



Home Office

Report on Safe and Legal Routes Illegal Migration Act 2023 (Section 61)

January 2024



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Report on Safe and Legal Routes

Illegal Migration Act 2023 (Section 61)

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 61 of the Illegal Migration Act 2023

January 2024



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Chapter 1: Introduction

On 20 July 2023, the government passed the Illegal Migration Act. The Illegal Migration Act provides the framework to stop illegal migration through unsafe routes and ensures that the only way to come to the UK is via safe and legal routes. The Illegal Migration Act makes it unambiguously clear that, if you enter the UK illegally, you will not be able to remain here. Instead, you will be detained and promptly removed either to your home country or to a safe country where any asylum claim will be considered. You will no longer be able to frustrate removal attempts with late or spurious legal challenges or appeals, and once removed, you will have no right to re-entry, settlement or citizenship.

Through Section 61 of the Illegal Migration Act, the government committed to publishing a report on existing and any proposed additional safe and legal routes to the UK. This report is focused on the UK's safe and legal routes for humanitarian purposes and does not seek to set out the broader legal pathways to the UK.

The UK has a proud history of providing protection for those who are most in need of it through our safe and legal routes. We continue to welcome refugees and people in need. Since 2015, we have offered over half a million people safe and legal routes into the UK, including through our Afghanistan, Ukraine and Hong Kong routes. This includes over 28,700 refugees, including over 14,000 children, via our formal refugee resettlement schemes. Our safe and legal routes are some of the most generous anywhere. We are the sixth largest recipient of United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) referred refugees, third only to Sweden and Germany in Europe.

Our resettlement schemes play a key role in the global response to humanitarian crises: saving lives and offering stability to those most in need of protection.

Many people become refugees when they can no longer live in their home country or are forced to leave due to war, conflict or persecution. The UK has a long and proud history of communities opening up their homes and providing sanctuary to those most in need. Successive British Governments have expanded our refugee resettlement schemes, reflecting the global context of increased conflict and humanitarian disasters. In response to the situations in Hong Kong, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, the UK has created additional routes. These schemes are some of the most generous routes in the UK's history.

Safe and legal routes are sanctioned immigration provisions that provide access to the UK for humanitarian reasons. By this, we mean they are formally sanctioned by government to enable travel to the UK— e.g. where a visa is granted or available for the journey; or the person is permitted to travel to the UK without a visa.

Claiming Asylum

Safe and legal routes are not routes to claim asylum and don't allow anyone to apply out-of-country for asylum in the UK and they do not facilitate the offshore processing by the UK Government of general asylum applications.

The Refugee Convention contains no obligation for signatory states to consider claims made outside their territory. Moreover, the Convention is very clear that someone must first be outside their country of nationality or habitual residence (if stateless), before they can be considered for refugee status. Our policy is consistent with the requirements of the Convention: we will not consider asylum claims made abroad and there is no provision in the Immigration Rules for someone to be allowed to travel to the UK to claim asylum.

With over 100 million people displaced globally, it is not possible to provide a route that meets every eventuality. Whilst we sympathise with people in many difficult situations around the world, the capacity and resources of the UK are not unlimited, and it is not feasible to consider protection claims from the very large numbers of people overseas who might ask to come here.

It is a longstanding principle, common in multiple jurisdictions, including the EU, through its Common European Asylum System, that those in need of international protection should take the fastest route to safety and claim asylum in the first safe country they reach, rather than making dangerous journeys through multiple safe countries to arrive at their preferred destination.

For many people, it is in their best interests to stay close to the region or in a neighbouring country where there are often similarities in culture and language, and they can be supported by international organisations, including the UN.

Under the Illegal Migration Act, the only way to come to the UK to find sanctuary will be through safe and legal routes. This will take power out of the hands of the criminal gangs and protect vulnerable people.

Safe and legal routes

The UK operates several safe and legal routes. Under these schemes, the government sets the criteria, controls the numbers and manages the flow through these routes. The UNHCR assesses and refers individuals based on the criteria for each scheme, individuals do not apply for asylum in the UK from overseas.

Global UNHCR Resettlement Schemes

The below resettlement schemes are open to refugees across the world. Under these schemes, the UNHCR assesses and refers individuals based on the criteria of each scheme. Individuals do not apply for asylum in the UK from overseas.

- **The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)**- this is the UK's main resettlement scheme. Individuals coming through this scheme are assessed and referred by the UNHCR according to their criteria, which is based on people's needs and vulnerabilities.
- **Community Sponsorship**- this scheme enables civil society - friends and neighbours, charities and faith groups - to directly support refugees resettled in the UK as they start their new lives in safety. Those identified and brought to the UK through the UKRS, and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), are eligible to be supported through Community Sponsorship.
- **Mandate Scheme**- this scheme launched in 1995 and resettles refugees who have a close family member in the UK who is willing to accommodate them.

Country Specific Schemes

- **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)**- responding to the situation in Afghanistan, the ACRS will give up to 20,000 people at risk a new life in the UK, through a safe and legal route. The ACRS prioritises those who have assisted UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy; women's rights and freedom of speech or rule of law (e.g. judges, women's rights activists, academics, and journalists); and vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk.
- **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)**- this scheme offers relocation to eligible Afghan citizens who worked for, or with, the UK Government locally in Afghanistan. The ARAP recognises the service of eligible Afghan citizens and the risks arising to them and their dependent family members due to their work.
- **Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) (BNO)**- an immigration route launched in response to China's passing of the National Security Law which significantly impacts the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong. The scheme reflects the UK's historic and moral commitment to those people of Hong Kong who chose to retain their ties to the UK by taking up BN(O) status at the point of Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997. Those arriving under the scheme can apply for visas of 2 years and 6 months or five years, and these can be extended as many times as individuals want.
- **Ukraine schemes**- responding to Putin's full-scale barbaric invasion of Ukraine, the UK Government devised three bespoke visa routes for the people of Ukraine, working in close communication with the Ukrainian Government. The government's relocation schemes for Ukraine differ from resettlement schemes in that they do not require referrals from the UNHCR. The Ukraine schemes are not asylum routes, and applicants are given time-limited visas, with recourse to public funds.

Family Reunion

- **Family Reunion**- the refugee family reunion policy provides a safe and legal route for families to be reunited. This allows immediate family members (partner and children under 18, and over 18 in exceptional circumstances) of those granted

protection in the UK to join them here, if they formed part of a family unit before the sponsor left their country to seek protection.

Accommodating, welcoming and integrating refugees

The capacity of the UK is limited, and we are unable to provide a route for resettlement for all those who wish to come here. Local authorities are essential to the successful operation of these safe and legal routes, with over 350 local authorities having played a part in resettling refugees in recent years. We recognise the current pressures faced by local authorities and it is only by working in partnership with them that we can continue to provide protection to those in need via safe and legal routes.

