



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 26 January 2023

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
3rd Meeting 2023, Session 6**

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)

*Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Andrii Kuslii (Consulate of Ukraine in Edinburgh)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 26 January 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Crisis in Ukraine

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and a very warm welcome to the third meeting in 2023 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. Donald Cameron MSP is attending the meeting remotely.

Agenda item 1 is to continue our deliberations on the crisis in Ukraine. We welcome to the committee for the first time Andrii Kuslii, consul and head of the consulate of Ukraine in Edinburgh.

We are interested in Scotland's humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine.

I invite the consul to make an opening statement.

Andrii Kuslii (Consulate of Ukraine in Edinburgh): Good morning, everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to bring before you the case of Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees' issues while they settle in Scotland. Our fellow Ukrainians who are living in Scotland have conveyed to me how grateful they are to Scots for their relentless support since Russia launched the detrimental, fully fledged war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. I thank you for that unwavering support for our people.

I will move on to some issues. I have received lots of information from Ukrainian refugees, who have asked me to talk about some issues with members.

For the time being, housing remains one of the most difficult issues. As members know, in Glasgow, there is a ship with 1,100 Ukrainians on board. To be frank, there is no social housing. Not many people have had the opportunity to get social housing from housing associations. Those organisations have refused to house Ukrainians. People who live on ships or in hotels are not officially considered to be homeless persons, so they are unable to obtain a document that grants the status of homelessness, as required by housing associations in order to get them a place to live in.

Dear colleagues, I also draw your attention to private rental homes for Ukrainians. From my perspective, there is also an issue there because

even fellow Ukrainians who have received an employment contract and are ready to pay half a year's rent up front are refused private housing. Most landlords want a credit history review and the presence of a guarantor, but neither of those can be provided by Ukrainians. Landlords are not interested in learning that Ukrainians might pay their rent for a while just by utilising perks.

I can see that there is a solution. Local councils might be considered as guarantors for Ukrainians so that those problems could be sorted out, but that decision needs to be supported.

On social housing, our Ukrainians do not understand the status of the properties that they have received—whether they are a permanent or a temporary place to live in. They are oblivious about that, about how and where to pay for contracts, and about how to make contracts with utilities companies. That is a gap in information sessions. Local councils might be in a position to provide an information campaign.

It took me by surprise to learn that there are issues for our fellow Ukrainians when they are dealing with jobcentres. People are offered jobs that do not match their experience or their expectations. For example, a woman who did not even have a driving licence and who submitted her CV in English to the jobcentre was offered a job as a construction crane driver. From my perspective, that is ridiculous. People who do not speak English are offered positions in call centres. That is not coherent.

Jobcentres should work closely with Ukrainians to inform them about opportunities, how to find a job, and how to submit effective CVs in order to open up opportunities to contribute to society in this country and to be effective in their local communities.

Another issue that I would like to underscore is a medical one. Many questions are asked about how to register with a general practitioner—Ukrainians do not know about that. What is more important is that they are not able to register for dental care. Sometimes they are forced to leave the United Kingdom for a time to go to Poland, for instance, to get dental services.

I was told by my colleagues from our branches of Ukrainians in Glasgow and Edinburgh that there is a problem in Glasgow with giving Ukrainians the £200 that was offered. Some of them cannot get that financial support from the Government.

It is important to draw members' attention to psychological support programmes for Ukrainians here. More than half of them have psychological trauma from leaving Ukraine and leaving their family there—we are talking primarily about women with kids leaving their husbands there. It

would be much appreciated if a solution to that issue was found.

There is an issue associated with driving licences for Ukrainians. There is a big problem in people changing their Ukrainian driving licence into a local one. That is expensive, and a certain period of time is required to sit and pass the exams.

I was also told to draw members' attention to the issue of qualifications. Lots of Ukrainians who are fleeing our country as a result of the Russian aggression have qualifications in law and in the medical field, but they are not currently used as professionals here. If you could manage to find a solution to recognise Ukrainian qualifications in Scotland, that would be much appreciated.

