

# RREUSE & ENSIE Position on the 2022 Ukraine Refugee Crisis

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## Executive summary

- Work integration social enterprises should be recognised in their role as providers of measures aimed at the integration of refugees, overall granting access to the job market, housing, and educational opportunities, upskilling and reskilling, among others. The Ukrainian war highlighted the EU's need to promote long-term and sustainable solutions to integrate refugees in European society.
- However, the allocation of funding to support the social economy and CSO solidarity efforts towards refugees from Ukraine is heterogeneous across the Union. Equally, social enterprises are oftentimes in need of financial opportunities to upscale their activities and thus, being able to deliver an even greater societal impact.
- Civilians fleeing Ukraine should have facilitated access to work integration social enterprises and be recognised by competent authorities as a target group of WISEs. When setting up such mechanisms, Member States must take into account intersectionality and refugees' overlapping experiences and identities.
- If implemented effectively, the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP) can be a much-needed impetus to support WISEs and other social economy actors, for instance, via stronger socially responsible public procurement and, given social enterprises historical contribution to an inclusive circular transition, via the inclusion of both social and green criteria within public procurement processes.
- Social enterprises put people first. As such, it is fundamental to support the social economy ecosystem in Ukraine, support networks that connect the Ukrainian with the EU ecosystem, while recognising WISEs and social enterprises involved in circular activities as central actors in the recovery of Ukraine after the war.

### Scene setter:

- Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, on April 14, 2022, [RREUSE](#), the European Network of Reuse and Recycling Social Enterprises, in cooperation with [ENSIE](#), the European Network of Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs), organised an online discussion among their members in the presence of representatives of the European Commission (DG EMPL, DG GROW).
- The discussion aimed to provide members the opportunity to share their challenges and be informed on the latest EU policy developments and funds available to support their solidarity efforts (e.g. CARE proposal, Temporary Protection Directive, fund flexibility under FEAD, ESF+).
- Members and their respective networks have been directly and indirectly affected by the devastating conflict in Ukraine. Nevertheless, they responded with solidarity actions including short-term actions to provide civilians fleeing Ukraine with housing, essential item donations, psychological support, as well as long-term actions providing educational and employment opportunities to integrate them into their activities and labour market.
- RREUSE and ENSIE have been monitoring how their respective networks have been coping with the current refugee crisis ever since, and hereby highlight the main challenges, needs, and policy recommendations.

### Main challenges

**The allocation of funding to support the social economy and CSO solidarity efforts towards refugees from Ukraine is heterogeneous across the Union.** Even though the EU answered the crisis with a variety of funding opportunities and the possibility to reallocate part of the funds, their effective allocation comes down to the willingness of each Member State. This is why we ask the European Commission to adequately monitor the funding repartition to ensure competent national authorities allocate the funds for their intended purpose of supporting social enterprises and CSO's activities in offering support, employment, training, and educational opportunities to displaced civilians fleeing Ukraine. This is particularly relevant for Member States neighbouring Ukraine which have been facing a large influx of refugees. Inadequate funding for social enterprises, including WISEs, means that they cannot properly respond to such crises when their own *raison d'être* consists in providing long-term solutions aimed at social inclusion.

**Civilians fleeing Ukraine should have facilitated access to work integration social enterprises and be recognised by competent authorities as a target group of WISEs,** as it has been done in France and Latvia. However, such schemes should specifically target refugees coming from vulnerable backgrounds such as low-skilled workers, women and mothers in need, and people with disabilities, among others, as they are more likely to face difficulties in entering the labour market. Thus, RREUSE and ENSIE call for Member States to take into account intersectionality and refugees' overlapping experiences and identities when setting up such mechanisms.

**Work integration social enterprises and other actors of the social economy struggle to have visibility and thus access to opportunities to upscale their innovative capacity to respond to the crisis.** Lack of visibility and awareness of social enterprises' remarkable contributions to, inter alia, work integration and promoting green job creation, hinder them from accessing upscaling opportunities that would allow them to better respond in integrating civilians fleeing Ukraine among their target groups. The EU Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP) presented different opportunities to boost the capacity of work integration social enterprises. Among key elements, RREUSE and ENSIE particularly stress the importance of involving the actors of the Ukrainian social economy within existing and upcoming European networks of social economy actors, as envisioned under the SEAP, to facilitate capacity building and access to resources for the sake of their own development and survival.

