

Psychosocial Centre





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International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Response to Ukraine – an example to follow but we must keep momentum

Close to two years after the beginning of the acceleration of the armed conflict in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, significant humanitarian resources have been mobilised from leading international donors. At the same time, EU triggered in March 2022 and later renewed the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). The TPD gave refugees from Ukraine a temporary right to accommodation, medical care, employment and education in all EU member states and became the model for European host countries outside the Union as well.

While Germany is the largest host with an estimated 1.1 million people, neighbouring countries, or countries close to Ukraine are estimated to host almost 2 million people. Poland is the largest host in the neighbouring region with almost 1 million people but countries like Czech Republic, Bulgaria, the Baltic States, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia many with significantly fewer resources are also hosting significant numbers. Further, millions are displaced within Ukraine. To respond to this complex displacement the scope of IFRC Psychosocial Centre interventions has been both wide and deep working with international actors, regional focal points as well as national societies in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

In many ways the European and international response to the Ukraine crisis is an example to follow in relation to other war-torn regions of the world and in that sense represents a hope amid a dire situation for millions of civilians caught in the conflict or displacement. The interventions of the IFRC Psychosocial Centre is one component of this international response and we have worked to ensure much needed mental health and psychosocial support for people affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine.

However, as we enter 2024 there is no denying that challenges remain severe – UN agencies estimate that 14.6 million people are in need of humanitarian aid, 4 million people are internally displaced, and 6.3 million people are in refuge outside Ukraine including 5.9 million in Europe. These numbers represent individual people experiencing the trauma and stress of armed conflict and displacement – lost family members, separated children, destroyed homes and flight to unknown destinations. It is extremely important that the international humanitarian community including both at donor and implementation level continues to invest resources and efforts - challenges remain and it is too early for crisis fatigue.

The past two years have made it clear that there is broad international will to ensure support for the victims of the armed conflict in Ukraine – if we can build on that momentum then there is reason to hope.

Nana Wiedemann

Director, the IFRC Psychosocial Centre

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT TWO YEARS ON

On 24 February 2022, the Russia-Ukraine international conflict dramatically escalated as Russian troops crossed the border into Ukraine on several fronts. The armed conflict persists and an increasing number of people are in severe need of humanitarian aid.

Nearly one in ten of those affected by war grapple with moderate to severe mental health issues, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) face heightened challenges. In Ukraine, psychological assistance requests are on the rise, particularly from women heading households and caring for vulnerable family members. Healthcare professionals, volunteers, and teachers are exposed to increasing risks due to the ongoing conflict. 90% of teachers report a decline in their psychological well-being since February 24, 2022, with 76% expressing anxiety over increased responsibilities towards students.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable during armed conflict. In Ukraine, three out of four parents report signs of psychological trauma in their children, such as impaired memory, reduced attention, and diminished learning abilities. Even before the escalation of the conflict in 2022, older individuals in Donetska and Luhanska oblasts, affected by the conflict since 2014, reported feelings of depression, anxiety, and helplessness.

Ukrainian families now confront heightened risks of military violence and separation, exacerbated by challenges in accessing psychosocial support, counseling, and family reunification services due to ongoing displacement

and attacks on infrastructure. Mental health and psychosocial support services are a key-element of the Ukrainian Red Cross Society's One Plan response aiming to enhance the well-being of conflict-affected individuals through community-based approaches. Director General, Maksym Dotsenko, warns of a worsening mental health crisis affecting nearly 10 million people in the country. Urgent efforts are essential to assist families in finding coping mechanisms, treatment, and support amidst the escalating crisis.

The Red Cross Movement response

The Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies across Europe are currently engaged in the most extensive mental health response to date targeting individuals who have suffered the loss of loved ones, homes, and jobs, and have been exposed to traumatic events. Over one million people in need have received psychosocial support, thanks to specialist staff and more than 124,000 volunteers from 58 countries spanning Ukraine, neighbouring countries, and countries across Europe.

