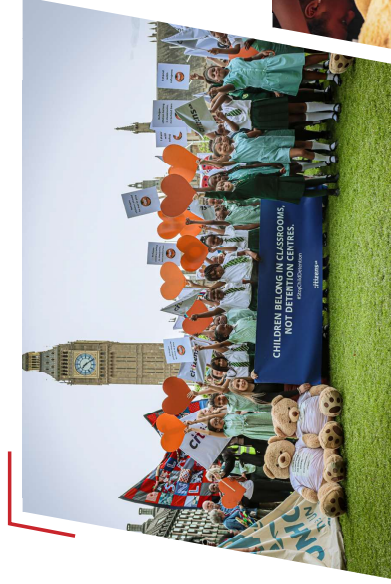


### 3. WELCOMING REFUGEES & A FAIR PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP



*"We found here family, a lot of smiles and support from people around. Thanks to the British Government, to Citizens UK, and to the Diocese of Chelmsford, we met Paul and Myra. I don't like the word "sponsors". They are more than sponsors, they are our Guardian angels. They brought us into their family."*

LENA,  
A GUEST UNDER CITIZENS UK'S  
'COMMUNITIES FOR UKRAINE' SCHEME

#### OUR TRACK RECORD

1. Our Strangers into Citizens campaign, launched in 2006, led to over 150,000 people being able to regularise their immigration status.
2. Citizens UK helped communities across the UK to host over 1,000 Ukrainians and resettle 280 refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sudan and Iraq through the traditional Community Sponsorship route – as well as persuaded the UK Government to resettle 20,000 Syrians.
3. In 2022, following years of organising, the government agreed to extend free school meals to all children regardless of their parents' immigration status
4. In 2016 Citizens UK led a campaign to resettle 1,000 refugee children stuck in France to join their families in the UK. We then worked with Lord Dubs to win the 'Dubs amendment' to secure the resettlement of children and their families to the UK
5. In 2022, the government agreed to introduce a fee waiver for the £1,012 application fee for child citizenship and waive the fee entirely for children in care.
6. Citizens UK led the campaign that ended the detention of children and families for immigration purposes in 2011, saving thousands of kids from being locked up (sadly, recent legislation has removed this safeguard for new arrivals).

## WELCOMING REFUGEES

### Campaign Overview

The UK has a proud tradition of offering sanctuary to people fleeing war and persecution. As a Recognised Provider of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and a Principal Sponsor for the government's Community Sponsorship Scheme, we've seen the massive difference that communities and hosts can make in stepping up to welcome refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine into their homes and their neighbourhoods. We believe that more should be done to unleash the generosity and hospitality of the public through expanding resettlement routes and making it easier for communities to resettle refugees.

Meanwhile those who seek asylum in the UK face often lengthy backlogs, poor quality and unsustainable accommodation, and for new arrivals the prospect of detention of children and families for the first time since 2011. We want to

offer a welcome to people seeking sanctuary and ensure their dignity and rights are respected, regardless of whether they have been resettled or claimed asylum.

### What are we trying to change?

We want to give every community in the UK the opportunity to become a place of welcome to those seeking sanctuary, and we want every resettled refugee and person seeking asylum to experience the best of British hospitality. We have seen the public appetite to welcome refugees through our Community Sponsorship Groups in every part of the UK, from rural communities in Pembrokeshire, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, to inner city London, Manchester and Birmingham – and every type of community in-between. And we have been overwhelmed by the tens of thousands of people who have

welcomed Ukrainians into their homes and supported refugees from Hong Kong.

However, that generosity of welcome is not experienced by all those who seek sanctuary in the UK. We want to see the best of UK government resettlement schemes inform a new agile community and civil society-led resettlement approach that can be extended to other refugees, such as those fleeing Afghanistan and Sudan. We need new safe routes for asylum seekers, supported with good processes, sufficient wrap-around support and necessary financial backing. And in relation to our asylum system, we need to ensure that the generosity of welcome in local communities is matched by asylum policies and practices that honour the dignity and rights of those who seek sanctuary here.

