

Ukraine crisis

Our help for people in need



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We are there for people affected by the crisis: a report on our current response in Ukraine, the neighbouring countries and Switzerland

Interim report October 2022

Thank you!

Dear Sir or Madam,

The escalation of the war in Ukraine came as a shock for the whole of Europe. Within a very short time, hundreds of thousands of people had their everyday lives snatched away. From day one, the Swiss Red Cross was a part of the coordinated relief efforts by the Red Cross Movement.

This quick, targeted aid was only possible with your help and thanks to the incredible solidarity shown by the Swiss population. Your donations have enabled us to provide the people in Ukraine, displaced people and the refugees in Switzerland with first aid, shelter, cash assistance and psychosocial support. The Red Cross relies on donations and partnerships to fund its work at home and abroad. I would like to thank you for all your support.

In this report, we highlight what we have been doing, thanks to your donations, to help those affected by the conflict. It will give you some insight into the ongoing projects and developments and how we are also preparing for upcoming crises, such as rising poverty due to inflation and worsening food crises.

The crisis is far from over. We will continue to provide support for as long as it is needed – that is the role of the Red Cross. And we are grateful and happy to have partners like you by our side.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'B. Schmid-Federer', written over a light grey, textured background.

Barbara Schmid-Federer

SRC President

Cover page: Emilia, a Polish Red Cross volunteer welcomes refugees at Lublin station with hot tea and a welcoming smile.



The Swiss Red Cross is committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



© Ukrainian Red Cross

When a bridge leading to the village of Demydiv was bombed in February 2022, the inhabitants of the surrounding villages could no longer receive humanitarian aid or escape to safety. Volunteer crews from the Ukrainian Red Cross built a temporary bridge, evacuated thousands of people and delivered hundreds of tonnes of relief supplies.

Red Cross in action: our response in brief

The conflict in Ukraine continues unabated. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is there for those affected. Volunteers and staff are helping in the field and wherever people are seeking protection. The Swiss Red Cross (SRC) is a member of this Movement. Thanks to your donation, we have already helped countless people.

Insecurity, violence and destruction in Ukraine have forced millions of people to flee for their lives, seeking protection in safer parts of the country or abroad. They are hoping for a speedy end to the violence, so they can return home.

These refugees need safe accommodation, medical attention, and often also financial assistance for day-to-day items. In the longer term, they also need to find work and the children need the opportunity to attend school. Those that find refuge in another country need to learn a new language.

Immediate deployment

Ukrainian Red Cross volunteers and staff were immediately deployed, despite the dangers. They provided first aid and distributed foodstuffs and hygiene products. In the western provinces, they set up emergency shelters and provided support for the new arrivals. The national Red Cross societies stood by at their borders with Ukraine with food, first aid and information for the refugees' onward journey.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) called upon the international community to support the Ukrainian Red Cross in these exceptional circumstances. The solidarity was overwhelming and the SRC was able to collect CHF 42 million in favour of those affected by the conflict.

We help wherever people need it

The SRC used these funds for the relief efforts coordinated by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It made a financial contribution and deployed 38 specialists to set up supply chains and help shape the relief measures. Thanks to the Red Cross, five million people have already received food, clothing or hygiene kits and eight million have been given access to clean drinking water.

The Ukrainian Red Cross, a long-term partner of the SRC, asked us to assist its two branches in Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk. They quickly expanded their capacity to cope with the huge influx of refugees, helping more than 3,000 people with cash assistance and improved the living conditions in 25 refugee shelters. In addition to the Ukrainian Red Cross, the SRC also provided support for the national societies in Moldova and Poland. Most of the refugees from Ukraine sought refuge in Poland.

In Switzerland: helping refugees and supporting host families

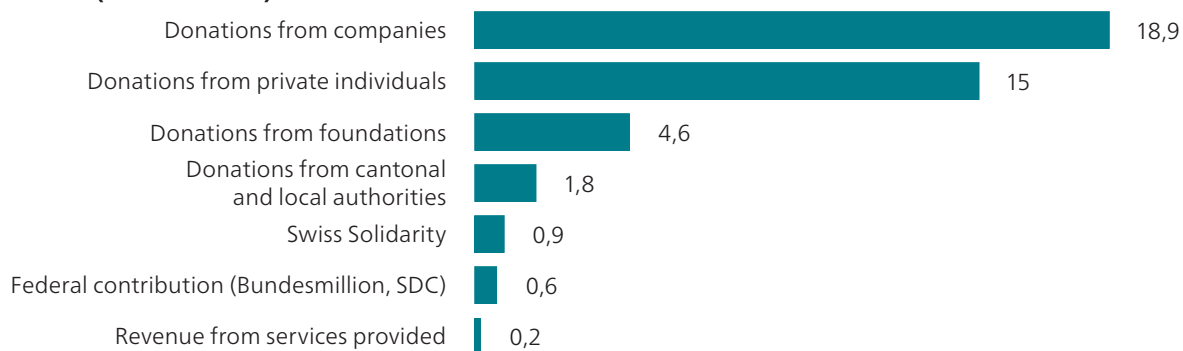
In Switzerland, the SRC supported the authorities, for example by deploying volunteers to federal asylum centres where they helped new arrivals. With 44 new or adapted services, such as language courses or psychosocial support, the SRC reached at least 8,200 refugees from Ukraine and assisted host families. The SRC provided reliable information not only for refugees but also for specialists, support persons and volunteers. Good information is crucial for new arrivals to quickly get their bearings and feel secure. Finally, the SRC also helps people having financial difficulties because of the impact the conflict is having on

food and electricity prices. Throughout all its activities, the SRC makes sure that all refugees receive help and support, regardless of their origins.