The number of refugees we resettle every year depends on a variety of factors, including local authorities' capacity for supporting refugees and the number of community groups that wish to take part in the Community Sponsorship scheme. In recent years, growing numbers of illegal migrants arriving in the UK means there have been significant pressures on local authorities, as well as the housing market, and this has impacted their ability to welcome more refugees, on top of their generosity in responses to the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

To provide more clarity and certainty for local authorities, communities and refugees, we will be introducing a cap on the number of arrivals through safe and legal routes, which will be based on a consultation with local authorities. The first ever consultation to set a cap on arrivals on our safe and legal routes was launched on 20 October 2023 and closed on 9 January 2024. The consultation sought responses from all local authorities in the UK. This is so that we can get a realistic picture of the UK's capacity to welcome, integrate and accommodate resettled refugees. It is only by determining a realistic picture of capacity that the UK can continue to operate safe and legal routes for protection and ensure these routes form part of a well-managed and sustainable migration system. The routes included in this report are not necessarily included in the cap. This will be set out via the regulations when setting the cap.

The consultation responses will be reviewed and considered at a national and regional level before a total figure is recommended to Parliament. The cap will apply to arrivals on safe and legal routes from 2025, subject to Parliamentary approval.

Through this report, the UK reaffirms its commitment to providing safe and legal routes for those most in need.

Chapter 2: Country Specific Routes

The UK operates several country-specific safe and legal routes to the UK, which have been established in response to crises in recent years. These routes are:

Hong Kong

- The British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) route

Afghanistan

- The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)
- Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)

The ACRS is distinct as one pathway is a refugee resettlement scheme. Under Pathway 2 of the ACRS, the government receives referrals from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) of vulnerable individuals who have fled Afghanistan.

Ukraine

- Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS)
- Homes for Ukraine Scheme (HFU)

In addition to the Ukraine schemes, there is also a Ukraine Extension Scheme which allows Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members to apply for permission to stay in the UK.

The Ukraine schemes and Hong Kong route require a visa application to gain entry to the UK. As these are application based, individuals arriving under these routes are not formally considered refugees. Applicants are given time-limited visas.

Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Routes

History of the Hong Kong BN(O) route

On 19 December 1984, the UK Government and the People's Republic of China signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The treaty stated that the colony of Hong Kong would be transferred to Chinese control on 1 July 1997, and it set out the conditions under which the territory would be governed until at least 2049.

Hong Kong was and continues to be a key priority of the UK Government. In June 2020, China imposed the National Security Law (NSL) on Hong Kong, violating Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and threatening the rights and freedoms protected by the Sino-British Joint Declaration. As a co-signatory to the Sino-British Joint Declaration, on 1 July 2020, the then Foreign Secretary Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP declared the NSL constitutes a clear and serious breach of that treaty.

The government's response to the evolving situation in Hong Kong was to create a new immigration route for British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status holders and their eligible family members. This route reflects our historic commitment to the people of Hong Kong who chose to retain their ties to the UK. It was agreed that following the imposition of the NSL, the rights and entitlements attached to BN(O) status should also change.

BN(O) status was created to enable Hong Kongers to retain their ties to the UK after handover in 1997. Between 1987 and 1 July 1997, anyone who was a British Overseas Territories Citizen by connection with Hong Kong was able to register for BN(O) status, but it had to be applied for before 1 July 1997. In total, 3.44 million Hong Kongers signed up for a BN(O) passport before handover.

Holding BN(O) status entitles the individual to a British passport and British consular assistance overseas (except in China, which does not recognise dual nationality). In addition, BN(O) passports allow six months visa free tourist travel to the UK, but holders are not entitled to the right of abode in the UK and are subject to immigration control.

Since January 2021, the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments have not recognised BN(O) passports. As a result, BN(O) passport holders must use Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) or other passports when travelling to and from Hong Kong.

The BN(O) route opened for applications on 31 January 2021 and was implemented through the Appendix to the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Immigration Rules. From the end of February 2021, eligible applicants could apply through a fully digital process, meaning they no longer need to visit a visa application centre and can apply using a smartphone application.

On 30 November 2022, the BN(O) route was extended to enable adult children of BN(O) status holders who are aged 18 or over, were born on or after 1 July 1997 and who have a parent who is a BN(O) status holder to apply for the route independently of their parents. This cohort can also apply with their spouse or partner, children under 18 and other adult relatives where there is a high level of dependency.

Principles developed during the implementation of the BN(O) route have been considered when developing policies concerning the government's response to the war in Ukraine and the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP).

Hong Kong BN(O) application process

The route allows BN(O) status holders and their eligible family members the opportunity to live, study, work in the UK in a choice that affords them long-term safety and stability. After five years, they can apply for settlement, and are eligible to apply for citizenship after a further twelve months.

Their family members do not need to hold BN(O) status themselves. Family members include:

- Spouse, civil or unmarried partner

- Child or grandchild (under the age of 18)
- Adult child of their spouse or partner born on or after 1997 (and their spouse, or child under the age of 18)
- Other adult relatives in exceptional circumstances of high dependency

The BN(O) route is not a humanitarian scheme, nor is it a human rights-based route. The route requires the payment of an application fee as well as the Immigration Health Surcharge. Leave is granted on the route with no recourse to public funds, although individuals can apply to lift the no recourse to public funds provision if they are facing destitution. Individuals must be able to show that they are able to support themselves and their family members for the first six months when entering the UK. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has developed a UK-wide 'Welcome Programme' to support those on the route to successfully integrate into life in the UK.

Eligibility of adults and children for Hong Kong BN(O) route

The route allows BN(O) status holders and their eligible family members, including children, the opportunity to live, study, work in the UK in a choice that affords them long-term safety and stability.

Afghanistan Routes

History of Afghanistan Schemes

In response to the 11 September attacks in 2001, the United States invoked the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) Article V for the first time in the alliance's history. Article V states that an attack on one NATO member is considered an attack on all NATO members. This activation of Article V symbolised the collective defence commitment of NATO members.

NATO countries, including the UK, supported the United States in its military campaign in Afghanistan, known as "Operation Enduring Freedom". The primary goal was to dismantle Al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban regime, which had provided a safe haven for terrorists. In the following years, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) missions were established in Afghanistan to stabilise the country, train Afghan security forces and support the development of democratic institutions. The UK played a significant role in these efforts, contributing troops and resources to the mission.

Afghan nationals played a crucial role in supporting UK and other foreign missions in Afghanistan. They worked under challenging and perilous conditions, fulfilling roles such as translators, helping in cultural liaison, providing logistical support, intelligence gathering, development and reconstruction as well as providing civilian support. As a result, ongoing efforts have been made to protect and offer resettlement opportunities for Afghan individuals and their families who are at risk due to their support for foreign missions in Afghanistan.

Amidst the August 2021 Taliban offensive and the withdrawal of US and UK forces from Afghanistan, Operation Pitting emerged as a defining moment in British military history. Operation Pitting was the UK's code name given to the evacuation of individuals from Afghanistan. It began on 14 August 2021 as part of a multi-national extraction of entitled persons by respective countries. This meticulously planned operation involved over 1,000 military personnel and ran alongside similar evacuation efforts by other nations.

