



## KONSORCJUM

Organizacji społecznych działających na rzecz migrantów i uchodźców

# Open letter to international donors and organizations that want to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland

Dear international donors and members of international organizations,

As a group of civil society organizations working for migrants and refugees in Poland, for many years we have been creating a broad platform for joint activities in the field of migration. We are at the center of crisis situations, close to migrants and refugees who need help.

Help has been particularly required in recent months by refugees from Ukraine. It is estimated that by September more than 6 million of them had crossed our border, and around 1.5 million registered refugees currently reside here. Providing support to them has been a large-scale, enormous challenge that we have undertaken in cooperation with you - international NGOs. For your presence and financial support, we are grateful.

However, this is not a letter of praise, but one in which we want to draw attention to the problems arising from our cooperation. We appeal for equal approach to the concept of partnership, respect for the limited time and resources of our organizations, unification of procedures, transparency and frankness. We have prepared 9 points that we would like you to reflect upon and consider actions leading to change.

### 1. No implementing partners - just partners

Language is important, how we talk about each other, how we define and name ourselves shows how we want to build partnerships. The wording: "implementing partners" is somewhat paternalistic. We don't want to be in a place where we just implement your vision. We save lives. We build our own country. We create our own response to the crisis we are facing in our territory. Respect that we have our own long-term agenda.

You bring extraordinary, much-needed knowledge and we are more than willing to learn from you. At the same time be open to learn from us. Only in a true partnership, using the local resources and the knowledge of local NGOs, combining it with international experience and capacity, we all are able to bring about quality change.

Our appeal is not just to change the term, but to change the approach. Please, stop implementing. Start (and continue) listening. Co-design, co-create your strategies and approaches with local experts. You bring a wealth of relevant experience and perspectives to the field. You are important and welcome. Just please remember that you are only here for a moment. Respect our knowledge, our perspective and our needs - we have been working in this field for years and we are here to stay.

We recognize the fact you are also obliged by your donors and procedures to maintain specific high standards. Share with us not only the requirements, but also profits from having long-term, good relationships with the financing institutions.

## **2. Respect for the time of local partners**

Note that there were about 55 locally based organizations, who had worked with migrants when the invasion in February 2022 started. Many of them were small and local. In most major cities you go to, you are likely to meet 2-5 organizations, in smaller - often none.

With all due respect to all the new initiatives and efforts - that are very important and welcome - the range of NGOs with previous migration-related experience is small. The INGO community outnumbers us by far.

No matter how involved we are, we can't keep every one of you informed all the time, we are not able to be available ad-hoc for everyone. We need time to do the primary work, that is assisting persons in need. Our cooperation would be greatly improved if members of your teams would pass on the information and knowledge you gain from us within your teams. Please reconsider frequent rotation of staff. We need your teams to be more permanent. We need you to be predictable.

Thus, respect our resources and time. We are open for cooperation and support from your side. Feel welcome to come and work with us hand-in-hand, so we learn from each other. Your additional human resources will be a great contribution.

## **3. Unified due diligence procedure**

Due diligence procedures we go through for multiple international organizations are a major burden for our teams. We understand that each INGO has its own specifics and focus. From our perspective - we go through these processes up to 10 times... 3-4 hours each, at least. That adds up to a whole week of work - in a situation of crisis this is a lot of time. Would it be possible to agree on a common, unified procedure? Could there be only ONE process that the local organizations must go through? If there was one standard that is respected by all - it would save all of us a lot of time.

Also, keep in mind many of the local organizations are small. Thinking about your impact, consider their potential and needs - not to scale them up for six or twelve months. To help them be who they are - working at their own capacity and speed. Current procedures often exclude small organizations or non-English speakers. Use local organizations supporting the NGO network - you will find local capacity to redistribute funding or channel funds to smaller entities.

While considering partnerships, be ready to invest in the organization in a sustainable way. For us accepting sizable funding for a few months only means that we are constantly insecure about the future of our team and activities. By investing in long term projects, our backend operations and growth, you ease our minds from thinking about exit strategies even before starting the project. We can then do better and think bolder about the solutions we implement.

#### **4. Shared and locally applicable internal policies**

Working with you has been an enabler for many of us to standardize our work. It is very helpful that we can benefit from your experience but it is also very time consuming. A good solution would be to create a standard list of policies that you require from partner organizations. A list with examples of such policies would be welcome. Many of our organizations were small before the full scale invasion in Ukraine began. There was no need for us to have a detailed financial policy or a personnel policy when we had three or five people in the team. Scaling up is the reason to have these policies done, it is important - if you were able to provide more guidance on this, it would be helpful.

It happens that some of your policies are not adequate for the Polish context, or smaller organizations. There are fields well regulated (like data protection or labor law), where extra internal policies are not necessary. Consider some flexibility in your policy standardization - based on the size of organization.

Support us in proper implementation of these policies. We want to do things well, so none of us are satisfied with just having a paper in the folder. Implementing the policies inside the organization requires time and resources. You can consider this in preparing the timeframe of the projects and administrative costs.

Some issues are out of question and not negotiable - safeguarding policy for example. We do not question those.

#### **5. Contributions at the local level**

As major players on the ground, you have been empowered for many years to raise significant amounts of money from various financial sources to help refugees. Our partners in Ukraine, in their recent letter to international donors, pointed out the huge disproportion in the placement of resources in response to the conflict in Ukraine. Citing "in May, the UN Financial Tracking Service (FTS) showed that UN agencies received about two-thirds of humanitarian aid funds for Ukraine. International NGOs received 6% of the funding, while domestic Ukrainian NGOs received only 0.003% of the total amount."

