

UK Social Work and the war in Ukraine

A BASW Briefing on Context, Ethics and Practice under the visa schemes for Ukrainians



BASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers

INTRODUCTION

Migrant and refugee crises for reasons of war, famine and oppression are happening across the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2024 is but one of several major conflicts or civil oppressions causing – or having recently caused - people to flee their homes on a large scale.

BASW is consistent in promoting social work's role in supporting and speaking out for all refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and internationally. Through our work within the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), and benefiting from member expertise and activism, we support and are vocal about the human rights of refugees from all nations and ethnicities who come or seek to come to the UK.



BASW's commitment to the rights of refugees and adherence to both national and international law has informed our recent vigorous campaign against the (now enacted) UK Nationality and Borders Act 2022¹. Amongst other retrograde steps, this creates a status of 'illegal' asylum seeker in contravention of international refugee law and enables outsourcing of asylum seekers deemed 'illegal' to Rwanda for 'processing' and long-term relocation.

We will continue to speak out against these policies which are as impractical and ineffective as they are morally objectionable.

Ukrainians seeking sanctuary from the Russian invasion in huge numbers have been provided with a simpler and more humane process by which to come to the UK compared to most potential refugees. The 3-year special visa schemes for Ukrainians do not confer full refugee rights, are intended to be temporary and raise a wide range of practical and ethical challenges as this briefing outlines. However, they also show how government resources and community compassion can be harnessed at pace and scale in a migration crisis, something to be learnt from and used to lobby for the rights of others seeking asylum.

BASW is committed to promoting a humane, rights-based system of support for *all* asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, compliant with international law and with UK obligations as a party to the Refugee Conventions of the United Nations and European Convention of Human Rights.

This document is in five sections

1. BASW and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) response to the war in Ukraine
2. Understanding the visa scheme for Ukrainians
3. Social work ethics
4. Social work practice with Ukrainians under the visa schemes
5. APPENDIX: Background information about the war

The focus of this document is to support, inform and empower social workers across the UK in their ongoing practice and consideration of issues that arise in relation to people arriving and staying under the UK Ukraine visa schemes. It will be of particular use to UK social workers who through their work are:

- Employed in roles that involve initial or ongoing risk management or support/intervention with hosts/prospective hosts; and/or,
- Find themselves working with individuals and families from Ukraine who are or may be at risk and/or entitled to social work, social care and related services

It will also be of use to social workers outside of the workplace who may be:

- hosting, or considering hosting, individuals and families from Ukraine.
- supporting friends, neighbours or family members who are hosting people from Ukraine.
- supporting Ukrainians and or working Ukrainian communities through a range of community-based initiatives, for example, English classes and various support groups
- wishing to support and advocate for Ukrainian – and/or other – migrants, asylum seekers and refugees

Local, regional and nation-level guidance and advice has emerged since visa schemes for Ukrainians started and there are some differences in country level approach. This document does not replace or duplicate these and all social workers should refer to local and national guidance. The point of this guide is to emphasise shared and common social work responsibilities and ethical responsibilities in different policy and political contexts across the UK.

We invite feedback on this document by email to jo-wathen@basw.co.uk

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/36/contents/enacted

1. BASW AND INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS RESPONSE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The specific geo-political and humanitarian dimensions of the war in Ukraine have shaped BASW's response as a European social work association. These include recognising the distinctive response of UK government to the mass displacement of Ukrainians and BASW's role as a member of IFSW Europe Region in which this conflict is happening and having huge, immediate impact.

The war brings enormous, dangerous conflict to our region in ways not seen since the second world war. It has broken all assumptions of post 'Cold War' European and global peace with Russia and threatens peace in neighbour states. It is also a key driver of our current economic and inflation crisis.

Huge numbers of people fleeing Ukraine and being internally displaced have had immediate and extensive impacts on all countries in wider Europe.

The war has had major impact on our social work colleagues in IFSW who are supporting Ukrainians in border countries of Romania, Hungary, Moldova, Slovakia, and Poland, and in surrounding countries such as Germany. An ongoing focus on Ukraine by BASW is important in this extraordinary situation.

There is much to learn including reflecting on the difference between the UK government's visa scheme rapid response to Ukrainians fleeing and the government's approach to wider migrant, asylum and refugee issues.

A longer summary of the geopolitical and socioeconomic context of the war is given in section 5.

Response of the International Federation of Social Workers in Europe

BASW is working closely with IFSW colleagues in countries bordering Ukraine and within Ukraine itself. BASW has used some of our designated international development funding to fund (along with other IFSW members) a sustainable resilience project led by social workers within Ukraine and to develop the social work profession. This includes supporting the establishment of the Ukrainian Association of Social Workers which has now been formally constituted by IFSW.

