



## The war in Ukraine and peri-urban Europe – A statement by PURPLE

June 2022

Two key impacts of the war in Ukraine, both being felt at considerable distances beyond the warzone itself, have featured particularly prominently in policy debate over the first half of 2022 – food security and affordability on the one hand, energy security and affordability on the other.

Both contexts have clear and significant peri-urban dimensions, and indeed both are already part of the thematic topic areas of the 2020-22 PURPLE Work Programme (*Peri-urban food and agriculture* in the first instance, *Peri-urban climate action* in the second). In both cases, peri-urban economic activities, either in multiple parts of end-to-end food systems, or across all elements of the energy sector, have the potential to counterbalance current negativities. At the same time, such activities can directly contribute to local sustainable economies and labour markets at all points of the value chain, at the same time stimulating and sustaining the jobs needed to make that activity happen.

There is a third aspect as well which has been raised as part of recent PURPLE Working Group deliberations - the more general effect that ongoing events in Ukraine have come to have on the provision of public services of all sorts by national, regional and local authorities. Bodies which are at the same time (and whilst still recovering from the impacts of the pandemic), working - to varying degrees - to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs of displaced people fleeing Russian aggression and invasion across the warzone. Evidence suggests that this impact is being felt most keenly, in Poland at least, in peri-urban areas.

At its 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in June 2022, PURPLE has endorsed the present short statement regarding how the Ukraine situation has impacted upon peri-urbans in particular ways and how those impacts might be harnessed as a catalyst for positive change with specific regard to peri-urban areas and actors, so as to bring about broader benefit for all.

In common with all statements such as this one, made whilst a situation is ongoing and evolving, it risks being overtaken by changing events. It is intended to be complementary to other statements, positions, and actions taken by individual PURPLE member regions relating to the broader geo-political and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict, deliberately limiting itself to the peri-urban policy arena.



### **Food security and affordability**

The Ukraine conflict has raised serious questions and concerns with regard to the stability and certainty of food supply. Disruption to supply, rising prices, and the destabilising of existing food systems have all led to a reconsideration of food security, supply, affordability and market operations. Urgency has been added to calls for systemic changes, not only to address these current issues, but to build in sustainability and resilience for the future. PURPLE considers that a refocusing upon the role, contribution, and importance of peri-urban areas within food systems should be an integral part of this debate. This ought to include a renewed focus upon peri-urban food production (agriculture) and its special value as a source of local (short chain) food supply to large urban markets – without forgetting that the peri-urban is a significant and growing market in its own right.

Importantly, this re-evaluation should extend beyond agricultural/horticultural production alone and take account and advantage of the key role that peri-urban places and people play as sites and actors in food processing, logistics, distribution and end-user supply as well as in subsequent food reuse and waste management. The nature of peri-urban agricultural production, and its particular suitability to contribute to organic farming targets and to operate as models of low-carbon agriculture, on often small sites, using labour-intensive means of production, and relying upon low-intensity energy, as part of larger multi-functional landscapes. With all of the above in mind, PURPLE wishes to see renewed focus on support for food system activities which reflect the importance and potential of the peri-urban in terms of food security and affordability.

### **Energy security and affordability**

Many of the same considerations which apply to food, also apply to the disruptions in the supply, and increasing costs, of energy, and will not be repeated here. Again, though, the role of peri-urban areas, this time as the source of energy supplies and site of energy infrastructure – in particular for large urban centres - should be more prominent in policy and programming debates and be better recognised and understood as PURPLE has consistently argued over many years.

The energy-related impacts of the Ukraine conflict have provided a pointed reminder that peri-urban energy generation local to large markets, plays a particular, and valuable, role in the context not only of local supply, but in light of the greater security and price stability that “local” implies. It should also signal the fact that it has the potential to do more. Rising energy prices contribute significantly to wider concerns over costs of living and inflation issues, which in turn slow down local economic growth and sustainability, greater levels of local generation and supply of energy take on greater urgency and value in this context.

As part of a broader approach to reducing dependency on fossil fuels, to reducing import dependency, to increasing the supply and take-up of renewable energy, and achieving greater levels of local self-sufficiency, investment in peri-urban energy infrastructure, and its accompanying human and knowledge capital has become an urgent prerequisite to achieving energy security and sustainability.



### **Impacts upon public service provision more generally**

Whilst food and energy concerns have been of specific concern to many policy-makers and professionals, there are also significant pressures being placed upon national and sub-national administrations in their role providing more general support to displaced people, in terms of humanitarian aid, and enabling access to a wide range of public services.

It is in this third sense that one can most clearly see the uneven (extent of) impacts in different parts of Europe with the huge number of those who have been forced from Ukraine being accommodated disproportionately in different countries. Estimates inevitably vary, but all suggest that over 50% have reached Poland as at least a temporary destination, for example. Clearly therefore, and in similar with the pandemic, the effects of the Ukraine conflict are asymmetrical, with spikes of different sorts in different places at different times.

An evolving body of data and evidence from Poland suggests that a disproportionate<sup>1</sup> volume of registrations of people fleeing Russian aggression are being made in peri-urban areas surrounding major urban centres, as opposed to within those urban centres themselves, or indeed, in more rural districts. The emerging data can no doubt be further amplified upon as the situation develops (and indeed compared with data from other countries), but it gives a clear indication that the greatest pressure on public service delivery is currently being experienced by peri-urban authorities. Clearly this mission-critical peri-urban contribution to the war effort needs to be acknowledged and recognised, and the role of such peri-urban public sector operators supported. PURPLE will want to continue to monitor this situation and will do its utmost to help secure the recognition of, and support for, the particular role which peri-urban public authorities, including two of its own member regions in Poland, are playing at the time of writing.

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<sup>1</sup> “disproportionate” in the sense of the numbers of registrations made as per ‘000 of resident population size – an inexact proxy for administrative capacity within local authorities