



ERSC

STRATEGY

REPORT

2024-2026



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DEFINITIONS

DISPLACED PERSON

A displaced person, as defined by the United Nations' International Organization for Migration (IOM), is someone compelled to leave their usual residence, often due to armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters, encompassing both internal and cross-border displacement.

REFUGEE

According to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is “A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”

PERSON SEEKING ASYLUM

A person seeking asylum is an individual seeking international protection, someone whose request for sanctuary is still pending processing. Wherever possible, we prefer to describe someone as a person seeking asylum, as we believe that the term “asylum seeker” can be dehumanising.

MIGRANT

A migrant is someone who has moved for reasons such as work, education or to join family. While poverty and economic hardship are valid reasons for leaving one's home, these individuals are typically referred to as migrants or, sometimes, economic migrants. It's important to note that economic opportunities are often a consideration for refugees and displaced people as well, but they are not, alone, sufficient grounds for being granted asylum under international law. Lots of people don't fit the legal definition of a refugee but could nevertheless be in danger if they went home due to political unrest or gang violence.

BACKGROUND

In the last decade, the global displacement crisis has reached staggering levels, with a reported 100 million people forced to leave their homes in 2022, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Behind this vast number are people fleeing terrifying conflict and violence in regions like Gaza, South Sudan, and Ukraine, in search of peace and stability. They are women, men and children facing genocide or human rights violations based on group persecution, such as the Rohingya and Kurdish communities, or LGBTQ individuals, who are hoping for acceptance and protection. Making the decision to leave your homes in search of a safer, better future is not an easy choice—it means leaving behind relatives, friends, and a sense of place, stepping into an uncertain

journey with the hope of finding security, opportunity, and a new beginning.

Each person's reasons for migrating are often complex and multifaceted. To address these diverse needs, the global community has attempted to define and distinguish between different migratory circumstances in order to shape appropriate responses and support mechanisms.

Of those forced to leave their homes, it's estimated 35.3 million are refugees, 5.4 million are people seeking asylum and 62.5 million are internally displaced, meaning they have not crossed an internationally recognised border (UNHCR, 2023). There are also millions of stateless people, who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic rights such as education, health

care, employment and freedom of movement.

Environmental issues, including climate change, natural disasters, and resource scarcity, are increasingly influential on people's movements. For instance, the 2022 floods in Pakistan highlighted the severe consequences of climate change, displacing communities and endangering livelihoods.

Traditionally, people affected by environmental disasters have preferred to stay close to their homes and families, seeking to return as soon as possible to rebuild. However, for some communities—such as those living in low-lying coastal or island areas—relocation may become necessary as their homes become uninhabitable due to rising sea levels or other climate impacts.

In recent years, climate change has displaced more people than conflicts, highlighting the urgent need for migration policies that address both immediate relief and long-term adaptation strategies. Effective migration policy should include measures for disaster risk preparedness, early warning systems, and support for communities striving to adapt to changing environmental conditions. These strategies are essential for helping people stay in their regions and build resilience against future challenges.

