



Image: Karollyne Hubert

# Public libraries and Ukrainian refugees

Briefing note  
July 2022



**Libraries  
Connected**

# Introduction

Public libraries have a long and proud history of supporting the most vulnerable. It is no surprise, then, that they have enthusiastically welcomed Ukrainians escaping the Russian invasion of their homeland.

This briefing note presents the findings of a snapshot survey of 45 library services across England. It reveals for the first time the vast range of support libraries are offering to Ukrainian refugees, and their crucial role in the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Within days of the invasion, libraries were placing orders for Ukrainian books, ebooks and audiobooks, ensuring refugees would have access to materials in their own language.

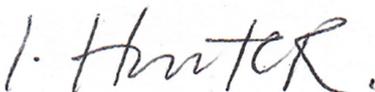
And the support goes far beyond books. Library services formed alliances with local charities, council resettlement teams and refugee support groups. These partnerships meant that libraries could quickly respond to local need: signposting refugees to local services, providing language support, helping with visa applications and giving access to mobiles, laptops, food and clothing

This very practical assistance is complemented by a range of social support. Most library services offer welcome events and social activities for refugees, giving valuable opportunities to meet other Ukrainians and share experiences in a friendly and welcoming space.

It is concerning, however, that the vast majority (87%) of library services have done all this without any additional funding. No respondent to our survey had received any of the funding provided to councils by central government to support Ukrainian refugees (4% received funding from other sources and 9% did not know if they had received additional funding or not).

This briefing reveals the important role that libraries are playing in welcoming, settling and integrating Ukrainian refugees - councils must consider how this essential work is being funded and ensure library budgets are not overstretched.

Finally, it is important to note that libraries welcome and support all refugees and asylum seekers, regardless of their country of origin. A number of services are now part of the Libraries of Sanctuary scheme (see page 7) and we hope the experience of supporting Ukrainian refugees will spur many others to join.



**Isobel Hunter MBE**  
Chief Executive  
Libraries Connected



Image: Daria Volkova

# What libraries are doing

Our survey shows that libraries are providing a very broad range of services to Ukrainian refugees. Some are part of a core offer - others have been specially developed, often in partnership with other council departments or local charities.

## Welcome centres

Libraries are at heart of their communities and so are obvious venues for welcome centres, providing local information and practical support to newly arrived refugees. Three in ten of the library services in the survey host at least one Welcome Centre; the support offered varies but most provide maps, local guides, travel passes and assistance with housing, benefits, health, employment and education. Many also offer free food, toiletries, clothes, bedding and school essentials.

## Reading materials in Ukrainian and Russian

Over 80% of library services now offer books, ebooks and audiobooks in Ukrainian. Most of these have been acquired since the Homes for Ukraine scheme launched in March. Some services haven't yet received their orders of Ukrainian books but expect them shortly. Over half (56%) also offer materials in Russian, which is the predominant language in parts of Ukraine most directly affected by the invasion.

## Support with visa applications

Over a fifth of library services provide support to refugees in applying for a visa to stay in the UK, mainly under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme. Fourteen library services provide support with visa applications through a partnership with Sopra Steria, which is contracted by the Home Office to manage UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services (UKVCAS). The remainder provide support through their council or local charities. If extrapolated to all our member library services, we estimate that libraries are currently processing or assisting with approximately 1,000 visa applications a week under the Ukrainian Scheme.

## Library enrolment

The majority (82%) of respondents had taken the opportunity to enrol Ukrainian refugees with their library service, giving them free access to their full range of services, including tablet and laptop loans. A number of services had relaxed their ID and address rules to make it easier for new arrivals to join. If extrapolated to all our member library services, we estimate that libraries have enrolled over 5,000 Ukrainian refugees so far.

## Support with DBS checks for hosts

Some libraries (13%) offer support with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks required by Homes for Ukraine hosts, verifying ID documents and helping with the online application.

## English language classes

Over a third (38%) of the library services surveyed provide some form of English language training to Ukrainian refugees. This could be a structured English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme in partnership with a local provider, an established English conversation group or more informal sessions where newcomers can pick up useful phrases in a friendly environment.

## Welcome/social events

Over half (58%) of respondents organised welcome or social events for refugees and their sponsors. These are important for building relationships between hosts and their guests in a safe and neutral space. They also provide opportunities for refugees to meet others in the same situation, and for hosts to meet each other.

**82%**

provide books, ebooks  
and audiobooks in  
Ukrainian

**31%**

host at least one  
Welcome Centre for  
refugees

**58%**

run welcome/social  
events for refugees  
and their hosts

**22%**

offer support with visa  
applications

**82%**

have enrolled refugees  
with their library  
service



# Case studies

## North Somerset

North Somerset libraries are working closely with their local authority's refugee settlement team to ensure newly-arrived Ukrainians get the support they need. The library service has used the resettlement team's data on the number of Ukrainian refugees housed in each ward to target support in these locations. The resettlement team is also promoting the Summer Reading Challenge to refugee families and the library service is planning other summer holiday events targeted at Ukrainian arrivals, alongside family English language sessions in partnership with the local ESOL team. North Somerset libraries are also able to offer Ukrainian refugees free data bundles and pre-paid SIMS through the National Databank in partnership with Good Things Foundation.

## Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire Library Service has teamed up with local refugee support group East Lindsey Area of Sanctuary (ELAS) to offer a range of support to Ukrainian arrivals and their hosts, including weekly coffee mornings. These coffee mornings coincide with the library's rhyme time so under-5s and their parents can also join in with the rhyme time sessions, giving Ukrainian children a valuable opportunity to mix with their British peers. The service has also worked in partnership with Grimsby Institute to offer free ESOL sessions to Ukrainians; when it became apparent that some of the group did not feel confident pursuing formal language training, ELAS and the library service recruited a volunteer to run "Survival English" sessions at the library, with games and flash cards.

## West Sussex

West Sussex library assistants have helped run a welcome hub for Ukrainian refugees at nearby Gatwick Airport, one of the main points of arrival for Ukrainians. The service is also carrying out DBS document checks for sponsors and has created a one-stop webpage for hosts and new arrivals outlining all the support West Sussex libraries can offer. A range of factsheets provide sponsors and their guests with essential information on topics such as digital support, English language learning, health and education. Library workers have created pictorial leaflets highlighting elements of the service that might be relevant to refugees, including free wi-fi, the toy library and access to online resources in Ukrainian.

The service has also added Ukrainian support as an area on its CliO (Council and Local information Online) database, developed by the West Sussex libraries to ensure staff across the county have accurate information on local, national, voluntary and health services.

For language support, West Sussex libraries use Transparent Language Online - an electronic resource that has English for Ukrainian and Russian speakers - and the SayHi app to help staff and sponsors converse better with non-English speakers. Chichester Library hosts informal "let's chat" sessions for non-English speakers and the service is in discussion with a local group about using library buildings out of hours for English classes.



## Libraries of Sanctuary

The Libraries of Sanctuary Award - run by the City of Sanctuary UK charity - celebrates public libraries which go the extra mile to welcome people seeking sanctuary, including asylum seekers and refugees. Award holders must “learn, embed and share” the values and principles which can make the UK a welcoming place of safety. Library services which currently hold the award include Oldham Heritage, Libraries and Arts, Brighton & Hove Libraries, Sefton Library and Information Service, Kirklees Libraries, Manchester Libraries and Southampton Library Service. Many more libraries hope to join them in the coming months and years.

## Cheshire East

The library service in Cheshire East initiates all DBS checks for host families and gives all new arrivals an introductory letter about the library in Ukrainian. The libraries have a Ukrainian keyboard option on their PCs and have purchased new books in Ukrainian and Russian as well as additional ESOL materials. Links to library resources have been included in the welcome emails sent to host families and three libraries in the service have hosted welcome coffee mornings. One of these also has a weekly early evening get together for Ukrainian families and their hosts. In addition, 12 Cheshire East libraries are collection points for school back packs filled with stationery, lunchboxes and calculators for Ukrainian children starting school in the area. They also provide welcome packs of toiletries, sanitary products donated by local businesses and charities and bus passes from a local operator. The service is now looking to introduce additional Lego clubs, after school gatherings and where possible language classes.

## Hampshire

Across Hampshire, 19 public libraries deliver Ukraine Connections events regularly, in each district of the county, providing a local welcome and information hub for refugees and hosts. Over 1,545 people have attended these events since the launch in April, and each session offers refugees a safe place to chat, meet others, and link with local services, partners and community groups. Translated welcome packs, local maps, and some household essentials are made available, alongside a growing resource of translated materials which is evolving to help meet people’s needs. These sessions continue to provide space for engagement and interaction between new arrivals, those supporting, and those who want to help, and it also provides a place of respite and refuge for families. The service has now enrolled over 150 refugees to library membership, enabling people access to the free books and online resources available to the community, some of which are in Ukrainian. Hampshire County Council’s libraries service has also hosted temporary visa centres and has teamed up with local partners to provide ESOL course opportunities. A small number of refugees now volunteer in libraries, and the service is pleased to have recently recruited a Ukrainian new arrival to the county into the library team too.



# Feedback

We asked library workers to share their own experiences and any feedback they had received while supporting Ukrainian refugees. This is a small selection of the responses.

“ A 3-year-old Ukrainian boy dived straight into Rhymetime with his mum and a staff member while the rest of his family were upstairs enjoying a coffee. The joy on his face when he saw all the books in the children’s library was priceless and although he did not know the words to the rhymes he was not hesitant at joining in with the actions. He absolutely adored our therapy dog too!

**Library worker**

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“ I was able to give a Chromebook to a mum for her 13-year-old old daughter who just ran at me and hugged me saying thank you over and over. Another woman hugged me then as well as she was so grateful. The children have enjoyed the books and colouring in sheets as well as cuddly toys they just hug them and take them home thrilled.

