



## Activities of The United Methodist Church in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe with/for Refugees from Ukraine



### *Summary of February 21, 2023*

#### **A sad anniversary**

Sowing and harvesting. Marveling and giving thanks. Celebrating and laughing. It could have been a year in which life blossomed. But it turned out differently. On February 24, 2022, Russian forces began their invasion of Ukraine. Months of unspeakable destruction and unimaginable suffering followed. And to this day, lasting peace in Ukraine is still not more than an object of unfulfilled longing, not more than a concern of persistent prayer.

In view of this persistent and common prayer for the people of Ukraine and for a lasting peace, a special event is planned:

On Friday, February 24, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. Eastern Time / 4:00 p.m. Central European Time (5:00 p.m. local time), an international prayer event will be held - in English - with the participation of people from Ukraine as well as those from other countries, including Bishop Christian Alsted, who is responsible for the Nordic and Baltic Area. Those interested can participate in this international prayer event at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86068155833?pwd=aFh1R3hUVETvdWI5WHNFU3hEckNTUT09> (Meeting ID: 860 6815 5833, Passcode: 795211).

#### **Invisible destruction**

The media have already disseminated so many images of obvious destruction that, on the one hand, many people in Western Europe and overseas have become accustomed to the fact that there is a war going on in Ukraine. Others, however, have long since been unable to look because these images weigh too heavily on them. But at a recent online meeting of coordinators of work for refugees from Ukraine, **Yulia Starodubets (Ukraine)** also pointed to destruction that is not even visible from the outside, and therefore cannot be captured by cameras: the devastation and destruction wrought inside people who have been internally displaced or have fled abroad. "There is particularly huge need for trauma relief," she said, summing up the situation. And although the government is doing its best to provide such services, she said, the UMC in Ukraine sees it as its responsibility to take action in this regard, as well. In addition to the many activities already underway for internally displaced persons, the vision of a Methodist Center for physically injured people and those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder is therefore becoming increasingly concrete. There is a significant number of people who want to be trained to work in this area, said **Yulia Starodubets**. However, the support of professionals from abroad is also welcome, she added.

The UMC in the **Czech Republic** would also like to give priority to the comprehensive health of the people in Ukraine in the coming period. Efforts with regard to temporary accommodation and linguistic, professional and ultimately social integration will not be stopped - on the contrary. Any relevant support to Ukraine continues to be important, according to a newsletter. But: "Our priority has organically become assistance in the form of medical support - and this is the direction we would like to primarily continue in."

The UMC in **Romania** also continues to be active in this regard - with the commitment including not only the delivery of medical supplies, but also the transport of generators to ensure power supply in important Ukrainian facilities.

#### **Some further activities**

- Contrary to expectations, the number of people who fled to countries bordering Ukraine in the first half of winter did not increase. "By the grace of God, it has been a mild winter so far," said **Yulia Starodubets**

from **Ukraine**, citing one possible reason. Nevertheless, the leaders of the UMC in the countries neighboring Ukraine remain vigilant and stand ready for a potential change in the situation.

- In **Romania**, a second community center offers a wide range of activities, said **Sarah Putman**, coordinator of the work with refugees. Musical, linguistic, artistic, dance and other offers aim to strengthen the network of contacts, to enable community and to support the integration into the Romanian society. It is striking that 95% of this center is run by people from Ukraine.
- Aid supplies continue to be transported to Ukraine from **Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary**. The UMC in **Hungary** continues to support a "humanitarian kitchen" in western Ukraine and a facility for Ukrainians who have fled near Debrecen (Hungary).

Faith, hope and love would remain, Paul wrote to the Christian community in Corinth 2,000 years ago. Would he write this today as an encouragement to the people in Ukraine, as well? And would he, one year after the beginning of the invasion and in spite of all destruction, even see very delicate, vulnerable and yet hungry for life little plants of this faith, this hope and this love? In the country itself, but also among the people who have fled to neighboring countries?

In any case, thank you very much for all the support that makes it possible to give signs of humanity and hope in these difficult times.

February 21, 2023 / Urs Schweizer  
(based on reports from UA, CZ, HU, PL and RO).