The response involves the establishment of 470 humanitarian service points, offering access to essential services and support. These services encompass first aid, medical care, shelter, food and water, hygiene and sanitation, psychosocial support, and family tracing and reunification.

The scope of needs extends beyond Ukraine across countries in Europe and around the world. Forcibly displaced people are facing the immense stress and negative psychological impacts of their past experiences and adapting

to a "new normal" in foreign environments, learning new languages, and securing income in a strained economic climate. Therefore, mental health and psychosocial support remain a top priority of the Movement's response.

Trained Red Cross personnel deliver psychological first aid at Humanitarian Service Points along refugee routes, through call centers, and at various contact points. Mental health is also prioritized for those actively responding to the crisis, recognizing the impact of the ongoing conflict on their well-being.

The PS Centre response

The PS Centre coordinates closely with affected National Societies and relevant networks, including the Interagency Standing Committee, the IFRC Regional Office for Europe, the ICRC, the European Network for MHPSS, and others, ensuring a comprehensive and collaborative approach to addressing mental health challenges in the wake of the crisis.

The PS Centre responses to the Ukraine crisis are funded by two complementary funding streams allowing a broad scope of intervention. A project funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG Santé), with specific objectives to offer mental health support to the people displaced from Ukraine and support strengthening caring for staff and volunteers structures in 25 European National Societies, while an appeal to National Societies allows the flexibility to address additional needs including trainings and technical support and capacity-building activities in specific technical areas.

MORE THAN 10.000.000

PEOPLE FORCIBLY DISPLACED

By the end of 2023 almost two-years after the escalation of the armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia on 24 February 2022 millions are displaced internally or as refugees outside the country.

More than **4.000.000** people were internally displaced across Ukraine at the beginning of 2024.

6.300.000 refugees had fled Ukraine, including **5.900.000** to Europe at the beginning of 2024.

Sources:

OCHA: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 Ukraine -Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2024

UNHCR: Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan January-December 2024

COORDINATION, ADVOCACY, PRACTICAL SUPPORT



Photo: IFRC Psychosocial Centre

During the initial phase of the international armed conflict in Ukraine in the winter and spring of 2022, the situation was unpredictable and fast-moving. It was the first large scale forced displacement in Europe since the Balkan wars. At the same time, the intense focus from donors, UN, INGOs and also less formal actors including volunteers and activists added a layer of complexity.

The PS Centre rapidly engaged on multiple levels including coordination, advocacy and practical support. The coordination involved setting up meetings and reaching out to regional National Societies and MHPSS delegates, and liaising with key international actors including UN agencies in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. "It was evident that there was an urgent need for coordination to place mental health and psychosocial support on the mental and operational map and ensure that communication lines were in place", says Ea Suzanne Akasha, Technical Advisor.

On the advocacy side, a key-message was to go beyond the traditional trauma treatment dealing with the individual experience of war. "There was a lack of understanding that displacement, in-itself is a traumatic experience and that dealing with all the concrete problems and questions – from the emotional distress over separation from family members or a child caught between two worlds to the challenge of making a doctor's appointment or finding accommodation in a new country – needed to be the starting point of the support, says Ea Suzanne Akasha.

In terms of direct support and intervention, the PS Centre could rely on two main assets. One was the recent experience of the global COVID pandemic. The other was the unique access and local knowledge of the IFRC National

Societies. "There were lessons learned in terms of fast adaptation and production of relevant guides and trainings in a volatile context. At the same time, we could rely on staff and volunteers with knowledge of the specific needs in different segments of displaced across Ukraine and neighbouring countries", says Ea Suzanne Akasha

The PS Centre interventions spanned from creating online training sessions on Child Friendly Spaces and PFA to implementing a variety of online trainings for groups, individuals, and staff and volunteers, and producing guides for mental health interventions. "The guiding principles of our interventions were to make resources and support relevant by adapting and translating publications and training modules according to specific audiences and to make them efficient by keeping them short, direct and understandable – staff, volunteers and displaced experiencing ongoing crisis and intense stress cannot benefit from abstract academic content, they need something tangible and operational", says Ea Suzanne Akasha.

