



DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND

Fumbally Court, Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8, D08 TXY8

Tel: 01 454 7978 Fax: 01 454 7981

Email: info@disability-federation.ie

Web: www.disability-federation.ie



Sent via email to: minister@welfare.ie

Friday 11 March 2022

Dear Minister Humphreys,

RE: Call for urgent and sustained action at EU and national level to support people with disabilities affected by the Ukraine war

The Disability Federation of Ireland, and its over 100 member organisations call on you to take urgent action to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in Ukraine and fleeing the Ukraine war. We want to work with you to facilitate the safe reception of Ukrainian people with disabilities and their families in our country.

I have been meeting with and listening to representatives of the Ukrainian disability movement and those from the neighbouring reception states over the past two weeks as they outline the dire situation for disabled people and their families. People are fleeing without their medication, specialised equipment, wheelchairs, prosthetics etc. I was listening again this morning, at the European Disability Forum EDF meeting, to the direct testimony and urgent requests for assistance.

An effective coordination effort is needed at the EU level. In light of the discussion on the war in Ukraine planned for the **EPSCO Council of March 14th**, we address you as Member of the EPSCO Council to take measures to ensure the protection and safety of children and adults with disabilities arriving in the EU as asylum seekers, migrants and refugees from the war in Ukraine.

There are 2.7 million persons with disabilities registered in Ukraine. Hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing this war and children and adults with disabilities are arriving every day in increasing numbers seeking safety. Many others cannot get away.

It is important that the EU and its Member States provide a coordinated and inclusive response. The European Union as a regional organisation and all its Member States have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Therefore, EU and Member States' institutions and policies are bound by the obligations enshrined in this Convention, in particular in Article 11 on the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies.

It is an important first step that the European Commission has acknowledged the need to utilise EU funding mechanisms to ensure that better support goes to

people crossing the Ukrainian border into the EU, with the establishment of the Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) package. This package will be discussed during the EPSCO Council on Monday the 14th of March. Unfortunately, the way in which this new mechanism is set to operate raises a number of concerns that must be urgently addressed prior to its implementation. **We therefore urge you to take note of these issues in preparation for Monday's discussion.**

Since CARE is a commitment to flexibility around the use of unspent cohesion funds, with the purpose of supporting Ukrainian refugees, this places certain Member States welcoming the largest number of refugees in a very difficult position. Poland, for example, is the Member State welcoming the largest number of refugees. However, Poland has planned its cohesion investment in a way that currently leaves it with little in the way of unspent funds. For Poland therefore, and other Member States welcoming many refugees, the commitment we see through CARE is likely to be largely insufficient, even when we consider the money available from REACT-EU. It is also the case that the Member States bordering or near to Ukraine are absorbing far more refugees than other countries and are thus in need of strengthened measures for support, and even new sources of funding.

Furthermore, while the money being re-diverted from the cohesion funds must adhere to the enabling conditions of the Common Provisions Regulation, the 10€ billion of permitted investment from REACT-EU does not hold this requirement. With the likelihood of such a large number of persons with disabilities and other support needs arriving from Ukraine, we must be absolutely certain that money is spent in strict compliance with rules regarding accessibility and the promotion of social inclusion. The EU cannot and must not allow itself to welcome refugees with disabilities whilst simultaneously neglecting their rights.

The need to ensure that the EU's support covers the needs of Ukrainians with disabilities cannot be stressed enough. There will certainly need to be an even greater demand for services and infrastructure accessible to persons with disabilities than first anticipated, as people start to arrive in EU Member States with disabilities caused by the conflict itself, including psychological issues and trauma that cannot go unaddressed.

With this letter, we urge you to ensure, in your role within the EPSCO Council, that nobody is left behind in the crisis unfolding in Ukraine. We count on your support and we will cooperate with you in whatever way needed.

Yours sincerely,



John Dolan,
Chief Executive Officer,
Disability Federation of Ireland