

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
**Sent by email**

Wednesday, 06 April 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

## Re: Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) represents over 22,000 social workers across the four countries of the UK. As you will know, social workers have specific legal duties (enshrined in a variety of laws both UK-wide and nation specific) which address a range of responsibilities relating to both adults and children.

Social workers have considerable experience with working with refugees. For example, social workers have legal duties towards unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and many social workers also have experience of supporting first generation migrants, such as families who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Many of the Ukrainian refugees who come to the UK will face additional challenges, they may have a disability, they may be traumatised by war and will need to access mental health services. Social workers, alongside other professionals, will be responsible for providing vital services and support.

The unfolding catastrophe in Ukraine is creating an unprecedented refugee challenge, and we understand that your department has taken responsibility for Ukrainian refugees. While we recognise that developing a suitable response and scaling up takes time, we are increasingly concerned that the Government needs to go much further, and much faster, in scaling up effective responses to meet this huge need.

We have grave concerns about the practicalities of the schemes being developed. For example, the on-line visa scheme announced on 11<sup>th</sup> March assumes that applicants have a smartphone, it is charged, that they have a roaming contract, and they have documentation with them, all big assumptions after individuals and families have been fleeing a war zone. As in any European country there will be individuals who have never had a passport, and many families fleeing the war are likely never to have been documented in the first place for example, the Roma community.

A key omission is that Ukrainian applicants are not matched with UK citizens who are volunteering for the scheme leaving too many families and individuals making contact by informal means, for example, through social media. This creates a major bottleneck in the system. It also feeds into broader concerns about safeguarding. It is not enough for checks to consist of the physical construct of the house that they will be staying in. More needs to be done to ensure the suitability

of placements, especially as people are sourcing these themselves. Without this there is a risk of inappropriate or harmful living conditions and also breakdown of arrangements. A proper matching scheme - with an NGO apartment for instance - could prevent a lot of problems arising.

This would also help with the risk that this scheme will pave the way for traffickers to abuse Ukrainian refugees. While we note that there is some new financial support for local authorities, local authority funding has been cut drastically over the past 12 years. Furthermore, social workers and our members who are on the frontline in local authorities are already reporting high caseloads. The stark reality is that local authorities may not have the capacity to carry out all the safeguarding checks, deliver extra services and provide support over time to individuals and families who may be very traumatised and dislocated from social networks.

We have seen before that Government has great power and capacity to deliver when it is something that they actively want to deliver. We believe the government has the capacity to speed up the process for supporting Ukrainian's and introduce a scheme with good, minimum regulations, that is fit for purpose and something to be proud of.

Our members will be proactive in working to ameliorate the humanitarian catastrophe, both as social workers and as citizens. As an organisation we can help you design and improve the system if that would be helpful. But the UK government must lead on ensuring a safe and effective framework is in place to respond effectively to this refugee crisis. Only your government can deliver this.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Ruth Allen, CEO, BASW

Contact Officer: [Kerri.Prince@basw.co.uk](mailto:Kerri.Prince@basw.co.uk)