

UKRAINIANS AND NEW COMMUNITIES FUND ANNUAL REPORT 2025



**Waterford
Volunteer Centre**
Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Port Láirge

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the activities delivered in 2025 by Waterford Volunteer Centre under the Ukrainians and New Communities Fund by DRCDG.

This grant supported additional work undertaken in response to the arrival of displaced Ukrainians and New Communities, including International Protection Applicants (IPAs), beyond the Centre's standard service provision.

In 2025, Waterford Volunteer Centre continued its work with displaced Ukrainians, refugees, and members of New Communities, including International Protection Applicants (IPAs), across Waterford City and County.

The Fund enabled WVC to deliver targeted, equity-focused supports that responded directly to the practical challenges faced by people newly arrived in Ireland. These included language barriers, unfamiliarity with Irish systems and services, frequent relocation of accommodation, and experiences of social isolation and uncertainty.

Volunteering remained central to our approach. We recognise volunteering not only as a contribution to community life, but as a structured pathway to integration. It provides meaningful opportunities for individuals to build confidence, develop skills, practise language, establish local networks, and foster a genuine sense of belonging. At the same time, it strengthens host communities by encouraging intercultural understanding and shared participation.

We firmly believe that integration is a two-way process. For this reason, in addition to outreach and one-to-one support, we prioritised open and inclusive community initiatives that created space for people from diverse backgrounds to meet, collaborate, and learn from one another.

2025 IN NUMBERS

- 1 Migrant outreach worker – 28 hours/ week
- Volunteers from 53 Nationalities
- 210 volunteer registrations from members of new communities
- 301 volunteer applications from the target group
- 118 directly supported new volunteers
- 1 travelling exhibition
- 2 new volunteer integration projects
- 37 community events
- 128 participants engaged in volunteer-led cultural workshops
- 53 different nationalities volunteered across Co. Waterford
- Weekly 2 Drop-in event to enhance accessibility
- 85 Volunteer opportunities with basic/intermediate English



OUTREACH AND SUPPORT

The Fund enabled Waterford Volunteer Centre to continue financing the Migrant Outreach Worker position at 28 hours per week in 2025. The continuity of this position is of significant importance. The established network and sustained presence of the role have strengthened referral pathways, improved coordination of supports, and increased confidence among individuals seeking to engage in volunteering.

As in 2024, the role was carried out by Anna Kachanivska. The specialised skills, language knowledge, and cultural understanding brought to the role by Anna have been essential in ensuring accessible and responsive support.

In 2025, the Migrant Outreach Worker role at Waterford Volunteer Centre focused on supporting migrants, refugees, and people seeking international protection to access volunteering opportunities, build social connections, and feel included in the wider community. The role continued to respond to the increasing diversity of new communities in Waterford City and County and to the complex challenges faced by people navigating settlement, relocation, and integration.

The core purpose of the Migrant Outreach Worker role is to act as a bridge between individuals who may face barriers to participation and the volunteering structures available locally. This includes people affected by language barriers, lack of information, limited confidence, frequent relocation, or social isolation. Volunteering is used not only as a practical activity, but as a tool for connection, confidence building, and integration, allowing people to contribute their skills and experiences while developing a sense of belonging.

Challenges

Throughout 2025, migrant outreach work took place in a context of ongoing relocation of refugee accommodation, fluctuating attendance at events, and uncertainty for many individuals navigating international protection or temporary protection systems. These challenges affected people's ability to commit to regular activities and made consistent engagement more difficult, particularly in rural areas.

In response, the Migrant Outreach Worker adopted a flexible and adaptive approach. This included bringing information directly to people through outreach sessions, creating informal and low-pressure community spaces, repeating key information in different formats, and focusing on long-term relationship building rather than one-off engagement. Collaboration with partner organisations and volunteer centres also became increasingly important to ensure continuity of support.

Personalised Support and Volunteer Pathways

The Outreach Worker provided structured, person-centred support through:

- Appointment-based volunteer meetings
- Drop-in sessions
- Follow-up meetings to sustain engagement
- Personalised role matching
- Assistance with volunteer registration
- Provision of reference letters
- Ongoing encouragement and mentoring

Special focus was given to:

- Individuals with basic English
- Recently relocated individuals
- New Arrivals
- IPAS Centres
- Those unfamiliar with Irish volunteering structures
- Individuals experiencing isolation

Ukrainian Knowledge Translation and Information Access

To ensure equitable access to services, the Outreach Worker:

- Created information materials in Ukrainian
- Provided informal knowledge translation
- Explained volunteering structures and expectations
- Contributed to information campaigns regarding relocation
- Supported understanding of local service systems

This work ensured clarity and reduced misinformation during periods of change.



