

TOGETHER

LWF responds to the war in Ukraine



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CONTENTS

Together	2
Responding to the war in Ukraine.....	3
Reception	4
Accommodation	7
Material support.....	9
Critical infrastructure.....	14
Coming together	16
“It is difficult to process all that is happening”	19

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Cover: A woman serves food at a soup kitchen for refugees from Ukraine, at the Vyšné Nemecké border crossing between Slovakia and Ukraine, 1 March 2022. The Vyšné Nemecké border crossing connects Slovakia with the city of Uzhgorod in Ukraine. Photo: LWF/ Albin Hillert





A Ukrainian refugee woman in a wheelchair is aided across the platform in Záhony, Hungary, where she and other Ukrainian refugees have arrived. A town of some 3,500 residents, Záhony has become a key border crossing for Ukrainians going to Hungary. Záhony residents supported incoming refugees in a variety of ways, and a local high school had been repurposed to serve as a temporary center for accommodation. Photo: LWF/ Albin Hillert, 10 March 2022



TOGETHER

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Matthew 5:9

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was founded in 1947 as a peace project. Lutheran churches from countries on opposite sides of World War 2 came together with a shared vocation to work for peace and reconciliation.

Seventy-five years later, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the LWF and its member churches were ready to offer their support, building on more than seven decades of work for peace and support to people in need.

From the start of the war, the LWF has condemned the Russian military attack, criticized the instrumentalization of religion, called for a just peace and a cessation of hostilities. Church leaders worldwide joined in this call, offering solidarity and prayers. The LWF member churches in the countries neighboring Ukraine opened churches and parish houses to refugees fleeing the war, offering food, shelter, and pastoral care; member churches worldwide mobilized resources to support this work. In addition, LWF World Service opened two humanitarian programs, building on its experience of helping people in need. In all of this, LWF has worked with ecumenical partners.

The Ukraine response has shown on a fundamental level what it means to be churches in communion, called to support people in need and work for peace.

This report, published as we mark one year of the war in Ukraine, shows a glimpse of the work the LWF and its member churches have done. As I commend it to you, I pray that we hold strong onto our hope and stand firm as messengers for peace and reconciliation in the world.

Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt
General Secretary,
The Lutheran World Federation

RESPONDING TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

UKRAINE

Kharkiv: LWF member church (German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine)

Kyiv: LWF Country Program
7,200 people reached

Activities:

- Food and relief goods distribution (incl. winterization), School renovation Bobrovtytsya
- Institutional (salaries and operational costs of the church)
- Support of heating points in the city of Kharkiv

Ichnya: anti-radiation school shelter and generators to run the Water & Sewage System of the municipality territory

POLAND

Warsaw: LWF country program, LWF member church (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland)

148,700 people reached

Activities:

- Cash distribution, Food and relief goods distribution (incl. Winterization), medical support, psychosocial and psychological support, education activities, creative activities, pastoral care, integration and awareness creation in host society

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Bratislava: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic

34 projects

Activities:

- Renovations, reconstructions, repairs, assistance for refugees, educational support, accommodation

CZECH REPUBLIC

Prague: Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren

2 projects

Activities:

- reconstruction, leisure activities, library

ROMANIA

Sibiu: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania

6 projects

Activities:

- institutional support, renovations, heating, winter support

HUNGARY

Budapest: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary

1 project

Activities:

- weekend school, short films creating awareness about refugee experiences

ESTONIA

Tallinn: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia

1 project

Activities:

- language exchange, providing household items and school supplies, pastoral care, activities for Ukrainian children, heating

The invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 caused one of the biggest refugee crises worldwide – and the biggest refugee movement in Europe since 1945. Millions left the country in the first weeks in search of safety, the majority of them women and children (as men of military age can only leave the country under special circumstances).

Lutheran congregations, especially in border areas, were among the first to respond. In Poland, Slovak Republic, Hungary, Romania and the Czech Republic, Lutherans distributed hot meals, arranged for accommodation and transport, and supported people with information for the journey onwards.

RECEPTION

“As a church, as a country, and as a society we were not prepared for this situation. At the same time, we could not remain indifferent. The first weeks of the war uncovered not only the terrible fruit of the war atrocities but have also shown the immense power of goodness, of the capacity to oppose evil with an active form of help.”

