



Activities of The United Methodist Church in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe with/for Refugees from Ukraine *Summary of March 29, 2022*



General Situation

“Save your strength, the road we are on will be long.” This is how Supt. **Ivana Procházková**, of the UMC in **Czechia**, perceives the current situation as it is becoming increasingly obvious that the response to the war in Ukraine and its implications won’t be a matter of a few weeks only. Numerous refugees continue their journey after having spent some restful nights in a country directly or indirectly bordering to Ukraine. In **Hungary** and **Slovakia**, for instance, the majority of those having arrived from the war-torn neighboring country, are in transit, according to Supt. **László Khaled** and Supt. **Štefan Rendoš** of the UMC in these two countries. **Andrzej Malicki**, Leading Superintendent of the UMC in **Poland**, on the other hand, estimates that about 60% of the more than two million refugees that have fled to his country so far, aim to stay. In **Czechia**, for instance, there are also many refugees who do not plan to move further on.

This means that in addition to providing emergency relief for refugees on their onward journey, taking care of those staying longer-term is of increasing importance – for the governments, but also for NGOs, Churches and other organizations.

The situation is still changing day by day – and so do the challenges in regard to this work. But based on the experiences of the past weeks, men and women of the UMC do their best to serve their “new friends” and “guests”, as the refugees are called by the leaders in **Romania** and in **Poland**. Or, as **Jana Křížová**, pastor and coordinator of the work with refugees in **Czechia**, says: “We do what we have done so far, only we learn.”

And Supt. **Ivana Procházková** adds when summarizing the response of the UMC in **Czechia** to the current needs: “Your help is professional and at the same time very personal and kind.” **Karel Nyerges**, director of Diakonia UMC in **Czechia**, is convinced that this must not be lost. “We find ourselves in a situation that reveals our weaknesses, but also our strengths. Right now, when we are all revealing our nature, unconditional acceptance and mutual tolerance are expected of us. Let us try to ensure that these virtues remain among us, even though the environment will already be promoting different thoughts and opinions.”

Relief transports to Ukraine

The leaders of the work with/for refugees from Ukraine do not only meet the needs of those who have and continue to come to them. They are, of course, also aware of the impact of the war in Ukraine itself – and thanks to their longstanding contacts and a newly expanded network of cooperation, several transports have been sent to Ukraine. Looking back to the past week, **Sarah Putman**, coordinator of the work with refugees in **Romania**, for instance, reports deliveries of relief supplies to five different locations in the north, the west and the center of Ukraine: medical and surgical supplies, medicines, food, and other goods.

Once the vans are unloaded and return to **Romania**, they serve as travel opportunity for Ukrainians looking to flee their country. So far, eight persons have been brought to **Romania** on such trips, according to **Sarah Putman**.

Kielce UMC in **Poland** also sent a transport to Ukraine. They brought medicine, food, articles for children, diapers, beddings, etc. to the center of Ukraine, as **Szarlota Kaminska**, coordinator of the work with refugees in **Poland**, writes.

The transports from **Czechia** to Ukraine will also continue. A newsletter of March 26 states: “We do not forget about the direct humanitarian aid going to Ukraine, where we consider it important to effectively use the synergies with our Russian-speaking UMC and our direct contacts in Ukraine as well as our knowledge of the local terrain.”

Passing on and giving back

In the past days, a remarkable development became visible: bridges were built between the work with/for refugees and the “regular” church work. Women, men, youth and children from Ukraine do not “only” sleep in church rooms or guest rooms, but they also participate or intend to participate in worship services, as it was, for instance, reported from Puławy and other churches in **Poland**, Budapest (**Hungary**), Litoměřice (**Czechia**), and Cluj-Napoca (**Romania**). According to Supt. **László Khaled** from **Hungary**, it was a very special and touching experience when a Ukrainian member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church shared about his experiences of the past days in a worship service of the UMC in Budapest (**Hungary**) – and when he sang a song in Ukrainian, which is also included in Hungarian in the hymnal of the UMC in **Hungary**.

In some cases, refugees also pass on what they have received – for instance a Baptist missionary who came from Ukraine to Budapest (**Hungary**) and who now helps other refugees with translation work – and by offering pastoral care to those staying in the same building of the UMC in Hungarian’s capital. **Ctirad Hrubý**, pastor of Mikulov UMC in **Czechia**, shares the encouraging example of two young female Christians from Ukraine who arrived in Mikulov a few days ago, and who now provide leadership to a newly opened children’s club for Ukrainian kids.

Activities of The United Methodist Church

- The UMC in Prague-Horní Počernice (**Czechia**) involves Ukrainian children in existing activities of the shelter run by Diakonia UMC.
- At the same place, a young mother of the UMC offers Czech language classes six days per week.
- And, again in Horní Počernice, a few mothers were successfully supported in finding jobs – in other places in **Czechia** such as Veselka and Poušť, similar encouraging experiences were made.
- Ukrainian children are invited to the softball club of Litoměřice UMC in **Czechia**.
- What Supt. **Ivana Procházková** from **Czechia** means when speaking about the “very personal” help that is offered, is becoming visible in the variety of people that are accommodated by the UMC for short or longer term in the countries directly or indirectly neighboring to Ukraine: grandmothers, youth, young women, children, people with special needs, unaccompanied minors, elderly men.
- According to Supt. **László Khaled** from **Hungary**, the UMC as set up a «Washing Point» and an «Internet Access Point» for Ukrainian refugees.
- Diakonia UMC in **Czechia** is busy preparing three buildings for accommodating Ukrainian refugees. Currently, about 35 people live there. And while the original plan was to open the doors for up to 100 people, practice has shown that a number of 60 is more realistic. A cottage or room with a capacity of four beds, for instance, can’t be occupied by a family of three people and a fourth person not belonging to this family. The leaders rather see it as a priority in the current situation to create a place similar to their circumstances at home.
- The governments do what they can to provide Ukrainian refugees arriving to their countries with the assistance they need. According to Supt. **Daniel Topalski** from Bulgaria, for instance, refugees already receive the necessary documents at the border, which regulate their residence status in the country and give them the legal opportunity to work, as well. But people

of the UMC in several countries are also involved in helping with administrative issues, translation, and, for instance, cultural and linguistic integration. They also support children that have been enrolled at schools.

- People of the UMC in countries directly or indirectly neighboring to Ukraine continue to collect donations in kind and money. An offering in all local churches of the UMC in **Hungary** resulted in a sum of over EUR 8,000 – an amount of money that has never before been achieved in such an offering.
- The advantages of belonging to one Church and one Central Conference with local churches in different countries, becomes visible when refugees do not stay in a country neighboring to Ukraine but continue their journey. At the request of Supt. **László Khaled** from **Hungary**, for instance, two families with four adults and six children who had come from Kyiv to **Hungary** were accommodated by Slaný UMC in **Czechia** on their onwards journey to Sweden.

March 29, 2022 / Urs Schweizer
based on reports from BG, CZ, HU, PL, RO, and SK