school, given their particular need…we ended up having to contact local politicians because the local authority…was not helping
> (Male, CS, V)

Volunteers also reported difficulties supporting older children into education, navigating welfare entitlements, and assisting with benefit applications. Some reported feeling ill-equipped and overwhelmed, which contributed to hesitancy about participating in future sponsorship efforts. Echoing these concerns, NGOs and refugees said that H4U hosts sometimes

lacked knowledge of the welfare system and received insufficient support from LAs. Universal Credit[30] and child benefit[31] claim forms, available only in English, were often very confusing for volunteers and refugees. CS volunteers reported confusion regarding welfare eligibility, particularly for refugee parents with similar challenges noted within the C4A scheme:

> **There's been tons of work to do with trying to navigate the Universal Credit system, which both the people involved in the benefits thing say is basically like going into an Orwellian world**
> (Female, C4A, V)

Some C4A volunteers felt unsupported by lead sponsors, describing the scheme as 'experimental' due to poor communication and limited resources. Volunteers also expressed discomfort with having the responsibility of explaining welfare or legal rules to refugees. Additionally, some struggled to balance helping refugees with encouraging their independence.

LAs said that volunteer burnout was widespread, with exhaustion in some CS groups leaving them unwilling to sponsor again. H4U hosts committed to the scheme for six months and some became 'stressed' when they felt obliged to continue hosting:

> **I think the main challenge within the Homes for Ukraine has been host fatigue...ends up in some cases being three years**
> (Female, LA)

NGOs involved in CS and H4U emphasised their heavy reliance on volunteers to deliver their services. Lead sponsors felt burdened with responsibilities they said would typically be held by the Government, but for which they received minimal funding or recognition:

> **We're doing the government's work and we're doing it exceptionally well but it's not being recognized... it has to come with funding**
> (Female, NGO)

Faith-based organisations described CS as unsustainable, arguing that without dedicated staff and adequate funding, scaling up was not feasible. Several NGOs felt that the momentum behind sponsorship was declining and that the voluntary sector and individual volunteers, were overwhelmed. They argued for paid NGO staff to provide the support that volunteers needed.

Misaligned expectations

CS scholarship identified that lack of information was problematic for refugees and sponsors, with the former knowing little about life in the UK and the latter sometimes lacking sufficient understanding of refugee needs and cultures.[32] Volunteers and refugees were found to have misaligned expectations because they accessed incorrect or incomplete information.[33]

Most CS refugees arrived with little understanding of the UK or the scheme and what it entailed:

> **We don't know anything about Britain. We applied for travel, so the country was determined, but we don't know anything about Britain at all**
> (Female, CS, R)

Volunteers were often unaware of the prospective family's composition but were still expected to secure suitable housing and arrange school places. This frequently resulted in mismatches when refugees arrived. In contrast, some C4A volunteers reported feeling better equipped to meet refugees' needs due to having direct communication with the families prior to their arrival. Scholarship indicated that misaligned expectations increased risk of sponsorship breakdowns as trust was undermined when refugees feel let down.[34] We heard how in all schemes inaccurate information about entitlements and the nature of support led to disappointment.

For example, the concept of volunteering was unfamiliar to many refugees, leading to misaligned expectations about the level and nature of support provided. NGOs reported that refugees in CS and C4A schemes often anticipated assistance from LA staff and felt disappointed when such support was not available. Conversely, volunteers, unaware that refugees believed they were paid professionals, sometimes perceived these expectations as unreasonable. This gap in understanding contributed to tensions between refugees and volunteers. Some CS and C4A volunteers sought to manage refugees' expectations through regular and clear communication.

LAs stressed the need to manage sponsors' expectations to enable them to understand the limits of the support the LA was able to offer to hosts and volunteers.

