



Full Length Article

Hosting as a border making process: Understanding the role of proximity in explaining the motivations of British hosts in the Homes for Ukraine scheme

Audrey Lumley-Sapanski^{a,b,*} , Kate Garbers^b

^a Colorado Mesa University, USA

^b Rights Lab, University of Nottingham, UK



ABSTRACT

The Homes for Ukraine (HfU) scheme provided a bespoke emergency visa pathway, accommodation in a host's home, and exceptional rights to Ukrainians for a period of three years. Established by the government of the United Kingdom it is the first large-scale hosting programme of its kind in the UK with 125,000 placements to date. To understand how the programme was successful in recruiting the large number of hosts, this research explored the motivations of participating members of the British public. We identify three common forms of proximity within host interviews: perceptions of common identity of guest and host as members of a bounded European community, shared geopolitical threat to that same European community (and the spatialized proximity of the threat), and the ability of the British public to situate Ukrainians within a collective British memory of war time hosting. Together these forms of proximity drove a sense of responsibility in hosts to participate in the 'war effort.' This willingness was made possible by the governmental programme and state response which distinguished this population of displaced persons in terms of deservingness, giving them privileged access to resources upon arrival. We demonstrate how the larger migration governance systems used proximity to both motivate welcome and conversely justify the exclusion of others. Findings are based on interviews and surveys with thirty-one hosts participating in the HfU scheme conducted in 2022 and review of media and government sources.

1. Introduction

The news was completely dominated by it, whereas other times we get one little article about it or whatever on the news, and there's other things like our own stuff going on in Britain, but all of that just went out of the window and everything was about Ukraine ... I think people relate more to people because they are in Europe. We find it harder, and it is wrong that we are like this, but we do find it harder to relate to Syrian refugees or Afghan refugees. But to see people who live similar lives to us being in that situation, I think that really affected people. —Alice.

It does feel close to home, you know. And from the beginning, I have always thought it could be us in this situation. You just never know, do you? I do not know. I do not know, I hope it is not to do with the colour of skin, but it might be, isn't it? The fact that they are European. It does feel close to home. —Jamie.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine began on the 24th of February 2022 triggering one of the largest human displacement crises in modern history (Garbers et al., 2023). Nearly one-third of Ukrainians were forced from their homes, 7.8 million went to Europe, of which 4.8 million

registered for temporary protective status (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2023). In the UK, the government initiated a bespoke sponsorship scheme for Ukrainians called 'Homes for Ukraine' (HfU). HfU affords temporary protection to displaced Ukrainians including visa access and the right to work for up to three years.¹ The HfU is a hosting program meaning that Ukrainians were initially provided housing with volunteer hosts (House of Commons Library, 2023a). An unprecedented number of people came forward and volunteered to open their homes: news outlets reported over 100,000 Britons had registered their interest within a day of the scheme's launch (Elgot, 2022). As of June 2023, the HfU scheme had received 198,800 applications, 163,400 applications were approved, and 125,000 Ukrainians have arrived (Home Office and UK Visas and Immigration, 2023).

The hosting scheme required mass public mobilisation and participation to make it 'successful.' Specifically, the scheme relied on the British public to accommodate Ukrainians - hosting them within the intimate spaces of their homes, often facilitating their international moves and assisting them in accessing public welfare once in the UK. There has yet been limited analysis of how the government achieved this

* Corresponding author. Colorado Mesa University, USA.

E-mail address: alumley-sapan@coloradomesa.edu (A. Lumley-Sapanski).

¹ The HfU was initially 3 years - now it is only up to 18 months. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-visa-under-the-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme#how-long-you-can-stay>.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2025.103446>

Received 7 July 2023; Received in revised form 6 August 2025; Accepted 9 November 2025

Available online 2 December 2025

0962-6298/© 2025 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

unprecedented response in a time otherwise marked by hostility towards refugees and migrants (see for example [Bowling & Westenra, 2020](#)). To this end, this paper explores the motivations of hosts within the Ukrainian hosting scheme seeking to understand why British hosts chose to participate.

We find that hosts extended hospitality to Ukrainians because Ukrainians were rendered similar ([Kallio, 2016](#)), safe and deserving by the HfU program design, government language and media discourses. Building on Caroline Nagel's work on the politics of sameness and difference ([Nagel, 2002a](#)), we see how the HfU program design and associated discourses conceptualized and created a sense of shared cultural, social, and geographic proximity. The sense of their proximity encouraged hosts to see Ukrainians as deserving and simultaneously drove a sense of responsibility to participate in the 'war effort.' The three common forms of proximity identified within host interviews were: perceptions of common identity of guest and host as members of a bounded European community, shared geopolitical threat to that same European community (and the spatialized proximity of the threat), and the ability of the British public to situate Ukrainians within a collective British memory of war time hosting. In the latter case, proximity was not about host and guest proximity, but British host identities as proximate to an idealized British identity and perceptions of Ukrainians as similar to WWII European displaced. We use proximity here to define a sense of nearness that is relational and can be between people and people, places, or narratives.

In sum, motivations for hosting arose from a sense of relational responsibility ([Darling, 2009](#)) emerging from perceived proximity: Ukrainians were rendered familiar through a process of recognition mobilized in state programs and media discourses. Welcome was extended in as much because of perceptions of Ukrainian proximity to Britishness, as Britishness was reimagined or re-bounded in these discourses such that Ukrainian displaced persons belonged. Hospitality was offered selectively based on these criteria and decisions over admission and sponsorship were devolved to hosts. We place these findings within the larger political geography literature showing how the HfU functions as a border making process that differentiates eligibility for protection based on forms of proximity.

2. Homes for Ukraine and alternative humanitarian pathways

Of the eight million displaced Ukrainians now in Europe, four million have applied for temporary status within the European Union and a further 352,000 Ukrainians have applied for UK visas ([UKVI, 2024](#)). The UK adopted a set of three measures to support displaced Ukrainians, one of which was the Homes for Ukraine scheme (HfU).² It was launched by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and delivered in conjunction with UK Visa and Immigration on March 14, 2022 ([UK Department of Levelling Up, 2022](#)).^{3 4}

The HfU is a population specific, humanitarian support pathway enabling Ukrainians with no UK connections to be hosted temporarily and to reside in the UK for up to three years. Prior to arrival in the UK, Ukrainian applicants identified and matched with a sponsor. Matches

were made online through social media, and other public chat forums. To access the HfU scheme, Ukrainians applied for a visa online and were vetted by the government. Hosts likewise had to pass a background check and screening ([Garbers et al., 2023](#); [United Kingdom House of Commons Library, 2023a](#); [United Kingdom House of Commons Library, 2023b](#)).⁵ Hosts were asked to host for a minimum of six months.

Ukrainians accepted to the scheme had immediate access to benefits and the right to work ([United Kingdom House of Commons Library, 2023a](#); [United Kingdom House of Commons Library, 2023b](#); [Garbers et al., 2023](#)). The government chose to waive health care and visa fees. The government also provided funds for the accommodation. Each host was given a monthly payment initially set at £350 per month for up to 12-months after which point it increased to £500 ([Home Office, 2023a](#)).⁶ No limit was put on the number of people that could apply to come through the scheme ([Garbers et al., 2023](#)).

The HfU scheme has many similarities to other UK resettlement schemes on which its structure is based. The UK has previously offered bespoke settlement and support in response to emergent population specific needs. These have included expelled or displaced Ugandans, Vietnamese, Bosnians, Kosovars, Afghans, Hong Kongers, and Syrians ([Home Office, 2021](#); [Phillimore et al., 2022](#)). Unlike the HfU which is largely reliant on individual hosts to screen Ukrainians for admissions, these programs were explicit about individual eligibility criteria.⁸ Programs like the Afghan or Syrian settlement programs were restricted to those most at risk, inclusive of those with identity characteristics that made them vulnerable and/or those allied with UK or western forces ([Home Office, 2017](#); [United Kingdom National Audit Office, 2016](#)).

For people with refugee status or humanitarian protection status determined prior to arrival, the UK offers the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS, 2021 – ongoing), Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS, 2016 – ongoing) and Mandate Resettlement Scheme (MRS, 1995 – ongoing) ([Phillimore et al., 2022](#); [Williams Walsh & Jorgensen, 1 July 2024](#); [United Kingdom Home Office, 2024](#)). To enter via these routes, persons must be pre-screened and receive refugee status or another form of humanitarian protection from abroad. Eligibility criteria restrict admissions to those with identified high needs including medical needs, being a survivor of torture or being a vulnerable woman or child. If admitted, individuals are granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK, access to public services, support, welfare benefits and the labour market. This is the smallest humanitarian admission category and typically only a few hundred people come annually ([Williams Walsh and Jorgensen, 2024](#)).