Information and updates about the IFSW project within Ukraine and the creation of the new Ukraine Association of Social Workers as a member of IFSW can be accessed on the IFSW website www.ifsw.org/post-country/ukraine

2. UNDERSTANDING THE VISA SCHEMES FOR UKRAINIANS

Ukrainians are fleeing their home country because of risk to their lives from invasion and war. Ukrainians are still frequently described by the media, politicians and in everyday conversation as 'refugees'. Although this word describes their situation and experience in a non-legal sense, in UK law they are not 'refugees.' In law, individuals and families who seek refugee status must first arrive in the UK, then claim asylum (or have their application processed at an agreed other location) and then undergo a complex and usually lengthy process to determine whether they are indeed refugees.

Individuals and families from Ukraine following the war do not claim asylum². They receive a specific visa which can be applied for from within Ukraine, or from another intermediate country using a UK Government website. This visa is approved on-line which then allows them to travel to the UK. Once granted the visa they can remain in the UK for up to three years.

The UK government has created three visa scheme routes: Ukrainian Family Scheme, the Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme and, most recently arrangements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Ukraine.

In another difference to the asylum and refugee schemes, schemes for Ukrainians are managed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities rather than the Home Office.

N.B. Other Ukrainians were already on different types of visa before the war, including work visas and student visas. Some Ukrainians continue to arrive on these visas and may therefore have different rights to those afforded to people arriving on one of the new visa schemes.

The Ukrainian Family Scheme

This scheme applies to Ukrainians who have partners and/or family members in the UK. Family members from Ukraine can bypass normal immigration controls to join their families. Unless social workers have family members in the UK social workers are less likely to come across Ukrainians availing themselves of the Family Scheme than the Sponsorship Scheme if arriving is based on positive family ties.

However, social workers should be alert to the possible risk of breakdown of relationships or other risks within family scheme arrangements.

You can read more about how the Family Scheme work here: www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-ukraine-family-scheme-visa

UK Sponsorship Scheme for Ukrainians ('Homes for Ukrainians')

The UK Sponsorship Scheme 'Homes for Ukrainians' relies on 'hosts' who are not related to make their homes or other accommodation available for at least six months.

² At the time of writing the UK government has recently withdrawn its country guidance on Ukraine for asylum and human rights claims and Ukrainians would need specialist immigration advice if wishing to pursue this

Hosts register their interest on a separate website, undergo basic checks and are then approved by local authorities. There is no centrally organised matching scheme that brings together refugees and hosts. The Government has opted not to go down a more coordinated route (e.g., pre-matching through a central online portal).

Informal matching has developed primarily through social media and through family and personal contacts. Several charities are assisting with information about the visa scheme and matching³ and have received government funding to do so. Charities are operating in the neighbouring countries to Ukraine, identifying families and then supporting them to settle in the UK. But the sponsorship scheme is set up on a self-matching basis.

While many successful sponsorships have been established, lack of formal and centrally coordinated matching has brought concerns about safety, suitability and viability of placements.

By the start of 2023, around two thousand Homes for Ukraine sponsorships had ended and rendered Ukrainian households (individuals and multiple resident households, most of the latter including children) homeless and seeking rehousing help from Councils. This is out of a total of 149,000 individual visas issued for adults and children by early January 2023 of which only 111,000 are recorded as having arrived. The total number of current and previously active Homes for Ukraine hosts is not currently easily available from the UK government.

Many Ukrainians for whom sponsorship has ended have been placed temporarily in hotels because of the overall lack of social housing options across the UK. They are, of course, but one at risk group seeking housing need in the UK wide crisis of social affordable housing supply.

Some Ukrainians have left UK sponsorship and returned to Ukraine despite the risks, but there are also new waves of visa applicants and numbers have increased throughout the winter as the war continues, energy supply has been hit, and temperatures have dropped in Ukraine.

Social work's role particularly in relation to the sponsorship scheme is often focused on supporting the assessment (often carried out by non-social worker colleagues) of host placements and housing, safeguarding adults and children, helping people settle into new communities and routines, access basic services and entitlements, find work or education, and start to plan forward for what is likely to be at least a medium term stay in the UK.

Increasingly, we expect social work's role to be either direct practice with eligible individuals and families, or advocacy for social work support from local authorities including support to hosts and their guests to maintain viable sponsorship arrangements and help reduce the numbers of disorganised breakdowns.

Unaccompanied Minors (under 18 years)

From 22 June 2022, the UK government allowed processing of visas (starting with those already submitted) for unaccompanied minors from Ukraine wishing to join family members or, exceptionally, someone else known and approved by the young person's parents or guardians. Visas require notarised consent from the minor's parents or legal guardian and will comply with Ukrainian law.

