British Red Cross

Planning for tomorrow

Lessons learned from the UK's response to displacement from Ukraine

Neighbourly Lab, Opora, British Red Cross

December 2025

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On the cover: Portrait of Vira, a displaced Ukrainian who came to the UK in November 2022.

Glossary

Displaced person: a person forced to flee their home, within or across borders, due to conflict, violence, persecution, human rights violations, natural disasters, the effects of climate change, development projects or a combination of these factors.

Displaced Ukrainians and people displaced from Ukraine: people who have fled the Russia-Ukraine international armed conflict. In the UK context, we refer to displaced people from Ukraine or displaced Ukrainians mainly to signify Ukraine visa scheme visa holders. In the report, due to the small numbers of non-Ukrainian nationals in the UK and for length reasons, we refer to both terms interchangeably. Displaced Ukrainians in the UK do not hold refugee status.

Ukraine visa schemes: (see the Table on page 17) in the report, these refer to the bespoke visa schemes introduced by the UK government in March 2022 and in February 2025 in response to displacement from Ukraine, namely:

- the Ukraine Family scheme, the Ukraine Sponsorship scheme (which refers to both Homes for Ukraine across the UK and the Super Sponsor schemes in Scotland and Wales), the Ukraine Extension scheme, and the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme.

Refugee and asylum seeker: a refugee is someone who is outside their country of origin and would be at risk of persecution if returned to their home country. Having refugee status refers to a person who has had their asylum application accepted by the government of the host state. An asylum seeker refers to a person who, due to a fear of persecution, has left their country of origin and has submitted an asylum application in another country, but the outcome of their application has not been determined yet by the government of the host state.

Core protection status: a proposed new temporary protection status granted to refugees who obtained status after seeking asylum in the UK, which will be reviewed every thirty months and allows people under the status to apply for settlement after twenty years of living in the UK.

Protection Work and Study route: a proposed separate, in-country route that refugees can apply to switch into if they secure a suitable job or begin an appropriate level of study and pay a fee. This route would allow them to apply for settlement more quickly than they would under 'core protection' alone.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG): a UK government department that oversees housing, communities and local governments. Known as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) until it was renamed in July 2024, MHCLG has been leading on most aspects of the Ukraine visa schemes after the point of arrival of Ukrainians into the UK, working closely with local authorities and devolved governments.

The Home Office: a UK government department overseeing a range of home affairs, including immigration, issuing passports and visas, policing and crime. In relation to the Ukraine visa schemes, the Home Office leads on the processing of entry visas, checks on the suitability of the sponsors, and the visa application process on the Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme.

VCS organisations: voluntary and community sector organisations are not-for-profit organisations including charities, community groups and faith groups.

Safe routes: regular and managed routes which enable certain groups of forcibly displaced people seeking international protection to safely travel to the UK. These include the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), refugee family reunion, community sponsorship and nationality-specific schemes such as the Ukraine visa schemes and the (now closed) Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme.

Refugee family reunion: a regular, managed and safe route for the immediate family members of refugees – predominantly women and children – to join them in the UK. In recognition of refugees' unique circumstances, it previously did not impose requirements, like meeting income thresholds. However, after being initially suspended until Spring 2026, in November 2025, the government announced that this route will no longer be available to refugees with 'core protection' status. While it will be accessible on the 'protection work and study route' for refugees in employment or study, it may include further requirements similar to those faced by other migrants and UK citizens, such as financial and language ones.

Biometrics: identification details such as fingerprints and facial photographs.

Private sponsorship: a route that facilitates the admission of displaced people and refugees to a new country. Sponsors identify and select the beneficiaries and are directly involved in their admission, reception and integration. In this report, Homes for Ukraine is considered an example of private sponsorship.

Sponsors/hosts and guests: 'sponsors' and 'hosts' refers to those who support and receive displaced Ukrainians into their homes in the UK. As this involves both visa sponsorship and hosting, this report uses the terms interchangeably. The term 'guests' describes displaced Ukrainians who are received by UK hosts.

Matching and rematching providers: matching involves pairing hosts and displaced Ukrainians through formal and informal methods. Formal matching is conducted by recognised providers working with the UK government, while informal matching occurs through means such as social media platforms. Rematching to a new host occurs when original hosting arrangements break down. It is a process conducted by local authorities, often in collaboration with voluntary and community sector organisations.

Safeguarding: protecting someone's health, wellbeing, and human rights; enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. In this report, we refer to measures aimed at preventing harms to people displaced from Ukraine, including modern slavery, exploitation, child or domestic abuse from adults.

'Foundry' and 'Share': the digital case management system used initially between DLUHC, the Home Office and local authorities to share information on sponsors and displaced Ukrainians on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Local authorities have been required to upload the outcomes of their safeguarding checks on the Foundry digital case management system. Since September 2025, due to challenges with data consistency and management, the UK government has been transitioning to a new data system called Share Homes for Ukraine Data, also known as Share.

Welcome accommodation: a form of temporary accommodation offered to displaced Ukrainians by the Scottish and Welsh governments on arrival, to accommodate them until suitable longer-term accommodation is found.

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Integration: while interpretations of refugee integration can vary, in this report it is defined as a gradual, multi-faceted and two-way process of including someone in a new community, with social, cultural and economic dimensions.[1] Most definitions recognise that it usually involves many levels of adaptation, by both the people seeking sanctuary and the communities receiving them. In this report, integration refers to the ability of people displaced from Ukraine, given enabling conditions, to settle and rebuild their lives in the UK.

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL): English language learning programmes for non-native speakers delivered by various providers. ESOL courses aim to develop learners' English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Ukrainians have been able to access ESOL as part of the Adult Education Offer through their local authorities.[2]

Dual-intent integration: the ability to integrate and prepare for long-term stays in host communities, while at the same time maintaining and acquiring the skills, social network and resources to eventually return to one's country of origin. The assumption for this report is that it entails providing both longer-term integration support to settle and thrive in the UK, and help to remain connected to the Ukrainian community, labour market and education system in Ukraine.[3]

Settlement: provides the right to live, work and study in the UK permanently. Being settled is a first and necessary step towards being allowed to apply for British citizenship. Until November 2025, people could apply for settlement, also known as Indefinite Leave to Remain, when they reached close to five years on from being granted refugee status. Following proposals in November 2025, the government plans to extend the qualifying period for settlement for refugees to twenty years for those with 'core protection' status, and a starting point of ten years, subject to be reduced if certain criteria are met, for those on the 'protection work and study' route (see UK policy context section on page 18).

Voluntary return: the return of displaced people to their country of origin based on a free and informed decision, made without coercion and in conditions of safety and dignity. In this report, it refers to displaced Ukrainians making informed and voluntary decisions to return in individual cases.[4]

Foreword

My family and I arrived in Scotland under the Scottish government's Super Sponsor scheme. From the first day, we felt safe and supported. The Scottish government, local councils, voluntary organisations, neighbours and community groups all gave us help that we will never forget.

> From the first day, we felt **safe and supported**

For me, safety meant more than just protection. It meant stability, dignity and the chance to think about the future again. Settling into Scotland, I liked the nature, the architecture and most of all the people. They were kind, open and willing to help. That kindness gave me confidence and strength from the very beginning.

My first city in Scotland was Stirling. It was there that I started my journey of integration into the UK. A Learning and Employability Officer from Stirling Council helped me find my first job. She guided me through rewriting my CV, adapting it to the UK standards, preparing cover letters and getting ready for interviews. Most importantly, she motivated me and believed in me. That belief made a huge difference at a difficult time. Even after I moved to Glasgow, she stayed in touch. This experience showed me that integration is not only about systems and policies. It is about people who care, who give their time and who encourage you to succeed.

Over the past three years, I've worked full-time, earned a professional UK certification in HR and continued to build a new life. But it has not always been easy. When my previous company downsized, I faced the reality of trying to find another full-time job with only a temporary visa. This is one of the biggest barriers for Ukrainians in the UK.

Many job applications begin with a simple question: Do you have British citizenship, settled status, or indefinite leave to remain? If the answer is "no", your application ends there. It does not matter if you have UK experience, qualifications, or skills. This has happened to me multiple times now. In one case, I passed two interviews for a temporary role that exactly matched my experience. I felt sure I would get the job. But at the final stage, I was rejected. The manager explained they hoped to change the role to permanent in the future and, because of my visa, I was not considered the best candidate.

Twice, I've had recruiters set me up to interview for roles that sounded perfect – one was an HR Administrator role with a track to promotion as an HR Advisor, the job I was doing in Ukraine. But both times when it came to explain my visa situation, everything shut down. I know many others are in the same situation. A friend of mine in Edinburgh, a project manager with excellent English, was rejected after two interviews because her visa had only 2.5 years left. Another friend in London, working as an analyst, lived in fear while waiting for her visa extension. She worried every day about losing her job and housing. The stress even affected her health.

This is the reality for many of us. We want to integrate, to work, to contribute and to give back to the communities that welcomed us. But without long-term stability, it feels like a closed circle. We are encouraged to rebuild our lives here, but the lack of secure status makes it very difficult. Despite these challenges, I remain grateful for the safety and support I have received in Scotland. Communities have welcomed us with warmth and kindness. These are the bright parts of our journey.

This report shows why quick access to safety, a warm welcome and the chance to plan for the future matter so much. My hope is that the lessons here will inspire policies that allow people not only to survive, but to live and rebuild their lives with dignity.

Sofia[5]

Displaced Ukrainian in the UK.

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Executive summary

The UK's response to the displacement of Ukrainians in 2022 marked a departure from past models of refugee protection. For the first time, the UK government deployed a visa-led, community-driven approach that has so far enabled more than 225,000,[6] people to find safety at notable speed and scale. This approach did not follow traditional asylum or resettlement pathways. Rather, the UK implemented bespoke schemes that empowered local communities, allowed a range of family members to find safety together in the UK, and enabled local authorities and devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to take the lead.

82%
of survey respondents are hoping to stay for the long term (five or more years)

While this approach was innovative, adaptable and allowed a large number of people to quickly find safety, it was often applied inconsistently. The same flexibility that enabled innovation also resulted in gaps in coordination and uneven support.

The temporary nature of the schemes has also created uncertainty about the future and challenges for integration, despite most Ukrainians and the majority of our survey respondents wanting to stay in the UK. Still, this research shows how the Ukraine response created more human-centred systems, while fostering community cohesion. Through recognising the individual needs of displaced people, supporting meaningful connections with host communities and strengthening schemes through continued and timely improvements, the UK provided strong support to many displaced people.

About the research

This mixed method research was commissioned by the British Red Cross and conducted by Neighbourly Lab in partnership with Opora, a Ukrainian-led organisation which supports people displaced from Ukraine in rebuilding their lives in the UK. This project explored Ukrainians' experiences of displacement and the support they received.

It is grounded in the lived experiences of people displaced from Ukraine, but it also speaks to the policies, systems and practices underlying the UK response that affect wider refugee protection. It provides practical insights to improve support for other displaced people and strengthen preparedness for future crises.

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Key findings

Our findings are structured around three key stages of people's journey:

Access to safety *(visa applications, eligibility and speed of arrivals)*

1

- **The speed, flexibility and accessibility of the UK's response was novel and offered a route to safety for more than 200,000 people.** Flexible visa processing, wider eligibility for family members and private and super sponsorship enabled a managed and rapid entry for people seeking protection. This was a clear break from slower, more complex and burdensome approaches for people seeking safety used in many previous responses.
- **Community networks helped people displaced from Ukraine feel welcome.** Hosts, neighbours and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations formed the backbone of support. Where these relationships were strong and well-supported, people felt safer, more connected and better able to rebuild their lives.

Welcome and integration *(integration experiences including English language, employment, education and social connection)*

2

- **Children's education provided vital stability and supported community integration.** Schools emerged as a consistent source of support, shaping where families settled and often anchoring them in their communities.
- **Ukrainians accessed different levels of support depending on location, scheme and available infrastructure.** Some local areas developed strong coordination between local authorities and civil society; others lacked infrastructure or struggled to provide support on a larger scale. This inconsistency led to unequal experiences for displaced Ukrainians.
- **While widely accessed, English language classes and employment support did not meet everyone's needs.** Half of survey respondents faced difficulties with English, which negatively impacted their ability to integrate into communities across the UK. Many struggled to find jobs that matched their qualifications and skills, with limited employment opportunities and lack of tailored support being a persistent challenge.

Planning for the future *(the intentions of people displaced from Ukraine, including motivations and concerns about the future in an uncertain context)*

3

- **Short-term visas and a lack of information limited opportunities and created uncertainty.** Short-term status restricted people's housing and job options, and some described employers being reluctant to hire them because their visas were too short. For many, this uncertainty continues to affect daily decisions and makes planning for the future difficult.
- **The majority of respondents hope to remain in the UK if possible.** After living in the UK for several years, most people have rebuilt their lives in their communities and many have children for whom they want to continue living in a safe and stable environment in the UK.

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Priorities for policy change

Our findings point clearly to four priorities for delivering successful refugee protection and effective integration support in the UK:

1. Secure long-term pathways for Ukrainians and other displaced people that offer the stability to integrate and real choice about their futures.
2. Uphold family unity in responses to forced displacement, supporting both access to safety and integration.
3. A national strategy for displaced people that better coordinates and sustainably funds integration support including improved language learning and employment support.
4. Create a Displacement Response Framework, built on lessons from the Ukraine response that is ready to activate in future emergencies. As a first step, adopt the British Red Cross Roadmap to Safety, Protection and Belonging – a practical guide to improve current and future refugee protection responses.

These priorities for change are vital not only for Ukrainians in the UK today, but also for how we improve current efforts and prepare for future displacement crises.

Recommendations can be found at the end of each chapter in the Findings section (for 'Access to safety', on page 32, for 'Welcome and integration' on page 41, and for 'Planning for the future' on page 50). A full list of the recommendations starts on page 52.

