

Certainty, Stability and Integration



A Briefing Paper on Responses to People Fleeing Ukraine

About Us

Ukraine Civil Society Forum (UCSF) is a new initiative convened by civil society acting collectively to support the emergency response and welcome of refugees from Ukraine to Ireland. This provides a space for the national coordination of civil society and community responses, connecting into the State's emergency response structures and ongoing reception and integration. The UCSF shares information, avoids duplication, identifies trends and patterns, including gaps in service provision, works together to share solutions, and escalates issues where necessary to the Government.

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Introduction

The purpose of this briefing paper is to build on previous civil society proposals, to highlight key issues and concerns being raised by UCSF members, and to put forward urgent and informed solutions. We reiterate our calls for greater coordination and planning, stronger communications, and engagement with civil society organisations meeting the needs of people fleeing Ukraine and the communities in which they now live. The unprecedented arrival and reception of so many people fleeing war requires new ways to manage the national response.

We commend the Government's leadership in response to the refugee crisis following the Russian invasion. We recognise the immense challenges that the 'unexpected' poses to state infrastructure. We recognise and acknowledge the huge amount of work gone into providing protection to 40,000 people, with over 26,000 provided with state sponsored accommodation. We submit, however, that there is an urgent need to put in place enhanced implementation structures to develop and implement medium to long term accommodation solutions along with resourcing public offers of support and refugee welfare and integration.

Delivering Outcomes

The community and voluntary sectors are essential stakeholders in the reception and integration of people fleeing Ukraine. Collectively, we provide vital frontline services, meet people as they arrive into local communities, provide enormous levels of support and are best placed to identify gaps in operational and strategic responses.

While we recognise there is no one solution, we call for more responsive, timely and informed decisions which if made now, can bear fruit in late summer, autumn and beyond. These interventions will ensure people fleeing Ukraine feel safe and secure, can predict where they live - to take up employment and enable children to stay in the schools they enrol in, to have access to trauma-centred care and provide local communities with the support needed to respond. Failure to deliver on these will have long term negative impacts on families, children and communities.

Equal Treatment

The State's progressive approach to supporting refugees fleeing Ukraine - facilitating quick access to PPS numbers, providing English language resources in schools, and taking a range of sensible steps - is the right response. There is serious concern however at the inconsistency of approach to people seeking refuge from other parts of the world. This is particularly stark where, for example, resources are specifically named for Ukrainian children only, where an Afghan child or a Syrian child also needs English language support. We support equality in the treatment of all refugees, noting that the State has a responsibility to fully uphold and protect the rights of everyone seeking protection in Ireland. We strongly recommend embedding equality for all those seeking international protection.

