



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 10 March 2022

Session 6



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**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**  
**8<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2022, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

\*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)

\*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

\*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Alison Byrne (Scottish Government)

Madara Hettiarachchi (Disasters Emergency Committee)

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Sue English (Disasters Emergency Committee)

Angus Robertson (Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture)

Jane Salmonson (Humanitarian Emergency Fund Panel)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

James Johnston

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



## Scottish Parliament

### Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 10 March 2022

*[The Deputy Convener opened the meeting at 09:25]*

#### Interests

**The Deputy Convener (Donald Cameron):**

Good morning and welcome to the eighth meeting of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee in 2022. We have apologies from the convener, who is still self-isolating, so, as deputy convener, I will chair this meeting. We also have apologies from Maurice Golden. I welcome Fiona Hyslop, who is here as a substitute member for our convener. Fiona, do you have any relevant interests to declare?

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** I have no interests to declare.

## Crisis in Ukraine

**The Deputy Convener:** Before we begin, I thank in public the Ukrainian consul general in Scotland for taking the time to brief the committee this morning on the crisis in Ukraine. He gave very powerful and moving evidence to us and we are incredibly grateful to him, given how busy he must be. The committee reiterates the remarks of the convener on 24 February in expressing our solidarity as a committee with the people of Ukraine and our hopes for a speedy and peaceful recovery from the situation in which the people of Ukraine find themselves.

The first item on our agenda is consideration of the crisis in Ukraine. I welcome representatives from the Disasters Emergency Committee to the meeting. We are joined in person by Jane Salmonson, chair of the expert panel of the humanitarian emergency fund. Joining us virtually we have Sue English, chair of the board of trustees, and Madara Hettiarachchi, director of programmes and accountability, Disasters Emergency Committee. Good morning to you all and thank you for joining us. I know that you are extremely busy. We are also grateful for the briefing that you have provided the committee in advance of this session. I believe that Ms English has a short opening statement.

**Sue English (Disasters Emergency Committee):** Good morning, everybody. Thank you for asking us to come and brief you today. *[Inaudible.]* As you said, we—

**The Deputy Convener:** Sorry, Ms English, we lost you for a few seconds there. Could you start again, please?

**Sue English:** I am so sorry. Yes, I will start again. I was saying thank you very much for inviting us to brief the committee today on the work of the Disasters Emergency Committee and our Ukraine humanitarian appeal.

To give you some background, the Disasters Emergency Committee brings together 15 of the major humanitarian aid charities, including the Red Cross, Save the Children, Oxfam and the International Rescue Committee. We come together for major disasters and emergencies only and we mobilise our rapid response unit, which includes the major television broadcasters and a number of other organisations, in order to facilitate the ability of the public to donate to disasters and emergencies. We have very strong relationships with the major television news broadcasters—BBC, ITV, STV, Sky, Channel 4 and Channel 5—and they allow us two minutes' airtime to launch an appeal, which we did in this case last Thursday. We also work closely with organisations such as PayPal, NatWest, British Airways and

Transport for London, all of which give us their time and energy to make it easy for the British public to show their generosity.

The response so far to our Ukraine humanitarian appeal has been overwhelming. As of yesterday, we had raised over £120 million, which is an extraordinary amount of money. It is probably the second largest appeal that we have ever had, the largest appeal being the one for the victims of the tsunami back in the early 2000s, which raised around £380 million.

However, the scale of the need, as you will have seen from the distressing pictures on our television screens and newspapers, is massive. We are estimating that this will be the fastest growing refugee crisis since the second world war. Over 2 million refugees have already fled to neighbouring countries in the past 13 days. The United Nations estimates that around 7 million people could be internally displaced in Ukraine and up to 18 million people affected in the country.

09:30

So far, the DEC appeal has raised £120 million, thanks to the extraordinary generosity of the British public. It is estimated that we have raised £12 million in Scotland, which includes a Scottish Government donation of £2 million. We also have a United Kingdom Government aid match of £25 million, which is the biggest aid match that we have had from the Government.

Madara Hettiarachchi will be able to go into more detail on the work that we will be doing on the ground and the work that is already under way, but, primarily, we are looking to provide immediate relief to people both inside Ukraine and in the countries surrounding Ukraine. We will be distributing food and hygiene parcels, providing first aid and helping to evacuate people. The Red Cross is already working both in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries and other members of ours are also active in Ukraine and in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. It is a massive crisis and I think that we all recognise that it is likely to continue for many years. Our initial estimate is that we will be working through this appeal for at least three years.

I will finish there. You have the pack of slides that we sent you and I hope that you will be able to ask us a number of questions about the work that we are doing. I will ask Madara Hettiarachchi to pick up on our response to the crisis in more detail.

**The Deputy Convener:** I will ask the first question, and it is a very simple one. How can people in Scotland best support the Ukrainian people? I ask that in the context of suggestions in some quarters that providing goods—aid in kind—

is less helpful due to the administrative issues that are involved in collecting it, packaging it, transporting it and then distributing it at the other end. Do any of the witnesses have views on that?

**Sue English:** Yes, you have summed up the issue for us. Our advice, and this comes from members on the ground, is that it is much better to give cash than to donate goods. Madara Hettiarachchi can go into more detail about why that is the case. We are in no way trying to minimise the response of people who are sending goods. We are simply trying to say what we think is the most effective means of helping people in Ukraine and the surrounding areas now and in the future.

**Madara Hettiarachchi (Disasters Emergency Committee):** As Sue English summed up perfectly, it is not cost effective to send items from here. It takes extraordinary manpower to sort through it and package it. The shipping delivery time means that it takes time to get the right items to the people in need on the ground, whether in Ukraine, Hungary, Romania or Poland. What aid agencies prefer is to buy locally. That is culturally and contextually appropriate, and it also stimulates the local economy. Aid agencies engage with the population, whether it is refugees in the neighbouring countries or people inside Ukraine, to understand the needs of the affected population, whose needs are changing by the hour and by the week, and to buy locally. That is to ensure that we get the right support to the population, the communities and the families, as and when they need it. It is generous of the UK public to donate items, but it is preferable to send cash so that the right needs can be met at the right time.

**The Deputy Convener:** How do you as a committee manage that changing picture? I take it that it involves trying to predict what will happen, which is difficult. I am interested in how you manage changing needs.

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** When we went to appeal last week, over 150,000 people had crossed the border, but we knew, based on decades of experience working in conflict-related environments, that what people need is safety and security. We knew that the refugee population would increase. We knew that there would be population displaced inside Ukraine and that other people, such as the elderly and infirm and people with disabilities, would be unable to make that difficult journey and would stay behind. Our members have local staff and local partners on the ground, and they have their fingers on the pulse to understand the changing needs. It is not people sitting in London making decisions; it is people in Romania, Poland and Ukraine talking to the community, understanding their changing needs

and coming alongside, providing solidarity and practical support.

**The Deputy Convener:** I will ask colleagues now to ask questions and I will turn to Fiona Hyslop first.

**Fiona Hyslop:** First, recognising the scale and the speed of the public's response to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal, I think that they would like to know where the funding is spent geographically. I have been struck by the number of women and children who are fleeing. What is happening for children in particular? I think that Madara Hettiarachchi might be able to answer that question.

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** Our priority countries are Ukraine, supporting the internally displaced population and making sure that the people remaining in situ are supported and protected and have their immediate needs met; and the neighbouring, refugee-receiving countries of Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Moldova, ensuring that support such as food, water and shelter is provided to people fleeing the conflict. In those countries, the state Governments are leading the response; local structures are providing the support and the aid agencies are coming alongside that.

As you stated, it is women and children in large numbers crossing the borders with just whatever they have on hand, and we are particularly concerned about young women making the journey by themselves and children. We know from previous crises, such as the Rohingya refugee crisis, that in these situations children can be separated from families in that difficult journey. Our aid agencies, particularly agencies such as Save the Children, World Vision and Plan International, have a real focus on children, ensuring that children's needs are protected and that they are supported. They do very practical things, such as creating safe spaces in refugee resettlement areas so that children can play and talk things out. It is very traumatic. We know from reports on the ground that fathers and brothers are going off to the front lines of the conflict and families are separated. Children are trying to understand what is happening and make sense of it. What aid agencies do is bring children together and create a safe space to bring some normalcy in a very chaotic environment. It is about getting that support immediately and making sure that children are part of the decision-making process.

