



JEWISH FEDERATIONS AND THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

March 10, 2022

Russian forces are suffering significant losses as they push to win more territory in Ukraine. As fighting intensifies, millions of Ukrainians, including tens of thousands of Jews, are attempting to flee the country.

(For background on the crisis, as well as information on the Jewish community in Ukraine, see [here](#)).

THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

- As fierce fighting continues, at least 1,300 civilians have been killed in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol according to the city's mayor. Residents have been cut off from water and electricity and on Tuesday Ukraine's Foreign Minister accused Russia of committing war crimes by holding 300,000 civilians in the city "hostage." To deal with the enormous death toll, city workers have dug a 75-foot long, deep trench where they have buried the bodies of soldiers and civilians who had been killed during repeated attacks by Russian forces.
- Also in Mariupol, Russian forces bombed a maternity and children's hospital injuring at least 17 people. The attack has sparked considerable international condemnation, not least because it occurred during an agreed upon 12-hour pause in hostilities to allow refugees to evacuate towns and cities. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said the bombing is "proof of a genocide" and has renewed calls for a no-fly zone over the country.
- Ukraine has also said that yesterday nearly 35,000 people managed to leave to safety through the humanitarian corridors that were established, despite sporadic Russian attacks.
- American military experts all agree that Russia's overwhelming numerical superiority will ultimately guarantee victory for Moscow in Ukraine. Nonetheless, and despite intense fighting, two weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine, Russia's "precision strikes" have become much less precise, according to defense officials, and its ground forces are struggling to seize territory.
- Russian forces have still not captured Ukraine's capital Kyiv, even though when fighting began, many US officials predicted the city would fall within 48 hours. Despite having 150,000 Russian troops inside its borders, according to US assessments, these forces control no more than 10% of Ukraine.
- According to a US defense official, Russia has suffered around 6,000 troops killed in action, 20-25 helicopters and 15-20 other aircraft, as well as hundreds of vehicles, including tanks and armored equipment. In total, Russia has lost 8-10% of its military assets placed in and near Ukraine, in the invasion.

- The United Kingdom's Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said that his country is planning to send anti-air missiles to Ukraine to help Kyiv combat Russia's "indiscriminate and murderous" airstrikes.
- Russian-born Israeli businessman and philanthropist Leonid Nevzlin has announced that he is renouncing his Russian citizenship in protest over the country's invasion of Ukraine. Nevzlin called his Russian citizenship a personal "disgrace" adding that he "simply cannot afford to be a citizen of a nation that kills another nation's children. I am against war, I am against the occupation, and I am against the annihilation of the Ukrainian people."
- According to the United Nations, at least 2.2 million refugees have fled Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion, despite the fact that it can now take more than 50 hours to cross the border, and the current weather conditions are life-threatening with snow and temperatures reaching 15 degrees at night.

ISRAEL

For articles on Israel's dilemmas regarding the war, see [here](#) and [here](#).

Israel's Minister of Diaspora Affairs Nachman Shai has just returned from a visit to the border area between Poland and Ukraine, and [says](#) that he is "coming back a different person." Meanwhile Israel's embassy in Romania has helped facilitate the evacuation this week of Ukrainian pediatric cancer patients to Israel for treatment. According to Israel's Foreign Ministry, Israeli Ambassador to Romania David Saranga and his staff [helped to arrange](#) the passage of 10 Ukrainian children with cancer.

Israel's Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked announced yesterday that the country will host about 25,000 citizens of Ukraine. In the first stage, Israel will grant temporary protection from repatriation for approximately 20,000 Ukrainian citizens who were present in Israel before the outbreak of fighting, most of them without any legal status, until the danger subsides.

In addition, Shaked said that Israel would grant entry and stay for 5,000 additional Ukrainian citizens who have fled the fighting in their country. Initially, they will be given a temporary visa for three months. Should the fighting continue beyond this time, all those present in Israel will be allowed to work. Every Ukrainian citizen who wants to come to Israel within the framework of the new program will be able to apply online through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. No other conditions will be required except for a short background check. At the same time, Israeli citizens will be able to apply to invite Ukrainian citizens, (up to one nuclear family per applicant), and they will be given priority as far as possible, in order to facilitate the hosting process in Israel.

Minister Shaked said that in addition to the unprecedented number of Ukrainian citizens who may stay in Israel until the danger subsides, the country is expected to absorb around 100,000 Ukrainians who are fleeing the fighting, within the framework of the Law of Return, in the coming weeks and months. Ukrainians fleeing the war, both those who have a Jewish background and their families, will be able to come to Israel and receive full citizenship. As a result, Israel is expected to be one of the world's leading countries of destination and refuge for Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war, both in absolute numbers and certainly based on the country's size.

Natan Sharansky, a former Israeli deputy prime minister, Jewish Agency chair and prisoner of Zion, was himself born in Ukraine. In a fascinating [article](#) from Tablet, he shares his unique perspectives on what is happening.

FLEEING UKRAINE, FEDERATIONS AND PARTNERS ON THE GROUND

In just two weeks, **Jewish Federations** have raised \$24.5 million for Ukrainian relief efforts. Of that total, \$16.2 million is being allocated by JFNA's special Allocations Committee while the balance are funds that have been

designated by communities to specific organizations. A total of \$6.1 million has already been allocated to The Jewish Agency for Israel, The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), World ORT, United Hatzalah, and Hillel International; and the Allocations Committee is meeting again later today to decide on the next round (\$9 million) of funding.