Kateryna and her daughter Dariia, who were internally displaced in Ukraine.

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Application of learnings to other safe routes

The UK should apply insights from the Ukraine response to current and future refugee protection efforts. Our roadmap sets out key principles and priority areas informed by our Planning for Tomorrow research and recommendation workshops, previous policy research[1] and operational experience.

A roadmap to safety, protection, and belonging

1. Help people access safety swiftly by consistently using flexible approaches

People in need of protection often face difficult journeys to safety, including to the UK, or wait a long time in unsafe situations before accessing a managed route to safety, if one is available to them at all. The Ukraine response showed how governments can enable people to access a safe route quickly and effectively. It was initially challenging due to inflexible systems, before the Home Office adapted to a mostly online rather than in-person approach to biometrics.

Future responses should:

- Use remote processing and online identity checks wherever possible. Flexibility around where and when biometrics are submitted can make accessing safety simpler for those who need it.

2. Provide safe and suitable housing for new arrivals and prevent hardship

Secure housing provides the stability that displaced people need to rebuild their lives. Insights from the Ukraine response can strengthen initial and longer-term housing provision and prevent financial hardship.

Key priorities for future responses:

- Set a time limit for stays in temporary accommodation as part of a plan for supported transition into long-term housing. At the same time, continue to invest in social and affordable housing so that local authorities can provide longer-term accommodation to all displaced people in the communities in which they live.[7] In future sponsorship responses, ensure hosting placements are supported through registered matching providers, effective safeguarding, and training for hosts.
- Provide cash-based assistance (CBA) so that people do not experience hardship while waiting to receive benefits or setting up bank accounts. For example, the government provided important welcome payments to arrivals under Homes for Ukraine and the British Red Cross also saw the positive impact of making CBA available to all displaced Ukrainians through its emergency programming.

3. Provide certainty through long-term leave to remain, a route to residence and enable families to stay together in safety

Temporary immigration status and family separation have a negative impact on displaced people's integration prospects. Uncertainty impacts day-to-day life and limits the ability to plan for the future for individuals, families, employers, educators and the communities in which they live.

In future responses, our learnings show that the UK government should:

- Make sure families are brought to the UK together wherever possible when fleeing conflict or persecution. And support access to refugee family reunion when displaced individuals are separated.
- Provide a minimum of five years' leave to remain and a realistically achievable route to residence for all displaced people with status.

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4. Improve English language learning and opportunities for informal support and connections

Language is often a first step to belonging. The experiences of Ukrainians made it clear that traditional ESOL classes, while welcome, are often too academic, inflexible, or poorly timed, and not enough. People need English that helps them get a job, speak to a doctor, or talk to their child's teacher.

Future responses should:

- Provide structured ESOL support, at the same time as expanding access to informal learning through community initiatives and buddy schemes.

5. Empower displaced people, through employment support, to contribute to society

One of the clearest frustrations among Ukrainians has been the inability to use their skills and qualifications. We have heard stories of engineers working in warehouses and doctors in cleaning roles, which reflect longstanding barriers to using professional experience.

This can be addressed by:

- Including job readiness training (e.g. CV writing, strength-based employment training) and local job matching support in integration support from day one.
- Strengthening coordination and information sharing between the Department of Education, Ecctis, employers, charities and displaced people to accelerate qualification recognition in identified key industries.

6. Mobilise communities and local areas to welcome displaced people

Integration often takes place locally and in everyday settings such as homes, schools, sports clubs and businesses.

Future initiatives could be supported by:

- Maintaining VCS mechanisms like Welcome Hubs that supported Ukrainian arrivals for other people in need of protection.
- Allocating resource for a community coordinator in each local authority for welcome activities. For instance, by organising events where displaced people build connections with the host community, as well as promoting community education initiatives. This would contribute to social cohesion.
- Providing consistent and long-term integration funding so local authorities can plan for the welcome of new arrivals, including support with accessing healthcare (including mental health and psychosocial support), English language, education, employment, accommodation and providing opportunities for play, building social connections and a sense of normality.

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7. Improve data and information sharing across the UK

Data sharing, management and communication need to be strengthened across all levels of response – between governments of the four nations and then to local authorities and VCS organisations.

Future responses should:

- Improve arrival notification services so they consistently share key information about new arrivals (e.g. numbers, family composition, needs and vulnerabilities) to local authorities and their local VCS partners in advance so that they can better prepare for their arrival.
- Ensure case management systems provide accurate and timely information to support safeguarding checks.
- Create a digital hub where hosts, displaced people, and VCS organisations can access real-time updates on policy from national, devolved and local government as well as tailored resources and support tools.

8. Create a Displacement Response Framework that can be triggered in response to future emergencies:

The UK needs a plan for future crises so it doesn't start from scratch each time. This would contribute to the government's aim of maintaining flexibility for future crises. Cooperation across different levels of governance – international, national, devolved and local is critical.

For future responses, the UK should agree and formalise a four nations framework by:

- Evaluating and drawing on good practices and lessons for welcoming displaced people from previous responses, including displacement from Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan.
- Developing preparedness plans based on a range of modelled arrival figures and the delivery of integration support.
- Establishing clear communication lines between UK, devolved and local government and VCS organisations.
- Testing the framework through a displacement focused exercise. For instance, within the UK Resilience Academy's National Exercising Programme. This would support understanding of the capacity of responders in comparison to need and improve coordination.

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Introduction

The UK's response to displacement from Ukraine has been an innovative approach to refugee protection. The deployment of visa-led and community-powered schemes enabled the UK to offer safety at scale. More than 225,000 people found safety in the UK through these bespoke visa schemes, including the Ukraine Family scheme (now closed) and Ukraine Sponsorship scheme (still open to new applications). In addition, over 34,000 Ukrainians who were living in the UK at the time of the escalation of the conflict have extended their stay through the Ukraine Extension scheme (also now closed)[8] and in-country applications to the Ukraine Family scheme. Unlike past refugee efforts, which were often slower, centralised, and more complex and limited in scope, this model devolved responsibility to local actors, encouraged community involvement and removed bureaucratic barriers. Learnings from this response can improve sponsorship and resettlement efforts, as well as community-led integration initiatives that can support all new arrivals. Our report also spotlights how sponsorship schemes could act as an additional route for refugee protection.

Displaced Ukrainian Melisa Kogut (second right), aged 11, stands with her family on the doorstep of 10 Downing Street after meeting with the UK Prime Minister after they arrived to the UK through the UK visa scheme. Friday 13 May, 2022.

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Aims and methods

The research aimed to:

- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the UK's response to Ukrainian displacement so far and identify what support is needed next by people displaced from Ukraine.
- Explore the lessons emerging from the response that have the potential to be applied to other safe routes.
- Identify key principles to strengthen the UK's overall approach to refugee protection across safe routes.

We wanted to explore the response across the four nations of the UK. Among the devolved nations, we focused on Scotland due to the large number of arrivals under the Scottish government's Super Sponsor scheme. This focus was reflected in our survey sample and our engagement with expert stakeholders in Scotland through interviews and a recommendation workshop.

The research was carried out between January and September 2025 and included five key phases:

1. Desk research

A rapid review of recent evidence, including academic studies, policy reports and evaluations. This provided context and helped identify areas of good practice as well as challenges.

2. Peer researcher involvement

Four peer researchers with lived experience of displacement helped design and carry out the research. They assisted in interviewing people displaced from Ukraine, disseminating the survey, analysing the qualitative and quantitative data, and facilitating the collaborative workshops. Their involvement supported culturally sensitive research practice, for example, through sharing personal insights, helping frame the research team's understanding of what was meant in interviews and strengthening trust with participants.

3. Qualitative research

- Semi-structured interviews with 10 expert stakeholders including local authority and VCS representatives, and devolved government officials.
- In-depth, trauma-informed interviews with 16 people displaced from Ukraine from across the UK. Participants included a mix of age groups, visa pathways and household types.
- Interviews with 10 Homes for Ukraine hosts, exploring motivations, experiences and lessons learned.

4. Quantitative research

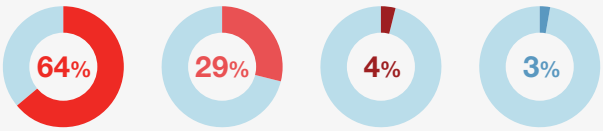
An online survey co-designed with Opora. The survey was primarily disseminated through Opora's social media channels and online support groups, reaching the wide base of displaced Ukrainians that Opora supports in the UK. Peer researchers also circulated the survey among their networks, and the Neighbourly Lab team did outreach with groups more likely to be digitally excluded. To ensure accessibility and ease of participation, the survey was translated into both Russian and Ukrainian.

Our survey sample

A total of 1,421 people displaced from Ukraine took part in our survey. As we used a convenience sample, rather than a random sample, there is a greater risk of bias. Our dissemination strategy may also have limited participation from individuals who are digitally excluded or less connected to support networks. However, the demographic breakdown generally aligns with our overall expectations for the sample.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) data from early 2024[9] shows that 70% of adults who arrived through the Ukraine visa schemes were women, compared to 80% of those who completed our survey. Most survey respondents arrived under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, as seen nationally. The majority (87%) had lived in the UK for more than two years, broadly reflecting arrival patterns that peaked in the spring of 2022.[10] Age profiles are also aligned with national data, with most respondents between the ages of 30 and 49.

In terms of geography, our survey includes participants living in all four nations of the UK:



Our survey slightly overrepresents the proportion of displaced Ukrainians in Scotland but reflects that Scotland received the largest number of arrivals after England. UK-wide data shows that 18% of all HFU arrivals were originally hosted in Scotland.[11]

While the sample cannot be taken as fully representative of all Ukrainians in the UK, it provides a credible insight into the experiences of a broad cross-section of this population. Conducted in spring 2025, our survey also provides a relatively recent and up-to-date overview of displaced Ukrainians' experiences and future intentions.

5. Collaborative workshops

Two online workshops with professional stakeholders and representatives from VCS organisations, local authorities, devolved governments and Ukrainian community members were used to test emerging findings and co-develop practical recommendations. One focused on stakeholders from Scotland, while the other focused on UK-wide solutions.

Background

The humanitarian situation in Ukraine

12.7m
people require humanitarian assistance in Ukraine

The full-scale escalation of the international armed conflict (IAC) in February 2022 has resulted in a humanitarian crisis on a scale that Europe has not seen in decades. In 2025, the UN estimates that 12.7 million people – around a third of Ukraine's population – require humanitarian assistance, with the highest levels of need concentrated in the eastern and southern regions along the front lines.[12] Around 3.8 million people remain internally displaced, while a further 5.6 million are displaced and being hosted across Europe.[13] In areas under the control of the Russian Federation, where humanitarian access is highly restricted, more than 1 million people are believed to be living in dire conditions with severely constrained access to basic services.[14] Nearly 42,000 verified civilian casualties have been recorded since February 2022, including over 12,600 deaths, with casualty rates peaking again in mid-2025 as hostilities intensified.[15] The conflict has systematically undermined access to essential services such as food, shelter, water and healthcare. Repeated strikes on Ukraine's power grid, gas supplies and water systems have left millions vulnerable, while widespread damage to health facilities and transport networks continues to disrupt civilian life.[16]

Volunteers with the Ukrainian Red Cross Society emergency response teams help an elderly resident during flooding caused by the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka Dam.

UK policy context

This visa-led approach was a new model, which relied heavily on private sponsorship through Homes for Ukraine, alongside coordinated efforts from the UK and devolved governments, local authorities and VCS organisations.

Table: Overview of Ukraine visa schemes

	Ukraine Permission Extension scheme – 18 months – (open)
What it is:	Allows Ukrainians, and their family members, living in the UK on any Ukraine visa scheme to apply for up to 18 months of leave with the same rights they currently hold. Children born in the UK to parents with leave under the schemes will also be able to use this route. Launched on 4 February 2025 and is open for applications.[17]
How it works:	Ukrainians can apply online 28 or less days before their visa expires, and can re-submit their previous biometric details online.
Extensions:	As of 30 June 2025, there were 80,704 extensions granted on the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme.[18]
	Ukraine Sponsorship scheme – Homes for Ukraine – UK-wide – (open)
What it is:	Allows Ukrainians and their family members[19] to apply for a visa to the UK if they have an eligible sponsor[20] who has committed to offer accommodation for a minimum of six months. If successful, Ukrainians receive an 18-month leave to remain in the UK. Scheme launched on 18 March 2022.
How it works:	Sponsors and Ukrainians match independently, and Ukrainians have to name an eligible sponsor as part of their visa application. The Home Office conducts background and suitability checks on sponsors before issuing the visa, and local authorities carry out safeguarding checks on sponsors (including DBS checks), checks on the suitability of accommodation and welfare visits after Ukrainians arrive. There are enhanced safeguards for children, especially when arriving without parents.[21]
Arrivals:	As of 30 June 2025, there were 167,000 arrivals and 202,000 Homes for Ukraine visas granted.[22]
	Ukraine Sponsorship scheme – Super Sponsor schemes in Wales and Scotland – (paused)
What they are:	Allow Ukrainians to be sponsored by the Welsh and Scottish governments directly, without the need to find individual sponsors. The schemes remain paused since June and July 2022 in Wales and Scotland respectively.
How they work:	Ukrainians can indicate the Welsh and Scottish governments as sponsors in their visa application.
Arrivals:	21,676 Ukrainians arrived on the Scottish Super Sponsor scheme, out of 32,623 overall visas granted, and 3,388 on the Welsh Super Sponsor scheme, out of 4,621 visas granted.[23]
	Ukraine Family scheme – (closed)
What it is:	Allowed Ukrainians to apply for a visa to join a wide range of family members who were British citizens, were settled or pre-settled, or had refugee status in the UK (initially including siblings, parents, grandparents and also nephews, uncles and aunties) in the UK. The scheme was closed to new applications on 19 February 2024.
How it works:	Applicants applied online; there haven't been checks on family hosts or the suitability of accommodation.
Arrivals:	As of 30 June 2025, 59,300 people had arrived on the Ukraine Family scheme, out of 72,494* visas granted.
	Ukraine Extension scheme – (closed)
What it is:	Allowed Ukrainian nationals living in the UK on or before 18 March 2022 with temporary visas to extend their stay in the UK, and was open also to those granted 'leave outside the rules' for six months after 24 February 2022. It opened on 3 May 2022 and was closed to most applications in May 2024,[24] and to all applications on 4 February 2025.
How it works:	Individuals applied directly online.
Extensions:	As of December 2024, 25,800 applications were granted on the scheme out of 32,000 applications received.

