Ukraine Scheme briefing: May 2022

In March 2022 in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the UK government launched new immigration routes for Ukrainians fleeing the conflict to come to the UK and concessions for those already in the UK to extend their stay. This briefing aims to explain the policy background, the new visa routes and their potential impact on local authorities.

In summary

- The government has created three new immigration routes for Ukrainian nationals and their family members: the Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine Extension Scheme, collectively known as Ukraine Scheme.
- These three routes provide opportunity for those displaced by the conflict in Ukraine to come to the UK for up to three years either through joining family in the UK or independent UK sponsors and provide an option for those Ukrainian nationals already in the UK and unable to return to regularise their stay.

- Some government funding is available to local authorities, sponsors and arrivals to under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) but there is no funding for the other schemes to support with integration needs.
- The lack of a maintenance and accommodation requirement under the Ukraine Family scheme could mean that local authorities are required to provide homelessness and housing assistance to new arrivals who don't have adequate support and accommodation. This could potentially include large numbers of arrivals through the scheme due to its expansion to include extended family members.
- There is some uncertainty about particular elements of the Homes for Ukraine scheme such around safeguarding and local authority roles as full details on these have not been available from the start.

Overview of policy background

1. The Ukraine Scheme developed throughout February and March 2022. Below is a timeline of the key policy developments and events.

- 24 February 2022: Russia invaded Ukraine. The European Union subsequently announced it was opening the borders to Ukrainians to travel into the union and that they would be eligible for temporary protection status. The UK government sought a different approach, choosing not to

remove Ukraine from the visa-national list and instead introduced some visa concessions for Ukrainians in the UK or seeking to come to the UK. UK immigration policy concerning Ukraine continued to develop over the coming weeks with the three new routes subsequently announced.

- 1 March 2022: The Home Secretary released a policy statement revealing the creation of the Ukraine Family Scheme and a humanitarian sponsorship pathway to enable Ukrainians to come to the UK and concessions for those already in the UK. Concessions for those already in the UK included the extension of leave until 31 December 2022 for those on Season Workers visas, HGV visas and Pork Butchers visas as well relaxations allowing those on other visas to switch into other routes.
- 4 March 2022: The Ukraine Family Scheme officially opened for applications.
- 14 March 2022: The Homes for Ukraine Scheme was launched by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 17 March 2022: An emergency amendment to the NHS regulations enables Ukrainians to access free healthcare, exempting them from NHS charges.
- 18 March 2022: The Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme opened with phase 1 of the programme, with applicants now able to apply for a visa through the scheme.
- 18 March 2022: An amendment to the Social Security regulations exempts this group from the Habitual Residence Test meaning they can access welfare benefits and housing

and homelessness assistance with immediate effect.

- 21 March 2022: An emergency amendment to the Housing and Homelessness regulations is published enabling local authorities to provide housing and homelessness assistance to this group.
- 29 March 2022: A statement of changes to the Immigration Rules was published bringing in the Ukraine Family Scheme and Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme into legislation and announcing a third new route, the Ukraine Extension Scheme for Ukrainians already in the UK to extend their leave.
- 3 May 2022: The Ukraine Extension Scheme opened for applications.
- 15 July 2022: The Homes for Ukraine Scheme expanded to consider applications from children who had applied without a parent or legal guardian.

Ukraine Family Scheme

2. The Ukraine Family Scheme visa route enables Ukrainians and their immediate family members to apply for a visa to join family in the UK. The UK family members can be an immediate or extended family member of any nationality as long as they have one of the qualifying statuses such as British citizenship, indefinite leave to remain, settled status or even refugee status.

3. There are no fees for the Ukraine Family Scheme visa and applications can be made inside or outside the UK. There are no

requirements to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge or any English language requirements.

4. Applicants will receive up to three years' leave to remain with access to public funds and the right to work. However, those applying from outside the UK will initially receive a letter permitting them to travel to the UK and will be granted six months' leave at the UK border and then up to three years leave to remain upon completing registration of biometrics in the UK. There is currently no route to settlement.

5. Despite the requirement of having a family member sponsor, there is no maintenance and accommodation condition as part of the visa. Sponsors are not required to provide financial support or accommodation and so applicants may well have no housing or support upon their arrival to the UK.

6. As of the 12 July, there have been 45,900 visas issued nationally and 29,700 arrivals in the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme.

Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine)

7. The Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme refers to the visa route enabling Ukrainians and their immediate family members to be sponsored by non-family members in the UK. Sponsors can be individuals, businesses, charities, community groups and local authorities.

8. There are no fees for the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme visa application. There are no requirements to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge or any English language requirements. Unlike the Ukraine Family Scheme, applications must be made from outside the UK and it’s not possible to switch into this scheme from within the UK. Both sponsors and applicants can complete the application together.

