

# MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR UKRAINE




PHOTO: SIMON CHAMBERS / ACT

**ACT** ALLIANCE'S  
PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT  
FROM FEBRUARY 24, 2022





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Bueno de Faria



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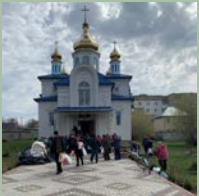
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# ACT ALLIANCE IN UKRAINE



**ACT** Alliance members have been working in Ukraine for many years, in communities with faith-based and secular local organisations to support vulnerable populations impacted by conflict.

In 2023, the humanitarian crisis stemming from the war in Ukraine and its neighbouring nations persists, impacting millions of lives and devastating communities, infrastructure, and livelihoods. As we approach a second winter of conflict, this booklet aims to shed light on the crucial psychosocial support ACT Alliance members are providing in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, including Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova.

ACT Alliance members have been steadfast in their response to the needs of populations deeply affected by the conflict, people often grappling with profound trauma. Our commitment lies in providing people-led humanitarian assistance. An exemplary approach in this regard is the Survivor and Community-Led Response (SCLR) method, a feature highlighted in an op-ed by Christian Aid. Additionally, the booklet shares the inspiring story of the 'Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv' project implemented by Diaconia ECCB.

Integral to the broader humanitarian response by ACT Alliance is the integration of psychosocial initiatives into various programmes, notably shelter projects. ACT members extend a range of activities to those impacted, including self-help training for stress management, art therapy, music therapy, psychological support sessions, and individual consultations. In regions where mental health services are underfunded and stigmatized, the blending of mental and spiritual support proves instrumental in bridging gaps and combating prejudice.

Within these pages, you will find an insightful interview with Father Gabriel Cazacu of AIDRom, a social worker, and interfaith dialogue leader. Father Cazacu managed to unite Ukrainian and Romanian Orthodox communities, creating a safe space for healing and communication.

We invite you to read the positive stories within this booklet, including testimony from a humanitarian worker, an interview with a mental health expert, and a video by Hungarian Interchurch Aid, showcasing therapeutic efforts in Lviv, Ukraine, among much more.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support. We encourage you to stay updated on our activities through our [website](#) and social media platforms. Your continued support is vital in addressing the needs of displaced Ukrainians and host communities.

Yours Sincerely

**Rudelmar Bueno De Faria**  
General Secretary

# TOTAL **ACT** RESPONSE

Total ACT Response in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, involved 40 members working together and in partnership with local organisations.

The ACT members listed at the bottom of the page are implementing the UKR221 appeal in Ukraine, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, and Romania.

ACT ALLIANCE PROVIDES HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE THROUGH ITS MEMBERS, THEIR LOCAL PARTNERS AND LOCAL CHURCHES IN THE FORM OF FOOD, WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES, SHELTER, NON-FOOD ITEM DISTRIBUTION, MULTIPURPOSE CASH ASSISTANCE, MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT, EDUCATION, LEGAL SUPPORT AND PROTECTION.





# WHEN THE CURRICULUM IS THE LEAST IMPORTANT PART OF THE CLASS

When most of us sign up for a course, we pay the most attention to what we will be learning and are focused on improving our skills.

Ilona teaches in Sambir Ukraine, a town near Lviv. She works hard to instill exactly the opposite thought in her students. "They were very worried at the start," she says. "They wondered if we would have tests, based on their experience of school growing up."

But the goal of this programme is much more than to learn English. Ilona's class is part of a psychosocial support project of ACT member Hungarian Interchurch Aid. "We are learning together," Ilona explains. "There is no hurry, no pressure. We go around in a circle, everyone trying things. There is no judgment when we make mistakes."

The important thing is that the students are together. "Many of the students feel alone," Ilona says. "If you learn online, there is no one to socialize with." And social time is key in the psychosocial support to these displaced Ukrainians. "When we come together, and get to know each other, we have a community. We can open up and share our thoughts, our feelings, our experiences."

**"Learning English isn't the main thing, time together as a community is."**

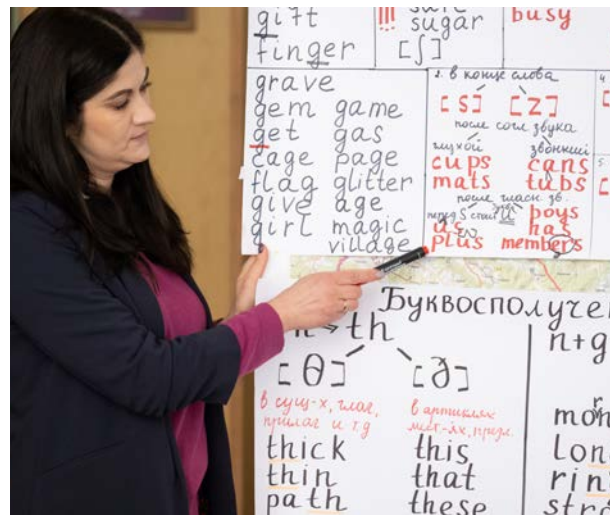


PHOTO: SIMON CHAMBERS / ACT

Life isn't easy for Ilona and her students. She is from Kherson, a Russian-speaking part of Ukraine. She had a life, a job, an apartment, and her husband owned his own business. "Everything was ruined in one day," she says. "My mother called us on the morning of February 24 and said 'we're being attacked from Crimea!' We quickly gathered winter clothes, some food, and other essentials and fled Kherson that morning. "We picked up my mother, and the five of us [Ilona, her husband, their two children, and her mother] along with our two dogs headed towards Sambir, where we have friends."

"When we left Kherson, the airport was already burning. There were huge traffic jams, people were panicking. Just driving to Mykolaiv, usually a one-hour drive, took four hours. You couldn't buy gas and the shelves in stores were bare. We had one 10L jug of water for our trip, and it took us 3 days to get to Sambir."

Even in the midst of the panic and confusion, there were moments of grace. "We stopped in Kropnisky on the first night and didn't know what to do. We had nowhere to stay. A local woman welcomed us into her home and started a fire on the stove to warm us. She gave us some food to eat and we had a short rest. Then we were ready to continue. We asked what we owed her, and she said 'Nothing. My son is already in the army.' That moment of welcome meant so much, and we are still in touch with her today."



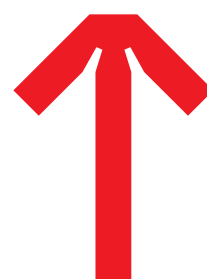
PHOTOS: SIMON CHAMBERS / ACT



PHOTOS: SIMON CHAMBERS/ ACT

CLICK THE BUTTON ABOVE TO WATCH HIA'S PSS IN LVIV

# Hungarian Interchurch Aid



HIA has supported 48,872 people through its protection activities until August 2023

- Art therapy for refugees and IDPs
- Group psychological therapy sessions for refugees and IDPs
- Individual psychological therapy sessions for refugees and IDPs
- Children's development for refugees and IDPs
- Community events of all sorts, especially for refugees
- Summer and winter camps for refugees and IDPs
- Legal aid for refugees and IDPs

HIA implements protection activities directly through its Support Centre for Ukrainian Refugees and also works with 25 implementing partners in Ukraine and Hungary. These organisations and their activities vary in size and reach, most having received financing through HIA's Flexible Small Grants (FSG) programme and the SCLR scheme.





ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE



PHOTOS: ANATOLIY NAZARENKO/LWF

Visit by Mark Mullan, the Lutheran World Federation's Team Leader to meet the families and inspect the apartments for the first phase of LWF's shelter rehabilitation project in Kharkiv.

LWF has launched a tender for the rehabilitation of 50 flats in the first phase. In the second phase, a further tender will be launched for 500 flats to be rehabilitated allowing the most vulnerable IDP families to return safely to their homes of origin in Kharkiv City.

LWF's work in Kharkiv, Ukraine, includes heating points and renovating apartments destroyed by the war.







PHOTOS: ANATOLIY NAZARENKO/LWF

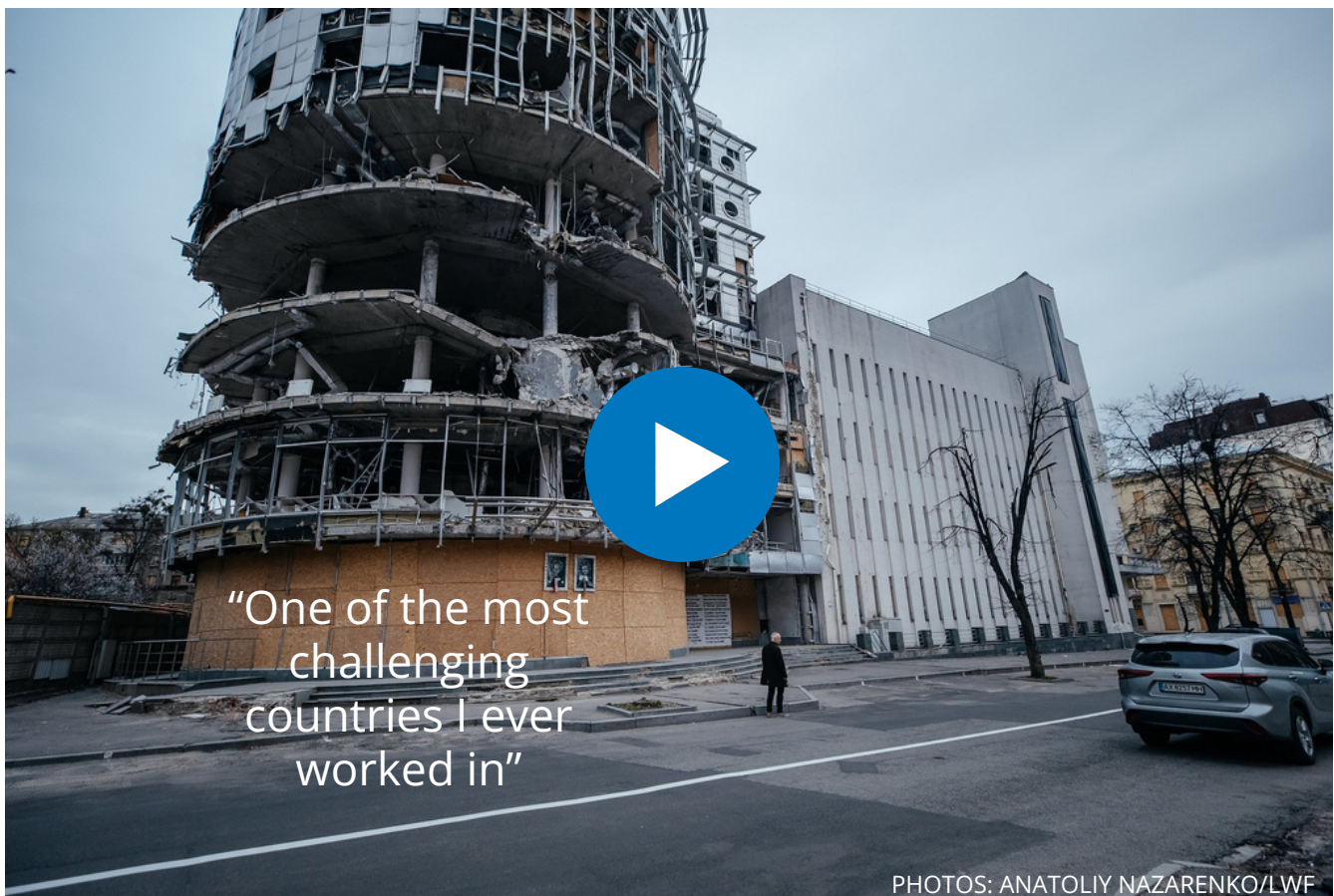
## FIELD STAFF REFLECTS ON WORK IN UKRAINE

I have headed humanitarian missions in hostile work environments such as Somalia, Rwanda, and Syria, but Ukraine is one of the most challenging countries I have ever worked in.

I arrived in Kyiv in February 2023, after a 10-hour train ride from the Polish border. After I checked in at the hotel, I went to my room to rest. I had just laid down on the bed when the first air raid started, with a deafening siren that could "wake up the dead" and a verbal message that I "must go immediately to the air raid shelter" and "not to be complacent." I didn't need much encouragement, to be honest, and I was down the stairs in record time.

Sometimes we would be in the shelter 5-6 times a day. Going through this intense experience forges unique bonds with people. From those early days and sleepless nights in the air raid shelters in Kyiv and Kharkiv, I forged new friendships.

A fun detail: the English version of the Air Alert mobile app that we use has the voice of Mark Hamill (the American actor who played Luke Skywalker in the film Star Wars). His voice would tell me to take cover, and when the air raid was officially over it would say: "May the Force be with you."



"One of the most  
challenging  
countries I ever  
worked in"

PHOTOS: ANATOLIY NAZARENKO/LWF



## FANTASTIC TEAM

Days have now run into months, and the daily air raids on Kyiv continue unabated. I have never felt so tired in my life. Sometimes I fall asleep on my bed with all my clothes on, including my boots. It is easier to wake up and make my way to the shelter without fuss. Sleep deprivation sometimes impacts my energy levels. While I heard people around me, both international and Ukrainian, mention that they were constantly exhausted, they never admitted that they were afraid. It is as if everyone must put on a brave face.

I work with a fantastic team at the LWF offices in Kyiv and Kharkiv; despite the many risks, no matter which office you are in, you are met with smiling faces and a willingness to do your best. Even though it's a new team, there is already an extraordinary closeness between the LWF staff. They reach out to each other even after hours to check that everyone is okay. I like it, and it says a lot about the quality of our people.

With a deeply developed sense of commitment, you can do humanitarian work in challenging locations over the long term. Having a good sense of humor helps me thrive in these situations, coupled with a willingness to reach out to others around me, engage, and make a community.



PHOTOS: ANATOLIY NAZARENKO/LWF

ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE

***"Seeing that our work makes  
a real difference in people's  
lives makes all the  
challenges worthwhile."***

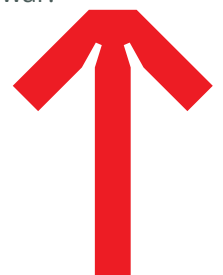
## NO WINNERS IN WAR

Seeing that our work makes a real difference in people's lives makes all the challenges worthwhile. LWF is rehabilitating housing in Kharkiv damaged by the war, so families can return to their homes. We also provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations in and around Kharkiv City. The most critical thing for me is to remain impartial and stand in solidarity with people in need of humanitarian assistance, and through our work, to show them that they are not alone and that someone cares about what is happening in Ukraine.