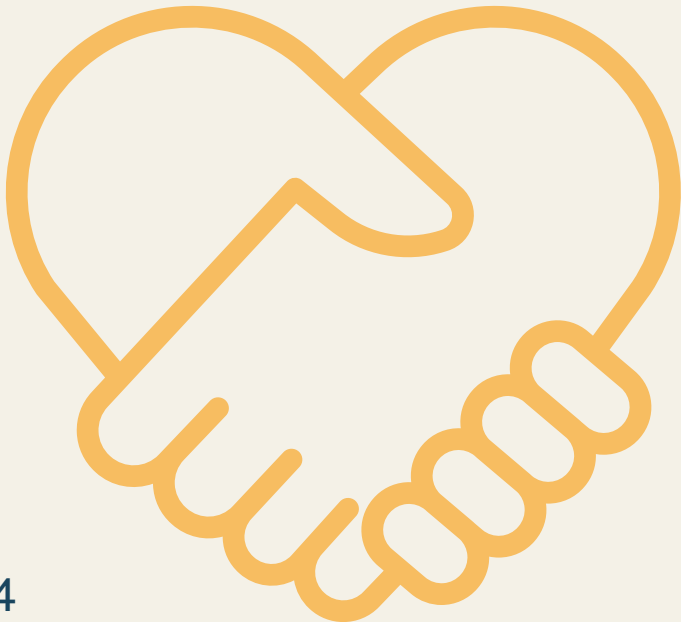


Photo by Maria Teneva on Unsplash

GLOBAL IMPACT

The 1951 Refugee Convention laid the foundation for refugee protection, emphasising the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning a displaced person to their home country. It also outlined the legal obligations of states to meet minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, including provisions for housing, work, and education. To fulfil their equitable share of responsibility, countries, particularly wealthier nations, must provide more substantial support to refugees and displaced persons through direct resettlement efforts and contributions to international humanitarian organisations. This approach acknowledges that not all nations face the same level of refugee influx or have the same resources to handle the situation, promoting a more equitable sharing

of global responsibility among nations.

Historical factors, including colonial legacies, subsequent dictatorships, and ongoing capitalist interests, have contributed to global inequalities and instabilities between and within countries (for further details see [Orakhelashvili, 2021](#)). This has left countries of origin ill-equipped to recover from conflicts and disasters and to support their internally displaced populations.

Neighbouring countries often find themselves unprepared and overwhelmed by the influx of displaced people, with 70 percent residing in countries bordering their home countries (UNHCR, 2023). The reality is that low- and middle-income countries host 76 percent of the world's refugees and others in need of international protection (UNHCR, 2022).

While Official Development Assistance (ODA) reached a record \$287 billion in 2022, aid flows to developing regions fell by \$4 billion. The overall increase in ODA was driven by a \$28 billion rise in aid to developed countries and a \$20 billion rise for asylum seekers and refugees in donor countries. This shift in internal aid allocation has raised concerns about the integrity of development aid as a crucial resource in addressing global challenges like poverty, violence, and inequalities. There are calls for a greater balance to ensure that development aid supports both global challenges and the financial needs of refugees in Western nations. The disproportionate hosting burden on low- and middle-income countries, coupled with insufficient financial support from wealthier nations, highlights a

significant imbalance in global refugee assistance.

We are witnessing further dissonance with wealthier nations advocating for "safe and legal routes" while simultaneously tightening their borders and evading their responsibilities. In some instances, this entails the forcible turning away of migrants at a country's border. For example, a group of refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia were taken from Lesbos and abandoned at sea by the Greek authorities. The group was later rescued and taken to Turkey (Guardian, 2023).

There has also been a crackdown on humanitarian workers supporting refugees. According to research published by the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, in 2022 there were "at least 102 human rights defenders facing criminal or

administrative proceedings in the EU for acts of solidarity with migrants".

In Italy, 21 sea rescuers, including crew members of the rescue ship *luventa*, were tried for "facilitating illegal immigration" and were only acquitted after two years and 40 hearings. Even Germany, initially known for its "open door" policy that made it the EU's largest host for refugees, has implemented greater restrictions and seen a rise in hate-fueled attacks on refugees.



Photo by Salah Darwish on Unsplash



UK CONTEXT

In the UK, there are several routes for resettlement that provide protection and support for refugees and displaced individuals. One primary route is UNHCR resettlement, where the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees identifies individuals who are most in need of protection and refers them to the UK for resettlement. Another significant pathway is the asylum system, which allows individuals already in the UK to apply for protection based on a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country. In addition to these, the UK has introduced bespoke humanitarian schemes for specific groups, such as the Ukraine Scheme, which offers refuge to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, and the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa, which supports those who sought to leave Hong

Kong following political developments. Lastly, community sponsorship offers a unique approach where local groups or charities, like the Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle, can directly support and resettle refugees by providing practical help and building a welcoming community.

