

# **Scotland's Support for Displaced People from Ukraine – Review of the Super Sponsor Scheme**

November 2022

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## Introduction

1. This short paper provides an update on the super sponsor scheme for displaced people from Ukraine, describing the background to the scheme and 'Warm Scots Welcome' programme, arrivals information and provision to date, as well as the outcomes of a review of the scheme including next steps.

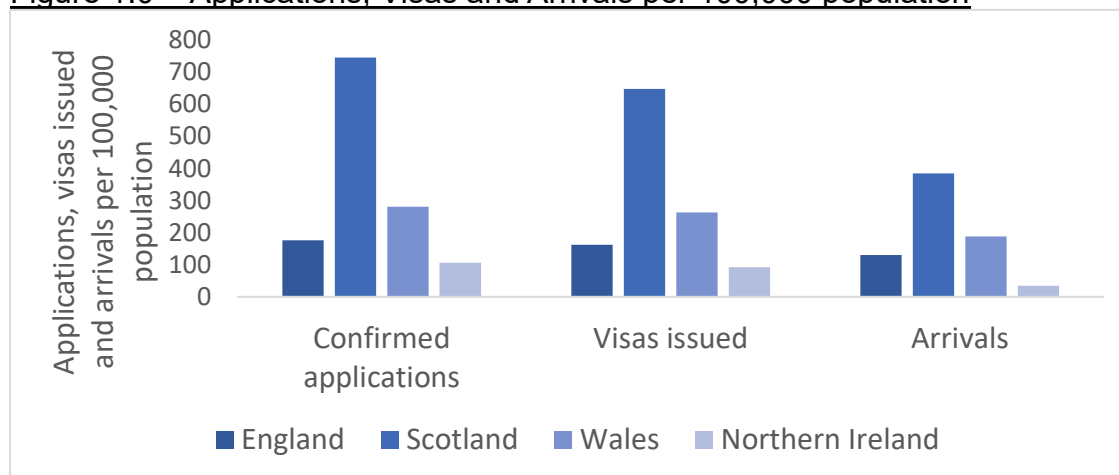
2. On 24 February 2022, Russia began a further unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine following the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. With immigration fully reserved, the Scottish Government called on the UK Government to immediately waive all visa requirements and establish a safe and fast route to sanctuary for those fleeing, the majority of whom were women and children.

3. On 18 March 2022, the UK Government introduced a new visa scheme called the 'Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme' (also referred to as 'Homes for Ukraine'). Ukrainian nationals and their family could now apply for a three year UK visa, but only having first secured sponsorship from an eligible UK resident able to provide accommodation.

4. The Scottish Government took the decision to act as 'super sponsor' in its own right, so that applicants could select the Scottish Government as sponsor, receive a visa and travel immediately without the need for private sponsorship arrangements to be found first. This option, designed to be accessible and safe, removed entirely the requirement for those fleeing war to seek out a sponsor, for example, on social media.

5. The super sponsor scheme has proven to be overwhelmingly popular with 35,501 applications, 30,629 visas granted and 17,463 arrivals to date. Even when taking into consideration a pause to applications from July, Scotland still reports the highest number of total applications, visas issued and arrivals per head of the population of any of the four nations (see Figure 1.0). A considerable achievement far beyond our initial commitment.

Figure 1.0 – Applications, Visas and Arrivals per 100,000 population<sup>1</sup>



6. When including those with a private sponsor in Scotland, more than 21,285 people fleeing war in Ukraine have now arrived on a visa with a Scottish sponsor<sup>2</sup>. Supported by partners and communities, this inward migration has occurred over a period of seven months. This compares to Scotland’s role in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, which saw the planned resettlement of 3,000 people with advance notice and over a period of five years. The scale and speed of the displacement has been large and swift, caused by a humanitarian crisis Europe could not have predicted or planned for. It is the largest movement of people on the European continent since the Second World War.