There is an issue with private vehicles that belong to Ukrainians. When they fled Ukraine, some people left in their private cars. According to United Kingdom legislation, private cars should be reregistered within six months of being brought to the UK. However, under the visa schemes, Ukrainians in Scotland are temporary visitors. It is reasonable to find a solution so that they can keep their vehicles with a Ukrainian registration plate for the period in which they are allowed to stay in the UK, because they are prepared to go back to Ukraine and the procedure of reregistering their vehicles will require them to take additional steps and spend time and money.

From our perspective, in order to support the culture of Ukrainians in Scotland, it is a good decision to support our branches of Ukrainians in Edinburgh and Glasgow, which are dealing very closely with our compatriots who live in Scotland. Taking the opportunity to set up special grants to develop and support culture for Ukrainians who are living in Scotland would be a solution for keeping Ukrainian traditions and culture alive here.

Thank you for your attention. I am ready for your questions.

The Convener: Thank you very much for your opening statement.

I would like to say that those problems are unfamiliar and new to us, but a lot of the issues that you have raised are, unfortunately, challenges for many people in Scotland at the moment. We will examine some of them in light of the competency of the Scottish Government. Some of the issues that you raise will be in the gift of the UK Parliament to address. The committee will decide on this later, but one possibility is that we write to the UK Government to raise the specific concerns around car reregistration and the issues that relate to the Department for Work and Pensions.

To speak personally, the displaced Ukrainians in my constituency are my constituents, and my door is open—I am sure that that is also true of my MP colleagues and councillors across Scotland. We are there to represent them as our constituents while they are living in Scotland, and there might be things that we can do individually to address some of those issues. I encourage anyone who lives in Motherwell and Wishaw to come to my door.

It seems that there is a gap with regard to the provision of a basic pack of information or a one-stop shop for people to get advice. I am sure that we will want to explore that with the minister.

I return to unemployment, seeking employment and qualifications issues. Those issues were raised with the minister when he visited my constituency several months ago as the very first families came to live in Motherwell and Wishaw. The specific issue is professional qualifications—in particular, teaching qualifications. I am interested to know what routes are being offered to the people whom you have spoken to. Pointing people to a jobcentre is maybe not appropriate for everyone.

09:15

In my work as a constituency MSP, I have successfully put people in touch with Skills Development Scotland. Ukrainian people have the same rights that anyone else in Scotland has to receive such support. Are you aware of that? What more would you like to see from professional organisations with regard to accepting the qualifications of the Ukrainians who are here?

Andrii Kuslii: I have been told by my guys that it has been proposed to people coming to Scotland who have Ukrainian medical or teaching qualifications that they clean rooms in hotels, for example. That is a problem. I would like Ukrainians who live in Scotland to have the same rights that other nationals who live in Scotland have, so that their international qualifications are accepted by locals.

You mentioned Skills Development Scotland. It should get more involved in dealing with Ukrainians, because it can help them to create CVs and open up their capabilities for use in Scotland.

The Convener: We will have the opportunity next week to discuss all the points that you raise today with the local authorities, because the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities will be at the committee. The minister will attend the following week. We will take the points forward.

We will move to questions from other committee members and start with Donald Cameron, who is the deputy convener.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Good morning, consul. Thank you so much for coming today. I have a question about housing, which you have talked about already. The Scottish Government has announced that the contract on the ship in Glasgow is coming to an end at the end of March, I think. The ship here in Edinburgh had its contract extended for a further five months in December. I think that that is the position, but I am happy to be corrected.

Given that it looks as though that temporary accommodation will come to an end in the next five to six months, it is vital that new accommodation ensures that existing employment and education can be continued. Do you have any concerns about the transition from the ships to housing on land? You have already spoken about some anxieties, but please feel free to expand on that.

Andrii Kuslii: As far as I know, the contract on the ship in Glasgow should end by 31 March. I applied to the Scottish Government with a request to make the placement process as smooth as possible for the Ukrainians who are supposed to leave the ship. I was told that, for the time being, a special team of people from the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council is working on that, and that they are looking for solutions for our Ukrainians.

