

Cross-Party Group on Ukraine

18 February 2026, 18:00-20:00 (Hybrid:
Committee Room 4 and MS Teams)

Present:

MSPs: Colin Beattie MSP, Miles Briggs MSP

Invited guests: Rona Hunter, Diletta Lauro, Eleanor Paton, Liubov Volodarska (Photographer), Olena Talimonchuk (Assistant to photographer), Jess Casot, Valeriya Dzhafarova, William Marratt, Morag Brown, Sharapov Kyrylo, Esa Aldegheri, Chris Yeomans, Grey Jenny (Secretary), Mykhailo Nimaschuk.

Non-MSP Group Members: Peter Cooper, Vitaliia Melnyk, Joyce Landry, Martin Huml, Olha Maksymiak, Nataliya Lyalyuk, Zhenya Dove, Esther Moodie, John Hawryluk, Nataliia Danova, Varvara Mishyna, Elena Frantskevych, Oleksandra Novatska, Lesia Vynnychuk, Olga Vivchar, Mariia Miskova, Liudmyla Shcherborska, Denys Dubytskyi, Ernst Avetisov, Olha Maslova, Juliette Lichman, Doug Allan, Anne Yarney, Serhii Kuzminov, Polina Moshenska, Maryan Pokhylyy, Oleksandr Rusanyuk, Mykola Zinchenko, Olga Lutsyshyn, Alina Litvinova, Tetiana Hordiienko, Nataliia Pidruchna, Valeria Gerus, Anna Kondratenko, Ivan Taran, Anna Kulish, Artem Pishel, Andrii Madzianovskyi, Magda Czarnecka, Andrii Kuzma, Peter Kormylo, David Hamilton, Linda Alison, Yuliia Ismail, Yullia Solovyeva.

Item 1: Welcome

Colin Beattie opened the meeting, welcomed attendees in the room and online. Convenor noted administrative points:

- Sign-in sheet being passed around — asked everyone to complete their details for the CPG records.
- A reminder that Cross-Party Group logos to remain in use until dissolution of Parliament on 26/03/2026

Item 2: Consul of Ukraine in Edinburgh (Andrii Madzianovskyi - online)

Welcome and brief remarks on the 4th anniversary of the full-scale invasion. Emphasised two themes: gratitude for past work and hope for the future.

Gratitude:

- praised the CPG's role (initiated by the Ukrainian community and supported by Scottish parliamentarians) — the group's voice has been heard and listened to in Scotland.

- Highlighted key individuals and community leadership contributing to the Group's effectiveness.

Hope:

- Reiterated the desire for an end to the war and return of Ukrainians to their homes; stressed the need for Ukrainians' skills and contribution to post-war reconstruction.
- Urged continued attention to the suffering in Ukraine (civilians living without heat/electricity; children in shelters).
- Expressed confidence that the next Scottish Parliament will continue support for Ukraine.

Thanked members and handed back to Convenor.

Questions and discussion

Peter Cooper (Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland): a reminder that Ukrainians with leave to remain in Scotland can and should vote in the coming Scottish Parliamentary elections; Consul encouraged participation and expressed hope that electors will continue to support Ukraine.

No further questions.

Item 3: Approval of previous minutes

Minutes circulated in advance (pages 1–8). Convenor called for approval; minutes approved.

Item 4: Membership Requests

- Convenor announced that membership requests are temporarily on hold while the Group reviews and updates criteria for admitting new members.
- Rationale: large volume of requests; need to adjust process for how requests are submitted and approved.

Item 5: Resettlement in a local context — Speakers

British Red Cross: presented online by Diletta Lauro with colleague Eleanor Paton
key points:

Introduced the policy report Planning for Tomorrow, a UK-wide review of the response to displacement from Ukraine and a lessons-learned exercise to strengthen future refugee protection.

Evidence base: mixed-methods research including interviews, a survey of 1,400+ displaced Ukrainians (not statistically representative but indicative), interviews with hosts and delivery partners, and specific Scottish case material.

