

Direct and Vicarious Administrative Burden: Experiences of UK Public Services as a Homes for Ukraine Host

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Abstract. *This article shows, through a study of hosts' experiences of the UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme, the ways in which sponsoring refugees can impose burdens on sponsors by virtue of the state's administrative processes. Specifically, it shows how sponsors incur learning, compliance, and psychological costs from administrative burdens and that these burdens are encountered both directly, through their own engagements with public bodies, and vicariously, through the experiences of their guests. The article thus makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the ground-level experience of refugee sponsorship while also expanding the burgeoning theory of administrative burden by demonstrating the relevance of burdens experienced vicariously.*

INTRODUCTION

Following the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, the UK government established the Homes for Ukraine scheme (Immigration Rules, Appendix Ukraine Scheme). This new mechanism allows UK residents, who meet certain eligibility requirements, to sponsor a

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person or family fleeing Ukraine. If permitted, the relevant Ukrainian nationals are provided with a visa that allows them to live in the UK for three years. Hosts then must provide a spare room in their house, or a room in a second property, free of charge for an expected minimum period of six months. In return, the UK government provides hosts with a small “thank you” payment. This is not a form of refugee protection in strict terms (it is a visa system), but it is legal and bureaucratic vehicle which has been designed specifically to respond to Ukraine’s refugee crisis. As of 2nd April 2024, 182,800 visas had been issued through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and there have been 145,900 arrivals (UK Government, 2024b).

The Homes for Ukraine scheme differs from but is effectively a species of the community sponsorship scheme model, which has become increasingly popular in recent years with governments around the world (Feith Tan, 2020). Past studies on such schemes have investigated the experience of sponsors. Broadly, such studies have found that while sponsoring can be fulfilling, it is also a very demanding and challenging experience (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019). Given the increasing emphasis on the role of volunteers in state systems that seek to protect refugees—including through visa schemes such as Homes for Ukraine—and the apparent attractiveness of these approaches to policymakers, it is imperative we continue to develop empirical evidence on the ground-level experiences of hosting.

In this article, we draw upon an original qualitative dataset—the most extensive assembled to date—on sponsor experiences of the Homes for Ukraine scheme to explore an important and under-analysed aspect of the hosting experience: how sponsors experience administrative burdens in the course of hosting (Herd and Moynihan, 2018). Specifically, we show how sponsors encounter learning, compliance, and psychological costs as a result of their own engagements with public bodies in the course of being a host. We also show how

sponsors experience administrative burdens, not just directly but also vicariously, through the interactions their guests have with public bodies (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2023). These burdens and the associated costs can be central to the hosting experience.

By demonstrating that these direct and vicarious experiences of administrative burdens are significant to the sponsor experience, we make two contributions to—and bring together—two bodies of knowledge. First, we develop the empirical understanding of, and propose a useful means of analysing, an important aspect of being a host within volunteer-based schemes. Second, we expand the burgeoning theory of “administrative burden” in public administration research by demonstrating the relevance of burdens experienced vicariously, which has far far been neglected.

This article is split into six parts. First, we introduce in more detail the existing evidence on the experiences of hosts, and locate our study within the wider literature on ‘community-based sponsorship.’ Second, we introduce the rapidly developing body of theory and evidence in public administration research on administrative burdens, where we also argue for recognising the importance of vicarious experiences of administrative burden. Third, we set out the basic design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the role of hosts within it, and what evidence already exists that points to the salience of administrative burdens in the hosting experience. Fourth, we set out our methods and dataset. Part five considers, in turn, what our dataset suggests about the nature of the learning, compliance, and psychological costs experienced, both directly and vicariously, by hosts as part of the Homes for Ukraine schemes. We conclude by offering some reflections on the implications of our analysis.

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP AND EMERGING EVIDENCE OF THE BURDENS OF HOSTING

Canada has the longest-running private sponsorship scheme (Lenard, 2016), and these schemes have gained popularity across Europe since 2015 (Feith Tan, 2020). The key characteristic of community sponsorship schemes is that private citizens, often in groups, volunteer to provide the financial, emotional, and practical support necessary to receive and integrate refugees in their home countries (Feith Tan, 2020). The ‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme is not the UK’s first experience with community sponsorship models, as it has also been adopted for resettlement purposes (Phillimore *et al.*, 2022).

It is important to note that the ‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme resembles, but is not identical to, a conventional community sponsorship scheme for refugees. Like other community sponsorship schemes, Homes for Ukraine largely presupposes that there are UK residents willing to sponsor and capable of sponsoring the entry and integration of Ukrainian refugees in the UK, and draws upon this resource. But the scheme also departs from the usual model in various ways. For instance, unlike many other community sponsorship schemes, Homes for Ukraine hosts did not take on the role of sponsors in a group. Perhaps most importantly, the scheme does not lead to Ukrainians being granted refugee status. Instead, they are granted a time-limited visa. The scheme thus appears to facilitate a more temporary arrangement in multiple respects.