It is important to take into account the fact that the people who have been living on the boats have socialised in those areas. It is therefore important that the local council and the Scottish Government try to find a placement that is not far from those areas, because they have become associated with the children and workplaces of our Ukrainians. That is my guess.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Thanks for taking the time to join us this morning, consul. I will ask a few different questions.

To go back to your points about the difficulties with temporary accommodation and seeking long-term accommodation, is that the experience of displaced Ukrainian people across Europe, or are there other countries in which permanent accommodation is being found more rapidly? Are other countries managing to find a way to do this better for Ukrainian people?

Andrii Kuslii: I should be honest with you and say that I do not know about other countries. We are working here in Scotland, and I can talk about the issue here based on the information that I have received from my Ukrainian fellows.

Mark Ruskell: I will move on to visa schemes and, in particular, the Ukraine extension scheme. Has it worked effectively? More specifically, has it supported Ukrainian people who are seasonal workers in Scotland and the UK?

Andrii Kuslii: I know that there is an issue with extension visas for Ukrainians. From my perspective, it is important to create conditions whereby Ukrainians might be able to get their visa extended to stay in the UK.

At the same time, there is an issue with getting biometric residence permits for Ukrainians. For example, people applied for their BRP and could not get it for three months. That issue should also be raised. Visa extension schemes should also be thought of.

Mark Ruskell: Would it be better if there was a scheme whereby there was a visa waiver or an automatic grant of leave for displaced Ukrainian people?

Andrii Kuslii: If that could be realised, it would be perfect.

Mark Ruskell: Does that happen in other countries around Europe?

Andrii Kuslii: Again, in accordance with my expertise, we are talking about the United Kingdom.

Lots of people are asking what will happen after three years, when the visas come to an end. From that perspective, it is important to take into account their wish to stay and work in Scotland, and to provide for them, if war keeps being waged. We need to think about that right now, because otherwise we will not have enough time to realise that step forward.

Mark Ruskell: I will go back to seasonal workers in Scotland. As a regional MSP, I have had some contact with fruit farms and other employers. I have also had some contact with Ukrainian citizens who are staying in hotels and picking up work at the moment, and who may want to continue with that work. Have you had any particular concerns from seasonal workers around accommodation, their ability to bring their families to the UK, or any other issues around communication or visas?

Andrii Kuslii: So far, I have no concerns about seasonal workers. They have contracts. If they want to bring their families to the UK, that process should of course be done according to the UK legislation. I have not received any concerns about that route.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): It is very good to see you today, consul. We appreciate the fact that you are telling us what feedback you got from Ukrainians who have come to Scotland. We tend

to meet individual people, so to get general feedback from them is critical for us. As the convener said, we are going to have local authority representatives and the minister in front of us, so that feedback is very helpful.

I am aware that, in my area of Edinburgh, we have housed a lot of the people who have come from Ukraine, but we have a local Ukrainian community, too, that was here already and that has been supportive. From what you have said, it sounds like we need to put in place a bit more support with regard to access to English language teaching. Do we need that just in Edinburgh or would it help in other places, too? For example, I know that several hundred people have come to Glasgow. Do we need to spread that access in other areas?

Andrii Kuslii: Yes. Thank you for raising the issue. To my knowledge, approximately 3,000 Ukrainians live in Glasgow, and not everyone has had the opportunity to go on ESOL—English for speakers of other languages—courses. Those opportunities for Ukrainians across Scotland should be extended.

It is also important to pay more attention to Ukrainian children, because not every school offers an opportunity to support them in order to help them socialise with local children. The majority of our Ukrainian kids do not have enough English language skills so, of course, it would be good to have those opportunities.

I understand that it is very tough for local government and authorities to provide every school with a supportive teacher for Ukrainians, but it would be much appreciated for Ukrainian families to have at least one person in schools with command of the English language and psychological skills.