#### *How are people in our communities affected?*

##### **Refugee Resettlement through Community Sponsorship: Diocese of Oxford Case Study**

Following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Diocese of Oxford partnered with Citizens UK to resettle Ukrainians through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This network of support has led to 100 host households to collectively welcome 198 Ukrainians (of which 72 are children) across the Thames Valley area.

Guests from Ukraine are becoming part of families and communities, finding jobs, running local art events and sharing cultures and food. Some are moving into independent accommodation. Hosts have gained a growing awareness of the limitations and difficulties of navigating our social support system, and the reality of life for those who flee dangers in their home country and seek to establish a new life (whether temporarily or more permanently) in an unfamiliar country.

*“We all have a right to better pathways that allow us to feel human – to be a citizen of the country we call home. As I have been through the process and lived the experience, it has made me more aware of how distant and worthless you feel waiting for an opportunity to be part of a community. All our situations and stories are different, but the pain, heartache and uncertainty are the same. All we want is a chance to be beneficial to society and use our skills.”*

AMANDA, SOUTH LONDON CITIZENS

## A FAIR PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP

### Campaign Overview

Hundreds of thousands of people in our communities are on long, expensive, and painful pathways to citizenship. For most people, it will be more than a decade and tens of thousands of pounds before they can finally have the security that comes with British citizenship. Whilst on the pathway, most people will be denied access to basic services and support. They will face uncertainty and be at risk of poverty and destitution due to their immigration status. We believe that the pathway to citizenship should be affordable, timely and fair. This would improve lives and strengthen our communities, our democracy and our economy.

### How are people in our communities affected?

*“I came to the UK nearly 20 years ago to build a better life for my daughter. The UK is my home but I'm not yet a citizen. Millions of people like me are blocked and struggling to survive when all we want is to be recognised as British citizens, contribute to society and build our lives.” MARY*

The length, costs, and barriers of our current systems leaves people stuck in limbo, unable to achieve their potential and make use of their talents. The stress, uncertainty and insecurity that comes as a result of our immigration system causes unnecessary pain and suffering. In 2020, Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that over







a quarter of destitute households were migrants and in many cases, the destitution arose primarily from people's immigration status.

People without any form of immigration status are unable to work or access basic services such as healthcare or the criminal justice system. Even people with a visa and the legal right to remain can be denied access to welfare through the so-called 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) conditions on their visas. This is effectively a welfare ban, denying people access to this safety net, including child benefit, and leaves people, including over 180,000 children, at risk of destitution.<sup>7</sup>

Combined with a lack of free legal advice, this leaves people in our communities to experience prolonged uncertainty, poverty and exclusion. Evidence suggests that this disproportionately affects minority ethnic women and disabled people. Insecure immigration status and the pathway to citizenship is a key campaign area for many of our chapters, including Tyne and Wear, South London, East London, North London, Nottingham, Wales, Thames Valley, Birmingham and Essex. We listened to thousands of people in our member institutions to identify the need to improve the pathway to citizenship.

**Case Study: Every Child Should Benefit**

Nori is a mum-of-two who is currently on the pathway to becoming a British Citizen. Her visa has a condition which bars her from accessing much of the welfare safety net including child benefit:



*"Having at least £24 a week extra would make such a difference for us. It's the difference between taking our children to after-school activities like swimming, or not. It would help with the precarious housing situations many of us are in. The Home Office says that they will not wait for children of migrant families to become destitute before intervening, but this is what we are seeing in the case of families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Our children are suffering."*

**NORI, MUM-OF-TWO, IS ON THE PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP**

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?**

1. **Expanding and simplifying refugee resettlement schemes, with a focus on involving communities in the sponsorship and integration process, and giving more agency to hosts/sponsors and the people they welcome;**
  - This could include an annual target of refugees resettled; the introduction of 'naming' into community sponsorship; and building on the experience of the Ukraine Scheme to streamline the Community Sponsorship process and expand it to other nationalities
2. **Reforming the pathway to citizenship to be shorter, cheaper and fairer**
  - This could include shortening the 10 year route to citizenship to 5 years, reducing citizenship fees to cost price (especially for children), introducing a one-off regularisation process, and enabling all children to access child benefit, whatever their parents' immigration status.
3. **Ensure people are treated with dignity throughout the immigration system**
  - This could include restoring the ban on children and families being detained for immigration purposes