**Library worker**

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“ A lady who attends the survival English sessions is trying to grasp the basics of our language but she now has the confidence to come to our craft club on her own, without her daughter. Some of the regular members use an app so that they can communicate and share their love of crochet and knitting.

**Library worker**

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Image: Ivan Bandura

“ ‘Don’t worry, the library is so helpful. They will help you sort out everything.’ Whilst not absolutely true this was said by one of our Ukrainian ladies who has excellent English and comes to help at the sessions now. She wanted to reassure a host family and their very distressed Ukrainian guest that it was all going to be alright.

**Library worker**

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“ I was so happy yesterday when I was able to point a 6-year-old Ukrainian boy to your books in Ukrainian. He promptly gathered about three and his dad enrolled him and himself. Proud moment for me - which is down to all your efforts and support. Thank you.

**Homes for Ukraine host**

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“ I’m so glad to have stumbled across you at that local meeting; I had no idea where to find good venues for language courses, and you’ve opened my eyes to how much libraries can do for the community - you’ve all been wonderful.

**Homes for Ukraine host**

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“ A particular emotional moment was when the Ukrainian lady hugged her host to say how grateful she was and thanked us for welcoming them today. There were a few teary eyes in the room, including me!

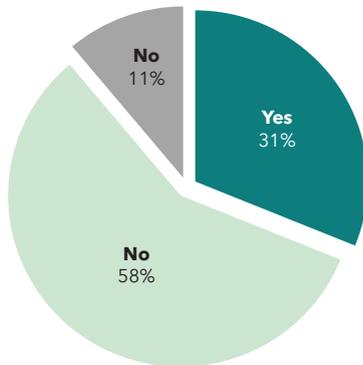
**Library worker**

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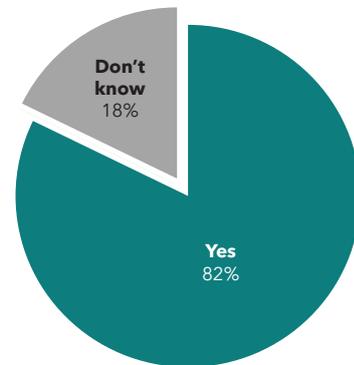
# Survey data

Total responses: 45. For full data tables please contact us.

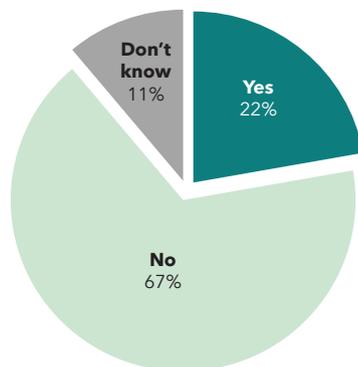
Are any of your libraries acting as a welcome centre or hub for Ukrainian refugees?



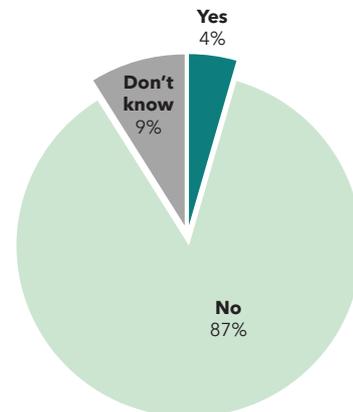
Have you enrolled Ukrainian refugees with your library service?



Does your library service provide any support to Ukrainian refugees in applying for UK Visas and Immigration?



Has your library service received additional funding to provide support to Ukrainian refugees?



Which of the following types of support does your library service currently offer to Ukrainian refugees?

|   |    |     |
|---|----|-----|
| Books, ebooks and audiobooks in Ukrainian                                       | 37 | 82% |
| Welcome/social events for refugees and hosts                                    | 26 | 58% |
| Books, ebooks and audiobooks in Russian   | 25 | 56% |
| Welcome Packs   | 20 | 44% |
| English language classes  | 17 | 38% |
| Support in accessing schooling and education services                           | 13 | 29% |
| Volunteering opportunities  | 12 | 27% |
| Support in accessing GP and health services                                     | 12 | 27% |
| Social, cultural or recreational activities specifically for Ukrainian refugees | 12 | 27% |
| Support with DBS checks for hosts   | 6  | 13% |
| Laptop loans  | 3  | 7%  |



## About Libraries Connected

Libraries Connected is a membership organisation representing heads of library services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We take a leading role in the development of public libraries through advocating for the power of libraries, sharing best practice and helping to shape the public library service now and in the future.

## Media enquiries

James Gray  
Advocacy & Marketing Manager  
[james.gray@librariesconnected.org.uk](mailto:james.gray@librariesconnected.org.uk)  
07849085762

Libraries Connected  
3rd Floor, Islington Central Library,  
2 Fieldway Crescent, Highbury East  
London N5 1PF

[info@librariesconnected.org.uk](mailto:info@librariesconnected.org.uk)  
[www.librariesconnected.org.uk](http://www.librariesconnected.org.uk)

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