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Online Forum: Addressing the Risks of Exploitation for Displaced Ukrainians in the UK

5th May 2022 Minutes

Yvonne Kachikoti (Refugee Action)

Refugee Action are providing support to the Homes for Ukraine scheme, high levels of women and children in the scheme – DBS checks are not fool proof and diligent background checks would be more useful. DBS does not pick up financial background on hosts – risk of exploitation if host is struggling financially and may use opportunity to manipulate refugees.

Power imbalance between host and refugee when doing things such as supporting opening a bank account or registering with a GP or universal credit application – where is the boundaries there and right to privacy? Clear boundaries of what is expected from a host and independent support outside of the home.

What assessments are being carried out on support needs of refugees (mental health issues or perhaps they are a survivor of trafficking) safeguarding concerns: lone 23 year old woman hosted by a single man, she wasn't comfortable and alternative accommodation found, refugee working as a sex worker in Ukraine before arriving in the UK but under the control of an exploiter – the host only just found out about it once she arrived risk that she was still being coerced by someone possible that she came into the UK under duress.

Reports of hosts wanting to deduct universal credit payments from refugees. Important that not all hosts are trained to recognise signs of abuse or mental health issues, services need to be supporting hosts directly.

Refugee Action receiving loads of queries from hosts and with collaboration we can move into the right direction to minimise risk.

Refugee Action we have the Insight Hub and the current survey we are running is focusing on Ukraine Arrivals, including the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Aiming to get a UK wide dataset around this - please do share this [survey link](#) with organisations in your network so we can get as many responses as possible (deadline Wed 11 May).

Sonika Sidhu (Local Government Association)

The local government association represents councils across the country. Encouraging to hear from councils their support for arrivals from Ukraine. Had questions from the outset on how the scheme is going to work and how to make it effective. Looking to deliver something impactful that ensures that refugees are safe this has been a challenge. Funding framework has mirrored previous schemes and that has been positive. Data still needs work, data set for councils that is accessible is so important for councils. Government has been committed to engaging with the sector.

There are still issues that need to be resolved. For the LGA it seems as though the policy agenda is struggling to keep pace with the operational reality on the ground. Councils are feeling like there isn't enough detail in the policy to deliver what they need to do. Policy being made on the spot as

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

the situation is moving so fast, LGA has flagged a key range of issues. Challenge in addressing issues quickly enough.

Issues that need to be resolved around accommodation and safeguarding checks – there is a need for both pace but also accuracy. Those who have to deliver need to be designing the checks. Issue is around risk, haven't been able to be clear on what level of risk is the Government comfortable with and who is responsible for the risk.

Unaccompanied minors continued concern for the sector (gap between policy and reality) arriving without a package of support in place. Need to be clear on the responsibility for this.

Challenge in the re-matching process (councils are leading the process) what the risks are there and how they ensure support. For councils the challenge is the shift of responsibility from the sponsor leading the process to councils leading the process.

LGA would like to be able to move individuals from the Family Scheme to the homes for Ukraine scheme to get the support they need – the sector are not able to unlock the same support packages for refugees coming through on the family route and the LGA are continuing to lobby on this.

Wrap around support making sure that arrivals have access to additional support and ensuring that the capacity exists to provide this (mental health services). Access to school placements with language skills.

Final issue is what happens after the 6 months – what are the longer-term solution with arrivals. LGA are starting to have those conversations with the Government now.

Phillipa Roberts (Hope for Justice)

There are significant risks in country. There are learnings from the borders areas, where there are lots of risks already as people are waiting for visas they are vulnerable. Real need to synergise the anti-slavery response into a humanitarian response.

Prevention needs to look at intervention throughout the process from the visa process at the borders and reception areas to the schemes in the UK. Anti-Slavery sector have created a central repository of resources that can be accessed [here](#).

Concerns to approach of international approach to protecting refugees through the Nationality and Borders Bill and the crucial element of this safe and legal routes and ensuring that visas do not access as a barrier when people are fleeing conflict. Important to look at the process and the different intervention points and who can act as protective factors.

Understanding different types of exploitation that could arise that might be within the schemes but also within communities already. Traffickers know who to target who are culturally disorientated as they arrive to the UK. Building capacity at national level through policy and at local level to mitigate risks so people know where to report complaints or risks. Key aspect of prevention work is taking a multidisciplinary approach working across sectors refugee, human rights, anti-slavery sectors.

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

Traffickers innovate to new protections put in place. Need to also look at longer term risks of homelessness and after the three-year period and the need for routes to resettlement. Traffickers are collaborative and entrepreneurial – we have to do the same

As we take approaches forward it is important that survivors are central to the development of legislation policy and practice as we take this forward.

