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Homeless in Europe

A Magazine by FEANTSA



FEANTSA



THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON HOMELESSNESS

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The unprovoked Russian aggression in Ukraine and consequently the resulting high number of exiled people searching for protection in Europe are very closely linked to homelessness. Since the entry of the Russian army into Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, at least 12 million people have fled their homes, with over 5 million arriving in neighbouring countries. While we are still in the process of taking stock of the war's impact on homelessness, both in Ukraine and in Europe, this issue of the 'Homeless in Europe' magazine contributes to a better understanding of the current situation.

The devastating situation in which innocent people have been thrown has sparked unprecedented and unconditional waves of solidarity from EU private citizens everywhere, but especially in the neighbouring countries. Governments and the European Commission have put forward new legislation and measures to facilitate entry for people in search of protection and their access to social rights. For this purpose, for the first time since it was adopted, the [Temporary Protection Directive](#) (TPD) was triggered by the EU. Funding was also announced from the EU and special guidance was established to support MS in receiving, guiding and integrating the newcomers, including for access to housing. A recent guidance published by the EC addresses the topic of housing under the [Safe Homes Initiative](#).

The contributions to this summer's edition of our 'Homeless in Europe' magazine illustrate the **importance of having safe housing in a time of crisis** and the consequences of its lack. As Isaura, the young Roma refugee, put it: "People need to have accommodation to stay in (...)". The changes that service providers have made in their offers to ensure accommodation for refugees underline the same imperative need, as do the dangers that women or people with disabilities are risking when their accommodation is insecure and not adapted to their needs. These and more issues are detailed in this edition.

The destructions caused by the Russian forces have led to **new groups of people in homelessness** within Ukraine, such as international students who became trapped in a war zone in a foreign country. It can also be argued that every individual in Ukraine is at risk of or experiencing homelessness. In an article from Depaul Ukraine we learn about their work with people in homelessness and marginalisation in Ukraine since 2007, how they adapted their services first after the 2014 conflict, and now in response to the full-scale invasion of February 2022. Many members of Depaul Ukraine became homeless themselves overnight and some colleagues are displaced or have lost their homes to shelling.

The **crucial role of homelessness service providers in welcoming refugees** has been particularly observed in the neighbouring countries of Ukraine, such as Poland, which also holds a big Ukrainian diaspora. The Polish Foundation for Activation and Integration (FAI) started their

EDITORIAL



By **Simona Barbu**, Policy Officer at FEANTSA

work with the conviction that the most needed form of support for refugees is providing long-term, comprehensive housing support with individualised social services. Refurbishing of previously uninhabitable premises was combined with administering apartments provided by private persons. BMSZKI, the largest homelessness service provider in Budapest, opened two centres in February 2022 to host refugees from Ukraine. Initially, the centres were set up as first reception centres, offering accommodation for a few nights; as longer stays were needed, BMSZKI extended their offers and transformed their night shelters for people experiencing homelessness to accommodate families and children.

Within Member States and the UK, the issue of **differential treatment** between refugees with Ukrainian nationality and non-EU refugees comes across as one of the most troubling aspects, including in the area of access to accommodation. The Greek Housing Network discusses the differences between the reception and integration of asylum seekers arriving from countries such as Yemen, Syria, Congo, Somalia and the recent influx of people in search of protection arriving from Ukraine. Among other differences in treatment, we learn how, in the summer of 2021, three-meter walls were built around the existing camps in Greece for “people’s protection”. The Greek response to the Ukrainians has been overwhelmingly positive, publicly acknowledging them to be the “real” refugees. The Salvation Army underlines this issue in France as well, by describing the much simpler and direct route to protection for those with Ukrainian nationality, with easier access to rights and considerably sped up processing times for applications. The argument coined is that “the resources put in place and the way they were rolled out to welcome people coming from Ukraine should be the norm all the time and not the exception”.

In a post-Brexit UK, the TPD provisions do not apply but the United Nations Refugee convention remains in place. However, Ukrainian asylum seekers were explicitly told by the UK government not to come without a visa, though this requirement circumvents the UK asylum system and does not uphold the UN Refugee convention. The UK piece discusses this process as well as the fundamental differences between ‘Homes for Ukraine’ and the Hosting projects where a differential treatment appears as well. We also learn about various scenarios in which Ukrainian refugees could become homeless in the UK under the current asylum provisions.

Beyond the issue of differential treatment of refugees, **discrimination against people belonging to minorities coming from Ukraine** has been observed. This leads to denied support during a war for those who are in the most vulnerable situations. People with disabilities face a variety of new challenges when trying to escape the war and the lack of accessibility, information, and consideration when designing support made it almost impossible to receive care in a war zone. Refusals to evacuate people and no effort to reach out to disability organisations or families to distribute help are reported. The discrimination experienced by Roma in Ukraine extends also during the war, leaving people in such difficult situations that some chose to return to war-torn Ukraine to escape racism: “There were also people who wanted us to help them return to Ukraine because they could not stand the living conditions they were staying in here anymore, sometimes in gym rooms with many others, or because they faced discrimination from the state and asked us to help them return to Ukraine.” reports Isaura, a Roma refugee herself, in an interview given to FEANTSAs.



In times of war, **women and girls** are particularly vulnerable and disproportionately impacted, which is why the European Women's Lobby calls for effectively guaranteeing women's rights. Horrid risks appear for women during wartime, particularly regarding sexual exploitation, the use of violence and rape and looming threats of trafficking into prostitution or abduction.

Another consequence of the war is that **energy prices** have increased, which affects all households, including homelessness service providers. FEANTSA colleagues explore how our members have been affected. Among measures adopted we can read about deep retrofitting, renovation work, upgrades in the heating system, installing photovoltaic panels or replacing heating systems with a pellet-fuelled system. These come at a cost and funding is an issue – to make savings shelters reduce their services (e.g.: no use of electric kettles or cooking machines) and some consider introducing additional charges on residents while seeking external sponsorship.

The Russian aggression in Ukraine has led to the destruction of people's houses within the country and immense efforts will be needed to reconstruct Ukrainian homes. Our duty meanwhile is to work relentlessly to support people until they can settle, either in a new country or back home once the war ends. Among **persisting needs underlined in the articles of this edition, we recall** the necessity for assistance in financing specialised medical services, to obtain financial assistance that will secure the key service for all refugees whose income does not allow to pay rent or utilities in rented apartments; fight discrimination against Roma and consider Romani language when developing information resources and especially hiring Roma

in the reception structures for asylum seekers; providing accessible housing for people with disabilities, preventing segregation in “care homes”, as well as eventual homelessness; issue political and policy guidelines to Member States on the provision of services to women and girls in transit and as refugees in EU host countries. The stringent need for improved access to funding for NGOs and the need for higher involvement of governments in managing the reception of asylum seekers and further support need to be addressed.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis determined by the Russian invasion serves once again to prove that the capacity to support refugees within Europe is a matter of political will and solidarity. We hope that these lessons will be put to good use as the EU moves forward in harmonising and defining its Common European Asylum System.

The EU must also learn from the recent waves of solidarity with the Ukrainian refugees so that we can ensure protection for all people who are searching for safety in Europe. Discrimination and racism must be combated unanimously, and **all refugees should be welcomed** in Europe. We should develop measures to ensure uncontested access to affordable and adequate housing for all, as a gateway to integration in new societies.

FEANTSA would like to thank all the contributors to this issue of the Homeless in Europe Magazine for their time in writing the articles and for their commitment to defending the rights of people experiencing marginalisation and homelessness and who are looking for protection in Europe.



Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the UK implemented 'Homes for Ukraine' as a Hosting-based reception scheme for those fleeing the war. Romy Wood, Hosting Coordinator at Housing Justice Cymru, explains the programme in the following article, pointing out the flaws, risks and discrimination that come with it.

'HOMES FOR UKRAINE' IN THE UK



By **Romy Wood**, Hosting Coordinator, Housing Justice Cymru

'Hosting' has been happening for a very long time in the UK, both formally and – of course – informally. 'Hosting' is a term used in the refugee and asylum sector for a household offering shelter to a destitute person with fragile immigration status. It is a benevolent act; volunteer hosts are not paid, and their guests are not expected to work in return for shelter. There are organisations of different types and scales all over the UK which run Hosting programmes accommodating people from many different countries across the world. Over the last year, Housing Justice Cymru and its partners have been working on building the Hosting community in Wales. Hosting organisations accommodate people who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) – no eligibility for local authority accommodation, no right to rent, no permission to work and no benefits. When the Prime Minister first used the word 'hosting' in connection with the migration scheme for displaced people from Ukraine, Hosting organisations received a wave of enquiries from the public and the media.

However, what became 'Homes for Ukraine' is not the same as these Hosting projects. The fundamental difference is that it is limited to people from Ukraine. Hosting charities would not discriminate on the basis of nationality. In terms of the financial arrangements involved, there are stark differences between existing projects and 'Homes for Ukraine'. On the scheme, hosts are offered a payment of £350 per month and Ukrainian guests have permission to work and are eligible for Universal Credit. The £350 does not affect any single person's council tax discount or benefits. Some existing Hosting projects offer hosts expenses or a standard payment towards expenses, but not on the scale of £350 per month. There are hosts who forego their single person's council tax discount because their local authority does not recognise the accommodation solution they are providing. And guests with NRPF manage on payments from charities, not Universal Credit or wages.

Ukrainian refugees were explicitly told by the UK government not to come without a visa, and it should be noted that this requirement circumvents the UK asylum system and does not uphold the United Nations Refugee convention.”

Homes for Ukraine is a UK-wide scheme. Its inception was chaotic, with the government in Westminster making announcements faster than it could consider logistics. It was suggested that members of the public in the UK and people fleeing Ukraine could find each other on social media. The former would then sponsor a visa for the latter, a convoluted process involving uploading documents and completing lengthy forms. Ukrainian refugees were explicitly told by the UK government not to come without a visa, and it should be noted that this requirement circumvents the UK asylum system and does not uphold the United Nations Refugee convention. Homes for Ukraine is a managed migration scheme as well as a hosting scheme. The lack of infrastructure created a space for human trafficking and exploitation, with people advertising themselves online without knowing for sure who they were connecting with. There are chilling reports of trafficking on the borders of Ukraine, and coming to the UK should be a way to escape that, but anyone can set up or abuse a matching portal. UNHCR and organisations from the refugee sector called on the UK government to put safeguards in place to mitigate the risks of online matching, and the UK government then changed its messaging to suggest that charities would match people. Charities of all descriptions received requests from people in and around Ukraine to find them sponsors and homes and requests from frustrated would-be hosts to find them refugees. This went on for two weeks before the government announced an endorsed matching scheme. On [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) as of 1st July 2022, the frequently asked questions list still includes this sidestep:

“I don’t know the person I’m sponsoring – we met on Facebook – should I give them my passport details?”

