

# **THE NORTH WEST ARRIVALS FROM UKRAINE (12 MONTHS AFTER ARRIVAL) HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT**



Photo credit: City of Sanctuary

## **SUMMARY REPORT**

**Completed by Office of Health Improvement & Disparities (North West)**

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## SUMMARY REPORT

This is the summary report of the Health Needs Assessment. In addition to this summary the following materials are available;

- Full technical Report including tables, diagrams, bibliography and appendices
- Full Recommendations Tables
- Full PowerPoint slide deck

## Acknowledgements

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Particular thanks to;

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## Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded and occupied parts of Ukraine in a major escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War, which began in 2014. The invasion has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths on both sides and instigated Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II.

The UK government created three visa schemes for people fleeing the war in Ukraine: the Ukraine Extension Scheme, the Ukraine Family Scheme, and the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, also known as Homes for Ukraine. The UK government were expecting approximately 200,000 refugees from Ukraine, this is approximately equal to the number of arrivals by the end of 2022. Arrivals from Ukraine have been located across the United Kingdom.

This Health needs Assessment was completed during January to March 2023. This was specifically to align with the first anniversary of the onset of the war and to be published approximately one year after the majority of arrivals in the UK. This is the point at which many would be seeking alternative housing as the extension to their sponsorship agreement neared its end.

## Aim

There has been no Health Needs Assessments carried out on the need of arrivals from Ukraine in The North West at regional or local level. The health needs of a population from a different culture who have been forcibly uprooted from their homes and experienced a range of traumas will bring with them a broad and complex range of different health needs.

The aim of the HNA is to provide information to the relevant stakeholders around the met, and unmet, health needs of Ukrainians living in northwest England and to make evidence-based recommendations that can improve their health and wellbeing of those arriving from Ukraine. To achieve this the HNA measures, analyses, and interprets the health status of refugees from Ukraine, from a range of sources.

The intended audience for this report is Directors of Public Health (and their teams), NHS senior management, Directors of Adult & Children's Services, Directors of Housing, Elected Members to councils, and those engaging and supporting refugees.

## Methods

This Health Needs Assessment used a range of different methods:

1. Data was used from various sources to draw an international, national and local picture of the Ukrainian refugee situation, specifically specifying health needs in terms of access, dental, maternity, mental health, vaccine uptake etc and wider determinants. A particular focus has been given to arrivals from Ukraine between March 2022 and November 2022;
2. A detailed literature search of the evidence was carried out to review the existing knowledge around the needs of refugees as well as evidence-based interventions designed to meet such needs. This work was carried out during January 2023 using published material between 2014 and December 2022;
3. In order to gain insights around the current provision of service, the experiences and the challenges faced by Ukrainian Refugees in northwest England, an online survey was established. The survey was publicised using Ukrainian communities/refugees' social media and by local groups

identified by the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain and completed between January and February 2023.

4. Interviews were carried out with the Regional Strategic Partnership for Migrants and the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain to increase understanding of the survey results.

5. Focus groups were held during February 2023 to explore the reasons for some of the survey responses and to identify possible recommendations for changes which are culturally appropriate.

6. Insights gained from ethnography and author observations during the production of this document have also been included where appropriate.

### Migrant situation in the North West

This needs assessment covers the whole of the North West of England. Although data is provided at local authority level, and there are refugees in every local authority in the North West, the numbers in each authority are relatively low. The report demonstrates there are more refugees in Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Cumbria, Lancashire and Manchester with higher densities in Blackpool and Trafford, the numbers remain too low to provide statistically significant data and risks disclosing identity of respondents. The majority of Ukrainian refugees in the North West during January-February 2023 arrived during May 2022. These refugees are in addition to existing pressures on local services from existing populations.

There is no data source or indicator which marks refugees specifically. It is therefore necessary to group all foreign-born populations together and focus on any specific supported schemes data available, for example the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The density of existing migrant populations varies across the North West.

