

Ukrainian Focus Group Report

Action Plan

Introduction

In May 2022, Business Consultancy Services (BCS) supported by research colleagues in the Innovation Lab in the Department of Finance (DoF), were commissioned by The Executive Office (TEO) to complete four focus groups – two with Ukrainian guests and two with hosts from The Homes for Ukraine Scheme. This was primarily to review the initial arrangements put in place to see whether they meet the needs of Ukrainian people and their hosts. In addition to this, the research also considered whether the arrangements are working as well as they could, whether adjustments can be made to help improve the experience for future arrivals and to make sure that something important has not been missed.

The four focus groups took place in June 2022 which included engagement with 11 guests and 14 hosts who were asked to describe their experiences and make suggestions for improvements. The discussions were structured around:

- pre travel/ arrival in Northern Ireland;
- arrival in Northern Ireland; and
- considerations of the future.

As part of the discussions the participants also offered views and experiences in respect of meeting other Ukrainians for support.

Suggestions for Improvement

A number of suggestions for improvement were identified by hosts and guests, some of which overlap, and these have been set out in the table below. Some have already been taken forward or work will be ongoing for those which are more complex. Some are not unique to Ukrainian Nationals and will be areas we will want to consider for all refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland, as part of our work in implementing the draft Refugee Integration Strategy.

The table below sets out our consideration and response to each of the suggestions, identifying those where actions are complete, ongoing or no action planned. This will be kept under review and updated as work to improve support arrangements for new arrivals progresses.

Suggestions for Improvement	Made By	Current Action	Future Action	Status
ARRIVAL				
Customer Journey Map/Flow chart for both guest and host. The guest suggested this included the key stages in the process of accessing necessary services in Northern Ireland.	Guests and Hosts	The Guide for Ukrainians in Northern Ireland has recently been revised and covers the journey from pre-arrival, what to expect when you arrive, visas, biometrics, accessing services, transport, working in NI, accommodation, community support and leisure, emergency support and staying safe. Sections have up to date links to the relevant information with details of 'how to' and contact numbers where relevant. It has been made much more user friendly incorporating flow charts which are easier to read and understand. The Guide has now been uploaded to the Executive Office website and is available in English, Ukrainian and Russian: Guide for Ukrainians	As guidance changes or the need for more information on key areas arises the guides will be revised and updated or added to, seeking opportunities to simplify and make the guidance as accessible and user friendly as possible. The Guide for Ukrainians will be updated monthly. Information on nidirect has been reviewed in line with the final version of the Guide for Ukrainians in Northern Ireland. A review of the Guide for Sponsors has commenced and will be completed in line with the principles established during the review of the Guide for Ukrainians. You can find the current Guide here: Guide for Sponsors	Ongoing
Provision of a basic care package on arrival for food staples, toiletries and cleaning products.	Guests	The £200 payment is already in place to help cover immediate essentials. In addition there is some support available from 3rd sector organisations e.g. Save the Children (family support package) and Red Cross.	Save the Children and the BHSCT are working together to deliver the offer of the grant of £340 and a £70 play pack for each family with a child/children under 11.	Ongoing
Financial assistance set up from the beginning	Hosts	The process for claiming the £350 'Thank You' payment has been working since June and progress has been made in working through a backlog of outstanding visits.	Consideration is being given to a digital system for future payments but this will be subject to cost and value for money consideration.	Ongoing