Finally, the most common route of entry to the UK for those seeking protection is asylum seeking; in 2023, alone 84,000 asylum seekers arrived to the UK, accounting for 11 % of all immigrants ([House of Commons Library, 2024](#); [House of Commons, 2023b](#)). However, not all asylum seekers receive asylum, and consequently are not permitted to

⁵ Sponsors/hosts can live anywhere in the UK and must be British or Irish Citizens or have the right to live in the UK permanently ([Garbers et al., 2023](#)).

⁶ The scheme was developed, administered and implemented by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in conjunction with the Home Office. The Home Office deals with visas and sponsors, while the DLUHC deals with post arrival arrangements including local government. It is abnormal in the involvement of the DLUHC in that the Home Office typically negotiates housing for asylum seekers with local authorities and third-party actors. This moves the program's oversight from the central immigration enforcement department. See William Walsh and Jorgensen 2024 for further discussion.

⁷ These numbers have subsequently changed. For the first 12 months (through 1 April 2025) hosts received, £350 a month. This increased to £500 after 12 months. After April 2025, all hosts received a flat rate of £350 a month. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/becoming-a-sponsor-homes-for-ukraine>.

⁸ This is ten times the number of Syrians who entered over a ten-year period ([House of Commons Library, 2024](#); [Williams Walsh & Jorgensen, 1 July 2024](#); [Garbers et al., 2023](#)).

² These included the Ukrainian Extension Scheme - temporary visa concessions and extensions for Ukrainians already in the UK when the war broke out; The Ukrainian Family Scheme - a family visa route that allows family members to join their family based in the UK; as well as the HfU.

³ The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It is one of 24 ministerial departments with responsibilities including job growth, strengthening communities and local governments ([Ministry of Housing, n.d.](#)).

⁴ The scheme was delivered in conjunction with UK Visas and Immigration, a department of the Home Office, who have the responsibility and mandate to alter immigration rules, changes that were required for these measures to be adopted ([Ministry of Housing, 2023](#); [UKVI, 2023](#)).

stay. Unlike refugees, asylum seekers must file for asylum and then await determination of their status and the right to remain from within the UK. Status determination currently takes an average of 21 months (Cuibus et al., 2024). The rights of asylum seekers are restricted during the asylum determination process; chiefly, individuals do not automatically receive the right to work and can standardly only apply for permission to work after 12 months if their claim is still outstanding, and, the job they want is on the Shortage Occupational List (UKVI, 2024). Instead, asylum seekers living independently receive a weekly stipend of £39.63 to cover their basic needs (Ahlberg & Granada, 2022) while those in catered asylum accommodation receive about £8 per week (Home Office, 2024b). The UK provides asylum seekers dispersed housing in communal living situations (Bakker et al., 2016; UNHCR n. d.). The Home Office—the UK's ministerial department responsible amongst other things for immigration—may move asylum seekers repeatedly during the process of status determination (Bakker et al., 2016; Kissoon, 2010). After receiving asylum, individuals are entitled to the same rights as resettled refugees including the right to work and indefinite leave to remain (i.e., permanent status) (Ahlberg & Granada, 2022).⁹

The HfU is thus, one program for humanitarian admission amongst others. The HfU shares aspects of the program structure with those discussed above. The reliance on individual hosts for housing and sponsorship, and the agency that guests have in choosing their hosts are two of the more significant differences between this program and the other settlement schemes. Perhaps most significant is the lack of right to permanently settle via the HfU.

3. Methods and data

This research emerged from a larger project aimed to understand hosting experiences and to gain an understanding of people's motivations for volunteering to be a part of the HfU scheme. A third sector hosting organisation planned to use the data that informs this research to shape future host recruitment activities. The study employed a mixed-methods, qualitative approach employing a desk-based evidence review of secondary sources, semi-structured interviews, and a survey.

The third sector hosting organisation partnered with the research team to recruit participants. They advertised and recruited hosts in the HfU scheme willing to participate in a survey or interview. The JISC online platform hosted the survey. Two formats—surveys and interviews, were offered to encourage host participation and to reach a wide number of hosts. The team also launched a website to provide additional information for those considering participation in the research project, including instructions for participating in an interview and links to the surveys.

Survey and the interview questions focused on gaining an understanding of why people had chosen to host. The questions were to help us understand: why people hosted, what could make hosting better, and how could learning from HfU improve future hosting schemes? Participants were able to choose to participate in one of two primary data collection methods and could opt to complete a survey or to participate

in a semi-structured interview.

Interviews were recorded with permission of participants. These recordings were manually transcribed by the researchers and uploaded into NVivo qualitative coding software. Both surveys and transcripts were manually coded using NVIVO. A deductive coding approach was used initially to identify codes and to create a shared codebook. During the coding process the research team expanded the set of codes to accommodate emerging themes identified inductively as coding proceeded. Key coded themes include practical elements of the HfU scheme, identifying, and matching with guests, the support in place for guests and hosts, financial benefits, challenges, interactions with other crises and their motivations for being involved. Additionally, we collected host and guest demographic information, and stay information including length, location and unit size.

Thirty-five interviews and surveys were conducted, thirty-one of whom were with households currently hosting a Ukrainian or Ukrainians. Sixteen households participated in an interview with the remaining households (19) submitting answers via a survey. Seventy-four people from Ukraine were hosted across the thirty-one placements (72 in placement at the time of the research).

All participating hosts identified as white, the majority were British citizens from birth (91 %) and were married (71 %). Most hosts owned their properties (91 %), which on average had at least three bedrooms. Thirteen of the hosting households were retired (37 %) while eighteen households engaged in paid employment (51 %). Hosts ages ranged from 33 to 77 with an average age of fifty-five. Eleven host households had children in them (31 %) – the ages of children in host families ranged from under a year to into their twenties. Forty-eight percent of hosts were aged between 50 and 69 and 33 % of homes had host children residing in them. Most guests were couples, family units or groups of friends (77 %) as opposed to single individuals. Three homes hosted multi-generational family units, three homes hosted a couple, eight homes hosted a single and twelve homes hosted a mother with her child or children.

4. Framing the deserving: Motivating hosting through selective narratives

"Hospitality in theory and practice relates to crossing boundaries ('Come in, come in') or thresholds ... including those between self and other, private and public, inside and outside, individual and collective, personal and political, emotional and rational, generous and economic ..." (Still, 2010)

As Still (2010) captures above, hosting (as an act of hospitality) is an inherently geopolitical act that involves the transgression of national borders, and of the threshold between public and private space. In schemes that involve sponsorship, such as the HfU, hosts take on the role of the border—selectively screening and matching with migrants as a precursor to their admission. As such, hosting is an exceptional act politically and personally.

In contemporary migration governance, hosting also subverts the public-private divide that characterizes migrant welcome and accommodation (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Lumley-Sapanski & Dotsey, 2022). Hosting takes place in the intimacy of shared private space which contrasts to the use of temporary and often distant housing for humanitarian protection seekers. In so doing, hosting disrupts the social and spatial containment of 'the other' typified by asylum dispersal policies and the resulting spatial marginalization of asylum seekers (Mason & Hughes, 2024). By bringing guests into the private home, hosting also challenges the hostile environment policies built upon we/them divides which justifies the spatial marginalization of refugee or asylum seekers (Boccagni and Giudici, 2022; p. 788).

Yet, hosting also functions simultaneously as a bordering process; in affirming who is welcome through sponsorship and hosting, the HfU, and similar hosting schemes, reinforce hostile environment policies. Not

⁹ Asylum is protection given by a country to someone fleeing from persecution in their own country and is also covered by the 1951 Convention (Article 1). To seek protection via asylum, an individual must meet the universal definition of a refugee contained in 'Article 1(A)(2) of the 1951 Convention, as amended by its 1967 Protocol, defining a refugee as someone who: "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." (Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951).

all migrant 'strangers' are made eligible for hosting schemes or equally received by hosts. States and other intermediary actors—in this case hosts—mediate who is eligible for admission or hosting and the terms of the encounter (Hakli & Kallio, 2021). Said intermediaries determine guest worthiness or deservingness for inclusion (Sperandio, 2025).

These interpretations are made based on images outside of a guest's control; guests are socially constructed by dominant representations (Brighenti, 2007) and the perceived capacity for incorporation (Sperandio, 2025). Migrants are represented by 'generalized bodies' and 'abstracted from personhood' (Kallio, 2016). Histories of interaction and implicit power dynamics overwrite their individual identities (Hakli and Kallio, 2021; Kallio, 2016; Ahmed, 2004) and inform who is felt to belong and who is not (Ahmed, 2004; Hakli & Kallio, 2021; Kallio, 2016). Some migrants are perceived as strangers, viewed as a threat, their presence a potential source of 'pollution' to the existing community (Sibley, 1995 in Ahmed, 2000, p. 53). Other narratives, shape the perception of sameness (Nagel 2002) or familiarity (Carpi & Pinar Şenoğuz, 2019; Hakli & Kallio, 2021; Kallio, 2016), fostered through selective representation and imagery. People, migrants, are made similarly discursively with impacts for their incorporation through these processes of recognition (Ahmed, 2000) and subjectification (Kallio, 2016).

Caroline Nagel's work on assimilation is instructive in this regard (Nagel, 2002a; Nagel, 2002b). In this work, she critiques the essentialization of assimilation processes in dominant literature, and their characterization as a natural or ecological process. She understands assimilation as a politics of sameness 'bound up with the construction and regulation of political space at multiple scales' (Nagel, 2002b). Assimilation requires that the host society undergo a 'political negotiation of racial categories and strategic definition of social proximity and distance' (Nagel, 2002a). Mediating forces determine legal membership, access to rights, and social inclusion and with it potential for assimilation (Nagel, 2002b). Thus, assimilation is not the apolitical adoption of 'mainstream' cultural markers by newcomers but a reinterpretation of social difference or sameness that defines the bounds of society and the new migrant in relation.

This conceptualization of assimilation and particularly the role of mediating forces in negotiating social proximity and distance has parallels to the forces and processes through which hosting motivations are elicited. Geographic scholarship of hospitality has focused on feelings of sameness, propinquity or proximity as the basis for acts of hospitality versus acts of hostility (Derrida, 2000; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Carpi & Pinar Sanoguz 2019; Gill et al., 2022). As in, what motivates responsibility to others wherein responsibility is conceived as 'the requirement to do something about it' (i.e. host) (Massey, 2004, p. 9)? And in relation to migrant 'others,' what motivates responsibility to others when welcome challenges 'mainstream views and boundaries of home'? (Boccagni & Giudici, 2022).

Within geography, spatial proximity has been key to explanations for extensions of hospitality (see Barnett & Land, 2007; Dikec et al., 2009; Gill et al., 2022; Glover, 1999 in Darling (2009a); Massey, 2009; Massey, 2004 for discussion). This is based on the premise that shared geography fosters responsibility or obligation to others, even unknown others. It is rooted in ideas of sameness, from geographic theory that near things are more similar than distant things and therefore, people who live near to one another will have more in common and therefore be more likely to have empathy for and extend hospitality to those with shared geography and characteristics (Tobler, 1970). Massey,

'Certainly, in Western societies, there is a hegemonic geography of care, responsibility which takes the form of a nested set of Russian dolls. First there is 'home', then perhaps place or locality, then nation, and so on. There is a kind of accepted understanding that we care first for, and have our first responsibilities towards, those nearest in. There are two qualities of this geography which stand out: it is utterly territorial, and it proceeds outwards from the small and near at hand.' (Massey, 2004, p. 9).

Yet geographers have largely rejected this idea. Much of the

argument follows the arguments of Doreen Massey's and her contributions to the field of spatial thought and in particular the relational production of space (see Kitchin, 2016 for summary). Massey challenged the fixity of place, and the idea of places as boxes that contain attributes or surfaces bearing inscription. Instead, Massey's work showed place as a trajectory: an ongoing production and negotiation within and without (Massey, 1995). In this reading, places derive meaning and identities from histories of and specificities of interactions with 'elsewhere' (Massey, 1994). Memories, temporalities, and histories—inform both the place and intersubjectively the members (Massey, 2004). As such, places are constantly reworked and contested through social networks and interrelations with 'outside,' including place based and individual relationships to others (Massey, 2008). Place, and perceptions of place and the people in them are relationally interpreted and given meaning.

These meanings shape interpretations of geographic and sociospatial proximity on which sentiments of belonging, inclusion and exclusion are derived (Massey, 2004; Darling 2009). Perceptions of and responsibility to proximate and distant 'others' arise from perceived proximity (Massey, 2004). While spatial locus and distance inform perceptions of place and proximity, temporality is an interrelated factor. Memories, inheritance and shared histories have temporal elements in terms of length of exposure, stage of life course and timing (Barnett, 2005). Temporality, with distance and other connectivities, inform the relational construction of others' proximity and are paramount to offers of hospitality.

In the case of the UK, a national discourse of hospitality derived from a history of (selectively) welcoming the displaced motivates current hosts. The government defines itself as a 'welcoming, hospitable, generous and tolerant nation' (Bernhardt, 2023) ... 'it is a matter of national pride that persecuted people have been able to find refuge in this country' (Pirouet, 2001). The self-proclaimed 'exemplary hospitality' (Gibson, 2016) arises from a shared sense of European consciousness—a commitment to fellow Europeans. Most often it is the role of the British public in Kindertransport during WWII and specifically, the role of the British public in admitting, housing, and protecting 10,000 Jewish children that has been 'instrumentalised in relation to constructs of Britishness/Englishness' (Kushner, 2018). The act of hospitality and the role of the British as hosts is celebrated as British and deployed during, for instance, the London Olympics (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014).

This ethic, or a variation therein, was used in the marketing of the HfU program and solicitation of hosts. When the HfU scheme was announced Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove released the following statement, *'The United Kingdom has a long and proud history of helping others in their hour of need and our new Homes for Ukraine scheme offers a lifeline to those who have been forced to flee'* (United Kingdom Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and The Rt hon Michael Gove MP, 2022). This combined with the framing of the displaced, the shared threat and cultural affinity (Western/European proximity), drove hosts sentiments of responsibility.

4.1. Discourses and depictions of Ukrainians

The reception and response to refugees and the displaced more broadly is shaped by dominant institutional and discursive domains (Malkki, 1995). The contemporary image of 'refugeeism' was born post-WWII and is associated with the machination of the aid machine and the technologies used to contain and protect the population (Malkki, 1995). Through the spatialization of refugee camps and the resettlement processes administered by global multilaterals, the dominant imagery of refugeeism constituted by managed concentration, abject poverty and destitution was born.

The image of displaced Ukrainians has been made outside the mold of the essentialized refugee. In the case of Ukrainians, media depictions and dominant narratives are credited with influencing the public's sense of 'Ukrainian deservingness.' Discursive and semiotic analysis of media

portrayals of Ukrainians have found that Ukrainians are portrayed as deserving and vulnerable (Fekre, 2023; Sambaraju & Shrikant, 2023). The reach of these representations was pervasive and constant; media scholars have described this as the most broadcast war on social media platforms (Fekre, 2023) granting unparalleled mainstream access to the conflict (Arda, 2022). Collectively, these portrayals reduce the 'temporal, geographical, and cultural distance' and reinforce the proximity of the Ukrainian conflict. In terms of hosting, hosts identified these narratives in their descriptions of hosting motivations.

Analysis of UK and European media sources has identified the dominant representation of Ukrainians as 'similar' and 'civilized,' overwhelmingly 'favourable' (Blomberg, 2023; Fekre, 2023; Sambaraju & Shrikant, 2023). These analysis point to repetition of four themes within the media that shaped the perceived social and cultural proximity of Ukrainians (Fekre, 2023; Sambaraju & Shrikant, 2023). First, images and narratives depicted women and children. Their vulnerability and the need to protect them was emphasised alongside the sacrifice of men or those who stayed behind (Fekre, 2023; Sambaraju & Shrikant, 2023). Second, the media selectively focused on the ideas of the 'poor' but grateful refugees. This narrative reinforced the need the group had for help. Rather than portrayal violence and conflict, and the threat of conflict, this narrative played on the idea of welcoming the population and the opportunity to contribute (Blomberg, 2023; Fekre, 2023). Third, the 'Ukrainian' is represented as an educated, hard-working and competent refugee. This distinguishes Ukrainians from the imagined African or Asian refugee who is depicted as arriving devoid of skills or knowledge (Blomberg, 2023; Fekre, 2023). Finally, the familiar neighbour trope was used to elicit familiarity and comfort. The familiar neighbour language brought the Ukrainian closer and constructed Ukrainians as non-threatening. The familiar neighbour trope was rooted in several areas of perceived commonality, including political and cultural proximity (Bayoumi, 2022; Sambaraju & Shrikant, 2023).