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The Ukraine schemes in wider context

The large scale and uptake of Ukraine visa schemes set it apart from other safe routes. For people fleeing other conflicts, such as in Sudan or Somalia, options for a safe route to the UK are limited, difficult to access and significantly smaller in scale. In the year ending March 2025, 7,736 people were resettled in the UK – 90% of these people arrived through the now closed Afghan Resettlement Programme. Only 800 people arrived through the UK Resettlement Scheme which delivers protection to refugees in particularly vulnerable situations.[25]

The recent "Restoring Order and Control" policy statement (November 2025) sets out proposals to change refugee protection in the UK.[26] These include replacing refugee status with a new temporary 'core protection' status for people who successfully claim asylum. This status will be reviewed every 30 months, and the qualifying period for settlement extended from five to twenty years. The government will also introduce a separate, in-country 'protection work and study route' for eligible refugees, which will allow them to apply for 'earned settlement' sooner. The UK government has recently launched a consultation on 'earned settlement', with lengthier residence requirements and a series of contribution criteria.[27]

Changes to safe routes have been also proposed. Refugee family reunion – already suspended in September 2025 – will now only be available only for people on the 'work and study route', and they may face new requirements, such as language and financial requirements.

Several safe routes have been proposed, alongside delivering existing commitments and maintaining flexibility for future crises. The proposed new routes are a reformed refugee sponsorship route with greater involvement from the VCS sector, and routes for skilled refugees to study and work. Annual caps will be set by the Home Secretary based on local capacity. Settlement on these new routes is expected to be available after ten years, but may be shorter under the proposed 'earned settlement' model currently under consultation.[28] No timelines for the introduction of these routes have been given at the time of writing.

As a distinct protection route and with no existing path to settlement, the Ukraine visa schemes are not covered in these latest policy statements on refugee protection and settlement. However, clarity and reassurance for Ukrainian people is needed on the future.

Access to safety

The introduction of **biometric concessions** led to faster entry for applicants with valid passports.

The Ukraine visa schemes enabled remarkably quick access to safety. The first people arrived in the UK on 7 March, 2022, only 11 days after the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine.[29] All Ukraine visa schemes have been uncapped while they remained open. Applications have been online and free of charge, with no immigration health surcharge. The Ukraine Family scheme, launched on 4 March 2022, enabled Ukrainians to join a wide range of family members settled in the UK.[30] The Homes for Ukraine scheme allowed Ukrainians to be sponsored by eligible private citizens, with a commitment to host them for a minimum of six months. Most Ukrainians arrived in the first year of the schemes, with 126,400 arrivals on the Homes for Ukraine scheme and 52,600 arrivals via the Ukraine Family scheme by the end of June 2023.[31] By June 2025, over 225,000 displaced Ukrainians had arrived in the UK[32], with arrivals having steadily declined since their peak in May 2022.[33]

Crucial to the speed of the response was the escalation of visa processing efforts after the schemes launched in March 2022, as well as the introduction of temporary biometric concessions[34] which led to faster entry for applicants with valid passports.

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In February 2024, access to safety through the Ukraine visa schemes was restricted.[35] The Ukraine Family scheme was closed, and more stringent eligibility criteria for sponsors on Homes for Ukraine were introduced[36], which meant displaced Ukrainians were no longer able to sponsor their family members to join them in the UK.[37] This was partly reversed in January 2025, when the UK government enabled displaced Ukrainians to sponsor their children under 18 through Homes for Ukraine.[38]

Super Sponsor schemes

The Scottish and Welsh governments introduced 'Super Sponsor' schemes, sitting under the UK Ukraine Sponsorship scheme. While the visa approval process was led by the Home Office, these schemes allowed displaced Ukrainians to select the Scottish and Welsh governments as their sponsors on the visa application, without the need to find an individual sponsor in advance. Under the Super Sponsor schemes, the Scottish and Welsh governments also provided temporary accommodation and support with finding longer-term housing. However, both these schemes were paused after a few months – in Wales in June[39] and in Scotland in July 2022[40] – due to demand exceeding estimations and pressures on available accommodation.[41] Both schemes remain paused at the time of writing.

Welcome and integration

Ukrainians on any Ukraine visa scheme are entitled to work, study, apply for benefits and use the NHS free of charge for the duration of their stay. They are also eligible for home fee status[42] and student support in higher education courses.[43]

Initial welcome

Hosts and UK-based families, rather than local authorities as in previous resettlement responses, have provided initial accommodation and welcome support. However, in a wider context of housing pressures, displaced Ukrainians faced extended stays in temporary accommodation, as well as challenges in moving into longer-term, secure and independent accommodation.[44]

The UK government financially supported Ukrainians, hosts and local authorities across the country (see scheme Table on page 17). As outlined in previous British Red Cross reports,[45] the provision of such support has been inconsistent between the Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine Family scheme. However, when provided on Homes for Ukraine, the one-year integration tariff enabled local authorities to help Ukrainians with both immediate and longer-term support (including help navigating the private rented sector and English language support).[46]

The tariff was also used by some local authorities to fund dedicated roles within their staff – known as Ukraine officers – who served as the single point of contact for newly arrived Ukrainians.

Ukrainian Assistance Centres in Northern Ireland provided multi-agency and holistic support to displaced Ukrainians

Devolved governments also met immediate needs through multi-agency, holistic support centres for people displaced from Ukraine. For example, in Northern Ireland, the Executive established Ukrainian Assistance Centres in partnership with the British Red Cross and other VCS organisations.[47] They brought together public service provision and local organisations under one roof, making access easier and collaboration possible.[48] Similarly, the Scottish and Welsh governments – working with local authorities and VCS organisations – established welcome hubs and welcome centres that provided initial welcome, and access to healthcare and accommodation.

Longer-term integration support

13,000+
Ukrainians provided with language and employability support by the STEP Ukraine programme (2023-2025)

The UK government also introduced targeted, but often small-scale and time-limited integration measures that supported the acquisition of English language and employability. For example, from August 2023 to March 2025, it funded the STEP Ukraine pilot programme, which provided intensive online English Language and employability support to more than 13,000 Ukrainians. This saw 84% of Ukrainians who took part successfully completing the programme.[49] Building on this, in November 2024, the STEP Ahead programme extended this support to refugees of all nationalities for another short-term pilot funded by the Home Office which concluded in early 2025. In autumn 2025, the UK government introduced further funding on the free STEP programme for displaced Ukrainians and Hong Kong British national (overseas) visa holders in England, offering flexible online English language and targeted employment support.[50]

Governments in Scotland[51], Wales[52] and Northern Ireland[53] have recently published updated strategies and delivery plans setting out a vision for the integration of all displaced people in their nations – including people seeking asylum, refugees and their families.

For example, the Scottish government – with COSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council – articulated a longer-term vision for the inclusion of displaced Ukrainians in Scotland through 'A warm Scots future' (2023).[54] Similarly to in Wales, in Scotland good progress has been made in moving people out of welcome accommodation,[55] and there has been continued investment in social and affordable housing[56] as well as English Language support.[57] As in other nations, the integration needs of displaced Ukrainians are now being addressed as part the wider New Scots Integration Strategy: Delivery Plan (2024-2026),[58] which sets actions for the Scottish government, COSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council, along with partners, on key integration priorities for all displaced people. These include actions on English Language (e.g. action 2.2) and employment support, (e.g. action 3.4). In the Delivery Plan, there is also a commitment to review learning and best practice from the Ukraine response to inform future protection responses (action 6.3).

Meanwhile, England lacks an integration strategy, and at the time of writing the UK government has no comprehensive refugee integration strategy.

Planning for the future

Many countries have offered temporary visas to people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, instead of standard refugee status. In the European Union (EU), the Temporary Protection Directive was triggered for the first time in 2022 and has been extended on a year-by-year basis, with the latest extension until March 2027.[59]

In March 2022, the UK government granted Ukrainians a three-year leave to stay in the UK on all three visa schemes, which in February 2024 was reduced to 18 months for new arrivals on Homes for Ukraine.[60] At the same time, the UK government announced the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme, which allowed Ukrainians already living in the UK to apply to remain in the UK for a further 18 months (see Table for details).[61] The scheme opened for applications on 5 February 2025, and over 80,000 applications to stay have been granted so far.[62] In September 2025, the Home Secretary announced a second two-year extension, but details are not yet published.[63]

While Ukrainians have been offered these time-limited extensions, they have no route to permanent residence in the UK. While Ukrainians have been offered these time-limited extensions, they have no route permanent residence in the UK. In November 2024, the Immigration Rules were changed to reflect that years spent in the UK under any Ukraine visa

scheme cannot be counted towards settlement.[64] And the schemes are outside the scope of the 'earned settlement' consultation.

However, people who fled Ukraine in March 2022, will have spent over six years in the UK by the time their second visa extension expires. Without an accessible route to permanent residence, displaced people are unable to invest in their long-term integration – from securing stable employment and independent housing, to building lasting connections in their communities, schools, and workplaces. This uncertainty not only affects individuals and families, but also limits the ability of local services, employers and educators to plan ahead effectively. In addition, while Ukraine scheme visa holders can now sponsor their children under 18 to join them through Homes for Ukraine[65], they are still no longer able to reunite with close family members such as their partners and siblings.

Gaps in evidence: longer-term experiences and planning for the future

While there is growing evidence on the initial effect of the UK's response, much remains unknown about the longer-term experiences of people displaced from Ukraine. In 2024, 68% of respondents to the ONS follow-up survey said they would want to live in the UK even in a future in which they felt it was safe to return to Ukraine, a notable increase from 52% the year before.[66] With many still unsure of their next steps, further insight is needed into how policies, information and services can support people to plan for the future.

This research fills a significant gap in the UK context. More research on the support that displaced Ukrainians may need upon return to Ukraine – especially for those in vulnerable situations such as people with disabilities – would be useful in continuing to build up this bank of evidence.[67]

Findings

Overview of system response

We have used our qualitative research findings to collate what worked well and less well within four levels of the system response: UK government, devolved government, local government and the VCS.[68] Together these different levels shaped the UK response to displacement from Ukraine, and the boxes below provide an overview of its strengths and challenges.

What worked well

UK government

- The decision to support a private sponsorship model allowed the UK to meet the pace and scale of displacement from Ukraine.
- The UK government supported local authorities and civil society to develop solutions on the ground to support people seeking access to safety.
- It tried to develop smooth systems and processes with few bureaucratic blockers that would hinder the work being done at a local level.

Devolved government

- The Welsh and Scottish governments' Super Sponsor schemes provided significantly faster access to safety than previous responses.
- There were fewer safeguarding risks because the government managed the accommodation process.
- In Northern Ireland, the Executive set up Ukraine Assistance Centres to provide advice and support to arrivals.

Local government

- Dedicated Ukraine officers often played a crucial role in supporting Homes for Ukraine guests.
- Some local authorities worked closely with each other to share guidance and learning.
- Local authorities received some funding from the UK government and responsibility to develop solutions that worked for their specific contexts.

VCS

- Larger national charities helped improve safeguarding checks and added legitimacy to the process.
- Smaller community organisations and charities mobilised communities of hosts, facilitated matching, and provided advice.

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What worked less well

UK government

- Communication to people displaced from Ukraine about the available visa schemes in the UK was patchy and hard to access.
- In the early stages of the response, coordination challenges between government departments led to delayed visa processing times.
- These challenges were exacerbated by the fact that the Homes for Ukraine scheme, unlike the Family scheme, did not build on any existing schemes and infrastructure within the Home Office.
- Some of the data architecture created by the UK government was difficult to operationalise.
- Communication and guidance to other parts of the system was mixed. A number of interested hosts were lost because they were not informed that they needed to actively match with guests themselves after registering on the governmental database.

Devolved government

- In Wales and Scotland, the level of demand on the Super Sponsor schemes was significantly underestimated. The speed in providing access to safety through these schemes also meant there was a lack of long-term accommodation planning.
- This led to people getting stuck in temporary accommodation for long periods of time (in turn impacting their ability to integrate).

Local government

- There was inconsistency in how local authorities responded, with some areas able to develop effective localised systems, while others struggled with overwhelm and fewer resources.
- Communication systems between authorities were often limited which stymied the sharing of best practice.
- In some instances, Homes for Ukraine hosts struggled to get support and guidance from their local authorities, including around safeguarding checks.

VCS

- VCS organisations had difficulty accessing data from local authorities and the UK government, to understand the number of people arriving in their area and when this was happening (often due to data constraints).
- Some charities struggled to deal with the scale of the response and felt stretched and overwhelmed, particularly in the early stages.

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Access to safety

Overview

By August 2022, the two principal Ukraine visa schemes provided more people with temporary protection than the combined total of people receiving protection through the UK's asylum and refugee resettlement routes between 2016 and 2021.[69] The Scottish and Welsh governments also acted as Super Sponsors to just over 25,000 people.[70] This section of the report sets out the key lessons to be learned from how the UK provided access to safety for many people displaced from Ukraine.

