

A Report on the Emergency Resettlement of People from Ukraine in Argyll and Bute

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Executive Summary

Journey to Argyll and Bute [p11]

The journey to Argyll and Bute for most of our interviewees was fairly straightforward, especially where they were meeting sponsors. However, there were many instances where people became stressed following their arrival in Scotland before their transfer to Argyll and Bute. Some of this stress could have been alleviated by more effective provision of information. Suggestions for achieving this include:

- Clearer communication from the Scottish Government pre-arrival for those coming via the Scottish Super Sponsorship Scheme, explaining that people would be relocated to areas across Scotland.
- Better communication at the Welcome Hubs concerning the reception process across Scotland and information about each region. The welcome pack shared with new arrivals in Argyll and Bute (see Reception section) for example, could have been shared with people while they waited at the Welcome Hub.

Expectations [p12]

Expectations play an important role in how resettlement is experienced, especially with regards to peoples' feelings of disappointment or confusion. The ways in which expectations are communicated and managed are therefore particularly important.

- Clear information and communication were mostly implemented by all members of the Argyll and Bute resettlement team. This helped manage and clarify expectations.
- A key aim of resettlement workers was to limit or prevent the formation of dependency in relationships with resettled people from Ukraine, in order to support people's agency and independence in the longer term.
- Most people from Ukraine had no specific expectations initially other than safety from the war.
- Expectations evolved as time passed, in particular when Ukrainian people compared their situation to that of others. Key areas where people expected to achieve success were in gaining employment and securing schooling for children.

Initial Resettlement [p14]

Despite peoples' difficult experiences of fleeing Ukraine and their journeys to Argyll and Bute, participants spoke favourably of their first weeks in hotel accommodation. While the research team had expected people to feel overwhelmed with the administrative requirements during the initial phase of resettlement, it was clear that people had felt extremely well supported during this time. Key learnings are as follows:

- Having one main point of contact in the hotel meant that people were given clarity on who to contact amidst what could have otherwise been a confusing period.

- Completing administrative tasks during the initial stages of resettlement was not overly-burdensome for the participants we interviewed. These tasks gave people a sense of direction so that they were aware of things progressing even though they were living in temporary accommodation.
- The completion of such administrative tasks was only possible with considerable help from the resettlement team and sponsors. Given the language barrier and cultural differences, completing these tasks without such support would have been extremely stressful and would have left many without support. This is particularly worth noting for forced migrants arriving in the UK who do not have access to such support.
- Argyll and Bute council's success in creating a resettlement process was evident in our research; with participants feeling as though they were receiving clear guidance at this stage. Key to this process was to not create a form of dependency, even at the start of the resettlement process.

Housing [p16]

The accounts we were told concerning peoples' initial arrival in the hotels and their subsequent moves into longer-term accommodation highlight the importance of two key aspects of the work carried out by the resettlement team:

- Clear messaging (through interpreters) from the first day of arrival in Argyll and Bute. With one exception, participants we interviewed that had initially been placed in hotel accommodation had understood that this was to be a temporary measure, and that their longer-term accommodation would not necessarily be in the same location.
- Participants valued the person-centred approach delivered by the resettlement team. Respondents felt as though their needs and views had been taken into consideration regarding the provision of longer-term accommodation. Despite being told that their stay in the hotels was temporary, those we interviewed felt they had been given the choice of whether to accept the offer of accommodation or not.

Employment [p18]

The availability of work in Argyll and Bute – especially seasonal service sector work – has meant that both resettled persons from Ukraine and local businesses have benefitted from the influx of people to Argyll and Bute. Nevertheless, as “The Situation” in Ukraine continues to evolve, people will become increasingly eager to work in positions more in line with their past work and expertise. Some key learnings concerning employment include:

- Efforts to have Ukrainian qualifications translated and recognised in Scotland and the rest of the UK should be centralised, rather than risk duplication of work across local authorities.
- The provision of accessible ESOL classes is key not just for improving peoples' English, but also to improve their employment conditions and mental health (see ESOL section below)

- While resettled persons from Ukraine have been extremely self-motivated to find initial work opportunities, more support is needed to ensure that long-term employment aspirations can be met.
- More information should be provided to enable people to understand employment rules and regulations in Scotland. At a national level, information should be collated and provided concerning particular employment routes.

ESOL [p21]

ESOL was consistently recognised by the Argyll & Bute resettlement team and by people from Ukraine as key to supporting resettlement.

- Speaking and understanding English is a key factor in informing people's decision to resettle in Scotland; in supporting their access to employment; and in reducing isolation and anxiety.
- A high proportion of participants were struggling to juggle ESOL with work, particularly due to the seasonal nature of their employment - despite the efforts of the Argyll & Bute resettlement team to provide online classes.
- Suggestions for improvement were: offer more ESOL in low season (winter and early spring); and offer ESOL classes for specific purposes such as passing the IELTS exam or a driving test.
- While communication around ESOL classes was mostly good, there were some cases in which people were not aware of which classes were available, indicating the potential for improving this aspect of ESOL delivery.

Languages [p24]

Different languages are involved in the process of resettlement people from Ukraine. Separately from ESOL, therefore, the following points are key:

- A multilingual approach to working with refugees is essential to support positive resettlement experiences. Where this approach is lacking, people struggle to obtain practical necessities and to maintain good mental health.
- More support is needed on a national scale for people who need to access essential services and are not able to communicate in English. Utility companies' processes demonstrate how these have not been designed to facilitate people who need access to different languages through interpreting and translation.
- The language of bureaucracy is often experienced as very difficult to understand, with complex systems that are hard to navigate.
- The picture of language needs within the Ukrainian community is complex and goes beyond 'just English'. Maintaining use of and access to Ukrainian is a key concern, particularly for parents, but also for many people who draw comfort from sharing their mother tongue while in exile.

School [p26]

We were not able to speak directly with people under 18, due to the parameters of our research ethics approval. However, participants who cared for children all spoke to us about their impressions and experience of schools in Argyll and Bute, raising the following key points:

- Schools are an important anchor of safety and stability for Ukrainian children and their families.
- Schools in Argyll & Bute are an extremely positive experience for participants and their children, and a key reason for people wanting to stay in Argyll & Bute.
- Communication from Argyll & Bute around schools has been very good.
- Most problems arise around transition stages: either into primary, due to different school ages in Ukraine, or into higher education due to poor communication from advisors around practicalities and logistics.

Transport [p29]

Transport was a key concern for many participants, in particular due to the geography of Argyll and Bute council where towns and villages are often quite distant from each other across a diverse geography which includes islands and mountains.

- The greatest problems with transport were experienced by people who did not own a car and lived in more rural locations.
- Issues were not about the cost of transport, but about the infrequency and unreliability of buses.
- Obtaining a driving licence was key to many of these people, with suggestions for the Argyll & Bute resettlement team to provide specific information packs and ESOL courses for driving tests.
- Given support and information to manage initial hesitations, people became able to manage and enjoy using buses and ferries across Argyll & Bute.