Whether to share your personal information is always your decision. But if you have concerns about sharing personal details, you may prefer to fill out the visa application form on behalf of the individuals you are sponsoring. To do this, you will need to ask them for their information.”

The Welsh and Scottish governments have built their own structures around the scheme. To achieve a balance between speed and caution, they became ‘super-sponsors’. People fleeing Ukraine can name the Welsh or Scottish Government as their sponsor and come to a Welcome Centre or Welcome Hub, where they receive initial support and a careful matching with a host or other accommodation provision. Housing Justice Cymru is working with the Welsh Government to put in place a support system for the hosts to help make placements robust and sustainable. Homes for Ukraine hosts are asked to provide accommodation for at least six months, which is a long time to share a bathroom, kitchen and living space. It is not something to take on lightly and everyone involved will benefit from professional guidance as well as the community support networks which have sprung up across the UK.



The fundamental difference is that it is limited to people from Ukraine. Hosting charities would not discriminate on the basis of nationality.”

There are various scenarios in which someone from Ukraine could become homeless in the UK. Firstly, there are people who arrive to find straight away that their match was entirely unsuitable, inappropriate or abusive. Secondly, breakdowns in relationships with sponsor-hosts are occurring, with individuals and families presenting as homeless to local authorities. Thirdly, there are people who were sponsored by family members on family visas rather than Homes for Ukraine visas, where the family member is unable or unwilling to accommodate them. And then there are people who were already in the UK before the war began, for example on seasonal worker visas. In 2021, by far the largest group of seasonal workers in the UK was Ukrainians, at 19,920. An extension scheme allows them to stay beyond their original visa date, but the conditions attached put them in a vulnerable position, and they cannot apply for Homes for Ukraine visas from within the UK. There is an additional scenario in which someone from Ukraine makes their way to the UK without a visa and claims asylum. The Home Office requires asylum seekers to prove that they are destitute if they need accommodation, and this is not always straightforward. A Ukrainian asylum seeker arriving outside of the routes that the government in Westminster labels ‘safe and legal’ has no access to benefits or local authority housing.

Assuming that most Homes for Ukraine placements last for six months, there is nonetheless a housing crisis building as we head towards autumn and winter when many of these will come to an end. There will be a lot of people in need of local authority housing or private rental properties, possibly in areas of the country where there is already a lack of availability. What the consequences for Hosting projects will be remains to be seen. Maybe there will be a wider understanding of Hosting, maybe organisations will have less of an uphill battle in supporting their hosts and guests. At Housing Justice Cymru, we hope that, when the dust settles, it will result in a normalisation and demystification of Hosting. We hope to see more hosts coming forward to offer people seeking sanctuary from many different countries a safe and secure place to sleep.

Depaul Ukraine, part of the Depaul International group of homelessness charities, has supported homeless and marginalised people since 2007 through a network of accommodation and support services. It adapted its services first after the 2014 conflict, and now in response to the full-scale invasion of February 2022. Ewan Day Collins, Emergency Programme Manager at Depaul International, explains what these adaptations look like and what the most immediate challenges will be in the future.

FROM THE FRONTLINE: HOW THE WAR HAS IMPACTED HOMELESSNESS IN UKRAINE



By **Ewan Day Collins**, Emergency Programme Manager, Depaul International

The experience of our staff is a microcosm of the social upheaval since 24 February. In that moment and the days that followed, almost everything inverted. Many in our teams, who have supported homeless people in the country for fifteen years, overnight became homeless themselves. Some colleagues are displaced. Some have lost their homes to shelling. Others have said goodbye to family members who escaped, whilst they stay to keep vital services running.

BEFORE THE WAR

The need was already considerable. As the war began, Depaul Ukraine was running homelessness services supporting 8,500 people, through a combination of outreach teams, supported and temporary accommodation, and support programmes. We could have expanded these services many times over if we had had the funding because the need was intense.


Ukrainian society has shown its compassion and resilience to the world but, as almost everywhere, homeless people were often stigmatised and services fell short of meeting their needs. Depaul started work in Ukraine in 2007 by providing services to kids sleeping rough underneath Kharkiv's streets, wherever they could find warmth, sometimes next to the sewers, by the heating pipes. Over time, services to children have improved but attitudes to adult homeless people were often unsympathetic. The last time I was in Odesa, in the winter of 2018, a person sleeping rough froze to death (a common occurrence) and a community of homeless people were attacked and their tents set alight. Several came to our day centre in the city the following morning and I cannot forget the trauma and the tears on their faces. FEANTSA members will recognise these stories from across Europe. I recall doing a shift with an outreach worker who had been present for an almost identical incident in Finsbury Park in north London. He had dragged

the unconscious body of a person sleeping rough from their burning tent and started CPR to save his life.

Maidan and the 2014 invasion shook the system. War and revolution became a part of everyday life. Almost everyone knew a family member or friend fighting in the conflict; many knew someone who had not come home. The social protection system was overwhelmed. A total of 1.5 million people were displaced across the country, many going to Kharkiv and Odesa, where Depaul has services. Pressures of varying kinds coalesced. Thousands of displaced people arrived destitute. Availability of housing couldn't keep up with the influx of internally displaced persons, forcing some into homelessness. Dozens, sometimes more, would sleep in the central railway station in Kharkiv. I remember meeting an elderly gentleman who had lost his family home in the Donbas. Depaul supported him and thousands of others with emergency provision such as food and basic medical care. We also offered legal advice. Many people lost their identification documents in the rush to flee conflict, a barrier to accessing state support. Others desperately needed hospital treatment whilst soldiers injured on the frontline were prioritised. We established a programme to facilitate medical treatment for homeless and vulnerable people who were otherwise turned away.

DURING THE WAR

These kinds of needs have intensified in the wake of the full-scale invasion this year. The situation now is dire and extreme. Traditional approaches to assessing need used by homelessness agencies such as Depaul struggle to provide clarity. You could argue that every individual in Ukraine is at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Europe has witnessed an extraordinary refugee crisis and Depaul teams from Ireland to Slovakia to the UK have seen the impact of this on



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our services. But, generally speaking, those who escaped were either close to a border or had the means and mobility to get over one. The poorest, those with mobility challenges such as the elderly or people with disabilities, and some with large families have often had little choice but to stay put, even if they had wanted to leave. Their needs are grave. The World Food Programme reports that one in two people in the south and east of the country are food insecure. OCHA, the UN coordination body, reports that 13 million people in Ukraine will need support with water, sanitation and hygiene by August.

Our challenge, amid overwhelming and universal crisis, is to identify those most in need. The humanitarian imperative demands that every individual has a right to assistance, including those in hard-to-reach areas. Depaul teams have bravely remained in cities under siege to provide for vulnerable groups, reaching well over 10,000 people with daily food and hygiene assistance and keeping vital services such as shelters open. This poses delivery and security challenges. Homelessness charities are used to managing the risks of supporting unpredictable client groups. Our philosophy to take proportionate risks to reach the most marginalised remains, even as the risks themselves

change. In Kyiv, we are reaching vulnerable individuals in the villages and towns surrounding the city. Many have lived through occupation over March and April, including plunder and sexual violence. Some of these towns have become synonymous with the brutality of war, including Bucha where civilian mass graves were uncovered. Our staff provide vital assistance to those who survived. Navigating the risks of mines and unexploded ordnance is now a daily reality. In Kharkiv our teams are at risk of shelling and gunfire. Life and death are the drumbeat of existence. Depaul staff and volunteers spend their days distributing life-saving aid while attending funerals for dead relatives or neighbours.

Despite the risks, civil society in Ukraine has galvanised. We are flooded with volunteering offers and contributions from communities in Ukraine. Volunteers tell us that providing assistance to vulnerable people gives them purpose in a time of isolation and turmoil. In Kharkiv, a group of cyclists who used to ride together for pleasure now form a vital network taking Depaul aid to hundreds of vulnerable households.

WHAT NOW?

I was asked to write about the impact of war on homelessness in Ukraine, but the truth is that we are still trying to make sense of it. Amid the unending speculation about how the war might turn, a lot of the shorter-term focus is on winter. With temperatures plunging to -20°C, winterization work will become a priority. Some people have grown tired of living underground or far away from home and are returning to their hometowns even if their houses are unsafe or no longer exist. Providing adaptations to damaged homes, or those cut off from the energy supplies needed for heating, will be vital to prevent a further increase in homelessness. Our outreach and emergency shelter programmes will operate, with an expectation of increased demand. Emergency assistance will need to continue for many months, likely years, although as markets reopen the intention is to move increasingly to cash assistance to improve agency for beneficiaries and stimulate the local economy.

In the longer term, the context has ruptured and our programmes will adapt to this. There are new groups of homeless people. In our shelter in Kyiv, we are accommodating some international students who did not make it home. They have been trapped in a war zone in a foreign country for three months. Longer-term programmes will need to be reshaped. Depaul Ukraine operates a successful through-the-gate criminal justice programme, making strides in preventing homelessness for those exiting prisons. We are still managing to provide case work online for some at risk people but not at the scale we had previously. Instead, prisons are calling us for urgent provisions such as food assistance. Reviving systems change work should be an aim when realistic to do so. We expect that our counselling programmes will be at capacity supporting those whose mental health problems have been exacerbated by the experience of conflict. So much has changed but

the system is not broken. We continue to work with social services in Kyiv, Odesa and Mykolaiv to identify and assist vulnerable individuals. Whilst not infallible, government social protection – in contrast to other conflict contexts – has not collapsed in the face of war.

The kinds of programmes Depaul has expertise in running around the world will remain relevant. A person-centred, strengths-based approach with mainstreamed trauma-informed care provides foundations on which to support individuals to rebuild their lives and adapt to the new reality. The language of recovery, so fundamental to homelessness services worldwide, should resonate in Ukraine as society shifts to whatever comes next.

Where do our teams take heart amid the misery and the suffering? We have seen remarkable generosity from international donors, and alongside the enterprise and dedication of local people this is allowing investment in Ukraine's services. Of course, the needs they are trying to meet have deepened significantly but I hope it is not too optimistic to think that crisis can be a catalyst for change. We have seen this in our sector elsewhere. The COVID-19 pandemic forced changes in thinking and implementation that would have seemed inconceivable before. In England, accommodation was opened using hotels for thousands of people sleeping rough – abandoning a labyrinthine system of priority need which left many on the streets – because the government and the sector simply decided it had to be so. Whilst such silver linings seem far off, we have to hope that the generosity shown towards Ukraine will continue so Depaul and other agencies can deliver services which allow individuals to survive and then recover when the war does end. We are at the start of a long, tough story but our teams and the people who need their support will be there long after the world's attention drifts to whatever crisis comes next.

