

## ONE YEAR AFTER THE ESCALATION OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

# Making International Funding Work for Women's Organisations

## INTRODUCTION

Every crisis is a woman's crisis, and the Ukraine crisis is no different. In Ukraine, the escalation of the conflict on 24 February 2022 has unravelled complex and multiple gendered impacts. These effects include the increase of women's responsibilities as carers and breadwinners and a rise in gender-based violence (GBV) such as domestic violence, conflict-related sexual violence,<sup>1</sup> human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse. As a result, survivors face a wide range of risks, such as unwanted pregnancies and psychological and physical trauma.

**Women make up for 59% of internally displaced persons within Ukraine,<sup>2</sup> and around 86% of the people who have fled Ukraine are women and children.<sup>3</sup>**

While being disproportionately affected by the conflict, women in Ukraine have demonstrated outstanding and unwavering solidarity, leadership, and courage to support and deliver assistance to the most vulnerable. They have done so whilst maintaining their caring responsibilities for children, the chronically ill, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Well established Ukrainian women's rights organisations (WROs) and women-led organisations (WLOs) were among the first to provide emergency aid to those in need before international organisations arrived. They continue to drive efforts to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups, especially women and girls, and those who do not want or are not able to leave.

Similarly, in neighbouring host countries, WROs/WLOs have extended their services to newly arrived Ukrainian refugees who face systemic discrimination<sup>4</sup> but they are struggling with insufficient resources to deliver essential services in some contexts. They scaled up their work to respond to the needs of Ukrainian refugees, but they also continued to advocate for timely and quality social protection services for host communities and the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in social protection schemes. They led response efforts to prevent and respond to GBV against women and girls who fled Ukraine, providing critical sexual

and reproductive health care, and supported Ukrainian refugees most at risk of being discriminated against or denied humanitarian aid, such as LGBTQIA+ individuals and Roma people.

Most of those organisations in Ukraine and neighbouring countries have had to expand or shift their activities towards emergency relief,<sup>5</sup> adapting and readjusting their work overnight, using existing and limited resources and capacity. They continue to operate in extremely challenging environments – including restrictive legal and policy frameworks in some neighbouring countries.<sup>6</sup> In Ukraine, women's organisations who deliver humanitarian assistance as well as essential services for internally displaced women and adolescent girls do so at great personal risk.<sup>7</sup> They are also often displaced themselves and have relatives and friends in areas of active conflict, further heightening the stress they are under.

Yet, one year into the escalation of the conflict, women's organisations at the forefront of the response still face significant funding challenges that impact their ability and capacity to deliver lifesaving services for those most in need.

**3.6 million people - 90% women and girls - need GBV prevention and response services in Ukraine.<sup>8</sup>**

**This briefing note, published on the eve of the one-year mark of the escalation of the war in Ukraine, follows on from CARE's six-month statement developed with some of its partners and which considered the gaps in the participation and inclusion of women's organisations in the humanitarian response to the crisis. This briefing provides an overview of the key and systemic funding challenges faced by WROs and WLOs in Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, and Romania. Its content, including its recommendations, is informed by the direct contributions from CARE's WRO/WLO partners and other women's organisations operating in those countries.**

1 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/12/1131317>

2 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enuk>

3 <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiZjYwMDFhMzMtMTJjZS00NzU1LTkzYzgtNTNhN2FhNjU3Y2RlIiwidCI6ImU1YzYzOTg0YTBjLTk1NDk0MmFmODBiZSIsImMiOiJh9>

4 <https://careevaluations.org/evaluation/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine/>

5 [https://hias.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/waiting\\_for\\_the\\_sky\\_to\\_close\\_regional\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://hias.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/waiting_for_the_sky_to_close_regional_report_final.pdf)

6 <https://careevaluations.org/evaluation/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine/>

7 <https://careevaluations.org/evaluation/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine/>

8 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enuk>

# 1. COMMITMENTS ON WOMEN-LED AND LOCALLY-LED HUMANITARIAN ACTION REMAIN LARGELY RHETORICAL

The international community has made several commitments - such as the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change - on equitable partnerships, shifting power, funding, and decision-making power to WROs/WLOs, and on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action. Yet, it keeps falling short of delivering on these pledges, including in its response to the Ukraine crisis.