Mental health and stress [p31]

Interviews with participants raised the following key points on the effects which evacuation and resettlement had on people's mental health and stress:

- Participants reflected on feelings of guilt for having escaped the war in Ukraine and concern for those who were still living there.
- People from Ukraine reflected on feelings of loneliness when they first arrived in Argyll and Bute. This was more common amongst those who had not arrived with other family members. Loneliness was attributed to difficulties in communicating in English with other members of the community.
- Sponsors played a significant role in introducing displaced persons to their new surroundings and the community.
- Visa uncertainty has significant knock-on effects for peoples' mental health and their ability to plan for the future. Clear communication is needed from the UK Government as to whether people resettled from Ukraine will be permitted to remain in the UK

indefinitely. The current 18-month visa extension scheme is a welcome change, yet the extension and three-month application window are not long enough.

Towards long-term integration [p33]

It is important not to understate the gratitude that participants wished to share to the Scottish Government, the people of Argyll and Bute, and the resettlement team for making them feel welcome and for providing them with safety.

- Participants felt as though they were integrating well in Argyll and Bute, even though they had only been there a number of months at the time of the interviews.
- While the majority of our research participants had found stable employment, only around half felt as though they were in control of their lives.
- Most felt as though they were well-integrated “on the surface”, it is clear that there is still much work to be done to help resettled persons from Ukraine to feel as though they are part of the local community and in control of their lives.
- Though the findings of this report highlight many successes regarding the resettlement of displaced persons from Ukraine to Argyll and Bute, much more work needs to be done in terms of ensuring that people can integrate in Scotland in the long-term. Based on our interviews, the key challenges in this regard concern languages, employment and security of immigration status.

Introduction and context

In the spring of 2023, the research team were approached by members of the Argyll and Bute resettlement team to investigate the experiences of people from Ukraine who had been resettled in the local authority. This report presents the main findings of the research we conducted. It is written shortly after the conflict in Ukraine entered its third year and the UK Government announced a visa extension scheme for Ukrainians until September 2026.³

The full complexities of conflict and resettlement - which many of the Ukrainian people who contributed to this report referred to as 'The Situation'⁴ - are impossible to analyse within the scope of this report. Rather, we summarise and discuss the key points which were repeatedly mentioned as significant in the experience of resettlement in Argyll and Bute. While responses and analysis are presented in separate thematic groups, it is important to note that themes and findings are all interconnected.

It is also important to note that resettlement of refugees in Scotland occurs in a context of multi-level responsibility, governance and decision-making related to forced migration. While immigration is a power reserved to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Government's New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy⁵ (NSRIS) sets out priorities for refugee resettlement and integration within the limits of powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The NSRIS understands refugee integration as a complex and multidirectional process involving many actors.⁶ These strategic priorities and understandings are then implemented by Local Authorities across Scotland and enacted by individuals such as the resettlement workers in Argyll and Bute.

In March 2022, the UK Government launched the Homes for Ukraine scheme (sometimes known as the Ukraine sponsorship scheme) and the Ukraine Family scheme, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of the same year. Under the Homes for Ukraine scheme,⁷ eligible individuals in the UK could sponsor a named Ukrainian national or family to travel and live with them in the UK. Under the Ukraine Family Scheme, eligible Ukrainian nationals could apply to join their family or extend their stay in the UK.⁸ An extension scheme for those who held a valid UK visa on or after 1 January 2022 and a family scheme for those with family in the UK were also opened.⁹ Each scheme offered displaced people from Ukraine limited Leave to Remain in the UK set to three years. As will be discussed in the report, this time limit has significantly affected peoples' decisions since arriving in Scotland and their

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-extends-stay-for-ukrainians-in-the-uk>

⁴ The term used by most research participants when referring to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2018-2022/>

⁶ See a report on the local and international dimensions of integrating refugees in Scotland, co-authored by the research team together with Prof. Alison Phipps for the University of Glasgow and published in 2022: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_900243_smx.pdf

⁷ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0021/#:~:text=Under%20the%20scheme%2C%20launched%20in,as%20of%201%20February%202024.>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-ukraine-family-scheme-visa>

⁹ <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2023/03/24/the-scottish-governments-supersponsor-scheme-one-year-on/#:~:text=A%20sponsorship%20scheme%20through%20which,paused%20since%2013%20July%202022.>

mental health. In February 2024, the UK Government announced a new Ukraine Permission Extension scheme, which will provide displaced people from Ukraine (who are already living in the UK through one of the aforementioned schemes) an additional 18 months of permission to remain in the UK.¹⁰

Within the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Scottish Government launched the Scottish super sponsor scheme which helped people apply for UK visas without the need for applicants to first be matched with a host. Under this scheme, the Scottish Government acted as peoples' sponsor, working with Local Authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to organise initial accommodation and then long-term accommodation.

As of March 2024, 5,882 people have arrived in Scotland from Ukraine through the Homes for Ukraine scheme and a direct sponsor. A further 20,893 people have arrived in Scotland through use of the Scottish Government's super sponsor scheme.

At the time of our data collection in the summer of 2023, 251 people had been resettled within Argyll and Bute council under the different schemes – 103 women, 56 men and 92 children.¹¹ In terms of age distribution, those between 35-44 years of age made up 39% of the adult Ukrainian population in Argyll and Bute, while those between 25-34 made up 29%. Young adults aged 18-24 made up 12.5% of the adult population, while those aged 45-54 made up 10%. The smallest groups were those aged 55-64 (6.9%) and 65+ (2.5%).

Argyll and Bute is the second largest council in Scotland by area size (6,907km²). One of the challenges faced by the resettlement team has been the distribution of resettled people from Ukraine across such a wide area, where towns including Oban, Helensburgh, Dunoon and Campbeltown are widely spread across the locality. At the time of our research, 73% of cases¹² from Ukraine were housed in towns and 27% were in rural locations.

As will be discussed in later in this report, the majority of people resettled to Argyll and Bute were initially housed in hotel accommodation. For the most part, people were then moved into different forms of longer-term housing – sponsored accommodation, housing provided by Registered Social Landlords (RSL) or Private Rented Accommodation (PRA). In the summer of 2023, of those who were not staying in hotel accommodation, 52% of cases were living in sponsored accommodation, 38% were in housing provided by RSLs and 10% were in PRA/other forms of accommodation.¹³

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-permission-extension-scheme-information/ukraine-permission-extension-scheme-information#:~:text=The%20Ukraine%20Permission%20Extension%20scheme,be%20free%20to%20apply%20for>

¹¹ These figures exclude those housed in hotel accommodation at this time.

¹² Cases refers to individual (family) units of persons from Ukraine. For example, and mother and two children would be one case.

¹³ Figures also collected and provided by Argyll and Bute council.

Methodology

The research that informs this report was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, the research team conducted research interviews with members of the Argyll and Bute resettlement team and other council employees working closely with persons from Ukraine. Interviews with council resettlement casework officers and interpreters were conducted in pairs, both for the sake of scheduling and to generate discussion of key topics regarding the resettlement process. The total number of council employees interviewed was therefore 12. Interviews were professionally transcribed and lasted between one hour and fifteen minutes to one hour and 53 minutes. Research interviews were semi-structured around the key headings of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy – and were therefore structured around housing, language, employment, education, wellbeing and culture. Research questions were also focused on the governance processes of the overall Ukraine resettlement programme, as well as individuals' experiences of organising resettlement in Argyll and Bute. These initial interviews helped us to then formulate questions for subsequent conversations with people resettled from Ukraine.

