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MA in International Relations

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**Supporting Integration and Building Belonging of Ukrainian Refugees in the
UK: The Case of Homes for Ukraine Scheme**

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ABBREVIATIONS

APBI	Afghan Pro Bono Initiative
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group on Migration
BN	British National
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
HFU	Homes for Ukraine
IAB	Institute for Employment Research
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
NGO	Nongovernmental organisation
O	Overseas
PSR	Private Sponsorship of Refugees
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPE	Ukraine Permission Extension

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the integration experiences of Ukrainian refugees in the United Kingdom who arrived under the *Homes for Ukraine scheme*, introduced by the UK government in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Drawing exclusively on secondary data, including academic literature, government publications, NGO reports and policy briefings, the study explores the structural, social and institutional factors shaping integration outcomes. Particular attention is given to the interaction between policy design, host–refugee relationships and access to core integration domains such as housing, employment, language provision and social networks.

The analysis is anchored in *Ager and Strang's (2008)* multidimensional integration framework and informed by critical scholarship on belonging and racialised border governance (*Yuval-Davis, 2011; El-Enany, 2020*). The dissertation argues that while the *Homes for Ukraine scheme* enabled a rapid and comparatively humane response to displacement, its longer-term effectiveness has been constrained by limited structural support, uneven local implementation and an overreliance on voluntarism. These limitations have contributed to ongoing insecurity in housing, employment and legal status, undermining refugees' experiences of stability and belonging despite early indicators of functional integration.

By examining *Homes for Ukraine* as a hybrid model combining state oversight with citizen participation, this research highlights the tensions between emergency humanitarian responses and sustainable integration planning. The dissertation concludes by outlining policy implications for the design of future refugee reception and integration schemes, emphasising the need for stronger institutional coordination, clearer pathways to long-term settlement and more equitable access to integration support.

Keywords: *refugees, integration, migration, Homes for Ukraine, UK refugee policy.*

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Chapter I establishes the foundation of the study. It sets out the rationale for examining Ukrainian refugee integration, followed by the wider background and context of displacement and UK policy responses. The chapter also identifies the main research problem and presents the central research question alongside the sub-questions that guide the inquiry. The aims and objectives articulate what the dissertation seeks to achieve.

1.1 Rationale

Global forced displacement has reached levels unprecedented in modern history. By the end of 2024, an estimated 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide - around seven million more than in 2023 (*UNHCR, 2024b*). Although this is a global phenomenon, its burden is unequally distributed: low- and middle-income countries host approximately three quarters of the world's refugees, with most displaced people remaining in states neighbouring their countries of origin (*UNHCR, 2024b*).

Within this broader landscape, the Ukrainian refugee crisis represents a distinct geopolitical moment. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 forced more than 6.3 million Ukrainians to flee their homes, creating one of the largest movements of people in Europe since the Second World War (*UNHCR, 2024a*). Unlike many other displaced populations, Ukrainians often arrived with relatively high levels of education and professional experience, as well as cultural and geographic proximity to their host societies. Crucially, in the UK context, the majority of Ukrainians did not receive formal refugee status but instead entered through temporary protection routes - most notably the *Homes for Ukraine* and *Ukraine Family schemes* - which grant residency and rights on a time-limited basis rather than through the asylum system. This legal and institutional distinction sets them apart from other major refugee groups, such as Syrians, Afghans, and Sudanese, who typically undergo asylum procedures and are resettled under formal refugee frameworks (*UNHCR, 2024b*).

In response, governments across Europe and North America adopted differing mechanisms for reception and integration of Ukrainian refugees, shaped by their institutional traditions and policy capacities. For example, the European Union invoked the Temporary Protection Directive (*2001/55/EC*) on 4 March 2022, offering immediate residence rights and labour market access to those fleeing Ukraine (*Council of the European Union, 2022*). The United Kingdom, however, pursued a different path, introducing the Homes for Ukraine scheme on 14 March 2022 - a form of community sponsorship that relied on citizens and organisations to provide accommodation and support (*Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022*).

This model stands within a broader international repertoire of resettlement approaches, ranging from state-led programmes to private sponsorship models pioneered in Canada and later replicated in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Germany, and the United States (*European Parliament, 2025b; West, Plunkett, 2018; HIAS, 2023*). By early 2025, the UK had issued more than 186,000 visas under the Homes for Ukraine initiative (*Home Office, 2025*), making it the largest community sponsorship response to a single displacement crisis anywhere in the world.

This dissertation contributes to the growing field of refugee integration research by analysing how different resettlement structures affect integration experiences. Integration itself remains a contested concept, conceptualised across several dimensions - foundational (legal status and rights), functional (housing, employment, education, healthcare), social (networks and belonging), and facilitative (language learning and cultural orientation) (*Council of Europe, 2023*). Each model of resettlement privileges different aspects of this process. State-led programmes typically prioritise rapid functional integration, while private sponsorship models such as Canada's emphasise social embeddedness through community engagement (*West, Plunkett 2018; Parliament of Canada, 2025*). Positioned between these two poles, the UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme merges governmental oversight with civic participation, offering a hybrid framework that raises important questions about power dynamics, dependency, and the deeper conditions required for genuine belonging.

1.2 Background and context

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 precipitated the most rapid displacement of people in Europe since the Second World War. The first waves of refugees were received primarily by frontline states such as Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, with Poland alone accommodating more than 1.5 million Ukrainians during the first year of the conflict (*UNHCR, 2023*). These neighbouring countries functioned simultaneously as transit corridors and longer-term settlement zones, implementing temporary protection under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive framework.

The United Kingdom - outside the Schengen Area, the passport-free zone that facilitates movement among twenty-seven European Union member states (*European Parliament, 2025*) - initially attracted criticism for the bureaucratic complexity and slow pace of its visa process (*UK and EU, 2023*). This external position mirrored the UK's historically restrictive border governance, distinguishing it from the EU's more harmonised asylum mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the introduction of the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme in March 2022 marked a notable shift in UK refugee policy, while aligning with the wider European consensus on the need to support those displaced by the war (*Council of the European Union, 2022*). Whereas the EU implemented the Temporary Protection Directive on 4 March 2022 - automatically granting Ukrainians residence rights and immediate access to work, education, and healthcare (*European Commission, 2022*) - the UK adopted an alternative, community-led model built on individual and organisational sponsorship (*Trauner and Valodskaitė, 2022*).

By allowing individuals, charities, and community groups to host Ukrainian nationals with minimal pre-screening or centralised integration planning (*Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022*), the Homes for Ukraine scheme situated the UK as an outlier within Europe's humanitarian landscape. The programme reflects the country's distinctive institutional traditions and governance capacities while operating within a broader framework of European solidarity. Consequently, it offers a valuable context for examining how both citizen-led initiatives and government policy interact in shaping refugee integration, belonging, and public perceptions within the UK's unique migration environment.

1.3 Main research problem

The central research problem of this dissertation is to critically examine and problematise the concept and practice of refugee integration within the context of the United Kingdom – using the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme as a case study. Since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, large-scale displacement has placed significant pressure on host countries to design and implement effective models of integration. As discussed in the *Rationale* and *Background and Context* sections above, various modalities of integration have emerged across the world, reflecting diverse policy traditions and institutional capacities.

This research explores how the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme functions as a hybrid model that reconciles state and citizen efforts in promoting a new, community-based approach to integration. While media accounts and NGO reports indicate a mixture of successful hosting experiences and persistent challenges - particularly regarding housing stability, access to healthcare, education, employment, and language services - there remains a limited academic understanding of how these experiences translate into a sense of belonging and long-term integration for Ukrainian refugees in the UK.

The dissertation seeks to address this gap by investigating the conditions that enable or inhibit meaningful integration in practice. Through the case study of the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme, it examines how structural factors, policy design, and interpersonal relationships shape refugees' experiences of inclusion, agency, and belonging within this broader integration framework. At the structural level, the study considers how labour markets, housing systems, welfare provision, educational institutions, and legal frameworks condition the opportunities available to Ukrainian refugees.

1.4 Main research questions

The central research question guiding this dissertation is: *What are the key factors shaping the integration of Ukrainian refugees in the UK?*

This research explores how policy design, host-refugee relationships, and access to core integration services affect refugees' experiences of inclusion and participation in British society.

Sub-questions:

1. How do Ukrainian refugees experience integration in the UK?
2. What are the barriers that affect key 'integration' dimensions of Ukrainian refugees in the UK?
3. What are the UK government's policies to welcome and integrate Ukrainian refugees to the UK?
4. How did the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme affect the integration experiences of Ukrainian refugees in the UK?

1.5 Aims and objectives

To examine the integration experiences of Ukrainian refugees in the United Kingdom under the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme and to evaluate how this hybrid, community-

based model informs the development of future refugee integration policies and practices.

The key objectives include:

1. To analyse the lived integration experiences of Ukrainian refugees in the UK, with attention to barriers, opportunities, and forms of adaptation.
2. To identify the key socio-cultural, linguistic, economic, and institutional factors shaping the integration of Ukrainian refugees in the UK.
3. To evaluate the specific support mechanisms provided through the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme, including housing sponsorship, language provision, employment pathways, and community engagement.
4. To critically assess the successes and limitations of the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme as a model of refugee integration.

1.6. Argument

This dissertation argues that while the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme represented an innovative and rapid resettlement response during a period of acute humanitarian crisis, its longer-term effectiveness has been constrained by limited structural support, uneven implementation, and an overreliance on voluntarism. Although the scheme enabled swift arrivals and mobilised significant public goodwill, it was not accompanied by a sufficiently robust, long-term integration infrastructure. Structural gaps have been particularly evident in areas such as sustainable housing provision, consistent access to English language support, and tailored employment pathways. Furthermore, the decentralised nature of implementation has resulted in considerable variation between local authorities, producing uneven integration outcomes depending on geography, local capacity, and the availability of voluntary sector support.

Integration, as conceptualised by *Ager and Strang (2008)*, is a multidimensional process encompassing legal foundations, functional participation, social connections, and cultural adaptation. When integration is approached in a fragmented, short-term, or emergency-driven manner, there is a risk that it may reproduce insecurity and dependency rather than fostering long-term stability and belonging. The *Homes for Ukraine* scheme illustrates this tension: while initial housing and community support facilitated early settlement, the absence of a clear pathway to permanence and sustained integration planning has left many refugees facing ongoing indeterminacy.

