



10 STORIES OF HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Stories of Ukrainians
2 years in displacement



JESUIT'S



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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 start of the war, the organizations of the Jesuits have served and accompanied 100.765 people fleeing violence. Coordinated by JRS Europe and the Xavier Network, in collaboration with NGOs and local partners, the Society of Jesus has provided emergency aid, shelter, psychosocial support, education, and integration, among other services.

The One Proposal, presented in July 2022 after an in-depth needs assessment, encompasses a wide range of services to be provided to an originally projected 73,168 people over the course of 3 years. Since then, it has been continuously revised and expanded with yearly needs assessments.

In the following pages, you will find stories of how some of the people accompanied have found a home away from home in the two years since they have been forcibly displaced. If you want to read more about the response and the stories of the people accompanied at <https://jrseurope.org/en/project/the-one-proposal/>



Photo of the JRS Ukraine Shelter by Sergi Camera.

*Photos on the cover and the back cover by Sergi Camera.



A spiritual home in JRS Poland

“Never again ...”, Galina recalls. “We couldn’t have imagined something so terrible, and devastating could happen again, but it did ... again. It is tremendously difficult to come back to my memories of those days.”

It all began on a frosty winter morning. Galina lived in the Bucha region and her family was abruptly awakened by echoes of explosions. “From that moment, our life was like a horrible dream.”

Day by day, the realization set in that their chances of survival were diminishing. There was no electricity and no mobile reception. As the days went by, bread became scarcer. “I will never get rid of the feeling of fear that I have only a few pieces of bread left”, Galina shares.

Throughout the occupation, it was tough for Galina and her family to stay calm. Every moment was full of fear, grief, and suffering. The family no longer wanted to reside in this environment. “We had to save our own lives. I believe that it was God’s will that we managed to flee”.

Upon crossing the border, they were relieved to have arrived in Poland, but at the same time devastated. They were in a foreign country without any knowledge of anything or knowing anyone. Fortunately, Galina and her family found compassionate volunteers who guided them to the city of Poznan and offered shelter to them.

This turning point was accompanied by another momentous encounter. “Later, we met our good friends from JRS, Father Dariusz Michalski and Father Grzegorz Dobroczynski, people with great hearts who still support and pray for us, Ukraine, and the world”.

“JRS became our second home, not only physically, but also spiritually” Galina describes. A second home providing a sanctuary for prayer, psychological support, understanding and care, where Galina’s husband was also supported in his priestly mission.

Grateful for the prayers of their Jesuit friends, Galina feels God accompanying them, on their temporary journey in Pozan, instilling their hearts with peace, calmness and faith in a better tomorrow.

Galina is unsure about her future plans because “life can drastically change”. For the time being, she feels that JRS’ support means a “safe haven”. “My family is sincerely very grateful to God for His kindness and blessing us to meet such a wonderful team of JRS, for their restless work and great support”.

Feel at home in JRS Romania's advice and accompaniment

At Ainur’s cosy family café, “people came not as customers but as guests and could feel themselves at home”. Ainur had just opened the café in Odessa when war came hitting at her door. She had hoped that the war would end soon, but a little over a month and a half after the start there was a turning point.

“When the “Corn agreement” was signed, the next day a missile hit the port. We saw it all with our own eyes because we were right on the waterfront. The younger son clung to my leg, and I couldn't calm him down for a long time...



Ainur and her son.

He became afraid of even the slightest sounds”, she recalls. At that point it was clear to her that it was urgent to save her children.

She decided to flee to Romania, where she found safety, but new challenges arose. “It was incredibly difficult for the children. We were alone; all relatives and close acquaintances remained in Ukraine. And the children felt like strangers here, everything was different: language, culture, customs, traditions. If I felt like a stranger, what could I say about the children?”, she explains.

This became her biggest challenge. Finding the way “to give the children the opportunity to learn and develop comfortably”. As she puts it “I didn’t only want to save the

from the war, but I also wanted them to have a normal life, where there is development, learning, and communication with other children”.

