

Warm Scots Welcome Research

Summary of key themes from **in-depth**
interviews with Guests



Warm Scots Welcome Research: Summary of key themes from [in-depth interviews with Guests](#)

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Context and aims

- The Scottish Government, in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), is delivering the Warm Scots Welcome (WSW) programme to support people displaced from Ukraine, or 'Guests', arriving in Scotland under the UK 'Homes for Ukraine' sponsorship visa.
- Between August 2022 and February 2023, SG researchers conducted qualitative interviews to explore the experiences of people displaced from Ukraine and people hosting them in Scotland, as part of a wider programme of research to inform the development of the WSW programme.
- This slide pack presents key themes from initial analysis of 17 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with people displaced from Ukraine ('Guests') who had arrived in Scotland since March 2022, either through the Scottish super sponsor scheme or through individual sponsorship. The interviews were conducted between late November 2022 and early February 2023. A similar slide pack presenting key findings from initial analysis of interviews with hosts and sponsors (conducted between 23 August and 8 September 2022) is also available.
- The aim of the interviews was to hear from guests directly about their experiences in Scotland so far, what information and support they've received (and require) to help them with life in Scotland, and their future intentions (and factors influencing these).

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Methodology and Key Limitations

- Interviews lasted 1 hour (90 minutes where an interpreter was required) and were conducted online by pairs of researchers, one primarily taking detailed notes. Interviews were not recorded. The ethics plan was reviewed by senior User Research and Social Research staff. Participants gave informed consent and all interviewers completed the Scottish National Trauma Training Programme to Level 2 (Trauma Skilled). Participants received a £30 thank you payment for participating, in the form of a Love2Shop online voucher.
- The topic guide was informed by findings from earlier focus groups with guests (August 2022), and by questions and findings from earlier waves of the UK-Wide Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys with [Homes for Ukraine Scheme Sponsors](#) and [people displaced from Ukraine](#). Where appropriate, relevant findings reported by ONS are presented [\(in blue\)](#) alongside the thematic findings from the guest interviews.
- The focus of interviews varied and was participant-led. The small-scale and qualitative nature of the research means findings are not intended to be representative or to characterise a typical experience of being a guest in Scotland. Instead they highlight important issues for the participants involved and provide insight into how and why a person might experience a particular phenomenon when arriving and settling into Scotland, furthering our understanding of guests' experiences and highlighting opportunities for service improvement.

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Methodology and key limitations (cont'd)

- **Recruitment:** A convenience sample of ~245 potential participants was recruited via third sector partners and hosts the team were in contact with. Potential participants completed an online screener - collecting information on basic demographics, accommodation type, employment/education status. This was used to achieve a diverse sample in terms of: age; participants travelling alone, as well as those travelling with family, including children under 18 yrs; visa pathways used; participants residing in hosted, Welcome and more settled accommodation; different locations across Scotland. Five samples of 20 people were selected based on screener information and invited to interview, with an average 3-4 participants successfully recruited through each sample.
- **Evidence gap:** Interviews with guests did not ask directly about experiences of trauma – to minimise risk of distress to participants - although a small number of participants volunteered information on this. The interviews therefore offer limited insight into how participant's may be affected by trauma and the impact of this.
- **Potential biases:** There is a risk guests may have downplayed negative experiences out of concern for appearing ungrateful (courtesy bias). Survivorship bias - whereby the less vulnerable/those with a more positive experience have greater capacity to participate in research - may also be present.

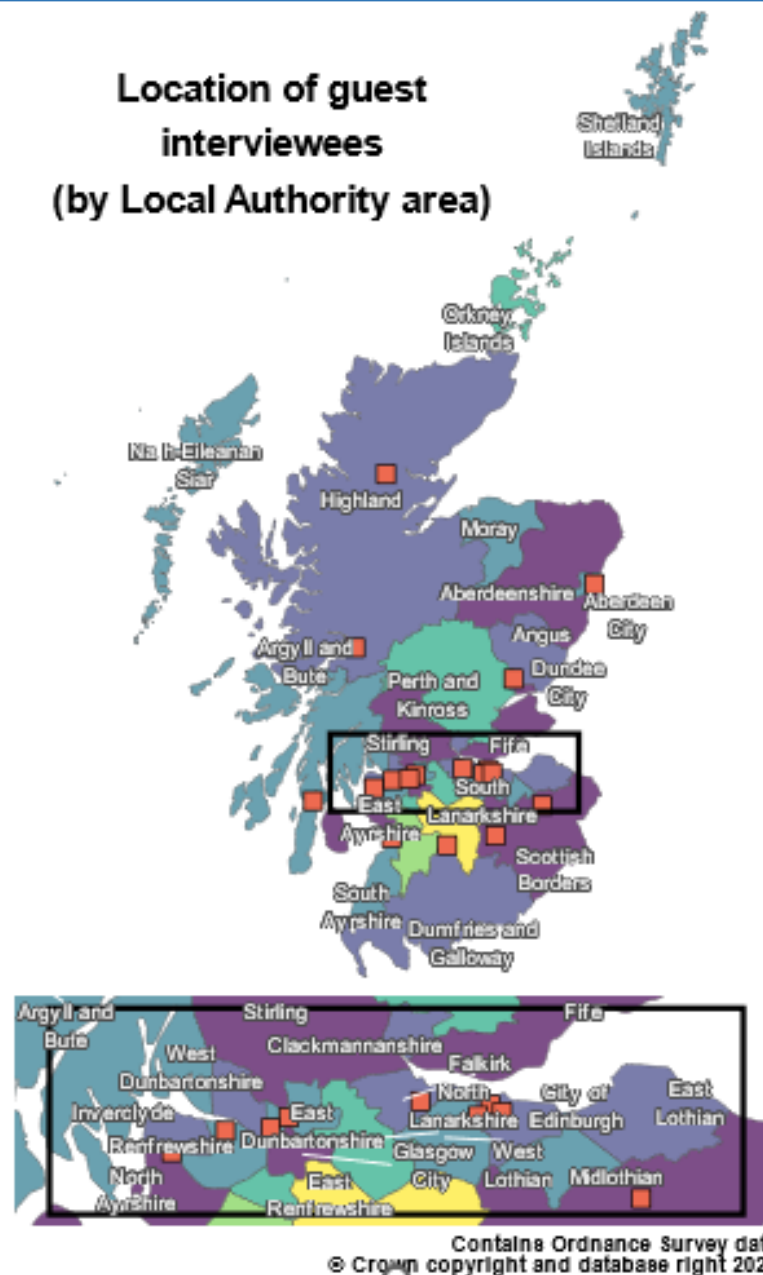
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Characteristics of Research Participants

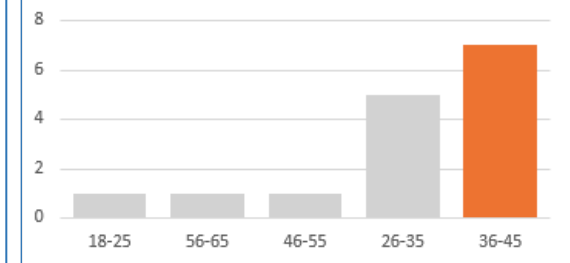
Of the 17 guests participating in this research:

- **The majority were women** (12 women, 1 man, gender not specified for 4)
- **Nine were sponsored via the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme** under the Homes for Ukraine visa; 8 had been sponsored directly by a host. None had used family visa or seasonal worker visa pathways.
- **Most (12) were between the ages of 26 and 45.** Under 18s were not included in this study.
- **Over half (9) were in hosted accommodation** (3 in self-contained accommodation, living separately from their host); **6 were living in Welcome accommodation** (5 in hotels, 1 on a ship), 1 of whom had moved from host to hotel since arriving in Scotland; 2 lived in Social Housing.
- **Most were in Scotland's central belt.** 6 described themselves as living rurally or in a small town.
- **Almost half (8) had travelled to Scotland with children aged under 18; the same number had travelled alone.**