Between the start of the operation and the final flight on 28 August 2021, more than 15,000 people were flown out of Kabul by the UK Government as part of an overall evacuation of over 122,000. Of those evacuated, 5,000 were British nationals and 8,000 were Afghan citizens. The operation evacuated approximately 2,200 children, including infants as young as one day old, underscoring its profound humanitarian impact.

This operation marked not only the largest British evacuation since the Second World War, but also stands as one of the most substantial airlift operations since the Berlin Blockade of 1948-49.

Afghan Citizens Replacement Scheme (ACRS)

History of the ACRS

On 18 August 2021, four days into Operation Pitting, the then Prime Minister, Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP and the then Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, announced there would be an Afghan-specific resettlement scheme. This would be a capped scheme committed to resettling up to 20,000 Afghans. Following this, work began at pace to design and implement the policy to support the announcement.

This scheme, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), was opened on 6 January 2022 by the then Minister for Afghan Resettlement, Victoria Atkins MP. During a parliamentary debate, Minister Atkins emphasised that the primary objective of Operation Pitting was to prioritise the saving of as many Afghan and British nationals' lives as possible, all while ensuring the safety of the British public.

The announcement of the ACRS in 2021 was prompted by a combination of factors. The rapid advancement of the Taliban throughout Afghanistan brought about a marked decline in security. Afghan civilians, especially those with affiliations to international entities or diplomatic missions, were confronted with severe risks due to their associations against the backdrop of heightened instability. Additionally, for those who supported the UK and international community effort in Afghanistan, imminent threats remained due to their collaboration with foreign entities. This exposed many of these individuals, as well as their families, to potential retribution from the Taliban.

Furthermore, the Taliban's track record of human rights abuses, particularly against women and girls, garnered significant attention. Many of the gains achieved by Afghan women and girls over recent years, began to erode after the Taliban took power in August 2021. The protection and welfare of women and girls in Afghanistan have consistently ranked among the top priorities of the UK Government.

In his opening oral statements to Parliament on 18 August and 6 September 2021, the then Prime Minister Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP highlighted the plight of women and children left behind in Afghanistan. During these addresses, he specifically referenced the ACRS as a means to focus on resettling the most vulnerable, particularly women and children.

The decision of the UK to establish the ACRS was substantially influenced by consultation and cooperation with allies, global organisations, and humanitarian agencies.

The ACRS was agreed upon following consultation across government and was partly modelled after the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), and its successor, the UKRS. The VPRS was a pre-existing programme in the UK designed to provide refuge to vulnerable refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict and welcomed over 20,000 refugees over its lifetime. The UKRS was launched in February 2021 following the completion of VPRS and accepts United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referrals from across the globe. The success and framework of both schemes served as a foundation for the development of the ACRS.

The VPRS demonstrated the feasibility of large-scale resettlement efforts and highlighted the importance of collaboration with international organisations like the UNHCR for identifying and referring eligible refugees. The ACRS borrowed certain principles and procedures from the VPRS and UKRS, such as coordination with partners, eligibility criteria definition, and logistical planning to ensure an effective and efficient resettlement process.

Following the successful evacuation under Operation Pitting, Operation Warm Welcome was introduced, as announced by the then Prime Minister Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP in his statement to the House on 6 September 2021. This phase was designed to provide essential support to Afghans arriving in the UK, helping them rebuild their lives by providing integration support, access to health care, education, housing as well as employment opportunities.

ACRS resettlement process

The ACRS operates alongside the ARAP. The ACRS is not application based in that eligible people cannot simply apply at a reception centre or UK embassy; instead, eligible individuals are prioritised and referred for resettlement to the UK through one of three referral pathways:

ACRS Pathway 1 was formally opened on 6 January 2022 by the then Minister of Afghan Resettlement, Victoria Atkins MP in an oral statement to Parliament. Under this pathway, vulnerable and at-risk individuals who arrived in the UK under the evacuation programme (Operation Pitting) were the first to be settled.

This includes eligible people who were notified by the UK Government that they had been called forward or specifically authorised for evacuation but were not able to board flights. If an individual has leave in a country considered safe by the UK and so is no longer in

Afghanistan that individual may no longer be eligible for referral under the ACRS, even if 'called forward'. Being deemed eligible and referred onto the ACRS is not confirmation of a place on the ACRS. Whilst Pathway 1 was ongoing, ACRS Pathways 2 and 3 were formally opened on 13 June 2022.

Pathway 2 enables the UK to receive referrals from the UNHCR of vulnerable refugees it deems in need of resettlement. UNHCR is the global authority on international protection of refugees and refers individuals based on standard resettlement submission criteria, which are based on an assessment of protection needs and vulnerabilities.

Under the first stage of **Pathway 3**, the UK Government is offering places to eligible and at-risk individuals from three cohorts who supported UK efforts in Afghanistan: British Council contractors, GardaWorld contractors and Chevening alumni. In the second stage of Pathway 3, the UK Government will work with international partners and Non-Governmental Organisations to welcome wider groups of Afghans at risk.

Eligibility of adults and children for the ACRS Scheme

The ACRS is a scheme that encompasses children and adults referred for resettlement in the UK.

The scheme recognises the important nature of safeguarding children's welfare and ensuring their access to essential rights and protections. Eligible Afghan children included within families being resettled through the ACRS are considered dependents.

Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)

History of the ARAP

The ARAP was announced on 29 December 2020 and launched on 1 April 2021. The ARAP offers assistance and, if necessary, relocation to eligible and suitable Afghan citizens, employed by the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed, meaningful or enabling roles, and assessed to be at serious risk because of their work. There are four categories for assistance, against which all ARAP applications are assessed, which range from relocation to other assistance and support. In certain cases, eligible and suitable individuals are supported to relocate to the UK, with their family members.

It was established by the Home Office and Ministry of Defence (MoD) to honour the service of eligible Afghan citizens by providing support that properly reflects their work and the risks involved.

The Afghanistan Resettlement and Immigration Policy statement (ARIP) was published on 13 September 2021, providing further information on the ARAP, as well as setting out details on the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) following the events in Kabul. This statement set out that those on the scheme would be given indefinite leave to enter or remain in the UK, rather than limited leave, which had been the approach up to

that point. This is in line with the operation and grant of leave on the UKRS. This means they will be able to apply for British citizenship after 5 years in the UK under existing rules.

The ARAP was established to replace the intimidation policy which had been in operation since 2010, and to run alongside the ex-gratia scheme (EGS) which had been in place since 2013 and which subsequently closed in November 2022.

The intimidation policy was designed to support local staff whose safety was threatened in Afghanistan due to their work with the UK. The policy was open to staff employed directly by HMG in Afghanistan from 2001, regardless of their role, job, length of service or reason for leaving.

The EGS was established in recognition of the UK Government's gratitude for the service of Afghan interpreters and provides assistance or relocation for those who were made redundant, or who resigned, providing they worked directly for HMG on 1 May 2006 (the date the UK assumed responsibility for Helmand province) and had served more than 12 months.

The EGS remained open until 30 November 2022 at which point the ARAP, alongside the ACRS, became the remaining safe and legal routes for eligible Afghan citizens and their family dependants. The ARAP remains open for those deemed eligible by the relevant government department or unit, for relocation along with their dependent family members.

The government welcomes its responsibility to those who have worked for and alongside British forces in conflict zones. Many have served with distinction and at great personal risk. They worked in dangerous and challenging situations, and we would not have been able to carry out our work there without them.

The commitment and bravery shown by those eligible for relocation under the ARAP in supporting UK objectives in Afghanistan was extraordinary and deserves the UK Government's gratitude.

ARAP relocation process

There is a two-stage application process. An eligibility application must first be made by the principal Afghan citizen to the Ministry of Defence (MoD). MoD will decide whether they meet the eligibility requirements for assistance or relocation under the ARAP, as a principal applicant or a dependent family member of a relevant Afghan citizen who is eligible under the ARAP. This application is not an asylum application under the Refugee Convention; it is an application to determine eligibility for the scheme. In cases where the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is the relevant government department, the FCDO will provide notification of their decision regarding the additional family members then refer details back to MoD for the entry clearance application to be made to the Home Office.

An ARAP application which is made by family members or additional family members that does not include a principal Afghan citizen or is made after the principal Afghan citizen's

application has been made to the Home Office, will be rejected as invalid and will not be considered.

Paragraph 10.1 of Appendix ARAP of the Immigration Rules requires the eligible Afghan citizen to include all dependants who intend to relocate to the UK in their ARAP application, regardless of when the dependants intend to travel.

When an Afghan citizen and their family members are deemed eligible for relocation to the UK, an application for entry clearance (if they are outside the UK), or settlement (if they are in the UK) is made to the Home Office on their behalf, under the ARAP Immigration Rules, for biometric enrolment and security checks to be carried out.

An eligible Afghan citizen can apply for support or relocation under the ARAP for a spouse or partner (who must be aged 18 or over at the date of application) and minor dependent children (under 18 years at the date of application) who meet the eligibility requirements under Appendix ARAP.

The eligible Afghan citizen can apply for support or relocation under the ARAP for any additional family member who meets the eligibility requirements under Appendix ARAP. This is based on either: vulnerabilities leading to exceptional dependence or threat of risk to life as a result of the work of the principal ARAP applicant for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan. Any such individual must also meet the suitability requirements under Appendix ARAP.

Further information on additional family members (AFMs) can be found at: [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy - ARAP \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672112/afghan-relocations-and-assistance-policy-arap.pdf)

The ARAP eligibility form is not an immigration application. It is designed for an individual to seek confirmation from the MoD that they meet the requirements to be eligible for assistance or relocation under the ARAP, as a principal applicant or a dependent family member of a relevant Afghan citizen who is eligible.

Eligibility of adults and children for the ARAP

An eligible Afghan citizen can apply for support or relocation under the ARAP for a spouse or partner (who must be aged 18 or over at the date of application) and minor dependent children (under 18 years at the date of application) who meet the eligibility requirements under Appendix ARAP.

Ukraine Routes

History of the Ukraine Schemes

In response to Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the UK has strengthened its partnership with Ukraine immeasurably. The UK, together with our partners and allies, stands in solidarity with Ukraine and condemns the Russian government's unprovoked and premeditated war against Ukraine.

The UK Government put in place three schemes to provide sanctuary to Ukrainians fleeing the war: the Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS), the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (also known as Homes for Ukraine – HFU) and the Ukraine Extension Scheme (UES).

These schemes were established by making certain temporary exceptions to the normal operation of the immigration system, cognisant of the difficulties Ukrainians may face in providing documentary evidence to meet the requirements of the immigration rules. This includes a fee waiver for application to the scheme, no matter how many times an applicant submits an application, and there are no language requirements for any of these schemes.

The visa also allows travel to and from the UK within its period of validity. We have noted that, during periods of stability, a significant number of Ukrainians travel between the UK and Ukraine taking the opportunity to maintain ties with their country of origin.

Under the Appendix to the Immigration Rules Ukraine applicants are exempted from a number of the usual eligibility requirements. This recognised that in the early months of the conflict, Ukrainian nationals may have had to evacuate or change their plans very quickly and therefore may have struggled to demonstrate they meet all the usual requirements of the rules.

All of the schemes are free to apply for, provide permission to come to the UK safely and legally, with 36 months permission to stay in the UK and no restrictions to the right to work or access to benefits and services.

The UK strongly believes that Ukraine will be safe again and recognises the Government of Ukraine wishes for its citizens to return to Ukraine, when it is safe to do so, to help rebuild and recover.

In line with this, the Ukraine schemes are a humanitarian response designed to provide temporary sanctuary for Ukrainians who are forced to flee the war in Ukraine. They are not routes to settlement or refugee schemes.

The Home Office continues to work closely with our European counterparts, including the Government of Ukraine, and keeps the future of our schemes and any future need for extension to the existing 36 months' leave under review, in line with developments of the situation in Ukraine.

Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS)

The UK Government's Ukraine schemes began with the UFS which came into effect as of the 4 March 2022. This scheme permits Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members to come to the UK, or extend their existing leave in the UK, using a sponsor who is a family member (using a wider definition of family that includes cousins, aunts, grandparents etc, as compared to the family rules under Appendix Family Migration) where that family member is 'settled' (has indefinite leave to remain) in the UK.

The UFS provides for support to be given by family members, without as many requirements as in the standard family migration routes. The immediate take up of the UFS demonstrated the importance of that, although the Homes for Ukraine Scheme now receives more applicants and arrivals.

UFS is not a family reunion route but is based on the principle that families should remain together. Therefore, third country nationals who are the immediate family members of the UK based settled sponsors and part of a family with a Ukrainian national are eligible to apply under the UFS.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme (HFU)

The UFS was shortly followed by the HFU scheme, which launched on 14 March 2022. The scheme is jointly run by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) and the Home Office.

HFU is an uncapped humanitarian sponsorship pathway, a route to the UK for Ukrainians who may not have family ties here but are matched with members of the public who can 'sponsor' them, providing accommodation for at least six months and light-touch support.

The scheme is open to Ukrainian nationals who were residents in Ukraine prior to 1 January 2022 and to their immediate family members (e.g. married/partner and children under 18) who may be of other nationalities, to come to the UK. Applicants can apply from Ukraine or from any other third country.

The scheme was developed in collaboration with the devolved governments and operates across the UK. The Welsh and Scottish Governments both chose, with the agreement of the UK Government, to act as super sponsors under the scheme. This enabled Ukrainians to name the Welsh or Scottish Governments as their sponsor if they did not have an individual sponsor. The Welsh and Scottish Governments then provided interim accommodation until the Ukrainian was able to move into settled accommodation. This was either in the community or where the Welsh or Scottish Governments, working with local authorities, had matched them into longer-term accommodation. Both of these super-sponsor schemes have been suspended for new applicants since Summer 2022.