In the literature on community sponsorship schemes, a recurring concern is the extent to which governments are exploiting community sponsorship to evade their responsibilities and pass them onto their citizens instead (Lenard, 2016; Labman, 2020). Given the significant role sponsors play in the success of such schemes (Feith Tan, 2021), it has thus emerged that

it is important to study the extent of the burden they are shouldering. In this respect, there is a small but helpful existing evidence base on hosting experiences within the refugee community sponsorship model, and the types of burdens they take on and experience.

The existing literature points to how the role of the sponsor, regardless of the particularities of each individual scheme, is inevitably demanding. For most sponsors their work begins before they even interact with the refugees they are sponsoring, since different sponsorship schemes have different requirements for interested parties to qualify as sponsors. Sponsors must often go through the process of finding a charity organisation to work with and then prove their capability and willingness to help in the application process (Lenard, 2016; Feith Tan, 2020). For example, they may need to show they have the funds to support the refugee they want to sponsor. In the case of the UK Community Sponsorship Scheme, with the help of the relevant charity, sponsors must show they have raised £9,000 and get their local authority's permission for the scheme to run in their area. Moreover, once accepted, sponsors may be required to expend some of their time and energy to undergo a period of training before taking up their new responsibilities (Lanphier, 2003). This might involve learning about cultural differences, how to cope with trauma survivors, how to communicate with people who do not speak the same language, and becoming more familiar with the processes they might need to guide refugees through (Behnia, 2007).

Following that initial period, the primary responsibility sponsors have is usually providing housing and helping refugees integrate into the host country culturally, financially, and administratively, which gives rise to a range of tasks. Sponsors usually carry at least some financial burden paying for housing or other expenses that may arise, such as clothing, food, and medical emergencies (Lanphier, 2003). In addition, sponsors often provide means

of transportation, driving refugees to appointments, school, and social outings (Behnia, 2007). Sponsors also act as the connecting link between refugees and the various services they need to access. As a result, they play a significant role in explaining how the host country's systems work and aiding refugees to complete administrative tasks, such as registering for benefits and the healthcare system. They facilitate access to language classes, schooling for the children, and employment opportunities for the adults (Lenard, 2016), and may also act as interpreters and advocates by attending medical appointments or school parent-child meetings (Phillimore *et al.*, 2020).

The most emphasised aspect of sponsors' efforts in existing literature and assessments of sponsorship schemes is the effort required for the sponsor-refugee relationship (Behnia, 2007; Lenard, 2016; Fratzke and Dorst, 2019; Phillimore *et al.*, 2022). This involves the emotional effort that must be expended by sponsors to cope with difficulties that may arise due to cultural differences, trauma, and the general psychological state of the sponsored refugees. They are often called to interact with and support vulnerable individuals who are generally undergoing a complex and often arduous adjustment process in an effort to meet both their social and emotional needs (Phillimore *et al.*, 2020). Sponsors must not only navigate the stresses and difficult emotions of the people they are sponsoring but must also work to manage their own expectations, frustrations, and sometimes prejudice (Lenard, 2016), a task sometimes made more difficult in cases where the sponsor's social circle does not approve of their participation in the scheme (Behnia, 2007).

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS

Our focus in this article is on the experiences of sponsors—and especially the costs they incur—when they encounter administrative burdens. Though it has many antecedents in even

the earliest public administration research—Woodrow Wilson spoke of “wearing frictions” (1887)—the idea of “administrative burden” has become increasingly prominent in that field in recent years. There is some debate about its precise definition (Martin and Tankink, 2022). However, in the simple terms of the most prominent definition offered by Herd and Moynihan (2018, 2), it relates to the range of costs that people encounter when they seek to engage with public administration (see also Burden *et al.*, 2012; Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey, 2015).

Also flowing from Herd and Moynihan’s influential conceptualisation (2018, 23), the concern of research in public administration has largely been with three “components” of burden (see Table 1). First, learning costs, which relate to the time and effort expended to learn about a programme or service, ascertaining eligibility status, the nature of benefits, conditions that must be satisfied, and how to gain access. Second, compliance costs, which concern issues such as the provision of information and documentation to demonstrate eligibility, financial costs to access services (such as fees, legal representation, travel costs), and avoiding or responding to discretionary demands made by administrators. Third, psychological costs, which are, for example, incurred in situations including where there is stigma arising from applying for and participating in an unpopular programme, loss of autonomy that comes from intrusive administrative supervision, frustration at dealing with compliance costs, unjust or unnecessary procedures, or stresses that arise from uncertainty about whether an individual can negotiate processes and compliance costs.