**Fiona Hyslop:** My second question is about what is happening here in Scotland, and perhaps Jane Salmonson could help with this. The Scottish Government has committed funding, and we know that we have the separate humanitarian emergency fund established. Clearly, in terms of humanitarian aid, I know that there are other

Disasters Emergency Committee appeals, such as the Afghanistan appeal. Where do you think that the funding from the Scottish Government is coming from? There is £4 million committed. You referenced £2 million for the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. Are those the correct figures? What is left for the remainder of this year and into next year?

We understand that the Scottish Government has provided medical aid in the form of, say, bandages or other medical equipment that is needed. Is there anything else that the Scottish Government can do in addition to the £4 million that has been allocated to this disaster—any other provisions, whether it is water or other mobilisation of governmental support? Reflecting on the continuous work of aid agencies across the globe, I would like to know how the Ukraine humanitarian appeal fits in with other work that you are all doing.

**Jane Salmonson (Humanitarian Emergency Fund Panel):** There are two sides to that. The first thing to do is to acknowledge with grateful thanks the speed with which the Scottish Government has responded. The civil servants were in touch with the humanitarian emergency fund, which is inevitably referred to as the HEF, asking which of the eight HEF panel members can respond very, very fast to this crisis. They wanted to know, "If we were to make a grant, how quickly could you spend it and where?" Of the eight HEF panel members, two—one was the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and the other was the British Red Cross—said, "We can spend this money immediately, either in Ukraine or in the neighbouring countries." The Scottish Government made £500,000 available instantly to each of those two agencies and the money has been paid and the money is being spent. The speed of that decision making is something to be noted. It was superb, so I thank the Scottish Government for that.

Beyond that, there is the Scottish Government donation to the DEC. Again, we are very grateful that that support was given. Since it set up the humanitarian emergency fund in 2017, the Scottish Government has been making available and allocating £1 million every year to the fund, which it created specifically to be able to make a speedy response to emergencies using the collective expertise of eight leading aid agencies in Scotland. Six of those agencies are also DEC members; two, Mercy Corps and SCIAF, are not. Because 31 March is the financial year end, that funding had come to an end but, thankfully, the Scottish Government did not see that as a reason not to make any funding available. Again, I think that that needs noting and we are very grateful for it. The new funding will kick in from the start of the new financial year.

In the meantime, while the support has been superb and outwith normal procedures, the fact remains that other emergencies will be underfunded and unnoticed. We are waiting to hear whether a proposal that was put in at the end of last year to help respond to the conflict in Burkina Faso or the humanitarian emergency created by the conflict in Burkina Faso has been approved.

The HEF is set up quite well to be able to do two things. One is to respond to the DEC. When there is a major emergency, the Scottish Government can use it to support the DEC's appeal. The other half of the funding goes to respond to the emergencies that do not win media attention in the same way. HEF funding has gone to help people in Tigray and we are waiting to hear whether we can get it to Burkina Faso. HEF funding has gone to Mali in the past. That will continue, I hope. I know that you will know that I will say this, but the HEF gets £1 million a year and it was the only element of Scottish Government funding to support international aid and development last year that did not get an increase in funding, and obviously we would very much like to see an uplift in the future and to be able to talk a bit more to this committee and the convener about what the HEF does. We think that we have something that was created in Scotland that is particularly valuable for public life and for institutions in Scotland.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes. As the former minister who helped to establish it, I recognise both appeals.

Finally, on additional support in the form of medical aid and goods, we have heard about the importance of cash, but we have been able to mobilise other resources in Scotland.

**Jane Salmonson:** I think that it is different if goods are provided in response to a direct request for help. As I understand it, the Ukrainian consulate said, "Please can you help us with these items?" I am delighted to hear that they have now joined a flight of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. There has also been a request for medical supplies from the Ukrainian community foundations, I think, which went to Foundation Scotland.

Conversely, I have also heard stories coming back from Mercy Corps about piles of goods with high-heeled shoes sitting on top—goods donated by well-meaning, kind, generous people that end up at borders needing sifting and sorting and hold back a mammoth volunteer effort. For the future, it would be excellent to see what we can do to encourage a response of in-kind donations that meet a specific request, but we need to find better ways of channelling public generosity and good will, which will always be there, to prevent the provision in a hurry of badly needed aid being held

up by the need to sift and sort through vanloads of goods that have been driven into dangerous areas in private vans.

09:45

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** I have another question for Jane Salmonson. We have talked in the past about the convening power of your fund and the Scottish Government to bring others to the table in Scotland at times such as this. Could you say a bit more about whether there is scope in this emergency for that to happen and to get the most out of the sums of money that you are distributing in terms of bringing others into the conversation?

**Jane Salmonson:** There could well be. The trouble is that those things take focus, attention, time and money. However, this could be a perfect opportunity to have a look at what has been working so well in Scotland—the wave of generosity is extraordinary—and what has been working less well to see what we can do to channel the generosity more effectively and to create a recognisable body or consortium of bodies in Scotland for the people of Scotland.

For example, take the HEF, which is there but has no budget. It is run on a shoestring. We have our superb part-time co-ordinator, Huw Owen, whose other part-time job is to represent the DEC in Scotland. He is its only resource; otherwise, it is just the eight panel members and a voluntary chair. There is untapped potential to raise more funds for another disaster and to manage the funds better.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** Thank you for coming to give evidence. We have heard a bit about how co-ordination works in Scotland and the United Kingdom. I am interested to hear how you co-ordinate with other international aid organisations, either in Ukraine or the surrounding countries that you mentioned. Perhaps Madara Hettiarachchi is the appropriate person to answer that.

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** Co-ordination is critical in a humanitarian response. The situation is large scale and fast moving—things are changing by the hour. Our DEC member agencies, along with UN agencies and local authorities, come together and look at thematic areas such as shelter and essential non-food items, and they co-ordinate provision so that a family that needs blankets gets them. They co-ordinate in other responses, such as in Afghanistan, where we also have an appeal. Cash is valuable. Cash grants and cash assistance are really valuable to suffering communities, but it is important to consider how much cash is provided so that tension and disharmony are not created as a result of aid work.



There are existing co-ordination mechanisms that the UN and international non-governmental organisations call UN clusters, and there are thematic areas for shelter, logistics, water, food and so on. They will be up and running in Ukraine as well as other locations to ensure that co-ordination and collaboration happens and that people are maximising resources and not duplicating them.

As a funder of implementing agencies, one of the things that we check is not just that they deliver aid quickly but that it is measured, considered and grounded in need for sustenance, as I talked about. We ensure that agencies are co-ordinated and delivering complementary support, particularly in neighbouring locations. The Romanian Government is highly capable, as are the Polish authorities. They have state-run systems such as cash programmes and social protection programmes, which they will try to move to support refugees. The UN and INGOs must work alongside that to provide support and not create a parallel structure.

**Jenni Minto:** Jane Salmonson, do you have anything to add to that?

**Jane Salmonson:** That approach has been tried and tested over the years; the cluster system is the best way to do it. As Ukraine would not be considered a normal disaster setting, it might take a new approach. When setting up a UN system in one of the, say, African or Asian countries where a disaster is more expected to happen, it can come into place more quickly. It is the best way to do it that we have. Co-ordination prevents duplication and wasted effort and money, and it reaches the people who it is intended to benefit more quickly and efficiently.

**Jenni Minto:** The shock of something like this happening in a country that to all intents and purposes looks like ours has struck us all. When I was driving into the Parliament this morning, I was thinking about the reports of people having to melt snow for water. When it becomes as stark as that—and we have all seen the photographs of the maternity hospital being bombed—it is important to co-ordinate the aid that you have to ensure that it arrives at places of major need. Will you expand a wee bit on that?

**Jane Salmonson:** The places that have local networks already in place are key. There has been a debate over the years about localisation, which, in essence, means international NGOs working as closely as they can with local-based partners who understand their own contexts and neighbourhoods and who are best placed to know where and how aid can be most effectively distributed and to whom.

To take an example, we talked about SCIAF being one of the two early recipients of Scottish Government grant funding. It works through the international Caritas network, which, in Ukraine, will have in place bodies that are already involved with antipoverty work. Those bodies are there, irrespective of emergency. Therefore, a body like SCIAF can work through that international church-led network to meet need. It is just there. It has not been doing disaster response but it has been meeting local needs in local ways.

All the major international NGOs will, wherever possible, always try to work with local NGOs and, in particular, the ones with local networks that are close to communities. It is the best way of doing it.