Ukraine Extension Schemes (UES)

On 3 May 2022, the UES launched. This was created to allow Ukrainians in the UK with

lawful status, outside of the HFU and UFS, to extend their leave to secure the same leave term, rights and access to benefits and services as the HFU and UFS. In May 2023, the government extended eligibility for the UES to include those who had permission to enter or stay in UK granted between 18th March 2022 and 16 November 2023, unless an exception set out at UKR21.3 exists with all applications to be made by 16 May 2024

Eligibility of adults and children for the Ukraine schemes

Adults are eligible for the HFU, UES and UFS scheme. Children are eligible to apply under the main HFU, UFS and UES scheme, provided they apply and travel with their parent or legal guardian; or are applying to join their parent or legal guardian already in the UK.

In August 2022, the government launched the 'Eligible Minors' Extension to HFU - where a parent or legal guardian of a minor (under 18) can identify a UK-based sponsor to be approved to host their child in the UK for the period of the visa, without them. The sponsor must commit to accommodating the minor for the full term of their visa or until they are 18 and must be known to the parent or guardian before the war.

The scheme supports eligible minors to safely arrive, and to live and thrive in the UK without their parent or legal guardian, supported by a sponsor that they know and trust. We worked with the Government of Ukraine, councils, voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups and other experts in designing the scheme to ensure that robust safeguarding checks are in place. We are committed to continually reviewing our processes to ensure children stay safe while here.

The process for applications is different and requires the prospective sponsor to first undergo safeguarding checks before an eligible child can begin their visa application.

To apply for the scheme the child must have two forms of parental consent: a notarised or equivalent parental consent form which meets the Government of Ukraine's requirements and a separate UK Government form which provides further information about the child, sponsor and confirms that the child's parents are content with the proposed sponsorship arrangement.

In recognition of the need to give children greater security, sponsors are asked to commit to hosting for up to three years, or until the child turns 18 and has been sponsored for at least six months.

Children arriving under this scheme will be able to live in the UK for up to three years and access education, healthcare, benefits, employment (as appropriate under UK law) and other support.

Any Ukrainian minors placed into local council care will not be included in the National Transfer Scheme threshold (currently 0.1% of the local councils' general child population).

Chapter 3: Global Resettlement Schemes

UK Resettlement Scheme

History of the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)

On 17 July 2019, the then Home Secretary, Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, announced a new resettlement scheme to begin once the government had met its commitment to resettle 20,000 people affected by the situation in Syria through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The VPRS and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) were established in 2015 and 2016 respectively in response to the situation in Syria and resettled over 22,000 vulnerable individuals. The new scheme, now known as UKRS, which was planned to begin in 2020, consolidated the previous Syrian resettlement schemes, the VPRS and VCRS, as well as the Gateway Protection programme into a single global scheme. The Gateway Protection Programme was a global scheme through which the UK worked with the UNHCR to resettle refugees referred by the UNHCR and which had a quota of 750 refugees per year.

The UKRS sought to expand the geographical focus of resettlement to enable UNHCR to resettle refugees from across the globe.

The announcement of the UKRS followed recommendations by the UNHCR of six key reforms to the UK's resettlement schemes, one of which included a call to consolidate the UK's existing programmes "into a single programme that is flexible and addresses evolving resettlement priorities globally".

Whilst the government had intended to launch the UKRS in 2020, following the completion of the VCRS, unprecedented restrictions and pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic meant the UK, alongside many other countries, had to temporarily pause the resettlement of refugees. The final arrivals resumed in December 2020, the final refugees were resettled under the VPRS on 25 February 2021 and the UKRS was subsequently launched.

The UKRS is a direct successor to the VPRS and builds upon the success of this prior scheme. It offers resettlement to the UK for some of the most vulnerable refugees around the world. This allows for a more agile and flexible approach to resettlement that is able to respond to developing crises anywhere in the world.

Under the UKRS, the UK relies upon referrals from the UNHCR: it is not possible for people to make individual asylum claims to the UK under the scheme. This also remains the case for Community Sponsorship, the Mandate Resettlement scheme, Pathway 2 of the ACRS, and was also the case for the previously run Gateway Scheme.

The UNHCR has been chosen as a reliable referral partner as it is the internationally recognised and mandated agency for dealing with refugees. The UNHCR are expertly

placed to help the UK authorities to identify and process vulnerable refugees who would benefit from resettlement to the UK. It has a global presence and 70 years' experience in handling refugee crises.

UNHCR resettlement process

The UNHCR works with countries across the world to find durable solutions for refugees fleeing persecution in the country of origin. It works to identify refugees living in formal refugee camps, informal settlements, and host communities.

Only a small number of cases will be considered for resettlement, these are cases in which the refugees face protection risks in their host country and cannot be assured a safe return to their country of origin.

The UNHCR consider seven resettlement submission categories:

- Legal and or Physical Protection Needs
- Survivors of Torture and/or Violence
- Medical Needs
- Women and Girls at Risk
- Family Reunification
- Children and Adolescents at Risk; and
- Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions

In assessing the resettlement needs of a refugee the UNHCR will assess an individuals' protection needs and through an interview will undertake a refugee status determination to assess their claim. Refugee cases will be assessed against their resettlement criteria and the UNHCR will determine if this case should be referred for resettlement.

Once the UNHCR has identified a suitable case they will refer the case to the UK Home Office. Home Office caseworkers will then conduct security checks and consider medical and safeguarding needs. The Home Office will make the final decision on if the case should be accepted for resettlement. The UK does not seek to influence the cases that the UNHCR refer.

Eligible refugees are resettled in the UK once suitable accommodation has been identified for them. In assessing the suitability of accommodation, the specific needs of the refugee being resettled will be taken into consideration.

When travelling to their new accommodation in the UK, they are supported by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The IOM will undertake further health assessments and provide cultural orientation sessions. Under the UKRS, local authority

representatives greet the resettled refugees upon arrival and transport them to their new home.

Eligibility of adults and children for the UKRS

Children and adults are eligible for resettlement under the UKRS, if they are deemed eligible under the UNHCR's resettlement criteria.

Under the UK's resettlement schemes, an unaccompanied and separated child is defined as an individual under 18 who has been resettled to the UK without their parent or guardian.

The vast majority of children resettled through the UKRS will arrive with their parents or other carers. Unaccompanied children are eligible under the scheme if UNHCR determine that resettlement is in their best interest. This aligns with the UNHCR's policy guidance which recognises that it is often in the best interest of children to remain with their family.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol (Relating to the Status of Refugees) maintain that the standards for children and adults should apply in the same way. However, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of Children goes further as to set out comprehensive standards for the treatment of children.

It further details that when a decision is being made about an individual child, then the child's best interests must be, at a minimum, "a primary consideration".