I recently went to see the film *Oppenheimer* when I was on leave. As I now sit in Ukraine with the alleged plot to cause an explosion at a nuclear power plant, it reminded me that there are never any winners in war.

By Mark Mullan

# Lutheran World Federation



*"We often invite the religious leaders to participate in the training, to introduce them, as they are an important part of CBPS mechanism. They bring in rituals, traditions, ceremonies, words of hope and forgiveness, reconciliation and trust where nothing else makes sense."*

NATHALIE TÖPPERWIEN BLOM



PHOTO: CHRISTINA WALLIN / ACOS

## THE COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH HELPS TO REACH A HIGHER NUMBER OF PEOPLE AND OVERCOME TABOOS, SAYS A HUMANITARIAN OFFICER OF ACT CHURCH OF SWEDEN

The latest report of the CBPS (community-based psychosocial support) consultant deployed in Ukraine by Act Church of Sweden shows that asking for PSS (psychosocial support) is still stigmatized in war-torn Ukraine where older generations distrust the psychiatric system as a result of the Soviet-era experience. Mental health is still largely seen in the community as for the weak ones.

ACT Alliance member, Act Church of Sweden predominantly relies on a community-based approach, in which ACT members involved in the ACT appeals are trained in online interactive/or in-person university-based courses. These provide them with basic knowledge by CBPS consultants to be able to provide aid where the funding or mental health professionals are not available due to a lack of resources.

*"We have had a roster of CBPS experts ready to deploy to any of our program countries or humanitarian disasters around the globe. All the CBPS experts took part in continuous training and networking throughout their entire contract period, which made it possible to quality assure their work and keep learning within the organization,"* says **Nathalie Töpperwien Blom**, a Humanitarian Officer Ukraine at Act Church of Sweden.

The strategy behind the concept is to train people in all the regions where ACT Alliance works on various levels – following the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) pyramid (further explained in the interview) and using the existing global Psychosocial Community of Practice.

These courses are translated into English, Spanish, French and now Ukrainian. Anyone who has an account at [www.fabo.org](http://www.fabo.org) can sign up free of charge.

The background of CBPS experts ranges from psychology, public health, or various community-based work but faith is an important aspect. Cooperation with faith leaders is what brings in the ACT Alliance's secret ingredient as they are already part of the community – therefore trusted sources – which makes all the difference, especially in Ukraine where the stigma is still deeply rooted.

*"We often invite the religious leaders to participate in the training, to introduce them, as they are an important part of CBPS mechanism. They bring in rituals, traditions, ceremonies, words of hope and forgiveness, reconciliation and trust where nothing else makes sense,"* added Töpperwien Blom.

According to Töpperwien Blom, there has been a rise in requests for CBPS training. Act Church of Sweden has currently deployed a CBPS expert in Ukraine – Timo Frilander whom we interviewed (below) about his latest experience in the field.



# PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT RECOGNIZED AS PRIORITY IN UKRAINE YET COMMUNITY MODELS STILL WIDELY UNKNOWN AND UNDERRATED

**ACT Alliance** spoke to **Timo Frilander**, CBPS expert of **Act Church of Sweden** with a background in theology, who has been providing trainings in the field for years, yet recognizes Ukraine as a challenging case.



**You have just returned from Kharkiv, where you were implementing LWF's PSS program aiming at strengthening community cohesion by recruiting "community mobilizers." Can you tell us a bit about that?**

Since there is growing demand and limited availability of mental health services in Ukraine, community-based models are widely recommended. LWF integrates psychosocial work into our shelter program, to be carried out in cooperation with UNHCR. Right now, I am training community mobilizers and local partners in community-based psychosocial support (CBPS). In addition to that and to ensure smooth referrals, some community mobilizers are also receiving training in protection case management. Mobilizers are then supposed to work with families and wider communities in areas (raions) the renovations will take place. My own duty is to capacitate the staff, partners, and volunteers, monitor the work and further develop LWF's psychosocial work.

LWF's psychosocial program is strongly supported by ACT Church of Sweden. The generous commitment of Act CoS to this work has made it possible to assess the situation on the ground, develop the program and start capacity-building processes. In many ways, Ukraine is a challenging case. We have a full-scale international war going on in the middle of Europe. It takes place in a highly urbanized middle-income country with a well-educated population. Under given circumstances, we need to modify and further develop our concepts and tools.

**How does Ukraine tackle the PSS? What place does it have next to the emergency care – physical injuries?**

Psychosocial support is recognized as one of the priority needs in Ukraine. There are several actors on the field offering different types of mental health services. Community-based models, however, are widely unknown or underrated. They may be considered as "soft" tools without a real positive impact on peoples' problems. In general, mental health services are considered highly stigmatizing in the Ukrainian context. However, the availability of information has improved and attitudes may be changing.

**Can you describe the CBPS concept as provided by your organization?**

Community-based psychosocial support relies on communities and their ability to recover from difficult experiences. Since we are operating on the community level, we do not deal with individuals. There is no therapy in clinical meaning either. CBPS is not something that only mental health professionals can do: principles, tools, and practices are easily accessible to those who would like to improve communal cohesion and overall well-being by developing more supportive communities.

Most NGOs are dealing with three lower levels of **the MHPSS intervention pyramid** (1. Basic services and security; 2. Community and family support; 3. Focused, non-specialized supports). CBPS services are often located on levels 1 and 2. The 4th level, specialized services, is reserved for highly educated mental health professionals like psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses. The rationale behind this division is simple: the better three lower levels are covered, the fewer patients end up at the top of the pyramid. It is equally important, that all actors deal with their respective areas of expertise. There are always individuals who cannot be helped by community-based tools only. That's why we need effective referral mechanisms.

**What role does the fact that ACT is a faith-based organisation play? What do you see as an advantage in having a background in theology?**

It helps me to value each and every human being as an image of God. Furthermore, theological background makes me value faith-based communities as important sources of compassion and consolation. I think there are basically two differences between FBOs and "secular" organizations: a) Our values are based on Scriptures and/or tradition that (also) reflect ancient wisdom of humankind; b) We do recognize the value of spiritual dimension to the well-being of an individual.

**CBPS TRAINING, KHARKIV, AUGUST 2023, PHOTOS: STRYZHAK DIANA**





# TOUCHING THE SOUL WITH FOLK MUSIC AND ART

Food, water, clothes, financial aid, having a safe place to sleep: meeting all of these needs is essential for the displaced Ukrainians but the comfort given by art, music, or group therapies provides healing for the soul that money cannot buy.

It is February 13, 2023, almost a year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and I am about to visit the Healthy Childhood Project in Lviv run by ACT Alliance member Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA). It provides music and art therapies for displaced children and their parents.

Ukrainian IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) who managed to escape the war zone now need more than security, food, and a roof over their heads. Once the basic needs have been secured, the soul needs to be cared for. Healthy communication within families where there is no energy or strength to open up about suppressed trauma can be accomplished with the help provided by professionals, who provide space for gentle healing.

