

Communities for Afghans: The Welcome Circle Programme FAQ

This FAQ document is intended to provide some responses to key questions that those who are considering forming, or have already formed, a HIAS+JCORE Welcome Circle may have.

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What is the current situation and what is the need?

In August 2021, after the final evacuation and the Fall of Kabul, Citizens UK members and Community Sponsorship Groups working with Sponsor Refugees wrote to the UK Government asking them to create a Community Sponsorship Scheme to help those Afghans who had been unable to escape. The UK Government established the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) soon afterwards with a commitment to resettle 20,000 Afghans, but there was no Community Sponsorship element.

Since March 2023, following the success of Citizens UK's 'Communities for Ukraine' scheme, they have been working with the UK Government to explore how we could develop an improved Community Sponsorship scheme for Afghans: 'Communities for Afghans'. Now Citizens UK and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are working together on a time-bound project – Communities for Afghans - to test an approach to sponsorship which allows Sponsor Groups to directly welcome an Afghan household into their local community and support them over a period of two years, to fully integrate and rebuild their lives in the UK.

Who are Citizens UK and how do they support refugees?

[Citizens UK](#) is the UK's biggest and most diverse people-powered alliance. They bring together everyday people and local organisations to build a better and fairer society. Their mission is to make change on the issues that matter, from campaigning for zebra crossings on dangerous roads, to reforming the immigration system, to the Living Wage campaign.

When it comes to supporting refugees, Citizens UK are working to build a safer and more just country for everyone. They work directly with people who have experienced the immigration system, faith groups, universities, charities who are working together to build power, develop partnerships and find solutions in their local communities to make sure that everyone can live with dignity.

What is Community Sponsorship and how does it work?

Community sponsorship enables community groups to directly welcome and support a resettled family into their local community. It is designed and delivered in partnership with local communities and promotes positive resettlement outcomes, both for the resettled families and for those who support them. Refugees resettled through the Community Sponsorship Scheme complement those resettled to local authorities through the UK Resettlement Scheme, underlining the critical role that communities can play in the global response to humanitarian crises.

Community sponsorship is a way for local communities, civil society organisations, charities, and faith groups to be directly involved in helping refugees settle in the UK. Community sponsors provide emotional and practical support to empower

families to rebuild their lives in safety, and to become self-sufficient members of their new community. Being a sponsor also benefits the local community through enabling the generosity of local people and creating new bonds between those involved.

Click [here](#) to find out more about the UK Community Sponsorship programme.

What is the Welcome Circle Program? And what are Welcome Circles?

In support of Citizens UK, HIAS+JCORE has launched the **Communities for Afghans: The Welcome Circle Program**, an initiative that facilitates small groups of private individuals to form certified Welcome Circles in their local Jewish communities to directly support the integration of newly arrived Afghans. The support of newcomers through the Welcome Circle Program is a partnership between HIAS+JCORE, Jewish communities across the UK, and Citizens UK. This program was established to create additional sponsorship capacity, streamline the recruitment and application process for sponsor groups, and reduce the fundraising requirements that exist under traditional community sponsorship.

Who will manage the Welcome Circles Program?

Citizens UK will act at the **Principal Sponsor** and will have overall responsibility for recruitment, training and support for Community Sponsorship Groups. Whilst HIAS+JCORE will provide guidance, resources and technical know-how to sponsorship groups and will also act as a point of contact for Sponsor groups and Citizens UK, guiding the recruitment of Jewish community groups, and supporting groups with voicing any concerns.

Who is eligible to form a Welcome Circle, and what are the requirements?

Communities for Afghans: The Welcome Circle Programme is open to anyone who can:

- Recruit a small team of at least 6 people committed to offering a warm welcome to an Afghan family in your community for the next two years;
- Help identify and secure a property to house the family (it needs to have its own front door and meet the standard of the local authority);
- Support the family to access benefits and public services, and move towards sustainable employment.

What are the responsibilities of Welcome Circles?

Welcome Circles are responsible to support the Afghan family with the following:

- **Identify long term (2 yr. minimum) housing** appropriate for the family (we anticipate larger families, so minimum 3-bedroom)

- **Ensure the housing meets local authority standards** and is appropriate to house a family (check list and supporting guidance, training will be provided by Citizens UK)
- **Meet the family** and transport them from the airport/transitional accommodation to their new home
- Post arrival, welcome and **support the integration** of the resettled family for 2 years
- Ensure the welcomed family are able to **access benefits and public services** such as the NHS, schools and ESOL.
- Make sure that the family are able to **meet their financial needs** and that funding provided is used responsibly and accountably.
- Support the family into **employment**.
- Regularly **report** and check in with Citizens UK and HIAS+JCORE

What do groups need to do to become sponsors?

- **Complete training** provided by Citizens UK;
- Undergo **DBS checks**;
- Sign a **Sponsor Declaration** and adhere to the Citizens UK's **code of conduct**;
- Be submitted for government **suitability checks**;
- Identify a **Named Sponsor** who will be listed on the application form, accountable to Citizens UK for delivery of the sponsorship, and receives the monthly payment from the Local Authority. This person will be security checked by government (as well as completing CUK due diligence process) because they are entrusted with public money.

What direct support does HIAS+JCORE provide to Welcome Circles?

HIAS+JCORE will provide support to Welcome Circles by:

- Providing guidance, resources and technical know-how to sponsorship groups
- Offering training and engagement opportunities
- HIAS+JCORE will also act as a point of contact for Sponsor groups and Citizens UK, guiding the recruitment of Jewish community groups, and supporting groups with voicing any concerns.
- HIAS+JCORE will also offer a space to discuss challenges and successes of the program
- HIAS+JCORE's Integration Coordinator is there to make the jobs of the community members easier and to offer guidance and support when needed.

What financial support is available to sponsor groups?

Under the Communities for Afghans scheme there will not be a requirement to raise £9,000 (as is the case for the Home Office Community Sponsorship Scheme). Sponsor Groups will be paid a monthly Sponsor Support Payment (between £200 and £500 depending on family size) to cover costs such as rent top-ups, void costs, furnishing etc.. Groups will also be able to apply to the Citizens UK Sponsor Expenses Fund to help with upfront costs if needed.

We want to make sure our group is respectful of the boundaries and emotional distress that the families may have. What is your recommendation?

Keep in mind that the role of a Welcome Circle is to be a resource for people to get their feet on the ground in a new and unfamiliar community while they work towards self-sufficiency. The first step is always listening to the family about their wants and needs and respecting their decisions.

We also recommend not asking questions that bring up trauma. If the families you have welcomed offers information about their experiences, listen and be supportive; however, we should never ask people to share these experiences as it might be uncomfortable or cause them distress.

It is also important that circles' members take care of themselves and practice self-care. Being exposed to someone else's trauma can take a toll on us as well. HIAS has trained staff members in dealing with trauma and can provide training and resources to Welcome Circles wanting to learn more.