

Some Irish families ‘unable to cope’ with housing Ukrainian refugees

Some Irish families who have taken Ukrainian refugees into their homes in recent weeks have already “returned them” to facilities such as the new temporary accommodation centre in Citywest, Co Dublin, telling volunteers they’re “unable to cope”.

Citywest conference centre is currently being used as a processing centre for refugees as the “one-stop-shop” facility at Dublin Airport is beginning to come under pressure with the number of refugees continuing to arrive from Ukraine.

Speaking at the centre, volunteer lead Tricia Nolan said her “real fear” was that Irish families taking in refugees “don’t know what they’re getting into”.

“We’ve already had people brought back here and that’s really tough, because then those refugees have to be sent on to new accommodation for the second time,” she said.

MS Nolan has worked in the same facility for over two years, when it was a Covid-19 testing and vaccination centre. For almost three weeks, she has been helping Ukrainian refugees find accommodation.

“This work is a lot more emotionally draining. The kids are resilient, but it’s the older people who get me,” she said.

“The first week I was only getting two hours sleep and waking up worrying that I might have sent someone on the wrong bus or something. I’m only starting to sleep now.”

One hundred temporary beds have been set up in the conference hall, where refugees awaiting accommodation sleep for a maximum of 24 hours, one official said.

Health conditions

There is a play area for children, and the HSE has set up a triage desk to assess

refugees with health conditions who will need to be accommodated near hospitals. A HSE staff member said she had already come across several refugees with various types of cancers, kidney problems, and an ectopic pregnancy.

The majority of Ukrainians passing through come straight from Dublin Airport, where the Departments of Social Protection and Justice issue PPS numbers before sending them to Citywest to be assessed for accommodation.

Visiting the facility on Monday, Minister for Integration Roderic O’Gorman said the Government would be looking to secure Citywest for a “long period” of time.

“The cost will be significant and there are negotiations ongoing between the Government and the owners, but I think you’re getting value here.”

Other facilities such as Gormanston Camp may be used if options run out, the Minister said. Gormanston has been set up “as a contingency in case there’s overspill or a day with a particularly large surge of refugees arriving”, but it has not been used yet.

Gerard Hughes, principal officer at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, has been drafted to work in Citywest. There were “some nights when all beds were used up” and people had to “put the spare mattresses on the floor” but equally there had been quieter nights where only 15-20 beds were taken, he said.

On Monday afternoon, about 50 refugees wait in the centre for a coach to take them to their temporary homes around the country. However, most days there are between 400 and 600 refugees passing through.

Hotel accommodation is already beginning to dry up, a Department of Children spokesman said. Most contracts in hotels are three to six months long.

It’s “even harder” to find hotels for refugees who arrive with pets, as some hotels refuse to take them, but after fleeing war and travelling across the continent with their dogs, cats and other animals, their owners refuse to leave them behind.

“It’s organized chaos. It’s a big area so it’s good to have the space but equally it’s a conference centre so it’s very loud and busy. We need to start planning long term because this could go on for months and months,” Mr. Hughes said.

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