Our research found that:

1. **Private sponsorship**[71] **was crucial for ensuring people's access to safety** (primarily through the Homes for Ukraine scheme), but there were risks around safeguarding.
2. **The Super Sponsor schemes enabled fast access to safety** in Scotland and Wales, where applicants could name the Scottish or Welsh government as their sponsor.
3. **Flexibility in visa processing resulted in quicker and more efficient safe routes into the UK**, through measures such as allowing people to submit biometrics once they had arrived in the UK and allowing uncapped access to the schemes.
4. **A broader definition of 'family' meant more people with family connections could access safety in the UK** through the Ukraine Family scheme which was open to both immediate and extended family members.
5. **Local innovation enabled quick access to safety** but mixed levels of communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing meant experiences of accessing safety varied across the UK.

Private sponsorship ensured access to safety at pace and scale

Across our interviews with expert stakeholders, people displaced from Ukraine and Homes for Ukraine hosts, we consistently heard how vital the private sponsorship approach was to accessing safety and initial accommodation. This can be seen most clearly through Homes for Ukraine and, on a smaller scale, through the Ukraine Family scheme. Homes for Ukraine was unique in how it directly involved and relied on individuals and communities in providing access to safety.

> The Syrian and Afghan models just wouldn't have worked because of the scale and pace. After the Kabul evacuation the plan was to book every hotel they could lay their hands on, but there was no next move. So it was agreed we wouldn't use hotels for the Ukraine response and it would be community led.
>
> **Expert interview participant, Senior civil servant**

The success of this model hinged on political will, public support and community-led hosting, which enabled displaced people to look for their own hosts, in turn leading to far higher numbers to be quickly and, initially, easily housed compared to previous refugee responses.[72]

The matching process

The matching process was key in enabling prospective hosts and people displaced from Ukraine to quickly connect with one another. Most displacement responses have been UK government-led, whereas Homes for Ukraine placed greater agency and responsibility on individuals and communities. Matching between displaced people and sponsors largely took place online and was facilitated by a range of platforms created by communities in response to the crisis.[73] This model included the ability for hosts to name the people who they wanted to sponsor. Some hosts we spoke to shared that having this flexibility and choice encouraged them to host, and professional stakeholders in our interviews also cited this informal model as a key factor in generating such widespread buy-in from hosts.[74]

> My friend sent me a link to the Opora site where I registered and had loads of amazing hosts offering to host me – I decided to go with someone who was a lovely lady living in the countryside of Northern Ireland… She helped me in so many ways.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, Northern Ireland**

Hosts were encouraged to come forward thanks to community-led efforts

Alongside formal VCS organisations, Homes for Ukraine also saw communities informally organise and work together to coordinate matching processes. In interviews with hosts, many described a strong sense of unity within their communities, and the networks of support they built with neighbours were often a key factor in encouraging them to sign up. For some, this created a positive feedback loop, where community-led efforts to host displaced Ukrainians increased local engagement and helped bring more hosts forward.

Local online platforms created by communities using Facebook, as well as national channels like Opora, developed in response to this crisis. They became essential both for matching people to hosts, but also as channels of trusted information for people navigating the visa application process from abroad. These online platforms were the core source of information and advice for the majority of the displaced Ukrainians that we interviewed.

> The amazing thing about this was that it felt quite organic and bottom-up and when government tries to be top down and create red tape it creates barriers and people are like 'no thanks', but we felt a sense of ownership and that we'd taken the plunge and gone out there and actually made it happen rather than someone doing it for us.
>
> **Host interview participant, North East England**

Partnership working

Partnership working between the UK government and local VCS organisations supported private sponsorship to be safe and effective in meeting need. Stakeholders from national and local VCS organisations described in our interviews how communication with government departments allowed for iteration and fine-tuning of the response. Many reflected that the involvement of grassroots organisations in decision-making processes (such as when establishing networks of approved providers) was key to the success of the response.

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> We worked in a core delivery group (CDG) with UK government stakeholders which meant I could give feedback in real time on what was working well and not well. It felt like we were always three months ahead of the government. But for the first time me and other organisations in the CDG actually felt heard and it felt really respectful and quite groundbreaking for the civil service, like we were building something together. We even had a hotline so when we had a bad safeguarding issue we knew who to call.
>
> **Expert interview participant, national charity**

Safeguarding risks

The Homes for Ukraine scheme includes two layers of safeguarding: the Home Office conducts security and criminal checks on sponsors before issuing visas, while local authorities carry out safeguarding and accommodation checks after the visa application is submitted.[75] To prioritise offering quick access to safety to Ukrainians fleeing conflict, the UK government does not mandate local authorities to complete all of their checks before the Home Office approves visas – except in the case of unaccompanied children.[76] However, local authorities must complete all safeguarding checks before they receive the integration tariff and hosts receive thank-you payments from the UK.[77]

Though many people we interviewed who came through Homes for Ukraine found their hosts online, interview participants from local authorities noted that these informal mechanisms sometimes led to safeguarding issues. This was echoed in our recommendation workshops, where safeguarding was discussed in relation to strengthening the matching process for future responses to displacement. But stakeholders were also keen to emphasise that these issues were not widespread.

We did not hear directly about safeguarding issues in our interviews with Ukrainians but some told us they had confirmed arrangements with hosts only to have them cancel at short notice. There is also a body of research that highlights the safeguarding risks that occurred through Homes for Ukraine.[78] That research has highlighted challenges in coordination between central and local government and problems using the Foundry case management system, which meant that checks were not always carried out on properties before displaced Ukrainians arrived.

Local authorities, communities and hosts often developed ad hoc safeguarding processes and in our recommendations workshops, participants said they would have benefitted from clearer guidance from the beginning of the response. Other safeguarding measures to strengthen future sponsorship responses discussed at the recommendation workshops are included at the end of the chapter.

The Super Sponsor schemes enabled fast and safe access to safety

The Ukraine Sponsorship scheme also enabled the Scottish and Welsh governments to develop their own Super Sponsor schemes. Through these, dedicated welcome hubs and strong partnerships between local authorities, governments and charities ensured people accessed the information and support they needed. Stakeholders interviewed in this research observed that by providing different forms of temporary accommodation directly to new arrivals, the Scottish and Welsh governments, working with key partners, reduced some of the safeguarding risks seen in the informal hosting model of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

However, it is also important to note the challenges that arose from the Super Sponsor model. Government stakeholders we interviewed acknowledged the financial cost was much higher than other schemes. This level of cost and resource was part of the reason for the schemes being paused in June 2022 (Wales) and July 2022 (Scotland), along with concerns around the capacity to provide safe accommodation for rising numbers of arrivals. The sheer number of people arriving through the schemes also initially overwhelmed capacity in key cities like Edinburgh and Cardiff, with nationwide dispersal efforts proving difficult.

Some professional stakeholders we interviewed also highlighted that the provision of welcome accommodation under the schemes had no system to prioritise applicants by urgency. However, frontline staff delivering services in these cities stressed that although the strain was tremendous, they felt like they successfully responded to what was a major crisis.

Sponsorship – a blueprint for other refugees?

Sponsorship – whether through the Ukraine Family Scheme, the UK public acting as hosts on Homes for Ukraine, or devolved governments on Super Sponsor schemes – has provided vital safe routes for displaced Ukrainians.

The response, especially through the private sponsorship route Homes for Ukraine, demonstrated how communities and civil society can rapidly mobilise and adapt in response to emerging humanitarian crises.

But, while sponsorship has clear value in certain displacement situations, there are further considerations for rolling it out more widely. Public support and the participation of sponsors may be based on the visibility of a crisis.[79] Sponsors may also be motivated by national, cultural, religious, and social affinities with certain groups[80], and this may need to be balanced with prioritising protection needs. There could also be a mismatch between the needs of refugees and the capabilities of sponsors.

So, while sponsorship should form an integral part of broader refugee protection, it should complement rather than replace a wider offer of safe and managed routes from the UK government, including resettlement and refugee family reunion.

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Key benefits and challenges

Benefits

- Can increase safe routes to the UK, with the potential to reduce dangerous journeys in certain circumstances.
- Provides invaluable and effective integration support through informal networks.
- Cost-effective approach – thank-you payments on Homes for Ukraine were estimated to cost around £8 per night.[82]

Challenges

- Scaling sponsorship so that it creates equal access to protection for those most in need and does not perpetuate biases.
- Building public awareness and support, as well as capabilities of sponsors (e.g. financial capacity and expertise in supporting displaced people).
- Potential for safeguarding risks through informal matching models.

Next steps for policy and implementation are:

1. Making sure sponsorship forms an additional and effective part of a holistic refugee protection response, alongside other safe routes, and prioritises safety for the people most in need of protection. This should support the delivery of the Global Compact on Refugees.[81]
2. Preparing communities to be mobilised as part of developing a Displacement Response Framework, especially for emergency initiatives that are similar in scale to the response to Ukraine.
3. Promoting and increasing public support for sponsorship, as well as awareness of protection needs and humanitarian crises.
4. Building the capabilities of hosts, informal networks, and registered matching providers to support both community and private sponsorship.
5. Developing hybrid and innovative models between the UK government, devolved government and communities. For instance, where governments offer places for protection, but communities play an expanded role in supporting integration for refugees across all routes, including asylum.
6. Including people with lived experience of private, community, and super sponsorship in the design of future efforts.

Flexibility in visa processing created safer and more efficient routes to the UK

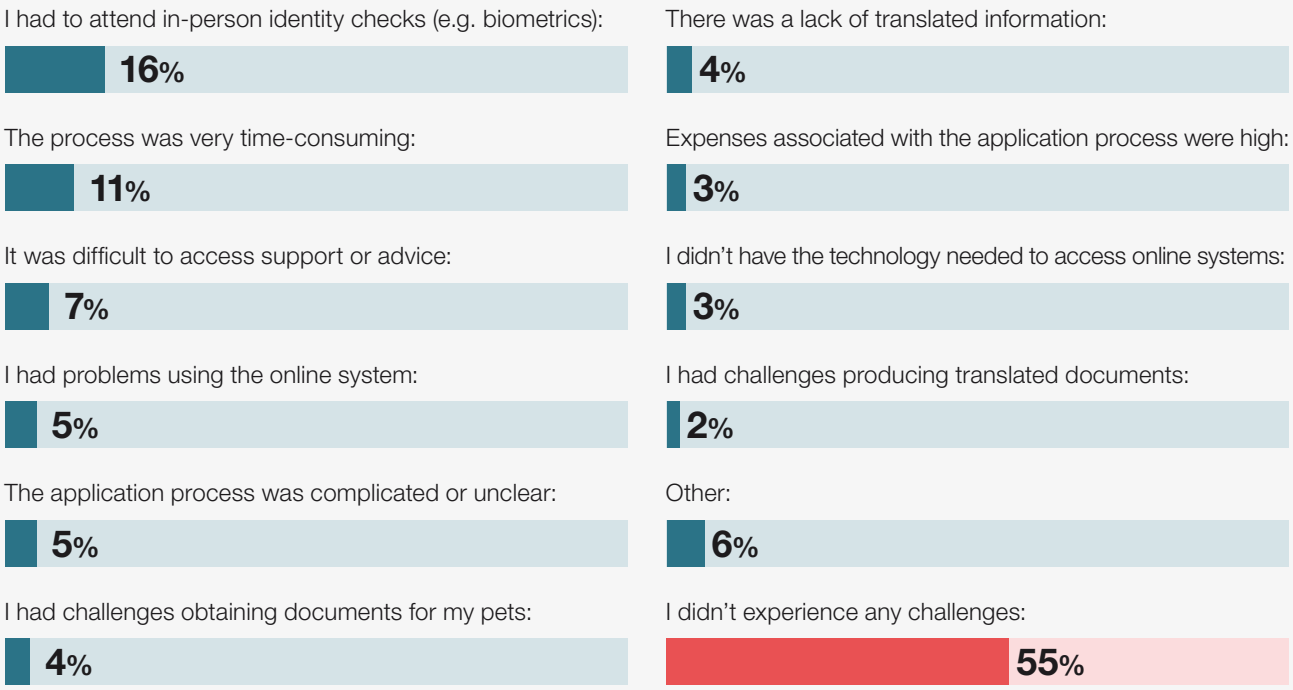
Between 15 March 2022 and 7 December 2023, the UK government deferred the requirement for people displaced from Ukraine with valid international passports to provide biometric information in person before travelling to the UK.[83] Instead, Ukrainians were initially given the option to apply online for the Ukraine Family scheme or Homes for Ukraine and submit their biometric information after their arrival in the UK. Usually, applicants must provide biometrics in person before they enter the UK, which can be difficult and dangerous, especially for those in conflict zones. A change to the Immigration Rules for applicants from Ukraine was made following significant political and public pressure (including from hosts), and media attention.[84]

> There was some info in the email we received with our visa that we had to do biometrics to get the BRP (Biometric Residence Permit) card so we then just Googled what we needed to do and the government websites here are really easy to navigate, so we just picked Croydon as the nearest place to go and drove down there – it was a really easy process.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, South East England**

Our research indicates that overall, this flexible approach led to a smoother and more straightforward process for reaching the UK. The people displaced from Ukraine that we interviewed were largely positive about their experience of both applying for visas and then coming to the UK.

Just over half (55%) of respondents reported "not experiencing any challenges" during the visa application process. However, the most common challenge reported by respondents was having to attend in-person identity checks. Some interview participants also shared how, despite arriving in the UK before 7 December 2023, they were still asked to complete biometric checks from their country of application, before entering the UK. This indicates some inconsistency in the application of biometric deferral.

Challenges experienced during the visa process



Did you experience any challenges during the visa process? Base: All respondents currently living in the UK (1,392)

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A broader definition of family offered access to safety for more people with connections in the UK

The Ukraine Family scheme was novel in that a broader range of family members were eligible for sponsorship by their relatives settled in the UK. The Ukraine Family scheme was open to parents, grandparents, aunts /uncles, cousins, nieces/nephews and foster children, whereas the usual eligibility for refugee family reunion is generally limited to spouses and children under 18.

Widening the definition of family for that scheme meant that displaced Ukrainians who came through this route were able to rely on extended family support networks before and after they arrived. Interview participants who came through the Ukraine Family scheme told us that extended family members helped them with their online application and provided translation support.

> My cousin had been living in Dundee for about 15 years and told me about the family scheme, I didn't know that it existed as an option until they told me. But she helped me with the whole process because I couldn't speak English and we did it over video call, applying for the visa together. This meant the process was very fast.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Ukraine Family Scheme, Scotland**

While the Ukraine Family scheme provided quick access to safety, our survey suggests people stayed in family scheme accommodation arrangements for less time than those in other schemes. 60% of respondents arriving through the Ukraine Family scheme came to live with their UK-based family members, but only 23% are still living with them. This compares to nearly 65% of people arriving through Homes for Ukraine still living with their sponsors. We know from previous British Red Cross research on housing[85] that issues like overcrowding, lack of government support to hosting families and cost-of-living pressures could lead to the breakdown of relationships within family scheme accommodation arrangements.

Local innovation

In the early months of the UK's response, policymakers often had to 'learn by doing', which meant the UK government's guidance was a few steps behind what was happening on the ground. Expert stakeholders shared examples of how local systems developed organically, ensuring that people displaced from Ukraine were quickly matched to the accommodation and support they needed. However, the breadth and flexibility of the response at times led to inconsistency in how support was provided across the UK. In some cases, siloed working between local authorities and VCS organisations restricted the sharing of best practice, including examples of what works in safeguarding and accommodation checks, data systems and ensuring ease of integration for displaced Ukrainians.

> It's hard to go from nothing to full-scale. There were a lot of teething problems. We need a blueprint for the next time… Imagine if every hospital in the UK ran itself independently, with no national system. That's how refugee resettlement works now – every local authority figures it out on its own, with no standard training, no best practices.
>
> **Expert interview participant, Director of a national charity**

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Spotlight on best local practice: Surrey County Council

In Surrey, the County Council (SCC) worked closely with its 11 district and borough councils to ensure there was consistency in the way support was provided, while allowing for localised flexibility around day-to-day service delivery. Working in close partnership with one another also enabled smooth data sharing processes during what was a challenging initial period, so that officers could plan for people arriving. Council stakeholders emphasised the sharing of learning and guidance with one another as crucial to success. An officer at Surrey County Council shared how they worked across the county, and the wider South East, to support Ukrainians:

Local authority (LA) networking

> We worked with other LAs in the South-East, including Kent, East and West Sussex, Brighton and Hove, Hampshire and Buckinghamshire, and we had a chatty working group. Then fairly soon there were weekly Foundry workshops that had LAs across the country sharing practice with each other. And now there's something called the Regional Local Authority Network. In the early days it was really hard with guidance constantly changing but we were all playing catch up together.

Clarifying roles

> There was guidance coming down from national government but some things were also down to local discretion and we wanted to ensure everyone across the county was treated the same way. We had to decide ourselves, for example, how to split responsibilities with the districts and boroughs and also how to split the funding. We agreed to protect some for homelessness and then initially split the rest 50-50 between the county and the district and boroughs. We also agreed that the district and boroughs would do the accommodation checks and visits. This approach worked best for us locally, but we were aware that some other areas took different approaches.

Data management

> Foundry was the national government system that had everybody's details including hosts and guests and at the start only the county council had access, so we worked with our data experts to download and share relevant data with our district and borough partners until they were able to access Foundry directly.

Cross-sector partnerships

> We have a Ukraine task group, with partners from across the county, which looks at problems arising, local initiatives and sharing good practice, just generally anything about sharing learning. It has partners from elsewhere in the sector but covers the boundaries of SCC.

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Recommendations – access to safety

The UK government should:

Uphold family unity as an important part of refugee protection

- Enable Ukraine scheme visa holders to sponsor more family members. For example, by sponsoring partners and siblings under Homes for Ukraine.
- Ensure refugee family reunion policy is sensitive to the specific circumstances of displaced people and remains accessible. Requirements should be realistic and achievable, recognising the unique nature of why families are forced to separate and the exceptional challenges and barriers they often face.

Strengthen matching processes through expected reforms to sponsorship[86]

- Invest in, and scale the capacity of, registered matching providers with proven experience of arranging safe and sustainable placements, to ensure people arrive through additional sponsorship routes safely.
- Work with local authorities to overcome barriers in implementing safeguarding checks on sponsors. These should take place as soon as possible after a visa application is made and before displaced people arrive in sponsors' properties. For instance, by ensuring effective communication between local authorities and the Home Office on the status and outcomes of safeguarding checks.

Embed flexibility

- Implement online processes and biometric deferrals wherever possible for other safe routes so that delays in accessing protection and impractical and dangerous journeys are reduced.

Other ideas on safeguarding measures for future responses

Based on our recommendation workshops, other safeguarding measures the UK government, in partnership with specialist VCS organisations, could consider are:

- Developing safeguarding standards and practical tools for implementation during matching processes.
- Publishing clear guidance to local authorities on roles, responsibilities and timelines for conducting safeguarding checks from the beginning of any future schemes.
- Making sure that hosts receive adequate safeguarding training before displaced people arrive in their homes.
- Enabling hosts, where possible, to apply in small groups so that there is greater accountability among hosts.
- Making sure displaced people have a clear avenue to report issues and there are effective mechanisms for monitoring risk.

The Scottish and Welsh governments should:

In collaboration with the UK government and with delivery partners such as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association, local authorities, and VSC organisations.

Build on learnings to adapt the super sponsor model to deliver urgent protection

- Seek to adapt the super sponsor approach for the delivery of urgent placements under other UK-wide schemes and publish a timebound plan for implementation. For instance, to offer swift protection to people arriving under the Afghan Resettlement Programme, UK Resettlement Scheme and refugee family reunion.

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Welcome and integration

Overview

This section explores experiences of welcome and integration among people displaced from Ukraine to the UK. In this report, integration is understood as multifaceted – involving legal, economic, social and cultural elements. It is a gradual, two-way process shaped by the efforts of both individuals and the communities around them. Most research considers access to and achievement in the sectors of employment, housing, education, English language and health as crucial markers of refugee integration.[87] Our findings focus on four areas that emerged strongly in the research as having a central role in shaping people's early experiences and their ability to settle in the UK.[88]

Our research found:

1. **English language lessons were accessed by most people**, but many said they needed more focus on everyday and workplace communication to build confidence.
2. **Employment was important for integration but did not always match people's experience and skills**. While many have found work, those with professional backgrounds often struggled to find roles aligned with their experience.
3. **Schools were a consistent point of contact with the community and offered a sense of stability** for those with children.
4. **Local networks and informal support, such as building a relationship with their hosts, helped people** navigate services, feel welcome and build connections in their communities.

English language support was widespread but not always practical

> I can read in English, but I cannot speak very well. I feel embarrassed. I'm afraid people won't understand me or I will make mistakes.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, South East England**

50%
of Ukrainian survey respondents have experienced language barriers in the UK

Participants reflected that just as language supports integration, integration supports language learning, providing opportunities to practice English in meaningful, real-world contexts.

Most survey respondents (89%) had accessed English language support since arriving in the UK – only 1% said they hadn't and didn't want to. However, 50% said they had experienced language barriers in the UK, making it the most commonly cited challenge encountered since arriving.[89]

English language ability varied by age. Almost half (49%) of 18–29-year-olds reported being fluent in English, compared with just 24% overall. Differences also appeared by route of entry: those on the Super Sponsor schemes were the least likely to say they either struggled to understand or could only communicate some things in English (35%).

Usefulness of English language support

58%

58% of respondents accessed English language support through government funded programmes, ESOL classes, colleges, or community sessions. But only half of those said they found it very or extremely useful.

53%

53% of respondents needed English language support focused on workplace communication which was not available.

Around three in five respondents (58%) reported receiving some form of formal English language support since arriving in the UK. This support was often accessed through ESOL classes, local colleges, community centres, or voluntary sector organisations. Among those who received it, lessons were typically frequent and sustained. Half said they attended sessions several times a week or more and over one-fifth (22%) had received support for more than two years. A further fifth (20%) said they had attended for between one and two years.

Despite this, feedback on the quality and usefulness of these lessons was mixed. Half (50%) of those who received language support described it as very or extremely useful, but one in five (19%) said it had been of limited use or led to minimal progress.

These findings were echoed in interviews, where many participants shared that formal lessons often did not meet their day-to-day needs. Courses were frequently described as too structured or theoretical, with limited focus on practical communication. Several respondents said that even after attending classes for an extended period of time, they still found aspects of everyday communication challenging, such as understanding local accents, navigating healthcare appointments, or feeling confident in workplace conversations.

On the other hand, conversations with hosts, neighbours, colleagues, or classmates were seen as more effective in fostering local social connections and building real-world language skills than classroom-based teaching alone. Several people interviewed said they learned more from practical experiences, such as volunteering, attending community groups, or working part-time. Though some people felt that this was less effective for developing structured language skills such as writing and grammar.

> I went to lessons twice a week, but I didn't learn how to speak with people in shops or how to ask for help. It was all grammar and writing, not the kind of English I need.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, North West England**

More than half of respondents (53%) said they needed English language support specifically focused on professional or workplace communication.

Barriers to accessing classes were also frequently mentioned. Some interview participants were unable to attend regularly due to childcare or work responsibilities; others struggled to find classes locally, especially in rural areas. In some cases, people said they had been placed on long waiting lists or had to travel far to attend sessions.

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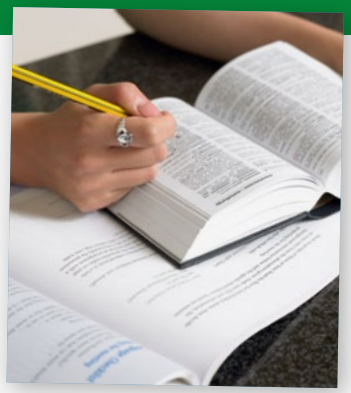
Case study: Larisa, Scotland



Larisa arrived in Glasgow in May 2022 through the Scottish government's Super Sponsor scheme. She came with her husband and three children. In Ukraine, she worked in HR and was eager to find work after arriving in the UK. She started English lessons at Glasgow Clyde College and volunteered in a charity shop. Although she made progress with written English, she struggled to understand people in everyday situations. Strong Glaswegian accents and unfamiliar phrases made communication difficult, especially outside the classroom.

Larisa trained to work as a steward at public events and took on casual shifts. She found the role difficult because she could not always understand instructions from supervisors or conversations with members of the public. She described feeling unsure and under pressure in busy environments. She relied on gestures and tone to work out what people meant and sometimes avoided tasks where she would have to speak too much. The English she learned at college did not reflect what she needed for work.

> My goal is to improve my English so I can understand what people say. I want to work, but I need to feel confident. I want to speak, not just study.

Employment shaped integration

Employment was a priority for many interviewees, who often described it as central to regaining independence, offering both routine and a sense of purpose. Some said they prioritised having a source of income above other considerations, even if the work was different from what they had done previously or clashed with opportunities such as English language courses.

Many have been able to find work: three-quarters (75%) of survey respondents said they were currently in employment and two in five (41%) of those were working 30 hours a week or more. Only one in ten reported being unemployed. But for a lot of respondents, it wasn't straightforward, as almost half (47%) said they had faced difficulty securing a job, making it one of the most commonly reported challenges across our research.

Employment and mismatch between jobs and skills

75%

75% of Ukrainian respondents were in employment

47%

But 47% said they had difficulty finding suitable work.

Among those currently in work, 45% said their role was completely different from previous experience, while 26% said their job only somewhat matched their skills, and just 29% reported a close match.

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> I asked an accounting firm if I could volunteer, just for free, to get experience. But they said they didn't have time for volunteers. I know it's hard to find a job in London, and I have this fear of being rejected.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Ukraine Family scheme, London**

Barriers included limited English proficiency, a lack of recognition for Ukrainian qualifications and limited access to targeted support for those with professional experience. These barriers meant that almost half (45%) of people surveyed who were currently in work said their role was completely different to their previous experience. A further 26% said their job somewhat matched their skills, while just 29% said it was a close match. This mismatch was especially common among older people: 58% of those aged 50 to 69 reported a complete mismatch, compared to 28% of those aged 18 to 29. Women were also more likely than men to be in roles that did not reflect their prior experience (48% compared to 33%).

> Your qualifications, achievements and career in Ukraine are not taken into account here, at least because of the language barrier and mentality. I have to start everything from scratch here, as if I were a child who was just born. It is sad that I put so much effort and time into my studies in Ukraine and had so much success and career growth, and now I am working in a job that I would never have done in Ukraine.
>
> **Survey respondent**

In interviews, several participants spoke about taking on lower-skilled or manual jobs, occasionally on a temporary or zero-hours basis, in order to gain financial independence quickly, even when the work did not reflect their previous careers. For example, one respondent went from working in HR to a zero-hours stewarding role at events. Others described needing to retrain to regain qualifications they already held, as Ukrainian qualifications and experience were sometimes not recognised.

Qualifications and experience from Ukraine were sometimes not recognised

At the same time, a small number of interviewees with strong written English and transferable skills did report being able to move into roles within their sector.

Formal employment support was often described as limited by the people we spoke to. Several participants said that Jobcentres were not well equipped to support those with professional or specialist backgrounds. Some were offered unsuitable roles or received little to no support tailored to their professional background. As a result, many took the initiative to search for jobs themselves, turning to online platforms like Indeed, or informal networks such as hosts, neighbours and local employers.