Most people fleeing from the war in Ukraine are women and children who have specific needs and vulnerabilities. Jéromine Andolfatto sheds light on this issue from the perspective of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and calls on international actors to effectively guarantee women's rights.

WAR IN UKRAINE: THE EWL CALLS ON THE EU AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS TO EFFECTIVELY GUARANTEE WOMEN'S RIGHTS



By **Jéromine Andolfatto**, Policy and Campaigns Officer, European Women's Lobby

Since the start of the Ukraine war, nearly 12.8 million people have been displaced, 7.7 million of which internally, around 17.5% of the country's total population. As international human rights and international humanitarian law violations have been recorded, these people urgently need adequate protection¹. In times of crisis, and throughout migratory processes, women and girls are particularly vulnerable and disproportionately impacted. The war in Ukraine is no exception.

As the majority of those fleeing Ukraine are women and children, all EU responses must mainstream gender. The policies and measures being designed and implemented must address the specific experiences and needs of women and girls. Throughout their migratory journey, women and girls face some of the strongest challenges particularly regarding sexual exploitation. To ensure that no woman or girl is left behind, the EU must also implement gender mainstreaming in all forthcoming migration and asylum initiatives in compliance with international guidelines, conventions and frameworks². This must be done in consultation with women's civil society organisations, including organisations of migrant women and girls; it must draw from a streamlined and systematic sex-disaggregated data collection

1 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/05/ukraine-millions-displaced-traumatised-and-urgently-need-help-say-experts>

2 Including: UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection; the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (i.e. General recommendation No. 26 on women migrant workers; General Recommendation No. 32 on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women; General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19); the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 22); and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 11); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

(data on individuals broken down by sex), and it must be carried out by undertaking gender impact assessments to adjust measures that may have unintentionally been preventing women and girls from fully accessing and enjoying their rights.

The approach taken must acknowledge that women are diverse and that due to their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or in some cases disability, some women experience intersecting discriminations:

- Girls and women with disabilities in situations of crisis or conflict face a disproportionate risk of abandonment, violence, death, and a lack of access to safety, relief, and recovery support. The obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities must be upheld, in particular the Article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies and the Article 6 on women and girls.
- Roma women and girls as part of minority groups among people fleeing Ukraine are being discriminated against in the receiving countries, from postponing their registrations for temporary protection status to refusing to provide them housing or other forms of support.
- Protection for all people from and in Ukraine must not be limited to Ukrainian citizens. Racially or ethnically motivated discrimination must be unequivocally rejected. All refugees' lives matter and they should be protected by the EU's values, rule of law, equality between women and men and anti-discrimination policies.

The EU response must address this reality and be intersectional.

Despite being disproportionately affected by the war in Ukraine, women and girls remain excluded from decision-making and policy-making processes. Their needs, once more, are not adequately represented and addressed. In order to ensure that the measures

developed respond efficiently to the situation of the whole displaced population, women's and girls' voices need to be heard; that is why the EU must guarantee that channels to convey women's interests are set and maintained open:

- The EU and international stakeholders must support the inclusion of women in every stage of the current and post-conflict processes, in line with UN Resolution 1325 and its agenda on "Women, Peace and Security". This includes consulting with women's civil society on building sustainable peace, peace negotiations and the (post-) conflict resolution processes. Women's representatives must come from all sectors of society, in terms of diversity, age groups, professions, educational levels, etc.
- UN Women should facilitate this inclusion by initiating and funding training so that women and women's organisations can effectively take part in all stages of the current and post-conflict processes.

The EWL is deeply concerned by the increased vulnerability of women and girls and by the use of violence and rape as a weapon of war. We are appalled by the discovery of partially burned naked bodies of women such as in Bucha. Sexual exploitation is also a looming threat as traffickers and organised networks take advantage of this situation to "recruit" vulnerable girls and women at the borders or on social media to lure them into prostitution or abduct them. It is urgent to address this situation and to provide women and children with effective protection. These horrific violations of women's rights must not go unpunished and must be stopped.

The visit of Pramila Patten, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in Ukraine highlighted that there is still a significant gap between the resolution adopted by the UN Council on the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and the reality experienced by women and girls in conflicts such as the one

unfolding in Ukraine. She stressed that addressing women's and girls' needs must be a priority³. The EWL reiterates its call to Ms Patten to thoroughly document all sexual violence, rape and trafficking and identify them as war crimes to subsequently provide evidence for the International Criminal Court (ICC) and all other relevant Courts. The ICC started its investigation into the situation in Ukraine in March on "past and present allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide committed on any part of the territory of Ukraine"⁴; the EWL reiterates its demands to ensure there is no impunity for war criminals. The EU must be proactive in supporting the ICC and ensure the Commission of Inquiry can undertake its work with adequate resources. The EU must also issue political and policy guidelines to Member States on the provision of services to women and girls in transit and as refugees in EU host countries. These should include, but not be limited to:

- Support in relation to violence against women;
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- Medical care;
- Psycho-social counselling;
- Legal advice;
- Access for children to kindergartens and schools and increase the capacity of care services;
- Access to quality jobs, social protection and safe accommodation and housing;
- Language courses for women and their children;

³ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14926.doc.htm>

⁴ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/ukraine>

- Special support for single mothers;
- Regularly updated information packs for easy access in different languages;
- An EU-wide anti-trafficking hotline.

The EU must urgently close loopholes in its legislative framework on trafficking and violence against women. Thus, the recent European Commission's proposal for a Directive on violence against women and domestic violence should be revised to include sexual exploitation and to reinforce sanctions on trafficking. Member States need to adopt adequate standards which are in line with the Nordic/Equality Model against sexual exploitation, including prostitution.

Migrant women play essential roles in labour markets and make a valuable contribution to the economies and societies. Their rights to access basic education and safe, fair and decent employment must be granted. They must also have access to current information regarding their rights, including the right to access programmes and training on integration, language and digital competency, irrespective of their legal migration status. Additionally, to face the influx of migrants coming from Ukraine efficiently and to support the independence and participation of migrant girls and women in the economy and society, it is essential to alleviate the care burden disproportionately resting on women by:

- Increasing public services and community-based care in order to guarantee capacity for migrant children;
- Supporting schools and kindergartens in being able to integrate these children as quickly as possible;
- Supporting women who have to take care of their children in their new homes and cannot join the labour market instantly.

Another violation observed has been women's and girls' restricted access to their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights while fleeing Ukraine's war. It is critical to guarantee the provision of basic hygiene products and services for women such as menstrual products, baby products, etc. Safeguarding women's rights to abortion should also be one of the highest priorities.

Women's rights organisations have been playing a key role in supporting women and girls fleeing the Ukraine war and in conveying their interests to decision-makers. They are doing their best to fill in the gaps left by EU Member States and international actors. However, women's civil society organisations' resources have been negatively impacted by the growing political and societal backlash. In this shrinking space for women's rights it is of the utmost importance to actively support women's rights organisations with funding and resources to enable them to continue carrying out their mission. The EWL also urges the EU to set up an EU inter-institutional Task Force composed of the three EU institutions (Commission, Council and Parliament) with representation from civil society, such as: women's organisations, gender equality organisations, human rights defenders and human rights organisations.

As we gradually emerge from a public health crisis, in which women took the largest part in keeping society functioning and which led to increased poverty, heightened violence, sexual exploitation and prostitution, the EWL emphasises once more that it is essential that the EU upholds the fundamental rights it is built on, in which equality between women and men is at the core. Conflict resolution must include women and respect international law.



As a neighbouring country of Ukraine, Poland is one of the countries that is most affected by the war and the resulting humanitarian crisis. In this article, Marcin Tylman from the Foundation for Activation and Integration (FAI) describes the initial reaction to the influx of refugees from a personal and an NGO perspective and gives insight into the work that the FAI, among other NGOs, has done to support people fleeing from Ukraine.

WE'RE WITH YOU!



By **Marcin Tylman**, Foundation for Activation and Integration


On February 24, Russian troops attacked Ukraine. That was the start of the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the end of World War II. Seeking help, more than two million refugees have found their way to Poland. Watching the news from the border, we were all wiping our eyes with shock. We were witnessing the misery, despair and uncertainty of hundreds of thousands of women and children. However, over time, our initial shock turned into pride for the people and organisations that provided emergency relief at the border. In the days after the invasion, people in those parts of the country where the refugees ended up joined the support chain. At the beginning of March, people working in the Foundation for Activation and Integration (FAI) decided to prepare and implement an aid programme for refugees. The Foundation operates locally, in a small town in the north of Poland but offered its help as it is in contact with large national NGOs.

HOUSING SUPPORT EXPERIENCES

FAI has been a member of the Polish National Federation for Solving the Problem of Homelessness for many years. They specialise in the preparation and implementation of housing support for disadvantaged groups at risk of social exclusion. Previously, the Foundation carried out projects in the area of assisted housing for people in the homelessness crisis, especially people with disabilities. For two years, it has been implementing its own Housing Training Programme for young adults leaving the foster care system, an independent programme, protecting against the phenomenon of youth homelessness. Furthermore, in the years 2018-2019, FAI co-created the mixed-community programme "We live together at Nowa 11 Street". It was a social experiment focused on creating a community of residents with a diverse age and social structure.

LIVE AMONG US

Previous experience and the conviction that the most needed form of support for war refugees is providing long-term, comprehensive housing support with individualised social services have resulted in taking action. Within seven days from the invasion, experts from the FAI together with volunteers prepared five housing units, two of which were adapted from previously uninhabitable premises. The remaining three apartments were provided to the Foundation by private persons. Experts concluded that it was crucial to make the accommodation available free of charge for at least 90 days. Furthermore, they decided that it was important to match the size of the apartments to the needs and size of the refugee family and to give each family their individual space. The Foundation advised against solutions consisting in accepting refugees in a shared space for a period longer than 7 days. Residential premises were equipped with the necessary furniture and household appliances. Everything was obtained through donations from the residents of Nowe and from local entrepreneurs. On March 5, the premises were ready for our beneficiaries. Women with children reached our city through various communication channels: some came because their family members work in local factories, others were located by the state authorities. FAI established contact with Warsaw NGOs that provided support at railway stations and served as reception points. As a result of this cooperation, we collected the first seven people from the reception point on March 6, then another two people and another three people. In total, about 29 families (women with children) arrived at the city and municipality of Nowe. Statistically, refugees from Ukraine made up 1% of the population of the Nowe municipality (about 100 people) in late March and early April.