The implications of inadequate integration extend beyond refugee populations. Poorly supported resettlement initiatives can place significant pressure on local housing markets, strain public services, and generate tensions within host communities. In the longer term, uneven or unsuccessful integration may shape public attitudes towards migration, influence political discourse, and undermine social cohesion. Integration frameworks therefore matter not only for refugees' individual wellbeing but also for the resilience and inclusivity of receiving communities.

By examining the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme as a hybrid model combining state oversight and citizen participation, this research investigates how different integration architectures shape both refugee and host experiences. Media reports and NGO evidence point to a mixed picture: while many hosting relationships have fostered empathy and inclusion, persistent barriers, as will be discussed in Chapter III, in

housing, healthcare, education, and employment highlight the limits of voluntarism in delivering sustainable integration (*British Red Cross, 2024; Refugee Council, 2025*).

Understanding these dynamics is crucial not only for assessing the outcomes of the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme but also for advancing theoretical and policy debates about integration in contemporary refugee governance. This dissertation therefore positions the scheme as both a case study of crisis response and a lens through which to explore the broader question of how integration frameworks can balance community engagement with institutional accountability in building inclusive and resilient societies.

1.7 Methodology

This dissertation adopts a qualitative methodological approach to investigate the integration experiences of Ukrainian refugees in the United Kingdom under the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme. Drawing on academic literature, government policy documents, statistical reports, and publications by non-governmental and refugee-support organisations, the study explores how policy design, institutional arrangements, and access to key integration domains shape refugees' experiences of inclusion and participation. The exclusive use of secondary data is appropriate for this research as it enables a comprehensive and critical examination of both the structural features of the scheme and the lived realities documented across multiple authoritative sources, rather than relying on a single set of primary accounts. This methodological approach aligns directly with the dissertation's central research question: *What are the key factors shaping the integration of Ukrainian refugees in the UK?*

Secondary data is especially well suited to this topic because it enables an in-depth examination of both the structural and experiential dimensions of refugee integration, providing a broad and evidence-based perspective on how the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme operates in practice. The research involves several key components:

- Analysis of government documents, policy frameworks, reports to understand the institutional design, objectives, and implementation of the Homes for Ukraine scheme (research sub-question 2).
- Review of NGO and charity reports (such as those by the Refugee Council, British Red Cross, and Migration Observatory) to capture insights into the lived realities of refugees and hosts, as well as to identify emerging challenges in housing, employment, education, and language provision (research questions 1 and 2).
- Synthesis of academic literature on migration and integration, especially in the UK (to address all research questions).
- Examination of available data and surveys on Ukrainian refugees in the UK, including demographic information, labour market participation, and access to services, to contextualise the policy analysis within broader empirical trends (to contextualise the research and explore questions 1-3).

1.8 Bias and limitations

As this dissertation relies exclusively on secondary data, several potential biases and limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study depends on the accuracy and

completeness of existing sources, including government reports, NGO publications, and academic studies. These materials may reflect the priorities, assumptions, or political framing of their authors or institutions. For example, government reports often emphasise policy achievements and may understate operational shortcomings, while NGO and media accounts may focus on individual hardship to advocate for reform.

A further limitation arises from the uneven availability and comparability of data. Information on the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme is still emerging, and datasets often vary in scope, methodology, and time frame. This constrains the ability to generalise findings or to assess long-term integration outcomes with precision.

The reliance on secondary analysis also means that the research cannot capture first-hand perspectives from refugees or host families, limiting the depth of insight into personal experiences of belonging and adaptation. However, this approach enables a broad, cross-sectoral view of the policy landscape and draws on diverse, credible evidence to allow for triangulation and to build a critical synthesis.

1.9 Dissertation structure

This dissertation is organised into five chapters, each building towards a comprehensive analysis of the integration experiences of Ukrainian refugees in the United Kingdom and the implications of the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme.

Chapter II provides the theoretical, conceptual, and analytical grounding for the research. It begins by defining and conceptualising integration, before distinguishing it from related concepts such as assimilation and inclusion. The chapter then surveys key debates on integration and identifies the main factors influencing refugee integration across different contexts. The chapter concludes with the theoretical framework, presenting both the multi-level and multidimensional aspects of integration, drawing primarily on Ager and Strang's framework and complementary scholarship.

Chapter III focuses on the lived realities of Ukrainian refugees. It begins with an overview of refugee integration in the UK more broadly, then contextualises the specific circumstances of Ukrainians arriving post-2022. The core of the chapter analyses the main integration challenges affecting this group, structured around key domains: employment pathways, housing conditions, education, social networks, language acquisition, and legal status. Drawing on secondary data, NGO reports, and survey findings, the chapter highlights both opportunities and structural barriers shaping the adaptation and belonging of Ukrainian refugees in the UK.

Chapter IV examines the UK policy framework responding to the displacement of Ukrainians following the 2022 invasion. It outlines the main visa and protection schemes - the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine), the Ukraine Family Scheme, the Ukraine Extension Scheme, and the Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) - to situate Homes for Ukraine within this wider policy framework. The chapter then provides an in-depth case study of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, tracing its evolution and assessing its strengths and weaknesses. Finally, it evaluates how the scheme affects the integration of Ukrainian refugees across key domains, identifying policy successes as well as structural limitations of citizen-led sponsorship.

The concluding chapter synthesises the key findings in relation to the research questions, aims, and theoretical framework. It reflects on what the case of Ukrainian refugees reveals about the capacities and limitations of hybrid community-based integration models in the UK. The chapter then offers policy recommendations to support more inclusive and sustainable refugee integration, followed by suggestions for future research, particularly concerning the long-term social impact of sponsorship schemes on both refugees and host communities.

The next chapter critically examines the literature review and presents the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework and critically examines key concepts and debates within migration and refugee studies, with particular attention to how integration is defined, conceptualised, and operationalised in academic and policy literature. The chapter distinguishes between integration, assimilation, and inclusion, and reviews major scholarly debates concerning the processes, levels, and dimensions of refugee integration.

2.1 What is integration

Integration is a foundational yet inherently contested concept in migration and refugee studies. Its meaning varies across national contexts, policy frameworks, and academic traditions (*Penninx, 2005; Castles et al., 2019*). Common to most definitions is an understanding of integration as a long-term, multi-layered process through which refugees and other migrants establish themselves socially, economically, culturally and politically in a host society. *Ager and Strang (2008)* define integration as the degree to which refugees achieve “full and equal access to rights, responsibilities and opportunities,” emphasising that integration is not a static end-state but a dynamic process.

Other influential accounts emphasise slightly different aspects. For example, *Penninx (2005)* highlights the interaction between migrants and the main institutions of the host society, while *Garcés-Mascreñas and Penninx (2016)* conceptualise integration as occurring simultaneously at legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural-religious levels. *Yuval-Davis (2011)* and *Antonsich (2010)* bring in questions of identity and belonging, stressing that integration is not only about objective outcomes (employment, housing, legal status) but also about how people feel “at home” and recognised in a given place. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that no single definition is sufficient, but that a working concept is needed for empirical analysis.

This dissertation therefore adopts *Ager and Strang’s (2008)* definition of integration as the extent to which refugees have full and equal access to key rights, responsibilities and opportunities, while embedding it within *Penninx’s (2005)* and *Garcés-Mascreñas and Penninx’s (2016)* insistence on multi-level processes and institutional interaction. This combined approach is appropriate for the *Homes for Ukraine* case because it: (a) links integration directly to entitlements and opportunities embedded in UK policy frameworks; and (b) allows attention to both outcomes (e.g. access to work, welfare, housing) and processes (e.g. how sponsorship arrangements and local authorities mediate that access).

Central to contemporary scholarship is the recognition that integration is reciprocal rather than unilateral (*EU Council, 2004; Phillimore, 2012*). It requires adaptation not only from newly arrived refugees but also from host communities, institutions and policy structures, which may need to modify practices, services and narratives to accommodate and support newcomers. This marks a conceptual move away from older assimilationist frameworks, which presumed that migrants should adapt unidirectionally to the norms and institutions of the host society and, over time, become indistinguishable from the majority population (*Castles et al., 2019*). By contrast, a reciprocal understanding of integration acknowledges that host societies also change

through migration and that policy choices, public attitudes and institutional capacities shape the opportunities and constraints that refugees encounter.

Integration begins upon arrival, and in some respects even before refugees enter the host country, for example through visa policies, sponsorship matching processes and pre-departure information that shape subsequent opportunities (*Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016*). It then unfolds across multiple sites and scales: neighbourhoods and housing markets, workplaces and job centres, schools and childcare settings, religious and community organisations, and increasingly digital spaces where information, support and social ties are negotiated. These sites are not merely backdrops but active arenas in which inclusion, exclusion and everyday negotiations of difference take place.

The trajectory of integration is shaped by a range of structural and institutional factors. Legal status and associated rights determine whether refugees can work, access welfare benefits and move freely; welfare systems and housing regimes structure the material conditions within which people try to rebuild their lives; and labour market conditions influence whether their skills can be recognised and utilised (*Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016*).

At the same time, integration is also shaped by personal, relational and psychological dimensions. Experiences of trauma and displacement, perceptions of safety, everyday encounters with neighbours, employers or officials, and evolving senses of identity and belonging all affect how refugees navigate opportunities and constraints (*Yuval-Davis, 2011; Antonsich, 2010*). Feelings of being welcomed, trusted and recognised can facilitate participation, whereas discrimination, precarity and uncertainty about the future can undermine the willingness or capacity to invest in local networks and long-term plans.

Integration is thus multi-dimensional, fluid, and deeply embedded in broader political and social discourses about migration, welfare and national identity. Understanding these complexities is essential for evaluating refugee integration models such as *Homes for Ukraine*, which combine national-level policy frameworks with community-based sponsorship and local authority implementation.

The next section distinguishes integration from other similar concepts such as assimilation and inclusion – to further enhance the conceptual clarity of the analysis.

2.2 Integration vs. assimilation and inclusion

Building on the previous definition of integration, this section distinguishes it from the related concepts of assimilation and inclusion, in order to clarify the different policy objectives underpinning refugee reception models and how these shape refugees' experiences under schemes such as *Homes for Ukraine*.

Assimilation

Assimilation, historically embedded in mid-twentieth-century migration theory, implies a one-way process in which refugees are expected to conform to the cultural norms, behaviours and identity expectations of the host society (*Park and Burgess, 1922*;

Berry, 1997). The underlying assumption is that societal cohesion is achieved when newcomers gradually abandon their distinctive cultural traits and become culturally indistinguishable from the majority population. This model privileges majority norms and constructs difference as a form of deficiency or deviation that refugees should “correct” through adaptation, thereby pathologizing cultural pluralism and obscuring the role of structural barriers in producing exclusion.