> We're a small community and jobs are always in demand, so I made sure people knew she was here and ready to work. She applied at the local school, did a mock interview with me, and sailed through. Her son was so proud. I try to support where it's needed, but not overdo it.
>
> **Host interview participant, North Scotland**

Case study: Anna, Wales

> At the Jobcentre, they didn't really know what to do with me. They usually help people into factory work, not journalism.

Anna arrived in rural Wales in April 2022 with her young son, hosted through Homes for Ukraine. She had worked for over 20 years as a journalist and editor in Ukraine and hoped to continue in the same field, but she struggled to find work that matched her experience.

> I tried to start from the beginning, even as a runner or with an apprenticeship, but I'm seen as too old and too experienced.

Unable to access relevant work, Anna took a remote admin role helping other Ukrainians with job searches. While it provided some income, she found the work unfulfilling and emotionally draining. After leaving the job, she described a long period of exhaustion and depression. She said the shift from a creative career to feeling professionally lost had a serious impact on her wellbeing. At the time of interview, Anna had not returned to work. She was still receiving financial support and described feeling unsure about her future in the UK.

Schools helped families feel settled

> My children (4 and 13 years old) were able to easily integrate into the English-speaking society, learn the language, and they really like the attitude of the people, the approach, the school, the kindergarten, and the extracurricular activities. The safety of my children and ensuring access to a continuous learning process is the most important thing for me.
>
> **Survey respondent**

Schools played a vital role in helping Ukrainian families integrate into new communities. Over half (58%) of survey respondents had come to the UK with children. Almost every parent we interviewed described schools as welcoming and supportive and instrumental in helping their families adjust to life in the UK. Interviewees reported that teachers took the time to make the children feel welcome without making them feel singled out. Some parents felt that time to play, build friendships and learn from peers was just as important as academic support.

> The teaching was clever, by just letting him play with the other kids, they learned how to communicate with each other. It built their confidence and helped them accept one another.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Ukraine Family scheme, London**

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For many parents we spoke to, seeing their children settle into school strengthened their own sense of belonging. In several cases, attending school events, talking to teachers, or simply dropping off and picking up their children gave families opportunities to connect with others. Some schools offered direct access to ESOL classes, mental health services, or food and uniform support, making them essential community anchors during a period of transition. Schools allowed parents to feel that their families had a safe and stable future. Several spoke about how their child's happiness at school made them more determined to remain and build a life here in the UK.

Case study: Marko, Nottinghamshire

> No one at school really cared that I was Ukrainian, I was just another British man. No one treated me like a child. I was happy that no one saw me as something different.

Marko arrived in the UK in July 2022 at the age of 16. He came with his mother through Homes for Ukraine and started sixth form in a rural area of Nottinghamshire. School became one of the first places where he felt accepted. He described being treated the same as everyone else, which helped him settle and begin to form friendships. This sense of inclusion gave him confidence and made him feel part of daily life in the UK.

> [The school] helped me understand things I couldn't, for example UCAS, or choosing subjects for A-levels. They were so helpful in teaching me a system I did not understand.

Marko found the UK education system unfamiliar, but received strong support from his teachers, who helped him with day-to-day challenges like understanding timetables and choosing subjects. They explained processes clearly and gave him time to adjust. When his GCSE results fell short, he repeated the year to focus on English and strengthen his application for further study. He said the extra time helped him catch up and gave him a clearer path.

> I got this really nice laptop from some British Ukrainians. Their families came here after the Second World War, I think. They've helped us a lot.

He now plans to apply to university and spoke positively about how education shaped his first year in the UK and gave him confidence for the future.

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Hosts and social networks supported integration

Displaced Ukrainians' sense of connection to their local community varied. In our survey, we described 'connection' as feeling part of the community through social relationships, participating in activities, or having a sense of belonging. While 47% of survey respondents said they felt somewhat or very connected, over a quarter (28%) said they did not.

Many people engaged in everyday social life, most commonly by going to cafés or restaurants (44%), attending cultural events (34%), or using gyms and sports facilities (32%). Among those who had taken part, 68% said it had helped them feel more integrated.

> Being in a village was really great, people helped us, explained everything… even a family on a farm threw a party just for Ukrainians.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, North East England**

For many interview participants, local spaces such as churches, charities, sports clubs and community centres played an important role in building relationships and finding support. Churches were particularly significant for some, providing not only a place to worship but also opportunities to connect with others.

Hosts, neighbours and community groups also offered practical and emotional support, from helping register with a GP to translating documents or simply providing reassurance in a period of significant change. Some described hosts not just as landlords or sponsors but as cultural guides, confidants and advocates and several said these relationships were among the most important factors in helping them feel settled.

> My host tried to make me British. She showed me where to go, what to do, and what the traditions are.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, North West Wales**

In rural areas, the nature of relationships with hosts or neighbours had a particularly strong influence on people's experiences. Where people had supportive networks, they described feeling welcomed and connected. But in areas with limited public transport or services, those without this support struggled to access opportunities and were more likely to feel cut off and isolated, especially if the relationships with their host had broken down or become strained.

Overall, a quarter of respondents (27%) said they had experienced social isolation at some point. People with physical or mental health concerns or illnesses were significantly more likely to report this, with 39% saying they felt socially isolated compared with 24% of those without ongoing health concerns.

Case study: Oksana, North London

> I didn't leave my apartment for a couple of months because I was so depressed. I didn't want to see anyone. I didn't want to do anything.

Oksana arrived in the UK in 2022 through the Ukraine Family scheme with her younger daughter. Her older daughter had already been living in London and working for the NHS. In the early months, the three of them shared a one-bedroom flat. Oksana was already unwell when she arrived and described the first period as deeply isolating. Her mental health was poor, and she spent most of her time indoors, unable to engage with others or take part in local life.

She describes herself as quiet and introverted. At one point, she and her daughter were supported by an older British couple who volunteered to help while her health was poor, offering both practical help and companionship. Even after her health improved, she found it difficult to connect with others. She began engaging more in her second year, attending a Ukrainian club and a refugee support programme run by Jewish Relief. Oksana now lives in a privately rented flat in North London with her younger daughter, but her social circle remains small, and she hasn't developed close links in the wider community.

Her younger daughter has settled well, is studying fashion at a London college, and has made new friends. Oksana is proud of her progress but feels her own path has been slower.

> My British friends love my younger daughter. She was like a granddaughter to them. They even found volunteer work for her.

Recommendations – welcome and integration

The UK, Scottish and Welsh governments and Northern Irish Executive should:

Working with the Local Government Association, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association, and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, key delivery partners and VCS organisations.

Build on efforts to support Ukrainians and other displaced people with language learning

- Increase resource and provide strategic direction to both formal and informal English language providers so that classes reflect the diverse and everyday language needs of displaced people, are accessible and trauma informed.
- Strengthen the quality of informal and community-based English language teaching, e.g. through training community volunteers.

Improve professional qualification recognition and strengthen tailored employment support for Ukrainians and other displaced people

- Fast track the recognition of qualifications and re-accreditation in key industries where Ukrainians previously worked (such as teaching and education, information technology, retail and healthcare).[90] This should be done by:
  - leading coordination with industry partners to make the process accessible and affordable (e.g. ECCTIS, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, professional bodies and employers).
  - continuing to invest in programming that is trauma informed and offers both tailored language and ongoing employability support to help displaced people access professional employment.

Resource hosts and community groups to provide informal welcome and integration support

- Provide two-way training in cultural norms and support displaced people to access services and find work, e.g. through job-shadowing schemes and mentorship programmes.
- Provide training for hosts in supporting people who may be affected by trauma.

Support schools to act as integration hubs within local communities

- Fund a pilot that expands schools' role in delivering integration support to displaced pupils and their families. This should be delivered in partnership with local authorities and VCS organisations and promote learnings for scaling similar initiatives.

Develop and publish a UK strategy for refugee integration

- Develop and publish a UK-wide refugee integration strategy that builds on work undertaken in the devolved nations to:
  - set shared priorities on accommodation, employment, language, health, and community connections.
  - ensure equal support for all displaced people.
  - support an expanded role for community integration based on lessons from the Ukraine response.

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Planning for the future

Overview

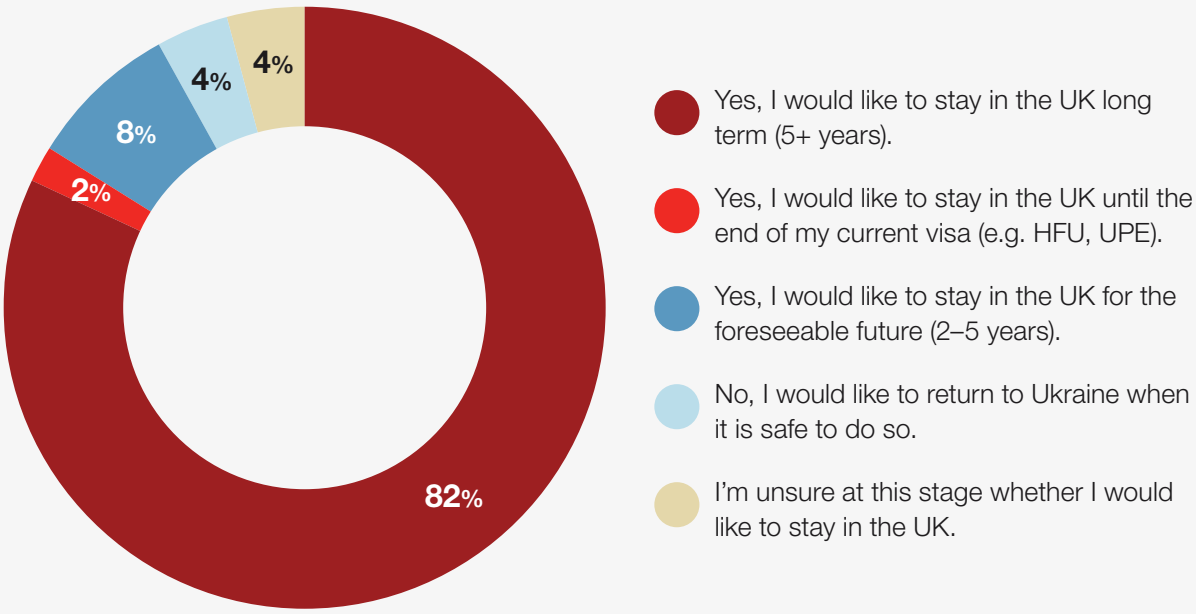
82%
of survey respondents are hoping to stay for the long term (five or more years)

This section explores how displaced Ukrainians are planning for the future, understanding the motivations and concerns for those who want to stay in the UK and those who want to return to Ukraine once it is safe to do so. Many of the Ukrainians in our survey (53%) had already applied for the Ukraine Permission Extension, which grants them up to 18 months of permission to remain in the UK upon the end of their original visa. After the completion of our research, the UK government announced that a further two-year extension would be granted to Ukrainians in the UK. However, there is still uncertainty about what this visa extension process will be and what happens after this time.

Our research found:

1. **Long-term uncertainty affects decisions around key aspects of integration** such as housing, health, employment, and education. People described delaying housing plans, missing job opportunities and putting off education or medical treatment because they don't know if they will be able to stay.
2. **Many feel they need clearer guidance** on employment, housing, rights and education in the UK to help plan their future.
3. **Many want to stay in the UK** due to a feeling of safety and security, and the relationships they have built.
4. **Some hope to return to Ukraine but have unanswered questions** around safety, infrastructure and access to housing or jobs in Ukraine, making it difficult to plan.

Intentions to stay in the UK or return to Ukraine



Would you like to stay in the UK long term? Base: All respondents currently living in the UK (1,392).

Planning for the future amid uncertainty

> The uncertainty is affecting us deeply, as we understand that we might have to leave – leaving behind [my children's] schools, their friends and the home we recently bought using all our savings.
>
> **Survey response**

Uncertainty around visas has a wide-reaching impact. It shapes how people make decisions about housing, employment, healthcare and education. It also affects how connected they feel to their new communities. Respondents described being caught between two futures. One involved preparing to return to Ukraine when it is safe, keeping social, financial and cultural ties that would help them reintegrate there; the other involved laying down roots in the UK, building a life that included work, education and community. Without more certainty, many said they could not fully pursue either path.

> I feel uncertain… at this moment, I would like to build my future here and to understand what I do in a year, in two, in three.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, Northern Ireland**

1 in 5
Ukrainian respondents want information about options to reunite with family members in the UK

Interview participants felt the conflict in Ukraine was likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Within this context, their worry over how long they will be able to stay in the UK has been exacerbated by the prospect of being sent back home before it is safe to do so. Some we spoke to had started looking into other immigration routes to secure their future in the UK.

In our survey, nearly one in five (20%) of those who had not yet applied for the Ukraine Permission Extension had applied for, or were considering, asylum or humanitarian protection.[91] Younger people (aged 18 to 29) were significantly more likely to have applied or considered applying for a work visa, including the Skilled Work Visa (25% in comparison to the overall 16%). Women were also significantly more likely to have applied or considered applying for a Family Visa, including the Spousal Visa or Parent Visa (7% compared to 3% of men).

A need for more information

Many said they lacked the information needed to make informed decisions about their future. When asked what would help, 64% of all survey respondents wanted more information about visa options and 50% said they needed guidance on employment, rights, housing and education in the UK. 21% also wanted support and information about options to reunite with family members in the UK.

Types of information needed

64%

64% of all Ukrainian survey respondents wanted more information about visa options.

50%

50% needed guidance on employment, rights, housing and education in the UK.

21%

21% wanted support and information about options to reunite with family members in the UK.

