

**WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKIE VOIVODSHIP SOCIETY AIDING UKRAINE  
AND REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE AFTER 24 FEBRUARY 2011 –  
SELECTED ASPECTS**

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***Abstract***

The war in Ukraine started in 2014, but the unprovoked Russian aggression on this country on 24 February 2022 was an unprecedented event – the first of this kind since the end of World War II. This aggression triggered one of the largest humanitarian crises in Europe. Over 4 million refugees crossed the Ukrainian border during the first six days of the war, whereas 1.83 million arrived in Europe from Syria during the entire 2015. Most of the refugees from Ukraine came to Poland. Polish society, NGOs, and local and central government organisations greatly aided Ukrainian refugees. According to the main study hypothesis, the regional authorities and the “minority” churches in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, situated a considerable distance from Ukraine but neighbouring the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, were greatly involved in aiding refugees from Ukraine. The research problems in the study questions included: 1) what was the extent of the aid provided to refugees from Ukraine, organised by the Voivodship governor as the government representative in the region? 2) what was the extent of the aid provided to the refugees by the local government of the Voivodship of Warmia and Mazury, whose twin region is the Rivne Oblast? 3) what is the extent of the aid provided by the “minority” churches operating in the voivodship under study? 4) how did the aid provided by the University of Warmia and Mazury, cooperating for years with Ukrainian universities (especially with the Lviv Technical University, National University of Ivan Frank in Lviv and the National University of Ostroh Academy), manifest itself? This paper presents the involvement of the central and local governments of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, as well as the aid of “minority” churches and the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, which resulted in the positive verification of the study hypothesis. The institutional and legal analysis was the leading method.

**Key words:** *war; Ukraine; refugees; Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship; “minority” churches.*

**Introduction**

The world is undergoing rapid changes due to social movements, economic inequalities, and climate change, leading to the refugee problem becoming a significant concern for authorities and societies. Refugees are now the focus of debates in scientific and political circles, as well as in citizen society. European states are grappling with the challenging task of developing and implementing a policy that strikes a balance between humanitarian aid and national interests. One of the main challenges faced by the countries of Europe, including EU member states, is to develop effective mechanisms for receiving and integrating refugees. These mechanisms concern the development of legal and social conditions for the acceptance of refugees as well as developing and improving programmes aimed at their adaptation and socio-economic involvement.

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The terms “migrant” and “refugee” are used interchangeably when describing people coming to Europe. As understood in everyday speech, a refugee is a person who had to leave the land where they had resided because of the threat to their life, health or freedom. The threat is usually associated with a military conflict, natural disasters, religious prosecution, race, or political convictions. According to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Geneva, 28.07.1951) and the appended New York Protocol of 31 January 1967, “A refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (Convention, 1951). It has been accepted in Poland that “a migrant” is a person who comes to this country in search of work and to improve their living conditions.

The Russian aggression in Ukraine started in 2014. Ukrainians had already come to the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, and they had been regarded as migrants, but their number increased considerably after 24.02.2022. This applies mainly to women and children who sought refuge in Poland, including in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship. However, it must be noted that this region was not a major focus for refugees due to its proximity to the Russian Federation (Kaliningrad Oblast – a 200 km border). This paper does not present the scale of aid provided to the refugees by the large Ukrainian minority and the Greco-Catholic population in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, as these issues were discussed in detail in a paper published in “Nowa Polityka Wschodnia” (Astramowicz-Leyk et al., 2023). Measures taken by NGOs and institutions (apart from the University of Warmia and Mazury) were also not analysed, as it is impossible to describe the extent of the Polish society’s involvement in one scientific article. This research requires considerable financial outlay, but it is worth continuing to record the Poles’ extraordinary “humanitarian outburst”.

The full-scale aggression on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 sparked the greatest humanitarian and migration crisis since World War II. According to UNHCR data for the end of May 2022, over 6.8 million people left Ukraine after 24 February, which includes both Ukrainians and foreigners who were staying in Ukraine when the war broke out.

Poland was the state with the largest number of border crossings among the countries bordering on Ukraine and had the largest number of war refugees from Ukraine. Polish researchers report that 1.15 million Ukrainian citizens were registered in the PESEL system by the end of May. Women aged 18-65 accounted for 45.75% of that number, whereas individuals above 65 accounted for 2.8%. Children under 18 years old accounted for 45.7% of all the registered war refugees from Ukraine (Duszczuk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

Poles have stressed the need to provide humanitarian aid to war refugees from Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale Russian aggression (see: Fomina & Pachocka, 2024; Karakiewicz-Krawczyk et al., 2022) and became involved in such aid (see: Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzalczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022; Centre of Migration Research, 2023).