In this report, we explain how and where we have used your donation and what we plan to do over the next few months and years. Unfortunately, no end to the conflict in Ukraine is in sight. We are using the funds entrusted to us in such a way that we can provide long-term support for the victims in Ukraine and the surrounding countries and those seeking protection in Switzerland.

Sources of funding and expenditure at 31 August 2022 CHF million

Income (CHF 42 million)



Use of funds



By the end of August, the SRC had received CHF 42 million in donations for its humanitarian response to the Ukraine crisis from companies, foundations, public authorities, private individuals, Swiss Solidarity and the federal government. Another CHF 200,000 was revenue from services provided.

More than half of these funds – CHF 22.4 million – have already been spent to help those affected or put aside for specific activities. At the end of August, we were running activities at a cost of CHF 18.4 million. We used two-thirds of this amount for our work in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries, while the remainder enabled us to carry out our multifaceted work in Switzerland. Another CHF 4 million had been set aside at the

end of August for upcoming activities abroad, such as the SRC's support for North Macedonia, where the SRC is helping its sister society to expand its aid for Ukrainian refugees.

We will use the remaining CHF 19.6 million to support people affected by the crisis over the next few months and years. These funds will enable us to continue our long-term commitment wherever there is a need.



A Polish Red Cross paramedic takes care of a Ukrainian man with diabetes in a refugee centre near the Ukrainian border.

© British Red Cross, Francesco Pistilli

Ukraine and neighbouring countries

Our help in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries

The first rockets struck Ukraine on 24 February. Since then, millions of people have fled from the conflict zones and are reliant on humanitarian aid. The Swiss Red Cross (SRC) is providing financial and logistics support for the relief effort coordinated by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In western Ukraine and in neighbouring Moldova, the SRC is supporting its sister national societies and other long-term partners.

The numbers are shocking. According to the UNHCR, more than **7.4 million people** have fled Ukraine for its neighbouring countries. Almost **7 million** have been displaced within their own country. As the conflict hotspots shift, more and more people are returning to Ukraine, in the hope of being able to rebuild their lives. However, many return to find their homes destroyed and their towns still unsafe to live in, so they must once again seek shelter elsewhere.

Millions of people need **humanitarian assistance** – urgently, but also in the longer term because their experiences have left psychological scars. Help is needed for those who settle in a new place with the little they have brought with them, but also for those who travel on – for example to family in another country.

Our support for Ukraine and its neighbouring countries, at 31 August 2022:

 <p>5 million people received direct aid, such as food, clothing or hygiene kits, from the Red Cross Movement.</p>	 <p>38 experts in emergency relief were deployed by the SRC to Ukraine and its neighbouring countries, more than in any previous crisis.</p>
 <p>25 shelters in Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, in western Ukraine, were visited by the SRC and the URCS and the living conditions there were improved.</p>	 <p>3,000 people in Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, in western Ukraine, received cash assistance from the SRC and the URCS to cover their basic needs.</p>



IFRC workers at a warehouse in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, about an hour's drive from the Ukrainian border. In March, the IFRC stored blankets, mattresses, tarpaulins, tents, first aid kits, hygiene kits, kitchen sets, reusable water bottles and drinks here on their route to Ukraine. The SRC also provided relief supplies.

© IFRC, Marko Kokić

The governments, the Red Cross and other relief organizations in Ukraine and the surrounding countries **reacted immediately**, but are faced with huge challenges to provide the refugees with the help they need. In the face of this unprecedented situation, the Ukrainian Red Cross (URCS) asked the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement for support.

The SRC has made a considerable contribution to the Movement's **multilateral response**, both financially and by deploying emergency relief experts. It also supports its long-standing partners **bilaterally**: it helps the URCS in the two western regions of Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk as well as its sister organisation and a second important partner in Moldova. Most Ukrainians have sought refuge in Poland, so the SRC has also provided financial support for the Polish Red Cross.

Multilateral response: SRC experts in operation

The IFRC appealed for **CHF 550 million** to support the national Red Cross societies in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. This work is coordinated at the IFRC's European headquarters in Budapest. IFRC staff liaise closely with the national Red Cross societies to ensure the relief measures are properly coordinated. IFRC teams are also present in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries. They are helping the national societies to expand their **response** and build **capacity**. Thanks to this support, the Red Cross has been able to provide widespread humanitarian assistance in the region since the conflict escalated.

The SRC has supported the IFRC's work **financially** and deployed **10 experts** from its own pool to quickly expand the assistance provided. This pool of specialists in logistics and healthcare are on stand-by for deployment within 48 hours in the event of

Worldwide humanitarian network

The SRC belongs to the world's largest humanitarian network. The shared mission and the seven Fundamental Principles unite the movement:

The **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** is the umbrella organization for the 192 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Its mission is to support people regardless of their national, ethnic or religious affiliation. It helps refugees outside conflict zones.

The **national societies** implement the humanitarian mission in their own countries. With their volunteers and staff, they provide a broad range of services that correspond to their populations' particular needs. They have a special relationship with their governments. In their role of auxiliary to the public authorities, they help the state to fulfil its humanitarian activities. In this role they adhere to the seven Fundamental Principles and International Humanitarian Law.

Within the Movement, the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** coordinates the international humanitarian relief efforts in armed conflicts. Its goal is to protect the lives, rights and dignity of the victims of armed conflicts and prevent human suffering.

Crisis structure to coordinate assistance

The SRC quickly set up a task force to coordinate the assistance in Switzerland and abroad and to liaise with the IFRC and the ICRC. In May, the SRC merged its international emergency response for the conflict in Ukraine into its emergency and disaster relief division. Three programme coordinators support the team leader: one for projects in Ukraine, one for projects in Moldova and one for multilateral emergency response. Since May, the team also has the support of a 'Ukrainian crisis expert', who is of Ukrainian origin. An additional assistant helps to handle the emergency relief operations.

crises and disasters abroad, and are released by their employers for the duration of the mission. To cope with these demanding operations, they undergo a foundation training course and keep up to date by means of annual refresher courses.