<i>Learning costs</i>	Time and effort expended to learn about the programme or service, ascertaining eligibility status, the nature of benefits, conditions that must be satisfied, and how to gain access
<i>Compliance costs</i>	Provision of information and documentation to demonstrate standing; financial costs to access services (such as fees, legal representation, travel costs); avoiding or responding to discretionary demands made by administrators
<i>Psychological costs</i>	Stigma arising from applying for and participating in an unpopular programme; loss of autonomy that comes from intrusive administrative supervision; frustration at dealing with compliance costs, unjust or unnecessary procedures; stresses that arise from uncertainty about whether a citizen can negotiate processes and compliance costs

Table 1: Types of administrative burden (Herd and Moynihan, 2018)

Since this influential framework was first advanced, research on administrative burden has ventured in many directions. This exploration has included what causes burdens, including the political (Aarøe *et al.*, 2021; Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen, 2020; Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey, 2016) and organisational factors in play (Peeters, 2020). It has examined the level of support for burdens amongst both the public (Keiser and Miller, 2020; Nicholson-Crotty, Miller, and Keiser, 2021) and street-level bureaucrats (Bell *et al.*, 2021; Stanica *et al.*, 2020). How people experience burdens has also been a key point of inquiry (Barnes, 2021; Mack *et al.*, 2021; Nisar, 2018a), including how people seek to navigate, mitigate, or evade burdens (Nisar 2018b; Nielsen, Nielsen, and Bisgaard, 2020). Other work has inquired as to whether some groups face administrative burdens more than others (Bisgaard, 2020; Christensen *et al.*, 2020; Chudnovsky and Peeters, 2021; Döring, 2021; Masood and Nisar, 2021; Olsen, Kyhse-Andersen, and Moynihan, 2020). Research has also sought to get a better understanding of the impacts of burdens (Fox, Stazyk, and Feng, 2020; Heinrich, 2016; Heinrich, 2018; Lopoo, Heflin, and Boskovski, 2020; Sievert, Vogel, and Feeney, 2020) and how burdens can be reduced or eliminated (Baekgaard *et al.*, 2021; Hattke, Hensel, and Kalucza, 2020; Linos, Quan, and Kirkman, 2020; Tummers *et al.*, 2016).

The theory of administrative burden, though of great utility and based in an increasingly sophisticated evidence base, has an important blind spot, which is also reflected in almost all research on “frontline” public processes. That is, it has traditionally focused on the relationship between public processes and the person or group formally subject to an administrative process. Yet, people who are not the direct or formal subject of such processes but are, in various ways, able to access the experiences of others can also have salient and consequential experiences. Elsewhere, we have documented the related phenomenon of “vicarious administrative fairness”, which we have defined as “the perceptions of the fairness of public decision-making processes that are generated not by one being directly subjected to such processes but through information received indirectly about the experiences of others” (2023). We have argued that it is important to consider vicarious experiences in order to advance a fuller sociological understanding of how people experience frontline administrative processes. This reflects the growing attempts of researchers across disciplines to shine a light on often-hidden “vicarious” effects—which we have seen in domains as diverse as taxation (Worsham Jr., 1996), criminology (Mondak *et al.*, 2017; Pryce *et al.*, 2021; Herda and McCarthy, 2018), the intersection of racism and health (Chae *et al.*, 2021; Zimmerman and Miller Smith, 2022; Wofford *et al.*, 2019), education (Herda, 2021), and the workplace (Huang *et al.*, 2015; Kray and Allan Lind, 2022; Allan Lind, Kray, and Thompson, 1998).

We take as a starting point that refugees and their support networks are a group for which administrative burdens might be particularly salient, as they might be considered both vulnerable to and reliant upon public institutions are particularly exposed to the impact of administrative burdens. Furthermore, we see no reason why the theory of administrative burdens should not include an examination of how burdens are experienced vicariously—as

we go on to show later in this article, they can be highly relevant in certain settings, including community sponsorship settings.

THE HOMES FOR UKRAINE SCHEME

Against this backdrop, our study focuses on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The scheme is a new immigration route through which Ukrainian refugees can enter and reside in the UK. As an appendix to the Immigration Rules, it makes provisions for Ukrainians with an eligible UK resident sponsor to be granted up to a 3-year UK visa. With this visa, Ukrainians can reside in the UK, work, and access public services. As of 2nd April 2024, 182,800 visas have been issued through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and there have been 145,900 arrivals (UK Government, 2024b).

Sponsors are expected to altruistically host the sponsored individual(s) in their home or another property. Interest in the scheme can be expressed either through the government's website or to independent organisations that are involved in helping sponsors and refugees navigate the scheme. A matching process must be initiated, most often by the participants themselves, but sometimes aided by local councils and relevant organisations, because sponsors are required to name the person(s) they are looking to sponsor.

