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## **Ukrainians in Poland on behalf of refugees – a case study of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship**

### **Ukrainians in Poland on behalf of refugees – a case study of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship**

#### ***Abstract***

The aim of the article is to present the activity of three branches of the Association of Ukrainians in Poland, covering the entire Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The study also outlines the Association's activities supporting refugees. The main research hypothesis is that the Association of Ukrainians in Poland is actively engaged in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, and following Russia's full-scale invasion, members of the Association became extremely proactive both in helping refugees from Ukraine, as well as Ukrainians who stayed in Ukraine, including those from the territory of military operations. The core research problems focuses on the following questions: What efforts

did the Association of Ukrainians in Poland undertake to maintain its history, traditions, language and culture? Which activities have been supported by local government authorities, including the Voivodeship ones? How has the Association changed its activity following the Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022? Previous studies conducted by the authors demonstrate that economic migrants from Ukraine in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship did not perceive themselves as a part of the Ukrainian minority living in the region. Meanwhile, the relationship between the Association and the refugees is different.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian minority, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, Ukrainian refugees, Association of Ukrainians in Poland, Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine

## **Украинцы в Польше от имени беженцев – на примере Варминско-Мазурского воеводства**

### **Аннотация**

Цель статьи – представить деятельность трёх отделений Ассоциации украинцев Польши, охватывающих всё Варминско-Мазурское воеводство. В исследовании также изложена деятельность Ассоциации по поддержке беженцев. Основная гипотеза исследования заключается в том, что Ассоциация украинцев Польши активно занимается в Варминско-Мазурском воеводстве, а после полномасштабного вторжения России члены Ассоциации стали чрезвычайно активно помогать как беженцам из Украины, так и украинцам, которые остались на Украине, в том числе с территории боевых действий. Основные проблемы исследования сосредоточены на следующих вопросах: Какие усилия предприняла Ассоциация украинцев в Польше для сохранения своей истории, традиций, языка и культуры? Какие мероприятия были поддержаны органами местного самоуправления, в том числе воеводскими? Как Ассоциация изменила свою деятельность после полномасштабной агрессии России против Украины 24 февраля 2022 года? Предыдущие исследования, проведенные авторами, показывают, что экономические мигранты из Украины в Варминско-Мазурском воеводстве не ощущали себя частью украинского меньшинства, проживающего в регионе. Между тем, отношения между Ассоциацией и беженцами иные.

**Ключевые слова:** Украинское меньшинство, Варминско-Мазурское воеводство, украинские беженцы, Ассоциация украинцев Польши, полномасштабная агрессия России против Украины

## Introduction

The article aims to present the activity of three branches of the Association of Ukrainians in Poland, which cover the entire Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The study also outlines the Association's activities that support refugees.

The foremost research method was the institutional-legal approach. This enabled to demonstrate the activity of Association in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, as well as the involvement of its branches in providing aid to refugees from Ukraine arriving in large numbers to Poland after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, and to show the support from the Association in Warmia and Mazury to people in Ukraine.

The results of the research enabled us to propose the hypothesis that the Association of Ukrainians in Poland is actively engaged in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, striving to keep its history, traditions, language and culture. After Russia's full-scale invasion, members of the Association in the study region became extremely proactive both in helping refugees from Ukraine (mainly women and children) who had come to the region, as well as Ukrainians who stayed in Ukraine, including those from the territory of military operations.

The core research problems focuses on the following questions:

- What efforts did the Association of Ukrainians in Poland undertake to maintain its history, traditions, language and culture?
- Which activities have been supported by local government authorities, including the Voivodeship ones?
- How has the Association changed its activity following the Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022?
- Did the Ukrainian migrants who came in Warmia and Mazury (particularly after Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014) collaborate with the Ukrainian minority in the region?
- What kind of activities did the association undertake on behalf of refugees?
- How did the relations between Ukrainians who came to Warmia and Mazury after 2014 and the Ukrainian minority living in Warmia and

Mazury differ from those of Ukrainians who arrived in the studied territory after February 24, 2022?

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland from 1997 is the foremost legal act regulating the rights of national minorities in Poland. Paragraph 1 of the Article 35 of the Constitution contains legal regulations concerning obligations imposed on the state regarding persons of national minorities (Janusz, 1998, p. 58; Janusz, 2001, p. 117), and paragraph 2 of the same article states *expressis verbis* that “National and ethnic minorities shall have the right to establish educational and cultural institutions, institutions designed to protect religious identity, as well as to participate in the resolution of matters connected with their cultural identity”.

Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship was created on January 1, 1999 as a result of administrative reform. It included the lands of Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle. Warmia and Mazury formed the southern part of the former Eastern Prussia. The region is the most diverse in terms of nationalities and ethnicities compared to other ones in Poland. National diversity is also overlaid by strong religious diversity, which together forms features typical for a border society, with its multicultural dimension. According to data from national minority associations, minorities constitute around 7–8% of its total population (1.429 million).

