



Responding to humanitarian crisis – the role of social workers during disasters

BASW and partners continue to promote the importance of human rights, social work values, ethics and values. The [BASW Code of ethics](#) highlights the importance of promoting social justice, challenging abuse of human rights, and demonstrating anti-oppressive practice, pro-active anti-racism and promoting the rights of all who experience discrimination, structural inequality and marginalisation

The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and in other parts of the world highlight more than ever the importance of our role in

- Promoting peace
- Human rights and social justice
- Advocating for the implementation of international and domestic law to enable safe passage for displaced people and those seeking asylum and refuge.
- Providing the resources necessary for daily life routines to be established quickly.
- Facilitating mental health and well-being

As social workers, we are part of an international community. BASW is a member of the International Federation of Social Work and collectively we must stand up for *all* people, fight all forms of human rights abuses, racism, discrimination and breaches of international and domestic law.

The below tips are not exhaustive; rather, they are a brief summary of how social workers can best support those directly or indirectly impacted by the war in Ukraine and humanitarian catastrophe. This may include children and families from diverse backgrounds, but also colleagues. Further, more in-depth advice can be found amongst BASW's [Social Work in Disasters](#) resources.

Top Tips

Ensure

- Implementation of legal duties of local authorities in relation to disaster response, including application of domestic statute to support those displaced, exiled and seeking asylum and fleeing war. Including consideration of safeguarding and wellbeing statutes for children, women, disabled people and older people, Mental Health Act 1983, Care Act (both [guidance](#) and [regulations](#)), relevant emergency provisions under the Housing Act 2004
- Human rights and social justice including environmental justice considerations
- Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and associated guidance in each nation.
- Find out who is the lead Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officer (HALO) in your organisation.
- Reach out to your colleagues from Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Moldova, and other countries neighbouring Ukraine. Other colleagues may have experienced war and conflict. Make time intentionally both listen and talk.
- Find out about any displaced person/arrivals programme in your area and the name of the coordination leads at a community level and offer support.
- Find out what is happening in your locality in terms of community donations to the conflict and promote ways people can help. We recommend donations are made via the [British Red Cross DEC \(Disasters Emergency Committee\)](#)
- Use [Trauma Informed Practice](#) approaches in your work

- Be nonjudgmental and be mindful of inappropriate and negative comments about citizens from particular nations
- Be respectful of the diversity of citizens of all nations, cultural heritage, history and identity. Approach organisations led by and for people from certain nations to better understand how best to support specific communities

Translation and interpreter services – always clarify languages that people speak. Do not assume literacy levels, and be mindful that lengthy written assessments or reports can be both inaccessible and intimidating for some. Obtain translation services appropriate for people from specific regions and be aware of their specific needs and sensitivities.

Social Workers for Peace

As the sounds of war roll across Ukraine and ricochet throughout the world, various social work organisations, have expressed solidarity with the people of Ukraine who have opposed Putin's discharge of state sanctioned military ordnance with people power. Putin's aggression seeks to enforce the message that 'might is right', regardless of the cost to human life, built infrastructures and the biosphere. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the British Association Social Workers (BASW) and Lena Dominelli, as Chair of the IASSW Disaster Intervention, Climate Change and Sustainability Committee, and the BASW special interest group on disasters, Reclaiming Social Workers' Place in Disaster Interventions (SPEDI), have formed the Social Work for Peace Network. Social Work for Peace is an offshoot of the Virtual Helpline for Disasters she created in 2010 to respond to natural disasters and support victim-survivors. Social Work for Peace seeks to support: social work educators, researchers, practitioners and students, and the residents they work with in Ukraine; and refugees from Ukraine seeking sanctuary in specific countries. It does so by:

- Seeking practical help such as financial donations, food, clothing, water, tents, medical and other supplies, power generators, and psychosocial first aid.
- Linking up with other agencies offering assistance to Ukraine to avoid duplication of services and channeling donations and supplies through other well-established players, e.g., the Ukrainian Red Cross and the British Red Cross in the UK, and organisations in the Ukraine specified by the social work academics and practitioners working there.
- Working within a multi-agency framework to link up with other organisations offering practical aid, including medical practitioners, schools, housing and local communities.
- Offering training for social workers supporting Ukrainian refugees.
- Working within an inclusive framework that values equality and diversity in responding to refugees, to ensure that they are treated with respect and dignity.
- Encouraging the acceptance of refugees as people who can rebuild their lives in diverse communities and make positive contributions to these communities.
- Assisting refugees to collect their stories and share them with others through social media, artistic and other means of communication to ensure that their experiences are not lost, but articulated and recorded for posterity
- Working within local communities to explain the consequences of war and their impact on local and national communities who only wish to live in harmony with others across the globe.

Calls for other forms of support will be made in due course.

Qualified and registered social workers are encouraged to volunteer to work within Social Work for Peace, by submitting an application to lena.dominelli@stir.ac.uk. Non-social workers are also welcome to apply, but they will be required to undergo vetting by the Disclosure and Barring Service to ensure that those fleeing war will not be subjected to secondary trauma or institutional harm, unless they are only offering to encourage people to donate to other organisations.