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Hosts' Experiences of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract. *The UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme has thus far issued more than 200,000 visas to Ukrainians fleeing war. The operation of this scheme is contingent upon a sizeable group of "hosts" volunteering, but we know little about this group. In this article, we draw upon the largest qualitative dataset assembled to date on host experiences to provide insights on these important questions and build upon the quantitative analysis produced by the Office for National Statistics. Understanding the experiences of this group may be relevant to ongoing policy debates about the future deployment of this type of scheme.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Homes for Ukraine scheme allows eligible UK residents to sponsor Ukrainians, who are then granted a visa permitting their entry and residence in the UK for up to three years.[1] The main responsibility of becoming a sponsor is hosting the sponsored individual(s) in a spare room, or another property, without charging rent.[2] The expected initial time duration of hosting is six months, but hosts can end or extend the arrangement—generally, sponsors are encouraged to extend their hosting for an additional six months. In return for volunteering, sponsors are given a monthly 'thank you payment'—which was initially £350, but is now

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[1] To be eligible, a sponsor must be a resident of the UK who has at least six months permission to be in the UK, can commit to hosting the refugees for six months, and can pass security and accommodation checks. Immigration Rules, Appendix Ukraine Scheme UKR 20.1 and 15.1, as supplemented by Home Office, 'Home for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme 4.0' (2022) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1097217/Homes_for_Ukraine_Sponsorship_Scheme_August_2022.pdf> accessed 30 Jan. 2023, 19-20.

[2] All adults in a potential home are required to pass security checks regardless of who is the lead sponsor, with more extensive checks undertaken where children are to be hosted. Immigration Rules, Appendix Ukraine Scheme UKR 15.1 and 15.3, as supplemented by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 'Homes for Ukraine: Guidance for sponsors (children and minors applying without parents or legal guardians)' (2022) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-sponsors-children-and-minors-applying-without-parents-or-legal-guardians#sponsor-approval-process> accessed 27 Jul. 2023.

£500 when hosting Ukrainians who have been in the UK for more than 12 months. As of 27 June 2023, 200,600 visas have been issued through this scheme.[3]

This scheme has been a vehicle for a significant mobilisation of the UK public in support of people fleeing war, and policymakers are now grappling with the questions as to whether the scheme could be replicated effectively in the future.[4] But we know little about the hosts who were pivotal to the Homes for the Ukraine scheme. What motivates them to volunteer? What are their experiences of hosting? What do they think of the support they receive from government and public services? Is volunteering changing their outlook? Are they willing to volunteer again? Thus far, we only have limited insight into such questions—with the leading study being a quantitative survey undertaken by the Office for National Statistics ('ONS'). In this article, we seek to supplement the ONS study with qualitative evidence pertaining to these questions. To do so, we draw upon the largest qualitative dataset to date on hosts' experiences, to provide new insights on the operation of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

II. EXISTING EVIDENCE

Past studies of the use "community sponsors" schemes internationally have investigated, albeit to a limited extent, the experience of sponsors.[5] While these schemes differ in design to Homes for Ukraine, they have, broadly, shown that, while sponsoring can be fulfilling, it is also a very demanding and challenging experience, while some suggest that vetting, training, the sharing of the financial burden, and ongoing guidance are essential to mitigate negative effects such as sponsor burnout and inappropriate relationship dynamics between sponsors and the sponsored.[6]

So far, the main insights into the experiences of sponsors of the Homes for Ukraine scheme are to be derived from an ONS survey – a large-scale two-wave survey, conducted with a sample of 17,702 participants in Wave One (fielded in July 2022), and 8,770 by Wave Two (fielded in November 2022).[7] The survey investigated the demographic profile of the

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[3] UK Government, 'Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data' (January 2023) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data--2> (accessed 26 January 2023).

[4] See *e.g.* R. Syal, 'Britons could be asked to house Afghans as thousands face hotel evictions' (*The Guardian*, 11 July 2023) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jul/11/britons-could-asked-house-afghans-thousands-face-hotel-evictions> (accessed 13 September 2023).

[5] N. Feith Tan, 'Community Sponsorship in Europe: Taking Stock, Policy Transfer and What the Future Might Hold' (2021) 3 *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*.

[6] Susan Fratzke and Emma Dorst, 'Volunteers and sponsors: A catalyst for refugee integration?' (Transatlantic Council on Migration 2019) <https://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/TCM-Refugee-Integration-Volunteering-FINAL.pdf> accessed 25 Jan. 23.

[7] Office of National Statistics, 'Experiences of Homes for Ukraine scheme sponsors, UK: 7 to 14 July 2022' (August 2022) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/experiencesofhomesforukraineschemesponsorsuk/7to14july2022> accessed 27 Jan. 2023; Office of National Statistics, 'Experiences of Homes for Ukraine scheme sponsors – follow-up, UK 21 to 28 November 2022' (December 2022)

hosts, their motivations for participating, the type of support they provided, the challenges they faced and what additional support they might find helpful.