Social media analysis indicates a similar pattern. Individual use of social media posts/stories functioned to create cultural proximity between Ukrainians and 'western audiences' (Arda, 2022). These representations of Ukrainian displaced people are linked to sentiments of perceived deservingness for host populations (Rosstalnyj, 2022). In turn, this translated to empathy and support for a humanitarian response (Arda, 2022).

The perception of shared values and the accessibility of war imagery in social media made the threat and loss more tangible and proximate for viewers. This combined with the perception of Russia's superior military power and Ukraine's underdog status in general, reinforced a perception of Russia as a bully and 'well-known' enemy (Rosstalnyj, 2022). That shared enemy status depicted in the brutality of the invasion juxtaposed to the humanity of the social media users on the platform drew a sympathetic audience. The fact that these scenes took place in architecturally similar landscapes to those of Western viewers further contributed to the humanisation of victims (Rosstalnyj, 2022).

Further, semiotic analysis has identified similar themes in photographic depictions. Images of Ukrainians and Ukraine used in media were more likely to portray women, children, and elderly people than men. Analysis of the composition and portrayal of people within photographs indicated that, 'there did not seem to be almost any sort of negative view of Ukrainian refugees. A lot of images had the right aspects and looked the right way to be able to evoke empathy and compassion.' (Wennerstrom, 2023, p. 31). When the media chose to represent men, the men were soldiers or volunteers assisting refugees. This representation is partially due to Ukrainian governance decisions about the role of men in the conflict, but also underscores the gendered narrative of vulnerability. These images reflect a particular form of 'ideal' victim (Wennerstrom, 2023) that evoked public sympathy (Fekre, 2023).

5. Constructing proximity & deconstructing borders: the HfU scheme

Building on this literature, this work explores how the situation of Ukrainian displaced persons came to elicit the response of the British public such that they were willing to take them into their homes and expend public money to facilitate their absorption. Findings indicate that the governmental response together with the media portrayals of the conflict and those it was impacting created a sense of proximity which motivated participation. Proximity took three interlinking forms: geopolitical, socio-cultural, and historical narrative. Membership within a shared European community and the obligations of that membership were specifically important. Hosts identified the importance of common orientations between Ukrainians and themselves, a perception of shared culture and a common threat, as well as an ability to see the hosting scheme as similar to the British public's response during the Kindertransport programme of WWII. In turn, the right to public services, the right to work, and spatial proximity to British public differently situated Ukrainians for positive economic and cultural absorption. All three forms of proximity were relational and negotiated in reference to the conflict, shared histories, and perceptions of commonalities.

5.1. Cultural and spatial proximity of the Ukrainian conflict and Ukrainian displaced

For British hosts, popular media and government narratives contributed to perceptions or a belief in Ukrainians as members of a European 'shared community' (Bocagni & Giudici, 2022). This depiction, the evocation and visibility of their Europeanness in particular, was essential to reconfiguring them as 'belonging' in the UK (Bocagni & Giudici, 2022). Their European identity and the threat to that European identity, presented by the Russian invasion, situated them within a historical memory of prior Russian threat (Barnett, 2005). This allowed hosts in turn to 'take on a (historic) role' (Barnett, 2005) as host similar to that of previous generations and celebrated by the public.

As in the media depiction, Ukraine's location in Europe was a crucial factor in the decision of hosts to take on Ukrainian guests. This was for three key reasons. First, Ukraine was described as geographically close. The geographic proximity of Ukraine meant that the conflict felt—to hosts—more likely to spill over. This is not to say that Ukraine was or is particularly spatially close to the UK, but rather that it is a part of a spatially bounded European community. The idea that Russia had attacked a European state, drove host fears of a threat to the UK and underscored a need for a unified European effort to combat a shared enemy. Hosts described their willingness to host as a duty, or a response to show their political opposition to Putin and the invasion of Europe. In the words of host Ben, 'I think the proximity of the war and of Ukraine, and the fact that it is Europe, I could drive there in just over a day ... It seemed close to home' (Ben). The spatial distance combined with the threat of shared common enemy were important drivers for hosts.

The 'annulment of distance' (Barnett, 2005) between the two nations was to an extent achieved through narratives of cultural affinity in media and government. These sentiments trickled through to interviewed hosts. Interviewed hosts described the conflict as 'close to home' both physically in terms of reach, but also socio-politically. Interviewees commented that they understood the potential reach of the conflict and could see themselves within it based on the depiction of the victims and the shared cultural references. The depiction of their similarities—namely the shared European cultural identity—decreased the perceived 'refugee burden' (Zetter, 2012). To hosts, the cultural affinity meant it would be more likely for Ukrainians to find and keep employment, learn the language, and adjust. Ukrainians, as Carpi and Pinar Şenoğuz (2019) have written, are 'pre known'. A host Nick exemplified this in his comments 'that is still definitely a driving force ... the fact that the Ukrainians are Europeans probably played a role ... they fit the employment profile very well. They are easy to put into employment. Once we

got the language skills issue sorted out- and that is the biggest barrier with Ukrainians- but generally, educationally, and with their own work backgrounds, they are sort of used to the environment we've got here in the UK. Afghans and Syrian refugees and Africans, you know, Somalis and Ethiopians - less so, and they require an awful lot more support (Nick). Hosts speak to the comparative worthiness of various groups for admission, based on their perceived capacity for settlement.

Hosts continuously juxtaposed Ukrainians to Syrians and Afghani refugees or migrants, in their exceptionalism which served to justify the host preferences. Syrians and Afghans were characterised as less culturally similar and therefore more difficult to integrate by hosts. Hosts identified Ukrainians as Europeans and based on this, hosts assumed they shared culture. Their Europeaness and thus their similarities were substantiated by their similar work histories and similar goals, like education. Criticisms of other groups by hosts do not show understanding of the differences in legal provisions made to HfU participants in comparison to other displaced populations. The critiques overlook the barriers faced by other groups in accessing employment, gaining employment skills, and transferring their skills during protracted displacement, or annexation in hotels or boats while they await status determination. As Derrida has written, 'a political space sets the conditions for the nature or form of hospitality' (Derrida, 2000a). Laws produce differences in spatial access and hierarchies of rights differentially marginalizing individuals (Anderson, 2008; Anderson & Andrej-savic, 2008).

Second, the threat to Ukraine was perceived as a threat to European and Western cultures. The conflict threatened or deprived Ukrainians of activities for which British hosts shared an affinity. Hosts referenced activities, like attending university, that the conflict robbed from the families they hosted, *'these are people who have hopes and dreams, the girl was at University in Odessa, and that's all stopped. And the younger girls she had finished the sixth form and was going to go off to university and it is the injustice of it all'* (Andrew). As with Arda (2022), the activities in which Ukrainians were engaged and the landscape in which the violence was taking place in the media was relatable. This made the loss relevant and palpable for hosts.

In this case the visible destruction of 'western life' evoked the notion of shared European 'kinship' ties which motivated hosting (Carpi & Senoguz, 2019). Again, another interviewee Alice went on: *'people relate more to [Ukrainian] people because they are in Europe. We find it harder, and it is wrong that we are like this, but we do find it harder to relate to Syrian refugees or Afghan refugees. But to see people who live similar lives to us being in that situation, I think that really affected people'* (Alice). There is a subtext built on assumptions of Ukrainians as white and Christian that appears in host justification for hosting. This generalized sense of threat to people with 'similar lives' —was a named motivating factor for hosting.

Third, hosts described the conflict resulting from the Russian invasion as a once in a lifetime event in Europe, an anomaly which therefore deserved a humanitarian response. Hosts contrasted the perceived abnormality of conflict in Europe with ongoing conflict in places like Afghanistan, Africa, or the Middle East. The collectively held perception of peace in Europe (and the perceived threat to it) (Norum, 2018) was central to hosting as Jamie highlighted, *'What other crises am I aware of? Not many. I mean, I know there's loads in Africa, but yeah'* (Jamie). The conflict was unusual, exceptional, and therefore victims warranted protection.

