

Ukrainians in Krakow: war is not the only cause for fear, the upcoming cold winter is equally intimidating



. describes the psychological and emotional condition facing Ukrainian refugees today: "It's very hard for them. Moving to another country is a challenge which they cannot cope with alone, neither financially nor from a psychological angle." "The war left a huge number of people traumatised - they were separated from their loved ones. Most of them had to leave their families behind. We are trying our best to help them cope with this new situation and to adapt to their new situation here in Poland."



In fact, the Caritas workers here in Krakow believe that it will only get worse. Alarming news is being reported from Ukraine. Attacks are increasing all over the country. Air raid alerts sound every day with the authorities urging people to stay in the shelters. In these conditions it's hard to make any forecasts or provide any data or statistical information. But one thing is certain: "we have seen an increase in the number of people calling our emergency number in the last few weeks," says Julia, "and finding accommodation for applicants is now a problem. Caritas has been providing accommodation and hospitality to all those who knock on its doors since the outbreak of hostilities. Three centres were thus set up for the distribution of humanitarian relief aid (one of them is located at the main railway station). In addition, Caritas is helping people to find a place to stay and in September alone, it managed to accommodate around 300 people, partly through the religious houses and the parish network.



And many of those who arrived here expecting a swift return don't know if their homes have been completely destroyed and need to be rebuilt. In short, long-term migrations are very likely and the way back to Ukraine, even from Krakow, still seems a long way off. However, Caritas braced for this scenario. It launched Polish language courses, with classes organised according to age group. And while children have already started school, blending in with Polish children, teenagers and older youths often prefer to follow online classes from Ukraine.



Rental prices have increased, coupled by a severe housing crisis. In the Caritas centres, people are asked to fill out a form detailing their needs. Most of them are mothers with children, women and families who ran out of financial resources. Some even arrived barefoot in the hurry to flee. Many stories from war-torn Ukraine are intertwined with those of the Polish aid workers. Julia recalled the story of a family from Mariupol who stayed in the basement of a shelter for more than a month. Then the Russians arrived and they travelled a very long way to get to Poland, via Moscow, St Petersburg, Lithuania. "They even drank the water they found in the radiators. They arrived, but they lost everything.

"The first question they ask is: where do we start from now?"



Thanks to Caritas Southwark (London), the family from Mariupol managed to make it to England where both parents found a job and the children are going to school. "We workers are tired too," Julia confesses. "But the moment we realise that these people are in serious need, their cry for help fills us with new energy." "I witnessed extreme poverty and human suffering - adds Fr Stec - but I also saw tremendous humanitarian support and empathy. Once again in my life, I had the experience that goodness is more powerful than evil." What message would you like to convey to people in Italy? The Caritas director replies: "We must not get used to or remain indifferent to this situation. No matter whether what we do is appreciated; no matter if everyone deserves it... Our vocation is bear witness through acts of mercy. And Mercy is the name of God."

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