



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



*Summary of April 25, 2023*

### **When spring is in the waiting**

Stable. Unchanged. It is adjectives like these that are heard again and again when the coordinators for the work with people who have fled Ukraine try to assess the situation in their respective countries. There are comparatively few new people arriving in Poland, Czechia, Hungary or Romania in these days and weeks to stay temporarily or to travel on. In western Ukraine, too, the number of newly arriving internally displaced persons is at a relatively low level, according to **Yulia Starodubets**, pastor of The United Methodist Church (UMC) in Ukraine. And **Kirsten Hastrup**, assistant to Bishop Christian Alsted, who is responsible for the UMC in Ukraine, makes similar observations in Scandinavian countries.

This sounds positive at first, because it means that many things still need strength, but are also running in a more or less orderly fashion. Many people who fled Ukraine to neighboring countries have now found their own homes and jobs, and they have become part of the respective societies. But it also means that the situation in Ukraine is not yet such that a return on a large scale could be considered. Peace, the blossoming of new life, the beginning of a new future are still in the waiting. Because the cruel war, destruction, death and suffering have not found an end even after 14 months. And **Jana Křížová**, pastor and coordinator in **Czechia**, once again pointed out in an online conversation what she observes in the Czech society: that many are getting used to the war.

### **Faithfulness in prayer - faithfulness in action**

**Jana Křížová** underlined how grateful she is that the people in the UMC in Czechia are not indifferent to the unchanged situation, but continue to do what is necessary with empathy and commitment. And this is no different in the other countries. Even if **Yulia Starodubets**, in particular, pointed out that the pressure that weighs especially on those who have been working for people in need since the beginning of the war, leads here and there to health issues. And that, as a consequence, the people who would help needed psychological and pastoral help themselves.

But still the prayer for peace, the request for protection for the fled and displaced people and the concrete help go hand in hand in a way that is as effective as it is encouraging - whether in Poland, Czechia, Hungary, Romania or Ukraine itself.

### **Concrete help**

- In **Czechia**, the accompaniment of Ukrainians who have found refuge in the country continues. In cooperation with Methodists in Slovakia, relief supplies are also sporadically brought to Western Ukraine. However, the focus of the activities is the longer the more the support of two organizations in Western Ukraine, which offer a place of refuge, psychological support and also general medical and surgical assistance.
- In **Romania**, the community centers with their wide range of services have become an important anchor for people who have fled Ukraine, says **Sarah Putman**, who works as coordinator. The regular organization of aid transports to Ukraine is also continued.
- Such transports also still take place in **Poland**, as coordinator **Szarlota Kaminska** said. However, the volume has decreased noticeably compared to last year.

- Of increasing importance is help for traumatized people. This is the case in **Romania** and even more so in **Ukraine** itself. Therefore, thanks to the help of UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), the UMC in Ukraine will buy a property in Uzhhorod, which will become a place of refuge for internally displaced persons as well as a place of recreation and fellowship. Psychological support and help in overcoming trauma will also be offered there.
- The UMC in **Hungary** is working in a special and varied way for Ukrainians who have found a place to stay in a large camp near Debrecen. Relief transports would also continue to be organized. **Boglárka Khaled**, the coordinator of the work, also pointed out that a negative development, to which the war in Ukraine contributes, has long since reached the Hungarian population in a painful way: a strong inflation, which confronts many materially poor people with existential problems.

### **Hope despite everything?**

It is perhaps precisely such developments that contribute to the fact that the willingness to provide state aid is no longer unrestricted. What **Jana Křížová** described as merely the content of rumors for **Czechia** has already become reality in **Romania**: State support for rent and food will be significantly reduced or even stopped completely in May 2023. This means that people who have fled Ukraine will have to think again about what to do - whether they can stay where they are and find other means of payment, or whether they will have to find cheaper housing somewhere.

And yet, even though the road may still be long, and even though many a challenge will still arise - in the coordinators' reports there is always a glimmer of hope. A hope that has been nurtured especially in many international and multilingual Easter services. A hope that allows people to trust in God beyond the horizon of the recognizable. A hope that counts on life being victorious.

April 25, 2023 / Urs Schweizer  
(based on reports from UA, CZ, HU, PL and RO).