



What does hope look like?

**Stories of Ukrainian refugees
after one year of displacement**



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THE JESUIT NETWORK FOR MISSION AND DEVELOPMENT



Working together to keep hope alive

The International Armed Conflict between Russia and Ukraine has displaced millions of people, constituting the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War. Since the beginning, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has been on the frontlines of humanitarian response, working with those who have been forced to flee their homes. After an in-depth needs assessment, JRS Europe presented the coordinated unified response from the Society of Jesus to the crisis: The One Proposal.

Through this initiative, JRS and Xavier Network, which coordinate the global response from the Society of Jesus, will accompany, serve, and advocate for more than 73,000 refugees fleeing conflict in Ukraine over the course of three years. This response is coordinated by JRS Europe and implemented jointly with 23 JRS Country Offices, the Society of Jesus in Europe, the Xavier Network, local civil society, and NGOs.

In the year that has passed since the start of this coordinated response, together we have accompanied and served more than 54.000 people in 14 countries with emergency aid, shelter, psychosocial support, education, and integration, among other services. The ongoing response has also helped keep hope alive in the midst of the crisis. On the following pages, you will find a few examples of what that hope looks like for each person.

Read more about the response and the stories of the people accompanied at <https://jrseurope.org/en/project/the-one-proposal/>





Yevheniia hopes to see Odessa with a peaceful sky.

Hope to get back to one's hometown

Yevheniia lived with her mother in Odessa, a city in southern Ukraine facing the Black Sea and known for its 19-th century architecture including the Odessa Opera and Ballet Theatre and the monumental Potemkin Stairs. As soon as the war broke, they tried to flee to neighboring Moldova.

Moldova is less than 70 km away from Odessa, however, the route there was full of families just like hers escaping the violence that the war was bringing to their homes. “We were 2 families in a 5-seat car. When there is no traffic, the trip to Moldova takes around 2 hours. That day, however, it took 27 hours for us to get to Moldova because the line was extremely slow”, Yevheniia recalls. While the trip was long, Yevheniia highlights “At least we managed to come here”.

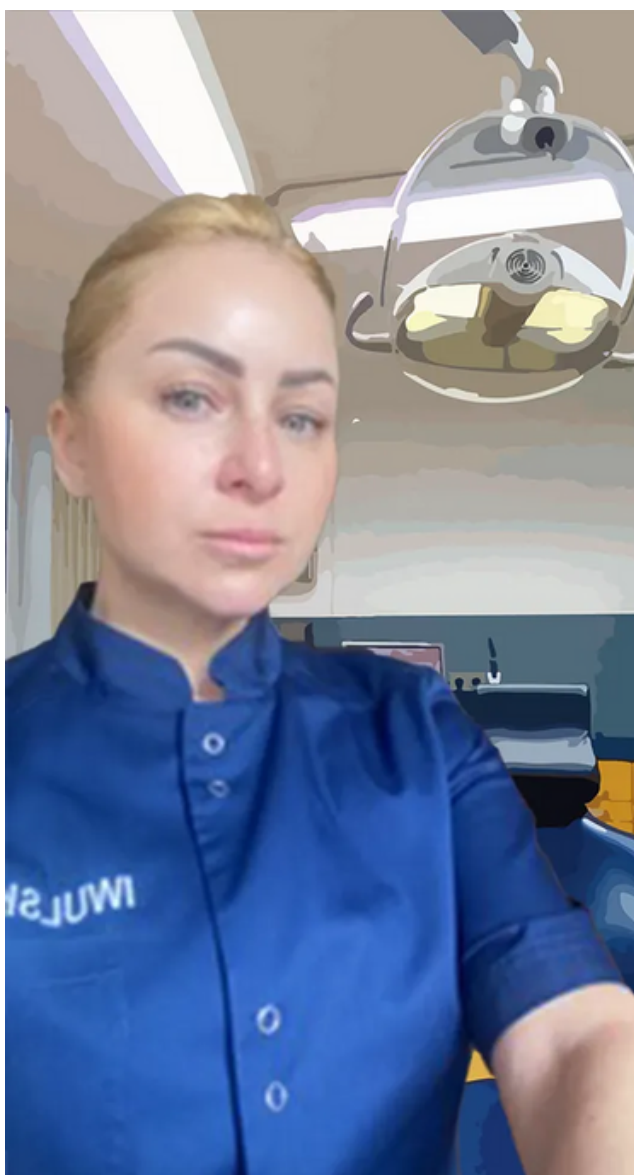
Since February 25th Yevheniia and her mother are in Moldova. They live together with other three families in a house provided by CONCORDIA, who converted the place into a home after the war in Ukraine started. CONCORDIA is offering Ukrainian refugees and forcibly displaced people a place to stay as long as needed, warm meals, counseling, and psychosocial support.