For the second stage of the research, the research team conducted qualitative interviews with people from Ukraine (aged 18+) who had been resettled to Argyll and Bute. Participants were initially contacted via staff from the Argyll and Bute resettlement team. We decided on this method of contacting because resettlement staff had pre-existing knowledge of people from Ukraine's situations and stories, and were able to ensure that the people we spoke to were a widely representative sub-section of the Ukrainian population resettled in Argyll and Bute. In this way we were able to consider a variety of factors in people's experience of resettlement. We thus interviewed people from different age groups, professional and educational backgrounds; with varied relationships or family circumstances; of different provenances from within Ukraine and resettled in different locations within Argyll and Bute. We recognise the potential drawbacks of this means of accessing research participants, yet it was considered the best means of approaching a population which was dispersed across a wide geographic area. In addition, approaching people via the resettlement team meant that researchers were able to establish a level of trust with the people they interviewed, through common connections with trusted resettlement workers – an important element when discussing sensitive topics with potentially-vulnerable research participants. Issues of bias were also addressed in the third stage of the research (see below).

The focus of our research questions with people from Ukraine resettled to Argyll and Bute was not on why people left Ukraine but on their experiences of resettlement since arriving in Scotland. We were keenly aware of the potentially distressing and extractive nature of questions around past experience and provenance from. Our questions were informed by the initial interviews we had conducted with the resettlement team and were all aimed at better understanding the many layers of interconnected experience involved in being a person from Ukraine resettled in Argyll & Bute. When requested by the research participants, we employed interpreters. Although this sometimes slowed the interview process, with participants often forgetting to pause for the sake of the interpreters, it also meant that we were able to speak with a much larger group of people than otherwise. The interpreters were from Ukraine and also worked for Argyll & Bute council. We are aware of the potential issues regarding confidentiality and disclosure which might be generated by this situation: we

therefore repeatedly assured participants of the confidential and safe nature of any disclosures they might make.

The research team conducted 14 research interviews with persons from Ukraine resettled to Argyll and Bute. On four occasions, multiple family members participated in the same research interview – bringing our total number of resettled research participants to 18. Interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams and were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Interview quotes utilised in this report have been modified to be in the first person, though in most cases they were spoken in the third person through the interpreters.

For the third stage of the research, we collaborated with the resettlement team at Argyll and Bute council to organise an event at which participants could hear the main findings of the research and provide feedback and/or criticism to the research team.¹⁴ This event aimed to reduce the potentially extractive nature of the research, address issues of bias raised during stage 2 of the research, and provide an opportunity for people from Ukraine to gather and meet other actors working to support resettlement.

Following our presentation of the research findings, which were presented to 50+ people (mostly from Ukraine), those present were invited to share their thoughts with the research team through a feedback form. Participants were invited to provide verbal feedback at the end of the presentation or to ask questions.¹⁵ Eleven feedback forms were completed – all but one stating that the findings accurately reflected their experience of resettlement in Argyll and Bute.¹⁶

¹⁴ With the exception of the presentation, the event was organised by the resettlement team and funded through research funding obtained by the research team from AMIF.

¹⁵ Feedback forms (translated into Ukrainian) were also provided in both paper form through an online QR code.

¹⁶ The exception concerned a case where they had first been housed with a sponsor and then been moved to hotel accommodation after they had been “unlucky” with the sponsor. Participants were also invited to share their thoughts and questions at the end of the presentation.

Journey to Argyll and Bute

For those who arrived in Argyll and Bute, deciding when to leave Ukraine and how depended on a variety of factors, including; the location of their home in Ukraine, whether they had family elsewhere and their ability to find sponsorship. As a result, there was no standard experience of arrival in Scotland and/or in Argyll and Bute.

Participants that had arrived through the Homes for Ukraine scheme (i.e. those who had arranged sponsorship before travelling to Argyll and Bute) reported mostly straightforward experiences where they were met at Edinburgh or Glasgow airport by their sponsors and driven directly to their new place of residence. People with pre-arranged sponsorship sometimes also drove from Ukraine directly to the sponsors' house with little difficulty.

For those not arriving with a pre-arranged sponsor, their travels took them via the Welcome Hubs that had been established in Edinburgh and Glasgow (with our respondents mostly receiving assistance at the hub in Edinburgh). None of our participants reported any issues finding the Welcome Hubs upon their arrival and communication with those working and volunteering at the Hubs was reported as being straightforward. People reported waiting in the Hub for between 1-4 hours before being transported to Oban, with many travelling by private taxi. In one instance, however, a mother and her children were transported from the Welcome Hub in Glasgow to a nearby hotel and "forgotten" there:

"We were forgotten there, that's why the hotel asked [us] to leave [...] One of the other families [found] other Ukrainians and asked them where to go [...] And they were given the address of another hotel, so they took a taxi and came to this other hotel. And there, the resettlement team were all surprised to see them and were surprised to know that they were in another hotel."

- Kateryna

Unlike those that arrived with a pre-arranged sponsor, those who were resettled to Argyll and Bute via the Welcome Hub did not feel as though they had a choice in terms of where they were moved to. While for the most part people iterated their feelings of relief at being moved to a safe place and general satisfaction with the speed of the process, others had believed that they would have the opportunity to live in either Edinburgh or Glasgow – an opinion most frequently shared by those who already had relatives or connections living in Scotland (either before the war, or if they had arrived sooner). In such cases, they were only informed upon their arrival at the Welcome Hubs that they would be moving elsewhere, which further added to peoples' stress:

"I was very scared [when I] understood I couldn't move to Glasgow where I had friends [who] had promised to show me everything, to tell me everything about Scotland. [...] And the children had some friends in Glasgow and [...] there were many Ukrainians in Glasgow and they hoped to join them [...] But then they understood that they were going to Oban, so they started to look it up on the map and they understood it's far away and they had many worries, 'Are there any Ukrainians [in Oban]?'"

- Ionna

Expectations

Expectations played an important role in how resettlement was experienced, especially with regards to peoples' feelings of disappointment or confusion. The ways in which expectations were communicated and managed were therefore particularly important.

One of the key needs of the resettlement team was to clarify and manage people's expectations about their resettlement journey, from the start – including during peoples' initial stay in the hotel and their subsequent moves into longer term accommodation. In particular, members of the Argyll & Bute team stressed that they were keen not to create a form of dependency on the resettlement team. As a result, the team were committed to striking a balance between creating a warm and welcoming environment for people to move into, while also providing enough support to foster growing self-reliance. Feedback received from the interviews suggests that the team were successful in this regard:

“We did things by ourselves, but we were [also] constantly consulted, helped, and supported [by the resettlement team]. [For example], how to fill out all the forms and stuff [like for the] BRPs¹⁷ and bank accounts. We didn't look for accommodation on our own at all though, because this was completely done by the resettlement team.”

- Valeriia and Andriy

“Sometimes I was [just] given just instructions [of] where to go and people already knew what he should do. And sometimes just everything was done on my behalf.”

- Fedir

Responses from Ukrainian participants indicated that the quality of information regarding what they would find in Argyll & Bute played a significant role in informing their experiences of resettlement. In cases where people arrived through pre-arranged sponsorship, people either knew enough about Argyll and Bute to decide it would be a good place for them to move to, or they had made the decision that they would be happy with anywhere as long it was safe:

“We never thought about whether it was going to be a village, or a little town, a remote place or city, because it wasn't a priority for us. The priority was to take our child away from the war.”