Outreach, Information Sessions and Community Presence

Outreach remained central to delivery, particularly due to relocation and rural access challenges.

Outreach Activities Delivered:

- 10 February – Volunteering presentations at VTOS and Friendship Café (WCCE) (approx. 40 students reached)
- 25 February – Pop-up outreach session, Dungarvan Library
- 28 February – Information session, Atlantic House, Tramore
- 4 March – SETU Volunteer Fair, Waterford
- 10 March – Outreach at Birchwood House
- 7 April – Connecting Communities Roadshow (Lisduggan Shopping Centre, Tramore GAA Club, Kilmacthomas)
- 19 May – National Volunteer Week information session, LAIT building (10 new registrations)
- 14 August – Information session, Waterford Central Library (LAIT organised)
- 28 August – Information session, WCQ Place (following relocation of Ukrainian refugees)
- 6 September – Information stand, Slice of Culture intercultural event, Wise Park (4 volunteers supporting)
- 15 October – Men's Wellness Day outreach
- 27 November – LAIT volunteering information session

Networking with Service Providers

The Outreach Worker engaged in structured networking to ensure coordinated responses:

- 6 February – National online networking meeting
- 7 March – International Women's Day networking
- 27 March – National Volunteer Network Meeting, Cork
- 29 September – Team Hope meeting
- 9 October – Migrant support networking meeting, Kildare
- 1 December – Buion Waterford networking event

Professional development included:

- 19 March – Information session (LAIT&Irish Refugee Council)
- Time-management training (NVCN)
- 4 September – i-Vol and Salesforce training
- 2 October – Essentials of Volunteer Management training



Outreach and communication remained a key focus throughout 2025, ensuring that clear, accessible information about volunteering and local supports reached communities across the county. Particular emphasis was placed on engaging people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including those living in accommodation centres or experiencing relocation.

We continued to meet people where they are — through community events, pop-up information stands, and targeted sessions — helping to build trust and awareness of volunteering opportunities. In partnership with Buion Port Láirge, we visited accommodation centres, while collaboration with LAIT supported information sessions for newly arrived individuals. We also worked closely with the New Communities Network, supporting their events with volunteers, promotion, and information stands, creating opportunities for cultural exchange and strengthening community connections



The Connecting Communities Roadshows were an important part of our outreach, bringing together local services and communities, and providing guidance on community development, funding, and participation. These events also helped raise awareness of volunteering and encouraged greater involvement.

Accessibility remained central to this work. We produced flyers in Ukrainian and easy English, particularly to support people during relocation, and used translation tools where needed. The Migrant Outreach Worker played an important role in engaging directly with individuals, including providing information in Ukrainian.

Alongside in-person outreach, social media was used to reach new audiences, with regular posts highlighting volunteer opportunities. Visual elements and simple language were used to indicate when only basic English was required. Campaigns for National Volunteer Day and International Volunteer Day also helped to promote volunteering more widely.

Supporting Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)

The Outreach Worker contributed to inclusive volunteer practice by:

- Supporting VIOs to host volunteers from intercultural backgrounds
- Advising on inclusive placement approaches
- Advertising volunteer roles to targeted audiences
- Circulating targeted newsletters
- Supporting volunteers with basic English to participate meaningfully

Fostering Participation, Equity and Development

The role ensured equitable participation in Centre initiatives, including:

- Welcome Ambassadors
- National Volunteer Week
- International Volunteer Day
- Volunteer HUB pilot

The Outreach Worker supported volunteers to fully participate, build confidence, develop skills, and move into leadership or facilitation roles where appropriate.

Language learning and integration were fostered through:

- Cultural workshops
- Crochet group sessions
- Informal conversation opportunities



PROJECTS

Waterford Weaves Hope

In early 2025, Waterford Volunteer Centre marked the conclusion of its involvement in the One Million Stars Ireland initiative through the launch of the Waterford Weaves Hope exhibition. This final phase highlighted both the creative achievements of the project and its significant contribution to social inclusion, particularly among Ukrainian volunteers and refugees in Waterford.

The exhibition was launched at Waterford Central Library in January 2025 and subsequently toured to Dungarvan Library and Ardkeen Library, ensuring accessibility across the county. It served as a public platform to raise awareness of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence while celebrating collective community action.

A key outcome of the initiative was the strong engagement of diverse communities. Ukrainian participants played a central role, with the Waterford Ukrainian Star Weavers contributing over 10,000 stars, both through workshops and independent work. Their involvement demonstrated the value of volunteering as a pathway to integration, connection, and participation in community life.



