

Exploitation in the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Briefing for Local Authorities August 2022

Whilst the generosity of the British public cannot be disputed, with 127,300 Ukrainian refugees welcomed into homes and local authorities across the country rapidly adapting to keep people safe, sadly there are now cases of modern slavery being identified within the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

In this briefing, three councils share details of cases of modern slavery identified in their areas and provide information on what worked well and suggest recommendations for how the response could be strengthened. By sharing their good practice and challenges, the local authorities hope that other councils will take steps to prevent and investigate modern slavery within the Homes for Ukraine scheme in their locality and ensure support is available for any victims identified.

Case Example 1:

A woman was living in a property provided through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The property looked different to photos she was sent online and her bed was in the kitchen. The sponsor made the woman work for the sponsor's business and she wasn't paid. The woman left the accommodation and moved to another city where she rang the Modern Slavery Helpline who alerted the council in the area where the exploitation took place.

Council Response:

When the council had carried out checks on the property before the guest arrived, there was no bed in the kitchen. Since the disclosure, the council has not been able to get in touch with other people at the property or the sponsor. The council is currently working with the police to investigate the sponsor's business.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure all staff are aware of the threat of exploitation within the Homes for Ukraine scheme
2. Work with relevant partners such as the police, NHS and charities to share information and establish processes to help identify modern slavery
3. Attempt to contact the guest as well as the sponsor, especially if there is no response from the sponsor. Consider poor engagement from sponsors as a potential red flag to investigate.

Case Example 2:

Two women were forced to work long hours completing domestic duties in the property where they were living through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. One of the women left the property and re-matched herself independently in another area. She contacted a charity who supported her to enter the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and alerted the council in the area where the domestic servitude took place.

Council Response:

The Council had made attempts to visit the sponsor previously but the sponsor refused all attempts made. The council raised concerns with Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC), as there was another woman still in Ukraine who was due to be placed in the same household and the sponsor was prevented from receiving more guests. An email address on the application for the Homes for Ukraine scheme was for a cleaning company in another country and DLUHC have since begun tasking Border Force to stop and question anyone with an organisation's contact details on their application.

Recommendations:

4. Make guests aware of their rights, entitlements and contact details for support, (such as local charities or the Modern Slavery Helpline) as soon as possible
5. Identify contact details for Homes for Ukraine leads in other councils to ensure swift cross-border working
6. If unsure when guests are arriving, use the request for sponsor's payment as indication and conduct welfare check

Case Example 3:

A woman arrived at Stanstead Airport with her child under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and planned to meet her sponsor in Yorkshire, however she could not get hold of them and was encouraged by a 'friend' to stay at an address in the South of England. The 'friend' asked the woman for her legal documents to send to the sponsor in Yorkshire but the woman refused. A few weeks later the owner of the property the woman was staying at and asked the woman and her daughter to leave. The woman went to a local charity, which she was aware of through a support group on Facebook, who helped her apply to the council as homeless.

Council Response:

The council addressed immediate needs, with the help of a translator, and placed the woman and her child in a hotel over the weekend. The council worked with the charity, police and council in Yorkshire to investigate further. A police search of the 'friend's' name found an alias and various criminal offences including domestic abuse and a stabbing. A multi-agency meeting was held with DLUHC and it was discovered that the sponsor in Yorkshire is a known trafficker and the 'friend's' home address was also registered as a sponsor for the Homes for

Ukraine scheme and he was due to receive a 27-year-old woman, which was subsequently prevented. Because no exploitation took place, no further action was taken by the police.

Recommendations:

7. Alert DLUHC to all cases of potential exploitation by recording on JIRA, the online system
8. Work with the police to investigate claims, even when exploitation has been prevented
9. Proactively investigate matches so it's not only victims who escape exploitation that are identified
10. Plan for guests leaving the Homes for Ukraine scheme at the end of 6 months, recognising the risks of homelessness and exploitation

Resources

Website for Ukrainian refugees providing links to resources and knowledge from a coalition of anti-slavery organisations in the UK. <https://ukrainianswelcome.org/>

Guidance for professionals and Ukrainian refugees.

<https://www.humantraffickingfoundation.org/ukraine-response>

Government guidance for councils on the Homes for Ukraine scheme

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils>