



Working with displaced people in a war context – Combatting contemporary forms of poverty *Ukraine*

A Ukrainian AIC volunteer shares her personal experience of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Living in a city close to the border, she took refuge in the basement of a church for 10 days to protect herself from the bombings, before managing to flee to the west of the country. With fellow AIC volunteers, she is now supporting other internally displaced people in Ukraine who, like her, have fled the conflict, leaving everything behind.

When the war began on February 24th, 2022, I woke up at about 5am (it was still dark) due to terrible explosions of rockets and artillery shots. It was scary, it was shocking... and it was clear that the war had begun – we were being attacked. To be honest, at first I did not know what to do, people called me, everyone was full of panic and fear... When the sun had risen, it was clear that the city was in smoke and explosions and shots did not stop. I got ready, took my documents and my cat and walked to a safer place, the basement of a church.

From that morning I never returned home. On the sixth day of the war, my

small house was burned down from a rocket shell which hit it. I became homeless. In the basement, together with our parishioners and local residents (there were about 130 of us), I sat under constant rocket shelling from multiple rocket systems, air bombs and other types of weapons for 10 days. It is impossible to convey... I never want anyone to experience this. War is the most terrible thing that can happen to humanity.

The consequences of the war are homelessness, poverty, migration, illness, loss of relatives, loss of work... War brings all kinds of poverty and fear!



After 10 days of this horror, we decided to evacuate to a safer place – to Western Ukraine, where our missionary Vincentian Fathers were waiting. We drove 30 people (adults and children) in 4 cars. The journey took 3 days because a lot of people began to evacuate themselves from cities and villages in Eastern Ukraine. The aggressor bombed and shelled the most densely populated area of the city where we lived, where more than 300,000 people lived in high-rise buildings. People saw their burning neighbours dying in the flames. The picture shows what the station looked like in the first weeks of the war... people waited 1-2 days to get on an evacuation train. People fled to Western Ukraine, and then to Europe...



You can talk a lot about what happened and is happening, but given the above, I would like to say that having survived all this horror, I am very grateful for your support, which helped me survive. In the first days of the war, I received messages from the International Secretariat, from AIC UK, from AIC Poland. In such difficult moments in life, it is very important that you are supported, to know that people are thinking of you and want to help. And most importantly, pray! Thanks a lot!!! You can't even imagine how it gave strength to endure all the horror in which we found ourselves.

I also want to express my great gratitude to all of you, your countries and your people and governments, who opened the borders of their countries, homes and, above all, hearts for us, Ukrainians, who fled to save our lives and the lives of our children. This is invaluable help and support. Thank you also for all the humanitarian projects and financial assistance that we have received and continue to receive.

Already describing my experience of the war and the evacuation, I touched on the topic of migration. People were forced to flee their homes, cities, villages, country in order to save their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Many have lost everything material – houses, work, their savings. They became refugees (migrants), homeless and poor...

Basically, these are residents of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, where active hostilities or occupation are taking place: Kharkiv, Donetsk, Lugansk, Sumy, Zaporozhye, Dnepropetrovsk, Nikolaev, Kherson, Odessa regions... The massive missile strikes and the consequences that followed them also caused blackouts, in which people in their homes had no elec-



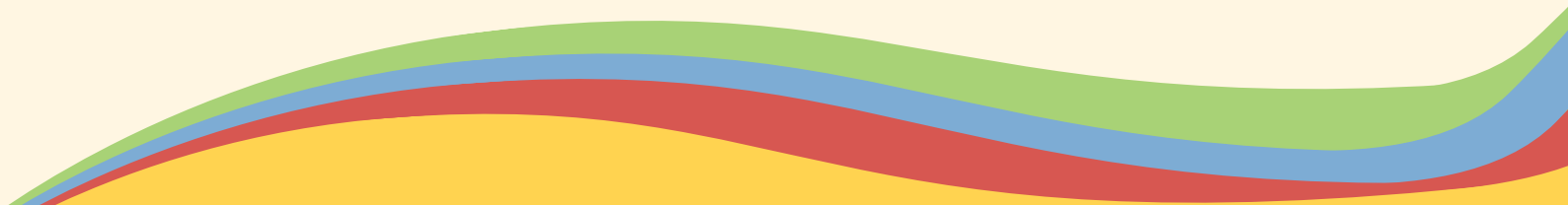
tricity, heat, water or communications for several hours a day and up to several days. Because of that people from Central and Western Ukraine were also forced to leave their homes.

From all this, we see how many challenges and difficulties both our people and European countries have faced. But, I repeat, your hearts and homes have been open to us, and Ukrainians have found warmth and safety there!

There is also the problem that not all Ukrainians will return home even after

the war. There are several reasons for this: fear of living next door to such a country, fear of the memories that they experienced during the shelling, the fact that everything is destroyed and there is nowhere to return to, the lost job opportunities... and others.

4.7 million internally displaced persons are registered in Ukraine. More than 14.5 million Ukrainians left after February 24, and at least 11.7 million entered the EU countries. 7.7 million are registered in Europe as recipients of temporary protection.



In turn, we, as an AIC Ukraine group, want to help in Western Ukraine, where our groups are located: Transcarpathia, Brody, Bukovyna and Sniatyn. Our president did great coordination work. AIC assistance to internally displaced persons is in the form of projects aimed primarily at providing housing for displaced persons, as well as providing necessary things. And we began to provide this assistance from the first days of the war, together with the Vincentian Family (Vincentian Fathers and Daughters of Charity, Miraculous Medal Sisters, DePaul):

- In Zakrapattya, in the pastoral parish centre in Perechyn, about 118 settlers were accommodated, where they were provided with all the necessary things (clothes, sanitary items), as well as food.
- In Snyatyn, in the house of the Daughters of Charity, as well as the Fathers' pilgrimage centre, about 120 settlers were accommodated, and everything necessary was also provided.
- In Brody, a large room was made available at the boarding school for housing immigrants, about 1348 people in total. Here too, people were also provided with everything they needed...

Only one person, the most persistent, because everyone was evacuated, remained from the group. And throughout this time, together with Vincentian Fathers and in cooperation with DePaul, she daily delivers hot food and humanitarian aid to those in need. After the end of the war, we plan to help people rebuild their homes and help them buy what they need. We have already started with roofs and windows.

In the end, I just want to say that despite the cruelty and the size of the army of the enemy, we believe in victory and peace. And this is also thanks to the solidarity of European countries, which have been present in Ukraine since the first day and are helping us! Without your support, without joint efforts, we will not be able to resist this terrible evil that destroys all of us in its path, destroys life... I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to speak at this meeting, at the international meeting of the AIC, to express my gratitude and the gratitude from those people whom we can help because of your donations and also to attract your further support to help restore our country and human lives.

*Testimony shared during the AIC
International Assembly 2023*