The first SRC logistics experts arrived in Budapest on 11 February to **coordinate assistance operations**, as the signs of a massive escalation of the conflict intensified. Three other logistics experts joined them in March and April. Based in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, they helped coordinate the operations for several months. They oversaw the shipping, registering and warehousing of relief supplies delivered by the Red Cross Movement and prepared the goods for distribution. One SRC expert acted as regional supply chain coordinator to bring relief supplies into Ukraine (see box, right).

One SRC expert spent a month in the IFRC's European headquarters **running the assistance operations** in Ukraine and seven neighbouring countries. Another expert is running the IFRC's delegation office in Kyiv. In Russia, an expert helped to coordinate emergency assistance for displaced persons in Rostov, while another expert in cash assistance spent three months in Warsaw helping the Polish Red Cross set up a **cash and voucher** programme for refugees from Ukraine.

Effective multilateral assistance

From February to July, the Red Cross Movement provided vital assistance for millions of people in Ukraine and the surrounding countries. More than **100,000 Red Cross volunteers** from 48 national societies made this help possible.

- 5 million people received direct assistance, such as food, clothing or hygiene kits.
- 626,000 people received cash or voucher assistance
- 8 million people were given access to clean drinking water
- 718,000 people received medical treatment
- 368,000 received psychosocial support



“Conflicts are unpredictable”

Thomas Büeler has been working as an SRC logistics expert for 15 years. During this time, he has been involved in emergency logistics operations in the field in the wake of various crises and disasters. A few days after the Ukrainian Red Cross asked for international support for its humanitarian assistance, Thomas Büeler travelled to the IFRC's European headquarters in Budapest to head the logistics operations.

Without reliable supply chains, Red Cross relief operations cannot be accomplished. Thomas Büeler and his team set up a structure to deliver urgent relief supplies to people in Ukraine: water, food, toiletries, tents, first aid kits and much more. The team's work also involved sorting the donations of urgently needed relief supplies from those less in demand.

In armed conflicts, it is considerably more difficult to set up supply chains than after severe natural events such as an earthquake.

“Man-made disasters, such as conflicts, are unpredictable. You don't know how long they will go on for, or how bad they will be,” explains Thomas Büeler.

The flight ban throughout Ukraine made the work even more difficult. The supply chain for Ukraine is therefore built on various bases just over the border. That way, supplies do not collapse if something happens in one place.

In its report *‘Der Weg der Hilfe’* (in German), the online magazine *‘Republik’* described how Thomas Büeler and the Red Cross carry out their emergency logistics operations.

Why does the SRC not accept any donations in kind?

For its humanitarian response abroad, the SRC is not able to accept any donations in kind, including foodstuffs. The logistics complications would delay the quick distribution of relief supplies because donated goods need to be transported, cleared through customs, sorted and cleaned. In addition, donations in kind often do not correspond to what the SRC can use. Instead, the SRC buys the goods that the beneficiaries need most urgently. Whenever possible, it buys locally, thereby supporting the local economy.

Whenever possible, the SRC supports the victims of crises or disasters with cash and voucher assistance or rechargeable debit cards instead of relief supplies. This enables the people to meet their own needs for themselves and preserve their dignity.

Bilateral assistance: displaced persons receive support in western Ukraine

Shortly after the conflict escalated, **thousands of displaced people** arrived in the **Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk** regions. The URCS asked the SRC to assist its branches in these two regions, providing emergency relief for the refugees and expanding the capacity and competence required.

In March 2022, SRC teams and the two URCS branches started to assess the **refugees' needs**, in collaboration with the ICRC, IFRC and other national Red Cross societies. They surveyed the refugees to find out their most urgent requirements and consulted the local authorities and other important institutions. The survey showed there was an enormous need for better accommodation, access to healthcare services and help covering the basic needs.

Cash assistance for essentials

The SRC and the URCS arranged suitable support. When the goods needed are available locally and the partners and local authorities support the approach, the SRC relies on cash and voucher assistance. If not, the SRC and its partners purchase relief supplies and distribute them.

A **market analysis** revealed whether the urgent goods could be sourced in Ukraine. In the west of the country, there were sufficient foodstuffs, clothes and shoes. From March to July, more than **3,000 people** received **cash or vouchers** with a value of about CHF 70 so that they could buy what they needed most. The SRC and the URCS identified the most vulnerable people and households as recipients – for example, families with elderly relatives, families with more than three children or single parents.

Owing to the large numbers of people arriving in the region, beds and bed linen were in such high demand that the local market could no longer supply sufficient quantities. Even certain medicines were in short supply, because the need for them had increased in the west, while hospitals had sent some of their **medical supplies** to the east of the country. The SRC and the URCS procured medical supplies and delivered them to hospitals in the region. More shipments are on their way.

Living conditions in shelters improved

The SRC and URCS teams visited **25 shelters** in Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, analysed the conditions of the building and surveyed the residents on their most urgent needs. They then procured **household appliances** and special **hygiene kits** for men, women, children and elderly people on the local market. They procured **beds** and carried out **basic repairs** and maintenance in the buildings.



Happy to help

In his role as emergency shelter expert, Simon Flückiger worked with the URCS to provide accommodation for the many displaced people within the shortest possible time. The architect consulted the internal refugees in Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil and the people and authorities in charge of shelters to understand the situation and needs. On the basis of this information, he worked with the URCS to improve the living conditions in the accommodation, such as by providing washing machines or kitchen utensils, greater privacy, and play corners for the children. Simon Flückiger is happy to help: "As a trained architect, I can improve people's living conditions here on behalf of the SRC."