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** Sadly, our members and their local partners have the experience of delivering in conflict zones, whether in Syria, Yemen or Afghanistan. What we are hearing from the Red Cross, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and Age is that they have local partners that can deliver a very quick response; assess the safety and security of the communities that they are trying to support and their own staff; make sure that everyone is safe; deliver; and contract. That is the response: they find a space, deliver and then go back.

Ukraine is an active conflict zone. It is a live conflict and things are changing very rapidly. However, those aid agencies are in it for the long haul; they understand. They are from the communities and understand the needs of the communities, so they will do their utmost to deliver aid safely without putting anyone's life in danger. They are there and, as Jane Salmonson talked about, they are relying on the local networks. I have worked in conflict zones and war zones, and it is the communities that keep us safe. They support aid workers and, while trying to stay alive themselves, make sure that aid workers are safe. There is solidarity, ensuring that safety, security and wellbeing is assured while aid is provided to the affected population.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Thanks for joining us this morning. In the discussion that we had with the consul general this morning, we got a sense of the trauma of war and of what the long-term impact will be on the victims. I want to ask you about the offer of psychological support that aid agencies can bring and how that works on the ground, both in countries where there is conflict and in the communities to which people flee. Will you provide a sense of the funding and long-term support that is required for that?

**Jane Salmonson:** I welcome that question. In stage 1 of an appeal such as this, humanitarian needs are paramount. People have no water and they do not have enough to eat. Stage 2 can be

the time when people have forgotten about the issue and moved on or thought, “Right, we’ve done that one”—of course, we have not done that one. The film cameras might have moved away, but work can be done on things such as trauma counselling to help children and adults to cope with the trauma of war and education for children who are displaced or in refugee camps. There is a raft of second-stage interventions that are extremely important to fund, but they might come at a stage when the public does not realise how much the continued support really matters.

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** Thank you for focusing on that question. It is critical that we do not focus on the hardware, shelter and sanitation. People often forget that, for people in conflict, there is a lot of deep trauma and survivor’s guilt about having left family and trying to survive. I have already talked about women and children and the fabric of their communities that is now destroyed. While our members are delivering much-needed food, water and shelter, they will be thinking about trauma care and counselling.

How that has worked in other responses, such as in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, is that members have established women and child-friendly spaces, where women engage in day-to-day activities so that they do not just sit and think. If they focus on and get involved in activities while getting counselling and trauma care, it is an opportunity for them to talk to one another and get peer support and peer counselling, which is important.

It is critical to ensure that counselling, psychological support and trauma care are not sidelined. Those are as important as food and water. However, it is about not just talking but ensuring that pregnant women, breastfeeding women and young women are engaged in day-to-day activities so that they are agents of their own recovery and are not sitting on the sidelines while aid agencies deliver. Many of our agencies include refugees in the aid-delivery effort, where possible. Decades of experience of delivering aid in places such as Yemen and Syria have shown that to be a value-added approach.

**Mark Ruskell:** I really get the sense of empowerment for people who have been disempowered. Sue, do you have anything to add?

**Sue English:** I agree with everything that Jane Salmonson and Madara Hettiarachchi have said. One of the most extraordinarily moving and effective bits of intervention that I saw when I went to the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh was the work that Age International did in setting up safe spaces for older people. The needs of old people in such circumstances are very different from the needs of young families, but it is just as

traumatic, difficult and painful for them to leave their homes and lives behind. Giving them the space to address their particular needs—physical medical needs as well as psychosocial needs—is incredibly important.

Although this is a European disaster, and many of our members do not normally work in Europe, the experience that they have over many years of dealing with refugees around the world will stand them in good stead. They are in this for the long haul—we are all in it for the long haul.

10:00

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank you all for the work that you are doing. It feels like yesterday but, just before Christmas, we had a briefing from the Disasters Emergency Committee about the work that you are doing in Afghanistan. The amount of work that you have done in the past couple of weeks is incredible.

I want to pick up Sue English’s point about older people. We have rightly been focusing on women and children who have been fleeing their homes but, on “News at Ten” last night, there was an incredibly moving piece about older people who had wanted their younger relatives and children to escape but, because things are so bad, they are now moving, too. There were images of people in wheelchairs or on crutches trying to escape. They are in a different set of circumstances, and the support that they need must be very different.

One thing that struck me was that people with heart conditions, diabetes or other long-term conditions all need medicine now, not in a couple of weeks. How on earth do you make that intervention on the ground to support those very specific needs? It is not about what happens in a fortnight; it is about getting people safe routes to somewhere else. How do you support local agencies on the ground to go from nothing to providing that detailed support overnight?

I do not know whether Sue or Madara is the best person to start on that.

**Sue English:** Madara would be better, because she is much more immediately informed on what is happening on the ground. I can pick up any other points.

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** We have heard that, for people leaving Ukraine, it is taking 28 hours just to get across 100km and that there are six-hour queues at the borders to leave Ukraine. You can imagine what toll that takes on people with disabilities and older people—they are really struggling to leave. We have just seen some assessment data from HelpAge International, which focuses on the needs of the elderly, the infirm and people with disabilities and looks at

their immediate needs and what is to come. Aid agencies are trying to ensure that the more visible people—those who are leaving at the borders—are not the main or only focus and that the people who are behind doors, hunkering down and trying to shelter from the on-going conflict are supported.

It is no easy task to find supplies. We are hearing about supply chains being disrupted, empty shelves and stores running out of food, but agencies such as HelpAge International are trying to ensure that they are on the front line, working with their network and prioritising the needs of the affected population. It is a challenging and fast-moving situation, but agencies are closely scrutinising the situation and talking to the elderly and trying to understand their needs so that they can immediately address them. It is a mammoth task—a giant task.

**Sarah Boyack:** That takes me on to what happens next, once you have supported people to either stay safely or to move. In such a fast-moving crisis, it must be incredibly difficult to provide support on the ground. I am not sure who the best person to ask is but, after the immediate support and the disaster appeal, where do you go next?

It was right to mention right at the start that there are lots of other crisis situations in the world that have less publicity. How do you ensure that you have investment in the right places with all the local organisations and that the raft of expertise is available on the ground? How do you make that work, and what more can we do to support you in that process, whether it is getting our constituents to donate or working on the strategic relationships on finance with the Scottish Government that you have referred to?

**Sue English:** I will give the DEC response to that. You are absolutely right to point out that there is a real concern about the needs of other parts of the world where people are facing very difficult situations. Our Afghanistan appeal, which we launched in December, has raised over £30 million. That is now being spent on the ground very effectively, but that area will need support for the foreseeable future.

Another issue that our members are becoming increasingly concerned about is that, as you probably know, Ukraine and Russia provide huge amounts of the world's grain supplies. In parts of Africa, we are already have serious hunger problems. If the price of grain continues to go up at the current rate and supplies are short, that will become even more of a problem. It is important to remember that, although what is happening in Europe is immediate and we have raised a lot of money that will be spent there as effectively and quickly as possible, other parts of the world still

require help. That is a long-term commitment for which we will need funding.

I will hand over to Madara.

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** That is a great question on the protracted nature of the crisis. It is not just about meeting the immediate and urgent basic needs of the affected population. DEC funding will be available for the next three years, to ensure that members and their local partners and affiliates are there for the long journey. As Jane Salmonson talked about, long after the cameras have moved on, our members and their local staff partners will be there, for the rebuilding, the refugee response or the response to the internally displaced population inside Ukraine. That will be for years, and much longer than three, five or seven years.

People's lives have been completely uprooted, and aid agencies will work alongside the affected population inside and outside Ukraine to ensure that support is given. We talked earlier about changing needs. What families need today is completely different from what they needed eight or nine months previously. Because aid agencies have their finger on the pulse, they are able to support families with those changing needs.

**Jane Salmonson:** I will come in on the Scottish aspect. Again, I go back to the HEF. Unfortunately, there are so many other disaster areas, in places such as Syria and Yemen. The other day, we had a discussion at the HEF about the Horn of Africa, where there are areas that are afflicted by a deadly combination of locust plagues and drought. When funding is available from the Scottish Government that is outside the DEC funding, the HEF's eight panel members meet and decide between them how that element of funding can best be spent.

We look at where the crises are most severe and weigh up where we can make the most strategic impact with relatively small amounts of money. In the HEF budget for this quarter of the year, there is only £250,000 to spend. There is absolutely no restriction on the choice—unfortunately, it is terribly wide. When small grants are made, we have to consider where the most impact can be achieved with small or relatively small amounts of money in facing severe humanitarian crises to try to help as best we can.