Viktorka Titarova, a 35-year-old music teacher specializing in folk music swears by the healing effect of Ukrainian folk music on the soul. She is a music group leader with the IDP children in Lviv's Healthy Childhood Project.

***"Ukrainian folk music brings out something very ancient in us – children get to dive in naturally without any professional training," says Viktorka. "This is a newly formed group. I like to make children love music by giving them the freedom to create – not by imposing rules."***

And no rules and a bit of relaxation is a combination that works wonders for children whose education has been regularly interrupted by the need to go to the bomb shelter in their school, and constant fear of what is coming next since the prospects of the future are rather uncertain.



PHOTO: SIMON CHAMBERS/ACT

Karina (10) and Ruslan (16) are visiting the group for the first time. Both are very keen on singing along, playing various musical instruments, and foremost letting go and relaxing and having some well-deserved amusement after an intense period of stress.

Marika (14) is amused with a newly discovered wooden musical instrument that imitates a bird's voice. "I do not have any instruments at home, so this is great fun", she says with a big smile on her face.

Private therapy consultations are not commonly sought out in Ukraine but the culture is changing slowly with the turbulent times. Art therapy classes for adults and children offer a gentle approach and a safe space for meeting people facing similar circumstances.



PHOTO: SIMON CHAMBERS/ACT

Natalia, an experienced mental health professional who previously worked with UNICEF, took this challenge to become a leader of a group of IDPs. The aim of group sessions is not to diagnose PTSD but rather to work with people in a safe space, create a circle of trust, and assess if there are any further needs - if they arise, individual sessions are then offered.

***"Art therapy might look like pure entertainment but there is a much deeper concept behind it. People who would be afraid to seek therapy join us, and then I see them hugging each other and coming back. I see them laughing again and these are the signs that it works,"*** says Natalia.

Oksana, 44 who attends group sessions with her daughter describes why she keeps coming back.

*"It is incredibly useful to learn to switch attention and focus on something else, to learn breathing techniques and work with emotions using the imagination techniques. We start with a short introduction – exchanging how we feel based on cards, then we proceed to physical exercises to move the body before we start creating. It is great to be able to shift awareness and focus in a new direction."*

The most popular relaxation technique is "blue bubble breathing" which provides a fun way of relaxing with the use of imagery of a blue bubble in your belly and promotes deep belly breathing that calms down the sympathetic system and the fight or flight response.

She believes in being systematic therefore she encourages the participants to follow up on group sessions at home, adopting the relaxation techniques into day-to-day routines.



PHOTO: SIMON CHAMBERS/ACT

ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE

Natalia is convinced that unlocking creativity together has the potential to rediscover inner strength and resources for both children and adults in a non-invasive manner and safe environment. Before attending groups, participants would cope with PTSD by keeping themselves busy in daily routines and attempting to forget or help others while forgetting to address their own primary needs, which is now changing. The demand for individual sessions is on the rise.



PHOTO: HIA



# WHEN YOU HAVE LOST YOUR HOME, JOB EVEN FAITH. PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT CAN BE LIFESAVER

Survival has become the way of living for most Ukrainian refugees in the past 18 months and sadly also the “new normal.” Anxiety, stress, guilt, and the avalanche of emotions leave deep scars on those living this traumatizing experience. Over time, many of these refugees may develop mental health conditions for which they need psychological intervention and counseling.

*“A year ago, I lost my father to the war and I took some other terrible blows. When the Russians bombed the Nova Kahovka dam, my house was washed away. As a result of the missile strikes, my mother's apartment has no windows, and no balcony. We have practically nothing. The biggest shock for me, however, was the fact that for more than 10 months I hadn't heard from my husband, a commander in the Ukrainian army who was lost in action. I don't know if he is still alive if he died, if he is a prisoner or wounded. I did everything I could to find out about him. I have petitioned all the organizations I know, including the Red Cross, and the UNHCR. I went back to Ukraine with the little one to give DNA samples. Now I just hope. It's the best I can do. I felt I had nothing to live for: I lost my father, my husband, my job, my home, and my faith,”* says Natalia from Kherson who managed to get back on her feet with the help of the AIDRom program after hitting her rock bottom.

**Georgiana Șoricică is a clinical psychologist and integrative psychotherapist involved in the AIDRom project – Emergency response for communities affected by the conflict in Ukraine, funded by ACT Alliance. S** has been involved in aiding people like Natalia on a daily basis.



Working with refugees from Ukraine was a big challenge for her because these were not the typical 1:1 sessions as it is in a therapy process, it often involved a translator because of language barriers.

“With a lot of effort and determination, we managed to establish a therapeutic relationship and provide psychological crisis intervention.”

Georgiana worked with Ukrainian beneficiaries on psychological phases and reactions: denial phase, anger, depression, acceptance, and reorganization. “We had requests for individual therapy, but there were more requests for group therapy focused on how to better manage emotions in the context of war, what mental states this war triggers, namely various emotional disorders, stress disorders such as PTSD, acute stress disorder or adjustment disorder.”

ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE



PHOTOS: AIDROM

Georgiana organised personal development workshops for adolescents and pre-teens in which she addressed different therapeutic goals such as: “effective emotional management; self-awareness; increasing self-esteem; emotional disorders such as depression and anxiety and how we can recognize, identify and manage them more easily, along with all the emotions they come with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can be present at any age, from children and teenagers to adults.”

Even very young children needed similar help in addressing depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. *“We have also done groups for children aged 6 to 10. We have used different techniques that the little ones resonate with more easily. We drew ‘how we feel’, what our emotions are like, what color they are, and what names they have. I used predominantly expressive-creative and projective methods in order to give them an easier, more effective framework for expression.”*

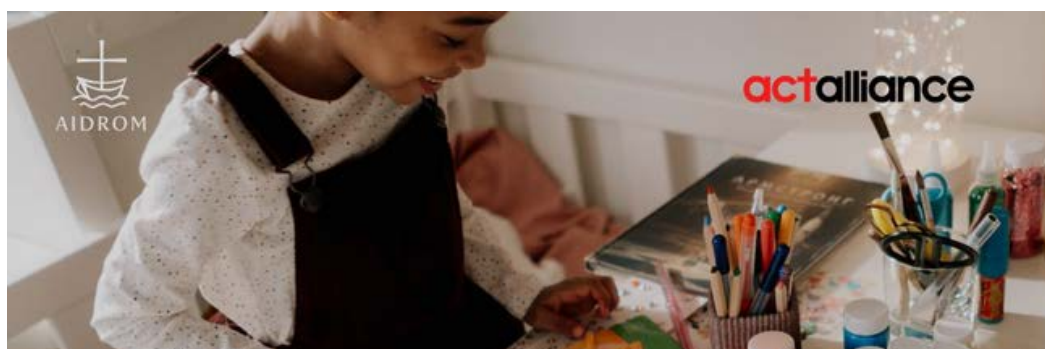
The main question repeatedly coming up in both individual and group therapy processes regardless of age was: “When do we get back home?” Homesickness among refugees is a big issue but as a therapist, it is vital to help refocus: “What is more important at this moment: our safety and that of our children or being outside our comfort zone far from home?”

Georgiana helped them to balance their needs and validate their emotions, supported them in “looking at the bright side: we are no longer at home, but we are safe”. This proved effective, especially in group therapy where mirroring each other's difficulties helped to realize that “they were not the only ones in this struggle called war.”