Sarah Boyack: In Edinburgh, we have a group called the Welcoming, whose members reach out to people who have come to Edinburgh—because it is a capital city, we tend to get a lot of folk. The group has put on lots of classes, so maybe there is experience there that could be shared. Could we do more to mobilise our local community support? I know that that has been successful when it has happened in Edinburgh. Could we as MSPs do more to encourage that work to happen with our councils?

Andrii Kuslii: May I ask you whether you mean Ukrainian local communities or local people?

Sarah Boyack: I mean both the local community and the Ukrainian community.

Andrii Kuslii: In that case, to my mind, it would be good to have some grants, which would help Ukrainian local communities to organise English lessons for Ukrainians living in Edinburgh and

Glasgow. However, lots of people live across Scotland and it is difficult for them to commute from a small village to the nearest city. First, it takes time; secondly, it takes money. That is why it would, of course, be better to find settlement for them not far from local cities. That is the rub—if we cannot sort out that problem, it drags in another one. However, it is a very good point.

Sarah Boyack: We can feed that in as well. Thank you.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): You ask very important and difficult questions, consul, but it is good that we hear them and that you are so clear and honest about them.

Some of the issues that you have raised are for local authorities, from whom we will hear soon. However, I think that, on some of the other issues—if the convener would be willing to allow this—the committee should hear from the UK Government or a UK Government agency at some point. For instance, consul, you mentioned the recognition of qualifications, which, as I understand it, is one of the very few areas of education in Scotland for which the UK Government has responsibility, so I think that there are other people from whom we should hear in the future, with the convener's permission.

09:30

The issue that I am most interested in is that of displaced families who are trying to get a house and who find that, although they have money for rent, they do not have the right paperwork and need someone to act as a guarantor. You suggested that a local authority might do that. Can you say more about that? How do people get trapped in that situation?

Andrii Kuslii: I will give an example. Let us say that I am a displaced person with a contract and a salary. I go to the private market here in Scotland and apply to an agency. It suggests a flat that works for me, but when we come to the signing of a contract and discussing matters with the landlord, the landlord finds out that I am a Ukrainian and a displaced person and requires a guarantor who will be responsible if anything happens in connection with the flat. I am ready to pay six months' rent up front when we sign the contract, but the landlord does not agree to take that into account.

Landlords require guarantors who will be responsible for Ukrainians if something happens. I am talking about private landlords, not about social housing. In some cases, landlords require a banking history, but Ukrainians who came here just six or seven months ago do not have enough banking credentials and cannot provide that. There is a gap and there is a problem. That is why

I said that local councils could act as guarantors for landlords. They might write a special note and act as a guarantor for people who are temporarily displaced from Ukraine. They could ask landlords to provide them with accommodation, according to the contract.

Alasdair Allan: That is a very interesting point, which I am sure that we will pursue with the local authorities when they come to see us.

You raised another point that I am keen to explore further. People who are homeless are given priority for social housing. You said that there is a difficulty in acquiring homelessness status. People also acquire social housing, either from a council or from a housing association, by getting points. They can get points because they have a disability, or a history of homelessness, or for all sorts of reasons. I do not know whether you can answer this. Are you aware of whether a person gets points or recognition because of their special status as a displaced person?

Andrii Kuslii: I am aware of how that works, but our people from Ukraine are oblivious of that because local authorities do not provide enough information. They know about the points-based system and that people need to get points in order to be in line for housing. The queue is very long: it can take 10 years. That is a problem not only for Ukrainians living here but for everyone who would like to get social housing, including Scots who live here. I understand that.

The problem is that someone needs to be assessed as a person without points in order to take the first step and get into the queue. If a person is living in a hotel or on a ship, it is not possible for them to provide any proof of that. That is the problem.

Alasdair Allan: You have answered my question. My next question is, what are the best opportunities for intervening to provide that information so that people are not left without it?

Andrii Kuslii: From my perspective, we need to urge local councils to have more drop-in sessions and to pay more attention to Ukrainians. It should be like a train. Ukrainians are coming in and we are trying to answer their questions as quickly as we can, sometimes without delving into the issue. We say, "Thank you for coming. Here are some leaflets. Please read this information."