Funding to WROs/WLOs remains woefully imperfect, reflecting a systemic (and well-acknowledged) problem. The lack of tracking, reporting system and disaggregated data on funding allocations, including the absence of mandatory indicators on funding to local actors<sup>9</sup> - and to WROs/WLOs specifically - make accountability on existing international actors' commitments extremely challenging. For example, despite pledging to target part of the funds to WROs/WLOs, the UN Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF), does not provide a public breakdown of the type of national organisations receiving direct or indirect funding.<sup>10</sup>

Local and national actors are also largely defined (or thought of) by humanitarian actors as a homogeneous group, without consideration of their mandate, their history and potential constituencies, their expertise, and the populations they serve; this compounds WROs/WLOs' invisibility. In the Ukraine context, too little has been done by international actors to ensure that organisations that had not previously implemented humanitarian activities were provided with support, capacity sharing, and information on how to engage in national coordination mechanisms and respond to funding opportunities.

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*“As we did not have any prior experience with the humanitarian funding system, and there were no platforms (and time) for proper interaction and learning in the beginning, it was a challenge for us to understand how these funding mechanisms work, what we can realistically expect as a front-line organisation, and how we could contribute to the ecosystem of humanitarian organisations without leaving local beneficiaries behind.”*

... Emma Association, WRO, Hungary ...

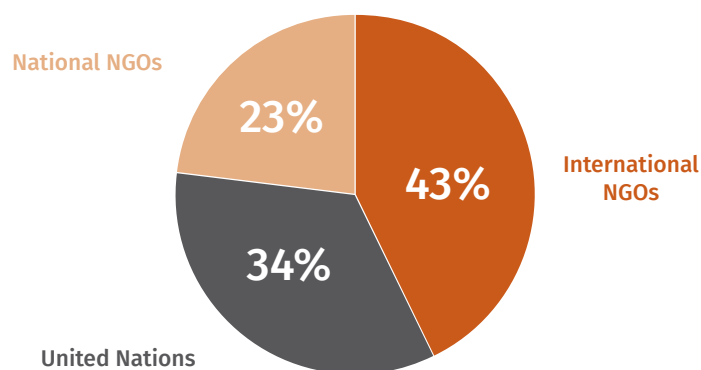
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*“We have scaled up our work using many years of experience in supporting people on the move. We kept focused on the quality of our services. At the same time, we experience difficulties with the institutional development of the organisation. While expanding the team working frontline is relatively easy, managing change in the organisation, creating processes that will ensure efficient operation - is very difficult. In our opinion, there is a lack of funding that strengthens the institutional capacity of local Polish organisations.”*

... Polish Migration Forum Foundation, WLO, Poland ...

**There is no public data on funding being directly provided to WROs/WLOs in Ukraine and the region. The UHF only provides the percentage of direct funding to “national NGOs”.**

**Ukraine Humanitarian Fund:  
Direct funding to partners in 2022**



<sup>9</sup> <https://devinit.org/blog/tracking-humanitarian-funding-local-actors/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://cbpf.data.unocha.org/?\\_gl=1\\*xaqd6d\\*\\_ga\\*MTMxMzk1MjkxOS4xNj11MTM0MDQz\\*\\_ga\\_E60ZNX2F68\\*MTY3NjY1Mjk3MS4xOS4xLjE2NzY2NTI0DQUNdCuMC4w](https://cbpf.data.unocha.org/?_gl=1*xaqd6d*_ga*MTMxMzk1MjkxOS4xNj11MTM0MDQz*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY3NjY1Mjk3MS4xOS4xLjE2NzY2NTI0DQUNdCuMC4w)

## 2. SIGNIFICANT FUNDING CHALLENGES AFFECT WROs/WLOs ACROSS COUNTRIES

All WROs/WLOs who contributed to this briefing face several funding challenges that directly impact their ability and capacity to deliver impactful support to affected women and girls,<sup>11</sup> and other vulnerable groups. The top challenges reported by the organisations were:

- Lack of quality, flexible and longer-term funding.
- Bureaucratic and over-complicated funding application processes and reporting requirements.
- Insufficient funding volume to resource the scale of the response.

### Funding is short-term and lacks flexibility to suit the needs of WROs/WLOs

Short-term funding remains a major obstacle for WROs/WLOs for the effective delivery of assistance to affected people and to women and girls, with some organisations also reporting difficulties to expand programmes beyond their existing focus due to the short-term nature of grants, and the never-ending search for funding.