That continuity of ongoing conflict elsewhere was 'naturalised,' endemic to a category of places 'outside' a community of perceived shared values (e.g. peace). The perpetuity of violence elsewhere rather than the exceptionalism of the Ukrainian conflict meant that to hosts 'othered' populations were less needy or less deserving of hosting. The ongoing nature of those conflicts and their naturalisation in non-European spaces did not elicit the same response to people displaced, as Alice described *'It is the first time in Europe that we have seen kind of ... No, that is not true, is it? Because a long time ago now we had all the Bosnia*

thing and what have you. But I think it is possibly the media and things, that I have just been able to see more of it and understand it a bit better, if anyone can understand it' (Alice). Another host Kate emphasised the length of the conflict in Afghanistan: *'I guess lots of those Middle Eastern countries have had their moments over the last however many years, but I would not be able to actually give you details ... And I suppose if I am being honest, I am more of aware that a European situation, even if it is an Eastern European situation, feels sort of closer'* (Kate). Perceptions of ongoing violence, irrespective of cause, seemed to increase sense of cultural, spatial, and social distance, diminishing willingness to host.

Since the invasion of Ukraine, the media and the British governmental response has shaped an image of Ukrainian refugees that elicits a sympathetic response based around cultural, social, and geographic proximity. The media has at times used explicitly racialised language to describe Ukrainians as different to other 'refugee groups' (Blomberg, 2023) as well as centring depictions of Ukrainians using cultural reference points premised on likeness to Western Europeans (Ellison & Andrews, 2022). In so doing, hosts presented Ukrainian experiences as anomalous and therefore more deserving to those of other displaced groups and conflict zones (Sambaraju & Shrikant, 2023). This allows for differentiated welcome to Ukrainians, in contrast to other rejected European groups like Albanians; the drivers of migration contrast between the two groups with Ukrainians seen as forced migrants while Albanians as economic migrants (O'Callaghan, 2023). Thus, while both cultural affinity and proximity to a shared bounded community were important to evoking host responsibility, the characteristics of displacement and shared threat was a critical factor.

5.2. Intent and need: seeing the similarity of Ukrainians to those fleeing violence in WWII

'Well, this is Europe. People have grandparents who have evacuees during the Second World War. And my mother-in-law is in her eighties, and had evacuees staying in Devon, Herefordshire, that sort of thing. And she spoke about having evacuees from London is a similar sort of spirit. It is a blitz spirit, isn't it?' Interview, Ben.

In marketing the programme, the government framing constructed Ukrainians in the image of previous victims of WWII; this was significant in motivating hosts. In public statements, the government encouraged the British public to see Ukrainians similarly to hosted children during the Kindertransport program: *'In 1939 the people of the UK opened their hearts and homes to children fleeing from the Nazis and we look back on that 'Kindertransport' as an act of culture-defining hospitality. With the invasion of Ukraine, the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war is unfolding'* (Sanctuary Foundation Director, Dr Krish Kandiah in Press Release, in UK Department of Levelling Up (2022)). This representation also creates a discursive bridge for the British public with a conflict to which their families contributed. The state used the evocation of pride in hospitality (El-Abed, 2014), to engender responsibility in hosts. The public saw themselves in a similar role with a remade enemy, contributing to a similarly positioned war effort. In this case, this response was nationalistic rather than a subversion of state hostile policies (Mason & Hughes, 2024).

Several hosts had parents who had hosted children or refugees during the World War II, and this served as rational for accepting responsibility. Hosting allowed hosts to embody familial acts of hospitality of which they were proud. Others had grandparents and parents who had been victims and fled concentration camps or the conflict and had relied on acts of hospitality for survival. World War II and the memory of family dependency on willing hosts was a motivation for interviewees in that case, like Rob, *'My father was a refugee. He was in the Auschwitz concentration camp. So, he came over here after the war. He was in the holding camp for a long time, and he found it difficult to find somebody to help'* (Rob). In this case, the individual was fulfilling a vital role on which their family depended. Hosting was seen as a familial duty or essential to supporting family life.

The portrayal of the displaced Ukrainian population as similar to WWII victims shaped host responses of welcome. Hosts like Zoe below described it both in terms of the similarity of the British role, and the similarity of the characteristics of displaced victims, *'I'm just mindful of things like, in the Second World War, people ... was it Anne Frank ... people taking in Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany'* (Zoe). The social and cultural proximity achieved by depicting Ukrainians as Europeans under threat by WWII foes was a powerful motivator:

'If that were my sister, my daughter, I would like to think somebody would open their homes - and I am not risking my life. People risked their lives during the war to house a Jewish family and so on. Would I be brave enough? I don't know. That is a different ball game, but not enough countries opened their doors, and it is somewhat personal for me. I am not Jewish myself, but my mum's best friend was Jewish. We were brought up to celebrate Passover and Hanukkah and so on and likewise Christmas. And I have seen the tattoos. I have had other personal experiences with survivors ... I just think to myself, my God, you know? We need to be more humane; we need to do more to help each other. And so that is why I did it.' (Helen)

This was relational, as in hosts related to the experiences of the Ukrainians based on their own experiences of displacements or exposure to previous generations of victims. This framing emphasised the hospitality on which their family members had relied and their sentiment that they could 'repay' the favour. Hosts spoke to the necessity of hosting during WWII as similar to now. The responsibility to prior generations as well as displaced Ukrainians, combined with the scale of the crisis and its proximity, drove responsibility for hosts. Albert speaks to this,

'In my lifetime this is the biggest human made crisis in a sense. So, I know our parents were war children, they were evacuated and relied on the hospitality of others too. And for the first time in my lifetime, that sort of need has presented ... I think being of the generation whose parents went through that, you know. They lived through the Second World War and obviously we feel a connection to that time, and God forbid that we are heading for a third World War, but I mean there are parallels.' (Albert).

From this vantage point, hosts wanted to be a part of this generation's duty served by contributing to war efforts. This speaks to the age of hosts and their generation; they had memories of WWII passed along intergenerationally that shaped their perceptions of Europe. The pride was communicated rather than lived and speaks to the relational temporal element (Barnett, 2005) of proximity.

5.3. The role of gender and family status: creating a sense of worth and vulnerability

'I am very aware that it is just the men coming over and you did not see the women. I would not do it [host] them because they are just looking out for themselves, and it was selfish that the women stayed, and the men were getting out. It is not quite right that. I am sure it is not all like that, but that is how it was portrayed on the news In Ukraine they were taking a stand and looking after the women, so it is completely different for me' (Harry).

The common depiction of bogus asylum seekers prevalent in UK rhetoric about migrants was essentially absent in the framing of Ukrainians (Bowling & Westenna, 2020; O'Callaghan, 2023). The governmental websites and media coverage framed the Ukrainian displaced as vulnerable and unthreatening. These depictions reference 'families' and 'courage,' as well as referring to Ukraine as a great country, *'The courage shown by the Ukrainian people in the face of devastation caused by the invasion of their great country is nothing short of remarkable'* (UK Department of Levelling Up, 2022). These depictions were a result of the emigration policies in place within Ukraine: Ukraine barred military age men from exiting the country and so women travelled alone with children. The visibility of vulnerable women and children traveling alone played in to

paternalistic ideas that hosts could fulfil in their role as hosts. The incomplete family structure also helped in convincing hosts that the Ukrainians were not intent on staying and therefore the burden would be less on them, and the nation.

Common depictions of other groups of refugees and asylum seekers are as 'faceless' masses, without individual characteristics. Their identities were 'reduced to generalized bodies' whose individualized experiences were not meaningful (Hakli & Kallio, 2021). Because refugees and asylum seekers are not physically present in public spaces due to policies, they have few opportunities to articulate their individual identities (Hakli & Kallio, 2021). While these tropes take multiple forms the dominant is of the undeserving or clandestine refugee most commonly depicted as a single male; perhaps second most common, the dependent and child-like refugee (ibid).

However, while Ukrainians were depicted en masse it was in their sense of deservingness for protection. A component of this was the need to protect women and children seen as particularly vulnerable. Some hosts situated their desire to help and specifically to help women and children within Judaeo-Christian narratives,

'The day after it was first suggested to us that this might be a good match, I was reading in my Bible. This was the verse in my reading for the day, which was so bizarre, I have never seen this before, but it says to defend the fatherless and the widow, and love the foreigner residing among you by giving them food and clothing. And we thought, both the widow and the fatherless, what are we going to be doing on a very basic level is providing food and clothing, you know. And when I said to [host name male], look at this there's funny verse tucked away in Deuteronomy which isn't a book that you normally go to for light relief, we thought, well, it kind of all feels good, and we had a real sense of peace about it.' (Jon).