9. Applicants will receive up to three years’ leave to remain with access to public funds and the right to work. Successful applicants will initially receive a letter permitting them to travel to the UK and will be granted six months leave at the UK border and then up to three years’ leave upon completing registration of biometrics in the UK. There is currently no route to settlement.

10. The sponsorship element of this route is managed through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities’ (DLUHC) Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Currently we are in Phase 1 of the scheme whereby individuals can register as sponsors. Sponsors and individuals can be matched either independently or through non-governmental organisations who are registering details of potential sponsors and applicants to coordinate appropriate matches.

11. Sponsors are asked to provide appropriate accommodation for a minimum of six months, however, arrivals may well be looking for alternative accommodation such as in the event of a breakdown in the sponsorship arrangement. Where sponsors are

sponsoring an unaccompanied child under the age of 18, they must provide accommodation for up to 3 years or until the child turns 18.

12. Sponsors can receive a ‘thank you’ payment of £350 per month for up to 12 months and new arrivals will receive a one-off £200 start-up payment. ‘Thank you’ payments are extended to up to three years where hosts are sponsoring unaccompanied children. Payments are to be administered through the local authority. Funding is available for local authorities in the form of £10,500 per person to support with carrying out housing and safeguarding checks on sponsors, providing integration support and administering payments to sponsors and arrivals. There is also funding for local authorities to support with early years education and school education and additional funding should a child be taking into care as a result of a sponsorship breakdown

13. As of 12 July, there have been 109,700 visas issued nationally and 65,600 arrivals in the UK under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme. Local-level data reveals that 4,616 visas have been issued to applicants with sponsors in our region, as of 7 July.

Ukraine Extension Scheme

14. The Ukraine Extension Scheme was formally announced via the publication of the Ukraine Appendix as part of a statement of changes to the Immigration Rules in March 2022. This scheme formalises a system for those already in the UK to regularise

their stay long-term beyond the initial visa concessions announced to support Ukrainian nationals.

15. The scheme is open for Ukrainian nationals and their dependent family members who are already in the UK. Applicants must have had permission to stay on or before 16 May 2023, meaning that anyone on another visa route will be able to switch into this route whilst in the UK. The scheme is also open to those whose who previously were in the UK lawfully but whose status expired after 1 January 2022.

16. Applications through the scheme will be free. There is no requirement to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge or English language requirements. Successful applicants will receive up to three years' leave to remain with the right to work and access to public funds. There is currently no route to settlement.

17. As of 12 July, 11,500 applications were made through the Ukraine Extension Scheme with 8,500 accepted so far.

Impact on local authorities and communities

18. The arrival of this new cohort of migrants through these new visa routes may offer a range of challenges for local authorities and the communities they support, but these can be managed well with planning and preparation. Local authorities may be considering the following.

19. The uncertainty over the number of projected arrivals and difficulties locating new arrivals at a local level. Although we don’t know how many people from Ukraine will come to the UK via these new routes, the government initially forecasted up to 200,000 arrivals nationally. Local authorities can make use of available data such as census or National Insurance data to gain insight into where Ukrainians in the UK may already be living, shedding some light into which areas may receive high numbers of arrivals through the Ukraine Family Scheme but this is speculative. Whilst the government is publishing national data regularly showing the number of visas issued as well as local authority-level data for the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, at present there is no known figures for arrivals on the family scheme at a regional or local level. Through the Homes for Ukraine scheme DLUHC will notify a local authority when a visa has been issued to a sponsor in their area which will allow them to prepare and deliver post-arrival integration support but at the time of writing there is no notification from Home Office when visas are issued or arrivals in the country occur through the Family Scheme.

20. The impact on housing and homelessness services. Amendments to the Housing and Homelessness Regulations and Social Security Regulations mean that local authorities can offer housing and homelessness assistance to Ukrainians immediately upon their arrival. The Ukraine Family Scheme visa contains no maintenance and accommodation requirement, therefore there is no guarantee that family sponsors will be able to accommodate arrivals. New arrivals may present as homeless to

local authority housing services and in need of accommodation. As there is no notification from Home Office to local authorities in advance of visas being issued, local authorities are unable to plan and prepare for such eventualities. Furthermore, housing shortages, the demand for emergency accommodation and the provision of temporary accommodation to other cohorts like Afghan refugees all create further challenges for councils in providing housing. There is also the possibility of those on the Homes for Ukraine scheme to find themselves homeless as a result of a breakdown of sponsorship arrangements. Local authorities will be required to offer assistance, either in the interim until a re-match is available or until a statutory duty ends. It's also possible that the Ukraine Extension Scheme could lead to an increased demand for support from this group too.