Becoming a sponsor is subject to certain eligibility requirements such as already being a resident of the UK for six months, passing accommodation and security checks, and making a six-month hosting commitment (Immigration Rules, Appendix Ukraine Scheme; UK Government, 2023b). Security checks are made for all adult residents of a potential home, with enhanced security checks required where the hosted person is underage (UK

Government, 2023b). Since the study was conducted, being a British or Irish Citizen or settled in the UK has become a new eligibility requirement (UK Government, 2024a).

Sponsors initially receive £350 per month as a “thank you” payment, but the amount increases to £500 for those hosting for over 12 months (UK Government, 2023a; UK Government, 2022). The six-month hosting commitment is the expected duration of the arrangement, but this period can be extended or brought to an end earlier, placing the responsibility on local councils to rehost the refugees where there is a relationship breakdown. There was a gentle push, including through the increased payment after 12 months, from government for hosts to extend their original commitment for another six months.

The setup of the scheme induces many sponsor-government interactions, which vary depending on the details of particular situations. For instance, sponsors may have to coordinate with local councils to get matched with a refugee or to resolve a relationship breakdown. Throughout their hosting experience, all sponsors will have to encounter government agencies to apply, meet the eligibility criteria, then follow along their guests’ visa processes, ensure they receive the “thank you” payments, and facilitate the smooth conclusion of this journey. Once a hosting arrangement was in place, hosts then often took on a wider variety of roles in public service interactions relating to their guests. This often included supporting access to social security and healthcare services, which, for some sponsors, required contact with public services they might never dealt with before in their own lives. However, we only have limited insights into these interactions and the burdens they impose.

Prior to our study, a survey from the Office of National Statistics (2022a; 2022b) was the main source through which we can get a glimpse into the experiences of the Homes for Ukraine scheme's sponsors. The survey catalogues various forms of support provided by sponsors, including helping with accessing services (91%), settling into the community (78%), transport (73%), emotional support (70%), interpreting and learning English (70%), finding work (66%), shopping for groceries (60%), cooking (53%), cleaning (48%), financial support (31%), and childcare (20%). Sponsors also spoke about sustaining additional costs, for example in relation to utilities (85%), transport (58%), and bedding and toiletries (62%) with some reporting that the rising cost of living was affecting their ability to provide support (18%). Sponsor responses in relation to the challenges brought on by the scheme included the uncertainty as to what will happen to guests (66%), difficulties relating to visas (50%) and sponsor applications (25%), and difficulties helping guests access public services (29%), benefits and financial support (25%), while some sponsors struggled to be certain of what was expected of them in that role (25%). More than half of the sponsors (59%) expressed that getting support for their guest(s)' administrative tasks would have been helpful. Most hosts also indicated that they would have liked advice providing support for dealing with challenges (52%) and for available guidance to have been signposted more readily (48%).

The interest shown by mainstream media in the scheme has also birthed several stories providing accounts of the hosting experience of some sponsors. It is common for these narratives to reveal the altruistic element of participating in the scheme and describe developing family relationships and friendships between sponsors and their guests, even if circumstances are not ideal (*e.g.* Russell, 2022). Nonetheless, hosts have reported feeling overwhelmed faced with uncharted situations and systems (Russell, 2022; Bryant and Townsend, 2022; Berthier, 2022; Hickey, 2022), and relationship breakdowns are not

unheard of (*e.g.* Fyfe, 2022). Kathy Burrell (2023), a human geographer, also produced a brief critical analysis where she proposes that amongst the scheme's shortcomings is not anticipating what effect a rising cost of living, a reluctance from hosts to continue their service, delays in visa decisions, and the magnitude of the effort required of the hosts might have on the scheme's longevity and success.

METHODS

The analysis that follows draws on the largest qualitative dataset assembled to date on the experiences of sponsors in the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The dataset is comprised of 43 semi-structured interviews, conducted between 8th March and 11th April 2023. The majority of the interviews were one-on-one, but three involved couples, culminating in a total of 46 participants. The research received full ethical approval from the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee of the University of York.

Recruitment took place first by utilising online advertisements posted through York Law School accounts onto Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn directing interested persons to a sign-up form and second by “snowball sampling”, a technique that relies on current participants making suggestions for other eligible individuals to be included in the study (Dosek 2021; Leighton et al 2021). The only condition for eligibility was for the individual to have some hosting experience, regardless of whether it was ongoing or concluded. Given that hosts are a relatively hard-to-reach population, we did not introduce quotas or operate a purposive sampling strategy across socio-demographic characteristics. Instead, our approach was to recruit as broad a group of participants as possible. This was both to ensure that participants were not faced with a long screening process (for instance, asking about a range

of factors like social security receipt, size of property etc.), and to ensure that data collection was tied closely to our research questions and was limited to necessary data only.