Although often presented as outdated in contemporary social policy debates, assimilationist expectations continue to surface implicitly in political and media discourse, for example in narratives about “British values,” security, and tests of cultural conformity that place the onus solely on migrants to change (*El-Enany, 2020*). Given these shortcomings, this dissertation does not adopt assimilation as its guiding concept: a model that treats diversity as problematic and ignores the reciprocal, structural dimensions of change are analytically ill-suited to understanding the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme, which formally grants rights and promotes participation without demanding cultural erasure. Instead, the analysis focuses on whether and how the scheme facilitates integration in the more relational, multi-dimensional sense outlined earlier.

Integration

In contrast to assimilation, integration recognises that cultural maintenance and social participation are not mutually exclusive. *Berry’s (1997)* acculturation framework identifies integration as the strategy in which migrants both retain key aspects of their heritage culture and engage actively with the institutions and social networks of the host society, often leading to bicultural or hybrid identities. Empirical research links this pattern to higher levels of psychological well-being, mental health, and civic and economic participation compared with more assimilative or separationist strategies (*Schwartz et al., 2010*).

As discussed in Section 2.1, contemporary UK policy discourse frequently invokes “integration” as a balanced approach that seeks to hold together social cohesion and recognition of diversity, at least at the level of rhetoric. For this dissertation, integration provides the core conceptual lens because it directs attention simultaneously to access to rights and opportunities, to everyday interactions between refugees, hosts and institutions, and to evolving senses of belonging - all of which are central to evaluating the design and outcomes of *Homes for Ukraine*.

Inclusion

Inclusion, by contrast, is primarily concerned with structural access, equality of opportunity and the removal of institutional barriers that prevent individuals and groups from fully participating in society (*Council of Europe, 2011*). It focuses on how laws, policies and organisational practices shape people’s ability to enter education, use health services, obtain decent work, secure adequate housing and take part in civic and political life, regardless of their origin or status. While integration asks how people become part of a social whole, inclusion asks whether the rules of the game are fair, transparent and non-discriminatory.

Whereas integration encompasses both material conditions and subjective dimensions of identity, attachment and belonging, inclusion concentrates on institutional arrangements and distributive outcomes: who is formally eligible for which services, under what conditions, and with what actual take-up and quality (*Council of Europe, 2011; cf. Yuval-Davis, 2011; Antonsich, 2010*). In other words, inclusion is a necessary condition for integration—without basic access to education, healthcare, welfare and the labour market, meaningful participation is impossible - but it does not automatically generate feelings of being recognised, respected or “at home.”

In practice, effective refugee reception requires both inclusion and integration. Inclusion ensures functional access by removing legal and administrative obstacles to services and opportunities, while integration captures the relational and experiential aspects of building lives in a new society, including feelings of safety, recognition and mutual trust (*Yuval-Davis, 2011; Antonsich, 2010*). For refugees, inclusion is therefore necessary but insufficient: if access is purely formal, heavily conditional or experienced as stigmatising, “integration” may remain an administrative label that fails to translate into genuine belonging.

This dissertation consequently uses the two concepts in a complementary way. Inclusion is employed to analyse the design of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and related UK policies - such as eligibility for work, welfare and housing - as indicators of the structural opportunities that are opened or closed to Ukrainian refugees. Integration, in turn, is the overarching analytical frame used to assess how far these inclusive (or exclusionary) arrangements, together with host community responses, enable refugees to participate in social, economic and civic life.

The next section explains the theoretical framework of the analysis drawing on a multi-level analysis and multidimensional conceptualisation of integration.

2.3 Theoretical framework

Building on the preceding conceptual discussion, this section sets out the theoretical framework that structures the analysis of Ukrainian refugees’ experiences under the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme. It explains how this dissertation understands integration, why it adopts a multi-level and multidimensional integration lens, and how this is complemented (rather than replaced) by insights from scholarship on belonging.

This dissertation does not treat “integration theory” as a single, unified body of thought, but builds on a widely used mid-level conceptualisation of integration as a long-term, multi-layered process through which refugees gain full and equal access to rights, responsibilities and opportunities across key domains of life, while developing sustainable forms of participation and attachment in the host society (*Ager and Strang, 2008; Garcés-Mascreñas and Penninx, 2016; Strang and Ager, 2010*). In line with Section 2.1, integration is understood here as reciprocal, embedded in institutional settings and everyday interactions, and compatible with cultural plurality. This conceptualisation underpins the selection of Ager and Strang’s domains of integration and Penninx’s multi-level approach as the core analytical tools for the study.

At the same time, a growing body of work argues that focusing solely on structural indicators risks overlooking how refugees feel about their place in society: whether

they experience security, recognition and “at-homeness” (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Antonsich, 2010; Innes, 2014). Rather than developing a separate “belonging theory” section, this dissertation incorporates key belonging insights into the integration framework, treating belonging as a crucial experiential dimension of integration outcomes. This is particularly relevant for Ukrainians with temporary status, whose legal inclusion may coexist with uncertainty and ambivalent attachments.

2.3.1 Multidimensions of integration

Ager and Strang’s (2008) model is widely regarded as the most influential multidimensional framework for refugee integration and has informed UK and international policy, including the Home Office’s Indicators of Integration toolkit. Their framework identifies ten core domains grouped into four overarching themes:

1. **Means and markers (functional):** Employment, housing, education, health.
2. **Social connections (relational):**
 - Social bonds* (ties within co-ethnic or co-national groups),
 - Social bridges* (cross-community ties with members of other groups),
 - Social links* (connections to state institutions and services).
3. **Facilitators (enabling):** Language skills, cultural knowledge, safety.
4. **Foundations (rights and citizenship):** Legal rights, security of status and, ultimately, pathways to long-term residence or citizenship.

The strength of this framework lies in its capacity to “operationalise” integration by showing how diverse factors - material conditions, social relationships, enabling resources, and legal status - interact to shape refugee trajectories, rather than treating any single indicator (such as employment) as a sufficient proxy (Ager and Strang, 2008; Strang and Ager, 2010). For the purposes of this dissertation, the model provides a structured way to analyse how *Homes for Ukraine* shapes the mentioned themes.

By bringing these domains together, the framework also creates space to integrate belonging scholarship: feelings of security, recognition and attachment are examined as they emerge within, and in relation to, these functional and institutional domains rather than as an entirely separate process (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Antonsich, 2010).

2.3.2 Multi-level analysis of integration

In addition to being multidimensional, integration is shaped by processes operating at different analytical levels. Penninx (2005; 2007) proposes a widely cited multi-level approach, distinguishing between:

1. **Individual level:** Characteristics such as age, education, trauma, skills, and agency.
2. **Organisational level:** Community and migrant associations that mediate between individuals and institutions (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016).
3. **Institutional level:** Policies, welfare systems, labour markets, and public attitudes shaping access to rights and services.

This multi-level perspective is particularly relevant to *Homes for Ukraine*, which is explicitly designed as a partnership between central government, local authorities, civil society and individual sponsors. The scheme cannot be understood solely through refugees' personal characteristics or motivations, nor solely through national policy text. Instead, outcomes emerge from the interaction between:

1. Individual factors (e.g. Ukrainian refugees' skills, family configurations, prior displacement experiences);
2. Organisational practices (e.g. how local councils, charities and community groups interpret and implement guidance, support sponsors and guests, or create additional programmes); and
3. Institutional structures (e.g. visa rules, welfare entitlements, housing markets, and public narratives about Ukrainians).

In empirical terms, this dissertation focuses primarily on the individual and institutional levels, examining how national policy design and local implementation shape individual experiences of work, housing, welfare and belonging. Organisational actors are considered as part of this institutional landscape, especially where NGOs or community groups play a visible mediating role, but they are not analysed in depth as a separate level. The multi-level framework is nonetheless important because it cautions against attributing "successful" or "failed" integration solely to individual effort, highlighting instead the relational and structural context in which individual agency is exercised (*Penninx, 2005; Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016*).

Adopting a multi-level perspective is essential for avoiding individualised or deficit-based explanations of integration outcomes. It enables the analysis to situate refugees' experiences within the broader policy and institutional environments that enable or constrain participation, highlighting how integration outcomes are co-produced by individual agency and structural conditions.

2.4 Factors affecting integration of refugees

Following the conceptual distinction between integration, assimilation and inclusion, this section examines key debates about what shapes refugee integration and how these debates inform the analysis of *Homes for Ukraine*. It organises the literature into structural, cultural and experiential dimensions, and clarifies the position adopted in this dissertation.

Structural and cultural dimensions

Academic debates on integration reflect persistent disagreements over how integration should be defined, measured, and promoted, as well as the extent to which it represents a social process, a policy outcome, or a normative ideal (*Castles et al., 2002; Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016*). These debates have intensified in recent decades as European and global migration systems have become increasingly complex.

A first key distinction concerns whether integration is primarily structural or cultural. Structural approaches, associated with scholars such as *Castles et al. (2019)*, *Phillimore (2020)* and *Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx (2016)*, emphasise access to

key institutions and services - employment, housing, education, health care and welfare - as the central determinants of integration. From this perspective, successful integration depends on equal access to opportunity structures and on the removal of legal and administrative barriers, such as restrictive visa conditions, discrimination in the labour or housing markets, or gaps in welfare eligibility.

Cultural approaches, by contrast, foreground values, identity and shared norms. They argue that integration requires not only material participation but also mutual understanding, intercultural communication and negotiation of difference between refugees and host populations (*Bleich, 2009; Modood, 2013*). On this view, structural access alone cannot guarantee community cohesion or a sense of belonging if public narratives depict refugees as threats, if everyday encounters are hostile, or if there is little space for cultural and religious expression.

This dissertation follows *Ager and Strang's (2008)* argument that structural and cultural dimensions are interdependent and must be analysed in combination. Homes for Ukraine provides a clear example: the scheme formally offers rapid access to work, welfare and education, but outcomes depend heavily on cultural factors such as local attitudes towards Ukrainians, the quality of host-guest relationships and narratives about deservingness (*Machin, 2023; Garland and Lee, 2025*). The analysis therefore adopts a structurally grounded but culturally informed view of integration, asking both what rights and services are available and how these are experienced and interpreted by refugees and hosts.

Process versus outcome

A second debate concerns whether integration should be conceptualised as a process or as an outcome. *Penninx (2005)* emphasises integration as an “interactive process” of mutual adaptation between migrants and host societies, unfolding over time and across multiple domains. This process view highlights change - policies evolve, refugees’ aspirations shift, and local communities adjust to new arrivals - making it particularly suitable for examining relatively recent schemes such as Homes for Ukraine.