According to the main study hypothesis, the regional authorities and the “minority” churches in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, situated a considerable

distance from Ukraine but neighbouring the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, were greatly involved in aiding refugees from Ukraine. The research problems in the study questions included: 1) what was the extent of the aid provided to refugees from Ukraine, organised by the Voivodship governor as the government representative in the region? 2) what was the extent of the aid provided to the refugees by the local government of the Voivodship of Warmia and Mazury, whose twin region is the Rivne Oblast? 3) what is the extent of the aid provided by the “minority” churches operating in the voivodship under study? 4) how did the aid provided by the University of Warmia and Mazury, cooperating for years with Ukrainian universities (especially with the Lviv Technical University, National University of Ivan Frank in Lviv and the National University of Ostroh Academy), manifest itself?

### **1. Measures taken by the central and local government authorities for the benefit of refugees from Ukraine after 24 February 2022**

Voivodship governors represent the government of the Republic of Poland in a specific area. The governor of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship started preparations for a possible massive influx of refugees – instructed to do so by the Minister of Home Affairs and Administration – in January 2022. The form and type of the aid provided changed after 24 February 2022.

Permanent, highly visible public services include a 24/7 reception point in Olsztyn and the organization of collective accommodation for refugees. One of the Voivodeship governor’s main activities was to organise a place of collective accommodation under agreements with private entities – Art. 12 of the Act. There were 9,198 individuals using points of collective accommodation in the voivodeship organised and paid for by the voivodeship governor (between 24.02.2022 and May 2023). The voivodeship office (the administrative base of the voivodeship governor) organised and ran two facilities for refugees in Olsztyn, for 500 people each at the peak moment – the Bratniak Dormitory and the TPSA facility. The total number of facilities used as organised accommodation (between 24.02.2022 and May 2023) was 72.

The voivodeship governor organised and ensured the operation of the 24/7 reception point in Olsztyn. There were 6,040 refugees aided at the governor’s reception point and directed to places of collective accommodation.

The voivodeship governor instructed local governments to open places of collective accommodation and provided their funding. Eighty-five of the 135 local government units opened such places and operated in every county. The voivodeship governor funded 3840 places as of 17.04 2023, of which 2611 were occupied and 1229 were free. The refugees without a means of transport were transferred from the reception points to their places of accommodation by transportation provided by the voivodeship governor.

The governor provided funds (transferred via local governments) to private individuals who accommodated refugees in their homes. The Aid Fund (money from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Administration and the Ministry of Family and Welfare Policy) amounted to PLN 109,046,710.90, of which the Voivodeship Office provided: PLN 12,304,393.79, PLN 14,655,430.99 was transferred to local governments

and PLN 462,725.00 – to NGOs. The remaining funds amounted to PLN 81,624,161.12 (25.15% of the fund was used).

Other measures taken by the voivodeship governor to aid Ukrainian refugees included the provision of funds for family benefits, welfare benefits, one-off allowances for refugees, funding foster care – (PLN 2,088,133.00); providing psychological assistance, both on an as-needed basis, provided by the Crisis Intervention Team under an agreement between the voivodeship governor and the Olsztyn Branch of the Polish Psychological Society, and funding psychological assistance organised by local governments (PLN 35,812.00); the collection of goods for refugees in the voivodeship and to provide support in Ukraine, co-organised with the Food Bank in Olsztyn and the Government Strategic Reserve Agency. Six lorries of collected goods were sent to Ukraine – the action was completed and the goods were distributed among welfare centres and facilities which accommodated refugees.

It should be emphasised that the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship governor provided, free of charge, the following equipment for the organisation of facilities of collective accommodation from crisis management warehouses and from the strategic supplies: 4,300 beds, 4,100 blankets, 4,000 pillows, 3,400 sheets, 3,700 towels and 1,000 disposable bed linen sets. He also organised online meetings on organising aid for refugees with local governments and state institutions, such as the Social Insurance Institution, customs administration and representatives of associations (e.g. the Food Bank) – as needed.

In the case of a shortage of means of transport, when the number of people was large, or if a facility was closed down, the voivodeship governor - in cooperation with the Voivodeship Headquarters of the State Fire Service – provided transportation for refugees. The need for extensive verification of refugees was a consequence of aid abuse, e.g. treating places of collective accommodation as stop-overs while travelling. Most people in the facilities had been there since the beginning of the war and were mainly non-working individuals. These people were investigated both by local governments and by the voivodeship personnel concerning partial payment for their stay or being released from such duty under the Act. Frequently, such verification was associated with data concerning entrances and exits from Ukraine and holding UKR status.

The voivodeship governor has also been actively cooperating to create places of collective accommodation with two entities since the beginning of the war in Ukraine: the Food Bank in Olsztyn and Caritas of the Warmian Archdiocese.

The Voivodeship Crisis Management Team has been operating since the beginning of the full-scale aggression. Its online meetings were held almost every day. Because of the number of entities involved, it was impossible to have daily meetings with all of the organisations. Therefore, the organisations were asked to designate a representative for the Crisis Team meetings. Such a person participated in the Crisis Team's meetings, provided information to others and gathered information about the aid possibilities and needs. Meetings with all the organisations were held several times, and they were very important for crisis management.

Table 1. A list of the average number of facilities and the number of refugees in a month – data from daily and weekly WW-M reports sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs

A LIST OF THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF FACILITIES AND THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN A MONTH BASED ON REPORTS SENT TO THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS				
No.	YEAR	MONTH	NUMBER OF FACILITIES	MEAN NUMBER OF REFUGEES
1	2022	February	11	199
2		March	67	2275
3		April	140	4446
4		May	150	4491
5		June	146	3932
6		July	143	3714
7		August	145	3647
8		September	113	3569
9		October	91	3567
10		November	92	3453
11		December	90	3420
12	2023	January	91	3396
13		February	91	3300
14		March	89	3029

Source: Department of Security and Crisis Management of the Voivodship Office in Olsztyn – letter of 17.04.2023

The voivodship local government is responsible for the region's development. It has the law-giving body, i.e. sejmik, and the executive body, i.e. the voivodship council. Cooperation between the Local Government of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship and the Rivne Oblast (Ukraine) is carried out under an Agreement on inter-regional cooperation, signed on 9 December 2003. The main areas of cooperation include sharing local government experience, cultural, tourism, healthcare-related, environmental protection, and NGOs.

In February 2022 (after Russia's full-scale assault on Ukraine), cooperation of the partner regions, i.e. Warmia and Mazury and the Rivne Oblast, entered a new stage – one of moral support and aid in kind.

By the Resolution No. XXXV/527/22 of 3 March 2022, the Sejmik of Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship expressed its will to provide material aid to the community of the Rivne Oblast (Ukraine) ((Protocol No. XXXV/2022).

By the Resolution No. XXXV/525/22 of 3 March 2022, the Sejmik of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship terminated the Cooperation Agreement between the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship (the Republic of Poland) and the Administration of the Kaliningrad Oblast (Russian Federation) – the agreement had

been valid since 19.09.2001. (Protocol No. XXXV/2022), and by the Resolution No. XXXV/526/22 of 3 March 2022, the Sejmik of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship terminated the Cooperation Agreement between the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship and the Duma of the Kaliningrad Oblast – the agreement had been valid since 9.04.2002.

On 3 March 2022, the Sejmik requested that the Duma of the Kaliningrad Oblast should be excluded from the work of the Forum of Regional Parliaments of the South Baltic for an indefinite period (Protocol No. XXXV/2022).

By subsequent resolutions, the Sejmik of the Voivodeship materially supported the Rivne Oblast, which became a centre of relocation of many residents and enterprises from eastern Ukraine after the breakout of war:

- Resolution No. XXXVI/532/22 of the Sejmik of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship of 29 March 2022 on granting material aid to the regional community of the Rivne Oblast (Ukraine);

- Resolution No. XL/595/22 of the Sejmik of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship of 28 June 2022 on granting material aid to the regional community of the Rivne Oblast (Ukraine);

- Resolution No. XLIV/647/22 of the Sejmik of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship of 29 November 2022 on granting material aid to the Rivne Oblast (Ukraine) regional community.

The Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury has been supporting the Ukrainian society since the first moments of the Russian assault on independent Ukraine. The voivodeship local government quickly contacted its partners in the Rivne Oblast. The Ukrainian side informed it about its needs, and efforts were made to respond to it as quickly as possible. Online connections were made with lecturers at the National Technical University of Lviv and the Ostroh Academy (Ostroh, Rivne Oblast) in order to learn about the situation and the needs of residents of these oblasts, which cooperate with the University of Warmia and Mazury. Cooperation with these two Ukrainian universities is coordinated by Teresa Astramowicz-Leyk, a professor at UWM and chairperson of the International Cooperation of the Sejmik Committee, who facilitated the contacts.

During the first phase (up to late March 2022), the goods provided to the refugees were collected by the Marshal's Office of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship (the administrative base of the voivodeship local government) in response to the appeal of the voivodeship local government to support the community of the Rivne Oblast – by NGOs, private individuals and enterprises. The International Cooperation Department coordinated the logistics and bore the costs of transportation. In total, 23 tonnes of essential goods and over 5 tonnes of food were transported. In spring 2022, the voivodeship local government provided an ambulance to Rivne from the Voivodeship Emergency Station. Another ambulance was provided by the voivodeship local government from the resources of the Warmia and Mazury Lung Disease Centre in Olsztyn. The voivodeship local government provided a third ambulance in July 2023 from the resources of the Voivodeship Hospital in Elbląg.

An amendment to the Act on the voivodeship local government allowed for the implementation of the second phase of measures (from April to December 2022),

i.e. the transport of goods whose purchase was funded by the voivodeship. The International Cooperation Department coordinated the logistics of the transport. In total, the budget of the Voivodeship provided nearly 600 thousand zlotys, and the following were sent to the Rivne Oblast: 26 tonnes of food, 28 electric power generators, 578 blankets and 242 sleeping bags.