This leads to an overall sample that skews towards female participants (34 female participants as opposed to 12 male), those based in England (with 2 participants in Wales and 2 in Scotland), and to those with an ongoing hosting arrangement (with 9 having had their hosting arrangement end). Our research questions for this study focus on direct and vicarious administrative burdens, so do not address the role that socio-demographic factors play on hosts' experiences of the scheme. This could be a fruitful line of further research outside of the present study. We are confident, however, that the sample reflected a range of host experiences, as is apparent in the data detailed below. More generally, the analysis did not reveal patterns between socio-demographic characteristics—either of the sponsor or the guests—and the direct or vicarious burdens set out below.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom and on average lasted 45 minutes. Audio recordings of these interviews were then transcribed, with participants being assigned pseudonyms and identifying information being omitted from transcripts to safeguard anonymity.

The interview schedule was broad and varied, including questions relating to the motivating factors for scheme participation, experiences at various stages of the hosting arrangement, and sponsor expectations and perceptions on how their participation has impacted them. A section was specially dedicated to investigating and understanding the vicarious experience of administrative processes arising due to the integration support provided by hosts.

We developed a six-part code to analyse the dataset having discerned the significance of vicarious experiences of administrative burden through an initial inductive analysis. The foundation of the code were the three established categories of costs associated with administrative burden (learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs). We also made a distinction between burdens related to the sponsor’s own interaction with an administrative process – direct burdens - and those arising through their guest’s interaction with an administrative process – vicarious burdens (see table 2).

	<i>Sponsor’s administrative process</i>	<i>Guest’s administrative process</i>
<i>Learning cost</i>	Direct learning cost	Vicarious learning cost
<i>Compliance cost</i>	Direct compliance cost	Vicarious compliance cost
<i>Psychological cost</i>	Direct psychological cost	Vicarious psychological cost

Table 2: Coding framework

Although some large-scale quantitative data on the experiences of sponsors is available (Office for National Statistics, 2022a; Office for National Statistics, 2022b), this is the largest qualitative study undertaken to date on the experiences of Homes for Ukraine hosts. It is important, however, to acknowledge the limitations of our data. Our sample is not representative of all the sponsors in the Homes for Ukraine scheme. As such, the views expressed by participants may not capture the full diversity of experiences and perspectives of all sponsors in the scheme. All participants were recruited via social media which may mean that respondents with certain characteristics—such as those who are more digitally literate—are overrepresented in the sample. Furthermore, the sample has a skew towards female participants (34 females versus 12 males). Nonetheless, our objective in interrogating our qualitative dataset is two-fold: first, to offer a more detailed understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants, revealing a range of administrative burdens that have been associated with the Homes for Ukraine scheme; and, second, to advance

theory in relation to administrative burden, demonstrating that burdens may be experienced both directly and vicariously.

HOST EXPERIENCES OF ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS

Our dataset revealed clear evidence of hosts experiencing learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs resulting from administrative burdens encountered in the course of being a host. Further, there was ample evidence that these costs can be experienced both directly and vicariously. In this part of the article, we set out this evidence to shine new light on these dynamics.

Learning costs

Host directly experienced learning costs from administrative burdens at multiple points in the hosting process. In the early stages of their involvement, participants underscored the difficulties they faced in finding accessible information about the scheme, described by Participants 7 and 10 as a “nightmare”:

I would say applying on the government website was an absolute nightmare. And the only reason I got through it was because I – purely by my own research. (Participant 7)

The waiting, the chasing up, finding out information, getting action on visas, was a complete and utter nightmare. (Participant 10)

Even where hosts were able to access policy guidance, they sometimes found it unclear and time-consuming to navigate, often leading to a considerable learning burden as they sought to

establish their eligibility to be a sponsor or finalise their application to host. For Participant 1, the application process was a particularly burdensome learning cost:

I'd looked at whatever policy guidance there was at the time and realised that you had to do a different application for each member of the family. It wasn't obvious. If I hadn't known that, I wouldn't necessarily have picked that up from the process. (Participant 1)

In addition to the learning costs associated with navigating the scheme themselves, hosts also reported incurring vicarious learning costs. Here, participants learnt about a range of administrative processes so they could support their guests in their engagements with public bodies as they settled into the UK. These learning costs were experienced in a range of different administrative settings, but the two most common examples were with respect to Universal Credit (the principal working-age benefit in the UK) and school applications. On the former, Participants 6 and 12 both assisted their guest with applications, having never been exposed to the Universal Credit application process before:

There was a few of us that – some sponsored, some were just interested – that did a bit of research and found out things. So a lot of the people around here that were taking refugees in didn't know how to claim for Universal Credit because they never have, don't know the rules about renting property because they've owned their own house for forty years or whatever. (Participant 6)