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> My work contract expires soon and I want to renew it but it's difficult. The uncertainty about getting a good new job is mainly because the visa is only prolonged for 18 months.
>
> **Survey response**

Around 4% of survey respondents said they didn't know whether they wanted to stay in the UK or return to Ukraine. These individuals had particular difficulty in making decisions based on the unpredictability of what returning would look like. They wanted more information about the state of infrastructure in Ukraine, the availability of jobs or housing and how returnees would be received. The lack of clarity made it difficult to plan or feel confident with either decision. For these people, support to maintain connections to Ukraine and better information about return options were seen as essential.

Case study: Lea, Brighton

Lea arrived in the UK from Odessa through Homes for Ukraine in 2022, together with her three-year-old son. After initially living with sponsors in East Sussex, they moved to Brighton in early 2023, where her son now attends Year 2. Lea has worked as a self-employed nail technician, a job she enjoys and excels at. But when it comes to planning for the future, uncertainty about visa routes has left her feeling stuck and unsure how to move forward. She feels unable to make decisions about her work, relationships, or where to call home.

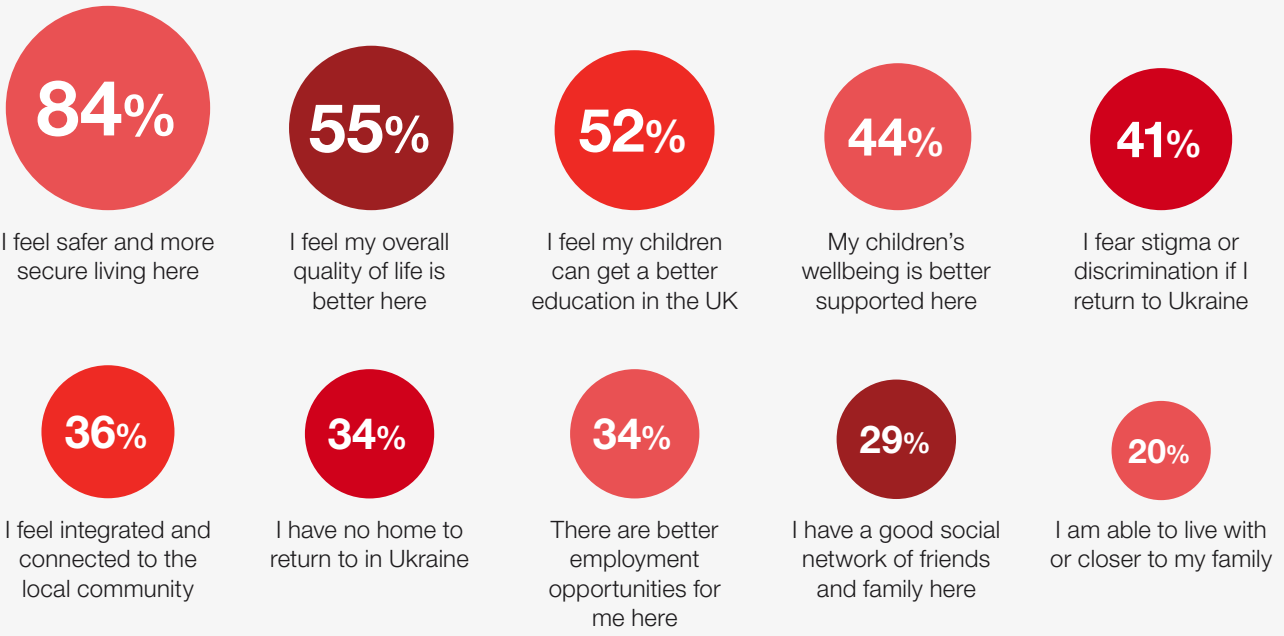
> I still remember no one promised anything. I have no idea if we will come to that point when my visa expires and that's it. I have no idea what to do.

Lea's long-term plans are further complicated by her relationship with her British boyfriend. Although they care deeply for each other, she doesn't want to feel forced into a decision about marriage simply to remain in the country. For Lea, the uncertainty affects every part of her daily life, from how she raises her son to how she connects with others. Without clarity on what happens after the current scheme ends, she feels unable to fully invest in life in the UK.

> [My son] dreams in English. When I asked him what language he thinks in, he said, 'English'.

Motivations for wanting to stay

Factors influencing motivation to stay in the UK[94]



What factors influence your decision to stay in the UK? Base: Respondents who would like to stay in the UK for the foreseeable future or long-term (1,244).

34%
of survey respondents said that they had no home to return to in Ukraine

Over 91% of our survey respondents said they want to remain in the UK for at least another two years, with 82% hoping to stay for the long term (five or more years). In both the survey and interviews, many shared that they feel safe, welcome and part of the communities where they live. Over four-fifths (84%) of respondents who want to stay in the UK cited safety and security as factors influencing their decision.[92]

Feeling integrated into life in the UK was important to 36% of survey respondents who want to stay. Interviewees told us about the connections they had made with sponsors, neighbours, colleagues and classmates. These relationships helped them feel settled and contributed to a sense of belonging.

> Being in a new country among these beautiful, kind people, paying taxes and settling in, but fearing every year that you will have to move because you don't know if you will be allowed to stay makes life uncertain and hopeless.
>
> **Survey response**

During the interviews, many displaced Ukrainians shared how their thinking about returning to Ukraine had shifted over time.[93] While some had initially planned to go back when it was safe, their views changed as they began to rebuild their lives here in the UK. For some, this included having children or continuing their education in the UK.

Children's wellbeing and education played a central role in decisions about the future. Parents were primarily concerned with maintaining the safety and stability their children had found in the UK. Of those aged 30 to 49 who wanted to stay in the UK, three in five (60%) said better educational opportunities for their children were a major factor in their decision-making and over half (51%) said their children's wellbeing shaped their plans.

> My son is why I'm so desperate to stay. In Ukraine, he struggled and had no friends. Here, he's thriving in a great school and, for the first time, has close friends.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, Wales**

Factors influencing future intentions by age

18- to 29- year-olds

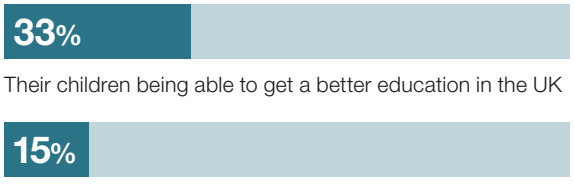
Significantly more likely to have considered...

30- to 49- year-olds

Significantly more likely to have considered...

50- to 69- year-olds

Significantly more likely to have considered...



Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Younger people across the interviews and survey were more likely to describe their lives as rooted in the UK. Of respondents who wanted to stay in the UK for the foreseeable future or long-term, those aged 18 to 29 were more likely than average to cite employment opportunities, quality of life, and having no home to return to in Ukraine as reasons for staying. Some displaced Ukrainians we interviewed had left as teenagers and become adults in the UK – formative years which had cemented their sense of belonging. A few shared how they see their future here and feel more confident speaking English than Ukrainian; they had built friendships, gained qualifications and in some cases had begun careers. This contrasted with what we heard from older participants, many of whom had stronger personal and professional ties to Ukraine prior to displacement.

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> It's a very stressful situation. We don't know what will happen. Maybe after one and a half years I need to go somewhere else. I can't accept medical treatment because it's a two-year plan and I don't have two years.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Ukraine Family scheme, Scotland**

Some older respondents did report wanting to remain in the UK, particularly where they had family close by. These family ties, coupled with access to stable healthcare, were the most commonly cited reasons. Some were undergoing medical treatment that would not be possible to continue in Ukraine. For others, the healthcare system in the UK felt more reliable. However, several have delayed or avoided long-term treatment because of fears that they may not have the time to complete it under their current visa.

Case study: Sean, Edinburgh

> So I have everything here. I grew up here, matured here. Going back to Ukraine is like going to any other country I've never lived in. It's like changing countries completely again.

21-year-old Sean arrived in Scotland through the Super Sponsor scheme in August 2022, having first started the visa process while staying in Poland. He was initially placed on a cruise ship in Edinburgh. Although the temporary nature of the accommodation created anxiety for many, Sean described it as a positive experience, as the close-knit setting helped him form lasting friendships. He values the community he has built in Edinburgh, where he says he has more friends than he did back in Ukraine.

> The main challenge is the visa. I'm planning on studying for a master's degree here to get a job, but it's not 100%. Even the university said just apply and we will see. They cannot confirm anything because it is the same time my visa is being reviewed.

Sean hopes to study business or management at master's level and is looking for employment that better fits his skills and could lead to long-term stability. But with his visa due for renewal in August, the same month his course would begin, even the university cannot say whether he will be able to start. This has made planning for the future difficult, and he feels caught between options. Studying and staying in the UK is what he wants, but the lack of clarity around next steps has made every decision harder. He worries about what will happen when his current visa ends.

Hoping to return but facing challenges

> Wherever we will have a chance to raise our child, we will be there. If we have a possibility to go back and have a safe life, we will definitely use our chance to go back to Ukraine.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, North East England**

4%
(60 respondents in our survey) would like to return to Ukraine when it is safe to do so

While most people displaced from Ukraine who took part in this research project are focused on rebuilding their lives here in the UK, 4% (60 respondents) of our survey said they would like to return to Ukraine when it is safe to do so.

The five most common reasons for wanting to return were:[95]

1. **Wanting to go home** (56 respondents)
2. **Want to help rebuild Ukraine** (33 respondents)
3. **Feeling socially isolated or lonely in the UK** (29 respondents)
4. **Struggling to find employment in the UK** (25 respondents)
5. **Facing challenges finding stable or affordable housing in the UK** (20 respondents)

For those considering returning to Ukraine, the decision is shaped by a mix of emotional and practical concerns. People were uncertain about how they would reintegrate after time away. Some worried about whether housing, schools or healthcare services would be available. Others feared the reactions of those who had stayed behind, or reported that they had no home to return to in Ukraine due to the conflict.

In some cases, people told us they hoped to return one day but not immediately. Some said they wanted to wait until their children had completed school or university in the UK. For these families, providing a stable and secure environment for their children was a top priority. Remaining in the UK for a few more years felt like the best way to do this.

> Everything depends on when the war ends. If it ends tomorrow, I still want my son to finish school here first. It is more stable and I don't want to move him again right now.
>
> **Lived experience interview participant, Homes for Ukraine, North East England**

However, nearly half (30 respondents) of those who said they would like to return cited social isolation or loneliness as a key factor, some adding more detail and explaining that they felt excluded from their local community and had been unable to make the UK feel like home. During interviews, people displaced from Ukraine explained that this could be due to difficulties building friendships, finding appropriate housing, securing employment or accessing mental health support.

> I feel isolated and lonely. The UK is a new environment for me, no people of my own age and no community. There is unstable housing and work, hidden discrimination and hostility from some locals because of the need for help.
>
> **Survey response**

For some of those we interviewed, maintaining strong ties to Ukraine is an important part of preparing to return. People shared how they continue to celebrate national holidays, other cultural traditions and encourage their children to speak Ukrainian. These practices help maintain identity and strengthen connections with their home country. However, some said this was not always easy, particularly in areas where it was difficult to access community spaces or organise events. Local authorities and community organisations were seen as having an important role in supporting these efforts. In some cases, this helped people remain hopeful about returning.

Maintaining family connections also involved visiting Ukraine when possible. Many of the people we interviewed had travelled back to Ukraine at least once since arriving in the UK, demonstrating an important element of flexibility that those displaced from Ukraine have, unlike many other refugees. For some of them, this was the only way to see relatives – including male partners serving in the military – who had not left. These visits helped people stay connected with their community, encouraged them to keep their children engaged with their heritage and assess how feasible a return would be.

Destroyed home in Chernihiv, Ukraine.

Recommendations – planning for the future

The UK government should:

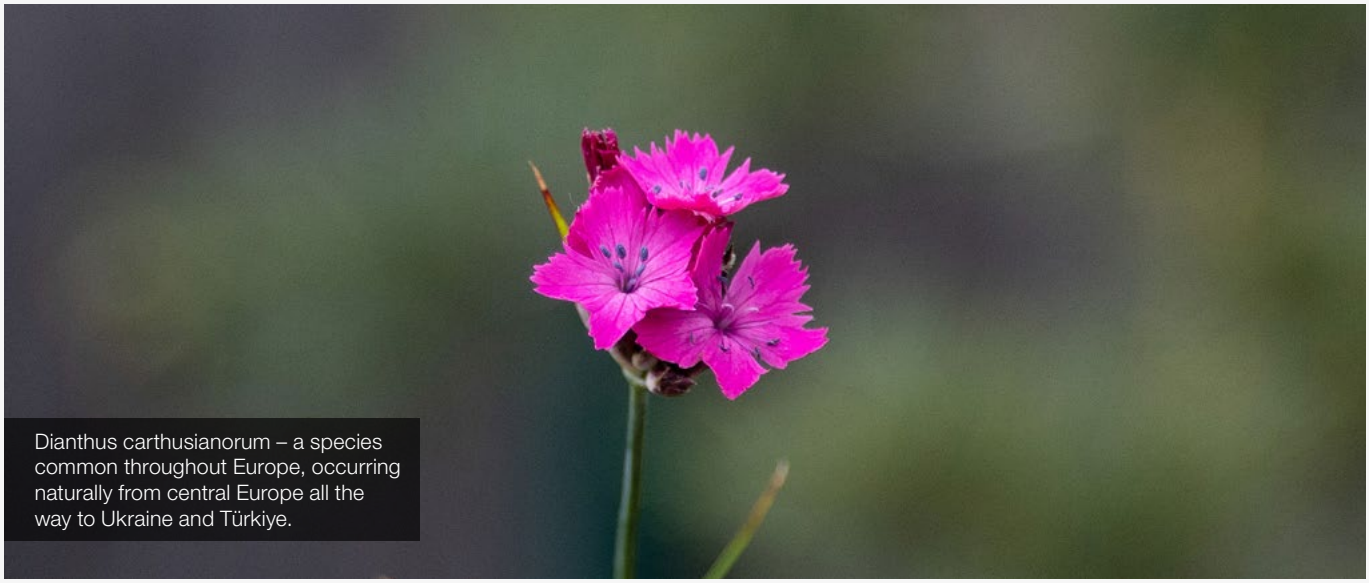
Promote stability and choice for displaced Ukrainians by

- Providing longer-term protection and reassurance for all Ukraine scheme visa holders. This can be done by announcing an accessible route to permanent residence. At the latest, this should come into effect when UPE 2 visas end and people in vulnerable situations should be able to easily access this status.
- Assisting those who do wish to voluntarily return. For instance, through providing dual intent integration support to help displaced Ukrainians remain connected to their communities, language, and economy.