In terms of demographics, the ONS data indicated most sponsors were over 30 years old— 38% were aged 20-49, 48% were aged 50-69, and 10% were aged 70 and over. Only 4% of sponsors were aged 18-29. 67% of sponsors were employed, of which 40% were in full-time employment, and 25% were retired. Most sponsors were motivated to volunteer as they want to help people flee a war zone (94%) and because they had the space to do so (79%). Only 8% reported that the monthly payments they received motivated them.

As regards how sponsors met their guest(s), 36% met via social media, 19% were formally matched, and 16% were informally matched. At the point of the survey, 43% were no longer hosting. Of those still hosting at the time of the survey, 6% had been hosting for three months or less, 34% had been hosting for more than three months but less than six months, 20% had been hosting for 6 months, and 40% had been hosting for more than six months. 2% of active sponsors expected to host for less than six months overall, 26% expected to host for 6-12 months, 27% expected to host for 12 months, and 27% expected to host for longer than 12 months. In terms of accommodation, 92% of guests lived in the sponsor's primary homes, 8% stayed in another property owned by sponsors, and 1% stayed in another property not owned by the sponsor. 32% of sponsors hosted one person, 32% hosted two guests, and 34% hosted more than two.

Sponsors reported providing a variety of forms of support to their guests, including helping with accessing services (91%), settling into the community (78%), transport (73%), emotional support (70%), interpreting and learning English (70%), finding work (66%), shopping for groceries (60%), cooking (53%), cleaning (48%), financial support (31%), and childcare (20%). Sponsors also reported incurring extra costs as part of their hosting duties, including in relation to utilities (85%), transport (58%), and bedding and toiletries (62%)— 18% reported that their ability to provide support to their guests is being affected by the rising cost of living.

Sponsors also reported several challenges, including uncertainty as to what will happen to guests (66%), difficulties relating to visas (50%), difficulties with helping guest(s) access public services (29%), difficulties with helping guests access benefits and financial support (25%), uncertainty about expectations of sponsor role (25%), and difficulties with their own sponsor application (25%). Some sponsors suggested they would have found it helpful to have support for administrative tasks for their guest(s) (59%), advice providing support and dealing with challenges (52%), and better signposting for available guidance (48%).

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/experiencesofhomesforukraineschemesponsorsuk/21to28november2022> accessed 27 Jan. 23.

This data provides a valuable insight into who sponsors are and their experiences. What emerges is a complex picture of hosts providing wide-ranging practical, emotional and financial support to their guests, with many wanting more guidance on administrative tasks, advice, and signposting to help available to them. Although this survey data provides useful indications of the scale of these experiences across the hosting population, it is inevitably limited in providing a more detailed understanding of their experiences, perspectives and—for those at the end of the hosting process—overall reflections on participation in the scheme. Our qualitative dataset allows us to examine these experiences in a different way.

III. METHODS

Our qualitative dataset is based on 43 semi-structured interviews, conducted between 8th March and 11th April 2023. The majority of the interviews were one-on-one, but three involved couples, culminating in a total of 46 participants.[8] Our study is not the only qualitative work that has been conducted on experiences of hosts in the scheme (see, in particular, Burrell's work with 30 "hosts and other people formally and informally supporting new arrivals").[9] However, our study represents the largest qualitative dataset to date exploring the experiences of Homes for Ukraine sponsors.

Participants were recruited using a two-pronged approach: online advertisements and "snowball sampling". Advertisements were posted via University of York accounts onto Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, directing potential participants to a sign-up form. "Snowball sampling", sometimes known as "chain referral" sampling, was used to extend the reach of the recruitment process. This technique relies on current participants referring others who are eligible for the study.[10] Combining these strategies enabled us to achieve a diverse sample representing a broad range of experiences of the scheme. Anyone with experience of hosting in the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was eligible to participate, whether they were currently hosting or if they had prior experience of doing so. All interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom, with audio recordings taken and then transcribed. To uphold participant anonymity, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and participants assigned pseudonyms.

Questions covered a range of issues, including the participants' motivations for becoming a host, experience with the application process and hosting, expectations of the scheme, and views on the overall impact of the hosting experience on them. A series of questions explored experiences of administrative processes and public services specifically. These covered the participant's involvement in helping guests settle into the UK and access

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[8] The research received full ethical approval from the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology ethics committee at the University of York.

[9] Kathy Burrell, 'Intervention – Hosting for the UK's 'Homes for Ukraine' Scheme" (*Antipode Online,* 2022) <https://antipodeonline.org/2022/11/16/homes-for-ukraine/> accessed 25th Jul. 23.