I mean, if you've never used Universal Credit before, I didn't realise that you're meant to go on just in case they've sent some random questions to you that you must answer within forty-eight hours or you don't get any benefits. I mean, if you've never used the benefit system, how do you know that? (Participant 12)

Likewise, Participant 20 was unfamiliar with the local process for making school applications, but had to “find it out” so they could assist their guest on arrival with getting their children into a local school:

We only found out by chance that [a local body] look at school applications on a Monday, and only on a Monday. So if you don't get your application in by the Sunday, you have to wait another week. So they arrived on the Sunday and we suddenly found out this piece of information, so the minute they arrived we were doing school applications with them to make sure we got the children into school as soon as possible. But nobody told us that. We just had to find it out. I just happened to notice on Facebook that somebody had mentioned that. (Participant 20)

A key theme echoed by participants across the sample was a lack of available, clear information from the government at all stages, both in relation to their direct engagements with government and in relation to their guests' access to public services. Many of them thus felt placed under a considerable administrative burden that imposed learning costs, but also thought the government did not support them in overcoming or mitigating this cost. Some hosts reported that, to mitigate the impact of information costs and the lack of guidance from government, they created or joined online communities to share the learning costs with other hosts. Participants drew on forums and Facebook groups as “there was no one else to ask”:

So, basically, the questions were extremely simple, and a lot of the answers that we didn't know, I had read about on forums. My support group was forums, was applications of other people and people saying, “Oh, what do you say to this answer? What do you say here?” (Participant 2)

It was a complicated application and you had no support. There was no one you could ask. There's just no point phoning the phone lines to speak to anybody. I was only getting support from other volunteers, other hosts, so no, there wasn't much support and it was complicated. (Participant 11)

I was following all these Facebook groups quite carefully, so gradually sort of saved information and I was significantly helped by the fact that at the point that we came to do the application it was probably about six or eight weeks after the scheme had opened, so it helped a lot. (Participant 29)

Others drew upon their own knowledge, connections, and resources to offset the learning costs affecting their guests:

Universal Credit. She doesn't need that now, so that's all fine. And applying for her actual three-year visa. So we had help with that, because we saw our immigration lawyer friend and he actually did that application for us. That part was done for us. Because he said he knew what to do and he wouldn't make the mistakes, so it would be a lot quicker process and it was. (Participant 12)

We did it all because she can't speak English and at the time that we did it, everything was in English. It would have been – it wasn't easy as it was because we had to get the information from her and so – and then we had to fill it out. (Participant 16)

What emerges from this data is a picture of a scheme with the potential to generate significant learning costs for hosts, which can be exacerbated by a lack of clear guidance and support. However, these learning costs were far from isolated to the direct experience of the host, such as their initial application to the scheme; hosts also routinely incurred learning costs in order to engage with systems or support applications on behalf of their guests.

Compliance costs

Our data on compliance costs illustrates a similar dynamic, with hosts incurring compliance costs both directly and vicariously. In their direct engagements, hosts pointed routinely to the volume of documentation they had to provide, including to their guests, in the course of their

initial application to participate in the scheme. As Participant 2 describes it, “they had everything of me”:

My passport number, my passport ID, where I live. All my passports. I've got three passports. They had everything of me, my National Insurance number, my address. I had to put a lot of trust in those people.
(Participant 2)

These compliance costs were not confined to the initial application. Participants regularly identified the burdens associated with arranging the “thank you” payment once their guest had arrived. For several participants, this involved having to make contact on multiple occasions with their local authority:

So, when they arrived, I filled in a form on the council website to trigger the host payments. I mean, I wasn't really doing it for the money but at one point I rang the council and said, “Am I going to get anything?” because [my guest] had been with me a little while by then, and they said, “Oh no, we won't release any money until we've had a welfare visit.” (Participant 4)

I don't think the thank you payment arrived for about three months, so that was very stressful... And then every month they would ring up to check that she was still there and then they would release the payment... One month my support worker was on holiday, so then we didn't get a payment for a month because she was on holiday, because she'd not processed it, so it was just ridiculous and then I remember, it should've arrived at the sixth of every month, so the 6th December it didn't arrive, it's obviously Christmas, there's this cost of living crisis, fuel bills were very bad, and I remember, it was like the 15th December and no money had come through, no phone call. (Participant 37)

A central component of the Homes for Ukraine scheme is the requirement for UK hosts to ensure their accommodation meets certain standards. Inspections for local authorities to enforce these standards were also a key source of compliance costs in the sample. Hosts

described frustrations with unexpected costs and changes needed to comply with inspections or facilitate access:

The council home check was a bit tedious, and we failed it (laughs). They said that 70% of people failed it because of a wood burning stove, which is here, doesn't have a service certificate. So we have to get that, which is fine... We can get that sorted but, yeah, that was a bit frustrating. (Participant 2)