- The greatest density of foreign-born populations is in Manchester (24.6%) and Blackburn with Darwin (16.6%)
- Much lower shares of foreign-born populations in other areas such as Cumbria (3.7%) and Wigan (4.3%).
- In December 2022 there were a total of 11,030 Asylum Seekers supported in the North West.
- In December 2022, the North West of England had a rate of 15 asylum seekers per 10,000 people in the region.
- In addition to asylum seekers the North West of England hosts refugees on the Afghan, Syrian and Hong Kong Resettlement Schemes as well as from Ukraine.

### Findings

The findings of this Health Needs Assessment are drawn from the literature search, key data sources, and the insights of a sample of key informants and refugees as listed in the methods section. The information for the assessment was completed between January and March 2023.

The North West has a long history of hosting asylum seekers and refugees from diverse parts of the world. Local Authorities and the NHS have become accustomed to delivering services to support these new arrivals. In many cases, the findings of this needs assessment highlights concerns which have already been identified for other migrant groups, which have not yet been fully resolved. However, the findings of this needs assessment highlight that compared to previous migrant groups, Ukrainian arrivals to the UK hold **higher levels of education**, have previously held better jobs, have high levels of personal agency and higher expectations. Due to the nature of the cause of migration

(war), the arrivals are disproportionately **female and children**, we are accustomed to accommodating mainly young men.

Survey respondents reported a **decline in their personal health standards since arriving in the UK**. Respondents reported an average score of 7.63/10 (1 is poor, 10 is good) pre-war, 7.1 on arrival in the UK and 6.71 now. This is an average decline in health of 12% since the war started despite being in the safety of the UK. However, the focus group clarified that although their health had declined, they felt that it would have been a lot worse had they remained in Ukraine. Key reasons for the decline in health were;

- Concern for those back at home
- A fear of the unknown
- Being disorientated in a new country
- Language difficulties
- PTSD and other mental health issues as a result of the time they left Ukraine
- Concerned about their child's education and development
- Skin complaints thought to be due to changes on types of employment
- Muscular and Skeletal disorders brought about by carrying out manual labour
- Loneliness (missing loved ones)
- Difficulties in navigating the health system in the UK
- Changes in diet
- Changes in water and air quality
- Digestive issues

The change in the type of work carried out by refugees on arrival in the UK has likely contributed to higher levels of **musculoskeletal, skin and respiratory complaints** than presented by previous migrant groups. Additionally, a growing cultural change to **mental health** in Ukraine has contributed to a greater awareness of raising mental health concerns than in many other migrant groups.

Just six of the survey participants state that they considered themselves to be **disabled** (by Ukrainian or UK definition which was provided). Thirteen stated that they did not know, which indicated that they have some form of physical or mental condition which prevented them from feeling they were in good health and able to freely participate in activity

In order to determine potential health service demand, participants in the survey were asked how many times a year they usually need to access treatment for long term condition. 99 stated that they did not access treatment for any long-term conditions, and 30 sought treatment once a year or less. However, 73 routinely sought treatment two to four times a year and 18 sought treatment five times a year or more. This would indicate over 300 additional hospital appointments a year from the survey cohort. Multiplying this to be representative of the total Ukrainian refugee arrivals in the North West, we could **expect demand for an additional 5,800 hospital appointment per year** across the North West

Refugees have experienced substantial **trauma** since February 2022, directly and indirectly caused by the war. They seek psychological and societal support to treat and manage this but feel that

there is **insufficient specialist war trauma psychologist services** available, especially immediately on arrival from Ukraine. Utilising a **Trauma Informed Approach** for all refugees arriving at services will help identify those requiring further support and ensure suitable treatment is made available as soon as possible. The trauma is also having an impact on **maternal health** and resulting in early births and poor maternal outcomes. An early referral to NHS maternity services is important for pregnant refugees.