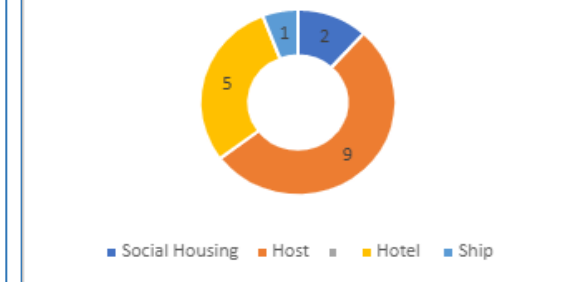
Location of guest interviewees
(by Local Authority area)



Participant Age



Participant Accommodation type



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Findings: introduction - Overview of key themes

The following slides present a summary of findings on guest experiences, organised into the high level themes listed below.

Section 1 - Coming to Scotland:

- [Choosing Scotland](#)
- [Visa pathways and pre-arrival support](#)

Section 2 - Settling into life in Scotland:

- [Expectations vs reality](#)
- [Welcome Hubs and Official Support](#)
- [Information and support from hosts and other informal sources](#)
- [Living in Host accommodation](#)
- [Living in Welcome accommodation](#)

- [Comparing Host and Welcome accommodation](#)
- [Living in their local area](#)
- [Accessing health and dental care](#)
- [Employment and job seeking](#)
- [Accessing school provision](#)
- [English language training provision](#)

Section 3- The future:

- [Plans and intentions](#)
- [Key factors influencing future plans](#)

Quotes from participants are presented to illustrate a range of experiences shared; they are not intended to be representative.

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Findings: Coming to Scotland – Choosing Scotland

Why did guests choose Scotland when escaping the war against Ukraine?

"I was invited to another European country by a friend, but I realised I could not adapt. That is why I am in Scotland. Learned English all my life, so decided to move to an English-speaking country"

"I didn't consider the US & Canada because I didn't want to go so far"

"Some people told me Scotland would be better in some social terms, like access to healthcare, free prescriptions."

For some, coming to Scotland was more a matter of chance while fleeing the conflict (e.g., hearing about sponsor schemes through word of mouth, connecting with a potential host at the border). Where participants had been able to give more consideration to their options, **existing English language skills were a key reason participants gave for choosing Scotland**. Participants expected that speaking English already would ease settlement for themselves, and, where applicable, their children. **Opportunities for and the needs of children were a key driver behind choosing Scotland for participants who were parents**. For these participants their perception of Scotland as a **'safe place'** - both immediately and in the longer term - that could provide quality education had informed their choice. The proximity of Scotland as an English speaking country in relation to Ukraine; positive perceptions of public services; perceptions of a more inclusive society in Scotland; and previous positive experiences in Scotland were also mentioned as benefits, if not drivers behind participants' choice.

"When they opened the scheme (HfU) I thought I should apply because I know the language, I know the country. 'It will be easier for me to live here, and I'll be able to find employment without extra effort... I will be more self-sufficient, independent'"

"Scotland and English language seemed like a good start and opportunity [for children]"

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Findings: Coming to Scotland – visa pathways and pre-arrival support

How was the experience of navigating visa pathways and what support was received?

"I didn't feel any discomfort in relation to visa application process"

Of the guests that mentioned the visa process, **some reported experiencing no difficulties with the application process, while others reported relying on support to complete their application.** [ONS](#) reported that around half of current and previous (50% and 47%) sponsors experienced difficulties with the visa application. Reported difficulties included language barriers and issues with (or knowledge of) required documents. The majority of guest interviewees reported receiving their visa between a few days and few weeks after applying. Some reported frustrations with communication about the progress of their application. For one guest, visa issues resulted in family separation, another reported finding the guidance confusing with regards to the requirement for separate applications for each family member.

