

## **London Chamber of Commerce and Industry submission to the Commission on the Integration of Refugees**

*March 2023*

### **What does refugee integration mean to you and what should communities look like where refugees are well integrated?**

For the London business community, refugees are key to the life of the capital. London is a global city and it welcomes people from across the world who are forced to flee war and persecution.

From the Huguenots of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to Ukrainian refugees in the 2020s, London has always been a welcoming city for people to start their lives anew after traumatic and tragic circumstances.

We support the words and deeds of the London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, when he states that London is proud to provide refuge to those seeking sanctuary. As the Mayor has rightly stated, our capital is richer for their presence in our communities.

London's very success is based upon its openness and diversity. This enables new innovations in business, science and the arts to develop and grow and has contributed to London contributing over 20% towards the GDP of the United Kingdom.

This is not to say that there are not issues to be addressed in the capital to help all communities to come together. London has a higher rate of child poverty than Teesside with over 200,000 children facing poverty. Basic services to support refugees are not always easily accessible such as translation services for people who may not speak or write English proficiently and the constant issues in London, with the high cost of housing, leading to severe deprivation for refugees who have just endured traumatic experiences.

With public debate rightly focused on issues to do with mental and physical wellbeing, it is a tragic error that this level of attention is not always focused on the needs of refugees.

Nonetheless, with London businesses having to cope with skills gaps and vacancies not being filled, the opportunity for refugees to fill these vacancies and contribute to the London and national economy should not be missed. The skills crisis affecting London's businesses, since the end of the EU transition period, sees no sign of abating. We recognise that there is a need to support and upskill people who have been out of the labour market for many years.

Whilst this long term work takes place, businesses across London do not see why Home Office restrictions should stop asylum seekers and refugees playing their role

in supporting themselves and the wider community. Only then, will effective integration of refugees in communities take place.

**How could the central government, devolved governments, local government and the voluntary sector better coordinate their work to tackle the challenges of supporting refugee integration across the UK?**

The Home Office needs to be more accessible to the London business community.

Whilst we welcome and support the active engagement of a range of Government departments with London businesses on refugee related issues, this same level of positive engagement is not on show from the Home Office.

The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry have very good links with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). With the DWP, we are working on several work streams to support refugees which will include a jobs fair for refugees on 31 May.

We also have very good links with other Government departments on refugee matters such as the Cabinet Office, Department for Business and Trade and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

However, the Home Office has decided not to engage in dialogue or with work streams with the London Chamber to support refugees in the capital. We trust this is an unfortunate oversight that will be rectified rather than an indication of a continuation of the hostile environment policy which not only harmed the interest of refugees but was also inimical to economic growth and prosperity in communities across London.

We do agree that there should be a stronger relationship between all Government departments with London local authorities and the London Mayor. The current disjunction between central, local and regional government is leading to a lack of a joined up approach on housing, health and business support.

Business support may not have as much prominence as other issues when considering the immediate needs of refugees. However, London is a city based on entrepreneurialism. Stronger business support services can help people move beyond poverty to providing the jobs, products and services that London – and the UK – needs.

We are undertaking research into the jobs and business support needs of refugees in London and we will share this research with the Commission once this work is completed later this year.

**What challenges do organisations (in the public, private and third sector) face in providing services for refugees and asylum seekers (including but not limited to housing, education, training, healthcare, children's services and social services)?**

For the business community, at a time when skills gaps are holding back business and economic growth, the unnecessary restrictions on asylum seekers and refugees seeking work is counter-intuitive to the Government's pro-growth policy.

The housing crisis in London is also exacerbating problems for refugees. A House of Commons debate in March 2023 revealed that 1200 Ukrainian refugees were now homeless in the capital despite Treasury belatedly responding to the DLUHC call for additional funding for the Homes for Ukrainians programme. This situation shows the need for long term planning when considering the needs of refugees.

### **What actions are needed to overcome the challenges faced by refugees, asylum seekers and service providers?**

The housing problems which impact refugees in London has led to the London Mayor's *Life Off the Streets* programme which provides a range of services and initiatives to help people sleeping rough come off the streets and rebuild their lives, including people who are not from the UK.

In addition, there are also specific services and initiatives to support non-UK national rough sleepers to find a sustainable route off the streets, including Routes Home, the Immigration Advice for Rough Sleepers Fund, and the Homeless Migrants Advisory Panel.

The scale of the problem means that work between regional and central government needs to be enhanced to tackle this housing crisis for refugees once and for all.

London Councils, which represents local authorities across the capital, have also identified specific issues with Ukrainian refugees and their information is below:

### **When Ukrainians have arrived in your local area, what support have they most wanted to access and what issues have been a priority**

- The top 5 issues that boroughs said were a priority for Ukrainian arrivals including sorting housing, arranging school places, setting up a bank account, enabling access to ESOL, followed by access employment support.
- 48% of boroughs thought that sorting housing was either the first or second main priority for Ukrainians, 40% said the same for enrolling children in schools, 40% for the setting up bank accounts, 28% for ESOL and 24% for access to employment.
- Other areas flagged, but considered less pressing for Ukrainians, included GP registration, mental health support, connection to the local community and understanding immigration status.