Bishop Peter Mihoč of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia (Eastern district)



A Ukrainian refugee girl is offered candy from a volunteer, as a group of Ukrainian refugees arrive at the train station in Záhony, Hungary. Photo: LWF/ Albin Hillert, 10 March 2022



Sol', Slovakia: Volunteers Eva Havrillova (left) and Anna Matisova (right) are two of many volunteers of the Lutheran Church in Kuková who currently help accommodate and support refugees from Ukraine. Kuková is one of many congregations of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia arranging accommodation, food and shelter for refugees. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert, 13 March 2022, Hungary

Pastor Rev. Drahos Oslík and one of many volunteers prepare supplies in a storage room at the Pozdišovce congregation, for transport to the border crossing at Vyšné Nemecké. Pozdišovce is the closest to the Ukrainian border of all the Lutheran congregations in Slovakia, and so the church here plays a key role in supporting incoming refugees. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert, 12 March 2022



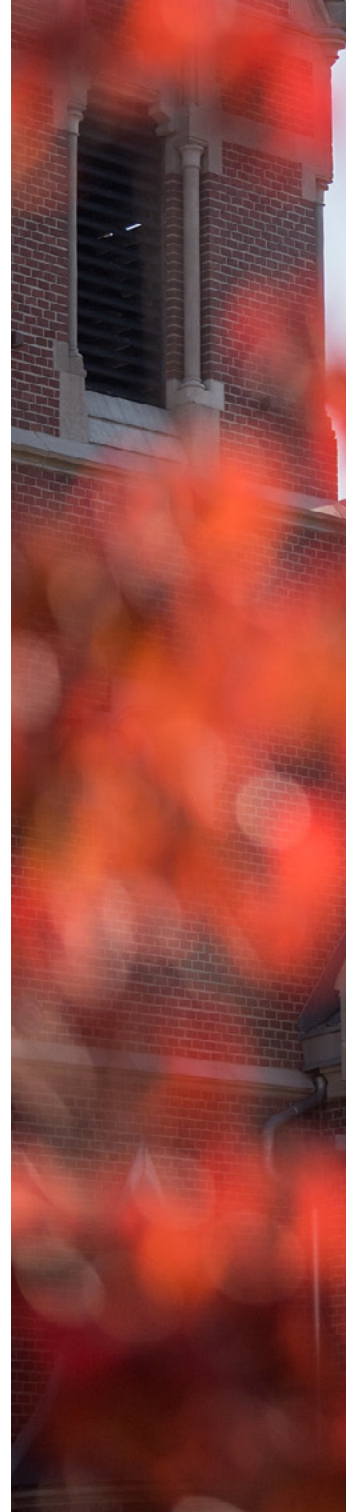
Hungary: Kóti Ákos, a self-employed pub owner in Chop Ukraine before fleeing, served in the Evangelical Lutheran congregation in Nyíregyháza Kertváros, Hungary and the diaconal institution Oltalom in supporting incoming refugees. Coming from a Hungarian-speaking family, Ákos supported the congregation mainly through interpretation. The Nyíregyháza Kertváros congregation works hard to accommodate and support people arriving in the city. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



Sol', Slovakia: Local pastor Zuzana Kubacková of the Lutheran Church in Sol' is one of a range of congregations of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia supporting incoming refugees from Ukraine by arranging accommodation, food and shelter. Since Russia began its invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, close to 200,000 Ukrainians have come to seek refuge in Slovakia. The Lutheran church is taking a leading role in hosting and providing support to incoming refugees, both immediately at the border, and medium to long-term by arranging accommodation and shelter, providing food and other support needed. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert, 13 March 2022



At the beginning of the war, LWF, in collaboration with Polska Akcja Humanitarna (PAH), distributed food and relief goods to refugees crossing into Poland through the borders in Zosin and Dorohusk as well as displaced populations in Volodymir and Obukhiv. For a month, LWF worked to protect refugees at the Medyka border crossing. In partnership with Humanosh Foundation, LWF conducted information campaigns for 3,500 refugees and transported over 1,100 refugees from the border to the closest reception center. Copyright Frank Schultze / Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 1 March 2022




ACCOMMODATION

During the first days of the war, many expected it to last days or weeks at most. In late spring however it had become clear that more permanent solutions were needed for refugees – above all, a place to stay. Tens of thousands of people all over Europe opened their homes for people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Lutheran churches in Europe repurposed their buildings to accommodate refugees for the long term. LWF supported their work in renovating and equipping these spaces

“Give shelter to refugees from war zones, deliver pastoral care, pray and speak out about the sin of the war and not about imaginary peace as if the responsibility for this invasion was on both sides. We need financial support for food, medical and hygiene products and for equipping emergency accommodation.”