The pre-arrival support guests received with visa applications included informal help from sponsors, friends, online support groups and help from volunteer organisations. Levels/types of support that guests relied on varied but included: understanding the process; identifying and submitting required documents; English language difficulties when completing visa forms.

"Most of the documents, my friend – she filled them out. I just sent them all the documents like passports or whatever"

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland – overall expectations vs reality

How does life in Scotland meet with initial expectations?

“System of education is very good here, it’s very different compared to Ukraine, it’s more interesting here”

“It’s a different pace of life, everything is faster in Ukraine. For example, it takes 2 hours to set up wifi at home, or 15 min to open a bank account. We just have to get used to this new pace of life, so it’s the same with the medical system”

Participants reflected on the warm welcome they had received in Scotland and expressed gratitude for this. A number noted they had encountered “a lot of kind people” including but not limited to hosts, and some observed Scotland’s inclusivity of those with additional support needs. Scotland’s scenery and wildlife received some positive mentions.

Participants observed a number of differences between life in Scotland and life in Ukraine. Scotland was compared favourably in terms of transport links and education, but less favourably in terms of the speed of access to public services (health and dental care in particular), opening bank accounts and internet speed. Some expectations around the ease of finding desired employment had not been fully met for some participants (see slide 18).

“First of all I want to say thank you to Scotland and the Scottish people for the warm welcome. People are really sincere and polite and good people.”

“They [people of Scotland] are very humble and cultured, I was amazed by that [...] I wanted to choose a country that would be best for my child...I was amazed that [in Scotland] there was no division [of kids] to 'normal' or 'not normal'”

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland – Support from Welcome Hubs and official sources

Experiences of Welcome Hubs and other official sources of support

A majority of participants interacted with Welcome Hubs, and those that did visited a Hub either immediately or within the first few days of arrival.

While many had positive experiences, long waits and limitations in support provision due to restricted working hours and staffing were also reported. Participants also received information and support from the local Council (e.g., resettlement and social work teams), schools, job centres, and Third Sector organisations to help them navigate life in Scotland. This included help to access English language courses. The quality of support and information guests received from official sources varied, with some reporting receiving confusing or inconsistent information on healthcare and social housing access – which had delayed access to healthcare and social housing in some instances. Some reported finding informal channels more informative on these issues. Some had found the timing of information/support sessions a barrier to access - those living in dispersed guest accommodation, in employment and/or unable to find childcare were most negatively affected.

“the council didn’t tell us we could apply to the housing association ourselves, so we lost a lot of time [...] if we knew we could apply we probably could receive council flat and would be on our own.”

“told everyone to look for accommodation themselves, and have not helped with this.”

“My hotel is like a centre or hub for information. Social workers are there and can help with information about job centre, benefits etc.”

“Sometimes I feel envious to Ukrainians who are not employed who can attend these things and socialise “

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland – information and support from hosts and other informal sources

“My host helped me with every question I had. About the GP, bank account, universal credit and so on.”

“They [hosts] take me on trips and excursions and are always one call away and help however they can

“I don’t know how all the bills work, whether it’s a meter or a set amount... I don’t know this information at all”

What support had participants received from Hosts and other informal sources?

Participants in host accommodation received a wide variety of support from hosts, including administrative, practical, financial, emotional and social support, including support to make social and professional connections. **The diversity of support received reflects findings from host interviews and the ONS sponsor survey, where hosts report providing support to access services such as health and education (91%), help settling into the community (78%), and assistance with transport (73%).** Overall, hosted guests greatly valued the support from and relationship with their hosts. Some interviews indicated potential overreliance on host support which may have implications for moving on to independent accommodation. A few participants reported using other informal sources of support - this was largely limited to peer support e.g., receiving information on social housing and NHS services from other guests, and sharing school run responsibilities.

“I didn’t ask the council about healthcare because my host family got me registered really quickly and they got me a bank account with Bank of Scotland”

“I’m afraid to get away from our host because he’s been handling everything since the beginning. We are like ‘greenhouse plants’, if we are taken out on our own we will perish”.

