

## **CITIZENS UK RESETTLEMENT HOUSING RESOURCE**

Citizens UK has collected responses from all around the country about what the main concerns are regarding housing for refugees. We hope that you find this resource helpful. If you have any further comments, please do not hesitate to drop us a line at [amalia.aguirre@citizensuk.org](mailto:amalia.aguirre@citizensuk.org) . This is a work in progress.

1. Finding private landlords
2. Template landlord letter
3. Examples from Darlington, Cambridge and Bristol
4. Questions to be answered

### **1. FINDING PRIVATE LANDLORDS**

#### **What are the benefits of finding private landlords?**

The Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPR) scheme provides funding to cover costs of resettlement, which includes the costs of private rented accommodation at Local Housing Authority Rates.

It is essential that the Syrian refugees can be resettled with no disadvantage to existing residents. By offering private rented accommodation to refugees, landlords can make a huge contribution to achieving this goal, as it will mean the scarce supply of social and affordable private sector housing is not impacted upon. Citizens UK, an independent community organising charity, is working with councils and local landlords to make this happen.

#### **Why do we need privately rented homes for Syrian refugees?**

We have committed as a country to taking 20,000 refugees but only just over 1000 have been resettled as of December 2015. That is in part because not all local authorities have said they will take people – but also because most local authorities have a shortage of housing. We don't want to make this a fight between housing that is available for local people who need it and vulnerable refugees. The Council and Citizens UK are looking to work with new private landlords and agents who can help. Social housing is very scarce with long waiting lists of UK residents in need. The private housing sector is much larger and flexible which makes it more suitable to for these purposes.

#### **Can I rent just one room to a refugee?**

At present, for Syrian refugees, the Home Office only allows (on UN advice) accommodation that has its own front door. This is important to protect vulnerable people and ensures that refugees can have independence when they arrive. It also avoids a number of safeguarding issues. If you have a spare room and would like to use it to help refugees, you can sign up at <http://www.refugees-welcome.org.uk/calling-landlords/> to be linked to NAACOM, which organises spare rooms for destitute asylum seekers.

## **What types of homes are needed?**

We are ideally looking for family sized rental properties.

## **How long do I need to be willing to rent a home for?**

12 months minimum. To offer increased stability for the refugees as they settle into their new community we are asking that wherever possible landlords consider renting their properties to refugees for at least 2 years.

## **How much will I be paid to rent my home?**

You will be paid at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. There's a postcode specific search engine though, so it'll be very easy to confirm where individual properties are. If you want to check what rate you would receive for your property, visit <https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/search.aspx> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2015-march-2016>

In addition, in some local authorities, a cash incentive will be paid to any landlord who can rent a home to a Syrian refugee. The cash incentive rates in the London borough of Barnet are:

- For a 12 or 15 month tenancy with no break clauses = **£2000** cash incentive
- If a landlord or agent renews for a second year we will pay a renewal fee of **£500**
- For a 24 month tenancy with no break clauses = **£5000** cash incentive

This will vary from council to council – please ask yours whether they are considering the initiative.

## **How long will it take to organise for a Syrian refugee to be in my home, and what do I do if I currently have a tenant but would like to help in future?**

We are looking for homes immediately and from January, February or March 2016. If needed, there will be a payment to cover the rent for up to four weeks prior to the

refugees signing their tenancy agreement and moving. This will be used to secure the use of the property ahead of the refugees arriving. However, resettlement will continue over the next 5 years, so if you would like to register your property, it may become very helpful in the resettlement programs up until 2020. See here to register - <http://www.refugees-welcome.org.uk/calling-landlords/>

**If I am helping to lead a team in my local area to find private landlords, what process should I follow?**

### **Step 1: Local Landlords**

Identify the exact requirements of a landlord and identify the potential barriers or fears that might prevent a landlord from saying yes.

Landlord's interested to join Register need to:

- Own a family sized rental property
- Be prepared to offer it as home to a Syrian refugee family, if vacant when demand arises
- Be able to offer a 2 year tenancy to provide stability to that family upon their arrival in UK
- Be able to rent property out for Local Housing Allowance rate. First 12 months of rent will be paid by the EU, subsequent months either through housing benefit or family's own earnings

A wide range of landlords may be interested, a prevailing profile has not yet emerged. They may only have one property to rent but be socially-minded, or they may have several and therefore feel that they are in a comfortable position to register.