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*“It is extremely important for donors to understand the local circumstances and the general situation of WROs in Hungary.*

*We need longer-term, flexible, and significant financial resources to enable us to integrate our services offered for refugees and local beneficiaries, develop infrastructure, provide resources for trainings and exchange of experience, and ensure the well-being of the organisation in a way that is embedded in the operations”.*

... Emma Association, WRO, Hungary ...

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*“The funding for the new employees is often limited to the length of a project. We need to train them for a long time with a risk of not having enough funds to offer them long term employment contracts. These challenges impact on the capacities and quality of our real time engagement with women, girls, and vulnerable groups to whom we address our services.”*

... FEDERA, WRO, Poland ...

Romania:  
Mindfulness and art therapy  
workshop for Ukrainian women  
in a refugee centre.

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*“In March, when we opened shelters for women in Lviv and Chernivtsi, we could count on grant funds for only 3 months without knowing if it is possible to extend for the next period. Thus, for about a month, we were desperately looking for funding for the next period, because the need for shelter among our beneficiaries was only increasing. By the way, our funding was extended, but its short-term nature affected the distribution of workload within the organisation and the stress level of Insight’s team.”*

... Insight, WRO/WLO, Ukraine ...

..... ☺ .....

*“What our organisation needs most urgently to be able to deliver gender-responsive humanitarian aid is to ensure the financing of the intervention over the long term.”*

... Fundația PARADA, Romania ...

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*“[What we need is] flexibility from the donors and the awareness that the situation is very dynamic, and that we need to adapt operations, goals, budgets and so on.”*

... Rădăuțiul Civic Association, Romania ...

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*“The funding should be made more flexible in three ways: (1) flexible deadlines and reporting; (2) listening to and trusting local actors more, not just blindly follow the established mechanisms; (3) providing core funding even during emergencies long-term as without it, organisations can face internal crises, a lack of vision for the future, and massive burnouts.”*

... Sphere, WRO/WLO, Ukraine ...



<sup>11</sup> [https://www.care-international.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Localisation\\_Women%20organizations%20in%20Ukraine.pdf](https://www.care-international.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Localisation_Women%20organizations%20in%20Ukraine.pdf)



Ukraine: Collective centre in Western Ukraine where mostly women and children stay who fled from areas of active conflict.

### WROs/WLOs struggle to manage lengthy, bureaucratic, and cumbersome grant procedures and reporting requests

Smaller organisations whose capacities have been depleted due to the conflict and which juggle multiple small grants find application processes and reporting requirements complex, time-consuming, and difficult to comply with. Some organisations highlighted that reporting challenges are further compounded by short-term funding, which in turn leads to difficulties to expand programmes beyond their existing programmatic focus.

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“Some agreement and granting procedures took a long time, which meant that the funding arrived at our account months after the start of the project. This was very challenging to handle as we did not have reserved or flexible funds to bridge these time gaps. By the time of the escalation of the war, the Hungarian WROs had been in an extremely underfunded and depleted position, with minimum capacities, and struggling to continue their work through volunteers and a few exhausted staff members.”

... Emma Association, WRO, Hungary ...

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“FEDERA's new collaboration with international partners are not without challenges. Some of the reporting requirements are very time-consuming and burdensome. For long term projects, we need to make expenditures in strict and short deadlines, sometimes difficult or impossible to meet.”

... FEDERA, WRO, Poland ...

..... “.....

“Local organisations also have a great desire to help as well as to work overtime to help more people. Instead, our team does work overtime, but this is due to the amount of paperwork, the large number of procedures that need to be followed, etc.”

... Insight, WRO/WLO, Ukraine ...

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“Our organisation has had sufficient funding since April but suffered the most from the short-term aid. Because of this, we tried not to use all the funds but to prolong them in the future (because we did not know whether we would receive further funds, and we cannot tell the people whom we started to help that, for example, from July 1 we will not provide help any more), because of this we delayed reporting, often received funding for similar activities, and had to make additional efforts to expand our activities.”

... Centre “Women’s Perspectives”,  
WRO/WLO, Ukraine ...

..... “.....

“Each organisation has a different method of reporting; some are more simplified, but they can also be very complicated. We had to hire an additional person to support us in this effort and to increase the scope of accounting work. Another problem is that some organisations expect monthly reports by the 10th of the month. This is not enough time for us to collect and enter data into so many documents.”

... FEMINOTEKA, WRO, Poland ...