### **When asked to identify areas/services where there are gaps/issues that mean Ukrainians struggle to access support**

- Out of 25 boroughs, 68% (17) identified housing, 52% (13) highlighted access to mental health support, 48% (12) access to employment and 36% (9) boroughs highlighted ESOL. 12% (3) boroughs said there were gaps arranging school places, and 8% (2) said there was a gap around helping Ukrainians to understand their immigration status and connecting to local community groups, and only 4% (1) said there was a gap for them to access benefits/getting bank account set up.

**When and how do you come into contact with Ukrainians that have not arrived on a Homes for Ukraine visa, but are in the UK from other routes i.e. the Family Visa Scheme or the Extension Scheme**

- 80% of boroughs (20 out of 25), said they identified family visa scheme arrivals or extension scheme arrivals through homelessness placements, 52% (13) boroughs said they identified them through school placements and 48% (12) through housing advice and support services and through local charities and organisations. Other routes included job fairs and employment support (identified by 36% of boroughs), through social care referrals (28%) and through welcome sessions or other events hosted by boroughs.

**Please select which of the approaches listed below you have applied, using the local authority HfU tariff, to help Ukrainians access housing post-sponsorship**

- 72% of respondents (18 out of 25) have helped Ukrainians pay deposits on housing, 60% (15) have paid their first months rent or more, 56% (14) have provided furniture, household essentials or helped with moving costs, 40% (10) have made incentive payments to landlords, 28% (7) have commissioned Beam to help with employment and housing access, 12% (3) have commissioned other organisations to support. None have acted as a guarantor to LAs.
- At least 10 boroughs have introduced a top up payment, either up until the government 12 month top up, or above the government top up to the thank you payment. A few other boroughs are in the process of implementing a top up fund.

We recognise the work of local authorities to support refugees but as this figures indicate, councils are under severe financial pressure to meet the demand that needs to be met. A joined up approach between central, regional and local government – with business – would go a long way to address these systemic problems.

**How does the way that politicians, the media and the general public talk about refugees and asylum seekers affect refugees' ability to integrate into British society?**

**Our preliminary findings have shown that integration policy has rarely been a political priority of the UK government. What can be done to put integration at the heart of government policy on refugees and asylum seekers?**

We recognise that during a cost of living crisis, the tendency to blame others for our misfortune can occur.

However, we believe this damaging narrative must change not only for ethical and social reasons but also for the good of the economy.

As the former CBI President, Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea, has said in respect of Ukrainian refugees:

*Businesses are keen to assist refugees arriving in the UK by working alongside ministers and civil society to help support and employ people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.*

*Since the outset of the crisis, many companies have been helping humanitarian efforts through monetary donations, alongside items including power generators, medicines and food.*

*Businesses are already demonstrating by their actions they are doing all that they can to go the extra mile.*

This stance from business also relates to refugees from other parts of the world. We recognise the enormous contribution that refugees have made to our national life. Stigmatising refugees for economic ills that have nothing to do with the refugees themselves must end.

Embracing the diversity of our nation is key to our continued economic success.

**Additional information**

London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) is the voice of London business and the premier sounding board for engagement with businesses in the capital. As the capital's largest independent business network, we enable businesses to work together in order to prosper individually and contribute to the collaborative economy of London and, ultimately, to that of the UK.

We help to create and maintain London's position as the world's most dynamic, connected, equitable and sustainable city in which to work, live, and visit. We promote and support London not just as a sizeable full-spectrum economy and as the capital of the UK but as a global city responsible for the defence of free and fair trade and the promotion of peace.

The London Chamber has decided to support Ukraine and its citizens in these difficult times following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We will support Ukrainian refugees in London looking for work or interested in setting up their businesses. Pursuing this goal, we have introduced a special position within our Policy and Public

Impact Team — Ukraine Project Manager. Within the Ukrainian Project framework, we have started to plan activities such as online webinars, B2B matchmaking sessions, meetings with government officials of different levels, and engagement with national and local NGOs.

We are working with the Cabinet Office, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the International Chambers of Commerce on this effort. Together with DWP, we have agreed on an action plan to help Ukrainian refugees find a job. We will transfer all received appeals on this matter through the DWP for processing at the Jobcentre Plus network.

Those Ukrainian nationals who plan to relocate their business or establish a new one in London or across the UK will receive full support from LCCI and access to a range of business services, from networking events to bespoke advice. Our various tiers are tailored to provide businesses of all sectors and sizes with the support they need.

Among the most popular services that we can offer for Ukrainian companies are:

- Access to LCCI Members' Lounge in the City. This is the perfect space to catch up on work, meet with colleagues and clients or simply recharge over a coffee. The lounge also includes a meeting room which can be booked for private use.
- Access to over 200+ business events and networking opportunities, including member and partner-run events.
- LCCI Business Mentoring. This programme matches small and medium business leaders with an experienced business mentor to act as a sounding board and advisor and help small business leaders achieve their business goals.
- LCCI can help you source the correct information for your business. You can access a wide range of business development support services, from B2B marketing data lists to credit reports and business research on UK and overseas markets.
- Access to business sectors, associations and interest groups. These groups bring together professionals from different sectors to enable networking and collaborations, represent key challenges and opportunities, and share best practices across critical themes.
- Business profile-building opportunities. LCCI membership can help boost business visibility and promote the company to our network of businesses. These include featuring on our online Members' Directory or using the directory to search and connect with other companies that are part of membership.

Apart from regular chamber service applications, we expect many requests from companies and private individuals regarding various aspects of assistance, including those related to the terrible events in Ukraine. Our team will individually process all submissions with the aim of maximum efficiency.