

# All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness

## Meeting on Homelessness amongst Ukrainian refugees living in Britain

### Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> January, 10.30-11.30am in 1PS Room C



#### **Panellists:**

Dasha, person with lived experience of Ukraine Family Scheme

Yuliia, person with lived experience of Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme

Victoria, person with lived experience of Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme

Natalia Beley, Islington Council

Jon Feantonby, Refugee Council

Adis Sehic, the Work Rights Centre

#### **Parliamentarians in attendance:**

Bob Blackman MP, APPGEH Co-Chair

Florence Eshalomi MP, APPGEH Co-Chair

Jason McCartney MP, APPGEH Vice-Chair

Helen Morgan MP, APPGEH Member

Stuart McDonald MP

Beth Winter MP

Baroness Kennedy of Cradley

Lord Selkirk of Douglas

#### **Parliamentary staff in attendance:**

Harriet Smith, Office of Bob Blackman MP

Daniel Ward, Office of Florence Eshalomi MP

Henry Dixon-Clegg, Office of Sir Desmond Swayne MP

Ben Soodavar, House of Lords researcher  
Hefin Rees Edwards, Office of Liz Saville Roberts MP  
Kathryn Summerfield, Office of Ben Everitt MP  
James Selkirk, House of Lords researcher  
Joe Shorten, Office of Sally-Ann Hart MP  
Greg Oxley, Office of Alex Chalk KC MP  
Alex Jones, Office of Sir Graham Brady MP  
Mark Gilmore, Office of Sir Gary Streeter MP  
Jessica Pycroft, Office of Tan Dhesi MP  
Madeleine Bentley, Office of Ellie Reeves MP  
Hayley de la Motte, Office of Barry Gardiner MP  
Annie Wenn, Office of Marsha de Cordova MP  
Hinna Ghafour, Office of Catherine West MP  
William Siebert, Office of Robert Buckland MP  
Daniil Dresviannikov, Office of Gagan Mohindra MP  
Rhys McKavanagh, Office of Steve Baker MP  
Max Darby, Office of Jason McCartney MP  
Hannah Walton-Hughes, Office of Jason McCartney MP

**Also in attendance:**

Emily Batchelor, Crisis  
Beth Exworth, Crisis  
Ruth Jacob, Crisis  
Laura Pugh, Crisis  
Inna Rohoman, Settled  
Chris Keppie, Settled  
Kate Roberts, FLEX  
Raewyn Jones, the Work Rights Centre  
Judith Tovey, DLUHC  
Alessandro Nicoletti, Centrepoint  
Lizzi Hearn, NHF

Hannah Keilloh, CIH

Ben Still, Salvation Army

Leyla Williams, West London Welcome

Kateya Mbita, Homeless Link

Maria Iglesias, Praxis

Mariia Ustymenko, EERC

Joe Walker, St Mungo's

Dmitri Macmillen, the Work Rights Centre

<p><b><u>Bob Blackman</u></b> <b><u>MP</u></b></p>	<p>Introduction to of panellists to the attendees</p> <p><b><u>Adis Sehic</u></b> is Research and Policy Officer at the Work Rights Centre, a charity that assists migrants to escape precarious employment, regulates their immigration status, improves their social mobility. His focus is on policy development and research, and analysis of frontline data, and furthering their mission with external stakeholders and colleagues in the third sector.</p> <p><b><u>Jon Featonby</u></b> is from the Refugee Council and works as the Chief Policy Analyst. Prior to this he spent five years with Red Cross. He also was the parliamentary manager for the Refugee Council from 2015 to 2017 following four years working in the Westminster office of Sarah Taylor.</p> <p><b><u>Natalia Beley</u></b> is resettlement officer and works for Islington Council on the Homes for Ukraine scheme; she leads on rematching citizens. Starting In June 2022 she supported Ukrainian nationals' arrival and act as an interpreter. Before joining the council, she worked in the leasehold sector as a block manager and his experience in letting property management teaching English and interpreting.</p> <p><b><u>Dasha</u></b> is an Ukrainian born British citizen who will share her experiences and challenges in securing housing for her mother under the family scheme.</p> <p>He explains the purpose of today's meeting is for MPs peers and their staff and people from housing refugee and homelessness sectors to listen and discuss the difficulties around housing and homelessness that Ukraine refugees are facing since moving to the UK.</p>
<p><b><u>Adis Sehic</u></b></p>	<p><i>'In September we released a report titled Six Months On and that was designed to look at the schemes, look at the experience of Ukrainians in the UK. It was based on a survey that we conducted with 191 Ukrainians looking at a variety of different factors.'</i></p> <p>It was a national survey with 30% of participants were based in London, some participants based in Leeds, Manchester and Scotland. Results showed that most respondents were highly educated women with one or two children.</p> <p><b>The data found that</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One in ten Ukrainians were at risk of eviction that was either now or at some point in the past</li><li>• Those in the family scheme were twice as likely to be at risk of eviction than those of the Ukraine scheme</li><li>• One in five Ukrainians were living in overcrowded accommodation with more Ukrainians experiencing that on the family scheme</li><li>• One in two Ukrainians had no savings at all for those who were lucky enough to have savings they had no more than around 13 weeks which is the maximum that we observed.</li><li>• Two in three individuals had little or very little confidence in their ability to find home in private rental sector and common barriers stated included high rents high deposits, struggling with the English language, the need to have references, guarantors &amp; credit checks.</li></ul>