### **National minorities in Warmia and Mazury**

After World War II, almost the entire German population left Warmia and Mazury. Due to the war, the number of Warmians and Masurians decreased – from a total population of 2.5 million in the autumn of 1944, only 450 thousand remained. About 120 thousand Warmians and Mazurians stayed, along with a comparable number of Germans. In the years following the war, there were large migrations of people from the central parts of Poland and the capital city of Warsaw (200 thousand) (Sakson, 1998, pp. 107–116), repatriates from the former Borderlands (140 thousand) (Sakson, 1998, pp. 116–128), Ukrainians under the Operation ‘Vistula’ (70 thousand) (Sakson, 1998, pp. 128–140) and some smaller groups like Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Roma (about 10 thousand all together) (Sakson, 1998, pp. 140–153) – all the data

from 1950. Such diversity of the immigrant population raised many problems in terms of integration (Sakson, 1998, pp. 113–115, 153–189).

The Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship has the greatest national and ethnic diversity in Poland. It is also overlaid by strong religious diversity, which together creates features typical of a border society, with its multicultural crucible. Religious diversity is a part of the national mosaic, however, one should be cautious when making statements about the religious beliefs of the Ukrainian population, such as that 70% are adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and 30% are adherents of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

Ukrainian and German minorities are highly engaged in the region. Specifically, the Ukrainian population, which had the privilege of taking part in activities after 1956, has accomplished remarkable educational and cultural successes. Ukrainians display active participation in elections – both parliamentary and local government.

### **Ukrainian minority in the region of Warmia and Mazury and its organizations**

Ukrainians are settled in the northern part of the voivodeship, stretching from the Kaliningrad region to Olsztyn. The group is most populous in the northern area from Braniewo to Banie Mazurskie, but there are still significant numbers in the central part of the region (in Olsztyn and Mrągowo). The dispersion of the population is caused by internal migrations over the last seventy years, as well as the Operation ‘Vistula’, which aimed to settle Ukrainians in the least inhabited border territory in the north of the region.

Currently, the most numerous national minority living in the Warmian-Masurian province are Ukrainians, amounting to around 75–80 thousand people. It is worth noting that there is debate regarding the size of national minority, such as Ukrainians<sup>1</sup>, in the examined region (Domagała, 2009,

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<sup>1</sup> The 2011 census revealed that 51,001 people of Ukrainian descent were living in Poland, 27,630 of them declaring Ukrainian origin as the only one. Data from non-governmental organizations suggests that more than 250,000 Ukrainians lived in Poland during the early 1990s. In particular, the Association of Ukrainians in Poland estimates this number to be somewhere between 350 to 500 thousand people (Yevtukh et al., 2005, p. 43).

p. 5). According to official data of 2011 census (*Ludność w województwie warmińsko-mazurskim. Stan i struktura...*; *RAPORT Z WYNIKÓW W WOJEWÓDZTWIE WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKIM Narodowy Spis ...*) (since data from the 2021 census has not been published yet) – there are 13.4 thousand Ukrainians living in the region. The Association of Ukrainians in Poland disagrees with these data, but so do scholars and local government officials (*Наш вибір*, 2023). For example, Marshal's Plenipotentiary for national and ethnic minorities of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodship Wiktor Marek Leyk in May 2019, during the 5th Polish-Ukrainian Scientific Forum in Olsztyn, stated that the Central Statistical Office researched the issues of nationality improperly, lowering the real data<sup>2</sup>. As evidence, the Marshal's Plenipotentiary cited the vastly underestimated size of the Ukrainian minority in the municipalities of Górowo-Ilaweckie and Lelkowo.

In 1947, Ukrainians were forced to leave their homeland in the vicinity of Przemysł, Sanok, and Beskid to be resettled in Warmia and Mazury. Researchers examining the results of Operation 'Vistula' stress that the expulsion of Ukrainians not only contributed to their material losses, but also to the obliteration of their culture, including teaching of their mother tongue. At the time, Poland's state policy had stringent regulations developed to expedite assimilation of the Ukrainian minority, such as limiting the protection of their own national identification (Czetyrba-Piszczako, 2015, pp. 543–557). The Ukrainian minority was secluded in the early years after its relocation, which insulated them from the outside world and enabled their language and national identity to survive and evade absorption. During the period from 1947 to 1956, the communist authorities in Poland had an aggressive assimilation policy. Following the 'thaw' in 1956, the political situation in Poland changed, including with regard to the Ukrainian minority. On June 18, 1956, Ukrainians established the Ukrainian Social and Cultural Society (Chałupczak, Browarek, 2000, p. 67)<sup>3</sup>. Since 1956, there have been classes

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<sup>2</sup> The Marshal's Plenipotentiary reiterated his remark concerning the census data in a talk on May 22, 2023, within the context of the 8th Polish-Ukrainian Scientific Forum which took place in May 18–19, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> It was aimed at representing the national interests of the Ukrainian population, promotion of Ukrainian culture and education, strengthening relations with Polish people and maintaining contacts with Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

with Ukrainian language of teaching alongside to Polish classes in Banie Mazurskie (Astramowicz-Leyk, 2002). Currently, there are two schools with Ukrainian language of instruction in the studied region, i.e. the Complex of Schools with the Ukrainian language of instruction in Górowo-Ĺaweckie (elementary and secondary school) and the Lesia Ukrainka Elementary School No. 8 with Ukrainian language of instruction in Bartoszyce.