UNHCR officials are encouraged to use available data to assess the risk factors to children and adolescents and prioritise them for resettlement considerations in a systematic way.

Community Sponsorship

History of Community Sponsorship

The UK Community Sponsorship scheme was launched on 19 July 2016. It was established in response to huge public and community support for refugees amidst the Syrian crisis in 2015. The scheme enabled, for the first time, members of the British public to support refugees directly.

At the time, the UK's resettlement efforts were focused on the response to Syria through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and as a result, groups predominantly supported those who had been resettled from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Under the VPRS, the government committed to resettle 20,000 refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria.

When the UKRS opened in 2021, the geographical focus of resettlement expanded beyond the MENA region, and Community Sponsorship enabled groups to welcome refugees from regions of conflict and instability all over the world.

In September 2021, through the Afghanistan Resettlement and Immigration Policy statement, the government committed to make it easier and quicker for community groups to become sponsors and extended eligibility for the Community Sponsorship Scheme to the ACRS cohort.

As outlined in the previous section, the UK continues to work with the UNHCR to accept referrals of refugees for its resettlement schemes and Pathway 2 of the ACRS. These referrals are based on the UNHCR's established process, and in line with their resettlement submission categories, which are based on people's needs and vulnerabilities.

Canada has been successfully operating sponsorship schemes since 1978 when its Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme was launched and is widely regarded as a world leader in sponsorship thanks to the success of its schemes. The Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme is most similar to the UK's Community Sponsorship scheme.

The UK Government is proud to play a leading role in the international community, supporting other countries to implement their own sponsorship schemes. We currently act as the co-chair for the states' network of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative.

In March 2022, through the New Plan for Immigration (NPI), the government committed to increase the number of resettled refugees supported through Community Sponsorship.

Community Sponsorship resettlement process

Under this scheme, groups must either be, or be partnered with, a charity or Community Interest Company to be eligible to sponsor an ACRS or UKRS family. Sponsor groups provide emotional and practical support to empower families to rebuild their lives and to become self-sufficient members of their new community.

Sponsor groups commit to providing integration support for a resettled family for their first year in the UK, and to find accommodation that will be available for at least two years.

This integration support includes, but is not limited to, supporting the family's access to education, medical and social services and English language provision, and support towards employment and self-sufficiency.

Eligibility of adults and children for Community Sponsorship

Children and adults are eligible for resettlement under Community Sponsorship, if they are deemed eligible under the UNHCR's resettlement criteria.

Mandate Resettlement Scheme

History of the Mandate Resettlement Scheme

The Mandate Resettlement Scheme is the UK's oldest running resettlement scheme. In 1989, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 44/82 which recognised 1994 as the "International Year of the Family" and in this proclamation maintained that the family constitutes the basic unit of society and therefore warrants special attention. On 18 January 1995, the House tabled an Early Day Motion, in recognition of the previous year, which noted the issue of refugee family separation and urged the government to support unaccompanied refugee children to reunite with their close family members.

Whilst the UK had been actively welcoming refugees from across the globe prior to 1995, there was no specific scheme to support family reunification other than through visa applications. The Mandate Resettlement Scheme was launched in 1995 and recognised the need for refugees to find sanctuary with the support of their family members who have already settled in the UK.

During the development of this policy in 1994, an agreement was reached between the Home Office, British Red Cross Society (BRCS), and UNHCR which saw the BRCS act as an implementing partner for the UNHCR in relation to refugee resettlement. At the time, refugees would be resettled under the government's Ten or More Plan. This plan was set up in 1974 in response to the needs of vulnerable, disabled or medically-at risk refugees.

Whilst the BRCS initially acted to assist in the travel of refugees, when the Mandate Resettlement Scheme was launched in 1995, the BRCS took on responsibility to undertake an initial assessment of the cases referred by the UNHCR.

Under this arrangement, the BRCS acted to:

- Undertake an initial assessment of the case before referring onwards to the Home Office.
- Verify the status and relationship of the relative in the UK and ensure that the relative is able to accommodate and assist with the integration of the refugee.
- Act as a liaison between UNHCR and the Home Office.
- Assist with the travel arrangement for the refugee which includes forwarding travel documents on to the Home Office.

The Refugee Services/International Tracing and Message Services team at the BRCS was identified as an appropriate body to manage individual case work for the following reasons:

- BRCS has a global presence and experience working with refugees in the UK and overseas.

- BRCS has worked with the UNHCR previously and supported refugees fleeing the 1990-1991 Gulf War.
- BRCS maintains a position of neutrality and independence.
- BRCS has and continues to support family reunion in the UK.

This arrangement lasted until August 2011. It was agreed in March 2010, that the Home Office would take over funding of Mandate arrivals and in December 2010 and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) would support travel arrangements.

Mandate Resettlement Scheme process

To be eligible for the Mandate Resettlement Scheme, the refugee identified by the UNHCR must have a close family connection to the UK. This means that they are either a minor child, spouse, or parent or grandparent aged over 65 of someone settled in the UK, or who has limited leave to remain in a category leading to settlement. Wider family members (e.g. adult siblings) are only considered in exceptional circumstances.

The Mandate scheme operates by receiving referrals from UNHCR of cases that they deem to be in need of resettlement. Home Office staff undertake relevant considerations of the case referred and check that relatives are able to sponsor the refugees identified. IOM support travel arrangements.

Those resettled under the Mandate scheme will be granted indefinite leave to enter and will be able to apply for British citizenship after five years in the UK under the existing rules. They will be provided accommodation and integration support by their family member.

Eligibility of adults and children for the Mandate Resettlement Scheme

Adults are eligible under the Mandate Resettlement Scheme so long as they have a close family member in the UK, who has limited leave to remain in a category leading to settlement. However, wider family members, such as adult siblings, are only considered in exceptional circumstances. This is in recognition of the right to family life as detailed in Article 8 of the 1998 Human Rights Act.

Children separated from their parents will be eligible for resettlement under the Mandate Resettlement Scheme so long as they have a parent or grandparent in the UK. However, unaccompanied minors are unlikely to be resettled under this scheme as they will need to have a family member in the UK who will act as legal guardians and provide them with accommodation.

Chapter 4: Other safe and legal routes

Refugee family reunion

The government recognises that families can become separated because of the nature of conflict and persecution, and the speed and manner in which people are often forced to flee their country. This is why the government provides a safe and legal route to bring families together in the UK through its refugee family reunion policy.

The refugee family reunion policy is intended to allow individuals with protection status in the UK to sponsor their immediate family members to stay with or join them here, provided they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country of origin or former country of habitual residence to seek protection in the UK.

Immediate family members include a partner and children under 18, and those over 18 in exceptional circumstances. For the purposes of family reunion, the sponsor must be an individual who currently has protection status in the UK. This includes refugee leave and permission to stay on a protection route. Eligible sponsors also include those main applicants resettled under resettlement schemes which confer refugee status, as well as individuals with protection status and settlement, but who do not yet have British Citizenship.

