

WAR IN UKRAINE: EASTERN EUROPE

ONE YEAR LATER



Lutheran Disaster Response



Thank you!

On Feb. 24, 2022, the world watched in horror as Russia invaded Ukraine. As the devastation spread, millions of people — mostly women and children — fled to neighboring countries in Europe in search of safety. Amid one of the worst refugee crises in recent history, Lutheran Disaster Response's partners in the region gathered food, clothing and other supplies and opened their doors wide to the traumatized people who began to arrive. A year later the impacts of the war continue to be felt around the world. There is a fuel shortage in Europe, and existing food shortages have been exacerbated. As the situation evolves, Lutheran Disaster Response and its partners continue to accompany people affected by the war.

You and other supporters responded with incredible generosity, sharing over **\$12 million** to help our neighbors in Eastern Europe whose lives were so suddenly disrupted, and showing them that they are not alone.



HUMANITARIAN AID

The sudden onset of the war left people little time to prepare. Residents of eastern Ukraine quickly fled to the western side of the country and into neighboring nations. Ukrainians hurriedly packed so they could leave for safety as quickly as possible. Organizations and individuals in bordering countries prepared to welcome them. The immediate needs of the refugees were clear — clothes, food, diapers, medicines. In western Ukraine and in other European countries, people prepared to address these necessities.

When the Rev. Bevan Stein began delivering supplies to Ukraine in March 2022, he didn't know what was in store for him. He simply saw the needs of the Ukrainian people whose lives were disrupted by the war, and he had resources to help them.

Rev. Stein and his wife, Laura, have lived and worked in Slovakia since 1996. In 1999 they founded a nonprofit called the Father's Heart that served at-risk children, and over the years their ministry has grown to serve others as well. When Russia invaded Ukraine and refugees started to pour into Slovakia and other neighboring countries, Rev. Stein saw an opportunity to expand the ministry in another direction.

He loaded up a truck with supplies, such as blankets, food, clothing and medication, and drove it over the border to Ukraine. In July, after making several trips, he was asked by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia (ELCACS) to serve as the church's humanitarian aid coordinator.

Traveling to a country at war isn't an activity to be taken lightly. Rev. Stein is aware of the dangers of his role: "Fear and faith are always battling for our hearts and for our minds. Faith is conquering my fear. But it is something I have to take seriously because I'm also a husband and father and a grandfather, so there are other people depending on me."

Rev. Stein continues to make trips into Ukraine, delivering whatever he can to people in towns near the border.



Kyiv, Ukraine
LWF/Albin Hillert

“We didn’t get involved in humanitarian aid in Ukraine because it was safe. We got involved because it’s where we felt God was leading us to go.”

Over the past year Rev. Stein has faced formidable obstacles. When he made his first trips, he had trouble procuring fuel for his truck. He says it's easier now, though more expensive. Another challenge is simply



Rev. Bevan Stein serves as the humanitarian response coordinator for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia.

determining what he can bring. Customs agents at the checkpoints have grown stricter on items such as clothes, demanding that they be identical. Because Rev. Stein usually cannot deliver donated clothes into Ukraine unless they are uniform, he instead must purchase matching clothes.

Despite these challenges, Rev. Stein and ELCACS are committed to providing humanitarian aid to Ukrainians

SUPPORTING THE VULNERABLE

After Ukraine was invaded, organizations throughout Eastern Europe took on new activities to address the sudden influx of refugees. With support from Lutheran Disaster Response, partners adapted quickly to address the new challenges resulting from the refugee crisis, especially for marginalized populations that faced additional obstacles when seeking assistance.

The Roma people, an ethnic minority, have a long history of being discriminated against in Eastern Europe. When Roma people in Ukraine fled to other countries to escape the war, they were sometimes treated differently from their white counterparts. In Hungary, Lutheran Disaster Response works with partners to ensure that Roma refugees are treated with the same dignity as are others arriving from Ukraine.

Attila Meszaros, coordinator of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH) refugee response, says that before the war, the church might help about 300 refugees per year. That number more than tripled as refugees poured across the border from Ukraine, he says, and about 90% of those served by the church are Roma people who have had difficulty accessing services elsewhere. With support from Lutheran Disaster Response, ELCH hired additional staff to manage the increased caseload.

For many people with disabilities, finding transportation west grew increasingly difficult. Some methods of transportation were inaccessible to those with physical

both within Ukraine and beyond its borders, and empowering local churches to do similar work.

Seeing firsthand the negative impacts of the war can be overwhelming, Rev. Stein said. He tries to see this as an opportunity to use his gifts from God to serve others. “It’s inspiring to see people weep with joy to know that they matter to somebody, that God cares about them, that God sees them.”



Attila Meszaros (left) with other leaders who work with Roma people.

disabilities. For others, public transit is an overwhelming sensory overload. One organization saw these challenges and, with LDR support, secured accessible vans to help people with disabilities travel safely to places within Ukraine or in neighboring countries. Partners and companion churches throughout Eastern Europe are helping families with rent, groceries

and assistance in finding employment. They also help with the translation of government forms, including those that officially acknowledge the disability

and support needs of individuals. These organizations ensure that vulnerable refugees, including Roma people and people with disabilities, have the support they need and are treated with respect.