The Chief Medical Officer for England's advice is that people arriving from Ukraine require screening for **immunisation status** for common childhood vaccines in the UK in order to reduce the risk of common avoidable infectious diseases. The higher level of education amongst those refugees arriving in the UK appears to have resulted in higher levels of immunisation, however, new refugees should still be screened.

Although **TB rates** are relatively high in Ukraine and vaccination rates are low, this was not the case amongst those who have migrated to the North West and taken part in the survey. Survey respondents reported that very few had received any TB screening on arrival. Rates of **sexually transmitted diseases** are high in Ukraine. Refugees who have used sexual health service support in this country have reported that it is considerably better than at home, it is important therefore to ensure sexual health is included in the initial GP assessment and screening appointment.

**Dental health** has been recognised as an area of concern with limited access to a dentist and large numbers reporting experiencing dental pain. However, it is difficult to gauge the severity of the situation until refugees are seen by a dentist.

Refugees have reported experiencing **language and cultural difficulties** in accessing and receiving treatment and have found the health care system difficult to navigate. Ukrainians are not accustomed to the **gatekeeper type role of the GP** and are culturally perplexed as to how this may provide adequate support for all their needs, particularly in relation to children. As refugees from Ukraine who have arrived here are substantially better educated and likely more affluent than the average Ukrainian and as such are accustomed to accessing immediate and private health care in their home country.

There is extensive family separation, increasing the risks of **isolation**, but **good community networks** are being developed. The survey results suggest that, overall, the experiences of refugees from Ukraine living in the North West have been mixed but mostly satisfactory, and they feel safe. The refugees consulted enjoyed living in the area and were grateful with the positive response of the community. However, as the war continues, refugees state that fear of finding and affording a **longer-term housing** of their own is beginning to cause **anxiety**. At a time of growing pressure on existing housing stock, this has the potential to become a considerable challenge for refugees and local authorities.

Although there has been a Ukrainian presence in the North West for over a hundred years, few people have until now knowingly met Ukrainians in the UK. This provides us with an opportunity to increase **cultural understanding** to benefit both new arrivals, existing populations and any future challenges. It is proposed that this can be achieved by increasing societal (especially children and young people) understanding of the Ukrainians plight and improving **cultural competency** amongst clinical staff via a range of training methods.

## Recommendations

There is recognition that a lot of excellent work is already taking place at local level to support existing and new migrants, including the Ukrainian refugees. This HNA takes a regional approach and therefore some recommendations may already be taking place in some areas but not others. This report includes several the recommendations to the health care system, local authorities, government departments, voluntary sector, and universities. Ukrainian refugees consulted recommended that there should be;

- Support for community liaison/champion/navigator type roles
- Better explanation of how the health system works at an early stage prior to and immediately on arrival
- Immunisation screening
- Quicker and easier access to translators/mediators
- Improved cultural competence amongst clinical staff including the social and cultural aspects of refugees

Additionally, the report identifies further recommendations to address;

- Improved screening
- Regular refresher training for staff
- Housing insecurity
- Societal education
- Improved welcome packs
- English Language lessons
- Sexual Health screening
- Rapid referral to maternity services
- Improved targeted psychological support
- Adopting a Trauma Informed Approach
- Commission and carry out further research in relation to
  - Cultural Competency Training
  - Benefits of hosting refugees
  - Effectiveness of Community Champions

Overall, the outcome of these recommendations should lead to quicker and more appropriate access to services, increased cultural engagement and understanding of clinical needs, resulting in improved physical and mental health.

These findings are in line with previous recommendations for other migrant groups in recent years, however, they are still being highlighted, A significant difference compared to previous migrant groups is that the Ukrainian refugees arriving in the UK have a higher level of education and previous employment, resulting in higher expectations and greater personal agency.

Government data demonstrates that there are Ukrainian Refugees in every Lower Tier and Unitary Authority in the North West. Therefore, it is likely that the recommendations are appropriate and relevant in most areas and footprints across the North West.