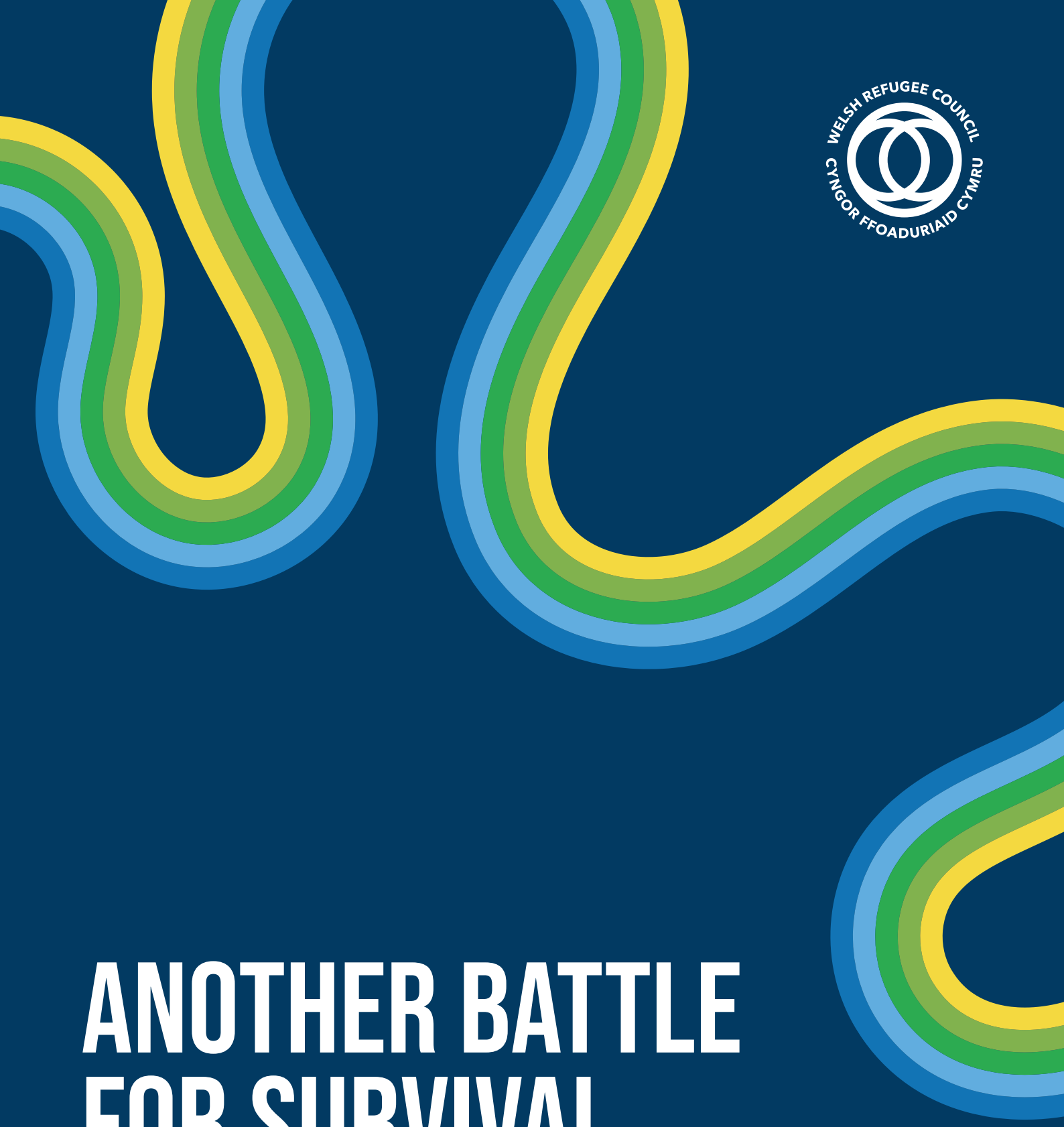

ANOTHER BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

The Housing Experiences of Ukrainian Refugees in Wales

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OAK FOUNDATION

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1. Introduction

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The UNHCR, reports that nearly 6.5 million Ukrainians have become refugees globally (as of February 2024).[1] The United Kingdom was at the forefront in welcoming Ukrainian refugees, creating routes to safety, via three three-year visa schemes:

- Homes for Ukraine – individual UK hosts, including in Wales, could sponsor Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members.
- Ukraine Family Scheme – UK nationals and people settled in the UK could bring Ukrainian family members to the UK.
- Ukraine Extension Scheme – open to Ukrainian nationals who had permission to be in the UK on or between 18 March 2022 and 16 November 2023 or who previously had permission to be in the UK and that permission expired on or after 1 January 2022.

The Scottish and Welsh governments decided to become 'super sponsors' under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Between 6 April 2022 and 3 October 2023, the Welsh Government sponsored 3,232 Ukrainians.[2] With the 3,886 Ukrainians who have been individually sponsored, Wales initially took in 7,118 Ukrainian in the 17-month period.[3] This does not account for those who came through the other two UK Government schemes or those who moved to other parts of the UK first and then to Wales. Ukrainian refugees were dispersed to Welcome Centres and hosting arrangements in all 22 Welsh local authorities. The scale was unprecedented.

Three years on, the initial warm welcome for many Ukrainians has turned colder. Research from Heriot Watt University found that Ukrainian refugees were four times more likely to become homeless than the general UK population in 2023.[4] Several factors that put Ukrainians at higher risk of homelessness, include the breakdown of relationships with host families, language barriers, and difficulty navigating the UK and Welsh labour and housing markets.

Several upcoming pressure points make this a priority area for research:

- the end of hosting arrangements
- uncertainty over continued funding of host welcome payments by the UK Government
- uncertainty over UK Government visa extensions
- first-year rents coming to an end after financial support and subsidies

From the start, Ukrainians had a unique set of rules and rights bestowed to them by the UK Government, making their experience significantly different to other migrant or sanctuary-seeking groups in the UK.

Firstly, there is their legal status. On arrival to the UK, Ukrainians were granted 3-years visas which were then extended by a further 18 months. There was no requirement for Ukrainians to go through the UK's asylum system, and to prove 'refugee status.' Secondly, Ukrainians were given permission to work from day one of arrival, and there was no requirement for work sponsor to support a visa application. Thirdly, there was an expectation, initially at least, that at the end of the three-year visa, Ukrainian would return to Ukraine. The reality seems more complicated.

In terms of practical aspects, there are differences as well. Ukrainians have been allowed to work in the UK from the moment they arrived. Many have found jobs in Wales or have been able to work remotely, holding down jobs in Ukraine. They also have relatively more savings than other refugee groups. Still, they face similar barriers in accessing housing as other refugees or minoritised groups, or indeed people in receipt of benefits. Local authorities do not deem Ukrainians as a priority for social housing and private landlords often demand UK-based guarantors and several months' rent in advance, which poses a significant barrier. In order to secure a property, Ukrainians have been asked to pay the entire contract up front.

Ukrainians are sometimes hesitant to leave urban centres, most notably Cardiff. Because of this, they have refused reasonable offers from Welsh Government and local authorities to move to other locations or have signed contracts for rents that do not meet their affordability tests, against advice. As a result of these factors, Ukrainian refugees are being pushed into Wales' overburdened mainstream homelessness services.

This report has collected the housing experiences of Ukrainians in Wales to identify the problems faced, the uncertainties and fears for the future, but also examples of good practice. As put by one of our survey responses *"getting into a new property in Wales, it is another battle for survival"*.

The need for this research is apparent. There is no body of literature that includes the voices of Ukrainian in Wales. Ukrainians are distinct from other migrant and sanctuary-seeking groups, and Wales has unique structures compared to the other three UK nations. This report also includes the voices of decision-makers and local authorities, who have played a key role in the Welsh response to the war.

The next section of this report will explain the methodology used throughout the research process. Subsequently, this report will thematically analyse the housing barriers, issues, and problems faced by Ukrainians in Wales, using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data gathered during the research supported by external data. Finally, the report will outline a series of recommendations and lessons to stakeholders at different government levels.

"I would like to thank the people of Wales for all the support provided during this hard time for us. Sponsor families for hosting and a friendship, well-being [social] workers for helping out, mindful advice and a good word, local councils for social housing for refugees who don't have any other option. Thank you!"
Survey response

"It is so hard to start a new life in a foreign country. Although we feel grateful to the Welsh Government for giving us shelter in Wales, I truly believe that Ukrainian refugees need a bit more time and resources to settle in and integrate successfully, and for sure, Ukrainian people still need support with their visas, accommodation, public transport, education, health and employment in Wales."
Survey response

The photographs throughout this report were taken during a Motanka-making worshop in Caerphilly. Motankas (Мотанка) are ancient Ukrainian family talismans. They are the symbol of prosperity, goodness, and hope. The first knotted dolls appeared about 5,000 years ago, and represented the unity of the family and deep connection between multiple generations. Photos courtesy of Dariia Zhdanova.

Design by Tom Findlay.


STAFF

2. Executive Summary

- Since February 2022, Wales has welcomed over 7,000 Ukrainians fleeing the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine via individual hosting schemes and the Welsh Government's super sponsor scheme.
- This research into the housing experiences of Ukrainians in Wales commenced in February 2024. In total, the research has included 4 one-to-one interviews, 196 surveys responses from Ukrainians, 27 participants in focus groups, and 10 survey responses from local authorities.
- The demographics of the responses was varied, but woman dominated.
- The experiences of hosting have largely been positive and have played a key role in the Welsh response.
- The scale of arrivals was higher than anticipated, created problems for local authorities, the Welcome Centres, and the move on process.
- Move on from the Welcome Centres has been incredibly hard due to a combination of factors. On the one hand, affordability and other barriers to access housing have limited options. On the other, Ukrainians' hesitance, mistrust of authorities, cultural factors, and issues around location have been issues local authorities have had to navigate.
- The private rented sector has been hard to access for Ukrainians because of its cost, other barriers (guarantors, rent in advance, etc.), and discrimination.
- There are concerns over the long-term sustainability of housing in the private rented sector without the financial support from local authorities.
- The experiences of street homelessness among Ukrainian are broadly rare. There was a mixed experience in terms of the support they felt they received from local authorities.
- Most Ukrainian were happy with the quality of the accommodation, but mould was seen as the biggest problem.
- Ukrainians were unaware about restrictions around the amount of people per room as set by Welsh housing guidance. This has resulted in Ukrainians trying to access accommodation which is unsuitable and local authorities having to do work to manage expectations.
- Ukrainians with pets have struggled to find housing at every stage of the process.
- Uncertainty over visas and the length of stay permitted has prevented Ukrainians to plan for their future, which has impacted their housing situation.
- Underemployment has had a negative effect on the housing options for Ukrainians in Wales.

3. Methodology

This research has used a mixed-methods approach, including interviews, surveys, and focus groups. The research and data-gathering process can be divided into five distinct phases:

- **Phase 1** – Desk-based research
- **Phase 2** – Scoping interviews
- **Phase 3** – Lived-experience participant survey
- **Phase 4** – Lived experience focus groups
- **Phase 5** – Local authorities survey

Phase 1
Desk-Based Research

The initial stage (February 2024) was used to explore and analyse the existing literature and research. Given the recency of the topic, there is no substantive body of literature to work on. Two important publications were released during the completion of the research:
Audit Wales, Supporting Ukrainians in Wales (March 2024)

British Red Cross, Finding a Safe Home: What can we learn about solutions to refugee accommodation from the Ukraine response? (July 2024)

Whilst these publications did not mould or influence the early research phases, they have been used to compare and contrast research methods and results since.

Phase 2
Interviews

Phase 1 was also used to identify Wales-based leading stakeholders and decision-makers. For Phase 2, we invited those identified for interviews. In total, we carried out four semi-structured interviews over Teams between March and April 2024. The purpose of these interviews was twofold: to broaden the understanding and context on the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Wales and their accommodation history; and to help develop questions for the survey and focus groups. The significance of these interviews and the value they bring to the broader understanding of the housing situation of Ukrainian refugees in Wales make them a key resource. So, the content will also be used in the report, with this eventuality covered in the consent forms shared with participants. To protect the anonymity of those involved in the research, their names, organisations, and roles will not be disclosed. Instead, quotes or mentions will be attributed to "Interview Participant".

Phase 3
Lived Experience Participant Survey

Phase 2 helped inform phases 3 and 4. To this end, we designed a 19-question survey in English and Ukrainian. Questions 2 to 7 were demographic, whilst questions 8 to 19 were specific to the individual's housing experiences. The majority of questions had choice answers, with 5 others allowing the responder to optionally expand on their choice answers. The full question list can be found in Annex 1.

The survey was advertised on the Welsh Refugee Council's social media channels and was shared in existing Ukrainian refugees in Wales forums on different social media platforms. Additionally, the scoping interview participants were asked to share the survey with their networks. The survey was open from 1 May 2024 to 30 June 2024.

In total, there were 200 responses to the survey. Four responses were excluded from the research as they were filled in by non-Ukrainian refugees. The responses will be analysed and expanded upon in the 'Findings' section of this report. The survey was completely anonymous, with any quotes attributed to "Survey Respondent".

Phase 4
Lived Experience Focus Groups

Phase 3 allowed us to collect quantitative data on people's broader housing experiences, but lacked detailed insights. To address this, we supplemented the quantitative data with a qualitative information-gathering exercise. For this, we conducted three focus groups with a total of 27 participants.

- **Focus group 1** – Swansea
- **Focus group 2** – Caerphilly
- **Focus group 3** – Cardiff

Participants were recruited from existing Ukrainian networks, namely Sunflowers Wales, Ukrainians in Caerphilly, and Cardiff for Ukraine. Putting participants at ease was prioritised by going into already existing structures in a regular environment where they felt comfortable. A £15 shopping voucher was offered as an incentive to encourage participation.