The lack of a matching system and multiple problems with the bureaucracy of online visa applications under the scheme initially created delays in the system. The scheme is now more efficient and more visas are being issued increasing arrivals in the UK.⁴

³ www.gov.uk/guidance/recognised-providers-organisations-who-can-help-guests-from-ukraine-find-sponsors-in-the-uk

⁴ Official government figures are available here www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data-2#:~:text=Sponsorship%20Scheme%3A%20177%2C100-,Total%20Ukraine%20Scheme%20visas%20issued%20to%20people%3A%20210%2C800,Ukraine%20Sponsorship%20Scheme%20visas%3A%20148%2C100

Entitlements of Ukrainians and hosts and local authority funding

Hosts receive a monthly payment for up to one year for hosting each Ukrainian household (of whatever size). This sum was £350 but has recently been increased to £500. Hosts may receive additional (discretionary) money from their local authority.

Hosts may ask guests to contribute to utilities and other bills but may not charge rent.

The recent increase in monthly payments is welcome but the level of funding for hosts means low-income hosts – and those particularly affected by current the cost-of-living crisis – may find it financially hard to support refugees, particularly if there are delays in access to host and/or guest funds.

Upon arrival, each Ukraine refugee receives £200 for initial costs.

Each local authority receives a one-off payment of £10,500 to support Councils in their duties towards visa arrivals.

Ukrainians can access a Biometric Residence Permit, Universal Credit, or pension credit if over pension age, and other benefits, get a national insurance number and gain employment, register with a GP, access schooling, set up a bank account and, if necessary, rent a property in their own name once hosting arrangements have ended.

In practice, the speed and efficiency of these processes are dependent on the responsiveness of local authority, Department of Work and Pensions and health service (etc) officials in localities. These have become smoother and quicker over time, but social workers and other agencies have an ongoing role in advocating for improvements.

Differences in operation of scheme within the UK

All three schemes (the Family scheme, Homes for Ukrainians and Ukrainian Unaccompanied Children) are operated by the UK government. However, how the schemes are implemented and delivered varies between the countries of the UK.

Scotland set up a 'super-sponsor' scheme i.e., central government matching of large groups of Ukrainians with hosts and provision of other accommodation. However, this scheme was paused and no longer open to applications as of July 2022 and remains paused at time of writing. This was largely because of lack of access to sufficient housing and other support resources.

Wales/Cymru also established and subsequently suspended a government super-sponsorship scheme (in June 2022) because of lack of housing options.

In **Northern Ireland** there is currently no functioning Assembly in Stormont which has precluded any decision making about variations from UK wide framework. Northern Ireland is receiving small numbers of Ukrainians through the UK host scheme frameworks and is also understood to be receiving Ukrainians entering via Ireland under European Union provisions and travelling across the open border into Northern Ireland.

Pets

There are special rules for bringing pets into the UK for Ukrainians. This allows arrangements to be made if the pet does not meet the animal health requirements. Ukrainians may have a pet with them, a pet in quarantine or a pet that needs quarantining at home, depending on the situation. They may need information and advice about pet care in the UK, e.g., registering with a vet.

Bringing your pet to the UK from Ukraine:
www.gov.uk/guidance/bringing-your-pet-to-the-uk-from-ukraine

3. SOCIAL WORK ETHICS

BASW's ethical and practice guidance for social workers is always rooted in our Code of Ethics (2021) (www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/basw_code_of_ethics_-_2021.pdf).

Our Code of Ethics reflects the international ethical principles and international definition of social work of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (www.ifsw.org) as well as reflecting our UK context and responsibilities as a registered profession.



Countering racism and social exclusion and actively promoting the value of the UK's diverse, multicultural and multi-ethnic society are core to UK social work ethics and practices. Social workers can play a significant and enduring role in promoting the rights and welfare of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

In Section 2.1 on Human Rights the BASW Code locates social work's ethics within the framework of the United Nations' international, universal and indivisible definition of human rights which is also the basis of global commitments to the fair treatment of refugees and other migrants:

Social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), other related UN declarations and the European Convention on Human Rights and the conventions derived from those declarations.

In Section 2.2 on Social Justice, the BASW Code locates social work's ethics in purposefully contributing to the creation of more just societies as well as to social justice practices:

Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work.

In 2021, BASW widened its definition of social work's responsibility to challenge discrimination and oppression beyond our domestic Equality Act 2010 (although that remains the basis of our domestic legal duties). We incorporated IFSW's ethical principles into our statement on Challenging Oppression in Section 2.2:

Social workers have a responsibility to challenge oppression on any basis, including (but not limited to) age, capacity, civil status, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, gender identity, language, nationality (or lack of), political beliefs, poverty, race, relationship status, religion, sex, sexual orientation or spiritual beliefs.

These fundamental ethics are the basis of our practice with those who have arrived through the Ukrainian schemes as with all immigrants and refugees.

