



SEEKING SANCTUARY

A snapshot of experiences under the Ukraine Family and Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship schemes in the UK

SEPTEMBER 2022



Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a Snapshot Assessment on the opportunities and challenges encountered under the **Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS)** and the **Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (HUSS)**; two UK Government schemes opened in response to the escalation of conflict in Ukraine. The assessment was carried out by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, in May and June 2022. UNHCR interviewed nineteen Ukrainian adults who arrived in the UK through these schemes, five Local Authorities (LAs), five Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and ten sponsors.

As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the UK Government announced in March 2022 two schemes to support Ukrainian nationals to come to the UK: the UFS and the HUSS. This report seeks to foster a better understanding of the experiences faced by Ukrainians, the LAs, NGOs and sponsors under these schemes. The interviews conducted not only shed light on some of the challenges faced, but equally highlighted some positive practices and practical recommendations which could help strengthen the UK's reaction to large-scale refugee responses relying on community support.

Although Ukrainians who arrive in the UK through one of the UK Government schemes are granted leave to remain for three years rather than refugee status or humanitarian protection, UNHCR considers Ukrainians who have fled the recent conflict to be *prima facie* refugees (unless an individual falls under one of the exclusion clauses). The forced displacement crisis arising from the conflict is now the largest globally, and the UK Government pursued a rapid, innovative response. In line with UNHCR's mandate to ensure that refugees are protected and able to secure solutions, including where appropriate through integration in new communities, UNHCR has conducted this assessment with the aim of generating insights into the emerging lessons from the schemes.

KEY FINDINGS

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCHEMES

Overall, participants highlighted that the schemes have been a positive and rapid response to the displacement of large numbers of Ukrainians. In particular, they referred to the following positive aspects of the schemes:

Greater flexibility

The requirements for these schemes are less strict than those applied to refugee family reunion applications and refugee community sponsorship. This has allowed more members of the public and family members to be involved, which has in turn translated to a much larger number of individuals who have been

supported. For instance, the greater flexibility of the UFS compared to family reunion applications has allowed more family members to come to the UK, who would have otherwise not had a route into the country. Compared to the Syrian Vulnerable Resettlement Scheme, which resettled over 20,000 refugees displaced from Syria over five years, 125,900 Ukrainians have entered the UK through the UFS and HUSS from March to September 2022. NGOs have all noted that the UK Home Office acted rapidly to ensure that a route was available to Ukrainians in need of support and has shown flexibility with the criteria for the schemes.

Community support

All participants highlighted that Ukrainians arriving through the schemes have been supported at different levels, from LAs to the local community, from sponsors to wider networks of Ukrainians. According to them, these different types and increased level of community support have allowed for a more comprehensive integration pathway into UK society. Within weeks or a month(s) of their arrival, Ukrainians have largely been able to access welfare benefits, Job Centre Plus (JCP) appointments, BRP card appointments, GP and school registration, and open a bank account.

THE UKRAINE FAMILY SCHEME

The UFS took an important step towards a broader definition of 'immediate' family members and lower requirements necessary for family members to reunite in the UK.

Although only one Ukrainian who arrived under this scheme was interviewed as part of the report, NGOs and LAs shared their experience

of the UFS, and highlighted the following barriers.

Higher risk of homelessness

Most LAs (4 out of 5) and NGOs have observed that Ukrainians arriving through the UFS are at higher risk of homelessness than their HUSS counterparts. Given that there are no formal requirements with regards to the accommodation provided by family members, they are at a higher risk of being hosted in unsuitable accommodation. For example, the Ukrainian family who arrived through the UFS and was interviewed as part of this assessment, was placed in temporary accommodation by their LA three days after arrival as the family accommodation was not appropriate to host two additional individuals.

Limited financial support and information to family members

NGOs and LAs noted that those hosting family members through the UFS seem to face financial difficulties. Often, they are hosting larger numbers of individuals compared to sponsors under the HUSS, but they are not entitled to receive the £350 monthly payment. As a result, NGOs have had to provide UFS sponsors with information on additional financial support they may be able to access and have spoken to LAs on their behalf. Similarly, three LAs and one NGO noted that family members in the UK are less able to support their family members in addressing queries on employment, benefits, BRP appointments or healthcare, as they are not provided with the same level of information as HUSS sponsors.

Strain created on LAs

Every LA participating in the assessment highlighted the resource strain they experience under this scheme, given that they are required to provide housing and integration support to Ukrainians arriving under the UFS, but are not given additional funding (compared to the £10,500 they receive per Ukrainian under the HUSS). In addition, they stressed that their lack of information on the number of Ukrainians arriving under this scheme means that they are unable to plan for the level of support that might be required in their area.

THE HOMES FOR UKRAINE SPONSORSHIP SCHEME

The HUSS has allowed members of the public to open their homes to those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Through this report, the following lessons were raised by participants:

Eligibility conditions

Unlike the UFS, Ukrainians can only apply to the HUSS from outside the UK. UNHCR became aware of an individual who was in the UK on a tourist visa, and who then had to leave the country to be able to apply for the scheme.

Application process

Ukrainian participants provided mixed comments on the application process. Whilst some explained that the application process was lengthy but straightforward, those with little or no English language skills reported difficulties in understanding the information and application documents required. Overall, the sponsor's support in completing the application was crucial. Once submitted, participants

explained that they were unable to track the status of their application and no timeline was provided on how long it would take to receive a response. The time applicants waited to receive their visa varied between 1-2 weeks (16%), 2 weeks - 3 weeks (42%), 1 month (37%) and 50 days (5%).

Accommodation and relationship between sponsors and guests

Overall, participants and sponsors have had a positive experience so far, and LAs and NGOs did not yet observe concerning numbers of relationships breaking down. All participants highlighted that they engaged in conversations with their hosts prior to their arrival, which made them feel reassured about their living arrangements. Also, over half of the participants had received videos and photos of the accommodation prior to their arrival and all participants except two felt that their accommodation met their needs. These two participants cited lack of privacy and smoking habits of the sponsor. While being content with their accommodation, a third participant indicated that they might need to relocate if their older son were not accepted in the local school. This reason, as well as those mentioned above, would not qualify participants for re-matching, which is limited to instances when the LA considers that the accommodation is unsafe or unsuitable.

Furthermore, there is concern among LAs and NGOs about the housing situation of Ukrainians past the 6-month sponsorship period. Sixty percent of interviewed sponsors said they could or wanted to continue hosting their guests beyond the six months' period.

Safeguards

Although all Ukrainian participants felt safe with their sponsors, UNHCR observed delays in the performance of DBS, accommodation, and welfare checks, which seems to be dependent on the capacity of each LA.

TIMING OF SAFEGUARDING CHECKS

- Two of the five LAs are working on a backlog and undertake most checks after the guest's arrival.
- 40% of interviewed sponsors had their DBS results and accommodation checks conducted after their guest's arrival.
- In Southwest London, one NGO reported that many sponsors did not have Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks carried out prior to the guest's arrival. Another NGO also stated that they had been made aware of digitally illiterate sponsors who are unable to complete online DBS check applications. UNHCR spoke with one Ukrainian staying with an elderly sponsor who has not initiated the DBS application due to digital illiteracy, and who is not intending to complete the application. This type of situation suggests that there is a risk that DBS checks might be left to the discretion of the sponsor.
- The proportion of DBS and accommodation checks that have failed in the five participating councils is rather mixed, ranging from less than 2% for 2 LAs, to 5%, 10% and up to 18%. According to the LAs that participated in the assessment, in most cases it is the accommodation that does not meet the requisite standard (mostly due to overcrowding) rather than a failure to pass the DBS checks.
- 35% of Ukrainian participants had not yet had the welfare visit, after living with the host for three weeks to one and half months. They all live in rural areas or towns.

Profiles with specific vulnerabilities: Unaccompanied children

One LA recorded having identified twenty-two unaccompanied children who entered the UK via the HUSS, some of which have no relationship with their sponsor. Also, UNHCR spoke with one sponsor who was hosting an unaccompanied minor. Worryingly, the LA conducted the DBS and accommodation checks after arrival.

