

communities for ukraine

Lee Shostak sets out how the TCPA could play a central role in welcoming refugees to communities across the UK

As I write, we are still learning about the crimes against humanity and genocide in Ukraine that started in February 2022. By late March the UN refugee agency was reporting that over 4,000,000 people, mainly women and children, had already left Ukraine, with well over half of this number crossing into Poland. And in response to the Secretary of State's 'Homes for Ukraine' invitation, some 200,000 of our fellow citizens in the UK have already offered to provide temporary accommodation for Ukrainians.

You might be one of these generous people. You might have donated to the charities providing aid, or even have followed David Cameron's example and driven a lorry full of supplies to Poland. By the time you receive this issue of *Town & Country Planning* (Volume 91, Number 2) some refugees will have arrived in the UK. Perhaps tens of thousands more UK families will have offered rooms.

From despair...to leadership

Many of us watch the destruction of Ukraine with a sense of powerlessness and despair. We know that others are organising the delivery of humanitarian aid, and there is an emerging network of organisations matching refugees with UK families. With all this, is there anything else that members of the TCPA, and the TCPA as an organisation, could do?

Yes. Say 200,000 households (say 600,000 refugees) take up temporary accommodation in the UK. It might be many more, or less. In due course, some will want to return to Ukraine or move elsewhere. Many others will want to remain and make their new lives in our country—provided they feel welcome, and our government allows them to do so. Building on our strengths, this is where the TCPA could play a vital role—if we want to.

A TCPA effort might include three main components. First, working with partners who focus on the needs of refugees, the TCPA could build a **national consensus** that all Ukrainian refugees would be welcome in the UK for as long as they wish to stay.



Humanitarian crisis—Ukrainians fleeing the war carry their luggage across the railway tracks in Lviv in Western Ukraine

This would mean recognising that refugees will want to move from their temporary housing with families into permanent homes for rent in their community. It would also mean the government commissioning Homes England and inviting national registered providers to invest resources in support.

Second, the TCPA could encourage local authorities across the UK to sign up to a new protocol, say the **Communities for Ukraine Charter**. This would set out how these local authorities could make permanent homes, education, and social support available. Such action might feature purchasing homes from private developers and/or planning to build new social housing, offering the new homes to existing tenants in their community, and then allocating the vacated homes to refugees.

Then, the TCPA could help a group of exemplar local authorities and registered providers to **demonstrate best practice** in delivering the Charter and then publicising these lessons.

Our past; our future

In considering whether the TCPA wants to work with partners to lead such an effort, please take our history into account. By the end of the Second World War, it was estimated that at least 40 million people had been displaced from their home countries. The refugees included former prisoners of war, those released from slave labour, and survivors from concentration camps.

As the war was coming to an end, the European refugee crisis was well publicised. However, in common with most (but not all) of 'civil society' in post-war Britain, the TCPA did not appear to have considered whether the UK could help. Perhaps understandably, Volumes 12 and 13 of *Town & Country Planning*, in 1944 and 1945, respectively, concentrated on rebuilding our bombed cities, density, the location of industry, and meeting housing needs, partly through new towns. 'Crisis' was on the cover of *Town & Country Planning* in 1944, but that crisis was the housing shortage facing the UK, not the refugee catastrophe facing Europe. Incidentally, Volume 12 included an article written by an architect from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and another by a professor from the University of Cracow; neither mentioned the Holocaust or refugees.

As members of the TCPA, and as an organisation, we can repeat our history—we can fail to rise to the challenge of Europe's worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. Or we can take our mission seriously: the TCPA works **'to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone'**. In the 21st century, 'fair for everyone' includes welcoming refugees to our communities when they have been displaced from their own. Today, the choice is ours; it really is.

● **Lee Shostak OBE** is a former Chair of the TCPA and is now Honorary Treasurer. The views expressed are entirely personal.