

First Ukrainians board the MS Victoria

The first Ukrainians to stay on the MS Victoria I passenger ship, docked in Leith in Edinburgh, have begun to arrive on board.

The ship was chartered by The Scottish Government on a contract which lasts until January 2023 and the government says it will provide those living aboard with fully staffed, safe and sustainable accommodation until they secure longer-term accommodation. Guests will have access to appropriate support services onboard, including healthcare and benefits support. They will also have unrestricted access to shoreside support services.

Scotland has welcomed around 115 new arrivals from Ukraine each day in the week to 19 July, providing a home for more than 9,000 displaced people, two-thirds of whom applied under the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme, with many more expected to arrive over the summer. This exceeds the 3,000 the Scottish Government committed to welcome when the scheme launched in March to provide a rapid route to safety for those fleeing the crisis caused by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. The scheme has been paused to allow numbers to settle and for the government and councils to find homes for Ukrainians who have arrived.

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing & Local Government Shona Robison said: "The safety and welfare of displaced people from Ukraine, who are primarily women and children who may have experienced much stress and trauma, is

of paramount importance to the Scottish Government.

“The success of the scheme can be seen in the fact that around 115 people arrived on average each day in the week to 19 July. With 9,000 displaced people with a Scottish sponsor already here, accommodating them all is always going to be a challenge.

“We’ve been working with partners such as Edinburgh City Council to make this ship a safe place for the displaced people and their families. A full risk assessment of the ship has been undertaken and all of the ship’s crew as a minimum have child and adult protection training.

“We do not want people spending more time in temporary accommodation, such as the ship, for any longer than is absolutely necessary. But we want to make them as comfortable as possible during their stay and we have worked with partners to provide a variety of services on-board for guests in addition to the support services available. These will include restaurants, child play facilities with toys and books, shops, laundry, cleaning, Wi-Fi access and communal spaces.

“The Scottish Government is still undertaking work to increase the capacity of the temporary accommodation and maximise the number of displaced people placed with volunteer hosts who have completed the necessary safeguarding checks.

“I am proud of the support that Scotland is providing the people from Ukraine and I want to thank everyone who has been involved from those helping to prepare the ship for use, those providing support services and to the people opening up their homes to provide Ukrainians with a warm Scottish welcome.”

As at 19 July there were:

- 9,037 total arrivals with a Scottish sponsor, of which 6,163 have come under the super sponsor scheme
- 35,085 applications under the super sponsor scheme

- 23,811 visas issued under the super sponsor scheme

The ship has a total capacity of 739 cabins, which could accommodate up to 2,200 people. In the first instance only around 1,600-1,700 displaced people will be accommodated on the ship, and this will be kept under review.

The ship will be docked 24/7 and guests who are staying on the ship will be able to transit to and from the dock via shuttle buses, available 24/7.

There will be a reception available 24/7 on-board the ship with Ukrainian speaking staff in order to assist guests. There will be a security perimeter around the ship with proportionate security and identification checks for people moving on and off the ship.

The City of Edinburgh Council's team will have an ongoing and visible presence on-board the ship, alongside support from the third sector and other agencies.