Further, the ability to screen potential guests allowed hosts to interface with Ukrainians. They were not anonymous, instead the HfU matching process humanized them. This helped create personal connections.

Additionally, hosts cited the decision of men to stay behind and fight in the Ukraine as a reason for hosting Ukrainian women and children. Hosts constructed men in this narrative as brave, which they juxtaposed to other displaced populations who they perceived fled and abandoned their families: Ukrainians *'put the women first, they look after the family It is not just me, me, me and the women just trail behind and carry the children and go and queue for the water for 2 day at the time'* (Rob). This gendered depiction of need and complimentary masculinized courage present in media analyses carried through to host motivations factoring into the decision to host Ukrainians.

The protection discourses—to protect women and children, contrasted to a counternarrative of exclusion directed towards male asylum seekers. Male gender made other migrant and refugee groups less sympathetic to hosts and therefore less deserving. Their admission as asylum seekers undercut their deservingness (despite this being the only route of entry) because it meant they were seeking permanent settlement rather than temporary accommodation, like Ukrainian families. Beth summarised in her interview, *'I think part of the thing with Syria is that it is mainly young men who are not seen as people in need. They could have sought refuge in other places on their way to us. And their need is not the same as primarily women and children who, through no fault of their own, have been put in a situation of danger and just need somewhere to live. They are not seeking asylum, so their intention is they want to go back. They do not want to live here ... So for a temporary period of time then, yes'* (Beth). This description of Ukrainians and the framing of the displacement also depicts Ukrainians as temporary guests. Hosts saw Ukrainian families as incomplete (absent male partners) and therefore destined to return. This sense of temporariness that made hosting seem like less of a commitment and the gender composition elicited a sympathetic response.

When not portrayed as selfish or cowardly, hosts viewed men arriving from other geographies as a threat to the household. Hosts declined to host men and overwhelmingly had women and girls in their

homes. Hosts and host family safety served as a justification for not having male displaced persons in the house, but particularly Syrian or Afghani men: 'Syria. I think in my mind, most refugees from Syria are young men. Now ... we would not have ever hosted a young man in our house. It just would be inappropriate with three teenagers. Maybe that's a cop out. I do not know' (Jamie). This did not apply to Ukrainians, because Ukrainian men had, in the narrative, valiantly remained in Ukraine.

Women and children were portrayed as seeking safety, rather than migrating for a better life and therefore more widely welcomed (Bilgen et al., 2023). This ignores the policy of forced conscription that prevented men from leaving Ukraine. Host commentaries omit the constitutive power of those legal frameworks in creating legal pathways for Ukrainians while criminalising male asylum seekers who lack access to those same routes.

5.4. Implications of spatial proximity and relational responsibility

Building on Ahmed (2007), socio-spatial exposure was important in the humanisation process and in embedding likeness. The spatial proximity in the stages of hosting exposed intimate domestic spaces to guests for often extended periods of time. This in turn created, in hosts, a sense of commonality 'established familiarity': intersubjectively establishes and mutually shared lived space of the family (Kallio, 2016). Further, the programme provided access to welfare benefits and a pathway to work, highlighting the capacity of Ukrainians to contribute positively to the UK.

The HfU scheme fostered bodily proximity by housing Ukrainian people in British people's homes giving them the opportunity to absorb cultural knowledge and demonstrate knowability to British people. Housed in people's homes, Ukrainians worked with hosts in their gardens, had the opportunity to practice English and went to drop-in groups, shared cooking and eating responsibilities (or not), and made use of local knowledge (e.g., of hosts) or technology that could again facilitate inclusion—like school enrolment and locating work. Secondly, the post-arrival pathway facilitated spatial integration and social interaction with the British public that had secondary effects for their incorporation. Meaning, the design of the HfU scheme created a cycle of secondary effects that promoted the inclusion of Ukrainians by providing ways in which the British public and Ukrainians could interact with and be exposed to each other. This chiefly included work, but also the ability to participate in normative temporal rhythms like attending church, school, or dating (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). Familiarity and likeness were built through these opportunities for cultural exchange. This in turn better situates Ukrainians for 'integration' and 'absorption' rather than more common sociospatial marginalization typified by the experience of asylum seekers.

6. Conclusion

This research explored the motivations of British hosts participating in the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Findings indicate that the HfU program's structure and governmental and media discourses depicted Ukrainians inside familiar narratives and tropes (e.g., the vulnerable woman). These narratives not only characterised Ukrainians as similar to the British culturally (shared values and lifestyles) but provided a familiar role for the British to play that built upon a national identity of hospitality typified in acts of hosting to 'similar' guests. These feelings of social, cultural and geopolitical proximity between host and guests created a sense of responsibility motivating hosts. In devolving migrant screening and hosting to hosts responsible for implementing inclusion or exclusion criteria the HfU functions as a mechanism of the larger bordering processes.

More specifically, our analysis identifies three interlinking forms of proximity that motivate host willingness to welcome 'the stranger': geopolitical, sociocultural, and narrative. First, hosts saw the Ukraine as a member the European community. Ukrainians' European identity

meant that the Russian invasion was a threat to the European community as a whole, of which hosts felt a part. This made the conflict feel spatially proximate and triggered a sense of responsibility to European neighbours. Second, the Europeanness of Ukrainians meant that hosts perceived shared cultural and social values. In turn hosts saw the invasion as a threat to their own values which provided hosting motivation. Finally, narratives likened Ukrainian victims to those displaced in WWII. This was made possible because Ukrainians fit the demographics of previous waves of displaced (e.g. Kindertransport) as implicitly white, European women and children facing a threat within Europe. In turn, hosts saw themselves fulfilling the lauded role of British hosts as their predecessors had done. Importantly, we see how all three forms of proximity derive from membership within a European community. Perceptions of responsibility are based on this membership and the implicated forms of proximity. The government's response and media depictions of the conflict were essential in reinforcing this sense of shared common identity and drawing the bounds of the European community to define Ukrainians as welcomed guests.

Other nationalities seeking humanitarian protection were not included within this welcome. The cognitive dissonance expressed in the interviews reflects the broader tension between the form and function of British hospitality, as explored in existing literature (Bernhardt, 2023; Gibson, 2003). The state can and does extend hospitality and projects its identity as a welcoming place to those it portrays and conceives as deserving while simultaneously policing its borders and protecting its citizenry from those they consider to threaten it. Together - climates of hospitality and deterrence - allow the state to build an image of protection, of a secure home space (Walters, 2004) that rejects threats to that security (Darling, 2013) while portraying itself as a place of hospitality through fulfilment of welcome to those 'deserving' (Gibson, 2003). This selectivity of British hospitality is predicated on deservingness and while shaped by law, defined by geography, gender and age categories (Bernhardt, 2023; Darling, 2011; Kushner, 2018).

The fact that welcome through the HfU is anomalous in the reception of the displaced more generally is problematic. Host portrayals of others seeking refuge lack context; they omit the larger politics of mobility (Ahmed, 2007), the larger structural factors which contribute to the composition of migratory flows and the need for people to leave their home nations. In particular, the lack of 'safe and legal routes' available to others means other forced migrants must move 'irregularly,' criminalising themselves in the process of seeking asylum (Lumley-Sapanski & Schwarz, 2024). In turn, their illegalisation is used against them in justifying further border enforcement. Recently, for example, governmental officials referred to asylum seekers from Albania as 'Albanian criminals' and vowed to deport them (O'Callaghan, 2023). The difference in governmental language is reflected in the host reception towards migrants more generally captured here (Gibson, 2003/2016). In this way, we observe bordering and borders operating unintentionally through hosts. Their gaze determines the reception of guests (Ahmed, 2007); their role in determining migrant suitability shapes the bounds and composition of Britishness.