Structured findings under three themes mirroring the resettlement journey:

- **Access to safety** — sponsorship models (including super-sponsor schemes) enabled rapid large-scale protection; flexible visa processing measures (e.g., deferring biometrics) aided speed of arrival. Identified risks included safeguarding concerns with informal matching and early problems with data-sharing between central and local government.
- **Integration** — hosts and community networks were crucial, schools acted as integration anchors, and local welcome hubs provided multi-agency support. However, access to services varied by location and scheme, and English language provision often failed to address workplace/local accent needs. High rates of employment were reported, but many experienced deskilling.
- **Planning for the future** — visa uncertainty (notably at the end of extension schemes) undermined long-term planning, affecting employment, housing and health decisions. Many respondents want to stay long term but lack clear pathways.

Policy recommendations (Scottish focus):

- Adapt and scale the super-sponsor approach with a time-bound implementation plan in partnership with COSLA, local authorities and delivery partners.
- Prioritise language provision (formal and informal, workplace-focused), accelerate professional qualification recognition, and expand trauma-informed employability support.
- Advocate that the UK Government create longer-term visa pathways and support voluntary, safe return where appropriate.

Introduced the **Roadmap to Safety, Protection and Belonging** — a practical set of good-practice principles for future safe routes.

Additional emphasis on accommodation

- Presented a detailed review of the accommodation response within Ukrainian visa schemes (including Scottish examples).
- Key learning: prolonged stays in temporary accommodation (especially beyond six months) seriously harm wellbeing, autonomy and integration; good practice indicates limiting temporary placements to a maximum of three months with a planned transition to longer-term housing.
- Recommended ongoing investment in social and affordable housing so local authorities can offer sustainable accommodation in the communities where displaced people live.
- Highlighted the Ukraine Longer-Term Resettlement Fund as a positive mechanism enabling councils to secure permanent housing for displaced Ukrainians.
- On sponsorship/hosting: training for hosts (pre-arrival and ongoing), robust safeguarding checks and the use of experienced registered matching organisations were recommended to reduce risk and provide support.
- Strategic recommendation: develop an agreed UK-wide displacement response framework across the four nations, drawing on lessons from Ukraine, Afghan and Syrian resettlement to ensure readiness for future crises.

Questions and discussion

David Hamilton (online) asked whether the study had looked at cultural and linguistic disconnection — for example, families who settled in Germany where children grew up speaking a different language/dialect, and whether support should include maintaining links to Ukrainian language and culture (not just English). **Diletta Lauro** responded that maintaining ties to Ukraine (language,

cultural activity, accurate information about conditions at home) is important for those considering return; around a minority (~4% in the survey) expressed a desire to return in the short term but many emphasised ongoing connections. Family reunification emerged strongly in decision-making. The organisation also highlighted its **Restoring Family Links service** as a practical means of supporting separated families.

Andrii Kuzma (University of Edinburgh Ukrainian society) noted that language and identity experiences vary greatly: some diaspora communities actively encourage Ukrainian language use and provide spaces where Ukrainian is spoken more than it may be in certain parts of Ukraine; community initiatives can therefore help maintain language and culture for those abroad.

No further questions recorded; presenters were thanked.

Capital City Partnership — presented by Rona Hunter

Presentation — key points:

- Overview of the Local Employability Partnership model (coordination across local agencies, DWP, Skills Development Scotland, education providers, health and third sector) and how the Partnership mobilised to support displaced Ukrainians arriving in Edinburgh.
- Early arrivals often lacked documentation and resources but displayed a strong desire to work immediately; many entered entry-level roles (notably hospitality) because of language barriers and urgency to earn.
- The displaced population includes many highly skilled individuals (notably a significant tech cohort). Capital City Partnership developed employer partnerships (including with NatWest) and retraining programmes — evening courses, provision of laptops — that enabled participants (notably women in low-paid roles) to move into professional roles such as software engineering.
- Delivery included construction reskilling, qualification conversion support and tailored training to help people move back toward careers aligned with prior experience.
- Impact figures cited: around 2,000 displaced Ukrainians supported in Edinburgh with approximately three-quarters entering employment; current emphasis is on career progression and preventing long-term deskilling.
- Noted housing pressures and in-work poverty risks in Edinburgh — high costs limit living options and affect employment choices; a regional approach to employment and housing was promoted to mitigate this.
- Emphasised the labour market opportunity: displaced Ukrainians represent a skilled talent pool that could help address sectoral shortages, provided red tape (recognition, residency certainty) is addressed.

