



Voices of Ukrainians in Greater Manchester - Project report

Start Date: April 2023

End Date: July 2023

Introduction.....	2
Approach	3
Outputs	3
Outcomes and Impact.....	4
Feedback from volunteers and participants.....	4
Limitations and Learnings	5
Conclusion.....	5
Appendix 1 – Findings: common themes and experiences.....	6
A. Support received on arrival.....	6
B. Main struggles for new arrivals	6
C. Messages for policy makers in Britain.....	8
D. Overall experience in Greater Manchester and in the UK	8



Introduction

The Voices of Ukrainians in Greater Manchester project aimed to gather stories and insights from Ukrainian nationals who recently arrived in Greater Manchester. Through 1:1 semi-structured interview, we sought to understand their experiences, reflections on the community response upon arrival, their current needs, and their aspirations for the future.

This project was delivered by Europaia, commissioned by Macc on behalf of a partnership of VCSE organisations and support bodies responding to the needs of sanctuary seekers in Greater Manchester, including: 10GM, Macc, Salford CVS, Bolton CVS, Action Together, Bury VCFA, Caritas Salford, Caritas Shrewsbury, Foundation 92, Manchester City of Sanctuary and The Pankhurst Trust/Mcr Women's Aid.

We want Ukrainian's stories to be heard by decision makers, in turn allowing them to be more responsive to identified needs. We aim to use the learning to influence medium and longer-term planning by statutory and VCSE support providers, provide valuable insight on improving future emergency responses in Greater Manchester, and in the empower those who participate.



Full audio podcast series 'Voices of Ukraine' is available to listen to here:

<https://europaia.org.uk/support-advice/voices-of-ukraine-podcast/> Each episode is the voice of a Ukrainian newcomer sharing their story about their new life in Greater Manchester. A transcription is available [here](#).

About Europaia

Europaia has been supporting and empowering local EU communities since 2008, giving us a strong understanding of this cohort and their needs. The majority of our staff and volunteers also come from Central and East European backgrounds, meaning lived experience of migration shapes all of our projects and services. We have a particular specialism in arts and culture - Europaia originated as an art collective for EU Nationals, and our community development and wellbeing projects continue to have a creative underpinning, for example in the arts

workshops we have run as part of the Europaia Roma Community Project.

Approach

The 'Voices of Ukraine' project adopted a creative and culturally appropriate approach to ensure the authentic representation of Ukrainian voices in Greater Manchester. We recognized the diversity and plurality within the Ukrainian community and aimed to capture a wide range of perspectives.

It is crucial to emphasise that a key aim of the Voices of Ukraine project was to ensure an unbiased narrative for the experiences of Ukrainian nationals arriving in the UK following the conflict. Recognizing the potential for misrepresentation and stereotyping in media portrayals, the project sought to provide a platform for individuals to share their personal stories and perspectives authentically. By giving voice directly to the Ukrainian community in Greater Manchester, the project aimed to challenge preconceived notions and promote a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. This commitment to presenting a fair narrative contributes to fostering empathy, respect, and inclusivity within the wider community.

Participant privacy was of the utmost importance throughout the project. To ensure anonymity, we used pseudonyms and removed any identifying information from the recordings and accompanying materials. This approach safeguarded the confidentiality and security of the participants.

Outputs

Recruitment of interviewees

12 in total aged 18-50 and coming from different regions of Ukraine. We have reached out to clients from our drop-in sessions, we made a call for participants on our social media and telegram channels, we involved our Ukrainian Youth Group, and we participated in the "Manchester stands with Ukraine rally" which takes place every Saturday in Piccadilly Gardens.

Semi-Structured Interviews

We conducted interviews with Ukrainian nationals, allowing them to share their stories and insights without filters or intermediaries. These interviews provided a platform for participants to express their needs, challenges, and aspirations in a supportive and confidential environment.

Sound Clip Recordings and translation

Ukrainian Volunteers were involved in translating the original sound clips into English to ensure accessibility to the broader audience of GM. Volunteers played a crucial role in translating and preserving the participants' voices while also doing voice over in English.