Ukrainian translation and interpretation were provided in-house so participants could express themselves in their native Ukrainian. The focus groups were unstructured; individuals told their own stories on their own terms. As facilitator, the lead researcher then asked open-ended questions to encourage participants to expand on certain points or to try to explain how certain decisions had made them feel. Quotes have been anonymised and attributed to the focus group when relevant (e.g. "Swansea Focus Group Participant").

The focus groups provided insights, thoughts and opinions which are expanded upon in the 'Findings' section.

Phase 5
Local Authorities Survey

The earlier phases of the research highlighted the importance of involving Welsh local authorities. Since the arrival of the first Ukrainian refugees in spring 2022, all 22 Welsh local authorities have created housing provision for them and supported the hosting relationship.

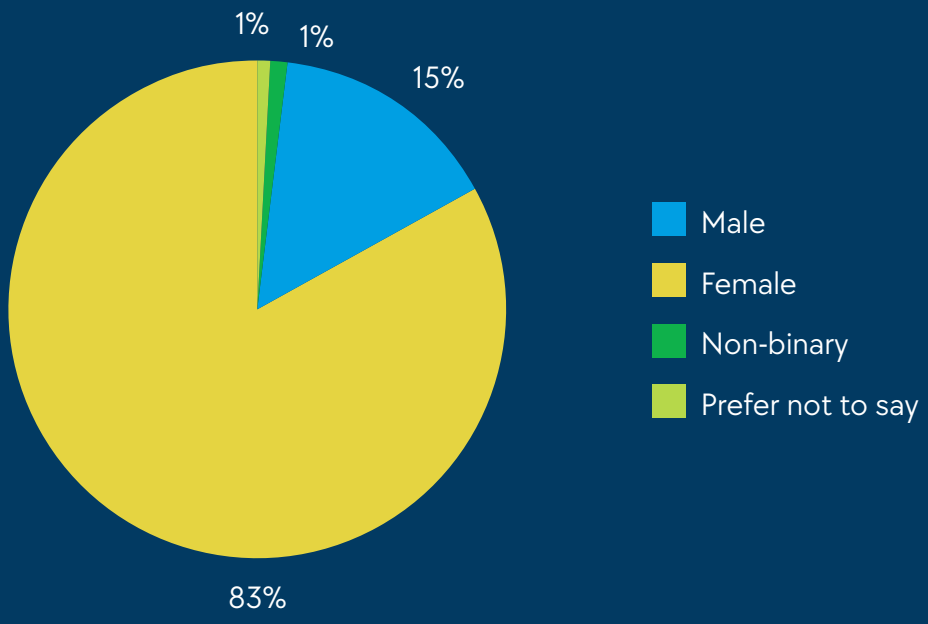
To this end, we created a 16-question survey to gather the views of local authorities. The complete question list can be found in Annex 2. The survey was distributed via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to Ukraine project leads in all 22 local authorities. In total, there were 10 responses. Quotes will be attributed as "Local Authority Survey Response", with an indication of locality only if relevant.

4. Demographics

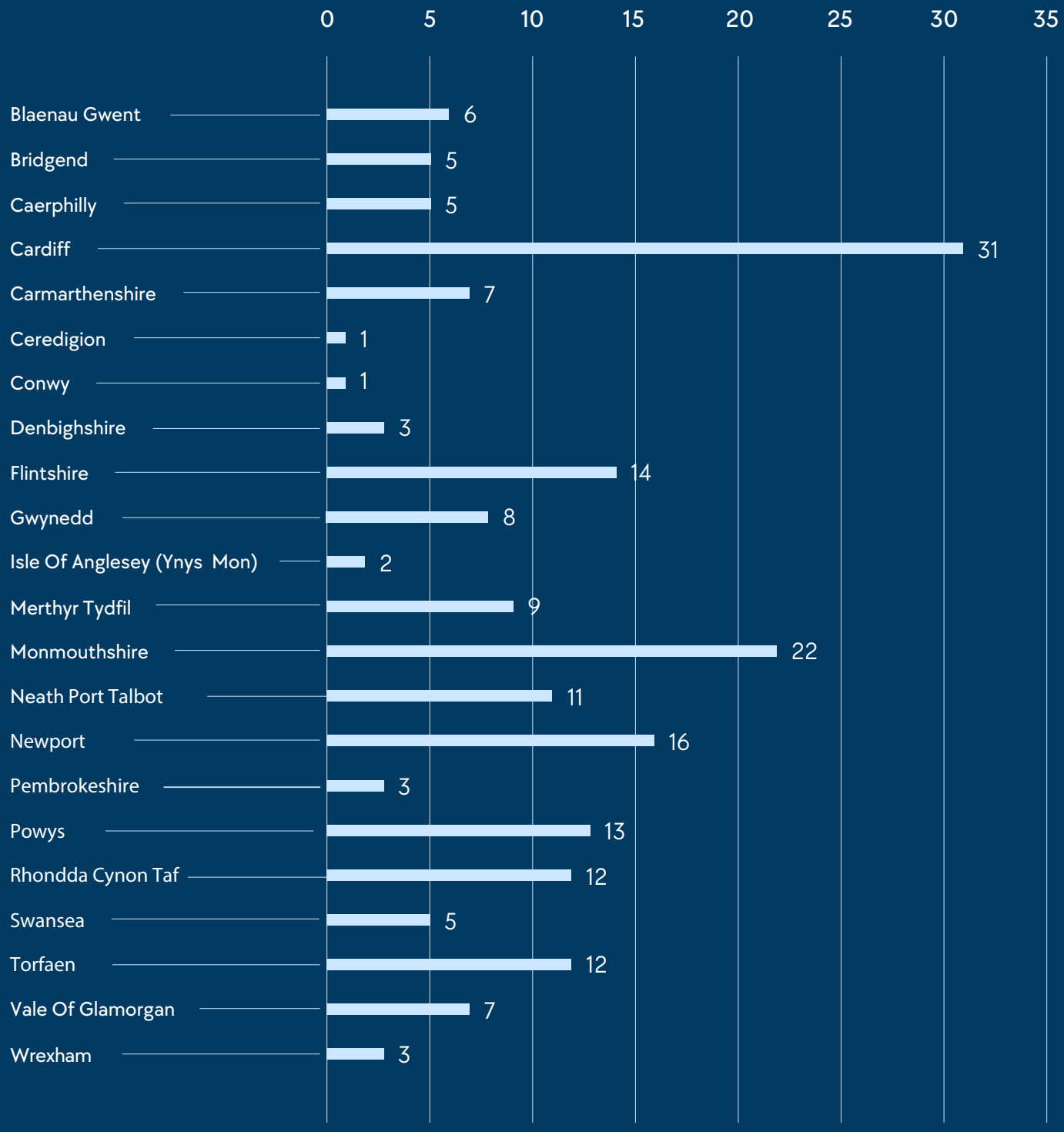
As part of the survey side of the data collection, we gathered demographic data from our Ukrainian respondents. The research was never set up to be fully representative. It relied on natural participant uptake rather than targeted sampling. Nevertheless, when comparing the research data to available official figures, the demographic breakdown is not that distinct.

One particularly interesting distinguishing feature of the Ukrainian cohort is the gender breakdown demographic. According to Audit Wales, 56% of Ukrainian arrivals via the Welsh Government super sponsor scheme were female.[5] In our survey, the percentage was higher (83%) (Graph #1), but still consistent with this trend. This disparity can be partially explained by other demographic data. Data gathered by the Home Office suggests that there were more male arrivals in the "Under 18" group in both the visas sponsored by individuals (660 males 630 female) and those sponsored by the Welsh Government (455 males 395 female). [6] In our survey, only one respondent fell into the "Under 18" group. Although we did not ask for demographic data in the focus groups, the majority of participants were female-presenting.

Gender of Participants (Graph #1)



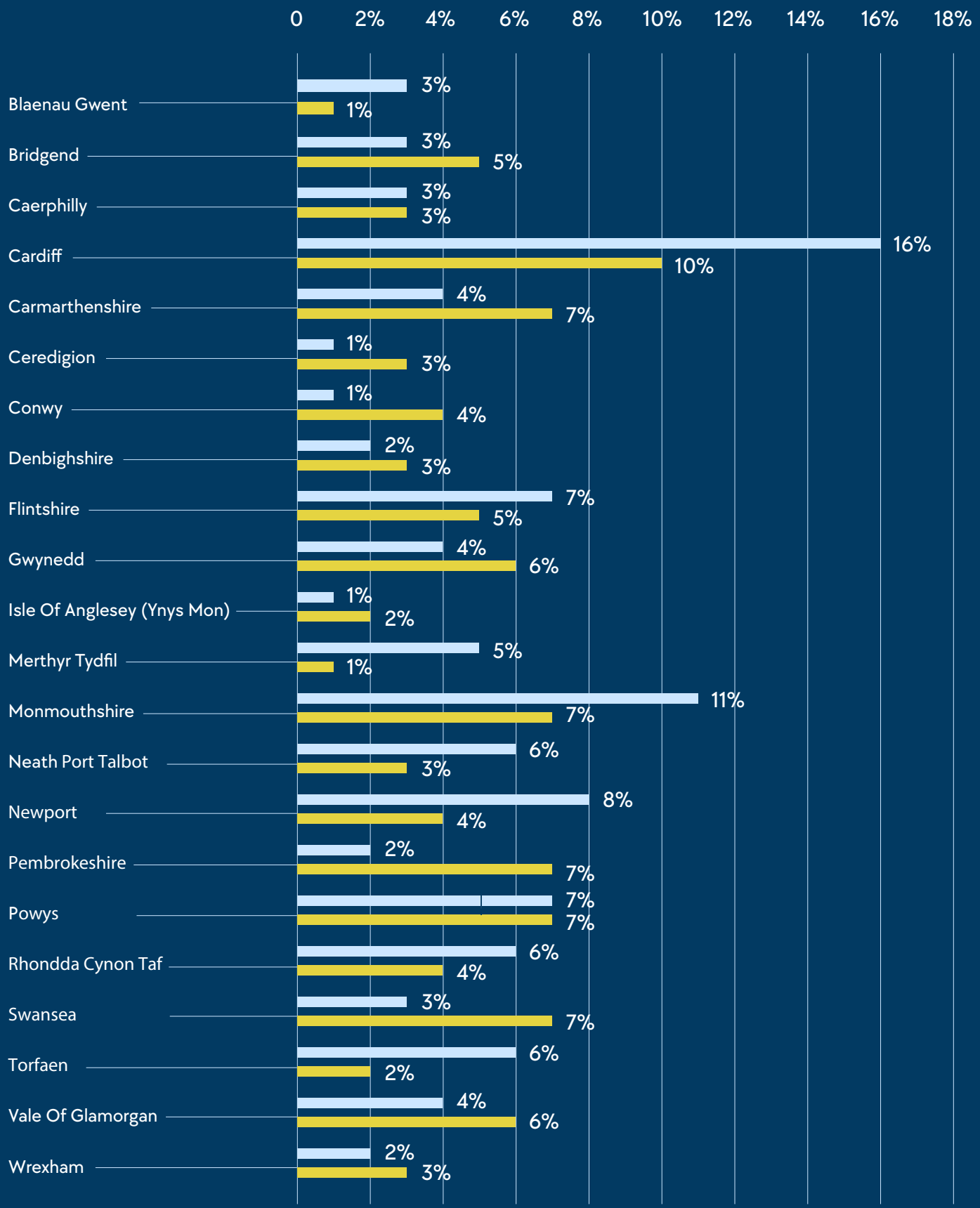
Local Authority of Respondents (Graph #2)



In terms of locations, our survey had responses from all 22 local authorities, with Cardiff, Monmouthshire, and Newport as the top 3 (Graph #2).

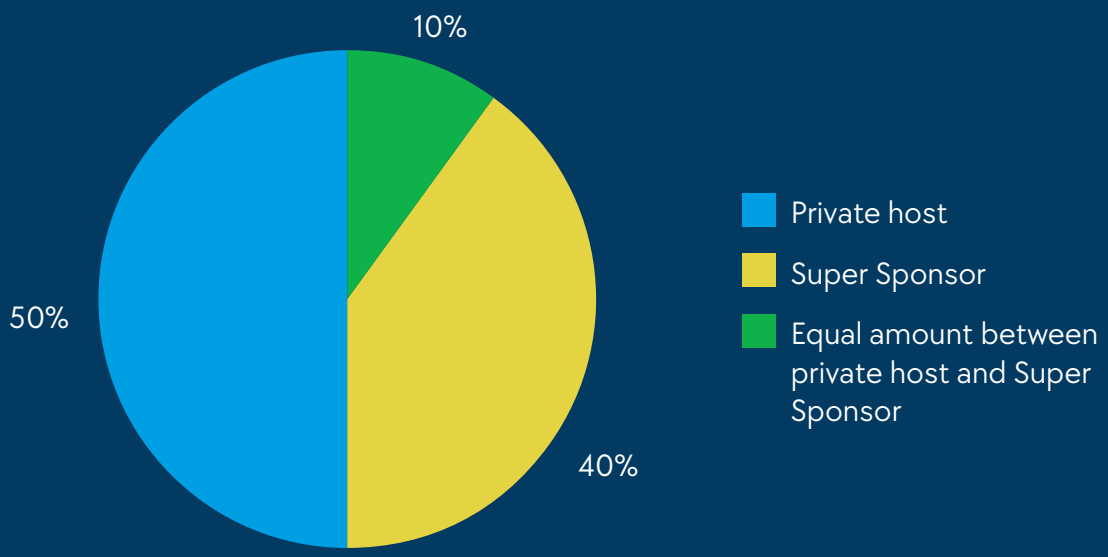
Drawing a comparison with the total number of Ukrainian arrivals is challenging though. There is available data for the local authorities where Ukrainian sponsored by individuals first arrived, but none for those sponsored by the Welsh Government. Additionally, those sponsored by individuals may have moved to another local authority after their arrival. Despite this, the available data still allows us to make an estimation. Combined with the data collected during this research, it is possible to more accurately account for the location of Ukrainian refugees in Wales. For instance, many Ukrainians will have moved to Cardiff or other larger urban hubs in search of employment opportunities.