However, the number of resettlement routes available is relatively limited. Currently, the UK hosts only 1% of the world's 26.4 million displaced people, reflecting a gap between its wealth and its resettlement commitments. This shortage of safe and legal pathways often drives individuals to take dangerous routes, such as the small boat crossings across the English Channel. In the first nine months of 2022, while 24,881 individuals from

countries like Albania, Eritrea and Sudan undertook these perilous crossings, only 867 were resettled through UNHCR routes. This disparity highlights how the lack of sufficient safe routes exacerbates the risks faced by refugees and enables human traffickers to exploit their desperation.

The previous Government implemented various hostile and deterrent-based policies. The former Home Secretary, Priti Patel, proposed a Nationality and Borders Bill to create a two-tier asylum system, where those arriving by irregular routes, such as crossing the Channel on small boats, would be denied asylum. This plan was dropped, but a later proposal aimed to send those arriving by “illegal” routes to Rwanda, where approved claims would grant refugee status in

Rwanda, No asylum seeker would be allowed to reapply in the UK. In November 2023, the UK Supreme Court ruled the Rwanda scheme unlawful, citing risks to genuine refugees and Rwanda's poor human rights record. Despite this, the government introduced legislation to declare Rwanda a safe country and disregard other legal frameworks that would prevent deportations. The new Government has committed to scrapping the scheme entirely.

These policies are underpinned by the rhetoric that migrants are a burden and that many "refugees" do not deserve asylum. Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman falsely claimed most Channel crossers are "economic migrants," despite evidence to the contrary. The Refugee Council found that three out of four Channel crossers this year would be granted asylum if processed.

A 2018 Migration Advisory

Committee review and a study of 30 years of data from Western Europe highlighted the positive economic contributions of migrants and refugees, including an average surplus of £2,370 per migrant and overall economic improvements and reduced unemployment in host countries.

Another 2018 analysis looked at 30 years of data from 15 Western European countries, finding that refugees and migrants contribute positively to their host nations' economies within five years of arrival. The study reveals that following a surge in migration, the overall economic strength and sustainability of the host country improve, and unemployment rates decrease. The benefits of migration and the hosting of refugees is dependent on the policies of the host country, including access of refugees to markets, education and language lessons. These analyses focus solely on the economic

benefits; there is also the rich cultural contributions that migration brings.

While it is crucial to challenge the narrative of refugees as a burden with evidence, we must be careful not to imply that only those with skills and an ability to contribute are deserving of support. Refugees and those seeking asylum have complex needs and are fleeing extremely difficult circumstances. It is essential to remember the moral imperative of supporting those in need.

For those fortunate enough to make it to the UK, their challenges do not end there, with lengthy and restrictive asylum processes inhibiting the ability of families and individuals to find true peace and security in their new environment. The Home Office can take months or even years to make a decision on an asylum case, and there is a growing backlog of cases. At the end of June 2022, there were over 117,000

people awaiting an initial decision on their asylum case. Almost all people seeking asylum are not allowed to work and are dependent on state support with as little as £6.43 a day to live on -forcing many to live in poverty. Additionally, people seeking asylum have no choice about the housing accommodation they are provided and are housed into what the home office refers to as dispersal accommodation.

Detention in the UK immigration and asylum system, an administrative process managed by Home Office officials, are also highly controversial. It involves holding asylum seekers and migrants to establish their identity or facilitate their immigration claim or removal. Detainees can be held at various points, including arrival or after visa expiration. Initially placed in holding facilities, they may be moved to long-term centres like those near Heathrow Airport. The UK has no maximum detention duration, except

for pregnant women, who must be released after 72 hours. A 2018 British Red Cross study found one person had been detained for two years and seven months, and another had been detained four times. Detention severely impacts mental health, with prolonged periods and high rates of suicide attempts among detainees. In 2017, only 45% of the 27,000 people detained were removed from the UK, raising questions about detention's necessity. The fear and trauma from detention often persist long after release, affecting detainees' willingness to engage with immigration authorities.