Creation of a podcast

The Voice of Ukraine podcast features 12 individual interviews with Ukrainian nationals from diverse age groups and backgrounds. The podcast served as an engaging and accessible medium to share the stories and insights of participants. We are proud to say that the podcast successfully captured a diverse range of experiences and voices from Ukrainian nationals in Greater Manchester, adding a dynamic and engaging element to the project, thus enabling a wider audience to connect with and gain insights into the lived experiences of the latest Ukrainian arrivals.

Outcomes and Impact

The Voices of Ukraine project generated several noteworthy outcomes and demonstrated a significant impact on various stakeholders:

Influence on Planning

The project's outputs provided valuable insights into the needs of Ukrainian nationals and their experiences in Greater Manchester. These insights will inform medium and longer-term planning by statutory and VCSE support providers. By integrating the voices of Ukrainians into decision-making processes, we aimed to foster a more responsive support system that addresses identified needs effectively.

Improved Emergency Responses

The gathered stories and reflections will contribute to enhancing future emergency responses in Greater Manchester. By learning from the experiences of Ukrainian nationals, support providers can adapt and improve their approaches to better assist sanctuary seekers during crises and emergencies.

Empowerment of Participants

Through their active participation in the project, Ukrainian nationals felt empowered and heard. Their voices will reach decision-makers, allowing them to advocate for their needs and desires. By amplifying their perspectives, the project helped to establish a sense of agency and recognition within the Ukrainian community.

Public Engagement and Awareness

The communications campaign created around the Voices of Ukraine project is aimed at raising awareness among the public about the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees. By offering opportunities to learn about and engage with a population that might not be regularly encountered, the project has fostered empathy, understanding, and solidarity.

Feedback from volunteers and participants

"This project has been an opportunity to voice my thoughts and feelings. In the world of continuous haste and hustle, Voices of Ukraine gave me the time to think and reflect. Amidst the wartime in Ukraine, I got to the UK to start a new life and no one ever really asked me what I felt. At some point, my feelings froze, and Voices of Ukraine was a fresh breeze to see which direction to follow and which ways to choose. Thanks for listening to Ukrainian Voices" (Anton - interviewee)

"I have volunteered to translate Ukrainian stories because I wanted to live through them. Being Ukrainian and living in the UK, I felt that every single word echoed in me. They are different stories, some are bright and positive, others are less optimistic and sad. I wish we could have more projects like this. Each voice is worth listening to..." (Iryna - volunteer)

"I am really thankful for inviting me and having a chance to share my experience. Maybe it will be useful for someone else."

"I am glad the world is open to us, it sees that we fight for our independence, for human rights, for being free. Thank you for the opportunity to express myself, to tell what I think. That means a lot to me."

Limitations and Learnings

The Europa team worked closely together, showcasing strong collaboration and a shared commitment to the Ukrainian cause. This cohesion allowed the team to overcome challenges and deliver the project successfully and timely. The collective dedication and passion demonstrated by the team members underscored their deep connection to the voices and experiences of Ukrainian nationals in Greater Manchester. The Voices of Ukraine project serves as a testament to the importance of teamwork, adaptability, and the pursuit of creating a platform for marginalised voices to be heard and valued. The following limitations and learnings provide valuable insights for future projects of a similar nature, enabling better preparation, increased collaboration, and improved technical execution:

- The project required intensive communication efforts, involving coordination with various stakeholders, volunteers, participants, and partner organisations. Effective communication strategies were implemented to engage participants, disseminate project information, and raise awareness among the public.
- There was less collaboration from potential partner organisations. Despite efforts to partner organisations already working with the Ukrainian community, the project faced challenges in securing active collaboration due to tight timescales and partners' capacity. Future initiatives can benefit from early and consistent engagement with partners to foster stronger collaboration.
- Technical aspects of the podcast were a challenge. The Europa communications department produced and curated the podcast which required high technical expertise, including audio recording, editing, and production. The team faced technical challenges which resulted in having to improve the audio quality a few times. This provided the opportunity to acquire new skills and consolidate existing ones, particularly in the field of communications to ensure smoother production in similar future projects.
- Efforts were made to involve the Ukrainian Youth Group in the production of the podcast, given their technical knowledge (they host their own radio station) and recognizing the importance of incorporating the perspectives of younger members of the Ukrainian community. Unfortunately, their involvement faced challenges and achieved limited success due to bad timing in conjunction with their University Exams.