Local Authority of Respondants Compared to Individually Sponsored Arrivals (%) (Graph #3)



The situation and numbers per local authority will differ too, as some would have taken a higher proportion in via hosts than who came in via the Welsh Government's super sponsor. Graph #4 shows that the distribution per local authority was largely split.

Did most Ukrainians arrive to private hosts or were most arrivals on the Super Sponsor Scheme? (Graph #4)



Once more, comparing age demographics is challenging. To a degree, there is reliable data on the age groups of Ukrainian refugees. Looking at available Home Office data from the end of June 2024, which includes Welsh Government and individually sponsored arrivals, there were three age groups recorded:

- Under 18 (2,140)
- 18 to 64 (5,250)
- 65 and over (320) [7]

When using these age groups in our survey:

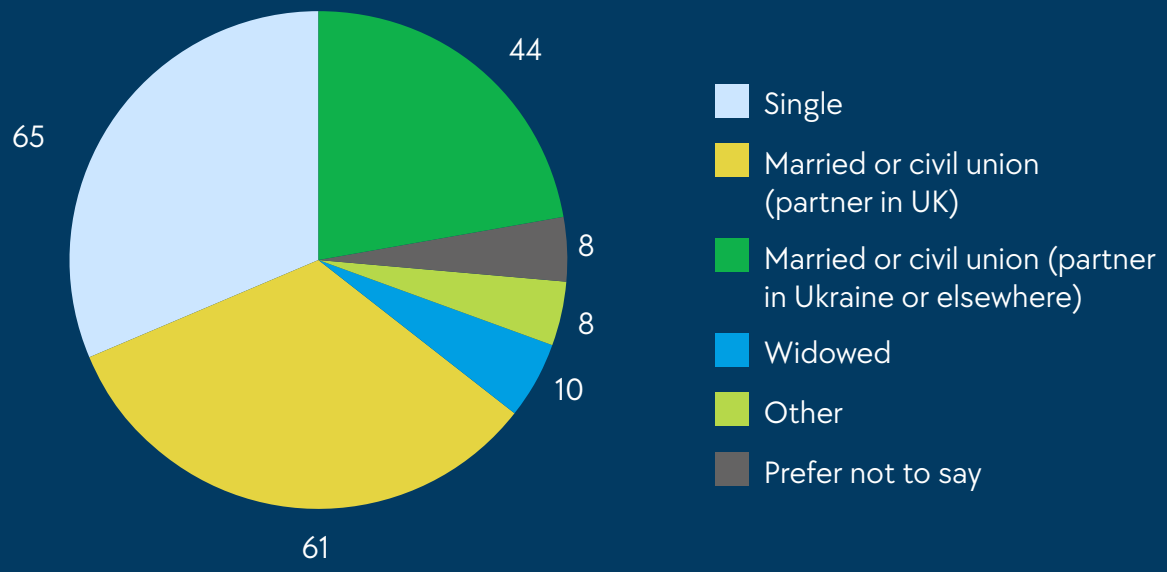
- Under 18 (1)
- 18 to 64 (187)
- 65 and over (2) [8]

The average age of survey respondents was 40.58 years old and the median age was 40.

The low uptake in the "Under 18" and "65 and over" age groups can be explained by a lower access to technology.

We also asked respondents about their civil and employment status. As seen in Graph #5, most respondents (54%) were married or in a civil union, with either the partner being with them in the UK (58% of married and 31% of total) or in Ukraine or elsewhere (42% of married and 22% of total). Nonetheless, "Single" represented the largest individual response (33%).

Civil Status of Participants (Graph #5)



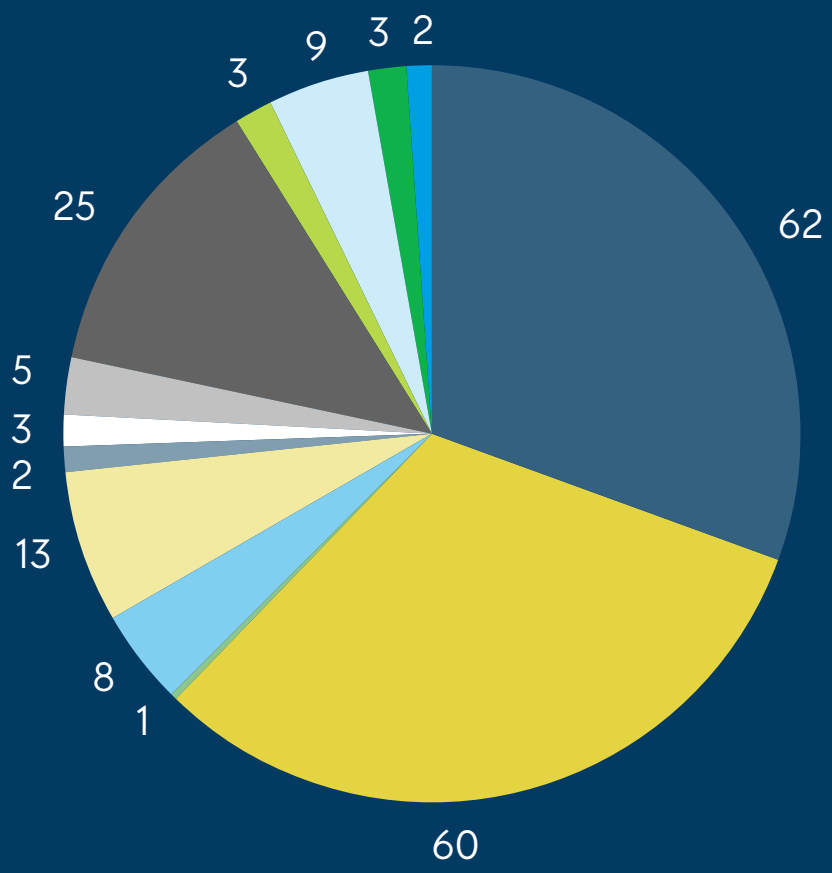
In terms of employment, the majority of respondents were in some type of employment (71%) (Graph #6).

The breakdown was:

- Full-time employment in UK (32%)
- Part-time employment in UK (31%)
- Full-time employment in UK or elsewhere (1%)
- Part-time employment in UK or elsewhere (2%)
- Self-employed in UK (46%)
- Self-employed in Ukraine or elsewhere (2%)

On the other hand, unemployed accounted for 17%, with 24% of those (4% of total), supported by an employed partner. Students accounted for 7% of responses.

Employment Status of Participants (Graph #6)



As part of our survey, we asked people about their current housing situation (Graph #7). Just over half lived in some sort of private rented accommodation (4% responded as shared private rented accommodation). This was followed by 28% who were in a hosting arrangement and 14% who had secured social housing. Other responses accounted for 3% or less, and included those who owned their own property, were still in emergency accommodation, or were homeless.

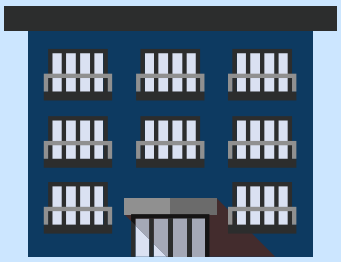
Accommodation Type of Participants (Graph #7)

47%
Private rented accommodation

28%
Host family

14%
Social housing/ council house

4%
Private rented accommodation (shared)



3%
Local authority emergency or temporary accommodation (hotel, hostel, etc.)

3%
Initial accommodation/ welcome centre (hotel)

1%
Own my own property

1%
Other

1% Homeless (sofa surfing, street homeless, etc.)

1% Prefer not to say

5. Findings

5.1 Initial Welcome

As has been established, the number of Ukrainian arrivals to the UK can be divided roughly in half between those who arrived to a host and those who were super sponsored by the Welsh Government.

Hosting

For the former, this was more straightforward, and they stayed in whatever accommodation the hosts already lived in. Hosts were initially given £350 to put up Ukrainians. This was increased to £500 after 12 months of hosting. At first, hosting arrangements were expected to be for twelve months only. But the war has dragged on resulting in considerably longer stays. This was perhaps not anticipated at first, or the need for a quick fix took centre-stage. The experiences within hosting have been extremely varied, depending on host, hostee, and the living arrangements.

There have been some awkward situations where members of the same Ukrainian family have arrived at different stages, and have been put with different hosts. For the most part, these hosting relationships have been positive. Early on, some hosting relationships fell through, but this was perhaps predictable. The researcher was unable to access any data on hosting breakdowns. An example of this was a Ukrainian family not disclosing that they were travelling with a dog. As their host was allergic to dogs, a new arrangement had to be found. Cases of people being asked to leave from one day to the next are extremely rare.

"In a month we may find ourselves on the street, because our sponsor asked us to move out, but we can't find a private rental!"
Survey response

"Although our sponsor family was very kind to us, two months was not enough to find alternative accommodation relevant to our needs (social housing). That's why we've got the status of homeless and we've needed to move to temporary accommodation. Also, there are problems with keeping our belongings."
Survey response

In some instances, the Ukrainian guests have been asked to contribute payments towards living costs. Our research was not set out to quantify the prevalence of hosts demanding payments or not, but it would be an interesting avenue of future research.

Case Study #1

Olha found a host in the Valleys, who has given her a room. The host has asked Olha to pay for half the bills. Olha works full-time, so can cover the bills, but would prefer to live elsewhere. She has looked for private rents, but this would cost her over half of her monthly salary. In Olha's own words "I'm kinda stuck there". She feels that the £500 thank you payment could be passed on to her and people in her situation to cover the cost of renting and be able to leave hosting situations they are not fully comfortable with.

Case Study #2

Marina managed to flee Ukraine to France in May 2022. From there, she made applications for hosts in the UK. A first England-based host proved to be unsuitable, but she was able to find one in Pontypridd. However, she had to leave after three weeks as this host demanded a rent payment, which she was unable to cover. The Ukraine response team was able to find her a host in North Wales, but she was reluctant as she wanted to stay near a city. Marina then found a host via Facebook. Although she was concerned that she did not know this host, Marina knew that the alternative was homelessness and accepted.

Speaking about hosting, a local authority representative stated:

"Hosting has been an incredibly important element of the Ukraine visa scheme/s and has avoided many people from having to access frontline services, including homelessness / temporary accommodation. There are unique challenges in managing this scheme, such as safeguarding concerns (albeit a minority of cases) and guest/sponsor relationship breakdowns, but it remains a critical element of [the local authority's] local response to the crisis."
South Wales local authority survey response

Welcome Centres

Those who arrived via the super sponsor route were housed in Welcome Centres. Welcome Centres included hotels, holiday lets, or student accommodation. The hotels were rarely found in urban centres. This led to problems with integration and school enrolment, and also the availability of language classes, and medical services. In total, there were 55 Welcome Centres across Wales, although not all were open at the same time. Given the enormous differences between these Welcome Centres, it is impossible to calculate the average stay in one.

At the outset, the plan was that these Welcome Centres would house new arrivals for six months. The following six months would be used to move them into longer-term alternatives, either hosting or by themselves in the private rented sector.

Broader housing pressures experienced in Wales meant that these targeted time frames could not always be met. This has created long-term problems for Ukrainians but also the ability of local authorities to provide for the wider population.

The research began in spring 2024, when the last two Welcome Centres, one in Denbighshire and the other in Wrexham, were being closed down and the last residents moved out. They are now both completely closed.

The Welsh Government acknowledged the need to involve the third sector in its strategy. The Welsh Refugee Council was duly awarded a contract in July 2022 to work alongside the Welsh Government, the 22 local authorities, other stakeholders, and refugees, essentially managing relations, signposting to the relevant stakeholders, and providing frontline casework advice to Ukrainians.

At the beginning, the casework and advice were directed towards aiding integration and looking at issues around school enrolment. At this early stage, according to those directly involved, the Welsh Government's welcome offer meant that housing was not much of an issue.

5.2 Move On

Local Authority Response and Powers

For the move on from Welcome Centres, local authorities were given a pot of money from the Home Office to help Ukrainians. The process was similar to the normal duties local authorities have to house people threatened with homelessness. There are two crucial distinct features though:

1. Ukrainians could refuse a reasonable offer without the local authorities having to end their duties.
2. Local authorities were allocated money to help with the move on.

This distinction has been a double-edged sword. On the one hand, Ukrainians have been given the financial support which has enabled them to enter the housing market, when other demographics, migrant or local, have not. On the other, it has also increased expectations, allowing Ukrainians to reject reasonable housing offers. This latter point will be expanded on in this section.