I understand that local authorities require to put much of their resources into finding the person who would be responsible for any issues. I understand that, but there is an issue, and that is why we are here.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): Consul, in your opening statement, you talked about access to mental health support and

enhancing psychological support programmes. Given that half of the displaced persons are facing trauma, could you expand on that point a little?

Andrii Kuslii: Of course. When I talked about trauma, I meant of Ukrainians who experienced bombing in Ukraine. It is difficult for you to understand, but they have psychological trauma and they need psychological support in this country. Part of their family or some of their kids might still be in Ukraine, so I hope that psychological experts can find ways to relax their brains for a certain period of time to support them psychologically.

This point would be considered well if we are talking about practical assistance for our local Ukrainian branches. A lot of people there are Ukrainian. They understand Ukrainians and how to help them and talk to them in their language. Psychological support means that a Ukrainian person will go and have a conversation with a psychologist but, often, a Ukrainian person will not have a command of the English language and will have to use interpreters. Interpreters do not always interpret everything correctly. They convey an idea. Our people need to talk more deeply. If it was possible to set up grants so that our Ukrainian communities could get psychologists from Ukraine who would be helpful to other temporarily displaced persons, that would take the burden off your local communities and put it on to our shoulders. That is what I was talking about.

Maurice Golden: On access to healthcare more generally, we have heard about some incidents of Ukrainians not being able to access a doctor. Has that been your experience?

Andrii Kuslii: I was told that it is very difficult to get access to dental care and to register with a GP. Many displaced Ukrainians do not know how to register with a GP. Again, that means that there is a gap. That is an issue for local authorities. When they are responsible for providing people with a temporary place to live, they need to provide information.

At our level, we are trying to inform our citizens about how that works, but our resources are not adequate for that. It should be within the competence of local authorities to provide that information. People are told that there are GPs, and that they can go to the GP or make a call, but they cannot do so because they do not have a good command of English. Perhaps they could make a call by using an interpreter, but there is a problem with finding interpreters online.

Those might look like small issues at first, but they can grow into a problem.

Maurice Golden: Thank you for that.

Finally, I note that there have been reports of infection control issues on the cruise ships. Has there been any improvement in that situation?

Andrii Kuslii: Frankly, I am oblivious of that. Could you please expand on that question?

Maurice Golden: There have been reports of issues on cruise ships—

Andrii Kuslii: In Edinburgh or in Glasgow?

Maurice Golden: In Edinburgh, I believe. I was just wondering whether you knew whether there had been any improvement in the situation, but that is fine—we can leave it there.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Thank you, consul, for coming along and for—as my colleagues have said—being so honest and giving us so many clear examples of where issues have arisen.

I underline what the convener said in her introduction. We are all elected to the Parliament to represent the people who live in our constituencies or regions. I know that, in my constituency of Argyll and Bute, my councillor colleagues have been very supportive and are very willing to help Ukrainians who are living in that region. We can give you the message to pass on to your fellow countrypeople that they have as much support from people like us sitting around this table as our own Scottish constituents do.

I am interested in culture, and I have asked some of your compatriots about that. How do we ensure that the children who are now living in Scotland—I hope that they enjoy living here, and that they get home very soon—are given opportunities to keep their important and strong links with Ukrainian culture? I know that you touched on that subject, but perhaps you could expand on it a little.

Andrii Kuslii: From my perspective, we can ensure that that happens by getting events together and inviting as many Ukrainians as we can. As I said, however, many Ukrainians cannot get to Edinburgh or Glasgow from remote areas. We need to think about how to improve their commute. For example, perhaps you could provide an offer to enable them to use their Ukrainian passports as train passes and commute for free on certain days of the week, such as Sunday or Saturday, or something like that. That would enable them to come and get together with their fellow Ukrainians in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee.

I hope that I have answered your question, at least partly.

Jenni Minto: Partly.

Andrii Kuslii: You mentioned that you represent the island of Bute. Is that right?

Jenni Minto: I do, yes. I represent the constituency of Argyll and Bute.

