



Department for
Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

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Synopsis of Responses

A consultation on extending the validity period of
Ukrainian driving licences in Northern Ireland



23 January 2024

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Email: DrivingPolicyBranch@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

This document can also be accessed through the Department's website.

Introduction and Overview

The UK has been playing a leading role in supporting Ukraine and we will continue to do so. The Department for Infrastructure, along with other Northern Ireland (NI) Executive Departments, Statutory Agencies and the voluntary and community sector has been actively engaged in making the transition to life in the UK as seamless as possible for those arriving here under these difficult circumstances.

A holder of a non-UK or non-EEA licence, who becomes resident in NI, is permitted to drive here on that licence for 12 months. In order to continue driving here beyond those first 12 months they are required to either exchange their licence for an NI one, if they are eligible to do so, or to take and pass a driving test.

NI, like some other countries, has a driving licence exchange agreement with Ukraine and Ukrainian driving licences can therefore be exchanged for NI licences. However, only Ukrainian licences issued after 28 December 2021 specify the type of vehicle transmission test that a driver passed. Therefore, licences issued prior to this date can only be exchanged for a NI licence which restricts the driver to driving automatic vehicles. For those Ukrainians with licences issued before this date, to obtain a NI manual transmission licence, they must take a NI manual transmission test.

This is a particular issue for those who have brought manual vehicles with them to NI, as they may lose the right to drive them. Given the exceptional and temporary nature of Ukrainians' residence in NI under the Ukraine Visa Schemes, the Department consulted on extending the current 12-month period during which the holder of a Ukrainian driving licence is treated as the holder of a licence authorising the driving of cars up to 3,500kg in NI (this does not apply to holders of HGV/Bus licences). The effect of this would be to extend the period of time before which a Ukrainian licence holder must exchange their licence from the current 12-month period to 3 years (36 months) to match the period granted under the Ukraine visa schemes.

The public consultation to consider 'extending the validity period of Ukrainian driving licences in Northern Ireland' issued on 6 September 2023 and remained open until the 3 October 2023.

We received a total of 137 responses to the consultation. 133 responses (97%) were received from **individuals** and 4 responses (3%) were received from **organisations**:

- 136 of the responses were received via the online questionnaire hosted on Citizen Space; and
- 1 response was received by email which could be put into the online survey format.

The consultation paper considered the current process for licence exchange and how it applied to the unique set of circumstances affecting holders of a Ukrainian driving licence, fleeing the Russian invasion and arriving in Northern Ireland.

The consultation sought views on a proposal to extend the period during which Ukrainians arriving in Northern Ireland due to the conflict can use their Ukrainian driving licences before being required to exchange them for a NI driving licence from 12 months to 36 months (3 years). This would match the full period of the visa schemes applicable to Ukrainian citizens arriving in the UK (the Family, Sponsorship and Extension visa schemes).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have taken time to respond to this consultation.

The overwhelming majority of responses (131, 96%) agreed with the proposal for a 36-month (3 year) extension.

Of the 6 (4%) individuals who did not agree with the proposal, 3 cited road safety concerns, 2 fell into 'other' (lost their licence) and 1 provided no reason.

Views on Road Safety Considerations

The consultation also considered the rationale and potential impacts of this proposed extension, asking for comments on our suggested road safety considerations, any other road safety considerations that hadn't been included and provided the opportunity for other comments.

When asked if they had any comments on our suggested road safety considerations, 127 (93%) of the respondents had no comments to make.

Of the 10 respondents who provided open text comments relating to our road safety considerations, 5 (50%) agreed with them. For example:

"Seems reasonable that if they have got to 12 months accident free...then they are suitably de-risked so another 2 years shouldn't be an issue"; and

"We agree that extending the 'grace' period from 12 months to 36 months is unlikely to further increase road safety risks. We agree that the period of greatest risk is when visitors are first in NI and are already permitted to drive using their Ukrainian licence and that the risk should lessen the longer they are driving in NI."

Of those that didn't agree, 2 (20%) thought that the extension was too long and that, although the risk may decrease over the period, it wasn't reason enough to extend the 12-month grace period, which should be the same for everyone.

The consultation also gave respondents the opportunity to provide any additional road safety considerations that they would like to see included. Eight respondents

provided comments, some were general, whilst others provided very specific suggestions - including:

“Requirement for evidential dashcam to be installed in the event of a collision”;

“Should only need to be a requirement for review of licence if caught speeding or some other violation. And advice on holders of this special licence should still be reminded to check eyesight and health”; and

“For newcomers would be useful to have free of charge information session on road safety in NI”.

Of the 8 who responded, one had no further comments to add but stated that all road safety considerations had been included.

The final question in the consultation gave those responding the chance to provide any other comments.

Of the 15 comments received, 7 (47%) used this as an opportunity to offer their support and thanks for the proposal, suggesting that:

“We must try to facilitate the Ukrainian people at this difficult time for their country”; and

“We should do all in our power to aid their transition to life here”.

Other comments included concerns regarding the exchange of lost and expired Ukrainian licences, one in relation to obtaining motor insurance and one outlining the position in the Republic of Ireland.

Next steps/ What the Department plans to do

The Department recognises the case for change to extend the period that Ukrainians, coming to Northern Ireland as a result of the Russian invasion, can continue to use their driving licences (for cars up to 3,500kg) before being required to exchange for a NI licence.

The responses to the consultation support the Department’s proposed extension from 12 months to 36 months (3 years) so that it matches the visa length they have been given (the Family, Sponsor and Extension visa schemes have all been given a 3-year period).

The Department will bring forward, as a matter of urgency, the required secondary legislation to make this change in Northern Ireland. These measures have recently been introduced in Great Britain.

We have considered the concerns raised by the respondents and would clarify the following points:

- If an individual enters NI on a Ukraine Scheme Visa, but subsequently transfers to a different visa before the end of the 3-year extension (for example, a skilled worker visa) they will still be entitled to the full initial 3-year period from entry under the Ukraine Visa Scheme, before being required to exchange.
- Any Ukrainian who stays in NI beyond the 3-year period **will be required to exchange their licence for a NI one**. Those who passed their test in Ukraine before 28 December 2021 would be expected to then undergo a manual practical test should they want to retain their manual entitlement licence.
- Other holders of foreign licences living in NI, including asylum seekers and refugee groups face similar issues. However, the circumstances of Ukrainians in NI because of the conflict, including the temporary nature of their intended stay, are distinct. It is unlikely that large numbers from other refugee groups will have arrived in NI with their own car and, unlike those who have come to live in NI for other reasons (e.g., to take up employment or join family), Ukraine licence-holders fleeing the conflict are unlikely to have had the opportunity to plan for the driving licence issues they now face.