Conclusion

The Voices of Ukraine project successfully achieved its objectives by creatively capturing the diverse voices of Ukrainian nationals in Greater Manchester. By using 1:1 interviews, sound clip recordings, social media, and QR codes, we facilitated a platform for participants to express their experiences and aspirations. The project's outcomes influenced planning, improved emergency responses, empowered participants, and raised public awareness about the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees. We express our gratitude to NAVCA, the British Red Cross, and the partnership of VCSE organisations for their support and trust.

Appendix 1 – Findings: common themes and experiences of Ukrainian nationals arriving in Greater Manchester

A. Support received on arrival

Hosting Families. With language barriers and not knowing the UK system, the support received by the hosting family is crucial. Hosting families help them to navigate the UK system: to look for a job (at the Job Center) or set up a small business, get their BRPs (Biometric residence permits), register to the GP, look for accommodations and be their guarantor for private rent.

- “My host mom sometimes even helps with the child. She gives me some advice when I don’t know what to do. On our first day here, they bought us literally everything - nappies for my son and a dressing gown for me.”

Volunteer Organizations. They help to navigate the UK system, facilitate communication with hosting families and with public service providers. Other services accessed through Charities and volunteer organisations are food parcels, vouchers, goods donation.

B. Main struggles for new arrivals

Language barriers. Difficulty finding English courses as well as strict course structure and enrolment processes.

- “I was waiting for a long time for the language assessment. Finally, I did it. They checked my level and still I am waiting for when the class will start. It has been almost 4 months since I moved to Great Britain, but there is still no progress.”
- “It is hard to be part of the society if you don’t understand the language”
- “Getting benefits feels uncomfortable because as a healthy adult I can work and continue my career. However, it is not clear how to improve the existing skills or learn some new skills with limited command of English. I could have been working, earning and not being a burden to the state. I could have been a person who pays taxes and feels as an equal member of society. This is the main thing for integrating in my opinion”

Socialisation. Ukrainian centres and community groups play a crucial role. Activities and cultural centres are not widely promoted though, and there are Ukrainians who are left out if they don’t already have connections in the Ukrainian community somehow. They don’t know how and where to find Ukrainians groups.

- “The process of adaptation for my daughter (9) is very difficult because she doesn’t have any friends her own age.”
- “They should be promoted also from public institutions (local councils). For example, it would be good to find some brochures printed out at the Job Center, with information about local communities' contacts and the work they do”.
- “We attend English classes at the Ukrainian centre, we do have conversational English clubs, we organise different events, traditional Ukrainian celebrations and we sing together, we also fundraise for Ukraine”.

Lack of a centralised point of information, that can provide clear information about the settling in process. Available to provide step-by-step processes and resources, from immigration, housing, employability, language courses, community and cultural centres, educational system, taxes, to open a bank account, or change their driving licence.

- “It would be great if there was an organisation or an online consulting service that can offer support and advice for new arrivals. Or a guide that explains step by step how to start the process of settling here. Such an organisation would make my life easier in many aspects. It would help me understand the system.”

Bureaucracy to obtain asylum status is too complicated, especially with poor English, and too slow (which cascades into the possibility to access all the other services: to apply for a work, obtain BRPs, put the children into school, get a GP etc.)