Ukrainians were given the ability to nurture their religion, which is an essential element in maintaining the national identity. The democratization of the political system in Poland commenced with the Round Table and elections in June 1989 became another vital stage in the development of Ukrainian culture and identity. The protection of the rights of national minorities has been a crucial part of the formation of democracy in Poland (Łodziński, 1998). At the 1990 Congress of the Ukrainian Social and Cultural Society, the Association of Ukrainians in Poland was founded. The Association's activities include protection of the civic rights of the Ukrainian national minority in Poland; furthering the Ukrainian minority's interests in dealings with the authorities, state and social institutions; advancing Ukrainian identity and culture; facilitating integration of the Ukrainian minority; and promoting Polish-Ukrainian friendship (Chałupczak, Browarek, 2000, p. 68).

Establishment of the Olsztyn branch of the Association took place in autumn, 1990. Meanwhile, in 1994, the branch of the Association of Independent Ukrainian Youth in Olsztyn was set up (its activity was short-lived and is not longer visible). The Association of Ukrainians in Poland has three separate branches that Ukrainians in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship are currently active in. According to records, they have one thousand members. These are the following branches: 1) Olsztyn branch (including Olsztyn, Dobre Miasto, Lidzbark Warmiński, Górowo Ĺaweckie, Bartoszyce, Stopki, Kętrzyn, Asuny, Gęsiki, Krelikiejmy, Srokowo, Mołtajny, Bajory, Ĺawa, Ostróda, Moraġ, Reszel); 2) Elbląg branch (miejscowości: Elbląg, Pasłęk, Pieniężno, Lelkowo, Tolkmicko, Marzęcino, Ostaszewo, Stegna, Braniewo, Pęciszewo, Nowotki, Szymbory, Głębock, Jelonki, Jarzeń); 3) Mazury branch (including Banie Mazurskie, Węgorzewo, Wydminy, Giżycko, Kruklanki).

## Activity of the Ukrainian minority in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship

Within the framework of the joint Polish-Ukrainian research project<sup>4</sup> “State policy in protecting the rights of national minorities: the experience of Ukraine and Poland”, a survey was conducted among representatives of the Ukrainian national minority in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The survey was intended to explore not only the nature of the Ukrainian community’s activities, but also the level of effectiveness of local government institutions in ensuring the rights and providing conditions for the development of national minorities (Astramowicz-Leyk, Turchyn, 2021).

The Ukrainian national minority in Poland is known for its culture and national traditions, which are a significant contribution to the development of Polish culture. In the multicultural Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, Ukrainians develop and promote their cultural heritage, while maintaining strong ties with their homeland and cooperate with other national minority communities on this regard. Major cultural events include: Days of Ukrainian Theater, as well as festivals like ‘Under the Common Sky,’ ‘Colors of the Ukrainian Culture,’ ‘E-Kolomyja,’ ‘Night of Ivan Kupala,’ ‘Days of the Ukrainian Culture, Regional Ukrainian Fair ‘From the Painted Box,’ International Days of Orthodox Music, International Festival of Children’s Folklore Ensembles of National Minorities, Shevchenko Concerts, Television and Radio Festival ‘Kalinowe Mosty.’ The Voivodship has also a large number of dance and singing ensembles, including Dumka, Lisova Pisnia, Dar Lubovi, Suziriachko, Cheremosh, Lemkivski Veselushki. Ukrainian cultural heritage is deeply respected by the local people, which is significant not only for sustaining the Ukrainian ethnicity or promoting the cultural heritage, but is also an effective tool of soft influence that ‘works’ to strengthen the integration of Ukrainians into Polish society.

It is essential that the Ukrainian minority is represented in the local information space using their native language. A newspaper of the Ukrainian

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<sup>4</sup> The project was carried out by the Institute of Political Science, the University of Warmia and Mazury and the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Lviv Polytechnic National University in 2018–2019. The project was led by Prof. Teresa Astramowicz-Leyk from Poland and Prof. Halyna Lucyshyn from Ukraine.



community in Poland, 'Nashe slovo', is distributed throughout the Voivodship, while the magazine 'Błahowist' maintains an editorial office in Górowo-Ławeckie. Since 1958, a Ukrainian radio program has been running, and has had a 30-minute daily transmission on Radio Olsztyn since 2011. Every two weeks, on Tuesdays, the regional TV station TVP3 Olsztyn airs a 30-minute program called 'Telenowyny'.

