



A note from the Knowledge Centre

HR considerations for employers in managing the distress, anxiety and uncertainty some employees may be facing connected with the current conflict in Ukraine.

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The current conflict in Ukraine and the spiralling humanitarian crisis has captured attention worldwide.

On Friday 25 February, the Department of Justice confirmed that in order to allow Ukrainian people who want to seek safety here do so as quickly and easily as possible - visa requirements were being waived for all Ukrainians who travel to Ireland. In a related move the department has now added Ukraine to its list of [non-visa required nationalities](#). Before the new measures a Ukrainian national would have needed a visa for any stay in Ireland longer than 90 days.

It is understood that Irish Government, in common with other EU countries, is examining ways to grant Ukrainians extra-ordinary protection, a never used status to allow refugees to live and work in the bloc.

The Department of Justice has advised that non-Ukrainian nationals resident in Ukraine who are visa required still require an entry visa if wishing to travel to Ireland. Applications will be accepted through the Embassy network in countries neighbouring Ukraine in the normal way.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has travel advice at www.dfa.ie/travel for neighbouring countries that people may be planning to travel to, or through.

Inevitably, there will be employees in Ireland who will be impacted because they are Ukrainian, or because they have family, friends or colleagues in the country. Many others with family and friends in the neighbouring regions and with close ties to Ukraine are also directly impacted. In supporting employees, employers could:

- Consider, where possible, offering flexibility around working hours /project deadlines to enable staff to maintain regular contact with family/friends in Ukraine.
- Consider requests for special paid leave.
- Temporarily suspend any prohibition on use of personal devices in the workplace where employees in this group are concerned that they may miss communications from or about loved ones caught up in the conflict.
- Be prepared to provide compassionate support if staff are directly affected by [bereavement](#) or family displacement as a result of the conflict.
- Remind employees of any Employee Assistance Programme in place.

Employers should also be aware that even people who have no particular connection with Ukraine, may be finding the media coverage of the conflict distressing and difficult to cope with, coming as it does after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mental health challenges this created for some workers.

During times of crisis, it is important to reach out to staff and let them know support is there, should they need it. Options for supporting employees who may be experiencing anxiety/heightened levels of anxiety connected with the conflict /fears of a global conflict include:

- Commit to taking a compassionate approach to employees during this time.
- Create a psychologically safe environment for workers to openly discuss any feelings of anxiety or fear.
- Educate line managers to recognise signs of distress in colleagues (see [Ibec's Employers' Guide to Mental Health in the Workplace](#)).
- Provide support for managers and remind them to check in with their teams.
- Remind workers about the resources available to them such as, where applicable, the company's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) / Occupational Health Service and/ or professional help from [organisations](#) offering relevant [assistance](#).
- Remind employees about the company's dignity at work / anti-discrimination policies. Make it clear that discriminatory behaviour or dehumanising language about other nationalities will not be tolerated and may result in the disciplinary policy being invoked.
- Regularly review the situation and make adjustments to the company's support measures as necessary.
- Increase communication to ensure workers are aware of the resources available to them.

As the crisis continues, this may provoke strong opinion and debate amongst workers and colleagues. People will have opinions shaped by their backgrounds and nationality. Employers can play an important role in addressing any conflict that may arise by reiterating and highlighting the organisational values and/or of codes of conduct and professional courtesy that are embedded in equal opportunities and Diversity and Inclusion policies.

For further specific employment advice, members should contact their ER Executive or speak to a member of the Knowledge Centre on knowledgecentre@ibec.ie or call 01 6051542