

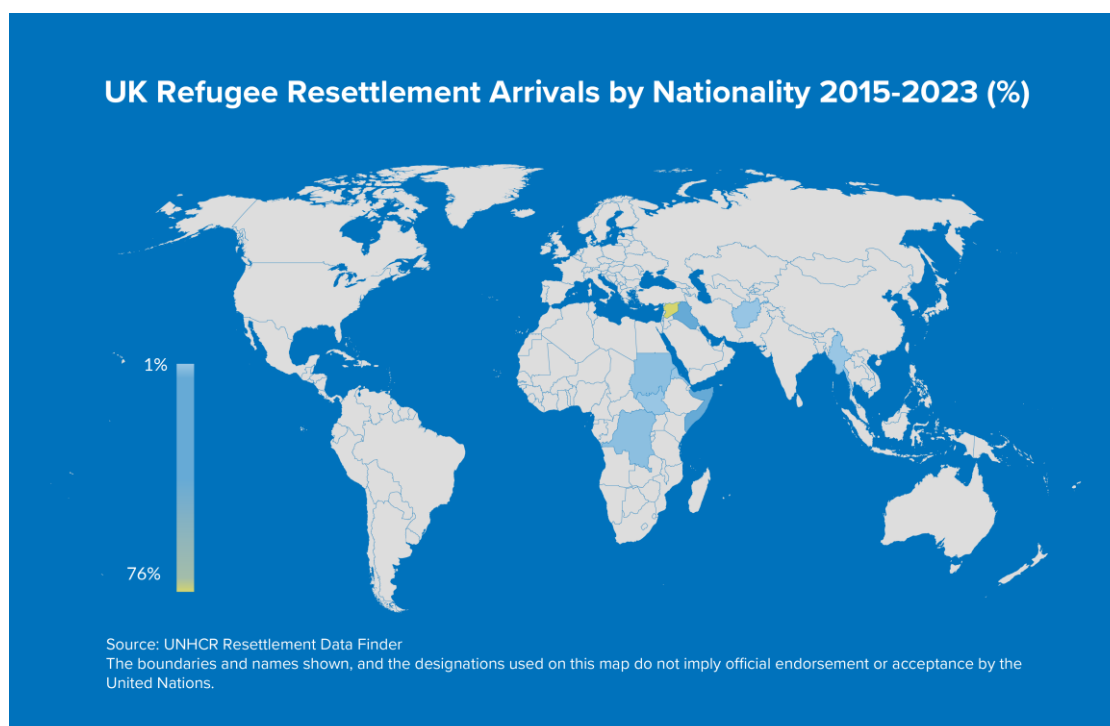
## UNHCR FACT SHEET ON SAFE AND REGULAR ROUTES TO THE UK FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

23 March 2023

*The vast majority of the world's refugees – some 69% – remain in countries neighbouring their own.<sup>i</sup> For those who seek protection outside their own regions, there are very few safe, regular routes available. This fact sheet sets out the official routes currently in place for people seeking to come to the United Kingdom as refugees or in order to seek protection. Importantly, there is no 'asylum visa' to the UK. Unless a refugee is able to access one of the routes set out below, they will not be able to travel to the UK in order to seek protection.*

**Resettlement** is a critical protection tool for refugees who have been identified as particularly at risk, and who cannot return home or integrate into the country where they have sought asylum. *It is the rare exception – available to fewer than 1% of refugees worldwide.* Although a critical and lifesaving mechanism, resettlement is not a solution for most refugees, and does not replace the right to seek asylum itself.

Since 2015, some 28,000 refugees have arrived in the UK through the resettlement programmes operated by the United Kingdom in partnership with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).<sup>ii</sup> The UK additionally supports UNHCR's global resettlement operations more broadly through its financial contributions to UNHCR. 76% of arrivals have been refugees from Syria, followed by Iraq (5.2%) Somalia (4.4%) and Sudan (4.1%) along with smaller numbers from Afghanistan, Eritrea, DRC, Myanmar and South Sudan. These cases are identified by UNHCR before being submitted to the UK Home Office for final decision.



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There is no application process for resettlement – refugees at heightened risk are identified by UNHCR through our ongoing protection programmes in countries of asylum. Currently, new resettlement opportunities to the UK for nationalities other than Afghans are minimal. The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) was launched in 2020 with the aim of creating a more global scheme. UNHCR has not been provided with a quota for the UKRS since 2020 and has been requested to restrict any new submissions to highly exceptional cases on an ad-hoc basis, amounting to a handful per year. There are still some UKRS cases which were submitted pre-pandemic which are arriving in the UK at a rate of around 100 individuals per month.

In June 2022, the Government agreed to receive up to 2000 referrals of Afghan refugees in the first year of Pathway 2 of the [Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme](#). A small number of refugees are also accepted under the [Mandate Resettlement Scheme](#) – less than 20 refugees per year since 2018, and just under 300 refugees since 2013.<sup>iii</sup>

