



Public attitudes to refugee sponsorship in the UK

This brief focuses on public attitudes towards refugee sponsorship at a time when sponsorship is becoming more prominent within the UK's asylum and resettlement system. The UK currently operates three refugee sponsorship schemes: Community Sponsorship (CS), Homes for Ukraine (H4U), and Communities for Afghans (CfA). Public understanding and confidence will be critical to their sustainability and future expansion.

This policy brief reports findings from a University of Birmingham study conducted between January and August 2025. It draws on 30 intercept interviews with members of the public in diverse and less-diverse areas of the Midlands and Southwest of England. Interviews explored awareness of and attitudes towards refugee sponsorship. We found that knowledge about sponsorship is extremely patchy and while support for refugee sponsorship exists, it is conditional and influenced by concerns about fairness, accountability, and competition over resources. In order to sustain and expand sponsorship-based approaches it is important to raise awareness of sponsorship and how it can benefit communities.

Awareness and understanding of sponsorship

Public awareness of refugee sponsorship is uneven and generally low. Over half of interviewees (16 of 30) were unaware of any sponsorship schemes. Homes for Ukraine (H4U) was the only widely recognised scheme. Community Sponsorship (CS) had very limited recognition and Communities for Afghans (CfA) was unknown.

Understanding of schemes was generally patchy with interviewees unclear how they operate, roles and responsibilities, and how sponsorship differs from asylum. Sponsorship was frequently conflated with broader concerns about immigration and asylum. Respondents relied on information from social or mainstream media which was not always accurate.

Public views of sponsorship

The public were generally sympathetic towards the plight of refugees but cautious about resettlement. Many expressed empathy and recognised the humanitarian case for support. But, support was often conditional, influenced by:

- **Concerns about resources**
In less-diverse areas, concerns focused on pressures on housing, welfare and public services, with interviewees seeking reassurance that sponsorship would not overstretch already limited provision. In more diverse urban areas, pressures on services were more often attributed to wider structural factors, such as underfunding and austerity, rather than as being threatened by refugees. Interviewees argued sponsorship could be viewed positively if the benefits to host communities were outlined.
- **Conditionality and support**
Interviewees emphasised that refugees should contribute economically and socially. Support was stronger where refugees were perceived as willing and able to fill labour shortages, particularly in care, hospitality and agriculture. Some interviewees distinguished between refugee groups, drawing on ideas shaped by media narratives and assumptions about cultural difference. Those with limited contact with diverse populations were more likely to express stereotypical distinctions.



- **Willingness to participate in sponsorship**
While many participants expressed principled support for sponsorship, fewer were willing to host refugees in their own homes or assume formal responsibilities. In more diverse areas, non-participation was largely attributed to practical constraints, including limited housing, time and financial resources. Those open to involvement tended to favour volunteering rather than hosting. In less-diverse areas, some argued that responsibility for resettlement should rest primarily with Government rather than local communities.

Increasing interest in sponsorship

Interviewees identified four ways to strengthen public engagement.

- **Raising awareness about sponsorship as a practice**
Interviewees called for clearer communication about sponsorship. Awareness should be built across multiple channels including social media, traditional media, and through promotion in local community spaces rather than relying on individuals to find information.
- **Clear information about the specificities of sponsorship**
Uncertainty about roles, funding and accountability emerged as a key barrier to participation. Interviewees called for clearer information about what sponsorship entails in practice, alongside transparent communication on oversight and safeguarding arrangements. Reassurance that schemes are fair, well managed and protected against misuse was seen as essential.
- **Using real-life examples**
Concrete, human examples were seen as more persuasive than abstract policy explanations. Personal stories from both sponsors and refugees were viewed as effective in illustrating what sponsorship involves. However, interviewees stressed the importance of

authenticity, including acknowledgement of challenges as well as successes.

- **Emphasising benefits to host communities**
Sponsorship was viewed as more acceptable to communities where benefits were evident. Interviewees emphasised the importance of visible local investment and open dialogue, facilitated by councils, churches and community organisations.

Conclusions and recommendations

Our findings suggest that while there is potential public support for refugee sponsorship, awareness and understanding of the approach remain limited. The recommendations below draw on interview insights and are directed towards central Government, MHCLG, local authorities and delivery partners.

Building public confidence in sponsorship

- Provide information about different sponsorship schemes and clearly differentiate sponsorship from asylum and other migration routes.
- Explain that sponsorship is a 'safe and legal route'.

Clarifying roles and accountability

- Outline the respective responsibilities of all parties to reduce public uncertainty around accountability.
- Enhance transparency around oversight, safeguards, and governance arrangements to reinforce public confidence in the safety, fairness and effective management of schemes.
- Address concerns about responsibility being shifted onto communities by highlighting the shared role with Government.

Addressing concerns about resources

- Make visible Government investment in



resources to support sponsorship in receiving areas to reduce concerns about competition over resources.

- Communicate the social, economic, and community benefits generated through sponsorship.

Promoting opportunities for public involvement

- Provide flexible, proportionate engagement opportunities communicating the range of roles through which individuals can get involved.
- Introduce a skills-based matching platform to link potential volunteers with sponsorship groups based on their availability and expertise.

Contact

For further information or to arrange a meeting contact
Professor Jenny Phillimore j.a.phillimore@bham.ac.uk – 07968 509675