[Prevention and risk document](#) with some practical solutions – keen to collaborate as they approach looking at these issues. Contact Phillipa.roberts@hopeforjustice.org for any questions.

Florina East European Resource Centre

Any form of migration drives exploitation, this fast-unravelling situation will bring particular risks.

Accessing the job market is difficult as a refugee there is a lack of willingness from UK employers to accept those without clear immigration status, national insurance numbers or English language proficiency. There will be a lot of confusion in eligibility for work for Ukrainian refugees with employers. Advocacy around this will be important. When desperate refugees will take precarious offers of work.

There will be a need to keep a close eye on the industries that predominately employ women such as domestic cleaning (already a big issue with Ukrainians and domestic servitude). Insecurity of other Eastern European countries because of the Ukraine war geopolitical issues shifting to moving to the UK for work without the right to work.

EERC has hired Ukrainian speaking staff, so they are able to support refugees if you want to contact them please do info@eerc.org.uk

Laura Wood Vita Network

There have been an estimated 63,000 births since the war has started which has meant that standard maternity care has been disrupted. Concerning reports of survival sex and sex trafficking as young women travel into neighbouring countries.

War disrupts access to family planning support. Neighbouring countries have different and perhaps more limited options for what women may have for example Poland has an abortion ban and lack of access to emergency contraception.

The IASC guidance on a public health approach (multi-layered, multi-sectored, contextualised, prevention focused) is [here](#).

Safeguarding women and children in the hosting scheme: complex issues around what a pregnant woman should have to share with her host. Also, dispersal of women around the UK through the hosting scheme means disruption of medical care for pregnant refugees. Perinatal care is challenging for refugees, services might not have access to medical records. Fail to address mental health of perinatal women.

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

How finance can be protected around the hosting of women and children.

Young people getting into exploitative situations to support their families. Contextual thinking is so important.

Anne Manos STOP THE TRAFFIK

Agricultural sector has high pre-existing risk of exploitation for Ukrainians (poor conditions, low pay and restricted movement to other workplaces).

Companies based in the UK are being contacted by Ukrainians saying that they are looking to coordinate jobs for refugees in the UK– could be indicating traffickers sharing fake job opportunities into exploitation.

STOP THE TRAFFIK has three campaigns reached over 1.5 million people targeting those on the move. First campaign with tips on how to stay safe on route, second one about looking for employment safely and what to do in experiences of exploitation in the workplace and finally the third campaign has launched the stay safe campaign a repository of information on health and legal etc about how people can provide for themselves, these campaigns are empowering refugees with knowledge.

STOP app (translated into Ukrainian, Russian and Polish) can allow individuals to report trafficking concerns, share what they are seeing and play an active part in reporting and keeping themselves safe.

Collaboration is risky for traffickers; we must share data on what's happening to put the business of trafficking at risk. Stay safe campaign – 25 NGOs all sharing the same information.

Jared Hodgson (Hope at Home)

Hope at Home

Only hosting scheme in UK specifically for survivors of modern slavery. Train and support hosts. Work in partnership with external agencies who support the survivor

Concerns around the scheme:

- Matching process
- DBS checks (need for advanced checks and references)
- Home visits
- Hosts support
- Move on options

Training for hosts at hope at home covers safeguarding, boundaries, trauma, resilience and self-care. In touch with hosts regularly with support offered to them. Without this support there are safeguarding risks and inexperienced hosts could provide wrong advice and hosts could experience

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

burnout as 6 months is a long term to host. Move on options – there are limited housing availability, where will those on the scheme go. Hearing from local authorities of refugees appearing at homelessness services due to a breakdown of a host placement. Hope at home working with local authorities to help them set up hosting support to mitigate risks.

www.hopeathome.org.uk or email jared@hopeathome.org.uk or call on 07877 447 341

Some helpful links around best practice for hosting here for those interested -

https://naccomm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NACCOM-Hosting-Good-Practice-Guide-2022_PART-1-FINAL.pdf <https://naccomm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/NACCOM-Hosting-Good-Practice-Guide-Part2-FINAL-MAY-2022.pdf>

Kate Roberts (FLEX)

19,920 Seasonal Worker visas issued in 2021 67% were to Ukrainian nationals. Short term visa which allows visa holders to enter the UK for 6 months to work in agriculture or horticulture.

Initial response- short extension within the scheme

- Ukrainian workers on the SWV had their visas extended until 31 December 2022- no other changes to the visa terms.

Concerns raised early March 2022:

- Dependency on employers
- No option to change sectors or work outside the scheme, no guarantee that there will be work within the scheme due to the work's seasonal nature.
- No recourse to public funds, brings with it the risk of destitution and debt.
- Workers on the scheme cannot bring family members from Ukraine to safety in the UK.