Grateful for help

Vira Vlasenko had to flee from Mykolaiv in southern Ukraine and ended up in Kolomyia in the Ivano-Frankivsk region. She lives in a shelter alongside other displaced persons. "In Mykolaiv, the humanitarian situation is currently very difficult," she says. "The city is regularly shelled, and there are serious problems with the drinking water. So, I'm really grateful to the Red Cross for helping to improve the accommodation here in Kolomyia. The living conditions are getting better. Now there are two new fridges where everyone can conveniently store their own food. I would really like it if this could all end soon so that I could go back home. Fortunately, we are all friendly to each other here and we help each other out."

Finally, the SRC also enabled the URCS in Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk to continue and expand its home care services while running the large-scale emergency assistance. From March to July, **40 nurses** regularly visited almost **270 people** who need day-to-day assistance because they live alone or are physically or mentally impaired. The nurses carried out about 10,000 visits. In addition, the two URCS branches are also expanding their psychosocial support services.

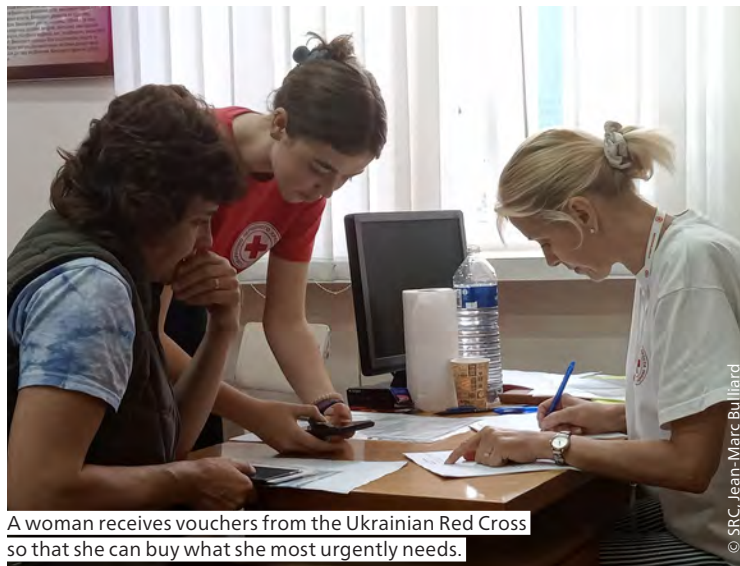
The SRC also helped the URCS teams in Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk to **expand their capacity** for planning and implementing extensive assistance measures. The SRC helped in particular to **recruit specialists** in various sectors: cash and voucher assistance, health, emergency shelters, finance, logistics and drivers. In the first three months, the experienced SRC staff coached and mentored the new recruits so that they could do their jobs independently.

Emergency experts in action

From mid-March to late August, **27 SRC emergency relief specialists** ensured that the URCS could quickly assist as many people as possible throughout the country, but especially in the Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk regions. Most of them were deployed for between three and six weeks.

From mid-March, the teams of experts in health, emergency shelters, logistics and cash and voucher assistance, led by team leaders, worked with the URCS staff to clarify what assistance the displaced persons needed most urgently. They helped them to take urgent measures and with the roll-out.

After the first joint emergency response stage, the SRC and the URCS agreed on a **longer-term arrangement**: eight SRC delegates on long-term contracts are now in operation (at end of September). In August, the SRC opened an office in Kyiv for the country coordinator to run the SRC delegation. Two delegates in Kyiv are helping the URCS to develop and reinforce its organization, focusing on home care services and on expanding its fundraising activities. The other delegates continue to help with relief activities in Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk and are preparing to expand them to other regions.



A woman receives vouchers from the Ukrainian Red Cross so that she can buy what she most urgently needs.

© SRC, Jean-Marc Bujliard

Fundraising campaign quickly launched – great solidarity with many donations

The humanitarian needs in Ukraine are so dramatic that the URCS needed enormous financial resources to support its relief efforts. Thanks to the SRC’s technical and specialist support over the past few years, the URCS was able to raise **USD 14 million** in online donations for its relief work within just four weeks.

Since 2020, the SRC has worked with its sister organization to improve fundraising, in particular digital fundraising systems and procedures. This enabled the URCS to set up a fundraising campaign within a few hours in February 2022. In the weeks that followed, as many as **130,000 individuals** all over the world made online donations to support the URCS’s work.

SRC staff worked alongside the URCS team: they registered and thanked donors and carried out other tasks that came up. In the coming months, the SRC will continue to help URCS retain its newly acquired donors so that the organisation has sustainable sources of income.

The ‘SRK Aktuell’ podcast (in German) features specialists explaining their role during the Ukrainian crisis.



Bilateral assistance in neighbouring countries: Moldova

In Moldova, the SRC is assisting Ukrainian refugees and disadvantaged host families. It is working with **Red Cross Moldova** and **CASMED**. CASMED is the largest provider of home care in the country and runs social, educational and health projects to support elderly and other disadvantaged people. Both organizations have long been partners of the SRC and are supporting the Moldovan authorities during the Ukraine crisis.

More than 600,000 people from Ukraine have crossed into this small neighbouring country, with a population of just 2.7 million people. Roughly 90,000 have registered as refugees here, but most travel on to other countries. The Moldovan population immediately showed their solidarity: they assisted those who wanted to travel on and took many refugees into their own homes.

But civil society and even the authorities have **limited capacities** to help the many new arrivals. Moldova is the **poorest country in Europe**. Many of the younger generation leave the country due to the lack of prospects. There is unease about the economic consequences of the conflict and the risk that it could spread to Moldova. So, the help provided by the Red Cross and CASMED is all the more important.