### 3. POOR QUALITY AND INSUFFICIENT FUNDING HAS FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES

The lack of flexible funding, including grants not covering all costs, particularly operational and core overheads,<sup>12</sup> and the short-term nature of funding received, has far-reaching consequences for the very existence of WROs/WLOs. It also impairs the effectiveness of the lifesaving assistance they provide to the most vulnerable and weakens the overall humanitarian response.

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*“The response activities over the past year have relied heavily on the force and resilience of civil society efforts.”*  
... **Federația Organizațiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Copil, WRO/WLO, Romania** ...

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*“If we cannot stabilise and consolidate our operation, the organisation will undoubtedly do the humanitarian work, but there will be no sustainable women’s organisations to take the work forward at the end. The most direct effect of the limited, short-term, and restricted funding of the first months was not a lowered number of beneficiaries we reached, but the total exhaustion of staff members and volunteers. This carries a very serious risk for the work of the organisations not only in the long term, but also in the medium term.”*  
... **Emma Association, WRO, Hungary** ...

#### **Insufficient and poor-quality funding affects women’s organisations’ meaningful participation and leadership<sup>13</sup> in decision-making fora and coordination mechanisms.**

The inadequate participation and leadership of WROs/WLOs willing and trying to engage in humanitarian decision-making and coordination structures affects the prioritisation of the specific needs of women and girls in the response. Programmes to address the gendered impacts of the conflict

through GBV prevention and response and reproductive and sexual health services remain under-funded, insufficient, and poorly targeted.<sup>14</sup> In addition, WROs/WLOs have also been largely absent from recovery and peacebuilding processes and decision-making at local, national and global levels.<sup>15</sup> Their invisibility in those critical spaces undermine their pivotal role in the humanitarian – development – peace nexus and leads to “gender-ignorant” policy frameworks, and lack of gender-responsive financing. For example, references to women and gender equality are overwhelmingly absent from key recovery and reconstruction frameworks including the European Commission’s Rebuild Ukraine Plan and Ukraine’s National Recovery Plan.

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*“Donors that declare support for women’s rights and gender equality should base their programs on feminist principles and values. The funding must be non-bureaucratic, and long-term to allow for systemic change and not just one-time actions. We know that these principles are applicable to humanitarian work and would like to see them working in Ukraine.”*  
... **Ukrainian Women’s Fund, WRO/WLO, Ukraine** ...

..... “.....

*“Many of our members are small organisations, with women leaders fighting for Ukrainian refugee women and other vulnerable groups. They are best placed to inform the next phase of the response, as they know first-hand what refugees need.”*  
... **Federația Organizațiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Copil, WRO/WLO, Romania** ...

..... “.....

*“Even if the response in Romania has stabilised, there is still space to improve coordination and clarity.”*  
... **ANAIS Association, WRO/WLO, Romania** ...

12 <https://careevaluations.org/evaluation/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine/>

13 <https://careevaluations.org/countries/ukraine/> ; [https://hias.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/waiting\\_for\\_the\\_sky\\_to\\_close\\_regional\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://hias.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/waiting_for_the_sky_to_close_regional_report_final.pdf)

14 [https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/UKRAINE\\_REPORT.pdf](https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/UKRAINE_REPORT.pdf)

15 <https://parispeaceforum.org/en/projects/empowering-women-of-ukraine-for-peacebuilding/> ; <https://www.citiesalliance.org/newsroom/news/results/ukraine-rebuilding-women> ; <https://blogs.prio.org/2022/04/ukrainian-women-engage-in-resistance-and-should-be-in-the-peace-talks-new-survey-evidence/>



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Poland: Maternity classes for Ukrainian refugees at the Polish Migration Forum.

**Insufficient and rigid funding undermines WROs/WLOs’ independence and long-term existence and constrains their capacity to fulfill their original mission and work.**

WROs/WLOs already existed and served women and girls in need long before the escalation of the conflict, both in Ukraine and in the region. Funding provided as part of the response must enable them to continue to deliver services to their existing constituencies. In some countries, the “trade-off” that some organisations have had to make has contributed to social tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities. Ensuring the sustainability of their operations in the longer-term<sup>16</sup> must also be at the core of the support provided to WROs/WLOs in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

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*“In the first few months of the crisis response (...) we had to withdraw both financial and human capacities from our core activities offered to local women. We had to make extremely difficult moral decisions, but we prioritised the urgency of the humanitarian crisis for the short run. Although some funding for the initial crisis response arrived relatively quickly into our country, it was limited both in time and amount, so we could not use it for the minimum necessary improvement of our infrastructure or operational capacity.”*

... Emma Association, WRO, Hungary ...

