



University of
Nottingham
Rights Lab

Homes for Ukraine: learnings to inform and shape future hosting schemes

Executive summary



Funding partners



Contents

Partner overview	3
Funding	3
Executive summary	4
1. Purpose of this research	4
2. What we found	5
3. Recommendations	7
4. Conclusions	8

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Partner overview

Commonweal Housing: Established in 2006, Commonweal Housing is an independent social justice charity working to investigate, pilot and champion housing-based solutions to social injustice. By using its charitable resources, Commonweal provides experts and partner organisations the opportunity to trial and test new approaches designed to enhance housing equality and justice. It also focuses its attention on emerging injustices, funding and supporting forward-thinking research and helping to influence policy and practice. commonwealhousing.org.uk

Hope at Home: Hope at Home is a registered charity providing safe homes for survivors of modern slavery via a hosting programme. The overarching objective of the charity is to relieve the needs of people who are at risk of, or who have been subject to, modern slavery or human trafficking by providing access to safe housing within the community and by assisting in the provision of all necessary support designed to enable individuals to rebuild their lives and become independent individuals and members of society. hopeathome.org.uk

Rights Lab: The Rights Lab delivers research to help end modern slavery. The Rights Lab is the world's largest group of modern slavery researchers, and home to many leading modern slavery experts. Through five research programmes, the Lab delivers new and cutting-edge research that provides rigorous data, evidence and discoveries for the global anti-slavery effort. More information about the Rights Lab is available at nottingham.ac.uk/rights-lab

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Funding

This project was funded by Commonweal Housing and Hope at Home.

Executive summary

1. Purpose of this research

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent on-going conflict has created one of the largest human displacement crises in modern history, with nearly one-third of Ukrainians forced from their homes. In March 2022, the UK government announced its intention to assist those fleeing Ukraine and established three new visa routes, including the Ukraine sponsorship scheme, also known as the 'Homes for Ukraine' (HfU) scheme. Nearly 300,000 Ukrainians have applied for visas to come to the UK across the three schemes, with nearly 150,000 of these granted via the HfU scheme.

This research project aimed to understand hosts experiences of hosting and to gain an understanding of people's motivations for volunteering to offer their homes as part of the HfU scheme. The questions we wanted to understand are: why do people host, what can make hosting better, and how can learning from this scheme be used to improve future hosting schemes?

The insights and experiences shared by hosts have enabled the development of key conclusions and considerations for a range of stakeholders in relation to the better running of existing and future hosting schemes.



2. What we found

Initial and ongoing concerns regarding the HfU scheme

At the announcement of the HfU scheme, various stakeholders – including the third sector and academics – raised concerns. These included concerns that; in launching the HfU scheme, the UK government were treating Ukrainians differently to other nationalities who also sought protection and assistance; that there was a risk of the scheme being abused and guests being exploited; and that the lack of clarity around longer-term accommodation options would be problematic.

Hosts' motivations

Hosts were asked what factors influenced their decision to take part in the scheme, such as cultural, religious, conflict exposure and previous familial experiences.

The key factors hosts reported as impacting their decisions to participate in the HfU scheme were:

- on-going and extensive media coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine which promoted an affinity with those fleeing Ukraine
- overwhelming feelings of injustice and immorality felt at the invasion
- the ability to practically be able to provide the space within their homes
- the short-term nature of the scheme and the fact that guests would have access to benefits and the ability to work
- that the scheme was centrally designed, endorsed and advertised by central government
- the apparent ease of access to participate in the scheme

Interestingly, engagement with other migrant and refugee crises, previous experience of hosting, and the financial incentive offered by government were not reported to be motivating factors for participation.

Recruitment and enrolment

Hosts registered their interest in hosting via a centralised government portal and once registered were able to match with Ukrainian guests. Initially, matching was undertaken predominantly via social media platforms and relied on hosts and guests self-matching. The government later outsourced the matching process to several recognised providers, although only a few hosts participating in this research used these providers.

The following key findings were identified during this stage of the hosting process:

- Hosts noted that the continuous and ubiquitous nature of the media reporting of the crisis influenced and prompted them to enrol in the HfU scheme.
- Hosts recognised the ease of access to register interest in the HfU, however also noted that there was a lack of clarity over the matching process for hosts and next steps once they had registered their interest to host.
- Checks on the property and hosts were not always conducted ahead of guests arriving.
- There was limited training available to hosts to help them prepare for hosting.

Practicalities of hosting

The scheme was posed first and foremost as a temporary accommodation solution, but the reality was it was more complex and nuanced with all hosts in the research ending up doing far more for their guests than providing a safe place to stay. Whilst the scheme was designed and instigated by the state, it was not delivered by them and relied heavily on the good will of the British public. Post the experience of hosting under the HfU scheme, nearly a quarter of hosts said they would not consider hosting again, however, the remaining hosts were all open to the idea of hosting again in the future.

Key findings in relation to the practicalities of hosting were as follows:

- Hosts found the scheme to be heavily bureaucratic and relied on them to undertake a greater role in supporting guests than expected, for example assisting with universal credit applications, school places or finding employment, and undertaking household activities together.
- Hosts found they faced a variety of spatial, financial, emotional and lifestyle challenges due to cultural or relationship differences, which had an impact on their personal lives and the running of their homes.
- The financial payment, whilst not a motivating factor for participation, was welcomed, and hosts reported using it to support increased costs associated with shopping and bills, especially before guests were able to work or claim benefits.