It needs to be made clear that the socially created movement to help refugees, which over the days of the crisis has become a social support system, was and is to a large extent implemented by NGOs.”

SVIETŁANA, MARINA, NATASHA AND OTHERS

I wondered what the phenomenon of ordinary Polish people helping others was all about. I watched TV reports, the exodus of people, the chaos at the borders, the railway stations and ordinary people who in a thousand ways provided simple help. I understood their actions when, together with a colleague from the Foundation, we were picking up the first people from the reception point in Warsaw. What we saw in the eyes of those people was something we had never encountered working in support. Despair, uncertainty, fear, grief, pain and extreme fatigue. I remember when we arrived in our small town with the first people on the night of March 6. The sight of these exhausted women with sleeping children caused our co-workers and volunteers to cry as they waited for guests in the apartments. As the days went by, with daily reports, we all began to get used to the new situation. Subsequent events in war-torn Ukraine were shared together: the massacre in Bucha and Irpin where Natasha and Halynka are from, rockets falling on Dnipro where Marina and Svieta lived. The fall of Mariupol. With time you get used to it and, as one of our service recipients used to say, “what can you do, you have to live on”.

EVERYDAY LIFE

After the first two to three weeks after arrival followed a period of adaptation to the new reality, socially and economically. People started establishing relationships and accepting the fact of having to live in a foreign country. It was time to make the first decisions on how to find oneself in the new reality. The programme of supported housing with social services planned and implemented by the Foundation for Activation and Integration seems to have fulfilled its task to a large extent because, firstly, families have been living in natural home conditions – each of the families occupies their own housing unit

that is well adapted to the individual needs of the family. Secondly, the available basket of social services was accepted by our guests. Thirdly, social and interpersonal relations have been established. The language barrier will be a serious communication problem. Eighty percent of refugees who came to our community spoke only Russian (these are people from the north and east of Ukraine). Meanwhile, it turned out that a significant part of Polish society, especially older people, communicates to some extent in Russian - a legacy of the times when the Russian language was an obligatory subject in local schools. On the other hand, the language adaptation of our guests is surprising. For example, one of the Ukrainians who was hired at our Foundation now speaks Polish fluently after only three months. After completing the necessary formalities for registration in the Polish system, we helped all those who wanted to take up a professional activity: we recommended professional internships, which, considering language barriers and uncertainty about the length of stay, seemed to be a good solution. This idea was accepted and implemented by the District Labour Office (local employment institution). The Foundation also organised Polish language classes, including classes for children and youth to participate in educational activities. It has involved refugees in every educational, sports and cultural activity carried out so far. The key for FAI experts is social inclusion (empowerment), which has a special meaning in this situation.

MONEY

It needs to be made clear that the socially created movement to help refugees, which over the days of the crisis has become a social support system, was and is to a large extent implemented by NGOs. Interestingly, most Polish organisations, including the Foundation

for Activation and Integration, had no experience in humanitarian aid. For the first 15 to 20 days after the beginning of the conflict, the government basically did not take any significant initiatives. The level of involvement of local governments varied. Therefore, the main burden of aid was taken on by NGOs, including our organisation. In addition to housing preparation, material collections were needed (and still are), as well as the provision of money. The FAI implemented a financial support programme in which citizens declared voluntary (but fixed) targeted contributions contracted for the next three months. In this way, we have secured a reliable amount of revenue, which we have fully allocated (and continue to spend) on the payment of cash benefits to our guests. We managed to raise an amount of about six to seven thousand euros. It is worth mentioning that we have also received donations from Germany and the USA. The stay of refugees in Poland is currently supported by the government, which has implemented a 120-day programme to support Polish hosts who have taken refugees under their roof. However, the programme ends in June 2022. Therefore, the FAI started a dialogue with OXFAM. The subject of our cooperation is to obtain financial assistance that will secure the key service of all refugees whose income does not allow to pay rent or utilities in rented apartments for the period until the end of 2022. Additionally, we see the need for assistance in financing specialised medical services. This task seems to be particularly important and, at the same time, difficult due to the already visible effects of the energy crisis: we are currently recording unprecedented increases in energy and heating prices. We all observe the situation in Ukraine, share concerns with our guests, and support them in their daily struggles with reality. We advise, support and help. The unexpected situation has taught us that nothing is permanent, that we must always be ready for changes and for new situations in which we “helpers” need to organise ourselves as quickly as possible.

Historically, Greece has been one of the main points of entry into the EU for refugees. Now, in the context of the war in Ukraine, Lazaros Petromelidis, Director at the Greek Council for Refugees, reflects on the conditions that refugees and asylum seekers endure in Greece and explains how the response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine shows that Greece and the EU can do a lot more to provide a dignified living situation for those seeking refuge.

SEEKING ASYLUM IN GREECE: THE MARATHON OF THE INVISIBLE



By **Lazaros Petromelidis**, Director, Greek Council for Refugees

The war in Ukraine has shaken Europe and not only financially...it has reminded all EU citizens of one of the most devastating consequences of war: the forced movement of people...millions of people moved in a very short period, most of them women, children and elderly, fleeing to save their lives. A massive movement of almost 5 million people is said to have left Ukraine to seek refuge mostly in the neighbouring countries while 8 more million are said to have moved internally. The war in Ukraine is not the only war on the globe but it is the one closest to our homes. However, there are several conflicts, such as the one in Yemen, Syria, Congo, Somalia and so on, that are currently taking place around the world and are not as talked about as the one in Ukraine. These wars are also forcing people to seek refuge in the aging Europe, quite far from their homes.

Greece, along with other countries at the Southern borders of Europe, is historically considered one of the main entry points for refugees and migrants, those who are fleeing their homes in other parts of the world, such as the Balkans, the Middle East, Asia and Africa, due to fear of prosecution or extreme poverty. In 2015, the increased influx of refugees mobilised a significant number of resources at international level to support Greece in coping with it. It was the first time that we have seen rapid responses that were supposed to be temporary: rescue programmes at the sea borders; fast-track asylum procedures, dividing those in need of international protection by their arrival date; creation of the camps on the islands and of the Eleonas refugee camp in the centre of Athens. Gradually, a total number of 26 temporary accommodation shelters that have had different names over the course of the years have been created all over Greece. They very often brought shame to Greece for the way people were treated: people have to endure disgraceful living conditions, are geographically isolated and cut off from any means of public transport. UNCHR designed a programme, ESTIA, that, until September 2021, hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees in apartments providing dignified living conditions and

a set of services that supported the integration process. The ESTIA programme in its total capacity reached 26.000 places scattered in the cities all over Greece involving both non-governmental organisations and municipalities as implementing partners. From June 2020, a handover period from UNCHR to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum started that was officially completed in September 2021 in reduced capacity of less than 15,000 places. At the same time, the camps were overwhelmed with people of different statuses: unregistered, asylum seekers, recognised refugees and rejected. Different statuses imply access to different rights and visibility in the systems of health, housing and labour. If people are unregistered and rejected, they get no visibility in the system and no access to anything.

In 2021, the reduced influx of people in combination with greater numbers leaving the country, regularly or irregularly, resulted in reduced numbers of refugees according to the national statistics. This has been considered a great success and a result of the proper management of the current government. The current plan is to close the ESTIA programme by the end of December 2022. All the remaining people in the programme who are living in apartments are supposed to move to camps, behind the walls that were supposedly built for their own protection. This plan practically implies that the people are forced, once again, to abandon whatever life they have built somewhere in Greece in order to move to an isolated area (camps, temporary accommodations, etc.) where they will need to start all over again. In the summer of 2021, three-meter walls were built around the camps for the “people’s protection”, clearly separating the area from the rest of its physical environment and, at the same time, improving the life inside the camps: less congestion, better living conditions. This is celebrated as the proper way to manage the refugee population: islands are decongested, and the cities as well will be gradually “emptied” of the refugees.

Today, entering Greece irregularly is considered an invasion by most of the mass media, and those supporting these people are accused of espionage. But apart from the Ukrainians, who have been publicly acknowledged to be the “real” refugees, the rest have no other way to enter the country but irregularly. Those who are still managing to reach the islands or the northern borders of Greece will need to stay in Reception Centres imprisoned for at least some days or weeks until they get their papers. Those who manage to walk to a major city or town in the mainland will need to return to the borders to apply for asylum. Once they manage to apply for asylum, they will be allocated to a camp and start from there again. They will also be eligible for a cash assistance programme and food distribution that does not take into consideration any of their preferences. Ever since the government took over the responsibility of managing the process, cash assistance has been cut by almost 50%, currently reaching 75€ for a single adult. This is also publicly acknowledged as the success of proper management by the mass media and the government. Medical needs are said to be covered inside the camps. However, the medical programme PHILOS II is under transition too; due to the uncertainty of its continuity, employees have resigned and have not been replaced. There is a severe lack of human resources and medical items to adequately cover existing needs.

Those who are rejected for international protection are cut off immediately from access to medical care, among other things, since the unique PAYPPA number that is providing their visibility to the health system is connected to their legal status and is automatically cancelled when they are rejected. This practically means that refugees suffering, for example, from chronic diseases are not able to continue their treatment unless they pay 100% of its cost. However, they are not able to cover the cost since they are not officially able to work and receive an income and the existing cash assistance programme can barely cover their transport needs to any medical facilities outside the camp. They are supposed to leave the country by their own means

“They are supposed to leave the country by their own means that they are officially not allowed to earn as they are not allowed to work or exist in the country.”

that they are officially not allowed to earn as they are not allowed to work or exist in the country. That way, they are all forced to work without permission or contract, to keep moving irregularly and feed the exploitation systems to survive.

The war in Ukraine and the management of the refugees coming from there clearly prove that both Greece and the EU can do better when it comes to the international protection and the implementation of the Geneva Convention’s articles. It has, once again, divided those in need of international protection, this time by nationality. However, it has also made it crystal clear that supporting refugees is all a matter of political will and understanding.

In France, as in many countries, the reception of people fleeing from Ukraine has raised important questions about the treatment of refugees from other countries. Pierre-Baptiste Cordier Simonneau, Communication Director in the Salvation Army, explores the issue in this article, recognising the commendable achievements that have been accomplished for refugees coming from Ukraine and raising the question why this is not the standard for everyone.

