

Updated Isle of Man Government Refugee Policy Statement and Report 2023



**Isle of Man
Government**

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Council of Ministers, September 2023

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Updated Isle of Man Government Refugee Policy Statement 2023

Following extensive consideration and consultation the Council of Ministers has approved the following policy statement:

1. Isle of Man Government agrees and affirms that all people have the right to seek asylum and to live free of persecution. It recognises that all displaced persons, including refugees¹, be they fleeing conflict, natural disaster or other humanitarian crises, require international assistance that is provided in a safe and secure manner, which also affords dignity and respect to those affected.
2. Isle of Man Government affirms its commitment to upholding refugees' rights under international law and to provide assistance within its scope and ability to do so.
3. Isle of Man Government will continue the vital work to support agencies which seek to address the root causes of displacement, and which provide support to those who have fled conflict, and to neighbouring countries of those experiencing conflict.
4. Isle of Man Government will maintain its close ties with the UK and uphold its role as a Crown Dependency within the UK asylum process. Those who seek asylum and are subsequently granted refugee status in the UK may continue to enjoy the right to take up residence in the Isle of Man, should they wish to do so.
5. Due to its relationship with the UK, the Isle of Man cannot process asylum applications, nor can it house those who are in the UK awaiting decision on their refugee status. Subsequently, the Isle of Man cannot create its own re-settlement routes in addition to or separate from the UK's, to allow for refugees to be re-settled in the Island.
6. Isle of Man Government will remain flexible and open to the possibility of replicating an operation similar to its response to the invasion of Ukraine, whereby Ukrainians were supported to travel to the Isle of Man and to be hosted by individuals in the community.

¹ The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) defines refugees as "*people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country*".

7. Activating a response to support displaced persons or refugees in the Isle of Man by way of any future scheme remains within the determination of the executive government of the day (the Council of Ministers) and should include consideration and evaluation of:
- The context, including risks and benefits of supporting individuals to travel to the Isle of Man as opposed to supporting them in their home/ neighbouring countries;
 - Opportunity for a community response;
 - Capacity of third-sector support;
 - Capacity of Government departments to assist individuals arriving on the Island with signposting, including access to education, benefits and to carry out necessary checks;
 - Housing availability including assessment of the private rental market and community based options;
 - Medical care and mental health services availability;
 - Alignment with, or impact on, budgetary and spending commitments and population growth policy.
8. Isle of Man Government remains open to the potential consideration of exploring further research into Isle of Man involvement in resettlement programmes, noting that any participation and terms would have to take account of the above, including additional costs.

ENDS

Updated Isle of Man Government Refugee Policy Report 2023

The policy statement above has been adopted by the Council of Ministers following consideration of this report.

Introduction

The Isle of Man Government recognises the challenges faced by people displaced as a direct result of conflict, natural or environmental disaster and the importance of contributing to international humanitarian efforts to alleviate their suffering and addressing the root causes, whilst acknowledging the constraints within which the Island can respond.

It is in this context that Isle of Man Government took swift action to support the international community's efforts in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and as part of the debate around the response to the war in Ukraine –

"At the April 2022 sitting of Tynwald it was resolved that the [Isle of Man] would benefit from a transparent and updated policy regarding the acceptance of refugees that takes into account lessons learned from the process of accepting those fleeing the current conflict in Ukraine;

And that the Council of Ministers should explore how this could be achieved and should submit a report to Tynwald by the last day of July 2023".

This report sets out the Council of Ministers' response to the Tynwald Motion, and provides a policy statement in respect of the acceptance of refugees in the Isle of Man for the future, recognising the actions already taken, and the constraints within which Isle of Man Government must operate. It also sets out the potential to explore further provisions in the future, should the Council of Ministers determine it to be warranted.

The Isle of Man's broader approach to International Development

The Council of Ministers recognises that even accounting for existing constraints on the Island's ability to take direct action, it can – and indeed does – provide support to agencies which seek to address the root causes of displacement, and which provide support to those who have fled conflict, particularly in regions that are impacted the most.

Isle of Man Government is therefore committed to supporting collaborative efforts through International Development funding aimed at conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and sustainable development in countries experiencing crises, recognising the long-term benefits of such interventions in reducing forced displacement. It is also committed to continuing to allocate funds to international agencies providing support in countries neighbouring those experiencing conflict.

Ukraine Response

Those fleeing conflict in Ukraine did not come to the UK (and subsequently the Island) via refugee resettlement programmes but were granted refuge via changes made to UK immigration/visa rules. This means that in strict legal terms, they are not defined as refugees, although they are of course fleeing conflict and would meet the UNHCR definition.

