



## **Safe and legal routes consultation**

Information sheet for Church of England affiliated community sponsorship groups

October 2023

### **Background**

As a result of the Illegal Migration Act, anyone who arrives in the UK seeking asylum via irregular means – outside of a Government-designed safe and legal route – will not have their claim assessed, and may then be detained in the UK indefinitely, returned to their country or removed to a safe third country.

Eligible individuals access safe and legal routes through an application or referral process made overseas, meaning that their status is already determined when they arrive in the UK.

The Government has launched a consultation with local authorities to determine an annual cap on the number of people admitted through safe and legal routes. Local authorities have been encouraged to engage with voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, which provides an opportunity for community sponsorship groups to feed back on their experience of community sponsorship as local authorities consider the capacity in their area.

### **What is the safe and legal Routes Annual Cap?**

The Illegal Migration Act places a duty on the Home Secretary to set a cap on the number of entrants to the UK arriving via safe and legal routes for humanitarian purposes and for this cap to be defined following consultation with local government.

The Home Office officially launched the consultation on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023 to inform the level at which the cap on safe and legal routes is set.

Home Office officials are now consulting local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, and the Executive Office in Northern Ireland.

Local authorities are asked to base their responses also upon consulting with VCS organisations. The consultation will end on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

## **Which safe and legal Routes are included in the Cap?**

The cap will include the UK Resettlement Scheme, Community Sponsorship and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme Pathway 2 and Pathway 3 stage 2.

There are some safe and legal routes not included in the cap – the Ukraine schemes, Hong Kong BNO route, Mandate and the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy. However, local authorities would consider the impact of these routes on their ability to welcome, house and support those arriving through capped schemes to provide a realistic view of capacity.

Community Sponsorship was launched by the Government in 2016 in recognition of the desire from civil society to play a greater role in refugee resettlement. From 2019, the number of people arriving through community sponsorship was considered additional to the number of people resettled by local authorities. However, in a departure from this principle of additionality, community sponsorship will now be included in the new cap and therefore represents an important part of this consultation in shaping the number of refugees the Government will admit via safe and legal routes.

## **Timeline so far:**

- 20<sup>th</sup> October – 15<sup>th</sup> December: Cap consultation with local authorities. Local authorities are encouraged to engage with VCS organisations. –
- The responses will be reviewed and considered at a national and regional level before a total figure is recommended and debated in Parliament.
- A summary of the outcome of the consultation will be published in the summer of 2024, in advance of laying a Statutory Instrument in Parliament.
- Annual Cap to be operative in 2025.

## **What can we do?**

Faith organisations have welcomed, provided housing, and supported the integration of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers through projects and services and, most extensively, through community sponsorship. Churches across the country have engaged with refugees and asylum seekers, recognising the value, dignity, and gift of all people, regardless of how they arrived in this country.

Community sponsorship groups affiliated to the Church of England have a considerable amount of wisdom, experience and insights to share about how the scheme has worked and what could enable them to welcome and integrate people more effectively. Therefore, it is crucial that community sponsorship groups and VCS organisations engage with their local authority before 15<sup>th</sup> December as they prepare their response to the Home Office consultation.

Although local authorities have been asked to engage with VCS organisations, community sponsorship groups are encouraged to contact their local authority

resettlement team or their housing and community department directly in order to feed into the consultation process.

Whilst community sponsorship requires less capacity and resource from local authorities, it is hugely important that local authorities feed back the willingness of community groups to continue participating in this work and to ensure that the lessons learned during the experience are used to improve the scheme for all concerned.

Please contact, Domenica Pecoraro, National Community Sponsorship Representative for the Church of England for further information and support:

[domenica.pecoraro@churchofengland.org](mailto:domenica.pecoraro@churchofengland.org)