	<p><b>Recommendations from this report</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The government could tackle the risk of homelessness by harmonising payments across the schemes and looking at how local authorities can consolidate their approach to homelessness.</li> <li>• Review access to the private rental sector, look to passport some of the hosts Ukraine payments to prospective landlords and testing out deposit guarantee schemes</li> <li>• Request for the government to facilitate entry into the labour market as one of the key findings were that participants were highly educated Ukrainians but unable to access employment opportunities whether due to a lack of English language knowledge or whether due to a lack of transferability previous employment and education related achievements and qualifications.</li> </ul> <p>A second report that was released In January 2023 looked at the responses of London councils.12 different interviews across areas in London and authorities who took part in that research covered around 5300 Ukrainians under the homes for Ukraine scheme. The aim was to provide a picture that represents around 36% of all homes for Ukraine based in London.</p> <p><b>Results showed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many Ukrainians were presenting to local authorities as homeless on the family scheme.</li> <li>• Some local authorities were looking for more strategic guidance on this.</li> <li>• We found a dissonance between the Home Office processing visas and local authorities being able to carry out sponsor checks which opens the door to potential exploitation if certain sponsors on who they say they are.</li> <li>• Frontline staff under pressure; Making note to the local authority cuts it was found that local authority staff are facing anxiety with no long-term certainty around government funding or strategy.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A call for a national refugee resettlement and integration strategy to coordinate the arrival of different groups; to coordinate the involvement of different government departments it's important to recognise have different aims.</li> <li>• Refine some of the digital systems that are crucial to the delivery of these schemes and to reflect on how the UK start with previous humanitarian crises</li> <li>• More social housing to be built something that's been advocated for by other charities. Statistics and research around local housing allowance show the effect of freezes on local housing allowance and the ability to afford rent particularly in expensive areas like London.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dasha- British Citizen from Ukraine with lived experience of Ukraine Family Scheme</b></p>	<p>Dasha explained that she previously works as a journalist in Ukraine but has been living in the UK for the past 15 years with her 9-year-old son, in a two-bedroom flat in Folkstone. She brought her mother to the UK via the family visa scheme in March 2022. She hoped that the war would end quickly and that accommodating her mum in her small home would be a temporary situation, but this sadly hasn't happened.</p> <p><i>She stated 'I would like to start by thanking the British people for their kindness those who genuinely welcome my mother and tried to help her. There were people who organised various support groups and who even invited Ukrainian refugees into their homes for a Christmas dinner. Those people didn't do it for money but did it on their own spare time and expense. It was very heartwarming and for me and my mother it restored our faith in humanity. Unfortunately, I can't say the same about the housing system despite the official statement of the UK government to support Ukrainian citizens, it seems the reality is different'</i></p> <p>She went on to explain that her mother Anna, aged 66, was left homeless without any help from the systems in the UK despite her age and serious health condition. Two years ago, her mother suffered a heart attack, underwent major heart surgery and she is now reliant on medications.</p> <p>Due to her home being overcrowded, her mother has been forced to sleep in the kitchen area of her flat and it has impacted her mental and physical health drastically. Her attempts to secure accommodation for my mother have failed due to a lack of affordable housing. She explains the vast difference between rent and housing benefit and the large shortfall particularly once you factor in bills and cost of living. <i>'The question is how a refugee like my</i></p>

*mum can afford this at that time my mother was on a benefit and received only £183 a month?', 'The option of rent was simply unrealistic.'*

In September 2022 she contacted Folkestone & Hythe District Council and applied for urgent rehousing as a vulnerable person who is under threat of homelessness. The experience of working with the council was traumatic and caused her mother an immense amount of stress. There as several delays in responses from the council: they refused to recognise this as a priority case and declared that it does not have a duty to rehouse. This decision was made despite doctors' letters who advised to consider her mother's case as an emergency. The council also failed to provide her mother with a translator which made communication for her impossible.