If I hadn't have quizzed it, they were going to make me put locks on bedroom doors, which I said was irrelevant because we were opening up our whole house. We weren't having locks on our bedroom doors so yeah, we weren't going to – it was not like we were renting the house, the room out. It wasn't completely their space. You know, they had access to our house. It just made a nonsense of it for them to have a secure area within our house. So that's what – I found that frustrating. (Participant 28)

While some hosts faced unexpected costs and changes to comply with requirements, others were frustrated with the inspection process itself, finding it unnecessarily repetitive and time-consuming:

For some reason, they came twice. When the daughter of the first guest, who was already in this country but she couldn't stay on where she was – she was staying with a family member who no longer had room for her – when she transferred from a different borough to our borough, then they wanted to come and visit a third time, and I said, "Well, you've already been twice. I don't think you really need to come a third time," and they agreed that they didn't. (Participant 33)

In common with the learning costs above, hosts also experienced compliance costs vicariously when assisting their guests in their encounters with public bodies. The initial application process was, once again, a recurring example:

So I did all the forms for them. I mean, [my guests] didn't really tell me but I guess they must have found it unnerving that they had to send me all of their documents. We didn't know each other beforehand and they had to send me copies of all their passports and birth certificates, you know, the whole family's details, before they even got the visa, obviously. So I know it was stressful for them to have different family members approved at different times, and then have the uncertainty on what was happening with the other family member. But they didn't have any direct contact with the Home Office. I handled all of that for them. (Participant 1)

For four people, I had to put on each separately, all the details of all the other people four times, and I'm writing names I'm not familiar with, Ukrainian names that I'm not familiar with the spelling of, I'm not familiar with the people or their dates, so I had to keep referring to the information in front of me. So instead of doing one and saying this is the mother, this is the brother, this is the sister, or whatever, you have to do four separate ones, naming all of the other people on each one. (Participant 30)

These vicarious experiences also extended to wider interactions between their guests and public authorities. Hosts often acted as intermediaries between their guests and public bodies, including social security agencies, schools and healthcare providers:

I helped her fill in the Universal Credit form, which was interesting, because I'd never done one before. (Participant 6)

The UK admin is massive. So the two without passports had a BRP at Portsmouth, so we had to drive them to Portsmouth to collect it. The two with international passports, we had to make appointments at Croydon and get those. We had to make appointments with the bank. We had to explain to the bank that two of them didn't have international passports, which made that more complicated. We registered them with the GP, which was six forms per person. We registered the ten-year-old with a school, which was eleven forms. Yeah, there's a lot of duplication, so we did all of that. (Participant 12)

The – I mean schooling, I ended up applying for 16 schools, you know, and instead of – it might be because of where we live, but I had to apply to two different boroughs because if you didn't apply at the beginning of a school year, you had to apply to everyone individually. (Participant 35)

The only thing I did, really, was go with her to a GP at the same practice I am, to help her with the forms and register for the GP. (Participant 42)

Our data illustrates that hosts experienced substantial compliance costs, both directly in their interactions with authorities and vicariously when acting as mediators between their guests and a range of public. Direct costs involved providing extensive personal documentation during the application process and ongoing contact with local authorities to chase payments. Indirect costs arose as hosts helped guests navigate various public services like welfare, education, and healthcare, which often involved repetitive paperwork, appointments, and navigating (often unfamiliar) administrative processes.

Psychological costs

Finally, hosts further experienced psychological costs resulting from administrative burdens linked to hosting – again, split into direct and vicarious experiences. Hosts pointed to how the initial application process often caused them unease. Sometimes this was just the nature of the process: “I just felt like, the weight of the world on my shoulders... so I felt totally responsible and if I'd made a mistake, like I've done this, so it just felt awful” (Participant 37). However, hosts also pointed to how they felt forced to share information with guests who were, at that point, effectively strangers:

We did it by sharing our screen on Zoom, so I had to share my information. I wasn't very happy about that... But I was keen to give them agency so we both had the password, we both had the visa application number, we both had each other's documents... (Participant 2)

Well, we didn't – it wasn't very clear. And to be doing it, we took the stance of I didn't want to give any of my personal details out to a complete stranger. So we led the application process and our guest, who is still with us, gave us all her personal information, like the passports. (Participant 7)

I mean there's an element of trust there because obviously you're handing over quite a lot of personal information to somebody you've never met other than by Zoom. (Participant 33)

Another common example of a directly experienced psychological cost related to the impacts of waiting for decisions on whether the arrangements were to go ahead:

So it was a traumatic experience all round. I mean, it was hard for us chasing it up, but for [our guest] and the children, it was horrendous... I got in the car, drove up there, couldn't get any sense out of anyone there. They wouldn't even see me. I couldn't even get past the security guard on the desk. So I came back and then I went straight to the MP's office and absolutely ripped into him that this is a ridiculous situation, because I was really angry at that point... I felt like it was my little mouth up against tonnes of people..... It was a terrible, terrible time... I would only recommend it to people that I felt could face it, because there were times when, emotionally, it was horrendous. Not dealing with these people, they're fantastic, but the process is awful. (Participant 10)

Anyway, it got lost in the system, or there was confusion over it anyway, so the family were delayed for quite some time. I was in touch with my MP to try and resolve the issue, and it probably took six weeks (laughs). It was very frustrating because they were living with someone else in Poland, so for them it was very unsettling to have to go through that, and extremely tense, emotionally tense for me. (Participant 22)

I chased because it was the perspective that the guests, I couldn't tell the guests what was happening. Every day they'd get in touch and say, "Have you got any news? Have you got the visas?" and it was kind of making me look foolish. (Participant 27)

Our dataset also provides ample evidence of psychological costs which were incurred vicariously, through hosts seeing their guests interact with public administrative processes, supporting them with these processes, and even from considering how to support their guests in the best way:

So our guests were asking if the council put on any events for Ukrainians, and the council woman was like, "Oh no, for GDPR purposes...", and not really explaining GDPR. I mean, what a load of nonsense. And then she kept saying things like, "The government hasn't thought this through. We have welcomed Ukrainians in but we do not have money for you." It was really, really horrific actually. (Participant 3)

I think there have been some problems at [my guest's child's] school and the mother has asked me to contact the school on a number of occasions because of the language issue, and the school have never responded. So that's been really difficult. They haven't responded to emails, they haven't responded to calls, they haven't responded to voicemails, so that's been really hard. (Participant 9)

Well it was emotionally difficult, even though there weren't any, any actual problems. But as I say we worried a lot about them and we still do, because the war is not over. We had to always balance this, the fact that, you know, we want to help but we don't want them to feel like we're interfering, so it's kind of, every day is an emotional struggle; what are you going to do and what are you not going to do; it's quite hard. (Participant 36)

Our data, therefore, reveals a range of instances of psychological costs stemming from administrative burdens, both directly in the host's own interactions and vicariously through

assisting guests. In common with learning and compliance costs, the burdens of the application process were a key focus of participants, including the anxiety that resulted from sharing personal information with strangers and waiting for visa decisions, which some found emotionally exhausting. Vicarious costs resulted as hosts witnessed guests struggling to navigate public systems.

CONCLUSION

This article has sought, through our study of the UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme, to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the ground-level experience of community refugee hosts, while also expanding the burgeoning theory of administrative burdens by demonstrating the relevance of burdens experienced vicariously. We conclude here by making three observations about the implications of our analysis.

First, our analytical framework—specifically, that of administrative burden—is prone to eliciting the challenges of implementing community-based sponsorship models.

Nonetheless, our data points to some of the arguable strengths of this model, such as hosts assisting refugees in navigating public services. Future research ought to consider the assets of this model as much as its potential problems and limitations. At the same time, however, we have demonstrated the utility of applying administrative burden theory to administrative processes relating to refugees and asylum-seekers, and we thus see the broader potential for further application to processes in this domain.

Second, with respect to the three key types of costs associated with administrative burdens, we have demonstrated empirically that sponsors experienced these costs from interactions with public bodies in the course of their hosting. Moreover, each of these types

of costs were incurred not only in relation to administrative processes to which they were formally the subject but also to the public processes to which their guests encountered. This finding has important implications for how the theory of administrative burden is understood and how inquiries in that field ought to be framed. Our findings point to a need for those investigating the nature of administrative burdens to consider not just those formally subject to processes but also how burdens generated by administrative processes are shared between individuals. Without this more expansive framing, there is a risk that the understanding of the nature of administrative burden and the impact of such burdens on society are too narrowly understood.

Third, our analysis has implications for ongoing policy debates. Broadly, schemes such as Homes for Ukraine pose significant and complex policy questions, such as whether they are more effective or desirable than traditional asylum processes. While we are not able to answer such broader questions on the basis of our dataset and analysis, our analysis ought to inform such wider debates as an empirical understanding of the ground-level operation of the volunteer-based models ought to be a key part of that wider discussion. More specifically, on the basis of our analysis, it is striking that, though the emphasis of volunteer-based schemes is on the community level, there is much that bureaucracies do that shape the hosting experience, including through the imposition of different costs—there is clearly much scope for interventions which reduce or eliminate such burdens on hosts, who have already taken on significant responsibility. For example, more guidance could be provided to sponsors, administrative processes could allow sponsors to speak to officials on behalf of their guests, or particularly administrative dispensations could be given to refugees using such schemes. Such interventions require careful consideration, but they are essential if this form of scheme is to continued being used in the future.

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