Questions and discussion:

- **Joyce Landry (Mission of Innocents)** thanked the Partnership for rapid, practical support at initial accommodation sites (training, employer engagement, DWP liaison) and noted the development of trust networks; the speaker reflected on safeguarding work (training staff to identify exploitation/trafficking risks)

- **John Hawryluk's (EVOC)** question on in-work poverty highlighted the tension between high skills and low-paid roles; Rona Hunter explained that flexible training (evening/weekend) enables upskilling while people remain employed, and that individualised support (childcare, commuting, remote work options) helps movement into higher-paid roles.
- **Robin Goodwin** asked about support for displaced people with disabilities (motor or sensory, pre-existing or conflict-related).
- Capital City Partnership reported that disability-inclusive employment services are commissioned where needed and gave the example of All in Edinburgh (a citywide pan-disability employment support programme) which provides ongoing in-job support and helps employers access funds for workplace adjustments. The Partnership stressed that the key challenge is connecting people to services through trusted intermediaries (including community organisations such as AUGB).
- Engagement with employers was described as positive given labour shortages; intermediary support post-placement helps employers implement adjustments and access funding.
- Closing
- The presenter was thanked for the update.

Argyll & Bute Council — presented by Morag Brown (with input from University of Glasgow research team)

Presentation — key points:

Speaker introduction and context:

- Morag Brown outlined Argyll & Bute's resettlement model: a person-centred, largely in-house service where each new arrival is allocated a support worker who remains the main point of contact from day one.
- Argyll & Bute's geography (many inhabited islands, towns and villages, no cities) shaped a distinctive resettlement experience and logistical challenges (ferries, weather, transport).

Service model and delivery:

- ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and employability support are delivered by the council's resettlement team rather than outsourced to a large third sector network.
- The council runs welcome accommodation and prioritises tailored support for the most vulnerable while fostering independence where possible.

Evaluation and research partnership:

- In 2023 Argyll & Bute commissioned the University of Glasgow to evaluate the Ukrainian resettlement programme; the research focused on lived experience across themes drawn from the New Scots strategy: housing, language, employment, education, wellbeing and culture.

Key findings from the University of Glasgow evaluation (presented by Esa Aldegheri):

- Clear communication and managing expectations were central to positive resettlement outcomes; local delivery in Argyll & Bute was generally praised for clarity and person-

centred practice, while some confusion stemmed from wider UK-level communications and social media.

- Housing: after initial hotel placements, most people moved into sponsored accommodation, social housing or private rentals with largely positive experiences; the person-centred approach of local staff was repeatedly noted as a strength.
- Employment and seasonality: the local economy is highly seasonal (tourism, hospitality), which complicates long-term employment planning and consistent ESOL attendance. Many took seasonal jobs knowing work would reduce in winter.
- ESOL and language: flexible, hybrid ESOL provision (online + face-to-face) helped overcome geographic isolation; hybrid classes enabled connections between people living far apart and supported community-building.
- Transport: lack of private transport and weather-dependent links (ferries, limited buses) posed a persistent barrier for rural residents; the council introduced a three-month travel pass scheme with local bus operators to reduce immediate transport barriers.
- Wellbeing: mental health issues were often linked to guilt about family left in Ukraine and visa uncertainty rather than lack of local healthcare provision; isolation (especially for those without cars) was a factor.
- Culture and language maintenance: families placed considerable effort on maintaining Ukrainian language and culture for children (evenings/weekend Ukrainian classes and community activities); schools were positively received and acted as key integration hubs.

Local responses and programme changes:

- Argyll & Bute expanded hybrid ESOL provision and developed community activities (annual summer outdoor week, children's activities) to strengthen social links.
- Operational adjustments were made following the research: travel passes, continued welcome accommodation, closer support for host relationships, and a locally authored Refugee & Asylum Strategy (launched December).
- A council film documenting family experiences ("Analute Welcome") was produced and published to raise awareness and share learning.

Community development:

- Ukrainian families in Argyll & Bute formed a community organisation that organises events, supports new arrivals and invites wider community participation.

Questions & follow-up:

- Presenter invited questions but noted time constraints; attendees were asked to submit further questions by email for follow-up.

