

# Ukrainians facing job barriers amid visa crisis

**As visa schemes draw to an end, thousands of Ukrainians struggle to prove their place of residence to employers.**



Over 200,000 Ukrainians came to the UK during Russia's invasion, according to Gov.UK. Justin Tallis/AFP via Getty Images

Thousands of Ukrainian refugees living in the UK are struggling to find and maintain full-time employment, as uncertainty around visa extensions leaves them unable to prove their right to work.

Some have even “been turned down for a job at McDonald’s”, according to Richard Kornicki CBE, the Deputy Lieutenant of Ealing in West London - the borough with the second largest number of Ukrainian refugees in the city. “They find it hugely difficult getting work,” he said.

Launched in 2022 in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the government’s Homes for Ukraine visa scheme lasted for three years and expires this month.

Yet applications to extend these visas only opened on February 4, leaving many Ukrainians unable to prove to employers that they can stay and work in the UK beyond March.

The Home Office said in a statement that the “UK’s support for Ukraine remains steadfast,” whilst also suggesting that there are “other routes are available for those wishing to settle permanently in the UK.”

The statement explained that the British government “always recognised the importance of providing certainty and security for Ukrainians and their families through our offer of sanctuary.”

However, 41 per cent of Ukrainians in the UK reported losing out on job opportunities as a result of the visa extension issues, according to a survey conducted by the University of

Birmingham. A further 22 per cent report that they did not have their current employment contracts renewed.

In Ealing, Kornicki supports the local Ukrainian diaspora in finding employment through the voluntary sector, as well as helping refugees integrate into the wider community.

“Saturday morning I was with Ukrainian refugees who meet fortnightly for English conversation”, said Kornicki, who formerly worked in both the Home Office and the Cabinet Office before becoming a Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

“I’ve been basically accepting everything which the Ukrainian community has asked me to do or to be around,” he said, “because for them, it’s a way of showing support.”

Kornicki believes that much more can be done to bridge the gap between highly capable workers and supportive employers.

“[People think] I wish I could do something for the Ukrainians. Well, you can, but you don’t know what it is and they don’t know where you are. So you need someone in the middle who can connect,” he said, referring to himself.

In lieu of support from the British government, Kornicki has taken it upon himself to connect Ukrainians with voluntary work placements across Ealing to help build toward permanent roles.

“It improves their language skills. They get a benefit. They’re not sitting at home and saying I wish I had something proper to do and it’s a win win,” he said.

“I’ll be in touch with the Ealing Business Club. And I’ll make the pitch to them about providing essentially opportunities for Ukrainians to volunteer and assist in any of their businesses,” he explained, in hopes of bringing together employees and refugees.

The former Home Office employee then went on to explain how many local businesses can benefit from the skills of the Ukrainian community across the city. “Where have you ever met a volunteer group that wasn’t desperate for a treasurer or someone to understand the accounts? It’s always the hardest one to fill, isn’t it?”, he said.

In Kornicki’s opinion, professional experience transcends language barriers: “Several professional accountants that I’m talking to are from Ukraine, and the thing about numbers is, they’re the same in every language.”

“They add up and subtract the same way. What language you’re muttering in while you’re doing the problems is entirely up to you, but the bottom line is it’s the same.”

Kornicki’s optimism is shared by many in the Ukrainian community, as approximately 94 per cent of Ukrainians surveyed by the University of Birmingham reported that they plan to apply for visa extensions.

But Kornicki’s role extends beyond finding employment for the Ukrainian diaspora in London, as he explained it also is “an opportunity just to be with them and to understand how they felt, and the shock the war had given them, and to just stand alongside them.”