

Focus: Housing and Relationships with Hosts

Our research shows that a lack of understanding of historical context and stereotyping of “Eastern Europeans” in the UK impacts on the experiences of displaced Ukrainians in multiple ways. This 2-page briefing focuses on housing and relationships with hosts/sponsors. The full report (including method and bibliography) can be downloaded from: <https://postsocialistbritain.bham.ac.uk/>

Recommendations

In the area of housing and relationships with hosts, we recommend that national and local government, service providers, and organisations working with displaced Ukrainians implement the following:

1. Guidance for “Homes for Ukraine” hosts, developed by Ukrainians and experts on Ukraine, that provides more in-depth understanding of Ukrainian identity, culture, and history. This could be in the form of an information booklet, online video and/or a live training session.
2. Training for hosts on recognising and challenging racism, xenophobia and negative stereotypes associated with Central and Eastern Europe, including their role in shaping hosts’ own perceptions of Ukraine and Ukrainians.

Findings

Data on experiences with the “Homes for Ukraine” scheme by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that former sponsors experienced challenges including, amongst other things, friction with guests (40%).¹

Beyond practical issues relating to space in the home and conflicts surrounding bills and length of stay, the main issue that our interviewees raised was encountering negative stereotypes about Ukrainians and a lack of knowledge about Ukraine from hosts. Reflecting stereotypes of CEE countries as an

“in-between space”, participants reported being viewed by hosts as ignorant or uneducated. For example, one participant describes her host explaining that she should not eat fish after the expiry date:

They might have expected that some ignorant poor woman would come who doesn't know anything...I lived in a European country, I'm sorry, we are a developed country and to treat me like a girl who didn't even finish school is very bad.

Participants feel like their hosts, and British people they meet in their day-to-day lives, consider Ukraine to be a country with limited modern conveniences and a poor education system. As one participant described it, British people:

think that Ukraine is a third world country, that is, we don't know what a microwave is, what a refrigerator is, a TV, what medicine is.

These attitudes reflect underlying perceptions of CEE countries as still “catching up” with the West, as a post-communist space “suffering from the ills of underdevelopment with which the West associates the ex-Soviet Union”.²

Participants also reported that hosts were uninterested in learning about Ukraine and that there was a lack of understanding of the difference between Ukraine and Russia. One participant, who had been in the UK for some years, recounted a longstanding conflation of Ukraine with Russia:

We all have our own identification and at that time we had nothing to do with Russia, but I am Ukrainian and I did not want to be called something else.

¹ Office for National Statistics (2022), *Experiences of Homes for Ukraine Scheme Sponsors Follow-up Data, UK: 21 to 28 November 2022 Dataset*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/experiencesofhomesforukrainianschemesponsorsuk>

(accessed 11 March 2023).

² Williams, G., & Piazza, R. (2012), “Nation and Supernation: A Tale of Three Europes”, in P. Bayley & G. Williams (eds.), *European Identity: What the Media Say*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (online edition).

Such findings are reflective of a wider absence of history in representations of migration,³ and demonstrate the impact on interpersonal relations between Ukrainians, their hosts, and British people more widely.

The ONS found that only 4% of former sponsors had received training, with support primarily focused on how to do practical things such as accessing healthcare, financial or visa support, and matching. Former hosts also said they would have found it useful to have more information on Ukraine and Ukrainian culture (42%).⁴

The Government provides links to a range of toolkits for hosts that provide guidance,⁵ however, most of this is focused on helping Ukrainians understand the UK system and adjusting to life in the UK rather than on what hosts need to know about Ukraine and how Brits need to adjust. For example, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' "checklist" of things to consider before becoming a host contains little about culture other than to consider how you feel about living with people with different habits and language.

More detailed resources sometimes even risk reproducing ideas of Eastern European underdevelopment; for example, a government-linked resource on cultural differences states that "life continues to be a struggle for many Ukrainians" with religion a dominant force in society.⁶ More substantive information about Ukrainian history and society for hosts may therefore improve relationships and mutual understanding between hosts and refugees.

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³ Połońska-Kimunguyi, E. (2022), "Echoes of Empire: Racism and Historical Amnesia in the British Media Coverage of Migration", *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1): 3.

⁴ Office for National Statistics (2022), *Experiences of Homes for Ukraine Scheme Sponsors*.

⁵ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023), *Becoming a Sponsor: Homes for Ukraine*. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/becoming-a-sponsor-homes-for-ukraine> (accessed 11 March 2023).

⁶ Country Navigator (2022), *The Ukrainian Mindset Map*.

Available at: https://www.countrynavigator.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/UKRAINE-MINDSET-MAP_2022.pdf (accessed 11 March 2023).