Integration

Ukrainian participants have been able to access most essential services, including Universal Credit, Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) cards and Job Centre Plus (JPC) appointments, opening bank accounts, registering with the GP, and accessing the school system (70% of participants with children have been able to register their children in school). Also, all but one received their £200 Welcome Payment within days of their arrival. Overall, while participants do not feel integrated yet, they feel welcome in the UK. The main challenges remain in accessing English language classes (68% have struggled to register) and employment, with concerns over recognition of their studies. Only one participant had found a new job. Generally, Ukrainian participants felt supported by their LAs, sponsors, community and network of Ukrainians, with social media groups and particularly WhatsApp and Facebook groups, being one key source of information. In addition, most sponsors recognised their practical responsibilities as broader than just providing accommodation and were happy to help their guest settle in the UK.

Background & Context

The war in Ukraine has triggered the largest forced displacement crisis of this century. Nearly one-third of Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homes, with more than 12.7 million having fled the country altogether.¹ An estimated 90% of those fleeing are women and children.²

The **UFS** and the **HUSS** are two new schemes opened by the UK Government to support Ukrainian nationals who had been residing in Ukraine on or immediately before 1 January 2022 to enter and stay in the UK for up to three years. The **UFS** is specifically designed for those who have family members in the UK, and the **HUSS** for those who have a named sponsor willing to provide them accommodation for a minimum period of six months. Successful applicants are given three years' leave to remain, with the entitlement to work, study and access public funds.

The generosity of the UK public, as reflected by the outpouring of offers to sponsor Ukrainians, has been exemplary, and UNHCR hopes that this solidarity, and the programmes that facilitate it, will be matched and sustained for refugees of other nationalities. As of 12 September 2022, 215,200 Ukrainians have applied to these schemes, 185,100 have been granted a visa, and 125,900 have entered the country.³

Even though the eligibility conditions for Ukrainians are similar for both schemes, the criteria that family members and sponsors must meet differ substantially. Under the UFS, the UK-based family member should be an immediate or extended family member of the applicant and must meet immigration status requirements. Only British nationals, those with settled status (or pre-settled under the EU Settlement Scheme) or with refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK can sponsor their family members to come under this scheme. Unlike other family visa schemes, family members are exempt from the income and accommodation requirement and applicants do not have to prove their knowledge of English. Under the HUSS, the requirements for sponsors relate to their ability to provide suitable accommodation for a minimum period of six months and passing standard security checks. Anyone can be a sponsor as long as they have permission to be in the UK for at least 6 months. While there is a requirement for applicants to name their sponsor under the HUSS, there is no expectation that the applicant and sponsor should have a close relationship or know each other.

¹ UNHCR, 2022. *Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>. More than 12.7 million movements out of Ukraine have been recorded since 24 February, with over 5.7 million movements back into the country.

² Siegfried, K., UNHCR, 13 April 2022. *Ukraine crisis creates new trafficking risks*, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2022/4/62569be24/ukraine-crisis-creates-new-trafficking-risks.html>.

³ Home Office and UK Visas and Immigration, 29 August 2022. *Transparency Data: Ukraine Family Scheme and Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: visa data*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data>.

What is community sponsorship and how is it different to the HUSS?

Community sponsorship (CS) refers to programmes where individuals or a community form a group of “sponsors” and commit to jointly support refugees from any nationality through financial, emotional and practical support. The UK first launched a CS scheme in 2016, and over 700 refugees have been welcomed in the country since.

In CS, sponsoring individuals, organisations and/or communities support refugees who have already been admitted in their country through resettlement after a referral by UNHCR or through complementary pathways such as education or employment. The sponsors are not involved in supporting the refugee’s entry into the UK, and their role begins once the sponsored person has arrived in their country.

Conversely, private sponsorship pathways such as the HUSS, seek to facilitate the admission of refugees to a new country. In private sponsorship, sponsors identify and select the beneficiaries based on other considerations such as family links, skills, professional or educational background, among others.

To circumvent protection risks that could stem from being housed by a stranger and to ensure that accommodation is indeed suitable, LAs conduct accommodation and DBS checks on sponsors, and welfare checks after the guest’s arrival. In the event that the DBS or accommodation checks fail, or the LA determines that it is genuinely not viable or safe for the Ukrainian guest to stay in the accommodation, the council is able to rematch guests with new sponsors. Where a sponsor is considered unsuitable and an applicant is yet to be issued with a visa, the applicant is contacted by the government to offer them the option to withdraw their visa application or be supported in finding a new sponsor through a rematch. In cases where the guest(s) has already been issued with a visa, but has not yet arrived in the UK, Border Force attempts to intercept the refugee at the border and contacts the council to liaise on providing alternative accommodation. Only those who received a visa through the Homes for Ukraine visa route are eligible for rematching.

Children can also use the UFS to reunite with their parent or legal guardian living in the UK. At the time that the interviews were conducted, children were not entitled to apply to the HUSS if they were not travelling and living with their legal guardian. This was subsequently changed following an announcement on 22 June 2022.⁴

AIM OF THE REPORT

This report seeks to deepen understanding of the opportunities created by the UFS and HUSS, as well as the challenges experienced by Ukrainians, the LAs, NGOs and sponsors under these schemes. This is in line with UNHCR’s responsibilities for international refugee protection, including its supervisory role under the 1951 Refugee Convention. The observations and findings aim to help inform and strengthen the UK Government’s response.

⁴ UK Government, 22 June 2022. *Homes for Ukraine Scheme to begin processing applications from unaccompanied children.* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-to-begin-processing-applications-from-unaccompanied-children>

Methodology

This report was conducted through individual interviews with a variety of stakeholders involved in the UFS and/or HUSS. While the experience of Ukrainians arriving under these schemes was the primary focus of this assessment, the perspective of LAs, NGOs and sponsors was also taken into consideration to enable a more comprehensive understanding.

Key Informants

1. **Adult Ukrainians** who arrived in the UK under the UFS or HUSS.⁵
2. **Sponsors** hosting Ukrainians under the HUSS.
3. **LAs**, given their key role in the reception and assistance of Ukrainians under the two schemes. Beyond their responsibility to provide a range of services to those living in their local area, they have been tasked with carrying out DBS, accommodation and safeguarding checks on sponsors hosting through the HUSS. UNHCR spoke with LA officers involved in the the implementation, management or oversight of the HUSS and/or UFS.
4. **NGOs** supporting Ukrainians who arrived in the UK under the UFS or HUSS.

Scope

The geographic scope of this assessment was limited to England and Wales⁶. It should be noted, however, that only LAs from Greater London and Home Counties were interviewed given that 52% of the Ukraine-born population in England and Wales is in Greater London⁷, and that some Home Counties present the highest intake of Ukrainians under the HUSS⁸.

Interview Process & Ethics

UNHCR does not hold data on individuals who were granted a visa under the UFS and HUSS schemes. Consequently, UNHCR shared an invitation to participate in English and Ukrainian with LAs and NGOs, which in turn supported UNHCR by circulating the invitation within their networks. Participation in the assessment was voluntary, and interested participants contacted UNHCR directly.

⁵ Only one Ukrainian that arrived through the UFS was interviewed.

⁶ Only one Ukrainian living in Wales was interviewed and UNHCR did not speak with any sponsor from Wales. However, two national charities were interviewed as part of this assessment which support Ukrainians in England and Wales.

⁷ House of Commons Library, 7 March 2022. *How many Ukrainians live in the UK?*, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/how-many-ukrainians-live-in-the-uk/>.

⁸ Home Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 29 August 2022. *Transparency Data: Ukraine Family Scheme and Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme visa data*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data>.

From May to June 2022, UNHCR conducted individual interviews with each participant. The interviews took place online and lasted 45 minutes to 2 hours. Most interviews were conducted with a Ukrainian interpreter to ensure that each participant was able to understand the questions and felt comfortable in sharing their responses. The interpreter signed an agreement of confidentiality.

The confidential and voluntary nature of the process was also stressed at the beginning of each interview. Ukrainian participants were asked whether they were in a room where they could speak freely and were informed that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any point.

Limitations

This report was put together swiftly with the purpose of providing an overview of the functioning of innovative and ongoing schemes. Due to its rapid nature and timeline, this assessment is based on a small sample. While four different types of stakeholders have been interviewed as part of this assessment with the aim of having a comprehensive perspective, the number of participants remains limited. The findings of this assessment should therefore not be considered as being representative of the functioning of the two schemes across England and Wales, or the UK. Furthermore, participation in the report relied on participants contacting UNHCR directly to express their interest. As such, this Assessment only captured the opinion of those wishing to share their experiences. Consequently, findings should be considered indicative rather than demonstrative of the broader situation.