Ethics and the advantages of the Ukrainian visa schemes

The visa schemes – despite significant problems in their set up and coordination – offer advantages over ordinary asylum seeking and refugee routes. The scheme is more generous and open to many more people than (for instance) that offered to Afghans through the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and an Afghan Citizenship Scheme (e.g., read legal analysis of this 'two tier' system here:

<https://rsilpak.org/2022/a-two-tier-system-afghan-and-ukrainian-arrivals-in-the-uk>

BASW believes social workers have an ongoing ethical responsibility to remain informed and able to support or advocate where necessary for the rights and needs of *all* asylum seekers and refugees, and to learn from the Ukraine situation to support this wider endeavour. BASW continues to speak out on this and ensuring all routes to settle temporarily and permanently in the UK are anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and in accordance with international law.

A key area of learning and social work advocacy is the increasing number of breakdowns in both family and non-family hosting arrangements and insufficiency of housing for Ukrainians despite having visa rights to acquire housing and settle for up to three years. Local authorities have powers to assist, but in many localities lack housing stock and financial resources to guarantee appropriate help.

While the visa scheme provides preferential access to support over most other migrants and people seeking asylum, Ukrainians may still be rendered homeless and experience the lack of access to basic help that affects others in poverty and income insecurity in the UK.

4. SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH UKRAINIANS UNDER THE VISA SCHEMES

This section aims to help social workers integrate our ethical code into practice. It does not attempt to duplicate or imitate the detail of national or local guidance, roles, and tasks. It aims to provide helpful knowledge and ideas, and to support social workers apply critical curiosity in this complex and emerging situation. It provides signposts to useful resources online.

Understanding the information and advice needs of arriving/settling Ukrainians

The UK government (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) provides generic guidance and advice (in English) for Ukrainians when they first arrive, what to expect at 4-6 months of their initial sponsorship, and guidance for under 18s) www.gov.uk/government/publications/welcome-a-guide-for-ukrainians-arriving-in-the-uk

The Ukraine Institute London is an independent charity that provides a wide range of information for Ukrainians, hosts, professionals etc including links to other helpful organisations <https://refugee-support.ukrainianinstitute.org.uk/home>
The site is in English and Ukrainian.

Local authority/Council responsibilities across the UK

Each local authority should provide its own guidance and information for:

- Ukrainians being hosted and existing wider Ukrainian communities
- hosts/sponsors
- local communities and community organisations
- professionals and agencies providing key services and resources locally

All social workers should be aware of the local authority's guidance in your area, whether you work for the local Council or have another role (e.g., in a charity or the NHS).

Country level advice and information

Overarching, government guidance for each country of the UK – for Councils/local authorities, professionals, Ukrainians seeking sponsorship, hosts etc – is available online from UK government and devolved administrations.

Key resources are available here:

For England:

www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils

This web page contains many other useful links to guidance and information.

For Wales:

<https://gov.wales/homes-ukraine-guidance-local-authorities>

For Scotland:

www.gov.scot/publications/super-sponsor-scheme-and-homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-local-authorities

For Northern Ireland:

www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/ukraine-crisis

The visa schemes

The visas for Ukrainians are valid for up to three years and provide immediate access to:

- a Biometric Residence Permit
- a national insurance number
- universal credit or pension credit
- the right to work and rent property
- bank accounts
- social housing (if host accommodation ends)
- education
- disability, carer and other benefits
- social and health services
- other state and local authority resources

The schemes were set up very quickly and continue to evolve. A key social work responsibility is to keep informed about changes in the schemes that may affect people you work with locally e.g., via the weblinks in this document and local resources.

As Ukrainians are not currently designated as asylum seekers or refugees, if they arrive outside of the visa schemes, they will not be able to claim asylum. The government has withdrawn its advice on Ukrainians seeking asylum. They may therefore be required to leave the country and reapply under the visa scheme from a third country or from within Ukraine. This could render a minority of Ukrainians at additional risk. However, the government is accepting, processing and approving visas under the special visa schemes for people who may have arrived (e.g., before the war) on a different visa (e.g., student visa) which has now expired.

Being outside of asylum and refugee statutory provisions - and the way the visas schemes have been designed at pace - carry other risks that social workers should be aware of. These have been indicated in previous sections but in summary include:

- not having a safe online matching system for hosts and applicants under the Homes for Ukraine scheme which has raised exploitation and safeguarding risks for women and children.

