

Visa Extension Issues and a Pathway to Permanent Residence for Ukrainians in the UK

What do you want us to do? (80)

1. Enable automatic humanitarian visa extensions for displaced Ukrainians, in line with the rest of Europe, until 4 March 2026 (i).
2. Clarify pathways to permanent residence for displaced Ukrainians who have lived and contributed to the UK.

Tell us more about what you want the Government of Parliament to do (300)

H4U was a temporary scheme to shelter Ukrainians fleeing war, with visas initially granted for 3 years. These 3 years have now almost passed: lives have changed and the war continues.

From 4 February 2025, an 18-month visa extension is being offered under the Ukrainian Permission Extension (UPE) (ii). However, details published on 26 November 2024 are causing disruption, anxiety, and further trauma because:

- Ukrainians can only apply no earlier than 28 days before their current visa expires. Early or late submissions risk rejection.
- The stated normal processing time for applications is 8 weeks. Approx. 87,000 Ukrainians arrived between 15 March and 30 June 2022 (iii). The Home Office needs to process almost 30,000 visa extensions per month, likely causing delays.
- While waiting for approval, Ukrainians retain their status but cannot prove their right to live and work, creating barriers to renting and employment and putting individual and family security at risk.
- There is no clarity about options after the 18-month extension. The 4.5 years in the UK will not count towards the 10-year Long Residence route to Indefinite Leave to Remain (iv).

Tell us more about why you want the Government or Parliament to do it (500)

Most displaced Ukrainians had no plans to come to the UK before the war and intended to return home. Three years on, the war continues, and they are becoming part of our communities. Britain responded to the invasion with generosity and compassion; we must continue to show compassion as the war continues.

Many Ukrainians have nothing left in Ukraine following widespread destruction. Over 149,000 residential buildings and 3,000 educational buildings were destroyed in 2022 (v). There are over 3.6 million internally displaced people (vi) and returnees may face marginalization and increased vulnerabilities. Russian forces currently control significant portions of eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

A majority (69%) of adult Ukrainians in the UK are economically active, and most are highly educated (80% hold a degree). Ukrainians have contributed to numerous community and cultural activities. 68% would remain in the UK even if it were safe to return to Ukraine (vii). Their jobs, children, and families are settled here. Many have been displaced multiple times, and the idea of uprooting again is impacting mental health.

Young Ukrainians, who came as children, are now trying to shape their lives as young adults. They want to stay and contribute but are in limbo, affecting their prospects and resources (viii). This is a loss for the UK, as their skills and experiences are not utilized.

Not enabling a pathway to settlement will not make people return; they will become 'irregular' or go elsewhere.

References

(i) https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-assistance-ukraine/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine/fleeing-ukraine-your-rights-eu_en

(ii) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/applying-to-the-ukraine-permission-extension-scheme>

(iii) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ukraine-visa-schemes-summary-previous-data-tables>

(iv) <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-11-26/hcws250>

(v) <https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/the-total-amount-of-damage-caused-to-ukraine-s-infrastructure-due-to-the-war-has-increased-to-almost-138-billion/>

(vi) <https://dtm.iom.int/ukraine#:~:text=This%20report%20assesses%20registered%20IDP,change%20since%20the%20previous%20round.&text=As%20of%20September%202023%2C%20an,displaced%20abroad%20according%20to%20UNHCR.>

(vii) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/visaholdersenteringtheukundertheukrainehumanitarian schemes/15aprilto22april2024>

(viii) <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/gees/research/projects/futures-of-ukraine/young-ukrainians-in-the-uk-two-years-on-lives-in-limbo.-research-report-and-recommendations.pdf>