

Ukraine Emergency Response: Three Year Report

MARCH 2025

OVERVIEW

On February 24, 2022, conflict broke out between Russia and Ukraine, sparking the largest human displacement crisis since World War II. Three years later, the impact of the conflict has not abated as the conflict continues to disrupt global supply chains and increase prices of food, fuel and other commodities. Missile and rocket attacks have caused widespread death and destruction, severely damaging Ukraine's energy infrastructure and disrupting access to essential services.

During the winter months, many Ukrainians live in damaged homes, facing freezing temperatures. Vulnerable groups, including older people, people with disabilities, women and children, face heightened risks. Meanwhile, global concerns have shifted, leading to fears of decreased support and solidarity. Nearly 15 million people still need humanitarian assistance, with more than 6.5 million fleeing to neighboring countries and 3.7 million displaced in the country.

Catholic Relief Services, Caritas and local partners have provided immediate aid and continue to address both immediate and long-term needs, including cash assistance, housing, education and mental health support.



CRS and our local partners are providing people affected by the war in Ukraine with comprehensive and sustained support. Photo by Schimbator Studio for CRS

UKRAINE

The war in Ukraine has steadily escalated, ravaging front-line communities and essential services. More than 14.6 million people need humanitarian assistance, especially in the east and the south. More than 3.3 million people in front-line areas lack access to water, food, shelter, health, protection and other essential services and supplies. The 4 million people who are displaced, including more than 100,000 in temporary shelters, have depleted their resources, increasing their vulnerability. Returning home is not possible until security, their homes and basic services are restored.

CRS PARTNERS IN UKRAINE

CRS works with Caritas Ukraine and Caritas-Spes to support families displaced and affected by the conflict across the country. Caritas Ukraine has 45 local organizations, 300 parish hubs, more than 2,000 staff members, more than 1,000 active volunteers, and thousands of engaged local communities. Caritas-Spes has seven diocesan centers, and its national office covers 23 regions and thousands of local settlements.

To support Caritas Ukraine and Caritas-Spes, CRS has a core team of more than 10 staff members in Ukraine, supported by teams in Moldova and regional security support. Our support for these partners focuses on two priorities:

- Providing urgent, lifesaving assistance to displaced people in Ukraine, while building foundations and means for long-term recovery.

- Providing technical accompaniment and building capacity for program development, monitoring and evaluation, grants management, supply chains, finance, security and safeguarding to support a high-quality humanitarian response.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

CRS has partnered with Caritas to support nearly 3 million internally displaced people across Ukraine. During our first year, humanitarian efforts focused on meeting urgent needs—for food, cash, safe shelter, hygiene and living supplies, and emotional care for grief and trauma. Over the past two years, our assistance has expanded to focus on safe housing, supplies for winter, ongoing emotional care and well-being, and strengthened livelihoods.

SAFE AND DIGNIFIED HOUSING

The response supported short and long-term safe and dignified housing solutions for more than 650,000 war-affected Ukrainians. As Ukraine reclaimed vast swathes of land, we supported communities to repair and rebuild homes and key community infrastructure. Over the last year, the project team has not only reached more families and new geographical areas with safe and dignified housing, but also piloted new approaches, including heavy repairs and cash methods for acute emergencies. Key achievements include:

- More than 500,000 people found a warm and safe place to stay in a network of Caritas collective shelters.
- More than 23,000 people received cash grants for rent and small housing repairs.
- More than 17,000 families were supported with cash grants to heat their homes during winter.
- More than 112,000 people received bedding, clothes, dishes, blankets and other essential items.
- More than 2,500 people were served by crucial infrastructure, like medical clinics and schools.
- Activities with Caritas-Spes and Caritas Odessa continue to provide home repair assistance to war-affected families. We are also collaborating with Caritas Ukraine, Caritas Kharkiv and Caritas Sumy on the restoration of critical communal infrastructure.

CASH AND FOOD ASSISTANCE

Early on, the response launched a multipurpose cash assistance program to cover people’s most basic needs while providing the dignity of choice and supporting local markets. Over time, the team has honed selection criteria to specifically target the most vulnerable people, like people with disabilities, large families and older adults. For displaced people without access to cooking facilities, hot meals are crucial, especially during the long winter months. CRS and our partners provided hot meals and food baskets, including dry staples, to vulnerable people. Specifically:

- More than 185,000 people received multipurpose cash assistance to help pay for basic needs—including rent, fuel, gas, food, clothing, medicine and other essentials.
- More than 3 million food assistance services were delivered, including cooked meals and food baskets.

In 2024, our targeted cash assistance remained a crucial tool for supporting the most affected people as the conflict ebbed and flowed. For example, following a recent incursion into Kursk oblast, CRS and Caritas Ukraine provided multipurpose cash assistance to approximately 400 displaced people in Sumy oblast.