Dr Kiril Sharapov (online): presenting comparative research (based on work with IOM and multi-country surveys)

Presentation — key points:

Research background:

- Dr Sharapov summarised multi-country research (surveys of nearly 3,000 displaced people; 50 practitioner interviews) across Poland, Romania and Moldova conducted for the International Organization for Migration — evidence used to draw lessons relevant to the Scottish context.

Core argument:

- Protection (or vulnerability) is shaped by structural rights and legal conditions rather than by goodwill alone. Rights-based reception (e.g., temporary protection directives in EU states) substantially reduced vulnerability to trafficking by enabling early access to work, healthcare and social support.

Findings on conditionality and erosion of protection:

- Temporary measures can become precarious over time: as emergency supports are reduced or conditioned on employment/registration, vulnerability increases (examples included mass evictions where assistance ceased).
- Statistical analysis indicated discrimination (in housing or employment) is a major predictor of vulnerability to exploitation — stronger than demographic factors.

Identified risks relevant to Scotland:

- Housing transitions: when formal housing support ends, people may be pushed into unsafe or informal arrangements; monitoring informal housing conditions is necessary.
- Labour exploitation: concentration of displaced people in low-paid, seasonal sectors (cleaning, care, hospitality, agriculture) increases risks of non-payment, excessive hours and informal/unprotected contracts — especially where credentials are not recognised.
- Intersecting vulnerabilities: groups such as Roma, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ refugees can face heightened discrimination and barriers; equivalent dynamics in Scotland require more targeted research.
- Post-war reconstruction risk: large reconstruction projects in Ukraine could create labour demand with poor regulatory oversight, risking exploitation of recruited workers.

Policy recommendations for Scotland (and the CPG):

- Maintain housing support beyond the point where UK central provision ends; plan housing transitions to avoid gaps that generate vulnerability.
- Monitor labour conditions in sectors that employ large numbers of displaced people; strengthen labour inspection and accessible reporting mechanisms.
- Ensure anti-trafficking and support services are available without immigration-enforcement penalties so people can access help safely.
- Collect disaggregated data to understand specific vulnerabilities (by disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) and target responses accordingly.
- Advocate at Westminster for credible long-term status pathways so displaced people have realistic prospects of permanence.

Ongoing research & call for collaboration:

- Announced an upcoming ESRC/UKRI-funded 30-month project on the war's impact on persons with disabilities (participatory, arts-based methods) and invited interested Ukrainian-speaking PhD holders to get involved.

Closing:

- Emphasised that uncertainty is a political choice; reducing conditionality and expanding stable rights is the most effective protection against exploitation and harm.

Questions:

- Time was limited; attendees were asked to submit follow-up questions for written responses.

Agenda item 6: Ukraine and Europe - Jess Cassot (presenting for Ukraine is Europe)

- **Organization background:** Ukraine is Europe was established in 2022 and has run humanitarian projects across Ukraine in response to needs identified by Ukrainian authorities. It is already registered in France and Ukraine and is progressing registration in Scotland with support from local partners and OSCR. OSCR was thanked for assistance.
- **Early humanitarian work:** initial activity focused on urgent needs — supplying electronic devices to support remote education, running mobile medical clinics in affected regions in cooperation with regional administrations and emergency services, and delivering energy-resilience packages (EcoFlow systems and solar panels) for schools, hospitals and community centres.
- **Shift to reintegration & reconstruction:** as needs evolved, the NGO has pivoted towards longer-term resilience, reconstruction and reintegration projects designed to support people who want to return to Ukraine.
- **Pilot and centre in Dnipro:** a 2023 pilot successfully reintegrated 11 families in Dnipro. Following that, the organisation reopened a social-medical centre in Dnipro (November 2025) to provide a joined-up package of services under local/state mandates: helpline, legal/admin support for state aid, job and housing assistance, education support for children, plus medical services (ophthalmology, gynaecology, dentistry, psychology).
- **Operational updates & constraints:** initial operational challenges included severe energy shortages; a generator from a partner NGO was secured allowing full-time operation from 15 March. Minimum short-term funding covers administrator, secretary and an ophthalmologist; however further funds are needed to (a) cover additional staff (e.g., dentist) and (b) transport ~\$180,000 of ready medical equipment and scale services.
- **Strategic case for Scotland engagement:** the centre is presented as a replicable model of reintegration support for returnees. Jess urged Scottish organisations (parliamentary representatives, local authorities and Ukrainian community groups) to consider partnership, funding or technical support now — before any future peace/ceasefire — so infrastructure is ready when return becomes feasible.
- **Evidence on return intent:** cited estimates show ~5.2 million Ukrainians abroad (start of 2025); a survey by the Centre for Economic Strategy found ~20% definitely plan to return and ~23% probably will — reinforcing the need for reintegration infrastructure.
- **Call to action:** immediate funding to stabilise and expand the Dnipro centre, longer-term fundraising to scale to other cities, and offers to share expertise and partner with Scottish actors.
- **Questions / follow up:** Speaker avoided live questions due to time; attendees were asked to submit questions via the organisers for written follow-up.
- Jess left contact details for collaboration and pledged to circulate slides / further information on request.