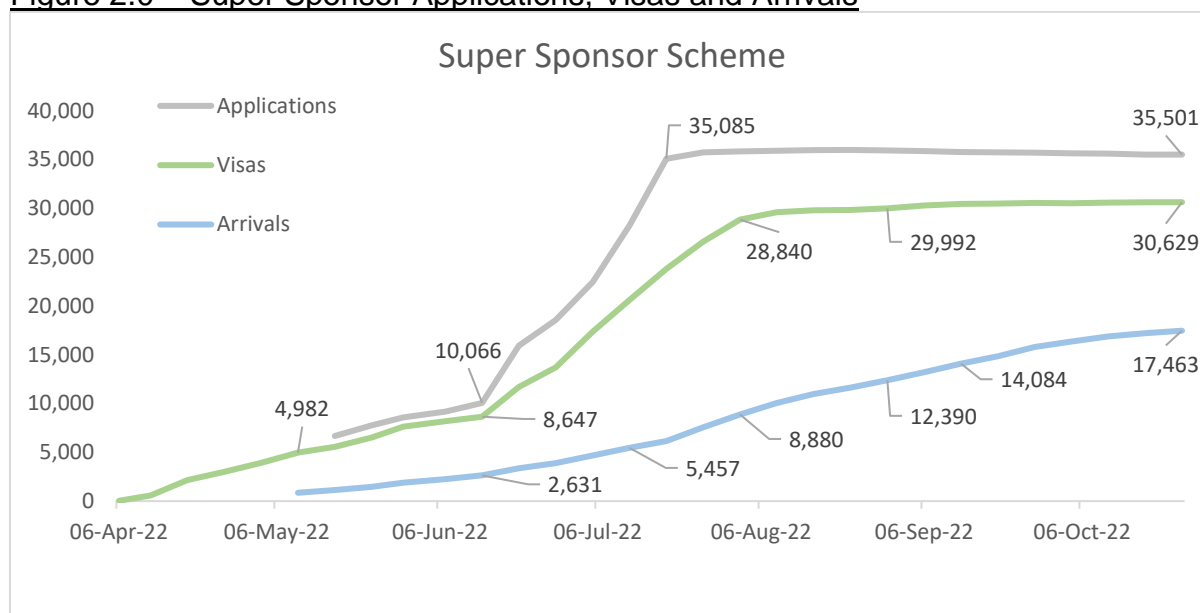
7. In a joint letter from the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, the Scottish Government originally estimated it would support an equivalent number of Ukrainian arrivals as were resettled under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme, i.e. 3,000 as an initial tranche. The letter also made clear the intention to build capacity from there, with Scotland taking a fair and proportionate share of total numbers entering the UK.

8. As outlined in the publication ‘[Scotland's Support for Displaced People from Ukraine](#)’ (11 July 2022), applications to the super sponsor scheme increased sharply in July (see Figure 2.0) following the pause of the Welsh Government equivalent scheme and the slowing of private sponsorship in England.

<sup>1</sup> [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: Visa data by country, upper and lower tier local authority, Office for National Statistics: Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.](#) Please note the number of arrivals into the UK is not necessarily reflective of the persons having arrived at the sponsors’ location.

<sup>2</sup> [Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: Visa data by country, upper and lower tier local authority - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Figure 2.0 – Super Sponsor Applications, Visas and Arrivals<sup>3</sup>



### Warm Scots Welcome

9. As part of standing up Scotland’s response, a network of ‘Welcome Hubs’ were quickly established in partnership with local authorities, the third sector and local volunteer communities at major points of entry in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Renfrewshire and Dumfries and Galloway. These hubs provide meals, comfortable accommodation, trauma support and access to translation to all super sponsor arrivals requiring assistance.

10. A dedicated helpline was introduced in April, delivered by NHS National Services Scotland, to help and support super sponsor visa-holders who had not yet travelled. Details of this international free-phone number is included in all ‘Welcome Messages’ issued automatically to new visa-holders. Those contacting the contact centre can receive advice on travelling to Scotland, what to expect on arrival and discuss any special requirements, for example, relating to health or accessibility.

11. Recognising the scale of the response needed to this humanitarian crisis, the Scottish Government committed £11.2 million to local government to increase the capacity of local resettlement teams, support refurbishment of properties and support integration work. A further £1.3 million was also awarded to the Scottish Refugee Council to boost its national integration service and additional funding provided to Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations’ Council in recognition that the majority of arrivals were being triaged at the Edinburgh Hub. The Scottish Government invested just over £100,000 to support the Ukraine Advice Scotland service delivered by JustRight Scotland to provide confidential legal advice, for example about visa status, to Ukrainians and their family members.

<sup>3</sup> [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme Visa data by country, upper and lower tier local authority](#). Please note the chart is an indicator of the trend, and cannot be used to make detailed week-to-week comparisons.

12. From the outset communities across Scotland have responded in solidarity. Thousands registered interest with the UK Government in privately sponsoring a Ukrainian in their own home, as well as donating to local appeals or volunteering. With growing numbers of super sponsor applications and arrivals, the Scottish Government worked with the UK Government and contacted those in Scotland who expressed an interest to ask whether they would be interested in hosting a super sponsor visa-holder currently in short-term hotel accommodation.