Uncertainty and confusion

Scholarship on H4U highlighted temporal uncertainty and financial shortfalls as a challenge. Some hosts said the financial support offered did not cover their costs.[35] Refugees were found to be traumatised by displacement and anxious over their uncertain legal status.[36]

Hosts, refugees and LAs said that visa precarity for Ukrainian refugees destabilised integration processes and resulted in non-renewal of job contracts and undermined access to stable housing and work. Without a pathway to permanence, H4U refugees were unable to plan their lives, resulting in stress for guests and their hosts "There is currently no route to settlement…so they're kind of stuck in this limbo" (Male, H4U, H). Problems arose when H4U guests needed self-contained housing. The short-term nature of visas and delays getting extensions under the Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme impacted access to the private rental market:

> **Guests can't sign tenancies if all they can show is a visa that's just valid for one month, two months…you're essentially locked out of the housing market for three months, four months, five months**
> (Female, NGO)

The close living arrangements in H4U, where strangers from diverse cultural backgrounds with different lifestyles shared a home, sometimes led to tensions. These arose when unspoken expectations regarding behaviour, daily routines, or financial contributions were unmet. Misunderstandings could arise, for example over parenting practices or household rules, with guests often unsure how to behave in shared spaces. Several H4U refugees said that while they were grateful to be housed, living in the homes of strangers was difficult. They could not relax and be themselves for fear of upsetting their hosts. Misunderstandings generated a precarious environment, increasing the likelihood of hosting breakdowns and refugee homelessness.[37]

In the cost-of-living crisis, hosts encountered unexpected rises in living costs while unprepared for what ended up being a long-term commitment.[38] The fixed amount H4U 'thank-you payments' also generated problems. One volunteer supporting over 60 Ukrainian refugees housed in a 'mansion' explained he received the same sum as those supporting one person:

> **That was very difficult, very frustrating, a very lonely place to be when you have no income coming in but your expenditure is very high**
> (Male, H4U, V)

C4A volunteers were confused about how funding would be distributed as despite being told the scheme would cover up-front and monthly costs, they ended up covering costs out of their own funds initially.

Respondents generally had limited knowledge of sponsorship schemes beyond the one they were directly involved with. Many were unaware of valuable resources, such as the information sheets produced by RESET for CS and H4U volunteers, that could have enhanced their understanding of refugees' rights, entitlements, and cultural backgrounds.

Where hosts, sponsors, and NGOs were aware of the different schemes, many expressed concerns about unequal treatment of refugees from different countries, despite their shared experience of forced migration. They observed that Ukrainian refugees received significantly more support than other groups, highlighting broader inequities within UK asylum and refugee policy.[39] Volunteers also noted that the Government's positive and highly visible promotion of H4U contrasted with the relative neglect of CS and C4A schemes.

> **The truth is people don't really know about community sponsorship… there's been a massive thing made out of Homes for Ukraine. There's been investment from government. There's been a positive narrative from government**
> (Female, NGO)

LAs also highlighted disparities between the schemes, noting that CS groups were often solely responsible for all post-arrival support, whereas H4U guests benefited from structured assistance, including welfare checks, service enrolment, and access to discretionary funding. Support levels were reported to vary across different LAs. Several LA representatives expressed concern that the comparatively more generous support provided through C4A might undermine the CS model:

> " C4A it's a kind of a plus version of community sponsorship, the funding, why would a group go via community sponsorship, when they could go via C4A...they would get a enhanced financial package, which will unlock their problems in relation to the funding of a unit, then uplift in terms of the rent
> (Male, LA)

Hosts and NGOs expressed concerns that LAs might elect to resettle Afghan families with the least complex needs, leaving groups to do the most difficult work with groups needing more intensive support.

The consensus was that the current system is confusing and inequitable, stemming from the previous Government's reactive response to refugee crises. Respondents described existing sponsorship approaches as fragmented and emphasised the need for a unified general sponsorship scheme that ensures equal support for all refugees and volunteers.

Local authority capacity

Scholarship highlights the central but often constrained role of LAs in sponsorship schemes. LAs involved in CS and H4U faced challenges such as underfunding, housing shortages, and limited guidance on their roles, which made participation difficult and sometimes led to reluctance.[40] Respondents described LAs as the 'structural glue' holding schemes together but noted institutional caution and unfamiliarity with CS. Poor visibility of sponsorship initiatives and their successes further discouraged engagement. As one LA participant explained,

> " And unless you can work your way through that, it's just another complication [sponsorship] on top of all the other new systems and things
> (Female, LA)

LAs' capacity to support refugees was further constrained by inconsistent government guidance. Interviewees reported that the national Government was often slow to provide direction, leaving LAs uncertain about their responsibilities. Support offered by LAs to hosts varied[41] as this was apparently not made clear when the former Government established the scheme.[42] LA interviewees said the national Government were slow and often unhelpful:

> " At times, they have been slow to come forward with specific guidance... this is classic, and my experience of immigration as well
> (Female, LA)

The Super Sponsor model faced challenges due to high costs, including a heavy reliance on temporary accommodation such as hotels.[43] Sponsors and NGOs emphasised that increased LA involvement, clearer application processes, well-defined roles and responsibilities, and improved collaboration would enhance LAs' capacity to support refugees and participate effectively. Several LAs expressed openness to building on their H4U experience to expand C4A and future sponsorship models, including through housing partnerships and integration hubs.