To compare those fleeing war in Ukraine and those who come to the UK via normal channels of refugee resettlement is not, therefore, comparing like with like.

More than 100,000 individuals from Ukraine have been hosted in the UK. Whilst the Isle of Man largely mirrored the UK's response, the scheme was adapted in order to best suit the Island and those arriving.

The development of the Isle of Man Homes for Ukraine Scheme saw officers from across Isle of Man Government working together to deliver a system that addressed the gaps the UK scheme had highlighted, and most importantly, the safety and well-being of guests.

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This was felt to be an appropriate measure given the international attention and the demand from the Isle of Man public including a number of Ukrainian nationals living on the Island.

Sponsors in the community or family members and friends have hosted Ukrainians who came to the Island under the scheme. In the period immediately after the call for interested potential sponsors to come forward, several hundred individuals registered their interest.

Whilst numbers proved hugely promising, once it was established that Isle of Man Government would not be facilitating the matching of hosts and Ukrainian guests, the number of potential hosts declined.

The majority of hosting has been between friends and family connections. Others have been connected through community groups. Communication between the Cabinet Office and officials in the UNHCR identified the service 'Reset' as an appropriate medium to facilitate matching².

The Isle of Man Homes for Ukraine Scheme has supported around 150 Ukrainians, including children, to travel to the Isle of Man and to be hosted by individuals in the community. Isle of Man Government continues to support those individuals with signposting, access to healthcare, education, benefits and relevant safeguarding checks.

Where the UK has struggled in some areas with the scale of the scheme, the Island has been able to mitigate and monitor issues in a more fluid and successful manner because the number of Ukrainians hosted was more manageable. The UK and the Isle of Man schemes have not come without significant cost and resource. For the 2022/2023 financial year, the cost of operating the Isle of Man Homes for Ukraine Scheme alone, without including additional resource committed by officers across Government, exceeded £240,000. Headline estimates are that involvement in UK resettlement schemes would come at a higher cost.

² Reset are a UK registered charity that support community sponsorship of refugees in the UK. UK Registered Charity No. 1179799.

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Difficulties faced by the dedicated Ukraine Support Team include management of expectations of both hosts and guests, language barriers and cultural differences. In dealing with these issues, guides were developed for hosts and guests which were translated into Ukrainian. These guides assist hosts and guests primarily with signposting to services.

Towards the end of 2022, the Ukraine Support Team ran a feedback exercise with hosts and guests to gather information on their experiences of the Isle of Man Homes for Ukraine Scheme. More widely, guests gave their overall feedback in respect of the Island too. A significant majority of those who responded when asked for feedback gave very positive reviews of the Island, the Ukraine Support Team and the assistance they have been provided.

As was expected, there was a small number of negative notes given in feedback from both hosts and guests. Most negative comments concerned relationship breakdowns between hosts and guests and the (lack of) availability of services in some areas. It was noted that the majority of issues faced by Ukrainian guests once they reached the Island were the same as any other person living on the Island. Issues identified included high rental prices for private accommodation and availability of dental services. Of the issues raised, the Ukraine Support Team has worked hard in order to resolve these where possible.

However, there are also a number of issues largely out of the Ukraine Support Team's capacity. Isle of Man Government is aware of several severe healthcare conditions that pose challenges to the provision of care by Manx Care. There are also a number of issues stemming from the cultural and social norms in Ukraine that were perhaps not considered in the initial stages.

Isle of Man Constitutional Context

Displaced persons may come to the UK if they are granted refugee status through established channels or as asylum seekers.

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As a small Island community, and as a dependency of the British Crown, Isle of Man Government operates within certain constraints. This means that the Isle of Man cannot make its own rules as they relate to immigration or nationality that would compromise or contradict those of the UK, and cannot therefore establish its own resettlement routes.

The Isle of Man cannot receive or process asylum seekers.

The Isle of Man could seek to participate in the UK schemes set out below, but are again subject to certain constraints, not least in respect of resources. By means of illustration, the UK resettlement schemes set certain expectations in terms of the provision of accommodation, education and health care, and the UK central government provides some direct funding to Local Authorities, with the authorities then meeting other additional associated/indirect costs.

It should be noted that any policy established by the Isle of Man Government could not operate independently of any changes in UK policy towards the resettlement of refugees. For this reason, any policy has to remain flexible and adaptable to Government and the community need at the time.

UK Refugee Resettlement Schemes

If an asylum seeker subsequently acquires refugee status and is then permitted to live in the UK they can also live in the Isle of Man as would be the case for any other person in the UK.