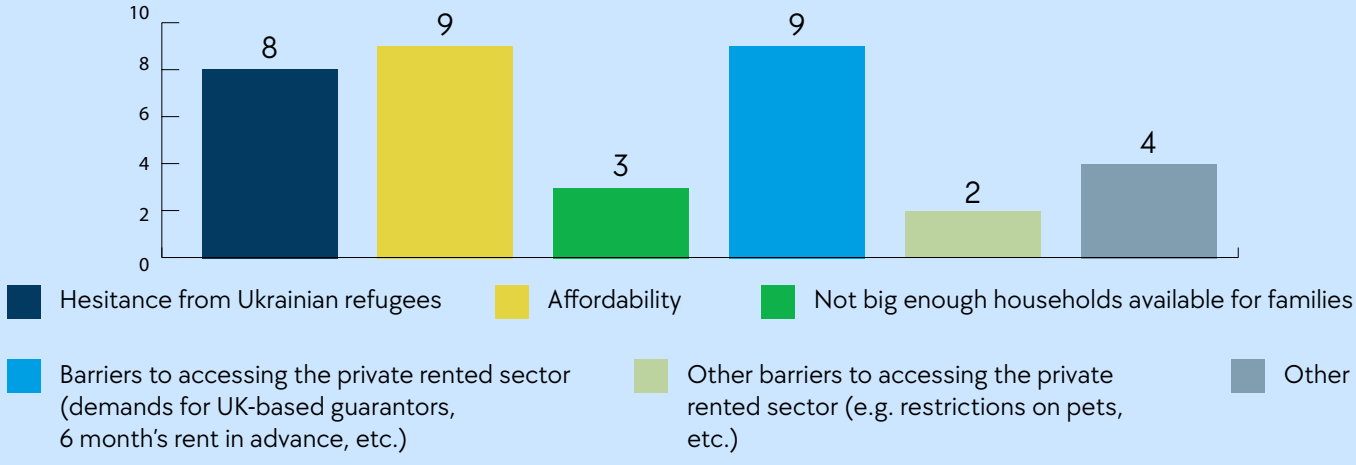
That said, all 22 local authorities acted differently, as explained during an interview:

"When you look at the Ukrainian schemes, [...] some of the funding that was available to local authorities was fairly open-ended. What that meant is that local authorities have done things slightly differently, so there isn't one bespoke model in which all 22 local authorities operate around move on and incentivise move on. Local authorities all have done different things depending on what the picture was like locally and with the housing market. To give you an example, some local authorities would be quite content just doing bonds and rent in advance and treat it in line with what would be their offer for homelessness [...] Other local authorities found that they, in fact, couldn't work with that. So they have done more [...] incentives for landlords, guarantors. They would pay something, say, the top ups"
Interview

This was confirmed in our survey of local authorities. Each local authority explained their housing offer to Ukrainians. The responses to this question can be read in Annex #3. Whilst a degree of flexibility is needed, the varying approaches has created something of a post code lottery.

We also asked local authorities to tell us what they believe had been the biggest barriers to moving Ukrainians out of the Welcome Centres (Graph #8). As will be seen later on, affordability (9) and barriers to accessing the private rented sector (9) were the most common answers. A perceived hesitance by Ukrainians themselves also ranked highly (8). Among the "other" responses, there were two mentions of high expectations and/or demands for social housing.

Barriers to Move On According to Local Authorities (Graph #8)



Welcome Centres

Due to the unprecedented and unexpected number of Ukrainians coming via the super sponsor route and the general housing challenges in Wales, the Welcome Centres remained open for longer than planned. As one interviewee said:

"[the Welcome Centres] were never intended to be, one, on the scale that they were, and two, they were never intended to run for the length of time that they did."
Interview

Spelling out the sustained use of hotels, the same interviewee explained:

"The overflow, which is the vast majority of the people who needed housing, ended up in holiday parks and hotels. Essentially, because they were places that could be block-booked and that was the only solution that we had in the immediate short-term. The problem is once you're locked into that particular short-term solution, it becomes a medium and a long-term solution because you don't have anywhere to move them on to and that obviously has been the main focus."
Interview

The block-booking resulted in the creation of communities and that may have had an unintended consequence. As one interviewee put it:

"There's the recognition that people who've been in the initial accommodation structures/ facilities for an extended period of time, some of them, have become institutionalised. They've not integrated at any point or attempted to integrate in any serious way over the last couple of years. They've stayed within that bubble of a language, a highly-localised community that's formed as a sort of a community of necessity. That's meant that they've been able to avoid learning the language and starting that process of trying to integrate into the community."
Interview

Mistrust

The move on process from the Welcome Centres has also been impacted by a culture of mistrust. This came up several times during the research.

"There was the cultural hang up of 'I'm being told that I can't afford this. I'm being told that there aren't any properties here, but are there really?' [...] there's a suspicion of your support workers that are coming from, particularly anything that seemed like an authority, local government and regional government. Because there's an expectation that there's got to be some level of corruption there and [they are] probably holding back some stuff for the people that [they] want to make sure are all right. So people [are] hanging on in the hope that if they stick it out for long enough, they will get to the 'sweet stuff' that everybody else [gets] [instead of a house in Pontypridd]. It's half an hour from Cardiff and you are now in an ever-decreasing pool of possibilities and hanging on there for dear life in the hope that you will get the win, because that's what you would do in Ukraine. You would just try and tap it out, you would find the right person to ask. You would ask enough people. Did you get the right answer? You'd find out who you need to [give a backhander to]."
Interview

"Ukrainians do not trust government structures. [...] If you say something, it will be used against you [...]. If the government is saying that they can't do something, they actually can, but they're withholding it from you for their own benefit."
Scoping interview

This culture of mistrust became fixed in some of the Welcome Centres, preventing a timely move on. Multiple refused offers resulted in local authorities having to end their duties to some Ukrainians. It is worth noting, that this culture of mistrust is in no ways unique to Ukrainians and can be seen in other sanctuary seeker groups.

"The Welcome Centre accommodation was comfortable with many Ukrainian guests. They did not want to move to hosted accommodation, did not trust government organisations and did not believe they needed to move. We only succeeded in move ons when a Welcome Centre closing date was confirmed."
Local authority survey response

Location

Based on the research, there is a feeling that, when it came to move on, most Ukrainians preferred to stay in the area they first moved to, as they had put down roots in terms of employment, children in schools, or settling into the community more broadly. For instance, we were told that around 200 Ukrainians arrived in Pembrokeshire, one of the most rural local authorities in Wales, and only very few left the local authority. For others, there was a worry that in new areas there would not be the community and support services available.

While not universal, this is something which might be worthwhile taking into consideration given the Home Office's policy of widening of asylum dispersal to all local authorities. Demographics go some way to explaining this phenomenon. As established in the Demographics section, the average Ukrainian arrival is a single Ukrainian woman in her forties. The jobs available to them will be different to those of a younger sanctuary-seeking man, the predominant demographic group in the asylum system.

Given particular housing pressures in large urban hubs such as Cardiff, there was an understanding that part of the move on from the Welcome Centres would have to be to other parts of Wales. This was sometimes met with reluctance. Explaining some of the issues, one of the interviewees said:

"People who've been housed in the city centre in Cardiff, who've stayed within a sort of a safety bubble of the Ukrainians that they know, may not have travelled significantly outside of a 10-minute walking distance of their hotel. And they know the centre of Cardiff like the back of their hand. But they haven't gone anywhere. And the thought of going out into the wild [...] is terrifying to them, and [the support workers] are trying to convince them to move to [location in the Vale of Glamorgan] and explaining that it's really nice, it's by the sea [...] It's 40-45 minutes on the train. [To us] it seems like a good selling point. To the terrified Ukrainian who just wants nothing to change [it is not]. They would just like to stay in the hotel in the centre of Cardiff until everything is fine and they can go home."
Interview

Other interviewees also brought this up as an issue. Some Ukrainian arrivals saw their stay in Wales as temporary before returning to Ukraine, so were reluctant to take the steps towards integration and did not learn the language as was hoped.

Not wanting to move was by no means unique to Cardiff, nor necessarily just urban centres. Most people who hosted Ukrainians were able to do so because they lived in large houses and had steady finances. Some of these lived in affluent areas, too. When a hosting agreement came to an end, the Ukrainian guests wanted to stay in that area, but would have been unable to afford anything and resisted moves elsewhere. Cultural factors may have played a role in holding people back from leaving urban centres. For instance, we were told that Ukrainians were used to 10 to 15 minutes of commuting to work, so living in a place with a 45-minute commute was alien to them.

"Ukrainians who came from anywhere that vaguely resembled a city or a metropolitan area resisted the idea of moving out into the 'sticks', into the country, into the villages, because they have a very Ukrainian view of what villages are. They don't understand that there are shops, doctors, and schools. And you can get on a train and you could be in Cardiff in half an hour and it's fine. They just resisted the idea: 'you're not going to relegate me to somewhere where I have no opportunities'."
Interview

For Ukrainians, there were also some very practical reasons as to why they would want to stay or move to a new location.

"I wanted to move to Abergavenny because the train is nearby, and the children's college in Hereford is close. The city itself is pleasant, tidy, beautiful landscapes, but it is difficult to find housing in Abergavenny because there are almost no offers. If there are, then the prices are too high. With universal credit, I will not be able to move and re-draw all the documentation, and search for new service providers. That's why I refused [an offer of housing]. The money is

increased the rent for the next year of residence, and they also asked for a deposit."
Survey response

"You are more likely to find a job in large cities and find a large group of Ukrainians and support"
Survey response

Overall, this left local authorities and support organisations having to manage expectations. People who worked directly with Ukrainians during this time have confirmed that assumptions of what the Welsh Government and local authorities could offer were extremely high. For instance, some Ukrainians believed that on arrival, they would be given a house and would have employment lined-up. It is hard to determine where these misconceptions were born.

"My own experience, but also across Wales, is that local authorities have to do a lot of management of expectations. I think some of the expectations that Ukrainians had, particularly if they lived in the big city compared to what they were being offered in Wales, wasn't really matching. Trying to draw up a compromise, sometimes that alone would take time because people know someone [...] in the Welcome Centre in the city centre of Cardiff and the nearest affordable accommodation was in Caerphilly. That 40-minute commute back and forth wasn't something they were willing to consider, but there wouldn't have been any affordable options in Cardiff for them. [...] that became quite a challenge that I think dragged out the process as well because local authorities had to work with the clients to break down a lot of the barriers or a lot of the concerns they would have."
Interview

Managing Expectations

As well as managing expectations within the move on support, local authorities had to consider affordability. This was perhaps one of the concepts most alien to Ukrainians.

"People have to meet their affordability to get the support. If someone signs a tenancy that's completely unaffordable for them, the local authority's not going to go and pick up a bill regardless of whether they are Ukrainian, British, or any other refugee or any other nationality. So there were those people and those instances where someone didn't fully acknowledge the advice that was being given by the local authority. They thought, 'oh well, I can just go get a tenancy and then I'll get reimbursed' and they found themselves in that position where they weren't being reimbursed. And that has happened a little bit more frequently, particularly in the beginning."
Interview

"I think understanding of housing and the differences between the housing in Ukraine and housing in the UK was something that caught us and some people out as well. Where people were used to, for example, [...] paying rent that includes bills and everything like that. [...] So some people thought, 'my rent is £600 a month. My internet, my water, everything is in it'. So they were surprised when there was £600 plus more and I know it was a challenge for some."
Interview

Combined, these issues have pushed Ukrainians into unfortunate situations. Case study #3 combines several of the above issues, including too long a stay in a Welcome Centre, a mistrust of authority, a reluctance to leave an urban centre, and affordability.

Case Study #3

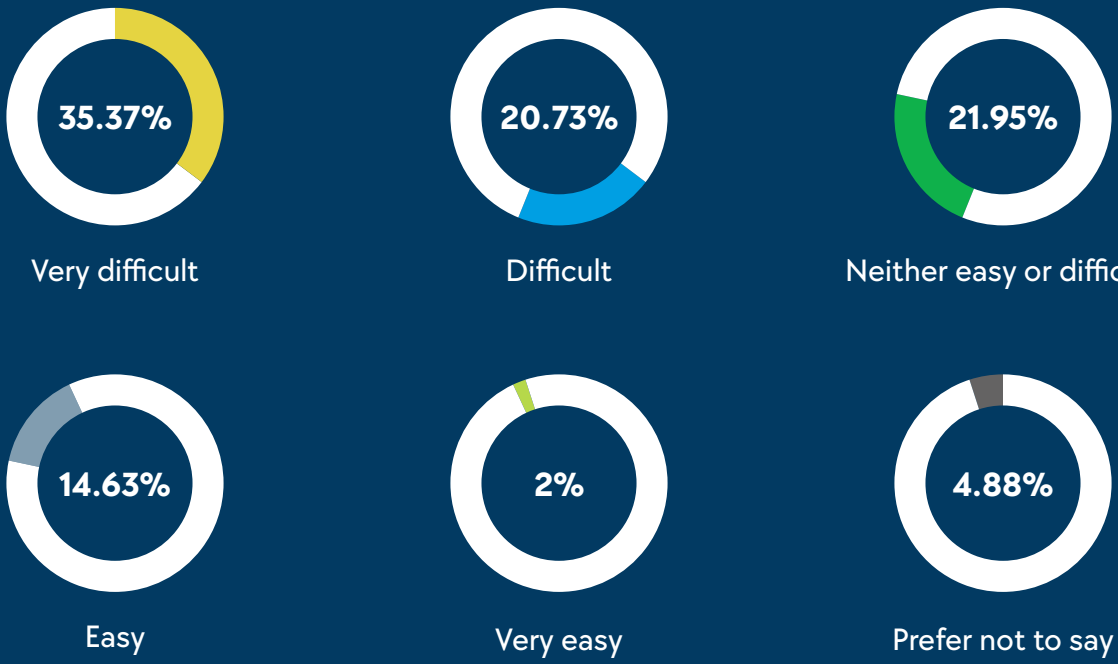
A Ukrainian mother and daughter were housed at the Angel Hotel in Newport, which was one of the hotels used as a Welcome Centre. The daughter was studying at university in Cardiff, but the mother had not integrated into life in Wales and had not picked up the language. Their budget was set by the mother's benefit allowance and the daughter's university student loan. As such, they were unlikely to meet any affordability tests in Cardiff, which was their preferred destination.

The local authority's resettlement team presented the mother and daughter with several affordable options out of Cardiff, which were refused. Eventually, after a failure to engage with the reasonable offers, the local authority had to cease support and set a date for them to vacate the hotel. Faced with homelessness, the mother and daughter borrowed money to enter a £1,000 a month rental, which they could not afford. As a result, the mother and daughter now find themselves trapped and in extreme financial hardship, but ineligible for support.

The Experience of Move On

Bearing all in mind, as part of our survey, we asked Ukrainians to rate how difficult or easy it had been to move out from the initial accommodation in the Welcome Centres. Nearly ¾ rated it as difficult or very difficult (20.73% and 35.37%) (Graph #9). On the other hand, only a quarter found it easy or very easy (14.63% and 2.44%) (Graph #9). A considerable percentage, 21.95%, found it neither easy nor difficult (Graph #9). We gave respondents the opportunity to expand on their answers. Some of the responses have been put in the section above, but many, given their relation to accessing private rents, will be placed in the section on accessing the private rented sector.

Difficulty or Ease to Move Out of Initial Accommodation (Graph #9)



As part of the survey, we asked respondents to tell us about their move out of initial accommodation. Interestingly, many responded by telling us about their moves from hosts, rather than leaving the Welcome Centres. The experiences were enormously varied. The responses help us to understand why some hosting relationships came to an end and who Ukrainians saw as the ones who had helped them.

"We are still in the process of finding a permanent place to live. For the first nine months, we lived with a host family, and it was a wonderful experience. Then we were offered to move into a council-owned accommodation, and we gladly accepted because the hosts lived quite far out of town, making logistics difficult. However, it turned out that our new apartment was severely damaged, and we couldn't move in. As a result, we had to move twice more between the hosts and our current place of residence. These were Airbnb apartments, but at each stage, we felt immense support from the team managing accommodation for Ukrainians, which made the process quite easy."
Survey response

"I am grateful to the council for helping me find housing for rent, paperwork, paying rent for the first year, and making a deposit. In addition, the council helped us fill out an application for DAF so that we could be provided with basic necessities (household appliances, furniture, small utensils for housekeeping)."
Survey response

"We were rushing to move in one day to the house without beds, cooker, fridge, washing machine. Thank God we had strong support from Ukrainian hub volunteers. They found for us temporary beds and all the necessary equipment to cook for the first time."
Survey response

"It took nearly 4 months to move from my relatives' place to a housing association place in Carmarthenshire for me, my daughter, and my 16-year old sister. It was possible by assistance from the local authority."
Survey response

"It was terrible. I lived with hosts in [South Wales], the council did not support me in my search for housing. I miraculously found a flat for rent and was forced to move out without having beds and furniture with a minor child. We slept on the floor and had nothing to cook with."
Survey response

"My journey was successful because I had a full-time UK contract and the huge support from my sponsor at that time. Even though I knew English at an intermediate level, I wasn't confident in speaking, especially on the phone. So my sponsor called the agencies, was with me on viewings, and was ready to even be my guarantor. We were worried because I had just changed work so couldn't provide the payslip for the last 6 months as there was a gap between employment. Luckily for me, everything worked out, so me and my son live in a beautiful flat."
Survey response

"We looked for housing for 7 months until the local council provided us with social housing. The main problem in the search, in my opinion, is the large number of applicants and the small number of suitable housing. Although, according to my observations, there are many abandoned and empty houses in which refugees could live with such a condition, for example, that they could make repairs to the house. This would make it easier to find housing and the houses would be supervised."
Survey response

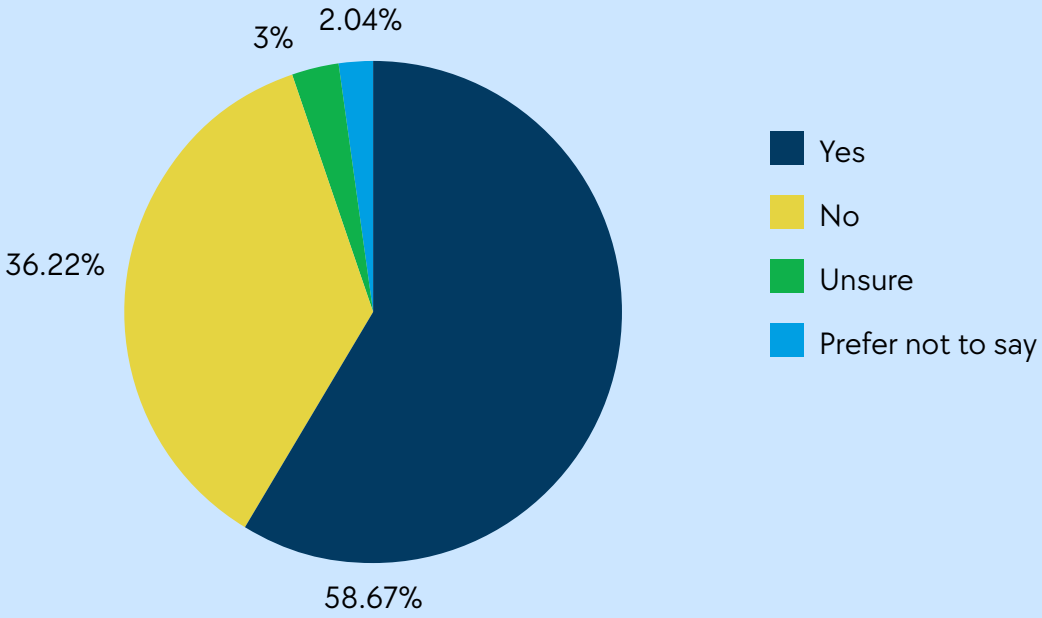
5.3 Accessing the Private Rented Sector

Ukrainians and the Private Rented Sector

As established in Graph #7, just over half of participants in our survey lived in private rented accommodation. Some will have found it by themselves or with the help of friends and community groups, whereas others will have been supported by a local authority. This process has been explained in the previous section.

Furthermore, as seen in Graph #10, 58.67% of survey participants said they had tried to access the private rented sector at some point during their stay in Wales. Within the 36.22% who have not, will be many of the 28% living with hosts (Graph #10). As per the data seen in graphs #7 and #10, the experiences of renting are quite common for Ukrainians.

Number Who Have Tried to Access the Private Rented Sector (Graph #10)



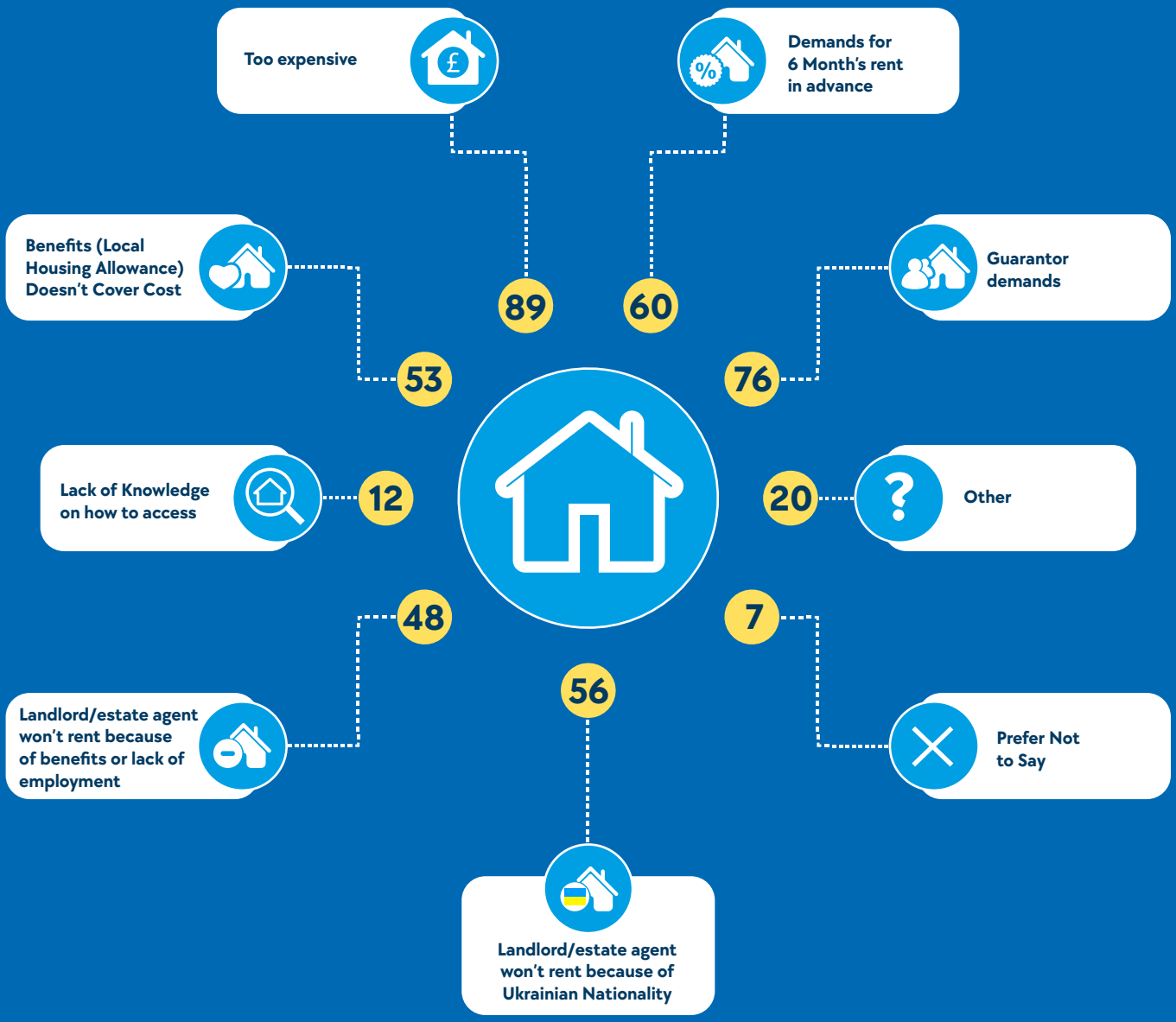
Barriers to the Private Rented Sector – Cost

Unlike other questions in the survey, we did not ask participants to grade how easy or difficult it had been for them to find private rented accommodation. Instead, as seen in Graph #11, we asked participants to choose what they saw or had experienced as barriers to accessing the private rented sector. Participants could select multiple options, with the top three being:

1. Too expensive (89)
2. Guarantor demands (76)
3. Demands for 6 months' rent in advance (60)

As seen, cost was the most significant barrier in accessing housing. The fifth most common answer, benefits not covering the cost of housing (53), was another barrier with a financial element.

Barriers to Accessing the Private Rented Sector (Graph #11)



"I have a lot of sympathy for the people of Wales. It is unrealistically difficult to find housing, its price is high, and its quality is low. The rules regarding the number of rooms for each person do not make it possible to rent a house. For example, I can afford a 1-bedroom, but having a child over 12 years old, I have to rent a much more expensive 2-bedroom."
Survey response

Barriers to the Private Rented Sector – Discrimination

Interestingly, 56 (the fourth highest barrier) (Graph #11) responded by saying that they felt that a landlord or estate agent would not rent to them because of their Ukrainian nationality. In terms of percentages, just under 30% of respondents selected this option. The figure would be higher if those who have had no experience of trying to rent are excluded. Discrimination because of nationality was higher than the 48 who said they felt a landlord or estate agent would not rent to them because they were on benefits. There is a possibility that these two factors, nationality and low income, contribute to each other.

Whether this is just a perception or not, it shows a failure in the implementation of the Welsh Government's flagship Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP) and their Nation of Sanctuary Plan. One of ARWAP's goals is "to ensure that Private Rented Sector (PRS) housing and accommodation, and service provision advances equality, embeds anti-racism and meets the diverse needs of ethnic minority people".[9] As part of the actions and outputs, there are provisions for Rent Smart Wales (RSW) to provide anti-discrimination training for landlords.[10] As such, either landlords have not taken the training, the training does not consider Ukrainians, or landlords have ignored the training. Questions must be asked about how many landlords actually receive the training and what are the consequences of them acting in a discriminatory matter.

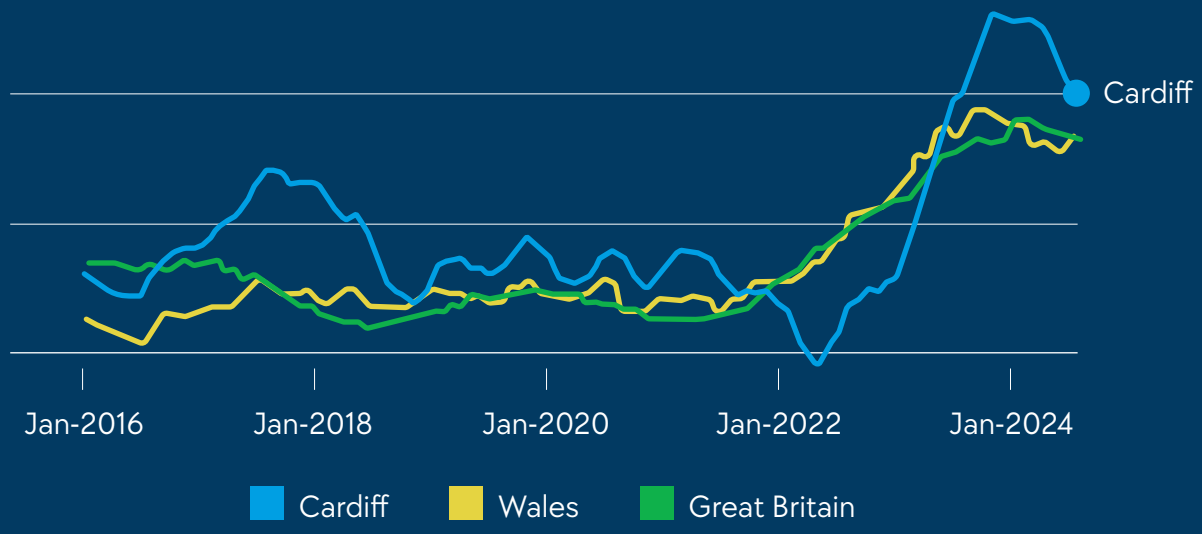
The consequences of this discriminations are that Ukrainians, who are fully capable to enter and sustain themselves in the private rented sector are pushed into local authorities' overburdened housing services.

Surprisingly, a lack of knowledge on how to access the private rented sector (12) was not seen as a significant barrier.

