



Brief written submission on the topic of housing Ukrainian refugees

FAO: Local Government and Housing Committee
14/06/2022

[Wales Council for Voluntary Action](#) (WCVA) is the national membership organisation for the voluntary sector in Wales. Our purpose is to enable voluntary organisations to make a bigger difference together.

In this response we have focussed on the questions most closely aligned with our work and where WCVA evidence would provide a unique perspective.

- **The role of local authorities and the third sector in supporting the operation of the Ukraine settlement schemes.**

Voluntary organisations and volunteers are present at nearly every stage of the way for Ukrainians arriving in Wales – helping them organise travel to the UK, greeting them at welcome centres, inviting them to their homes, providing counselling, practical guidance and support, making them a part of their local communities. For some arrivals, a volunteer they've connected with initially becomes a constant and reassuring presence in their life, which can be especially valuable in cases where individuals end up moving across county lines and in transition periods, such as between welcome centres and more permanent accommodation.

The third sector works collaboratively with Welsh Government and local authorities to support the settlement schemes. Our sector provides a plethora of both general guidance and specialised services, such as language support,

social opportunities, banking, travel, schooling, benefits, immigration advice, mental health, disability, children's and women's services, among many others. The sector compliments statutory bodies' support by offering tailored advice and solutions to individuals, disseminating information, as well as, in many occasions brokering a link with the local community.

Alongside long-established national and regional organisations, many purpose-driven civil society groups have formed and now collect donations, provide practical advice and link with new arrivals in their communities. As we have seen throughout the pandemic, the speed and effectiveness of local voluntary action makes it a crucial part of the nation's response to any crisis and we anticipate local groups will be instrumental in the continuous support and integration of Ukrainian refugees into Welsh society. Aside from the practical benefit of the help offered, those informal or semi-formal volunteering groups provide an opportunity for local people to take action and feel less helpless in the face of tragedy, whilst enabling genuine social connection between them and the refugees, in line with the Wales of Cohesive Communities goals. The formal voluntary sector often supports those groups by offering practical advice, training, and linking them with statutory services.

The sector also acts as a source of specialist advice to Government, via consultations and meetings, most notably through the Ukraine Third Sector Support group. The group meets weekly and has recently identified five main workstreams – welcome centre support, safeguarding women and children, access to advice and advocacy, community action, and connecting and reuniting families. WCVA welcomes this collaborative approach to designing a synched-in, comprehensive support system. It is important to note that the sector's ability to engage in those discussions is limited by the high demand for delivering services and with no additional funding to increase capacity, many organisations are not able to engage strategically as much, or as often, as they would like and would be useful.

- **The cost of providing support and services to Ukrainians arriving in Wales and how these costs will be met.**

It is difficult to assess the costs of providing support to Ukrainian refugees long-term at this early stage.

Many voluntary sector organisations have expanded existing services they offer to accommodate the needs of arriving Ukrainian refugees, e.g. translation of resources, hiring Ukrainian-speaking staff, specialised training. These extra costs are largely absorbed by the charities themselves.

The Nation of Sanctuary Croeso Fund is a source of small amount of funding for some, but not all organisations would be able to benefit from it and for others it will not cover all their costs.

It is important to note the sector is under a lot of pressure still dealing with the aftermath of a global pandemic deepening existing inequalities in society, the rising costs of living and inflation. The demand for the sector's services is only increasing while the emergency funding from the pandemic is running out and charitable giving is projected to decrease. In addition, the lack of funding allocation to local councils to support individuals arriving through the Family Visa Scheme is a source of concern as this will likely further increase the pressure on our sector and we are not best placed to provide the primary support to those individuals. There is a real worry in the sector in regards to future capacity.

Strategic investments would help alleviate some of that pressure and enable organisations to co-ordinate their approach in working partnerships to deliver better outcomes. Underfunding often results in unintentional silo working when there is insufficient staff resource to form, co-ordinate and maintain collaborative projects with others.

- **Issues and pressures resulting from other refugee resettlement schemes and whether lessons/best practice can be shared.**

The voluntary sector still offers support to individuals who have arrived through the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, the UK Resettlement Scheme, and asylum-seekers who have arrived through other routes. While the whole sector is under pressure, specialist organisations providing support and advice to refugees and asylum seekers in particular are in urgent need of funding to expand their capacity and continue offering services to all refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Wales.

WCVA supports the Welsh Refugee Coalition in their call to ensure all

refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Wales are supported to the best of our ability, as a true commitment to Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary.