



Ukrainian Refugee Update

March 22nd

From Sheila Wade, Interim Head of Charity, Caritas Portsmouth Diocese

I spent time last week in Hungary finding out about the situation on the ground for Ukrainians as they leave their country and enter another life, their hope is for a short time only. Finding out what their wishes and needs are... and how we can help them.

For some of this time I was in a border arrivals help centre, which is a community centre and a series of tents in the small Hungarian border town of Barabás where those arriving in cars, buses or on foot are directed. I also spent some time at the border railway town of Zahony, and also at the Western Railway Station in Budapest, the arrival places for those travelling by train.

Caritas Hungary and lots of other agencies were at all these locations: food and drink, accommodation advice, transport advice, legal and translation services, medical and veterinary care, information about other countries refugee policies, reflection and prayer spaces.... I can't begin to describe how much was available to those arriving at all times of the day and night in a steady stream, not a flood now/yet... but a steady stream of women and children and elderly people... hoping for sanctuary for a short time before they can return to their country.

I met two sisters, both English speakers. The younger had travelled from Kiviv where she had been at university and was en-route to Turkey to stay with the family of friends; non-English/Ukrainian speaking but she was sure she would cope. Her first visit outside of Ukraine, her first airplane flight. The elder was on her third trip out of Ukraine in 2 weeks accompanying family members and friends on the difficult 48 hour journey to safety. She has since returned to Lviv, where she is volunteering as a translator. She speaks English, Russian and Ukrainian and 4 other languages. Their parents are in eastern Ukraine in a Russian occupied area, thankfully with no shelling at the moment. They have food and water there, but no medical supplies and only intermittent power. They have very limited communication with their daughters and are prevented from leaving, from protesting, from living a normal life. Both girls are anxious, both girls are determined. Both girls are proud to be Ukrainian. Both girls are the ages of my younger nieces.

This is the experience of just one Ukrainian family... one of hundreds of thousands of families.

What can we do here in the UK, here in Portsmouth Diocese?

- Donate money to the DEC appeals to allow the relief agencies including Caritas to continue their work with refugees as they arrive in neighbouring countries. Assistance with physical and emotional, psychological and spiritual needs starts from the moment they arrive.
- Consider joining the Homes for Ukraine scheme here in the UK, either as a host or as a supporter.
- Write to your MP to protest about the Nationality and Borders bill currently going through parliament. Ukrainian refugees are not unique in their suffering, they are just "closer to home"
- Pray for peace

Go to the Caritas Portsmouth web site where you will find more information on how you can help.

<https://caritasportsmouth.org.uk/news-events/>