Then sit together with your team to think through the landlords that you know – call them up and begin having the conversation with them. Would they be interested? Do they think they know one or two people who may be interested? Begin to build your list of landlords – personal contact is the best. And then think together with your team how you might create a large amount of publicity encouraging landlords to come forward.

### **Step 2: Approach local letting agents**

\*Did you know? In Luton, letting agents contacted all landlords on their books and dozens of properties were found within hours\*

#### **Questions to ask local letting agents:**

1. Are you willing to reach out to the landlords on your books?

2. Do you require any support? Can we make things easier for you in any way?
3. If not on board yet... can I make an appointment to meet you at your office?
4. What are your contact details?
5. Would you be interested in attending a public meeting to tell others how you got landlords to register?

### **Step 3: Approach Housing Associations**

Are you willing to pledge to house a Syrian refugee family when the need arises, i.e. when the family is resettled to the UK in line with the Government's plans?

### **Step 4: Approach Churches / Mosques / Synagogues , e.g. Schools**

Do you have any resources (properties / school places / community volunteers), which could be useful to a resettled refugee family? Are you happy to make a pledge in support of those who will be resettled in your area? i.e. can we list you and contact you when the need arises?"

### **Possible Objections**

1. "Why our area? There is severe housing shortage here".

Many local councils have demonstrated solidarity to welcome and offer a bright future to what is likely to be a relatively small number of refugee families. Moreover, we believe that this crisis can be better managed if refugees are accommodated around the country.

2. "What will landlords gain from signing up? Why should I tell them about this?"

Landlords will not be making a loss: during the first 12 months the EU will pay the equivalent of the Local Housing Allowance Rate, after which the resettled family will be entitled to housing benefit.

There may be landlords who already wish to support refugees but may not know how to do so: they will be grateful to you for informing them on how to house refugees.

3. "What will I as agent gain from reaching out to landlords about this campaign?"

You will demonstrate that you are somebody who understands the community well and knows that people want to welcome refugees.

The reputation of your agency will increase: landlords will appreciate your efforts and what you stand for. Moreover, reporters from local newspapers would be interested in running stories on the agents and landlords that have stepped up.

4. "I am not interested. We do not have many properties / landlords in this area".

Where are you based instead? Similar campaigns are being run in many other local groups, possibly in nearby areas. Let me connect you with another coordinator.

## 2. Template

Dear Landlord,

With the war in Syria we are facing a humanitarian crisis that has not been seen on this scale for a generation. Citizens UK is working with [insert] council to enable our local authority to develop a Refugees Welcome programme and resettle [insert number] refugee families to our borough.

Last year, children froze to death in UN-administered camps on the borders of Syria. As winter is here again, we have an opportunity to do our part and save lives. Our government has committed to resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK over 5 years. The first 1000 have already arrived but many more are still to join us. To make this happen, we need homes (not spare rooms) that they can live in. These homes will be paid for through a mixture of EU and national government money.

We're hoping to resettle 50 people (around 12 families) in each local authority. In Luton, one estate agency contacted all the landlords on their books and enough homes were found to resettle 50 people in one day. That is all it takes – for 12 landlords to rent a home to a refugee family. Some of our faith and community groups in Lambeth have already found willing landlords but we need more. Could one of those landlords be you?

### **What can you do to help?**

If you are a landlord and are willing to explore renting your house or flat to a Syrian refugee, please contact us on [insert number] or at [insert email]. You can find out more on the FAQs overleaf or see our Refugees Welcome website for details of the landlords scheme <http://www.refugees-welcome.org.uk/calling-landlords/>

We look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely,

### 3. Examples

#### Darlington

- Began by trying to find landlords themselves
- Contacted all churches and faith groups to ask if they could offer to act as a guarantor for a family - paying the bond, holding fee and months rent in advance.
- Additionally, would members of the church/group be willing to befriend the family they have supported financially? Join DAR as volunteers and be prepared to have DBS checks, especially to those who are available during the daytime.
- Finally, would the church/group be prepared to set up a drop in for all refugees one day a week offering English language support and advice on housing, health, applying for jobs etc.
- Look into a 700 club style fundraiser (to purchase a house for refugees)

#### Cambridge

How to approach letting agents:

1. Make initial call, check that they have a spare moment and speak to head of lettings

Suggested script:

- My name is..., I'm from an organisation called \_\_\_\_ Refugee Resettlement Campaign
- We're basically just a bunch of ordinary people who are trying to help with the refugee crisis. There have been so many images on the TV and I thought "it's better to do something than nothing". And we're getting huge amounts of support from people. [It's important to stress we're just ordinary people. It's about empathy and common humanity]
- So what we're trying to do is get a few landlords on board with what we're doing. We've had loads of pledges of help from different people - [try and get them to load up [www.yourwebsite.com](http://www.yourwebsite.com)]

- Talk about the pledges you've received, eg. in Cambridge they had pledges from builders and the cycle hire (to reinforce the idea that the ENTIRE community is hopping on board). Talk about the examples of landlord pledges you've already had (if any) and stress that they could be talking to potential customers (if members of your group are landlords themselves).

## **\*The goal is to GET A MEETING rather than go into specifics\***

As soon as you go into specifics, that provides a reason for them to make a rejection over the phone. A meeting is crucial for the following reasons:

- It's about building relationships. The lettings person may reject your initial proposal but the fact that someone has taken the time to meet them personally (and someone utterly charming and friendly means they are more likely to chat about it with friends, family and work colleagues. It's about spreading the positive message through the lettings community.
- Body language is so much more effective at communicating genuine passion and concern.
- Once you know you have a meeting arranged, you can formulate your specific strategy based on the individual lettings agent and maybe go in as a group.
- Lettings agents spend all day on the phone - you need to stand out!

Things to take/say in your first meeting:

- Some testimonials of previous landlord pledges.
- We have a network of volunteers who can help with cleaning and overseeing the properties, including furnishing properties where necessary.
- There will be NO issue with Home Office. All refugees will have humanitarian visas and so will be explicitly signed off as legal. We can provide explicit Home Office validation so the Home Office will not bother them.
- These tenants will be the best tenants you can possibly imagine. They will be on their best behaviour for fear of invalidating their humanitarian visa. They also just come from a horrendous situation and will be grateful to have safety and a home.
- Many of the refugees will be professionals.
- It's a chance for landlords/lettings agents to show their support for this important cause. Excellent PR.

## Bristol

To secure housing so far Bristol has taken the following steps:

- Call out at a charity event organised to raise awareness and money for Syria
- Media radio and Newspaper
- Utilising the national register- during big media story after picture of child on the beach
- Email to all contacts within the group
- Email to all landlords from the council

- Poster
- Visiting letting agents

Next steps...

After their first refugee welcome meeting they organised a housing sub team who met shortly after with the intention of carrying out the following actions:

- Sub team: to pull together succinct information regarding call out to landlords in order to get the message out to as many networks as possible. Two different messages – one for business and another for charitable. Once information was finalised by sub team it was passed on to everyone in the committee
- Sub team: Created leaflets to distribute by committee
- All: Used every network available to get the message out that they urgently needed private landlords willing to rent property in order to resettle Syrian refugees in Bristol (email, social media, e bulletins, multi-faith forum etc)
- Gathered public statement from Bristol Council regarding Housing that could be communicated through a variety of media/outlets
- Representatives attended Islamic culture fair to advertise for Landlords
- Call out on various radio stations when communications strategy was finalised
- Created a short video
- Went back to letting agents

#### **4. Questions to be answered**

- How can agencies and landlords be kitemarked for supporting the scheme?
- How can landlords be protected – in terms of rent protection and data?
- Is it possible to secure extra payment/incentives for landlords in other boroughs?
- Will funding be available to families in the first year even if they are able to secure employment?
- If your council is offering a cash incentive to landlords, where is that money coming from?