### **Support to the Ukrainian minority by local government of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship**

The Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship's local government is committed to providing support for all the national minorities in the region (Astramowicz-Leyk, Turchyn, 2021). Since the establishment of the voivodeship, there has been a Marshal's Plenipotentiary for national and ethnic minorities of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodship and, since 1999, the only National and Ethnic Minorities Committee of the Regional Assembly in Poland (Jarosław Słoma of the Civic Coalition holds currently the position of chairman). The data on financial support for national minorities, including the Ukrainian one during the COVID-19 pandemic fail to accurately reflect the actual financial aid of the local government to minority organizations. It is therefore worth quoting the latest data. In 2023, the local government allocated 200 thousand PLN for non-governmental organizations of the national and ethnic minorities (compared to 160 thousand PLN in the year before) (*Rozstrzygnięcie Konkursu ofert...*). In 2023, as many as 15 out of 26 offers were submitted by Ukrainian minority organizations<sup>5</sup> (compared to 11 of 24 offers in the year before):

As the data shows, the Warmian-Masurian Voivodship local government increased its funding for activities of national minorities in 2023, with the Ukrainian minority, like in the year earlier, submitting the most projects<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Central European Youth Training Center with its office in Górowo-Ławeckie is an organization operating within the Complex of Schools with the Ukrainian language of instruction in Górowo-Ławeckie.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that today as well as even before the war in Ukraine, the Ukrainian minority did not have access to financial aid from the Ukrainian government.

**Tab. 1.** List of offers that received funding from the self-government budget of the Warmian-Mazurian Voivodeship for the implementation of tasks by non-governmental organizations and entities in 2023 within the scope of activities for the Ukrainian minority listed in Article 3 of the Law on public benefit activities and voluntary work

Lp.	An organization name	Task title	The requested amount in PLN	The amount of grant awarded in PLN
1.	Central European Youth Training Center with its office in Górowo-Ilaweckie	XIII Festival of Ukrainian Culture in Górowo-Ilaweckie	25.000,00	25.000,00
2.	Association of Ukrainians in Poland, Mazury Branch in Giżycko	XXII International Church Music Concerts – 2023	23.000,00	18.000,00
3.	Association of Ukrainians in Poland, Elbląg Branch	Activities on behalf of national and ethnic minorities and regional language, 55 Children's Festival of the Ukrainian Culture in Elbląg	10.000,00	10.000,00
4.	Central European Youth Training Center with its office in Górowo-Ilaweckie	XIV National Days of Ukrainian Theatre in Olsztyn	25.000,00	15.000,00
5.	Central European Youth Training Center with its office in Górowo-Ilaweckie	XXXVI Regional Ukrainian Folklore Fair "From the Painted Chest" – Kętrzyn 2023	22.400,00	10.000,00
6.	Association of Ukrainians in Poland – Circle in Kruklanki	Ethno journey 2023 Magic Kupala Night	13.530,00	8.000,00
7.	Association of Ukrainians in Poland, Circle in Banie Mazurskie	XII Colors of the Ukrainian Culture in Banie Mazurskie	14.3000,00	6.000,00
8.	Association of Ukrainians in Poland, Circle in Giżycko	Weekend with the Ukrainian culture and tradition	15.000,00	8.000,00
9.	Association of Ukrainians in Poland, Elbląg Branch	Activities on behalf of national and ethnic minorities and regional language: workshops – cultural education for children of Warmia and Mazury	8.000,00	4.000,00
10.	Central European Youth Training Center with its office in Górowo-Ilaweckie	Regional Shevchenko Days	24.260,00	9.000,00
11.	Central European Youth Training Center with its office in Górowo-Ilaweckie	XXVII Inauguration of the Cultural Year of the Ukrainian People of Warmia and Mazury	6.000,00	5.000,00
12.	Association of Ukrainians in Poland, Mazury Branch in Giżycko	Children's creativity festival – 2023	8.000,00	4.000,00
13.	St. George Greek Catholic parish in Morąg	Diversity of cultures and traditions enriches the whole society – continuation	11.960,00	3.000,00
14.	Central European Youth Training Center with its office in Górowo-Ilaweckie	Music and dance workshops	19.950,00	4.000,00
15.	Parish Hall Association based in Olsztyn	Activities on behalf of the Ukrainian minority	24.960,00	3.000,00

Source: Marshal's Office of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship

**Activities carried out on behalf of Ukraine and refugees  
by the branches of the Association of Ukrainians in Poland  
in the studied Voivodeship following the full-scale aggression  
of Russia in Ukraine on February 24, 2022**

Following February 24, 2022, the Ukrainian minority began to show great commitment to aiding refugees from Ukraine and assisting Ukraine's plight. Thus, investigating the behavior of certain branches of the Association in the studied region is beneficial.

For instance, the Olsztyn branch of the Association of Ukrainians in Poland together with the ELEOS Orthodox organization from Podlasie (headed by Rev. Adam Ostapkowicz), is working to facilitate collaboration with the Protestant Church in Finland. Through these contacts, over 10 trucks of aid have been delivered – around one hundred wheelchairs, in addition to hospital beds, medical and hygiene supplies, household chemicals, apparel and food for both adults and children. Besides, eighteen power generators, each with a value of 800 euros, were donated from Finland. This collaboration has expanded. The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Kętrzyn, led by Bishop Paweł Hause of the Mazurian Diocese, organized a collection of food, clothing, household chemicals and hygiene products. Due to the collaboration between the two entities, the fire department received a selection of equipment from Germany.

