



Activities of The United Methodist Church in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe with/for Refugees from Ukraine *Summary of August 20, 2022*



177 Days

Given the hot and dry summer days, the idea of celebrating Christmas in about four months takes some getting used to. On the other hand, the time that the war in Ukraine has been going on is one and a half times as long. About six months of destruction, suffering, despair - and still sometimes hope. The war has somehow become "routine", part of everyday life, said **Yulia Starodubets** from Ukraine in a recent online meeting. "People got used to living with it." And the coordinators for work for and with refugees in Poland and Czechia, **Szarlota Kamińska** and **Jana Křížova**, described the situation in their countries in similar terms. This does not take away the horror of the cruel war. **Yulia Starodubets** emphasized: "There are still terrible moments when everybody is shaken." And it does not mean in any way that people in neighboring countries would forget about those directly affected in Ukraine. On the contrary, aid continues with as much commitment as ever. And the prayers for peace do not cease either.

There is another observation that can also be made these days: Many people are exhausted. "At the beginning of the war, people did what they could do, as fast as possible and as well as possible. After all these months, people still do what they can. But it can be observed that, for instance, those who work in the shelters, are tired because of all the work they have already done." This is how **Yulia Starodubets**, who works primarily with internally displaced persons in western Ukraine, described the situation. She thus underlined what **Ivana Procházkova**, Superintendent of the EMK in Czechia, had already pointed out to her helpers in March 2022: "Save your strength, the road we are on will be long." Self-care is, therefore, crucial, said **Yulia Starodubets**. Time for yourself. Time for rest in the middle of the storm.

Further Observations and Experiences

- Refugee numbers are declining - both in western Ukraine and in neighboring countries. Numerous people dare to return to the homes they had left weeks or months ago.
- The leaders of the ministries with/for Ukrainian refugees in neighboring countries face a similar reality: In the big cities, Ukrainians who want to stay longer term can relatively easily find jobs. Housing, however, is very expensive there. In smaller towns or villages, apartments are more affordable – but there are hardly any jobs.
- Not all places currently accommodating Ukrainian refugees are usable for winter. It is, therefore, very urgent to do some action steps in order not to face difficult situations in a few months from now.
- The educational situation is challenging – in Ukraine, where a limited number of schools are open only, and where parents do not know whether it is safe to send their children to school, or whether there will also be distant learning opportunities. But also in neighboring countries, where the integration of Ukrainian children leads to bigger classes – and to new challenges for language reasons. In Romania, they are currently working hard on opening a Ukrainian school, said **Sarah Putman**, coordinator for the ministries with/for refugees in Romania.

Activities in the Past Weeks

- The UMC in Ukraine received a mini-bus from Methodist brothers and sisters in Romania. It could be officially registered in Ukraine and can now be used for the transport of people and food.
- There were several transports from Romania to Ukraine – among other with very much needed medicines, medical equipment and other supplies for health institutions in the south of Ukraine. More such transports are planned for the upcoming weeks, according to **Sarah Putman**.

- The UMC in Czechia participated in an initiative to provide Ukrainian soldiers with first aid kits allowing them to do the initial treatment themselves and thus saving lives.
- They are currently exploring whether they can offer an ambulance for an Orthopedic Institute in Ukraine taking care of 80% of the wounded Ukrainian soldiers.
- Several UMC camps in Poland, Czechia, Hungary, and Romania did not only include people from the respective countries but also Ukrainian refugees. It is very encouraging and hopeful that children, teenagers and adults from Ukraine can become part of a sustainable community – and that they not only have a roof over their heads and something to eat, but that their hearts are also taken care of.
- Pastor **Milan Mrázek** from Czechia recently told a touching story of a Ukrainian family that had experienced the horrors of the war in Ukraine and that fled to Prague about two months ago. What was supposed to be housing for 3-4 nights turned out to be a much longer stay. The whole family became involved in church life. At the same time, a woman from Russia started attending the worship services. In spite of everything that might divide them, the Ukrainian family and the Russian woman got along and even started to learn Czech before the worship services...
- **Szarlota Kamińska** shared another experience mirroring the wide and open hearts of the Polish people – and underlining the source of strength, of hope, of love, and of life: During the "Days of Renewal", a camp with participants from all over Poland, three special Bibles with the United Methodist logo on them were auctioned off. The proceeds amounted to roughly 900 USD/EUR – money that will be used for the ministries with people from Ukraine.

The relief activities are reasons to thankfulness and hope. Even if people "got used to live with the war".

Olga, a woman from Ukraine now living in Czechia, recently said about her experience: "The Czech Republic will always leave a mark in our hearts and in the heart of every Ukrainian, because it kindly sheltered us, gave us a break from the sirens, and allowed us to live in peace the spring and summer of this difficult year for all of Ukraine in 2022."

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(based on reports from CZ, HU, PL and RO as well as on a recent online meeting)