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INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council
Subject: Public libraries and Ukrainian refugees
- Information Note from the German delegation

Delegations will find attached an information note from the German delegation on the above subject, which has been put on the agenda under 'Any other business' for the next Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting of 15-16 May 2023.

Public libraries and Ukrainian refugees

Information Note from the German delegation

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which is contrary to international law, must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. There is great solidarity among the European Member States, including in the area of cultural policy. The Council conclusions on ‘At-risk and displaced artists’ identify the measures that can be taken. In light of the EU Work Plan for Culture, Germany would like to draw attention to another dimension.

Around 2.9 million refugees live in Germany. More than one million are Ukrainian refugees, mainly women and children, who were registered in Germany at the end of 2022. For many of these refugees, public libraries in Germany also serve as cultural points of contact and places to spend time.

As ‘third places’, libraries are open to all citizens in their catchment area and are therefore of particular importance for refugees. Libraries provide a peaceful and safe environment for people in need of protection, which is currently of particular importance for the many displaced persons from Ukraine and their need for physical and mental refuge. Libraries are low-threshold meeting places where refugees can refuel intellectually and culturally. As social places, they enable refugees to participate through their broad-based services for all segments of the population.

The formats on offer, which cater for refugee needs (e.g. language learning opportunities, lending of books and media, readings, discussion evenings, music events with artists and cultural workers from their home countries), have proven and continue to be very popular.

The Ukrainian community uses libraries, for example, as places for meetings and exchanges, to settle into their new environments outside the structures of refugee accommodation. Feedback from the libraries in Berlin alone shows that there is still demand for the services that enable encounters and neighbourly exchange, and efforts are being made to step up the transfer into regular programme work of the formats that were set up last year – often at very short notice and with a great deal of voluntary commitment. This is an area requiring an ongoing effort for all refugees.

Last year, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media made an exemplary contribution to humanitarian aid by funding a scholarship programme which supported refugee Ukrainian cultural and media professionals from the library sector to implement their own charitable projects in public libraries in Germany.

Based on this contribution, Germany would like to draw attention to the important role of public libraries as social places. We can learn from each other's national measures, taken politically or operationally by national bodies. Germany proposes an intensive European exchange for this purpose. An important step in this regard are the measures already envisaged in the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, which are all the more important not only in light of the Russian war against Ukraine, but also with regard to other conflict regions.