Despite its positive elements it is important to note that the HfU scheme has not been a categorical win for Ukrainians. The individualized matching enabled by the programme allowed the host and guest to find a suitable arrangement unlike other asylum seekers or refugees. This provision of 'choice' helped to ensure that the programme would be an acceptable arrangement for both host and guest. Yet, the devolved matching model of the HfU presents potential problems for those unable to suitably match or find a willing host. Further, the program provided no transition for guests exiting hosting or access to long term solutions. Concerns over former HfU participant homelessness and destitution have been identified (United Kingdom House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2024). Finally, and relatedly: the HfU scheme was intended to be a short-term solution to the Russian invasion, with the aim of Ukrainians being able to return home. There was little substantive planning to address what will happen to those Ukrainians who do not

want or are unwilling to return. As the war continues and Ukrainians increasingly settle and contribute to UK society and its economy – the narrative and the welcome may shift.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Audrey Lumley-Sapanski: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Kate Garbers:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation.

Funding

The funding for this research was provided by Hope at Home and Commonweal Housing.

Declaration of competing interest

At the time of the research, on which this paper is based, Kate Garbers held a voluntary position on the Board of Trustees at Hope at Home—a project funder. The organisation (along with the funder Commonweal) commissioned the research to be done by the Rights Lab—where Kate worked. The organization was interested in host motivations with the goal to use outputs to increase their participation. An industry facing report was launched earlier this year based on that work.

The Board of Hope at Home and the Ethics Board at the Rights Lab mitigated potential conflict via:

- No beneficiaries of Hope at Home being involved in the research.
- A research team at the Rights Lab undertook the research and validated findings.
- The project having Hope at Home Board sign-off.
- The third-party funder being aware of the situation.
- Charity Articles of Hope at Home allowing for trustee involvement in a paid capacity – not relevant for this project as the Rights Lab are the direct recipient of funds (not Garbers) and the main funding was provided by a third party charity.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank the reviewers for their helpful suggestions, Francesco Chiodelli for reading previous drafts, and Hope at Home for advertising the survey and interview opportunity. Special thanks to all the hosts who agreed to participate and share their experiences with the research.

Data availability

Data is archived at UoN repository in a deidentified version.

References

- Ahlberg, M., & Granada, L. (2022). The making of irregular migration: post-Brexit immigration policy and risk of labour exploitation. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 30(2), 120–130.
- Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*. Routledge.
- Ahmed, S. (2004). Collective feelings: Or the impression left by others. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21(2), 25–42.
- Ahmed, S. (2007). A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist Theory*, 8(2), 139–238.
- Anderson, B. (2008). “Illegal immigrant”: Victim or villain? ESRC centre on migration, policy and Society working paper no. 64, WP 08 64. University of Oxford.
- Anderson, B., & Andrijasevic, R. (2008). *Sex, slaves and citizens: The politics of anti-trafficking Soundings*, 2008 pp. 135–145), 40.
- Arda, B. (2022). Who deserves to be refugee?: The instrumentalization of art and culture in the solidarity discourse of Ukrainian refugees in social media. *MSGÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*.
- Bakker, L., Cheung, S. Y., & Phillimore, J. (2016). The asylum-integration paradox: Comparing asylum support systems and refugee integration in the Netherlands and the UK. *International Migration*, 54(4), 118–132.
- Barnett, C. (2005). Ways of relating: Hospitality and the acknowledgement of otherness. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(1), 5–21.
- Barnett, C., & Land, D. (2007). Geographies of generosity: Beyond the ‘moral turn’. *Geoforum*, 38(6), 1065–1075.
- Bayoumi, M. (2022). They are ‘civilised’ and ‘look like us’: The racist coverage of Ukraine. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/02/civilised-european-look-like-us-racist-coverage-ukraine>.
- Bernhardt, F. (2023). “In Wales ... we do things differently”. The politics of asylum dispersal in the UK and emerging national (self-) imaginaries of hospitality in Wales. *Political Geography*, 103.
- Bilgen, E., Zagefka, H., Bjornsdottir, R. T., & Abayhan, Y. (2023). Are they refugees or economic migrants? The effect of asylum seekers’ motivation to migrate on intentions to help them. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 53(10), 996–1011. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12991>.
- Blomberg, K. (2023). Is there a difference between refugees and Refugees?: A text analysis of UK media presentation of Ukrainian refugees 2022 and Middle Eastern refugees 2015 [Uppsala University] <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1759807&dswid=4361>.
- Bocagni, P., & Giudici, D. (2022). Entering into domestic hospitality for refugees: A critical inquiry through a multi-scalar view of home. *Identities: Global Studies in Power and Culture*, 29(6), 787–806.
- Bowling, B., & Westera, S. (2020). ‘A really hostile environment’: Adiaphorization, global policing and the crimmigration control system. *Theoretical Criminology*, 24(2).
- Brighenti, A. (2007). Visibility: A category for the social sciences. *Current Sociology*, 323–342.
- Carpi, E., & Pinar Şenoguz, H. (2019). Refugee hospitality in Lebanon and Turkey. On making ‘the other’. *International Migration*, 57(2), 126–142.
- Cuibus, M. V., Walsh, P. W., & Sumption, M. (2024). *The UK’s asylum backlog*. Migration Observatory. Retrieved 25 July from <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-uks-asylum-backlog/>.
- Darling, J. (2009a). Thinking beyond place: The responsibilities of a relational spatial politics. *Geography Compass*, 3(5), 1938–1954.
- Darling, J. (2009b). Becoming bare life: Asylum, hospitality, and the politics of encampment. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27(4), 649–665.
- Darling, J. (2011). Domopolitics, governmentality and the regulation of asylum accommodation. *Political Geography*, 30(5), 263–271.
- Darling, J. (2013). Moral urbanism, asylum, and the politics of critique. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 45, 1785–1801, 2013.
- Derrida, J. (2000). Hospitality. *Angelaki*, 5(3), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09697250020034706>
- Derrida, J., & Dufourmantelle, A. (2000). *Of hospitality*. (Bowly, R., trans). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dikeç, M., Clark, N., & Barnett, C. (2009). Extending hospitality: Giving space, taking time. *Paragraph*, 32(1), 1–14.
- Dotsey, S., & Lumley-Sapanski, A. (2021). Temporality, refugees, and housing: The effects of temporary assistance on refugee housing outcomes in Italy. *Cities*, 111.
- El-Abed, O. (2014). The Discourse of Guesthood: Forced Migrants in Jordan. In A. I. R. Fabos (Ed.), *Managing Muslim Mobilities* (pp. 81–100). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Elgot, J. (2022). More than 100,000 Britons offer to take in Ukrainian refugees. *The Guardian*, 15 March 2022. Retrieved 01 June 2023 from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/homes-for-ukraine-website-crashes-refugees>.
- Ellison, S., & Andrews, T. A. (2022). ‘They seem so like us’: In depicting Ukraine’s plight, some in media use offensive comparisons. *Washington Post*. Retrieved 31 May 2023 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/media/2022/02/27/media-ukraine-offensive-comparisons/>.
- European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (2023). Movement to and from Ukraine under the temporary protection directive. Retrieved 05 July 2023 from <https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Policy-Note-43-movement-to-and-from-Ukraine-January-2023.pdf>.
- Fekre, I. (2023). *The European refugee: A critical discourse analysis of Swedish newspapers and their portrayal of Ukrainian refugees*. Thesis. Uppsala University. Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences.
- Garbers, K., Lumley-Sapanski, A., & Brown, R. (2023). Homes for Ukraine: Learnings to inform and shape future hosting schemes. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2023/march/homes-for-ukraine-learnings-to-inform-and-shape-future-hosting-report.pdf>.
- Gibson, S. (2003). Accommodating strangers: British hospitality and the asylum hotel debate. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 7(4), 367–386.
- Gibson, S. (2016). ‘Abusing our hospitality’: Inhospitableness and the politics of deterrence. In *Mobilizing hospitality* (pp. 159–175). Routledge.
- Gill, N., Riding, J., Kallio, P., & Bagelman, J. (2022). Geographies of welcome: Engagements with “ordinary” hospitality. *Hospitality & Society*, 12, 123–143.
- Hakli, J., & Kallio, P. (2021). Bodies and persons: The politics of embodied encounters in asylum seeking. *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(4), 682–703.
- Hubbard, P., & Wilkinson, E. (2014). *Welcoming the world? Hospitality, homonationalism, and the London 2012 olympics* (Vol. 47, pp. 598–615), 3.
- Kallio, K. P. (2016). Living together in the topological home. *Space and Culture*, 19(4), 373–389.
- Kissoon, P. (2010). From persecution to destitution: A snapshot of asylum seekers’ housing and settlement experiences in Canada and the United Kingdom. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 8, 4–31.
- Kitchin, R. (2016). Geographers matter! doreen massey (1944–2016). *Social & Cultural Geography*, 17(6), 813–817. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2016.1192673>