The eight HEF panel members work well, combining their collective expertise and knowledge, and their reach through their field colleagues and local partners around the world. We could be looking at the disaster in Haiti, which did not get support the other day, or a typhoon in the Philippines. We make the best use that we can of the human and financial resource that is available in Scotland.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is helpful. As well as the immediate humanitarian crisis, as a couple of you have mentioned, there is also the issue of rebuilding afterwards.

**Jane Salmonson:** There are longer-term or protracted crises.

**The Deputy Convener:** I have a couple of final questions, the first of which is for Madara. I want to get a sense of the balance between what aid is going to Ukraine and what aid is going to neighbouring countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Romania for operations. Could you help with that?

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** I cannot put a figure on it because, as we have talked about, it is such a fast-moving situation. Members right now have deployed their assessment or scoping teams to understand the nature of the situation. As we have talked about, inside Ukraine, a lot of rebuilding and recovery will need to happen. The UN has said that more than 7 million people will be internally displaced and there will be 4 million refugees outside Ukraine. As we talked about earlier, given that there is a state-led response in the neighbouring countries, we anticipate much of the funding going to Ukraine over time. In the immediate term, given the responding and contracting nature, it is possible that funding will be largely for refugees but, over time, as access inside Ukraine eases, and security permitting, we hope that the response inside Ukraine will be much larger.

**The Deputy Convener:** My final question is on the administrative burdens and costs that such a big appeal places on the DEC. The issue is complicated by the fact that events are happening at scale and also that you have 14 member charities. Can any of you give us a sense of the bureaucracy that you are trying to wade through?

**Sue English:** The DEC is set up to deal with precisely this kind of emergency situation. Our secretariat is small, but it is efficient and we have clear processes in place to ensure that we can manage the administration of the very large amount of money that is being made available to us. Fortunately, we have 50 years of experience of doing it, so we know how to manage such events.

Because we are completely focused on disasters and emergencies, we are very good at managing a response that is fast but is appropriate, efficient and does not duplicate. One of the great advantages of having this coalition of humanitarian organisations is that they can come together around our board table, through the humanitarian and finance directors and so on, and can work together at pace and at scale.

It is tough, but that is what we were set up to do, and it is what we will continue to do. The

generosity of the public is humbling and absolutely overwhelming. For us, the focus is to spend the money as quickly and effectively as possible. That is what we will do in phase 1, which will be the first six months, but then, for at least another two and a half years after that, we will attempt to do longer-term work. However, as everybody has pointed out, the trajectory of the event and the longer-term effects are very unclear.

**The Deputy Convener:** Jane, do you have any final comments on that or on anything else?

**Jane Salmonson:** I cannot really speak for the DEC. All that I want to do is congratulate it on its superb fundraising efforts. It has been doing extraordinary and admirable things, and I am happy to work alongside it. I again thank the Scottish Government for the speed of its response and its ability to step aside from normal structures in such circumstances.

This is for the long haul. I am sorry to say that the problems will not be behind the citizens of Ukraine in one, two, three or probably four years. I hope that the interest of the Parliament and this committee will continue and that you will invite us back another day to hear more about how it is going.

**The Deputy Convener:** I certainly give you the assurance that we will continue to pursue the issue in the months and years ahead.

Madara, from an operational perspective, is there any final message that you would like to give the committee?

**Madara Hettiarachchi:** On the question about bureaucracy, our non-negotiable is that programmes are delivered with quality and accountability to the affected population. We will meet needs immediately, but it is about ensuring that international quality, accountability and technical standards are met. That is our non-negotiable. We will ensure that our tried and tested methods of delivering aid are available for the response.

We are hugely overwhelmed by the generosity of the public response to this incredible aid effort. As a previous emergency responder in places such as Sri Lanka, Haiti and Pakistan, I know that, when you are on the front lines, working with affected communities and delivering aid, it is incredible to see that solidarity and support. The practical cash is brilliant, but the sentiment goes a long way—it is incredible.

Thank you for making the time for us this morning. I really appreciate it.

**The Deputy Convener:** I thank all our witnesses.

I suspend the meeting for five minutes to allow for a changeover of witnesses.

10:15

*Meeting suspended.*

10:21

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Convener:** Item 2 is further consideration of the crisis in Ukraine. I welcome to the meeting Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and two Scottish Government officials: Alison Byrne, director for equality, inclusion and human rights and Joanna Keating, head of international development.

Cabinet secretary, I invite you to make a brief opening statement.

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Thank you very much, convener. I will read out the first half of my statement and then, because of the very fast-changing situation that no doubt members will wish to ask me about, update the committee on my understanding of a very significant change in UK Government policy towards Ukrainian refugees.

I begin by reiterating that the Scottish Government has condemned Russia's unprovoked invasion of a peaceful, democratic neighbour in the strongest possible terms several times over the past weeks. Scotland offers its unqualified support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Russia's illegal act of aggression has no conceivable justification, and we reject wholeheartedly the premise of the invasion that is being peddled by President Putin and the Russian Government.

I deplore, as I know colleagues right across the Scottish Parliament do, the heartbreaking loss of life, including that of civilians, which is the direct responsibility of the Russian regime. I wrote to the Russian ambassador on 25 February in those terms, and I have spent time with the acting consul general of Ukraine to assure him of the Scottish Government's steadfast support.

The Scottish Government has so far committed £4 million in humanitarian aid as part of global humanitarian efforts, with £2 million of that allocated to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal for Ukraine, which launched last Thursday. I thank everybody in Scotland who has also contributed so generously on a personal basis. The DEC appeal has now raised more than £10 million in Scotland alone.

The Scottish Government has allocated £1 million of our humanitarian aid to UNICEF to support its work in providing life-saving services and supporting families, while a further £1 million has been allocated to the British Red Cross and to the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund. Our financial aid contribution will help provide basic humanitarian assistance, including in health, water and sanitation and shelter to those fleeing Putin's bombs.

On top of the £4 million in humanitarian aid, we have committed to providing around £2.9 million-worth of urgently needed medical equipment for Ukraine. Our first donation of medical supplies arrived in Poland on Thursday 3 March and is destined for the Ministry of Healthcare of Ukraine in Lviv. A second donation worth £1.2 million left Scotland on 4 March containing more than 130,000 items of medical supplies, including bandages and syringe pumps, and a further 32 pallets of bandages, intravenous sets and syringes left Scotland on Tuesday morning. I would like to place on record my thanks to NHS Scotland for responding to the specified needs of the Ukrainian Government with such lightning speed and fulfilling the request for urgently needed medical equipment, supplies and pharmaceuticals.

Like many across Scotland and the world, I have watched with distress the most significant displacement of humanity since the second world war. It is estimated that around 2 million Ukrainians—although that figure is soon to be overtaken—have been forced to leave their country because of Putin's invasion, and I am sad to say that many more will follow. If I can take any heart from this tragedy, it has been the amazing generosity shown by people here in Scotland who have rallied to provide support for their fellow humans on the other side of Europe. The stories of families, communities, churches, mosques, shops, schools and workplaces across Scotland raising funds and collecting provisions and clothing for Ukrainians show the humanitarian support that has long been a feature of our country.

As is mentioned in the supporting documents for this evidence session, the Polish embassy in London has welcomed our communities' generosity but has asked those wanting to help to make financial support and contributions instead, given the scale of the logistical effort and to ensure the most effective use of resources. I would echo that: the best way now of supporting people in this crisis is to provide cash to allow agencies to respond quickly in Ukraine and surrounding countries. The Scottish Government has provided information on the Ready Scotland website, where people can make donations of humanitarian support safely and effectively.

I will now briefly update the committee on the resettlement issue. Scotland, as ever, stands ready to offer refuge and sanctuary for those fleeing Ukraine, as we did with the Syrian resettlement programme, in which all of Scotland's 32 local authorities participated and as a result of which more than 3,300 refugees were welcomed into communities. In recent days, we have been working very closely with colleagues in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Refugee Council and Police Scotland to co-ordinate plans and address the practical challenges of resettling Ukrainians here.

However, people need to arrive in the UK for that support to be given, and up to now, the UK Government has not, in our eyes, been doing enough to enable refugees to seek refuge. The UK Government's planned community sponsorship scheme does not go far enough in supporting all those who seek refuge in Scotland and, instead, places responsibility for resettlement on to the community rather than with the UK Government.

We must also ensure that we learn lessons from the Afghanistan resettlement schemes with regard to providing rapid and appropriate support for those who need it. We absolutely stand ready to offer refuge and sanctuary to those who might be displaced, and we have been appealing to the UK Government to work with us on developing the detail of the scheme to ensure that we in Scotland can build in appropriate support from local government and other partners. We are working on the detail of the Scottish approach to implementing the UK Government's schemes, but for us to do so effectively, the UK Government must share its plans and the detail urgently. After all, the situation seems to be changing literally as we meet.

We must be clear that the route as foreseen is completely inappropriate in addressing what could become the biggest refugee crisis since the second world war. Reports are beginning to emanate from Westminster that there has been a major rethink of the UK Government's resettlement and visa scheme, which, uniquely in Europe, requires Ukrainian refugees trying to reach these shores to seek a visa from a UK Government office and to provide biometric data in situ—that is, in the likes of Poland and other neighbouring countries and indeed in France, too. We have all watched the very distressing television pictures of largely women and children, distraught as they wait for hours to register their interest in getting a visa and then have to wait an indeterminate amount of time to learn whether they will receive one.

10:30

It has been widely reported that the UK Government is in the process of deciding and announcing a major policy shift on this front, but I do not have any confirmed final details of that announcement. There will be colleagues who, while I have been speaking, have been able to follow updates on social media and might well know more than me, but we have not yet been formally informed of the position. My understanding, though, is that the visa application process is set to change by being dramatically speeded up and by not requiring people to automatically present themselves at offices. The expectation is that that will dramatically increase—and in a much shorter time—the number of people who can reach these shores.

That raises questions for us, and, after this meeting, I and my colleagues from the civil service will no doubt be having very detailed discussions to learn what we can expect as a result of this change in UK Government policy. As somebody who has been very vocal in calling for the UK to change its system, I will welcome anything that makes it easier for people seeking sanctuary and refuge to get it. Yesterday and the day before, I was in Dublin, holding talks with the Irish Government about, among other things, its humanitarian and resettlement programme. I was hugely encouraged by how the Irish national and local authorities and public administrations, including the health service, have been mobilised and are on hand to give people arriving in Dublin airport on a plane from Poland the help, support and guidance that they require from the minute that they arrive in Ireland. We, too, will look at doing absolutely everything that we can to ensure that, when people arrive here, they receive all the help, support and guidance that they require.

Deputy convener, I will stop there. Members will no doubt have many questions, especially in relation to the change in UK Government policy, but I am also happy to answer questions on any other aspect of the Scottish Government's response to the crisis in Ukraine.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you, cabinet secretary.

I will begin the questioning by asking about certain issues that you touched on in your statement. What is the Scottish Government's preferred set-up or system for dealing with the number of refugees that we expect to arrive in Scotland? You spoke about local authorities, some of which have previously put in place schemes to deal with refugees arriving from other countries. What system would you prefer, particularly with regard to housing and health issues?

**Angus Robertson:** Before I answer that, convener, I draw your attention to the fact that I am joined by Joanna Keating and Alison Byrne of the Scottish Government. They are the experts in the field, and I will ask them to follow on from my own answers if there are any pertinent aspects that I have not been able to share with you or if they have any insights from the constant meetings that are being had at the moment.

We have been communicating with the Home Office on our preferred scheme, but thus far we have not had a response on whether, from its perspective, it is workable or preferable. However, in Scotland, we want to work with local authorities, given the experience of the Syrian refugee scheme in particular, to ensure that there is, de minimis, an understanding of who is seeking resettlement and where. That will allow a local authority to know what people who are arriving in a new country require by way of help and support, whether it be housing—which obviously will be a primary consideration—or other wraparound care and support.

As we are talking largely about women and children, there will, in addition to housing, be questions of access to health service and health visitor support to deal with, and people will need to have an understanding of how nursery and school provision works. Of course, the focus in that respect is on the refugees who require that help and support, but it is also mission critical for our local government partners, in particular, to have an understanding of what they need to be doing, given the very rapidly increasing numbers of people who might well be arriving in different parts of the country. Local authorities will need to know how many additional places will be required in nurseries, schools and so on. That is why we have been sceptical of what appears to have been the UK Government's preferred approach, which is that people just receive a visa and arrive. There seems to have been no thinking in the Home Office or in other UK Government departments about the primary role that local government needs to play in the process.

Up to now, therefore, the Scottish Government has been trying to impress on the UK Government its view that we have established practices in place, and we have been making it clear that we want to ensure that, as people arrive from Ukraine, we have learned from best practice from the Syrian refugee scheme and all the lessons about what works. My expectation is that the refugee numbers that we are talking about will be multiple times the 3,300 who arrived as part of the Syrian refugee scheme. Indeed, Ireland, which is pretty much the same size as Scotland, has seen more than 1,000 arrive in the first week alone. As I have no particular insight that suggests to me that we would be looking at any significant difference

between Scotland and Ireland in that regard, it is quite helpful for us to understand what the Irish are already going through. If the updated UK scheme expedites the ability of Ukrainians to arrive here, we are going to have to stand these systems up very quickly and at scale. As you will appreciate, after this evidence session, I and my cabinet secretary colleague Shona Robison, who has the primary responsibility for the domestic side of this challenge, will be very actively having meetings to understand how things are likely to work and what the impact will be.

**The Deputy Convener:** I am sure that colleagues will return to that subject.

On the issue of humanitarian aid, we have just had a very useful evidence-taking session with the Disasters Emergency Committee, and before that, we heard from the consul general of Ukraine in private session. The Government has indicated that financial aid to Ukraine will be allocated following discussions with UN agencies, and it is likely that the Scottish Government will take a mix of approaches, working with both non-governmental organisations and UN agencies. Can I explore that with you? Can you elaborate on that approach?

**Angus Robertson:** As we are all aware, the work of different charitable organisations will have a different focus and locus, and they have different logistical abilities with regard to delivering in different places. At the same time, we are also getting very strong guidance and requests from our Ukrainian Government partners, and there needs to be a mix-and-match process that takes into account our ambition to want to help as well as we can and the delivery mechanisms that are offered by the different charities.

Usually, when emergencies happen, UN agencies—perhaps those such as UNICEF that are focused on children, but other parts of the UN family, too—are despatched to react to such situations, and then there is also the likes of the Red Cross network. It is important to understand, as I know the committee will, that we are also assisting the countries neighbouring Ukraine, which have taken in the largest number of people. Those countries, which run in an arc from north to east and which include Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova, have seen very significant numbers of people coming in. The number coming into Poland has been very large, but I think that Moldova, which I think that I am right in saying is still the poorest country in Europe, has had the largest per head uptake of refugees. We therefore have to ensure that we are being helpful and supportive to Ukrainians in country as well as those who have already left and to the different geographic areas that those people have fled to, and we will do that by working with the UN and, in

particular, partners in the Disasters Emergency Committee sphere. We are also working beyond that, too. The Mercy Corps and Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund are two examples of aid organisations that are not currently within the DEC consortium but which we are also working with, because of their capability and their reach in Scotland, too.

Again, we are talking about a very fast-moving process. It is also an iterative process, because once one has despatched certain types of aid, the need changes. Members might want to follow this up in their questioning, but people have, as we know, been enormously generous here and, indeed, right across Europe in providing what they think will make the biggest difference to people. Baby food, nappies, clothing and toys are literally piling up in warehouses right across Europe. The question, now, is how we get those things to people in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. Indeed, given the numbers of people arriving, it might be best to offer that kind of charitable giving in the form of welcome or support packs for people who will be coming here. At the same time, we should recognise what the aid community and, indeed, Ukraine and its neighbouring countries have been saying about financial aid being the top priority now. The best thing that people who want to help and support Ukrainians in need can do is to give financial support primarily through the 12 or 13 charities in the DEC appeal consortium that are delivering in that area.

**The Deputy Convener:** That very clear message emerged in this morning's evidence, too.

We now move to questions from members. I call Mark Ruskell.

**Mark Ruskell:** The situation is obviously developing rapidly and we all have one eye on Twitter to find out if there will be a genuine route to safety to the UK for Ukrainians.

