

SICAP 2022 Case Study



Comhar na nOileán CTR – Goal 2 Project

Target Group – New Communities

*Active Citizenship Measures for Local Residents, New Communities and
New Arrivals Across the West Cork Islands.*



Introduction



The Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022 set in motion Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War II. It is estimated that over seven million people have fled the country, and a third of the population has been displaced. Like many European countries Ireland was quick to offer refuge to those fleeing the conflict. By the end of April, Ireland had issued over twenty-five thousand PPSNs to arriving refugees. Most Ukrainian arrivals in Ireland were women and children and made up 85% of the total number, while 13% were adult males and 4% were aged over sixty-six. Income supports are being paid to almost twenty-four thousand individuals with a further eight and a half thousand receiving child benefit.

Fifty-seven refugees arrived on the West Cork Island of Sherkin within the first week, with very little prior notification given. There are currently fifty-four Ukrainian refugees living in Sherkin House Hotel and this occupancy is on a rolling basis. Some refugees have left Sherkin to take up employment, and some refugees with prior health issues have left to be closer to full-time health services. This situation is ever-changing because when refugees leave the island the resulting bed vacancies are subsequently filled by the arrival of new refugees. As there has been a steady flow of new arrivals whenever an occupancy becomes available, our workload has significantly increased as we need to start all over again with the

newcomers. The island of Sherkin itself only has a full-time population of one hundred and eleven so the arrival of the refugees has completely changed the local demographics. Along with this, the infrastructure of the island is severely lacking. Currently there is no school, no shop and no full-time medical services on Sherkin. To avail of any of these services it is necessary to travel to the mainland by ferry, and then on to the nearest town of Skibbereen which lies fourteen kilometres away. There is also a significant language barrier, as only five refugees have competent English. As a result, many of the Ukrainian refugees on Sherkin have been left feeling extremely isolated. Comhar na nOileán have staff working with the Ukrainians daily, but as they are not permanently located on the island this is not sustainable in the long-term.

The main aim of Comhar na nOileán is, through SICAP, to support the provision of essential services and activities to the Ukrainian Community on Sherkin Island. This case study will examine the impact of the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees, and how Comhar na nOileán has implemented SICAP in helping them transition into their new lives.



Sherkin Island Pier

Arrival on Sherkin

Sherkin Island is located off the West Coast of Cork and is only a ten-minute journey by ferry from the small fishing port of Baltimore. On the 4th of August Ukrainian Refugees were

allocated to the Sherkin Island Hotel, on Sherkin Island, Co. Cork. Within one week fifty-seven refugees had arrived. At the time of arrival only five of those fifty-seven were competent in the English language and the remainder had no knowledge of English. Of the fifty-seven, there were twelve children requiring access to education.

Comhar na nOileán staff member Jude Gilbert plays a prominent role in welcoming the Ukrainian refugees to Sherkin and is working extremely hard in ensuring that their needs are being met. This was particularly difficult because of the language barrier, and also the fact that many of the arriving refugees required different supports. Some of the new arrivals had young children with the youngest being only six weeks old. Other arrivals had children who were in school, and it became imperative that a place could be found for them in a nearby school as there is no school on Sherkin. Some people arrived with pre-diagnosed health conditions, and it was necessary to help these individuals get in contact with the HSE as soon as possible. The accommodation provider supplied food and cooked meals for their guests for their initial two weeks. After the initial two weeks it was expected however that the refugees would become more independent financially and be able to cater for themselves. The hotel kitchen was also set up to allow a number of families prepare meals at the same time. Community engagement and integration with the wider community of Sherkin Island was another immediate goal once people had settled in.

Prior to the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees Deirdre Ní Luasaigh, chairperson of Sherkin Island Development Society (SIDS), wrote to all one hundred and eleven residents of Sherkin in order to ascertain their views on the new arrivals and overall received an incredibly positive response. Many islanders were eager to help in any way they could with some of them even downloading translation apps.

'People are offering whatever support and help they can provide. Some are offering to help teach English, while another person kindly offered to help anyone with hearing difficulties. It goes to show the generous and caring nature of the people of Sherkin,'

Deirdre Ní Luasaigh

The re-opening of Sherkin House, which had closed in 2019, has also been welcomed by many residents. Local Cllr Karen Coakley stated that people are delighted that the hotel is open again and that *"We're all thrilled to see something being done with such a beautiful building. There was a sadness around the island when it closed as it was such a prominent place and big part of life"*.

"Sherkin is such an inviting place, and the people there bring so much value and creativity. I have no doubts the Ukrainian people will feel very welcome, and they'll also play a big part in the community feeling too."

Cllr Karen Coakley

Implementing SICAP

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the lead agency in accommodating Ukrainian refugees and stated that it and its fellow stakeholders would be examining all property options in relation to housing the incoming refugees. In a statement to the Irish Examiner Cork County Council said that *"Local authorities have, in recent weeks, been tasked by Government to assist the Department of Children and the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) in examining and reviewing listings of vacant pledged properties submitted by property owners to Irish Red Cross over recent months"* and that *"The assessment process includes any pledged vacant properties situated in the inhabited islands off Cork County"*. There is an independent contract between International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) and Sherkin House, so that the refugees can stay at the island hotel, with the first refugees arriving in the first week of August.



One of the main SICAP actions for Comhar na nOileán is to provide active citizenship measures for local residents, new communities, and new arrivals across the West Cork Islands. This is a Goal Two Action and in this case is providing support to the recently arrived new community of Ukrainian refugees.

Comhar na nOileán deployed a project officer to the Island to provide essential services and to ensure that the needs of the Ukrainians were met. At present, Comhar na nOileán have no full-time staff on Sherkin but because of the extra effort of our staff we have been able to maintain a continued presence on the island. Although Baltimore is only a ten-minute ferry trip all essential services are located fourteen kilometres away in Skibbereen. These services include, health services, social welfare services, schools, shops, and post offices. Travelling to Skibbereen requires a journey by bus and as the timetables are not always reliable emergency expenditure has sometimes been required on essential services such as extra ferry services and buses. Staff members have also had to acquire accommodation and food during this period as well as ferry costs and transportation. During the initial settling in stage and the subsequent weeks, staff members have put in a considerable amount of overtime on Sherkin in order to deal with the ongoing and ever-changing situation. Below is

a brief list, but by no means an all-encompassing list, of the work that Comhar na nOileán has conducted in implementing SICAP on Sherkin Island in connection with the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees.

- All refugees are registered with SICAP, their information recorded and documented and shared with relevant agencies.
- All lists are broken down in age groups and requirements and shared with relevant agencies.
- Of the original fifty-seven, twelve of them were children, and of these there were two pre-schoolers, six primary school age and four secondary school age.
- Meetings were arranged with a translator with Skibbereen Community School and Rath National School.
- The HSE Primary Care team was engaged to come in and assess all residents.
- The Public Health Nurse was engaged to assess the patients.
- Applications were made with all the residents to the Social Welfare Intreo Office in Skibbereen. Several trips took place over five weeks.
- All Medical Card applications were completed.
- Staff member liaised with the Skibbereen Community School and with Rath National School.
- A meeting was set up and facilitated with the Rosses College.
- Buses were arranged to meet ferries and transport children to and from school.
- Shopping trips were arranged to buy uniforms and other essential items.
- A support group was set up in the community and Baltimore to provide the various items that were needed.
- Correspondence and meetings with the HSE, ETB's and other agencies are ongoing.
- English language classes are taking place.
- Visits taking place to shops and other service providers.
- Advocacy sessions taking place via phone calls and emails with relevant agencies.
- Liaising continuously with the ferry, busses, and the Hotel Manager.
- Staff members are available to assist as much as possible as concerns arise.

Comhar na nOileán also plan to employ a Ukrainian liaison person for 21 hours through October 2022 to December 2022. This person will be recruited from amongst the Ukrainian refugees located on Sherkin Island. This person will also function as a translator and be the liaison person with Comhar na Oileán and other agencies, and also work with the local community liaison person. This person will liaise with Comhar na nOileán staff members and provide a daily report of any emerging issues or needs within the community. They will also liaise with the local community development office on the island i.e., Sherkin Island Development Society in arranging community activities.

Conclusion

The accommodation of Ukrainian refugees on Sherkin Island has required Comhar na nOileán and our partners to conduct a significant amount of work in a short space of time. This work has been made even more difficult because of the lack of facilities and services on Sherkin, particularly in the context of education and full-time healthcare. However, as this case-study clearly demonstrates Comhar na nOileán have been able to provide not only a welcoming environment for the Ukrainian refugees, but to also meet the urgent needs of many of the new arrivals. These needs have included the provision of meals, clothing, healthcare, and education. The welcoming attitude displayed by many of the local residents has also significantly helped us in our continuing work in aiding the Ukrainian refugees. It is our intention to continue to liaise with local community groups and residents in order to keep them informed on the developing situation.

It is unclear how long the refugees will be staying, and more support will be required. Many of the new arrivals came to the country with very little provisions, and of the individuals who arrived on Sherkin only five had competent English. If some of these refugees are to remain for an extended period of time it will be necessary to provide for supports in areas such as language and literacy.

The increase in our SICAP budget has helped us to provide additional support to the Ukrainian refugees. However, it remains crucial that Comhar na nOileán should continue to have an open line of communication with the relevant government bodies in charge of providing additional funding due to the lack of the aforementioned facilities and services on Sherkin. Due to the uncertainty of how long Sherkin will be hosting the refugees, it will soon

become necessary to investigate further the next tranche of additional funding that may be required to continue supporting the refugees.

Overall, the arrival on Sherkin of the Ukrainian refugees has increased our workload significantly. However, we at Comhar na nOileán remain committed to the principles of SICAP, and in implementing our actions on the West Cork Islands. The war in Ukraine has led to a great disruption in many people's lives, and none more so though than the actual people fleeing the conflict. As part of our work with SICAP Comhar na nOileán is completely committed to helping new arrivals to the West Cork Islands, and in particular those who belong to new communities such as refugees.



View of Oileán Chléire from Sherkin Island