- Daniela

One issue that was frequently reported by participants was the lack of information they received in the Welcome Hubs concerning Argyll and Bute and what was going to happen upon their subsequent arrival there. While some were told of its “beauty”, most reported being given basic information about Argyll and Bute by the taxi drivers that brought them there, rather than by staff at the Welcome Hub. This lack of information proved to be exceptionally stressful for people who had just arrived in Scotland and had been told they

¹⁷ Biometric Residence Permit

would be moving to new place (outside Edinburgh and Glasgow) that they had never heard of before:

“I can’t forget those feelings when I was on my way from Edinburgh to Oban [...] I couldn’t cope with [my] feelings because I didn’t understand what it would be like, what was going on. And I couldn’t predict anything and felt terrible.”

- Ionna

In contrast to the Welcome Hubs, the resettlement team in Argyll & Bute were found to be extremely informative and supportive by almost all participants:

“While we were in the hotel, we saw the resettlement team members often and they helped there. And when we moved out, we got emails from the support workers and the resettlement team, with explanations and support. They explained everything that needed to be explained and it was easy and straightforward.”

- Kateryna

There was one instance that we were made aware of, however, where there had been a significant misunderstanding between a person in the hotel and the resettlement team – where they were under the impression that social housing would be found in the town where the hotel was located. This expectation had also been created by the fact that their friends from the hotel had been offered social housing in the same town. In this instance, the person had managed to secure employment in the town by the time that accommodation had been found. In addition to feeling forced to give up their job (due to the location of the housing and limited public transport), they found the additional change of location hard to adjust to – in large part because their children had made friends and thought they were about to start school.¹⁸

“We had kind of settled in, in Oban. You know, it was [a month and a half], and we had found friends. So our friends, they got social housing. And my family and I imagined that we would receive this social housing and that we would stay in [the town too]. But then we were moved and we needed to start everything from scratch. You know, it was very hard to settle in and to adapt, especially for children, because they [had] made friends in [the town] and then everything changed again.”

- Ionna

¹⁸ Where possible, children were not enrolled in school until they had been moved to long-term accommodation. This decision likely assisted with ensuring that families did move out of the hotels. It is therefore unlikely that in this case the children had been enrolled in the local school.

Initial resettlement

The Scottish Government procured several hotels for people from Ukraine in Argyll and Bute for the purpose of providing initial accommodation to those who had recently arrived. Research participants were mostly very pleased with the welcome they received from the Argyll and Bute council resettlement team and the hotel staff, especially considering many were stressed from their journeys to Argyll and Bute. Respondents spoke of being met at the hotel by a member of the resettlement team and receiving personalised support:

“We arrived [at the hotel] in Oban [and] there was [the resettlement officer]¹⁹. [They] waited for us, asked us some questions (like general information), and then we could rest in our rooms. [...] The council worker, [they were there] almost every day so, if you have questions you can always ask. [They] gave us a lot of papers to fill in about accommodation so we can choose what we prefer, where we prefer to live so we can tick an area in those forms.”

- Anichka

A key aspect of the resettlement approach taken by the resettlement team was to have one primary resettlement officer at the hotel, rather than sharing this duty between the team. As a result, people in the hotel who had just arrived knew exactly who to turn to for advice and felt like they were being supported personally during their initial stages of resettlement. In addition to the person-centred approach that they received in the hotels, a few participants also directly mentioned the Welcome Pack of information that was provided to each person, prepared by the resettlement team. For example:

“I was surprised and satisfied that everything was really organised because [when I arrived] in Oban [...] I was given different leaflets, information, a welcome pack, and I wanted to just read and know more. [...] The welcome pack contained everything: some basic information about Scotland, something about rules and the list of emergency organisations and how to contact them, and there was a part about Argyll and Bute.”

- Borys

For the most part, peoples' stays in the hotels represented a period of respite between their evacuation from Ukraine and their long-term resettlement. During this time, people were assisted to sign up for social housing, register with the local GP practice, apply for their Biometric Residents Permit (BRP) cards, register with the Job Centre and sign up for English classes. Respondents spoke of being assisted to complete this process, and that they would have felt lost without this assistance. Moreover, respondents felt as though they were being assisted to complete this initial admin process for themselves, and that the process was well-understood and explained by the resettlement team:

¹⁹ Redacted in order not to single out individuals.

“It just seemed that [the administrative process] was just a usual process for the team. Because I was told what to do, step by step. And the impression was that everything was planned and they knew what to do.”

- Fedir

For those who arrived in Argyll and Bute with pre-arranged sponsors, these initial administrative steps were predominantly taken with the help of the sponsors rather than the resettlement team. This reliance on sponsors for the initial phase of resettlement was not listed as a problem by those we interviewed (both people from Ukraine and members of the resettlement team).

“[My sponsors] were the people who helped with everything, with filling out all the forms and preparing needed documents and taking me to the different places that I had to be taken to. I felt like a little parcel that was sitting in the car, because they were dealing with all the stuff I had to deal with. [...] Because of how things work in Scotland, it’s [so] different from Ukraine [...] I wouldn’t have been able to do it on my own. So, I am really grateful for all that help and support they have provided.”

- Daniela

Research participants typically reported staying in the hotels for several weeks, which they felt was a healthy amount of time before moving on to either social housing or sponsored accommodation.

“So, looking back, I think that it was actually ideal, perfect, because [staying in the hotel] was a great time to acclimatise and to get used to all the local things, you know?”

- Borys

Housing

While in other parts of the country a matching service had been set up to match people from hotels to new sponsors or accommodation through housing associations, the presence of the hotels in Argyll and Bute meant that people in the hotel could be directly matched with accommodation in the local authority – thereby minimising steps and people acting as go-betweens. Compared to the short-term accommodation provided in Glasgow and Edinburgh, for instance, people housed in hotels in Argyll and Bute had already experienced the initial move following their arrival in Scotland. Combined with clear messaging from the resettlement staff that hotel stays were temporary and instructions for people to not look for work too quickly, it was possible to ensure that hotels in Argyll and Bute were mostly used by residents for short periods of time.

[The resettlement worker] made them sure that they will be resettled, and that it was just their choice to choose the sponsor. But [they] made it very clear that they will be resettled anyway, so nobody stays in the hotel.

- Alina

Importantly, the resettlement team were able to combine clear messaging concerning the temporariness of the hotel accommodation, with person-centred assistance with finding long-term accommodation. Participants we interviewed therefore stated that they did not feel pressured into accepting leaving the hotels. Anichka, for example, noted how they were frequently asked by the resettlement team if they were happy with the social housing that had been found for her family before they moved out of the hotel:

“I think yes [we had choice, because they asked our opinion, like several times, “What do we think about it? Do we want to live?” They showed this apartment before we signed any documents. We had even a few days to think.”

- Anichka

Aside from clear messaging, research participants noted their appreciation for the efforts that the resettlement team made to assist with their moves from hotel accommodation to both sponsored and social housing. For example, resettlement team members helped to set up meetings with new sponsors and those viewing social housing were often accompanied by resettlement workers. In addition, where people were moved into unfurnished accommodation, the resettlement team went to great lengths to ensure that people had everything they needed.