FRANCE'S RECEPTION OF REFUGEES: CAUGHT BETWEEN SOLIDARITY AND DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT



By **Pierre-Baptiste Cordier Simonneau**, Communication Director, Armée du Salut

One of the main consequences of the war in Ukraine has been the displacement of millions of people who have had to flee their country to escape the conflict. According to the French Interior Ministry, 57,578 displaced people were identified to have entered the country between 24 February and 25 May 2022.¹ A significant number of them were in transit on the way to other countries. Of its own accord, as well as in response to calls from the government, the French voluntary sector has put in place lots of initiatives in order to give these refugees a proper and unconditional welcome, whether that be through accommodation or through food aid. As a reminder, “according to the 1951 Geneva Convention, the term ‘refugee’ applies to anyone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. But in reality, this is an ambiguous text that each country interprets differently depending on the nationality of asylum applicants and above all depending on the political climate at the time.”² Within this context, the French Salvation Army Foundation has served more than 1000 meals every day to people from Ukraine, and the Foundation’s accommodation services have offered almost 10,000 nightly placements every week.

1 <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/actualites/dossiers/situation-en-ukraine/foire-aux-questions-accueil-des-refugies-ukrainiens>

2 Karen Akoka : « Le statut de réfugié en dit plus sur ceux qui l'attribuent que sur ceux qu'il désigne » (Refugee status says more about those who grant it than those it applies to) https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/08/30/karen-akoka-le-statut-de-refugie-en-dit-plus-sur-ceux-qui-l-attribuent-que-sur-ceux-qu-il-designe_6092733_3210.html

REFUGEES COMPETING FOR ACCOMMODATION SPACES – A WORRY THAT HAS NOT YET BECOME REALITY

The fact that the French system cannot offer a roof over the head of every asylum seeker, despite the authorities’ best efforts, has given rise among some in the voluntary sector to the worry that accommodating people coming from Ukraine will be at the expense of people who are already accommodated. So far, this has thankfully not been the case.

What has happened, though, is that the situation is more difficult for asylum seekers from other countries, for whom things have not improved in this time. The new work stemming from the conflict in Ukraine has come at a challenging time for the French accommodation system: it is struggling to deal with the successive arrivals of migrants in the country and the social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have pushed a greater number of people into poverty.

THE DELICATE QUESTION OF ACCESS TO RIGHTS

Like the other stakeholders in the social sector, the Salvation Army Foundation supports people who cannot return to their country of origin in its accommodation services and in its day centres. Before they can be allocated a space in these services, these people often sleep in tents put up in squats. What we do is to offer these people a service to support them in their applications to the authorities or to help them access medical care. These asylum seekers are often from Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan or Eritrea. They have fled difficult

experiences in their countries, risking their lives and the lives of their families, in pursuit of a future free from violence. Being forced to leave their countries has caused some of them a deterioration in their mental health. This means the teams have to employ a great deal of flexibility and professionalism in order to work with these people and help them with their day-to-day undertakings, especially when it comes to their asylum claim. This is rendered even more difficult by the fact that these displaced people do not necessarily have access to all the information they need.³ They have to fulfil criteria, but these are not necessarily understandable or clear to everyone, and this is true for the people who apply as well as for the professionals. In the same vein, the procedures and rights are different depending on whether someone is an asylum seeker or has refugee status.⁴ For people fleeing from Ukraine who have Ukrainian nationality, the situation is much simpler given that there is, for the most part, a direct route for them. It is, thus, easy for them to access their rights. This difference in circumstances creates tensions. Even though everyone, service users and professionals, want to welcome people fleeing war, many cannot understand why people are treated differently by the authorities when their situations are the same or almost the same.

3 [Les oubliés du droit d'asile – enquête sur les conditions de vie et l'accès aux droits des exilés fréquentant 5 structures d'accueil à Paris](#) (Those that the right to asylum forgot – inquiry into the living conditions and access to rights of migrants using 5 homelessness services in Paris)

4 <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>

[M]any cannot understand why people are treated differently by the authorities when their situations are the same or almost the same.”

ACCESS TO RIGHTS IS USUALLY A CHALLENGE

For people who live in France, it is not easy to meet all the necessary prerequisites that allow them to access their rights, even in normal times. This is due to people's journeys that have often not been straightforward and the complexity of the application procedures they must follow, which are often online. The *Défenseur des Droits*⁵ (rights ombudsman), an independent body tasked with protecting

5 <https://defenseurdesdroits.fr/fr/institution/organisation/defenseur>

people whose rights are not respected and making sure everyone has equal access to their rights, raised this in 2022 when he said: “The move towards digital-only services is only justifiable if it is part of a wider and more sophisticated ambition to create authorities that are fully accessible to all and committed to their duty of allowing everyone access to their rights.”⁶

The COVID-19 health emergency was particularly disastrous for people’s access to their rights. Public services were not open to the public and, as a result, everything had to be done virtually. This meant people found themselves “with additional barriers to accessing public agencies”, as highlighted by the day centre team in Dunkirk in northern France, for example. We should say that this digital access to public services is nothing new. Paradoxically, offering this more modern and seemingly more accessible system could actually be part of the reason why people do not access services: often, they do not have access to a computer or find it difficult to understand the forms they have to fill in. And things are even more complicated for people who have fled persecution or war. When these people arrive in France, they have to ring a telephone service that will give them the right to make an application at the *préfecture* (district office). This starts off a laborious and complicated procedure which will determine their “immigration status” (refugee, right to asylum) and, therefore, which rights they can enjoy and whether they can stay in the country. Professionals support the people using their service to make this application but also give them emotional support during the whole process.

6 <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/dp-demat-press-28.03.22.pdf>

Refugees from Ukraine have not had to follow this complicated application process. Since 3 March 2022, they have had “temporary protected status”.⁷ Specific offices have been set up to process their applications in the places where they arrive in the country. This has considerably sped up processing times – which is a great achievement.

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF HOUSING IN WELCOMING REFUGEES

The discrepancy between the experience of people coming from Ukraine and those from other countries has also become apparent in their access to accommodation. There are many reasons why people experiencing homelessness are accommodated by the Salvation Army’s services. These include family breakdown for financial reasons that have pushed people into addiction, low income that makes it difficult to access even social housing, or a migration background.

Thankfully, people who flee the war in Ukraine can currently access housing. However, social workers are concerned for those who wish to stay in France. These people will have to integrate into the country through employment and the creation of social ties. This aspect of integration receives public funding in France, but additional private investment is needed too. One solution that has been decided on to help solve the housing issue is to disperse people to areas where it is

7 <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F299>

easier to find housing than in big cities. However, this raises questions around the resources available to help them learn the language, which is a necessary part of entering the labour market. Likewise, children have to be able to go to school. On 24 May, there were 17,677 Ukrainian children in primary and secondary schools and sixth form colleges.⁸ This begs the question of whether these schools have the capacity to take on students and whether they are able to help the children settle in. Having to change schools can cause additional trauma on top of that of having to leave their country as a result of the war. For some children, starting school, especially in big cities, has been a positive experience as they have been able to connect with people in their area. We need to find the fairest and best way to help these people settle into their communities and set them up for the future, giving them dignity and allowing them the time they need.

⁸ <https://www.education.gouv.fr/accueil-des-enfants-ukrainiens-l-ecole-point-de-situation-au-27-mai-2022-341378>

KEEPING FRATERNITY ALIVE

Throughout the Ukraine crisis, the staff of the Salvation Army Foundation and others in the voluntary sector have stayed faithful to the values of unconditional access for those affected by the refugee crisis and for people sleeping rough, despite an already very difficult context where tensions are high. This unprecedented situation has meant we have had to rely on the public authorities to be flexible and adaptable. We are pleased that they have been able to live up to this. Samuel Coppens, Salvation Army Foundation spokesperson, reminds us that “the resources put in place and the way they were rolled out to welcome people coming from Ukraine should be the norm all the time and not the exception. France has shown it can fully uphold the values of the republic, in particular the value of *Fraternité* (fraternity). We welcome this and are prepared to continue to keep the values alive each and every day through our actions that help make sure there is a space in society for everyone.”

“For people fleeing from Ukraine who have Ukrainian nationality, the situation is much simpler given that there is, for the most part, a direct route for them.”

UKRAINIAN REFUGEES HOSTED BY BMSZKI IN BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, FEANTSA member BMSZKI, located in Budapest, converted former shelters into first reception centres for those fleeing from Ukraine. Over time, these centres have become temporary accommodation for families. In this article, Boróka Fehér reflects on the developments so far, current challenges and on what is still to come.



By **Boróka Fehér**, Policy Officer, BMSZKI

[BMSZKI](#), the Budapest Methodological Centre of Social Policy, is the largest service provider for people experiencing homelessness in the capital of Hungary. Upon request from the City of Budapest, we opened a reception centre for people fleeing the war in Ukraine on 26 February with the capacity of accommodating 100 people – formerly a shelter that had not been frequented by many people living in homelessness. As it filled up very fast (on 28 February, 125 people spent the night there), we rapidly opened a second centre for 60 people (and relocated the elderly homeless people who had stayed there). The war started on a Thursday; the first refugees arrived at our doorstep on Saturday. The original plan was to serve as a first reception centre, offering accommodation for a few nights to the people fleeing war, on their way to something more permanent. However, people fleeing from Ukraine were welcome to stay as long as needed. The first guests only spent a few nights, but later families with numerous children arrived, who did not have anywhere else to go, nor the financial means to pay for a hotel. During these initial stages, NGOs set up help booths at the main train stations of the city, and the City Hall provided buses to transport people to reception centres – or the airport, another train station, whatever was needed. Accommodation was coordinated by the 24-hour homeless hotline, operated by former FEANTSA member [Menhely Foundation](#). The City Hall of Budapest as well as those of the districts opened summer holiday homes and transferred refugees

there – however, as these became full most families tended to stay in Budapest, in the shelters that were supposed to serve as first reception centres only.

BMSZKI first offered basic emergency services: accommodation, a hot shower, laundry, food three times a day, Wi-Fi and charging of phones and health care. In the first weeks, many of the refugees, especially the children, had health issues from exposure to the cold and stress. Most families arrived with only the basics so we had to provide them with clothing, toiletries – basically, everything. The refugees staying at our two centres were either smaller nuclear families speaking Ukrainian, independently organising their onward travel, or larger, mostly Hungarian-speaking Roma families from rural, segregated areas of Western Ukraine, who were not able to find their way around the city on their own. The fathers of these families had usually been working abroad (either in Hungary, or neighbouring Austria, even Germany) and now their families had joined them.