21. Local authorities will be cognisant of the need for integration support for new arrivals and to meet a range of different needs. Funding is available to local authorities to support arrivals under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and this includes the provision of integration support to new arrivals. Additional funding is also available to support with the provision of education for pre-school and school-aged children. Exactly what this integration support will look like is still undefined but like other migrant groups fleeing conflict they will have needs around access to education, healthcare services, English language, access to employment and more. However, there is no funding available to support those under the Ukraine Family Scheme or Ukraine Extension Scheme. The allocation of funding to support one group of Ukrainians but not others risks creating a tiered system

of integration and creating challenges for services and service users navigating this.

22. There is uncertainty over the provision of bespoke health services, particularly around mental health for this group. Ukrainian arrivals may have suffered trauma. Many may require specialist support around physical and mental health issues. Although emergency regulations were laid enabling this group to access free healthcare, there has been no announcement of funding for the provision of health services to meet this group's needs. This also raises questions about how existing healthcare providers can meet the additional demand for services without additional resources.

23. The Homes for Ukraine Scheme presents some challenges to local authorities due to their role in housing and safeguarding checks. The scheme was launched without local authority roles being fully defined and so there are concerns around how their role will operate. Local authorities welcome the provision of funding to assist them but there are still uncertainties about how this will look in practice. Local authorities may already be supporting with other schemes such as Afghan resettlement which places further pressure on capacity and resources. Meanwhile, the Homes for Ukraine scheme has raised concerns from anti-trafficking groups that it poses significant safeguarding risks due to the ability of individuals to sponsor vulnerable refugees often matched through unregulated forums on social networking sites. Local authority safeguarding checks and intelligence may not be able to stop exploitative activities before

visas are issued and where they do, local authorities will be mindful of how their role may result in tensions in their relationships with local communities and individuals who may seek to challenge such decisions.

24. The expansion of the Homes for Ukraine scheme to process applications from children without parents or legal guardians could lead to future burdens placed on local authorities where sponsorship arrangements breakdown and children are taking into care. In such circumstances, local authority placements will not be considered as part of the threshold for the National Transfer Scheme which coordinates placements of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children across local authorities, and so could place additional pressure on councils. There is also a greater need for thorough and robust safeguarding checks to ensure such placements are safe and meet the required standards.

25. Where new migrants settle into new areas, this will have an impact on local communities and local authorities will be mindful of community cohesion, particularly if new arrivals settle in areas already under stress. Perceived competition for resources such as employment opportunities, access to housing and other services can lead to hostility and social segregation. Other possible risks to cohesion include hostility targeted at Russian communities, or whether local communities will embrace new arrivals so soon after the UK fully left the EU. Challenges may be more likely to present in areas with higher rates of arrivals, for example North Yorkshire is the local authority with the most

arrivals so far under the sponsorship scheme in the region but is an area with a large rural population, limited infrastructure and experience in supporting the arrival of a new cohort of migrants. However, there will inevitably be a number of benefits to local communities as a result of this cohort. The arrival of new migrants with the right to work who may be able to fill skill gaps, develop local businesses or improve the performances of local schools are just some of many examples of where migration can have a positive impact on local communities.

26. New arrivals shape communities and local authorities might want to consider how they can utilise existing resources or develop new ones to support them. They will need to ensure they have Ukrainian interpreters and translators available for key services and may also need to think about sensitivities around using Russian translators. Local authorities might also be anticipating the emergence of Ukrainian community organisations who will need support to get set up and to participate in community life too.

27. Finally, the long-term picture remains unclear due to the fact there is no route to settlement on any of the three new immigration routes for Ukrainian nationals. This may change in the future, but at present Ukrainians on any of the routes will be unable to settle in the UK after their three years' leave has expired. Will Ukrainians be expected to return to the country and if so, what is the possibility that many will go on to claim asylum or the risk that many become undocumented in the UK? Having no clear route to settlement will affect individuals, families and

communities and could negate the long-term benefits of providing an integration support package.

Key information

Guidance: Apply to stay in the UK under the Ukraine Extension Scheme. Home Office. 3 May 2022.

Guidance: Apply for a Ukraine Family Scheme visa. Home Office. 4 March 2022.

Guidance: Apply for a visa under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine). Home Office. 18 March 2022.

Homes for Ukraine: guidance for councils. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. 18 March 2022.

Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme – numbers of visas issued. Home Office. 26 April 2022.

Immigration Rules Appendix Ukraine Scheme. Home Office. 30 March 2022.

The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Amendment) Regulations 2022. UK Legislation. 21 March 2022.

The National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) (Amendment) Regulations 2022. UK Legislation. 17 March 2022.

The Social Security (Amendment) Regulations 2022. UK Legislation. 18 March 2022.

Ukraine Family Scheme and Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: visa data. Home Office. 26 April 2022.

About this briefing

This briefing was prepared by Stefan Robert and last updated in July 2022. It is available on the Migration Yorkshire website

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