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Impact of Changes to the Ukraine Visa Schemes on Ukrainians in the UK

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Key Recommendations

1. Grant an **automatic** extension of 18 months to all Ukraine Scheme visas, avoiding the costly application process that is causing significant emotional and material harm.
2. Grant Ukraine Scheme visa holders the right to settlement after 5 years, as for all other humanitarian routes.

Introduction and Background

There are approximately 218,600 Ukraine Scheme visa holders who have travelled to the UK.¹ The Ukraine Schemes granted visa holders the right to live, work and claim benefits in the UK for 3 years. For those who arrived in the first few months of the Russian invasion (the majority), these visas are coming to an end. What started as a temporary escape from war has turned into building a new home for many. Office for National Statistics data shows that 69% are economically active, 78% feel a very or somewhat strong personal connection to the UK, 68% said that they would prefer to remain in the UK, even if it were “safe” to return to Ukraine.²

In February 2025, the UK Government opened the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme (UPE). This allows Ukrainians to apply for an 18-month extension to their visa. The application is complex, requires multiple documents, and has to be completed within a 28-day window before the existing visa expires. Processing time is up to 8 weeks. In November 2024, the Government announced that the 3 years+ Ukrainians have spent in the UK on Ukraine Scheme visas will not count towards the 5- or 10-year routes to residency.

Ukrainians are the only national

group excluded from the 10-year route, and the only humanitarian scheme not to include the right to settle after 5 years.

This briefing reports on the impact of this visa regime on displaced Ukrainians in the UK. It is based a survey completed by 1133 Ukrainians across the UK between 20 February and 7 March 2025.

Numbers Applying to UPE

99% of our respondents hold a Ukraine Scheme Visa and 74% of those visas are set to expire before July 2025. 93% of Ukraine Scheme Visa holders definitely plan to extend their visas. And 93% of those wishing to extend plan to use the UPE route. This indicates that the Home Office can anticipate a very significant number of applications in those first few months.

Material Impact

Difficulty proving the right to live and work in the UK beyond the expiration of the original Ukraine Scheme visa is causing significant hardship. Our survey asked about issues with renting, jobs, loans/mortgages, benefits, and NHS appointments. 39% were affected by at least one issue.

Figure 1 shows the percentage affected in each category. Jobs and renting are significantly impacted:

- 41% state they lost a new job opportunity;
- 22% that a job contract was not renewed;
- 26% that their tenancy was not renewed;
- 24% that they could not sign a new tenancy.

Visa precarity is creating a real risk of homelessness and unemployment.

"The agency used the imminent expiration of the visa, knowing that no one would sign a new lease for me, to raise the payment 3 times more than last year's amount and demanded to pay everything in advance."

25% of those who applied for a student loan state it was refused due to their visa status. Young people are struggling to move forward with their lives and education in this state of uncertainty.³

"It's tough navigating through the job market. I cannot secure a long-term skilled job because they require settled status or a visa that leads to it."

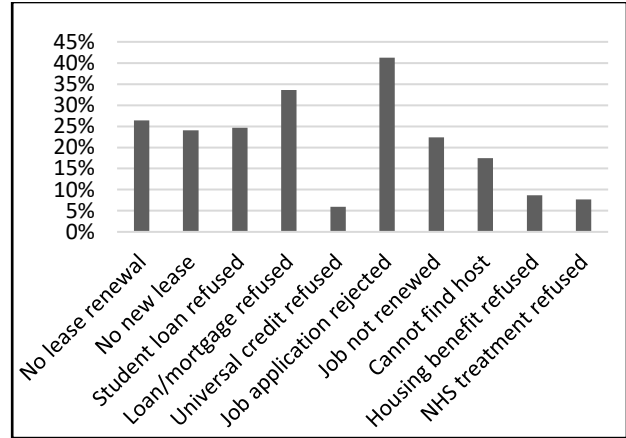


Figure 1: Impact of Visa Status on Displaced Ukrainians.⁴

Mental Health Impact

The uncertainty regarding visa status, together with stress related to barriers in employment, accommodation, previous traumatic events, and worries over the war in Ukraine, contributes to a high level of anxiety among Ukrainians in the UK. Testing via the Generalised Anxiety Disorder assessment (GAD-7)⁵ revealed that Ukrainians in the UK have an average score of 12.74. This indicates a moderate level of anxiety. 43.5 % of Ukrainians have severe anxiety.