Andrii Kuslii: If you do not mind, I will be open with you today. Last week, I saw a family at the consulate with a practical problem. They are a family of five people, including the children of two ladies, who go to the local school. After being bullied there by local youths, they appealed to the local school administration but, unfortunately, they got no response. In some circumstances, they even had to apply to the police to secure their kids, but they have had no response.

I hope that you do not mind me sharing that information directly with you, and I ask you to get involved in that case, because they require help.

09:45

Jenni Minto: I would be very happy to be involved. I am very upset to hear what you have told me. Please contact my office, and I will provide whatever support I can. Thank you for raising that issue. I am very happy to provide support in whatever way I can.

I also asked specifically about culture and how we can help you to ensure that Ukrainian children do not lose cultural ties with their homeland.

Andrii Kuslii: As I have told you, one of the best options is to financially support our Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain branches in Glasgow and Edinburgh. That will mean that they will be able to arrange many events that are associated with national holidays, such as the independence day of Ukraine. They could also set up Saturday schools to keep the Ukrainian language alive, because children are like sponges, and they very quickly forget their native language. My guess is that those could be for children aged seven to 10.

We could also urge local communities where Ukrainians live to share our values, to support our national holidays and to invite Ukrainians to take part in joint events.

Jenni Minto: It is fair to say that people are people the world over, and understanding how different communities operate is part of how we can understand and respect differences. Thank you very much for your honesty.

Mark Ruskell: I want to come back to talk about accommodation, particularly the shift from short-term accommodation in hotels and on cruise ships to longer-term accommodation. Are there other lessons that we need to learn around that? We have witnesses from the Scottish councils' representative body coming to the committee next week, and I am thinking about how we make that shift as smooth as possible for Ukrainian residents.

I should say that I had some contact with Ukrainian people and the local community in Killin, a number of months ago, about the issues with the Killin Hotel, including the lack of certainty about what would happen with accommodation there and the desire of some people to stay in the hotel and of others to move into more permanent accommodation. There seemed to be issues with communication on that.

I am interested in any reflections that you have about what would make the shift easier for people. We are here to make things as easy as possible.

Andrii Kuslii: First, we need to differentiate whether we are talking about social housing or private housing, because different schemes and approaches are required depending on which of those we are talking about.

If we are talking about social housing, local councils should be more proactive in dealing with housing associations and urging them to provide social housing for Ukrainians. If we are talking about the private sector, we need to urge local councils to deal with tenant agencies and landlords and provide necessary documents in order to assure them that Ukrainians are guaranteed tenants. So, it depends on what kind of housing they need.

If I understand correctly, all routes lead to local councils, so we need to talk to local councils and urge them to be proactive for the Ukrainians who live in their areas. People living in hotels are concerned about what kind of place they will live in next and when they will move. If placement in different areas is considered, we need to find a solution, because they will need to find a new place of work and a new place of schooling for their kids. That is my personal point of view.

Mark Ruskell: Is there a difference between the rural areas and more urban areas of Scotland? In Killin, the concern was that if somebody was moved 20 miles away to a different school or a different job, they might have difficulty getting to work or there might be no bus route.

Andrii Kuslii: It is clear that in rural areas it is more difficult to find a job and to get to schools. That is why people are asking us to find a solution in areas where the commute and the infrastructure will be easy for them. Many of them do not have personal cars, so it can be difficult to go to the shop to buy something. Do you understand what I mean?

Mark Ruskell: Yes, absolutely.

Sarah Boyack: One thing that strikes me is that the welcoming at the start of the process is very good, but the following-up with people and making sure that information is available afterwards is an issue, and your suggestions on that are helpful.

The other observation that I have is that we first had these discussions early on in Putin's invasion, and people were thinking in the short term. We now have the experience of Ukrainians who have been in Scotland for several months, and we need to raise that longer-term support and connectivity with colleagues.