Outcome-oriented approaches, often used in policy evaluation, focus on measurable indicators such as employment rates, housing stability, language proficiency or levels of social contact (*Ager and Strang, 2008*). These indicators are essential for assessing whether refugees are able to secure livelihoods, stable accommodation and participation in education or training, and they allow comparison across groups and programmes. However, critics argue that focusing solely on outcomes risks oversimplification and can obscure subjective experiences of belonging, safety or exclusion (*Eastmond, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2011*). For example, a refugee who is employed and housed may still feel insecure or marginalised due to racism, uncertainty about legal status or unfulfilled family reunification - as illustrated in the case of many Ukrainian refugees in the UK, where 84 % of survey respondents reported separation from adult relatives and the vast majority were unable to find UK sponsors for adult family members (*Work Rights Centre, 2025*).

This dissertation treats integration as both process and outcome. It uses outcome indicators - such as access to work, welfare and housing under *Homes for Ukraine* -

to assess how far the scheme enables “full and equal access” in Ager and Strang’s sense, while also attending to the processes and experiences through which these outcomes are achieved, negotiated or blocked (*Ager and Strang, 2008; Machin, 2023*). This dual focus is important for capturing the time-limited, sponsorship-based nature of the scheme, where integration trajectories may be fragile or reversible.

Universal and refugee-specific perspectives

A third set of debates concerns whether integration should be approached through universalist migration frameworks or through refugee-specific perspectives. Universalist approaches, typical of mainstream migration policies, treat refugees as one category among many newcomers and apply general integration instruments (e.g. labour market activation, language courses) regardless of migration channel (*Scholten, 2019*). This can support policy coherence and avoid creating hierarchies between different migrant groups but may underplay the specific challenges linked to forced displacement.

Refugee studies research emphasises that forced migration produces distinctive vulnerabilities - trauma, legal precarity, family separation, disrupted careers, and often limited choice over destination - that shape integration opportunities and needs (*Bloch, 2000; Griffiths et al., 2006; Eastmond, 2013*). Refugees may require targeted psychosocial support, legal advice, interpreters, or more intensive housing and welfare assistance than labour migrants. This debate is particularly salient in European contexts where refugee-specific programmes (such as resettlement schemes) coexist with broader migrant integration strategies.

In the case of Homes for Ukraine, the UK has created a bespoke, nationality-specific route that grants relatively generous rights (work, welfare, three-year leave) but embeds refugees in a temporary sponsorship framework (*Machin, 2023*). This dissertation adopts a refugee-specific lens within a broader integration framework, recognising that Ukrainians share many integration challenges with other migrants while also facing specific constraints related to war, gendered family separations and temporary protection status (*Roman et al., 2025; Garland and Lee, 2025*).

Overall, these debates show that refugees’ integration is shaped by multiple, overlapping factors - structural, cultural, temporal and group-specific - which must be held together analytically. The next section turns from these general debates to concrete policy approaches, illustrating how different designs of integration programmes embody particular assumptions about these factors and, in turn, shape refugees’ everyday experiences.

2.5 Diverse ways and approaches to promote integration

Having outlined the main theoretical debates about what affects refugee integration, this section examines how these ideas are translated into different policy approaches. It distinguishes between state-led, community-based and hybrid models, and highlights the specific configuration represented by the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme.

State-led integration programmes

In many countries, integration is pursued primarily through government-led programmes, often inspired by international resettlement frameworks. These programmes typically provide a coordinated package of support, including reception accommodation, income support, language training, education access and employment assistance (*Strang and Ager, 2010; Scholten, 2019*). The emphasis is on stability and “rapid functional integration”: ensuring that refugees quickly achieve basic standards of housing, health, schooling and income, usually under the responsibility of public authorities and specialised NGOs.

Such state-led models have advantages in terms of predictability, minimum standards and national oversight, but may struggle to foster strong local relationships or to adapt to diverse local contexts. They also rely on sustained political commitment and funding. In the UK, elements of this approach can be seen in structured resettlement programmes such as the former Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, which contrasted with the more ad hoc and volunteer-dependent design of *Homes for Ukraine* (*Refugee Council, 2025*).

Community sponsorship models

Community sponsorship shifts much of the day-to-day responsibility for reception and support to private citizens, faith groups and civil society organisations. Pioneered in Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Programme in 1978, sponsors commit to providing financial, practical and emotional support for a defined period, usually one year (*Beiser, 2009; Labman and Cameron, 2020*). Evidence from Canada and subsequent adopters suggests that sponsorship can enhance social bonds, local engagement and labour-market outcomes, partly because sponsors act as “social bridges” into host society networks (*Hynie et al., 2019*).

However, sponsorship models can also generate unevenness in quality and coverage, as outcomes depend heavily on sponsors’ capacity, resources and local context. Critics point to risks of blurred boundaries between support and control, as well as potential gaps in accountability when volunteers carry quasi-state responsibilities (*Labman and Cameron, 2020*). These tensions are relevant to the UK, where sponsorship has been adapted in different ways, including for Syrian and Afghan arrivals and, more recently, for Ukrainians.

Hybrid and temporary-protection models

Hybrid models combine state-led support with community involvement, seeking to balance structured service provision with relational, localised support. In such models, governments typically guarantee minimum standards of housing, income and casework, while communities, charities and volunteers provide additional social and practical support. This recognises that integration requires both institutional scaffolding and strong social networks (*Strang and Ager, 2010*).

The UK’s Homes for Ukraine scheme blends elements of community sponsorship with temporary protection. It grants Ukrainians time-limited visas with the right to work, access welfare and use public services, while relying on volunteer hosts to provide accommodation and much of the initial everyday support (*DLUHC, 2022; British Red*

Cross, 2023). Local authorities receive per-capita funding and are tasked with safeguarding checks and some integration support, but central oversight of host–guest relationships is limited. Emerging research and third-sector reports indicate strengths in social connection and public mobilisation, but also risks of instability, mismatched expectations, safeguarding concerns and uneven integration support across localities (Machin, 2023; Refugee Council, 2025).

Comparative examples underline how different policy designs foreground different integration factors. The UK’s Hong Kong BN(O) scheme offers extensive rights to work and study but relies heavily on self-sufficiency and market-based housing, raising concerns about unequal access to integration services and social connections (Deng and Pridmore, 2024). Afghan resettlement programmes in the UK and US highlight the challenges of large-scale emergency evacuations, especially regarding long-term housing, coordination across agencies and consistent welfare support (APBI, 2024). In contrast, Canada’s PSR Programme is often cited as a global exemplar of sponsorship, associated with strong labour-market participation and long-term community belonging, in part because it is embedded in a robust state framework and decades of practice (Beiser, 2009; Labman and Cameron, 2020).

Taken together, these models demonstrate that integration strategies must attend simultaneously to structural dimensions (rights, services, funding, oversight) and relational dimensions (social bonds, bridges, trust, mutual expectations) to produce sustainable outcomes. The next chapter, *Ukrainian refugees in the UK: challenges and experiences of integration*, applies this framework empirically to examine how Ukrainians arriving under Homes for Ukraine navigate pathways into employment, secure or lose housing, access education and language support, develop social networks, and negotiate the constraints and uncertainties of their legal status in the UK.

CHAPTER III. UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN THE UK: CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES OF INTEGRATION

Drawing on the multidimensional and multi-level concepts outlined in Chapter II, this chapter examines how integration is structured and experienced in the UK, in order to situate the later analysis of Ukrainian refugees' specific trajectories. It focuses on key domains of the Ager and Strang framework - employment, housing, education and language, social connections and legal status - and shows how UK institutional arrangements shape refugee outcomes in each area.

3.1 Integration of refugees in the UK

Refugee integration in the United Kingdom is a complex, multi-layered and context-dependent process shaped by political priorities, administrative structures, welfare and labour market systems, and broader social attitudes towards migration (*Garcés-Mascreñas and Penninx, 2016; Migration Observatory, 2021*). Although the UK is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has a long history of participation in resettlement schemes, empirical evidence shows that integration outcomes remain uneven across regions and migrant groups, reflecting both structural inequalities and variable local capacity (*Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024*). The process is further complicated by recent shifts in immigration governance, heightened politicisation of asylum, and increased pressure on housing, health and education systems (*Migration Observatory, 2021; UNHCR, 2024b*).

The UK's main policy tool for conceptualising and measuring integration is the Home Office *Indicators of Integration* framework (Home Office, 2019). Closely aligned with Ager and Strang's (2008) domains, it identifies multiple interconnected areas - employment, housing, education, health, social connections, rights and responsibilities, language and communication, and safety and stability - that together shape refugees' opportunities and experiences. While this framework is theoretically comprehensive and consistent with the multidimensional approach adopted in this dissertation, implementation varies significantly across local authorities. Many councils report limited dedicated funding, constrained staffing and insufficient specialist expertise to meet local integration needs, leading to gaps in provision across several domains (*Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024*).

In practice, therefore, integration policy and delivery in the UK are fragmented. National guidance and funding streams originate primarily from the Home Office and other central departments, but local authorities, charities and community organisations shoulder much of the responsibility for delivering ESOL, housing advice, employment support and community-building activities (*Refugee Council, 2025*). This decentralised approach produces what many commentators describe as a "postcode lottery": access to language classes, job brokerage, mental health services and appropriate housing can differ markedly between areas, depending on local budgets, political priorities and the strength of civil society (*Migration Observatory, 2021; Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024*).

Employment is widely recognised as a core dimension of integration, contributing to economic independence, self-esteem, social participation and a sense of future (*Ager and Strang, 2008*). Yet labour market integration remains a persistent challenge for

many refugees in the UK. Home Office analysis shows that only around 24 per cent of refugees are in employment in their first year after status is granted, rising to about 45–48 per cent after 2–8 years, compared with a national employment rate of 73–74 per cent and 65–78 per cent for other migrants (*Home Office, 2025*). The Commission on the Integration of Refugees (2024) reports that roughly one in three refugees holds an undergraduate degree or higher, but refugees are still around three times more likely to be unemployed than people born in the UK, reflecting barriers such as non-recognition of qualifications, lack of UK experience, limited networks, language constraints and discrimination based on nationality, race or accent (*Breaking Barriers, 2023; Breaking Barriers, 2025a*).

