
Ukraine Refugee crisis Response and Resilience through volunteering.

What role for Municipalities?

7 June 2022, 14.00 - 17.00 CET

Online

Welcome and Introduction- Presented by Gabriella Civico, CEV Director, and Monika Popow, Mayor of Gdansk Representative for EVCapital 2022

The webinar began with an introduction by Gabriella Civico, CEV director. Gabriella talked about how the way municipalities and NGOs work together is an important topic, especially in the context of situations such as the war in Ukraine which requires joint action from both groups. Because of this, it is important to put forward guidance to assist municipalities and NGOs on how best to coordinate with one another.

Gabriella also stressed the need for not labelling the flow of refugees from Ukraine to the rest of Europe as 'a crisis.' She reflected on how refugees needing help is not necessarily a crisis in itself- however our response to them can make it one, showcasing the need for an effective and humane response.

Monika Popow also then gave an introduction. She reflected on the importance of webinars such as this since only the exchange of ideas and discussion can lead us to permanent solutions.

The structure of the event was then introduced, with six cities each presenting how their municipal bodies coordinated with NGOs and volunteers when helping refugees from Ukraine.

Friedemann Walther, Senate Chancellery Berlin, EVCapital 2021

Friedemann Walther, from the Senate Chancellery in Berlin, began his presentation by explaining how the war in Ukraine is not the first time that Berlin has dealt with a situation involving refugees inflows. Berlin responded to a similar situation in 2015 with an inflow of refugees from Syria. Friedemann emphasised that Berlin learned a lot from 2015, such as the importance of having an attitude of wanting to help. Society has to want to help refugees obtain accommodation, healthcare and transportation.

Friedemann emphasised the importance of resilience in these scenarios, both for the refugees and the societies that host them. Resilience is important for refugees, as it helps to empower them in overcoming the adversity of having to leave their home and move to a new country. Resilience is also important for host societies, so that they can help the volunteers that assist refugees. Friedemann explained how at the start of the war when the first refugees arrived in Berlin, there was a lot of spontaneous action from the city's citizens with people volunteering to assist, offering things such as food and accommodation. He stressed that a resilient society is needed to support such spontaneous action with a framework.

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Revealing European Values In Volunteering in Europe (REVIVE) - Project No: 101051131

Friedemann also reflected on some of the support that Berlin gave these volunteers. He explained how many of those who volunteered didn't know when the war was going to end and already had elements of psychological stress. As such, the municipality offered volunteers psychological support - "help for the helpers." Friedemann then explained how the Mayor of Berlin invited people who hosted refugees to a meeting in the town hall on the 15th of May. This meeting had 800-900 people attend, involving city officials and people from NGOs. This allowed for an exchange of ideas where volunteers were able to receive advice on how to assist the refugees that they were hosting. Friedemann then explained how Berlin set up a welcome tent for volunteers at the train station where refugees arrived. This tent included food, first aid, and psychological support services which ensured that volunteers were looked after and were compensated.

Friedemann then mentioned how volunteering is not possible without structures and organisation. Because of this, early on during the war in Ukraine, Berlin reviewed every institution and system involved in the assistance of refugees and installed volunteer management in them. By having units whose specific job was to manage volunteers, there was a structure in place that made volunteering as effective as possible.

Maria Maślak, Deputy Director of the Social Development Department, City of Gdańsk

Maria Maślak, the deputy director of the Gdańsk Social Development Department, explained how Gdańsk's reaction to the war in Ukraine was immediate. On the first day of the war, a cross-sector crisis management team was convened. The team is represented by officials from multiple city departments such as the Social Development Department and Crisis Management Department, as well as officials from key NGOs, creating a structure of cooperation.

It was then highlighted how Gdańsk had a good basis for a partnership between the municipality and NGOs and rapid provision of humanitarian aid. This is because Gdańsk had an immigration integration model, an immigrant council, and good cooperation with NGOs.

Maria explained how at the start of the war in Ukraine, as well as convening a cross-sector crisis management team, Gdańsk identified key resources and needs as well as key NGO partners. The key NGO partners that Gdańsk identified and then worked with were: the Gdańsk Foundation, The Regional Centre of Volunteering in Gdańsk, and the Gdańsk Immigrant Support Centre. Maria then expressed how it was key to coordinate with these NGOs under one name; 'Gdańsk Helps Ukraine.'

Maria then reflected on the involvement of volunteers in the process. Gdańsk received 7368 offers of aid, 2523 volunteering offers, 2234 shelter support offers, 416 psychological support offers, 671 childcare support offers, 543 translator offers and 171 medical support offers. Maria explained how these volunteers came from numerous organisations, with some coming from the Regional Centre of Volunteering in Gdańsk, some from scouting associations, and some from private companies. As well as coming from different organisations, Maria talked about how many volunteers came from other countries. Around

20% of volunteers came from outside of Poland. Gdańsk set up numerous channels to recruit such volunteers via helpline, website, and email.

Maria then presented statistics on the results that Gdańsk and its NGO partners achieved. 29 trucks with humanitarian aid have been sent from the city to Ukraine, over 12,000 cards of aid programmes have been distributed, 14,564 refugees have been housed in the city and 3,500 students from Ukraine are now in Gdańsk schools.

Roman Dohovic, Plenipotentiary for Humanitarian Aid to Refugees from Ukraine & Miroslav Sambor, Communications Department, City of Košice, EVCapital 2019

The first speaker from Košice was Miroslav Sambor, the coordinator for volunteering activities.

Miroslav explained some of Košice's credentials when it comes to volunteering. Košice won the European Volunteering Capital award in 2019, something which the citizens are very proud of. Many people in Košice over the years have taken time to swap out from their office jobs to on the ground volunteering engagement. Miroslav emphasised how the municipality has supported volunteering efforts, with 46 volunteering projects having been awarded grants of up to €70,000.

Roman Dohovic, the plenipotentiary for humanitarian aid to refugees from Ukraine, then presented the city's response to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees.

Roman firstly explained how at the beginning of the war, Košice saw an increasing number of refugees, leading to congestion at the railway and bus stations in the city.

One week after the war started, Košice created the Centre for Refugees, which served as a place of first contact for Ukrainian refugees. The municipality established this in coordination with NGOs such as K13, and organised volunteers to assist at the centre.

Roman then explains the aims and objectives of the centre, as well as their daily activities. He highlighted how the centre provided basic services to Ukrainian refugees such as accommodation, transport, food, and sanitary facilities.

Statistics on Košice's support to refugees were then presented. At the peak of the refugee flows, Košice helped assist 2500 refugees daily. The city currently hosts over 40,000 Ukrainian refugees, with over 80,000 having transited through at some point.

Volunteers played a key role in running the centre. Roman explained how at the peak of the refugee flows, there were 25-30 volunteers on each shift at the centre, with there being 75-90 volunteers helping there daily.

Roman explained how over time, Košice was able to provide more services to Ukrainian refugees thanks to NGOs. For example, mothers were provided childcare services and the World Central Kitchen helped provide meals.

To conclude the presentation, Roman explained some of the long-term challenges that the city faces in regard to Ukrainian refugees that will require coordination between the municipality and NGOs to solve. These include long-term accommodation, financing of continued services, integration, social security, education, and work.

Ilaria Ferraro, Projects and Training Manager, Volunteer Centre of Padova and Rovigo, EVCapital 2020

Ilaria Ferraro, the projects and training manager for the volunteer centre of Padova and Rovigo, began her presentation by highlighting that Italy has not hosted as many Ukrainian refugees as some other European countries. This is because they are not as close to the border.

Italy's situation with refugees was presented. At the end of May, 125,323 Ukrainian refugees had entered the country, with 85,956 being adults and 40,000 being children. 111,259 of these refugees have asked for temporary protection status and 35,912 have asked for Government financial assistance.