## Main needs

**Social enterprises are in need of financial opportunities to develop and upscale their activities.** WISEs and other social enterprises from the RREUSE and ENSIE networks are fully dedicated to helping the most vulnerable individuals in our society at all times, having demonstrated to embrace a resilient business model during previous crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic [1], [2]. Although tackling some of the biggest challenges of today, such as reducing inequalities, providing access to essential services to the most vulnerables, and fostering an inclusive green transition - all within a current economic context characterised by high inflation rates and cost of living crisis -, social enterprises lack adequate financial support to upscale their activities.

**Work integration social enterprises should be recognised in their role as providers of measures aimed at the integration of refugees, overall granting access to the job market, housing, and educational opportunities, upskilling and reskilling, among others. The Ukrainian war highlighted the EU's need to review its migration policy and harmonisation of reception procedures to focus on long-term and sustainable solutions to integrate refugees.** Individuals and families in neighbouring countries to Ukraine, such as Poland, have been offering immense capacity to accommodate refugees through sharing their own means, with limited support from the governments. However, this is not a long-term solution for integrating civilians fleeing Ukraine, as capacity of households is further strained by the current cost of living crisis and high inflation rates, as well as not being able to deal effectively with the challenges refugees face. Moreover, refugee facilities are often ill-equipped. Not only do WISEs offer refugees opportunities to access the labour market and learn new skills, including the local language, but they also grant them agency over their life and potentially provide them with a community, as opposed to the common scenario of finding themselves stuck in lengthy bureaucratic procedures for years and not being able to work for their own independence.

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[1]: ENSIE (2020), Impact of Covid on WISEs First & Second Publication, (Available [here](#)).

[2]: RREUSE (2022), Ingenuity and Resilience - Social Enterprises during the Covid-19 crisis (Available [here](#)).

**Social enterprises need access to supporting measures to continue providing essential items and other types of material assistance to displaced persons** (e.g. food, clothing, bedding medical equipment, and medicines) **as well as essential services** (accommodation, access to health services including psychosocial support to cope with the situation). Although the flux of refugees continues to change, with some civilians having settled within the EU, moved to another EU Member State, or gone back to war-free areas of Ukraine, given the unpredictability and heterogeneity of the situation across the Union, social enterprises should be supported in their immediate response capacity.

## Policy Recommendations :

RREUSE and ENSIE thus lay down the following recommendations for the European Commission:

- **Call on the effective implementation of the initiatives foreseen in the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP) that aim to upscale social economy actors for a greater societal impact.** Some of these practices, such as **socially responsible public procurement**, are crucial for the development of the sector and thus providing vulnerable categories of individuals such as refugees with quality employment and training opportunities for their integration. Equally, as some social enterprises carry a decades-long contribution to fostering the circular economy, for the provision of quality social and environmental services it remains crucial for **public procurement processes to further include both social and green criteria when awarding bids.**
- **Encourage Member States to recognise people fleeing Ukraine as a target group for the work of WISEs**, following the examples of Member States such as France and Latvia, **as long as such schemes are set up in a way that focuses on intersectionality such as prioritising low-skilled workers, women in need, and people with disabilities.**
- **Support new and existing local, national, and European networks aimed at supporting social enterprises, ensuring access to resources and upscaling opportunities in particular for Ukrainian social economy actors for their support and survival**, in line with the ambitions of promoting the internationalisation of the social economy outlined in the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP).
- **Recognise WISEs, social enterprises involved in circular waste management activities, and other entities of the social economy as central actors in the recovery of Ukraine after the war.** The recovery will only be successful if it puts people first. For this reason, ensure the development of the social economy in Ukraine as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and in line with the EU Social Economy Action Plan.
- **Finally, RREUSE and ENSIE welcome the appointment of the new Special Advisor for the reception of refugees from Ukraine of the European Commission, Mr. Lodewijk Asscher, and call him to ensure EU Member States provide adequate access to labour market integration opportunities** to people fleeing Ukraine such as those offered by work integration social enterprises.

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