..... ☺ .....

*“It is necessary to strengthen women’s organisations, give them freedom in choosing activities and projects, support for existence and restoration.”*

... Zhiva-Ya, WRO/WLO, Ukraine ...

..... ☺ .....

*“The huge number of implemented projects along this last year proves that we were capable of doing more than we imagined, and I think what we have achieved during this period is a huge encouragement for our 31 partners, many of which are women led organisations or fight for the rights of women and children. Unfortunately, we still don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel and we have to arm ourselves with resilience, a quality that we learned a lot from the refugees we work with.”*

... SERA Romania Foundation, Romania ...

<sup>16</sup> [https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/regional\\_report.pdf](https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/regional_report.pdf)

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

As the escalation of the war enters its second year, the needs of women and girls within Ukraine and neighbouring countries remain extremely high. Most international humanitarian actors responding to the conflict are signatories of the Grand Bargain and have committed to “less paper, more aid”. **This means simplifying and harmonising granting and reporting procedures and providing more volume and quality funding as directly as possible to local and national actors.**

They must now put these commitments into practice to meet the needs of WROs/WLOs who play critical roles in the response, serving entire communities, and ensuring the specific needs of Ukrainian women, men, boys, and girls are met.

### UN agencies, donors, and INGOs should:

#### ON FLEXIBLE AND QUALITY FUNDING

- Provide WROs/WLOs with direct, substantial, quality, and longer-term (at least one year, ideally, multiple years) funding<sup>17</sup> that covers all costs and is flexible enough to quickly pivot activities based on the country context and rapidly evolving situations.
- Provide flexible funding towards WROs/WLOs’ pre-conflict development activities in addition to responding to humanitarian needs.
- Increase funds specifically for WROs/WLOs, including the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund and ensure that WROs/WLOs are part of governance boards of these funds.

#### ON ADAPTABLE AND SIMPLIFIED REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- Ensure that equitable partnerships are based on a mutual understanding of processes and clear expectations of priorities and requirements.
- While not compromising basic compliance, transparency, and accountability requirements, simplify and as much as possible harmonise bureaucratic and rigid funding application processes to increase smaller WROs/WLOs’ ability to secure funding. This includes adapting due diligence benchmarks and funding eligibility criteria to the type of organisations, ensuring smaller community-based organisations can also access funding.
- Reporting requirements should be simplified – as per the Grand Bargain commitment – by adopting the harmonised 8+3 template.
- Cascade all flexible rules and regulations from donors when INGOs and UN agencies act as intermediaries, in alignment with the Grand Bargain Intermediaries caucus outcome document.<sup>18</sup>

#### ON PARTICIPATION, LEADERSHIP, CAPACITY SHARING

- Prioritise building strong equitable partnerships with WROs/WLOs and ensure that the localisation agenda is also framed in terms of gender equality and women’s empowerment, participation, and leadership.
- Ensure the meaningful participation and leadership of women’s organisations in all decision-making fora and humanitarian response’s planning, coordination, delivery, and monitoring, as well as in peace and recovery dialogues and processes. This is paramount to deliver on the Grand Bargain’s participation revolution promise and Inter Agency Standing Committee, donors and other Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls’ commitments.
- Invest in institutional development and capacity sharing with WROs/WLOs to deliver humanitarian activities and pre-February 2022 core activities, based on organisations’ identified needs and priorities.

#### ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

- Set a target for funding<sup>19</sup> to WROs/WLOs including from the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund, and enhance accountability and transparency on progress against these targets:
  - Data on funding provided to WROs/WLOs specifically in Ukraine and the different host countries should be collected and made publicly available.
  - Data should include the number of WROs/WLOs funded, amounts and percentage of funding allocated to them. The Ukraine Humanitarian Fund should explicitly disaggregate funding to national partners by type, and specifically include WROs/WLOs.

<sup>17</sup> <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2022-07/Grand%20Bargain%20Caucus%20on%20Quality%20Funding%20-%20Outcome%20Document%20-%20final%20-%2011jul22.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2022-08/Outcome%20Paper%20Towards%20Co-ownership%20-%20Caucus%20on%20Intermediaries%20-%20August%202022.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> CARE is also working on finding solutions to more accurately track and report on funding to WROs/WLOs.

**THIS BRIEFING HAS BEEN ENDORSED BY THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS:**