Supporting participation and decision-making

The UK government, working with devolved governments, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations should:

- Facilitate the meaningful participation of displaced Ukrainians in policy development and implementation through specialist forums, engagement with Ukrainian led networks and wider civil society.
- Develop tailored communication plans to update Ukraine scheme visa holders on policy developments.
- Support Ukrainian people with decision making about the future by providing:
  - information on conditions in Ukraine (e.g. safety, security, access to services) and rights and options to stay in the UK.
  - free immigration advice at key visa transition points with a focus on complex cases, people in vulnerable situations, and accessing fee waivers for wider routes (e.g. work/study).
  - psychosocial support for those affected by trauma, loss and family separation, which can impact decision making.



Dianthus carthusianorum – a species common throughout Europe, occurring naturally from central Europe all the way to Ukraine and Türkiye.

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Conclusion

This report comes at a critical moment. As a spotlight is cast on how the UK welcomes displaced people, we must embrace the opportunity to learn from this generous response so that we can improve the lives of Ukrainians and other displaced people seeking safety.

88%
described their experience in the UK as 'somewhat' or 'very' positive

Some of the earliest people arriving in the UK amid conflict in Ukraine are now marking almost four years here. As further visa extensions are rolled out, people displaced from Ukraine are reflecting on what comes next. While experiences have varied, most of the people we talked to expressed a strong sense of appreciation for the welcome they received and the lives they have begun to rebuild. Nearly half of our survey respondents (48%) said their experience in the UK had been very positive, with a further 40% describing it as somewhat positive.

The response has shown what's possible when safe routes are supported by national coordination, local delivery and public generosity. But it has also highlighted gaps, particularly around long-term planning, communication and consistency across services.

While many people displaced from Ukraine hope to stay, the temporary nature of their current visa status is shaping everyday decisions about housing, education, work and relationships. Others are unsure how much to invest in building a life in the UK. Hosts are also navigating uncertainty. Some continue to support their guests well beyond their original commitment, while others are unsure whether they can carry on without further support.

The time for emergency measures has passed. What's needed now is longer-term vision, and the action to back it up.

This means grasping the insight we've gained and investing in systems and support that allow people to make informed choices about their future – whether they hope to stay or return, or remain undecided.

The UK's response to the Ukraine displacement was unique in scale, speed and the level of public involvement. As a nation, we've been offered valuable lessons on what a compassionate and community-led welcome can look like. Now, these insights should inform how we respond to future displacement, both in times of crisis and in building longer-term solutions.

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Recommendations in full

Access to safety

The UK government should:

Uphold family unity as an important part of refugee protection

- Enable Ukraine scheme visa holders to sponsor more family members. For example, by sponsoring partners and siblings under Homes for Ukraine.
- Ensure refugee family reunion policy is sensitive to the specific circumstances of displaced people and remains accessible. Requirements should be realistic and achievable, recognising the unique nature of why families are forced to separate and the exceptional challenges and barriers they often face.

Strengthen matching processes through expected reforms to sponsorship

- Invest in, and scale the capacity of, registered matching providers with proven experience of arranging safe and sustainable placements, to ensure people arrive through additional sponsorship routes safely.
- Work with local authorities to overcome barriers in implementing safeguarding checks on sponsors. These should take place as soon as possible after a visa application is made and before displaced people arrive in sponsors' properties. For instance, by ensuring effective communication between local authorities and the Home Office on the status and outcomes of safeguarding checks.

Embed flexibility

- Implement online processes and biometric deferrals wherever possible for other safe routes so that delays in accessing protection and impractical and dangerous journeys are reduced.

Other ideas on safeguarding measures for future responses

Based on our recommendation workshops, other safeguarding measures the UK government, in partnership with specialist VCS organisations, could consider are:

- Developing safeguarding standards and practical tools for implementation during matching processes.
- Publishing clear guidance to local authorities on roles, responsibilities and timelines for conducting safeguarding checks from the beginning of any future schemes.
- Making sure that hosts receive adequate safeguarding training before displaced people arrive in their homes.
- Enabling hosts, where possible, to apply in small groups so that there is greater accountability among hosts.
- Making sure displaced people have a clear avenue to report issues and there are effective mechanisms for monitoring risk.

The Scottish and Welsh governments should:

In collaboration with the UK government and with delivery partners such as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association, local authorities, and VSC organisations.

Build on learnings to adapt the super sponsor model to deliver urgent protection

- Seek to adapt the super sponsor approach for the delivery of urgent placements under other UK-wide schemes and publish a timebound plan for implementation. For instance, to offer swift protection to people arriving under the Afghan Resettlement Programme, UK Resettlement Scheme and refugee family reunion.

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Welcome and integration

The UK, Scottish and Welsh governments and Northern Irish Executive should:

Working with the Local Government Association, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association, and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, key delivery partners and VCS organisations.

Build on efforts to support Ukrainians and other displaced people with language learning

- Increase resource and provide strategic direction to both formal and informal English language providers so that classes reflect the diverse and everyday language needs of displaced people, are accessible and trauma informed.
- Strengthen the quality of informal and community-based English language teaching, e.g. through training community volunteers.

Improve professional qualification recognition and strengthen tailored employment support for Ukrainians and other displaced people

- Fast track the recognition of qualifications and re-accreditation in key industries where Ukrainians previously worked (such as teaching and education, information technology, retail and healthcare). This should be done by:
  - leading coordination with industry partners to make the process accessible and affordable (e.g. ECCTIS, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, professional bodies and employers).
  - continuing to invest in programming that is trauma informed and offers both tailored language and ongoing employability support to help displaced people access professional employment.

Resource hosts and community groups to provide informal welcome and integration support

- Provide two-way training in cultural norms and support displaced people to access services and find work, e.g. through job-shadowing schemes and mentorship programmes.
- Provide training for hosts in supporting people who may be affected by trauma.

Support schools to act as integration hubs within local communities

- Fund a pilot that expands schools' role in delivering integration support to displaced pupils and their families. This should be delivered in partnership with local authorities and VCS organisations and promote learnings for scaling similar initiatives.

Develop and publish a UK strategy for refugee integration

- Develop and publish a UK-wide refugee integration strategy that builds on work undertaken in the devolved nations to:
  - set shared priorities on accommodation, employment, language, health, and community connections.
  - ensure equal support for all displaced people.
  - support an expanded role for community integration based on lessons from the Ukraine response.

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Planning for the future

The UK government should:

Promote stability and choice for displaced Ukrainians by

- Providing longer-term protection and reassurance for all Ukraine scheme visa holders. This can be done by announcing an accessible route to permanent residence. At the latest, this should come into effect when UPE 2 visas end and people in vulnerable situations should be able to easily access this status.
- Assisting those who do wish to voluntarily return. For instance, through providing dual intent integration support to help displaced Ukrainians remain connected to their communities, language, and economy.

Supporting participation and decision-making

The UK government, working with devolved governments, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations, should:

- Facilitate the meaningful participation of displaced Ukrainians in policy development and implementation through specialist forums, engagement with Ukrainian led networks and wider civil society.
- Develop tailored communication plans to update Ukraine scheme visa holders on policy developments.
- Support Ukrainian people with decision making about the future by providing:
  - information on conditions in Ukraine (e.g. safety, security, access to services) and rights and options to stay in the UK.
  - free immigration advice at key visa transition points with a focus on complex cases, people in vulnerable situations, and accessing fee waivers for wider routes (e.g. work/study).
  - psychosocial support for those affected by trauma, loss and family separation, which can impact decision making.

Acknowledgements

Our special thanks to:

All the people displaced from Ukraine who participated in the interviews and responded to our survey, for sharing their stories of rebuilding their lives in the UK; and to the hosts who shared their experiences of welcoming people into their homes. We are also grateful to the professional stakeholders from governments across the UK, local authorities, and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) for sharing their experiences of delivering the Ukraine schemes.

The research team at Neighbourly Lab for designing the research materials, carrying out the data collection and analysis, and drafting the report: Nick Lancaster, Jake Preston, Rebecca Nichols, and Beth Worku-Dix. We also thank Kathryn Crowther from KMC Research Ltd, who supported the design of the survey and conducted the data analysis.

Opora, with particular thanks to Stan Beneš, for invaluable support in sharing the survey with displaced Ukrainians and advising on research materials and strategic direction.

The four peer researchers – Iryna Shkarovska, Natalia Bulbuk, Taras Falkovskyy, and Natalie Soko – who contributed their lived experience to the design, data collection, and analysis of this research.

The British Red Cross project team, who brought their time and expertise to the project design, editing, and development of recommendations: Diletta Lauro, Georgia Mealings, Anna Studman, and Eleanor Paton. Thanks also to Olivia Field, Mubeen Bhutta, Chris Davies, Alex Fraser, Alison McNulty, Katija Dew, Rob Murray, Phil Arnold, Rad Fortune-West, Ann Marie White, Joanne McKenna, Laurie Wynne, Eleanor Stack, Nicola Stove, Etienne Berges, Cicely Fraser, Carey Roach, Sohini Tanna, Jonna Monaghan, Sabah Aslam, Leo Bryant, Vicci Moyles, and Michael Feegrade for their valuable input. We are also grateful to our wider British Red Cross colleagues from the Refugee Support, Media, Stories, Public Affairs, and Production teams for their support.

Representatives from external organisations and universities, including the Association of Ukrainians in the UK, members of the Ukraine Working Group, and the University of Warwick, who helped disseminate the survey and provided feedback. We are also deeply grateful to all the expert stakeholders who contributed to the UK and Scotland recommendation workshops.

Joanna Wheeler for designing the report, and Laura Kennedy for proofreading.

With additional thanks to the British Red Cross Stories team for documenting the stories of people displaced from Ukraine.

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Notes and references

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5 All names have been changed.

6 In the year ending June 2025, according to Home Office data, there have been 226,600 arrivals in the UK under the Ukraine Family scheme and Ukraine Sponsorship scheme since 7 March 2022. This is in the context of 274,417 visas granted so far on the schemes, and 34,000 granted permissions to stay for Ukrainians already in the UK at the time of the escalation of the conflict through the initial Ukraine Extension scheme and the in-country application route to the Ukraine Family scheme. See: Home Office (2025a), Immigration System Statistics year ending March 2025: Ukraine Visa Schemes – Summary Tables, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/how-many-people-come-to-the-uk-via-safe-and-legal-humanitarian-routes#ukraine-schemes

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46 The application of tariff funding and delivery to hosts as thank-you payments also contributed to disparity and unequal integration experiences among new arrivals.

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88 Housing is not explored in detail here even though it was an issue that created challenges for integration. The British Red Cross' recent research on homelessness and housing insecurity found that barriers to employment and ESOL, hosting relationship breakdowns, and issues accessing long-term housing increased displaced Ukrainians' risk of homelessness or precarious housing situations. See: British Red Cross (2025), Still at Risk, https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/still-at-risk; and British Red Cross (2024a).

89 Other challenges cited in our survey included: difficulty finding employment (47%); difficulty finding stable housing (30%); difficulty accessing healthcare (28%); feeling socially isolated (27%); experiencing financial difficulties (25%); and experiencing discrimination (12%).

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90 These are the most common industry sectors in which displaced Ukrainians worked in while Ukraine according to available data. See: ONS (2023), Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/visaholdersenteringtheukundertheukrainehumanitarianschemes/27aprilto15may2023

91 Recent media reports and analysis show that people displaced from Ukraine are being refused asylum by the Home Office, being told that there are safe parts of Ukraine that they can relocate to. See: The Guardian (2025), Ukrainians who fled to UK being refused asylum on grounds it is 'safe to return', https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/27/ukrainians-who-fled-to-uk-being-refused-asylum-on-grounds-it-is-safe-to-return

92 The statistics from our survey may not be directly comparable to other surveys conducted with people displaced from Ukraine; the difference in sample and sample approach, timing, and question wording may all be factors as to why our statistics are higher than the nationally representative ONS survey. According to the ONS, in June 2024 around 7 in 10 (68%) said that they would prefer to remain in the UK, even if it were "safe" to return to Ukraine. In contrast, 15% reported they would return to Ukraine, 1% would move somewhere else and 16% do not know (see: Visa holders living in the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes, follow-up survey). However, the statistics from our survey are similar to other, smaller scale recent surveys. For example, Jones, Kuznetsova, and Kogut (2025), Impact of Changes to the Ukraine Visa Schemes on Ukrainians in the UK, https://postsocialistbritain.bham.ac.uk/outputs/28/

93 Some of those who arrived from Ukraine will have since left the UK either temporarily or permanently. Management information indicates that as of the end of March 2025, around 92,800 people (42%) who had previously arrived on the Ukraine schemes had exited the UK and were believed to be out of the country, although some may subsequently return. See: Home Office (2025a).

94 Other factors included 'I can access healthcare and support services when I need them' (19%); 'I have better access to affordable housing' (14%); 'I am undergoing essential medical treatment here' (9%); and 'Other' (5%).

95 This was followed by wanting to reunite with family and friends living elsewhere, short-term visa and immigration status causing difficulties, having health or wellbeing concerns that aren't addressed here, experiencing discrimination here, and feeling that there are better opportunities in another country.

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BRC25-119