In October they attended a pre booked appointment with the housing officer where it was mentioned that Dasha intended on making a complaint. On hearing that the officer stated that in that case she was not obligated to see them and she refused to talk to them and left the room.

*"Unfortunately, all this stress has affected my mother's health badly it caused frequent chest pains and anxiety in a form of nervous spasms in her throat she was prescribed until their presence by GP and currently she is on medication. As a daughter it's heartbreaking to watch all this, I wrote two official complaints, but the council reviewed its sound complaint case and denied its fault even though I provided documental evidence is of negligence and procedural violations down by housing department representatives"*

*"In total despair I wrote to my local MP and finally things started to move my mother was finally included onto Kent home choice list after four months of waiting she was even promised an accommodation by the council but one month passed since this promise was made and nothing has happened, she still sleeping in the kitchen."*

She went on to say her mother is not the only one in this situation there are many other Ukrainians facing this problem therefore the housing system must be changed.

She feels that there should be more transparency in the rehousing process. That the work of councils must be monitored by an independent body organisation where Ukrainians can complain directly if they feel they have been mistreated by councils.

Secondly there should be an easy way to switch the schemes from family visa scheme to sponsorship scheme. This is because those who arrived as sponsors seemed to be widely supported by councils, they receive money full assistance in rehousing etc. while those on family visa are denied any form of assistance.

<p><b>Natalia Beley - Islington Council</b></p>	<p>Works for Islington council as a resettlement officer under the Ukrainian refugee programme. In March 2022, Islington welcomed in 362 refugees into the borough (mostly women and children).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Currently there are 160 active sponsorships in the area</li> <li>- 137 people have since moved on, 45 % in private accommodation, 26% returned to Ukraine and 23% have been rematched to a new host</li> </ul> <p>She raised the point that Ukrainian refugees are facing the highest barriers to accommodation, in particular vulnerable groups like unemployed single mothers receiving benefits.</p> <p>Islington has used £5000 of the grant money rewarded from the government to pay landlords as an incentive for them to agree to house Ukrainian refugees. Some of the issues faced are landlords requesting a year's rent upfront &amp; guarantors.</p> <p>Many homelessness presentations presented to Islington Council are from refugees from the family scheme (34 Households out of 70, this includes 24 children).</p> <p>The borough has worked to manage this issue via the rematching scheme and has successfully rematched 18 households. There is significant value in rematching as it avoids issues like homelessness however there are few hosts available.</p> <p>In addition to families with children who are struggling to secure a property in private rental sector. Islington has several students who do not receive any financial support, they're not employee and cannot claim Universal Credit. Currently the only feasible option for these students is rematching as the need for accommodation for Ukrainian refugees isn't set to improve.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Running a nationwide campaign encouraging new hosts to come forward</li> <li>• Increase in monthly host payments to house accommodating a larger group and also hosts who provides self-contained accommodation.</li> <li>• Introducing funding for family scheme</li> </ul> <p><b>Questions from Islington Council</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the longer-term option after the initial three-year lease expires if the migrant decides to stay in the UK?</li> <li>• In view of reduction in funding is an estimate of how many more Ukrainian refugees may wish to come to UK via the sponsorship programme?</li> <li>• A wider question of fairness across all refugee asylum and migration streams, currently we have some arrivals to the UK have no support which is not conducive to running an effective service?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bob Blackman</b></p>	<p>Thanks Natalia, for her contribution and introduces <b>Yuliia</b></p>
<p><b>Yuliia – Person with lived experience of Ukraine Sponsorship scheme</b></p>	<p>Yuliia came from Ukraine where she previously worked as medical doctor. She came to the UK alone via Poland and has since lived in three different properties with three different sponsors, due to difficulties with the first two.</p> <p><i>'When I came to London my sponsor met me at the airport and told me that there was there a problem and I would have to leave in two months, he told me that the council requested written permission for me to stay in his apartment just two days before my arrival and the landlord said that he didn't want any refugees in his property'</i></p> <p>She shared her experiences since living the in the UK. She has experienced going through the homelessness housing application process with her local council, following a personal plan to be eligible such as apply for Universal Credit and the difficulty of there not being enough time to carry out all what was needed to be eligible to be considered as homeless by her local council. She shared that her council warned that there might be not enough time to find a new sponsor and she must look for a sponsor herself.</p> <p>She was able to briefly move in with another sponsor but unfortunately after a few days the sponsor decided that they did not want to continue. Yuliia expresses that she was lucky enough to be able to stay with a friend for a few days and that she found work as an</p>