This morning, we spoke in private with the consul general for Ukraine. We discussed the Ukrainian population that is already here, that is already part of our communities and part of us. We understand that around 7,000 Ukrainian nationals are in Scotland. The majority of them are seasonal workers and are clustered on the east coast of Scotland, working in north-east Fife, Dundee, Falkirk and Edinburgh. How can we support those people? They will be incredibly anxious. They will want to bring their family and loved ones over to Scotland as quickly as possible, but there are challenges in terms of language and of having enough qualified immigration advice to support them. What thinking has the Scottish Government given to how we can deliver immigration advice where people are, which is primarily in those communities on the east coast where they are employed as seasonal workers?

**Angus Robertson:** There is a lot in that question. I, too, have been discussing that with the acting consul general. There are two specific aspects to the Ukrainian community in Scotland.

First, there is a long-settled and long-established Ukrainian community in Scotland that largely goes back to the 1870s and post second world war. In that case, we are already talking about a second or third generation of Ukrainian Scots. They live right across Scotland. There is no geographical concentration beyond the conurbations that we are aware of. For example, there are Ukrainian community facilities in Edinburgh and Glasgow, but Ukrainian Scots are also established right across Scotland. The consul general told me that he thought there were probably up to 5,000 of them.

Secondly, we could add up to a maximum of another 5,000 seasonal workers. Therefore, the figure of 7,000 that Mr Ruskell gave speaks to that 5,000 plus 2,000 seasonal workers. Yes, there will be concentrations of those people in certain parts of the country, and we have to think about that.

10:45

During my conversations with Ireland's foreign minister, Simon Coveney, yesterday, I was interested to hear that the majority of people who are arriving in Dublin are heading towards the address of a family member, a friend or somebody who they know. Again, given the point that I made earlier, unless somebody can tell me that there is a profound difference between people arriving in Ireland and those arriving in Scotland, I suspect that the first wave of people will arrive knowing where their people are. They might well be working in the seasonal industries, but they might also have connections with the established Scottish Ukrainian community as well as people who have been working here for a number of years and also form part of the community, but who do not traditionally move back and forward every year. We need to be aware of that as a phenomenon.

That shows why the Scottish Government has been keen to work on the resettlement scheme that has emerged from the Syrian scheme of which we have good experience at local government level, to make sure that we are able to match public service support for people who are arriving in situ in localities with the levels of demand.

Mark Ruskell might well be right that a significant number of refugees might head to certain parts of the country because of the nature of work that they do. We do not know that yet, which is why we are still keen to make sure that we are working hand in hand with our colleagues



in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, who have been doing a great job in making sure that there is co-ordination right across the 32 local authorities so that we can be aware of what might be coming.

What might be coming are people in their hour of need and I have no doubt that the response that we will see in this country will be the same as we have seen right across Europe—people wanting to be helpful and wanting to be supportive.

I also draw attention to the fact that—I am sure that members also saw this on their televisions—when people arrive on trains in different parts of Poland or different parts of Germany and even across to France, there are people standing in the stations saying, “I will take in two people,” “I will take in four people,” or “I will take in eight people.”. On a human level, that is extremely moving, and I am sure that those who do not have family here would want to feel that they can live in safety with people who can help and support them. Having said that, though, we have to consider safeguarding and be aware of who is arriving and where they are going, primarily for the reasons of matching the social service support that we want to offer.

That all underlines the reason why we want a resettlement scheme that has local government and the provision of local services at its heart. We are ready to do that, our colleagues in local government are ready to do that and we are just trying to impress on the UK Government that, regardless of the route that it opens up and the preferences that it might have for how it operates in other parts of the UK, we are clear that we have good experience and we want to apply that good practice to do the best that we can do.

Do my colleagues want to add to that? In a nutshell, that is our approach thus far. I know that the situation is fast moving, but that is still where our preference lies.

**Alison Byrne (Scottish Government):** To add to what the cabinet secretary has said, while we have been engaging with the UK Government this week to understand the plans for its humanitarian sponsorship scheme and how it might work in Scotland, we have of course been talking to COSLA, the Scottish Refugee Council, and other key partners about how we can mobilise and organise in Scotland and what our preferred approach would be. As the cabinet secretary has said, we have long-standing experience of local government and partners doing this well in collaboration and partnership across Scotland. That is certainly the approach that partners want to take.

The space that our partners want to get to is similar to the Syrian resettlement scheme, which

successfully resettled more than 3,000 Syrian refugees in Scotland. We hope that, over the course of the day, we will get more clarity from the UK Government about the role that it sees the Government playing and the funding package that might come with it to enable and facilitate offers of accommodation and support.

**Angus Robertson:** Forgive me, but I did not get to Mr Ruskell’s question about language skills and assisting people who might not have English as a second language. The Scottish Government has been identifying a number of colleagues who are speakers of Ukrainian and/or Russian. The Ukrainian community in Scotland is, as you might imagine, seized of doing absolutely everything and anything that it can do to help people who are arriving, which is why we are working so closely with them to mobilise as many resources as we possibly can.

I should perhaps clarify that what we are learning about the significant change in the UK Government’s approach is that it is not moving from a position of waiving visa requirements for entry into the UK to the same position as the European Union countries are taking. The system it is changing to is making it possible for people to apply online and to receive a reply to that request online. We do not yet know how long applications might take. We are still at the early stages of understanding how things might work. Given the constraints on human resources, I imagine it would be easier administratively to deal with any application online, compared to using a smaller number of outlying visa offices where there are now long queues.

Our preference is for the UK to emulate the approach of Ireland and other EU member states and waive visa requirements entirely. That is not, apparently, what it is planning to do. It is changing the system in a way that should make application and the processing of such applications a lot speedier, with the anticipation that that would allow a lot more refugees to arrive here much more quickly than would otherwise have been the case.

**Mark Ruskell:** That leads me to another question, which is about the nature of the visas that are issued as short-term visas, as well as visas for seasonal workers, and some of the conditions that are applied to them, particularly that of no recourse to public funds. Does the Scottish Government have an assessment of how many people might be captured by that? If people’s visas are being extended until December, and there is some security that they might be in employment during that period, that is good. Of course, if people are out of employment during that period, and they are unable to access benefits and have no recourse to public funds, that is a

very serious problem and could lead to homelessness and a range of other problems. Do you predict that that might be an issue and how would you tackle it?

**Angus Robertson:** On the way here, I heard on the news headlines that the Home Secretary is expected to make an announcement that would see a change to the status of Ukrainians who are in the UK without leave to remain, and that their situation could be regularised because of course they cannot return to Ukraine. That was at 9 o'clock this morning. It is now being signalled that significant changes might be made on a number of fronts. Forgive me, but I have not been sighted on what those might be. Obviously, it would be a good thing for the UK Government to tell the Scottish Government what it intends to do about something that will have a big impact on things here, but I have still not been informed about that.

On no recourse to public funds, that is totally unsustainable. We have to make sure that people who are here, who have lost everything and have nothing, do not find themselves homeless or in penury. I will be looking closely at what the UK Government proposes. I have not seen it yet, but I hope that common sense has prevailed so that those who are here already can remain and will not need to go back, that all of those who wish to seek support and sanctuary here can do so, that they have recourse to public funds and, apart from anything else, that they can earn their keep if they want to work. Unfortunately, Scotland has been losing people and seeing people leave because of the impact that Brexit has had on our workforce.

Our first response is a humanitarian response, but people might stay here for some time. Notwithstanding the fact that most refugees would wish to go home as quickly as possible, looking at the damage that has been wrought on communities in Ukraine until now, we are talking about people going back to cities that do not stand any more. We have to be ready to support people for as long as it takes before they can go home. That will require public funds to be made available to ensure that people are properly supported, as they should be.

**The Deputy Convener:** I am keeping an eye on the time. We have a cut-off point of 11.30.

**Fiona Hyslop:** If reports from the BBC are accurate, this looks like a process change to online processing of a remaining restricted rule base for who can come here. Scotland has a specific interest in seasonal workers, but unless it changes them today, the rules that are applied by the UK Government would mean that families of seasonal workers could not come here. Under the very narrow limits of the current provisions, immediate family can come but not if you are a seasonal worker. In your discussions with the

Home Office, which I expect should be today—I expect the Home Office to give respect to the Scottish Government and speak to you today—could you specifically raise that issue of, for example, children not being able to come to meet their parents who are seasonal workers here in Scotland? We should press on that specific point to get that change.

**Angus Robertson:** Yes. This relates in part to the community scheme that the UK Government has talked about under which individuals, organisations or companies might be able to sponsor applicants so that they might secure a visa. We have been talking with the Home Office about those areas, and this is a very good example of where we would want to impress on the Home Office that families should be able to be together.