After a month of looking for possible solutions, she learned about JRS Romania’s Educational hubs. She decided to give it a try but she was not sure what to expect. “The first thing that impressed me was how warmly the staff welcomed me. This attitude, this care, genuine and unfeigned. Then we met with the educators. JRS selected such specialists for working with children. The adaptation happened quickly and easily”, she highlights.

This was crucial assistance because educational and developmental activities for children are a priority for Ainur. But since then, she continued to come to JRS for assistance when needed and she always found a helping hand. “I know for sure that when you come here, they can help you. Yes, perhaps it won't be an instant solution to certain issues, but it will be the right advice, a hint on which direction to move, where to find solutions, and what needs to be done for it”, she explains.

This became the first of many interactions with JRS Romania. According to Ainur, JRS support is like “wings”. She adds, “Without them, you can seemingly live, move, and continue to exist... But it will be entirely different. Now I am sure: it was a great stroke of luck to find JRS. This organization helps you feel not like a refugee but as a person with a future. JRS helped me and my children not to feel like I am not a stranger in a foreign country.”

An understanding home in Slovakia

Katerina used to live in the town Chasov Yar in the Donetsk region when war came to her doorstep. “On the 24th of February, we were woken up by explosions in our forest. We were forced to move to the house of our grandmother because there was a cellar”, she remembers.

For more than a month she lived there alongside her grandparents, her mother and her friend. “There were just a few products in the stores, often there was no light and every day we heard explosions. So, we decided on the 4th of April to leave our country for Slovakia. It was very difficult for us to decide where to go, and in which country because we had never been abroad”.

“We traveled with my mother, and



Katerina.

we only had one suitcase because we were thinking the war would end very soon and we would return home. We left with a special evacuation train, in which there were many people and animals too. People couldn't even sit, and so we were on the train for 27 hours in full darkness”, she adds.

Once in Slovakia, they had a positive surprise. “We were very surprised at how friendly the volunteers welcomed us on the border with Slovakia. We were very afraid, but they helped us to handle our fears. We got help with everything: food, water, clothes, medicine, accommodation, transport, paperwork. After their assistance, we felt finally safe”, she describes.

In Trnava, they found the Family Help Centre which provided a lot more than material aid. “In the beginning, we got clothes from Eco – clothing. But when we adapted a little, we started attending Slovak language classes and going to Zumba dance classes. We are very grateful to the Family Help Center and JRS for the assistance and help we have received here and still can get. In addition, we constantly attend events organized by the Family Help Center”.

“Here we found interesting activities and people with whom we could communicate in our native language or just have fun. This support means humanity and understanding. Even in our difficult situation, we do not feel alone. We can see those people who are interested in us, they can feel our pains and sorrows. We always have somebody here who can advise us, who can be here for us. Then we can move forward, we can still live our lives”.

A home the Concordia community



Ivan and Natalia.

Ivan and Natalia were enjoying their pension years together. “Finally, the children had grown up, and Natalia and I took care of the garden. During summers, we spent time with our grandchildren, went fishing, and once a year,

we used to go to the sea in Odesa. It was beautiful, peaceful, and serene, and now look at what has become of us”, recalls Ivan.

The outbreak of the war originally did not convince them to leave but it all suddenly changed. Natalia remembers, “In the middle of the night, a rocket destroyed our kitchen. The street was in ruins, many houses had windows shattered from explosions. Out of fear, we moved to the basement, where we cooked and slept for a week. It was during that time I fractured my leg. We realized we had to leave for our safety”.

Ivan and Natalia's memories of arriving in the Concordia Moldova multifunctional Centre Sănătăuca are very vivid. “Oh, the broth!”, exclaims Natalia when thinking of the soup she was offered as soon as she entered the centre. It has been her favourite food since arriving in Moldova. Beyond food, the centre offers comprehensive support including access to the activities of the centre and the facilities such as the laundry room.