Bishop Pavlo Shvarts of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine, 27 February 2022



The church in Bytom, Poland.
Photo: LWF/ Albin Hillert,
October 2022



Slovak Republic: Ukrainian refugee family Sasha (right), Tatiana (left) and 20-year-old Anna Radchuk (right) are one among a couple of families staying in a repurposed parsonage belonging to the Poprad Lutheran Church. Anna and her family fled from their home in Bila Tserkva, when Russian missiles hitting the city started destroying houses in their own neighbourhood. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert, 12 March, 2022



Poland: Olga Buzenowska (48) came to Poland as a refugee from Voznesensk in the Mykolaiv region of Ukraine in March 2022. Today, she lives with her husband, daughter and granddaughter in a dormitory at the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland parish in Bytom, where she also works as a cleaner to earn an income. In Ukraine, Olga worked in sales at a bakery and bread factory. In the church dormitory, each part of the family has their own room, and they share a kitchen and playing room for children in the building's basement with a couple of other refugee families. Olga's two sons stayed in Ukraine to fight. One of them has died in battle. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



Romania: The Skrypkar family from Dumitrovca, Odessa, is one of many families who were accommodated by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania. From March to August 2022, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, with support by LWF, repurposed its recreation homes, youth centers and guest houses to host people who had fled the war in Ukraine. Many volunteers provided legal and administrative support, meals, outings and recreational activities.

“I am grateful for all who made it possible to be in Elimheim for my family. We have good fresh food every day, many activities and care.(...) And it is great that we can speak with other Ukrainians every day – our language, our problems, news from our country and news about living in Romania.”

Olena Yantchuk, Ukrainian refugee in Romania

MATERIAL SUPPORT

“There was no calculation, no analysis, just spontaneous action. In many parishes volunteer groups were formed, projects are being implemented, and people from Ukraine have the opportunity to integrate into the local community and receive support.”

Jerzy Samiec, Bishop of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland



On various occasions, LWF distributed food, hygiene products and baby care products to Ukrainian refugees in Krakow and other cities in Poland. 8,000 people in Cieszyn, Krakow, and the LWF community centers in Ostroda and Gdansk were given the possibility to choose items such as canned pasta, marmalade, cereals, coffee and chocolate, hygiene and baby care products, as well as cleaning detergent and toilet paper. These distributions were organized with local congregations and other partners like supermarkets. Photo: LWF/ Léa Gillibert.



Upon the request of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (ECACP), LWF's humanitarian arm, World Service, established a country program in Poland in the spring of 2022 to support the diaconal work of the ECACP. LWF Poland (LWF Fundacja w Polsce) established six refugee support centers in Gdansk, Wroclaw, Zgierz, Bielsko-Biala, Ostroda and Bytom Miechowice. The centers have provided multipurpose cash assistance; mental health and psychosocial support and referrals to other refugee services to at least 70,000 people. After the initial intervention, the centers transitioned into community centers offering continued psychosocial support, cultural activities and support in local integration.

The centers are run in collaboration between LWF World Service and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, an LWF member church. Many of the staff in those centers are themselves Ukrainian refugees.



Loss of stability, a home, and income are reducing people's self-esteem, says Lina, a medical worker from Ukraine. A Polish family hosted her and her husband and helped them find a job. Lina works as a psychologist at the LWF center in Gdańsk. "Psychological support is very important for people in this situation," she says. "They feel suspended, between their homes in Ukraine and their new home in Poland."

Lina has observed that people return to Ukraine because they do not have the money to live abroad. "Refugees do not come here because they want to, but because they have no other option," she says. She advocates to not lose the potential of the refugees, but to help them find jobs in line with their skills and qualifications: "Don't give us a fish, give us a fishing rod!"



Anna Kucman from the Municipal Center for Family Support gives a presentation on violence against women and how to get help during a workshop organized by the LWF community center in Gdansk, Poland, for the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence.

“Women migrating are more exposed to economic and emotional abuse when they travel and establish in a foreign country. The challenges of navigating life in a foreign country, being the sole provider for children and elderly parents, while experiencing overall financial difficulties because of the war, put them at higher risk of being exploited or entering into abusive relationships”, explains Viktoriia Svidovska, LWF Psychosocial Officer in Poland. Photo: LWF/A. Brzozowski





Bytom, Poland: LWF staff from the community center in Bytom gather for training in 'community-based psychosocial support'. Many staff are refugees from Ukraine. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



Ukrainian Photographer Maria Kurashkina with some of her portraits in the LWF community center in Gdansk. Her photo project "Be brave like Ukraine" celebrates the strength and courage of the mostly female refugees in taking their families to safety. Photo: LWF/L. Gillibert

CRITICAL INFRA- STRUCTURE

“Houses were burned down, the infrastructure is destroyed, schools and hospitals have been looted and bombed, the soldiers left land mines behind. The people who stayed are the most vulnerable.”

