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Councils call for funding help as more Ukrainian refugees become homeless

Ради закликають до фінансової допомоги, оскільки дедалі більше українських біженців стають бездомними

Заступниця політичного редактора «The Guardian» Ровена Мейсон звертає увагу на те, що уряд Великої Британії оголосив про продовження на 18 місяців віз для українців, які рятуються від війни. Після закінчення спонсорства багато українців залишаються без даху над головою. За даними Асоціації місцевого самоврядування (LGA) за 2 роки 9000 українських біженців потрапили у ситуації, що їм ніде жити. Місцеві ради допомогли знайти житло для 6000 біженців. Речник LGA з питань притулку, біженців і міграції

Роджер Гоф зазначив, що оскільки українські візові схеми були розроблені для забезпечення тимчасового притулку, механізми фінансування рад для підтримки прибулих потребують термінового перегляду, бо ради продовжують надавати довгострокову підтримку, включаючи інтеграцію та житло, коли спонсорські домовленості закінчуються.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/19/councils-call-for-funding-help-as-more-ukrainian-refugees-become-homeless>

Continuation of war has left more refugees unsettled, with councils stepping in to to relieve most cases of homelessness

Councils have called for urgent review of funding for Ukrainian refugees amid alarm that 9,000 have reported as homeless and many more are needing longer-term support – with no sign of the war ending after two years.

The government announced on Sunday that it would extend by another 18 months the three-year visas of Ukrainians who escaped the war.

The move was welcomed by councils, MPs and others who had urged the government to resolve the issue of visas expiring in March 2025, with many facing anxiety and poor mental health as a result of uncertainty over their future work or study.

However, councils are still facing huge pressure to accommodate refugees presenting as homeless as well as helping those who want to move on from their sponsor hosts, as the second anniversary of the conflict approaches this week.

The Local Government Association said the continuing presentation of Ukrainian refugees as homeless at a rate of about 4,500 a year was largely driven by a breakdown in sponsorship arrangements.

The number in temporary accommodation has risen 25% from 660 this time last year to 820. Of the 9,000 total, about 6,000 so far have had their homelessness prevented, or relieved by councils.

Councillor Roger Gough, the LGA's asylum, refugee and migration spokesperson, said: "Councils work incredibly hard to support asylum and resettlement and have helped communities welcome around 200,000 Ukrainian refugees since the start of the war.

“However, the pressures of multiple asylum and resettlement schemes are still being compounded by chronic housing shortages. This has resulted in a high number of Ukrainians and refugees leaving asylum accommodation and having to present as homeless.

“As the Ukraine visa schemes were designed to provide temporary sanctuary, the funding arrangements for councils to support arrivals need urgent review as councils continue to provide crucial longer-term support, including integration and housing support as sponsorship arrangements come to an end.”

UK families have played a huge part in hosting many of the 250,000 Ukrainian arrivals, with hosts paid £350 a month in the first year and £500 in the second year, but a large number of these relationships have come to an end.

Many Ukrainian families have struggled to get private rental accommodation in areas where there are shortages and landlords demand high upfront deposits and guarantees.

Baljeet Nijjhar, of the volunteer group Ukrainian Refugee Help, welcomed the visa announcement but said Ukrainians needed “far greater” support to help them live independently.

Nijjhar said: “They need help from local councils willing to be their rent guarantors to make the transition.

“While some councils are using the extra money provided by the government for this purpose, we would like to see consistent policies being required to be adopted by all councils to avoid a ‘postcode lottery’ for Ukrainians.”

London Councils, which represents 32 local authorities in the capital, also drew attention to the problem of homelessness after sponsorship breaks down or family accommodation is found to be unsuitable.

“Affordability challenges in London, with 2.3% of private rental-sector housing being affordable under local housing allowance rates, and requirements by landlords for high levels of rent upfront, are major contributors to homelessness,” the group said.

“Of the 1,720 households owed a duty in London, 650 households are Family Scheme arrivals. There is no tariff funding for these arrivals.”

Pauline Latham, a Conservative MP who this month led a parliamentary debate campaigning for extensions to the visas beyond March 2025, also called for more thought about how to house Ukrainians more permanently to allow them to get on with their lives.

“We should consider how we will minimise the risk for Ukrainians who are threatened with homelessness as the Homes for Ukraine scheme comes to an end,” she said.

“Many sponsors cannot afford to continue to house the refugees, and many Ukrainian families would like their own home in order to become independent. I know of sponsors who are desperately trying to find private accommodation for Ukrainians, which is very hard because it is in short supply.”

A spokesperson for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said: “For arrivals under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, we provide a £5,900 a person tariff to councils to enable them to provide support to individuals and families, including in the minority of cases where someone is left without accommodation.

“We want to prevent homelessness before it occurs, which is why we are giving councils £1bn over three years for them to help people find a new home and move out of temporary accommodation. We also allocated an additional £109m this year to help prevent Ukrainian homelessness.”

The Ukrainian government has expressed hope that many refugees will return home once the conflict is over rather than settling permanently elsewhere.

In relation to the visa extensions, Tom Pursglove, an immigration minister, said: “This new visa extension scheme provides certainty and reassurance for Ukrainians in the UK on their future as this war continues, and we will continue to provide a safe haven for those fleeing the conflict.”