PROTECTION AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

CRS and our partners provided safe spaces for children, emotional care and counseling to help people heal from and manage a range of emotional hardships, including grief, distress, fear, anxiety and trauma. More than 424,000 people received protection services, and nearly 130,000 people received individual counseling or crisis consultations.

LIVELIHOODS

Over the past year, CRS and our partners have added livelihoods programming to our response. By piloting a series of strategic interventions, we seek to learn which work best and then increase activities in this sector over time. Livelihoods pilots have included business grants, vocational support and cash assistance for conflict-affected people, entrepreneurs and vulnerable subsistence farming families. More specifically:

- Nearly 300 farming families received cash assistance, enabling them to continue or restart their agricultural and livestock production. Families also received tailored agricultural technical assistance.

- 400 people participated in cash-for-work activities focused on repairing and cleaning public spaces.
- More than 130 small businesses received grants and professional training, enabling them to continue and grow their operations.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND SKILLS STRENGTHENING

CRS staff members in Ukraine work with Caritas partners to support key initiatives in design, funding and implementation. As the response evolved, the focus shifted to strategy development, capacity building and localization.

"I want to express sincere gratitude for your help! Your support greatly improved my life, providing me with home care services. Special thanks to the social worker for helping me after my spinal cord surgery. Thank you to Caritas for food assistance and medicines, which were very important to me."

—Lyudmila



Lyudmila received tailored support to meet her needs in Ukraine. Photo by CRS staff

ACROSS THE REGION

More than 1.4 million Ukrainian refugees live in the 10 countries where CRS and our partners provide support. As the situation stabilizes, CRS has shifted from immediate relief to empowering self-reliance and equipping families with tools for their future. Caritas and diocesan partners focus on areas with the most refugees, coordinating registration, referrals, case management and most activities. Safeguarding mechanisms enhance participant protection. National Caritas organizations share knowledge and best practices, improving service quality. Numerous staff trainings have been conducted to enhance support for refugee families.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

CRS' regional response focuses on the following:

- Meeting the needs of vulnerable Ukrainian refugees, providing food, hygiene, shelter, information and well-being.
- Ensuring that vulnerable refugees from Ukraine who choose to stay in host communities for longer periods have knowledge, skills and services to integrate, rebuild their lives and become self-reliant.
- Collaborating closely with Caritas organizations to deliver high-quality services to Ukrainian refugees. Areas of focus include strengthening project design and management skills, financial systems, monitoring and evaluation, safeguarding policies and procedures and case management.
- Supporting Caritas to provide rental cash assistance and accompaniment to secure longer-term housing to vulnerable Ukrainian families in Greece and Hungary.
- Supporting Caritas Poland to establish a regional learning platform connecting all Caritas organizations from Europe who participated in the Ukraine response. The platform is an ongoing initiative of learning, advocacy, exchange and scaling up of lessons learned.
- Shifting efforts in Balkan countries from immediate relief to empowering self-reliance and equipping families with the knowledge and tools to navigate their future.

MOLDOVA

Since February 2022, more than 1 million Ukrainians have crossed into Moldova, with more than 120,000 staying. For one of Europe's poorest countries, this influx has strained Moldova's social and economic landscape. Many refugees continue to rely on assistance to meet their basic needs, including for housing, employment and mental health. Additionally, refugee children have struggled to integrate into local Moldovan schools due to language barriers and other issues.

CRS has worked closely with Caritas Moldova, Diaconia and other partners to provide critical support for people to be able to have safe shelter options, be able to provide for themselves, and have resources and skills to integrate into society. CRS' work in Moldova includes the following:

FOOD AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE

During the initial emergency response, CRS and Caritas Moldova implemented a program providing essential support to vulnerable refugees. This program, which concluded in December 2023, offered cooked meals, hygiene and multipurpose vouchers, and beds, enabling displaced people to meet their basic needs with dignity. The project targeted Ukrainians staying in refugee accommodation centers, hosted by Moldovan families or self-accommodated in urban areas.

- More than 19,000 people received cooked meals distributed across various locations in Moldova.
- More than 3,500 beds, cribs and mattresses were delivered to refugee accommodation centers.
- More than 94,000 hygiene and multipurpose vouchers were distributed across Moldova.

CASH ASSISTANCE

Since March 2022, CRS, Caritas Moldova and Diaconia have run a cash assistance program, helping more than 130,000 people with \$125 grants. With CRS' support, Caritas Moldova and Diaconia operate eight centers providing services like cash assistance-related activities, protection, legal aid and more. Two centers also offer community activities for Ukrainians and Moldovans. Caritas Moldova also operates a nationwide cash assistance hotline.