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland – how well does hosted accommodation meet guest needs?

“own bathroom and own room with full access to all parts of the house and free to use anything, pretty free”

“I was provided with all the things I needed”

“I live in a cosy nice place, a warm place, with nice people, friendly people...it kind of feels so strange to live in the house with people who I never supposed to me[e]t and I try not to think about that because it's just crazy how it is”.

How well does Host accommodation meet guest needs?

Host accommodation was meeting the current needs of some, but not all, participants in terms of space, privacy, freedom and provisions. Those reporting insufficient space/privacy had travelled with their children or pets. The relationship with and (sometimes significant) support received from hosts [see slide [12](#)] was highlighted by some as a benefit of hosted accommodation – overall, hosted participants described positive relationships with their hosts. Some, while also describing positives, reflected on how living in hosted accommodation could be an isolating experience.

“We don't have enough space since we have 3 children and different genders. I sleep in the living room, kids live in [the two] bedrooms”

“We have a lot of privacy... Even too much. It's very quiet here, sometimes I want to take kids out to interesting events”

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland – how well does Welcome Accommodation meet guest needs?

We don't have facilities to make or prepare our own food. In the first hotel, we didn't have even a fridge in the room and it was summer, so it was hot, so we couldn't buy anything or store anything.

"We were placed in the hotel and we were waiting - and a lot of people are still waiting - for resettlement for a long time. We had an impression and an expectation that this would happen very soon".

How well does Welcome accommodation meet guest needs?

Many expressed gratitude and some commented positively on the environment and staff, however **participants in Welcome accommodation listed a variety of challenges**, including: inadequate space to accommodate family unit; lack of amenities for storing, preparing, or heating up food, and/or for washing clothes; limitations in terms of the quality and variety of food available; restrictions of meal times; and difficulties securing a job while in temporary welcome accommodation. **The challenges and limitations of life in a hotel became more significant for participants the longer they stayed.** Some interviewees had been living in hotels many months, which was very different to their initial expectation. Some had been promised a short stay – one participant was promised 10 days by a council worker, but spent almost 7 months - others had assumed their stay would be shorter. Some reported this uncertainty had a negative effect on wellbeing. One interview highlighted that their long stay in temporary welcome accommodation had made transition to longer term accommodation in a different area harder as they had had to leave behind established friends and network.

"It is very difficult for three of us staying in one room. It's hard for my older [child] because [they are] studying [...] For my younger one, the food is hard [...] it's also difficult do not run, scream like kids, make fun. It's very difficult."

"That [uncertainty around being matched] added to our nervousness, but the hotel itself was a great place".

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland – comparing host and welcome accommodation

"It is better than the hotel [was] because there is a washing machine, you can cook for yourself, healthy options compared to just eating chips in a hotel – sometimes you just want access to the kitchen"

Participant reflections on differences between, and preferences for, Host and Welcome accommodation:

Few direct comparisons were reported. Most participants had only experienced one accommodation type. In terms of freedom, privacy and access to facilities, for two participants who had experienced both, host accommodation was preferable to Welcome accommodation. By contrast – exemplifying how priorities and experiences differed depending on individual needs and contexts - one participant had successfully advocated to move from a host to a hotel anticipating (and once there, experiencing) greater privacy. One hosted guest perceived Ukrainians in temporary welcome accommodation might have better access to support and services and might feel under less pressure to work, allowing more space to recover from trauma.

Overall, the importance of individual choice and control over their living arrangements and accommodation options emerged as a key theme for most participants.

"it's very easy to contact people on the ship, they can be offered lots of help, but when it comes to us, people who live with host families, we [in hosted accommodation] don't have access to this."