[10] Tomas Dosek, 'Snowball Sampling and Facebook: How Social Media Can Help Access Hard-to-Reach Populations' (2021) 54(4) *Politic Science & Politics* 651; Kim Leighton et al., 'Using Social Media and Snowball Sampling as an Alternative Recruitment Strategy for Research' (2021) 55 *Clinical Simulation in Nursing* 37.

services, with follow-on questions about their experiences of any such involvement. On average, interviews lasted 45 minutes.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of our data. Our objective was to build on the ONS data, offering a more detailed understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants. However, our sample is not statistically representative of all the sponsors in the Homes for Ukraine scheme. As such, the views expressed by participants may not capture the full diversity of experiences and perspectives of all sponsors in the scheme. Therefore, while our findings provide valuable insights, they should be interpreted within the context of these limitations.

IV. MOTIVATIONS

What motivated our participant sponsors to volunteer? One prominent reason given for choosing to participate in the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was a strong desire to help and contribute against a perceived wrong—a sentiment expressed by almost all participants. Some hosts described it as a need to "do something", a moral obligation to help people in a substantive way, and even as a protest against Putin's actions. Often participants would say they considered how they would want others to respond if the UK or they themselves were in need of such help and acted accordingly:

> There was probably a part of me that wanted to feel good about it and do my bit against this war. I can't send a tank, or I cannot pay £3 million for twenty-seven bombs or whatever, but I could save one life. (Participant 2)

Some hosts also said that they would have liked to have hosted other refugees when prior crises had arisen but were unable to, either due to personal circumstances or because the government had not provided a simple and easy avenue to do so. In addition, interviewees mentioned that a main or supporting motivator was that they had the financial and personal capacity to host. For example, they referred to the size of their house, having a spare room, or being the type of person who could easily have a stranger living in their house either due to prior experience or because of their personality.

Some interviewees were motivated by their personal background and connection to the plight of refugees, either having a family member that was a refugee or having been a refugee themselves. In some instance, family members, friends of the hosts or the hosts themselves had distant links to Ukraine or countries near the area, which prompted hosts to participate. A separate but adjacent motivator was a feeling of connection to the region because Ukrainians were perceived as similar and proximate to them:

> It was just an overwhelming desire to help. It was more than a desire to help. It felt like an obligation, to me at least. This doesn't happen very often, a war in Europe. Ukrainians are our neighbours. It feels like we have a duty, in my opinion, to look after our neighbours. (Participant 11)

Some hosts specifically mentioned that they were deeply affected by the news coverage of the war and, in particular, of images of victims, which prompted them to sign up for the scheme:

> [W]e have this picture still in our head, and it was when he – I say him because I don't like to use the word, when he first started, he went for a maternity hospital I think it was originally, and there was a video that the news channel had brought out of a pregnant woman on a stretcher. Then we found out that she actually passed away and the unborn baby did as well. I looked at my wife, my wife looked at me, and we both just went, we've got to do something. And I went straight onto the computer, had a look at the homes for Ukraine scheme. (Participant 17)

Our dataset did not reveal much evidence of our participants' motivations directly influencing their experience of the scheme more widely—though some noted that the strength of their motivation helped them move beyond difficult issues in hosting. For instance, one participant, despite really struggling with the delays over the granting of their guest's visa, found a clearly challenging experience worthwhile because they perceived themselves to be helping vulnerable individuals:

> It was a horrendously stressful situation for me. I'll be honest with you, there were times I cried over it. There were times I had sleepless nights. There were times sat up all night worrying myself sick about these people. So goodness knows what it was like for them at the other end because I was sitting in a safe place, under a safe roof, and it was draining and emotionally exhausting for me, and upsetting. Goodness knows what it was like for them. I can't imagine. But that's what kept me going, was 'we can't leave them like this'. (Participant 10)

V. HOSTING

What were our participant sponsors' experiences of hosting? Some hosts we interviewed described their overall experience as good, even though they were critical of various aspects of the scheme. Where experiences were generally negative, it was connected to the relationship they had with their guest as well as the "moving on" stage of the scheme.

Hosts developed a variety of relationships with their guests, ranging from viewing the guest as a member of the family or a close friend, considering them a lodger or houseguest, and, in the more unfortunate cases, experienced a relationship breakdown which ended the arrangement. In relation to administrative tasks, the range of hosts' experiences included interacting with public services and bodies such as the Home Office and the Job Centre, contacting their MPs, figuring out how to share a common space, and trying to help their guests move on.