The facts speak for themselves: we don't have access to even a fraction of the funds that are at your disposal, and yet we do much of the work at the local level. Despite the fact that we are the ones who know the local situation, who are with the refugees and try our best to help and serve them, international organizations are prioritized in accessing these international funds.

UN agencies have very broad and complicated procedures for applying for funding. They can be passed only by big/medium organizations, which later may sub-grant the resources

further. This bottleneck is not optimal in terms of transparency, effectiveness, longitude of the processes and sharing the risks.

## **6. Recognize capacity**

We will continue to do our work here in the future when you move to respond to further crises that arise. We know you will leave, sooner or later. That is why it is so important to strengthen the local organizations and their ability to help refugees - yet, do not overdo. We are showered with capacity building proposals - give more space to adapt your offers to our needs. We would like your strategies for financing local organizations to be re-planned and rethought to expand the level of funding, which will be beneficial in the long term.

## **7. Transparency**

Be transparent about how much money raised by your organizations has been distributed to support local organizations and for what. Not only does this fulfill the obligations that some of you have already shouldered (e.g., through the Grand Bargain procedure), but it is also an important example for other organizations and can be presented as the gold standard for dealing with humanitarian crises around the world.

Be open about who you work with and what are your plans - so we can use your help sensibly. Tell us whether you discuss with us the funding options that are at your disposal - or those you are only starting to apply for. This translates to waiting time for the agreements and availability of funding - we need to know this in advance.

## **8. Quality cooperation**

It is clear that crisis situations are demanding. We are also struggling to maintain the quality of services on the scale previously unknown. It is clear that INGOs also need to hire and train staff, this takes time. Yet, the quality and reliability of your work is crucial to us, if you fail - you weaken us and our potential to be efficient.

Do make sure your procedures, processes and funding are provided with no delay. It already happens that we wait for responses/documents/agreements for months. In the situation of the crisis this is harmful. Time changes our working environment. Promise less - but deliver in a timely manner.

Do not ask us to take risks and start preparation or implementation of the project before we sign the agreements. We often have no unrestricted funding to cover the cost of changing decisions at the level of your HQ. Moreover, undelivered promises hamper not only our finances, but also good name.

We recognize the need to implement quickly, but we cannot work with our full potential for fear of not being able to pay salaries.

## **9. Frankness**

We know you will go. Share with us your exit strategies. Don't make promises for a year and draft partner agreements for three months - let's talk on your agenda, too.

We know each crisis is different, and has its own dynamics. Many things are hard to predict. With all this in mind we appeal for frank and open communication on what you plan to do. We already have experiences of organizations changing their minds after long joint planning processes - this is a great waste of effort for us.

These are some of the points we wish to make, and we would appreciate you spreading our message to others INGO. A similar letter was issued by Ukrainian organizations, [if not now, when? \(philanthropy.com.ua\)](https://philanthropy.com.ua). We share the view of our partners from Ukraine and see that working with international donors is a broader issue in responding to the conflict in Ukraine.

We know that in a broad, good quality and respect-based partnership we can do a lot but we need our relations to be revised, rethought and adapted to our needs and experiences too. It makes perfect sense to work in a way complementary to each other. We want our work to be as effective as possible, wisely planned and delivered. Taking into account our comments, together we will make it faster and better to help refugees from Ukraine and the Polish community as a whole.

We also believe that lessons learned here and now can help us in future - and responding to other crises the international community of helpers can be more effective and sustainable.

We are open to a broader discussion of the issues raised to come up with solutions that will make our cooperation more effective.

**This letter was drafted by the Migration Consortium, a group of experienced migration-focused non-governmental organizations in Poland, formed by:**

Amnesty International

Association of Legal Intervention

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Homo Faber Association

Migrant Info Point

Nomada Association

Our Choice Foundation

Polish Hospitality Foundation

Polish Migration Forum Foundation

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Mapuj Pomoc (CultureLab Foundation)

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Kuchnia Konfliktu

OVUM Association (Stowarzyszenie OVUM)

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East European Democratic Centre (EEDC)

Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (Polish Women's Strike)

Fundacja Uniwersytet Dzieci

Alliance4Europe

Komitet Obrony Demokracji (Committee for the Defence of Democracy)

Koalicja SOS dla Edukacji Wspólna Szkoła

Institute of Public Affairs

Fundacja Wolni Obywatele RP

Fundacja Kaszubskie Słoneczniki

National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP)

Fundacja Stocznia

Matki na granicę

SOK Foundation (Fundacja Samodzielność od Kuchni)

Open Republic - Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia (Otwarta Rzeczpospolita - Stowarzyszenie przeciw Antysemityzmowi i Ksenofobii)

Fundacja na rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny FEDERA

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Fundacja Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego

Fundacja Wspierania Kultury i Języka Polskiego im. Mikołaja Reja

Fundacja Res Publica im. H. Krzeczковского

“To ma sens” Stowarzyszenie Asystentów Międzykulturowych

Fundacja Civis Polonus

Polskie Stowarzyszenie im. Janusza Korczaka/Polish Janusz Korczak Association

Fundacja ari ari

Kultura Liberalna

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Kobiety Filmu

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Fundacja w Stronę Dialogu (Foundation Towards Dialogue)

Fundacja Instytut na rzecz Państwa Prawa

Fundacja Zustricz

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