- not being closely followed up or statutorily supported once placed with hosts unless there is strong a priori reason for social work or safeguarding attention
- breakdown of both family and non-family hosting leading to risk of being rendered homeless if local authorities cannot assist with suitable accommodation

Social workers will need to be aware of (and if where possible, help mitigate) the predictable risks of hosting breakdown including:

- Relationship breakdown/conflict,
- Language barriers and/or culture clashes
- Isolation of guests e.g., far from other Ukrainian people or relevant services
- Financial – including the increased expenses from inflation and cost of living rises
- Safeguarding risks or abuse
- Other practical matters e.g., accommodation unsuitable in the longer term
- Emotional factors e.g., sense of dependency or loss of identity or control over own life

Trauma informed practice

Running through all this is the impact of trauma from war experiences including:

- living through direct conflict, attack and/or personal assault
- separation from family and friends (particularly male partners and relatives)
- loss of home, belongings, pets and lifestyle
- news of deaths and harm from Ukraine
- ongoing fear for those left behind
- emotional challenges of leaving loved ones behind in danger
- recognising that later arrivals are likely to have lived through more direct war trauma
- some people will have experienced greater poverty, marginalisation and discrimination while in Ukraine and in the process of leaving e.g., ethnic minorities including Roma people and Black people

Trauma informed practice – as explored in select resources referenced below ⁵ - informed by the specifics of the Ukrainian war and context, will be as much as staple approach of social work with Ukrainians arriving or staying under the visa schemes as it is with all asylum seekers and refugees. Indeed, it is important to consider transferable learning from trauma informed practice with other asylum seeking and refugee groups as well as considering what is specific and different about the Ukrainian war context.

Levels of possible social work practice: micro, meso and macro

Social work support for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers often requires actions at different levels of practice – i.e., not just direct individual and family support but wider advocacy and influence.

The following well-known model is helpful in organising and reflecting on relevant approaches and opportunities for social work:

- **Micro level:** direct practice and supervision/management of direct work
- **Meso level:** practice at the level of groups, communities (e.g., community development or advocacy, social work strategic leadership or management within or across local services)
- **Macro level:** practice at public policy or political level, strategic leadership for change, wide community or population level organising, lobbying or campaigning, activism and mobilising with others for change⁶

This three-level framework is useful to think about social work practice in the rapidly changing and novel context of the Ukrainian visa schemes where direct practices,

community level action and policy improvement are all very much needed. These require real time innovation and in-action reflection on unfamiliar circumstances.

Social workers may often work at more than one level of this model simultaneously e.g., advocating locally for policy or resource change at community and group level or helping community groups to organise, while also providing individual or family support.

Many social workers' job roles will require focus at the micro level, reflecting pressing workloads and/or employer priorities and statutory responsibilities towards risk to individuals and families. The three-level model is a reminder of the opportunities social workers have to be effective beyond the individualised focus if they can find time and space.

Being involved with BASW and/or other representative, activist or community organisations such as Trade Unions provides opportunities to contribute at meso and macro levels, often collectively with colleagues and people using services, within and beyond main work roles.

Raising concerns, advocating good practice

At all levels, there is a role for social workers to promote good practice and escalate concerns about risks and gaps in services, particularly those relating to the core protection, social justice and community cohesion responsibilities of social work. This includes safeguarding Ukrainian adults and children anti-racism and anti-discrimination and preventing and addressing poverty and housing crises.

⁵ Some references for trauma informed social work practice with refugees/displaced people: www.researchgate.net/publication/320052674_Working_With_Refugees_in_the_US_Trauma-Informed_and_Structurally_Compentent_Social_Work_Approaches www.gov.scot/publications/ukraine-refugee-psychological-wellbeing-pack-guidance-services/pages/3 www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09540261.2022.2072191?cookieSet=1 <https://socialcare.wales/supporting-people-from-ukraine>

⁶ See e.g. – Encyclopaedia of Macro Social Work <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/page/4007> and articles in the Encyclopaedia of Social Work e.g. <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-1447?jsessionid=0E9379AEE1E10BED5FA69CF761140C1A>

Understanding local guidance, resources and services – their strengths and weaknesses – is a key basis for speaking out on what good practice looks like (including celebrating it where it exists locally), and raising concerns and issues with managers, leaders, politicians or peer colleagues where needed.

The following section is a non-exhaustive list of some key practice considerations at each level relevant to Ukraine visa scheme context which may be helpful and/or spark further investigation and dialogue locally.

Social workers are encouraged to discuss these and the rest of this document with colleagues and BASW welcomes feedback by email to here jo.wathan@basw.co.uk

Micro level practice in initial and ongoing work with hosts

All family scheme and Homes for Ukraine hosts should be visited and the suitability of placement for the needs of the specific person/s coming to stay should be assessed. This should include basic health and safety and space/condition suitability – and local authorities and governments issue guidance on this.

The urgency of providing and sustaining sponsorships continues as the war continues. It is therefore important social workers approach their work with an enabling and encouraging mindset, considering the strengths of the hosts and the people due to join them to make the arrangement work.

However basic checks and risk management are essential. Hosts are required to have a DBS check including an advanced check if children or adults at risk are to be living with them. There have been delays reported in recent months and guests have arrived before the DBS has been completed in some instances. Social workers should raise concerns about this locally and advise against placements before this is resolved.