### **Accommodation**

13. As set out in the publication ['Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme in Scotland: Statistics' \(October 2022\)](#) contact information for 10,025 potential volunteer hosts were provided to local authorities with around 5,485 remaining 'active' following outreach activity. This includes potential or current hosts that local authority teams are actively engaged with, for example, concluding checks, finalising matches or supporting new placements. Volunteer hosts are able to claim £350 monthly 'thank-you' payments from councils once guests are staying with them. The Scottish Government continues to press the UK Government to increase these payments to better reflect the rising cost of living.

14. Of course matching is a two-way process, with resettlement leads listening and taking account of the needs and preferences of Ukrainian arrivals. Many people may prefer to live in areas close to amenities and services, or near to pre-existing Ukrainian communities. In addition, volunteer hosts have their own preferences and/or may not be able to provide space for larger family sizes or more complex group compositions.

15. What has become clear in the past weeks and months is that, due to the on-going war in Ukraine, these displaced communities will very likely need to stay in Scotland into the medium and longer-term. We know many Ukrainians ideally hoped their stay would be temporary. We have remained clear they are welcome and that Scotland is their home as long as they need it to be. Moving from mass evacuation and into longer-term integration, a mixture of accommodation is required to meet the needs of arrivals and the differing composition of groups - from families to individuals.

16. The Scottish Government is firmly committed to working with partners to reduce the length of stay in short-term accommodation and support integration into our communities. Local authority resettlement teams are working across welcome hub accommodation, leading sensitive conversations with Ukrainian guests to identify and make suitable offers of longer-term accommodation, including social housing, volunteer hosts or – where suitable – private rental.

17. To support these conversations and provide improved strategic coordination across local authority boundaries, a national matching service was established in partnership with COSLA enhanced by further digital improvements. To date, an estimated 2,790 super sponsor visa holders have been matched into longer-term accommodation by local authority resettlement leads. This equates to around 1,420 cases<sup>4</sup> (for example groups or families), with around a quarter supported by the national service.

18. The Scottish Government has also put in place targeted capital investment to help bring social housing back into use as longer-term accommodation. This work includes early investment in North Lanarkshire to begin refurbishment of 200 properties and led to the establishment of a dedicated £50 million 'Ukraine Longer-Term Resettlement Fund', announced in September.

19. This dedicated capital investment fund is aimed at councils and registered social landlords with £486,000 already awarded to North Ayrshire Council and £6.1 million now committed to Aberdeen City Council to bring up to 500 void properties back into use. The Scottish Government continues to work with local authorities across Scotland to identify potential properties and help bring forward proposals.

## **Review**

20. Following a significant increase in new applications, and against a backdrop of continued pressure on short-term accommodation from pre-existing visa-holders, on the 11 July the Scottish Government announced there would be a three-month pause to new applications and the scheme closed on 13 July. The wider Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (referred to as 'Homes for Ukraine') remained open to applications sponsored privately by UK residents, including those in Scotland.

21. On the same date, the Scottish Government also announced it was chartering a passenger vessel MS Victoria to be docked in Edinburgh to provide additional immediate accommodation for new arrivals, later joined by MS Ambition in Glasgow. These passenger ships have since been providing comfortable temporary accommodation with facilities including restaurants, child play areas and communal spaces, and have been well received by the communities living there.

22. The Minister with Special Responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine also instructed officials to conduct a rapid review of the scheme with a focus on sustainability and longer-term accommodation, and to develop a set of criteria against which any plan to re-open the super sponsor scheme to new applications could be objectively assessed.

23. The review was led by the Chief Social Policy Adviser, Professor Linda Bauld, with broad engagement from subject matter experts across local government, the third sector (for example the Scottish Refugee Council) and academia (for example the Chair of 'New Scots Core Group for Refugee Integration'). The review also benefitted from the lived experience of recently arrived Ukrainians.

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<sup>4</sup> [Welcome accommodation - Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme in Scotland: statistics- October 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Welcome-accommodation-Ukraine-Sponsorship-Scheme-in-Scotland-statistics-October-2022-gov.scot)

24. The outcome of the review is 16 specific interventions (**Annex A**) aimed at improving the performance of the existing scheme, and a set of seven criteria, also developed with support of key stakeholders, to ensure any future plan to reopen is safe and deliverable (**Annex B**).

25. The interventions range from clearer information and support, to investment in social housing and innovative alternatives such as modular housing, in addition to actions to reduce barriers to employment and the private rental sector. The review team noted that many of the more innovative interventions have potential well beyond Ukrainian communities, for example, responding to homelessness.