Ilaria explained how Padova specifically has hosted 2,668 Ukrainian refugees. Both the municipality and volunteers have helped to assist them; 1037 school-aged refugees all now attend Italian schools thanks to the work of the regional school office, and 2007 refugees live in private accommodation thanks to individuals volunteering to host them. Ilaria stressed the importance of these individual volunteers, explaining how Padova does not have a big centre to help refugees find accommodation and that they would have struggled without them.

Ilaria then presented how, in response to the refugee inflows, the Emergency Management Control Unit was established. This unit facilitated the coordination of multiple different parties, including representatives from the Government, the Ukrainian consulate, municipalities of the province, local health services, civil protection, and the centre for volunteers. She highlighted how the centre for volunteers was also included in the municipality's response to Covid. The fact that the centre for volunteers has been included again in a coordinated response shows that the Government realises the importance of volunteers in crisis management.

The services that NGOs and their volunteers offered Ukrainian refugees were then presented. 70 volunteers from Vides Veneto ran free Italian language courses for refugees, which was attended by 50 Ukrainian students. Selvazzano for Children Association have hosted 15 minors and 20 adults to whom they also provide language courses and help with paperwork. Amici dei Popoli have provided literacy courses, and Centro Aiuto alla Vita have provided clothes, powdered milk and nappies to mothers with small children.

Ilaria then explained the co-planning mechanism that was activated to facilitate the coordination of different involved organisations. This mechanism led to the creation of shared objectives, strategies and budgets. It has 30 enrolled organisations and a budget of €100,000.

Flavia Boghiu, Deputy Mayor of Braşov

Flavia Boghiu, the deputy mayor of Braşov, started her presentation by providing context about the specific situation in the city. Braşov is in the centre of Romania, so it is less close to the Ukrainian border. As such, there was little obvious reason for why Braşov would become a key player in strategising how best to accommodate Ukrainian refugees. Flavia says that despite this, Braşov became one of the best examples of dealing with the refugee inflow.

Flavia explained that the most important factor in achieving this was by effectively balancing collaboration and community. She emphasised that it showed what a strong and united community can achieve.

How Braşov responded when the war first started was then presented. Flavia reflected on how at the beginning of the war, there was no legislative arrangement on how to deal with the situation of incoming refugees. She recalled how early on she talked to officials from local NGOs who had already made arrangements for getting involved. Flavia said that she did this because she knew that, if there wasn't effective organisation and collaboration, work and resources would not be allocated efficiently.

After a meeting between municipality officials and NGOs, the group 'Braşov for Ukraine' was set up. The group analysed what their joint resources were and what needs had to be met. The group then set up a call centre that had Ukrainian speaking operators and a refugee centre.

Flavia then reflected on 'Volunteer Braşov' - a platform where NGOs can advertise their projects and where volunteers can find projects that they wish to work on. She said that it was important to utilise such a platform because the municipality did not have the resources needed to tackle the inflow of Ukrainian refugees on their own. When projects relating to helping Ukrainian refugees were posted to 'Volunteer Braşov', hundreds of people joined the platform.

Lots of people and organisations also offered donations to the cause. People donated money and offered clothes, and many businesses such as restaurants offered to provide meals to refugees.

Flavia mentioned how the refugee centre is now operated by the municipality, with NGOs offering their services within the space. The refugee centre in Braşov has so far provided services to over 4000 Ukrainian refugees.

Flavia concluded by reflecting on the importance of collaboration between municipalities and NGOs in scenarios such as this. Municipalities cannot deal with this emergency on their own, and NGOs relied on public authorities for support. The public and private sector also need to learn to understand and work together despite working in different ways.

Anna Szadkowska-Ciężka, Deputy Director of the Participation Office, City of Lublin

Anna Szadkowska-Ciężka, Deputy Director of the Participation Office in Lublin, opened her presentation by explaining how, out of all the cities talked about in the webinar, Lublin is the closest to the Ukrainian border. Lublin is only 100 km away from the border, which Anna said made the city very close both geographically and emotionally with Ukraine and its people.