Agenda item 7: Working Group Updates:

Health & Well-being Working Group; presented by Olha Maksymiak (working Group Chair)

Key activities since last meeting:

Displaced Ukrainians with disabilities:

- Met in Glasgow with Robin Goodwin (University of Warwick) to discuss challenges faced by displaced Ukrainians with disabilities. Ongoing work aims to better understand the Scottish context and inform policy responses.

Educational exhibition “Bigger Than I”:

- Social-educational project highlighting solidarity through stories of 10 young Ukrainians
- Developed by an educational NGO led by psychologist Anna Lenchovska
- Previously seen by 350,000+ visitors in Ukraine
- Opened in Scotland on 7 February at a Glasgow Clyde College campus hosting St. Mary’s Ukrainian School
- Supported by the working group, community organisations, and international partners
- Additional event planned for 24 February at the French cultural institute with participation from multiple European consulates

Support for Ukrainian pharmacists:

- Peer support group reports barriers to professional integration
- Ukrainian pharmacists denied access to an online clinical pharmacy course at Robert Gordon University despite being qualified
- Completion would not allow UK practice without the Overseas Pharmacist Assessment Programme (OSPAP)
- OSPAP available only at four universities in England, oversubscribed (waiting lists up to 3 years), none in Scotland
- Without OSPAP, displaced pharmacists cannot progress to training or registration
- Issue being raised with MPs

Collaboration with Ukraine Policy Network:

- Partnership with a research/advocacy project led by University of Birmingham
- Focus areas: visas & settlement pathways, employment & skills, mental health
- Contributions made to working groups on challenges facing Ukrainian doctors, pharmacists, and mental health issues in Scotland
- Joint evidence submitted to the UK Parliament on impacts of visa uncertainty

Policy engagement:

- Issues of mental health and wellbeing raised within monitoring of the “New Scots” refugee integration strategy delivery plan (2024–2026)

Overall message:

- The group is focused on structural barriers to integration (health, disability, professional recognition, visa uncertainty) while also promoting awareness and community-based initiatives.

Culture / Arts Working Group; presented by Zhenya Dove (working Group Chair)

Overall approach:

Maintaining a steady, visible presence of Ukrainian culture across Scotland rather than large-scale flagship events.

Recent activities:

Maria Prymachenko exhibition: Works by Mariia Prymachenko displayed at Edinburgh Central Library — chosen deliberately as a high-footfall public space to reach everyday audiences through accidental encounters.

Film screenings:

- Screening of “The Editorial Office” at the French Institute in Scotland with mixed Ukrainian-Scottish audience and Q&A. Supported by Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (Edinburgh branch) and the British Council
- New Ukrainian director involved in organising further screenings and festivals
- Sold-out screening of “2,000 Meters to Avdiivka” raised £500+ for Ukrainian paramedics
- Screening and Q&A for “Queens of Joy,” highlighting diversity of contemporary Ukrainian culture

New initiatives:

- Plan to establish a permanent Ukrainian documentary film club with Docudays UA — seeking venue and funding
- Collaboration with a Manchester charity (“Kрила”) on film project “Culture vs War”

Language & community outreach:

- Participation in UNESCO Language Day Scotland with Ukrainian language taster sessions delivered alongside local partners.