The Olsztyn Branch of the Association also cooperates with the Olsztyn Food Bank, which regularly provide aid to people living in the frontline Ukrainian towns, as well as with the Federation of Social Organizations in Warmia and Mazury, which provided winter clothing, blankets, quilts, shoes, candles, hygiene products, etc., and the Olsztyn Ambulance Service delivering ambulances and their equipment. Thanks to the Association members having made connections with individuals in the USA and Canada, generous amounts of food, clothing and dressings were provided to the front in Ukraine and to the refugees who had come to Warmia and Mazury. Furthermore, members of the Association are actively participating in donating money for cars for frontline troops. Up to the present, more than a dozen off-road vehicles have been delivered (including contributions from the Ukrainian families). Besides, the Association's field circles, in collaboration

with local governments, provide partners with clothing, hygiene items, food, and vehicles. Numerous individuals in the community extend support to Ukrainian refugees by providing them with extensive aid including accommodation (*Informacja przewodniczącego Olsztyńskiego Oddziału...*, 2023).

The tenth delivery of aid to the partner city of Vladimir is arranged by the Circle of the Association in Kętrzyn (*Informacja przewodniczącego Koła ZUwP w Kętrzynie...*, 2023). This time, there are cleaning items – soaps, shower gels, washing powders, shampoos. In addition, shovels, hatchets, power saws, crowbars, insect repellent, tourist gas bottles, and instant soups. They are also in the process of collecting funds for an off-road vehicle. All the goods are going to soldiers fighting at the front. At the request of the Association, the County Office in Kętrzyn has provided rooms in a boarding school for refugees from Ukraine. 23 people have been staying there, mostly women with children. The Starost's Office is covering all related fees. In addition, it has pledged to donate 10.000 PLN for the purchase of an off-road vehicle for soldiers fighting at the front.

Apart from that, Ukrainian and Polish members of the community are engaged in the charity efforts of the Caritas of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of the Olsztyn-Gdansk Eparchy.

The Elbląg branch of the Association was also involved in helping refugees (*Informacja przewodniczącego Oddziału ZUwP w Elblągu...*, 2023). As declared by its Chairman, Stefan Dembicki, the branch's members provided help to refugees from Ukraine, including registration, allocation, and translation of documents (1,200 refugees in Elbląg received PESEL numbers). Members of the Association in Elbląg and Braniewo provided shelter for 373 refugees. In partnership with the Greek Catholic Church, they gathered together clothing, food and toiletries, and set up a redistribution point at the Greek Catholic parish in Elbląg. This initiative is still operational and helps around eighty refugee families. The Lions Elbląg organization, private firms from Elbląg and its vicinity, members of the Association, and other entities were the ones to provide the point. They also co-organized and co-financed the shipment of items to Ukraine:

- The city of Elbląg to the partner city of Ternopil;
- The city of Nowy Dwór Gdański to the partner city of Sarny (hold by head of the local branch of the Association, Jerzy Hrycyna);

- AJRAM company from Pasłęk – Piotr Łesyk (member of the Association);
- Piecobudowa company – Maria Paluszek and DEDAL company – Zenon Kret – (member of the Association);
- 4 off-road vehicles and 2 vans to the front.

The Association members arranged post-school programs for refugee children living in Elbląg, Braniewo and Pasłęk. Additionally, 53 refugees were supported with job finding.

The Mazurian branch of the Association has been providing aid to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees since the beginning of the full-scale war (*Informacja przewodniczącego Oddziału Mazurskiego...*, 2023). The City of Giżycko, and Municipalities of Giżycko, Wydminy, Kruklanki, Pozezdrze, and Miłki, in addition to the donations to the special account 'WE HELP UKRAINE', have enabled the first aid – comprising 14 power generators – to be distributed to Ukrainian partners already in early March. dedication and preparedness of the citizens of Giżycko to provide help during the initial days of the war was remarkable, exceeding all expectations. From the very first days of the Ukraine war, 4 shipments, amounting to about 40 tons, have left the Giżycko Humanitarian Aid post. These products were provided to both the military and the civilian population. The majority of the assistance went to Rivne and Dubna (the Giżycko partner city), as well as to the Lviv City Council and Kalush. Polish partners were involved in gathering aid to the villages of Verba and Klewań: the Elementary School in Pozezdrze and the Wydminy municipality with its residents, as well as the city of Orzysz donating its aid to Horoshovo in the Zhytomyr Oblast. The Mazurian branch of the Association's volunteers worked by gathering, ordering and packing the items delivered to the collection point. Thanks to the personal connections of Kruklanki Association volunteers, Malbork chipped in with medical aid and dressing supplies. The assistance from Giżycko's partner city, Kwerfurt in Germany, has been also delivered. Thanks to the aid, a fire truck was delivered to Dubno within a month of the war.