Even once granted refugee status, many struggle with a lack of guidance in accessing resources to rebuild their lives and integrate into their new communities. They often face isolation caused by separation from family and friends, language barriers, and potential placement in unwelcoming areas with limited

choices for housing and support. The additional restrictions of family reunion routes, which allows close family members such as a spouse and children under 18 to reunite with an adult who has been granted refugee status in the UK, can leave refugees both in the UK and elsewhere in vulnerable and isolating positions. Furthermore, austerity policies have disproportionately affected poor communities, intensifying the impact of poverty and health inequalities, especially among refugees and notably within black and ethnic minority populations. The closure of community spaces and essential services compounds the lack of support for those experiencing hardship.



WHAT IS COMMUNITY

SPONSORSHIP

The UK government's Community Sponsorship scheme enables local communities to sponsor a refugee family or individual, securing housing for at least 2 years and supporting them during their first year of resettlement in the UK. While the scheme offers a unique opportunity to assist people fleeing conflict, it is also a significant responsibility. To be approved as community sponsors, groups must demonstrate adequate resources for housing and other financial support, through the fundraising of at least £9000. They must have adequate personnel, as well as a well-informed and credible resettlement plan, all while ensuring no threat to the sponsored family. This plan may encompass assisting the family in finding employment, navigating the school, benefits, and health systems, arranging driving lessons and licences, and connecting the family with other community groups, including faith, interest, and hobby organisations. Once approved, community sponsors are assigned a vulnerable family identified by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which may include those in need of urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, or women and children at risk.



WHAT IS COMMUNITY

SPONSORSHIP

Individuals arriving through community sponsorship come with refugee status, a distinction that significantly impacts their arrival process and the establishment of their lives. This designation grants them immediate access to various rights that people seeking asylum lack, sparing them from some of the challenges of the asylum system.

ERSC recognises community sponsorship as a vital component in the broader effort to support those seeking sanctuary in the UK, complementing other resettlement and asylum routes. This initiative empowers communities to actively participate in providing refuge, fostering social cohesion and a sense of togetherness. However, the success of community sponsorship hinges on supportive local and government policies that ensure social protection for resettled individuals and families. While community sponsorship plays a significant role, it should not shift the entire responsibility onto ordinary people and civil society; comprehensive support from all levels of government remains essential.

THE FOUNDATION OF EDINBURGH REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP CIRCLE

The Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle was founded in May 2020 by a group of friends from various backgrounds, including Syria, Australia, Germany, England, and Edinburgh, who shared a common goal: to provide a welcoming home to those in need in the city they love.

The group operates within the framework of The UK government's Community Sponsorship scheme, as described above. Since its inception, the organisation has grown and achieved registered charity status, with an expanding membership that brings a diverse range of experiences, including the third sector, legal expertise, health, and hospitality. A core principle of the group is to be guided by individuals who have first-hand experience with displacement and the resettlement process, ensuring that their efforts remain deeply rooted in empathy and understanding.

Our dedication to tangible solidarity is deeply ingrained in our collective commitment, drawing strength from the lived experiences of some among us and the shared knowledge gained through organising in regions marked by the harsh realities of displacement and asylum systems. This commitment propels us to stand together, leveraging our varied backgrounds and insights to create a supportive and empathetic environment for individuals navigating the challenges of displacement.

Through their dedicated efforts, the Edinburgh Refugee Sponsorship Circle is making a tangible difference in the lives of displaced individuals taking a person-centred and trauma-informed way, to offer them hope and a fresh start in a new home.