Sample

UNHCR interviewed:

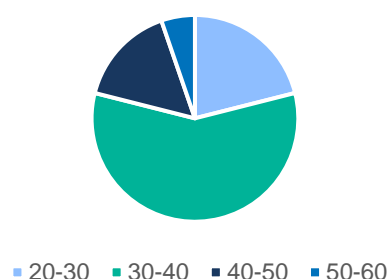


The Ukrainian participants interviewed have a diversity of profiles:

Scheme: Eighteen arrived via the HUSS and only one participant via the UFS.

Gender: Given the profile of the displaced population, all participants were women and three did the interview jointly with their husbands.

Age



English Proficiency

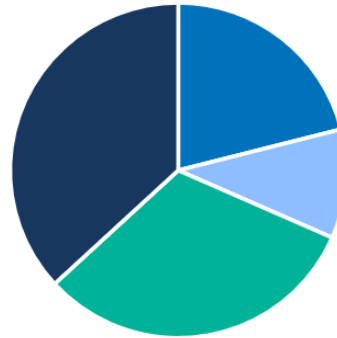


Family Composition



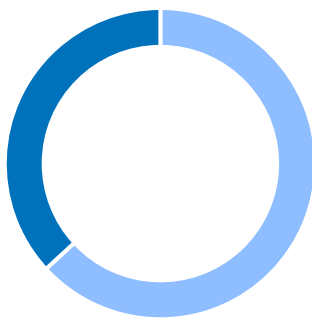
- Women with children
- Women w/children and another female adult (mother,sister)
- Couples with children
- Single women

Time in the UK



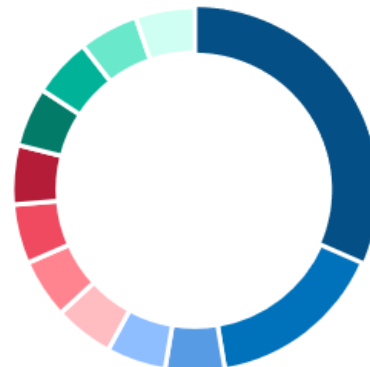
- 2 weeks
- 3 weeks
- 1 month
- <1.5months

Rural vs Urban in UK



- Urban
- Rural

Location in UK



- Greater London
- Surrey
- Gloucestershire
- Kent
- Bedfordshire
- Berkshire
- East Riding of Yorkshire
- Merseyside
- Telford
- Dorset
- Hampshire
- Wales

Profession: Participants have a wide range of professional profiles, ranging from psychologists, teachers, managers, lawyers, administrators, beauticians, engineers, fitness trainers, to tourist agents and entrepreneurs.

Employment: 32% are continuing to do their job remotely, and 5% have found employment in the UK.

Relationship with sponsor: A large number of participants (61%) met their sponsor through social media. 28% met their sponsor through friends of friends, and only 11% knew their sponsor beforehand.

Profile of sponsor: 39% live with a family, 28% with a couple, 22% with a single man and 11% with a single woman.

The 5 LAs:

have together received **1,200 Ukrainians** under the HUSS in their area by the time of interview. This is excluding the number of Ukrainians arriving under the UFS given lack of data.

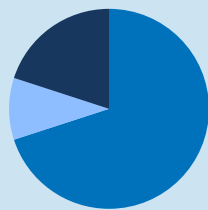
The 5 NGOs,

have together supported **over 1,000 Ukrainians** at the point of interview in May 2022.

The 10 HUSS sponsors:

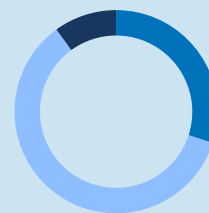
Age: 40-50 (20%), 50-60 (10%), 60-70 (30%), not recorded (40%)

Family Composition



■ Couple ■ Single woman ■ Single man

Location in UK



■ Greater London ■ Surrey ■ Kent

Profile of guest hosted: 50% of sponsors hosted a single woman, while the rest hosted a variety of profiles: couple; mother and child(ren); couple with children; mother, children and grandmother; unaccompanied children/young people.

Relationship of sponsor to guest: Stranger (70%), friend (20%), friend of a friend (10%).



GENERAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCHEMES

The UFS and HUSS introduced more flexible eligibility requirements compared to other family reunion and community sponsorship routes, particularly by waiving the financial requirements for sponsors and families, the required English level of applicants, and by adopting a broader definition of 'immediate' family members. The report found that, overall, the UFS and HUSS have been positively received by the different key informants, highlighting that the schemes have provided a positive and rapid pathway to refuge in the UK. This section covers the main impressions of different groups of informants and explores the attraction of the UK schemes as opposed to other options.

Ukrainians

The Ukrainians who participated in this report were largely grateful for the schemes, since they provided them with a legal route to come to the UK.

MAIN MOTIVATING FACTORS

Participants explained that the basis of their decision to apply to these schemes and come to the UK, instead of going to another country, included:

- previous knowledge of the English language or perception that it could be more easily learned than other European languages,
- potential employment and education opportunities in the UK,
- government support with schooling and medical care,
- previous knowledge of the UK through studies or tourism, and
- friendship networks in the country.

In addition, four participants explained that the schemes seemed clearer than in other countries (citing The Netherlands, Norway, and Spain) due to the information available on social media and the UK Government website. Two participants also mentioned feeling comfortable in knowing that they would stay in vetted accommodation for a guaranteed period of six months.

Specifically, regarding the HUSS, some participants indicated that the scheme complemented the eligibility criteria of the UFS and allowed a larger number of people to reach safety in the UK. In particular, two of the participants interviewed had relatives in the UK but were unable to join them through the UFS for different reasons. One participant joined her partner through this scheme – which she would have been unable to do so under the UFS given that they are unmarried – and another participant had a brother in the UK who had no space to house her.

Sponsors

Most sponsors shared positive impressions of the scheme, and noted it gave the public an opportunity to be directly involved.

“The Homes for Ukraine scheme was introduced quickly and provided people with an opportunity to do something to help, which for me is an immediate positive.”

“I had capacity and enough room, and felt I needed to do something.”

HUSS Sponsors⁹

Sponsors highlighted that their commitment to participate in the HUSS was driven by media coverage about the conflict and the need to support those fleeing the war. In addition, a few sponsors mentioned that their involvement in volunteering and community work or previous work with refugees had further influenced their motivation to participate in this scheme.

Local Authorities

In general, LAs were positive about the two schemes, mentioning that they provide a faster legal route for Ukrainians to come to the UK. Particularly, they indicated that the strength of the schemes relied on the family or sponsor-based approach, since it allows authorities to utilise the will and resources of the community, to raise awareness amongst the public on issues faced by refugees, and to promote a more welcoming environment. This was said to be in stark contrast with the reception of Afghans under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, where individuals have been housed in hotels, under what is intended to be a transitional arrangement.

“This is a good approach to get people involved and change the mentality towards hosting those fleeing conflict in your homes rather than in hotels.”

LA based in Greater London

Furthermore, they noted that the HUSS has created a rich mix of partnerships at the local level (e.g. between different teams within LAs, voluntary bodies, faith councils)

⁹ All quotes have been reconstructed from the notes taken during interviews, and names have been deleted to preserve the anonymity of participants.

and an outpouring of community mobilisation amongst sponsors. Consequently, the LAs who were interviewed did not have strong concerns at this point regarding the integration capacity of Ukrainians, who they noted seem keen to learn English and find employment. Specific challenges raised by LAs will be addressed further below.

NGOs

Similarly, the NGOs that participated in the report had overall a positive outlook on the schemes. Particularly, they all noted that the Government acted rapidly to ensure that a route was available to Ukrainians. Regarding the UFS, NGOs welcomed the fact that this scheme is available not only for the immediate family but is also expanded to other family members.

On the HUSS, they noted that they have seen communities coming together to ensure that guests feel welcome in the area and believe that the scheme has helped to change the narrative and perception that some people had towards refugees. NGOs have highlighted that this type of approach, with the appropriate safeguarding in place, is preferred to hosting individuals/displaced people in hotels for prolonged periods. Similarly to LAs, NGOs also shared the view that this approach facilitates the possibility for refugees to integrate, as Ukrainians are tangibly supported by the hosts and their families in a variety of situations (from benefits to employment, and access to health and education).

On a less positive note, the NGOs interviewed expressed their concern that the schemes are taking away attention from other refugees in need of protection in the

UK and that there is a disparity with refugees of other nationalities who have equally compelling needs for refuge and protection, but for whom there are no available legal routes to enter the UK. However, they hope that the schemes will pave the way for resettlement pathways for refugees from different countries.