Ukraine Extension Scheme

- Announced 29 March. Opened 3 May
- A Ukrainian national and their partner and children who had permission to stay in the UK on 18 March 2022 (or which has expired since 1 January 2022) can stay in the UK under the Ukraine Extension Scheme.
- Free to apply
- Successful applicants will be granted permission to stay in the UK with full access to work, study and public funds. 3 years

Potential issues with the Extension Scheme

- Delay before scheme opened 3 May & eligibility dates. Must have permission to stay in UK on 18 March 2022 (or expired since 1 January 2022)

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

- Information and specialist legal advice (Ukraine Advice Project) plus practical assistance – finding work accommodation
- No direct route to bring family members
- Need for integration support and certainty beyond 3 years

FLEX blog on the Ukraine Extension scheme <https://www.labourexploitation.org/news/filling-gaps-preventing-increased-risks-exploitation-ukrainian-workers-seasonal-worker-visa>

Phillipa Ishola Love 146

We know exploiters find opportunities in the weaknesses of systems and exploit these to their own ends. If we fail to implement safeguarding systems harm happens and there is a need to question whether is our response safe and effective?

Immigration enforcement in put in front of child safeguarding. It is all separated children that must be placed in safe protection frameworks that are effectively resourced.

Failure to ensure that visas are given means that we are creating a rouge system outside of effective mechanisms that increase – is this incompetence or incompetence designed? An agenda preventing us to have a multi-agency response to protect children and families coming from Ukraine. For children arriving here the trauma that they face are great, identification of needs and risks are crucial with better training and coordination across Europe.

Ella Cockbain (UCL)

7th April UCL and IASC hosted a roundtable with 100 experts as a rapid evidence gathering exercise to identify what are the risks and recommendations for responses. The [report](#) was published last week and identified five key themes with 25 policy recommendations:

There is a spectrum of exploitation (moves across different levels of severity) so it is important to not only focus on modern slavery.

Nature of those seeking refugee from Ukraine (women children, elderly, disabilities, minority groups, undocumented migrants and non-Ukrainians) falling through gaps in the current responses.

Refugees are not a homogenous group, and it is also important to think about building resilience as well as protection. The EU visa free response was praised meaning rapid integration into the labour market etc (but not open to everyone non-Ukrainians falling through the gaps)

UK visa-based response is going to exasperate risks as it is difficult to navigate the visa scheme, described as chaotic as there is a lack of clear guidance and support, and individuals are having to wait so long for visas and so therefore are put in great risk on route to the UK because of delays.

Need to remove the visa requirement for Ukrainian refugees (important for Anti-Trafficking) but if this is not removed as a minimum eligibility must be extended and offer provisions for non-Ukrainian nationals to access support in the UK.

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

Homes for Ukraine safeguarding concerns include the checking process, lack of clear information for Local Authorities expectations, matching process on social media, limited oversight and support. Hosts could be actively predatory or opportunistically exploitative when put in this position (domestic servitude) support is not in place for hosts (information and training). Housing concerns for placements that have broken down or for those under the family scheme without somewhere to stay also within the extension scheme there is no housing provided. Local Authorities are not going to be able to meet housing needs.

Stark disparity between schemes - £200 payment within the homes for Ukraine scheme and £10,000 for local authorities but provisions are not there in the other schemes – Scotland more positive example with central immigration support and labour rights.

Both information gaps and overload – lack of information from official sources, fragmented and decentralised routes to support are becoming difficult. There is a compelling case on scaling back targeted messaging and think about the goals. Important that messaging is both digital and non digital and of course in the right language for refugees.

Not enough to warn those about modern slavery, need safer options!

Reconciling Ukraine scheme with the hostile environment – establishing a protective firewall between police and immigration so those with insecure status are able to report securely without fear of deportation. General need to dismantle the hostile environment.

Report found how important long term strategic planning is to look at what happens when placement breakdown integration was seen as really important protective factor. Responses are trauma informed building people's rights and Ukrainians are involved in this process.

What happens if this war lasts for a long time? schemes don't have routes to settlement not being addressed.

Discussion

Why would a single woman be matched with a single male host? This could be a product of self-matching on social media. Reset has been tasked by the government and are developing an accreditation model around official matching schemes to hope refugees would be directed to this.

Housing for women have an increasing concern that not everyone in the Ukraine is going to be a citizen, international students being preyed upon and are not eligible for schemes.

Central host databased was raised.

Those applying for the visa scheme there are checks but not everyone has a criminal conviction, more could be done in country.

Unlikely for a host to be vulnerable to exploitation themselves more likely the refugee.