



Dublin City Community Cooperative, Register Number 5628 R, Registered Charity Number (RCN) 20107079, Unit 1 Killarney Court, Buckingham Street, Dublin 1

## **Childcare, Capacity and Ukrainian Refugees – A Statement to Government**

### ***Who we are***

The Dublin Inner City Community Co-operative Society Limited ('the Co-op') was established in November 2014. We are a membership organisation of 13 grassroots Dublin inner city community development organisations which have come together to ensure the continued development and delivery of social, economic and cultural services within our communities. The Co-op's member organisations are operational in all or parts of Dublin 1,3,7 & 8 as well as disadvantaged city areas in Dublin 2 and 4. The Co-op operates to community development principles and a social inclusion ethos forms the basis for all communication with stakeholders. Advocacy on issues of social justice and poverty forms a key component of our collective work. Seven of the member organisations provide Early Care and Learning (ECL) services and services to School Aged Children (SAC).

### ***National and International Obligations***

The government is bound to the protection of children and the promotion of their wellbeing by numerous national and international policy documents and agreements, including *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*, *First 5*, the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the latest *EU Child Guarantee*. The lack of capacity (space, staffing numbers, finances, resources) within ECL facilities and services for SAC is a systemic flaw which undermines the ability of government to fulfil these obligations. The lack of capacity counteracts the goal of accessibility stated in *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*. It impedes the realization of the first objective identified in *First 5*: to foster strong and supportive families and communities as a means to enable parents to balance work and caring roles. Lastly, the EU Child Guarantee introduced in 2021 recommends that member states guarantee that children have effective and free access to early childhood education and care. Clearly the dearth of spaces in such services is a practical issue which must be addressed if the government can reasonably expect to effectuate this recommendation.

### ***Lack of Capacity***

The lack of capacity faced by ECL providers and services for SAC has been raised by Dublin City Community Co-operative (the Co-op) before, most recently in our submission re the successor document to *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* (see Appendix 1). This issue became clear to us following consultation with member organizations providing such services. Our member organisations have informed us of long waiting lists and the resource constraints impeding them from expanding to meet demand. The resource constraints outlined in Appendix 1 include uncertainty around funding via the National Childcare Scheme and inadequate premises.

### ***Research by the Childhood Development Initiative***

Recent research carried out by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) and supported by funding from the North East Inner City (NEIC) Initiative, *Needs, Provision and Recommendations relating to 0-5 year olds in Dublin's North East Inner City*, corroborates the crisis of capacity in ECL services. The CDI has investigated the need for increased ECL space through analysis of the under 5 population and current capacity. The Census 2016 indicated that there are 1,781 children under 5 in the North East Inner City (NEIC). However, input from public health nurses (PHNs) across three Primary Care Centres: North City, Summerhill and North Strand, suggest that the number of children aged 5 and under is closer to 2,813. At maximum capacity, the eight service providers who engaged in this research can collectively provide services to 456 children. Among these eight services there are 349 children on waiting lists. Not all providers in the area participated in the research. The CDI estimates that ECL providers can only cater to 26% of under 5s in the NEIC. This starkly highlights the capacity crisis. Moreover, consultation with parents found that 30% of all parents in the NEIC found it challenging to access ECL spaces for their children with inadequate spaces in the community being the most commonly referred to obstacle to access. Cost was also found to be a barrier. We have no reason to believe the situation is different in other parts of the inner city (north west inner city, south east inner city, south west inner city).

This piece of research acknowledges that Dublin's Inner City is an area in which a high number of Ukrainian refugees are being accommodated. At time of writing we are aware of eleven separate accommodation centres (hotels, hostels and community facilities) in the Co-op's catchment area hosting Ukrainian refugees, the majority of whom are women and children. The authors stress the need for immediate government investment in this sector to reflect the complexity of the Inner City, of which the influx of Ukrainian refugees is now a major component. There are real concerns around the ability of the sector to respond to local and evolving needs when services are already stretched so thin.

### ***Ukrainian refugees***

The acceptance of Ukrainian refugees is welcomed, and the Co-op commends the government's humanitarian response to the invasion of Ukraine. This influx of people has accentuated pre-existing issues, of which the lack of capacity in ECL services is one. Statutory agencies, the community and voluntary sector are responding to this influx of people in a variety of ways. English classes are being provided and Ukrainians have been given PPSNs, two actions improving the prospects of employability and integration of refugees. However, in order for these actions to be effective the capacity of ECL services and services for SAC must be addressed. Most of the families who have arrived in Ireland are single mothers. How are these single mothers to avail of English classes or engage in employment if there is no space within ECL facilities for their children to be looked after? This is a fundamental flaw

which will negate the progressive initiatives that have been taken to support Ukrainian refugees. There is a real risk that mothers and their children will become confined to their accommodation centres for lack of ECL services and services to SAC. Moreover, the primary funding via the National Childcare scheme awards greater subsidies to parents who are working, thus increasing affordability for those in employment. This is a flawed approach as parents are unable to work if they have not first secured childcare. This is a challenge facing all parents residing in Ireland. However, refugees generally have less access to informal networks of support such as family and friends that can fill this childcare gap if employment is secured first. Therefore, refugees are impacted by this flaw to an even greater degree.

### ***Conclusion***

Lack of capacity within ECL services and services for SAC is a major issue in the inner city. If this issue is not resolved or addressed with the necessary level of funding and resourcing Ireland's ECL sector will never fulfil aspirations outlined in national policy documents or meet obligations under international agreements. Concerns around capacity and viability in meeting local need are further compounded by the influx of Ukrainian refugees. The already stretched sector has been rendered wholly inadequate in the face of hundreds if not thousands of Ukrainian children to whom it is not able to cater for. This must be a matter of priority going forward if Ukrainian refugees are expected to integrate and rebuild their lives successfully in Ireland.

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Dublin City Community Co-operative submission re Government Policy Framework for Children & Young People in Ireland

(Available upon request).

## Bibliography

Assets.gov.ie. 2014. *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*. [online] Available at:

<https://assets.gov.ie/23796/961bbf5d975f4c88adc01a6fc5b4a7c4.pdf> [Accessed 12 April 2022].

Consilium.europa.eu. 2021. *European Child Guarantee: how the EU protects children*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/european-child-guarantee/> [Accessed 12 April 2022].

Childhood Development Initiative, 2022. *Needs, Provision and Recommendations relating to 0-5 year olds in Dublin's North East Inner City*. (pending publication).

First 5. 2019. [online] Available at:

[https://first5.gov.ie/userfiles/pdf/5223\\_4966\\_DCYA\\_EarlyYears\\_INTERACTIVE\\_Booklet\\_280x215\\_v1.pdf#view=fit](https://first5.gov.ie/userfiles/pdf/5223_4966_DCYA_EarlyYears_INTERACTIVE_Booklet_280x215_v1.pdf#view=fit)

[Accessed 12 April 2022].

## Contact:

Noel Wardick, Chief Executive Officer, [nwardick@dublincitycommunitycoop.ie](mailto:nwardick@dublincitycommunitycoop.ie)

Sofia Clifford Riordan, Policy, Advocacy & Programmes Assistant, [sofia@dublincitycommunitycoop.ie](mailto:sofia@dublincitycommunitycoop.ie)