“[My resettlement worker] helped me with everything [...] Even sometimes when I didn't know I needed something, [they] would write an email saying, ‘You need this, this, this, and this, and this can be done in this way and I'll come and help you.’ And then [they] would come to the house and do everything with me; whether it's the utility bills or furniture. When [they] came and [saw I] needed furniture, [they] helped me to apply for a grant and I got £836 to help buy furniture, and I didn't even know this grant existed to apply [for it].”

- Anastasya

“[Moving into the new accommodation] was very good. [...The resettlement worker] helped us move. [They] bought us everything that we would need for the start. Like dishes and kitchenware and stuff like that, and food. And here in [the new location], we were welcomed by [the new] support worker. And everything was good”

- Tatiana

Participants also noted that they felt supported in the initial period after their moves, while they were transitioning from being supported by the resettlement team member in the hotel to the person responsible for their geographical location.

“So first of all, when we arrived in this flat, everything had been prepared. The bed, things, everything was clean. And [the resettlement worker] was there. [They] met us and even brought some food so the fridge was full. And then [they] told us about shops nearby and they gave us their details about how we could contact [them]. [...] So the first day, [the resettlement worker] explained everything about the flat; so about electricity and about gas. [...] And then [they] referred us to the school and explained that [they] would like to be there with me when we will sign up for the school.”

- Ionna

Despite feeling supported in their moves, one of the main concerns that people had once they moved into social housing was their heating and electricity bill. People were confused regarding the how the costs were calculated, how they would pay their bill, whether it would align with their Universal Credit payments and how much they should expect to pay. It should be noted that these are issues that non-resettled persons also struggle with in the UK, and that the resettlement team on the whole were praised for helping people with setting up utility bills, bank accounts and registering with GPs. Moreover, interviews with the resettlement team highlighted how banks, utility companies and internet providers are poorly set up to manage the inclusion of vulnerable clients.

“When [resettled persons from Ukraine] are they’re moving in somewhere, they’re getting energy bills from the previous tenant and sorting that out is [...] really difficult for them to do. You can spend hours and hours trying to sort these things out for people. It worries them.”

- Stuart, Council employee

Employment

Many businesses in Argyll and Bute have benefitted from the arrival of hundreds of people from Ukraine keen to seek work. During our interviews with the resettlement team, it was remarked how quickly the resettled population from Ukraine actively sought out employment opportunities. In some cases, especially where people were still housed in hotel accommodation, people were even dissuaded from seeking out employment opportunities too quickly (with the aim of ensuring onwards movement into long-term accommodation). For the most part, people had found seasonal work in the service sector (in hotels in particular) and low-skilled positions requiring limited knowledge of English.

While the resettlement team supported people to apply for Universal Credit and complete other forms for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the majority of those resettled to Argyll and Bute were self-dependent in terms of seeking out employment. Participants mentioned a variety of means through which they had searched for employment, these included local Facebook groups, word of mouth (other resettled persons and locals in the area), the Job Centre, community events organised by the resettlement team, websites with job listings, and local notice boards.

Many of those living with sponsors were often able to find employment through their sponsors or their contacts. In some cases, they could also receive personal advice on how to apply for jobs in the UK – which was infrequently mentioned by those who had not been in sponsored accommodation.

“My sponsor also spoke with somebody, and we had some meeting in Kilmarnock. This man told me how I need to write a CV, like local rules, what you need, some covering letter, what you need to add, what you don't need to add, because, for example, for Ukraine we should write our age, but for the UK it is not right.”

- Artem

Concerning the Job Centre, participants had a limited understanding of their role and the support they could receive there. For most, the Job Centre was where they needed to go to receive Universal Credit and who they should phone once they obtained employment. Those we interviewed had not been offered a placement onto a programme for particular trainings (such as retraining courses of CV writing sessions with the community education team).

“Frankly speaking, I wasn't asked for any certificates or diplomas in the Job Centre, any evidence of my qualification, any translations, nothing. So I just phoned them and told them I had a new job, and that's it. [...] There was no conversation about [my] qualifications at all. [...] I was told to bring the original document of birth certificate of my son, and that's it. [...] no more questions, no more anything.”

- Diana

Nevertheless, we were aware of people from Ukraine making use of the Fair Start Scotland²⁰ programme, which had been extended for another year in March 2023. Through this programme, people are entitled to 1-to-1 support regarding preparation of CVs, how to conduct job searches and how to fill out application forms. Thereafter, support can be more specifically tailored to the individuals on the programme in terms of matching their skills to specific jobs. One of the issues with the delivery of this service in Argyll and Bute, however, has been that many resettled persons from Ukraine have been keen to take up employment immediately, rather than wait for more appropriate opportunities to arise.²¹

A lot of the Ukrainians [...] were so desperate to work [that they] weren't precious about what job they took, they were happy to take any job. We had lawyers, doctors, accountants, dentists, working in bars, restaurants, cleaning. They just wanted to have money coming in for themselves. [...] On the whole, we've found with a bit of support, a bit of guidance, they're more than keen to move on.

- Emily, Council employee

Despite peoples' initial desire to gain employment as soon as possible, in our research interviews it was clear that participants were starting to realise that the initial phase of resettlement was over and that "The Situation" in Ukraine could last longer than they had initially expected and hoped. Even though participants were grateful of the work they were doing, therefore, some were becoming frustrated and coming to the realisation that the work they were in should not be for the long term.

I am working as a kitchen assistant at a hostel [...] Before that, I also worked for the high school, as a kitchen assistant as well. [...] If there is work to do, I do the work. But personally, I don't like cooking and I never thought I would be working in the kitchen.

- Kateryna

Some days I have a big desire to go and work and [...] some days that I just want to run away and never come back.

- Daniela

When discussing integration with the resettlement team, there was a clear sense that the 'emergency' period of resettlement was largely over (i.e. a process has been established to transfer people into long-term accommodation and complete initial administrative tasks), but that the work of long-term integration is now beginning. A major challenge in this regard has been ensuring that Ukrainian qualifications are both understood and recognised in Scotland. Frustratingly, despite the national oversight of the resettlement of people from Ukraine, there appear to be limited attempts to tackle the issue of qualifications at a national scale. As a result, resettlement teams and employment officers across Scotland are likely duplicating efforts to have similar qualifications recognised in Scotland and the UK as a whole.

²⁰ <https://www.startscotland.scot/fair-start-scotland>

²¹ This is not the case for all research participants. Some were in the process of moving away from Argyll and Bute to find jobs which they felt were not available within the local authority.

“I know it’s very difficult because you’re speaking about doctors, lawyers, teachers. They’ve all got their own bodies where you need to go through to get the qualifications checked, assessed and everything. From my point of view, it would be quite good if there was somewhere I could go and say, “I’ve got a teacher. I’ve got a doctor. What do we need to do?” Instead of each person [in separate councils] individually trying to find how to go about getting this sorted for the individual.”

- Julia, Council employee

Aside from the issue of qualifications, research participants we interviewed were particularly concerned with their need to speak better English in order to gain employment in their chosen area. Despite attending ESOL classes – and there being a general view that their English was indeed improving – participants felt there was still a strong language barrier preventing them from seeking work more closely aligned with their work experiences and expertise.