- Kushner, T. (2018). Truly, madly, deeply ... nostalgically? Britain's on-off love affair with refugees, past and present. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 52(2–3), 172–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1433014>
- Lumley-Sapanski, A., & Dotsey, S. (2022). Paradoxical migrant allyship: The adoption of a disciplinary model of 'compulsory integration' for asylum seekers in Italy. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(13), 2965–2984.
- Lumley-Sapanski, A., & Schwarz, K. (2024). Constructive (in)visibility and the trafficking industrial complex: Processes, narratives, and geographies of (in)visibilisation and their utility for exploitation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*.
- Malkki, L. (1995). Refugees and exile: From "refugee studies" to the national order of things. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24(1), 495–523.
- Mason, O., & Hughes, S. (2024). A cultural geopolitics of hosting: Domesticity, violence and hospitality in the home. *Geopolitics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2024.2316660></div
- Massey, D. (1994). Double articulation. *Displacements*, 110–121.
- Massey, D. (1995). The conceptualisation of place. In D. Massey, & P. Jess (Eds.), *A place in the world: Places, cultures and globalisation* (pp. 46–79). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Massey, D. (2004). Geographies of responsibility. *Geografiska Annaler - Series B: Human Geography*, 86(1), 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2004.00150.x>
- Massey, D. (2008). A global sense of place. In *The cultural geography reader* (pp. 269–275). Routledge.
- Massey, D. (2009). Concepts of space and power in theory and in political practice. *Documents d'Analisi Geografica*, 55, 15–26.
- Nagel, C. (2002a). Constructing difference and sameness: The politics of assimilation in London's Arab communities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25(2), 258–287.
- Nagel, C. R. (2002b). Geopolitics by another name: Immigration and the politics of assimilation. *Political Geography*, 21(8), 971–987.
- Norum, R. (2018). From welcome to well ... come: The mobilities, temporalities and geopolitics of contemporary hospitality – Commentary to gill. *Fennia*, 196(1).
- O'Callaghan, L. (2023). Albanian PM hits out at UK's 'disgraceful' rhetoric about his citizens before Sunak talks. *National NOW Times*. Retrieved from 31 May 2023 from <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2023/03/23/albanian-pm-hits-out-at-uks-disgraceful-rhetoric-about-his-citizens-before-sunak-talks/>.
- Phillimore, J., D'Avino, G., Papoutsis, A., Strain-Fajth, V., & Ziss, P. (2022). *Refugee resettlement policy and practice: A systematic literature review*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham. <https://doi.org/10.48352/uobx.00000124>
- Pirouet, L. (2001). *Whatever happened to asylum in Britain?: A tale of two. In, Vol. 8. walls*. Berghahn Books.
- Rosstalnij, N. (2022). *Deserving and undeserving refugees?: Thesis: Department of international relations*. Central European University. Retrieved from https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2022/rosstalnij_nina.pdf.
- Sambaraju, R., & Shrikant, N. (2023). 'All of a sudden for no reason they've been displaced': Constructing the 'contingent refugee' in early media reports on the Ukrainian refugees. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12652>
- Sperandio, E. (2025). A welcoming city and nowhere to live: Private hospitality and the urban politics of reception in Bologna. *Urban Geography*, 46(2), 291–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2024.2366674>
- Still, J. (2010). *Derrida and hospitality: Theory and practice* (1st ed.).
- Tobler, W. A. (1970). Computer movie simulating urban growth in the Detroit region. *Economic Geography*, 46, 234–240.
- UKVI. (2023). Ukraine family scheme, Ukraine sponsorship scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine extension scheme visa data, transparency data, Updated April 2023). Retrieved 25 April 2023 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publication/s/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data-2>.
- UKVI. (2024). Permission to work and volunteering for asylum seekers (accessible). Retrieved July 29, 2025 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handling-applications-for-permission-to-take-employment-instruction/permission-to-work-and-volunteering-for-asylum-seekers-accessible>.
- United Kingdom Department for Levelling UP, Housing and Communities and The Rt hon Michael Gove MP. (14 March 2022). *Press release, 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme launches*. Retrieved 05 July 2023 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-launches>.
- United Kingdom Home Office. (2017). Syrian vulnerable persons resettlementscheme (VPRS) guidance for local authorities and partners. Retrieved July 29, 2025, from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8209abe5274a2e87dc0d21/170711_Syrian_Resettlement_Updated_Fact_Sheet_final.pdf.
- United Kingdom Home Office. (2021). UK refugee resettlement: Policy guidance. Retrieved 22 July 2024 from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/611cd056d3bf7f63b45df0ed/Resettlement_Policy_Guidance_2021.pdf.
- United Kingdom Home Office. (2023a). Guidance: Apply for a visa under the Ukraine sponsorship scheme (homes for Ukraine). UK visas and immigration. Retrieved 01 June 2023 from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-visa-under-the-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme>.
- United Kingdom Home Office. (2023b). Homes for Ukraine: Record your interest. UK visas and immigration. Retrieved 01 June 2023 from <https://www.gov.uk/register-interest-homes-ukraine>.
- United Kingdom Home Office. (2024). Safe and legal (Humanitarian) routes to the UK. Updated 13 June 2024. Retrieved 25 July from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2024/safe-and-legal-humanitarian-routes-to-the-uk#resettlement>.
- United Kingdom Home Office. (2024b). Report on review of weekly allowances paid to asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers: 2023. Updated 24 May 2024. Retrieved August 4, 2025 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-on-review-of-cash-allowance-paid-to-asylum-seekers/report-on-review-of-weekly-allowances-paid-to-asylum-seekers-and-failed-asylum-seekers-2023#:~:text=the%20main%20rate%20of%20asylum,%C2%A310%20to%20%C2%A38.86>.
- United Kingdom House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts. (23 February 2024). *Homes for Ukraine: Fourteenth Report of Session 2023–24, HC 69*. Retrieved 11 November 2025 from <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43430/documents/216162/default/>.
- United Kingdom House of Commons Library. (2023a). Anniversary of the homes for Ukraine scheme. Debate Pack Number CDP 2023 0043. Retrieved from <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2023-0043/CDP-2023-0043.pdf>.
- United Kingdom House of Commons Library. (2023b). Delays to processing asylum claims in the UK. Published 20 March 2023. Retrieved 05 July 2023 from <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9737/>.
- United Kingdom House of Commons Library. (2024). Asylum statistics. Published 24 May 2024. Retrieved 19 July 2024 from <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01403/SN01403.pdf>.
- United Kingdom Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (n.d.). About us, Retrieved August 5, 2025 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-local-government/about>.
- United Kingdom Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (2023). Guidance role of sponsors, voluntary and community sector, councils, and where to focus tariff funding: Homes for Ukraine. Retrieved 9 July 2024 from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/role-of-sponsors-voluntary-and-community-sector-councils-and-where-to-focus-tariff-funding-homes-for-ukraine#role-of-the-voluntary-and-community-sector-rvc>.
- United Kingdom National Audit Office. (2016). The Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. *Comptroller and Auditor General Sir Amyas Morse*. Retrieved 8 August 2024 from <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-Syrian-Vulnerable-Persons-Resettlement-programme.pdf>.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). Asylum in the UK. Retrieved 01 June 2023 from <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-uk>.
- Walters, W. (2004). Secure borders, safe haven, domopolitics. *Citizenship Studies*, 8(3), 237–260, 2004.
- Wennerstrom, S. (2023). *The visual depiction of Ukrainian refugees: An empirical study of the depiction of Ukrainian refugees in Swedish national media*. Lunds University, Department of Political Science. Thesis.
- Williams Walsh, P., & Jorgensen, N. (2024). Asylum and refugee resettlement in the UK. *The migration observatory*. Centre on Migration, Politics, and Society. Retrieved 22 July 2024 from <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migration-to-the-uk-asylum/>.
- Zetter, R. (2012). Are refugees an economic burden or benefit? *Forced Migration Review*, (41).

Further reading

- Massey, D., Human Geography Research Group, Bond, S., & Featherstone, D. (2009). The possibilities of a politics of place beyond place? A conversation with Doreen Massey. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 125(3–4), 401–420.