OUR VALUES AND APPROACHES

TRAUMA-INFORMED

A trauma-informed approach recognises and responds to the widespread impact of trauma on refugees. This involves understanding the signs and symptoms of trauma, integrating knowledge about trauma into policies and practices, and actively working to avoid re-traumatisation. It ensures that all interactions and interventions are conducted with an awareness of the past and ongoing trauma experienced by refugees, promoting their safety, empowerment, and healing.

RIGHTS-BASED

A rights-based approach ensures that the charity's activities and policies are grounded in the principles of human rights. This means recognizing refugees as rights-holders with entitlements under international and national law. The approach involves advocating for and protecting these rights, ensuring access to justice, non-discrimination, and the fulfilment of basic needs such as housing, education, healthcare, and work. It emphasises the agency and dignity of refugees, holding institutions accountable for upholding their rights.

PERSON-CENTRED

A person-centred approach places the individual needs, preferences, and experiences of refugees and volunteers at the core of all activities and decision-making processes. We aim to recognise and nurture the inherent strength and individual skills and talents people bring, enabling them flourish. This involves actively listening to and valuing their voices, providing tailored support that respects their autonomy and choices.

INCLUSIVE

Inclusivity means creating an environment where all individuals, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances, feel welcomed, valued, and supported. This involves actively working to eliminate barriers to participation accessibility . Inclusivity also means fostering diversity within the organisation and its community, promoting equity, and ensuring that all voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes. Community-based safeguarding is an integral part of this approach, ensuring that safeguarding measures are culturally sensitive, locally relevant, and involve the community in creating a safe and supportive environment for everyone.

STRENGTH-BASED

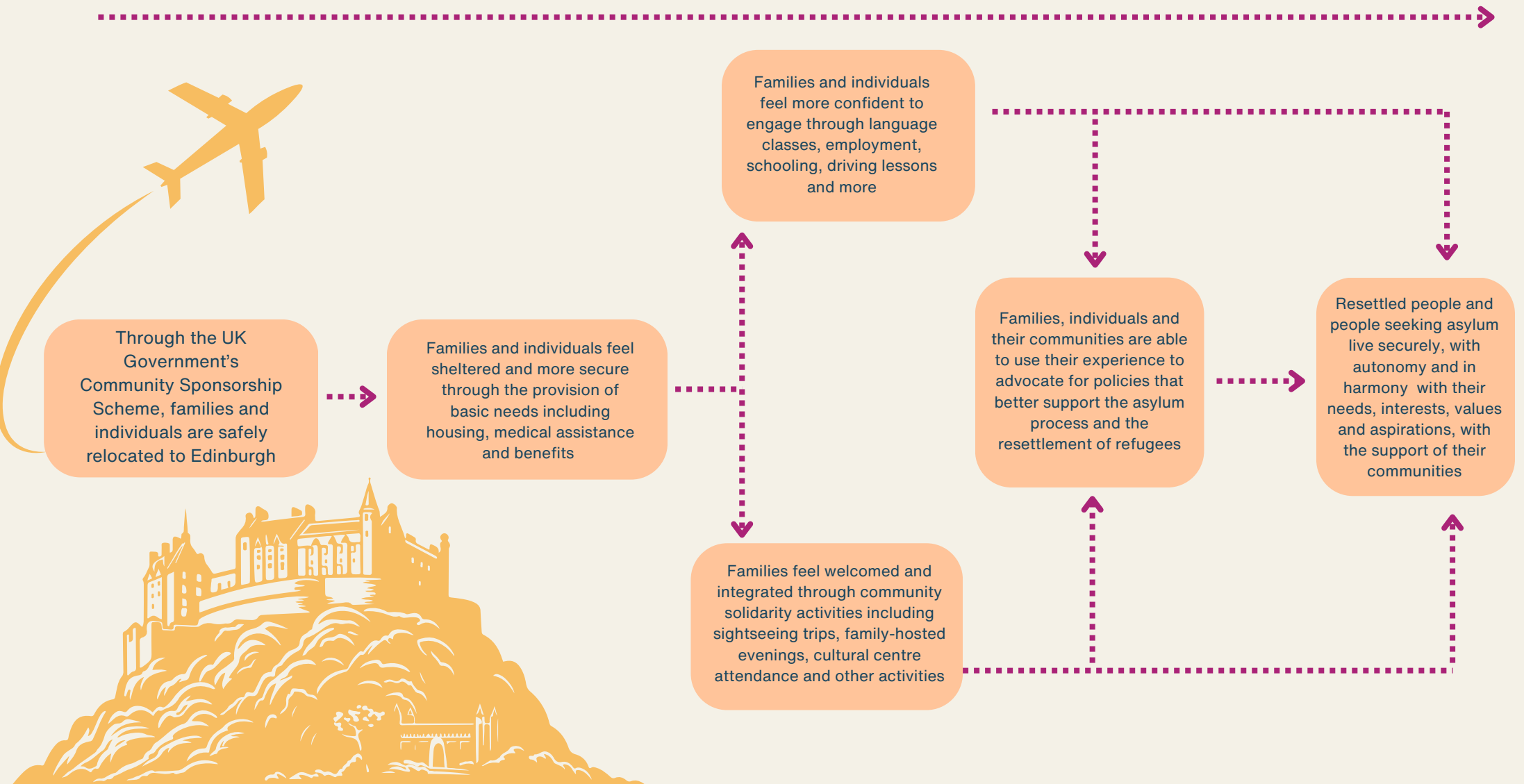
We inherently see everyone as a whole person, recognising and celebrating their talents and skills. We aim to integrate these strengths by creating opportunities for them to be showcased. This approach applies to the people we support, our volunteers, and the wider communities we work with, ensuring that everyone's abilities are valued and utilised.

