



How can UK social welfare provision be improved for displaced Ukrainians?

OVERVIEW

- The war in Ukraine has created the biggest European refugee crisis since World War Two. By May 2023, over 175,000 displaced Ukrainians have arrived in the UK.
- The UK government quickly introduced emergency social security and housing provisions for Ukrainians which go beyond the scope of support for many other groups arriving in the UK and is more generous than the standard asylum system.
- This includes two bespoke housing schemes, the Ukraine Family Scheme and Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine), three years' leave to remain and the right to claim welfare benefits, work and study.
- However, there are emerging problems with the current social welfare provisions including:
 - ◊ inconsistencies between the two housing schemes;
 - ◊ breakdown in housing provision leading to over 5,000 Ukrainians presenting to local authorities as homeless;
 - ◊ significant safeguarding concerns;
 - ◊ difficulties accessing a complex welfare benefits system;
 - ◊ long-term uncertainty about the continuation of support.
- This policy briefing sets out recommendations for how UK housing and social security policy can be improved for displaced Ukrainians.



'The UK – a home for Ukrainians? An analysis of social security and housing policy' by Richard Machin in the *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, published by Policy Press

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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FINDINGS

The government has set out a clear moral and policy rationale to support displaced Ukrainians moving to the UK as the result of the Russian invasion. The volatility created by the war meant that policy needed to be quickly developed and implemented.

It is now important to review the effectiveness of provisions to make sure they are fit for purpose, to establish where reform is needed, and to identify gaps in the knowledge base. We should reflect on the lived experience of the thousands of Ukrainians who have come to the UK since February 2022 and to assess the impact of policy on their lives.

Housing policy:

- The Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) (introduced 4 March 2022) allows Ukrainians to apply to join a UK-resident family member.
- The Homes for Ukraine (H4U) scheme (launched 14 March 2022) allows Ukrainians with no links to the UK to secure housing provided by an individual or community group sponsor.

Issues and concerns

- There are significant inconsistencies between the two policies:
 - ◊ When a H4U arrangement ends, a guest can be matched with an alternative host, providing the local council has undertaken DBS and accommodation checks. Arrivals under the UFS cannot be rematched or transferred to H4U and are expected to present to the local authority (LA) as homeless.
 - ◊ Under H4U, hosts receive £350/month, increasing to £500/month if the arrangement lasts longer than 12 months. There is no equivalent payment for the UFS.
 - ◊ Under H4U, LAs were initially provided with a per-person grant of £10,500 to support community integration (reducing to £5,900 for arrivals after January 2023). The Ukraine education tariff allocates £3,000/child for early years, £6,580 for primary and £8,755 for secondary. LAs receive no funding to support Ukrainians under the UFS or any information on placements.
 - ◊ Accommodation provided through H4U is subject to in-person pre-arrival checks by the LA. The LA must complete a DBS for sponsors and other household members over 16. After a guest's arrival, the LA should determine any welfare or safeguarding issues and, where appropriate, complete a Care Act 2014 needs assessment. No checks are required for the UFS.

- A significant homelessness issue is emerging. LA statutory homelessness duties apply when arrangements under the H4U or UFS break down. By 19 May 2023, 5,995 were assessed as owed a homelessness prevention or relief duty. These figures relate to England only and are based on a return of 67.3% of all authorities. Many Ukrainians relying on the private sector are facing unaffordable rents and difficulties paying deposits, providing evidence of finances and securing guarantors.
- The UN Refugee Agency and the Charity Commission have concerns about safeguarding and exploitation associated with H4U, partly because of the matching process. According to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, hundreds of Ukrainians have been placed in temporary accommodation where checks have identified concerns after their arrival. The Home Office often issued visas before LAs could complete the necessary checks.
- LAs have reported that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) sponsor registration form lacks an appropriate data validation protocol meaning much time/resource is spent undertaking erroneous accommodation/welfare checks.

Social security policy:

Emergency regulations allow Ukrainians arriving in the UK to have immediate access to Universal Credit (UC) and other means-tested benefits, and disability, carer and child benefits.

People leaving Ukraine after 24 February 2022 and residing in Ukraine immediately before 1 January 2022 are exempt from the Habitual Residence Test and Past Presence Test.

Issues and concerns

Some Ukrainians struggle with the digitalised UC adjudication process without specialist support. Regulations provide that hosts under the H4U scheme will not be affected by their guest's income. UFS hosts, however, could see benefit entitlement reduced as guests are classed as non-dependants. Although displaced Ukrainians can immediately claim disability benefits, professional support is often needed to help a claimant gather evidence for their application. National Insurance numbers are not always issued quickly, and the value of property in Ukraine is not always disregarded for means-tested benefits.



IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Implementation of these recommendations would provide longer-term certainty for displaced Ukrainians, ensure a more appropriate package of welfare support, and help to address the current breakdown in provisions.

Policy recommendations

- UFS arrivals should be able to switch to the H4U scheme when provisions break down, and not have to present to LAs as homeless.
- Parity across the schemes should be introduced, including provision of payments to hosts, interim payments to arriving guests, and the commitment that UFS hosts should not experience a reduction in benefit entitlement based on their guest's circumstances.
- LAs should receive funding for the UFS equivalent to H4U provision.
- A cross-departmental approach would respond to the increasing number of homeless Ukrainians or those experiencing difficulties accessing the private rented sector. LA housing services and voluntary/community advice providers need funding to deliver tailored advice to Ukrainians. DLUHC should develop a centralised online hub, to benefit from emerging LA best practice support for Ukrainians (rent deposit schemes, incentives for private landlords to rent to Ukrainians etc). Guidance on existing discretionary schemes and homelessness support should be reviewed to ensure its appropriacy for displaced Ukrainians.
- The H4U sponsorship form must be reviewed with adequate data validation mechanisms in place to allow LAs to complete timely and appropriate checks.
- The government should revise guidance on the H4U matching process, benefitting from the Local Government Association's set of good-practice examples for effective partnership work between LAs and the voluntary sector, drawing on partnerships established during COVID-19.
- Given the prolonged nature of the conflict, the government should commit to a full review of the current three-year permission to remain in the UK before the second anniversary of the invasion

of Ukraine (24 February 2024), and issue revised guidelines in the absence of a resolution to the conflict.

- Responsibility for Ukrainian welfare support should fall under the remit of a dedicated Minister for Refugees rather than the Minister for Immigration.

Monitoring and research:

- The Social Security Advisory Committee and/or the Work and Pensions Committee should conduct an inquiry into the operation of the emergency social security regulations introduced for displaced Ukrainians. This should explore the social security concerns above, and work with Ukrainian benefit claimants to learn from their experience of the DWP translation services and face-to-face advice.
- LAs should receive detailed data on UFS arrivals and be given checking responsibilities.
- Homelessness management information on displaced Ukrainians should be provided as an Official Statistics or National Statistics release. Data should be provided by LAs from all four UK nations.
- The Home Office and DLUHC should commission independent research to investigate why placements break down. This should include both host and guest perspectives and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. It should consider the adequacy of financial payments made to H4U hosts; the impact on welfare benefit entitlement for UFS hosts; cultural and financial issues; guests' experience of securing employment and alternative housing.
- The Home Office and DLUHC should commission independent research with local authorities on the adequacy and administration of H4U funding, the education tariff, 2023/24 new burdens funding, Local Authority Housing Fund and safeguarding arrangements. The research should establish the actual LA spend on supporting the integration of Ukrainians to ensure that appropriate funding is provided.