Social workers and other colleagues should be alert to the possible need for further enquiries about risk beyond DBS including undertaking proportionate records checks within local authorities or other public

services (within the scope of their role and data protection policies) and should not rely solely or necessarily on the DBS check alone (which only pick up risk associated with recorded offences).

Assessment of hosts is expected to be 'light touch' and is often undertaken by non-professionally qualified staff. It should ask basic questions and include questions aimed at identifying whether hosting is likely to be a success. The risk factors for hosting breakdown, and protective factors likely to make it a success can be part of initial assessment tools e.g., asking hosts how they intend to sustain the placement, what support they have and their thoughts about the future of hosting and options for their guests.

The understanding of hosts about the types of journey and experiences of Ukrainians in the war, the likely experience and ongoing impact of trauma and their awareness of risks as well as benefits of hosting, should be explored, but in a positive and solution-focused way.

A key issue is ensuring hosts have considered what support they have and what else they may need to make hosting a success. Social workers should be aware of the support available from statutory or third sector/informal sources.

Assessing and supporting host/guest compatibility

The visa schemes have been set up to place most responsibility for the compatibility and success of the hosting schemes on hosts and their guests or family members. This responsibility is with the legal guardian or parent remaining in Ukraine in the case of unaccompanied minors.

Where guests/family member have already arrived at the time of host assessments host assessment may include two-way suitability and compatibility assessment and conversations.

At or close to the end of the initial six-month hosting period, social workers and other

colleagues may be involved in assessing situations before, at the point of or after breakdown.

Where there are specific safeguarding risks to children or adults, social workers are more likely to be involved, to provide more in depth and holistic assessment of risks and options.

Each local authority should provide social workers and others with guidance focused on reducing harm and finding early solutions to try and prevent hosting arrangements ending in unplanned ways. This should include:

- Advice to hosts to seek early help if they want to sustain hosting but are having difficulties e.g., having additional financial difficulties or other stresses
- Clear advice and pathways for guests/family members (in relevant languages) about how to raise early concerns about arrangements and their options
- Targeted help for guests/family members at high risk e.g., isolated, at risk of sexual or other exploitation, without sufficient money and/or community support, with dependents, with disabilities or in ill health.

Such assessments by social workers or colleagues/other agencies where social workers may provide supervision or advice, should apply understanding and curiosity about common experiences of the war, the mass journey of flight and anxiety about the situation back in Ukraine. Each person and family will be different, but the overall war and trauma context behind coming to the UK is important for skilled and effective inquiry.

Assessment should look at current realities and look forward to the possibility of future scenarios and how hosts and guests might manage these.

Other pointers for assessing the situation for guests/family members, whether at the start of the placement or later, should include (inter alia):

- Use interpreters or work in first or proficient second language. If possible, work with a Ukrainian colleague or person chosen by

the person to facilitate discussion but be alert that the Ukrainian community is diverse. See next point.

- Ensure matching of correct language and cultural background; in particular ensure distinction between Ukrainian, Russian and Roma first language and cultural needs (and recognise that Ukrainian and Russian are written in Cyrillic alphabet and Ukrainians may not be familiar at all with English (Latin) letters).
- Be sure to speak separately with host and guest if they are already living together
- Take time to inform yourself of the background circumstances affecting Ukrainian people (such as the overview given in this guide) but do not make assumptions about the person's specific experiences or views. Listen.
- Take resources and communicate empathetically to promote understanding and trust in the purpose of the meeting. Ensure first language or proficient second language information is available in written or online form.
- If appropriate and acceptable to them, ask about their refugee journey so far: what has happened to them? How did they arrive in this place? Are there any specific and immediate needs arising from the experience of their journey?
- Find out if anyone else is supporting the guests in the UK and how. Identify benevolent support in their social network, in real life and online, and consider whether there are any risky/exploitative contacts that may cause harm.
- Ask about their financial situation in relation to their own money, earnings, dependency on others, risks of exploitation and other harm.
- Ask about their health situation (physical and mental health) and that of others in the household.
- Provide or enable access to tangible resources and sources of further advice. Ensure hosts and guests/family members know where to go to access all their entitlements. Have the information in written/online form available in the appropriate language and explore any barriers to access e.g., transport availability and costs, language barriers.
- Ensure people know where to go for help if they are concerned for their own safety or

that of others e.g., accessing safeguarding or domestic abuse services.

Some people will have specific support needs which may not be immediately evident or assessed. As in all situations, social workers should be alert to specific physical or mental health, physical disability, learning disability, neurodivergent, exploitation risks (etc) that may need specialised assessment or support.

Meso level practice

Social workers may have job roles or undertake activities in their own time at meso levels of practice. These can be vital given the success of the visa schemes rests to a large degree on Ukrainians being able to connect with each other and with wider communities, to feel safe, supported and welcome, able to build on their strengths as well as deal with the strains, losses and traumas of the war and migration.