SYSTEMS CRITICAL

We believe that the migration system is deeply flawed and by design and incompetency ineffective, inhuman and responsible for an unacceptable amount of suffering in the UK and globally. While our work with the families is about individuals we understand ourselves also as part of a wider movement towards real system change. We actively combat the stigmatising decisive and xenophobic language and narratives about migrants and refugees promoted by some media and politicians and promote safe routes and a rights- and community based welcome.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

A person-centred, trauma-informed, and human rights-based approach that centres families and communities in decision-making processes by engaging in tailored support and collaboration at every stage. The voices and needs of the families are always respected.





OUR GOALS FOR 2024-26

EXPANDING SPONSORSHIP

Building on our success in resettling two families, we aim to leverage our community's skills and resources to secure institutional support for sponsoring a third family. We will enhance governance, collaboration, and safeguarding processes to ensure we stay true to our values and operate efficiently as we expand our network.

ENHANCING WELCOMING SPACES IN SCOTLAND

Utilise our established community network to foster and create more welcoming spaces for refugees throughout Scotland, promoting inclusivity and support. We will connect with other local groups, charities, and institutions for a more cohesive and collaborative approach, taking the New Scots Integration Strategy into consideration.



ADDRESSING HOUSING CHALLENGES

We acknowledge the critical housing issues in the UK, particularly in Edinburgh. We are committed to securing long-term, trauma-informed housing solutions that reduce the need for frequent moves and mitigate the risk of evictions or rent increases, thereby alleviating pressure on local councils. We will explore investment and fundraising options that could support the purchasing of property.

INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING

Develop and enhance mechanisms that ensure the involvement of resettled families and volunteers in our decision-making processes, promoting inclusivity and shared commitment.

ADVOCACY FOR HUMANE ASYLUM AND RESETTLEMENT POLICIES

Hold the new government accountable by advocating for a more humane asylum and resettlement system, designed with input from those it seeks to support. We will take our ideas on improving the sponsorship scheme into the Community Sponsorship Alliance to reach national-level advocacy.