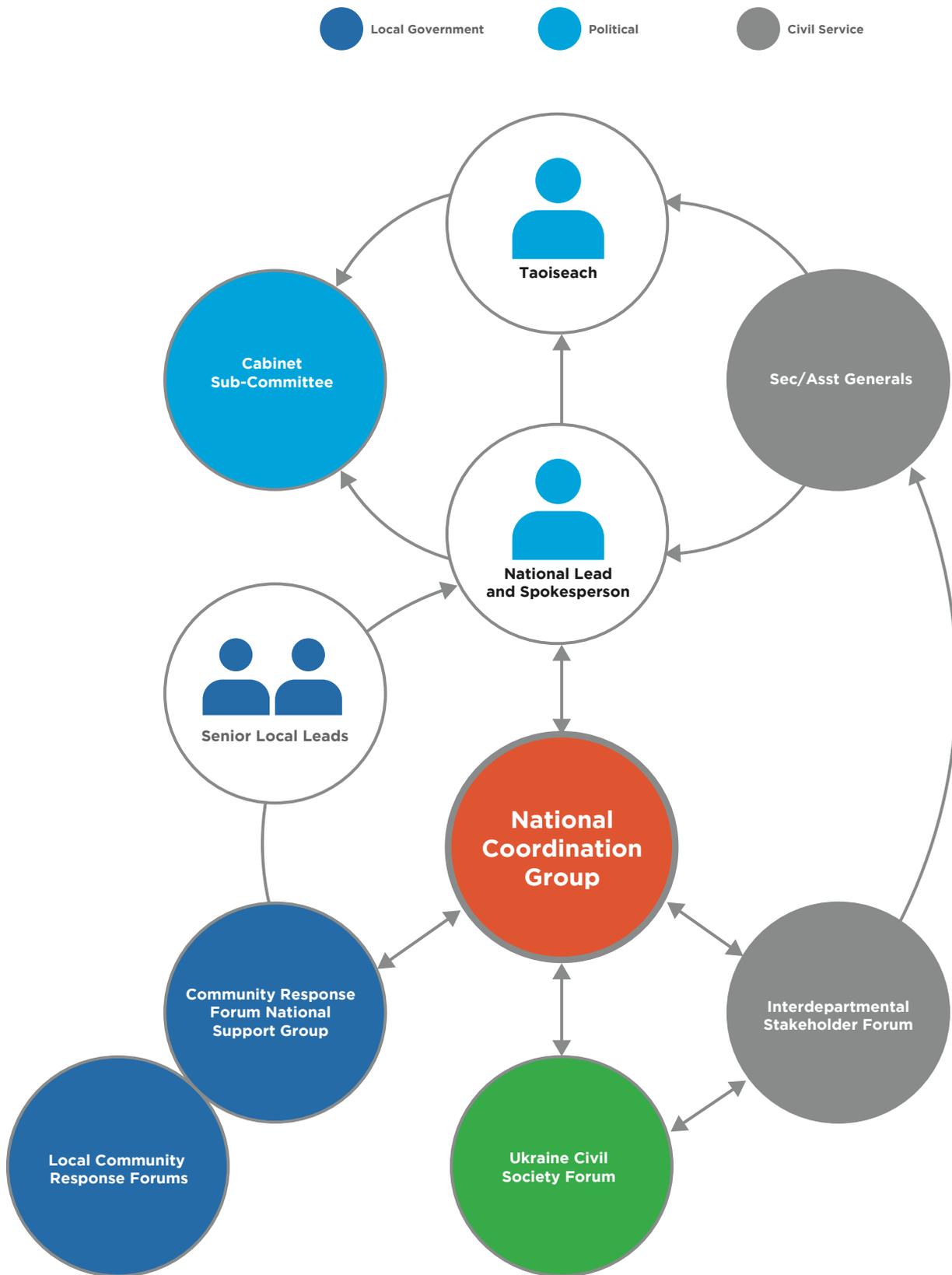
Key Recommendations

1. Appoint and resource a National Lead to drive planning, coordination and implementation

We are aware of a range of government structures established to respond including the establishment of the Cabinet Sub-Committee, the creation of the Community Forum National Steering Group and newly established NGO Stakeholder Engagement Forum to engage civil society. However the reality remains that responses lack coordination, are inconsistent and often fragmented. These challenges are not unique to this situation but are systemic. **This is an emergency, with women and children at the core.** We need to make the system work better, connecting the national and local response efforts, processes, and overall management. We recommend:

- **Appointing a National Refugee Response Lead.** There remains a vacuum in terms of overall governance, planning and communications. The Government has a responsibility to keep the public informed and to ensure people fleeing Ukraine are communicated with clearly and openly. We strongly reiterate our calls to appoint a National Refugee Response Lead to build confidence, while being empowered to drive and coordinate the national and local response. This could be an independent person or a senior official who undertakes to project manage, communicate and lead the response reporting to the Taoiseach.
- **Establishing a National Coordination Group inclusive of civil society** together with the key senior officials from relevant government departments (eg, Department of Children, Department of Social Protection, Department of Community and Rural Affairs) and representatives of appropriate state agencies (eg, Tusla and the Health Service Executive).
- **Publishing a plan that articulates the State's approach.** A planned and shared response is needed to identify and respond to areas of critical need. Publishing a plan that articulates the State's approach is overdue and vital. This should identify key national and local actors and stakeholders, and cover critical areas such as (i) housing; (ii) health; (iii) education; (iv) information, (v) employment, (vi) child welfare and (vii) resourcing.
- **Ensuring that all counties have appointed a Director of Service.** These Local Authority Directors need to have responsibility to ensure that there is effective local inter-agency planning and coordination. This includes ensuring that the relevant Local Development Companies, Family Resource Centres and independent community organisations are included in communication, planning and coordination locally. The Local Authority Director of Service could have a dotted line of accountability to the National Refugee Lead to strengthen communication and coordination.

Below is a diagrammatic illustration of our proposals in relation to leadership and oversight.



2. Mandate the Housing Agency to drive development of medium-term accommodation for refugees

The bulk of responsibility for delivering accommodation solutions for more than 35,000 people (including both refugees from Ukraine and international protection applicants) currently sits with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. While the Department team and officials are doing an extraordinary job in delivering emergency accommodation, medium term accommodation desperately needs focused attention. Parallel tracks are required. The Housing Agency is named as having a supporting role in the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision in terms of policy development¹. This role could be expanded and the Agency could be mandated to establish a unit to develop refugee accommodation in partnership with Local Authorities and others.