“Hosts have been great, and there has been a lot of community support for the guests. The Homes for Ukraine scheme have brought a lot of people together, and hopefully paves the way for other refugee programmes. (...) However, this is also having a negative impact on other schemes. There have not been any new arrivals through the Afghan schemes since April. The capacity of LAs has been stretched with the Ukraine situation and I am worried about community resentment.”

NGO offering a wide range of support to Ukrainians

NGOs also highlighted that the two schemes have faced strong challenges as a result of the speed at which they were created, including issues with sponsors' checks prior to arrival, and lack of appropriate resources for NGOs and LAs. These will be further detailed in the next sections. On the latter, however, NGOs explained that while they have received additional funds from the Government to support this increasing population, they are overwhelmed given the variety of support they provide to new arrivals, which includes welfare, employment, education and housing advice, support applying for a BRP card and registering with a GP, assistance and donation of phones, as well as signposting to other services.



APPLICATION PROCESS

To apply to the UFS and HUSS, applicants must complete an online application through the UK Government website. As part of the application, individuals should provide documents that show that they were residing in Ukraine on or immediately before 1 January 2022, and those applying through the UFS should also include documents proving their relationship to a UK-based family member. These documents need to be uploaded via a document upload app (TSL or VFS). Applicants who are unable to provide these documents, need to explain why they were unable to provide them upon application.

After completing the online application, Ukrainians without an international passport (including applicants who are under the age of 18 years old) need to book and attend an appointment at a Visa Application Centre (VAC) to prove their identity. These are located in Budapest (Hungary), Chisinau (Moldova), Warsaw (Poland), Bucharest (Romania) and Paris (France), amongst other locations. However, those with a Ukrainian international passport (valid or expired) do not need to attend a VAC and can evidence their identity instead through the “UK Immigration: ID check” app, or within six months of arriving in the UK.

Applicants then need to await a decision from the UK Visas and Immigration Department on their application before travelling to the UK. Specifically, those that attended a VAC need to return to collect their visa before travelling to the UK. This section explores the experience of Ukrainians and sponsors in applying for their visas under these two schemes, as well as the observations from LA and NGOs in this regard.

Access to information at the time of application

Since their opening in March 2022, the schemes have been in constant revision, and further information is frequently added to the UK Government website.

Nearly half of Ukrainians interviewed indicated that they had all the information they needed at the time they made the application and many participants mentioned that they looked for information elsewhere, including on social media.

UNCLEAR / MISSING INFORMATION

- One participant was unsure whether her application would be accepted given that her sponsor (her partner) did not have an additional bedroom.
- Another participant who entered the UK without his family indicated that their family would have not taken the decision to split had they known that a BRP was needed to leave and re-enter the UK, given that the father had to wait a month before he was able to leave the UK to help his family make the journey.
- Three other participants mentioned that they struggled to find information on how to register children at school, and the amount that they could receive from the Universal Credit, making it more difficult to gauge whether their needs would be met.

In contrast, most sponsors were satisfied with the information available on the Government website. They felt they had everything they needed to make an informed decision on hosting their guests

and were able to find answers to all their questions. Some sponsors explained that they appreciated that the scheme involved a major exercise on the part of the Government given the speed by which the schemes were launched, and were therefore prepared to do further research, contact their LAs, as well as rely on community groups and social media.

Application process

Regarding the application process itself, Ukrainians had rather mixed opinions regarding the complexity of the application form. More than half of the participants considered that the application form was difficult to fill for a non-native English speaker. The type of vocabulary used in the questions was said to be complicated and the use of online translators was not always helpful since they would incorrectly translate some terms. The rest thought that the application form was straightforward. However, these participants spoke English, received full support from their sponsor to complete the application and/or guidance from informal groups set up by Ukrainians. The general conclusion was that the support of the sponsor or social groups was crucial to fill the application.

“It took me two days to fill the application for the whole family - We are seven so we had to do seven different applications. It was not easy. My sponsor helped me. It would have been impossible without his help. There were a lot of questions in the form, and even if I speak some English, 50% of questions were too difficult to understand.”

Ukrainian who arrived in the UK via the HUSS

NGOs also noted that the application process was particularly difficult for those without computers or mobile devices, or with poor digital skills, so the NGOs offer support in this regard. In addition, one third of Ukrainian participants considered that the application form was too long and cumbersome to be filled individually by each family member.

“The visa applications should be linked to make the process less laborious and less complicated.”

HUSS sponsor (male)

Beyond language and digital skills barriers, a few participants faced additional issues when completing the form. One participant, for example, had to apply twice, after learning that the application needed to be filled by each family member and not for the whole family. Another participant had to delay their travel on several occasions, given that the policy to bring pets was constantly changing, and that several expensive documents, including the EU Pet Passport and vaccinations documents, were required for the application.

Disconcertingly, one participant who was already in the UK had to exit the country to be able to apply to the HUSS. This is due to the requirement that applicants need to be outside of the UK to apply under this scheme.

Once the application was submitted, Ukrainians and sponsors commented that they did not have any knowledge about the length of time that it would take for their visa to be approved – which made it difficult to make plans regarding their current living arrangements - and noted they were unable to track the status of their application. Some

sponsors followed up with their local Member of Parliament to try to get updates.

Timing

Most participants noted delays in the processing of applications.

The Ukrainian interviewed who entered the UK via the UFS waited one month to receive choose his or her visa.

For those who applied under the HUSS, the time they waited to receive their visa varied between 1-2 weeks (16%), 2 - 3 weeks (42%), 1 month (37%), 50 days (5%). For all the sponsors with guests who had children, visas were issued at separate times, sometimes coming a few weeks apart, which delayed their travel.

One LA mentioned that these delays and lack of update on the applications were creating additional problems:

“Some hosts are making multiple applications given the delays in processing them. We even became aware of one sponsor who made 9 separate applications to sponsor different families.”

LA based in Greater London

On the other hand, the visa delays also gave sponsors and LAs more time to prepare for the arrival of Ukrainians. One LA, for example, explained that they were able to conduct the additional DBS and accommodation checks ahead of the guest’s arrival due to the visa delays. Similarly, most sponsors indicated they had enough time to prepare for their guests’ arrival and furnish the bedrooms.



RECEPTION, ACCOMMODATION & RELATIONSHIP WITH HOST

Experiences of reception, welcome and orientation in a new host country can have a powerful impact on an individual's early integration. The UFS and HUSS work on the premise that Ukrainians arriving in the UK under these schemes will be received and/or housed by a sponsor or family member.

**“I felt very welcome.
 When I arrived, my hosts prepared dinner.
 The room was ready, and they even got some toys for our daughter.”**
 Ukrainian couple that arrived in the UK via the HUSS with their three children

While there are no specific accommodation requirements under the UFS, those arriving via the HUSS are expected to be housed in safe, appropriate and suitable accommodation. To be considered suitable, the accommodation should be free from serious health and safety hazards, and have a working fire alarm, a carbon monoxide alarm in any room containing a solid fuel-burning appliance, and a safe gas supply and working electrics. The property should also have sufficient heating to be at a comfortable temperature, be almost entirely free of dampness or mould, have doors and windows at the entry level that lock properly, and be easy and safe to move around in. Guests should have access to the kitchen and bathroom space and should have their own room.¹⁰

¹⁰ UK Government, 6 July 2022. *Homes for Ukraine: Guidance for Councils*, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils#background-and-eligibility>

Furthermore, Ukrainians arriving under the HUSS are eligible for an interim payment of £200 per person for subsistence costs, which is administered by the local council where the sponsor accommodation is located. Those arriving via the USF are not eligible for this type of assistance.

Upon arrival in the UK, relevant councils who have primary ports of entry have been asked to establish welcome point arrangements to provide an initial welcome and any immediate support required. This includes food, drink, medical supplies, link with local travel operators for general provision of advice on onward travel, and support if matching arrangements fail.

On a general note, all Ukrainian participants felt safe during their journey to the UK and felt welcomed upon entry. Participants travelled from Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, France, the Netherlands and Spain by plane, train or car, and most were received by their sponsors at place of arrival. An overwhelming majority indicated that the immigration authorities and airport staff were welcoming and helpful. Generally, their expectations of life in the UK have been met and they feel welcomed by their sponsor, the authorities, and their community. Some participants also mentioned that they have received welcome cards or gifts from neighbours and local schools.