Almost two years after the beginning of the armed conflict in Ukraine the challenges and along with them the role of the PS Centre gradually changed from an operational and direct approach to a more consultative role. "The initial phase of any emergency or crisis tends to be chaotic – in a way the early phase of the international armed conflict in Ukraine was a gigantic real-time cooperation exercise. However, once capacity is established the task is to bring down the pace and increase the quality of the interventions – the PS Centre has very defined expertise and experience in that regard", says Ea Suzanne Akasha.

THE PS CENTRE RESPONSE IN NUMBERS



Red Cross Red
Crescent National
Societies supported
by the PS Centre



Red Cross Red
Crescent coordination
meetings (co-)
facilitated by the PS
Centre



tools and materials developed and made available for staff and volunteers working with MHPSS



high level/donor meetings related to the Ukraine response attended by the PS Centre



640 staff or volunteers trained in MHPSS related topics



956
Ukrainian related requests responded to by the PS Centre

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It means a lot to me that I can help people. Whether it is cleaning, cooking, buying groceries or just sit down and chat, to distract people's minds from the war

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Inna, social worker, Ukrainian Red Cross Society, working with home-based care

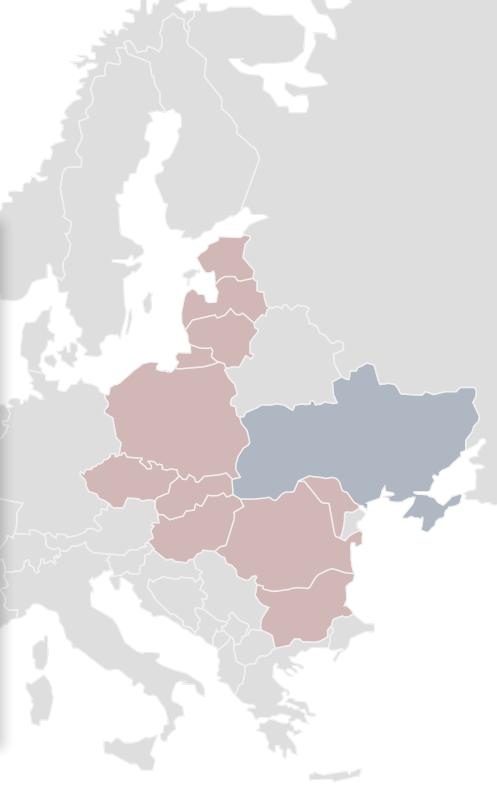




Photo: Oana Bara, German Red Cross

REFUGEE HOST COUNTRIES IN THE REGION

COUNTRY	REFUGEES DISPLACED DUE TO THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE AS OF DECEMBER 2023
Bulgaria	51,860
Czech Republic	373,080
Estonia	50,450
Hungary	63,775
Latvia	46,610
Lithuania	52,305
The Republic of Moldova	115,862
Poland	956,635
Romania	83,765
Slovakia	113,925
TOTAL	1,945,307
Source: UNHCR: Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan January-December 2024	



CREATIVE SPACES IN ZONES OF CONFLICT

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At first, he only felt safe when I was near. But now he always asks me to leave so he can spend time with his new friends.

Natalia, mother of 8-year-old Rostyslav, attending a Child Friendly Space (CFS) session arranged by Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS).



In a Child Friendly Space (CFS) set up by volunteers from the Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS) in the Solomyanskyi district in Kyiv, six children engage in games, stretching exercises and creative activities while their mothers talk to each other in the background. The activities are managed by URCS staff and volunteers, and the kids are fully involved in the physical games as well as the creative activities like drawing, colouring and creating collages.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the PS Centre has been supporting the implementation of CFS and delivering training and support to National Societies in Ukraine and affected countries on setting up and managing CFS. With support from both the PS Centre and Danish Red Cross, the URCS has provided recreational activities to almost 70.000 children in Ukraine and trained 319 staff and volunteers in managing a CFS in 2022.