A number of hosts expressed that the most rewarding part of the scheme were the connections they formed with their guests and the sense that they were helping someone be safe. Even where relationships broke down, interviewees would still comment that they felt good about offering a safe space for someone in need:

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> I guess just feeling that you have done what you can to be helpful. I mean, in the face of all the terrible things that are going on in Ukraine, it's really easy to feel completely helpless and horrified and just appalled, but we're kind of doing what we can. (Participant 21)

> Sharing cultures, just being able to provide a safe space for a short time. Even if I can't solve all their problems, at least I was able to give them these months of respite so that they could become mentally strong. (Participant 23)

The administrative and bureaucratic aspects of the scheme were sometimes seen by hosts as one of the greatest challenges of the scheme. Some expressed that dealing with the administrative tasks required to help the guest integrate was experienced as equivalent to a full-time job:

> I think if you're looking round the forums, most hosts feel unsupported in the cultural, the language, and just the whole process of what was expected of us, because a number of hosts wouldn't have signed up if we had known about the volume of bureaucracy and navigating that whole process. (Participant 24)

> [S]o those families are working full-time as well, I have no idea how they did it, because it was a full-time job maybe for a month, maybe six weeks. That's all I did, all day long. (Participant 38)

More specifically, there were two stages of the scheme that were widely highlighted as challenging: the application process and the end of hosting process. The latter was widely seen as "unkind" in its lack of clarity, and even was seen as forcing hosts to make guests homeless to force the local councils to get involved and help with finding the guests alternative housing arrangements:

> I don't think there was a huge amount of information provided to us. I mean, literally the only information you got was when completing the applications. And I understand that, because it was an unprecedented situation, but I think the paperwork wasn't easy to do. I like to think I'm reasonably intelligent, but the process of doing it wasn't obvious, wasn't easy. There was no one to refer to, so it was sort of hit and miss in what you were doing. (Participant 31)

> I thought someone would be having those conversations with her and coaching her or supporting her, or helping her move on, but there was none of that. (Participant 37)

Some hosts observed that the opportunity to learn about guests' culture was one of the most rewarding aspects of the scheme. As one interviewee put it, the scheme allowed for "a kind of intercultural exchange… getting to know a little bit of Ukrainian, try different foods".[11] But this "exchange" also created complexities in some contexts. The language barrier was mentioned frequently as a challenging aspect of hosting as it made communication difficult, both in terms of practical matters and in the attempts to form bonds with guests. Some of the more conservative aspects of individual guests' ideologies were mentioned as hard to navigate for hosts, as were cultural differences in approaches to parenting. A further challenge was the sharing of private space with a stranger. Even where

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[11] Interview, Participant 8.

guests and hosts got along, hosts still acknowledged a sense of lost privacy and the difficulty of adjusting to or accepting different habits:

> Sharing your space, I guess. I mean it's the same with anything, isn't it? In theory, it's lovely to have people stay, but it's like having guests, isn't it? After a day you think, bog off (laughs). But you can't do that, obviously. (Participant 10)

Hosts sometimes also found providing emotional support for their guests challenging. For example, due to a string of unfortunate events, one host reported having to inform their guest of their son's death—a particularly harsh and stressful experience. Hosts can find themselves having to navigate their guest's trauma or fragile psychological state without having the training, time or capacity to do so effectively:

> So that was quite difficult. We could tell that she was really affected by certain incidents that were going on in Ukraine and it was a bit hard to provide emotional support with the language barrier and just not knowing what to say for the best really. (Participant 8)

> But we just can't carry on. Mental health-wise, it's not been great for me and, yeah, for my husband, for both of us… I think when you're in a relationship, when things are frustrating you, you kick the person closest to you. So when the Ukrainians are being really, really annoying, we fight rather than telling them they're being really, really annoying. And that's just happening more and more. (Participant 20)

VI. SERVICES & SUPPORT

Did our participant sponsors think government and public services are helping enough? Some hosts expressed that they did not receive the support they needed throughout the hosting process. They pointed to the two most problematic stages being, once again, the application process and the end of hosting arrangement.

There was a misconception on the part of some hosts at the start of the hosting that the government would help with the matching process, but that interaction never occurred, leading most hosts to rely on social media or charity organisations to find someone to host. In addition, some hosts reported that they helped their guests with their visa applications or completed them for them. Some hosts became frustrated when there were delays in the granting of visas for the guests to enter the country, especially when the responsible providers did not give reasons or did not give accurate updates. Some hosts turned to their MPs looking to expedite the process or get information on visa applications with mixed results. A significant point of contention was the extent to which government should have formalised the matching process, with concern being expressed about the opportunity the informal process gave to scammers and criminals to exploit vulnerable people. Some interviewees would have liked the government to take up more responsibility and set up further safeguards:[12]

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[12] See also: Ella Cockbain and Aiden Sidebottom, 'War, Displacement, and Human Trafficking and Exploitation: Findings from an evidence-gathering Roundtable in Response to the War in Ukraine' (2022) 1(1)

> [O]ne of the other things I don't think the scheme really prevented, and it made it worse that there wasn't a matching scheme, was people that were preying on the vulnerability of these young women. And having looked on the social media sites very early on, I did see a recurring group of male sponsors who I thought probably or possibly were not in it for the right reason, and I think more safeguards could have been put in place to protect these young women. (Participant 40)

However, there were those who appreciated the increased level of agency and the lack of government interference provided despite their concerns:

> I think it's sad that they have to go onto Facebook, but I wonder if the government would've made a better job of matching me or not, I don't think they would. I think I did a better job of matching me than they would've done, because I could instinctively, if I chatted to somebody and I just felt when I was, because we did Zoom calls, I thought, do you know what, we're not going to get on. I didn't have to give a reason, I'd just think, this isn't going to work and that's that, or they could say, this is not going to work. (Participant 38)

> I would never have gone through a scheme where they pick the person for you, I live by myself, I'm disabled, it's not worth the risk. (Participant 25)

The lack of support in terminating participation in the scheme was one of the trickiest problems identified by sponsors. Some hosts noted that they found that aspect of the scheme badly planned and stressful:

> So I think the intention of Homes for Ukraine was very admirable, but I think how it actually was in practice was actually ill-thought through, and what we're seeing now is a real issue for families that have signed up for six months or have said they'll offer accommodation for a year, it's now, where do they go? (Participant 24)

> I think where it's been less successful is what, you know, what is the expectation on a host beyond six months? And how do we move people on from hosting to the remainder of the three years? And I think that is woefully under resourced and just hasn't been thought through. (Participant 29)

Some interviewees suggested local councils did not provide any meaningful support in helping guests become independent and move on to alternative housing.[13] In contrast, others reported that their councils offered to act as guarantors or provided some financial support for guests, but most councils would only step in if the guest was made homeless by the host. When asked what further support they would have liked, some hosts expressed that they would have liked to be given more support to help guests move, and for the government to

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Journal of Human Trafficking 1; Fiona Simpson, 'Homes for Ukraine: safeguarding concerns for vulnerable refugees' (2022) 7 *Children and Young People Now* 10.

[13] See also: Dora-Olivia Vicol and Adis Sehic, 'On the frontline: London councils' responses to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine' (Work Rights Centre 2023) <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/3364491/on-the-frontline-london-councils-response-to-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-ukraine/4163146/> accessed 11 Jul. 2023; Richard Machin, 'The UK – a home for Ukrainians? An analysis of social security and housing policy' (2023) 31(2) *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* 298.

have been clearer and more organised over what was to happen after the initial 6-month period ended:

> [O]bviously what would have made it better was to have had more information on what happens after the, as I say, I think it was initial six-month period of them being in your house, what happened with the payments and things, I think that was a little bit – left a bit of a – getting close to the deadline and people didn't know what was going to happen. (Participant 28)

> Now, which, you know, person who's compassionate to bring people in is then going to try and make them homeless? I mean – so that's a stress in itself. It's like, you know, there needs to be a bit more consideration. You've set up the scheme, lots of people are coming to the end of the – lots of people have passed the six months, as we have, there needs to be more support there to help people move on. (Participant 35)

Furthermore, there was a desire expressed by some interviewees for more government guidance or a manual outlining what the essential administrative tasks were, what order to do them in, how to fill in the various forms, and how to help guests adjust:

> I think one would be a kind of portal because this information goes somewhere, a portal whereby you could see at what stage the visa was. Having a helpline for hosts, having published guidance, like 'These are the things that you need to do', and being transparent with that. I think, also, post-arrival, there was no support in terms of what came from the local authority…So the whole guidance about, so what does it mean in having a guest, and having some kind of Social Services touchpoint, because obviously some of the people arriving have got health problems, emotional problems, and there being no point of contact. (Participant 24)

Some hosts expressed that they did not anticipate the extent to which they would be involved in their guest's integration and that a designated social worker would have been a great support along the way:

> I thought there'd be like a social worker that would be there to meet them on the first day and check that they're okay and they would take them to do bank, Universal Credit, doctors, dentists, whatever, and I literally thought I would be providing a room and a shelf in the fridge and a shelf in the kitchen. (Participant 37)

> Someone, a named worker, someone to speak to, someone who answered emails, someone who actually did what the scheme said it was supposed to do; and I guess, I mean no more, no more bloody emails about mindfulness workshops, I don't need a mindfulness workshop, I need a workshop that teaches me as a host how to support someone apply for Universal Credit, Working Tax Credits, Housing Benefit, Child Benefit, you know, a workshop on the benefit stuff, that would've been so useful. (Participant 40)

Such information was either provided through charities or compiled by other hosts and posted on local group chats and social media platforms. One host contrasted the support provided by their local authority with that offered by community groups:

> In your first Zoom call, they spent fifteen minutes of the Zoom call doing a mindfulness exercise with us when we had to just pick up a mug and look at it and think calming thoughts. It was just like you've

completely missed the point here. We are absolutely snowed under with trying to get these people sorted out and you have no idea, really, what it's like. So the most helpful support we got was from Facebook. (Participant 20)

Indeed, our participant hosts widely relied on social media to get support and information, and there was a widespread feeling that the support made available, as well as the success of the scheme was very much a result of "hosts supporting hosts":

I think that [the scheme] has been successful in many ways and I think a lot of that success has entirely rested on the voluntary efforts of random people, and it wasn't particularly thanks to anything that the government has done, other than create the scheme. (Participant 4)

Even where support was made available, some hosts saw it as coming too late. Beyond these local and online groups, sponsors made use of organisations providing support either for matching purposes, completing the visa applications forms, or the integration process.

