

Opening Statement

Mr. Roderic O’Gorman, T.D., Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Joint Oireachtas Committee Tuesday 22/11/22 15:00

- **Motion on Referral to Joint Committee of proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 9 (2)) (Amount of Financial Contribution) Order 2022**
- **Discussion regarding the refugee accommodation crisis**

Government made a number of Decisions on 28th October to assist with the State’s response to the war in Ukraine. Many of these fall to my Department to implement; this includes doubling of the Accommodation Recognition Payment to acknowledge the support of the general public in providing accommodation to those fleeing Ukraine.

I will make the legislative changes required to increase the recognition payment for those offering accommodation to BOTPS from €400 to €800 with effect from 1 December 2022. The Department of Social Protection will then make the necessary operational changes to facilitate the introduction of the new payment as soon as possible thereafter.

I thank all those who have welcomed those fleeing Ukraine into their homes, providing them with a space of safety and with an appropriate level of autonomy over their own lives.

It remains the case that the majority, and indeed an increasing proportion, of those arriving from Ukraine seek accommodation from the government.

My Department is now providing accommodation for nearly 46,000 people displaced from Ukraine. In addition we are accommodating almost 17,000 applicants for International Protection. Together that’s equivalent to half the number of people that live in my constituency of Dublin West.

Projections are that by year end we will have 72,000 BOTPs in Ireland.

The Citywest Transit Hub team is reviewing admissions on a daily basis. Where it has sufficient accommodation, all are admitted, and that is the case as of now though the outlook on accommodation provision over the coming months remains challenging.

Chair,

I can confirm that some changes are to be made in our accommodation offering for BOTPs, to improve equity between those arriving and those here already and ensure that we align with the offering in other jurisdictions.

My officials have begun the necessary process of consultation with those in the hospitality industry about bed-only contracts, which we would like to introduce on a phased basis as existing contracts expire. It is hoped that this can incentivise moves to independent accommodation reducing also the reliance on the tourism sector for accommodation. We are presently engaging with the tourism sector and other stakeholders on the most appropriate way to give effect to the Government's Decision.

Some contracts with serviced accommodation providers may not be renewed with the plan transition BTOPs where we can into independent available accommodation in the same area. I acknowledge that in this environment it is important that we communicate with those impacted on their options and do all we can to minimise the disruption for families.

Proposed changes to the Governments Refusals Policy can also improve fairness given the pressures on accommodation availability. Government will shortly announce plans for a new vacant homes call for those from Ukraine and working with those from Ukraine and with communities all efforts will be made to encourage use by BOTPs of offers of accommodation with less reliance on the serviced sector.

In general however one suitable offer of accommodation will be made to all BOTPs.

In terms of capturing all suitable accommodation offers made to my Department, we are working to deliver a consolidated, comprehensive real-time database to cover all properties offered to us and identified as potentially suitable. A single contact point will be established to streamline the process and this is an all of Government priority.

In light of the launch shortly by the Local Authority sector overseen by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage of a call for unoccupied properties my Department

will work with implementing partners to close out the existing Irish Red Crosss pledge scheme;

To date, nearly 5,450 beneficiaries have been accommodated in over 2,050 properties pledged through the Irish Red Cross Pledge appeal and this is good progress.

Chair,

Our agenda today relates to Ukraine accommodation challenges but I would like to take this opportunity to update members on the significant accommodation shortages for the International Protection cohort.

Given the increased arrivals, over 15,000 to date this year and the shortage of accommodation offers available for this cohort, we have to consider all offers of accommodation for those seeking international protection, including offers of repurposed buildings that can be utilised for short term accommodation.

We are working urgently across Government and with agencies, NGOs and local authorities to bring new accommodation on board to meet State's humanitarian responsibilities.

Emergency centres have been opened in all parts of the country, with some 40 accommodation locations utilised since January across 13 counties.

The Two Gateway Accommodation Centre in East Wall, Dublin City, has come on-stream in the last few days and communication with the local community is ongoing.

The capacity of the building at East Wall is 380 persons, made of up families and single adults in segregated configurations.

Irish people have shown remarkable solidarity and welcome for those who come here seeking refuge, and the Department is keen to foster positive linkages with the local community for the new centre. This work will continue as a priority.