



Activities of The United Methodist Church in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe with/for Refugees from Ukraine *Summary of April 14, 2022*



Developments of the past days

Methodists in the countries directly or indirectly neighboring to the Ukraine continue their various activities. But they aim not to just do something because it has been done in the past weeks, as well. Instead, they rather try to respond to the needs as they become visible today.

The Methodist coordinators of the work with refugees, however, also face the development of some general conditions. **Timotej Tagaj** from **Slovakia**, for instance, reported that the work with and for refugees that is done at the Slovakian/Ukrainian border had been taken over by big organizations (such as Red Cross) and by the State itself. According to him, this helped to eliminate some negative aspects (e.g. the danger for women with little children to be exploited, or overpriced taxi offers). "On the other hand, smaller organizations such as the UMC who were and still are willing to help there were simply pushed away."

Jessica Morris-Ivanova, a pastor in Shumen, **Bulgaria**, shared about the experience that the work with and for refugees in Bulgaria could not be done without the commitment of smaller organizations – although to what extent municipalities, for instance, are willing and able to provide help may considerably vary from city to city. The social framework conditions are increasingly changing. She mentioned racism issues they are facing all over the country. "Many are jealous of the help that the Ukrainians are getting." But she also pointed to another problem: "We are starting to have problems with the abuse of food pantry and the generosity of people."

Language issues

Jana Křížova, pastor and coordinator of the work with refugees in **Czechia**, recently shared about educational resources that were newly developed for families with children that want to stay in the country. However, these resources (e.g. coloring books with simple words to learn) are Czech/Ukrainian and, therefore, not useful for other countries.

In addition to learning the local language at a regular school, Ukrainian children often take Ukrainian online lessons offered by the Ukrainian State. Helping children to have the necessary equipment to access these online lessons is, therefore, sometimes part of the Methodist work with refugees, as well – for instance in **Sibiu (Romania)**.

In some cases, it would be easier to organize written materials (e.g. spiritual resources) in Russian than in Ukrainian. However, **Szarlota Kaminska**, coordinator of the work with Ukrainian refugees in **Poland**, said: "Ukrainian refugees do understand Russian but sometimes do not want to use this language and rather choose not to communicate than doing it in Russian." Though this may depend on the situation and the people, it seems to become an increasingly sensitive issue to provide Ukrainian refugees with materials in Russian.

Where volunteer work reaches its limits

Many Methodist men and women in various countries prove to be wide-hearted and helpful. However, the longer people in Ukraine had to live with the war and the more they have seen and

experienced, the more psychological support will be required. **Jana Křížova** from **Czechia** mentioned a psychologist from the UMC talking about post-traumatic stress disorder at a recent pastors' meeting. This specialist mentioned that after recovering from the first shock, up to 50% of the refugees might have severe problems after six months and thus will need help. The pastors were strongly urged to be patient in regard to challenging behavior and not to handle such post-traumatic stress disorders themselves (without appropriate educational background) but to connect people they are accompanying to specialists.

Szarlota Kaminska from **Poland** reported that the Polish State had employed Ukrainian-speaking specialists, and that in every larger city, people can basically get psychological or psychiatric help. However, according to her, there are not even enough Polish-speaking specialists – this might, therefore, become a considerable challenge in the months to come.

Against this background, **Jessica Morris Ivanova** from **Bulgaria** shared the encouraging example of a psychologist from Ukraine, who is a refugee herself. This woman made herself available and offered some group therapy in the newly opened center in **Shumen (Bulgaria)**.

More activities of The United Methodist Church

- The Russian-speaking UMC in **Prague (Czechia)** did not only send several shipments of food and other useful items to the Ukrainian border, from which the goods are taken over and delivered further east. Recently, the Methodists in Prague had a visit from a pastor from Ukraine who came with a team and picked-up the humanitarian aid himself. During his time in Prague, he did not only share about the impact of these shipments but also preached about loving enemies.
- A few days ago, another shipment was brought from Prague to the Hungarian-Ukrainian border (about 900km). These relief items were added to a shipment going to the Dnipro area (another 1200km). On the spot, they were transported in small cars on dirt roads at night and without light so that no-one would start shooting at the drivers.
- According to **Jessica Morris Ivanova** from **Shumen (Bulgaria)**, the average daily attendance of the newly opened Methodist social center for refugees is 20+. Last Saturday, with the help of the Scouts, an event was organized in the park next to the center – with games for children and food. There were estimated 250 people at the park event (both Bulgarians and Ukrainians).
- The Methodists in **Romania** sent another transport to Ukraine – and another eight Ukrainians were taken to Romania on the way back. They will stay in the Methodist facilities in Cluj-Napoca as they figure out their next plans.
- Two long-term families left **Romania** last week. Both were reporting alternative needs for schooling than they were able to find in Romania. According to **Sarah Putman** from **Romania**, this might become an issue for other families with older children, as well.
- A lay leader in **Sibiu (Romania)** facilitated a donation of USD 5000 worth of goods from a supermarket. These goods are being put into a storage facility for easy access to continue aiding those who are coming into the care of the wide-hearted people in Sibiu.
- While Methodists in **Hungary** still continue to help refugees coming to them, they increased their activities to bring relief goods to the Hungarian-Ukrainian border in order to help internally displaced persons, according to **László Khaled**, United Methodist superintendent.

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