My view is that we should take in everybody who needs to be taken in. If the UK Government is going to continue to use what are effectively administrative immigration systems to deal with a humanitarian crisis, we have to do our best to make sure that it has the fewest restrictions possible. What Fiona Hyslop raises is a particular by-product of the existing approach, and it is exactly the type of thing that we have been bringing up.

One of the problems that we have had in the Scottish Government—and this will be the same for our colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland—is that when one seeks to speak with UK Government departments about the intended workings of schemes, nothing comes back on how they are intended to work. We have made major suggestions about what we would prefer, and I described to the committee earlier our approach involving local government at its heart. We say that to the Home Office and ask whether it agrees that it would be workable and advisable regardless of what one concludes is the best way of doing it elsewhere in the UK. We are very clear about what we want to do here. We think that it is the best way of delivering for people. In addition to that, it would appear that those specific administrative restrictions might still apply with after today's update to visa applications that the UK Government is in the process of deciding and announcing, and we might still have to press to make sure that we do not see the circumstances that Ms Hyslop has raised.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will move on as I am conscious that other colleagues might want to come in. You have just returned from Dublin. Could you briefly share with us the Irish Government's view? Obviously, Ireland is part of the EU's political response to Ukraine but are there any practical lessons that we can learn from there? You have already indicated that there are some.

11:00

**Angus Robertson:** There are. Ireland is 2 per cent of the European Union's population and uses that as a rough rule of thumb for the consequences of what that means financially and in other ways. Ireland is working on the expectation of taking in up to 80,000 Ukrainians. That process has just begun.

At Dublin airport, there are welcome tables from the Irish public authorities that take people's details. The whole problem with the UK scheme is that it is the wrong way around. The Irish do all the due diligence when people arrive from Ukraine. They take people's details and then make sure that they can be matched to health provision and local government support. Ireland makes sure that people's positions are effectively regularised from the moment that they get off the plane.

Ireland is working hard to make sure of being able to provide the housing that will be required. I have already made the point that early indications are that, among the first arrivals are people who have friends, family and relations who they can stay with, but a proportion do not and, in Ireland's case, those people will have to be matched with local authorities and also religious institutions and other places where accommodation is available. Ireland runs a national portal where people can indicate their willingness and ability to take people in. In addition to people who are friends and family from Ukraine, there are obviously people in Ireland, as there are elsewhere in Europe, and here too, who want to help and take people in. Ireland has a system for that matching process and is expecting numbers to go up quite dramatically.

**Dr Allan:** To build on a question that Mark Ruskell asked, this morning we had a conversation with the consul general of Ukraine, who made a very impressive contribution. One thing that came through loud and clear was the pressure on the consulate to provide information at a time when the UK's policy on the matters that you have described has changed and continues to change.

Looking back, post-Brexit, we provided information to people in communities in Scotland, who realised that although the Scottish Government could not sort out the problems that the UK Government was responsible for, it could provide information. In our earlier session, we asked whether there was anything that could be done to provide a single point of contact for information, particularly for the community of Ukrainians in Scotland. Would the Government be able to work with that community and its consulate to find ways to do that?

**Angus Robertson:** We are already working with the consulate, and we are working with the community on a daily basis to work out what its needs, interests, concerns and expectations are. That extends from offering to be helpful and supportive to the consul general, whose phone goes incessantly. I have met him a number of times. Forgive me—I do not know whether you met him in person. I have been on numerous Teams calls on which he has talked about everything that is important from the perspective of the consulate, and the phone has been going non-stop. Help and support has been offered by the Scottish Government and by other consulates. That is a matter for the consul general, because we are talking about the consular responsibilities of the republic of Ukraine. It is for the consulate to work out what the most appropriate support would be. We have made it very clear that we want to help.

At the heart of the work that we are doing in the early stages—this will undoubtedly continue to be the case—is the involvement of the Scottish Refugee Council, which has a lot of experience. In the meetings that I have had with Shona Robison and the Ukrainian consul general and the Ukrainian community, including its organisations, as well as the Scottish Refugee Council, the police and other public authorities, we have tried to work through all the various issues of messaging and communication. As is the way of these things, one just has to make sure that one is using every route possible to make sure that people are hearing and learning about the things that they need to do.

Some of what we are talking about here is a capacity issue. How can we make sure that the consulate has everything that it requires? How can the Scottish Refugee Council have the capacity to deal with the scale of the challenge as it develops? That is very much at the forefront of our thoughts. The Scottish Refugee Council is already providing office space for the Ukrainian communities, and it is co-ordinating and supporting them.

Is there more that can be done, whether on communication or anything else? Absolutely, and we are doing more. Because things are changing very quickly, we will need to make sure that we are doing the right things in the circumstances as they develop.

Our Ukrainian colleagues are very well aware of the offers of help that are there for them, as is the Ukrainian community. The First Minister was with the Ukrainian community in Edinburgh yesterday. We are talking to one another on a daily basis to make sure that we do everything that we can.

**Dr Allan:** On another theme, you mentioned the multiplicity of needs that people will have when they arrive in Scotland. One of those is that people

may arrive with a variety of medical needs but may not have medical records because of their situation. How can we ensure that the national health service is in a position to support people who find themselves in that unusual situation?

**Angus Robertson:** There is that group of people and there are other groups, including people with disabilities, of whom we are very mindful. That is an issue that our colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy raised with me in the chamber last week. We are very seized of the spectrum of needs that people will arrive with.

On the technical question about Ukrainian medical records, I will have to come back to Dr Allan. Ukraine is a developed country that has computerised data management systems. Notwithstanding the fact that it is in a war situation, it has a functioning medical system, and the largest part of the country is not occupied. There must be ways in which information can still be accessed, but that very much depends on the capacity of the Ukrainian health system, which, as we can all understand, is under huge strain because of the injured—civilians in particular but also military personnel—who will be treated right across the country.

I will take that question away, but I know that our health service and everybody who assists in areas such as disability will be very seized of the need to ensure that we are able to do everything that we can to help.

**Sarah Boyack:** Your comments about what we hope is the significantly changing picture with regard to visa regulations reinforce the unanimity of the committee's belief in the need for intergovernmental working on issues, the case for which has been made very powerfully this morning.

I want to follow up on two issues, the first of which is that of seasonal workers, which Mark Ruskell and Fiona Hyslop commented on. The importance of that issue came through powerfully from the Ukrainian consul general. There are 6,000 to 7,000 of those workers, who are very widely geographically spread—they are located in the Lothians, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Dundee and Falkirk.

It is critical that the local authorities and the voluntary sector in those areas gear up, because it is clear that there will be a demand there, and across Scotland, from people applying to come here. As you have acknowledged, the Ukrainian consul general said that their ambition will not be to come here as permanent refugees. They very much want their stay to be short term. I point you to the evidence that we took earlier, which was very specific and helpful.

I have a point to make about work with employers. We have talked about what our local authorities and third sector could do, and I hope that we can agree on the need for us to use our soft power as a country. Gordon Brown has been talking about war crimes and working with lawyers on that. I met him to talk about that yesterday. There is also work that could be done with employers and companies in Scotland. I make a plea to the Government to think about what more we could do there, whether by enabling staff or companies to donate to the Disasters Emergency Committee, or by assisting with access to work visas, where companies are looking for those.

Is there more that we could do to encourage employers to do more? I noticed that Skyscanner advertised and reached out to Ukrainian workers to work in its sector. I know that it is a fast-moving situation. For weeks, we have lobbied the Government about local authorities and visas, but it feels as though the situation in that regard might become more real, and those are some practical issues that I hope that the Scottish Government will pick up on.

**Angus Robertson:** Sarah Boyack raises a number of points, which are all excellent, in relation to not only the wider assistance that can be provided to people who seek sanctuary, but the need to be more generally helpful to Ukraine and people who have been forced to leave there. We are receiving reports—I am sure that members of the committee will have heard examples of this—of companies that want to offer Ukrainians positions, should they arrive here. The Scottish Government is co-ordinating those offers. I am sure that members will have examples of that; as a constituency MSP, I have an example of such an offer from a leading local company. I have no doubt that, when people arrive here, they will be able to take up those opportunities.

We also know about—and should acknowledge and praise—Scottish companies that have made principled decisions about divesting from Russia, because they no longer want to work in a market with such a regime and want to join the rest of the civilised world in doing everything that they can to put pressure on the Russian regime. They are also looking at other ways of helping. For example, some have made significant donations to charities and other efforts related to Ukraine. We should recognise that that is already happening.