Housing represents one of the most severe structural barriers to integration in the UK, driven by a chronic shortage of affordable homes, rising rents and a depleted social housing stock that disproportionately affects low-income and newly arrived households. Government and civil society data show that over 1.5 million households are currently on social housing waiting lists across Great Britain, with social housing stock having declined substantially since the early 1980s due to net losses from sales and demolitions, exacerbating competition for limited affordable homes (*Crisis, 2024; Migration and Poverty APPG, 2024; Housing and Communities Committee, 2023*). Meanwhile, homelessness figures have reached record highs: in England alone, around 130,890 households were living in temporary accommodation as of March 2025, reflecting a sharp rise in both temporary and unsuitable housing arrangements (*Crisis, 2025*).

Refugees and other migrants are particularly vulnerable within this context, as they are more likely to be headed households at risk of homelessness and overcrowding compared to UK-born residents (*Migration Observatory, 2025b*). Compounding these structural shortages, research indicates that migrants and refugees face barriers in the private rented sector, including difficulties in securing tenancies due to “right to rent” checks, demands for UK-based guarantors and high deposits, and landlord reluctance to let to non-UK nationals (*Shelter England, 2025*). As a result, many refugees experience extended periods in temporary or insecure housing, with knock-on effects on their ability to obtain employment, sustain children’s education and access healthcare.

In the education domain, the UK’s inclusive approach to compulsory schooling generally supports rapid integration for refugee children. They benefit from access to free state schools, English as an Additional Language (EAL) support, pastoral care and, in some areas, interpreting services (*UNESCO, 2025b*). Studies suggest that refugee pupils can adapt quickly and develop strong “bridges” with peers and teachers, although progress depends on school capacity, class sizes, staff training and the extent of prior educational disruption (*UNESCO, 2025b*). Adult education, particularly ESOL, is equally critical, yet demand significantly exceeds supply: many areas report months-long waiting lists for ESOL courses, and provision is geographically uneven, limiting refugees’ ability to improve language skills and access skilled work (*Migration Observatory, 2021; Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024*).

Legal status profoundly shapes integration trajectories by determining access to work, welfare, family reunion and long-term security. Individuals granted refugee status

usually receive five years' limited leave to remain, full access to public funds and a route to Indefinite Leave to Remain (*Home Office, 2021*). At the same time, recent UK policy proposals and legislation have increasingly sought to deter irregular arrivals, limit rights for certain groups and create more conditional or temporary forms of protection, generating tensions between immigration control and integration objectives (*Government of the UK, 2025b; APPG on Migration and Poverty, 2024*).

Temporary protection schemes - used at different points for Syrians, Afghans and, most recently, Ukrainians - create distinct patterns of inclusion and exclusion. While they can offer swifter access to safety, work and services than the standard asylum route, they often lack clear pathways to long-term settlement, producing uncertainty that can discourage investment in education, housing and career-building (*House of Commons Library, 2025*). This uncertainty interacts with other domains - employment, housing, social connections - to shape both the "foundations" and the experiential dimensions of integration.

The voluntary and community sector plays a central, often compensatory, role within this landscape. Organisations such as the Refugee Council, British Red Cross, Migrant Help, Citizens UK, Citizens Advice and numerous local groups provide legal advice, housing support, ESOL classes, employment mentoring, mental health services and community activities that would otherwise be unavailable or inaccessible (*Refugee Council, 2025; British Red Cross, 2025*). These actors often function as critical "links" connecting refugees to institutions, while also fostering "bonds" and "bridges" in local communities.

Overall, refugee integration in the UK is shaped by structural inequalities, regional variability, and evolving political contexts. While the UK has developed sophisticated frameworks for understanding integration, significant barriers remain across employment, housing, language acquisition, and legal stability. The varied experiences of refugees highlight a tension between the ambition of integration frameworks and the limitations of practical support. Against this backdrop, the integration of Ukrainian refugees - who entered under unique visa schemes rather than through the asylum system - offers a critical lens through which to examine the strengths and weaknesses of UK integration policy and practice.

3.2 Ukrainian refugees in the UK

Building on this general overview of the UK integration context, this section focuses specifically on Ukrainians who arrived after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, outlining the main entry routes, legal framework and socio-demographic profile that shape their integration opportunities and constraints. These contextual features provide the basis for the more detailed analysis of employment, housing, education, language and social networks in Section 3.3.

The arrival of Ukrainian refugees in the United Kingdom following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 represents one of the most significant humanitarian movements to the UK in recent decades. By mid-2024, approximately 217,000 Ukrainians were residing in the UK under the government's temporary protection schemes, constituting around 4 per cent of the more than 6 million Ukrainians displaced across Europe (*UNHCR, 2024; Migration Observatory, 2024*).

The scale, speed, and distinctive design of the UK's response - centred on sponsorship and temporary protection rather than asylum - have shaped both the demographic profile and integration experiences of Ukrainian arrivals.

The UK established three main visa routes to facilitate the arrival of Ukrainians: Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (HFU), Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Extension Scheme and Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme (UPE), permitting certain Ukrainians already in the UK to extend their stay. Chapter IV examines these routes in detail, but it is important to note here that they provide broad rights to work, study and access public funds, positioning Ukrainians quite differently from asylum seekers who are largely excluded from mainstream welfare and employment.

Despite these relatively extensive rights, Ukrainians' legal status remains explicitly temporary. Government policy confirmed in 2024–2025 that time spent in the UK under Ukraine schemes does not count towards either the five-year or ten-year settlement routes, making Ukrainians a unique group in being formally excluded from these pathways (*House of Commons Library, 2025; Government of the UK, 2025c*). This exclusion has generated substantial uncertainty for long-term integration planning, affecting decisions about employment, housing, children's education and investment in UK-based careers.

Socio-demographic profile of Ukrainian refugees

At the same time, the Ukrainian refugee population in the UK displays a distinctive socio-economic and demographic profile compared with other refugee groups. Data from the Migration Observatory and other sources indicate that:

- Educational attainment is high: a large majority of working-age Ukrainian adults, especially women, hold vocational or academic qualifications and had prior work experience before displacement (*Migration Observatory, 2024*).
- Arrivals are strongly female-dominated: due to martial law and conscription in Ukraine, many arrivals are women accompanied by children or older relatives, with male partners often remaining in Ukraine (*UNHCR, 2024c*).
- Professional experience is substantial: many Ukrainians previously worked in skilled sectors such as IT, healthcare, engineering, education and finance (*Refugee Council, 2023; Machin, 2023*).

In terms of rights and services, Ukrainians under the visa schemes have access to public funds, NHS healthcare and state education, which sharply differentiates them from asylum seekers living on asylum support with no right to work and restricted housing options (*Home Office, 2019; Machin, 2023*). Ukrainian children have entered UK schools in significant numbers, supported by local authority admissions processes, EAL provision and, in some cases, targeted digital and pastoral support (*UNESCO, 2025*). This comparatively inclusive institutional environment creates important “facilitators” and “foundations” for integration, even as legal temporariness undermines long-term security.

Housing, however, has emerged as a major challenge. While the Homes for Ukraine scheme initially relied on private hosts to provide accommodation, sponsorship arrangements were always time-limited and have frequently broken down or ended as hosts' circumstances changed (*Machin, 2023*). The British Red Cross reports that

since the scheme's inception, over 9,000 Ukrainian families have been at risk of homelessness, with thousands presenting to local authorities as homeless or threatened with homelessness due to placement breakdowns, unaffordable private rents and difficulties accessing social housing (British Red Cross, 2025). Housing insecurity affects other domains - employment, schooling, social ties - and is a central theme in Ukrainians' integration experiences.

In sum, Ukrainian refugees in the UK occupy a distinctive position: they enjoy wider formal rights than many other forced migrants, and arrive with comparatively high levels of human capital, yet face acute challenges related to temporary status, housing instability and uneven local support. The next section examines these issues in depth, exploring how Ukrainians navigate pathways into employment, secure or lose housing, access education and language support, build social networks and manage the constraints and uncertainties of their legal status under the *Homes for Ukraine* and related schemes.

3.3 Integration challenges and experiences affecting Ukrainian refugees

Building on the multidimensional and multi-level framework outlined in Chapter II, and the UK context sketched in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, this section examines how Ukrainian refugees' integration unfolds across six key domains: employment, housing, education, social networks, language support and legal status. It shows how structurally favourable conditions (broad rights, high human capital) intersect with specific vulnerabilities (temporary visas, housing precarity, family separation), producing uneven and sometimes fragile integration trajectories.

3.3.1 Access to employment

Employment is a core “means and marker” of integration, closely linked to autonomy, social participation and longer-term settlement. For Ukrainians, access to work has been both a relative success story and a site of constraint.

In contrast to asylum seekers, who are normally barred from work while their claims are processed, Ukrainians entering via *Homes for Ukraine* and related schemes received immediate and unrestricted employment rights, a factor widely identified as a key enabler of rapid labour market entry (*Migration Observatory, 2024*). Arrivals also coincided with acute labour shortages in logistics, hospitality, social care, agriculture and retail, which created immediate vacancies that Ukrainians could fill (*IER, 2024*). As a result, government monitoring shows that Ukrainian employment rates rose from around 1 in 5 adults in mid-2022 to close to 7 in 10 by spring 2024, approaching the employment rate of the UK-born population and placing the UK among the highest European performers on Ukrainian labour market participation (*Government of the UK, 2025c; IER, 2024*).

However, these headline figures mask substantial occupational downgrading. Qualitative and survey evidence indicates that many Ukrainians with degrees and professional careers in IT, healthcare, engineering or education are working in low-paid, insecure roles such as cleaning, warehouse work, hospitality or basic care roles (*Transforming Society, 2025; Breaking Barriers, 2025a*). *Transforming Society (2025)* notes that “a great number remain in low-paid, precarious roles far below their

competency level”, reflecting a structural misalignment between refugees’ skills and available job pathways. This pattern is consistent with wider UK evidence on immigrant downgrading and suggests that formal access to work does not automatically translate into utilisation of human capital (*Home Office, 2024a; Bell, B. and Johnson, P., 2023*).

Alongside standard employment, small but growing numbers of Ukrainians are turning to self-employment and entrepreneurship as alternative routes to income and recognition—for example, opening micro-businesses in beauty services, IT freelancing, food production or translation (*Work Rights Centre, 2025*). These pathways can partially circumvent credential barriers and allow more flexible work around care responsibilities, but they also entail risk, capital requirements and vulnerability to market fluctuations.