Josef Pfattner, LWF Ukraine Response Coordinator,
on his first visit to Chernihiv oblast, August 2022





In the fall, LWF also opened a humanitarian program in Ukraine, and started reconstruction in two schools in Chernihiv district. In Bobrovitsa a school was renovated, while in Ichnya, the bomb shelter of the school was reconstructed. As the risk of air strikes persists, Ukrainian authorities have decided schools in the country cannot run onsite classes unless they have a functional bomb shelter. The bomb shelter in Ichnya can hold up to 1000 people, and therefore also protects the community. LWF also supported the communities with generators.



On a visit in October 2022, Bhoj Khanal, then LWF team leader in Ukraine, (left) greeted handiwork teacher Natalia Koval (right) wearing products made by students at the Ichnya school of Vasilchenko — home to 540 students aged 6-16. Since the beginning of the war, the students had been taught online. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert




When the Russian Federation started to systematically attack critical infrastructure in Ukraine in the fall of 2022, people were left without electricity, heating and water. All over Ukraine, cities and volunteers established heating points. These are places in public buildings such as schools, where people could warm up, eat, and charge their devices. LWF Ukraine, together with the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine, helped equip five heating points in Kharkiv, run by the Youth Council of Kharkiv. Photo: Ekocity/ Youth Council of Kharkiv

COMING TOGETHER

“Evil can never completely deprive us of faith, hope, and love. Even if we are robbed of everything else, faith, hope, and love cannot be stolen.”

Archbishop Urmas Viilma, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia



An orthodox icon sits on the baptismal font in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Partizánska Ľupča, Slovak Republic. The icon has been brought to the church by Ukrainian refugees who were hosted by families in the congregation, and the local pastor placed it on the baptismal font as a token of hospitality to the refugees, and as a symbol that 'in baptism we are all one family'. The 150-person strong congregation at Partizánska Ľupča received about 80 Ukrainian refugees. Photo: ECACP



Volunteers of St. John's congregation in Tallinn organized a language summer camp for Ukrainian children. The camp was also very successful because each refugee child had an Estonian roommate. Some of these encounters developed into lasting friendships.
Photo: EELC/Piia Aasmäe



Music connects people: With the support of LWF, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland organized a music festival with four concerts featuring Ukrainian artists in Grudziądz.

The concerts gave an opportunity to get to know Ukrainian folk music and Ukrainian performers. The music festival brought Ukrainian culture to the residents of Grudziądz. Some artists came from war zones, so their remuneration constituted a form of help in their difficult situations. At the same time, the remaining concerts were performed by young people – students of the music academy. Their participation in the festival encouraged them to help Ukraine.

During all the festival concerts, there were collections to help the people from Ukraine. The collected funds were allocated to the families living in the Parish facilities.



Polish evangelical parishes, supported by LWF, organized Christmas meetings for refugees from Ukraine, to help them feel at home and among friends. The Christmas events brought together refugees and the local community, to provide a space exchange customs and traditions and support each other. Among others, the Diocese of Katowice, Evangelical-Augsburg Parish in Golasowice , Evangelical-Augsburg Parish in Wisla-Malinka and the Evangelical-Augsburg Parish of St. Christopher in Wroclaw organized those Christmas dinners.



Children from Odessa bake pelmeni. The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession organized outings, celebrations and regular creative activities such as creative workshops, sewing, cooking or baking activities, sports activities, participation in bazaars, establishment of a children's museum, summer activities. The church also organized pastoral and psychological help, weekly therapy for stress and post-traumatic stress disorder, but also separate medical help. Photo: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania



First aid in the snow – the Evangelical-Augsburg Parish in Wisla-Malinka, Poland organized an outing with a first aid session for refugee children in January. Photo: ECACP



During the winter holidays, LWF Poland organized a vacation program for children in the community center in Gdansk. During this time, the entire team focused on activities for children organized in two groups of children and youth. Photo: LWF Poland

“IT IS DIFFICULT TO PROCESS ALL THAT IS HAPPENING”

Bishop Pavlo Shvarts talks about the situation in Kharkiv, the work of his church, and faith in times of war.

The German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine (GELCU) is the newest LWF member church. In June 2022, the church became an independent member of LWF. Already before the invasion on 24 February, GELCU had been providing aid to its congregations and people affected by the fighting in Donbass. Since the beginning of the war, congregations have been receiving aid from the Lutheran communion, through LWF and bilaterally. At the same time, they have also become an actor, sending relief goods to their congregations in the East of the country.

Bishop Pavlo Shvarts in Kharkiv.
Photo: LWF

How is the situation in Kharkiv?

Bishop Pavlo Shvarts: Apart from missile strikes on critical infrastructure, the situation in the city has been relatively stable during the last few months. About one million people live in Kharkiv, and most things in the city function. The only exception is the northern part which suffered greatly from the war with the Russian Federation, from missile attacks and other weapons.

How do the people feel, after one year of war and aggression?

The situation in Kharkiv is exceptional because many people in Kharkiv have family on the other side of the border, for example, in Belgorod. That creates a difficult emotional situation because Kharkiv and the Kharkiv region are regularly shelled from Belgorod. Therefore the invasion of one state into another also creates tensions in families. Part of a family is there;

the other part is here, which was and still is very difficult. Some families have broken up; they no longer speak to each other. These family breaks are quite a severe problem and will take decades to resolve.

I noticed that life is continuing here and people are returning to Kharkiv.

What do you think gives them strength?

People return to the city for various reasons. Partly they return because if they have not lost their homes, there is an opportunity to live and work here. If you rent a house outside Kharkiv, then these are additional expenses. The second reason is the desire to return to their native city and, in some sense, to return to that time before the war. I hear very different stories of how people are finding strength for themselves. If we are talking about religious people, it

will be faith and connection to a congregation. But everyone is trying to find their way. It is not always possible, unfortunately. That is why quite a lot of people are experiencing depression. It is difficult to process all that is happening emotionally.

How is the situation in the congregations of your church?

We are a small church: some members of our congregations left for other cities in Ukraine, and some moved abroad. We maintain relations with both, and we also welcome new members. We categorically separated the distribution of humanitarian aid from religious services so that people would not feel obliged to attend worship.

As a church, we set up gatherings and worship services, so the congregations are like a support group where people help each other. In the same way, we

involve people in some activity so that they not only receive aid but also feel like they can contribute something: unload cargo, and hand over relief goods to someone.

We provide humanitarian aid, but more in the form of direct assistance. We do not do mass distributions. Instead, we see where there is personal contact because this reduces the probability of manipulations and gives more opportunities to help those in need.

What kind of humanitarian aid are you doing?

Over the last 11 months, the needs have changed. In the early days of the war, we helped to evacuate people. We enabled people to leave and find a new place either in Ukraine or outside Ukraine. We brought people bread; then, when there was bread again, we delivered milk. Now we distribute packaged food.

We also provided medicine in the spring. Later, we did not do that anymore because the pharmacies were working, and giving out medicine was complicated. We also help with vouchers. Since May, we have been holding classes for children, helping with school, and even organizing computer science classes.

What gives you the strength to continue your work during this war?

Everything we do is grounded in our faith. Faith in Jesus Christ is the primary motivation for our work. Faith prompts us not to be indifferent and to help other people but to help with wisdom. As I always like to repeat: it is important not to harm people with support.

We want to avoid creating new problems, for example, by giving away things people don't need, or that might cause them to lose their independence and expect someone to always take care of them.

What does it mean for your church, your work, you to be a part of the communion of churches?

Being a part of the Lutheran community in a crisis is vital because it gives you the feeling that you are not alone with the problem and that other people pray for you, help you, and want to hear you. During these months, we built a lot of new relationships. It helped people to hear how to provide aid best: not to help with what I want to give but with what is needed and to listen to the people on the ground.

Interview: Daniel Kiss (Hungarian Interchurch Aid), LWF/ C. Kästner-Meyer (questions and edits).

Translation: LWF/ O. Batoryk



Kyiv, Ukraine: Lidija Tselsdorf, Head of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint Catherine in Kyiv pictured by a set of supplies packed and ready to be shipped to communities in need of humanitarian aid because of the ongoing war in Ukraine. The church of Saint Catherine is one of the congregations of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine, an LWF member church. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert, Oktober 2022



Computer classes for children in Kharkiv, winter 2022. LWF supports GELCU congregations with satellite internet equipment. Photo: GELCU

*Liberated by God's grace, a communion in
Christ, living and working together for a just,
peaceful and reconciled world.*

LWF VISION STATEMENT



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