



## Supporting Ukraine – Combatting contemporary forms of poverty *Poland*

Since February 2022, Poland has welcomed a large number of people who are migrants fleeing the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. AIC volunteers support almost 300 families in three Polish towns. They provide them with food, clothing and hygiene products to cover their basic needs. They also organize Polish language classes and sewing courses to create jobs for women. Joint celebrations, such as Easter, enable people who are migrants to get together and meet their compatriots. AIC Poland also supports AIC Ukraine by sending donations, food and hygiene products.

### Context

24th February 2022, Russia started its aggression against Ukraine. The harshness of this aggression surprised Polish AIC volunteers. A large number of Ukrainians fled to the border with Poland – mainly mothers with children, elderly people and people with disabilities. They did not know the language, had no money, no food, no spare clothes and nowhere to go to. They had to wait at the border in the icy cold (-7°C) for almost 30 hours.



## Context (continued)

In the first week alone some 1.5 million Ukrainians crossed the border – the largest exodus since the Second World War. No one was prepared for this. Polish AIC volunteers, with others, went to the border. Each refugee received a hot meal, clothing, hygiene products, transport and somewhere to stay, all free. Most were taken in by parishes, religious houses or by Poles in their own homes. Refugee centres were virtually non-existent in Poland at the time.



## Project activities

AIC volunteers worked to get social security numbers, social cover, SIM cards, medical care and to have the children attend school. They also supplied food, clothing and hygiene products.

Volunteers wanted people to feel at home. They tried to reduce the mental trauma and, for a brief time at least, allow the people who were migrants to forget the nightmare they were living. Volunteers organised weekly meetings, with coffee and cake, listening to the refugees, seeing what their needs were and enabling them to meet their compatriots. There was a special play area reserved for the children. They would pray together, cook together and have fun together.



In 2022, over the Easter period, volunteers and people who were migrants got to know each others' cultures and customs. They made Easter Palms together and prepared a traditional breakfast for 200 families.



Volunteers stay in constant touch with their friends from AIC Ukraine. They were able to send them the money they had raised as well as food and hygiene products. A Father transported all this to the border with Ukraine. There were emotional and joyful meetings with members of AIC Ukraine.



## Future prospects

The war goes on, no-one knows for how long. Beginning of 2023, over 9 million Ukrainians had crossed the Polish border. Some have continued their journey into other European countries whilst others have returned to Ukraine, and over 2 million have stayed on in Poland. The Polish population and people who are migrants are all learning to live together but it raises a number of challenges on a daily basis.

AIC volunteers organise free Polish language classes. They encourage local initiatives to create jobs for the women, raising funds to acquire sewing-machines. A sewing workshop has been set up. They are also able to provide legal assistance and regular deliveries of food parcels and clothing. 200 families are looked after in Wroclaw, Warsaw takes care of 50 families and in Rabka there are 21 people.

AIC Poland helps Ukraine get through the winter with no electricity or heating, and have sent batteries, blankets, warm clothes and food to Bakhmut. Volunteers are grateful for all the donations they have received, which enable them to continue supporting Ukraine.

