



The Jewish Federations®
OF NORTH AMERICA
Israel Office

JEWISH FEDERATIONS AND THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

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After more than two months of fighting, the war continues in Ukraine. Millions of Ukrainians, including tens of thousands of Jews, have fled the country, many to Israel. Jewish Federations and our partners continue to work together to ensure that urgent relief reaches the neediest.

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

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

- The Ukraine military said that it is preparing for a new intense wave of fighting, and claims that Russian forces “are exerting intense fire” as a multi-pronged offensive takes shape across three regions of the country.
- United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres traveled to Moscow for a one-on-one meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss “proposals for humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of civilians” from conflict zones. According to Guterres, the war in Ukraine will continue until Russia agrees to end the conflict. Following the meeting, the Secretary General explained that “The war will end when the Russian Federation decides to end it and when there is – after a ceasefire – a possibility of a serious political agreement. We can have all the meetings but that is not what will end the war.”
- Meanwhile President Putin warned that any country “interfering” in Ukraine would be met with a “lightning-fast” response from Russia. “We have all the tools for this — ones that no one can brag about. And we won't brag. We will use them if needed. And I want everyone to know this.”
- The United Kingdom’s Defense Secretary Ben Wallace estimates that Russia has lost as many as 580 tanks since the war began. Experts say battlefield images show the tanks are suffering from a defect that the United States has known about since the Gulf War, involving the storing of shells which can explode when the tank is hit. The problem is known as the “jack-in-the-box effect.”
- The US military said it has information that a Russian military unit executed Ukrainians who were attempting to surrender near Donetsk. “If true, this would be a violation of a core principle of the laws of war,” Ambassador Beth Van Schaack said at the United Nations.
- According to the UN Human Rights Council, some 5.3 million refugees have fled Ukraine since the beginning of fighting. More than 1.2 million refugees who fled Ukraine have also since returned. The UN Human Rights Office has reported that well over 2,000 Ukrainians have been killed since the breakout of fighting. See [here](#) for an overall mapping of the situation of Ukrainian refugees in the neighboring countries.

ISRAEL

The U.S. has invited Israel to take part in an emergency summit on security assistance to Ukraine. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who is organizing the meeting to be held in Germany, sent the invitation to Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz. The invitation follows Israel's recent decision to send a shipment of protective vests and helmets to Ukraine, and against the backdrop of criticism by the Biden administration over the fact that the Jewish state has offered defensive and humanitarian assistance, but not offensive weaponry to Ukraine to date.

Israel has tried to maintain a semblance of balance in the conflict, largely due to the need for Russia's ongoing acceptance of Israeli strikes against Iranian targets in Syria. In response to Israel's participation in the upcoming meeting in Germany, Russia criticized Israel's recent attacks in Syria and its conduct in the West Bank.

Meanwhile, more than 15,000 new immigrants have arrived in Israel from the Former Soviet Union since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. This includes some 8,800 new immigrants from Ukraine, 5,800 from Russia and about 400 from Belarus, as part of the government's "Immigrants Come Home" operation.

In addition, more than 10,000 people from the region have applied to make Aliyah, but have not yet arrived. According to data published by the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption, 24% of the new immigrants are children and teens, while 18% are adults aged 66 and above. Males "of fighting age" have not been allowed to leave Ukraine since the war began, and as a result, twice as many female immigrants have arrived than men. With major absorption efforts being undertaken by Federation-partner the **Jewish Agency for Israel** and the Israeli Government, less than 3,000 of the new immigrants are still living in hotels.

According to Immigration and Absorption Minister Pnina Tamano Shata, "Two months into the war in Ukraine, there is a great national effort in the absorption of immigrants. At the moment we have reached the absorption of more than 15,000 new immigrants and this is just the beginning. The employees of the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration absorbed the immigrants with dedication and sensitivity, helping them to integrate into Israeli society and establish a new life here in Israel.... A large proportion of the new immigrants have started learning Hebrew [and] have already integrated into the employment market and the education system."

See [here](#) for an article on how the northern Israeli town of Nof Hagalil is welcoming Ukrainian olim, including adding Russian to street signs.

Meanwhile, with the Ukrainian city of Mariupol subject to some of the most intense fighting of the conflict, it is interesting to note the city's Jewish past, including the fact that it was once home to the famed Ponevich Yeshiva, now located in Bnei Brak in Israel. Read more [here](#).

In a separate interesting note, the rabbi of the parents of Ukrainian President Zelensky has given an interview to an Israeli newspaper, where he claims the parents do not understand why their son wanted to be president. See details [here](#).