History of the refugee family reunion

Provisions for refugee family reunion originated from a concession set out in policy guidance in 1998. This followed the passing of the Human Rights Act in 1998, which incorporated the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), most notably Article 8 (right to private and family life).

The 1998 guidance set out that this concession only applied to pre-existing families (i.e. the spouse and minor children) and noted that, in exceptional circumstances, we may allow other members of the family (e.g. elderly parents) to come to the UK if there were compelling, compassionate circumstances. Since the publication of these provisions, the refugee family reunion policy has provided discretion for decision-makers to grant leave outside of the rules, where the facts of the case warrant it, and a refusal would result in unjustifiably harsh consequences.

The provisions for refugee family reunion were brought into the Immigration Rules in September 2000 – this was under Part 11 in paragraphs 352A- 352FJ. From September 2000 up until the simplification of the rules in April 2023, there were two key sections of the family reunion rules: the requirements to be met by a person seeking leave to enter or remain in the UK as the partner or spouse of an individual with protection status, and the requirements to be met by a person seeking leave to enter or remain in the UK in order to join or remain with the parent who has protection status.

Following the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, the next update of the family reunion guidance (2011) included the consideration of Section 55: the duty regarding the welfare of children. This duty and the accompanying statutory guidance (Every Child Matters) sets out that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration, but not the only consideration, when making decisions affecting children, including when assessing a family reunion application involving a child.

The Law Commission published a report on simplifying the Immigration Rules which the government responded to in March 2020. This included 41 recommendations on how to simplify the rules. The family reunion rules were simplified in line with these recommendations.

The simplification of the refugee family reunion rules in April 2023 introduced a four-stage decision making process, which aims to provide clarity and transparency to decision makers and applicants. This also included implementing validity requirements and incorporating the consideration of any exceptional circumstances which would render a refusal a breach of Article 8 (right to private and family life) of the ECHR, within the Immigration Rules.

The new Immigration Rules changes of April 2023 also included removing Family Reunion Immigration Rules from Part 11, under paragraphs 352A-352FJ to its own appendix – Appendix Family Reunion (Protection), or ‘Appendix FRP’. All applications are now considered under paragraphs FRP.1.1 to FRP.7.3 of Appendix FRP. Further information can be found at: [Immigration Rules - Immigration Rules Appendix Family Reunion \(Protection\) - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules-immigration-rules-appendix-family-reunion-protection).

Family reunion application process

Family reunion applications can be made both in-country and out-of-country. Those granted permission to stay or entry clearance under the family reunion policy may be granted “leave in line”, which is permission for a period which expires at the same time as their sponsor subject to the same conditions on work, study and access to public funds. In-country and out-of-country refugee family reunion applications are considered under Appendix Family Reunion (Protection) of the Immigration Rules.

There are no application charges or biometric enrolment fees for applications under this refugee family reunion route. Applicants do not have to satisfy additional requirements including financial, accommodation or English Language requirements or pay the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS). Applicants are also exempt from the Knowledge of language and life in the UK requirement at the settlement stage.

Individuals who are currently in the UK and wish to remain with their family member under the refugee family reunion route must apply for permission to stay by email or by writing to the in-country refugee family reunion team.

Where an application does not meet the eligibility requirements of the Immigration Rules, decision makers must consider whether there are any exceptional circumstances which would render a refusal a breach of Article 8 of the ECHR.

The refugee family reunion policy makes clear that there is discretion to grant visas outside the Immigration Rules, which caters for extended family members where there are compelling compassionate factors.

Eligibility of adults and children for family reunion

Family reunion is not a protection route and asylum cannot be claimed from outside the UK. Individuals should apply for asylum in the first safe country they reach if they have a protection need.

The refugee family reunion rules allow adults with protection status in the UK to sponsor their partner or children to stay with or join them here, provided they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country of origin to seek protection. The family members who come to the UK do not have protection status.

The family reunion policy does not permit children to sponsor. The policy is not designed to keep child refugees apart from their parents, but in considering any policy we must think carefully about the wider impact to avoid putting more people unnecessarily in harm's way. This is why we believe that if children were allowed to sponsor parents, this would risk creating incentives for more children to be encouraged, or even forced, to leave their family and risk hazardous journeys to the UK.

Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot

The UK's Displaced Talent Mobility pilot, launched in October 2021, provides a pathway for skilled and talented displaced people who have had to flee their homes to come to the UK safely and legally.

Delivered in partnership with Talent Beyond Boundaries, up to 200 displaced people will be supported to get sponsored by a UK employer and apply for a Skilled worker Visa under the UK's points-based immigration system.

The pilot is being run in partnership with the charity Talent Beyond Boundaries, who already work in Australia and Canada on similar routes. In November 2023, the pilot was expanded so that refugees and displaced people of any nationality or location are eligible to benefit, after an initial focus on candidates in Lebanon and Jordan.

The Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot follows a successful pilot established by the Department of Health and Social Care who worked with the NHS to develop programmes to match employers with displaced nurses in Lebanon and Jordan through Talent Beyond Boundaries.

The pilot was designed to harness the skills of the global displaced population and match them with employment opportunities in the UK. The pilot runs in addition to our

resettlement schemes, which have brought tens of thousands of at-risk individuals into the UK. Findings will inform consideration of further efforts to enable skilled refugees and other displaced people to work in the UK.

Delivered in partnership with Talent Beyond Boundaries, candidates will need to pay the fees and meet all the requirements for a Skilled Worker visa, such as speaking English language. To support the delivery of the pilot, the Home Office conducts free priority visa processing for displaced talent applicants.

Eligibility of adults and children for the Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot

Children cannot apply to the pilot. Under the Skilled Worker route, a candidate's partner and / or children can apply to join them or stay in the UK as their 'dependants' if they are eligible and can pay the relevant fees.

To participate in the pilot, candidates would need to be of working age and likely have spent some time studying/gaining relevant experience to fill jobs from the Shortage Occupation List at skills level RQF 6+ (degree level or equivalent).

Chapter 5: Next Steps

The Prime Minister was clear in his statement to Parliament on 13 December 2022 that the UK would continue to provide sanctuary to those most in need. He committed that as we bear down on illegal migration we can create more safe and legal routes, to ensure that refugees in need of international protection can be welcomed, accommodated and integrated sustainably in the UK.

Under the Illegal Migration Act, the only route to the UK will be through safe and legal routes. Illegal entry will no longer be a route to asylum.

As set out in the report, when the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) was launched in 2021 - as the successor to the highly successful Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme - the intention was to provide a global safe and legal resettlement route to the UK for those identified by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as being in need of international protection. Working with the UNHCR in this way is a tried and tested mechanism which operates in a global context where the UK also provides overseas development assistance to the UNHCR and other humanitarian and development agencies in situations of conflict and instability. This is in line with the longstanding policy principle that the UK supports refugees directly in regions of conflict and instability. We remain committed to this principle.