Of the public services accessed, hosts pointed out how trying to find a GP, a dentist, and a school place could be challenging. Yet, there was also a sense that public service providers were quite sympathetic to Ukrainians and the hosts during the early days of the war, which may have made accessing some services easier than it might have been otherwise:

We had a running joke with [my guest] that his passport would open all the doors. I take three weeks to see my GP and he managed to see the GP the next day. And when he wanted to do something, I said, "Have you got your passport?" (laughs) (Participant 2)

Some councils were seen as more proactive, providing English lessons, host seminars, meeting points for Ukrainians, welfare visits, and welcome packages, while others did not:

I think our council has been very good. Quite quickly we got vouchers from them. Whenever I spoke to them or emailed them, and I had a few conversations with the support team at [the local authority], whenever I spoke to them they were excellent. It was a generous thing that they were offering, they were doing vouchers, they were making sure [the guest] knew about support groups. And I was quite impressed with how quickly they set up a Ukrainian support group which was functioning well. (Participant 7)

When issues arose with the guests, some of our participant hosts did try to turn to their local councils for support, but whether that support was there or effective was very dependent on the approach of the specific council. Some hosts noted a lack of consistency between councils and increased dissatisfaction levels when they were aware of other councils doing more:

The government did nothing, and still do nothing. They do it all too late; and now what's happened is that our local council does things before the government, which is fine. But it means, I think, I think that every county does different things, that's the problem I think, so, which is unfair on the hosts to be having different experiences. (Participant 38)

I think it would've been nice if it had been clearer around winter, when it got cold, and any cost-of-living assistance. Or the thank you payment might have gone up in terms of heating, because it did

happen but, again, one county did it in October, one did it in December. Again, not consistent. (Participant 43)

While hosts often expressed appreciation for the "thank you payments", feeling like they covered the extra costs, some noted that this might not be true of everyone hosting. Unexpected expenses, such as flight tickets for guests and school uniforms in combination with the rising cost of living, resulted in some hosts expressing that the payments were not enough to cover everything and that they would have struggled even more without the payments, despite not being motivated by them:

> It depends how you view it. If you're viewing the financial aid through the lens that it was originally intended, which is purely a thank you payment, then I think that's adequate. But if you're viewing through the lens of being able to compensate for having someone in your home and the increased bills and possible food costs, then it's not adequate. (Participant 23)

VII. ATTITUDES

Did volunteering change the outlook of our participant sponsors?[14] Hosting had a wide range of impacts on the attitudes of sponsors to various related policies, processes, and issues. Our dataset revealed mixed impact on hosts' perceptions of refugees generally. Some hosts noted they already had a sympathetic attitude to refugees and forced displacement, were conscious of the issues they face, and disapproved of the government's present policies and perceived negative media representation:

> So to me migration is a really positive thing, and if people are fleeing war, then why wouldn't we host them, why wouldn't we offer them refuge? It could be us one day, who knows? (Participant 8)

As a result, many hosts noted their perceptions were perhaps not altered but reinforced. However, other hosts said that the experience had made them more aware of other refugee crises, opened their eyes to the difficulties refugees face, and made them wonder why there was such a difference in approach by government in making things so easy for Ukrainians but so hard for refugees of other nationalities:

> I was very singular with my thoughts and my life, and I'll be honest with you, (sighs) maybe it's because of the area, I don't know, but when things have happened in the past, I've been so busy getting on with my own life. I mean Syria and all the others; I've never really taken a great deal of interest. But I suppose because this was a different area, kind of close to my homeland and what my family had been through, I sat up and took a little bit more notice. It's kind of made me feel a bit guilty that I didn't take notice before of other areas. (Participant 10)

While some hosts found the experience eye-opening to the state of public services, others entered into hosting with low expectations of public services and anticipated that they

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[14] Some have suggested this crisis may have such impacts, see: Linda Morrice, 'Will the war in Ukraine be a pivotal moment for refugee education in Europe?' (2022) 41(3) *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 251.

would be inefficient or slow. Especially in relation to the welfare system, some expressed that their negative views were affirmed:

> I probably didn't have a great opinion of [public services] ahead of time and they – I had a low bar and, let's be honest, they didn't exceed the bar that I had in my mind. (Participant 35)

Even if there was a positive experience, we did not see much evidence that it changed long-held perceptions of public services, but there were some exceptions:

> Yeah, I had a pretty poor opinion of the Jobcentre from something I'd seen ten years ago. So it was nice to see how welcoming and efficient and helpful they were. I actually did follow up with a letter to say thank you for all they did. So I found that very good and that changed my views. (Participant 41)