REFUGEES, FEDERATIONS, AND PARTNERS ON THE GROUND

Jewish Federations continue to raise money for Ukraine relief efforts, and have collectively raised some \$57 million since the fighting began. [Click here](#) to see the latest update on the allocations process and decisions. Recipient organizations include our Jewish Federation partners, The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and World ORT; as well as United Hatzalah, Hillel International, Nefesh B'Nefesh, HIAS, the Israel Trauma Coalition, Hadassah Medical Organization, Chabad, Shma Yisrael, Project Keshet, JCC Krakow, Jewish Community Vienna, the Emergency Volunteer Program and others.

Jewish Federations host half-hour webinars twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, to update audiences about the rapidly evolving situation in Ukraine. [Click here](#) to register.

Over 100 Federation and communal leaders from around North America have traveled to the Poland-Ukraine border on a series of humanitarian aid delegations, to provide relief to refugees and to evaluate the ongoing needs on the ground. See [here](#) for a first-hand account of the trip from Rockland County.

Federations have created a first-of-its-kind central volunteer hub in support of refugees fleeing Ukraine. The first two cohorts have now returned from Poland and Hungary where they provided humanitarian assistance, aided olim in their immigration process and cared for children. The initiative is being run in partnership with the Jewish Agency, the JDC and IsraAID. To volunteer for this program (please note that only those who speak Russian and/or Ukrainian are being selected at this time), [click here](#). For a list of FAQ's, [click here](#). For more information, email [Sarah Eisenman](#).

The **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee** (JDC) continues to help Jews in need across Ukraine, but reports vastly different circumstances in different cities. JDC explains that:

- While tens of thousands of Jews have fled Ukraine since the start of the war, the majority of the community still remain. Most elderly Jews are too frail to leave and do not want to be split up from their family or leave the only home they know. For some, the journey out of the country is simply too terrifying a prospect or they feel that it is simply too dangerous to venture out.
- Life inside Ukraine is largely dependent on where one is located. For example, in Western Ukraine, where there is currently less fighting, JDC welfare recipients can still use bank and food cards to access necessary food and medicine, there is money in the ATM machines and the supermarkets are mostly stocked with food and supplies. In Western Ukraine, JDC is also able to provide homecare services in full to vulnerable elderly welfare recipients.
- In southern Ukraine, the city of Odessa is preparing for a possible Russian assault. Barricades can be seen in the streets and a curfew was introduced during evenings and weekends. Nonetheless, most shops are open, ATMs have cash, and JDC welfare recipients can use their bank cards, and continue to receive homecare services in full. Mykolaiv, a roughly one hour drive from Odessa, has been subject to Russian shelling recently and has seen some street fighting on the city's outskirts. Many shops are still open and functioning, but medications are mostly unavailable. As a result, JDC's Hesed social service center in Odessa helps Mykolaiv colleagues with purchasing medications and personal hygiene items. Homecare services have been reduced, but are still being provided to all vulnerable JDC welfare recipients. Matzah and food sets were delivered in the lead up to Passover.
- In Kharkiv, which has suffered serious shelling over a few weeks, and where tensions are now rising again with increased fighting, those shops which were not destroyed or are not located in the heavily shelled areas – sell food, and accept bank cards. However, medications continue to be problematic to obtain. JDC homecare services are now provided to over 50% of the usual caseload in the city. In the capital Kyiv, which earlier saw a large amount of shelling and intense fighting, life is getting back to normal, stores are open and food is available.
- In cities that are now under Russian occupation, like Mariupol, the conditions are far harsher. In such locations there is an overall deterioration of the humanitarian situation as fighting continues. There are very small quantities of food and water available and no money in the ATM machines. The southern city of Kherson has already been under occupation for several weeks.

Many shops and pharmacies are closed, meaning medications are completely unavailable. Even so, homecare services are provided to all vulnerable JDC welfare recipients and its Hesed social service center continues to provide material support via food packages largely stockpiled before the war.

The **Jewish Agency for Israel** continues to coordinate mass relief efforts and enables Aliyah for the Jewish community in Ukraine. See Jewish Agency stories [here](#) about Ukrainian women on the frontlines, and read [here](#) about the Agency's Warsaw Immigration Center.

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](#); for those of the Jewish Agency, see [here](#).

HIAS, a recipient of Jewish Federations emergency grants for Ukraine relief work, reports that it has provided:

- 31,200 refugees with food and supplies at the Ukrainian border with Poland
- 4,000 people with cash assistance in Ukraine
- 3,700 refugee children with psychosocial support

Read here a [story](#) about a Ukrainian Jewish couple who have chosen to remain in the country to protect a historic synagogue.

In the United States, more than 4,000 applications were filed to sponsor Ukrainians seeking to come to the country within 48 hours of the Biden administration launching its streamlined process for those fleeing Ukraine.

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, as well as to provide as much general humanitarian aid as we can.

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