"The rental housing situation in Wales is very complex and it is difficult for foreign citizens to understand the system and scheme of rental housing, since their country has completely different systems."
Survey response

Cost of Renting in Context

As has been widely reported, high rents have not just been a barrier for Ukrainians, but everyone in Wales more widely, especially Cardiff. According to figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), private rents rose to an average of £1,052 in September 2024, an annual increase of 10.1% from £956 in September 2023.[11] This was higher than the rise in Wales (8.3%) over the year.

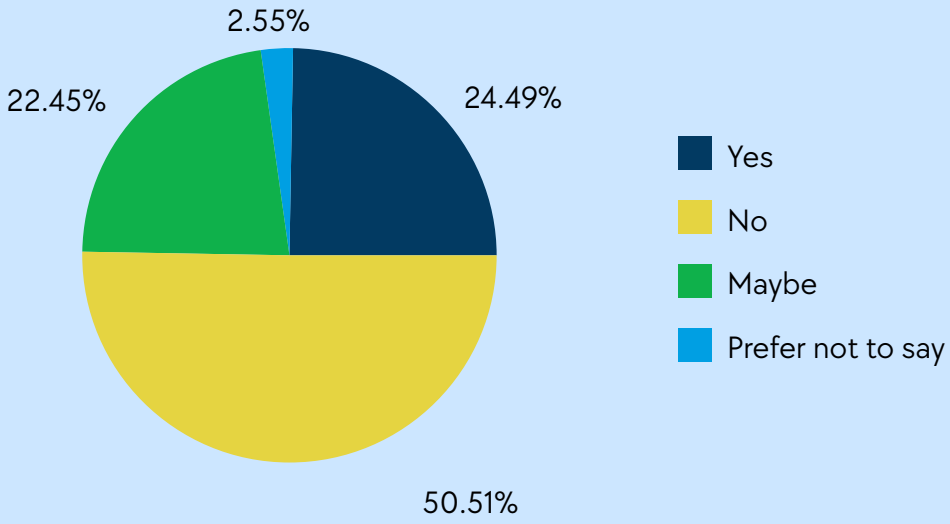


Source: Price Index of Private Rents from the Office for National Statistics

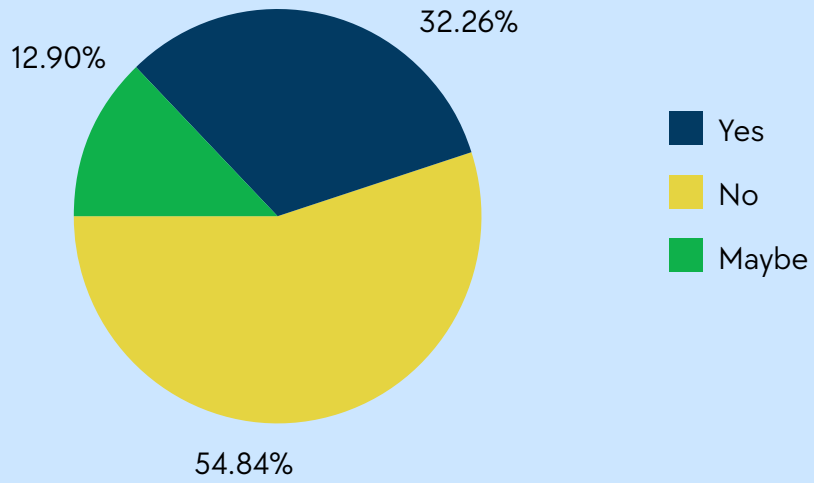
Searching for Alternatives

Nearly a quarter of respondents to our survey said they had considered moving to another part of Wales or the UK for easier access to accommodation (Graph #12). Another quarter said they were "maybe" considering it (Graph #12). As seen in Graph #13, the number of those considering a move to a new location, 32.26%, is higher in Cardiff.

Number of Those Considering Moving to Another Part of Wales for Easier Access to Accommodation (Graph #12)



Number of Those Considering Moving to Another Part of Wales for Easier Access to Accommodation (Cardiff Only) (Graph #13)



For those who had considered or rejected moving for easier access to accommodation, there were practical reasons.

"We have already agreed and moved to another area of Wales from Cardiff, to make it easier to rent housing."
Survey response

"I was ready to relocate across the UK as long as I had a permanent full-time job that goes along with my skills and education."
Survey response

"I'm not sure if I want to move somewhere else as I work in this area and my daughter attends a local school. It's difficult for us to move again and start everything from 'zero'. I'm not sure I would have easier access to accommodation anyway."
Survey response

"Actually, we were forced to move to Manchester, because we were not able to rent a private property in the area. However, it was very expensive to live in Manchester for our family. Only eventually we managed to secure a house for rent in Newtown, so we could come back to Powys, but it was only because we were so lucky to meet a very kind landlord, who is willing to help refugees from Ukraine. It would not work with the estate agents for sure."
Survey response

5.4 Sustained Tenancies

As seen in section 5.2 and in Annex #3, local authorities used a variety of financial incentives, including providing bonds or paying top ups on LHA upfront, to move Ukrainians into private rents. Several interviewees commented on the long-term sustainability of this and the problems this may cause when it comes to renewing these tenancies.

"Paying a top up does bring another set of challenges with itself as well. Because if someone isn't meeting an affordability [test] and you're paying a top up, how sustainable is it when the money is not there? That is a big question, so, it's that kind of balance of moving someone on into long term sustainable accommodation versus are we not creating a problem further down the road?"
Interview

"Realistically speaking, giving you an extra £200 a month to top up your rent just means that at some point when that ends, you're now £200 a month short and there's nothing that you can do about it."
Interview

"There are people who were in a much more marginal situation where they've stretched their finances to get that little bit closer to Cardiff or Swansea or Newport or wherever. They've stretched their finances for some other secondary reason in terms of what they thought. They thought, 'I can live here. It'll be really hard. I'll have to get more work. But I'll probably be able to pick up a couple of extra shifts and then it'll all be fine.' So you've got people who've made choices which were sensible enough that you could realistically make them, and that the local authority could realistically support that to some degree. But in the long term, whether or not that continues to be sustainable, that's a question and we'll discover that in the next 6 to 12 months really."
Interview

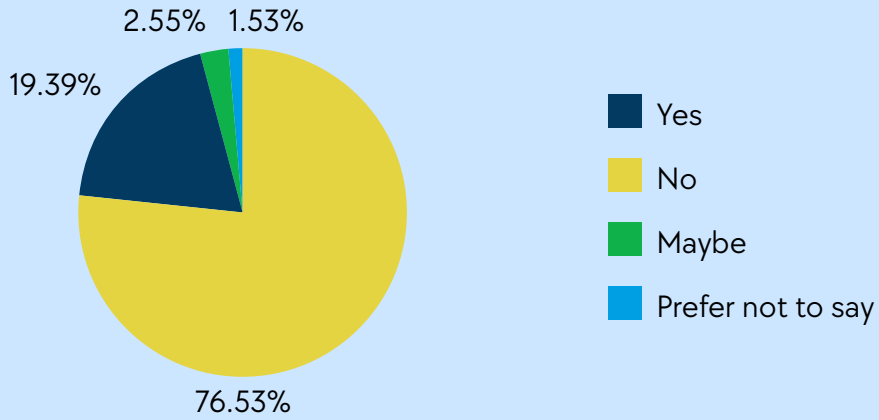
At the time the main body of the research was conducted, these move on tenancies had not yet come to an end. As such, it is hard to say with any certainty how sustainable they have been, or if we have seen a wave of tenancies ending as a result. The theory is that if these tenancies end because of a lack of local authority support, in the long run, Ukrainians may become indebted trying to cover the costs or local authorities will have to support them via their homelessness services anyway.

5.5 Experiences and Threats of Homelessness

Ukrainian Homelessness in Numbers

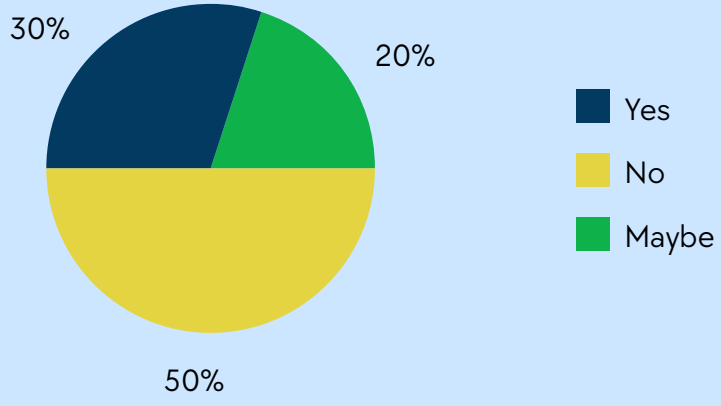
Based on our survey, very few Ukrainians, 19.39%, had actually had to engage with local authorities because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness (Graph #14). As seen in Graph #7, the number of Ukrainians in local authority temporary accommodation or homeless was just 4%. This is perhaps a contrast to the situation in England. Data released by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) found that over 9,300 Ukrainian households became homeless between June 2022 and February 2024.[12] There is no comparable official data for Wales.

Number Who Have Accessed a Local Authority's Homelessness Support (Graph #15)



For the most part, unlike in England, Welsh local authorities do not collect specific homelessness data on Ukrainian refugees (Graph #15). A local authority stated that they only collect data for families that have had to move into emergency accommodation.

Local Authorities That Collect Specific Homelessness Data on Ukrainian Refuguees (Graph #15)



Personal Experiences with Local Authority Support

In the survey, we also asked those who had accessed a local authority's housing support to tell us about their experiences. A common complaint was the tardiness of decision-making, which left many frustrated. With record numbers of homelessness presentations, this is unfortunately unavoidable. There were several reported cases of Ukrainians missing out on housing because of delays from local authorities.

"We have lived in temporary housing for a month. We lost our property because the person in Housing Options was very slow. Now, we are in the queue for a council house."
Survey response

"The experience is only negative. The Housing Options team has not responded to our application for almost three weeks. We even postponed the signing of a contract in order to receive assistance from housing options, but they only contacted us when we had already signed the contract. After that they refused to help. We couldn't wait any longer because otherwise, we would have lost this house, which is very difficult for Ukrainians to find. Not everyone [landlord or estate agent] wants to hand it over to us."
Survey response

"My experience has been overwhelmingly positive, so there isn't much to tell. Usually, people share their experiences when they have faced difficulties and problems. The only thing that constantly worries me is the complete uncertainty regarding the duration of our stay in the temporary housing where we are currently living. Every day, I check my emails, knowing that I might be told to move out in a week. This makes any long-term planning, including job searching, impossible. If I end up having to commute an hour and a half each way to work, such a job wouldn't make any sense. Moreover, Ukrainians in Wales cannot expect jobs that match their level of qualification. Typically, these are low-skilled manual labour jobs. There's no point in looking for such a job now when you don't know where you'll be tomorrow."
Survey response

"I still don't know about the length of my stay here. I would like to leave at any time or go back to Ukraine. I don't have a place to go yet, but I don't feel very free. Lease agreements at a time when things could change tomorrow, it's challenging. It's hard when you can't go to Ukraine when you are in temporary housing, even to go to see your mother, because you will be on the street (so they said) and there will be nowhere to return to. It's almost like being in prison. And it's almost impossible to find a job. I think it's mysteriously difficult for a mother with a child to live alone. That's all the help I get. And if you want to and go to work, then even this help will be taken away. I don't feel free here."
Survey response

There were also responses regarding the lack of Ukrainian language support.

"Our local resettlement local authority officer gave a 64-year-old Ukrainian lady a phone number for homelessness support, when that lady could no longer stay in her rented place. That lady doesn't speak any English, and when she tried to call there was a voicemail service, and she asked about translation, but no one called her back. Thank God we (Ukrainians) found a new temporary host for her, and she didn't have to stay on the street."
Survey response

On the other hand, several responses were positive.

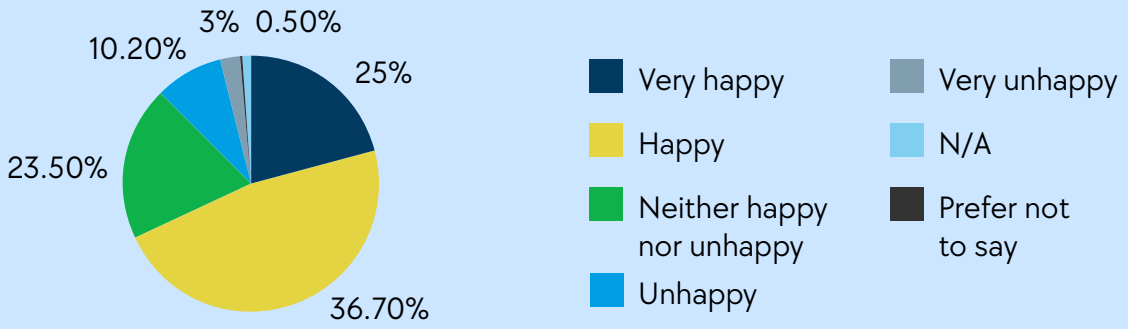
"Great experience. Despite our worries, we received support and the necessary information."
Survey response

"Good communication and support, but a very large bureaucracy, due to which the process is very long"
Survey response

5.6 Housing Quality Happiness and Mould

For the most part, Ukrainians are happy with the quality of the accommodation they are in (Graph #16), with 25% and 36.7% saying they are "very happy" or "happy". Those who are "unhappy" (10.2%) or "very unhappy" (3%) represent a smaller percentage of less than half of those who are "neither happy nor unhappy" (23.5%) (Graph #16).

Happiness or Unhappiness Over Quality of Current Accomidation (Graph #16)



"It is a comfortable, modern apartment located in the city centre, and we are very happy about it because there is no need to buy a car, which we cannot afford, nor to spend significant amounts on transportation. My children's college and school are very close, so we are absolutely delighted. The only inconvenience is that we have two bedrooms for three people, and my children are of different genders. This means my son and daughter share one bedroom, and they are already quite grown up and require some privacy. However, this is not a major issue, and we handle it with family solutions."
Survey response

For those who said they were "unhappy" or "very unhappy" (Graph #16), mould and humidity were two of the most common reasons.

