**Ukrainian refugees in deep water**

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Ukrainian refugees, with the number expeditiously swelling to more than 3 million, are the worst victims of the war between Ukraine and Russia. With the trauma of leaving their own homes, bombarded neighbourhoods, dead bodies of dear ones and exodus miseries, the evacuees feel completely doomed. Among the displaced influx, unaccompanied minors, single mothers and orphans are in dire straits. Their rescue and rehabilitation is a bigger challenge. Ukrainian men have been barred from leaving the country lest they need to be called on to fight.
That is why on most crossings, there is a dramatic gender imbalance—the refugees are almost all women and children. UN spokeswoman Joung-ah Ghedini-Williams told media that it was mostly women and children making the crossing into Poland, with some facing a wait time of 24 hours. In some cases, children were travelling with distant relatives or family members who returned to Ukraine after dropping them off, she said. With the flood of refugees on the rise, infrastructures at various places have been insufficient to accommodate the influx.
It is heartening to see that global rescue efforts have been exerted. The UN’s High Commission for Refugees estimates that 12 million people inside Ukraine will need assistance. It says people in southern Ukraine desperately need assistance like bedding, medication and heating—and that food, water and shelter are desperately needed in the east. The UN says it is offering humanitarian assistance inside Ukraine “wherever necessary and possible”. This includes: delivering supplies from west to east, including food and tarpaulins for homes damaged by shelling providing folding beds to people in bomb shelters, setting up reception and transit points for internally-displaced people. The EU believes the total number of refugees could climb to seven million.
In my perspective, the EU response to the Ukraine refugee crisis is an enormous display of unprecedented unity of the 27 countries. The EU home affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson told journalists that “Unfortunately, things are getting worse, the bombs are falling, more people are being killed, we are going to see more and more people fleeing. We don’t know exactly how many but I should guess many millions will come”.
More than two million refugees have flooded into the EU in the two weeks since Russia invaded. The bloc has rushed to grant those fleeing temporary protection as it grapples with one of the fastest growing crises on the continent since World War II. One of the biggest challenges of the EU is to ensure normality to displaced children to make them go to school, or to childcare facilitating parents to be able to work and be part of society.
Brussels has announced €500 million (S$740 million) in initial emergency funding to help deal with the humanitarian consequences of the war. Officials are also pushing to release another €420 million in additional support to help integrate arrivals and say that billions more could go towards supporting the refugees.
Meanwhile the UK is also launching a new visa scheme to help people host Ukrainian refugees in their homes. Under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, which is being launched today, people in the UK will be able to nominate an individual or family to stay with them rent-free, or in another property, for at least six months. Applications will be made online, and both hosts and refugees will be vetted. Hosts will receive £350 a month and there will be no cap on the numbers able to come to the UK.
Refugees are told they do not need documents, but should preferably have their internal or foreign passports, birth certificates of children travelling with them and medical documentation. To get refugee status, they need to be Ukrainian citizens or people legally living in Ukraine, such as foreign students.
The government of Poland, which has received the highest number of refugees, has said it will need more money than the EU is currently offering in order to host the number of people arriving there. Moldova, which has by far the largest concentration of refugees per capita, has also appealed for international help in dealing with the numbers arriving. The next few months might see harder times for the refugees ahead.

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