

APPG for Ending Homelessness briefing for MPs and Peers

Homelessness amongst Ukrainian refugees living in Britain

February 2023

This month will mark a year since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which, with over 7 million refugees recorded to date, amounts to the biggest humanitarian crisis Europe has seen since WWII.

In response the Westminster Government announced the introduction of three visa schemes which aimed to provide support for those individuals fleeing the conflict in Ukraine - the Ukraine Family Scheme, the Ukraine Extension Scheme and Homes for Ukraine (the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme). These give Ukrainian nationals and specific family members of any nationality the right to stay in the UK for an initial three-year period, as well as the right to work, study and claim means-tested benefits.

According to the latest Home Office data from February 2023, 217,900 visas were awarded under the Family and Sponsorship Schemes, out of a total of 267,800 received, and 161,400 Ukraine Scheme visa holders had arrived in the UK. In addition, applications for permission to extend existing stays in the UK totalled 28,700, with 23,500 of these being granted.

While these schemes have provided a lifeline for many, some serious concerns are emerging, particularly with increasing reports of Ukrainian refugees experiencing breakdown of living arrangements and facing homelessness or destitution during this cost of living crisis.

Homelessness amongst Ukrainians refugees:

Official statistics from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) published in January 2023 indicate that a total of **4,295 Ukrainian households in England received homelessness assistance from their local authority between February 2022 - January 2023**.¹ Of these households, **2,985 (69%) included dependent children**.

The number of homeless Ukrainian households in England has been steadily rising since the summer, and the latest figures continue the worrying trend of increasing numbers of Ukrainians at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Between November and January there was a **44% increase in the number of homeless Ukrainian households**. Since June 2022, there has been more than a sixfold increase in the number of Ukrainian households receiving homelessness assistance from their local authority, and a similar increase amongst households with dependent children.

These official statistics reflect the findings of the Work Rights Centre who surveyed 191 Ukrainian arrivals and found that:

- 1 in 10 were threatened with eviction at some point during their stay, with risks particularly high for those on the Family Scheme.
- More than two thirds had little or very little confidence in their ability to find accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Less than a third had found employment, with the main barriers including difficulties with English, translating qualifications, and a lack of transport and childcare.

This is placing additional pressures on local authorities, many of whom are already forced to rely on expensive temporary accommodation to house households experiencing homelessness because of severe shortages of affordable housing options in their local area.

What is driving the increase in homelessness amongst Ukrainian arrivals?



Key statistics

- **4,295** Ukrainian households have received homelessness assistance from their local authority between February 2022 and January 2023.
- On 14th December 2022 the Westminster Government announced a £650 million support package for Ukrainians under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This will help local authorities provide financial support to hosts and acquire an estimated 4,000 homes by 2024.

¹ Based on data from 72% of English lower-tier local authorities

The increase in homelessness amongst Ukrainian nationals is being driven by a combination of factors deriving both from the design and implementation of the visa schemes, and wider issues, such as the lack of affordable housing options and the worsening cost of living crisis.

Short-term focus of the sponsorship scheme: Under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, British hosts “sponsor” and house Ukrainian guests for an initial period of 6 months. Though the Government has encouraged hosts to continue sponsoring their guests beyond 6 months and payments for hosts can be extended beyond this period, many sponsorships are breaking down, leaving Ukrainians with limited alternative choices for somewhere safe to stay.

Absence of specific funding for families under the Ukraine Family Scheme: The Work Rights Centre research found that **more than twice as many Ukrainians under the Family Scheme, where arrivals can join family members already in the UK, were at imminent risk of eviction compared with those on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.** This pattern is confirmed by further research with local authorities. This may be driven by the absence of specific funding attached to the Family Scheme which leaves people reliant on their own financial resources to get by. This is compounded by the barriers Ukrainians reported facing in finding employment, despite many being highly educated and interested in securing skilled employment. Additionally, more than half of respondents (58%) reported having no savings at all and those who did, reported not having more than 12 weeks’ worth of savings.

Pressures of the cost of housing and living: In addition, the acute lack of affordable housing is severely restricting people’s ability to move on from sponsorship or family arrangements and into their own settled housing. Barriers to access, including high deposits, high rents and the need for credit checks and guarantors, mean that for substantial numbers of Ukrainians moving into privately rented accommodation is simply out of the question.

This reflects the wider pressures of housing precarity across the country, with the number of accessible affordable rental properties continuing to plummet, alongside skyrocketing rents at record levels. Private rents have increased by 11.8% on average outside London, and 15.8% in London over the last year. Support for private renters has not kept up with the real cost of renting, leaving too many struggling to cover their rent, as rising costs of energy, childcare and food put more pressure on their budgets.

What action is needed:

While the announcement of continued funding for both sponsors and local authorities is very welcome, there is more that needs to be done to prevent more Ukrainians from being forced into homelessness this winter and beyond.

Firstly, the design of funding arrangements to hosts and sponsors must be improved. The Westminster Government should:

- **Increased flexibility in funding for hosts:** For example, this could include providing increased payments for those hosting larger families and allowing payments to continue for hosts where sponsorship arrangements have been sustained and developed into lodging arrangements. Currently, this is leaving some hosts outside the scope of the Homes for Ukraine funding.
- **Harmonise funding across schemes:** The most glaring omission in funding announcements is the absence of financial provision for arrivals under the Family Scheme or their family members hosting them in the UK. As they face the same if not more acute financial pressures to those on other schemes, this continued exclusion risks pushing more people into destitution and homelessness.

Additionally, the Westminster Government should not miss the opportunity to learn from recent humanitarian crises, and must develop a refugee resettlement and integration strategy, and appoint a successor to Lord Carrington, Minister of State for Refugees. This could include the option for Ukrainians to settle permanently in the UK after the expiry date of the current visa schemes.

The Westminster Government must also recognise that many of the challenges facing Ukrainian refugees are not unique to this community. The acute shortage of affordable housing and the pressures of the cost of living crisis are already pushing more people into homelessness and new research commissioned by Crisis finds that **300,000 families and individuals across Britain could be forced into homelessness in 2023.** We also know that refugees from all countries continue to face a higher risk of homelessness.

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