

National to Local Response to Support People Fleeing Ukraine

April 2022

Introduction

It is estimated that Ireland may receive up to 200,000 refugees seeking protection from the war in Ukraine. There will be many challenges facing the women, men and children coming to Ireland, the communities in which they are being placed and those seeking to provide support, assistance, and services. We recognise the significant pressure that public representatives, civil and public servants, community organisations and others have been under in providing an immediate response and present this proposal in the belief that this is not sustainable.

We are conscious of the complexity in relation to the integration of Ukrainian refugees, current refugees and people currently seeking international protection in Ireland and the associated possibilities for racism.

Our proposals bring together various perspectives from a variety of organisations at local and national levels already committed to collaborating and coordinating responses. It seeks to capitalise on the positive public and state response to people fleeing Ukraine to date and outlines a number of approaches that need to be advanced.

Challenges

As groups fully engaged in the settlement and integration process nationally and locally, we are concerned that the difference in standards, approaches and levels of support being provided are largely dependent on the strength of community infrastructure and local communities. The over-reliance on a volunteer-led response is also a matter of concern given the depth and breadth of needs that are presenting.

We acknowledge the emerging co-ordinating structures including the Secretary Generals Group, the Seniors Officials Group, the recently established Task Force on Housing, the National Community and the Voluntary Stakeholders Group, Community Response Forums and Tusla Community Mobilisation Response, all led by a range of different government departments.

We believe however, there is an immediate need for coordinated, cross-sectoral strategic planning and implementation, with urgent additional resourcing nationally and locally for immediate crisis response and permanent resettlement. The following proposed structure, approach, and additional resources we believe will do much to mitigate these challenges.

Proposals

Underpinning Principles

The response to people fleeing Ukraine must be based on an understanding of people's traumatic experiences and be underpinned by respect for their human rights. We believe that the design and delivery of national and local responses to the Ukrainian crisis should be based on the following principles:

- Collaborative cross sectoral partnership between the State, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders at local and national levels

- Human rights principles and the promotion of human rights standards in all service provision
- Additionality, in the form of funding, staffing and out of hours supports
- Coherent policy, consistent practice, and standardised quality of approaches in public service delivery across the country
- The safeguarding of children and families in the procurement and provision of accommodation and all other services
- Commitment to maintaining proper and systematic data for safeguarding, planning, permanent resettlement, and integration
- Commitment to expediting the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision
- Inclusion of the voices and experiences of people with lived experience

National Response

To advance cross-sectoral national and local coordination, ensure strong leadership, direction and accountability and maintain high levels of public support we propose the following:

1. **Urgent appointment of an independent high level National Director of Ukrainian Response to lead the national response and oversee local implementation.** The National Director will have:
 - a. Power to drive and coordinate the national and local response
 - b. Credibility and public profile
 - c. Ability to bring the nation on board in a crisis through strong communications
 - d. Humanitarian crisis management experience
 - e. Capacity to identify and convene experts to advise the Taskforce

The National Director should report directly to the Taoiseach.

2. **Immediate establishment of a National Ukrainian Response Taskforce to include state and civil society actors at local and national levels, including representatives of people fleeing Ukraine.** The Task Force should be chaired by the National Director of Ukrainian Response. This would benefit from a clustered approach to working, as is utilised in humanitarian responses. The role of the Taskforce will be to develop and oversee the implementation of a national plan for emergency provision and the settlement and integration of people fleeing Ukraine in association with action to expedite the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision. (See Appendix 1 for the role of the Task force).
3. **Additional resources will be required for implementation** of national and local strategies and plans.

County and City Response

It should be noted that the intensity and levels of support and the range of services required will be far greater than was experienced during the COVID crisis. It is also important to acknowledge the key differences in the responses needed, levels of potential trauma and depth and breadth of needs that are presenting.

We restate our concern at the over-emphasis on a volunteer-led approach. While recognising the valuable contribution that volunteers are and will continue to make, this over emphasis is neither appropriate, realistic nor sustainable. What is required is a multi-disciplinary and professional

approach requiring dedicated staff across a range of disciplines including community work and resettlement.

Community Response Forums

Government has announced the re-establishment of the Community Response Forums, originally set up during the COVID crisis. Their purpose is to supplement the supports and services being provided by government agencies at a local level *“to ensure effective communication and information sharing in the coordination of local community and voluntary actions in providing community support to the new Ukrainian communities”*.

This approach appears to focus on information sharing and communication as opposed to the vital need for collaborative strategic planning and coordination in relation to all aspects of crisis response, resettlement, integration, and public service provision.

The role of the Community Response Forum should be to develop and oversee implementation of a Ukrainian Response Strategy. The strategy should identify the additional resources required for implementation, while ensuring the continuation of existing essential work being undertaken in the local community. Community-based organisations, Family Resource Centres, migrant groups, and programmes such as SICAP cannot be expected to absorb all of the additional work required without additional resources, including for staff and out-of-hours cover, and associated support and overhead costs.

Acknowledging the level of work already being undertaken by City/County CEOs, and the intensity of work required by this response, we call for the **appointment of a full time Senior City/County Lead under the auspices but independent of the Local Authority**. The Senior Lead should convene, chair, and direct the Forum, ensure participation of people fleeing Ukraine, be responsible for coordinating strategic approaches, responses, communications and information flow at city/county level, and report directly to the CEO of the local authority and the National Director of Ukrainian Response. **The Senior Lead should be supported by a dedicated team.**

Impact

We believe our approach will achieve the following impact:

- Clear lines of responsibility, coordination, strategic interventions, communication, and the flow of information nationally and locally
- Confidence amongst the public maximising the good will and trust of people and communities contributing to the Ukrainian response
- People fleeing Ukraine and given protection in Ireland are informed, feel safe and are aware where and how to escalate concerns
- National plan for accommodation of refugees identifies new supply and provides transparency around the location of accommodation and established minimum standards
- Excellence in practice and approaches to settlement and integration
- Strong intercommunity and cross sectoral, relationships, collaboration, and partnership
- Amplification of the voices of Ukrainian refugees in the development of responses
- Rapid and efficient sustainable city/county and local solutions

Appendix 1 - Role of National Ukrainian Response Taskforce

The role of the Task Force should include:

- a. Rapid assessment and deployment of additional resources at national and local level, with a particular emphasis on front-line services and responses
- b. Extending the urgent allocation of additional resources to community development organisations working directly with Ukrainian refugees. The response to the crisis cannot be left to volunteers - a skilled, tailored professional response is required for the resettlement and integration of refugees.
- c. Establishing and driving a national plan for accommodation of refugees to include identifying new supply, transparency around the location of accommodation and established minimum standards
- d. Urgent recruitment and allocation/secondment of staff within the civil service
- e. Activating a mechanism for speedy and efficient two-way flow of information from local to national and vice versa
- f. Responses to gaps in public service delivery across the country and eliciting feedback from people directly affected
- g. Appointment of independent coordinators in each county with power at county level to lead/coordinate the county response and feedback to National Director
- h. Development of a system of data collection for planning and ongoing response
- i. Activation of existing processes e.g., pledge a bed and offers of support in a timely manner, including a system to act on pledges locally
- j. A systemic approach to the medium and long-term resettlement of people, including people living in direct provision and refugees, including expediting the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision
- k. Establishing strategic/expert group/s to advise Taskforce
- l. Providing a range of spaces for feedback to inform ongoing responses