Reception Conditions under the UFS

Homelessness and financial difficulties

LAs and NGOs noted that many of those arriving and hosting under the UFS are facing challenging reception conditions. According to them, family members in the UK often feel the need to sponsor their families affected by the conflict in Ukraine, even if they do not have suitable accommodation and/or financial conditions. Given that family sponsors do not receive financial support, unlike sponsors under the HUSS (who receive £350 per month), NGOs have observed that families hosting under the UFS are struggling financially, also noting that the number of family members arriving per family is often higher than the number of individuals that a sponsor hosts through the HUSS. They have also witnessed cases of applicants who arrive to already crowded accommodation.

Because of this, NGOs and 4 of the 5 LAs have observed that the scheme has put families in a difficult financial situation and their guests at risk of homelessness.

“This is happening a lot. Accommodations are not suitable, and it places a huge burden on the family here. We saw the case of a family of nine being hosted by their UK family in one room.”

LA based in Greater London

The one Ukrainian participant who entered the UK via the UFS was unable to remain in their family’s accommodation due to space reasons. After three days of arrival in the UK, they had to find alternative accommodation which their LA efficiently provided.

One NGO has already reported a dozen or so cases of individuals not being able to stay at their family's home, and three of the LAs interviewed counted 35 cases of homelessness.

“We are witnessing big need from Ukrainians on the family scheme, which is putting them at risk of being homeless, and we expect that it will snowball. Ukrainians and their families under this scheme cannot afford to pay bills, and the problem is that they cannot switch to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. They do not have a credit score, so private tenants do not accept their applications. There are big gaps in the Family Scheme.”

NGO with national presence

Reception Conditions under the HUSS

Relationships between sponsors and guests

All interviewed Ukrainians continued to live with their sponsor, and all interviewed sponsors continued to host their guests. UNHCR did not observe any severe difficulties which led to the breakdown of a relationship or an immediate risk of this.

“My sponsor treats me like a member of their own family. I feel very lucky”.

Ukrainian participant who arrived under the HUSS with her son.

Furthermore, all but one Ukrainian participant had a positive relationship with their host, and most interviewed sponsors had a positive co-living experience, with only a minority experiencing challenges as a result of hosting. For example, one sponsor who was working from home indicated that they struggled with their guests (mother and daughter) arguing and with the feeling of having to be constantly available to them throughout the day. The remaining 80% of the sponsors felt positively about the hosting experience and would recommend others to take part in the scheme. The majority also expressed a willingness to host refugees under other sponsorship schemes or stated they would consider it.

“I would definitely continue with a scheme like this in the future. It is a much better way of integrating refugees.”

HUSS sponsor (male).

Conversations with different stakeholders indicated that most matches under the HUSS had worked well so far, and LAs and NGOs observed only few cases in which the relationships between guests and sponsor broke down. Two LAs mentioned that they are only aware of one relationship which has broken down, and one NGO working in Southwest London observed this only in two occasions.

SPONSOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The Government's Sponsor Guidance reflects the minimum responsibilities expected from sponsors, which includes providing accommodation for at least six months (for which they receive a £350 monthly payment to support with living costs) and help to adapt to life in the UK by directing their guests to public services. In practice, most sponsors interviewed recognised their practical duties as broader than just providing accommodation, and assisted their guests with completing applications, booking appointments, registering at school, going with them to the bank etc. A few were going even further, sharing food, helping children in school with homework, cooking together and assisting them with house chores.

Although most sponsors were happy about their participation in the scheme, some highlighted that this was a big commitment, which others should be aware of when deciding to host guests.

“As a host, you are not only giving accommodation. With my guests, we shop together, we eat together. We do a lot of things together. It's a big time commitment.” (John, 61)

The majority mentioned that the 'Thank you' payment was useful, particularly given the rising costs of living. Twenty percent also indicated they would have participated in the scheme regardless of any remuneration offered. However, two sponsors noted that the fixed amount of the payment created a disparity, given financial support as those hosting a single person.

NGOs similarly noted that sponsors are often not sure of the implications on what it means to sponsor an individual and highlighted the lack of training compared to other community sponsorship programmes. As a result, NGOs are trying to give as much advice as possible.

Suitability of accommodation

A large majority of Ukrainian participants considered that their accommodation meets their needs; many mentioned that their sponsors obtained additional equipment to furnish their rooms and cater to their needs. Interestingly, more than half got to see pictures/video of the accommodation prior to the arrival and got a better understanding of the area where they were going to live.

The two Ukrainian participants who are having difficulties with their accommodation mentioned that they are struggling with lack of privacy, bad connectivity in the bedroom, and smoking habits of their sponsor. They are unlikely to stay in the accommodation for the entire 6-month period. A third participant indicated that they might need to relocate if their older son is not accepted in the local school. All these reasons would not qualify them for re-matching, which is limited to instances when the sponsor fails the DBS check or if the LA considers that the accommodation is unsafe.

“There is just one problem: My sponsor smokes inside the house. He mentioned this before we applied, and I accepted this. But we will not be able to continue staying with him once the weather gets colder.”

Ukrainian participant.

It was also mentioned that the scheme is disadvantageous for large families, given that it is more difficult to find sponsors who have large properties. Due to this, one family made the difficult decision that the 18-year-old daughter would apply separately to increase their chances of finding a sponsor.

DBS, accommodation checks, and the risk of homelessness

On the topic of re-matching, the proportion of DBS and accommodation checks that have failed according to LAs is rather mixed, ranging from less than 2% for two LAs, to 5%, 10% and up to 18% for the remaining three. Usually, it is the accommodation check that fails (mostly due to overcrowding) rather than the DBS.

For three of the LAs interviewed, the number of checks that have resulted in 'fail' ratings is not yet a concern. For the remaining two, this is an issue since most often the guest has already arrived or will arrive shortly. The LA with the highest percentage of failed accommodation checks indicated that additional requirements for rented properties are a particular concern. The LA explained that 70% of the HUSS hosts live in rented accommodation, and with HO requirements in relation to the House of Multiple Occupation license (needed when 3 or more people in the household are not family, and which is costly and requires the landlord's consent), they expect that half of HUSS guests will end up at risk of homelessness.

Length of hosting

Under the current HUSS requirements, sponsors have committed to hosting their guests for a minimum of 6 months. While the failure of relationships under the HUSS is not a current source of concern, NGOs and LAs interviewed are worried about the level of support that will be required of them once the sponsorships reach this 6-month period. Many stated that six months is not enough for individuals to get the necessary resources to find accommodation independently and are worried that LAs will have to deal with a substantial number of emergency accommodation situations.

When asked whether they could/want to continue hosting their guests beyond the six months period, 6 out of 10 sponsors responded positively, with 4 of these indicating that their guest is welcome to stay as long as they wish.

From the Ukrainians' side, while the large majority of participants are satisfied with their current accommodation and have a positive relationship with their host, there is also a general feeling of wanting to live in their own accommodation, as this would help with feeling independent and integrated in this country.



Second-hand accounts of negative reception experiences

Throughout the report, UNHCR learnt about instances where Ukrainians have been made homeless through the HUSS. However, UNHCR was unable to gather first-hand information on these experiences, due to the limited timeframe of the report.

One Ukrainian participant indicated that they supported two families who arrived in unchecked accommodations and had to move out due to unsuitability of the property (one woman was sleeping on the sofa in the living room), as well as another family who was asked by their sponsor to leave due to the noise created by the children. A second participant mentioned that they are acquainted with Ukrainians who have had negative experiences under the HUSS but who are afraid to talk about it.



SAFEGUARDING

Given the profile of those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, which is heavily weighted towards women and children, the UFS and HUSS have generated a series of discussions around safeguarding, particularly in relation to the type of requirements and checks that would be asked of sponsors. While no specific safeguarding provisions appear to have been put in place for those reuniting with a family member under the UFS, a series of measures were introduced by the UK Government for those staying with friends, contacts and/or strangers under the HUSS. These include safety, DBS and accommodation checks on sponsors, as well as a welfare check conducted by LAs after arrival. This is particularly relevant in a context some sponsors and guests are being matched online via social media platforms.

In interviews, Ukrainians and sponsors were asked several questions about their feelings of safety whilst in the UK and in their accommodation, including whether they feel safe and secure in their current living placement in the UK; whether they feel safe with their sponsor or guest; whether they feel safe in the community and in the UK more generally, and whether they knew how to get help or report any abuse. All Ukrainian participants included in the assessment reported feeling safe and secure since arriving in the UK. Nevertheless, the assessment identified several key safeguarding concerns that can put some Ukrainians at risk.