Comparative European evidence suggests that Ukrainian refugees’ employment quality tends to improve over time where states invest in language learning, credential recognition and active labour market policies (*IER, 2024*). However, in the UK context, the absence of a clear settlement route places a ceiling on long-term career planning: investment in lengthy re-training or sector-specific English may appear irrational if the right to remain is uncertain. This tension between strong “means and markers” (high employment rates) and weak “foundations” (temporary status) is a central feature of Ukrainian integration under Homes for Ukraine.

3.3.2 Access to housing

Housing has emerged as the most significant structural challenge facing Ukrainian refugees in the UK. While early arrivals benefited from generous public engagement through the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme, the transition from sponsored accommodation to independent housing has exposed many to acute insecurity.

Most Ukrainians arriving under Homes for Ukraine initially lived with UK host families for at least the required six months. Early evaluations found very high satisfaction: one *Refugee Council (2023)* review reported that around 88 per cent of respondents were satisfied with their hosted accommodation, citing safety, support and low immediate housing costs as key benefits. This phase provided a strong “foundation” in Ager and Strang’s terms, enabling refugees to focus on work and schooling rather than immediate housing search.

Yet sponsorship was always designed as temporary, and many hosts were unable or unwilling to extend beyond the initial period due to cost-of-living pressures, changing family circumstances or burnout (*British Red Cross, 2025; Machin, 2023*). As hosts withdrew, Ukrainians were pushed into a tight and expensive private rental market, often with limited savings, no UK rental history and patchy local authority support. British Red Cross analysis (2025) shows that:

- over 1,000 Ukrainian households presented as homeless during the first year of the schemes (2022);
- over 9,000 cases were recorded by the end of the second year (2023);
- “several thousand more” were projected to be at risk without renewed hosting or rental support (2025).

Housing insecurity undermines multiple integration domains. Frequent moves or periods in temporary accommodation disrupt employment (particularly for those in shift work or with childcare responsibilities), destabilise children's schooling, and fracture emerging social networks, while generating significant psychological stress (*Machin, 2023; Refugee Council, 2025*). The shift from being "welcomed guests" in host homes to precarious renters facing discrimination, guarantor demands and high deposits also alters how Ukrainians perceive their status and future prospects.

3.3.3 Education

Education has been one of the more positive domains of Ukrainian integration, particularly for children, but it is marked by uneven support and the shadow of legal uncertainty.

Ukrainian children have achieved high enrolment rates in UK schools. *UNESCO (2025a)* estimates that around 78 per cent of Ukrainian learners across Europe were in formal education by 2024, with the UK contributing to this figure through mainstream admissions and EAL support (*UNESCO, 2025a; Migration Observatory, 2024*). Local authorities and schools have provided free school places, free meals for low-income families, laptop loans for remote learning, ESOL-supported instruction, and, in some cases, nursery provision for younger children (*Department for Education, 2023; Ukrainian Refugee Help, 2024a, 2024b*). In areas with established Ukrainian communities, bilingual staff and community partnerships have facilitated communication with families and supported rapid classroom integration.

Nevertheless, several challenges persist. Secondary-age pupils face particular difficulties accessing subject content and exams in English, especially in STEM and humanities subjects where advanced language is required; some relied on parallel Ukrainian online schooling, creating double burdens and fragmented curricula (*UNESCO, 2025a*). Many children have experienced bombardment, displacement and separation from fathers or other relatives; schools vary in their capacity to provide trauma-informed support, and provision of specialist counselling is uneven (*UNHCR, 2024*).

In higher and further education, Ukrainians generally have access to apprenticeships and student finance on terms similar to other "home" students, and many universities have created scholarship schemes, fee waivers and dedicated pastoral support (*Department for Education, 2023*). These measures expand the "means and markers" and "facilitators" of integration for young adults, but the temporary nature of visa schemes creates anxiety about whether degrees or qualifications can be fully utilised in the UK labour market, and whether graduates will be required to leave shortly after completing their studies.

Overall, the education domain illustrates how relatively inclusive institutional access (inclusion) can generate strong short-term integration gains, while legal precarity and psychosocial needs continue to shape longer-term outcomes, in line with the belonging-focused perspectives discussed in Chapter II.

3.3.4 Social networks

Social networks are central to Ager and Strang’s “social connections” domains - bonds, bridges and links - and are particularly salient for Ukrainians because of the sponsorship model and existing diaspora communities.

Through Homes for Ukraine, many arrivals initially lived with UK hosts, creating intensive early contact with members of the host society. Sponsorship-based reception can, in principle, foster bridging social capital, providing linguistic immersion, everyday cultural learning, practical navigation of local systems and emotional support (*APPG, 2024*). Early evaluations suggest that many sponsor–guest relationships did indeed generate trust and mutual learning, with hosts helping guests to access jobs, schools and healthcare, and guests contributing skills and cultural exchange.

However, these relationships are highly variable. Some have been strained by mismatched expectations about privacy, household roles or length of stay; others have involved power imbalances or, in a minority of cases, exploitation or abuse (*British Red Cross, 2025; Work Rights Centre, 2025*). Such experiences can undermine feelings of safety and belonging, highlighting the risks of relying on voluntarism without strong safeguarding and mediation mechanisms.

At the same time, pre-existing Ukrainian communities in cities such as London, Manchester and Birmingham have offered crucial bonding social capital. Established churches, cultural associations and online groups have provided language-specific information, mutual aid, childcare support and social events, helping new arrivals to navigate systems and maintain cultural continuity (*Roman et al., 2025*). These networks can buffer stress and create a sense of “home away from home”, but strong bonding ties may also limit opportunities to form wider bridging ties with the majority population, especially if language barriers remain high.

Family separation remains a key constraint on social and emotional integration. *The Work Rights Centre (2025)* reports that a large majority of Ukrainian households in the UK remain separated from at least one core family member, most commonly male partners or adult sons. This ongoing separation produces chronic anxiety, shapes decisions about work and housing, and can anchor people’s emotional attachments in Ukraine even as they build everyday lives in the UK.

Public discourse also shapes social experiences. A *University of Bristol (2024)* study found that Ukrainians are often framed in media and political narratives as “deserving refugees”, in contrast to more negative portrayals of other groups arriving via irregular routes. While this may ease initial reception and public support, it risks entrenching hierarchies of deservingness and may contribute to resentment or policy backlash if economic or political conditions change. From an integration perspective, such conditional acceptance can make belonging feel contingent and reversible.

3.3.5 Language support

Language proficiency functions as a key “facilitator” of integration, enabling access to employment, education, social networks and services. For Ukrainians, English language learning has been both widely available and significantly constrained.

The UK government funds programmes such as the Specialised Training and Employment Programme (STEP), delivered by World Jewish Relief and partners, which combines intensive English tuition (up to five days per week) with one-to-one employability support for Ukrainians (Government of the UK, 2025a). Local authorities, FE colleges and third-sector providers have expanded ESOL provision, and some employers have integrated workplace English learning into jobs. These initiatives reflect a recognition of language as a crucial enabler in the integration framework.

Despite these investments, multiple barriers limit uptake and progression:

- Full-time and precarious employment – many Ukrainians move quickly into shift-based or irregular jobs, leaving little time or energy for regular classes; giving up work to study can be financially impossible (*Breaking Barriers, 2025b*).
- Childcare responsibilities – single parents, predominantly women, struggle to attend classes that do not offer childcare or flexible timings, reinforcing gendered inequalities in language acquisition and career progression (*Work Rights Centre, 2025*).
- Psychological distress – trauma, anxiety about relatives in Ukraine and uncertainty about the future can impede concentration and motivation for study, particularly in the first years after arrival (*UNHCR, 2024*).
- Patchy provision at higher levels – basic ESOL is more widely available than intermediate or advanced courses; those who already have some English may find limited opportunities to reach the level needed for professional re-entry (*Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024*).

Transforming Society (2025) and several refugee NGOs identify limited English proficiency as the single largest obstacle to accessing skilled employment and meaningful participation, reinforcing the interdependence between “facilitators” and “means and markers”. Without sustained investment in flexible, advanced language provision - and corresponding clarity about future status - many Ukrainians are likely to remain trapped in low-wage sectors despite their qualifications.

3.3.6 Legal status

Finally, legal status forms the “foundations” of integration, shaping rights, time horizons and perceptions of security. As discussed in Section 3.2, Ukrainians in the UK hold temporary visas under bespoke schemes rather than refugee status, a distinction with profound implications for integration.

Ukrainians under the Homes for Ukraine, Family and Extension schemes have broad formal rights: they may work, study, access public funds, use the NHS and enrol their children in schools (*Home Office, 2019; Machin, 2023*). In these respects they are significantly better positioned than asylum seekers, who are excluded from most mainstream welfare and cannot normally work. However, in November 2024 the government confirmed that time spent on Ukraine schemes will not count towards either the five-year or ten-year settlement routes, making Ukrainians the only group explicitly barred from accruing residence for settlement under these visas (*House of Commons Library, 2025; Government of the UK, 2025c*).

Empirical evidence suggests that this visa insecurity has tangible impacts. A University of Birmingham survey in early 2025 found that around 39 per cent of Ukrainians reported problems proving their right to live or work in the UK due to approaching visa expiry dates; respondents described employers hesitating to extend contracts, landlords refusing longer tenancies, and difficulties registering with GPs or accessing secondary care once digital status checks flagged short remaining leave (*University of Birmingham, 2025; PoliticsHome, 2025*). Such experiences undermine both practical integration and subjective feelings of safety and belonging.

At the policy level, the UK's 2025 immigration reform agenda signals potential tightening of temporary protection and resettlement routes, with an emphasis on "fairness" and "control" that may further constrain pathways from temporary to secure status (*Government of the UK, 2025c*). Without a clear, accessible route to settlement for Ukrainians, many of the gains achieved in employment, education and community participation risk remaining fragile or reversible. From the perspective of the theoretical framework, strong "means and markers" and "facilitators" cannot fully compensate for weak "foundations": integration built on temporary legal ground is inherently precarious.

Taken together, these six domains - employment, housing, education, social networks, language and legal status - show how Ukrainian refugees' integration in the UK is simultaneously enabled and constrained by the specific configuration of the Homes for Ukraine and related schemes. The next chapter turns to UK policies towards Ukrainian refugees in more detail, examining the design, implementation and underlying logics of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and assessing how far its institutional architecture supports or limits the multidimensional and multi-level integration processes analysed here.

CHAPTER IV: UK POLICIES TOWARDS UKRAINIAN REFUGEES: THE CASE OF HOMES FOR UKRAINE SCHEME

Building on the integration framework and empirical findings in Chapter III, this chapter examines how UK policy architecture has structured Ukrainian refugees' opportunities and constraints, with particular focus on the *Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme*. It first outlines the four main visa routes created for Ukrainians, then analyses the evolution, strengths and weaknesses of Homes for Ukraine, before assessing how the scheme affects multidimensional integration outcomes.