Re-visit written translations of Government documents. Participants discussed that the current translation contained many 'legal' and 'jargon' words that few non legal professionals would understand.	Guests	The recent review of the Guide for Ukrainians in NI is written in simple language; jargon and acronyms have been removed and the naming of links has been simplified.	All future reviews of information available on nidirect and the TEO website will be written in simple language; jargon and acronyms will be removed and the naming of links will be simplified	Complete
More support for hosts at every stage of the process - dedicated helpline for both hosts and guests – participant gave example of phoning the nidirect number and the member of staff they spoke to (whilst really lovely) was not aware that that number was being given as a support line for queries.	Hosts	<p>Make the Call has now been updated with lines to take and have been provided with contact emails to forward any queries they cannot resolve to the wraparound team.</p> <p>Workshops are being run for hosts by the Association of Family Therapists (AFT). These are to help hosts navigate the practical and emotional challenges of hosting. The feedback from the facilitators after the first series of workshops is that they are also a useful peer support forum.</p>	<p>Further workshops have been arranged for October with future dates to be agreed with the Association of Family Therapists.</p> <p>Initial discussions are being set up with stakeholders to consider longer term actions, including consideration of a dedicated helpline</p>	Ongoing
English classes – available on arrival	Guests and Hosts	<p>The Policy circular has been updated to enable English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) to be provided free for all Ukrainians. The ESOL NI website and related social media channels are updated with details on a number of opportunities for informal language learning.</p> <p>The ESOL co-ordinator is attending the Ukraine Assistance centres to register Ukrainians for English classes and provide information.</p> <p>You can find out more information about ESOL: here: ESOL NI and here: nidirect ESOL</p>	There are extensive ESOL requirements given the quantum of newcomers in NI and pressures on the services available. Under the draft Refugee Integration Strategy, consideration will be given to how the ESOL offering might be enhanced to meet increased demand and will form part of longer term implementation plans.	Ongoing

Single point of contact “case Worker” would be helpful	Hosts	A short-term Ukrainian speaking support worker has been engaged by the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) to support Ukrainians working in the Dungannon area.	An evaluation of the STEP support worker role will be carried out to inform whether this support can be replicated in other areas across NI.	Ongoing
Access to a support group for mental health.	Hosts	<p>The Health section of the Guide for Ukrainians in NI contains a link to the Access to Health and Social Care Booklet. Paragraph 4.7 covers mental health and advises seeing the family doctor in the first instance if there are concerns around mental health.</p> <p>The link to the booklet will also be included in the review of the Guide for Hosts.</p> <p>You can access the booklet here: Health and Social Care Booklet</p> <p>nidirect also includes information about Emotional Support which is provided by Red Cross and Barnardo’s. A link to both organisations is included in the Guide for Ukrainians at an appendix with important numbers and links. You can find information about Emotional Support here: Emotional Support</p>	There are wider mental health support and capacity issues but the trauma experienced by refugees generally is very much recognised. Implementation of the Refugee Integration Strategy will consider the potential for longer term support in this area for all refugees and asylum seekers.	Ongoing
SETTLING IN / INTEGRATION				
Support in getting Ukrainian qualifications recognised to allow for work in their own profession	Guests	The Guide for Ukrainians includes a new section about getting your qualifications recognised in the UK and details on how to access the free Qualifications Equivalence Service through the local Jobs and Benefits office. It also provides a link to the UK Centre for Professional Qualifications website and their enquiry contact number. You can access the Guide here: Guide for Ukrainians	This is a recognised barrier to successful integration and there can be challenges with costs and timeframes. Longer term work under the Refugee Integration Strategy will consider skills needs and employment opportunities in NI with a view to identifying what (if any) additional support could be provided to maximise employment opportunities for those arriving. There is potential to consider the health service needs as a test case. The Executive Office and the Health Trusts are considering this, including progressing a wider	Ongoing

			skills audit and means of addressing barriers to support access to work where possible	
School places more readily available	Guest and Hosts	<p>The number of available places at all schools is published annually on the Department of Education website. This provides the number of available places in each individual school across NI and is available for 21/22 here: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enrolment-school-level-data-202122</p> <p>While this is not a 'live' list, it provides an indication of the pattern and quantum of available places.</p> <p>There are over 13,000 available post-primary school places in Northern Ireland and almost 30,000 available primary school places, although there are local variations in availability.</p> <p>Where schools are full in an area, the Department can increase approved numbers, at schools' request, to create additional capacity. Furthermore, where children cannot access a school place the Education Authority has the power to direct children's admission to schools.</p>	<p>Work will be commenced with the Executive Office, the Department of Education and the Education Authority to look at barriers and specific issues impacting provision of school places.</p> <p>The Department of Education has met with all education partners to highlight potential barriers. Partners have agreed to make representations to all sectors to ensure that where there are available places, asylum seeker and refugee children including those from Ukraine, are accepted / admitted and where there are no available places, schools can come to the Department for Temporary Variations which will be given priority.</p>	Ongoing
Raise awareness of the role that the Red Cross can offer to support with mental health and other support for guests.	Guests	<p>The Health section of the Guide for Ukrainians in NI contains a link to the Access to Health and Social Care Booklet Paragraph 4.7 covers mental health and advises seeing the family doctor in the first instance if there are concerns around mental health.</p> <p>You can access the booklet here: Health and Social Care Booklet</p> <p>nidirect also includes information about Emotional Support which is provided by Red Cross and</p>		Complete