We are very conscious of accommodation challenges that persist across the country particularly given the housing crisis and long-standing issues with how Ireland accommodates people in the international protection system. The Government, therefore, cannot manage this totally new situation by simply doing things the same way it has always done them.

While some people have access to medium term accommodation, more than 25,000 remain in short term emergency hotel accommodation. The negative impact on children of long term hotel stays is well documented from our experience with homeless children and children in Direct Provision. In addition, short notification periods for people to move accommodation is creating uncertainty and anxiety. This makes employment hard to source and retain, and creates insecurity - especially for children, compounding their sense of instability.

We must do everything in our power to ensure that children fleeing war in Ukraine are in stable accommodation by September when schools return. Children need stability and security and a chance at 'normal' family life. We welcome the provision for 500 modular housing units in this regard. We strongly recommend building on this to leverage all possible accommodation to deliver in the short and medium term. This includes:

- **Bringing unused accommodation into circulation with urgency.** We must urgently focus on solutions that can support 'family life' in a way that hotel living cannot. **There is no silver bullet**, we need to resource communities and the private sector as well as local authorities to realise

¹ 3.4.3.1 Support from the Housing Agency It is proposed that the Housing Agency will partner with and support DCEDIY in addressing the housing needs of applicants for International Protection. The Housing Agency has unique knowledge and understanding of housing in Ireland and works with a range of stakeholders involved in the sector across Ireland...As such they have been identified as an agency with the skills and expertise to support DCEDIY in the development of a model to provide support, housing and accommodation for applicants for International Protection... The Housing Agency may also provide direct assistance with the delivery of housing, accommodation and technical support on projects as required. It is intended that a memorandum of understanding be entered into between the Housing Agency and DCEDIY in relation to the supports and services to be provided. p.45

every possibility. This includes holiday homes, converting unused buildings and repurposing office spaces into apartments.

- **Utilising Community Sponsorship expertise and building capacity to support pledged accommodation.** Public pledges are going to be critical to meeting a good portion of the need. We welcome the announcement of the €400 stipend. Before renewed calls to the public are made, we need to ensure that the systems and resources are in place to make good on the offers. **It is essential we get this right this time.** This requires the government to scale up the resources behind processing pledges and we recommend utilising the expertise of the Regional Community Sponsorship organisations, by expanding their remit, to train hosts and support pledging regionally. Thus increasing the sustainability of matches, ensuring best outcomes for guests, hosts and local communities. A public campaign, including positive recognition of current hosts, will be needed to generate more pledges.

[3. Establish a Refugee Agency as per White Paper Recommendations on Ending Direct Provision](#)

The White paper on ending Direct Provision stated that in “view of the complexity of the multi-strand approach proposed, and the extent of expertise required, consideration will be given at an early stage to the question of whether or not an agency needs to be established to manage the new model”². Given the increase in numbers now being faced, this recommendation is even more valid. We recommend that the Government expedites this decision to provide some medium term relief for The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth.

[4. Urgently resource welfare and integration](#)

Make available an immediate budget to support the welfare and integration of refugees. We call for proper on-going investment in the next budget that ensures the welfare and integration of refugees in all our communities. This is a matter of urgency given the significant movement of people and the need to ensure standards are maintained. Each area of concentration of refugees, especially in congregated settings, should have a two-person liaison team, one Ukrainian speaking Liaison worker and a Community worker to support welfare, strengthen communication and support integration. At a maximum ratio of 1:250. This would require an allocation of €3.5-€4m for 12 months through the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth leveraging the regional community sponsorship structure. Separately, local authorities and other State agencies should be supported to ensure additionality rather than drawing on existing resources or taking budget away from other vulnerable groups.

2 White Paper on Ending Direct Provision p.33

Conclusion

This briefing paper sets out the urgent actions needed to respond to the medium to long-term needs of refugees seeking protection.

We reiterate our calls for the appointment of a National Lead and the establishment of a National Coordination Group inclusive of civil society. We call for the establishment of a Refugee Agency as per the recommendation of the White Paper on ending Direct Provision.

In the short term, we recommend mandating the Housing Agency to deliver refugee accommodation and the publication of an overarching plan for refugee reception and accommodation. **Actions taken today are an investment in support of achieving the Government's commitment to end the system of Direct Provision.**

We need to ensure local coordination structures are functioning effectively and inclusively and that effective interagency working is happening across the entire country.

Finally, we welcome the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme additional funding to local development companies, but call for proper on-going investment in the next budget that ensures the welfare and integration of refugees in all our communities.

The Irish response to date has demonstrated real humanitarian leadership matched by the generosity of the public and communities across Ireland. **Failure to build upon the positive actions taken to-date will lead to serious and poor outcomes for children, families, individuals and local communities.**