Another very helpful therapeutic activity for women with children in Ukraine was the organization of mothers' support groups, both for mothers-to-be and for those who had children of various ages at home.

According to Georgiana, the mothers had to learn to “manage all their emotions, adapt to the new roles in their lives and the new start away from home. Only after 6 months, they were ready to face the challenges related to bringing up their children, after the adaptation had taken place.”

Time is the keyword as the process of recovering emotional well-being is a marathon, Georgiana stresses the need for raising general awareness about the mental health needs among the refugees traumatized by the war even long after it has finished. Their needs for psychotherapy and assistance will continue, she adds.



PHOTOS: AIDROM

# AIDRom



# STORIES OF CHANGE: SOLIDARITY AND HEALING

In war-torn countries like Ukraine, the effects of war go beyond what is visible to the bare eye, and into the minds and hearts of children. While these wounds can be hard to heal, there is always hope. In Moldova Church World Service (CWS) supported one of its partners, Diaconia Social Mission, to establish an educational center known as "Anastasis" where there is never a shortage of hope. The word Anastasis means, "recovery from a debilitating condition" or "rebirth," which describes well the healing energy and mission of the centre.

During a recent visit to the centre, the CWS team met Olena Grubina, a Ukrainian refugee who is both a program participant and a care provider at the centre. When we first met Olena, we were captivated by the way she carefully observed each child while assessing their needs. Olena told us that the same thing that drew us to her is what drew her to the educators at the centre. She said "The educators' eyes emanate warmth and sincere love for children. This feeling cannot be confused with anything else. You can feel it from the beginning."

Perhaps the reason Olena was so quick to notice this type of intentional care is that Olena herself has experience in psychology. As a single mother from Ukraine, Olena was forced to leave her career behind to protect her two youngest children, Daniil and Gheorghii, from the war. When she discovered Anastasis, Olena saw the centre as an opportunity for her children to heal and a way for her to use her own skills.

Olena immediately enrolled her children into the program and soon became acquainted with the whole team of educators. As the team got to know Olena and learned about her profession, they quickly realized how valuable she would be for the program and hired her as an educator and psychologist.

Olena's work focuses on leading workshops for children between the ages of 12 and 16 that teach the youth methods to adapt to their new environment. While working with teenagers can sometimes be a challenge, Olena's own experience as a Ukrainian refugee allows her to connect deeply and naturally with the youth. She explains,

***"I know all these children. Many of them are my neighbours since we now live in the same hotel. I know their parents, their past, and the way they experience the trauma of this war."***



ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE

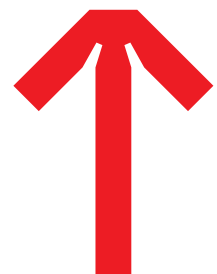
PHOTO: CWS

Olena is thriving in her role and feels grateful for her team. She said, "Here I feel a kind of family support; a feminine solidarity. I do my best to bring peace and harmony to these children, who are going through a hard time right now. I would like our centre, Anastasis, to be a shock absorber that will help them adapt to their new living conditions." With her team, Olena is healing the hearts and minds of dozens of children, along with her own.



PHOTO: CWS

# Church World Service



# JOINT PROJECT OF DIACONIA ECCB AND UKRAINIAN MYRNE NEBO TO PROVIDE “PEACEFUL HEAVEN” FOR CHILDREN IN KHARKIV REGION



ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE

Irina Vasilievna (40) was born, grew up and lived her entire life in the city of Kharkiv. After the war broke out, she and her family were evacuated inland. “It was a nightmare. The journey seemed never-ending, and I felt anxious and consumed by fear for our future. Although I did my best to adapt to our new environment, my heart was broken by feeling homesick and disturbed by dramatic news from the front.” Not surprisingly, Irina decided to return home immediately after the frontline had finally moved away from Kharkiv. She found her hometown vastly devastated, with many of her loved ones missing. She realized she was unable to continue her daily routine without professional assistance and she reached out to Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv, known to provide free care and safe haven for people just like her.

**Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv (supported by Diaconia ECCB)** was founded in direct response to Russian aggression and full-scale invasion in February 2022. Its primary mission was the distribution of food in the besieged city of Kharkiv and throughout the Kharkiv region. In addition to food aid, Peaceful Heaven began to provide child-focused and family-focused psychosocial support shortly after the withdrawal of Russian forces. The organization has built a network of 14 well-equipped centres for children (e.g. Kharkiv, Kupjansk, Izium, Zolochiv, Dergachi) with staff and services to the highest standards. Besides profiting from socializing, almost 23,000 children and parents are treated there every month by psychologists and psychotherapists.

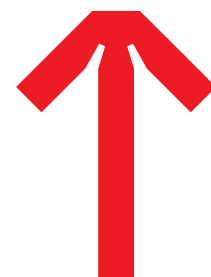
*“Sessions with experienced psychologists helped me to comprehend the traumatic reality and find my way to cope with the immense emotional burden. I gradually began to enjoy my hobbies and practise the daily routines from my past. Although I managed to overcome my trauma through perseverance, support of psychologists and thanks to my inner strength, I still continue to visit the psychological centre.”* shares Irina.

While Peaceful Heaven psychologists provide individual therapy, group therapy, and art therapy, teachers are devoted to distance learning, tutoring, English courses and other activities related to school education. As preschools and schools mostly don’t operate in the region due to frequent shelling, the centres run by Peaceful Heaven constitute a key alternative to standard educational facilities. Activation workers offer leisure activities like handicraft clubs or sports, which are particularly popular as there are not many opportunities for them in the de-occupied and front-line towns and villages. The centres, however, can be the safe haven caring for children’s souls only by caring for the safety of the body first - each hub has its own bomb shelter.



PHOTOS: MYRNE NEBO

## Diaconia ECCB







PHOTOS: MYRNE NEBO

Alina's (13) mother Ludmila sought psychological support because Alina would refuse to go out without her, felt anxious, and was being more and more socially isolated. "I was worried about my daughter in the first place. Nevertheless, after the psychologist recommended that I also take advantage of the service to strengthen our mother-daughter bond, I started my regular sessions, too." After only three therapeutic sessions and two more upon Alina's own request, her situation improved, and Alina was yet again able to enjoy free time with her peers. Moreover, both Alina and her mother profit from the professional supervision of an often-complicated mother-daughter relationship, let alone amidst war.

All activities are provided free of charge and thus make psychosocial care services available to low-income, socially weak, or otherwise disadvantaged groups. Peaceful Heaven currently implements a pilot project oriented at children with special needs and has a great dedication to continue and even expand its aid in the future.

“ *Diaconia ECCB – CDC has proudly participated in operating the children's centres and cooperated with Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv on humanitarian and development activities and looks forward to keeping joined forces in the future. We have seen first-hand that it is by strengthening local capacities and trusting in the know-how of local organisations that we can achieve a truly synergistic effect,*

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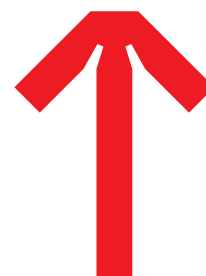
adds Kristina Ambrožová, the director of Diaconia ECCB – Centre of Relief and Development.



