

Summary: ‘The Role of the State in Community-Led Welcome: Lessons from Homes for Ukraine’

PUBLICATION
REVIEWED: Broadhead, J., & Turcatti, D. (2024). The Role of the State in Community-Led Welcome: Lessons from Homes for Ukraine. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*.

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ORGANIZATION: Journal of International Migration and Integration

DATE OF
PUBLICATION: 2024/12/03

LINK: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-024-01208-y>

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(This summary was created with AI support.)

DATE OF
SUMMARY: 2025/11/19

☐ Book ☒ Journal Article ☐ Website ☐ Report ☐ Other (specify):

KEYWORDS: Governments, Local authorities and municipal bodies, Community sponsorship, Integration, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Housing

The Role of the State in Community-Led Welcome: Lessons from Homes for Ukraine

Executive Summary

- The article argues that community-led welcome is not a substitute for government-led resettlement, but an approach that relies on multi-level governance from central, regional, and local authorities.
- Homes for Ukraine (HfU) illustrates this dynamic: while public mobilisation was unprecedented, central government-controlled visas, funding parameters, and legal status, shaping the scheme.
- Local authorities were pivotal, acting as the safeguarding and homelessness backstop, coordinating rematching, and delivering integration support; however, wide disparities in local capacity and the absence of a national integration strategy limited consistency.
- Devolved administrations exercised distinct approaches, including Scotland and Wales adopting super-sponsor routes, yet these initiatives strained quickly, showing the limits of devolved autonomy without structural levers in place.

Introduction

- The authors define community-led welcome as initiatives where individuals and communities take leading roles in receiving and integrating refugees.
- While these approaches can strengthen newcomer integration through community networks, they have also raised concerns that governments may be shifting resettlement and integration responsibilities onto private actors.
- The paper uses the UK's Homes for Ukraine (HfU) scheme because of its rapid mobilization of community and state support and its parallel deployment with other schemes in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
- The authors argue that **understanding HfU requires a multi-level governance lens**, showing how central, regional, and local governments shape community-led welcome and why such schemes cannot be seen as community-driven alternatives to state-led resettlement.

Migration Governance in Multi-level States

- Since the 1960s, European states have created additional layers of government between national and local levels, decentralizing decision-making power.
- Migration governance became “rescaled”: **central governments retained control over admission and citizenship, while integration responsibilities shifted to sub-state authorities.**
- Scholten's (2013) typology outlines four vertical governance models:
 1. **Centralist:** central government dominates policy and implementation.
 2. **Localist:** local governments lead with minimal central government involvement.
 3. **Decoupling:** absence of coordination between local and central government, leading to contradictory policies and conflict.

4. **Multi-level governance:** shared responsibilities with cooperation across tiers.
- Horizontal governance examines relationships at the same level, including alliances between municipalities that strengthen integration agendas in restrictive national policy environments.
- Civil society also operates horizontally: national governments tend to work with large NGOs and UNHCR, while local governments depend on smaller NGOs and volunteer groups.

Community-Led Welcome: Devolution of State Responsibilities?

- Community-led welcome began in the 70s with Canada's model of private sponsorship and has gained renewed momentum since the 2015–16 refugee movements and the Global Compact on Refugees, which encouraged expanding complementary pathways.
- Newer policy experiments include humanitarian corridors, UK community sponsorship, the US *Welcome Corps*, and hosting initiatives.
- **Community-led welcome improves integration outcomes and decreases xenophobia.**
- Critics argue that community-led welcome aligns with neoliberal strategies that devolve or privatize refugee protection, enabling states to shift responsibility and blame onto volunteers, while creating hierarchies between “good” (resettled) and “bad” (irregular) refugees.
- Evidence from UK community sponsorship shows that volunteers frequently feel unprepared for the complexities of language acquisition, labour market integration, and housing access.

Examining Homes for Ukraine's Governance Through Policy Roundtables and Policy Analysis

- The study draws on an embedded researcher model working with 12 UK local authorities, allowing real-time insight into how councils interpreted their responsibilities during HfU's rapid rollout and where early implementation pressures emerged.
- Two inception-stage roundtables were synthesised, capturing shared challenges and opportunities from the rapid mobilization of HfU.

Understanding Homes for Ukraine Through Multilevel Governance

HfU in the Context of the UK Migration Governance

- HfU was introduced into a strongly centralised migration system, where the Home Office controls admission while integration is devolved to regional governments.
- Local authorities have gained increasing responsibilities across multiple “bespoke” schemes (e.g., Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy), despite lacking national integration strategies.
- UK Resettlement Scheme resettled only 2,192 people between 2021–23, while HfU admitted 138,200 by late 2023, showing how nationality-based routes now overshadow global resettlement.
- The authors track three distinctive shifts with HfU:

1. HfU's operational leadership moved from the Home Office to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), a department responsible for local government, **signalling a policy shift from migration control to integration.**
2. HfU functioned as a temporary visa route, not a refugee or asylum pathway, blurring the boundaries between migration and refugee policies.
3. HfU radically expanded community-led welcome by removing the high barriers found in the Community Sponsorship Scheme, enabling an “incredibly fast” mobilisation at scale.

Role of Central Government in HfU

- Central government's first major decision was to make the number of arrivals uncapped, supported by increased numbers and reduced timescale of application approval by the Home Office. The central government also financed the project and controlled host allotments.
- Other major decisions were to: make the policy a “bespoke” nationality-based approach; allow DLUHC to control operations; have the central government establish the operational guidelines to support the DLUHC; and, outsource some functions (e.g., matching) to NGOs such as Reset.

Role of Regional Government and Devolved Administrations in HfU

- DLUHC operates only in England, so Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland were responsible for operational delivery, which marked the **first time a humanitarian admission scheme was effectively devolved.**
- Scotland and Wales introduced super-sponsor routes that removed the need for matching and allowed immediate travel, bringing large numbers of arrivals rapidly. Both super-sponsor programmes were paused after a quick strain due to accommodation shortages.
- Northern Ireland instead created Ukraine Assistance Centres to respond to higher levels of spontaneous arrivals across the land border with Ireland.

Role of Local Authorities in HfU

- Local authorities were responsible for strategic planning, service delivery, community-led welcome, monitoring, evaluation, and learning.
- They were further responsible for safeguarding checks, rematching, homelessness prevention, and broader integration tasks—making them the essential backstop for scheme safety and continuity.
- Their responsibilities resembled those in existing resettlement schemes, but with added pressures from host-guest breakdowns and housing scarcity, and with wide variation in capacity across councils.

Conclusion

- The authors argue that **community-led welcome is intertwined with services for resettlement and broader refugee integration** offered by various levels of government.
- In the multi-level system, the central government sets scheme parameters and funding from a top-down model.
- The local government acts as a safety net by providing services, planning, and community-led welcome, but this net is held back by challenges with host-guest breakdowns, housing scarcity, and a lack of capacity.
- HfU was used to demonstrate the potential for community-led schemes, but it **could not be realised due to the power imbalances towards the central government**. The central government controlled overall planning and financing, but this plan was unable to be met effectively given the capacity issues across the regional and local levels.