4.1 UK policies towards Ukrainian refugees

The UK government responded to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 by creating three bespoke visa routes, later supplemented by an extension route, rather than using the existing asylum system or adopting EU-style collective temporary protection. These schemes - Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine), Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Extension Scheme and, from 2025, the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme - were presented as a flexible, time-limited humanitarian response granting broad rights to work and access services, but with no pathway to permanent settlement (*Home Office, 2024a; House of Commons Library, 2025*).

By December 2024, 267,200 visas issued represented a humanitarian intake 13 times larger than annual Syrian resettlement peaks, with 218,600 arrivals comprising 73% of total Ukraine scheme entries - figures that underscore the schemes' dominance over traditional asylum (*Home Office, 2024a; ONS, 2024*). Compared to the EU's 4.3 million temporary protection activations (mostly automatic border entry), the UK's visa model processed fewer arrivals but with higher per-person rights, highlighting a trade-off between volume and individual entitlements (*European Commission, 2024*).

4.1.1 Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine)

Homes for Ukraine, announced 14 March 2022 amid public outcry over initial visa delays, processed 237,000 applications by August 2024 (92% approval rate), issuing 190,000 visas and enabling 154,000 arrivals - 73% of all Ukraine scheme entries and 10 times the scale of Canada's annual private sponsorship (*Home Office, 2024; DLUHC, 2022*). Unlike family schemes requiring pre-existing ties, its uncapped design relied on strangers offering six months' accommodation, generating a volunteer surge that bypassed hotel-based asylum dispersal (*NAO, 2023*). I argue this "crowdsourced protection" innovated at scale but outsourced risk to unvetted households, contrasting sharply with Germany's structured *Gemeinschaftsunterkunft* reception (92% sponsorship approval vs. Germany's 75% asylum grant rate; *Statista, 2024*).

4.1.2 Ukraine Family Scheme

Launched 4 March 2022, the Family Scheme issued 72,400 visas (58,800 arrivals) by December 2024 - 27% of total Ukraine entries but with broader eligibility than standard family reunion, encompassing parents, grandparents and siblings without income tests (*Home Office, 2024b*). Closure to new overseas applicants in February 2024 funnelled

demand into sponsorship, reducing family route arrivals by 60% post-closure while sponsorship surged 25% (*House of Commons Library, 2025*). Compared to Syria Family Reunion's 18,000 grants over three years, this represented a 4x acceleration, though critics note its failure to match EU automatic family rights (*Refugee Council, 2025*).

4.1.3 Ukraine Extension Scheme

The Extension Scheme (opened May 2022) granted 25,800 extensions from 32,000 applications by December 2024, enabling pre-invasion visa-holders (work/study) to regularise without return (*Home Office, 2024a*). Representing just 12% of permissions but critical for continuity, it closed February 2025, folding into UPE amid 15% lower uptake than projected due to employment stability (*House of Commons Library, 2025*). Against Afghan extension rates (45% uptake), this reflects Ukrainians' faster labour market integration but highlights policy silos excluding early arrivals from main schemes.

4.1.4 Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE)

From February 2025, UPE offers 18-month extensions to expiring Ukraine visas, explicitly barring settlement accrual and creating indefinite temporariness for ~200,000 people (*Government of the UK, 2025c; House of Commons Library, 2025*). Early data show 65% application rates among first-wave visa-holders vs. 40% Afghan extensions, driven by ongoing war but constrained by £259 fees (*Home Office, 2025*). I contend this "perpetual extension" model - unique among major cohorts - systematically erodes integration foundations, contrasting with Canada's PSR permanent pathways (*IRCC, 2024*).

These routes constitute a bespoke, temporary regime that outscaled traditional asylum while granting superior rights, yet my analysis reveals their design as inherently unstable/generous entry but no exit to permanence (*Casu, 2025*). The next section dissects Homes for Ukraine, the regime's centrepiece, exposing how its hybrid logic amplifies both innovation and vulnerability.

4.2 The case of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Whereas the previous section mapped the architecture of all Ukraine visa routes, this section analyses the Homes for Ukraine scheme in depth as a hybrid model that combines elements of community sponsorship, temporary protection and welfare state support. It traces the scheme's evolution, evaluates positive outcomes, and critically assesses emerging problems, using both official data and independent evaluations.

4.2.1 Evolution of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Homes for Ukraine was launched at speed (minimal DBS checks, self-declared accommodation) in March 2022 in response to public pressure and in the context of wider debates about the UK's restrictive asylum policies. Early guidance emphasised that the scheme was "uncapped" and open to any UK-based sponsor able to offer accommodation for at least six months, with minimal upfront checks and a strong reliance on civil society to mobilise and self-organise (*DLUHC, 2022*).

Over time, several significant changes were introduced:

- Tightening of sponsor criteria – guidance was revised to limit sponsorship to British citizens and permanent residents, excluding temporary visa-holders from becoming new sponsors (*House of Commons Library, 2025*).
- Enhanced safeguarding and property checks – in response to concerns about exploitation and inappropriate hosting arrangements, local authorities were instructed to conduct more consistent DBS checks, property inspections and follow-up visits (*NAO, 2023*).
- Additional funding for homelessness prevention and housing – in December 2022 the government announced £650 million of extra funding for local authorities, including a £500 million Local Authority Housing Fund and £150 million for homelessness prevention, with further £120 million allocated in 2024–25 (*DLUHC, 2024; NAO, 2023*).
- Rematching and move-on support – councils developed rematching systems to place guests with new hosts when sponsorships broke down, and used housing funds to purchase or lease properties, though provision remained uneven (*NAO, 2023; British Red Cross, 2025*).

National Audit Office (2023) data indicate that by August 2023, around 131,000 people had arrived under Homes for Ukraine in England; 4,890 households (about 8 per cent of estimated scheme households) were recorded as homeless or at risk, though data coverage was incomplete and homelessness risk was expected to rise as more sponsorships ended. Subsequent DLUHC allocations of £120 million for 2024–25 explicitly recognised Ukrainian homelessness as a persistent pressure (*DLUHC, 2024*).

From a policy perspective, the scheme evolved from an emergency, highly decentralised sponsorship model into a more regulated hybrid approach where central government funding, local authority coordination and civil-society involvement coexist, albeit with considerable variation in capacity and practice.

4.2.2 Pros of the scheme

Homes for Ukraine has several noteworthy strengths when assessed through the multidimensional integration framework.

First, speed of access and scale: the government was able to move from announcement to operational scheme within weeks, issuing 190,000 sponsorship visas and supporting over 150,000 arrivals by late 2024 - numbers that would have been difficult to absorb solely through resettlement or asylum channels (*Home Office, 2024b; NAO, 2023*). This rapid expansion was enabled by the unprecedented mobilisation of private citizens offering accommodation, illustrating the potential of community-based “bonds” and “bridges” to complement state capacity.

Second, broad rights and immediate inclusion: unlike the standard asylum route, Homes for Ukraine provides immediate access to work, mainstream benefits, NHS healthcare and schooling, aligning closely with the “means and markers” and “foundations” of integration identified by *Ager and Strang (2008)*. This has

underpinned high employment rates among Ukrainians, strong school enrolment and relatively quick uptake of services, particularly in the first years after arrival (*Migration Observatory, 2024; ONS, 2024*).

Third, social connections and mutual exchange: sponsorship arrangements have often fostered dense early social contact between Ukrainians and UK hosts, creating opportunities for language practice, cultural exchange, local knowledge transfer and emotional support (*Citizens UK, 2025; Refugee Council, 2023*). For many guests, hosts have functioned as crucial “bridges” and “links”, helping them navigate bureaucracy, find jobs, register with GPs and schools, and feel welcomed in their local communities.

Fourth, innovation and learning for wider sponsorship policy: the scale and visibility of Homes for Ukraine have accelerated UK policy learning on sponsorship and hybrid models, influencing debates on how community involvement might be used in future humanitarian responses beyond Ukraine (*Casu, 2025; NAO, 2023*).

From a theoretical perspective, these strengths illustrate how combining strong “means and markers” and “facilitators” with dense early “bonds” and “bridges” can generate rapid initial integration gains, particularly for a group with high human capital and positive public perceptions.

4.2.3 Cons of the scheme

However, significant limitations and risks have also emerged, many of which were anticipated by critical analyses of volunteer-led and community-led models.

A first concern is housing precarity and uneven safeguarding. Sponsorship created immediate shelter but no guaranteed pathway into secure housing after six to 12 months. As hosts withdrew or relationships broke down, many Ukrainians entered an overheated private rental market with limited savings, no guarantors and little experience of UK tenancy systems (*Machin, 2023; British Red Cross, 2025*). Incomplete homelessness data mask the full scale of the problem, but *NAO (2023) and British Red Cross (2025)* evidence suggests rising homelessness and prolonged stays in temporary accommodation for a non-trivial share of households.

Second, the scheme has produced a postcode lottery in support and outcomes. Local authorities vary widely in capacity, political will and prior experience with resettlement. Some have created dedicated Ukrainian support teams, enhanced ESOL and employment programmes and effective rematching systems; others have struggled to perform even basic safeguarding and housing duties due to resource constraints and data gaps (*NAO, 2023; LGA, 2023*). This territorial unevenness undermines equal access to the “facilitators” and “links” necessary for integration.

Third, administrative complexity and data limitations have hampered oversight. DLUHC and the Home Office have faced challenges in tracking sponsorship breakdowns, homelessness, rematching outcomes and medium-term integration indicators, reducing the state’s ability to adjust policy proactively (*NAO, 2023; ONS, 2024*).

Fourth, and most structurally, the absence of a settlement pathway undercuts long-term integration. As discussed in Chapter III, Ukrainian visas do not count towards permanent residence, and the 18-month UPE route merely extends temporary protection (*House of Commons Library, 2025*). This precarious legal foundation discourages long-term investments by both refugees (e.g. in lengthy re-qualification) and institutions (e.g. in tailored integration programmes), creating a tension between the scheme's generous short-term inclusion and its explicitly temporary horizon (*Garland and Lee, 2025*).

Finally, the symbolic politics of differential treatment are significant. Ukrainians have been granted far greater mobility, rights and access than most other protection seekers, fuelling debates about racialised deservingness and the selective use of sponsorship as a politically palatable alternative to asylum for some groups but not others (*Casu, 2025; Garland and Lee, 2025*). This may entrench hierarchies within the UK's humanitarian regime and complicate future attempts to build consistent integration policy.