Changes in hosts' feelings, based on participation in the scheme, towards their own local community did not follow a particular pattern. However, when local host groups were created, and the host interviewed participated in it, an increased sense of community was often reported, with an expansion of their own network:

> It brought everybody together and people have supported each other. People who haven't hosted have offered lifts to people. So you could just call on people and they would give them lifts places and if you needed any help with anything. Or if you were going away and they needed somewhere to stay, there were all sorts of offers from people. […] So yeah, it was amazing. (Participant 14)

There were also hosts who were very active in their local communities and positive towards them before their participation in the scheme. However, we also interviewed individuals who continued to not have a relationship with their local community or even participated less in public activities due to the demands of the scheme. Sometimes hosts reported a change of attitude towards community members who had the means to host but did not, or members of their community who disapproved of the scheme and refugees more generally:

> Well, I live in a [Christian] community … and I have the smallest house in this community… and they're all associated with the church, a very big church, a very rich church. And yet, despite me asking them many times, I'm the only one that's taken in a refugee and I feel very disappointed by my Christian community as a result of that because it can't be just words; it needs to be actions. Some of my neighbours have five spare bedrooms, four spare bedrooms, three spare bedrooms, and they have a lot more to offer than I do, and none of them have chosen to help. So it's made me look at people differently. (Participant 11)

Some hosts expressed attitudes towards local government and central government. Some hosts had not significantly interacted with their local councils before their participation in the scheme and had a neutral opinion or no opinion of them, other than, for instance, one relating to the ruling political party in their area. Following interactions with their local councils for the purposes of the scheme, hosts who had a good experience tended to view their councils more positively, while those who had a bad experience expressed negative views and reduced levels of trust towards their local authority:

> And the council, yeah, I guess I didn't really have an opinion of the council before, but now, I think they're fairly rubbish (laughs), based on being there for the meeting with our council housing woman. (Participant 3)

> The council were quite good when it came to finding housing. They were quite helpful, more than I expected.…I suppose [my opinion] was more positive. I have to say, the council did a better job than I thought they would with it. (Participant 5)

On the other hand, attitudes towards central government tended to be negative at the outset and to remain negative regardless of scheme experience. This was often linked to continued grievances over the difference in treatment between different groups of migrants and refugees. The Home Office was a particular source of disappointment:

> They are, let's say, xenophobic, the fascist words that they use, attitudes. I mean, they didn't put a scheme like this forward for people like Afghanistan and they abandoned them. And Syrian refugees. And they don't want to take any more people. And I just feel like they're building up people's anti-migration really and using hate language. I just think they're just building up problems unnecessarily so....I just think this scheme is only because Ukraine is in Europe. They didn't do it for any other countries. When we look at Syria and the poor people there, the people who were abandoned. Afghanistan and so many other countries, and they don't do the same schemes for them. (Participant 14)

> I guess the biggest surprise, I think, has been how shabbily the Home Office are. You'd think our Home Office, or I thought, or I had it in my head, was sleek, they knew exactly what was going on. But when you actually delve into the system, there are a lot of people that haven't got a clue what's going on and there's a lot of paperwork that goes missing and files that go missing. It's quite horrific. (Participant 10)

Hosts were also generally more sympathetic in this regard towards local authorities than central government:

> I kind of feel sorry for them that they've been left, probably by central government, to their own devices to create some scheme of help or support for hosts and guests. But given what I'm assuming is a kind of lack of support from central government, I feel like they've done really well. (Participant 1)

Hosts did see the scheme overall as a positive initiative most of the time and considered it a success. Moreover, they were conscious of the speed with which it had to be set up, the complexity of the crisis, and the urgency of a response of this scale. Thus, they were willing to be more understanding when it came to the scheme's shortcomings, even though they were still critical of them:

> I'm positive about the government's approach to the scheme and the way they brought it in very quickly. And, because it was so quick, we were prepared that there might be things that had been overlooked or not too deeply thought about because it was done so quickly, so I have praise for that. (Participant 30)

VIII. FUTURE INTENTIONS

After all their efforts, were our participant sponsors willing to support similar schemes in the future and even volunteer to host again? Many were, in principle, positive about the general idea of similar schemes being established in the future. However, several hosts commented on the difference in treatment between refugees of different nationalities being a problem:

> You know, I think the way the system has responded is a really important thing to do, and I hope that it results in there being a working system there to kick in for the next refugee crisis because I think it's, you know, in the world that we live in, it's obviously something that's really important that needs to be done. (Participant 15)

> I think the homes for Ukraine scheme is brilliant, and it's great that Ukrainian refugees have been able to access all these services from day one. But I kind of feel it should be the gold standard for all refugees. Why should Ukrainians get a better deal than Syrians or Afghans, you know? (Participant 8)