PHOTO: JIŘÍ PASZ

MYRNE  
NEBO

Diaconia  
ECCB



# FANCY MINDFULNESS, ROLE-PLAYING GAME, OR DEEP DIVE IN GROUP SESSIONS?

WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACE (WGSS) PROVIDES A WIDE VARIETY OF PSS TOOLS



ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE

**HEKS/EPER**, with support from NCA, launched a Women and Girls Safe Space (WGSS) in March 2023 after completing the time-consuming process of recruiting staff and finding appropriate premises. PSS offered at WGSS includes a wide range of options, catering to the needs of IDPs preferring individual sessions, support group sessions for those needing verbal expression, and art therapies for those preferring expressing their trauma in a non-verbal manner. Mindfulness is a tool used within self-help stress management course training and is a concept based on the Psychological First Aid Kit program that offers adolescents self-help through gaming.

## HELPING HAND

Imagine you could play a game to train yourself in life skills that would also help mental health literacy. Role-playing puts you in a situation where you are in charge of helping a friend master stressful moments triggering anxieties in adolescents. The Helping Hand toolkit, which gamifies PSS skills for youth, was contextualized and translated into Ukrainian and further adopted based on the pilot sessions held in WGSS. Basic principles of the cognitive-behavioural model are taught through gaming. 120 minutes of digital gameplay is offered through in-person sessions at the HEKS centre or online, along with 10 sessions of PSS with a guide/facilitator. Proving highly effective, the Helping Hand toolkit was further requested by MHPSS representatives from other international agencies.

## SELF-HELP

A 5-session stress management course for up to 30 people designed by the WHO offers essential tools and techniques to cope with the emotional and psychological impact of the war. It provides a variety of stress reduction strategies, relaxation techniques, and mindfulness practices leading towards improved well-being, reduced anxiety, and enhanced resilience under the supervision of the MHPSS program manager.

## ART THERAPY

As a part of the diversification process at the centre, HEKS/EPER came up with art therapy sessions which proved to be very powerful expressions for traumatized IDPs. Exploring the emotional process by drawing and painting offers an alternative to the verbal processes offered by cognitive models.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT SESSIONS:

Group sessions allow participants to share their experiences, emotions, and challenges with others who have similar experiences, thus fostering a sense of belonging, validation, and understanding which helps reduce feelings of isolation.

## INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS

HEKS MHPSS team has offered 881 individual consultations in the WGSS centre providing confidential space to participants who needed specialized guidance, coping strategies and unique treatment plans. Between November 2022 – March 2023, HEKS/EPER partnered in Odesa with local organisations FHL and WAY HOME – and was able to conduct PSS activities, including both individual and group counselling sessions to address specific needs using local centres. To be able to cater to individuals with limited access to the centres, a mobile modality was developed. Both FHL and Way Home provided their mental health experts who provided services to 188 individuals and referred 46 cases to external service providers for health care services.





# MILLIONS OF UKRAINIANS ON THE MOVE SET OFF AN AID REVOLUTION



ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE

**Christian Aid's Head of Humanitarian Policy Simone Di Vicenz argues the devastating war in Ukraine shows a change in approach is required to respond more effectively to global crises.**

In the first few months of the war, TV news showed the pictures we have come to expect of civilians caught up in conflict: rapid evacuations, temporary shelters and soup kitchens as millions left their homes for safety. Donations poured in from around the world to pay for this response.

Christian Aid was at the heart of this by channelling donations to our Ukraine partners such as Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA) and HEKS-EPER of the Swiss German church. Nothing was easy in those early frantic weeks but these long-established international charities already working in Ukraine had the contacts and legal permits to scale up their support for those on the move.

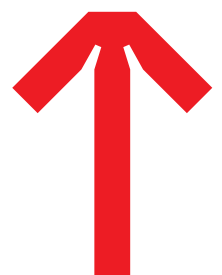
Months later, those donations are still helping and are paying for different kinds of help as the needs of displaced people evolve. Christian Aid has now made its own direct links to Ukrainian national charity organisations like the Alliance for Public Health (APH).

It's an umbrella organisation supporting even smaller partners on the ground and through them Christian Aid has pioneered and applied a community-led way of working. It involves displaced people deciding for themselves their own priorities for the kind of support they need. In short, international charities must do more listening and less telling.

The advantages of this approach, known as survivor and community led response or "SCLR" are remarkable. Instead of large impersonal and distant support, agencies are going down to the micro-level of organisation such as church groups, village councils and school parents.

These small, community-level groups know much better their urban or rural needs. For example, Christian Aid small grants of a few hundred pounds, for APH and Heritage organisations in Odesa, bought playground equipment for a children's centre and a generator to draw water from a well in a recently liberated village.

Instead of relying on big blobs of non-transparent funding sloshing around, vulnerable to fraud and waste, small groups of individuals are much more accountable to each other. Although no system is perfect, locals will know if the cash has been spent because the playground equipment and generator are there or they're not.



“

*It's not just about receiving aid. The process itself brings people together by repurposing existing civil society groups or supporting new ones where Ukrainians have joined up to help those who have left occupied regions.*

”

To succeed, local people need to collaborate on what they want, how to do it and who to involve. It breeds community cohesion, empowerment, and self-help - especially among women having to operate without their partners. One microgrant provided by Christian Aid to a local kindergarten was used to pay skilled locals to build an internal staircase to a kindergarten bomb shelter.

The sclr concept has been evolving since it was first used after the Haiti earthquake but the scale of the war in Ukraine has supercharged its application because it can be replicated easily by Christian Aid's network of faith and non-faith Ukrainian partners across the country. It's also being enthusiastically adopted by Christian Aid's bigger partners like HIA and HEKS. They too can see the advantages of moving beyond "traditional" humanitarian support.

Christian Aid believes this community-led approach is a message of hope for the future as Ukraine moves away from its post-Soviet past. It's a model for a civil society after the war where local people are entrusted and empowered to decide their own futures. It's also a model that we'd like to see more aid agencies copy in other global crises.

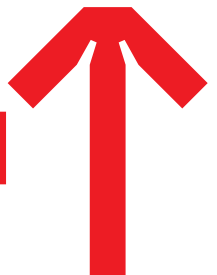
Who knows, that in an age of government and institutional distrust, it might even be an approach that could be adapted to revitalise grassroots democracy in the UK.

PHOTO: BLYTHWOOD/UKRAINE HERITAGE



ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE

# Christian Aid



Utilising the DEC funds of £19 million in sixteen months, Christian Aid has responded by delivering emergency assistance to over a million people affected by the war. In partnership with six organisations (Alliance for Public Health, Blythwood, Hungarian Interchurch Aid, Swiss Church Aid, Crown Agents and World Jewish Relief), we have worked across Ukraine and the neighbouring countries of Hungary and Romania. Our key priority is meeting priority needs following a local and people-centered approach reaching war-affected populations , and supporting local volunteers who have been accidental humanitarians to keep doing critical work.



# DEEPENING SPIRITUAL BONDS BETWEEN CHURCHES: FR. CAZACU CALLS FOR UNITY IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

In a world shaken by conflict and suffering, the role of the Church to be the bearer of light and hope becomes even more important. Reflecting the teachings of Holy Scripture and responding to the call to be a welcoming host to those in distress. Involved since the early days of the war in welcoming and helping refugees in Ukraine, Fr. Gabriel Cazacu, coordinator of **AIDRom's Department for Inter-Christian and Inter-religious Relations**, tells us that "through this divine call, the Church reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters in the eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of origin or tradition."

The involvement of the clergy in welcoming and supporting refugees has been a vital bridge between them and local communities. Priests, with the trust and respect they inspire, are able to create deep connections between people and facilitate relationships at both personal and institutional levels. This direct involvement has brought comfort and support, helping Ukrainian refugees to integrate more easily into a new and unfamiliar environment.

The experience of Fr. Gabriel Cazacu, as a professional social worker who chose to embrace the "double ministry of the biblical word and good deeds", has brought light and help to people who have to flee the path of war.



ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE RESPONSE

PHOTOS: AIDROM

*“ I work with refugees from different corners of the world. I am a professional social worker and I combine in my two ministries the biblical word and the good deed. My special role has been as a social facilitator in Bucharest and in the provinces and as a promoter of communication activities, PR, TV media, and sponsorships. I have always been where teamwork and the multidisciplinary expertise I have as a priest, social worker, and psychologist were needed.”*



Fr. Gabriel Cazacu recalls the deep spiritual bond that exists between the Church in Romania and Ukraine due to "belonging to the Orthodox rite through which we share millenarian traditions. We have a link also through similar structure and organization, but also through spiritual education that transcends borders and supports an atmosphere of solidarity in times of suffering and need." Moreover, in an effort to promote inter-Christian and inter-religious harmony, Romanian and Ukrainian priests served together and prayed for the community at important spiritual moments, highlighting the unity and support that faith can bring in times of difficulty.

Events such as the Ukrainian Children's Choir Christmas Concert, the preparation for Palm Sunday and Easter, the one-year commemoration since the outbreak of war, are just a few of the spiritually charged moments facilitated by AIDRom, where this kind of collaboration between Romanian and Ukrainian priests and their communities transcends borders and contributes to creating a space for strengthening common values and mutual understanding, being a concrete example of unity in diversity. They have had a positive impact on Ukrainian refugee communities, giving them a sense of belonging and spiritual support in a new and often difficult environment.

*"These moments of prayer and fellowship have brought comfort and hope to the hearts of those affected by war and separated from their homes. These experiences brought light and encouragement, highlighting the power of unity and compassion that can overcome cultural and geographical barriers. They are living proof that in a context of suffering, solidarity, and human bonds can provide hope and a safe haven for those in need."*

This social mission assumed and promoted by Fr. Cazacu, for he does not consider it work, is one in which faith is combined with action, and the desire to help becomes a personal calling. He understands that in the face of injustice and suffering, we must "all be involved, act in solidarity to bring change and hope to these people who are so tried by this unjust war" and humbly adds "Slava Ukraina!"



PHOTO: AIDROM



# HOW IMPORTANT IS SELF-CARE FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS?



PHOTO: KLÁRA JIŘIČNÁ/ACT

“The challenge of humanitarian work is the desire to help others in the face of overwhelming needs. Taking care of yourself seems like the least important thing, but without self-care, you cannot care for others.

**Simon Chambers,**  
Director of Communications,  
ACT Alliance

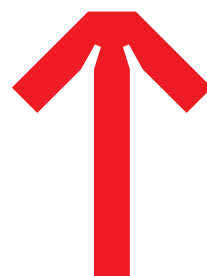
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ACT Alliance recognizes its responsibility to protect affected populations where it is responding, strictly adhering to its guiding principles to ensure the quality of psychosocial work, yet it also recognizes responsibility towards its own staff and its members towards their staff as well.

The better one understands the toxic effects of trauma, the more one can learn about how to manage it in oneself and others. Strengthening resilience is at ACT Alliance's heart, hence ACT offers training in CBPSS online at [www.fabo.org](http://www.fabo.org)

We have created a survey among members to give an overview and perhaps also an inspiration as to what tools are provided for humanitarian workers across the alliance for self-care. See below how we ensure well-being, and resilience, and nurture the capacity for growth.

- Online interactive/in-person courses offering a community-based approach to psychosocial care following the MHPSS pyramid. These courses are available in English, Spanish, French and now Ukrainian. Anyone who has an account at [FABO](http://FABO) can sign up free of charge.
- Community Resilience Model Training at [Trauma Resource Institute](http://Trauma Resource Institute): trauma-informed resiliency draws on the latest neuroscience for a better understanding of how the nervous system can generate resiliency during times of stress and trauma. The aim is to bring the participant back to the “resilient zone” after having been through a period of stressful impact. Humanitarian workers learn 6 well-being skills to build their own resilience and then share the skills with individuals and communities. It teaches humanitarian teams a common language to better understand and communicate about the effects of trauma and stress. People do not have to be clinical practitioners to be able to share their well-being skills. Humanitarian workers are taught how to support affected people without engaging in therapeutic work or having to focus on stories of suffering.
- Field return is supported by an “evaluation day” to provide space for sharing difficulties and best practices, followed by group sessions with a psychologist or individual sessions as requested.
- Continuous monitoring of the mental health state of staff and anonymous HR forms available to fill out when in need.
- Relaxation room with yoga equipment and massage available, and group events such as mountain hikes, and rock climbing.
- [Employee assistance program](#): assessment, short-term counseling, management consultations, coaching services, and referral.
- HEAT course: with the recent escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, security has become even more accentuated. Hostile Environment Awareness Training courses offered both – in-person/online enable ACT staff to increase self-awareness in situations of personal risks. Staff is taught to navigate risk mitigation when encountering carjacking, digital security breaches, emergencies, environmental hazards, theft, robbery, civil unrest, or even arrest and detention. A resiliency plan is designed in the process of training.
- Psychological First Aid training and crisis intervention courses are provided both to lay, staff, as well as clergy.



# ACT MEMBERS IMPLEMENTING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE UKRAINE WAR





## EMERGENCY RESPONSE UKRAINE

actalliance

After the Russian Federation's military offensive in Ukraine escalated on February 24, 2022, ACT members responded through the ACT UKR221 Appeal and through their own programmes and work with bilateral partners responding to the needs of millions of people displaced by the war.

The "Total ACT Response" refers to the work of all members, while the "ACT Appeal" refers to the work undertaken by the members implementing the appeal UKR221.

### ✓ Implementing members

**AIDRom**; Christian Aid; **Church World Service**; DanChurchAid (DCA); Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe; Diakonie ECCB; Finn Church Aid (FCA); **HEKS/EPER**; **Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA)**; Kerk in Actie (KIA); **Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**; Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)

(Members in bold are implementers of the UKR221 Appeal)

### ✓ Countries

Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine



PEOPLE ASSISTED

**TOTAL ACT RESPONSE**  
2,980,269



**Total Duration:**  
24 Months ~

22,901,736 USD



### SECTORS OF RESPONSE



Food security



Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)



Renewable energy, MPCA, protection



Health, protection, MHPSS, legal aid, diaconal assistance



Education in emergencies



Unconditional cash grants



Humanitarian, emergency relief, shelter, logistics, NFI



Mine action


































\*This information has been collected as of February 2023 by inputs from our member organisations and presents an estimate of the total ACT response. For up-to-date data relating to ACT Appeal UKR221, please see the Appeal reports.