"I have stopped sleeping at night since 28th January 2025, I get very depressed and also have panic attacks as soon as I start thinking that I might not be able to extend my stay here for 18 months, just because the migration rules are changing."

Majority Would like to Stay

A significant majority (68%) of Ukrainians would prefer to remain in the UK, even if it were “safe” to return to Ukraine. The ONS data shows that major reasons for wishing to stay include employment opportunities (60%), feelings of having built a life in the UK (59%), access to education (49%), and having family in the UK (44%).

58% of our respondents have school-aged children in the UK – children who have now spent a significant part (in some cases all) of their education in the UK. Forced return would also mean another major disruption to their young lives.

“When talking to my daughter about returning to Ukraine, she starts having a tantrum because she has already lost friends and a stable life in Ukraine, and here she has made new friends and adapted to school. The thought that she has to change everything again causes panic and depressive states.”

There are also major ‘push’ factors influencing the decision to stay. A significant majority (78%) of those who would return to Ukraine have concerns about their safety. Others have nothing to return to.

“My home in my city in Ukraine was destroyed, my close ones and family suffered, and on top of that, I had to face such humiliation here.”

The damage to infrastructure in Ukraine is estimated to be \$176 billion, with housing, transport, energy, commerce and industry, and education as the most affected sectors. Roughly 13% of the total housing stock has been damaged, affecting more than 2.5 million households.⁶ 26% of our survey respondents who own property in Ukraine state that it has been damaged, destroyed or seized.

The terms of any peace deal remain uncertain and large parts of Ukrainian territory remain under Russian occupation or border Russian-occupied territories (see Figure 2).

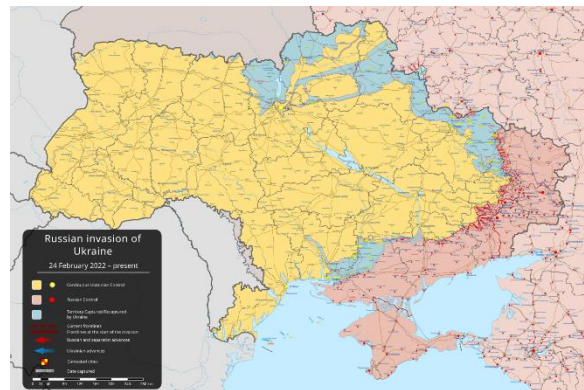


Figure 2: Russian-Occupied Territories of Ukraine (By Viewsridge. CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=115506141>).

27% of our respondents are from the territories occupied by Russia – and 8% had already experienced internal displacement before 2022 due to

Russian aggression started in 2014. For some Ukrainians being forced to leave the UK would mean being displaced three or more times in a decade.

Returnees may face significant problems with economic, social and cultural reintegration. On the other hand, Ukraine has historically had one of the highest levels of remittances – showing how the diaspora can continue to contribute financially to the national recovery whilst in the UK.⁷

"I could work more in the UK, earn a higher salary, and pay more taxes if I left my remote job with a Ukrainian company. But it doesn't make much sense because the visa may soon expire, so I don't want to lose my current job if I have to return."

Notes

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data--2>

²Office for National Statistics, Visa holders living in the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes, follow-up survey: 15 April to 22 April 2024.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/visaholdersenteringtheukundertheukrainehumanitarianschemes/15aprilto22april2024>.

³See I. Kuznetsova, N. Kogut and S. Jones (2024), *Young Ukrainians in the UK: Lives in Limbo*.

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/gees/research/projects/futures-of-ukraine/young->

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⁴This data excludes respondents who responded "not applicable" in each given category.

⁵ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/adults/nhs-talking-therapies/service-standards/>

⁶ United Nations, Updated Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment Released (25 February 2025).

<https://ukraine.un.org/en/289807-updated-ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-assessment-released>.

⁷IOM UN Migration, Remittances in War: How Money from Abroad is Helping Ukraine. <https://ukraine.iom.int/stories/remittances-war-how-money-abroad-helping-ukraine>

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