



Activities of The United Methodist Church in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe with/for Refugees from Ukraine *Summary of April 5, 2022*



General Situation

Due to a shift of military focus in recent days, the number of people returning to Ukraine was sometimes greater than the number of those who fled from Ukraine to a neighboring country, as it was reported by the media - for example, with regard to the situation in Poland. And the Polish Superintendent **Sławomir Rodaszyński** confirms: "Many refugees want to stay as close as possible to the border in order to be able to return as quickly as possible when the situation in Ukraine has improved." But he also knows from conversations with refugees how husbands and fathers who have stayed in Ukraine worry about their family members who have fled: "Please stay in Poland and don't return yet."

The fact that the number of refugees has decreased is also confirmed by the two coordinators for work with refugees, **Sarah Putman** from **Romania** and Pastor **Jana Křížova** from **Czechia**. The latter says: "People are still coming, but most of them aim to stay longer than for a few days only." Permanent housing and related concerns (schools, jobs, etc.), therefore, have increased in importance.

Jessica Morris-Ivanova, a pastor in Shumen, **Bulgaria**, points to a new crisis on the horizon: The Bulgarian state has accommodated many people from Ukraine in hotels and resorts in an uncomplicated way, she says. But when the summer season will begin in less than a month, these accommodations will be needed elsewhere - and new solutions will have to be found for numerous refugees.

"Part of what we give is soul care"

Congregations and individuals of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in neighboring countries directly or indirectly bordering Ukraine continue to take care of the very practical needs of the people who have found their way to them: They offer them a short-term or, in increasing numbers, longer-term place to live, a place of rest and safety, something to eat, clothes and shoes, etc. But those responsible are also concerned to help beyond this very concrete support. "Part of what we give is soul care," says Pastor **Jessica Morris Ivanova** in this context. That's why she gave to some of those who came to her for help and then continued their journey a New Testament in Ukrainian or Russian, in which she wrote words of comfort, encouragement, and blessing. Superintendent **László Khaled** from **Hungary** also reports that the UMC in Hungary has received Ukrainian translations of the New Testament through The Gideons, which are now being distributed. The example of the house church in Mosonmagyaróvár (**Hungary**), where three refugee families have been taken in and also participate in the Sunday service, shows that "soul care" can also include more than "just" giving away New Testaments. Similar experiences are made in other countries, as well.

Long-term help in Czechia

Karel Nyerges, director of Diaconia UMC in **Czechia**, shares his experiences with people from Ukraine living in permanent housing facilities. "So far, we have not encountered any visible psychological problems," he writes. According to his observation, "this is mainly due to the fact that they are still dealing with issues related to staying in our country, and thus personal problems recede into the background." While some of them hope that the situation in Ukraine can change quickly and that they will be able to return to their homes, **Karel Nyerges** is convinced: "We must think ahead to the possibility that these people will begin to realize the seriousness of their situation and will need psychological or psychiatric help." For him, a priority is to gradually integrate these people into the Christian but also the local communities so that they feel safe and accepted. "It is also very important for adults to find employment in the region of residence and for their children to start attending school. Our goal is to support these people to become independent of us so that they can live full lives." He is optimistic as all residents of the three facilities of the UMC have already taken care of the necessary matters with the authorities. They are registered and granted a special visa, which allows them to find employments. **Karel Nyerges** also works together with these authorities, and it is reason to thankfulness that, for instance, the mayor of Bechyně (south of Prague) has already offered employment for the mothers staying at the nearby Poušť center. "We are negotiating the placement of the children in the primary school in Bechyně so that their mothers can start work without any worries," he adds.

More activities of The United Methodist Church

- According to Pastor **Jessica Morris-Ivanova**, the Ukrainian day center in some of the church facilities in Shumen (**Bulgaria**) has in the meantime been opened. They offer language classes, art therapy, a safe place to gather for coffee and tea, food and hygiene packets, used clothing and free laundry facilities. Children's activities are offered, as well.
- In other local churches, a variety of gatherings are organized – it is a possibility to connect and to experience fellowship.
- As a response to the reality that many people from Ukraine will stay for a longer term, an increasing number of local churches are offering language courses or are considering doing so.
- An additional aim is to help particularly women to find a job in order to be able to
- Transport to Ukraine (e.g. food and medicines) continue, as it was reported from **Romania**, **Poland**, and **Czechia**. In **Romania**, this was once again combined with bringing a number of Ukrainian people to Romania on the return journey.
- The UMC in **Hungary** also supported a kitchen ministry in Kaszony (**Ukraine**), where 60 people regularly receive a hot meal.

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based on reports from BG, CZ, HU, PL, and RO