“I work in a hotel right now. Because of [the] language barrier, I can’t get a better job, I can’t do what I would like to do. [...] I am a mechanic¹⁹ and I repairs engines and stuff like that – I love it. But if I were given a chance to try, I would try to speak with people and get more practice with English and get successful with it too. But I have to have this job at the hotel now.”

- Ivan

Some did feel as though more support could be given in order to find relevant work, as well as guidance concerning rules and regulations in the UK concerning employment. In addition, where people came from a certain employment background (e.g. teaching or accountancy), they needed general information concerning such national system (e.g. Scotland’s school system). Again, providing such information is challenging at the scale of the local authority and such information could be provided at a national scale.

Due to the abovementioned challenges, a significant proportion of those we interviewed were considering self-employment and setting up businesses in Argyll and Bute. As part of this process, they had received free support from Business Gateway, with support from the resettlement team in submitting information and establishing this link. Those who had used this service spoke very favourably of Business Gateway:

“I would also like to mention and to thank Business Gateway, the organisation that helped us to develop our business. They helped us to apply for grants, and they constantly have meetings with us [... We have had] consultations with accountants and [...] professionals who could advise us [on specific issues]. We are really grateful for the whole support that we [have received] in Scotland. This is many times more than what we ever expected to get.”

- Valeriia and Andriy

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

Access to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) was a key concern both for Ukrainian participants and resettlement workers, especially in connection to employment, with people keenly aware of the need to improve their English language skills in order to find work that they wanted. Many participants reported experiencing considerable isolation due to not speaking 'good enough' English. People from older generations spoke of relying on younger people who have 'better English'. The stress of making friends and speaking a new language was also a factor which exacerbated mental health struggles, whereas after gaining more language skills, people's self-confidence was greatly boosted. Access to ESOL, then was directly related to a sense of increased agency and choice:

[...] as long as [people from Ukraine] have the language barrier, it gives [them] very little choice to decide what to do differently.

- Ivan

Our interviews concerned the ESOL classes provided by the Argyll & Bute council resettlement team – therefore not courses run by community groups or colleges, which some participants also accessed. Overall, respondents were satisfied with the ESOL classes and teachers via Argyll & Bute council.

Resettlement workers explained that all ESOL teachers hold formal qualifications and all are employed, as opposed to community ESOL programmes often run via unqualified volunteers. A great number of ESOL classes were online. This decision was made to facilitate access taking into consideration a number of factors. Firstly, Argyll & Bute's large geographic area means that people are widely dispersed in communities on islands or in small villages, as well as in towns which are often distant from each other. Online classes ensure that the maximum number of people can attend, wherever they are resettled. Online classes also obviate for the need to provide childcare and are more flexible in terms of people's work schedules. The main difficulties in running ESOL classes were related to the continuous turnover of students, due to people arriving to be resettled at different times, and then gaining employment which meant their time availabilities changed continuously:

"People get jobs but they also move to different jobs and so therefore the hours that they're available to learn English changes a lot. So there's a lot of people moving all the time so it's about rearranging people into classes that fit, yeah, that's a constant turnover [of students]."

- Katherine, Council employee

Work was also cited by participants as one of the key reasons for not attending ESOL classes – paradoxically, as ESOL was also cited as one of the key factors to help get more and better work. However, employment and earning money was often a higher priority, even if it clashed with ESOL:

We used to go to the classes but now, with the work, sometimes we become very tired or we are not in time for the lesson, we are too late to join. We arranged to not attend the classes for July and August, when there is a lot of work for us. And then we will continue attending again.

- Tatiana

As the above quote illustrates, for many participants the most available work was seasonal, particularly in the catering or hospitality industry which is a salient feature of Argyll & Bute's economy. This means that during the summer months people worked long hours and stopped attending ESOL classes:

"I used to go to all the classes in winter and spring and I hope that when it's low season I will continue from October [onwards]. The issue was that I was always late [...] and then I was told, 'Could you please be on time?' and I tried to explain that I just come home when the session has already started. And because I thought I would offend them, I just made this pause [to stop coming to ESOL classes]."

- Vira

The temporary nature of peoples' Leave to Remain in the UK influenced their decision-making in terms of how they lived in their lives in Argyll and Bute. Some families, for example, put less stock in attending ESOL classes, preferring instead to work as many hours as possible in order to save up funds for the next move.

"I can't arrange the time of the classes beforehand because sometimes I go to work and I am told, 'If you want to stay, because there is more work today, if you are available to stay longer, you can.' [Right now] I am trying to get all the possible hours, even work during the days off."

- Artem

Most participants were overall very happy with online learning and the opportunity to fit ESOL around work timings, even if this was not always easy. This was a reflection of the ESOL team at Argyll & Bute council working hard to accommodate timings and different needs. Generally, communication about ESOL from resettlement workers was described as good. When miscommunication did occur, it was often because participants felt they needed more information that the resettlement worker thought – perhaps in connection to the stated reluctance to create dependency:

"My support [worker], he told me there is ESOL [...] So I just asked, 'Could you please enrol me or could you tell me more about it? I would like to attend.' [...] But] I am [still] just waiting for the information about who is the person who has classes, what level, how it looks like, what time. I need all this information."

- Ionna

The main problems were faced by those who were starting English from scratch. These people expressed feelings of being a burden on the class, and needing some Ukrainian to be spoken by the teacher at the start:

"My husband, he doesn't understand the teacher, he needs to start from like a zero level, like from the letters, so maybe the hello and goodbye, something like this."

- Anichka

Other complaints included needing more structure beyond the provision of ESOL which was felt to be useful for local sayings & customs but not more. People also expressed a desire for ESOL classes for specific purposes such as passing the IELTS exam²² or a driving test. While one resettlement worker told us that such classes were being provided, not all participants from Ukraine were aware of this, indicating the need for clearer communication about course availability.

²² <https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/>

Languages

Languages, as distinct to ESOL provision and access, were a recurrent element in people's conversations. Participants from Ukraine repeatedly spoke of languages as a significant factor in their resettlement. For people who spoke English fluently, language was an important factor in their decision to come to Scotland:

"I made this decision to go to Scotland because, more or less, I knew English. It was the first reason, and the second one, my son will start English and it is a useful language for future."

- Irina

While English language skills were seen as key to people the kind of employment they wanted, many participants also indicated that the main concern was to have an income and that they were happy to get any work and then change employment when they could. Therefore attitudes towards language skills played an important role in the degree to which people interviewed were willing to find diverse ways to communicate:

"The story was, I went to a shop, and passing near the door, there was an advertisement that they needed housekeepers. So I just entered the door and wrote [using] Google Translate, 'Can I work without English?' And I was interviewed. And then my husband called me back and asked why I was taking so long at the shop. And I said, 'I'm working, just call me back.' So that was the story, I found this work very accidentally."