A great number of war-fleeing women with their children made their way to Giżycko, thus volunteers from the Association of Ukrainians in Poland stepped in to facilitate their integration to the new environment. In addition to the donation collection at the common room of the Greek Catholic

Church in Giżycko, integration activities were held in the Ukrainian Cultural Center in two forms: integration between children who came from Ukraine and integration of children from Ukraine with young people of Ukrainian nationality who have Polish citizenship. The Mazurian Branch of the Association, together with the Giżycko Circle, held the 'WE HELP SOLIDLY UKRAINE' charity concert, with 3 choirs and a female artist duo from Kyiv taking part. Moreover, the event included the sounds of classical instruments: piano, violin, clarinet, flute, and an author's poem about the war by a refugee lady from Kyiv. During the two-day 'DON'T CLOSE YOUR EYES' vernissage/exhibition event held in June 2022, a collection for 'HELP UKRAINE – SUPPORT THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE' was organized, with all proceeds going to the charity (*Informacja przewodniczącego Oddziału Mazurskiego...*, 2023). During the first half year of the war, a Humanitarian Aid Point, referred to also as a headquarters, operated daily in the common room of the Greek Catholic Church in Giżycko. This was the place where gifts were accepted, divided, packed, and prepped for transportation. In addition, it was an information center for Ukrainian citizens arriving in the city, who could also get the most necessary products. Here, at the Mazurian Branch of the Association, the activists regularly gathered to devise plans of action or give guidance on how to support women and children coming from Ukraine. During the International Orthodox Church Music Concerts at the Greek Catholic Church in Giżycko in October 2022, a voluntary financial collection was conducted to SUPPORT UKRAINE in the fight against Russian aggression. The Help Ukraine SUBCONTRACT was provided with donations to pay for the most essential items which are distributed also to those on the frontline, in collaboration with organizations in Ukraine. Moreover, in January 2023, an initiative was launched to acquire a bus for soldiers on the front lines.

### **Another entities formed by Ukrainians from Warmia and Mazury helping refugees and struggling Ukraine**

In the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, the Parish Hall Association in Olsztyn established a Parish Refugee Aid Point to provide assistance to refugees and Ukrainians in need (hereinafter: Parish Point). This peculiar aid center

has been operating continuously since the beginning of March 2022 at the Greek Catholic parish as the 'Parish Hall' Association, and the Parish Caritas Team. The primarily goal is to provide humanitarian aid to the most needy victims of the war, both in Poland and Ukraine.

Humanitarian aid by the 'Shop for a Smile' and others has been on-going since March 2022 (*Informacja Anny Farańczuk...*, 2023). Initially, for five months, the store was open daily from 10am to 6pm, then for the following four months, four times a week from midday to 5pm, currently, the store is open twice a week from midday to 4pm. Over 8500 people have been given assistance in different ways. It is a well-known and respected aid station in Olsztyn for those who were forcibly displaced to the city and region. During the peak of the relief effort, up to two hundred families were assisted daily; currently, it is sixty families twice a week. People from even the most distant villages come to the Parish Point for aid, knowing that they can be certain of assistance.

The Parish Point has accepted donations (i.e. foodstuffs, clothing, medicines or other medical supplies) both for the needs of refugees in the region and arranging humanitarian transports to Ukraine. Day-by-day, volunteers at the Parish Point contact businesses, organizations and foundations in order to secure the money or goods needed to provide additional humanitarian aid, both for those who have come to the Point and for arranging transportation to Ukraine.

Particular attention is paid to families with numerous children. Ukrainian Volunteers often come to the Parish Point with their children, resulting in a 'kindergarten' being created in a small room – kids play, watch cartoons and, mainly, gain skills to assist from a young age. The youngest volunteer was only one year old. Arrangements have been made to procure ambulances with medical equipment, medical supplies, and dressing materials in response to specific requirements from the Ukrainian authorities. Donations are being sought to purchase vehicles for the transportation of wounded and noncombatants away from the front lines, as well as generators to be conveyed to Ukraine. Humanitarian convoys have been organized and support is being offered to humanitarians from outside the parish (including Joanna Mieszczyńska, Julia Żak, Piotr Witos, Jacek Staruch, Mirek Grycuk).

Thus far, there have been managed transports to:

- Lutsk – an orphanage and an army;
- Lviv – an orphanage;
- Kyiv and Kharkiv;
- Rehabilitation Hospital in Truskavets;
- Zhytomyr and Vinnytsia;
- Yagodyn in Rivne region – an army;
- Zhytomyr – retirement home;
- Berezhany – to hospitals;
- Zaporizhia – an army;
- Rivne;
- Khudniv – an army and orphanage;
- Mykolayiv – an army;
- Lviv, Lysychansk, Zaporizhzhia;
- Andrusivka near Zhytomyr.

The Parish Point has provided aid to orphanages and relief centers for people who have been displaced from their homes in Ukraine:

- Orphan care center run by chaplains in Lviv;
- Orphanage in Zhuravna;
- Foundation for assistance to big families in the Lviv region;
- Resettlement points in the Berezhany, Novovolynsk, Lviv (Green Street), Mizocha (in Rivne) regions;
- Assistance to war-affected civilians in Borodzianka.

The Parish Point volunteers focus their efforts on helping frontline medical centers by organizing medical transport and life-saving equipment. To date, they have supplied, i.a.:

- 8 ambulances (ambulances) with full equipment;
- 14 off-road vehicles;
- 12 buses;
- countless power generators;
- a large 1200 kg aggregate to the children's and youth hospital in Kharkov;
- infusion pumps, defibrillator, patient monitor (a gift from the Regional Children's Specialized Hospital in Olsztyn);
- rehabilitation equipment for injured soldiers;



- baby bottles, porridge for kids (gift from the Regional Children's Hospital in Elbląg).