Last night [Federations held a webinar](#) featuring partners on the ground speaking about their work to support the Ukrainian Jewish community along with JFNA's CEO and President, Eric Fingerhut, who was joining a flight of olim coming in from Warsaw.

Also yesterday, Jewish Federations' Public Affairs Office led an ultimately successful effort in Washington to ensure that the United States House of Representatives passed their omnibus bill, which included \$1 billion for Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system, \$250 million for the nonprofit security grant program (NSGP), and supplemental funding to support Ukraine.

The **Jewish Agency for Israel** has processed around 16,000 inquiries from Jews in Ukraine and their relatives in Israel. Of these, 6,600 were interested in making Aliyah. At the same time, about 19,500 calls have been received from Russia. The Agency's hotline operates day and night through reinforced staff along with some 40 volunteers.

The Agency has now deployed 32 people, (emissaries and local employees), in five countries to process Aliyah arrangements for refugees seeking to arrive in Israel immediately.

Agency facilities in six countries currently house about 1,800 Aliyah applicants, some within Ukraine itself, in the vicinity of Lviv, and others in neighboring countries. Last night two Aliyah flights landed at Ben Gurion Airport, one from Poland with 150 olim on board, and the other from Romania with 100 olim.

The Jewish Agency and Israel's Ministry of Education are holding educational activities for pupils in Ukraine via the Internet, through the Heftziba program. Personal meetings are held between teachers and students, Kabbalat Shabbat is celebrated, and so on – as far as the situation allows. The Agency is also using psychologists and educational counsellors to help teachers and families in Ukraine cope with the difficulties and angst arising from fighting. Online sessions help strengthen the resilience of families, students and teachers and provide tools and methods for the educational community.

Since the outbreak of hostilities, the Jewish Agency's Security Assistance Fund has provided \$390,000 in emergency grants to 60 communities and organizations in Ukraine, in order to immediately upgrade the protection of their facilities. Dozens more applications are under review and are expected to be approved soon.

The Jewish Agency has also launched a joint campaign with the Israeli Federation of Local Authorities and The Spirit of Israel to mobilize humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees. So far, about seventy local authorities are participating in the operation and thousands of boxes have been collected with basic equipment such as coats, blankets, gloves, hats and scarves, as well as personal hygiene equipment such as soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper, etc. The operation is called "Torenu" (Our Turn), and the equipment collected will be sent to Poland and distributed to refugees in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Polish authorities.

The **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee** (JDC) has so far helped evacuate over 2,800 Jewish community members in Ukraine, while at the same time they are caring for some of the community's most vulnerable individuals unable or unwilling to evacuate. The organization's hotlines are receiving more and more calls each day. Some 70% of requests are for food, medicines and evacuation, while other needs include equipment loans, warming products, psychological support, requests for information, and more.

In just one week since they were set up, JDC's centers in Moldova have already taken in around 2,500 refugees. JDC has also initiated and convened an open table for all of the 22 Jewish and Israeli organizations currently

operating on the ground in Moldova. Coordination efforts have already enabled faster and more coordinated response to different issues faced by the refugees in the area.

In the southern Ukrainian city of Odessa, the evacuation of people to Moldova continues. While bank cards can be used in some stores in the city, food shortages have been reported. In nearby Mykolaiv bank cards are not operating and JDC is providing food packages to the neediest. Meanwhile in Lviv, JDC's two accommodation facilities are completely full. An additional 70 internally displaced people are staying in the local JDC Hesed welfare center. Meanwhile some 165 people were evacuated from Sumy. In Kharkiv, parts of the city have been shelled, making evacuating and bringing in provisions difficult.

Watch a [video](#) from JDC about efforts in Ukraine.

The Jewish Agency and JDC have both established [emergency hotlines](#) to assist the Jewish community in Ukraine. For more about JDC's efforts, see [here](#) and those of the Jewish Agency [here](#).

Federation partner **World ORT** has representatives at an evacuation site on the Polish border with Ukraine, which accommodates many thousands of people — mainly children, women and the elderly. ORT is working with partners in the region to provide essential items to Ukrainians waiting on the border as well as ORT schools and communities in Kyiv, Odessa, Zaporozhe, Chernivtsi, and Belaya Tzerkov. Click [here](#) for first-hand accounts of ORT staff in Ukraine.

The first professional mental-health care delegation from the **World Zionist Organization** (WZO) for Jewish refugees from Ukraine landed in Poland on Sunday morning. The WZO responded to a call from the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Rabbi Michael Schudrich, and recruited the first delegation of its kind in the field of resilience and post-trauma mental-health care to fly out and assist with the care of refugees. This delegation will be engaging in on the ground care and treatment, and training caregivers from the Jewish community in Poland. The delegation will work directly with Jewish refugees from Ukraine and will take advantage of the experience that the State of Israel has in the field of trauma. The delegation includes psychologists and social workers from the **Israel Trauma Coalition**, a Federation partner, and members of the WZO's Departments of Diaspora and Community Resilience.

One **United Hatzalah** volunteer on the ground wrote [this](#) emotional account of her experiences, and also recorded a [video report](#).

Tens of Israeli and **Jewish organizations** are working to provide humanitarian relief for Ukraine. JFNA has put together a summary of these efforts, which can be found [here](#).

Jewish Federations have activated our emergency protocols and are working closely with the Government of Israel and our partners to do everything in our power to support efforts that ensure the safety and well-being of the entire Jewish community in Ukraine.

For more information, please contact: JFNA's Dani Wassner dani.wassner@jewishfederations.org