H4U refugees outlined problems generated by uneven LA support. Language provision varied enormously, with some refugees unable to access interpretation when needed. Gaps in LAs' coordination and resourcing left H4U hosts unsupported in some authorities. The time-limited nature of assistance was problematic as LAs built services that had to be disbanded when funding ended, despite ongoing needs from hosts and refugees.

Finally, scholarship identified the lack of a formal H4U matching process as raising safeguarding risks for women and children escaping Ukraine. NGOs believed the scheme's rapid rollout left insufficient time to establish robust safeguarding mechanisms. LAs were tasked with conducting pre-arrival safeguarding checks and follow-ups, but some were unaware of refugees residing in their areas, which prevented them from undertaking these checks. NGOs reported poor coordination between sponsors, Government, and LAs, resulting in some hosts and refugees receiving limited follow-up support after initial checks.

Integration challenges

There was broad agreement that sponsored refugees received more comprehensive integration support than other forced migrants in the UK. However, scholarship identified ongoing challenges, including language barriers and cultural misunderstandings, which often left sponsored refugees feeling isolated and disconnected, particularly in less diverse communities.[44]

Scholarship found that H4U refugees faced difficulties accessing healthcare due to a lack of knowledge about navigating the UK healthcare system, compounded by UK clinicians' inability to access Ukrainian medical records.[45]

CS refugees were selected for resettlement based on vulnerability, with serious health conditions in family members being a key criterion. Consequently, many faced significant health challenges, including trauma-related issues, antenatal and postnatal complications, and dental problems stemming from limited healthcare access during displacement or in refugee camps. Addressing these complex, multiple health needs is challenging for the general population and even more so for refugees navigating a different healthcare culture, often relying on interpreters and volunteer assistance.

Lack of transport in rural areas meant refugees experienced additional barriers to care:

> **The transportation is very bad. The train is cancelled. We faced a medical issue. If someone is sick, it is very difficult to come to the hospital on time**
> (Female, CS, R)

CS volunteers reported challenges in supporting refugees with complex healthcare needs, while C4A volunteers described the strain involved in coordinating frequent hospital appointments. Some volunteer groups paid for private dental care when they could not locate NHS dentists for refugees. Meanwhile, H4U refugees found the UK health system so hard to navigate that some risked returning to Ukraine for medical treatment "I think the Ukrainians find it easier to go home and get something sorted, for instance, health-wise, things like that" (Female, LA).

LAs pointed to a combination of communication difficulties and unfamiliarity with UK systems as major barriers to refugee integration. Inadequate support with studying English, despite the desire to learn, left refugees struggling to be independent and relying on volunteers and hosts.

CS refugees consistently identified language learning as their greatest challenge, with one explaining how difficult this made his life, "I didn't understand the documents or forms. Even with translators, it wasn't enough" (Male, CS, R). Similar difficulties were observed in C4A and volunteers could not afford to pay for the interpretation needed. Although volunteers provided support with language learning, most refugees relied on ESOL classes to learn English and said these did not equip them with practical communication skills needed for everyday life.

Scholarship highlighted that sponsored refugees faced difficulties accessing work and education, with poor English language skills a key factor alongside inability to convert overseas qualifications, and high childcare costs. Given that CS suggests offering just one year of integration support, volunteers were under the impression that refugees should be working by the end of this period. CS refugees and volunteers described getting a job as a major obstacle, which was particularly problematic for men who were often desperate to work. Volunteers and refugees felt they had failed, unaware of just how difficult it is for refugees to find work. H4U refugees often located jobs in insecure, lower paid and lower status roles than they had in Ukraine, reflecting findings from elsewhere.[46] C4A refugees were frequently reported to experience health issues, which posed significant barriers to securing employment.