In the Parish Hall, volunteers run a store where anyone can buy icons, crosses, medallions or candles. Additionally, there is a repository that provides books in Ukrainian. Furthermore, a job placement service is conducted. Volunteers offer their help by calling and talking to potential employers, as refugees worry about misunderstanding via the phone. Verification of agreements with refugees is also being conducted. Documents have been translated into Polish. The Parish Point also collaborates with accredited translators. During the initial stages of the conflict, the refugees were provided with the support to acquire PESEL numbers, free of charge photos for documents, and guidance in filling out forms and undergoing interviews at the workplace.

An ongoing Polish language course – occurring three times per week – assists refugees in finding jobs and making acquaintances in an unfamiliar environment. Documents can also be photocopied, printed and scanned without charge.

In the Parish Point, both individual and group meetings with psychologists were held. In autumn, there were conducted meetings with psychologist bimonthly. This shed light on the plight of refugee. Psychological assistance was provided to both female refugees and volunteers.

A training course was held teaching refugees the operationalize the E-system. Its goal was, among other things, to acquire proficiency in navigating websites such as: E-PUAP, school logbook, E-ZUS. During March and April of 2023, there was provided an aid in filling Personal Income Tax (PIT) form to the Tax Office.

During the period from June to December 2022, integration sessions for both minors and adults were held on a weekly basis, along with lectures and presentations. Artistic contests for the young were organized. Christmas and Easter fairs were also conducted. The knitting workshops were available to both children and adults, as well as lessons on Easter egg writing, cross-stitch embroidery, crocheting, and papier mâché crafting.

Bilingual volunteers are of great service to refugee women by connecting them with professionals and medical services, and by translating dialogue in real time. During the initial phase of operation, volunteers crafted dumplings,

pancakes and buns daily – with the proceeds contributing to the maintenance of the hall and the funding of humanitarian transports. Nowadays it is also possible to order all sorts of goodies for a related fee.

During the initial stages of the conflict, Zoltrax provided tailored tourniquets manufactured from donated supplies, which were then shipped to the frontline. Tracksuits were tailored and overhauled for soldiers housed at the Truskavets (Ukraine) rehabilitation hospital. A procurement of cans and wax for the production of trench candles was also completed. Since January 2023, volunteers have been weaving camouflage nets daily to be donated to the frontline. Subsequently, 18 nets have already been made.

A variety of cultural occasions were either hosted or co-hosted, i.e.:

- a performance by the ‘Cranes’ choir at the Greek Catholic Church in Olsztyn – June 2022;
- organization of the Ukrainian music concert in Mrągowo – July 2022;
- a concert on the occasion of Ukrainian Independence Day in Olsztyn – August 2022;
- end of vacations in Ataman settlement in Olsztyn – a bonfire, chanting, team games – August 2022;
- an embroidery presentation – an exhibition of embroideries in the Parish Hall – August, September 2022;
- a Parish indulgence in the Greek Catholic Church with a festive concert and food for all parishioners and guests – October 2022;
- a weekly musical evenings – Vechornytsi – July – December 2022;
- a concert of the OREYA choir from Zhytomyr – November 2023;
- Saint Andrew’s Day – Andriyivski Vechornytsi – December 2022;
- an autumn art contest for Ukrainian and Polish children – September 2022;
- a Christmas parish fair with more than 10 tables of handicrafts and cakes, the works in the form of products with embroidered designs – sold for the humanitarian aid organization – December 2022;
- weekly rehearsals of the vocal ensemble ‘Suzirjaczko’ – which was augmented by children from Ukraine;
- weekly rehearsals of the parish choir joined by 7 persons – refugees from Ukraine (35% of the composition);

- a family meeting with Ukrainian cinema ('Shchedryk') – November 2022;
- Nicholas Day for children from Ukraine – at the Greek Catholic Church – December 2022;
- the concert of Christmas carols – the Heorhiy Maiboroda National Honoured Bandurist Chorus of Ukraine – January 2023;
- the concert of Christmas carols of the youth from Gdansk – January 2023;
- the concert of Christmas carols of the 'Crane' choir – January 2023;
- the reflective concert in memory of war victims – documentary film screening about the humanitarian activity of volunteers from Olsztyn, a performance of the Enej band – February 2023;
- the concert of Taras Shevchenko poetry – March 2023;
- Easter parish fair with more than 10 tables of handicrafts and cakes, the works in the form of products with embroidered designs – sold for the humanitarian aid organization – December 2022;
- baking of the Easter blessing bread – 'Paska' – April 2023;
- art contest 'My mother' for Ukrainian and Polish children – May 2023;
- the Concert of the Heorhiy Maiboroda National Honoured Bandurist Chorus of Ukraine – on the occasion of Mother's Day – May 2023;
- Photo shoot featuring historical costumes borrowed from a private collector in the open-air museum in Olsztynek – in cooperation with the 'Two Wings' Organization, Polish Humanitarian Aid and Polish and Ukrainian students of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn – June 2023.