"There are problems with the ventilation of the house. The agency ignores us. For the black mould spots everywhere around the house, we are advised to use spray and a rag. All the clothes in the closet, which is built-in by default, are covered with mould." Survey response
"The house is large, but it needs to be renovated. Some of the equipment does not work and the owner does not want to change it. There are many places where there is mould, it has been painted over, but still spots can be seen. The house is dirty, the estate agency did not order cleaning before moving in new people."
Survey response

"The rented flat has problems with mould, so when I contacted my resettlement officer from the council, they came to have a look at it, but, eventually, I was told that I have to deal with that on my own."
Survey response

"There is a lot of rubbish on the pavements and on the lawns. I don't understand why there is no cultural and social support for keeping the space in which people live in Wales tidy."
Survey response

The Renting Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) (Wales) Regulations 2022 set out the 29 matters and circumstances to which regard must be had when determining whether a property is fit for human habitation (FFHH). The Renting Homes Act 2016 places an obligation on a landlord to ensure that, at the start of and during the length of the occupation contract, the dwelling is FFHH according to the 2022 regulations. The first matter and circumstance are damp and mould growth. Damp and mould can cause detrimental health effects.

Some, although happy with the quality of their housing, felt it did not represent good value for money for what they got or compared to what they were accustomed to in Ukraine. For others, there was a grudging acceptance.

"There are some inconveniences in our temporary accommodation, but I suppose we have no other choice for now."
Survey response

Overcrowding

Although not directly linked to the actual quality of accommodation, a topic that came up during the research was different concepts around overcrowding. We found out that, on the whole, many Ukrainians did not object to living in conditions considered to be overcrowded in Welsh housing guidance. As such, Ukrainian families who would have been happy to move into overcrowded houses to meet affordability found that local authorities could not support them in the move. This was thoroughly explained in one interview:

"Ukrainians are quite comfortable being overcrowded if that makes sense, or what we would consider overcrowding here by our legislation. Some families were struggling and going to a local authority and turning up saying 'right, I found this lovely one-bedroom flat. I want to go for it because I can afford it because my housing benefit is £525 a month (...).' And then the local authority has to say 'well actually no, looking at the ages of your children, you need 3 bedrooms. And your affordability is £525, but that's for a 3-bedroom, not a one-bedroom house.' (...) And that was a big challenge for Ukrainians to understand (...). Our legislation considers it, but then it's a bit more challenging when you have to turn down a Ukrainian that's desperate to move on. And then you have to kind of breakdown [the housing rules in Wales]. The children are saying 'yeah, but back in Ukraine we all shared a one-bedroom property and we were all perfectly happy and content. Why can't we go and do that?'"
Interview

Case Study #4

Yana and her family of six arrived in Swansea following the Russian invasion of their homeland. Yana's husband has suffered a heart attack and is unable to work. Initially, Yana's family was to be moved from their Welcome Centre to a caravan park in Rhyl, but Yana did not want this, as her children were already enrolled in school and did not want to cause more disruption to their education. The teachers in the school supported this. To stop Yana's family from becoming homeless, the school collected money so that they could stay in an Airbnb.

In the end, the local authority helped them to move into a private rent. However, this new property is not suitable for Yana and her family, as it is far from the children's school and is old. Yana has tried to find a new private rent, but with her studying and her husband unable to work, many are too expensive. As such, Yana has looked for cheaper properties, but her family cannot access these, as existing regulations mean that her family-size is too big for the property.

Yana feels that "big families with children have no support. It should be different" and that children are often ignored when it comes to housing issues.

5.7 Other Housing Issues

Throughout the research, other issues came up as barriers to accessing accommodation. This sub-section will highlight some of them.

Pets

Having pets has long been seen as a barrier to housing people, given the restrictions imposed by private landlords and other housing providers. Shelter Cymru research from 2022 found that "over half of landlords (57%) said they don't, or would prefer not to, let to people with pets."[13] Ukrainians have also faced this barrier.

"Ukrainians wouldn't leave their pets [in Ukraine]. They would never abandon their pets. That meant then that we needed to find hotels that would take them. One of the last facilities that ended up being closed is a facility that had a lot of people that had animals in there because it's difficult to house people with animals, especially if that person has serious affordability issues. And that means they need a host. So you need to get a host that will then take animals rather than just a landlord that'll rent to someone who has a dog. And the place that would take animals was the most expensive hotel that the Welsh Government was using."
Interview

"I have 2 cats from Ukraine. I couldn't find a house for 3 months because 90% were not pet friendly."
Survey response

At the time of writing (October 2024), the Renters' Rights Bill is being considered in Westminster. This proposed legislation will remove many of the barriers pet owners face when trying to access accommodation.[14] Although the Renters' Rights Bill will not affect Wales due to the devolved settlement, the Welsh Government has suggested similar rights in its White Paper on Adequate Housing, Fair Rents and Affordability, which was open to consultation in the final stages of writing this report.[15]

Transport

Access to transport has been a tool used to convince Ukrainians to consider living in areas outside of the major urban centres, especially Cardiff. The fact that the Welcome Ticket enabled Ukrainians to access bus and Transport for Wales (TfW) train services for free, was an incentive to move to places with a 30-to-40-minute commute to Cardiff. Unfortunately, the Welcome Ticket scheme came to an end after just over two years in March 2024 and has not yet been replaced. Ukrainians are no longer eligible for free transport. With transport costs further increasing, the lack of the Welcome Ticket may make moving outside of urban centres even less desirable for Ukrainians.[16] The Welcome Ticket was discontinued whilst the research was being conducted, so it is hard to gauge the impact it has had. Even so, a few people brought it up:

"People have been relying on access to free transport as a way of facilitating their ability to afford a property because they don't have any transport costs or be moved to a property which is affordable because they can move back and forth for free even though it's in the Valleys. [...] And all of a sudden, it's going to cost you [...] £8.30 a day for your train."
Interview

A lack of adequate transport has also affected integration.

"The situation with public transport is bad. Bus and train schedules do not coincide with when you have to leave early. The duration of the trips is short due to the short period of operation of the buses. And on Sundays, they don't go at all. That's why we sit indoors, we almost don't go anywhere. It's morally difficult to be in one place all the time. If there is any opportunity to go somewhere and diversify everyday life, it rarely happens. Often you have to ask new British acquaintances for a ride, but this is inconvenient for everyone."
Survey response

5.8 Future and Uncertainty

There are several uncertainties for the future of Ukrainians in Wales which have an impact on their housing situation.

End of Hosting Arrangements

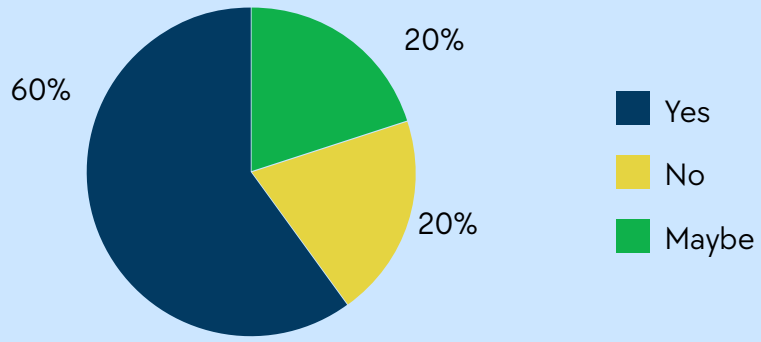
Among them is hosting arrangements coming to an end. Many of the initial hosts have now been hosting for at least two years, which, in many cases, is far more than they thought they were signing up for. With the cost of living crisis, and uncertainties over the continued 'thank you' payments to hosts, it remains to be seen how many hosting arrangements will come to an end. In our survey of local authorities, 8 out of 10 mentioned the ending of hosting schemes as the biggest challenges Ukrainian refugees in their local authority faced in the next 12 months.

"The biggest challenge will be finding accommodation for Ukrainians families when the hosting arrangement ends. There is very little affordable housing in the private sector and most Ukrainians want social housing, for which there is high demand and little availability. The expectation of many families is that they will have social housing and this has already proved difficult as some families do not want to consider privately rented accommodation. In addition to this, many families living with hosts have saved a lot of money having claimed UC [Universal Credit] and not had many outgoings, however, they are very reluctant to use this money for their next accommodation."
Local authority

"I'm very stressed about my future, because I have 3 children and I don't know where I will live in the future when my host will stop support."
Survey response

In our local authority survey, we asked local authorities if they had hosts who had previously hosted and would be interested in doing so again. Fortunately, only 20% said that they had hosts who would not be interested in hosting again (Graph #17).

Local Authorities with Hosts Interested in Hosting Again (Graph #17)



Visas and Length of Stay in the UK

This situation is intrinsically linked to the visas given to Ukrainians to move to the UK in the first place. These visas were for three years, but in February 2024, the previous UK Government announced that from February 2025, those with visas coming to an end, have been able to apply for an 18-month extension.[17] This will mean that those who came on the first visas under one of the Ukraine visa schemes could now stay in the UK until September 2026. This will leave Ukrainians six months short of the 5 years required to claim residence. The new UK Government has not made any further announcement on visa extensions since they took office in July 2024.

With no end in sight to the war in Ukraine, it is unclear what the future holds for Ukrainians in Wales, the UK, or worldwide. It is suspected that Ukrainian officials want Ukrainians to return. Allegedly, Ukrainian officials have held talks with other countries to place restrictions on their welcome policies to Ukrainians and to encourage returns.[18]

This all leaves Ukrainians in Wales with a lot of uncertainty. Evidence from the research would suggest that whilst initially Ukrainians wanted to return to Ukraine as soon as possible, they have now put down roots in Wales and want to stay. For many, there is the feeling that they have already had to rebuild their lives from scratch once, and they do not want to have to do so again.

"I don't understand my future in Ukraine, I don't understand my future in this country"
Cardiff Focus group

"I think only around 14% of the people from the last survey that I did with [other stakeholders] said, 'we definitely want to go back at this stage.' [...] Compared to more like 60 or 70% going back to the start when it was, 'no, we're going to win this, it's going to be fine, and we're going to go home, and we'll be home in a year.' There's now the realisation of actually 'no, we've settled here. Now the kids have friends and Ukraine's not going to be rebuilt anytime soon.'"
Interview

This has a practical element, too. Visa uncertainty will have an impact on housing and employment, especially in England. As explained by an interviewee:

"Then again, England has different housing rules. Particularly around the right to rent [...]. Anecdotally, some landlords are now refusing to start renting to Ukrainians in England because their visas are not long enough. [...] they would say, 'well, you know, we don't want to be caught fined by the UK Government because we're renting to you when it's illegal to rent to you because your visa expired [...], which then adds to a pressure from the Welsh side of things when you've got people that are literally insisting on moving over to England when they're with a host or they're even in a private rental here and they're considering giving notice and they want to move over there and then they can't because there's completely different barriers that are being faced in England as well, but it may have an impact on people living here."
Interview

"I have some savings and would like to buy my own home, but none of the banks I applied to have given me the opportunity to apply for a mortgage to buy a home, indicating that I am a refugee and that I do not have a permanent job. I ask, 'what difference does it make whether I pay the landlord's rent or pay the mortgage and live in my own premises?'"
Survey response

Not only that, but there may be a reluctance from Ukrainians to move to a new locality or buy a house if they know that they will have to leave Wales in less than two years.

During the focus groups, many Ukrainian parents explained that they are sending their children to school in the UK as normal. Additionally, they are also sending them to take online classes from Ukrainian schools in the evening to prepare for the eventuality of if they have to return.

5.9 Employment

Although the research was set out to investigate the housing situation for Ukrainians in Wales, employment issues were also prevalent. There is a direct link between housing and employment, because theoretically, a higher paid job would allow someone a wider option when it comes to housing. At the same time, housing location will impact job availability, and vice-versa.

As seen in Graph #6, a majority of Ukrainians in Wales are employed. Nevertheless, based on the research, we also found out that there were issues around underemployment and a lack of access to jobs to match their skills and qualifications. During the Cardiff focus group, which had Ukrainians from all over South Wales, there was an enormous frustration at the lack of jobs available to them. There was a feeling that only low-skilled and low-paying jobs were being made available to them, in spite of their past experiences and qualifications. Some even called it out as direct discrimination.

"[Some Ukrainians are] very qualified and they're working in low-skilled employment and then the kind of aspects of getting their qualifications either translated or them having sufficient level of English to work in their field is a barrier in itself as well. [...] You have some people with really fantastic qualifications that, unfortunately, in the UK are for one reason or another just not recognised. With some fields, and I'll use the medical field as an example, some Ukrainians were expected to take an exam again [...]. But because our UK system doesn't recognise those qualifications, they weren't able to practise medicine in the UK without taking additional exams. We have to bear in mind that those exams would have been at a level of English that is very advanced. They're not going to be the basic English that they're using. So even going through ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] classes regularly, that wouldn't give them the English level skills that they would require in a short amount of time. It will be a lengthy process for them and that's one of the frustrations that you have with someone that could have been on a really good salary in Ukraine. They come over here, they're working as a cleaner or they're working in any other kind of manual labour or minimum wage job because their qualifications here are just not recognised."
Interview

6. Conclusion

This research has demonstrated the breadth of experiences Ukrainians in Wales have had in relation to their housing. It has also shown the successes in the Welsh response, but also the areas from which lessons can be learnt. There is an understanding that the number of arrivals was larger than expected. This has had an impact, as the Welcome Centres were not set up to accommodate that many people. Combined with generic unprecedented housing pressures in Wales, the move on from the Welcome Centres has been fraught with complications. Critically, the ability to move people on to the private rented sector has been an obstacle. A great number of Ukrainians should not be in a situation where they have to be supported with their housing. Nevertheless, affordability, restrictive practices (such as demands for guarantors), and discrimination have pushed Ukrainians into having to rely on the support of already oversubscribed services.

