

Welcoming New Neighbours - Setting up a national response to mass migration movements

The UK government's decision to expand the criteria for people from Ukraine to come to the UK to escape the war and conflict in Ukraine means that this will be the third mass migration to the UK in the last 12 months. Over the past year, Welcome Churches has equipped and supported UK churches to welcome people arriving on a BNO (British National Overseas); we have supported churches to welcome around 4,500 people from Afghanistan since August 2021, and alongside these and the many other refugees who come to the UK, we are now looking at encouraging and equipping the UK Church to welcome those arriving from the Ukraine.

Looking back, there are some key factors that helped us mobilise the Church to become involved with welcoming all of these new Neighbours and helped us open doors for the Church in new ways in the UK.

These are some of the things we have learned, that we are implementing again as we look forward to welcoming people from Ukraine:

Mobilising quickly. Mobilising quickly enables the Church to be at the forefront of the Welcome. Many organisations have strategy and policy decisions to make before they roll out their plans. In the UK, churches are in every community and can, with support and equipping, be quickly ready to welcome new Neighbours. With relocatees arriving from Afghanistan, we wrote our church training and started to run it online within a week. We equipped churches to understand who was arriving, to be aware of the effects of trauma, to have a good cultural awareness and understand what good practice involves when welcoming newly arrived refugees.

A high profile Christian advocate. Christian advocates with connections at government level help you grow your voice and the 'offer' of the Church in joining in with welcoming new arrivals. They can also advocate for the Church to work alongside other national stakeholders and local authorities. They can help with legitimacy of your offer, enhance your social media reach and potentially boost fundraising efforts.

Clear information. Information can help clarify the role of the church and what clear, practical support they are bringing. A good quality leaflet explaining to the government, local authorities and other interested parties what churches can offer with contact details for further discussions helps relieve any suspicions about the Church and helps clarify the role churches can play locally.

Partnerships. Partnerships with established national organisations to broaden your offer and to give churches a clear role in the welcome. Examples are a national baby equipment provision

charity so that churches can offer this support as they meet newly arrived people. Or perhaps a Christian charity that offers specialist help in employment or educational information and support. You may be able to raise funds and support these partners to also expand their work too.

Equip and open up the opportunity for local churches

If training includes a trauma-informed, cross cultural training which includes robust good practice training, then this is not only a strength to the church leaders and volunteers being trained, it also legitimises the role of churches and the professional way in which they are able to join in and welcome newly arriving people seeking asylum. Having volunteers who are trained is a huge strength both to the volunteers and to those receiving the welcome and support. In the UK, safeguarding and child protection is also an important aspect for churches to consider, to show that they are committed to keeping everyone safe.

Website. Having a new, dedicated website can also help with legitimacy - secular organisations and local authorities can see who you are and what you are clearly offering. This website can still link back to your main website and, if you are raising funds, can be linked to your main fundraising page. You should also provide an easy way for enquiries to be submitted via this website.

Transferable resources. When you are producing resources, try and make the resource transferable for refugees of other nationalities and countries. Produce in a way that makes it either easily transferable or translatable into other languages, or a product that refugees of all nationalities can benefit from.

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Please contact Welcome Churches if you would like to hear more about our work.
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