Accommodation. Long stays in temporary hotels, before being assigned accommodation. Long waiting lists for social houses (after the initial 6 months with hosting families) and when these are offered, they are in very bad conditions (neglected, mouldy, indecorous). Difficulties in accessing private rent without any support from the institutions. They rely on the goodwill of their hosting families, who help look for accommodation and being guarantors for the tenancy. Even this is difficult as many landlords are reluctant to rent to Ukrainian refugees due to the limited 3-year leave to remain.

- *“I would ask to increase trust towards Ukrainians who are looking for accommodation. This is one of the biggest problems. When we were looking for accommodation, it took us around 3 months to find one and we had refusal after refusal, in spite having secured a good job”*

Cultural barriers. Communication between refugees or asylum seekers and the government is not working (you can call the Migrant helpline, but not the Home Office directly). They feel that this service is more for them to have a chat or vent their problems, instead of having their problems solved with real results.

- *“I suggest that local authorities have more officials who understand the mentality of Ukraine and Britain. It would be very useful to have diversity in this case. Both sides would avoid a lot of problems and misunderstandings about what is acceptable here and what is not.”*

Employability. CV writing in correct English, prepare for interviews. Jobcentre didn't support this. Employment process.

- “It requires you to provide references. These references should be written by someone from the UK, and it's hard for us because we just arrived. Without references, you will not be able to find employment”

Discrimination. Due to language barriers, they are forced to accept under qualified jobs, in respect to their qualifications and experience, unless they are employed by or with the interposition of other members from the Ukrainian community.

- “I found a job quickly. I am a skilled worker, a dental technician. I had a good career in Ukraine. And ... well ... It was difficult for me to gather my courage for this, but I asked for help from a local dentist with Ukrainian heritage”

Cost of living. They cannot afford cultural activities like cinemas and theatres or some activities for children.

C. Messages for policy makers in Britain

- **Russian language:** “All the documents, regulations, rules regarding Ukrainians are issued in the Russian language, why? This is the language in which orders to kill Ukrainians are issued.”
- **Role of Social services and public institutions:** “They should not only be responsible for control but also provide services, advice and answers to questions. I found all the answers to my questions mostly from the internet or from accidental acquaintances. For example: on the exact order of actions, you need to take once you arrive here. The local council should give more practical advice and be more helpful. On the general level everything works very well but locally, everything depends a lot on the people you encounter”.
- **Homes for Ukraine scheme:** “It isn’t too difficult, in terms of the process of applying for the documents and going through the system. I found it easy because we already had our BRPs. I know that it can be much difficult if you don’t have these” And “There was a special application to scan passports, but we had problems with it. which caused delays in the process. Eventually, I received my visa after two months, but my daughter didn’t. Because this process was so long, we lost our sponsors, and they hosted another Ukrainian family. We had to start the whole process again”
- **Settlement scheme.** “It is difficult to make plans for life and build a new life in the uncertainty of what will happen after the 3-year visa expires.” And “If I could ask for more, I would like to ask for the further stay of Ukrainians in Britain. It would be great if the British government could allow Ukrainians to extend their residency permit. Unfortunately, not all of us have the place to return to”

D. Overall experience in Greater Manchester and in the UK

- “We are happy, we receive enough support from our local council, we feel that people really care about us, they do not do it just for a check mark.”
- “Our host family, they were always there to help us with everything”.
- “At Bolton Town Hall - the staff were helpful and welcoming. They showed us everything, they explained every detail. Everything was so neat and organised”
- “There are so many various nationalities living here in Britain and it is amazing. I think it is just great. Also, I really like how open and friendly all these people are. They don't really care what country you are from or how you look or even that your English is not perfect.”
- “I don't feel that I'm lonely here. No, I'm not alone. “
- “I met very nice and kind people, if not amazing local people and foreigners who are here with me. I don't know how I would survive without them, everyone's so helpful.”
- “We've been here for more than one year. All my life here is just like I'm fighting with the government. Basically, I'm sending them many emails, I'm calling them, but we are still waiting, constantly waiting.”
- “We realised that it was difficult for the kids to adapt, and they were stressed. We did not emigrate; we fled the war. I was never considering emigration and I was content with everything in my Ukraine.”