Many hosts reported that they would be open to hosting again. Some were already hosting a second guest at the time of their interview. However, within that group, many expressed that they would need a break before doing it again, and some found it so tiring they would not be open to hosting again:

> I don't know whether I would do it again, probably not. Not because of the family, but because of the amount of work; I'm really tired, I've had another job for a year, you know, and I just, I want to just go back to having one job. (Participant 39)

> I think most hosts are either, you know, they've done their bit, they're tired now. (Participant 6)

In addition, some indicated they would host again, but only under certain conditions. For example, one host said they would only host women or people from a similar culture, and others said they would need to know that there would be far more support and a clearer 'moving on' plan. Some hosts would only be open to hosting again if it was for a limited amount of time, with six months being mentioned as an acceptable time period by many hosts. A number of hosts reported they would not host someone in their own house again, either due to getting older, their mental or physical health deteriorating, because they had had a bad experience with the scheme, or because they simply were not willing to share their space again. Some hosts talked about changes that might make them more inclined to host again, with many pointing to a perceived need to create more accurate expectations as to what the experience is like and what is required of hosts, so prospective hosts can make a more informed choice and be more prepared:

> I think there needs to be more support upfront just to kind of help people prepare as to what it might be like. And also, you know, what the expectations are. So you've suddenly got to become an expert in the schooling system, the benefits system, you know, emotional support and all those kinds of stuff, as well as dealing with cultural differences and different languages, so to me – they're looking for new hosts now, obviously, they need to do a lot more for the new hosts. And I'd more than happily help and support anything like that because I genuinely want to continue to support, but we can't continue any more in our home. (Participant 35)

> [T]he role of host wasn't actually defined and I think most hosts found that there was a whole level of bureaucracy thereafter in supporting guests. (Participant 35)

Many hosts suggested issues around the lack of support would have to be addressed, specifically in relation to what happens at the end of the prescribed six-month period:

> I guess it's not something I could do again, without knowing— I could never make that open-ended commitment right now without knowing what the outcome is going to be and how it's going to resolve now, or not resolve, in that we live together forever. (Participant 9)

> Maybe knowing what was going to happen after the period that you'd agreed to sign up for, what was going to happen to them afterwards, because we felt like that became our problem. So yeah, that was probably the hardest thing is, yeah, that being our problem and it's like a big period of how do they leave our house without us evicting them? So that's the biggest concern. (Participant 28)

Many of the hosts we interviewed were individuals who had already volunteered or made donations for refugee causes, so there was not an apparent further shift towards volunteerism due to participation in the scheme. Most hosts without any such background expressed a desire to help and be involved in charitable initiatives in the future, expressing more sensitivity to refugee issues and a newfound desire to be more involved:

> Refugee things, yeah. Because my normal focus is very local and it's been quite interesting being exposed to a bit of different culture. It's been really nice, up close and personal, I've really enjoyed that. But I mean, I'm quite happy to help anybody, I don't really care who they are. (Participant 6)

> I think it's just opened my eyes to some of the issues that refugees face, and once you know about a problem, then I think being aware of something is the first step to taking action on an issue. (Participant 9)

> I'm more likely to help. I would help on a much wider view, more than just helping one family or one person. I'm much more likely to do fundraising for the Red Cross, do more charity, more of a community or wider-based help where I can touch many people. (Participant 23)

Finally, a minority of interviewees reported that they were less likely to get involved in other initiatives, refugee-related or otherwise, either not giving a reason why or explaining that they felt like they did their part, that they were tired, did not have the time or were financially unable to contribute any more:

> [I]n a way it's done the contrary because I used to do, you know, I've done other volunteering stuff with refugees, which I haven't been doing since [my guest] arrived, so, you know, it's one or the other, I've got a limit. (Participant 15)

IX. CONCLUSION

Our study of the experiences of sponsors who volunteered as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme provides multiple important insights. One possible overall interpretation of our dataset is that the Homes for Ukraine scheme was a success insofar as it allowed the mobilisation of a significant part of the UK public, and, despite shortcomings within the

scheme and other support systems, many interviewees broadly had positive and rewarding experiences. When viewed from this perspective and given the other government-side benefits of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, it is not difficult to see why policymakers are asking whether this model could and should be replicated in response to future forced migration crises. There are also, as identified in our study and the ONS study, some recurrent pressure points manifesting within the scheme—such as the ending of hosting arrangements—which it might be possible to alleviate in any future scheme. From another perspective, however, there are aspects of our findings that present challenges to the idea that the Homes for Ukraine can be easily replicated—such as common motivations being linked to Ukrainian heritage and the level of sustained media coverage, or how some sponsors see their volunteering as a 'one-off'. The experiences and perceptions of hosts are, of course, merely one part of a much wider debate as to whether the scheme could and should be replicated in the future. We do not adopt a view on these wider questions, but our study provides empirical insights that can inform answers to them.