The transition out of hosting

Those arriving in the UK via the HfU scheme had the capacity to reside and work in the UK for up to three years. The transition out of a hosting arrangement is a crucial element of any hosting scheme. Whilst the HfU scheme offered an initial six-month timeframe (due to end September 2022), this has been extended due to a lack of other available and suitable follow-on accommodation options being available.

Key findings at this stage of the hosting processes showed that:

- Hosts felt there was a lack of clarity around the length of placement; whilst most signed up for six months and were content to extend this, the lack of clear move-on options left hosts feeling stuck. Most only wanted to offer short-term help but realised there were no clear move-on options for their guests.
- A lack of appropriate and affordable accommodation options was seen to impact guests and their feelings of safety.
- Whilst the leave to remain offered to Ukrainians was well intentioned, it is misplaced if it is practically unfeasible for guests to move-on. The wider housing crisis means options for Ukrainian refugees are scant.
- Hosts expressed concerns that the success of the HfU scheme was over-reliant on hosts extending their hosting period and that goodwill may run out.
- Government guidance on move-on is limited in its practical application and feasibility.

3. Recommendations

The recommendations below offer practical and tangible actions for a range of stakeholders to improve the development and delivery of current and future hosting schemes. A full list of key recommendations and considerations can be located in the body of the main report and are offered at the end of each identified stage of the hosting process.

Recruitment and enrolment

- Government should provide centralised mechanisms to enable and facilitate all elements of a hosting arrangement. This should include clearly defining which organisation is responsible for each element of the recruitment, matching and training process. These elements should be mandated and monitored for effectiveness.
- Third sector organisations in the hosting sector should advertise the role of the host realistically – not only stating what benefits hosts will get from the process but also noting the potential personal, emotional, practical, and financial costs of hosting.
- NGOs must support hosts with appropriate training and assistance.

Practicalities of hosting

- Government should consider working with stakeholders in the design of any future schemes. The development of a uniform scheme that could be replicated would be welcomed. In addition, government should invest in infrastructure to better equip participating hosts and guests with required tools, including at a minimum, centralised provision of language lessons, employment and skills-based training, and support in Universal Credit applications.
- The hosting sector need to consider how to offer appropriate initial and ongoing training and support for hosts and work to understand how to increase host retention – this could include improvements to host support, host debriefs and time off between guests.

Transition out of hosting

To ensure safe transition out of hosting arrangements, the UK government should consider:

- providing a suite of on-going, long-term suitable housing options for guests
- supporting the right to work for those accessing resettlement and hosting schemes
- providing leave to remain for those accessing resettlement and hosting schemes

To establish routes out of hosting arrangements, hosting and partner organisations should:

- work in partnership with the local authority and private landlords
- include the voices of guests to ensure understanding of what those being hosted want and need in relation to future housing options

4. Conclusions

The hosting sector should take learnings from the HfU scheme.

Despite initial concerns and a series of challenges presented by the application of the HfU scheme has largely been successful. HfU offers key insights and practical learning points that can be applied to existing hosting schemes. The HfU scheme and its success should set a precedent of how government, the third sector, and wider society can respond to such crises and provides the foundations of a model that can be further developed and considered for existing and future hosting schemes.

Those involved in hosting must work to change the narrative.

Mobilising connection and action are big challenges for any hosting scheme. The proximity of Ukraine, perceived affinity to Ukrainian culture and work ethic, familial experiences and the media portrayal of the crisis all contributed to the number of people signing up to be hosts. It is encouraging that many hosts involved in this research had not actively considered or participated in hosting previously and yet decided to do so via the HfU scheme. Whilst some hosts expressed anxiety about hosting other population groups and felt they wouldn't consider housing other nationalities, the experience of hosting via the HfU scheme has begun to challenge perceptions and preconceived ideas about what it is like to host someone and who needs this type of support. With the right narrative, clear structures and systems, training and support, people may be encouraged to reconsider their positions on specific groups of people they see as deserving of assistance. The hosting sector must challenge narratives that position population groups as more or less deserving and champion hosting as a viable option for a range of different nationalities as appropriate.

Those involved in the hosting sector must continue to lobby the government for safe and legal routes of entry into the UK for all population groups.

With these routes in place, and the provision of access to the labour market, benefits and health systems for those arriving, hosting could provide a viable accommodation option for a range of populations, and assist with cultural integration. Any future scheme spearheaded by government (as HfU was) must be developed in collaboration with existing hosting schemes, sector experts and community groups and should be available as a ready-made response, rather than being constructed as a crisis response.

Effective hosting schemes require the investment of a range of stakeholders to be successful.

In the case of the HfU scheme, the government, local authorities, third sector, NGO partners and members of the public have needed to engage and perform different roles. In order for hosting and hospitality to work efficiently within the UK, overall changes to centralised systems, policies, laws and attitudes will need to be considered. With the right surrounding structures and systems in place (for hosts and guests), hosting for a range of population groups could flourish and provide guests with the initial welcome and safety they need. With the right training and support, people may be encouraged to open their homes to host other population groups and hosting could act as part of a solution to accommodate, support and integrate not only new population groups arriving in the UK but also those who are already here and unable to access appropriate housing.



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