Direct help and psychosocial support

Red Cross Moldova distributed **pillows, bedding and towels** to the refugees housed by host families. This helped to relieve the burden on the host families, who themselves often have to manage on meagre resources. It also distributed these articles to Moldovan families with many children, single mothers or fathers, and elderly people with disabilities or no help from relatives. From March to August, the Red Cross reached about **3,300 people**.

CASMED helped refugees living in refugee shelters or with host families. For example, from March to June, the organization distributed **food parcels and toiletries** to **2,000 refugees** in nine districts and supplied **three refugee shelters** with safe drinking **water**. Women and girls received hygiene products and families were given baby products, soap and washing powder. The refugees also received **cash and voucher assistance** so that they could cover their own most urgent needs for themselves and preserve their dignity. Since June, more than **1,000 people** have received vouchers.



Volunteers from Red Cross Moldova and IFRC workers distribute blankets and hygiene kits to refugees from Ukraine.

In March 2022, CASMED took on a Ukrainian psychologist who carried out almost **300 consultations** in various shelters by the end of June – mainly with women and children, but also with men. **280 children** and their parents had recourse to other low-threshold **psychosocial support** services. Actors employed by CASMED organized workshops for refugee children and teenagers and youngsters from the local population. The workshops provide the opportunity to meet others of the same age, cope with the stress caused by their circumstances and cheer them up.

In March, the SRC deployed an emergency relief specialist to Moldova. She spent two weeks helping the two partners to assess local needs. She was then replaced by two specialists to support the emergency relief operation in the longer term.

Maintaining the blood supply

The SRC has been supporting the blood transfusion service in Moldova for nine years. As a result of the escalation in the conflict, the country's need for blood donations rose sharply, because many refugee women gave birth in Moldova and refugees needed emergency treatment. The local population showed great solidarity, and the voluntary blood donations doubled. However, the conflict in Ukraine could mean that the blood processing materials from Ukraine no longer reach Moldova. To cover this eventuality, the SRC is building up a **stockpile** that would suffice for three months in an emergency.



25 February 2022:
A Polish Red Cross worker at the Przemyśl railway station ready to help the many refugees arriving from Ukraine.



A child plays with an IFRC worker in a child-friendly space run by the Polish Red Cross. The children can play here while their parents register for cash assistance.

Bilateral assistance in neighbouring countries: Poland

By the end of August, the Polish Red Cross had helped more than **300,000 people** and distributed almost **7,000 tonnes of relief supplies** – mainly foodstuffs, hygiene products and medical supplies. The SRC supported this aid directly with a financial contribution.

About 6.3 million refugees have already arrived in Poland – more than in any other neighbouring country. Many have stayed there. When the conflict broke out, the Polish Red Cross received the new arrivals at the **railway stations** in major cities of Warsaw, Krakow, Lublin and Przemyśl. It is helping refugees in the state-run **centres and shelters** throughout the country as well as those who have been **accommodated privately**.

Special support for children

The Red Cross is mainly working in two of the 16 provinces: the Subcarpathian and Lublin voivodeships on the Ukrainian border. This is where most of the refugees stay. Volunteers and staff run **shelters** and distribute **food, water, hygiene products and toys** for the children to help them forget about their traumatic experiences. The Red Cross informs the refugees where they can turn for assistance and organizes medical transportation.

The Polish Red Cross has trained more than 100 staff and volunteers nationwide to help refugees **trace missing relatives**. It also helps refugee children fit into the Polish school system: they receive **school supplies**, attend **language courses** and join **leisure activities** so that they can meet other children. The Red Cross is also providing the refugees with direct financial support in the form of **cash assistance** and rechargeable shopping cards for a supermarket.

Finally, the Polish Red Cross is also supporting the population in Ukraine. The **warehouses** in Lublin are an important link in the supply chain. The Red Cross transports urgent supplies of food, water, first aid kits, hygiene products, blankets and sleeping bags from there to Lviv in western Ukraine.



Nine-year-old Artem and his mother are among the millions of people who have had to flee from their homes in Ukraine. The SRC is providing long-term support for refugees in Ukraine and the surrounding countries.

Outlook

The conflict in Ukraine is becoming drawn out. Refugees from Ukraine and those still in the country are facing an **uncertain future**. As part of its international commitment, the SRC is prepared to help people in distress for as long as they need it.

It does this in close cooperation with the IFRC and the other partners in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The SRC is also planning to support the ICRC with a financial contribution.

In partnership with the URCS, the SRC is continuing to ensure that refugees in Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk can live in safe, well-equipped shelters. It has decided to extend its commitment to the Kirovohrad region in **central Ukraine**, where many internally displaced people are also seeking protection. The SRC is also supporting emergency assistance operations wherever necessary and helping its partners in Ukraine and Moldova to prepare for the **cold winter months**. Because the energy shortage is likely to make additional aid necessary. The SRC is also working to ensure that elderly people living alone in Ukraine and Moldova receive the everyday support they need.

The SRC is continuing to help the URCS to **reinforce its organizational capacity**, both nationwide and in its regional branches, so that it can uphold its emergency response while maintaining its core activities for the Ukrainian population.

From September, the SRC is also helping its sister society in **North Macedonia** to expand its support for refugees from Ukraine. Refugees and their host families receive cash and voucher assistance for winter clothing and to cover rising heating bills. The Red Cross of North Macedonia is expanding its language courses and distributing school supplies to refugee children attending school in the country. It sets up child-friendly play and study rooms with recreational activities, learning aids and access to psychosocial support. Finally, it helps refugees who urgently need medical assistance but have not yet been granted asylum and therefore do not have health insurance: In cases of hardship, it covers the costs of treatment and medication.



15-year-old Vlad, five-year-old Diana, their brother and their parents are among many Ukrainian families the SRC asylum and refugee service has housed in the former Hotel Aurora.

© SRC, Berno Nädli

Switzerland

Support and psychosocial counselling for refugees

Since early March, people from Ukraine have been seeking protection in Switzerland. The Swiss Red Cross (SRC) has helped the authorities to cater for new arrivals, while Red Cross volunteers assist with social integration and advice for host families. In the longer-term, the SRC will ensure that the refugees get psychosocial support.

Every day in March and April, hundreds of people arrived in Switzerland from Ukraine. That many refugees had not sought asylum here within such a short time since the Second World War. In its capacity as **auxiliary to the public authorities** (see box, right), the SRC was ideally placed to support the national and cantonal structures in these exceptional circumstances. With over 50,000 volunteers, the SRC is the largest humanitarian organization in Switzerland and has a great deal of experience and expertise in the migration sector.

The SRC built temporary crisis structures at its national headquarters to coordinate the many activities it organized to respond to the Ukraine crisis. Thanks to generous donations from private individuals, companies, foundations and the public authorities, the SRC was able to set up a **fund** to provide its cantonal associations with emergency financing for their projects for refugees.

Special relationship with the authorities

The Swiss Red Cross is one of 192 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Each national society is an independent, impartial and neutral humanitarian organization. Compared to other humanitarian relief organizations, it has a particular status. It works in hand in hand with its national, cantonal and communal authorities. This partnership is anchored in the law and is referred to as being an auxiliary to the public authorities. This means that the Red Cross helps the public authorities to fulfil their humanitarian responsibilities. The SRC comprises 24 cantonal associations whose services are adapted to the needs of the local population. Four rescue organizations also belong to the SRC, along with Swiss Transfusion SRC, the SRC Humanitarian Foundation and the SRC Headquarters.

The first goal was to help new arrivals **quickly and without red tape**. In some cantons, the SRC set up reception centres at railway stations, while in others it provided information and gave out clothing, shopping vouchers and food, but always subsidiary to state aid.

In parallel, the SRC started to set up or expand its services for refugees and was able to make use of its experience and expertise in **volunteer management**. Experienced Red Cross volunteers and new recruits quickly provided a variety of assistance for refugees, people supporting refugees and host families.

Psychosocial support remains a keystone of the SRC's services. The SRC uses its know-how to advise therapists, teachers and people supporting refugees. Another of its keystones is **social integration** for refugees. To help them quickly get their bearings in Switzerland and feel safe and secure in their everyday lives, the SRC provides **reliable information** through various platforms, for refugees themselves, but also for specialists and volunteers working with them. The information is available in Ukrainian, Russian, German, French and Italian. Finally, the SRC also supports people having **financial difficulties** because of the conflict's impact on food and electricity prices.



Families get together in the new day centre in Geneva. Volunteers answer questions about how things work in Switzerland and help with administrative matters.

© SRC, Patrick Gilliéron Lopreno

Understanding and being understood

The staff of the reception centres and relief organizations often had to rely on **interpreters** to ease communication with the new arrivals from Ukraine. The SRC quickly built up a pool of Ukrainian and Russian speaking volunteers. Some of them helped out in the federal asylum centres, for example the contact centres for host families. The SRC now mainly recruits interpreters through the regional intercultural interpreting offices, which have expanded their services. However, the volunteer interpreters remain a good resource for specific assignments.

The SRC also recruited specialists in psychological and psychosocial support, and currently has a pool of 20 counsellors. They are available to help out, for example, with round tables for women and men. These are moderated sessions in various languages in which people with or without a migration background talk about family, health and integration issues.

Arriving and staying: volunteers provide support

Red Cross volunteers and corporate volunteers from our partners were deployed to various **federal asylum centres**. They handed out clothing, meals and drinks, looked after the children or assisted new arrivals from Ukraine. Volunteers also play an important role in most **social integration projects**.

In July, the SRC launched **HELPFUL**, an online information platform. It provides reliable information that refugees from Ukraine need in their first few weeks and months here and for their longer-term integration in Switzerland. The platform refers visitors who cannot find the answer to a question to a Telegram channel, where Red Cross volunteers answer questions within 24 hours.

Our response through expanded services and new projects at 31 August 2022:

 <p>8,200 refugees from Ukraine used our services</p>	 <p>760 volunteers supported refugees and host families</p>
 <p>320 host families were supported or received information</p>	 <p>44 projects and services were expanded or launched to support refugees</p>

Red Cross volunteers: coordination and operations

With over 50,000 volunteers, the SRC is the largest volunteer-based organization in the health, integration and rescue sectors in Switzerland. From March to August, about 760 Red Cross volunteers helped refugees from Ukraine through expanded or new projects. Without their commitment, the SRC would be unable to provide support throughout the country.

Psychosocial support: helping refugees and training professionals

Conflict and displacement leave deep scars. The victims need to recover a sense of security and work through the trauma they have experienced so that they do not have to live with the long-term consequences. This is especially the case for children.

At the **SRC Outpatient Clinic for Victims of Torture & War** (SRC Outpatient Clinic), the SRC has gained many years of experience and expertise in treating trauma and providing psychosocial support. It is committed to ensuring that the many refugees from Ukraine receive the most suitable support and to helping professionals share knowledge and experiences.

The SRC Outpatient Clinic trains and advises professionals and provides low-threshold services for teachers and people supporting refugees. For example, psychotherapists at the clinic provide telephone counselling about dealing with post-traumatic stress and trauma.

In May, the SRC launched the **SRK Aktuell podcast** that features experts who explain the SRC's work. Three of the episodes highlight the challenges faced by displaced people who have experienced trauma and offer advice. A child psychologist at the SRC Outpatient Clinic explains, for example, what those supporting refugee children should pay attention to, while an expert in health and migration provides important information and tips for refugees' host families and teachers.

The SRC also ensures that refugees themselves are made aware of the **psychosocial support** available to them. For example, it has translated the information brochure 'When you just can't forget' into Ukrainian and Russian. This brochure is intended for women, men and children who have experienced trauma, and their relatives. It uses concrete examples to explain how post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurs, its consequences, and how it can be overcome.

Courses for various target groups

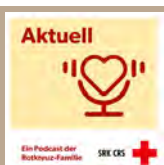
In Aargau, Bern, Fribourg and Solothurn, the SRC had been providing **courses on displacement and trauma** before the conflict in Ukraine. In response to the arrival of so many refugees, these Red Cross cantonal associations have expanded their services. Now they also offer courses for host families and other target groups, both online and face-to-face. The SRC has trained additional instructors so that other Red Cross cantonal associations can also offer these courses. Other low-threshold services for refugees as well as volunteers and professionals such as telephone and peer-to-peer counselling services for adults and young people are currently being developed in various cantons.

In June, the SRC trained teachers, social workers and psychologists so that they could run **START group sessions**. START helps refugee children and teenagers to recognize and work through their emotional stress and trauma.



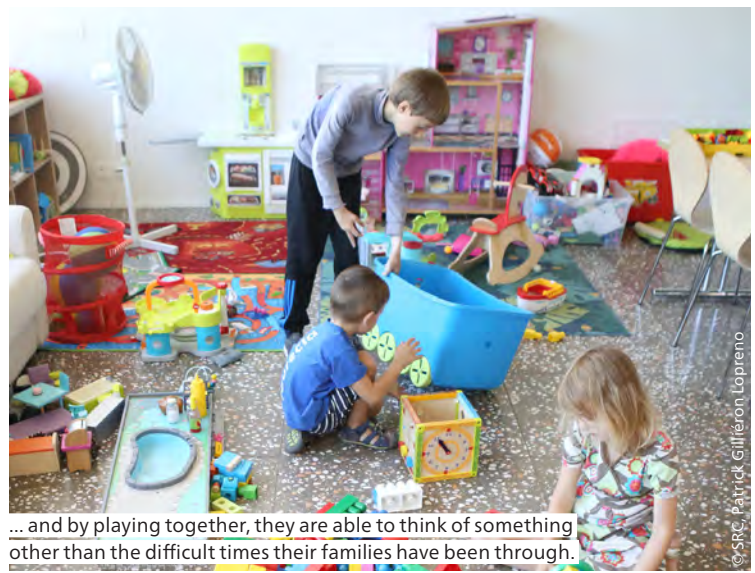
Andrea Stähli runs the 'displacement and trauma' course at the Solothurn Red Cross. The SRC has expanded its courses to reach more people of various target groups.

Listen to the SRK Aktuell podcast featuring experts talking about displacement and trauma (in German)





In the new day centre in Geneva, Ukrainian children find reading materials in their mother tongue...



... and by playing together, they are able to think of something other than the difficult times their families have been through.

Social integration projects

Refugees from Ukraine receive an S permit and are allowed to work in Switzerland. Depending on their professional qualifications and language skills, they may need help looking for work and learning one of the national languages.

The SRC helps refugees with their social and professional integration throughout Switzerland. By end of August, the Red Cross cantonal associations had **expanded or launched 44 services** and projects. They helped at least **8,200 refugees** from Ukraine and provided support for **320 host families**, mainly in the sectors described below.

- **Language courses** enable refugees to pick up the basics of a national language so that they can cope with everyday life. Many people from Ukraine already speak some German, Italian, French or English and improved their level so that they could gain a foothold in the labour market more quickly.
- **Leisure activities** are organized by volunteers so that refugee children can meet others of the same age and forget the difficult situation in their home country for a while. Volunteer tutors help the children with their homework.
- A new **day centre** has been set up in Geneva, where families can meet. The premises are equipped with cosy seating areas, games and computers. Volunteers answer questions about how things work in Switzerland and help with administrative matters. The Geneva Red Cross runs the centre in partnership with the Hospice Général that helps migrants integrate into local society.

- A **mentor system** pairs refugees with volunteers who help them get used to life in Switzerland: the refugees learn more about their environment, improve their spoken language and have positive experiences. The mentors also help them to deal with **administrative situations**, such as opening a bank account.
- In some cantons, the SRC liaises with host families and the refugees staying with them **on behalf of the authorities**. It also supports host families with various services, such as round-table meetings where host families can network, exchange their experiences and discuss issues as well as a helpline for advice about challenges they face living with their guests. The SRC also makes host families and refugees aware of other SRC services that refugees have a right to call upon, such as the SRC driver service.

Information – essential for fitting in

Refugees need a lot of information to cope with life in Switzerland and fit in. The SRC leapt into action last spring. Various cantonal associations opened help lines and information centres. Staff and volunteers manning these services help new arrivals to find the information they need. Thanks to the SRC, volunteers and professionals are also able to quickly find information on how to provide the refugees with the right support.

The SRC's [migesplus](#) online portal provides easy-to-understand information about the Swiss healthcare system in various languages, along with a variety of materials for professionals. In March, the SRC translated much of this content into Ukrainian and Russian.

Volunteers working with refugees and migrants can use the [Infobox Migration](#) to find regularly updated information about relevant topics, the addresses of counselling services and information about events and courses. The SRC has added a page with information relevant to refugees from Ukraine.

HELPFUL – a new online platform

Discussions with refugees revealed that on arrival in Switzerland it was sometimes very difficult to find the **right information**, which was an additional source of stress. Within a couple of months, and with the assistance of Ukrainians, the SRC had developed the [HELPFUL](#) information platform, which has been up and running since July. Two new staff of Ukrainian origin that the SRC was able to employ thanks to donations now answer additional questions and make the Ukrainian community aware of the platform.

HELPFUL centralizes information for **Ukrainian refugees, host families** and **people supporting refugees** that otherwise they would have to look for in various different places. This helps the refugees take care of their most immediate needs and quickly find a sense of stability and security.

All the information is available in **Ukrainian, Russian**, German, French and Italian, in two sections. The Arriving section contains information refugees need in their first few days and weeks in Switzerland, on topics such as residence status, accommodation, healthcare and mental health. The Staying section provides information about living in Switzerland and integrating into Swiss society, such as how to find an apartment, a job, training and language courses. The site also links to a Telegram channel where Red Cross volunteers answer any questions the site does not cover. By the end of August, the platform had been visited more than **80,000 times** by over 22,000 individual persons.



“Facing the future with courage and hope”

The life of Oksana Merkulova (left in the picture) changed overnight in February 2022. She was on holiday in Switzerland when the conflict in Ukraine escalated. It was suddenly unimaginable for her to go home. “The most difficult thing was accepting the situation. Suddenly everything I had at home was worthless. My previous life no longer existed.” Oksana Merkulova stayed at a friend’s house in Aargau canton.

Volunteers advised her to apply for a mentor at the Aargau Junior Red Cross, and a week later she met up with Red Cross volunteer Kasia Zabec. “As soon as the war broke out, I just knew I wanted to help refugees,” explains Kasia Zabec. Since then, the two women have been meeting once a week for coffee, or going out to explore the canton together.

Oksana Merkulova thinks of their meetings as a return to normality. “I consider Kasia as a friend. I’m really happy to experience the warmth of her home. With Kasia’s help I can face the future with courage and hope.”

Shopping vouchers for people affected by poverty

Coop, our official partner, has donated CHF 500,000 in shopping vouchers for refugees from Ukraine. These vouchers tide the refugees over in the time between their arrival and when they receive some social benefits. The Red Cross cantonal associations are distributing these vouchers until the end of 2023 (while stocks last).

The SRC is committed to ensuring that all people are treated equally. It has made the same amount of emergency financial assistance available to other population groups.

Help in financial hardship

The war in Ukraine has an impact on the **prices** and **energy bills** in Switzerland. People and households living on or below the poverty line are most affected. When money only just covers day-to-day needs, a high medical bill, for example, becomes a problem. In many cantons, the SRC runs a fund especially for people who have found themselves in financial straits because of an unexpected event.

It has also set up a new SRC **financial aid fund**, currently in its pilot phase, to provide help all over the country, though the SRC only provides support when all other possibilities have been exhausted. Ukrainian refugees with an S are eligible to apply for support.

From April to August the fund received almost 400 applications and helped **980 people**. It handed out CHF 240,000 in aid. The SRC expects to receive an increasing number of applications before the end of the year. Thanks to the enormous solidarity from private individuals and institutional donors, it has sufficient funds for the time being to extend its aid.



SRC, Remo Nägeli

SRC asylum and refugee service in Uri: more room and additional services

In Uri canton, the authorities have commissioned the SRC to provide personal and financial assistance and various other support services to all recognized refugees, temporarily admitted persons and asylum-seekers living in the canton and also provide emergency assistance. The SRC asylum and refugee service has now signed an additional service agreement with the canton to assist refugees with an S permit. Over the summer, it was responsible for about 800 refugees, some 200 of whom came from Ukraine.

The SRC quickly found additional premises and housed refugees in two vacant hotel building and in apartments. It also set up extra integration measures and psychosocial support. Many new employees have joined the team to handle these tasks. Long-time staff members Kurt Strehler and Emile Cavalho (photo) provide stability. The Makiienkos are one of many Ukrainian families the SRC has housed in the former Hotel Aurora. They appreciate the fact that their basic needs are taken care of and that they can interact with other families. The youngest daughter and the eldest son have already made friends and successfully finished their school year. For the middle son, the new language is more of a barrier and he often retreats behind his computer.

What are the next steps for the Makiienko family? "Our top priority is a German course, followed by getting our own apartment – a settled home for the children," says the mother. After that, they want to look more closely into their educational and professional future.



Thanks to the generous donations, the SRC will be able to continue helping refugee families like the Makiienkos.

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Outlook

People fleeing conflict zones need time to settle in and find peace. At the outset, their priority is meeting their basic needs: safe housing, food and healthcare. It often takes a while until refugees become aware of their **mental stress** and recognize that they need help to cope with it. The SRC psychosocial support services are in increasing demand, and the professionals working at the SRC Outpatient Clinic anticipate a rise in referrals.

The SRC's projects for social **integration** also meet a great demand. Language courses, help finding work, opportunities to meet others and everyday support remain the focal points of our work, thanks to the many Red Cross volunteers.

The situation in Ukraine remains unpredictable and there could be renewed major **refugee movements**. In addition, the colder season may pose further **challenges** for Switzerland's population, including for refugees from Ukraine. Rising electricity and heating costs hit people with low disposable income especially hard. Another wave of Covid-19 and renewed protection measures would have a negative impact on the lives of newly arrived refugees in particular.

The SRC is preparing to help as much as possible, even under **difficult circumstances**. It is examining whether it can expand its services or should shift its focus in order to best respond to refugees' needs.

It continues to ensure that refugees receive the help they need and support the many professionals and volunteers who accompany them. Many people who have fled the conflict in Ukraine will be in Switzerland for quite a long time. The SRC uses the donations it has received in such a way that it will be able to help for several years.

New structures to coordinate the response

The SRC quickly set up a task force to coordinate the response in Switzerland and abroad and to liaise with the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

To coordinate the activities in Switzerland, in April a staff member from the SRC Headquarters took up the position of 'head of Ukraine operations, Switzerland'. She heads the Ukraine–Switzerland coordination committee that is responsible for allocating project funds and ensuring a good flow of information. The extra resources also facilitate communication with the cantonal associations and coordination of the SRC's nationwide services. The position has been planned for one year, after which the new services should be integrated into our regular structures.

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