Since their opening, both first reception centres have become temporary accommodation services for families. With financial support from the City of Budapest and numerous NGOs (SOS Children's Villages Hungary, United Way Hungary, Terre des Hommes, Budapest Bike Mafia – Age of Hope etc.) as well as a myriad of private donors,

BMSZKI first offered basic emergency services: accommodation, a hot shower, laundry, food three times a day, Wi-Fi and charging of phones and health care.”

BMSZKI has transformed its night shelters for people experiencing homelessness to accommodate families (installing playrooms for example). Furthermore, we have also hired staff to be able to respond to the families' numerous needs day and night; for instance, we employed social workers to support the families in settling in and claiming benefits. BMSZKI, a public service provider, had not cooperated with volunteers on a large scale before – now several NGOs as well as schools have been providing free time activities to the children we support on a regular basis. After the initial plans failed, we managed to get children enrolled in kindergartens and schools with support from the local family support unit. Pregnant women were offered healthcare – some had not seen a doctor or nurse despite being close to delivery. [Utcáról Lakásba Egyesület](#) (Association from the Street to Housing - ULE) coordinates short-term, affordable rentals in and around Budapest, also offering floating support for families who are moving out of the first reception centres. [Menedék Egyesület](#), an NGO supporting refugees, has held information days for the families, as well as offering activities to the children. The zoo has invited children staying at our centres to take part in their day camps.

Under the Temporary Protection Directive, the Hungarian state has been forced to change many of its policies regarding migration. Prior to the war in Ukraine, refugees had to ask for protection at the border or outside of Hungary, and there was a severe limitation on the number of demands to be accepted. Since the beginning of March, Ukrainian citizens and third country nationals fleeing Ukraine can request [temporary protection](#) – since May, it is also possible to do so online, and applicants no longer need to personally appear at the offices of the National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing. Those requesting temporary protection have the right to lodging, food and healthcare (which NGOs provide to everyone in need, even those not demanding this status), a monthly subsistence support (the same as Hungarian citizens, 57 eur/month!), employment, schooling for children, and free Hungarian courses. There was some ambivalence as to the situation

of those who also have Hungarian citizenship – originally, they were excluded from the benefits. Employers hiring Ukrainian citizens are entitled to a subsidy.

Currently, we are pursuing two aims: organising summer activities for children and supporting women in finding employment (many of whom do not read or write) while fighting traditional gender roles (many men do not want their wives to work). One of the people we are trying to help this way is a Ukrainian-speaking mother alone with two kids (8 and 9) – the father left behind in Ukraine. She had found employment despite the language barrier, but her work is from 10 AM to 10 PM. She left her kids alone in the centre until she arrived home. Although there are staff on duty 24 hours of the day, this is not feasible. They have found daycare for the kids, but she cannot pick up her kids after work. Now we are looking for volunteers – or a different job for her.

The current challenge is that it is impossible to plan anything: nobody knows how long people need to stay for, partially due to the war but also due to the emotional state of the families. Although most families have been with us for several months, there are also sudden changes: in the beginning of June, several families went back to Ukraine from one of the centres, some only on a temporary basis. Our other centre is still completely full. We are still working on an emergency basis. Funding from NGOs has been offered for a year, with the possibility of turning services more towards floating support for refugees who have moved out.

No one knows what the following year will bring: will children be here long enough to finish their whole academic year in school? Will parents have time to learn to read and write? Will they have the possibility to move out and live in rented apartments, much more adapted to the needs of families? Can homeless people re-occupy these buildings by winter? Only the future will tell.

Homeless service providers are experiencing the impact of the rapid increase in energy prices that started in 2021 and has skyrocketed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In this article, our colleagues Alice Bergoënd and Clotilde Clark-Foulquier explore how FEANTSA members have been affected by the rising energy bills and what their plans and options for the future are.

ENERGY PRICES AND THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON FEANTSA MEMBERS?

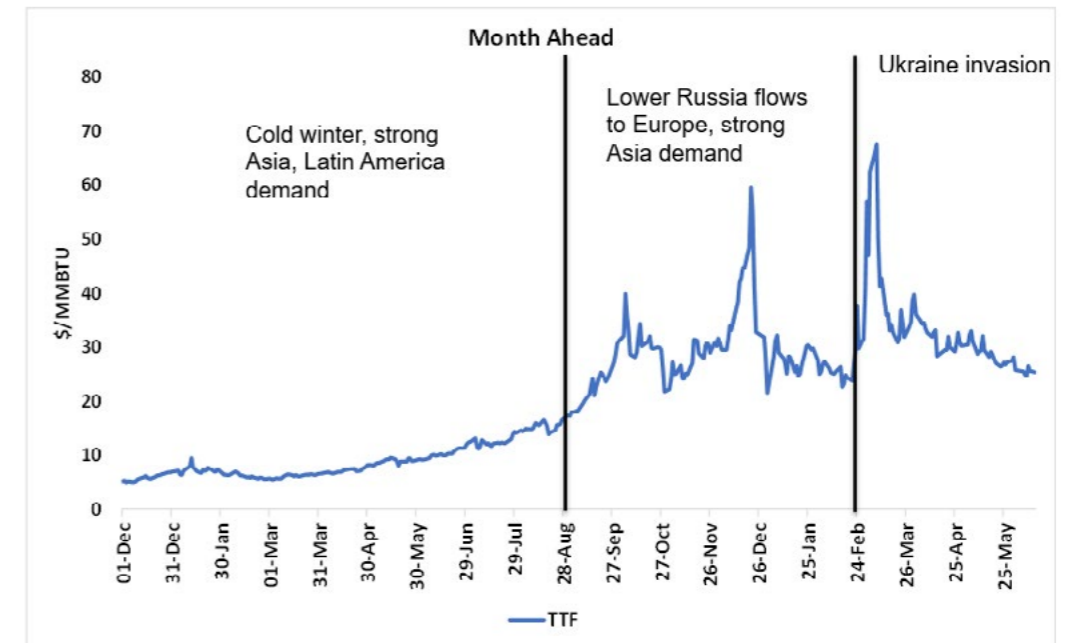


By **Alice Bergoënd**, Project Officer, FEANTSA

THE PRICE INCREASE IS NOT NEW

A core element of the energy transition is to achieve a massive improvement in the energy efficiency of buildings. This is particularly true in the current context of skyrocketing energy prices, exacerbated by the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine. Energy prices, however, did not increase only recently and due to the war. The trend started in 2021, with the economic COVID recovery that created a further surge in demand for energy and more upwards pressure on prices. Other extrinsic factors have also contributed to the situation, such as the weather. An unusually cold winter in 2020/21, especially in some parts of Asia, triggered an increase in demand for energy on international markets, leading to an increase in prices. This was sometimes exacerbated by technical issues in Europe, for instance due to maintenance work on 24 out of 56 nuclear plant reactors in France decreasing productivity. The current policy direction in most European countries is moving towards renewable energy sources and the closing of coal power stations while renewable sources are not able to provide sufficient power yet. This has increased Europe's reliance on gas and, therefore, Europe's vulnerability to Russian gas sourcing. In this context, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 increased the pressure on a market that was already over-heating.

TTF Month Ahead (M+1) Prices 2021 - 2022¹



EUROPEAN GAS MARKET



THE IMPACT ON SERVICE PROVIDERS: FROM STARK INCREASE TO DELAYED HIT

With an estimated 50 million people already living in energy poverty in Europe, this price surge and its consequent impact on inflation is likely to bring a devastating hit to many people that were already struggling to make ends meet. But what about its impact on those who support

¹ Oxford Institute for Energy Studies on 'European energy security'
<https://www.oxfordenergy.org/publications/quarterly-gas-review-short-and-medium-term-outlook-for-gas-markets/>

people – the service providers? To investigate this, FEANTSA has launched a data collection process to monitor the impact of the crisis on its members. What can already be seen is the decisive impact of **rising energy prices for many homeless organisations.**

- In Poland, the **Barka Foundation**, a network of organisations that provides accommodation in communities and is involved in social enterprising, reports that the recent increase in the cost of electricity is on a scale not seen in decades. In March 2022, the electricity price had increased by approximately 220% compared to 2021. Regarding heating, the organisation does not yet know the final scale of the price increases of thermal energy. They expect very drastic increases, comparable to the increases of fuel and electricity prices. These rising energy prices have dramatic consequences, particularly for people on low incomes who are at risk of social exclusion.

- **Monar Gościejewo**, also a Polish organisation, is a homeless shelter located in a rural area, 40 km from Poznan. The organisation has witnessed that electricity charges have increased by about 15% compared to the same month last year. For several years, they have noticed an increase in electricity charges from 2000 - 3000 PLN per month to currently 5500 PLN, with the same consumption.
- **Caritas Kielce** is a regional NGO from the Kielce region in Poland, providing shelter and care services including temporary and transitional housing. For the organisation, in the last quarter alone, gas costs have increased by around 400%. Electricity has increased by 15%, while coal has become 40% more expensive. The gas price cuts announced by the Government are not yet working and the gas supplier is demanding payment of inflated invoices.
- In Ireland, the organisation **Focus Ireland** saw increases from 4% up to 35% in the unit cost of electricity over the course of 2021. The organisation has a fixed rate contract until early 2022 and expects prices to continue to increase when the contract ends.

“In Ireland, the organisation Focus Ireland saw increases from 4% up to 35% in the unit cost of electricity over the course of 2021.”

Many other FEANTSA members were still benefitting from a fixed rate contract, so it was too early for them to assess the impact of the price increase on their services.

WHAT CONTINGENCY STRATEGIES?

FEANTSA members report that they know they will have to adapt. They recognise that the situation will put a heavy burden on budgets and may lead to indebtedness and loss of financial liquidity. Some organisations warn that they will reallocate funds away from front line services to cover the cost of these rising bills.

Monar Gościejewo cautions that “the rising prices of goods (among them energy) lead to fear and concern about what will happen next. The organisation carefully plans the costs of maintaining the shelter for each month (food prices, utility bills, salaries), and cannot make any additional expenditures on repairs or retrofitting the centre with required equipment”. The Portuguese organisation **CASA - Centro de Apoio ao Sem Abrigo** explains that the impact is not limited to building heating and electricity, but also affects the organisation in its outreach work due to the increased cost of fuels for transports.

To respond to the challenge of increasing energy prices, the organisations are forced to put strategies in place.

Some of them have decided to focus on the reduction of private energy consumption, asking the staff to make sure that residents turn off the lights everywhere, and that they don't use electric kettles or cooking machines in their rooms. To make savings, the **Barka Foundation** conducted educational activities aimed at employees and beneficiaries to change attitudes and habits resulting in energy wastage. When possible, the organisation even installed heat recuperators in ventilation systems. They are planning to raise funds for a photovoltaic installation, which would allow them to reduce spending on electricity.