*"The massive humanitarian response in Ukraine has been made possible thanks to the national organisations, especially churches and faith-based organisations, with the support from international partners. The generous and timely support of ACT Alliance members was decisive to save lives, support resilience and promote human dignity"*

**Rudelmar Bueno de Faria,**  
General Secretary, ACT Alliance

# LIST OF FUNDERS OF THE UKR221 APPEAL

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  ACT CHURCH OF SWEDEN  |  EPISCOPAL RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT  |
|  ACT FOR PEACE   |  EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH<br>IN AMERICA   |
|  ANGLICAN OVERSEAS AID -<br>ANGLICORD  |  EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH<br>IN BAVARIA   |
|  ANGLICANS IN DEVELOPMENT  |  FINN CHURCH AID   |
|  AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN WORLD<br>SERVICE  |  FINNISH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN<br>MISSION   |
|  CANADIAN LUTHERAN WORLD<br>RELIEF   |  CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF<br>CHRIST) - WEEK OF COMPASSION                            |
|  CHELLARAM FOUNDATION<br>LIMITED   |  ICELANDIC CHURCH AID  |
|  CHRISTIAN AID   |  KERK IN ACTIE - KIA   |
|  CHRISTIAN WORLD SERVICE NEW<br>ZEALAND  |  NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID  |
|  CHURCHES OF CHRIST OVERSEAS<br>AID  |  PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE-<br>PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA                            |
|  CHURCHES OF CHRIST OVERSEAS<br>AID - AUSTRALIAN CHURCHES<br>CHRIST GLOBAL MISSION<br>PARTNERS |  PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT<br>(AGENCY) PWSO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CANADA |
|  CORDAID - ICCO  |  THE PRIMATE'S WORLD RELIEF<br>AND DEVELOPMENT FUND                                      |
|  DAN CHURCH AID  |  THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN JAPAN  |
|  DIAKONIA SWEDEN   |  UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA   |
|  DIAKONIE KATASTROPHENHILFE  |  UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, USA  |
|  DIGNUS BURKINA FASO   |  UNITED METHODIST COMMITTEE ON RELIEF - UMCOR  |
|   |  WORLD NEIGHBOURS  |
|   |  WORLD RENEW   |





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## WHO WE ARE

Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance) is a coalition of more than 145 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 125 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards.

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*"With extremely high levels of humanitarian need and no clear sign of an end to hostilities, ACT Alliance remains committed to the delivery of quality humanitarian assistance in response to this devastating crisis."*

Niall O'Rourke

Head of Humanitarian Affairs

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## OUR HUMANITARIAN WORK

ACT Alliance demonstrates its value as the leading faith-based alliance in humanitarian response by working with faith and humanitarian actors at the global, regional, national, and community levels. ACT harnesses the combined strength of its members in delivering humanitarian response at scale and with considerable reach through joint programming approaches.

We commit to an effective ecumenical response that saves lives and maintains dignity, irrespective of race, gender, belief, nationality, ethnicity, or political persuasion. Humanitarian needs define our priorities and the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence guide our actions. We remain committed to strengthening the resilience of affected communities and to being accountable to people and communities affected by a crisis. The ACT Alliance Secretariat is certified against the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability and is committed to the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.

ACT ALLIANCE UKRAINE  
RESPONSE

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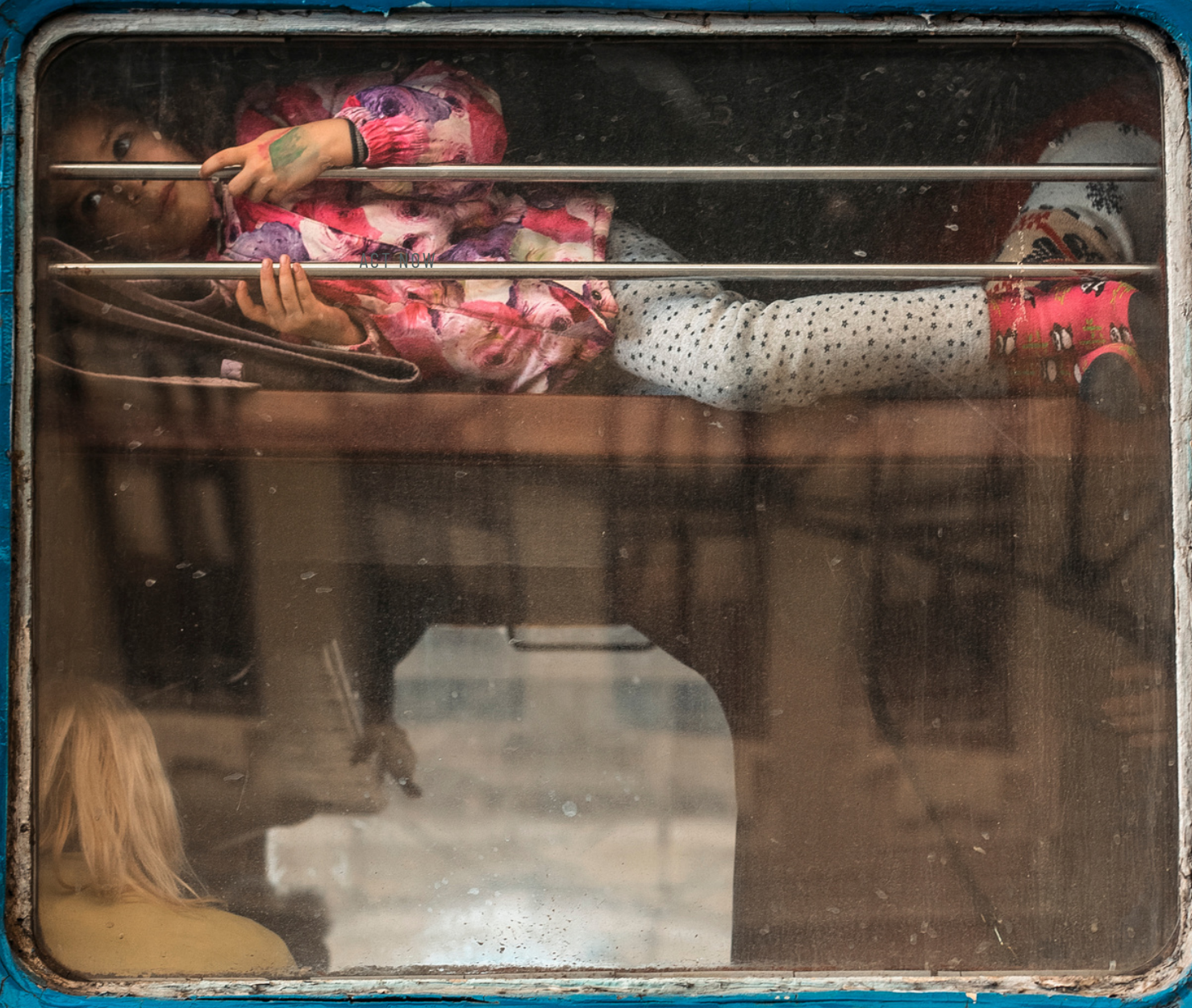


PHOTO: Antti Yrjönen / FCA

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