The exhibition featured contributions from a wide range of community groups and schools, including St Bridget's Family Resource Centre's Women's Health & Wellbeing Group in collaboration with Waterford Men's Shed, the New Communities Network Women's Shed and Friendship Café Sewing Group, and students from Presentation Secondary School and St Angela's Secondary School. Commissioned artworks by local artists Suzanne McCreedy, Magdalena Karol, and Kristiana Stegmane further enriched the exhibition.

Preparation and delivery were supported by volunteers, with 17 applications received and 12 volunteers actively involved. Volunteers contributed to installation, coordination, and visitor engagement. Four preparation meetings were held in January at the Friendship Café, and training for Exhibition Hosts and Event Support volunteers was delivered on 16 January. A workshop for Ardkeen Library staff further supported public engagement with the exhibition.

This initiative demonstrated the capacity of volunteer-led cultural projects to promote inclusion and strengthen community cohesion.



**"EVEN SMALL ACTS CAN MAKE
A DIFFERENCE. TOGETHER, WE
ARE STRONGER."
LYUBOV**



For a group of eight Ukrainian women living in Waterford — Lyubov, Varditer, Mariia, Marharita, Tetyana, Olena, Hanna, and Yuliia — volunteering became an important source of connection and support after arriving in Ireland due to the war in Ukraine. Although they came from different regions and did not know each other previously, they formed strong friendships through their involvement in the One Million Stars Ireland project.

The initiative provided a shared purpose, with the group contributing significantly to Waterford's target of 32,000 woven stars, each symbolising hope and solidarity. Initially unfamiliar with the process, they quickly embraced it as a meaningful activity. As Lyubov noted, "At first, we didn't really understand how to do it, but Anna encouraged us, and soon it became a reason to gather, to talk, and to focus on something positive." Varditer added, "We had missed being around people. This project gave us two hours each day to put aside our worries, to breathe, and to create something together."

Beyond the creative aspect, volunteering provided a safe and welcoming space to build confidence, practise English, and develop relationships. Marharita reflected, "From choosing the colours to seeing the finished stars, every moment was meaningful," while Tetyana highlighted the importance of connection: "Even small conversations while weaving became important — sharing a laugh, checking in, supporting each other. It made us feel like we belonged."

Their engagement extended beyond the group, as they shared their skills with friends and family, further strengthening community ties. Visiting the national exhibition at EPIC in Dublin was a significant milestone. As Yuliia described, "Seeing our stars displayed was unforgettable. Each one represented hope, protest, or the pain of someone affected by violence."

Through this shared experience, the women developed a strong support network and a sense of belonging. As Olena summarised, "We came to Ireland strangers to each other. Now we are a team, a support network, and friends."

Cultural Art Workshops

Cultural art workshops formed a central strand of migrant outreach work in 2025, providing inclusive and welcoming spaces where migrants, refugees, volunteers, and local residents could connect through creativity. These workshops enabled participants to share cultural knowledge, build relationships, and engage meaningfully without the need for language proficiency or formal structures.

The programme began in January with two St Brigid's Cross weaving workshops, introducing a traditional Irish craft to participants from diverse backgrounds, including families. A St Patrick's Day workshop in March further encouraged engagement with Irish culture through creative expression. Alongside these, workshops such as Ukrainian crochet and Petrykivka painting provided opportunities for participants to share their own cultural traditions, highlighting the importance of mutual exchange rather than one-way learning.



Throughout the year, the programme reflected a wide range of cultural perspectives. During Refugee Week, a South African fabric workshop offered participants the chance to learn directly from a community member, reinforcing the value of lived experience and peer-led learning. Summer workshops explored Vietnamese cultural identity through traditional dress and Lebanese heritage through clay modelling, while autumn activities included a collaborative watercolour session with a local seniors' group and a seasonal Halloween workshop.

In November, a Brazilian cultural workshop focusing on the symbolic "Cocar" achieved full attendance, demonstrating strong community interest in intercultural learning. The programme concluded with a Christmas card-making workshop in December, where participants created 50 cards for local nursing home residents, linking creativity with community outreach.

In total, **12 workshops** were delivered, engaging **128 participants**. All sessions were volunteer-led, offering flexible and meaningful opportunities for volunteers to share skills, cultural knowledge, and personal experiences. This flexible model supported volunteer involvement while ensuring authenticity in delivery.

The workshops played a significant role in fostering integration through the arts. They helped break down social and language barriers, encouraged cultural exchange, and created opportunities for people from different backgrounds to connect, contribute, and feel part of the local community.



Crochet Group – Long-Term Community Initiative

In 2025, a weekly crochet group with a charitable focus was successfully launched as part of a long-term community-building initiative. The programme was designed to be welcoming and accessible to beginners, with a volunteer facilitator providing guidance and helping to create a supportive, inclusive environment for all participants.