Since the launch of the UKRS in 2021, the UK has also provided bespoke responses to support Hong Kong BN(O)s, as well as those from Afghanistan and from Ukraine. These routes have provided a safe and legal route to the UK for hundreds of thousands of people in need of either temporary sanctuary in the context of Ukraine or permanent relocation to the UK (Hong Kong, Afghanistan).

These routes are some of the most generous in UK history and we should rightly be proud of the safe haven the UK has provided to those in the greatest need. The large number of arrivals who have come to the UK through these routes has, however, impacted on housing and other public services at a time when these services are already under strain. Moreover, the system has simultaneously been impacted by the significant increase in illegal migration in recent years. This has had a combined effect of negatively impacting the UK's ability to resettle refugees as this is dependent on local authority capacity to accommodate, welcome and integrate refugees.

In line with the government's ambitions to tackle illegal immigration, UK officials are working to return safe and legal routes to a model which will allow us to expand our reach globally. Through the introduction of an annual cap, we will revert to the approach where refugees can come to the UK when a local authority is able to accommodate them. The cap will include the UK Resettlement Scheme, Community Sponsorship and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme Pathway 2 and Pathway 3 stage 2. This will in turn provide clarity and certainty to UNHCR on the number of refugees that the UK will be able to take in future years – introducing a quota for the first time.

The consultation to set the cap has closed and the Home Office are currently reviewing responses from local authorities across the UK. The responses will be reviewed with Strategic Migration Partnerships to build up the regional and national picture and will be the subject of further review and consolidation. A consultation summary report will be produced in the spring with draft regulations laid in Parliament before the summer recess. Parliament will then have an opportunity to debate and vote on the cap before it comes into force from 2025.

As we revert to the sustainable management and operation of our safe and legal routes, alongside the ongoing concerted effort to bear down on extremely resource-consuming illegal migration, we will be able to develop greater safe and legal opportunities. This will build on the successes and lessons learnt from the recent bespoke geographic schemes.

This could include piloting an Emergency Resettlement Mechanism within the UKRS that would allow us to resettle certain cases, where necessary and requested by UNHCR, faster than we could otherwise.

We could also explore the introduction of new referral partners which would allow us to support a wider set of people from overseas including, of particular interest, those groups for whom UNHCR doesn't currently have access, potentially including those currently at risk in their home country. Such an approach could enable us to operate more flexibly in a crisis and to respond to specific geopolitical contexts building on the UK's strong track record of providing protection to those most in need.

Under the New Plan for Immigration, the UK committed to grow the number of refugees resettled via Community Sponsorship and last year, we welcomed the 1,000th refugee via Community Sponsorship. Through sponsorship, we have welcomed Afghans in the UK through the ACRS. We have also learned from the Homes for Ukraine Scheme that giving individuals a say in who they welcome into their community and providing flexibility in how sponsorship works can have a transformative effect on the UK's ability to welcome those in need of sanctuary.

We will look at how we build on the success of the Ukraine schemes. This could include looking at who can be sponsored, the ease of becoming a sponsor and how to give communities a say on who they support. This will help to further grow the scheme and to build our long-term offer to some of those most in need across the globe.

We will also look at our complementary pathways for refugees, to explore non-protection focused routes for refugees and to provide alternatives for those with skills and expertise that the UK can benefit from. The UK's displaced talent mobility initiatives, which have welcomed hundreds of displaced people into the NHS and into skilled jobs in the wider economy, have demonstrated that displaced people can access a skilled worker visa or health and social care visa and add value to the UK labour market. We could build on the success of these initiatives to provide further complementary pathways for displaced people looking for an alternative to a protection route. This could also include building on the work that universities across the UK are already doing to support refugees so that they have the qualifications, skills and experience to help rebuild their countries when the time comes.

Chapter 6: Summary of statistics

Published National Statistics data on the number of arrivals under each scheme is available at: [Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-september-2023)

- The latest available published statistics show that in the 8 years from 2015 to September 2023, over half a million (555,630) people were offered safe and legal (humanitarian) routes.
- 477,762 individuals of this 555,630 figure, were issued a grant of protection under the existing country- specific routes
- 28,780 individuals of this 555,630 figure, were issued a grant of protection under the global United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) resettlement schemes.
- 49,088 individuals of this 555,630 figure, were issued a grant of protection under the Family Reunion policy.

Country Specific Routes

Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas)

Route	Date route was established	2021	2022	2023 (Q1 – Q3 only)	Year ending September 2022	Year ending September 2023	Total (2015 - Q3 2023)
Total BN(O) Hong Kong visa grants	31 January 2021	96,418	57,137	31,145	68,824	40,243	184,700
BN(O) Route visa grants		75,579	53,694	24,805	64,038	32,994	154,078
In country BN(O) Route extension grants		20,839	3,443	6,340	4,786	7,249	30,622

Afghanistan

Route	Date route was established	2021	2022	2023 (Q1 – Q3 only)	Year ending September 2022	Year ending September 2023	Total (2015 – Q3 2023)
Total Afghan Resettlement and Relocation		16,679	4,715	279	5,346	1,110	21,673
Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy	1 April 2021	7,359	4,190	135	4,229	886	11,684
Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme	6 January 2022	9,171	524	144	1,115	224	9,839
Afghan route not recorded		149	1	0	2	0	150

Ukraine

Route	Date route was established	2022	2023 (Q1 – Q3 only)	Year ending September 2022	Year ending September 2023	Total (2015 – Q3 2023)
Total Ukraine Visa grants		232,135	39,254	207,125	64,264	271,389
Ukraine Visa Schemes grants	Ukraine Family Scheme - 4 March 2022 Homes for Ukraine -18 March 2022	209,706	32,608	188,114	54,200	242,314
In country Ukraine Extension Schemes grants	3 May 2022	22,429	6,646	19,011	10,064	29,075

Global UNHCR Resettlement Schemes

Route	Date route was established	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (Q1 - Q3 only)	Year ending September 2022	Year ending September 2023	Total (2015 – Q3 2023)
Total Resettled		1,865	5,212	6,212	5,806	5,612	823	1,587	1,163	500	1,387	700	28,780
Community Sponsorship	19 July 2016	-	-	-	-	-	-	133	272	103	280	162	508
Mandate Scheme	1995	19	8	28	18	11	5	2	4	13	6	13	108
UKRS	25 February 2021	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,136	887	384	1,101	525	2,407
Previous routes:													
Gateway Protection Programme	2004	652	804	813	693	704	77	-	-	-	-	-	3,743
Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme	April 2016	-	31	539	688	489	79	12	-	-	-	-	1,838
Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme	January 2014	1,194	4,369	4,382	4,407	4,408	662	304	-	-	-	-	20,176

Family Reunion

Route	Date route was established	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (Q1 – Q3 only)	Year ending September 2022	Year ending September 2023	Total (2015 – Q3 2023)
Family Reunion visa grants	September 2000	4,849	6,039	5,199	5,712	7,456	4,797	5,645	4,113	5,278	4,365	6,114	49,088

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