Profile and vulnerabilities of those arriving under the schemes

The suitability of safeguarding measures should be examined in relation to the particular profile and characteristics of the refugee population (unaccompanied children, single women, older persons, persons with disabilities), as these can impact the level of vulnerability and capacity to seek help if needed.

Conversations with LAs and NGOs confirmed that most of those arriving under the two schemes are indeed women and children. Some older women and men, as well as pregnant women, have been identified, though it was said that the range of vulnerabilities observed is not very wide.

Given that most arrivals are single women, LAs and NGOs were requested to provide feedback on the perception of safety of hosting arrangements. LAs explained that while they do not have specific safeguards in place for instances where the gender of the guest and sponsor is different, they indicated that all sponsors are subject to the set of safeguarding checks as required by the scheme. In addition, they mentioned that if any concerns arise during the welfare check, additional visits are scheduled and separate conversations with the guest are held. This can also be escalated to a social worker who would undertake a more thorough assessment. UNHCR did not observe any safety concerns from the Ukrainian participants.

Children travelling on their own

While the number of people with vulnerabilities observed by LAs and NGOs has not been very wide, one LA identified 22 unaccompanied children, some of which had no relationship with their sponsor. Additionally, UNHCR identified one unaccompanied child (12 years-old) who was staying with an unrelated sponsor.

Perceptions of safety

Reassuringly, all Ukrainian participants indicated feeling safe with their sponsor or family member and mentioned that they could reach out to their sponsor, family member or contact the local council in the event of any issues. Even though over 60% of Ukrainian participants met their sponsor through social media networks, most of them also mentioned that they did not have safety concerns about living with an unknown person. They explained that the conversations they had with sponsors prior to their arrival (either via WhatsApp or video calls) made them feel reassured, and their main concern at that moment was to reach a safe location away from the war.

Similarly, the overwhelming majority of sponsors (all except one) indicated feeling safe with their guest, even though 70% did not previously know their guest. Nonetheless, some sponsors highlighted concerns about the self-matching process and lack of oversight over the scheme. Most sponsors noted that the matching was self-driven, with prospective guests and sponsors asking their own questions/sharing what they saw fit and conducting their own verification, such as review of social-media profiles.

Case study:**Sponsor's feeling of safety**

One sponsor was due to host a family with three children. However, while she was expecting the arrival of the entire family, she explained that only the father arrived. The Ukrainian guest explained that the visas of the rest of the family had been delayed, and he had therefore made the decision to travel to the UK on his own to start setting some basic things that would facilitate the family's integration (including opening a bank account, securing a place in school for the children, and others). However, the sponsor learned through an MP request that this information was incorrect, and that the visas for the rest of the family had been issued a few days apart. The sponsor indicated that being a single female, she did not feel comfortable hosting only the father. However, she ended up staying with the father for a month until the rest of the family joined them in the UK.

DBS and Accommodation checks

Under UK Government Guidance, LAs are encouraged to conduct DBS and accommodation checks prior to the guest's arrival wherever possible but are not obliged to do so. This report found that there are differences in the periods within which LAs conduct these checks, and identified a significant number of cases in which guests arrive at the accommodation prior to DBS check finalisation, or the property being verified by the LA.

Three of the LAs interviewed reported conducting over 65% of the DBS and accommodation checks before the guests' arrival. However, the remaining two said that they are working with a backlog and undertake the majority of checks after the guests' arrival. One of them further clarified that it is rather common for the DBS results to become available only after the arrival of the guest, since they take a long time to be completed, especially when they reach stage 4.

On this note, 4 out of 10 of sponsors interviewed had their accommodation checked after arrival and had not had their DBS checks finalised before their guest(s) arrived.

Case study:**Unaccompanied children arriving under HUSS and timing of safeguarding checks**

One sponsor interviewed as part of this report indicated that they were hosting a 12-year-old and an 18-year-old (who are not related to each other), given that the sponsor was connected with their mothers through voluntary work. The sponsor indicated that they were concerned that the DBS and accommodation checks were conducted only after the child's arrival, being mindful of the vulnerable profile of the unaccompanied minor. The 12-year-old is currently attending school, and the 18-year-old is hoping to go to university next year. However, this is concerning given that unaccompanied minors were at the time of interview not eligible through this scheme, and that unaccompanied minors are at greater risk of abuse, and safeguarding checks should therefore be conducted diligently when they are involved.

NGOs also expressed their concern that conducting DBS and property checks in a timely manner is proving to be difficult for LAs with a high number of Ukrainians. For instance, in Southwest London, an NGO reported that many of the hosts have not had their property or DBS checked, and the sponsors themselves are coming forward to the NGO to point this out. Another NGO also stated that they have been made aware of difficulties faced by digitally illiterate sponsors who are unable to complete online DBS check applications.

Case study:

Digitally illiterate sponsors and DBS applications

One family composed of single women has been living with a +65 years-old male sponsor for over a month. While the family feels safe, the mother is concerned that their sponsor is not receiving the £350 Thank You payment from the LA, and that the hosting situation might put some financial pressure on him due to the increase of living costs.

The mother explained that the reason why the sponsor is not receiving the payment, is because he has not completed the DBS application (and does not intend to complete it), given the fact that he does not know how to do the application online. She explained that the sponsor is digitally illiterate, and therefore has no intention of completing the application.

“We came in contact with an 82-year-old host who couldn’t use his computer. We mediated and asked for paper copies of the application form but this is beyond what we do. We also had a welcome event for sponsors. Many said their checks had been done after the guests arrived. It seems LAs have washed their hands of doing DBS checks.”

NGO present in England and Wales

Welfare checks

According to the UK Government Guidance for Councils, following the guest’s arrival councils should confirm as soon as possible that the guest is well and that there are no serious safeguarding or welfare concerns or needs for care and support. This is assessed by in-person welfare checks.

This report found numerous instances where welfare checks were conducted after several weeks and including months after the guest arrived. While nearly half of Ukrainian participants received the welfare visit within their first week of arrival, 35% have not yet had the welfare visit, even though they have been living with the host for three weeks to one and a half months. Regarding the latter, all participants live in rural areas or small and large towns. One of the LA interviewed also clarified that they take at least two weeks after arrival to conduct the welfare check.

Furthermore, the majority of LAs explained that they have difficulties monitoring the arrival of Ukrainians. Four LAs mentioned that one of the main challenges they face is that the database isn't always up to date or accurate. For example, some applications appear twice, others make it seem like a child is travelling on its own, and in other instances it appears as if the guest has not arrived but when they visit the accommodation, they realise that the guest is already there.

Interviewees mentioned that this made it difficult to know who has arrived, because it is unclear whether the date of arrival that appears in their database is correct, or whether it is the estimated date of arrival indicated in the application. This data is often incorrect, and LAs rely on sponsors to inform them when someone has arrived.

LAs have found mechanisms to ensure that they are not entirely dependent on the host's initiative, such as calling the hosts, conducting spontaneous visits, or contacting the guest. One LA believes that most sponsors do notify the LA of their guest's arrival, given that they are dependent on this to receive their £350 monthly payment. However, another LA mentioned having identified 18 sponsors who they have not been able to reach. A third LA mentioned they are concerned about missing guests, and their team diligently cross-references their data with sponsors they have not heard from, to minimise any risk of exploitation or trafficking.



INTEGRATION

Integration is a dynamic two-way process that places demands on both the refugee and the receiving community. It requires, on the one hand, preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome them and encourage participation in all aspects of economic, social, cultural, civil and political life.

The UFS and HUSS were set up as a temporary solution to allow Ukrainians to stay in the UK while the conflict in Ukraine is on-going. As such, those arriving under these schemes receive leave to remain for three years in the UK, which is less than the period normally granted by the UK to those in need of international protection. Given this relatively short-term perspective, it is interesting to assess the desire and capacity to integrate of Ukrainians who arrive under the two schemes.

It is notable that all the Ukrainian participants indicated that they hope the conflict will end in the coming months, and all but one wish to return to Ukraine as soon as it is safe to do so. Despite this short-term perspective on life in the UK, 95% of participants are willing to take active steps to integrate, such as by finding a job and learning English. None of those interviewed felt integrated at the time of interview, explaining it is difficult to do so in the absence of a job, accommodation of their own, and the ability to communicate in English.