More than 8 months after leaving Odessa, Yevheniia longs for her hometown. She especially recalls with melancholy the Odessa National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet and the Statue of the Duc de Richelieu. However, while the present is bleak, she maintains hope. “Russians are bombing Odessa little by little, but I hope that they will not destroy the architecture, we have so many monuments there... I hope we will soon go back to our Odessa, and we will have a peaceful sky over our heads”.

Hope to get one's profession back

Before the war, Tetiana worked as a dentist in Kharkiv, a city in the North-East of Ukraine less than 50 km away from the Russian border. War came fast to her hometown and for the first few days she took refuge with her daughter in a basement. However, soon she had to flee.

“On March 3, my daughter and I fled Kharkiv as it was extremely difficult and nervous to live in the basement. We got on an overcrowded train to Lviv. The train was really crammed with people; so many that you could hardly get to the bathroom. But we didn’t care about how we had to travel. We only wanted to escape the shelling”, she recalls of the days fleeing. Thankfully, she was received with open arms by her Polish neighbours. “When we finally got to the border, we didn’t even expect to cross it so quickly and be treated so friendly”.



Tetiana hopes to recover her professional life.

Tetiana is now living together with her sister, who also had to flee Kharkiv since the full-scope invasion, and their children in Nowy Sącz, Poland. Fortunately, the hospitality of Poland she had experienced at the borders was mirrored once settled inside. “In Poland, I have received lots of help from different organizations which I am grateful for from the bottom of my heart. It has given me a chance to stay on firm ground”, she highlights.

A little bit more settled right now, Tetiana is starting to plan her next steps, and key in that future is recovering her professional life as a dentist. “I have already received the proof for the recognition of my diploma here and now I am employed at one of the dental clinics. I have to work under supervision for three months though, but in three months I will be entitled to work independently and for that, I need to learn the language. Thanks to JRS I am now attending Polish courses”, she explains. Soon Tetiana will be able to work as an independent dentist in Nowy Sącz, where she is planning to stay.

Yrina was living in Odessa before the war started, working as a swimming coach in a sports club.

“In the early days of the war, we were overcome by panic and fear, we didn't know what to do next.”, she recalls. No one knew where it would be safe to live or where they would get money to eat.

Yrina and her kids had to wait at the border to enter Romania, and when they arrived, they lived in an apartment with 8 other people. They did not have a job, and they wanted to go back home “But we believed that everything would work out, that we would find kind and helpful people”.

They registered in the JRS program, and since then they received help with housing and vouchers, as well as language courses and educational activities for their children. “With the help of JRS, life is getting better!”, she says.

Yrina hopes the war will be over soon, and she can't wait to be back home, but she will stay in Romania until then. “We don't even think about going to other countries, I like everything here. But, of course, I really want to go home”.



Yrina hopes to go home and to her club.



Maria hopes to find a job in her specialty.

Before the start of the war, Maria and her 3 daughters were playing in Odessa. She worked as a dentist in a good school, the younger children attended the Montessori Kindergarten, the eldest daughter attended the Primorsky Lyceum. When alarms and explosions became more frequent in Odessa, the children began to panic and cry, the eldest began to have panic attacks, the children stopped sleeping at night. At the beginning of March, they decided to leave, thinking that in a couple of weeks the war would have been over.

Once they got to Bucharest, they found the help and support of JRS Romania, that provided them with financial support in the form of coupons, of compensation or paying of

apartment rent, and Carrefour cards for families. “I really hope to find a job here in my specialty (dentistry). We are very warm and comfortable in Bucharest. We’re not going anywhere else”, she says.

In addition to financial assistance, they got the opportunity to attend numerous courses and master classes, Maria goes to Romanian language courses, and her children attend master classes in needlework and chess. There is a children’s room, where it is possible to leave the children during the course. They also went to Constantia for an excursion. “You help us to live on with the belief that everything will be fine, that we are not alone!”, she says. JRS Romania helps her and many other Ukrainian refugees to keep hope alive.

Hope to build a future



Ira hopes to go to medical school.

Ira has wished to be a doctor since as long as she can remember. This year, she was supposed to enroll in the medical institute in Kyiv, but after the war broke out everything changed. “It’s just that, when that will happen now is a mystery”, Ira says.

When the war started, Ira and her family went to their summer cabin outside of Kyiv. “At our cabin we thought things would be safe because we thought they’d attack the city, Kyiv. But a couple of days later, they cut off the power at our cabin. And it turned out that Kyiv was surrounded on all sides and we ended up right in the middle of the heat of it all”, she describes. They had no power for 5 days, they stayed lying on the floor because there were artillery shells flying over their house. Next to their house there was a tank, Ira was scared.