Every event is a formidable organizational and logistical challenge displaced by warfare, for the volunteer team at the Parish Point, comprising Poles, Poles of Ukrainian origin, and Ukrainians. Every undertaking with a clear and acceptable goal is successful in bringing the group together. Such integration is also reflected in the small communities which the volunteers come from. This means that for every ten volunteers, a hundred individuals are involved in completion of the task (*Informacja Anny Farańczuk...*, 2023). The Food Bank, the Association of Ukrainians in Poland, the Caritas Poland, the Caritas of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Olsztyn–Gdańsk, and various other foundations and associations have a significant role to play through cooperative efforts.

The data above demonstrates that Parish Point undertakes a wide range of activities with the support of volunteers. The below mentioned volunteers should be particularly highlighted for their most active involvement:

- Anna Farańczuk – coordinator of the Parish Point – from the beginning, continuously, the organization of the point (Ukrainian minority);
- Beata Bachmura – Polish volunteer;
- Ilona Sekścińska – teaching the Polish language (a Polish volunteer).
- Elżbieta Jedlińska – registration management (a Polish volunteer);
- Joanna Liweń – teaching the Polish language (a Polish volunteer);
- Maria Omelan – Ukrainian minority;
- Halina Migus – Ukrainian minority;
- Tamila Kotliarevska – psychologist (refugee from Ukraine);
- Stefan Melnyk – organization, transports (Ukrainian minority);
- Nadia Tatarчук – refugee from Ukraine;
- Alla Vitiuk – refugee from Ukraine;
- Iryna Chomyn – weaving nets (refugee from Ukraine);
- Nadia Machuga – translation – refugee from Ukraine in 2014;
- Jan Kuryj – Polish – (Ukrainian minority);
- Andrzej Farańczuk – organization, transports (Ukrainian minority);
- Mirek Grycuk – transportation (Polish volunteer);
- Maryna Derevianko – refugee from Ukraine.

In total, there are about 50 volunteers at the Parish Point.

In carrying out such extensive tasks, Parish Point cooperates with:

- Foundation for the Development of Regions – infusion pumps;
- Kadziewicz company – Kredos, SecondMed;
- Barka Foundation – Piotr Baczewski – supply of medical and rehabilitation equipment;
- Olsztyn Rotary Club;
- Olsztyn PCK;
- Citaslow organization – medical supplies;
- Food Bank in Olsztyn and Pisz;
- Dabkowski Bakery – donates bread daily;
- ‘Two Wings’ Women’s Foundation (foundation established by refugee women);
- FIKA Foundation for Active Women;

- Children's Aid Foundation;
- Alight (Formerly American Refugee Committee) and many others, as well as a lot of individuals.

### **Final remarks**

Russia's aggression in Ukraine had already begun in 2014. Even then, Ukrainians were coming to the Warmian-Masurian and other voivodships and were treated as migrants, however, since February 24, 2022, the amount of people from Ukraine, mainly women and children, seeking refuge in Poland, including the studied region, has significantly increased. With the new arrivals, the challenges with adaptation, i.e. the search for employment, housing and the organization of living circumstances, have become more severe. Psychological and social problems have occurred, i.e. longing for family and home, the urge for autonomy, establishing new acquaintances; educational complications – disparities in value systems, education, criteria for educational accomplishments and teacher-student relationships; as well as cultural and communication difficulties, such as low proficiency in the Polish language, disparities in culture, national diversity, and peculiarities of local mentalities. Meanwhile, a properly conceived state migration policy can be beneficial for three parties: for the host country, Poland, as it has had a positive impact on the labor market; for refugees, since Poland has provided them with financial aid and living conditions, i.e. housing, access to education, health care and social services. Furthermore, because of the refugees working in Poland, elderly people in Ukraine and men aged 18-60 who are unable to leave due to the war can receive financial and in-kind assistance from their family members abroad. These outcomes were revealed in previous studies (Astramowicz-Leyk, Turchyn, Ivasechko, 2022, p. 68). Ukrainian immigrants who settled before 24 February, 2022, but after 2014, did not identify themselves with either the Association of Ukrainians in Poland or the Greek Catholic Church. These links experienced a marked shift in the result of the Russian Federation's all-out aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. Thus, the research hypothesis was proven. War refugees, mainly women and children, who had arrived in Poland, including

the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, were aided by the Association and the Greek Catholic Church in the region under the study.

It is worth underlining that these refugees were actively participating in the initiatives of the Association, particularly in terms of providing help to refugees and supporting Ukraine. In particular, there is an activity at the Parish Point in Olsztyn, where refugees, members of the Association from the Ukrainian minority, and Polish citizens without Ukrainian origins are actively involved. Guests from Ukraine identify themselves with the Greek Catholic Church by participating in services and other forms of spiritual and material support.

This article does not allow for a full overview of civil engagement in the region, which includes other churches and non-governmental organizations, new one as well as those established as a consequence of the outbreak of war. Noteworthy, there are the organizations founded by refugee women, for example, the 'Two Wings.' Such type of civil activity should be the subject of further research.

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