Aid in kind was also provided with subsequent transports collected by the Complex of Schools with the Ukrainian Language of Instruction in Górowo Ilaweckie (with the Voivodeship Local Government as the supervising authority). Sixteen tonnes of goods were transported. The facility became a shelter for young people fleeing the war, where pupils can continue learning without a language barrier.

The voivodeship tried to include foreign partners in its actions aimed at aiding Ukraine. Gustaw Marek, the Voivodeship Marshal, informed members of the Baltic Euroregion from Denmark, Lithuania, and Sweden about the measures taken to aid the Rivne Oblast and offered to coordinate with them if any of them wanted to join. It is noteworthy that the website of the European Region Committee (an EU institution for local government officials from all member states) published information on measures aimed at aiding the Rivne Oblast together with the contact details of the International Cooperation Department, encouraging institutions/local governments from other EU countries to join. The regional partners from the Côtes-d'Armor Department (France) conducted a campaign to collect goods, which were subsequently transferred to organisations in Elbląg and distributed among the refugees.

In 2023, the local government of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship continued aiding its partners in the Rivne Oblast. In the spring, the voivodeship local government provided 30 computer sets for children and adolescents in the all-day accommodation centre. In June 2023, the Sejmik provided further funds for the purchase of a drone which firefighters use to patrol the Belorussian-Ukrainian border and for summer holiday leisure in Warmia and Mazury for children from the Rivne Oblast (the Voivodeship local government subsidised the communal local governments which organised the leisure). About 60 children from the Rivne Oblast whose parent(s) fought in the war used the leisure opportunities.

The International Cooperation Department of the Municipal Office in Olsztyn, together with the voivodeship branch of the Voluntary Fire Services of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, organised training for voluntary firefighters from the Rivne Oblast in July 2023. The project was co-financed by the Central-European Initiative.

## **II. The Ukrainian minority in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship aiding refugees from Ukraine**

The northern part of the voivodeship, between the border with the Kaliningrad Oblast and Olsztyn, is inhabited by Ukrainians. The largest concentrations of Ukrainians are between Braniewo and Banie Mazurskie, but there are also some in the central part of the region (in Olsztyn and Mrągowo). Such distribution of these populations is caused by internal migration during the past fifty years, but also by the “Wisła” Action, in which Ukrainians were relocated to the northern part of the voivodeship, close to the border, in an area with a low population density.

The Association of Ukrainians in Poland is divided into three branches in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship: in Elbląg, Olsztyn and Giżycko. Its activities aim at preserving the history, language and culture of the Ukrainian people and following the full-scale Russian assault on Ukraine, members of the association in the area became very active in organising aid for refugees from Ukraine arriving in the region, but also for Ukrainians back at home, including in the areas affected by the war. An important point at which aid is provided to refugees and to the fighting Ukraine is the Parochial Point of Aiding Ukrainians in Olsztyn, run by the “Sala Parafialna” Association. This aid centre has been active without interruption since early March 2022 at the Greco-Catholic parish as the “Sala Parafialna” Association and by the Caritas Parochial Team. The main aim of its activities is to provide humanitarian aid to individuals in the greatest need, affected by military activities, both in Poland and Ukraine. Currently (March 2024), goods are given out once a week. The Polish language is still being taught, and the association’s volunteers help the refugees to complete their tax returns. Money is still being collected for purchases for the military (underwear, socks, boots, long-term food). Volunteers still make camouflage nets for the Ukrainian troops, and they are sent to Ukraine once a week.

The great involvement of the Ukrainian Association in Poland and the Ukrainian population in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship was described in the article in No. 3/2023 of “Nowa Polityka Wschodnia” (Astramowicz-Leyk et al., 2023). Moreover, the Ukrainian community and its Polish neighbours participate actively in humanitarian activities of the Caritas of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church of the Olsztyn-Gdańsk Eparchy, as described in the article mentioned above. Therefore, this information is not repeated here. Since the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, acting through its Caritas, used state subsidies, and because of the limited volume of this text, its activity is not analysed here. However, the study is worth expanding to include the involvement of the dominant Church in Polish society.

### **III. Minority churches aiding Ukrainian refugees and Ukraine during the period under study**

The Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship is the most diverse in terms of nationality and ethnicity. The national diversity is combined with religious diversity, which results in a typical borderland society and a multicultural crucible. Minorities account for about 7% of the Voivodeship’s population (1.4 million). Minority churches involved in aiding refugees from Ukraine obtained funds for this aid from their faithful or their church authorities. Therefore, it is worth mentioning this involvement, which is a sign of a highly humanitarian attitude.

#### **1. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church (Stachurski, 2023)**

People arriving from Ukraine after 24.02.2022 received help in the Olsztyn church and other Adventist churches. Refugees were accommodated in rooms of the Church in Olsztyn, which housed the ADRA Polska aid organisation – they were provided with places to sleep, food, and spiritual assistance – several dozen people who stayed there from several days to several months. Some are still staying in the Church building in Olsztyn. Some people received psychological assistance.