	<p>interpreter with the military where she was able to stay in barracks for about two months meanwhile the council found another sponsor where have been living since last September.</p> <p>Having gone through such an ordeal she expressed that <i>'all this has affected my mental health. I have found it very difficult to get treatment for this.'</i></p> <p><i>'In regard to the process of getting settled in the UK, I have found it difficult and disjointed. Lots of information was thrown at me and there was no support to help me find my way through it. There was no help in finding permanent accommodation or in finding employment. There are openings for doctors in the NHS but no options, support or advice for retraining and reintegration.'</i></p> <p><b>Yuliia's recommendations to Government</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better support and advice from local council, improved by personal plans to prevent homelessness ahead of time rather than when someone needs to submit a homelessness application.</li> <li>• Council officers should also meet settled refugees and sponsors to help solve any issues from early on.</li> </ul> <p>She concluded with expressing her thanks and gratitude. <i>'I don't have many words to express my gratitude to the British, but I deeply appreciate what you are doing for Ukrainians, thank you'</i></p>
<p><b>Jon Featonby – Refugee Council</b></p>	<p>Refugee Council has worked with approximately 1100 Ukrainian national since March 2022, all from various schemes.</p> <p>He expressed that the experiences of the refugees that have worked with Refugee Council mirror people they lived experience individuals that have spoken today.</p> <p>JF takes time to express the success of the Ukrainian schemes; highlighting that over 200,000 visas being issued, over 150,000 arrivals and expresses that this is a good demonstration of what can be achieved when the British public, local authorities and central government work well together.</p> <p><b>Next steps/ Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding for the family scheme - homelessness statistics which were updated last week show that now 3100 households who were presented with the homelessness relief prevention duty; 38% of those are on the family scheme.</li> <li>• Reflects the lack of support both those people respond from that scheme receive financially and also from local authorities. Local authorities have shared that those on host Ukraine scheme/sponsored scheme they know exactly where those people are but with the family scheme they do not. This make its harder make sure that there are rematches possible or other forms of support.</li> <li>• He explains that this should be taken in the that context of the cost living crisis that we're all facing.</li> <li>• Local authorities need to work together and share best practise around supporting people into private accommodation</li> </ul> <p>JF touched on the role of the Lord Harrison had from this scheme is first set up and the role that he had on the Syrian scheme when that was set up. That this was able to bring together various government departments. <i>'Since we've lost that role, we don't seem to have that same kind of joined up approach.'</i></p> <p>He said it is valuable to have a minister for refugees not only to oversee the Ukraine schemes but currently there is too much pressure on local authorities &amp; local communities that are being asked to support those who arrived in Ukraine schemes, the Afghanistan schemes and other UK resettlement programmes and asylum processes.</p> <p>As well as integration strategy for England as we have in Scotland, this will make sure that there is that consistency across the different schemes and a clear indication about what we're trying to achieve in terms of integration, clear ways that we measure that also.</p> <p>We are now getting up to the end of the first year of this scheme it's imperative to address what's going to happen to people the end of that three years. Otherwise end up with people they need to go to the asylum process or people falling out of the immigration system altogether and then having no access to housing support.</p>