“Concordia Moldova’s support has been a lifeline for us. It's not just about the practical assistance, although that has been crucial. The financial aid has eased our burden, and the daily activities organized at the centre provide a sense of normalcy and purpose. But beyond that, it has given us a community”, she highlights.

“The emotional support, the friendships we've forged here, it's like finding a second family. In times of displacement, where everything is uncertain, having Concordia by our side means more than words can express. It's like a source of encouragement for us., a reminder that we're not alone in this journey. Concordia’s support is the warmth that keeps us going”, she adds.

Looking forward, both pray to God for peace in Ukraine. “We know we have to remain strong and hopeful and witness peace with our own eyes. Ideally, our greatest desire is to return to Ukraine and see an end to the war. Staying here in Moldova is a temporary solution, and our hearts long for the day when we can go back home”, concludes Ivan.

Building a home for her and the whole community

Olena used to work as a chief specialist of the preschool department at the Education Administration in Kherson. She enjoyed this job but she also had a dream of one day opening a café of her own.

When the war started, she had to leave and started a very dangerous journey to Poland. “When we were fleeing Antonivka, my hometown, it was a complete nightmare at the beginning. There was constant shelling and fighting. When fleeing, we ran over a grenade. I still wonder how it did not explode under us”, she recalls.

“At that moment, my child cried and prayed ‘Our Father, who art in heaven’. It was the first time I saw her like that. Thank God, we were not injured! After it

happened to us, I understood one thing: If we stay alive, it means I have not yet done what I am supposed to”.

After arriving in Poland, Olena tried to find a job in her field. “First, I was looking for a job corresponding to my position in Ukraine. I failed to find it. Who knows if I will regret it or be thankful”, as she describes. “I did not know Polish, and there were no vacancies”. This would lead her to enrol in JRS Poland’s language courses.

But her future would change with an unexpected offer. “Later, by chance, I received an offer to work at the café – and I accepted it because I had to work and make a living. In the end, I worked at the café for a year. Thanks to my parents and experience, I decided to open my own business”.

Nowadays, you can find Olena at SofiLen café in the center of Nowy Sacz town. “I treat my café with my whole soul and organize everything here so that people feel cozy and comfortable. I call this place ‘a café with a petite soul’”. The sport now welcomes students, tourists, and businessmen with a positive atmosphere and tasty coffee.



Olena in her café.

A safe home in JRS Ukraine

In the fall of 2021, Svitlana fell seriously ill. She was in the city of Pokrovsk in the Donetsk region, and it took intensive treatment for her to be able to walk again. So, when the war began, she was uncertain about what to do. They anxiously watched the events unfold, until March 2022. “The situation was only getting worse and when a rocket fell near our home, my daughter and I finally decided to evacuate”, she says.

“I was already feeling better that day, gradually regaining my ability to walk,



Svitlana and her daughter.

but it was very frightening and worrisome because we didn't understand what awaited us... it was incredibly difficult to leave our native home. Throughout the night, my daughter and I were almost motionless on the train because there was no space. People around us were scared, children were crying, but the feelings of heading into the unknown were much heavier...", she recalls.

Once in Lviv, she found JRS who provided her with housing and food, or as she puts it "the most essential and immediate need for refugees". "Thanks to JRS, we began to feel safe. Support from JRS has built my new life far from home.", she adds.

Once feeling safe, Svitlana also started participating in some of the activities of JRS such as "beautiful and necessary" gift-giving for both children and adults and training sessions.

As for what the future holds, Svitlana only hopes that the war will end, and she will be able to come back home. "I truly hope that the war will end, and we will return home. My fears revolve around the war itself and everything associated with it".

A home that allowed to continue her son's treatment

Liudmyla had lived in Bakhmut for 63 years and she was planning on staying in her hometown. She lived with her son Dmytro when war came to their backyard. "His tracksuit pants were drying on the street. And he went out to get them. He opens the door and that's it. An explosion and that's it. The leg was left hanging on the skin", she describes.

Dmytro had stepped on mine in their yard, which left his left leg shattered, his right leg broken, and more fragments scattered all over his body. He was in deep need of immediate intensive care. First, they were taken to the closest medical facility. They later were moved to a bigger city and after that, they were transferred to Lviv.

“Here we were met by our best doctor. I'll remember this doctor for the rest of our life and I will tell everyone this man is not a man, he is a ray of God, honestly, He met us, placed us in the hospital, and 15 days later we had our first surgery. One leg had a broken toe, and the other... they were putting it together and "glueing" it, just glueing it together... In the end, we had 10 surgeries in one year”, she expresses.

After all these surgeries, Dmytro could not walk on his own and he needed continuous medical monitoring. They were offered multiple shelters, hospitals, and monasteries but all of them were very far from the traumatologists, surgeons and rehabilitation specialists who had been so helpful in Dmytro's recovery.

Eventually, social workers offered the possibility of the L'Arche-Kovchek community, which is close to the hospital and Svitlana and Dmytro decided to give the community a visit. “We just came in, the guys from an ambulance carried Dmytro on a stretcher, he was moving to the bed, and a social worker was standing there asking: "How do you like it?", he said, 'It's so good here'. And Dmytro didn't want to go anywhere”, she says.

Svitlana and Dmytro have been at L'Arche-Kovchek community since March 2023 and are happy to be close to the specialists. "We have our own room in the house, Dmytro can move around the whole ground floor in his wheelchair. Our hospital is close, and our doctors, physiotherapists, masseurs, and nurses come to us. And when it was warm in the summer, he liked to sit in the garden”, she mentions.

But beyond the special care that the community and the nurses provide, they have also found some soul accompaniment in the community. “In April, we were celebrating Easter here and Dmytro's birthday. The girls sang so beautifully for him, he was very happy. It was very important to Dmytro. Now we live in paradise. That's how it is."



Svitlana and Dmytro celebrating Easter.

How JRS Ukraine became a home

Olena was a happily expectant mother waiting for the birth of her daughter, the fifth child in the family. She lived in Bilozerske with her husband, who worked in the local mine. “However, when the war started, our happiness seemed to freeze at one moment”, she recalls.

At that moment, they did not know what decision to take. The children were intensely scared by the explosions. For months, they stayed at their home, hoping the war would end soon. “But at some point, we finally came to our senses and realized that we couldn't continue to endure. We left our native home due to explosions in the city. It was very frightening, especially for the children, panic-inducingly scary”.



Olena and her sons.

The evacuation was not any easier. “We travelled in a train overcrowded with people wishing to reach a safe place. There were 15 people instead of 4 in a compartment. It was hot, cramped, and frightening. We could take almost nothing from home; each person could only take a small backpack... And if someone took more things, they had to throw away what was less necessary because the train didn't allow two bags per person”, she describes.

Initially, they aimed to leave the country but one of the brothers was not allowed to cross the border. So with a lot of uncertainty and concern about how to provide for the children they ultimately decided to stay together in Ukraine.

Thankfully, Olena found JRS Ukraine. “JRS is a truly special organization”, she highlights. “When a person is forced to leave their home in distress, run into the unknown, and encounters an organization that provides them with such wonderful housing where everything necessary is available, then that home truly becomes your temporary Home. We believe that JRS is a big God's gift to us in our extremely difficult life situations”.

The housing offered by JRS also helped the family with her son's Anton therapy session. "We lived more than 70 km away from Lviv and commuted daily for these sessions. Now Anton calmly interacts with other residents, is diligent in his development, and is gradually learning and speaking different words. Thank God, he gives us great hope for his progress".

Olena remains committed to stay in Ukraine and she hope the war will end soon. "Our main fears are related to uncertainty and unpredictability in the Ukrainian reality, but we hope that the war will end soon. We will stay in Ukraine. It is our homeland, which we will build and develop."

A home where you are accompanied in your own language

Radmila's passion was always to bring joy through organizing great events, and she had managed to turn this passion into a living in her home city of Dnipro. "For a very long time, I have been working on coordinating different types of events. I established an agency with the primary goal of bringing joy to people's lives and orchestrating memorable gatherings. This work is not just a business for me, a simple job, but merely a passion for my entire life; it was all I desired to do", she describes.