Ukrainians have mentioned to me that when they arrived they were so grateful that they had escaped and had another start, but they did not want to mention health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder or other long-term conditions on day 1. We need to make sure that we give them relevant information. I know that some of that information is available in Ukrainian from the health service, but perhaps we need to work out how to get it to people directly, so that they can access that advice and make use of it.

Andrii Kuslii: I agree with you—that would be good. We need to think that Ukrainians' stay in Scotland might be longer than we banked on.

Sarah Boyack: Another thing occurred to me after Jenni Minto's question about culture. Most of us do not know about Ukrainian heritage, so would it be possible for you to send us a briefing on the key dates in the year so that we could put them on our website or have them in our minutes?

Andrii Kuslii: There is independence day, constitution day and defenders day, so yes, we will do that.

Alasdair Allan: We have rightly focused on the issues that you raise about the services and opportunities that are here for displaced people from Ukraine, but it is also important that we continually remind people in Scotland why people are displaced and why people are here, so that people in Scotland understand that. Therefore, I will give you the opportunity to talk about what is happening in Ukraine now, so that people understand the situation and so that we do not allow this to leave our news screens or miss an opportunity to explain to people what is going on. Are you able to give us an update on the position in Ukraine?

Andrii Kuslii: Thank you. I can brief you on the war situation in Ukraine. Despite a number of devastating defeats and growing losses—123,000 Russians have been killed—Russia continues to deny our legitimacy as a sovereign state and retains its maximalist goals to destroy Ukrainian statehood, including by attacking civilians and critical infrastructure.

The Kremlin's on-going mobilisation and plans for an expansion of the conventional armed forces indicate its readiness for a war of attrition. Russian invaders are currently concentrating their forces for large-scale offensive actions, with a focus on the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The active front

line with the Russian aggressor constitutes 1,500km for the time being, although the whole of the front line for Ukrainian defenders is 3,786km.

The spring and early summer of 2023 will be decisive in the course of the war. From our perspective, it is possible to win the war this year. The speed of ending the war primarily depends on timely military and technical assistance from our partners. We must not allow it to slow down. I know that Scotland cannot provide us with military support, but I know that you can keep yielding generosity and kindness for Ukrainians.

Ukrainian defenders have liberated nearly half of the territory that was seized by Russia since the start of the full-scale invasion. That process will continue until our territorial integrity within the internationally recognised borders is fully restored. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the Kremlin's efforts to significantly strengthen Russia's military machine will be a formidable military threat to its neighbours, including the entirety of Europe, in the coming year.

It is impossible to achieve a peace that is acceptable to Ukraine with the current Russian leaders. I should be frank with you that that is the position of our Government and our President. Implementation of the 10-point peace formula presented by President Zelensky will bring the end of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and security to the whole world. The formula's main goals are to deprive Russia of its tools to commit the crime of aggression against Ukraine and to guarantee security and justice for the entire international community.

Ukraine has signed an application to accelerate its access to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Until a consensus is reached among NATO member states, Ukraine suggests implementing our proposals on the security guarantees and mobilising the necessary political, financial, military and diplomatic resources for Ukraine's self-defence, both to deter external aggression and to protect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, if such aggression takes place.

This morning, Ukraine was under attack. That was a couple of hours ago, and the capital was bombed, unfortunately. That is in brief. If you would like to get elaborated information on that, I will be pleased to email it to you directly.

Alasdair Allan: Thank you, consul.

The Convener: Thank you. I think that that exhausts the committee's questions.

Consul Kuslii, thank you for your attendance this morning. You opened with recognition and thanks for everything that Scotland is doing. Although we appreciate that, it is clear that there is much more

that we could be doing to deliver holistic support for displaced Ukrainians. We will take those issues up with UK Government and local government colleagues. Indeed, there might be some interest from other committees of this Parliament, given that we heard about issues around health, local authorities and education.

Thank you again. You have given us a lot of food for thought, and we will follow up on that. We look forward to following up with you on those concerns. Again, we stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

Andrii Kuslii: Thank you, convener, and thank you, members.

The Convener: We now move into private session. Thank you.

10:00

Meeting continued in private until 10:29.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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