Social isolation

Scholarship indicates that refugees experienced significant social and psychological challenges when their social networks were limited, and the absence of same-age peers or gender-specific support left them feeling isolated and lonely.[47] While some refugees reported forming deep and meaningful relationships with their sponsors, others expressed disappointment at relationships they perceived as superficial and described distress at being separated from their families.[48]

Our findings for H4U and C4A reflected these concerns. Some Ukrainian refugees reported having few local social connections beyond their hosts. Single Ukrainian parents, in particular, lacked the social networks necessary to help with childcare:

> **It was stressful, because often they were appointed at the very moment when I had to pick up my son from school...it was a real challenge**
> (Female, H4U, R)

In general, refugees living in less diverse areas reported feeling more isolated. One C4A volunteer described how the father they sponsored expressed concern about the impact of this isolation on his family:

> **He feels he's quite isolated because where we live is very rural and there isn't any other Afghans locally...he worries about their mental state**
> (Female, C4A, V)

Section 6:
Conclusions

This report presents a comprehensive review of refugee sponsorship in the UK, integrating extensive new qualitative evidence from multiple stakeholders alongside a thorough analysis of existing scholarship. Our findings reaffirm earlier research on CS, highlighting that sponsorship delivers exceptional support to resettled refugees, yields positive outcomes for volunteers, hosts, and communities, and retains public appeal despite unprecedented anti-refugee sentiment.

The introduction of two newer programmes, H4U and C4A, each with distinct approaches to refugee identification and resourcing, enriches understanding of how varied models can enhance the UK's sponsorship landscape. Valuable lessons emerge from across all three schemes.

Motivations to participate vary, group volunteers are often driven by empathy, personal or familial refugee experiences, or faith, whereas individual hosts are motivated by available home space and a fixed hosting timeframe. Social networks significantly influence awareness and engagement, although public knowledge of sponsorship remains uneven. H4U is more widely recognised, while CS is better known in less diverse areas. The public expressed interest in sponsorship but generally expects refugees to achieve self-sufficiency. LAs and NGOs, frequently acting as lead sponsors, are pivotal in connecting stakeholders and managing safeguarding responsibilities.

Sponsorship schemes offer several key strengths. Refugees benefit from personalised support tailored to their needs, facilitating access to essential services. Effective groups clearly define roles and provide volunteer support, with refugee involvement in leadership enhancing outcomes. Sponsorship fosters community cohesion and raises awareness in areas less familiar with refugee resettlement. H4U notably demonstrated that rapid, large-scale resettlement can be achieved during emergencies without overburdening public resources.

Nonetheless, challenges remain. Volunteers require more expertise in navigating complex systems and greater support to prevent overwhelm. The roles of LAs need a clearer definition. Misaligned expectations between volunteers and refugees underscore the need for better information. Visa insecurity for Ukrainians lacking pathways to permanence creates significant distress. Financial incentives, such as 'thank-you' payments, require review, especially for those hosting multiple refugees. Difficulties

accessing healthcare and English language learning persist, impeding refugees' employment prospects. Social isolation, especially in rural locations, further exacerbates health and integration challenges.

As the UK reviews its sponsorship framework, this report offers critical insights to guide future programme development. The current multiplicity of schemes tied to refugees' countries of origin has caused confusion and perceptions of inequity.

Building on past successes while addressing ongoing challenges will be essential to establishing a coherent, equitable, and sustainable sponsorship system. The recommendations that follow propose actionable steps to improve existing models and inform the design of a unified future scheme.

Section 7:

Recommendations for sponsorship in the UK

Existing research and our findings provide strong support for the continuation of sponsorship in the UK, highlighting benefits for all stakeholders and an unprecedented level of support with integration processes. We ran a workshop with refugees, hosts, volunteers, LAs, NGOs and policymakers to share our findings and collectively identify the main ways that sponsorship could be improved in the UK. These are outlined below.

A flexible scheme for everyone

- Develop a 'global' sponsorship programme wherein all sponsored refugees have the same rights and entitlements, including pathways to permanence and are protected by the same level of safeguarding
- Ensure the scheme includes expedited application processes to use in emergencies
- Allow H4U style 'naming' so volunteers and hosts can select refugees based on the support and resources they have available
- Provide all sponsored refugees who do not arrive with a permanent leave-to-remain with a pathway to permanence.