- Diana

The language of bureaucracy also featured as a particularly difficult kind of communication. Participants often struggled to understand systems related to obtaining key documents and services such as basic utilities, because the companies involved were inflexible in terms of providing interpretation or services in any language other than English. Resettlement workers were named by almost all participants as key allies in navigating the complexities of bureaucracy, along with the ease and availability of interpreting provided by the Argyll and Bute council. Support workers shared participants' frustrations at utility companies' approach to languages:

"I think a lot of the companies are not very refugee friendly. Having to speak to them and if you're on the phone and they say, 'We need to speak to the client.' You say, 'That's fine, but they don't really have any English.' Then they try and proceed with this conversation and you know it's not going to work. The person gets very frustrated. A lot of companies just don't seem to have any policy in place for people without English. They don't seem to be able to send translations. It's ridiculous actually how backward we are in this country with translation for other languages. It's terrible."

- Cameron, Council employee

Participants spoke of language needs beyond 'just English'. Parents were often concerned about their children losing their Ukrainian language skills and reported meeting up with other Ukrainian families to keep talking their mother tongue together. In general, speaking

Ukrainian was a source of comfort for many participants – but not for all. Some people stating that they did not want to meet up with Ukrainians because they wanted to avoid discussing ‘The Situation’, and because of complexities related to language dynamics and regional provenance in the context of the Russian invasion:

I'm from the eastern part of Ukraine, and we used to speak Russian all the time. [... When] we stayed in the [...] Hotel, and because we were from [an Eastern] region, some people were really rude [...] and called us names [...] because we spoke Russian.

- Svitlana

School

It is important to state that we were not able to speak directly with people under 18, due to the parameters of our research ethics approval. However, the parents and carers we interviewed were extremely positive about the school experience for their children in Argyll & Bute, with the following quote being exemplary of many more:

"[Our son] says he feels very well at school, he is happy. [The school] think he has adapted well. And the teachers are great. [...] the deputy headteacher is just super great [...] and everybody is very supportive at school.

- Daryna

People resettled with children were more invested in long-term goals and staying in Scotland than people without children, with schools in Scotland a reason to stay longer if possible. The uncertainty of people's future was a burden which influenced children's education, particularly in terms of planning transitions from high school to further education:

"We can't predict he will be in Ukraine or in Scotland, when he finishes his high school."

- Diana

Strong feelings of homesickness and uprootedness among children and adults alike were also acknowledged:

"It is very hard just to start your life again, and especially for kids. Because my children really wanted to go back to Ukraine, to their friends.

- Ionna

Amidst such difficult feelings, school was repeatedly named as an important element of a general sense of safety:

"I am safe, my child is safe, and he goes to school, which is very important. So these are the main points."

- Diana

Schools were generally felt to be very supportive, well organised and extremely effective at communicating with children from Ukraine and their parents or carers:

"It is very good that we receive letters very often. And we were given all the information from school very often. So it's good communication."

- Diana

Most parents and carers from Ukraine said that school did not present an opportunity to meet other adults from the local community and integrate via school activities or at the school gate, because participants spent most of their time at work or caring for other family members. However, school was an important source of employment for a number of the female participants who found work as classroom assistants or Ukrainian language support staff at

their local school. For the children, though, school was a place to meet new people and make friends:

“Our daughter finds the school great, and we all love the school. It’s really well equipped, and it was very easy for her to study. She easily found friends, she feels like a part of her friend group.

- Valeriia

Activities such as summer camps and sports clubs, accessed through schools, were also an important way for young Ukrainian people to find friends:

“[The children] are members of the football club, and they have a lot of friends there through football.”

- Yeva

Participants stated that their older children spend more time with other Ukrainian children at school, whereas the younger children are more willing to speak English and spend time with their non-Ukrainian peers. However, the younger children often encountered issues stemming from the different ages at which children start formal education in Ukraine and Scotland:

“But it’s just a big problem for the youngest one because she came from Ukraine and she used to be in the first grade in Ukraine. So she hadn’t started reading in Ukrainian, and now here, it’s very hard to start reading and writing in English. It’s a big issue.”

- Ivan

Many children were also engaged in online Ukrainian school programmes, often in the evening after other engagements and tasks were completed. Scottish schools were not always aware of this double schooling, and while parents reported that their children were tired, keeping up with Ukrainian school was considered extremely important. This was also related to the uncertainty regarding how long people would be allowed to stay in Scotland, with Ukrainian school seen as a necessary undertaking in case people were to return to Ukraine.

When problems arose, they were largely about managing logistics and communications around moving from high school to further education. This quote is from a family who were not informed about the system for securing student accommodation in Glasgow; as a result their child had to commute from Argyll & Bute three days a week:

“The career advisor didn’t help much, [...], because other people applied for accommodation in December, [...], and now it’s too late to ask for accommodation in Glasgow, because they are all full.

- Andriiy

The communication around schools from resettlement workers in Argyll & Bute, however, was generally considered excellent:

"We contacted [our resettlement worker] pretty often because there were many questions at each stage. For example, when we were enrolled to school, we needed to fill in many documents and then to apply for bus pass. And then we needed a referral to have some food at school. [...] So there were many questions every time, and [our resettlement worker] helped a lot."

- Virayy

Transport

Problems related to transport were a recurrent issue, especially for people living more rurally and/or on islands. Lack of available transport was cited as a major factor in people feeling that they had little agency or choice about their life, especially with regards to work. This contributed to feelings of increased isolation and made people wish that they had been resettled to a place with better transport links such as a major city:

“In [our] area, yes, [we have] less choices. Because we don’t have transportation, we don’t have no car, no job [sic]. [...] “Maybe if we stay in Edinburgh, [there would be] more choices to find a job, [...] But because we stayed in [redacted] even to go to buy, like, groceries, it’s 40 minutes, and we have to [take a] bus that goes every hour, so, like, you have to come, like, exactly this time, go there, spend time there, and come back exact- so, it takes us, like, three hours, at least.”

- Veronika

The problem with transportation was related to scarcity rather than cost: people didn’t complain about buses being too expensive, but they often complained about buses being very infrequent and irregular. This meant that people spent a lot of time doing simple things such as the school run, which then meant they had less time for learning English or finding work:

“We need to go with the kids by bus to school just to be sure that they get to school. Then [my husband] comes back and then he needs to return and pick them up [by] bus again.”

- Anichka

As well as the abovementioned point about accessing work, lack of transport meant that participants stopped trying to access opportunities to socialise and improve their spoken English, such as community groups:

“[Community groups] are far away and they are on top of the hill and I am without car. [It takes] one and a half hours to get there.”

- Irina

Some families had driven to Scotland with their own car, so did not face such problems. Other participants repeatedly stressed the importance to them of saving up to buy a car and getting a driving license. People were unclear about how to access information about driving lessons and tests, and suggested that the resettlement team could put together information packs about this; people also suggested ESOL courses specifically tailored around the vocabulary of driving tests, seemingly unclear about whether these were available:

“I need a driving licence. If they have that course, it’s super for me”

- Irina

However, there were also some positive statements related to transport, with buses in particular seen as friendly places:

“And when she travels by bus, people know her already because the town is small and people know each other and they ask her, “How are you?”

- Yeva

People stated that they had received very good support from resettlement workers to navigate the system of bus tickets and Young Scot Cards for children. This support made it easier for families to overcome initial hesitations and adapt to some transport systems, such as ferries, which they had never experienced before and which they now enjoy:

“Because [Argyll and Bute on a map] it looks so, so, so full of water and really hard to navigate or to get from place to place, which it’s really not. I’m in Dunoon and there is a ferry and the transport system works so great. It’s really easy. And the Western ferry never gets cancelled even if the passenger ferry gets cancelled due to bad weather, for example.”