		Barnardo's. You can find information about Emotional Support here: Emotional Support		
One participant arrived on the Jubilee Weekend and no services were available – offer out of hours support.	Guests	Reports of one participant arriving on a holiday weekend would not justify the cost of providing an out-of-hours service for such eventualities. This could be reviewed if it transpires it is an ongoing occurrence or some arrangements may be possible if there was advance notification of arrival.		No action proposed - complete
Availability of translated Bank Application forms	Guests	This is something Banking facilities would need to consider.		No action proposed - complete
Impact of having Russian accents / translators in Assistance Centres.	Guests	We are working with our interpreter provider to maximise the number of Ukrainian interpreters, including ensuring those whose first language is Russian are catered for. Registration Forms ask for language preferences and where possible are considered.		No action proposed - complete
Provide a leaflet in Ukrainian to explain the purpose of the background check visits from Barnardos and Extern.	Hosts	Guidance on the purpose of the home visits has been included in the recent update of the Guide for Ukrainians which has recently been published in English, Ukrainian and Russian. This information will also be included in the Guide for Sponsors which is to be reviewed imminently.		Complete
More assistance centres (participants felt that the north and western areas of NI are 'badly serviced').	Hosts	The Assistance Centres Model is continually under review in response to demand and geographical coverage. A number of pop-up AC's have been and will be held in different locations. These are published on the nidirect page and TEO social media.	This will continue to be reviewed.	Complete and ongoing
Open Assistance Centres for longer as many hosts work full time and they are responsible for getting guests to the centres.	Hosts	The locations and opening times of the Assistance Centres is continually under review. As a result a number of evening sessions were held. These are published on nidirect and TEO Social media.	This will continue to be reviewed.	Complete and ongoing

MEETING OTHER UKRAINIANS FOR SUPPORT				
Opportunities for guests to meet informally facilitated by Ukrainians who have been living here for a while.	Guests and Hosts	Ukrainian Facebook links are highlighted in the Guide for Ukrainians in Northern Ireland. You can find the Guide here: Guide for Ukrainians	Ukrainian Facebook links will also be included in the review of the Guide for Hosts.	Complete
Independent phone line for Ukrainians to phone in order to keep some privacy with hosts.	Guests	Belfast City Council, in partnership with the BHSCT, are commissioning a pilot proposal to provide bilingual support for Ukrainians living in the Belfast City Council area that would provide a triage service with follow on advice, signposting and support.	The proposed Belfast City Council proposal will be considered as a pilot for wider roll-out.	Ongoing
Ukrainians who have been living in Northern Ireland for a while being available to talk about what life is like and key differences.	Guests	Some local councils and community groups have had events.	Lived experience, sharing learning and orientation is something which will be considered as part of the implementation of the Refugee Integration Strategy.	Ongoing
A representative from the Ukrainian Embassy to travel to Northern Ireland to support guests.	Guests and Hosts	This will be explored with the Embassy including where travel is not possible, whether someone from the Embassy would consider doing a video welcome for their citizens arriving in NI and this could be provided to all future arrivals.	Initial contact will be made with the Ukrainian Embassy to scope potential for local engagement	Ongoing
SUPPORT FOR THE FUTURE				
Clarification on travel arrangements for enabling other members of their family to join them in Northern Ireland.	Guests and hosts	This is another case of the status that the Ukrainians arrive under causing them disadvantage as the Ukrainians do not have refugee or humanitarian protection status. For example they have no right to a Maternity Grant for baby born in NI or for family members to join them here. We can therefore only advise them to seek legal advice. This has been included in the review of the Guide for Ukrainians in NI: Guide for Ukrainians		Complete
More information on applying for Social Housing.	Guests and hosts	Information on more permanent housing is now included in the Guide for Ukrainians in NI, which is available in English, Ukrainian and Russian:		Complete

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