Strong Government leadership

- Co-develop a national refugee sponsorship strategy with all stakeholders, setting out a long-term vision for sponsorship in the UK and identifying key roles and mechanisms
- Support lead sponsors to facilitate their leadership role, clearly allocating responsibilities and ensuring their costs are covered
- Work with civil society to promote positive sponsorship stories and highlight the contribution that sponsorship makes to communities in diverse and less diverse areas
- Provide clear, accessible guidance to NGOs and LAs outlining refugee rights, entitlements, and the roles and responsibilities within each scheme, helping to reduce confusion and improve coordination.

Sustainable funding

- Fund committed LAs and lead sponsors to support sponsored refugees, hosts and guests
- Facilitate a multi-year allocation for chosen LAs and lead sponsors to enable planning for the longer term rather than 're-inventing' services for each new scheme
- Ensure the payments available to individual and group sponsors are provided in a timely fashion.

Expanding involvement

- Reach out to refugees who have previously been sponsored and to others via refugee community organisations to consult them about how to support future refugees and encourage them to form groups.
- Develop materials about the benefits of being a volunteer/ sponsor that appeal to diverse demographic groups
- Encourage wider participation in sponsorship for example by lead sponsors and groups reaching into colleges and universities, and via the Duke of Edinburgh programme
- Commission a lead sponsor to work with potential corporate sponsors and to promote sponsorship with diaspora organisations

Repeat sponsorship

- Experienced hosts and sponsors to have access to a lighter touch application process with accelerated processing times.

Managing expectations

- Review pre-departure information offered by delivery partners to ensure accuracy, clarifying the reality about the availability of housing and work
- Map roles and responsibilities so all parties know who is responsible for what action
- Manage volunteers' expectations by clarifying what is meant by vulnerability and how it may impact refugees' needs
- Enable refugees and volunteers to communicate in advance of arrival so expectations can be clarified
- Explain the notion of volunteering to refugees so they understand that volunteers are not paid to support them
- Develop contingency plans with volunteers, hosts and LAs so that support is available when original timelines are not achieved
- Make sure all those involved in volunteering/ hosting are made aware of the materials provided by RESET and the University of Birmingham[49]
- Utilise Facebook groups to share the above information.

Language

- Explore and identify ways in which AI tools can support interpretation and enhance communication between volunteers and newly arrived refugees
- Offer an intensive online language course for new refugees to take while waiting to access ESOL
- Build on CS good practice and develop online one-to-one and group tutoring for sponsored refugees perhaps through encouraging volunteering by retired teachers
- Increase the number of free ESOL hours available to refugees
- Organise online and, where numbers allow, in-person conversation sessions
- Ensure all refugees have access to an intensive programme like STEP Ukraine.

Access to work

- Manage refugee and volunteer expectations around access to work so that both parties understand the challenges involved and do not feel that they have failed when unable to find work in the prescribed period
- Build on the STEP Ukraine programme to develop pathways to work for all refugees able to work
- Improve mechanisms for the recognition of overseas qualifications including vocational qualifications (i.e. UK ENIC certificate)
- Reach out to major employers to develop paid internship programmes for refugees
- The Home Office, DWP and MHCLG might collaborate to establish a taskforce to support refugees into work. Given the difficulties that all refugees face in this arena, the taskforce could establish programmes for all refugees.

Mental health

- Ensure all new volunteers and hosts are given access to information about how to support refugees with their mental health
- Establish online and in-person support groups (where numbers allow) to reduce social isolation
- Lead sponsors and RESET to work with NHS to access funds to establish an online counselling service for sponsored refugees to which volunteers/hosts can refer
- Ensure Ukrainian refugees have a pathway to permanence to reduce levels of insecurity and associated anxiety.

Housing

- Future sponsorship schemes to include a hosting element where hosts' costs are covered up to the Rent a Room Scheme threshold (£7500)[50]
- 'Thank you' payments should be calculated on a per-occupant basis
- Collect information about the innovative approaches that groups have used to identify housing and share these on RESET and lead sponsor websites
- Information and support should be provided around move-on options.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Government to work with NGOs to develop a simple monitoring mechanism which can be used consistently by all groups to identify challenges and good practices
- Distribution of a light touch e-survey to reach hosts of larger-scale schemes such as H4U
- Partnership working with academic and NGO experts to collect and analyse data.