Access to Services

The large majority of Ukrainian participants have been able to open a bank account, register with a GP and the JCP, apply for a BRP, Universal Credit and for a National Insurance Number. While some challenges have been experienced, especially in accessing English courses, access to services upon arrival has been largely successful and straightforward. Most participants learnt about these services from their sponsors, LAs and social networks.

Only a minority of participants had trouble accessing some essential services, including dentistry and ophthalmology care, as well as applying for a National Insurance Number.

In addition, a few participants mentioned that they had experienced difficulty in accessing some services and feeling integrated due to the location of their accommodation. The price of public transport and/or the few public transport options available in their area were considered to limit the number of integration activities and job possibilities accessible to them. One participant further explained that the BRP appointments are far from their accommodation which creates additional struggles, given that BRP appointments were given at different dates for each family member.

Support from host communities and governmental institutions

According to Ukrainian participants, the success they have experienced in accessing basic services is in large part due to the support they receive from sponsors, LAs or Ukrainian groups, whose advice has been vital to understand how to access these services and have helped to navigate some of the challenges. Ukrainian participants mentioned that the UK system works very differently from their own, and they would have found it difficult to understand the differences between each service and how the Universal Credit works, without the support from their LA and community networks.

The one participant who entered the UK via the UFS, for example, was very satisfied with the support received by their LA, which gave them information about welfare benefits, BRP and JCP appointment, and provided them with temporary housing in an efficient manner.

“I take my guests with me wherever I go. They go out with me and my children, we go visit my friends, and we go out for meals. Next week we’re going to a rugby match.”

HUSS sponsor (male)

Due to the additional all-around support provided, NGOs have observed that Ukrainians have been able to access these services in a more straightforward manner than refugees going through the standard asylum process in the UK.

Given this form of community support, LAs do not have strong concern regarding the integration capacity of Ukrainians.

Challenges faced by LAs supporting the integration of Ukrainians in their area

Lack of information on numbers under UFS:

Every LA interviewed mentioned not having data on the number of people arriving under the UFS. According to them, this represents a challenge, given that it gives them no information on the level of support that might be required and hinders their capacity to prepare.

“At the moment, our support is very much reactive. We are only aware of those who arrive under the UFS when a person needs our support. If it was possible to capture this information, the council could prepare and thus manage the risk better.”

LA with one of the highest numbers of HUSS arrivals

No additional resources to support those under the UFS:

Given that those arriving under the UFS have similar needs than those under the HUSS, and that their families often have less information to help advise them, LAs support them with a range of services, including applying for UC, opening a bank account, accessing education, food vouchers, emergency fund to help pay for energy costs (...). However, LAs pointed out that they do not receive any additional funding to support the individuals arriving through UFS. This has significant resource implications for councils, especially when the relationships fail, and they must provide alternative living arrangements. To paraphrase one LA:

“LAs are not given resources for the UFS, but they are expected to pick up when things do not go well.”

Payment to LAs under the HUSS is tied to the sponsor:

LAs also mentioned that the way in which the payment is set up – which follows the sponsor and not the guest – is creating additional financial pressure. LAs receive the £10,500 payment once all the checks are completed AND when these are successful. However, this is said to create issues, for instance when the LA cannot get hold of the sponsor to complete the checks or when the sponsor fails the checks. In the last case for example, the LA will need to incur additional costs to conduct checks on the new sponsor and in providing temporary accommodation in the meantime. Additionally, should the re-matching take place in another borough, the LA would not receive payment for that guest.

Ability of sponsors to support their guests

As previously mentioned, the practical realities of hosting guests under the HUSS extend beyond providing accommodation for 6 months. Conversations with sponsors and LAs have indicated that sponsors provide wider support, signposting guests to services, assisting them with booking appointments and in some instances going with them to the appointments to support with any challenges. The UK-Government-supported charity RESET has produced toolkits to help sponsors and train them. However, this training is not mandatory under the scheme's design.

When speaking with sponsors about their preparedness and ability to support their guests, some sponsors felt they did not receive sufficient information about the process of supporting their guest(s) post-arrival. One of those highlighted that the Government website provides information on sponsors and LAs' theoretical responsibilities but little to no information on the realities of hosting. Others expressed not knowing where to find information to signpost their guests.

Around half the sponsors felt they were appropriately supported by their LAs throughout their participation in the scheme. Some sponsors noted their LA was well-prepared to provide guidance and assistance to HUSS arrivals and had useful materials to support them.

“Our Local Authority is really good, they gave us support materials, provided our guests with funds, got their child into school and provided sports memberships. They also sent someone to help with applying for benefits.”
HUSS sponsor (male)

Family members' ability to support

UNHCR did not speak with family members who hosted Ukrainians under the UFS. However, NGOs who were interviewed mentioned that little information is provided to family members prior to the arrival of their families and observed that family members often do not know where to refer their families for support. This was also raised by 3 of the 5 LAs, who have observed that those arriving under the UFS struggle more to understand the schooling system, registering with a GP, and have more financial needs given that they do not receive the same type of financial support.

Access to Education

In addition to health, welfare benefits and registration services, access to education has been largely positive. Some 70% of Ukrainian participants have been able to register their children in school, and the rest are still looking for schools with availability or pending responses. This is a very positive enrolment rate given the limited time that they have been in the UK. Several participants indicated that they received significant support from their sponsors in this regard; many sponsors contacted their children's schools and secured a place for their guests directly. Another Ukrainian family also reported that they were very touched by the fact that the school had already purchased their son's uniform and school materials, which were handed out on the first day.

Access to Mental Health

Ukrainians arriving under the two schemes are entitled to use NHS services at no charge. From the observations of this report, there has not yet been a great demand for mental health support amongst those arriving through the UFS or HUSS. Most Ukrainian participants indicated they do not need mental health support at the moment, and some explained having their own methods to cope with the events that they went through – for example through yoga, or remote welfare sessions organised with other Ukrainians. Few expressed interest in receiving mental health support and most would prefer to wait a few months until they are able to better communicate with health practitioners.

While NGOs interviewed supported these general observations, one NGO has received reports of alcohol usage amongst those arriving in Lewisham and Lambeth, which has caused issues with hosts. One LA also mentioned that those arriving now are likely to present more trauma than the earlier arrivals and will require additional mental health support.

Access to English Language Courses

Knowledge of the receiving society's language is considered to be integral to successful integration. The UK Government has acknowledged the importance of English language provision for refugees, seeing it as an important tool to find and improve employment prospects, access local services, become part of the community life, and reduce isolation.¹¹

The report found that the lack of English language was a major impediment to most participants' successful integration in the UK. While all Ukrainian participants are eager to learn English, 60% of those interviewed spoke little or no English. In addition, one LA recorded that an average of 5% of Ukrainians in their area speak English. Provision of adequate and appropriate English language courses is essential to help Ukrainians integrate in their local communities, navigate the UK system and find employment. However, the assessment identified substantial challenges and gaps in this area.

¹¹ UK Government, March 2018, Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, ("UK Government Green Paper"),

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper>

Sixty eight percent of Ukrainian participants mentioned struggling to register in English classes, and only 16% are currently attending English language courses.

MAIN ISSUES

- Lack of information on where and how to access these classes;
- Current courses being fully booked;
- Courses too basic;
- Cost of public transport;
- Lack of free courses in some areas;
- Inability to attend face-to-face classes due to caring duties or distance to learning centre;
- Poor quality of online classes (with 50 students in one online class);
- Some of the participants who are currently attending language courses indicated that these are not intensive enough, given that they only take place once or twice a week, and will not allow them to acquire the language skills necessary to integrate or find a suitable job.

As a result, nearly half of Ukrainian participants believe that language will be the main barrier to their integration.

Access to Employment

One of the key contributors to refugee integration is meaningful employment, given that it enables self-sufficiency and provides social connections as refugees are able to use their skills and experience in a new context.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Ukrainians who participated in this report consider that they would be unable to feel integrated in the UK without having a job. They are all keen to work, and while a third are continuing to do their previous job remotely and part-time, several have been attending job interviews in the UK, and one has already found employment.

Nonetheless, the second main issue that was mentioned by participants on the topic of integration was access to employment. Many participants are worried that their qualifications are likely not to be recognised in the UK. Some of the professions include teachers, lawyers, psychologists, engineers, and beauticians. One Ukrainian commented:

“My qualification is not recognised in the UK and the exam to qualify is very expensive. I don’t know how long I will stay here in the UK, so it seems like too much of an investment.”

