

Beyond Sanctuary: Building the Future of Ukrainians in the UK

Introduction and Methodology

This policy brief examines the socio-economic participation of and challenges faced by Ukrainians residing in the UK under Ukraine Scheme visas (including Ukraine Permission Extension, UPE). As of March 2026, there are over 180,000 people who arrived under the Homes for Ukraine scheme in the UK, including 38,400 under 18 years of age.¹ This brief draws on a survey of 5454 displaced Ukrainians in the UK conducted in May–June 2026, 18 expert interviews, and discussions within the Ukraine Policy Network (UPN) at the University of Birmingham.² The work builds on our previous research in this area.³ A full policy report on these findings will be published in autumn 2026.

Recommendations

1. Create a timely and affordable pathway to permanent residence for displaced Ukrainians in the UK. Ensure this is accessible to vulnerable groups.
2. Include the time spent in the UK on the Ukraine Scheme/UPE visas in qualifying time for any existing route to permanent residence.
3. Address barriers to further and higher education and apprenticeships for displaced Ukrainians, especially those caused by short-term visa status.
4. Draw on localised best practice to create national programmes that facilitate access to skilled employment (e.g., mentorship, work experience, English language training).
5. Work with professional bodies to create fast-track routes for the formal recognition of Ukrainian qualifications, including for health practitioners.
6. Improve access to affordable and culturally informed mental health care for displaced Ukrainians through increased availability of Ukrainian-speaking services and reducing barriers to professional recognition for qualified Ukrainian mental health practitioners.

Key Findings

We rebuilt our life here, it was very difficult... This uncertainty has a very negative impact on the emotional and psychological state of both me and my child, who has already integrated into society here and doesn't even remember life before. (Survey free text)

Temporary visa status and lack of pathway to permanent residence impact Ukrainians across all domains

The existing temporary visa framework restricts the ability of Ukrainians to fully utilise their skills and capacities. Practitioners working with Ukrainians report that employers are discouraged from investing in training or hiring for higher-skilled roles. Of those who report barriers to employment at their skill level in the UK, 63.6% state that the barrier is short-term visa status.

Short-term visas also hinder access to education and skills development for displaced Ukrainians. 29.8% of Ukrainians who have sought access to education experienced barriers

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homes-for-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-and-ukraine-family-scheme-visa-data-by-age-and-sex-of-applicant>.

² The UPN brings together 80+ members from academia, NGOs, charities and practitioners in different fields.

³ See <https://blog.bham.ac.uk/supportukrainians/>.



in doing so – for 69.8% this related to the short-term status of their visa. Access to apprenticeships is particularly impacted (45.1% of those facing barriers to education).

Most Ukrainians would like to stay in the UK regardless of the situation in Ukraine

76.6% of our respondents want to stay in the UK even when it is safe to return to Ukraine. 18.1% are undecided and only 4.6% want to return to Ukraine. However, 87.5% of survey respondents see **no option** to switch to a visa status that offers a pathway to permanent residence. Of those who are eligible for another type of visa, only 37.9% have the means to pay the necessary fees/healthcare surcharge.

When asked about their plans at the end of the Ukraine Scheme/UPE visas, 30.6% of respondents plan to apply for refugee status, 16.7% to move to another country, 3.2% would stay in the UK irregularly, and only 8.3% would return to Ukraine.

Survey respondents were asked about the Ukraine and UK government expectations of Ukrainians in the UK. The community displays a strong negative attitude towards the possibility that immediate return is the desired outcome of either government.

Ukrainians demonstrate high levels of employment and educational participation

A significant proportion of Ukrainian adults have entered the labour market. 90% have worked in the UK, of whom 89.2% are currently employed: 71.0% full-time and 63.9% on a permanent contract. 12.9% own an active private business. Many are pursuing further training or professional requalification: 41.5% of all respondents have achieved a qualification in the UK, with 11.1% at degree level or higher.

Despite these positive trends, participation often occurs below an individual's skills level, indicating a loss of valuable expertise in sectors such as healthcare, education, legal and financial services, digital technologies, and business. 59.4% work in a different industry to the one they worked in in Ukraine, with a marked shift to lower skilled employment. A further 14.2% work in the same industry at a lower level. 75.2% state that they have experienced barriers to employment at their skill level in the UK, including short-term visa status, level of English, and lack of work experience in the UK.

Of those who have experienced challenges accessing employment, 23.1% named formal recognition of qualifications as a barrier. Practitioners report that qualification recognition is often a lengthy and costly process and inaccessible to many professionals.

Underemployment can lead to a loss of professional identity and social status, which in turn is strongly associated with depression and low self-esteem.

Children face disruption to their education and anxiety about their futures

Over one tenth of parents/carers state that their children have had difficulty accessing higher or further education, or apprenticeships. Of these, 55.5% were problems relating to visa status. Practitioners stress that this disruption occurs at a key moment in the life course of these young people and will likely have life-long impacts.

81.4% of parents stressed that the short-term visa status affects children's wellbeing strongly or very strongly and 84.5% that children are anxious about returning to Ukraine. Most Ukrainian children in the UK (70.8%) speak English better than any other language.

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