



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



Summary of December 22, 2022

Active Waiting and Preparing

"Our desire is that the war in Ukraine will end, but in this moment, they need an ambulance in Ukraine." This is what **Superintendent Ivana Procházková (Czechia)** said when an ambulance, fully loaded with medical goods, was sent on its journey to Ukraine to become a blessing for many. And this is what describes the attitude of those who stand by the side Ukrainian people – by those who left their homeland to (temporarily) live in a directly or indirectly neighboring country or in other parts of Europe; and by those who currently live in the Western part of Ukraine as Internally Displaced Persons. Together with Brothers and Sisters in Ukraine, many helpers and their congregations are praying, hoping, longing for peace. But as there is no peace yet, they are continuing to faithfully respond to the needs of the people who have lost so much. Waiting takes a very active, faithful and often courageous shape.

Yulia Starodubets (Ukraine) during a most recent meeting of the Coordinators of the Ministries with Refugees from Ukraine, confirmed what is shared through many news channels. The destruction of the energy supply impacts the situation in the whole country – in regard to water, heating, public transportation (e.g. subway in Kyiv), communication. "In some parts of the country, electricity is more episodic." But she also underlined: "People don't lose hope." They "adjust to the situation and try to be very creative". That's why generators are very important items these days – and they have been part of more than one humanitarian aid transport, particularly from Romania to Ukraine.

The difficult situation regarding power and heating was among the main reasons why it was broadly expected that the number of people leaving Ukraine would increase with the beginning of the winter. **Jana Křížova**, Coordinator in **Czechia**, however said: "We expected more refugees to come, but so far this did not happen." This statement was echoed by **Sarah Putman**, Coordinator in **Romania**.

However, the leaders of the various ministries nevertheless continue to prepare for more refugees to come, for instance by renovating and adapting facilities that have already been used as accommodations for refugees from spring to fall 2022 and that need to be winterproof and more convenient for larger numbers of people.

But if one takes a closer look, there are two developments that can be observed. Against the background of societies still open to welcoming refugees, "enthusiasm has lessened" as **Sarah Putman** from **Romania** put it. And, as **Jana Křížova** from **Czechia** stated that "there is a loud minority blaming the government for not doing enough for Czech people" who, for instance struggle with high energy costs.

This means that providing the leaders of the various ministries in Ukraine and neighboring countries with material resources is one thing. An important thing. But taking into consideration that some of them served their neighbors for the last 10 months and now, in some cases, face a certain fatigue, it is equally important to pray for these people, for the renewal of their physical strength, for protection of their hearts and souls, for the dawning of a new hope that helps them to persevere and to not get used to the war.

Some activities

- There is not only a wide range of activities in the indirectly or directly neighboring countries but also in the **Nordic and Baltic Area**, as **Kirsten Hastrup**, Assistant to **Bishop Christian Alsted**, shared. These activities include the accommodation of a limited number of refugees and support of integration measures of wider groups living in the respective societies.

- Accommodation and integration (very broadly understood) are also key elements of the activities in **Romania, Hungary** and **Czechia**.
- This also means that bi-lingual worship services or worship services with interpretation continue to be offered – and often added by times of fellowship.
- **Yulia Starodubets** from **Ukraine** shared about an interesting experience of two brothers of the UMC in Kyiv. After their arrival in the Netherlands and in Germany, they started Ukrainian-speaking fellowships / congregations consisting of people who did not identify themselves as active Christians before. The activities of these group include worship services, Sunday school, and Bible studies.

Light in the Darkness

As there are, in many Ukrainian places throughout the whole country, no street lights and no lights on the houses, the streets at night are a rather dangerous place for pedestrians. That's why **Bishop Christian Alsted**, on the occasion of his most recent visit to Ukraine, brought reflective vests that can be distributed and used to make people visible. In addition, he brought batteries, lamps and powerbanks. The light vests have a very practical function. But they are also a symbol of the desire that people who live in the dark, figuratively speaking, not be overlooked. A symbol of the desire that the One who came to us as the light of this world wants to make visible those who are in the dark. That he wants to make them feel: I see you. You are important to me. And where people let themselves be illuminated by this light of peace, hope and love, they can pass it on, reflect it. May something of this miracle happen in many places. Especially in these Christmas days.

December 22, 2022 / Urs Schweizer
(based on reports from UA, CZ, HU, DK, and RO)