On the employers front specifically, we already have an excellent working relationship with the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, most recently in relation to the Afghan resettlement scheme, but that will be extended to include Ukrainians. Such co-ordination is already taking place. It is for us to capture the details of those who want to be helpful and supportive

In relation to Dr Allan's previous question about health, the existing arrangements for refugees that NHS boards and local authorities have in place between them have been brought to my attention. Work is already done to make sure that that connection works to the advantage of people with medical conditions or disabilities who may come to Scotland. The integrated one-Scotland approach that we have taken to Afghans and Syrians is one that we want to take for Ukrainians when they arrive, so that all our public services, along with those in the third sector and the private sector, can be incorporated in the effort to meet the big challenge that we face.

Everybody wants to step up to that challenge, so we are extremely keen that the UK authorities hear that we have a good model that works here, and we want it to work for Ukrainians, too. It would be excellent to hear that the UK Government understands that that is the route that we wish to pursue in Scotland.

11:15

**Sarah Boyack:** I have a quick supplementary that relates to your answer to Alasdair Allan about health issues.

Lots of women and children have fled from Ukraine, but now we are seeing older people, people with disabilities and people with health conditions beginning to leave, because they have no home to stay in. I flag up the fact that people may arrive with quite a range of health conditions—their need could be as basic as needing free medicines. I hope that the Scottish Government is considering the range of support that people will need for their health and for post-traumatic stress, and not just in the future—it could be that people need that support from day 1, as soon as they arrive.

**Angus Robertson:** I totally agree with Sarah Boyack. Such considerations need to be at the forefront of people's minds. We will probably all have seen the same reports of the children with cancer who were unable to continue to receive medicine in Ukraine, who have now left and are receiving treatment in Poland. We can only imagine the challenge that it poses to the Polish health system to have to deal with a million refugees, including people with existing health conditions and other challenges.

That underlines why we all need to do our share so that the burden does not fall entirely on the immediately neighbouring countries. We have an excellent health service in Scotland, which is there for everybody at the point of need, and it will be there for Ukrainians who arrive here, too. They are entitled to free healthcare, as they should be, and the medicines that go with it.

**Jenni Minto:** We also took evidence from the consul general about the sanctions that are being imposed on Russia. I am interested to hear a bit more about the Scottish Government's position on that.

Last night we passed the legislative consent motion on the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill, which is passing through Westminster. I have had constituents get in touch with me about shell companies laundering money, on which I appreciate the power is reserved, but also about businesses trading with Russia and how we can change their situations, or encourage them to do so.

**Angus Robertson:** In concert with the situation in all other European countries, there has been a reaction from both the Government and the private sector in Scotland. Some—I would say most—of our leading brands in most of our economic sectors that have had interests in Russia have already announced that they are divesting from Russia, or are no longer continuing to operate there. Committee members will be aware that the First Minister has written to ask that companies or entities that fall into that category consider their positions and divest from Russia.

We all know that the UK, and London in particular, has become a preferred location for oligarchs to park often ill-gotten, massive funds in different legal entities, including some with the name "Scottish" in them but which are Scottish only in name. They have been buying expensive property in London—some have bought expensive property and estates in Scotland. I very much hope that the new legislation will finally—finally—begin to get to grips with what until now has, at best, been tolerating ill-gotten gains being whitewashed in the UK's headquartered financial systems, using overseas territories, and, at worst, has been understanding that that is happening at scale and allowing it to continue. It cannot continue. It is totally and utterly unacceptable.

Part of the problem for us in our national Parliament, speaking on behalf of our national Government, is that we do not have many of the levers to deal with this. We are dependent on legislation being passed in Westminster. The legislation has catch-all exemptions, which allow people to be exempted from the process on the ground of national security and any other number of reasons.

I am here to talk about the things that we have the power to make decisions on, but I was asked specifically about what we can do in an economic response. I think it is good that the UK Government is finally making some progress on this front, but there is still much, much more that can be done, and we should never go back. It should not be a temporary response to the

circumstances in which we find ourselves now. Our company systems should be transparent. Landholding should be transparent. People who have ill-gotten gains should forfeit them, and we should use unexplained wealth orders as much as is necessary. If we are beginning to do that properly on a UK basis, that is to be welcomed.

**The Deputy Convener:** Can I pursue that in a slightly different way? I appreciate that this question is a little off topic, but you are the culture secretary, so it is for you to answer wearing your culture hat. We all support economic sanctions on Russia and its regime, but we have also seen in recent weeks some cultural institutions—the Glasgow film festival, for example, and I think an orchestra in Cardiff—withdrawing Russian art and music from their programmes. To be fair to them, they each have justifications for doing that. Do you accept that there is quite a fine line between absolutely justified sanctions and boycotts of output linked to the regime, and more worrying cultural discrimination?

**Angus Robertson:** Yes, in principle. I agree that there is a fine line in all of this. There are very principled Russians, often exiles, whether in the cultural sphere, journalism or political activism, who are opponents of the Putin regime, who have spoken out against the approach that the Russian Government has taken in pursuing its aims through violent means. As we know, this is not the first time that it has done that. It has done so in Georgia, twice; it has done so in Moldova; it has done so within its own borders, in Chechnya. This is not a new phenomenon. We have now got to the stage where the international community is saying, “We need everybody in Russia to understand that this cannot go on.” There is a general approach of divesting from Russia. There is a general approach of ending the participation of official Russian delegations, teams and so on.

At the heart of what you asked is an appreciation of the nuances of a situation in which the honorary president of the Edinburgh International Festival, who has not spoken out against the Putin regime, has been asked to give up his position—and quite rightly so—and a conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra has taken a principled position in condemnation of the Russian Government. There is and must be nuance in the approach that we are taking to Russia, which recognises that there are a great many people who should be applauded for their principled stand, whether those in exile—who might be here—or the thousands of people who have been protesting on the streets of Russia itself. We need to make sure that, while taking a very strong and principled stand that is aimed at having a significant impact on Russian public opinion and the Russian regime, our approach is nuanced enough to encompass those Russians

who are opponents of the regime. I am sure that nobody would wish an unintended consequence to be that we cause them difficulties.

**The Deputy Convener:** I will bring in a previous culture secretary to follow up on that, just to finish off on this topic.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I point out that no Russian minister has ever been invited to the Edinburgh international culture summit since 2014, when Russia invaded Crimea. Culture is very powerful in building connections, as we have learned from incoming refugees from other countries. I would impress on the cabinet secretary the importance of that cultural connection for when people arrive here, and also in the rebuilding of Ukraine when peace eventually arrives.

In terms of culture giving hope, one of the most hopeful things that we heard this morning from the consul general was the re-establishment of online learning for Ukrainian children in Ukraine. We also need to prepare support for online learning when they arrive here, not just assimilation in our schools, which they might do for social reasons, because the spirit of education and culture is not just to bring comfort and solace but to provide and build the future, in this case for Ukraine through the education of its children. That is surely something that the Scottish Government can try to support—a very practical measure to help children with their education when we receive families here.

**Angus Robertson:** I think that might be paraphrased as an invitation to a further evidence session where we can talk at length about what we can do, because I have a lot of views about things that we can think about in the medium and long term after Ukraine successfully repulses the Russian invasion of its country.

In recent days, I had a conversation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Lord Provost and council leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, whose city is twinned with Kyiv. We talked at some length about the potential for our local authorities, our cities and our towns that do not have existing links with communities in Ukraine to think about partnership and/or twinning going forward, so that when Ukraine has emerged victorious and needs to rebuild its infrastructure, there can be direct relations between Scottish towns, cities and regions and parts of Ukraine. There is quite a lot of opportunity in that.

More broadly on the culture point, we will absolutely be enriched by Ukrainians who come here, and we will learn a lot more about Ukrainian culture, which is a thoroughly good thing, but at the same time we will also have to think about how we can help and support Ukrainians who come here culturally. Of course children will learn

English while they are here, and no doubt they will learn Gaelic in various parts of Scotland as well, but we have to think about the educational support that we are able to give them so that their education can also continue in Ukrainian and Russian as their national languages. I suspect that that will be a conversation for a further evidence session. We need to think about all these things. The points about culture are very well made.

**The Deputy Convener:** That concludes our discussion. I thank the cabinet secretary and his officials for their time this morning. I ask people to keep an eye on the committee's website for further information about some of the issues that we have discussed.

*Meeting closed at 11:29.*





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