Social workers can have a key role in promoting and where possible, facilitating group and community level activities, supporting other groups and community organisations to develop suitable services for local Ukrainians, integrating them into universal sources of support (e.g., parent support groups and networks, groups of elders, activity and recreation groups and activities etc).

As in direct micro practice, social workers may not be directly tasked in job roles with providing or facilitating such 'meso level' services, but they should be seen as important part of social work support to local communities. Social workers may reach out to relevant colleagues and community groups, including the local Ukrainian community or Ukrainian colleagues, to offer support, solidarity, advice or resources, where appropriate.

Over time, if Ukrainians stay for longer periods, those still hosting and communities as a whole need to be supported to sustain their support for Ukrainians. Social workers may have a role in working with and acting as an ally to Ukrainian communities to support their initiatives; supporting hosts individually or through group or community activities;

advocating for services and/or acting at a community level to prevent the breakdown of hosting arrangements where this can be usefully prevented or delayed.

Macro level practice

At macro level, the visa policy has been created very quickly, imperfectly and has needed real time critique to fill gaps and solve implementation, risk and ethical issues. This dynamic policy context continues to need social work macro advocacy, activism and lobbying. BASW members and other collective social work and allied organisations have a role in promoting good policy and upholding people rights through the operation of the visa schemes – and point out that these schemes throw into relief the inhumane and rights-depriving approaches of the current UK government towards others fleeing war. This can be done through writing to local or national representatives, or other activism including through BASW or other organisations.

In relation to the visa schemes, macro social work practice that reflects our Code of Ethics can include:

- Advocating that the visa schemes are equally accessible to all eligible Ukrainians without discrimination (e.g., advocating for access for Roma, other ethnic minorities and other discriminated and at-risk groups who may have more difficulty providing documentation, finding hosts or accessing interpretation).
- Advocating and where possible, acting to prevent discrimination at all stages in the operation of the visa schemes before and after coming to the UK
- Advocating for adequately funded social services support for Ukrainians upon arrival and throughout their stay, particularly at transition points.
- Advocating safeguarding policies at national level practices are effective at all stages of the visa scheme journey e.g. focused on reducing exploitation risks from the Homes for Ukraine online/social media matching scheme and supporting alternative models of matching; ensuring local authorities are resourced to support Ukrainians at risk including adequate language support;

ensuring systems of safeguarding checks on sponsors/hosts before and during hosting arrangements are resourced sufficiently

- Identify where cost of living, inflation or other financial pressures are impacting on Homes for Ukraine or Family Hosting arrangements and provide relevant information, referral or hardship support where available
- Support and lobby for the UK's role in recovery and rebuilding within Ukraine, including the development of social work and social services.

Macro social work on wider migrant/refugee concerns

BASW advocates equal support and humane response towards all refugees. We challenge many current government policies which are increasingly extreme in demonising most asylum seeking and refugee groups and out of step with United Nations international convention and human rights duties.

UK and national government responses to Ukrainian refugees have been notably different – better resourced, more unequivocally positive and garnering more public support - to those towards other groups. The comparison with the recent Afghan refugee crisis (after the withdrawal of international forces and the return of Taliban rule in 2021) is particularly stark and pertinent. The Afghan schemes have been inadequate, and eligible Afghans have been delayed or unable to access resettlement in the UK. It has been very poorly implemented even for those reaching the UK.

The difference between a positive governmental (and societal) response to the largely white, European Ukrainian population and other migrant groups is stark and has been critiqued as exposing differential, discriminating public and political responses to refugees and migrants from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Social workers can support BASW – including through its work in collaboration with IFSW Europe and Global colleagues – to:

- Ensure a humanitarian and anti-discriminatory social work response within and beyond Ukraine
- Learning from the Ukrainian visa schemes, showing what is possible and the benefits to the UK of a generous and publicly supported migration scheme
- Lobby for the rights of all refugees
- Support good social work practice in responding to all migrants

5. APPENDIX: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE WAR

Context and background

After a major military build-up over months, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The estimated population in Ukraine (excluding those in Crimea which was annexed by Russia in 2014) at that time was forty-one million. By the end of 2022, the war has resulted in over fifteen million people being internally displaced/in need of humanitarian support within Ukraine and c. eight million fleeing the country. These numbers are likely to increase as the war continues.

Countries bordering Ukraine on the west (Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland) are hosting the largest proportion of the eight million who have left the country. A large number have also fled from the east to Russia.

Ukraine is not (yet) part of the European Union (EU)⁷ but since the war started, has been accepted as an accession state i.e., formally moving towards becoming part of the EU. However, the governments of Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, all of whom are EU countries, have implemented a Temporary Protection Directive so that Ukrainian citizens and legal residents arriving in the EU have residency rights and access to welfare and other assistance.