26. On 30 September, the 'Ukraine Senior Oversight Group', which includes members of COSLA, local government and the third sector, endorsed the outcome of the review and committed to working in partnership with the Scottish Government as part of work to move Scotland's response from mass evacuation and towards integration, more aligned with the principles of New Scots – Scotland's refugee integration strategy: integration from day one, a rights-based approach, refugee involvement, inclusive communities and partnership and collaboration.

## **Current Situation**

27. Following the pause to the scheme, the number of super sponsor visa holders stabilised at around 30,000. Since then, arrival figures have consistently remained high with some general fluctuations week-to-week.

28. To date, 17,463 (57%) of the 30,629 eligible super sponsor visa-holders have arrived in the UK. Not all who arrive have required short-term accommodation, and there are currently around 7,000 people in Scottish Government hotels and passenger ships<sup>5</sup>.

29. It is very difficult to predict with certainty how many of the remaining 13,166 visa-holders may decide to travel, and if so when they may arrive. Developments in the war will have a significant bearing on actual behaviour. What is clear, however, is that arrival rates have remained high and visa-holders continue to arrive.

30. Despite considerable investment in time and resource by a range of partners and community organisations, Scotland's supply of 'welcome hub' short-term accommodation remains under significant pressure, with the number of weekly departures from hotels not yet at a scale to support new additional applications, in addition to supporting the on-going arrival of pre-existing visa-holders.

## **Next Steps**

31. Scotland has a wealth of experience from previous refugee and resettlement schemes. The Scottish Government and its partners, including third sector and community volunteers, are firmly committed to providing all those arriving with the compassion and care they so rightly deserve.

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<sup>5</sup> [Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: Visa data by country, upper and lower tier local authority - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-visa-data-by-country-upper-and-lower-tier-local-authority); [Welcome accommodation - Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme in Scotland: statistics-October 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/statistics-welcome-accommodation-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-in-scotland/october-2022/pages/12.aspx)

32. By working with partners to design and implement the 16 specific interventions identified by the review of the super sponsor scheme, we aim to improve the performance of the scheme, empowering those arriving with clear advice, support and improved access to longer-term housing options thereby reducing dependency on short-term accommodation.

33. It should be recognised this work is set in a particularly challenging fiscal environment, where the cost of living crisis and rising inflation means the Scottish Government's budget is now worth around £1.7 billion less than when it was set in December. For this reason, the Scottish Government continually reviews its temporary accommodation estate to ensure we are providing the best support to people while ensuring good value for the public purse. Hotels booked in the early stages of the programme for example, to ensure the immediate supply of accommodation, will also be part of this work to consolidate our short-term accommodation estate.

34. We do not want anyone to stay in hotel or ship accommodation longer than necessary. It is clear that a settled home is a better longer term outcome. As part of reducing dependency on hotels, we will set clearer expectations that stays are short-term and only until longer term settled accommodation is secured, with improved prioritisation of limited accommodation capacity for those most in need. With many arrivals now in employment or receipt of social security benefits, we will also consider the introduction of more formalised time-limits, adjust the provision of hospitality and/ or seek contributions where appropriate. This will also promote alignment of the offer with guest experience in private host homes, as well as those living in other temporary rented accommodation.

35. To further boost the supply of volunteer hosts we will also launch a Scotland-specific campaign to secure new hosts, with clearer advice and support to hosts as well as improved geographical targeting, therefore seeking to encourage volunteers to come forward while improving the likelihood of successful matches aligned to displaced people's expectations.

36. Recognising the barriers facing arrivals to access the private rental sector, we will also bring forward and pilot a range of interventions such as one-off grants, deposit guarantees or national headleasing. And we will continue to prioritise investment in social housing and work with local authorities and registered social landlords to make best possible use of the dedicated £50 million 'Ukraine Longer-Term Resettlement Fund'.

37. The Scottish Government is working with national and local partners, including the Ukraine Senior Oversight Group, which has senior responsibility for overseeing the Warm Scots Welcome programme, and New Scots, which oversees the implementation of Scotland's refugee strategy, to review our governance structures and ensure implementation of all 16 interventions is sensitively and robustly managed. As part of this, the Minister with Special Responsibility for Refugees continues to maintain a regular, open and positive dialogue with the Consul General of Ukraine in Edinburgh.



38. In recognition of the expertise and capacity right across Scotland, a new Ministerial-led Reference Group will also be established to ensure wide feedback and participation from the fullest range of stakeholders with an active interest, including wider third sector and volunteer communities and of course representatives of the Ukrainian community in Scotland.

39. Data on the operational performance of the scheme is continually collated and monitored by officials and partners. The impacts of these interventions will therefore be reviewed against these national and local datasets which are also published transparently and routinely on the Scottish Government website, such as the number of arrivals, the occupancy rates of short-term accommodation and numbers being successfully placed into longer-term accommodation.

November 2022

## Annex A

### 16 Interventions to Guide Improvement

	<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
1.	Improved Clarity in Pre-Arrival Communications	Refreshed communications giving accurate reflection of limited availability of accommodation; prioritisation for those most in need (e.g. families) and request accommodation booked in advance.	Improved clarity around what to expect	Immediate
2.	Refined Arrival Script and Communications	No longer assume all arrivals require accommodation; better prioritisation for most in need; clearer expectation stay is short-term until accommodation secured; advice and integration from day one.	Improved clarity around what to expect	Immediate
3.	Strengthening of Matching	Taking steps to better support and expand resources to assist local authority resettlement teams finalise longer-term accommodation for guests, as well as identify opportunities to match ahead of arrival.	Local resources	Immediate
4.	Social Housing	Introduce capital fund and programme of work aimed at registered social landlords to improve the overall supply of housing stock for arrivals.	Sustainability	Immediate
5.	Scotland Call for Volunteers	Scottish campaign to secure volunteer hosts for those currently in short-term accommodation, with improved geographical targeting and clarity on role, expectations and support.	Increased supply of volunteer hosts	Short-Term
6.	Greater Emphasis on Employability	Improved coordination with councils, third and private sectors, Skills Development Scotland and DWP to ensure arrivals can seek out and secure employment, including through job fairs.	Empowerment of arrivals	Short-Term
7.	Local Welcome	Working closely with third sector, consulates and Eastern European communities to bring alive cities, towns and villages across Scotland through digital content and case-studies.	Empowerment of arrivals	Short-Term
8.	National Approach to Re-Matching	Work with local authorities to finalise consistent approach to 're-matching', where there has been a breakdown in	Improved clarity around what to expect	Short-Term

		host arrangements for super sponsor or private sponsor visa-holder.		
9.	Refinement of Accommodation Offer	Improve sustainability of the programme by adjusting provision of accommodation and wider hospitality, including consideration of time limits and contributions, depending on needs and income of guests.	Sustainability	Short-Term
10.	Warm Welcome Grant	Consider and test feasibility of grants programme aimed at financial support to those leaving short-term accommodation, recognising the barriers around this important milestone.	Empowerment of arrivals	Medium-Term
11.	Private Rental Assistance	Improved advice on renting privately, as well as identifying and testing interventions which may include deposit guarantees recognising the potential for wider application for other groups.	Empowerment of arrivals	Medium-Term
12.	Self-Matching Infrastructure	Facilitated 'in-person' matching events and exploration of digital solutions aimed at allowing arrival to 'self-match' using a directory of approved hosts prior to a facilitated introductory meeting.	Empowerment of arrivals	Medium-Term
13.	Modular Housing	Working with our partners to identify potential sites for modular housing and analysis of modular design options for both short-term and longer-term application.	Sustainability	Medium-Term
14.	Approach to Matching	Looking at evidence of delivery to date, a targeted project reviewing the most efficient delivery model for this type of service, with consideration of other public and third sector organisations.	Sustainability	Medium-Term
15.	Headlease Scheme	Scoping potential for a national 'headleasing' scheme to incentive landlords to provide accommodation thereby reducing barriers for those seeking to access privately rented accommodation.	Sustainability	Longer-Term
16.	Research and International Best Practice	Working with universities, academics and policy-makers both at home and abroad to ensure Scotland continues to provide the best possible welcome for people displaced by the war in Ukraine	Continuous Improvement	On-Going

## **Annex B**

### Criteria for Reopening

As part of the review, a set of criteria was also developed with support of key stakeholders against which plans for reopening could be objectively considered. The proposed criteria is as follows:

- Displaced people already in Scotland are in safe and suitable accommodation;
- Welcome accommodation is available for people who are yet to travel, with a pipeline of longer-term properties available;
- Displaced people can access information and advice about relevant services and support;
- Measures are in place to mitigate pressures on local councils and services;
- Clear understanding of the costs related to re-opening the scheme and confirmation funding is place to cover these;
- Clear understanding of the challenges of re-opening the scheme, and how these will be managed;
- Assessment of the current situation in Ukraine, including unexpected or unforeseen developments in the war leading to mass migration events.



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

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