Initial interest in the group was strong, with 24 expressions of interest received and 15 individuals attending the first session. Over the course of the year, the group developed into a stable and consistent community, with regular attendance ranging from 10 to 14 participants. A total of 17 sessions were delivered in 2025.

The group not only teaches and learns crochet skills, but participants also choose their own goals and decide who they want to support with the items they create. This approach encourages ownership, creativity, and connection to the wider community. Beyond learning a practical skill, the crochet group provides a welcoming space for integration, conversation, and mutual support. The core group is made up of both Ukrainian and Irish participants, while additional members and visitors from new communities have joined, enriching the social and cultural diversity of the group. Participants also have the opportunity to practice English in a relaxed, supportive setting.

Working collaboratively on a shared charitable project, participants produced approximately 200 crocheted squares, nearly completing a blanket intended for donation to Waterford Hospice.

The continued success of the crochet group demonstrates the value of regular, low-pressure activities in building trust, fostering integration, strengthening relationships, and supporting community cohesion.



Christmas Cards for Nursing Homes

During the winter period, the annual Christmas Cards for Nursing Homes initiative was relaunched and coordinated by Waterford Volunteer Centre. The project offered a simple but meaningful way for people to get involved, bringing together creativity, kindness, and community connection while helping to reduce social isolation among older residents.

In 2025, a total of 340 cards were created through volunteer-led workshops and community participation, and delivered to four local nursing homes, reaching 340 residents. The response was very positive, with the initiative providing an easy and impactful way to give back over the festive season.

A key focus this year was ensuring the activity was open and accessible to all. The workshops were designed as a low-barrier volunteering opportunity, with flexible participation and little to no English required. This supported greater involvement from people who may face challenges accessing more formal volunteering role.

Workshops at the Volunteer Centre were led by volunteers, including a Polish facilitator, helping to create a welcoming and inclusive space. A pop-up workshop at the launch of the new centre also encouraged people from different backgrounds to meet, chat, and take part together, supporting connection and understanding across communities.

The involvement of WGOA this year was also very welcome, marking a positive step in strengthening links between our organisations and opening the door for further collaboration.



Refugee Week Environmental Volunteering Event

As part of Refugee Week, a collaborative environmental volunteering event was organised in partnership with Tramore Eco Group. The activity focused on biodiversity and environmental care, with volunteers working together to clean and prepare an area to support local bee populations.

The event was attended by over 20 volunteers from diverse backgrounds and provided an opportunity to engage in volunteering with a clear social and environmental purpose. It also offered a relaxed and inclusive setting for people to connect, work side by side, and contribute positively to the local community.



Volunteer HUB Initiative

Following the move to a new premises in 2025, Waterford Volunteer Centre piloted the Volunteer HUB as a way to support volunteers beyond initial recruitment. The HUB was created as a welcoming and inclusive space for people from all backgrounds, with a particular focus on engaging volunteers from migrant and refugee communities and those underrepresented in volunteering.

The aim of the HUB is to make it easier for volunteers to access information, stay connected, and feel a sense of belonging throughout the year. It encourages peer support, sharing of ideas, and volunteer-led activities, offering an informal space where people can learn from one another and build confidence in their roles.

The first HUB meeting took place on 10 July, with around 20 attendees, and focused on introductions and shaping the direction of the initiative based on volunteer input. On 14 August, a Volunteer Stories Sharing session created a reflective and engaging space for participants. A consultation event on the National Volunteering Strategy was held on 18 September, with a strong focus on gathering the views of volunteers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

In the months that followed, the HUB grew to include a range of themed workshops and social activities, such as Poetry through Volunteering (23 October), a session on burnout and self-care (30 October), a board games evening (13 November), and a workshop on empathy and listening skills (20 November). These events helped build connections and support wellbeing among participants.

By the end of 2025, 69 people had signed up to receive HUB updates, showing strong and ongoing interest. The Migrant Outreach Worker played a key role in supporting the pilot, helping to ensure the HUB remained accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of volunteers from diverse backgrounds. Overall, the initiative has laid the foundations for a growing, peer-supported volunteer community.



CONCLUSION

The Ukrainians and New Communities Fund enabled Waterford Volunteer Centre to deliver flexible, inclusive, and impactful supports in 2025.

Through outreach, personalised support, and community initiatives, volunteering was strengthened as a pathway to integration, participation, and belonging.

The Migrant Outreach Worker role remained central to this work, ensuring accessibility and continuity for individuals facing barriers.

Despite ongoing challenges, the work delivered demonstrates the value of community-based approaches that prioritise inclusion, adaptability, and relationship building.

These efforts have supported both individuals and the wider community, strengthening connection, understanding, and social cohesion.

Waterford Volunteer Centre will continue to build on this work, expanding inclusive opportunities and supporting participation for all members of the community.