Recognition of Ukrainian artists:

- A Ukrainian member artist selected for major UK exhibitions, demonstrating Ukrainian art’s place in mainstream cultural institutions.

Community arts support:

- Ukrainian artist collective “Abandoned Artists” secured a new workspace after relocation challenges.

Design & cultural events:

- Promotion of a Ukrainian designer pop-up event (“In Bloom”) showcasing fashion, jewellery, art, and music.

Challenges acknowledged:

- Attempt to bring the Mariupol Drama Theatre production to Scotland failed due to logistical constraints, though future efforts are planned.

Commemoration approach:

- For the anniversary of the full-scale invasion, the group chose to support existing events rather than create parallel ones, to avoid fragmentation.

Overall message:

- Cultural work focuses on visibility, continuity, collaboration, and showing Ukraine as a living culture beyond war.

Business & Economy WG: presented by Anna Kulish (working Group Chair)

Key points:

Recognition and congratulations: Anna opened by congratulating the John Smith Trust on completing the Ukraine Recovery & Reconstruction Leadership Programme, with a focus on green recovery (hydrogen, renewables, grid resilience).

Scotland–Ukraine commercial links: The group is actively advising Scottish companies (energy, construction) on entering Ukrainian reconstruction markets—helping with strategy, procurement routes and partner identification following the Rebuild Ukraine conference in Warsaw.

Market intelligence: The Business Group published an overview of the Ukrainian construction market (2025 trends and statistics) to inform government and industry partners — contributor acknowledged: Vasyl Shvets.

Innovation collaboration: Anna flagged collaboration with the Scottish government innovation team SIFT-TECH. She noted the Scottish accelerator model is being shared in Ukraine via the Global Government Technology Centre.

Rebuild example: A recent pilot project to restore bridges in Kyiv region was highlighted as a tangible Scotland–Ukraine outcome (Scottish-made steel used in reconstruction), demonstrating supply-chain links from Scottish industry to on-the-ground rebuilding in Ukraine.

Closing note: Anna thanked the convenor and team for their leadership ahead of the election and expressed hope the Group’s work will continue.

Agenda item 7: AOB and Close

Update from Feniks: mental health workforce & barriers (presented by Eshter Moodie)

Findings / issues

- Feniks presented research showing a high prevalence of psychological distress among Ukrainians in Scotland (over 50% clinically significant in their sample) and ongoing barriers to accessing mental health services.
- Noted a sizeable number of displaced Ukrainians in Scotland who are trained psychologists, counsellors or therapists but are not able to practise.

Barriers identified:

1. **Qualification recognition:** Differences in training models (continental vs UK) lead accrediting bodies to deem some applicants as not meeting UK requirements.
2. **Documentation problems:** Missing/older records and records from institutions in occupied areas complicate verification.
3. **Financial barriers:** Translation, insurance, application and membership costs are prohibitive for many underemployed applicants.
4. **Retraining impracticality:** Full retraining routes are unrealistic for those working and with caring responsibilities.
5. **Capacity burden:** Supporting individual applicants is time-intensive (Feniks estimated 100+ staff hours per case), unsustainable at scale.

Proposed solutions:

- Introduce more flexible and transparent international recognition processes.
- Create accessible bridging programmes that fast-track professionals into UK practice by addressing specific gaps.
- Pilot limited/supervised practice routes (e.g., practice in Ukrainian-language settings) to enable immediate, safe use of existing skills.
- Feniks offered to share their report and collaborate with employability services, higher education, professional bodies and the CPG to develop pathways.

Convenor: Secretariat change & administrative notes

- Secretary transition: **Andrii Kuzma** has agreed to take on secretariat duties (subject to the Group's continuity).
- Convenor's remarks on dissolution:
 - The convenor (Colin Beattie) thanked members for their work and noted the Group is entering the dissolution period ahead of the Scottish Parliament election.
 - Administrative instruction: all Cross-Party Group logos and formal use of the CPG identity should be suspended from midnight on 25 March until the parliament reconvenes and CPGs are re-established.

Request: speakers were asked to submit their slide decks/presentations for circulation to members.

Meeting closed; attendees were invited to send outstanding questions by email for follow-up.