“With the beginning of the war, I had a feeling that a great darkness was approaching,” said one mother of a child with disabilities. “But fate showed that there is room for light, goodness and joy in our world.”

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A HOLISTIC REFUGEE RESPONSE

As the war in Ukraine has progressed, support for refugees has evolved. In the first months of the war, our partners welcomed refugees with food, clothing and other daily necessities. They provided temporary shelter in churches, community centers and their own homes. As the war raged on, it became clear that refugees would be in their host communities long-term, so organizations adapted to the new needs of refugees. They helped people learn languages, obtain jobs, find permanent housing and integrate into their new communities.

Nataliia is a data entry clerk at the integration center in Bielsko-Biala, Poland run by ELCA partners Lutheran World Federation and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. The center is one of six around the country where refugees from Ukraine can apply for cash assistance, access counseling and social services, and find child-friendly spaces where their children can play.

A refugee herself, Nataliia arrived in Poland in March 2022 with her 10-year-old son when her hometown in Ukraine was under siege. She spends her days helping others in the same situation. “I go to work, but I go to Ukraine,” she says. “I am very thankful that I have a job, and we can help people with the same problems. They come here and ask us for advice: what to do, where to go? ... I help them fill



Nataliia works at an integration center in Bielsko-Biala, Poland, where she helps other refugees navigate access to social services and financial assistance.

in documents and explain to people how to get the money, what to do at the bank.”

Most of the staff members at the center in Bielsko-Biala are Ukrainian, either refugees escaping the war or immigrants who were already in Poland for work or educational opportunities. “Our staff are Ukrainian, our clients are Ukrainian,” Nataliia says. “It feels good to be able to help people cope with the situation.”

Nataliia’s son is enrolled in a Polish school. She says that he enjoys it and is quickly picking up the Polish language, speaking it better than she does. “He tells me, ‘Mom, you have a bad accent!’” she laughs. They had accommodations with a host family until January. “After that, we will find new accommodation, or maybe the war will be over and we can go home and reunite with our family,” she says. “Either way, life will continue.”

GLOBAL IMPACT

The effects of the war in Ukraine reach far beyond Eastern Europe. In addition to economic instability, supply-chain issues and other factors, the conflict has exacerbated food shortages in regions such as the Horn of Africa. The ELCA's deep relationships with global partners allow the church to respond to local challenges that are intensified by the war, including food insecurity, now and in the years ahead.

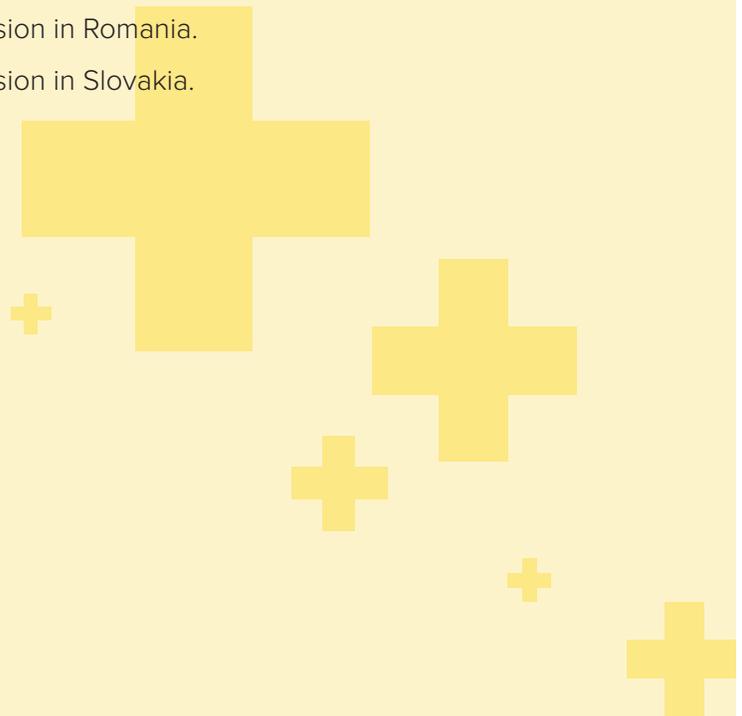
With no clear end in sight, the humanitarian and refugee crises in Eastern Europe require a yearlong response. Lutheran Disaster Response and our partners continue to provide holistic support for our neighbors impacted by the war, addressing the myriad needs of displaced people. The work doesn't stop after one year — it continues for as long as is necessary.

POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS

This work to steward your incredible generosity would not have been possible without our partners in Eastern Europe. As the first refugees crossed the border with very few belongings, volunteers were prepared to welcome them and provide food, clothing and temporary shelter. As the war progresses, these organizations are adapting to the changing needs of refugees as they acclimate to their host communities.

We are incredibly grateful to:

- ACT Alliance.
- Church World Service.
- German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine.
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary.
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania.
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania.
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia.
- International Orthodox Christian Charities.
- L'Arche.
- Lutheran World Federation.
- RGDS-Phiren Amenca.



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Thank you!



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WAYS TO SUPPORT THIS ONGOING RESPONSE AND OTHERS LIKE IT:

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[ELCA.org/disaster](https://elca.org/disaster)

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Lutheran Disaster Response and send to:

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ELCA Gift Processing Center
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Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

BY PHONE

Call 800-638-3522 to make a donation with a credit card. Operators are ready to assist you Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Central Time.



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