<b>Bob Blackman</b>	<p>Thanks, panellists, for contributions</p> <p><i>'I have sympathy for you and your families back in Ukraine who are suffering deprivation as a result of this illegal invasion by Russia and indeed we thank you for contributions you're making United Kingdom already and we hope that you will be able to continue to make those contributions. We hope very soon it will come to a point whereby hopefully the Russians are expelled, and Ukraine can return to a level of normality and then you can make a choice do you want to be here or do you want to return to your native country.'</i></p> <p>Hands over to Florence Eshalomi MP, APPG Co-Chair.</p>
<b>Florence Eshalomi MP</b>	<p>Open the floor for Victoria to share her account before the Q&amp;A</p>
<b>Victoria – Lived Experience of Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme</b>	<p>Shared her experience in the Q&amp;A section of the event and talked about trying to rent in the private rented sector after 6 months of living with a sponsor when she arrived from Ukraine.</p> <p>She came to the UK with her son who is 15 years old. She expressed that she has been lucky with her host family but would like to now move out and rent her own space. She has found a job which means she is no longer eligible for Universal Credit. Her job allows for her to survive while she is still living with her host family but it doesn't pay enough to allow her to rent an apartment at the current cost of renting.</p> <p>She is seeking advice from Citizens Advice, and the job centre but was unable to receive clear advice. She expressed she is facing difficulty renting because she doesn't have any credit history. Her host family cannot be a guarantor. And other issues she has experienced is landlords asking her to pay six months rent upfront which she states is impossible in her situation. Also she was told that she cannot get housing allowance until she has a rental agreement so she has found it very difficult to see a solution.</p> <p>Advice given from Citizens Advice job centre was to change to a cheaper area but relocating is unsettling particularly to her son. They have both been through so much trauma that relocating will only further enhance this. She expresses the feeling her and her son are currently dealing with since the war started.</p> <p>Ends with thanking everyone for their attention.</p>
<b>Dasha – Lived Experience</b>	<p>Expressed her support to Victoria said and explains that she went through a similar experience.</p>
<b>Florence Eshalomi MP</b>	<p>Thanks Natalia and Victoria.</p> <p><i>Trying to rent in our area the challenges that poses in myself and other London MPs and rent in London has gone up, but actually right across the country rent in the private rental sector is going up, and this notion of people having to pay upfront and in some instances I've had constituents write to me trying to rent with severe struggles of having to pay too much up front.</i></p>
<b>Florence Eshalomi MP</b>	<p>Q&amp;A Session</p> <p>Question from Florence 'just opening up to the floor now and until our panellists in terms of with all the issues we've heard this morning what you think what the solutions are should like government and councils to be working out in addressing this?'</p>
<b>Adis Sehic</b>	<p>Housing is the place to start - Research in the from Shelter tell us that the UK suffered a net loss of 24,000 homes between the period of 1991 to 2020 house building in the country is effectively hard from around 3 million. There's been a 3.5% increase in rent in London others like Spare Room research state an 18% increase.</p> <p>We have a national housing issue and obviously when you have refugee communities coming into the UK, particularly on low incomes, having to rely on means tested benefits, they are unfortunately going to be the worst affected. That's why in our latest report we call from more social housing.</p> <p>The resetting of local housing allowance rates will be really important as well they were frozen from 2016 to 2020 and then they were reset. But unfortunately in the last 18 months rent have skyrocketed so much that if you're looking at an area in London you know the</p>



	disparity between the rent you pay and the local housing allowance how much it covers can be anywhere between around 380 to 1200 pounds.
<b>Florence Eshalomi MP</b>	Opens the floor to the audience to ask questions
<b>Leyla Williams, Deputy Director – West London Welcome</b>	<p><i>... There has been a massive upheaval in our work, and we had to recruit more staff, more volunteers as our workload have massively been increasing. We spend huge amounts of time contacting local authorities ,completing applications, chasing those and in some cases finding that the Ukrainian you are supporting is going to end up homeless, so a lot about informal hosting people.</i></p> <p><i>I just wanted to say is that local authorities will say they have 10,500 pounds paid but in practise they often are paid in arrears by the Home Office so therefore unwilling to spend the money that they in theory have and this is a problem with notice because of course to get it back ages. This is also what happened with the Afghan Scheme.</i></p>
<b>Chris – Settled UK Charity</b>	<p><i>Echoes the disparity in funding, lack of rematching.</i></p> <p><i>Goes on to discuss the Biometric resident's permit (BRP), for people who apply for this in the UK where there is a delay they are still prioritised even if they are homeless. Chris explains that this should be something more take note of but also there are a lot of challenges apply for this.</i></p> <p><i>(inaudible)</i></p>
<b>Victoria</b>	Agreed by Victoria - her application was lost, and it took 5 months
<b>Statement from audience member (Ukrainian National)</b>	Touched on the struggles of childcare, schooling and support for single parents
<b>Florence Eshalomi MP</b>	Answers this by stating she will encourage Bob Blackman along with other MPs to bring childcare back on the agenda and that it is an ongoing issue for many including nationals. Also mentions care provisions for elder parents
<b>Audience Members</b>	Further questions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Safeguarding, particularly around the homes for Ukraine Scheme</li> <li>- Jobs, having well qualified individuals that are unable to get to obtain jobs.</li> </ul>
<b>Florence Eshalomi MP</b>	States that this is not a situation that is in isolation to Ukrainian refugees. Many have fled and have valuable skills but the bureaucracy of the process stops them progressing
<b>John Featonby</b>	<p>Explains that Refuge Council has worked with NHS partners to retain and reintegrate refugees and it has been successful.</p> <p>Regarding safeguarding this has massively improved as time has gone on but does differ between schemes.</p>
<b>Adis</b>	Explains that the Home Office does carry out checks, but also local authorities also have a duty to as well as follow up checks.
<b>Florence Eshalomi</b>	<p><i>'What's clear there needs to be more focus and consistency between schemes, learning from previous humanitarian crisis' and what happens next, what happens after the 3 years. This is an ongoing discussion that we on the APPG will be looking at.'</i></p> <p>Thanks to panellist and audience, close sessions.</p>