There are several established and recognised channels that allow refugees into the UK, which the UK operates in partnership with the UNHCR. The main channels are:

- The UK Resettlement Scheme,
- The Community Sponsorship Scheme, and
- The Mandate Resettlement Scheme

Numbers through these routes are relatively low.

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There are also a number of other legal pathways including those to provide support to current and former locally-employed staff in Afghanistan and other country specific resettlement schemes that see the majority of refugees arrive into the UK.

In the UK, the **Resettlement Scheme** is delivered in close partnership with local authorities. The UK central government receives offers of accommodation either directly from a local authority, or on a regional basis through a regional strategic partnership. Refugees are matched to a local authority that can provide suitable accommodation and the appropriate support to those being resettled. Local authorities receive central UK Government funding to facilitate this resettlement.

Through **Community Sponsorship and supported by the UNHCR**, suitable community groups are able to 'sponsor' refugees to be resettled in the UK for a minimum of two years. Local authorities must consent to each Community Sponsorship application and agree to the group accepting the proposed refugee family.

Refugees resettled through the **Mandate Resettlement Scheme** are accommodated and supported by a family member living in the UK. Prior to resettlement, individuals must be recognised as refugees by UNHCR and must have been assessed and determined to be in need of resettlement.

According to the latest UK quarterly statistics (as of March 2023), resettlement accounts for only 19% (4,414) of those granted refuge in the UK under the recognised and established routes as explained above from March 2022 to March 2023³. Of this 19%, the vast majority of those had arrived from Afghanistan following the fall of Kabul in August 2021 causing a spike in figures. This figure does not include those granted asylum, those currently seeking asylum or those arriving in the UK from Ukraine. The majority of those individuals that the UK grants refuge to are those seeking asylum.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2023/how-many-people-do-we-grant-protection-to#:~:text=There%20were%204%2C414%20people%20resettled,of%20Kabul%20in%20August%202021.>

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To provide context to UK resettlement figures, in 2022, the number of Ukrainians granted temporary leave to remain within the UK was equivalent to the number of people granted refuge in the UK from all origins in total between 2014 and 2021, including the peak of the European migrant crisis in 2015⁴. This response to displaced persons from Ukraine is largely reflected across the globe.

Exploring direct participation in UK resettlement programmes

The Council of Ministers recognises the potential for exploring participation in UK resettlement programmes as a means of supporting the international community in providing long-term solutions for refugees in the future. Further consideration will therefore be given to working with UN/UK authorities, to assess the feasibility of participating in their resettlement initiatives, in a way that suits the needs of refugees, and the Island's abilities to meet those needs including assessing the costs of doing so at the resolution of the Council of Ministers.

Potential activation of dedicated refugee resettlement support

If deemed appropriate at the time, additional work on the potential for participation in UK resettlement schemes can be undertaken. The Council of Ministers would then have further information available upon which to base a decision as to whether to activate dedicated refugee resettlement support, in response to any future refugee crises. It may, as an alternative, choose to continue to channel existing International Development funding to a particular region.

The Council of Ministers notes that participation in UK resettlement schemes in the Isle of Man would require additional staff and financial resourcing, and would need to be approved via normal government processes. Any such initiative would sit outside of normal revenue funding/budgeting and currently agreed budgets, and would therefore require a supplementary vote in, and the approval of, Tynwald.

⁴ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01403/SN01403.pdf>

Importance of local support and the community-led response

The Council of Ministers acknowledges the critical role that community support would play in facilitating the successful integration of displaced persons and refugees into Island society. Local support was vital in the success of the Isle of Man Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

The Council of Ministers also acknowledges Isle of Man residents may have concerns related to resource availability and social cohesion as evidenced by feedback to the public consultation on the matter in late 2022. Therefore, any consideration of participation in UK resettlement schemes would need to consider these factors.

Should participation in UK resettlement schemes be pursued, consideration would also need to be given to working together with civil society organisations, the community, and educational institutions to encourage local support networks, promote cultural exchange, and ensure integration between refugees and the host community.

Alignment with Economic Strategy

The Council of Ministers recognises the importance of aligning any future policy to bring refugees to the Island with the Government's priorities including budgetary and spending commitments and population growth policy at the time. When considering any direct resettlement support which may be provided, it must therefore be provided in a way that is consistent with the sustainable development goals and the well-being of the Island population as a whole. This means considering the capacity of the Island's infrastructure, healthcare, education, housing, and employment sectors to ensure that the acceptance of refugees does not create an imbalance or over-stretch resources.