

Chris Philp MP
Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

HOCS Reference: MIN/0012341/20

12th October 2020

Dear Minister,

Re: Resumption of Refugee Resettlement and Community Sponsorship

Thank you for your reply dated 13th August. We appreciate your commitment to community sponsorship and to refugee resettlement, and your hope that resettlement will resume in the “weeks and months” ahead. We share a desire to see the UK resume the delivery of its humanitarian commitments and our groups stand ready now to accept families and put into place any risk assessments required by the present health crisis.

Criteria for Resumption of Resettlement

Thank you for setting out the factors on which resumption of resettlement depends:

- 1. restarting flights from refugee host countries*
- 2. the lifting of restrictions imposed by the governments of those countries and in the UK*
- 3. the ability of our international partners to operate*
- 4. the reopening of the UK's visa application centres*
- 5. local authority and central government capacity in light of COVID-19; and*
- 6. recovery of the asylum system from the impact of COVID-19*

With regard to the list of factors, we understand that factors 1-4 have caused difficulty, but France, Germany and Spain have worked with IOM and UNHCR to successfully resettle 422 vulnerable refugees in recent months, and we hope that the UK will not be left behind. The Government is right to celebrate our global leadership on refugee resettlement, but this rings hollow if we are not resuming resettlement when other comparable countries have already done so. We urge you to work closely with IOM and UNHCR to restart flights.

In relation to factors 5 and 6, it is not clear to Community Sponsorship Groups why these are legitimate reasons to prevent resumption of community sponsorship, and we would be keen to know if there are any procedures we could put in place to expedite the process? We work closely with many local authorities through Citizens UK and the Sponsor Refugees network, and know that many of them are eager for local authority-led resettlement and community sponsorship to resume as soon as possible – and have the capacity to do so.

Request to Reimburse Rental Costs in Exceptional Cases

Thank you for acknowledging the particular issues that community sponsorship groups are facing. Locating and securing housing is one of the most difficult and costly elements of the community sponsorship process, and retaining an empty property for an extended period of time is expensive. For groups who have had their applications approved and were ready to resettle a family at the time the scheme was frozen, the prospect of relinquishing their property is devastating and will set them back many months. On the other hand, in the absence of an anticipated date to resume resettlement, they cannot fund the rent on an empty property indefinitely.

With that in mind, we request that the Home Office relaxes the restriction on reimbursement of rental costs for the very small number of Community Sponsorship Groups, like WRAP, I Family Cardiff, and Croeso Menai (who are likely to incur unplanned rental costs of approximately £3,000 each between now and Christmas), who had received approval for their property and were anticipating the arrival of a family. The cost would be minimal to the Home Office but make a very significant difference to the small number of groups concerned, and mean that they are ready to resume resettlement as soon as the Home Office restarts the scheme.

Invitation to be Guest of Honour at the 'Refugees Still Welcome Assembly', December 6th

Finally, Citizens UK, Sponsor Refugees and many of our local groups would like to formally invite you as the guest of honour to our 'Refugees Still Welcome Assembly' on 6th December 2020 between 15:00 and 16:30 (on Zoom). It is now five years since our local chapters and member organisations, along with diverse civil society organisations in the Refugees Welcome movement, called on the UK government to introduce a refugee resettlement scheme in response to the Syrian crisis. We are very proud that the UK has (almost) delivered on its commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees, and would like to celebrate hitting that target at the 'Refugees Still Welcome Assembly' on December 6th. As well as earning international plaudits, the UK's resettlement programme has been a brilliant example of civil society working together with local, devolved and UK governments for the common good, and so we will be inviting representatives from councils and communities who have helped to make refugees welcome to come along and participate.

We will be announcing the winners of the annual Community Sponsorship Awards, and would like you to present the award for 'Outstanding Refugee Contribution to the Fight against COVID-19' (for which we have received a number of exciting nominations - including a number of refugees working in COVID-response teams in the NHS). We know that you have a very busy diary but we do hope that you will be able to attend and speak. During Refugee Week in 2019 we very much valued your predecessor as Immigration Minister announcing the extension of the resettlement scheme at one of our events in South London. During this event, she was able to engage directly with resettled refugees and the communities that had welcomed them. We cannot so easily offer a physical venue and gathering to help celebrate the 20,000 milestone, but hope that the hundreds of people gathered online for our 'Refugees Still Welcome Assembly' will provide a fitting context, and demonstrate the government's continued commitment to refugee resettlement.

We would be grateful for your response on these three requests - you can contact us via jonathan.cox@citizensuk.org.

Yours sincerely,



Rachel Griffiths
Herne Hill Welcomes Refugees



Richard Williams
Wendover Resettlement Assistance Project



Revd Michael John
I Family Cardiff

Supported by the following Community Sponsorship Groups

1. I Family Cardiff
2. Barnstable Community Welcome
3. Bath Welcomes Refugees
4. Bude Refugee Support Group
5. Budleigh-Syrian Community Sponsorship
6. Caritas Homes Without Borders (Basingstoke)

7. Caritas Refugee Matters (Fareham)
8. Caritas Rugby 4 Refugees (Ringwood)
9. Caritas Shrewsbury
10. Caritas ToDaRe (Waterlooville/Horndean)
11. CHARIS Exeter
12. CHARIS Taunton
13. Chulmleigh Community Welcome
14. Citizens UK/Sponsor Refugees (Lead Sponsor)
15. Companions, Sidmouth
16. Cotham & Redlands Welcome
17. Croeso Cowbridge
18. Croeso Menai
19. Croeso Roath/Cathays
20. EI23 Welcomes Refugees (Tower Hamlets)
21. Falmouth and Penryn Welcome Refugee Families
22. Forest Hill and Sydenham Welcome Refugees
23. Goodleigh Community Welcome
24. Greyfriars Community Sponsorship Group (Reading)
25. Hampstead Churches Community Sponsorship Group
26. Herne Hill Welcomes Refugees
27. Ilfracombe Community Welcome
28. Kings Heath Welcomes (Kings Heath Action for Refugees)
29. King's Resettlement Support (London)
30. KSIMC of Birmingham
31. Newport Community Sponsorship Group
32. Peckham Sponsors Refugees
33. Sherwood Sponsors Refugees
34. Smethwick Community Sponsorship Group
35. Stepney Salvation Army
36. The Pickwell Foundation (Devon)
37. Tyneside Welcomes
38. Uplyme Community Sponsorship Group
39. Wendover Resettlement Assistance Project (WRAP).
40. West Hampstead Welcomes
41. Westbury Welcome (Bristol)
42. Whitechapel Welcomes