5 days later, they decided that they couldn't stay there at the cabin. They got ready in five minutes and took off in their car. They got on the Zhitomorsky highway. There were shards of glass everywhere and the road was completely destroyed. They ended up driving on a section of the road not controlled by Ukraine but by Russian Troops. "At that moment, my Dad said "start praying". We all started, I started crying because I saw Russian Tanks standing there and I understood that they might attack our car", she remembers vividly. They made it out and stayed in Vinnitsya for the night, then they headed to the Carpathian mountains and stayed at their friends' house for a few days, before going to the Polish border.

Ira's dad stayed behind in Ukraine, while Ira and the rest of her family went to Gdynia, where her mom's sister lives. She found a family that gave Ira and her mother a place to stay.

"We are incredibly grateful because they have been so hospitable. They make us feel safe, they understand us", she describes. Overall, her family is adjusting well in Poland. Ira even speaks some Polish, so she can get around quite well. She is getting her high school diploma online. Ira still hopes in the future, and is planning to go to med school wherever she is. "As far as college, I'll see, If everything ends in Ukraine, then of course, I'll study in Ukraine. But if not, then I'll learn Polish and pass the language exam here and get my degree here. So I'll try to get into college here", she says.

Hope to stay safe

"I remember when my friend called me at 5 am on February 24th and informed me that Kyiv airport was under fire", recalls Olena who at the time was living in Bucha, in the Kyiv region. She immediately knew she had to flee: "I am originally from Donetsk and I knew it was the beginning of the war, so I tried to think calmly and decided not to waste any time because I knew that near Bucha there is an airport and an important strategic point for the enemy. We started to gather ourselves to leave the country and decided to go to Romania".

However, the journey to get there would not be easy. "I had to drive for about 25 hours without any possibility of change because there was only my mother and my children. I still remember this night when we tried to enter Mukachevo,



Olena hopes to stay in Romania where she feels rested and supported.

a town near the border of Halmeo, to cross the border to Romania, and in that town, they created a block post. It took 10 hours to do 69 km”, underlines Olena. Her story is replicated by thousands of mothers that drove similar or even more hours to get to this post and try to save their families. Thankfully at the border, she was pleasantly surprised by the helping open arms that received them. “When crossing the border, we found a very high hospitality from the Romanian people that we could never imagine receiving”, she expressed.

Once inside Romania, Olena received help from JRS Romania, who have been offering a myriad of programmes to support Ukrainian refugees and displaced people since the start of the war. As she describes, “when I registered for the JRS program, I felt released and supported. It gave me time to look for a good job and learn the language, as well as to take care of my children. It also helps me to pay for my flat and my mother’s medicine. Without this help, it would be very difficult to continue in Romania”.

Beyond the tangible impact these programmes have had on her life, Olena also highlighted the warmth of the staff and how that has helped her. “The support of the JRS means a lot to me! I want to thank the JRS team. They are very supportive and helpful people who do their best to help us. They try to lighten our days so that we can believe in tomorrow and they are very good at taking care of our children”.

While she does not know what the future has in store for her, Olena wants to stay in Romania. “I don’t want to go back to Ukraine in the near future. I want to stay in Romania. It’s not the first country I’ve lived in, but it’s the first one where I feel rested and supported”, she concludes.

Hope to help others



Veronika hopes to help other Ukrainians who need support.

Veronika left Ukraine on the day the war started, on 24th February 2022. She decided that she had to leave as soon as possible because her son can't hear in one ear, but the other ear is also very sensitive, so she was afraid that the very loud sound of the explosions would be terrible for him. She decided to go to Trnava because her husband had been working there for about 4 years. They took two trains, and walked through the cordon, and then took the bus, train and taxi. The journey took 45 hours. "We were very tired after this journey and by the end we didn't know how it was going to go on", she remembers vividly.

Two weeks after she got to Trnava, she came to the Family Help Centre. The first time she got clothes for the children. She wrote an e-mail to the Family Help Centre asking to be a volunteer there. Since then, she started going to the Centre in her free time and she liked it very much. "I have received a lot of support, attention, help and work from this organisation which I enjoy.", she says. With the center, she organized a summer camp for Ukrainian children and many different activities to help Ukrainians integrate in Slovakia.

"I see our future here in Slovakia, because it is not good for children in Ukraine now", she says. She is actively learning Slovak in order to have some office work and also to develop herself. She wants to help the Ukrainians who are in Slovakia and need support. She believes in herself, she knows she can do it. She knows she will not be home for a long time, because even after the war ends, the country will have big economic problems, but she is doing her best to live a good life in Slovakia and she does not lose hope.

"In my opinion, this project gives Ukrainians a chance for a normal life and self-realization here in Slovakia, otherwise I don't know how it could be. I am very grateful that I knew the Family Help Centre and now I can live on and have some plans for my life.", she describes. JRS Slovakia helps her and many other refugees with language-related issues, communication with the state offices, and also provides them basic living conditions and find a community where they can live and work. To help them with integration.

*Names have been changed for privacy and security.



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