In terms of positives, Ukrainians have reported gratitude and happiness at every stage of the process, from the initial welcome from the Welsh Government and the Welsh people, through hosting schemes, to the support from local authorities.

There are many lessons that can be learnt, not just for future large influxes of sanctuary seekers from a unique group, but also for the response to the asylum journey in the UK and the subsequent move on. The dedicated multi-disciplinary teams and money made available has created better outcomes for Ukrainians. There flexibility has also been an asset It would be a real shame to lose this experience and expertise.

There are also lessons to be learnt in terms of the readiness of Wales to respond to these types of crises. More broadly, there is a clear need for a long-term plan for housing to avoid a collapse like the one we have experiences in the last three years.

Ultimately, it is unclear for how much longer Ukrainians will continue in Wales. This uncertainty has been constantly brought up as a worry. Many Ukrainians have now built a new life in Wales and would like to continue. However, the lack of commitment on what will happen after the 18-month visa extension makes it difficult for Ukrainians to fully move on and is a barrier to integration.

Lastly, the research team would like to thank all participants and Ukrainians in Wales more broadly for their warmth and generosity. At all stages of the research, Ukrainians have enthusiastically shared their experiences in spite of the horrors and trauma they have experienced and have shown their appreciation for their voices finally being heard and represented. This research would have been impossible without the contributions. A special thanks also goes to Adrian Marszalek, Nicholas Wysoczanskyj, and Yuliia Bond for their support with the research, their willingness to listen, and their help in getting Ukrainians involved in the research.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7. Recommendations

Recommendations to the UK Government

1. Provide Ukrainians with more certainty over their visa situation before the 18-month extension comes to an end. Although these visas will only start ending in August 2026 at the earliest, the worries are being felt now.
2. Continue the 'thank you' payments to hosts in some form to avoid increased instances of homelessness. Alternatively, if the 'thank you' payments cannot continue, make money available to local authorities to support the Ukrainian hostees into new accommodation.
3. Ensure that the visa situation for Ukrainians does not affect their right to work in the UK.
4. Reverse the decision to freeze the Local Housing Allowance in the latest UK budget announcement.

Recommendations to the Welsh Government

1. Find alternatives to the 'thank you' payment if the UK Government decides to end them. We welcome the Welsh Government's decision to continue paying a top-off to hosts in the first year, but the number who fall in this category are low compared to the overall number of hosts.
2. Explore the possibility of converting the hosting scheme into a lodging scheme. Support hosts, hostees, and local authorities in standardising lodging contracts and arrangements.
3. Explore how similar schemes to hosting and lodging can be adopted for other sanctuary-seeking groups, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).
4. Legislate to end restrictive practices in the private rented sector, such as demands for guarantors. Ukrainians, newly granted refugees, other migrants, care leavers, and other groups would broadly benefit. Alternatively, standardise the support Welsh local authorities can provide with guarantors, bonds, or several months' rent payments in advance so that it is not a postcode lottery.
5. Introduce rent caps or some sort of rent controls so that Ukrainians and other low-income groups can access the private rented sector.
6. Use Rent Smart Wales to monitor instances of discrimination against Ukrainians by landlords or estate agents. Include the voices of Ukrainians in the training available to landlords.
7. Mandate local authorities to collect data on Ukrainian homelessness. This should also be done for other sanctuary-seeking groups.
8. Explore and standardise the conversion of Ukrainian qualifications to avoid underemployment.

Recommendations for Welsh Local Authorities

1. Keep the Ukraine response teams and pivot them towards the asylum widening of dispersal.
2. Fund Ukrainian and Russian translation and interpretation services.
3. Locally collect data on Ukrainian homelessness presentations. This should also be done for other sanctuary-seeking groups.
4. Collaborate with other Welsh local authorities to support Ukrainians who wish to leave their current local authority. This can be extended to English local authorities.


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8. Footnotes

1 USA for UNHCR, Ukraine Emergency Ukraine Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR (unrefugees.org) [accessed 11 September 2024].

2 Audit Wales, Supporting Ukrainians in Wales (March 2024), p. 4.

3 Ibid.

4 Heriot Watt University, Research finds risk of homelessness is four times higher for Ukrainian families this winter (22 November 2023) Research finds risk of homelessness is four times higher for Ukrainian families this winter - Heriot-Watt University (hw.ac.uk) [accessed 11 September 2024].

5 Audit Wales, Supporting Ukrainians in Wales (March 2024), p. 4.

6 Operational data, Home Office (HO) and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: by age and sex of applicant

7 Ibid.

8 Six responses were wrongly imputed. i.e. dates in the future or the day they completed the survey

9 Welsh Government, Anti-racist Wales Action Plan: What we are going to do to make Wales anti-racist (20 July 2022), p. 188

10 Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, pp. 189 and 228

11 Office of National Statistics, Housing prices in Cardiff (16 October 2024)

12 Kwame Boakye, "Over 9,300 Ukrainian refugee households have reported as homeless", Local Government Chronicle (19 March 2024)

13 Shelter Cymru, Can I Get A Home? Barriers to getting a private rented home in Wales (March 2022), p. 18

14 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Guide to the Renters' Rights Bill (26 September 2024)

15 Jayne Bryant, Cabinet Statement: Written Statement: Publication of the White Paper on Adequate Housing and Fair Rents (24 October 2024)

16 The Health Foundation, Trends in transport costs (1 November 2023)

17 Home Office, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Tom Pursglove, and Felicity Buchan, Government extends stay for Ukrainians in the UK (19 February 2024)

18 Barbara Moens and Jacopo Barigazzi, "Ukraine wants EU's next migration rules to encourage returns", Politico, 24 January 2024

9. Annexes

6.1 Annex 1 – Ukraine Survey Questions

The Housing Experiences of Ukrainian Refugees in Wales survey had 19 questions available in English and Ukrainian and had 196 final responses. Those marked with an asterisk (*) were compulsory. The number in parentheses notes the total number of answers.

1. Are you a Ukrainian refugee in Wales? / Ви біженець з України в Уельсі?* (196)
2. When did you arrive in Wales? / Коли ви прибули до Уельсу?* (196)
3. What local authority do you live in? / У якому окрузі Уельсу ви проживаєте?* (196)
4. What is your gender? / Який ваш гендер?* (196)
5. How old are you? / Якого ви віку?* (196)
6. What is your civil status? / Який ваш подружній статус?* (196)
7. What is your employment status? / Який ваш статус працевлаштування?* (196)
8. What type of accommodation do you live in? / В якому типі житла ви наразі проживаєте?* (196)
9. How difficult or easy have you found moving out of the initial accommodation? / Як складно або легко було вам переїхати з першопочаткового житла?* (196)
10. Would you like to share your experience of moving out of initial accommodation? / Чи хотіли б ви поділитись вашим досвідом переїзду з першопочаткового житла? (94)
11. Have you considered moving to another part of Wales or the UK for easier access to accommodation? / Чи думали ви про переїзд в іншу частину Уельсу чи Великобританії, з метою простішого пошуку житла?* (196)
12. If you have considered moving to another part of Wales or the UK for easier access to accommodation, would you like to expand? / Якщо ви вирішили переїхати в іншу частину Уельсу чи Великобританії, з метою простішого пошуку житла, чи хотіли б ви, більше розповісти про свій вибір? (44)
13. Have you had to access a local authority's homelessness support? / Чи доводилось вам звертатись до служби підтримки безпритульних від місцевої влади?* (196)
14. If you've had to access a local authority's homelessness support, how would you describe your experience? / Якщо вам доводилось звертатись до служби підтримки безпритульних від місцевої влади, як би ви описали свій досвід? (40)
15. How happy or unhappy are you with the quality of your current accommodation? / Чи ви задоволені або не задоволені якістю вашого поточного житла?* (196)
16. Would you like to share your thoughts on the quality of your current accommodation? / Чи хотіли б ви поділитись вашими враженнями, щодо якості вашого поточного житла? (74)
17. Have you tried to access the private rented sector? / Чи намагались ви орендувати житло у приватних орендодавців?* (196)
18. What barriers have you faced when trying to access the private rented sector? (select as many as relevant to you) / З якими перепонами ви зустрілись, коли намагались винайняти житло у приватних орендодавців? (Оберіть як найбільше пунктів, які відповідають вашому досвіду)* (196)
19. Are there any other thoughts you'd like to share about your housing situation in Wales? / Чи хотіли б ви поділитись будь якими іншими думками, щодо житлової ситуації в Уельсі? (61)

6.2 Annex 2 – Local Authority Survey Questions

The Local Authorities - The Housing Experiences of Ukrainian Refugees in Wales survey had 16 questions and received responses from 10 local authorities. Those marked with an asterisk (*) were compulsory. The number in parentheses notes the total number of answers.

1. What Welsh local authority do you represent?* (10)
2. Since when have you been supporting Ukrainian refugees in Wales?* (10)
3. Approximately, how many Ukrainian refugees are in your local authority? (10)
4. In your area, did most Ukrainians arrive to private hosts or were most arrivals on the Super Sponsor Scheme?* (10)
5. Do you have former hosts in you area who have expressed a desire to host again?* (10)
6. Is there anything you would like to add on hosting? (8)
7. Could you describe how your local authority supports Ukrainian refugees with their housing? (10)
8. Does your local authority collect specific homelessness data on Ukrainian refugees?* (10)
9. How many Ukrainian refugees do you think your local authority has supported with housing issues? (10)
10. In your opinion, what has been the biggest barrier to moving Ukrainian refugees from the Welcome Centres? (please select as many as are applicable)* (10)
11. Would you like to expand on the previous answer? (5)
12. What do you foresee to be the biggest challenges Ukrainian refugees in your local authority face in the next 12 months?* (10)
13. What sanctuary seekers groups do you support in your local authority? (please select as many as applicable)* (10)
14. In terms of the support required with housing, how similar or dissimilar are Ukrainian refugees to other sanctuary seekers or migrant groups?* (10)
15. Would you like to expand on the previous question? (6)
16. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience of supporting Ukrainian refugees with housing? (4)

6.3 Annex 3 – Local Authority Housing Support Measure Answers

All ten answers to Question 7 (Could you describe how your local authority supports Ukrainian refugees with their housing?) in the Local Authorities - The Housing Experiences of Ukrainian Refugees in Wales survey.

1. We offer 6 months' rent in advance (3 months due back), a deposit, and help with furniture, either supporting with DAF [Discretionary Assistance Fund] or with funding this when in employment. We can also help with removals and buying extra items to make their home homely.
2. We contact the guests leading up to 6 months and 12 months within hosting situation advising them of their options, (i.e. host to lodger, host to landlord, PRS (private rental sector)), complete affordability checks so they understand what they can afford and how they can improve their chances of securing PRS property. We have a dedicated Housing Options Advice Officer who attends with our caseworker and translator to ensure guests are fully aware of the difficulties and processes. We provide financial support to families who have secured PRS with deposits, and essential furniture and electricals. We also provide support post move on to PRS to ensure they get utilities bills and council tax payments set up. We endeavour to make all families independent but understand that some are more capable than others so ensure we build relationships with guests so they feel

they can approach us if they have any issues. When they do approach us, we help where we can and signpost to suitable services when appropriate. Our in-house translator who arrived via the Super Sponsor Scheme in June 2022, moved to hosted accommodation within [a mid-Wales local authority] in Sept 2022, moved to Manchester to PRS in Feb 23, and has since moved back to [the same mid-Wales local authority] PRS in April 24 has been invaluable in assisting us explain to guests and dispel rumours of being provided council housing which apparently happened frequently in other LAs. We have very little council house stock and approximately 3 year waiting list.

3. Our caseworkers have move on conversations with hosts and guests, throughout their time with hosts. We determine the length of time the host is happy to have the guest there. We carry out affordability checks with the individuals/families, utilise right move, engage with estate agents, LLs to broker conversations. We provide a move on grant of £1,500 to go towards rent/first months' bond or furniture.

4. We support them [Ukrainians] to sign up for benefits, open bank accounts, register for schools, school transport, free school meals, school grants, register with GP. [We also] help with looking for jobs, attend job interviews, looking for PRS when host arrangement ends if not alternative EOI can be sourced, arrange viewing of PRS, help apply for DAF grants and [other] funding to help secure PRS. [We] refer to third party agencies for specific support e.g Careers Wales.

5. We have two housing officers within the team. If we have a Ukrainian family who are under notice from their current host, we will look for another host in the first instance but if none are available, we will help them to secure suitable, affordable, and sustainable housing. [We help] with rent, bond, and furniture. We will also do the same for those who are looking to and are ready to move to PRS.

6. We support Ukrainian refugees to find and sustain suitable hosting arrangements. Alternatively, we will support to find private rental and can assist with deposits, etc. We also work closely with the Housing Options and Homelessness Team as and when required.

7. [We have] dedicated support workers [and] support plans.

8. Move on support [is] provided, rent and deposit paid upfront to the landlord. Some refugees required support with registering with utility providers, support if there is a breakdown, or if they wish to move out when tenancy ends.

9. We support whilst Ukrainians are living with hosts and then further down the line by supporting looking for properties in the private rented sector (PRS), we support the transition moving to the PRS and then support with any tenancy support issues. We also register all eligible Ukrainians onto the social housing list.

10. [South Wales local authority] has an in-house support team that provides direct support to Ukrainian guests that are hosted, locally. The team provides an initial orientation and integration support service to new arrivals, but also works with hosts to ensure the longevity of the arrangement. We support Ukrainian clients to access move-on housing, primarily through the private rented sector and offered incentives to some private landlords through our leasing scheme. Where sponsorship breakdowns have resulted in homelessness, referrals are made to the housing options services to conduct an assessment and temporary accommodation is provided, where needed.

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