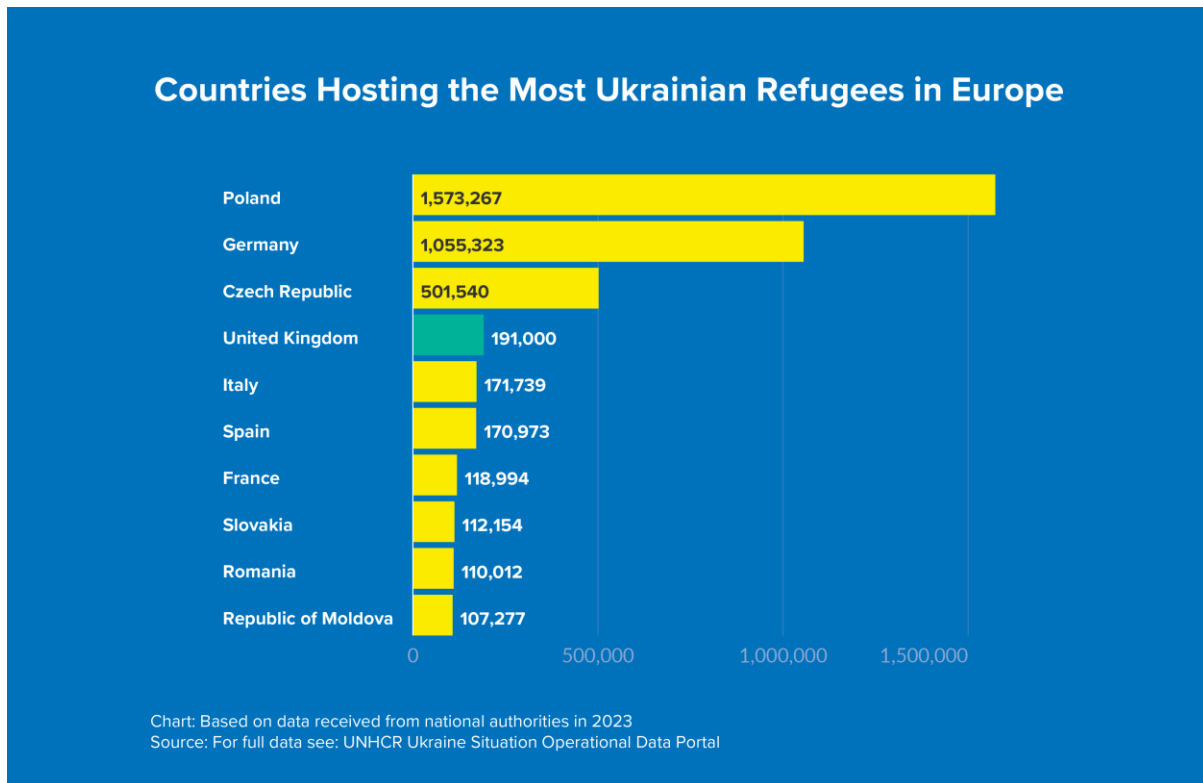
Adult refugees and beneficiaries of humanitarian protection in the UK have the right to apply for [family reunion](#) with their immediate relatives, defined in the Immigration Rules as spouses, partners and unmarried children under the age of 18. Refugee children, however, currently do not have the right to sponsor their parents.<sup>iv</sup> Since 2010, approximately 66,000 spouses, partners and children of refugees living in the UK were granted entry to the UK in this way. [Of these, approximately half came from just four nationalities: Iran, Syria, Eritrea and Somalia respectively.](#) Arrivals through this route have averaged 4-5,000 individuals each year since 2018.<sup>v</sup>

The *Nationality and Borders Act 2022* introduced a two-tier system and differentiated treatment for refugees, including access to family reunion.<sup>vi</sup> ‘Group 2’ refugees are normally not entitled to sponsor their families under family reunion, unless a refusal would breach the UK’s international obligations in respect of family unity in accordance with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The UK has also opened [bespoke schemes](#) to respond to specific situations of displacement, such as Afghanistan and Ukraine. For example, the UK Government announced that, as part of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), two pathways (Pathway 1 and 3) would allow for the relocation and evacuation of Afghan nationals from Afghanistan or countries in the region. This is in addition to Pathway 2 which is aimed to resettle Afghan refugees from neighbouring countries with the assistance of UNHCR, and the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme which allowed Afghans who worked with the UK Government and their families to arrive in the UK. The UK Government has also opened the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, the Ukraine Family Scheme, and the Ukraine Extension Scheme, to enable Ukrainians to enter or extend their stay in the UK. These bespoke schemes are nationality-based. Those coming through these routes do not arrive with refugee status in the UK, and their rights and entitlements are different.

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By the end of 2022, the UK had admitted approximately 21,000 Afghans through ARAP and ACRS Pathway 1. In addition, the UK has commendably provided protection to over 191,000 Ukrainians under the Ukraine visa schemes (figures as of 14 March 2023).<sup>vii</sup>



Finally, some refugees may be able to access education and labour mobility pathways, such as skilled worker or study visas, to enter the UK.<sup>viii</sup> As opposed to protection needs, [access to these opportunities is based on successfully meeting the employment criteria or academic excellence](#). In these cases, a person's leave in the UK is limited by the conditions of their work or study visa given that they are not granted refugee status upon arrival. [For refugees who do not fall within the parameters of these programmes, there are no safe and regular routes by which to travel to the UK, including for the purpose of seeking asylum.](#)<sup>ix</sup>

<sup>i</sup> See [UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2022](#).

<sup>ii</sup> See [UNHCR Resettlement Data Finder](#).

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/settlement-refugee-or-humanitarian-protection/family-reunion>

<sup>v</sup> [family-reunion-visa-grants-datasets-dec-2022.xlsx](#) (live.com)

<sup>vi</sup> *Nationality and Borders Act 2022*, available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/36/part/2/crossheading/treatment-of-refugees-support-for-asylumseekers/enacted>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data--2>

<sup>viii</sup> For example, in July 2021, the UK government announced a new Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot in coordination with Talent Beyond Boundaries, which aims to facilitate the admission of up to 100 displaced people and their families from Jordan and Lebanon via the Skilled Worker Visa.

<sup>ix</sup> The visa scheme for British Nationals (Overseas) from Hong Kong is based on a pre-existing legal tie to the UK rather than on risk of persecution.