Appendix 1:

Comparative table of the UK's sponsorship schemes (2016-2025)

Categories	Community Sponsorship (CS)	Homes for Ukraine (H4U)	Communities for Afghans (C4A)
Date launched	July 2016	March 2022	March 2024
Target group	UNHCR-identified refugees. Initially Syrians. Since 2021, no specific nationality - CS numbers are additional to the Global Resettlement Scheme.	Ukrainian nationals displaced by Russia's full-scale invasion	Afghan citizens from the Afghan Resettlement Programme
Selection	UNHCR in communication with the UK Government	Hosts via websites and latterly RESET and Citizens UK In Scotland and Wales (until 2022), devolved Governments named as super sponsors	1. Individuals who arrived under the evacuation programme. 2. Referrals from the UNHCR. 3. Those at risk after supporting international community efforts in Afghanistan, and the especially vulnerable.
Duration of support	12 months support from volunteer group 2 years housing	At least 6 months' hosting commitment	2/3 years support from LAs, Principal sponsor and volunteer groups.
Refugees resettled with the scheme as of March 2025	Approximately 1100 refugees	Approximately 164,300 Ukrainians	41 refugees (target was 100 families March to August 2024)
Application process	Volunteer group applies via Home Office, detailed plan needed	Ukrainians apply for visa with a UK sponsor	Volunteer group applies via Citizens UK (principal sponsor)
Migration status and pathways	Initially 5-year refugee status, changed to Indefinite Leave to Remain from 2022	H4U visa for 3 years, extension 18th months, no pathway to permanency	Individuals under the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) given Indefinite Leave to Remain

Categories	Community Sponsorship (CS)	Homes for Ukraine (H4U)	Communities for Afghans (C4A)
Funding	Lead groups and volunteers must raise £9000 per refugee household family	£500-£350/month 'thank you' payment to hosts plus some guest contribution	Central government funding via LA grants to principal Sponsors Phase 1: £750 per family member for set up costs then maximum of £500 paid to volunteer groups each month. Phase 2: £909 per family member for set up costs then £136 per person each month for three years.
Volunteers'/ hosts' roles	CS groups apply to Home Office with detailed resettlement plan needed, seek approval from LA and Police and provide integration support	Households apply, provide accommodation and integration support	Principal sponsors recruits volunteers who support a resettled household by sourcing accommodation for 3-years and provide integration support
Accommodation	Sponsor groups must secure self-contained accommodation for 2 years	Households must offer accommodation for a minimum of 6 months extendable. LAs deal with homelessness. Scottish and Welsh super-sponsors arrange initial accommodation	Sponsor groups must source self-contained accommodation for 3 years.
Integration Support	Volunteers offer holistic support including access to ESOL, benefits, healthcare and jobs	Hosts provide initial support, LAs funded to offer additional assistance In Scotland and Wales, local councils and charities provide wraparound support alongside Government support	Varied, includes casework and integration help
Safeguarding Checks	Full DBS and property checks required	DBS checks (basic or enhanced, depending on setup)	Coordinated through partners, LAs and principal sponsors

Appendix 2:

Studies reviewed

Category	Details
Scheme Focus	35 CS, 30 H4U, 3 both CS & H4U, 1 C4A & H4U
Publication Years	2017–2025
Publication Peak Years	2023 (20 studies), 2024 (17 studies)
Type of publication	Reports and briefings (46), journal articles (20), book chapters (2), PhD thesis (1)
Geographic Focus	UK-wide (46), England (7), Scotland (2), Wales (2), England & Wales (1)
Comparative Perspective	11 studies (mainly with European models)
Setting (Urban/Rural)	Both (35), Urban (6), Rural (5)
Methodology	Qualitative (54), Quantitative (2), Mixed methods (10)
Study Type	Empirical (38), Theoretical (8), Combined (23)
Stakeholder Perspectives	Multiple stakeholders (15), Civil society (7), Volunteers (8), Refugees (14), Refugees & Volunteers (7), Authorities/Policymakers/Government (9), Wider community (3)

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