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Clare Adamson MSP
Convener of the Constitution, Europe, External
Affairs and Culture Committee

Sent by email: CEEAC.committee@parliament.scot
30 June 2022

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter. I was grateful for the opportunity to speak to the Committee on 16 June.

The Scottish Government is doing all it can to work within the UK Government's sponsorship scheme to provide a fast and safe alternative to displaced people from Ukraine seeking sanctuary in Scotland.

I am immensely proud of what we have achieved in standing up a national response, at incredible pace. Colleagues from across Scottish Government, COSLA and local authorities, and the third sector have been working day and night to provide a 'Warm Scots Welcome' to tired and often traumatised people arriving in Scotland. The Scottish Government continues to work urgently with local authorities and other partners to ensure that all displaced Ukrainians have the support they need, including access to education.

To date there have been 6,348 arrivals, more than 3,800 of which have been sponsored by the Scottish Government, with the remainder sponsored by private individuals in Scotland. In the most recent week alone, almost 700 people arrived.

More than four months into the illegal war in Ukraine, these numbers continue to increase. Therefore we must be aware of the scale of the challenge ahead to accommodate and integrate Ukrainians into Scotland.

Accommodation

I share the Consul-General's concerns about the length of time people are being accommodated in hotels. Through the super sponsorship scheme's provision of temporary accommodation, people are able to arrive to an immediate place of safety and ensure there are no safeguarding issues when guests and hosts are matched through private means. Our priority once people have safely arrived to temporary accommodation is to place people into matched longer-term accommodation as quickly as possible, through the national matching service, delivered by COSLA. This can be through private hosts, or social homes.

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I know the national matching service, delivered by COSLA, has been working hard to find longer-term accommodation for those in hotels across the length and breadth of Scotland. COSLA provided you with a helpful update, clearly articulating how challenging this process is. The matching process is resource intensive, with multiple, often highly sensitive, conversations being required with both the Ukrainian and potential host. It is very much a human process. We are working in partnership with COSLA to enhance the service, contributing jointly to resourcing and continuous improvements, alongside local government.

Coordinating Information about Services

I was interested to hear the Consul-General's suggestions on how we might ensure that displaced people have easy access to clear information about what to expect on arrival in Scotland, and how to access public services.

My officials are reviewing all communications from pre-application to arrival, including in welcome hubs to ensure that displaced people arriving in Scotland understand how the super sponsor scheme operates and what to expect.

Many local authorities have dedicated pages on their websites for people arriving from Ukraine. These signpost to support and services, and where applicable provide contact information for Welcome Hubs.

We are in the final stages of developing a guide for displaced people that will provide information about support available to them in Scotland. This will be published on the Scottish Government website, and will be available in Ukrainian and Russian. We have also recently published the [New Scots Welcome Pack](#) which provides helpful information about life in Scotland, including rights and entitlements, and how to access benefits.

Education

All children resident in Scotland are entitled to an education, and I understand that parents who have arrived from Ukraine will be anxious to ensure their children are enrolled in schools or have places in nurseries. Local authorities have a wealth of experience in welcoming displaced people through previous resettlement schemes. They are best placed to make decisions about the best way to provide education and early learning and childcare (ELC) with regards to the needs of the child and the local context. In addition to support from local authorities, the Scottish Refugee Council is also providing support on school enrolment and access to childcare.

The UK Government is providing an additional education tariff to support children arriving from Ukraine into schools and ELC in Scotland, where they arrive through a sponsorship route and live in the community. We continue to press the UK Government to provide parity of funding across all schemes, as local authorities are providing vital support to all those arriving from Ukraine, regardless of the route.

Language

We are also committed to ensuring that everyone in Scotland whose first language is not English can contribute to Scotland's future and the society they live in. For many people, language skills enable them to find employment or pursue further education, and build relationships in their new communities.

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English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes are delivered through colleges and community organisations. Local authority case workers allocated to each individual or group can support people to access these classes.

Interpreters are available in Welcome Hubs, and we are considering ways to enhance the availability of interpretation and translation for people from the moment they arrive. We are ensuring that written materials providing information are available in both Ukrainian and Russian. Interpreters are also available to support people to access key public services such as healthcare, employment support, and access to benefits.

Transport

I am aware that some local authorities have put arrangements in place to provide bus passes to displaced people from Ukraine, as well as refugees. This is in addition to the concessionary travel many are already eligible for.

Funding

I am able to update the Committee that a mechanism for payments to local authorities has now been agreed with the UK Government, and local authorities have begun claiming tariff and 'thank you' payments for arrivals with longer-term accommodation in their areas.

I remain concerned that the £10,500 tariff from the UK Government is not sufficient to cover the costs to local authorities of supporting displaced people from Ukraine. We are also pressing the UK Government to find a solution to allow local authorities to claim tariff funding for arrivals in hotel accommodation before longer-term accommodation is found. Further, that local authorities will not receive any tariff for supporting those who have arrived under the Family Visa Scheme is indefensible.

We continue to work closely with our local authority partners, and have made available £11.2 million to increase capacity of their resettlement teams, to support refurbishment of properties, help integration and enhance the pace of the national matching service.

Thank you for sharing the concerns raised by The Highland Council. My officials have contacted the Council directly to understand this issue further and will work with Council officials to resolve these.

We will also need to work together to understand the impact of resettlement on public services in the longer term as more people arrive. We will consider all options to ease the pressure on public services.

Ukraine Extension Scheme

My long-standing concerns about the complexity, bureaucracy and delays associated with the UK visa response are well known. I have repeatedly called on the UK Government to waive all visa requirements, putting people first, not processes.

The Ukraine Extension Scheme does go some way to help existing Ukrainian residents in Scotland, however it does not provide the reassurance that individual needs will be met. It does not allow individuals to bring family over from Ukraine, nor does it provide a route to settlement. Ukrainians wishing to remain in the UK are being asked to make an unreasonable choice between their visa and their safety.

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I will continue to call on the UK Government to provide a clear humanitarian, not administrative, solution that alleviates distress and offers support to those who need it most. In the meantime, the Scottish Government's super sponsorship scheme provides people with an alternative to the family and private sponsorship routes.

The solidarity shown by the Scottish people for the estimated 12 million displaced people of Ukraine has been remarkable. The desire of our communities, public services, third sector and partners to do all they can to support Ukrainians in their time of need has been truly heart-warming.

I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge. I understand and have seen the significant pressures facing local government and their resettlement teams. This must be a whole of Scotland response, and support, housing and access to public services will need to come from across the country.

Today, I met with the new COSLA Presidential team and spokesperson and we reaffirmed our commitment to work in partnership on this national response.

Scotland has a wealth of experience from previous refugee and resettlement schemes. We will ensure all those arriving are treated with the compassion and care they so rightly deserve. By agencies and communities working together I am confident we will be able to provide a place of refuge for displaced people from Ukraine for as long as they need it.

NEIL GRAY

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