Some organisations warn that they will reallocate funds away from front line services to cover the cost of these rising bills.”

For other organisations, the strategy relies on searching for more subsidies. Focus Ireland has been discussing the possibility of an increase in funding, while other organisations are considering introducing additional charges on residents or seeking external sponsorship.

Although they want to plan renovation work, some organisations do not have the technical capacity to carry it out or cannot afford it. Poland, again, offers a range of examples. Fundacja Zupa, for instance, did not launch renovations because the premises are rented, so they do not have the opportunity to invest in modernisation and major renovations. The Barka Foundation has not benefitted from grants for energy efficiency renovation due to the unavailability or difficult conditions for such grants, as well as legal restrictions concerning, for example, listed buildings. Their district heating provider has offered to upgrade the heating system, but the savings from such an investment may not appear for another five years at the earliest. Monar Gościejewo is looking into the possibility of installing photovoltaic panels or replacing the entire heating system with a pellet-fuelled system. However, the organisation does not currently have the funds for this and will seek new sources of funding.

Other organisations are successfully implementing renovations. Galway Simon, an organisation committed to finding answers to the questions faced by people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in Ireland, has deep retrofitted five of their properties, availing of a grant from the Sustainable Energy Authority Of Ireland² to do so. They have identified several other properties that are also suitable for a deep retrofit, and as grants become available, they say that they will endeavour to also retrofit those. They will incorporate this work into their cyclical maintenance programme. Focus Ireland has been retrofitting some of their housing and offices as well over the last years, either through grants or donations, and in partnership with energy providers. The organisation has a rolling programme of upgrading their housing to higher energy and insulation standards. However, this process has been slower than they would like because of the limited grants and supports available.

2 The Irish governmental body established to promote and aid in the development of sustainable energy in Ireland.

THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: WHAT THE HOMELESS SECTOR CAN LEARN FROM THE DISABILITY SECTOR

People with disabilities in Ukraine were already facing many difficulties before the Russian invasion. Now, discrimination against them has only been amplified as their needs and vulnerabilities in this humanitarian crisis are often forgotten about. Milan Šveřepa from Inclusion Europe shares lessons they have learnt from the conflict that can be important for the homeless sector.



By **Milan Šveřepa**, Director, Inclusion Europe

THE SITUATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN UKRAINE

There are over 2.7 million people with disabilities in Ukraine, of which some 260,000 are people with intellectual disabilities.¹ They often experience severe discrimination and a restriction of their autonomy, frequently facing institutionalisation when their families can no longer provide care for them. Some local governments promote social inclusion, but they are the exception. It is estimated that at least 82,000 children with disabilities are segregated from society in “care home” institutions, with thousands of adults with disabilities also living in institutions. Before the war, about 41,000 people with disabilities had been declared legally incompetent, stripping them of their basic human rights, including the right to vote, work or marry, as well as the possibility to make autonomous decisions.²

In short, the lives of Ukrainian people with intellectual disabilities and their families were very difficult even before Russia launched this phase of its war on Ukraine on 24 February 2022. And the war made everything much, much worse. Now, people with disabilities face a variety of new challenges. They cannot use shelters because they are inaccessible or too crowded. They lack daily supplies, including food and medicine. Despite these obstacles, many people with disabilities have fled their homes, becoming refugees in Ukraine and outside of it.

1 [“Weeks of horror. And we cannot possibly leave.” - Inclusion Europe \(inclusion-europe.eu\)](https://inclusion-europe.eu/)

2 [100 days: Ukrainians with intellectual disabilities and their families surviving the war - Inclusion Europe \(inclusion-europe.eu\)](https://inclusion-europe.eu/)

Crisis makes existing neglect and discrimination more pronounced, acute, and just many times worse. If you are being overlooked in normal times, it is unlikely that anyone will take you into account during a crisis. We saw that with the war in Ukraine: the lack of accessibility, information, and consideration when designing support was now not “only” affecting everyday life, but rather was making it almost impossible for people with disabilities to receive support in a war zone.³

Many disability activists have been dismayed by the lack of preparedness and action from major humanitarian actors.⁴ We have seen the refusal to evacuate people with disabilities and no effort to reach out to disability organisations or families to distribute help. Even most of the support to refugees with disabilities has been provided by local disability organisations and NGOs. All the “disability inclusion” promotion that we so often see online in no way resembled reality. Things have improved in recent weeks,⁵ but much more could be done. Disability organisations in Ukraine are still not receiving enough support for their work from the major actors.

WHAT HELPED US MAKE PROGRESS

However, being “last in line for everything” teaches you some things – resilience and solidarity, for example. Although many big actors have disappointed, the disability sector and private persons have shown an

3 [Neglect and discrimination. Multiplied - How Covid-19 affected the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and their families \(inclusion-europe.eu\)](https://inclusion-europe.eu/)

4 [War in Ukraine: What support do people with disabilities need? | TV News | Al Jazeera](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/02/24/ukraine-disabilities-support/)

5 [Виховуєте дитину з труднощами розвитку чи інвалідністю і потребуєте кризової підтримки в час війни? | UNICEF](https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/stories/vychovuyete-dytynu-z-trudnozhchami-rozvytku-chi-invalidnistyu-i-potrebuyete-krizovoi-pidtrimki-v-chas-voiny)

impressive effort to help; this includes Inclusion Europe members, self-advocacy groups, organisations supporting people with intellectual disabilities, people with personal connection to people with intellectual disabilities, or simply some kids who just wanted to help.⁶ The generosity and speed of contributions to help people with intellectual disabilities and families in Ukraine has been impressive and humbling. By June 2022, the fundraiser for Ukraine collected € 600,000, an amount we did not even discuss as we prepared to function as a “facilitator” for help to those who could not flee the war zone. This money – and all the other ways in which people and organisations are helping – represents solidarity and empathy among those who mostly rely on themselves to get things done.

Clarity, speed, and direct involvement of our friends and colleagues in Ukraine were essential in getting media attention to the issue. It really helps to get the message across when journalists from CNN, Time Magazine, or the New York Times can speak directly to people with disabilities and their families in Ukraine. Collaboration with the European Disability Forum (EDF) and the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) was crucial at this stage too, as we pooled resources and the media’s attention to one joint event.

Our members as well as other organisations played an essential part in less visible ways too, most importantly by talking to national governments about what needs to be done. It was to a large extent a matter of pooling resources and dividing labour so that everyone could focus on their own strengths instead of having to deal with all of the same obstacles. For that reason, EDF’s experience in humanitarian

⁶ [‘I just wanted to help’: Students at Whole Children raise money for Ukrainians in need \(gazettenet.com\)](https://www.gazettenet.com)

“If you are being overlooked in normal times, it is unlikely that anyone will take you into account during a crisis.”

and development affairs allowed them to carry these messages to relevant UN and EU bodies, while we focused on facilitating – collecting people’s testimonies, letting them describe their situation in their own words and making these stories available for many people to see.⁷

All of this was possible thanks to our incredible friends and colleagues in Ukraine. The VGO Coalition, an all-Ukrainian NGO coalition for persons with intellectual disabilities, became an Inclusion Europe member in 2019. They consist of 118 local organisations and represent some 14,000 families of people with intellectual disabilities. We were aware of the situation people with intellectual disabilities face in the country, and we had contacts to build on. Right after Russia launched the invasion, we started working with the VGO Coalition to see what needs to be done. We also hired Ukrainian and Russian speakers to

⁷ [One month of the Russian war on Ukraine in the words of families of people with intellectual disabilities - Inclusion Europe \(inclusion-europe.eu\)](https://inclusion-europe.eu)

contact local branches of the VGO Coalition and to establish direct communication with them.

It is incredible what the women – as they are mostly women – in the VGO Coalition and their local branches have done. They were able to distribute the money we collected to individual families while under bombardment and having to provide 24/7 support for their own family members with disabilities. They gave interviews to global media and attended numerous webinars about their situation and needs while sitting in a basement with bad internet connection, rockets literally hitting neighbouring houses.

Similarly, another Ukrainian disability organisation arranged the evacuation of hundreds of people with disabilities when the global agencies responsible for this would not.⁸ Furthermore, many local disability organisations or NGOs in neighbouring countries stepped up without hesitation to provide support to refugees with disabilities when governments and agencies in EU countries barely acknowledged their existence.

WHAT WE NEED TO CONSIDER FOR THE FUTURE

While Russia continues to kill people in Ukraine, destroy entire cities as well as houses and infrastructure all over the country, Ukrainians are already looking to rebuild their country. It will be an enormous task.

⁸ [The Disabled Ukrainians Doing What the UN Can't \(or Won't?\) | LSE International Development](#)

In the Kyiv region alone, 4,835 private houses and 161 high-rise buildings were completely destroyed, with 13,292 partially damaged. At the moment, 11,319 families need housing.⁹ Over 400,000 people lived in Mariupol before the war. Now the city is no more – with tens of thousands likely dead, and hundreds of thousands with no housing. And this is not the only such city in Eastern Ukraine.

In this humanitarian crisis that is so closely linked to homelessness, there is an acute risk of many people with intellectual disabilities being left without care or being forced to go into “care homes” because they lost relatives and have nowhere to go. Alongside this, there will be huge psychological impact on people who faced unimaginable suffering and trauma. It will impact all aspects of their daily lives, including finding and keeping suitable housing or employment.

All of this needs to be considered by everyone involved in the reconstruction of Ukraine. To avoid further damage to people who suffered too much already, rebuilding and relevant policies must be disability-inclusive, creating a better future for Ukrainian people with intellectual disabilities. This includes providing accessible housing, preventing segregation in “care homes”, as well as eventual homelessness.

One of the most important lessons we have learnt time and again is that advocacy on these issues cannot start early enough. We cannot count on relevant agencies to act responsibly and take people with intellectual disabilities (or people who are homeless) into account of their own accord. We can see every day that that is not how they operate.

⁹ [UkraineWorld on Twitter](#)

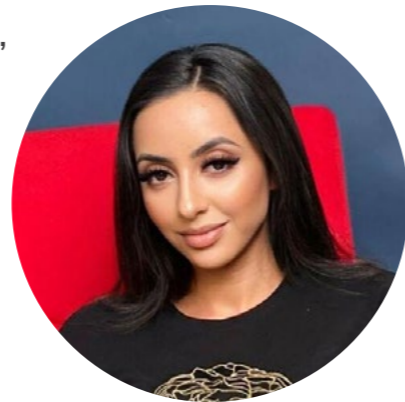
The discrimination suffered by Roma also occurs in times of war. Isaura Dhrima is in a unique position to address this issue as a young Roma refugee in Bucharest, working with the Aresel team to support other Roma refugees who have fled their homes from Ukraine.