However, the outbreak of the war destroyed many dreams including the Radmila's. "People's spirits fell short of joy, and the desire to celebrate vanished amid the sense of despair. The war not only impacted me but also had a profound effect on people's willingness to engage in festivities".



Radmila

Leaving Dnipro behind was not an easy decision though. "I loved my country and wanted to continue living there. I had a good job and a supportive network of friends, and my children were deeply rooted in their schools and friendships", she expresses. However the situation became increasingly dangerous for her family, and she decided to flee.

After a brief stay in Turkey, they settled in Romania. Arriving in a new city brought a lot of emotions to Radmila and her family. As she mentions, "Although arriving in Bucharest, a vibrant city, initially brought a sense of joy,

the reality set in after a couple of days. Being alone with my children in a new place, I felt overwhelmed and uncertain about what steps to take next”.

In this context of uncertainty, Radmila heard about JRS Romania and decided to ask for some advice. “Upon arriving, I encountered a community of genuinely kind individuals. Everyone was eager to offer assistance, guiding me on where to go and what steps to take. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that I wasn't alone; many people from Ukraine were also present, bringing me a sense of joy”, she remembers.

With the support of JRS Romania and the community that they built, Radmila began to find her feet. “Day by day, I began to grasp the opportunities available and figured out how to navigate the situation, especially in finding suitable arrangements for my children. JRS offers a variety of courses for kids, which not only brought joy to my children but also allowed them to connect with many Ukrainian kids in the process”.

“At JRS, I feel a sense of home because everyone can communicate with me in my native language. Whenever I have questions, the JRS staff promptly provides me with answers. Whether it's assistance with courses for me or my kids, vouchers, or information about Bucharest in general, I consistently find the help I need here”, says Radmila.

A sense of home in JRS Hungary community

“February 24th was just another day. I woke up in the morning, got ready for work and got the kids ready for kindergarten, but then we heard the news, Ukraine was under attack from Russia”, Olena recalls.

She adds, “I will never forget the moment I called my husband, who fortunately was in Hungary for work. I was already packing our papers and most important documents without thinking. He immediately told us to leave for the border as soon as possible, to go to Hungary”.

Olena and her family decided to leave as soon as possible but the situation was already chaotic. “By that time, panic had taken hold in the town, as it had in the people. So, we set off for Hungary with our most important documents and a change of clothes”, she summarizes.

When they arrived in Hungary, they stayed with relatives waiting for developments “because at that time we were hoping that it would all blow over in a few days. But unfortunately, it didn't”.

“I hoped in my heart that this would not last more than six months or a year, that everything would be the same. That we would go home and go on with our lives. But unfortunately, we must admit now that this is not the case and who knows what will happen next”, she expresses. Finally, they managed to rent an apartment and enrol their son in the regional kindergarten.

Their next challenge was for Olena to find a job. “Unfortunately, this did not happen so easily and quickly, as it is not easy to find flexible work with a child. It wasn't easy”, she highlights. After some time, uncertainty and anxiety started to affect Olena.

“When I was a little bit really out of hope and couldn't find a job, that's when I heard about the JMSZ (JRS Hungary). Luckily, we got into the support programme, where we not only received financial help for housing but also real spiritual help, as they were always able to offer a little encouragement”, she comments.

“This was a great help for us. Because I feel that we belong to a community where, if I have a problem, I can tell them, and we try to find a solution. If not with anything else, at least with some words of encouragement. And what has given me the most from the community is that they have tried to make me think about our long-term future, try to plan here, not dwell on the past”, she highlights.

While Olena and her family are more settled today, they are still longing for home. “Since then, I've been lucky enough to get a job, I feel like I've found my place here, our child is in kindergarten and my husband is working. Now we are trying to make a living here, which is not easy because our hearts are longing for home, but we don't think about it every day”.



Yoga for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support.



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