SAFE AND DIGNIFIED HOUSING

Moldovans of all economic and social backgrounds across the country opened their homes to refugees fleeing violence in Ukraine. Despite increased costs, hosts took refugees into their homes at an astonishing rate, with most refugees staying in the host community. As the crisis continued, CRS and Caritas Moldova tailored our response to evolving needs, including rental subsidies, repairs and cash assistance.

- More than 2,500 host families have received bimonthly cash assistance to help offset the cost of hosting— supporting more than 6,000 refugees.
- More than 1,000 refugee families have received rental and utility subsidies— supporting more than 2,300 people across Moldova.
- Nearly 300 host families have received support to repair accommodation units to support safe and dignified homes for more than 600 refugees.
- Nearly 2,000 families have received cash assistance to fund home heating during winter months.

EDUCATION AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Almost half of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova are children, many facing trauma and separation from family and schools. Without schooling, they have limited opportunities and face threats to their well-being and education.

CRS has supported more than 3,800 children and caregivers since summer 2022, providing school preparation, online learning spaces, structured support, recreational activities, Romanian language lessons and peer support groups. CRS also works with local Moldovan organizations to improve education for refugees and Moldovans, training more than 30 partner staff in 2024.

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Caritas Moldova has been at the forefront of the Ukrainian refugee crisis response, providing hot meals, transportation and necessities since 2022. As the crisis continues, Caritas Moldova has to meet the growing needs of refugees, expanding services for accommodation support and strengthening connections with host families.

CRS initially provided Caritas Moldova with part-time support, focusing on reporting, business development and training. In September 2023, CRS increased support by assigning a full-time partnership coordinator. Over the past year, CRS has supported Caritas Moldova's leadership and organization on priority issues such as procurement, human resources, safeguarding and project management.



Vera, left, welcomed Yana, right, into her home in Moldova after Yana fled Ukraine. They have been living together for two years. CRS provided Vera with cash support, which helped her get through the winter, when heating costs are high. Photo by Schimbator Studio for CRS

GREECE, HUNGARY, ROMANIA, CROATIA, MONTENEGRO AND POLAND

ESSENTIAL FOOD AND LIVING SUPPLIES

107,552 people received assistance to help meet their basic needs.

Direct assistance to meet basic needs decreased as the situation in outreach countries stabilized. In some places, the Caritas network continues to address critical needs of the most vulnerable people—including single mothers, older adults and people with disabilities. Food and household items are distributed by some Caritas partners, based on local donations. Basic needs assistance in many places—Hungary, Romania, Croatia and Montenegro—was provided through cash or voucher assistance. This approach empowers refugees to choose how they spend their resources, while stimulating the local economy. Toward the end of fiscal year 2024, cash and voucher assistance has decreased as families are linked to local services.

SAFE AND DIGNIFIED HOUSING

20,642 people received support to find safe and dignified housing.

Although acute demand for emergency shelter has decreased, refugees still struggle with a persistent challenge of securing safe and dignified accommodations. In collaboration with our Caritas partners, CRS assists refugee families in finding and securing suitable housing, applying innovative approaches. In Greece and Hungary, for example, Caritas has been providing rental cash assistance and support to secure longer-term housing for vulnerable families. In Montenegro, Caritas has been offering accommodation to refugees in its own facilities and building a partnership with the government of Montenegro to provide collective accommodation and activities.



CRS and our partners are providing displaced Ukrainian children with safe spaces to learn. Photo by Vladimir Gerasimov for CRS

REBUILDING LIVES

Refugees continue to adapt to new surroundings. CRS and partner efforts are focused on helping refugees rebuild their lives, which involves supporting them in accessing education and health care, finding employment, navigating local services and fostering peaceful coexistence with the host community. Key achievements include:

- 16,320 children and caregivers benefitted from education programs. Caritas centers have been providing vital educational support and enrollment assistance to Ukrainian families displaced by the ongoing conflict.
- 24,449 people received health assistance, including consultations, counseling or referrals.
- 20,395 people received support to find employment.
- 28,296 people received protection services and tailored assistance through case management by trained professionals.
- 93,017 people participated in activities that promoted refugee integration into host countries.
- Social inclusion events—like workshops, camps, tours and educational activities to provide refugees with opportunities to engage with host communities—boosted confidence, established essential connections and ensured adaptation to a new country.

SUPPORT FOR OUR PARTNERS

93 support centers were managed by 12 partners.

CRS provides continuous technical assistance to Caritas organizations to ensure effective project management and maintain program quality. Partners across Europe receive rigorous support for program management, strengthening financial systems, monitoring and evaluation systems, feedback and response mechanisms and safeguarding standards. This has included capacity strengthening activities and a social and emotional learning framework in Greece, as well as sharing best practices and lessons learned from other child-centered programs in the region. In 2024, CRS started working closely with Caritas Europa and Caritas Poland to facilitate development of a regional learning platform among all European Caritas organizations that participated in the Ukraine response.