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland – views on their local area

Views on their local area

Regardless of the type of accommodation they were living in, there were a number of features that guests generally considered desirable from their local area. **Access to good public transport links - to assist with access to work/study/ schooling for their children – was most commonly mentioned and was a key factor influencing decisions about where to seek more settled accommodation.** Access to affordable grocery shopping was highlighted as beneficial, as well as access to a pharmacy and also shops selling Ukrainian food. Those accommodated more rurally or further away from main cities considered the beauty of their local areas a positive, but found the distance from travel links and various amenities to be challenging. Some living rurally were very content with their location.

It's [local area] beautiful, it's nice".
"The bus stops are not so close." "there's not so many cheaper supermarkets nearby"

"It's very beautiful area... really love it, everyone is wonderful and really cheerful here. The difficult thing its very far away from the city and its difficult to find a job there and it always takes a lot of time to get to the city.

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland - Experiences of Health and Dental Care

Experiences of accessing health and dental care provision in Scotland:

Participants' experience of and access to health and dental care in Scotland did not always align with their expectations. Some had chosen to travel abroad – one back to Ukraine – for health or dental care. For some, frustrations around challenges accessing healthcare were a significant issue, with one participant saying it would influence their decision to stay in Scotland. For others, they observed their experience of healthcare in Scotland to be different to, rather than worse than, their experience in Ukraine. Several recurring issues were mentioned: long waiting times to get an appointment and prescription; treatment/procedures that were sought not being available; different expectations – for example, a number mentioned that the NHS approaches diagnosing and treatment differently (from Ukraine). Some had received confusing or conflicting information about what health services they could access and how.

"I need really urgent response, really fast examination but I may not get it. This would be a block for me staying in Scotland... If it happens again I don't know"

Medical system is confusing, Ukrainian healthcare system is more preventative, but the UK system is reactive.

"I went to the GP, but I didn't receive what I expected and it took a very long time. It was something I'd had years ago and had again. I needed treatment ASAP but I ended up having to go abroad for treatment"

"You cannot just pay money and get the service immediately like in Ukraine. I chose to go to Ukraine and remove braces...In four months I couldn't get an appointment.. at first it was very surprising and somewhat annoying, but then I understood that its just a system like that"

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland - Employment and Job Seeking

Experience of employment and job seeking:

Many participants were in some form of employment at the time of their interview.

Between October to November 2022, [ONS](#) found 52% of people displaced from Ukraine in Scotland to be in employment. Some mentioned receiving advice and support from the Job centre with job seeking, including with access to English language classes, while others had independently identified and applied for jobs. [ONS](#) found 87% of people displaced from Ukraine (or their family members) had used employment services at least once. Hosts had been instrumental in helping some participants find work; in one instance, the guest felt pressured into working by their host. **Finding employment was commonly highlighted by guests as important to securing a financially stable life in Scotland.** Some guests reported that they were looking for/would consider, any form of employment, although, finding a job that drew on their qualifications was preferable for many. Those in employment tended to be working in roles that were different to those they'd held in Ukraine. Some were not optimistic about finding their preferred work in Scotland. **Commonly reported barriers to employment included English language skills, lack of childcare (also highlighted as a barrier to accessing English classes), and location.** Some had experienced difficulties getting their qualifications recognised. One participant reported being told by their manager they'd lose their job if they were to stay in a hotel.

"I'm quite happy with my job, it's a good job in terms of my skills... "I don't feel any difficulty qualification wise to do the work I do"

"The jobs we are given here are really simple [in comparison to our previous professions]"

"Scotland is that country which is not wanting to use our skills that would be useful for it so we are given simple and so-called dirty jobs and our skills are not used here"

I am quite happy with my host family ... [but] the pressure (to get a job) came from my host family

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland - Experience of School Provision for dependent children

Experience of school provision for dependent children:

School was very welcoming and accepting, "they gave us all the necessary information and uniforms"

"I will cry again because I'm so grateful for everyone, for all the teachers and assistants"

All participants who mentioned experiences of engaging with schools on account of having school-aged children had had **positive experiences with local schools**. Many of them mentioned they found the registration process straightforward, there was one case when a child was enrolled with ease into school mid-year. [ONS](#) found 20% of people displaced from Ukraine with dependent children who responded to their survey had experienced difficulties registering their children for school. **A recurring theme across these interviews was how accessible the education system in Scotland was, and how welcoming and accepting teachers had been.** Inclusivity of education was a particularly important quality for guests who's school-age child had additional support needs.