Church volunteers in the ADRA Polska aid organisation carried out the following programmes:

- Cash Assistance – that was the financial aid addressed to people who fled from the military conflict in Ukraine. The aid was provided to 79 families – 169 people. A total of PLN 366,880 was provided in the towns of Szczytno, Dywity, Olsztyn, Jonkowo, Stawiguda, and Elbląg.

The aid to each family who received it amounted to PLN 700 for the first person in the family and PLN 600 for each subsequent one. The aid was provided for three and five months for the people in the greatest need. Apart from financial aid, the beneficiaries were provided with welfare care as part of which they received support in settling down in Poland, e.g. help in applying for Polish documents, children's enrolment to a kindergarten school, help of an interpreter during visits to a doctor's or to an office, help in handling various everyday problems, psychological and spiritual support, legal counsel and assistance in looking for a job.

- Cash 4 Rent (at two stages) – addressed to people from Ukraine – mainly those staying in shelters. As part of this project, beneficiaries received financial aid of PLN 2000 per family for three months, which – in exceptional cases – could be extended to five months. These funds covered the cost of renting a flat and a deposit. The aid was provided to 67 families – 207 people in the following towns in the voivodeship: Olsztyn, Dywity, Różnowo, Ilawa, Ostróda, Mielno, Jonkowo, Dobre Miasto. The amount of PLN 376 thousand was provided.

Apart from the financial aid, families were given welfare support: help to find flats, help in signing contracts, psychological support, legal advice, vocational assistance, help in finding a job, and help in everyday matters.

Programmes executed by ARA Polska church volunteers were co-financed by HIAS and CARE.

## **2. Christ Church in Ostróda (Chojnacki, 2023)**

It organised humanitarian aid (food, technical aid, accommodation):

- total amount of accumulated funds – ca. PLN 545,000.00,
- total amount of spent funds – ca. PLN 486,809.00,
- number of shipments to Ukraine – ca. 9,
- total number of people taken care of locally – 36.

Aid to refugees has been provided since 27 February 2022 – they were accommodated in the church guestrooms, in rented flats and – in one case – in a rented house. They were provided with financial support, with food, medicines, etc. Many people were given clothes, footwear, and even laptops and tablets for children as an aid in distance education. Two cars were purchased, used by one family of seven and one of five. Eleven children were given aid to find a place in a kindergarten or school. Members of the congregation were involved in aid – they brought food, clothes, bed linens, and medicines, provided transportation to take people to the doctor, and provided the basic household appliances, furniture, beds, mattresses, etc., for the rented facilities. Humanitarian and technical aid transports were organised to Vinnytsia, Vyshhorod and Lutsk in cooperation with the “Arka Noego” Foundation and the “Pokój i Wolność” Foundation from Kiev. Three electric power generators were given

to the churches in Vinnytsia and Vyshhorod. Humanitarian aid was often provided in cooperation with the ICHTHYS Foundation from Ostróda (Zbigniew and Małgorzata Kolak – members of the congregation).

Mission trips were organised for two families from the congregation to the orphanage in Tczew, where 36 children from Ukraine were staying. Goods collected by the congregation were donated several times. Two flats were renovated and equipped for people from Ukraine.

Moreover, two flats for families from Ukraine were rented and paid for (one of them for Pastor Wolodymyr Shkir and his wife from Vyshhorod).

By the end of August 2023, such actions had gradually been discontinued as many people had left. Some had returned to Ukraine, and others had gone to various places around the world. One family of five found a sponsor and left for the state of Indiana, USA. Three people remained in the church building. Many people became independent during the past year, found a job, rented a flat and are coping without the congregation's help, which was extremely needed just after they arrived.

### **3. Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Olsztyn (Stachelek, 2023)**

The parish and the congregation provided accommodation to 20 people in their homes. Aid was given to over one thousand people at the point where food and hygienic products were distributed (it was active for 1.5 months). Moved by the atrocities of war, the congregation members were very generous in supporting the parish's actions financially in 2022. Nearly 120 thousand zlotys were collected for aid to Ukraine, of which nearly 100 thousand had been used by the end of 2022. These resources provided various kinds of aid to over 50 people. Part of this amount was allocated for humanitarian aid in Ukraine. Support was given in the form of six shipments of goods, and the pastor went to Ukraine with three of them. Each time, the aid was provided through the Lutheran Church in Ukraine.

Support was provided to the point of aid to people from Ukraine, which operated at the Greco-Catholic Parish in Olsztyn. The parish co-organised two charity concerts to raise funds for aid to Ukraine. Free courses in the Polish language were organised from March to June 2022. The courses and training were paid for, which helped people from Ukraine to improve their skills and to find a job. Trips and excursions for people from Ukraine were organised. Children and adolescents accounted for the majority of participants (about ten trips).

### **4. Orthodox Church (Jaszczuk, 2023)**

All orthodox parishes in Warmia and Mazury organised food collections from the first days of the war. They also collected medical products for civilians and soldiers fighting in Ukraine. Cooperation was established with the military hospital in Vinnytsia, and all the necessary supplies were sent there owing to support from firms and individuals. The whole voivodeship has provided countless supplies.