INTERVIEW WITH ISAURA DHRIMA: DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ROMA IN TIMES OF WAR



Interview conducted by **Simona Barbu**, Policy Officer at FEANTSA, with support from **Lucian Gheorghiu**, Programme Coordinator at the [Roma Education Fund](#) Bucharest, and **Alin Banu**, Community Organiser at [Aresel](#).

Isaura is a young Roma activist from Ukraine, previously a Roma Education Fund (REF) grantee who has settled in Bucharest, Romania, as a refugee after having to leave her hometown Mykolayiv. Isaura is currently part of the [Aresel](#) team, where she works together with her colleagues to provide support to Roma refugees from Ukraine and to fight the racism they face in Romania.



FEANTSA: *When did you decide to leave Ukraine and how was the journey to Romania? How was the situation at the border?*

Isaura Dhrima: When the war in Ukraine started, the town where I was living was attacked because they [the Russian Army] wanted to occupy our town. My family thought it would last a few days and then it would be over, we thought that an agreement would be reached, because we couldn't imagine that we still lived in those times when people go to war. After a month, we understood that we couldn't stay there anymore, because we couldn't walk in the street, we couldn't be in our house, we were afraid everywhere we went. I talked to my family, and we decided it was better to leave Ukraine and flee to another country until the war was over. We knew we wanted to go to Romania, we didn't think of going to another country. Why? Because we know the language and that can help us to get a job and start a new life, because we don't know if after the war we will even have something to go back to. Our family is Roma and our grandparents lived on the border with Moldova, so we learned Moldovan.¹ And the Roma usually know several foreign languages, so that is helpful.

¹ Moldovan language is very similar to Romanian, therefore Isaura can speak and understand Romanian.

When we left Ukraine, we took the bus to Moldova and from there we kept going until we reached Romania. The journey was very hard, we were very scared on the bus because they were shooting at the buses even if there were children inside, and the buses were from the Red Cross. Finally, we arrived in Romania with our family and some of us stayed here, some of us went on to other countries, like Germany.

FEANTSA: *How is your situation in Romania? Where do you live now and what support can you get from the Romanian state?*

Isaura Dhrima: In Romania we arrived directly in Bucharest by bus, and we were met by volunteers who helped us to settle at the refugee centre where we are staying now. We feel good here, we were welcomed by the people who work here. But those who came here as refugees from Ukraine look at us differently because we are Roma. Besides my family there are some other Roma families here. A few days ago, there were some arguments, some guys who are Roma stayed up late talking and making some noise. Some Ukrainian mothers came out and told them to stop because they couldn't get their children to sleep. Everything stopped after a while and things calmed down. After that, in our chat where we keep in touch between refugees, some people started writing that *"this shows that Roma are bad, that they don't want to work, they only do bad things and that this is the worst nation"*. They wanted to kick the Roma out of the refugee centre after this incident. So today I replied to them and told them that they shouldn't talk like that about all Roma because not all people are bad in a nation and that some Roma are employed to help Ukrainian refugees, like I do at my job. Everybody is suffering in this period, also mentally, and all people may fight, not only Roma. We must look at things differently, there are arguments and fights everywhere. We were devastated that this happened and that they said such things about us Roma in general.

FEANTSA: Roma refugees from Ukraine were discriminated against upon arrival in Bucharest by the people who were supposed to help them - can you tell me about this and other examples of discrimination against Roma in Ukraine?

Isaura Dhrima: Yes, this happened in the North Railway Station in Bucharest. Roma arriving from Ukraine were not given food, they were chased away, and the employees there said that the Roma were making too much noise. But if there were women with children, 20 people, how could there not be noise? So, they were chased away, told to stand in a different queue and sent to stand separately from the other refugees in Ukraine, where there were only Roma. Together with my colleagues from Aresel, we went there and explained to those in charge that they should not create separation between refugees and send Roma to a different waiting room. We are all people. If the employees there can help, they should help everyone, otherwise why are they there? When they see us, they don't know what to do, they are happy that we came to help the Roma, but they chase people away and then we have to go and explain what happened. We speak in Ukrainian and Russian, sometimes also in Romani, but there are different dialects.

There are problems in other countries too. In Romania, the state doesn't support refugees with money. In other countries they get social benefits and cash aid. The Roma are joining waiting lists and waiting for months to receive help. We [the Aresel team] here in Bucharest help people who arrive at the train station with finding accommodation, among other things. We have a colleague who goes to stay at the train station and welcomes people, and then together we help them to settle somewhere. I work with Aresel now and together, when we find out that there are Roma arriving at the train station, we go to welcome them. We also help them to get a residence permit to stay in Romania for a year. But most of them want to go on to other countries. Those who stay here arrive at the refugee centre (supported by the state),

but there are also families who want to go to other cities because living in Bucharest is expensive. We can help them to identify private families who want to house refugees or who can provide food and everything they need. We support the families with communication and we accompany them.

FEANTSA: What help can people get from the Romanian state?

Isaura Dhrima: The refugee centre where I live now, together with my mother, is run by the Romanian state. But we don't get any money from the state, only from non-governmental organisations. The children can go to school here and all children who live in the centre are enrolled. There are buses that come to pick them up in the morning and bring them back when they finish the programme. The people who work here are very helpful. The problem at the centre was between refugees, that's why I explained to them that they shouldn't discriminate, that this is racism, because we all came here to run from the war, we all have problems. We are all in the same situation and are waiting to go back home. But they behave the same as they did at home, in Ukraine, where we were discriminated, they don't try to be better. People don't see that there are a lot of Roma who have good jobs, are eager to learn and are good people; they only talk about the negative examples and think that everybody is the same. Before I came to Romania, I studied all my life. I received a scholarship from the Roma Education Fund [REF] and I was going to school. When I came here, I contacted REF directly because I knew they had an office in Romania, and I asked them for a job because I knew I could help. In Ukraine I was also working in this field, participating in projects and activities to fight discrimination, organising activities with young people, writing projects to engage youth in sports activities and to increase Roma girls' access to education and work.

“So, they were chased away, told to stand in a different queue and sent to stand separately from the other refugees in Ukraine, where there were only Roma.”

FEANTSA: To which countries did the Roma refugees go who left Romania?

Isaura Dhrima: To Belgium, Germany, elsewhere. I don't even know when we'll meet again, how many kilometres each of us has walked; when I think about it, it makes my heart ache. In Ukraine we couldn't see our cousins and relatives very often because we were in different cities, but now I don't know what will happen when we are so far apart. We talk to them all the time because we care about them, especially as they are in countries where they don't speak the language. That's

why we decided to stay here, because if we speak the language we feel at home, I can go out wherever I want, I can do anything. But in other countries, if you don't speak the language, it's a different world, different people. Even among Ukrainians it's hard, no matter how many diplomas you have, they will still think less of you. To them you will always remain Roma and even if we are facing the same problems now during the war, they still look at us differently. They see that I work and there are many Roma working here, and they keep saying that “this is how all Roma are, they don't want to work”.

FEANTSA: Do you still have friends or family in Ukraine? How is their situation now?

Isaura Dhrima: Yes, there are a lot of friends and family members who stayed at home because they don't want to leave Ukraine. Many men are stuck there because they are not allowed to leave, they have to stay and fight. We talk to them because we are afraid for them when we see what is happening, but we can't talk to them every day because they can't always respond. Our whole town is in ruins, it's dirt, they don't even have food.

FEANTSA: Were there cases when refugees returned to Ukraine and why?

Isaura Dhrima: There were requests from refugees, especially women, who wanted to go and see their family members who were back home, to see if they were all right. There were also people who wanted us to help them return to Ukraine because they could not stand the living conditions they were staying in here anymore, sometimes in gym rooms with many others, or because they faced discrimination from the state and asked us to help them return to Ukraine; and they left.

FEANTSA: *You organised a protest on 8 April with your colleagues at Aresel. Can you tell us what it was about?*

Isaura Dhrima: The protest was connected to the fake news that discriminated against Roma in Ukraine. I was still at home when a Russian tank disappeared. Nobody knows where the tank is even now, what happened to it, but everyone said that the Roma stole it. For them this was a joke: “Roma stole the tank, you should steal Putin too”. Maybe they thought it was good that the Roma did it and even applauded such a thing. But I felt bad, because I didn’t understand why, if we don’t know who stole the tank, they said the Roma stole it. How could the Roma steal a tank from the Russians? Then they started a whole discussion about it, they put this video on Tik Tok, on Instagram, on Facebook and on Youtube and they laughed at us and they labelled us as thieves again. On 8 April, International Roma Day, we organised this protest to show that we didn’t steal the tank and that such jokes are not okay. We wanted to show that discrimination against Roma continues even in times of war.

FEANTSA: *What kind of support do you think is important? What do refugees in Ukraine need and how should Member States and the European Union better support them?*

Isaura Dhrima: I think people should be supported to settle in the country where they feel the best. Then if they want, people can return to Ukraine, but as long as there is war, they should be helped by the countries in which they arrive. At the moment you can’t go back there, there is war, you can’t go out on the street, there is a lot of dust, everything is black and dark, I don’t know how to explain it...it’s like Auschwitz Birkenau. I don’t know how people stayed behind and how they live there. When we were there at the beginning of the war, we couldn’t breathe even when we were outside, we had no air. When we went to the shop there were shootings everywhere, we walked in fear and prayed that we could get back home.

People need to have accommodation to stay in; if possible every family should have a place of their own. That way incidents like the one here in the centre where I live can be avoided. If each family had somewhere to stay and a sum of money to support themselves, confrontational situations would be avoided.

We don’t know how long we can stay here, the staff don’t know either, they told us: “You can stay here, but we don’t know for how long”. We have to start looking for accommodation because this centre is normally for students, we may have to leave at any time. That’s the biggest fear because we know that anytime they can tell us that we have to leave. For the moment, I want to stay in Romania. When the war is over, I will go to see how our relatives in Ukraine are, but for now we have to start life again.

We wanted to show that discrimination against Roma continues even in times of war.”

Cover art by Kinder Album

Kinder Album is an artist who works and lives in Lviv, Ukraine. Projects of Kinder Album are always a study of the edges of intimacy, challenging the viewers to test their own readiness for openness. During the war, Kinder Album also works with emotional and sensory spheres, trying to convey in art how a person feels while being subjected to anxiety, terrible news, and permanent fear for their life.

You can find Kinder Album's art on their [website](#) and [Instagram account](#).

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