"My younger child has difficulties with socialisation, but the school has all necessary specialists, such as psychologists, to help them. I am amazed by this"

"They [teachers] created a trusting environment, they are amazing people. My son is way more calm now and shows progress. Nobody around has this attitude that my son is somehow not normal or doing something wrong"

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Findings: Settling into life in Scotland - Experience of English Language Training Provision

“I am very happy, after six months, my language level improved.”

English language training provision: Most participants had undertaken some form of English language classes; similarly [ONS found that 64% of respondents in Scotland \(as of Oct/Nov 2022\) attended courses \(95% of which were provided for free\)](#). **Some reported being unable to access intensive English classes due to high demand**, an issue also raised in interviews with hosts, some of whom reported challenges finding quality English classes for their guests. Online classes had helped to bridge the gap for some who reported being unable to access (sufficient) provision. Volunteer organisations filled a gap for some, but were reported to lack official certification. Some guests expressed a desire for more frequent and more immersive classes. Some were unable to access English classes because of lack of access to childcare.

“I attend [English classes] once a week, but recently I also started an intensive course with the job centre – 3 hours a day online on Zoom”

“We end up speaking our own language [during classes]... [Current] English course is not enough... I’m studying at home by myself as well”

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Findings: The future – plans and intentions

“I might [consider moving in with a host] I mean, it’s not entirely my choice. I don’t know if it’s my choice or I even have a choice I’m not sure”

“Emotional part of this was the most difficult, too much moving around”

“I don’t know how easy it is to get private accommodation”

Plans for the future: Most participants who were currently living in either host or Welcome Accommodation were **considering or actively planning to move out to independent accommodation, mostly to social housing. Being able to live independently and have their own space and greater control over their environment was key.** [ONS](#) found that of UK hosts whose guests are planning to move out, 69% are planning to move into independent accommodation, while 11% are planning to return to Ukraine. Not all participants had firm intentions with regards to the future given the war is ongoing. Most were planning on staying in Scotland for the meantime, with some planning to stay at least a few years. Of these, most did not feel attached to any particular place in Scotland and were willing to relocate; areas perceived to have better employment opportunities were preferred. Those enrolling in further education courses expressed firmer plans. Reasons participants mentioned for seeking social housing rather than private rental included: difficulty finding private rental properties, meeting requirements for renting (such as finding guarantors) and the high cost of renting.

Scotland a "temporary safe place"

"When the program [hosting arrangement] is over I will be able to find an accommodation for the long term like a rented apartment. Depends on how the things are going, I think I may be able to do that. I'll need to have something for work."

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Findings: The future - factors influencing plans

"I'm sure if my husband finds a job we'll be able to afford accommodation"

"Being with a family member is more important than being in a good place...If my mother isn't here I'm not sure I'll stay [in Scotland] because I'll have little motivation". [...] "I want to go back to Ukraine, and my longer term plan is to go back to Ukraine".

Key factors influencing future plans:

A common factor was availability and affordability of housing to enable guests to move out of host/welcome accommodation. [ONS](#) found that most (81%) sponsors experienced barriers when helping guests to look for private accommodation. Affordability (64%) was reported as a major barrier to securing housing, and this was a common concern expressed during qualitative interviews. Work and study opportunities were also often discussed. The former was considered important for securing private accommodation, whereas study opportunities were valued by many in terms of children's education and future prospects. Some mentioned having family members able to join them in Scotland, or being able to re-unite with family in Ukraine as the most significant factors that would determine their future plans.

"Life in a hotel is different and not normal"

"Unless it's a hotel, I could work in the same place I live and not have to commute – I don't like commuting"

"Affordable accommodation - that's important"