Ukrainian participant who arrived under the HUSS

Given that many Ukrainians implicitly envisage an early to mid-term return to Ukraine, lengthy and costly re-qualification procedures may act as a strong deterrent for those who are highly educated, pushing them to take jobs that do not require specific qualifications.

The under-utilisation of their experience and skills would be a loss to them, the UK market and society.

In addition, participants had mixed reviews of their JCP, with many indicating that the JCP had not been very useful in providing them with information on how to re-qualify, or in sharing relevant job positions. Overall, there was an impression that the information given by the JCP had been very general and its provision slow.

Capacity of older persons to integrate

Finally, it is worth noting that the capacity of individuals to integrate is also linked to their specific profile and needs, including age. Of the two Ukrainian participants who arrived with an older person through the HUSS, one mentioned that their mother struggles to integrate and wishes to return to Ukraine as soon as possible.

“I am very glad that you asked me about my mother. She has a very basic level of English, and she can’t communicate here fluently. It is very hard for her. She is very depressed; she doesn’t feel very settled here. She hasn’t met any Ukrainians of her age. She wants to go back to her husband and her dog, and she doesn’t want to stay here. But she’s very helpful for me here because she can lend a helping hand, especially with the children.”

Ukrainian participant who arrived under the HUSS with her mother and children

Recommendations

ON THE SCHEMES

- Based on recommendations given by participants, it may be beneficial to align the two schemes so that Ukrainians receive similar types of protection and support in the UK independently from their pathway of arrival. This may minimise the protection challenges faced by those arriving under the UFS and improve their reception and integration experience.
- Re-matching arrangements should also be available to those arriving under the UFS. This would remove pressure from LAs, and would also maximise the offer from non-matched sponsors. Rematching is also a more cost-effective type of integration support to Ukrainians who find themselves homeless. In addition, it is recommended that the re-matching policy be extended to instances where the accommodation does not meet crucial needs of the guest (for example lack of school availability) or puts the health of the guest at risk (for example due to smoking habits from the sponsor).
- LAs indicated that they would find it helpful if the funding paid to them follows the guest and not the sponsor. Under the current system, LAs receive the funding only once the sponsor has passed all the checks. This creates financial pressure in situations when sponsors are not responsive (making it difficult to conduct the checks) or unsuitable. The Home Office could re-

consider the way in which funding is provided given these difficulties raised.

- The protection granted through the UFS and HUSS should be extended to all persons fleeing Ukraine who are in need of international protection, including those refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons that were in Ukraine and have been affected by the conflict.

APPLICATION PROCESS

- The application form should be available in Ukrainian so that it is understandable and easy to follow for non-English speakers.
- Applications could benefit from being able to add dependants, instead of being filled individually by each applicant. This would simplify the application process and minimise instances where family members are unable to travel together.
- Applicants and sponsors should be able to track the status of their visa application. This would allow them to have a better understanding of the timeline and make informed decisions on how long they will need to remain in their current circumstances.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- Information gaps that can be addressed in the Government website and application form include:
 - Clear mention at the start of the application form that it should be filled per individual and not per family group,
 - Explanation of the different types of welfare support available, with specific focus on the Universal Credit (including a benefits calculator and indication of timings) to help applicants have a better understanding about the type of support they would have in the UK.
 - Clarification of the importance of having the BRP before traveling back to Ukraine or neighbouring countries, to avoid families from making decisions to separate in the hope that they can reunite within weeks.
- Sharing clear step-by-step guides on things that need to be done upon arrival (depending on family composition and support needs) and, for their sponsors, prior to arrival. This would be most effective if translated into Ukrainian and provided upon issuing the visa, so that all Ukrainians receive the same type of information.
- Although social media and community groups seemed like a good source of information for most participants, government websites should provide clearer guidance on other organisations providing support beyond LAs.

ACCOMMODATION

- Participants indicated that they would find it useful to have an indicative list of questions that sponsors, and guests should ask each other prior to filling the application in the Government website. This would help manage expectations and reduce the risk of relationships breaking down. Questions can include lifestyle, cultural or religious practices, eating and drinking habits, expectations, etc.
- To the extent possible, prospective sponsors should follow training on the practicalities of being a sponsor and on refugees' needs prior to submitting the application. This would allow them to make an informed decision about hosting and be better prepared for the support that may be required. Government websites may be able to direct sponsors to relevant training providers and include materials created by organisations involved in the schemes on understanding trauma, building healthy relationships with guests, amongst others.
- It is recommended that a transition plan for the post-six-months accommodation period is established, ideally at the 4th month of arrival. This would promote a smooth transition and prevent guests from becoming homeless at the end of the period. This might include:
 - Verifying with the sponsor whether they are willing and able to provide housing for an extended period of time,
 - Providing financial advice so that guests save the amount needed for a rental deposit,
 - Ensuring that sponsors can provide a letting reference on behalf of their guests.

SAFEGUARDING

- Currently, LAs are unsure as to whether the date of arrival indicated in their database corresponds to the real date of arrival or to an estimated date given in the application. Consequently, the way in which this information is shared and updated in the system could be revisited to allow LAs to have better visibility on actual dates of arrival and be able to complete necessary checks prior to arrival.
- Given the profile of the displaced population, safeguarding checks should be carried out in a timely manner to ensure that Ukrainians are in safe and suitable accommodation.
- Upon conducting accommodation checks, LAs should ensure that sponsors have initiated the DBS check. Sponsors with digital difficulties can then be supported or referred to organisations that can help fill the online application.
- A more thorough monitoring of cases of children travelling on their own should be in place so that they are diligently identified. Upon identification, protocols observing the best interest of the child should be followed to ensure the child's safety and that their needs are met. This should include establishing contact with the child's parent and assigning a social worker in interim charge of the child's wellbeing. No action should be taken that may hinder eventual family reunification, such as adoption, change of name or lack of prospects for the parents to join their children.

INTEGRATION

- Increase availability and intensity of English language classes so that individuals in need of international protection can integrate faster in the UK. Examples can be taken from countries such as Germany, whereby 600 hours of language course are imparted on a full-time basis (8 hours a day), from Monday to Friday. Ability to attend English language classes can also be improved by offering classes at no cost, ensuring access to childcare facilities and by providing funding to cover travel costs. Alternatively online classes could be provided. To maximise learning opportunities, it would be recommended that online courses have limited class sizes.
- The JCP could give more concrete information on how to requalify and how to write CV and Cover Letters depending on their sector of experience.
- Support should be provided to facilitate recognition of equivalency of academic, professional and vocational qualifications, so that the refugees are able to utilise their skills contribute to the UK society. Examples can be taken from countries who have established recognition procedures based on interviews and evaluations (e.g. Norway), waived fees to those with refugee background (e.g. Belgium) or established fast-track programs for occupations with labour shortages (e.g. Sweden).
- Public transport schemes to support refugees (until they receive Universal Credit for example) could be designed, so that location and budget do not impede the integration of those forced to flee their country.

Conclusion

This report finds that the UFS and HUSS are overall regarded positively by LAs, NGOs, sponsors, and Ukrainians. Relying on the tremendous solidarity from the public and support at different levels, Ukrainians have been able to take active steps for their integration. All interviewed Ukrainians feel safe in their accommodation and low numbers of relationships breaking down under the HUSS have been recorded.

However, challenges include: higher risk of homelessness for those arriving through the UFS; greater financial difficulties for their family members and lack of oversight for LAs; limited English language courses; and ineligibility for re-matching of those who are unable to remain in their accommodation for what are valid justifications, including no vacancies in local schools. As a note of concern, UNHCR observed delays in the performance of safeguarding checks, and recorded cases of Ukrainians living with sponsors who have not received their DBS result, or who have not initiated the DBS application at all. The latter should be particularly scrutinised by LAs to ensure that DBS checks are not left to the discretion of the sponsor. Worryingly, 23 cases of unaccompanied minors were identified.

UNHCR is very grateful to all stakeholders for their positive and constructive engagement with this study. While they should not replace other protection-led pathways for refugees in need of international protection, such as resettlement programmes, the UFS and HUSS are more flexible schemes that have created new opportunities to deal quickly with large scale displacement. UNHCR hopes that the public's solidarity will continue to be extended as the conflict continues and the six-month sponsorship period nears its end, as well as to refugees from other countries to promote a welcoming environment for refugees more generally.

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