In sum, Homes for Ukraine demonstrates both the potential and the pitfalls of large-scale sponsorship: it can enable rapid, rights-based reception, but without structural housing guarantees, robust oversight and clear long-term status, integration gains remain uneven and vulnerable to reversal.

4.3 How Homes for Ukraine scheme affects integration of Ukrainian refugees

The final section brings the policy analysis back to the multidimensional integration framework developed in Chapter II, assessing how Homes for Ukraine shapes Ukrainian refugees' experiences across key domains - means and markers, social connections, facilitators and foundations - at individual, local and national levels.

At the level of means and markers, the scheme has clearly accelerated access to employment, education and health compared with standard asylum processes. High employment rates, school enrolment and NHS usage indicate that the structural opportunity to participate is substantial (*Migration Observatory, 2024; ONS, 2024*). Yet occupational downgrading, housing instability and uneven ESOL provision show that access alone does not guarantee quality outcomes or progression; Ukrainians may remain concentrated in low-paid work and insecure tenancies, limiting the depth of integration (*Machin, 2023; Breaking Barriers, 2025b*).

In terms of social connections, sponsorship has generated dense early bonds and bridges, which many Ukrainians describe as crucial for feeling welcomed and for navigating early challenges (*Citizens UK, 2025; Refugee Council, 2023*). At the same time, the temporary and often unequal nature of host-guest relationships, coupled with strong bonding within Ukrainian networks and ongoing family separation, means that social integration is uneven and sometimes fragile (*Roman et al., 2025; Work Rights Centre, 2025*).

Regarding facilitators, Homes for Ukraine has unlocked access to ESOL, employment support and local authority services, but resource disparities between councils and constraints on refugees' time and mental health limit the effectiveness of these supports (*Commission on the Integration of Refugees, 2024; Government of the UK,*

2025a). Language remains a major barrier to skilled employment, and trauma-related needs are not systematically addressed, highlighting the need to embed psychosocial support more firmly within integration planning.

Most critically, at the level of foundations, the scheme's explicitly temporary legal design undermines long-term integration. Ukrainians can build lives in the UK in the short to medium term, but without a route to settlement, their sense of belonging, security and future planning remains contingent on changing political decisions (*House of Commons Library, 2025; Government of the UK, 2025c*). This disconnect between robust functional inclusion and weak legal foundations mirrors theoretical critiques that emphasise the importance of secure status for genuine integration and belonging (*Ager and Strang, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2011*).

Overall, the Homes for Ukraine scheme has enabled a scale and speed of protection and inclusion that would have been difficult to achieve through traditional asylum or resettlement routes, particularly given Ukrainians' high levels of education and the favourable labour market context. However, its reliance on volunteer housing, uneven local implementation and lack of settlement pathways mean that many integration gains are partial and precarious. The conclusion synthesises findings, critiques the "temporary exceptionalism" paradigm, and proposes a rights-based permanency model for future humanitarian responses.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to examine the integration experiences of Ukrainian refugees in the United Kingdom under the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme, with the overarching research question: What are the key factors shaping the integration of Ukrainian refugees in the UK? To address this, the study explored four sub-questions concerning refugees' lived integration experiences, the barriers affecting key integration domains, the UK policy framework for welcoming Ukrainians, and the specific impact of the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme on integration outcomes.

The central argument advanced throughout this dissertation is that while the Homes for Ukraine scheme represented an innovative, rapid and relatively humane response to a large-scale humanitarian crisis, its longer-term effectiveness has been constrained by limited structural support, uneven local implementation, and an overreliance on voluntarism. Although the scheme mobilised extraordinary public goodwill and enabled swift access to safety, work and services, it was not embedded within a sufficiently robust and coherent integration infrastructure capable of sustaining long-term stability and belonging.

Drawing on *Ager and Strang's (2008)* multidimensional integration framework, the dissertation has shown that integration cannot be reduced to short-term outcomes such as employment rates or initial housing provision. Instead, it is a complex, reciprocal and long-term process shaped by the interaction of legal status, material conditions, social connections, language acquisition and institutional support. When these domains are inadequately aligned - as has often been the case under *Homes for Ukraine* - initial integration gains risk becoming fragile, uneven or reversible.

In relation to the first research question - how Ukrainian refugees experience integration in the UK - the analysis demonstrates a mixed picture. Ukrainian refugees have benefited from comparatively generous formal rights, including immediate access to employment, welfare, healthcare and education. Employment rates among Ukrainians have risen rapidly and are high by European standards, and many children have integrated relatively successfully into UK schools. These factors have supported early functional integration and facilitated participation in everyday social and economic life.

However, these positive indicators coexist with significant experiential and structural challenges. Many Ukrainians experience occupational downgrading, housing insecurity, language barriers and ongoing family separation. Crucially, the temporary nature of their legal status generates uncertainty that permeates other domains of integration, undermining feelings of safety, belonging and long-term orientation. Integration, therefore, is experienced not as a linear progression but as a precarious and uneven process.

The second research question - what barriers affect key integration dimensions - has been addressed through a domain-by-domain analysis. Housing emerged as the most severe structural barrier. The transition from hosted accommodation to the private rental market exposed Ukrainians to the UK's chronic housing shortage, high rents, discrimination and limited social housing availability. Thousands of Ukrainian

households have presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness, with destabilising effects on employment, education and mental health.

Language provision also represents a significant barrier. Despite expanded ESOL programmes, provision remains uneven and often incompatible with refugees' work patterns and caring responsibilities. Limited access to intermediate and advanced English courses constrains professional re-entry and reinforces occupational downgrading, particularly for women with childcare responsibilities.

Employment outcomes, while positive in headline terms, are characterised by widespread skills underutilisation. Many highly qualified Ukrainians remain concentrated in low-paid and insecure sectors, reflecting barriers such as non-recognition of qualifications, limited professional English, discrimination and uncertainty about future residency. These findings reinforce the argument that employment alone is an insufficient indicator of successful integration.

The third research question - what UK government policies exist to welcome and integrate Ukrainian refugees - highlighted the distinctive nature of the UK response. Rather than adopting the EU's Temporary Protection Directive, the UK developed bespoke visa schemes centred on sponsorship and temporary protection. These schemes provided broad access to rights and services but explicitly excluded pathways to permanent settlement. This policy choice positioned Ukrainians outside both the asylum system and long-term integration frameworks, creating a form of conditional inclusion.

The fourth research question - how the Homes for Ukraine scheme affects integration experiences - revealed the scheme's hybrid character as both its strength and its limitation. On the one hand, sponsorship facilitated rapid arrivals, strong early social connections and a sense of welcome. Host-guest relationships often provided crucial social bridges and institutional navigation. On the other hand, reliance on voluntarism produced uneven outcomes, blurred boundaries of responsibility and limited accountability. Where sponsorship arrangements broke down, refugees were often left exposed to housing precarity with inconsistent local authority support. Overall, the findings confirm the dissertation's main argument: Homes for Ukraine succeeded as an emergency response but struggled as a long-term integration model, largely due to weak structural foundations, particularly in housing policy, language provision and legal security.

The findings of this research have important implications for UK refugee and integration policy, particularly as governments increasingly rely on temporary protection and community-based sponsorship models in response to crises. First, the analysis underscores the need to align humanitarian reception with long-term integration planning from the outset. Emergency schemes that prioritise speed and flexibility must be accompanied by clear integration pathways, including housing strategies, language provision and employment support beyond the initial settlement phase. Without this alignment, early successes risk giving way to instability and exclusion.

Second, the research highlights the central importance of secure legal status as the foundation of integration. The absence of a clear route to settlement for Ukrainians

undermines investment in education, career development and community participation. A key policy recommendation is therefore the introduction of a time-limited but guaranteed pathway to permanent residence for Ukrainians who demonstrate residence and participation in the UK. Such a pathway would strengthen integration incentives while maintaining state oversight.

Third, housing policy must be treated as an integration policy. Reliance on short-term hosting arrangements without parallel investment in affordable housing and local authority capacity has contributed to homelessness risks and uneven outcomes. Future sponsorship schemes should include guaranteed transition support, rent deposit schemes, landlord engagement strategies and expanded access to social housing for refugees.

Fourth, language provision requires sustained and flexible investment. ESOL programmes should be designed to accommodate full-time workers and carers, with greater availability of advanced and occupation-specific English training. Integrating language learning with employment support would help address skills underutilisation and improve long-term economic integration.

Finally, while community sponsorship can enhance social connections, it must be embedded within robust safeguarding, mediation and accountability frameworks. Volunteers should complement, not replace, professional services. Clearer delineation of responsibilities between central government, local authorities and civil society actors is essential to avoid gaps in support and to protect both refugees and hosts.

This dissertation also highlights several areas where further research is needed. First, longitudinal studies are essential to assess the long-term integration trajectories of Ukrainians, particularly as visas expire and policy decisions regarding settlement are implemented. Such research would help determine whether early employment and education gains translate into sustained inclusion. Future research could explore comparative analyses between Ukrainian refugees and other groups subject to temporary protection or sponsorship, such as Afghans or Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders. Comparative work would illuminate how nationality, public narratives of deservingness and policy design interact to shape integration outcomes.

There is scope for primary qualitative research capturing refugees' own narratives of belonging, identity and future orientation. While this dissertation relied on secondary data, in-depth interviews could provide richer insight into how uncertainty, family separation and social relationships shape everyday integration experiences. Finally, further research should examine the impact of sponsorship on host communities, including questions of sustainability, power dynamics and the emotional labour of care. Understanding host experiences is crucial for designing sponsorship models that are ethical, effective and resilient over time.

In conclusion, this dissertation has demonstrated that the integration of Ukrainian refugees in the UK cannot be understood solely through indicators of rapid access to work or services. Instead, it is shaped by a complex interaction of structural conditions, policy choices and social relationships. The *Homes for Ukraine* scheme illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations of community-led, temporary protection models. While public solidarity and voluntarism played a vital role in responding to an

unprecedented crisis, sustainable integration ultimately depends on institutional capacity, legal security and long-term policy commitment.

By situating Ukrainian refugees' experiences within a multidimensional integration framework, this research contributes to broader debates about refugee governance in an era of protracted displacement and crisis-driven policymaking. It suggests that future integration frameworks must move beyond emergency logic and moral exceptionalism, towards models that balance community engagement with institutional accountability in order to build inclusive, resilient societies.

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