Anna said that hours after the first bombs were dropped in Ukraine, a committee comprised of municipality and NGO officials was being set up. This committee decided to divide up their work into different areas such as the creation of a hotline, logistics, provision of legal advice, and the provision of accommodation.

A phone hotline was very quickly set up which operated 24/7 and in 5 languages. Anna emphasised how this hotline would not be possible without the help of Ukrainian volunteers.

The municipality also worked with volunteers on providing accommodation for Ukrainian refugees. Anna talked about how residents volunteered to provide accommodation and gave their proposals to the municipality, which in turn matched these proposals with Ukrainian refugees who could have their housing needs met by them. She also talked about how a key role of the municipality in this accommodation process was also to make sure that refugees were not assigned accommodation from volunteers who may have malicious intentions.

Anna also explained the important work of volunteers at information points. Information points were set up for Ukrainian refugees in different locations all across Lublin, which were operated by volunteers. The municipality worked with around 170 volunteers every day on these information points.

Anna reflected on the large demographic-change that the situation caused. 50,000 Ukrainian refugees are currently staying in Lublin, which as a city has a population of 300,000.

It was then highlighted how the municipality worked closely in assisting volunteers. The municipality assists volunteers in providing accommodation to refugees, gives them mental health and psychological wellbeing support, and sets up support groups for them. Anna stressed the importance of this assistance to volunteers since their resilience and energy has to be maintained as the 'heroic phase' of the emergency fades.

Open floor discussion & Invitation to submit best practices for publication

The open floor discussion started with an introduction from Maksym Turkevych, a representative of Lviv candidate to be European Volunteering Capital 2024.

He started his introduction by thanking the speakers for the work they and their cities have done.

Maksym then talked about how the Ukrainian refugee emergency is the consequence, not the problem.

The specific situation of Lviv in the war was explained. Maksym said that Lviv, being the most Western Ukrainian city, saw a large flow of refugees. Early on during the war, around 6 million refugees went to Lviv, with some travelling through the city to get to other European countries to find safety and others staying in more permanently. Maksym highlighted that the municipality was not prepared to deal with the arrival of refugees on their own, and that the help NGOs and volunteers provided was vital to dealing with the situation. 80% of all the registrational processes were done by volunteers.

Szymon, the volunteering coordinator for the Volunteering Centre in Gdańsk, asked two questions. He firstly asked how municipalities were able to communicate and cooperate with large international agencies such as UNICEF and the Red Cross. He then asked how we can apply the strategy used for dealing with one humanitarian situation to one that can be applied to humanitarian situations in general.

Anna answered the question on communicating with large international agencies. She said that agencies such as the Red Cross operated in key areas where refugees went very early on in the war, such as in cities like Lublin, which provided easy facilitation of communication and coordination between them and the municipality. She reflected on the fact that UN agencies such as UNICEF had a slower response to the war and the subsequent flow of refugees than many smaller organisations and citizen initiatives.

Monika Popow contributed to the discussion by stressing the difference between the Government and civil society. She said that it is important to remember that the support for refugees has in many cases mostly come from civil society.

Monika then asked all the presenters how best to address the need for the long term support of volunteers.

Flavia answered by talking about the need to rotate the jobs of volunteers so they stay energised and aren't doing the same things too many times over. She also talked about how Braşov has started involving more Ukrainian volunteers who were previously using the refugee services, ensuring the long-term viability of volunteering programmes.

Benoit Vivegnis from the Francophone Platform of Volunteering in Belgium answered by talking about how as the war in Ukraine has prolonged, people have less energy and are not as enthusiastic about volunteering for long hours. He said that he has found that people are willing to still volunteer if it is for shorter hours, showing the need to fragment certain tasks and job roles to ensure long-term volunteering numbers.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of the webinar started with Gabriella talking about the upcoming publication on how best municipalities can partner with the volunteering sector to meet needs, especially in emergency/ crisis situations. She expressed hope that the publication will provide

concrete guidance and examples on how to collaborate most effectively for these groups to collaborate.

Monika then concluded the webinar by thanking those who attended and the presenters for sharing their ideas and experiences.