Shelter was given to over 700 people from Ukraine by the Orthodox population of Warmia and Mazury with the support of the "Eleos" Orthodox Charity Centre. The Church is still helping to arrange accommodation and jobs and to organise Polish language courses and educational activities for children.

Necessary supplies were collected with the help of the Orthodox chaplains of the Polish army and Border guards, who performed their service in Warmia and Mazury. The chaplains provide support to civilians traumatised by the war.

The “Eleos” Orthodox Charity Centre provided support, which enabled the purchase of educational materials for children – they were given to primary schools in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship to be used by children from Ukraine. Orthodox priests provide church services, administer sacraments, and support refugees from Ukraine with their spiritual needs at all centres and anywhere where they are needed.

## **5. Congregations of the Pentecostal Church in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship**

**Congregation of Christ the Saviour in Frombork** collected funds and purchased:

1. 1,500 tactical first-aid kits – ca. PLN 50,000
2. Medicines and equipment for paramedics – ca. PLN 10,000
3. 5,500 protein bars – ca. PLN 10,000
4. 3 tonnes of salt – ca. PLN 3,500
5. More than 2 thousand trench candles.
6. Presents for Children’s Day for 100 children from Ukraine.

Moreover, congregation members opened their homes, providing accommodation and food to about 40 refugees. They helped to relocate (to countries in Europe and North America) – about 15 people. They organised holiday travel for people from Ukraine as part of the “respite from war” action. On “Good Friday with Ukraine,” a concert was organised to raise funds for first-aid kits. Uniforms, footwear, clothes, toys, hygiene products, medicines and food were bought, and aid was provided to over 50 people. Books in Ukrainian and translations were distributed. The total aid to Ukraine and Ukrainians provided by the congregation exceeded PLN 100,000.

### **Betel Congregation in Kętrzyn**

Starting in March 2022, a flat was provided in the church building for a mother with six children for six months. She was helped to find a job. Her husband works for the congregation and is currently a maintenance person. A mother and her daughter are staying at the church, but she came from Donetsk at the beginning of the war in 2014.

### **Congregation in Mragowo**

The Congregation in Mragowo provided aid to 15 people from Ukraine. As of September 2023, a family of four is staying at the pastor’s flat.

### **Syloe Cogregation in Morąg**

Twenty-one people were received in the congregation after 24.02.2022. Some of them stayed in the church building. Two 2-bedroom flats were rented for the others for one year for about 4 thousand zlotys a month. Both families now support themselves. The two mothers with four children returned to Ukraine, and the others left for other cities. As of September 2023, there are four people in the church building, and they intend to stay there for good.

### **The Nowe Życie Congregation in Elbląg**

The Nowe Życie Congregation in Elbląg provided financial aid of about PLN 10,000 to Christian charity organisations in Ukraine. Representatives of these organisations distributed the purchased food and medicines among those in need. They transported them to various towns, often close to the front line in Ukraine. Moreover, seven vans with food and medical supplies were sent through the Nowa Nadzieja Mission at the Congregation in Elbląg, including 500 first-aid kits, an electric power generator and 600 LED lamps. Thirty Ukrainians were provided with support by the mission in cooperation with the food bank in Elbląg for a year.

### **Betel Congregation in Gołdap**

Pastor Marek Ciak went to Przemysł on the first days of the conflict to help the refugees – the Church covered the related costs. A large electric power generator (8 kW) was purchased for a village near Lviv. Medicines and dressings were purchased in cooperation with the Commune of Węgorzewo (by the Węgorzewo Community Centre Head) for several thousand zlotys. Funds were provided for 13 children and auxiliary personnel to attend summer and winter camps. Medicines and clothes were purchased, and financial and legal support was provided for Romani people from Ukraine who lived in Olecko. Especially for those who – for various reasons – lost their refugee status. Support was given for various measures in the town associated with Ukrainians, such as:

- purchase of products for making pierogies, which were then sold,
- aid in furniture replacement,
- logistical help – finding a job and accommodation.

### **Emaus Congregation in Mikołajki**

Since about 450 people came to Mikołajki (Mikołajki has a population of about 3800), the congregation cooperated closely with the town authorities and a group of volunteers. The Church organised activities for children and adolescents from the start. The Pastor's wife coordinated activities designated by the Municipal Office for children and adolescents. These activities resulted in organising – with the cooperation of Ukrainian animators – a concert for the town residents and the refugees. Initially, all the expenses related to the aid were covered by the congregation from its own resources (ca. PLN 15,000). Food and hygiene products were purchased, travel costs were covered for the returning families, rooms in the church buildings were made available, etc. The Supreme Church Council was also asked for help. Support of PLN 25,000 was provided. There were three families with children (14 people) under the constant care of the congregation. Two flats and the church's offices were rented. Household appliances (washing machines, fridges, vacuum cleaners) were purchased. Wood as fuel for the winter was purchased for one of the families, and the cost of making the central heating installation was covered. The cost of renting the flat was covered. The individuals in the care of the congregation were aided in getting odd jobs. The cost of return to Ukraine was covered for 60 people. A collection of food was organised, and the necessary items were purchased (candles, electric torches, batteries, sleeping bags, and two electric power generators) for the total amount of PLN 15,000 and shipped to

Ukraine. Aid was organised for the refugees staying at the Centre for Foreigners in Kętrzyn. About PLN 70,000 was provided for war refugees from Ukraine between February 2022 and June 2023. Currently, the congregation provides rooms in the church building with Internet access for working from home and for integration meetings for people who cannot return to Ukraine.

### **The “Horyzont” Congregation in Giżycko (Trybek, 2023)**

It has been taking care of eight families from Ukraine for over a year. It has rented eight flats for them, pays all the bills and helps to support the families.

**The “Twoja Przystań” Congregation in Olsztyn (Giska, 2023).** It organises the Olsztyn Humanitarian Convoys (<https://www.facebook.com/OlsztynskiKonwojHumanitarny>).

So far, 15 convoys have been organised, over 440 refugees have been transported to Poland (especially during the first weeks of the war), and 80 tonnes of goods have been donated for civilians, hospitals and the military. The departure of the next (the 16<sup>th</sup>) convoy with aid for Ukraine is planned for October 2023.

A platform for aid for Ukraine was created on the first days after the outbreak of war [www.pomoc.twojaprzystan.pl](http://www.pomoc.twojaprzystan.pl) where help was provided with accommodation, supplies and finance.

Courses in the Polish language for refugees were conducted. An Aid Warehouse was run during the first nine months of the war, which provided food and other supplies for hundreds of Ukrainian families.

Moreover, church services were organised for the Ukrainian congregation of the Pentecostal Church, with acting pastor Igor Balakin as the person in charge, with about 60 people from Ukraine. It supports aid organisations which provide help for Ukraine (other convoys, humanitarian actions).

Two members of the Twoja Przystań Rosslyn and Robin Szvec churches received Military Chaplain certificates, and they performed their services for Ukrainian army soldiers. There is a facility in Olsztyn that is being renovated, where they will conduct and expand aid activities for Ukraine.

The other congregations joined these activities and collected money during the church fundraising actions.

## **6. Congregation of the Baptist Christian Church in Szczytno (Seweryn, 2023)**

Soon after the outbreak of war and refugee influx to Poland, from April to mid-June 2022, a Catechetical Centre was opened in Świętajno, county of Szczytno, where 50 refugees found shelter. They found accommodation, food, and other necessary means of living, and an opportunity to acclimatise to Poland was provided to those who decided to stay in Poland longer. They were provided with legal, psychological, and spiritual aid, and they were helped to find jobs, permanent accommodations, and schools for children.

The church in Szczytno was made available to refugees from Ukraine for:

- regular, ecumenical religious services in the Ukrainian language.
- courses in the Polish language for refugees and their children,

- two families joined the Congregation permanently, and they also participated in services in the Ukrainian language.

Material aid was also provided to the refugees on an as-needed basis: food, furniture and other household equipment. Daytime summer camp was organised for Ukrainian children during the 2022 summer holiday, in which 40 children took part. The congregation financed a summer camp for children and adolescents from Ukraine (21-25 August 2023).

#### IV. University of Warmia and Mazury (Wielgosz, 2023)

Since the University in Craiova (Romania) is preparing to sign a cooperation agreement with the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (Poland), it is worth showing the University's activity in providing aid to refugees from Ukraine and to Ukraine, especially since the UWM has been actively cooperating scientifically with several Ukrainian universities, and the cooperation gained new dimensions with the full-scale war in Ukraine. The University organised fundraising – about PLN 80,000 was collected – as well as collected new shoes, clothes, toys, cleaning supplies, medicines, sleeping bags, and first-aid kits, with a total value of about PLN 500,000. Exemptions from dormitory fees amounted to: PLN 67<500 (PLN 50 thousand came from ALIGHT). The amount of other aid to staff and students from Ukrainian universities, as well as covering the cost of living, spending allowance, and participation in conferences and seminars in Poland – this aid included the reception of female scientists from Ukraine and students from the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv: PLN 43,000. The amount of remuneration for Ukrainian refugees, including that for visiting professors from Ukraine (until June 2023): PLN 270,381.93. Moreover, the Polish Language Culture and Language Centre organised three free Polish language courses for female refugees. Owing to the cooperation of Professor Teresa Astramowicz-Leyk with the American ALIGHT organisation, the UWM obtained PLN 50 thousand for accommodation for female refugees and for two Polish language courses. This cooperation bore fruit in the form of financial aid for the “Sala Parafialna” Association and one working at the Greco-Catholic Parish in Olsztyn (a total for food for the refugees – EUR 50 thousand and for a Polish language course). During the initial period of the full-scale Russian aggression in Ukraine, professor T. Astramowicz-Leyk organised two electric power generators for hospitals in Kyiv and medicines for hospitals in Lviv, and just before the Greco-Catholic Easter 2022, in cooperation with Iryna Suprun, a Lviv Oblast councillor, and later over 40 tonnes of humanitarian aid was sent to Brodzianka and other villages of the Kyiv Oblast, which was of great importance given the destruction and disruption during the first weeks of the war.

When the full-scale war broke out in Ukraine, UWM hosted four Ukrainian students in the Institute of Political Sciences within the double diploma programme with the National University Lviv Technical University. Professor Teresa Astramowicz-Leyk (Honorary Professor of the Lviv Polytechnic National University) organised humanitarian aid for them (the parents had either lost all their property or were jobless) and helped them find jobs. Between 28.02 and 13.03.2022, the students worked as volunteers at the CAMP Ostróda leisure and training centre (this has been used by refugees from Ukraine since the Russian assault on Ukraine). Their tasks included

translation, help in administrative work that required the knowledge of Ukrainian and Russian languages, translation during activation work, doctor visits, and psychological consultations, and they were in charge of groups leaving the centre. There were about 180 children-refugees aged between 7 months and 17 years, staying at the centre. The aid was coordinated by Dr hab. Teresa Astramowicz-Leyk, professor at UWM – cooperation coordinator between the Faculty of Social Sciences of UWM and the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Lviv Polytechnic National University (they have been cooperating since 2015).

### **V. Organisation of female refugees**

The female refugees in Olsztyn established their own organisation – the “Dwa Skrzydła” foundation. It is a group of female Ukrainians who fled to Poland after the war outbreak and organised their community, establishing a place for cultural, educational, and psychological meetings to lift up their spirits and boost their integration with Polish society. The aim of this initiative is to facilitate meetings of two cultures, get to know each other and support each other in terms of psychology and information. Participation in cultural events, preparing them jointly, alleviates stress, supports and unifies, and shows cultural differences but also similarities. The Foundation has been active since June 2022, being an informal association of women who did not want to just sit alone doing nothing. They wanted to organise some activities for their children to activate those more confused. The Municipal Cultural Centre provided them with a safe and welcoming space. Development and support for Ukrainian consciousness, as well as help in the adaptation and professional development of women and children, are the main priorities of the organisation. Their activities include support in culture, education, rehabilitation, and organised recreation for children – they also organise thematic and integration meetings and cultural events. The foundation is in touch with about 400 Ukrainian families who came to Poland after the war and who live in Olsztyn and the surrounding area.

### **Conclusion**

The full-scale Russian assault on Ukraine has no precedent after World War II. The murders of civilians, torture, and genocide committed by Putin’s army caused the mass exodus of civilians from Ukraine. Polish society opened their homes and hearts, providing help to Ukrainians. This opening to guests from Ukraine also involved the societies of Warmia and Mazury. The Ukrainian minority in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, but also Poles with no Ukrainian roots, became involved in aiding refugees from Ukraine. Such aid was provided by Polish central government authorities, by local governments, by the Greco-Catholic Church, and by minority churches in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship.

The arrival of the refugees exacerbated problems with adaptation, i.e. everyday problems, such as finding a job, accommodation, and organising living conditions. There were also social and psychological problems, longing for one’s family, for the homeland, family breakup, the need for being independent, finding new friends; educational problems – differences in the system of values, education, requirements concerning the educational sphere and in the teacher-pupil relations and cultural and

communication problems, including an unsatisfactory or low level of mastering the Polish language, as well as peculiarities of the local mentality. On the other hand, the proper migration policy of a country can be positive for three parties: the receiving country (Poland) in a sense that there is an influx of labour force to the labour market; for refugees, as Poland gave them financial aid and provided them with accommodation, education, healthcare and welfare benefits, and third, it can be beneficial for Ukraine, in a sense that elderly men who remained in Ukraine and those aged 18-60 years who cannot leave Ukraine because of the war receive financial and material aid from the refugees – members of their families, who work in Poland and can send such aid to them to support them during the war. These conclusions appeared in earlier studies (Astramowicz-Leyk et al., 2022). Previous immigrants from Ukraine (after 2014, but before 24.02.2022) did not identify themselves either with the Ukrainian Association in Poland or with the Greco-Catholic Church. These relations changed after the full-scale Russian assault on Ukraine in February 2022. The war refugees who came to the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship used assistance from the Ukrainian Association and from the Greco-Catholic Church in the region under study. It is noteworthy that the refugees became involved in the activities of the Association, especially regarding the organisation of aid for other refugees and Ukraine. This is particularly manifest in the activity of the Parish Point in Olsztyn, whose active members include refugees from Ukraine, members of the Ukrainian Association (Ukrainian minority) and Poles with no Ukrainian roots. The majority of guests from Ukraine identify themselves with the Greco-Catholic Church, and they take part in services and other forms of spiritual and material support.

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