- Marta

Mental health and stress

While past trauma plays a role in the process of integration, the research team were careful not to ask questions concerning the effects of the war or peoples' experiences before leaving Ukraine. Evidently, "The Situation" in Ukraine still plays a massive part in peoples' lives, contributing to daily stress and anxiety – while having to restart one's life is an extremely demanding endeavour. Those we interviewed were also struggling with the guilt of knowing that they had been able to escape "The Situation", while members of their family and friends were still fighting in the war.

"I mainly came here for my son because he was 16 and we were evacuated actually from the town where we lived. Our family just pushed us out, 'At least somebody can leave, so you leave.' But I felt really guilty. I still do."

- Bozhena

This feeling of guilt contributed to some peoples' desire to find work as soon as possible; to feel as though they were contributing to society through their work and by paying taxes. In addition to the stress of the journey to Argyll and Bute and the guilt experienced, participants discussed the challenge of moving somewhere completely new and the challenges of opening up to new people in another language. Indeed, the language barrier was seen as the primary obstacle to engaging with the pre-existing people in the community – which again highlights the need for language and ESOL classes in the context of resettlement. Yet, for the most part, participants praised the welcome they received from the community and those who had moved into sponsored accommodation, in particular, found that this had been helpful in terms of getting to know people and (re)developing confidence.

"I felt stressed because it was difficult to communicate and everything was new around me and, moreover, I felt a bit like I was alone now because I used to be with friends and it was not comfortable to be alone. But the host, he helped me a lot. [...] He showed me everything around [the town]. We went for an excursion. He showed me shops, the surgery, and helped me sign up to the local GP here."

- Borys

A significant additional source of stress experienced by the research participants was their uncertainty concerning the length of time they could stay in the UK – with their Leave to Remain (granted by the UK Government) set to expire within three years of issue. The three-year limit was discussed by each participant as a serious issue affecting their mental health and inhibiting their ability to make clear plans for the future.

"We are always wondering how long we will be allowed to stay. It's not only for me, [we are all asking it], my neighbours and everyone: 'What to do? What to do?' We feel like we [have just] settled. We talk about it often."

- Vira

"Knowing that [our Leave to Remain] is only valid for three years, it means I don't know how to plan or what aims to have [for the future...] it's hard to plan"

anything, because when I start planning, I know that in less than three years' time, [our LtR] will be over and we will have to go back to Ukraine. Otherwise, it's illegal to stay in the UK. But I realise that in Ukraine, even if the war is over today, it will be hard. There is no future for the children for probably some 10 years or so, so it's hard to think [of the future]."

- Daniela

The potential temporariness of peoples' Leave to Remain in the UK influenced their decision-making in terms of how they lived in their lives in Argyll and Bute. Some families, for example, put less stock in attending ESOL classes (see ESOL section). Others were unsure of whether or not to invest in new businesses in Scotland or pay into a pension scheme, given the uncertainty of their visa situation and whether they would be forced to give up on their new business. In other cases, families prioritised the career of one family member over another in order to increase their chances of successfully applying for a different visa to extend their stay.

"It is difficult to think about the future, because we are only here for three years, as for now, the government says. That's why it's a lot of uncertainty. [...] Yesterday I had a conversation with my manager and [they] said that as long as I don't have the documents certifying or allowing me to live [in the UK for] longer than three years, then I should opt out from the pension scheme. So that's what I did."

- Kateryna

Since conducting the research interviews, the UK Government announced the 'Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme', which will allow people to extend their stay in the UK by a further 18 months. Although this is a welcome extension, it will not alleviate the existing concerns that people have regarding their long-term futures, which will also impact on their integration journeys and decision-making while in Scotland.

Moving forward: from resettlement to integration

While this report is primarily concerned with experiences of emergency resettlement, there was a sense amongst the interview participants – both those who had arrived from Ukraine and the members of the resettlement team – that the initial (urgent) phase of resettlement was over. Participants were therefore able to consider other aspects of their lives related to longer-term integration processes.

As part of the research interviews, we asked participants how they would define integration and to reflect on whether or not they felt integrated in Argyll and Bute. For the most part, participants understood integration as knowing and accepting local customs and rules, as well as finding employment to limit reliance on others and the state. This practical understanding of integration goes some way to explaining the strong desire of resettled persons from Ukraine to find employment as soon as possible following their arrival in the local authority. Given the value placed on employment and understanding local culture, participants were particularly thankful for the resettlement team's organising of large events – where people had been able to meet local employers and community groups. In addition, participants expressed their pleasure regarding the day outings that the resettlement team had organised for resettled children and families.

In terms of developing relationships with locals already living in Argyll and Bute, participants spoke very favourably of their neighbours and regularly expressed their thanks to both the Scottish Government and the people of Argyll and Bute for welcoming them to Scotland. Those living with sponsors at the time of the interviews were particularly grateful of the support they had and were receiving. Nevertheless, participants also spoke of struggling to develop “deeper” relationships with their Scottish neighbours despite the warm welcome they had received. This challenge was again associated with the language barrier, yet participants also mentioned significant cultural differences as well as the lack of certainty concerning the longevity of their stay in Scotland and their next steps.

“I think a lot about it. Okay, I am here, I have a job, I have a house. I started to [save] for my house and it means I put my roots inside this tree, yeah, and starting to grow here. [...] When I communicate with Scottish people, yeah, like lovely and everything okay, but I can't go deeper, [...] maybe I don't need to do it, maybe nobody needs to do it. And it depends if I would like to stay or if I stay for a long time here, [then] I would like to make friends, Scottish friends, but I'm not sure. I don't know how to, like how to make relationships deeper because it's just on the surface.”

- Irina

While integration involves gaining access to services and rights concerning housing, employment, health etc, integration also includes supporting people to ‘self-author’ their lives (once more).²³ The research team were therefore particularly keen to investigate whether participants felt as though they were at a stage in which people felt they had agency over their lives in Argyll and Bute. We therefore asked participants whether they felt they

²³ <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/23/4/546/1526039?login=false>

could make choices concerning their lives in Argyll and Bute and whether they had developed aims since arriving.

For some these questions were straightforward to answer; their main consideration was the safety of their children and their aim was to stay in Scotland in order to provide safety and good quality education for them. Similarly, many viewed their safety and the “guarantee of tomorrow” to be enough of a resource through which to have agency. Other participants, however, viewed agency as being linked to their work and, therefore, being independent.

“I can solve many problems because I have my job and I can solve some problems now. But it’s a hard question.”

- Diana

This link between employment and agency was common – yet it also meant that those who were not in employment of their ideal choosing felt as though they were not in control of their lives. In such cases, the language barrier – and with it restrictions on employment – constrained their ability to make significant life choices.

“As long as we have the language barrier, it gives us very little choice to decide what to do differently.”

- Valeriia and Andrey

Though the findings of this report highlight many successes regarding the resettlement of displaced persons from Ukraine to Argyll and Bute, it is nevertheless evident that much more work needs to be done in terms of ensuring that people can integrate in Scotland in the long-term. Based on our interviews, the key challenges in this regard concern languages, employment and security of immigration status.