Once in an EU country there is freedom of movement across further EU borders which allows individuals to travel without immigration restrictions and border control. Now the UK is outside the EU, different border controls and visa schemes have been put in place as described in the body of this briefing.

The Ukrainian population

The Ukrainian population is ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse. There are intersecting experiences and histories of oppression within the region.

The census data on the Ukrainian population dates from 2001 so should be read with some caution but data indicates the main ethnic and identity blocks. The census found the majority of Ukrainians self-identified ethnically as either 'Ukrainian' (78%) or Russian (17%) although linguistically, the census shows 68% spoke Ukrainian as a main language and 30% Russian. A significant proportion of people coming to the UK under visa schemes may speak Russian as their main or only language.

Minority communities

Proportionately very small minority communities with linguistic, cultural and ethnic distinctions include Crimean Tatars (0.5%), Jews (0.2%) and Roma (0.1%).

As across most of Europe, Jewish populations were decimated (by 70% in Ukraine) in the Nazi holocaust and other actions in the second World War. Many who survived left Ukraine during the Cold War era of Russian control. Yet the Jewish community is still estimated to still be the fifth largest in the world.

The Roma population has suffered many centuries of persecution and discrimination in Ukraine as across Eastern Europe where most Roma people live. Many Roma people are undocumented, that is, they do not have passports or other official documents. In this displacement and refugee crisis, there are reports⁸ of Roma people being denied entry

⁷ It has recently been accepted as an accession state, moving towards membership of the EU.

⁸ E.g. [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729411/EPRS_ATA\(2022\)729411_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729411/EPRS_ATA(2022)729411_EN.pdf)

to EU countries at border control, and as a result of this and other factors, it is reported that many Roma have fled to Moldova, the country which is situated between Ukraine and Romania. Moldova is not in the EU. It is also one of the most economically poor, if not the poorest country, in Europe, and as a result state mechanisms of control are undeveloped compared to other European countries and this is reflected in less well-developed border control.

There have been reports of people from other minority ethnic communities⁹ being stopped at the borders with the EU and experiencing racism and different treatment from others seeking sanctuary.

Because of the government directive that Ukrainian men of military service age must remain in Ukraine to work or fight, the people able to leave Ukraine are overwhelmingly women, children and people with health and support needs.

Women and children are at known risk¹⁰ of organised human trafficking, sexual and other criminal exploitation when they leave Ukraine, particularly if they are not with family or friends or have little money. Risks may be exacerbated by the trauma and shock of war, leaving a life behind including (particularly male) relatives, having to flee and relying on strangers for help. This may be as true if they are in the UK as in other states in Europe.

Considering the above, UK social work's responsibilities and response in the refugee context must take a holistic and contextual perspective – being informed of the nature of the war and reasons for fleeing, making sense of how that affects a specific person or family and recognising risks as well as opportunities in communities and social networks. These may include online and social media driven risks.

This brief overview illustrates how refugee journeys may have additional layers of

persecution, discrimination and difficulty which may be relevant to the support they need when coming to the UK and settling into communities.

The humanitarian disaster of the invasion and ongoing war in Ukraine has been at the centre of our news and politics since February 2022. There are multiple sources of information about the progress of the war and its impact on civil society, including multiple human rights violations, atrocities and the flattening of whole villages, towns and cities by Russian forces.¹¹

Wider humanitarian, economic and inflationary crisis

The humanitarian crisis is not confined to Ukraine. Ukraine is a major producer of grain, cooking oil and other staple goods. Countries in the Middle East (for example, Syria, Lebanon) and in north-east Africa (for example, Egypt, Libya, Somalia and Kenya) are heavily dependent on food supplied from Ukraine. There is real risk of food shortages, famine and increased political instability in those countries.

The war is having an impact on the economic situation in the UK too. Food poverty and fuel poverty are already a feature of the lives of many people who use social work services. The costs of food and fuel are likely to increase still further.

As a result of the war Western governments (including the UK) imposed an economic embargo on Russian products, particularly on gas and oil. While the war in Ukraine is not the only factor in rising prices in the UK, across Europe and beyond, it is a major factor. It is staunching supplies of fuel and goods from Ukraine and from sanctioned Russia which have not been replaced by supplies from elsewhere, driving up prices on international free markets and contributing heavily to the cost of living rises we see today in the UK.

⁹ E.g. www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/africans-in-ukraine-does-the-world-still-care/

¹⁰ Risks of trafficking and exploitation

Advice within the UK www.humantraffickingfoundation.org/ukraine-response

UN background report www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/Conflict_Ukraine_TIP_2022.pdf

¹¹ UK report on war crimes www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/un-commission-has-found-array-war-crimes-violations-human-rights-and

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