Many of the children attending the CFS activities in the Solomyanskyi district have difficulties meeting new people. One of them is 9-year-old Rostyslav. He came to Kyiv from Kherson with his mother, Natalia, after a particularly heavy artillery shelling. Natalia says that Rostyslav has been going through stages of anxiety, and he still gets afraid when the air raid alarms go off. But he enjoys the CFS sessions. "At first, he only felt safe when I was near. But now he always asks me to go away so he can spend time with his new friends."

As one of the first responses to the escalation of the Ukraine-Russia international conflict, the PS Centre produced three training videos and a workbook on how to set up and manage a CFS. Ea Suzanne Akasha, MHPSS Technical Adviser in the PS Centre says: "We know from our work around the world that children are a particularly vulnerable group, as they often don't understand the context or the long-term implications of conflict. Therefore, we felt a need to move fast and provide the needed support, not only in Ukraine but also in the affected countries surrounding Ukraine."

Victoria, like Rostyslav, fled from Kherson with her mother in October 2022, when the shelling became too heavy. They came to Kyiv and received help from URCS to set up a new life. After that, Victoria's mother, Natalie, became a Red Cross

CHILD FRIENDLY SPACES

Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) is a service to increase children's access to safe environments and promote their psychosocial well-being.

Some CFS programmes may focus on informal education or other needs related to children. However, all CFS try to provide a safe place where children can come together to play, relax, express themselves, feel supported, and learn skills to deal with the challenges they face.

CFS activities are designed to build on children's natural and evolving coping capacities and proactively involve children in the selection of activities to ensure that they are relevant to children. CFS can provide a child-focused and child-friendly environment in which children continue their cognitive development and can give them opportunities to learn on a variety of levels.



volunteer herself: "I saw all the volunteers helping people in need and I decided that I wanted to help too." And even if setting up a CFS is just a small part of the volunteer work by URCS, it is an important one for Natalie: "It is so relieving for me to see the change in Vika from when we arrived in Kyiv. She had become introverted, and afraid of meeting new people, but she has opened up and found her curiosity again. Sometimes, she asks me "Mom, can I skip school today? Then we can go to the event in the URCS." She is always waiting for these classes, prepares her bag and makes drawings for the volunteers." But even if the CFSs are important, they can never substitute a home or school. "Every evening, Victoria asks me "Mum, when will we go home? I miss my toys and my bedroom." I wish of all my heart that the day will come soon. And when the day comes and we can return to Kherson, I know that I will still be a Red Cross volunteer."

CHILD FRIENDLY SPACES IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS









In 2022, as a direct response to the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict, the PS Centre produced three educational videos about setting up Child Friendly Spaces. The videos were published along with a training workbook for participants to use and fill out while watching the lessons.



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I feel joy and kindness when volunteers come. They relate to me with their soul. I would like to meet them even more often. They give me energy to move in my daily life, even though I have leg problems.

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Mikola Kulinich. Mikola has been living in Myronivka Community Centre for almost 9 years

MORE THAN 14.000.000 PEOPLE IN UKRAINE WILL NEED HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN 2024

Representing about 40% of the Ukrainian population living in Ukraine

Including 31% women, 20% children, 23% older adults and 11% people with disabilities

Over 3,300,000 people are in need of assistance in the front-line communities in the east and the south of the country including the territories occupied by the Russian Federation

Needs are high for 4,000,000 internally displaced across Ukraine, particularly 111,500 people currently living in collective sites.

Sources:

OCHA: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 Ukraine - Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2024

VOLUNTEERING FOR THE RED CROSS RESTORES YOUR DIGNITY

44

I woke up in the middle of the night to the sound of sirens, bombing and shooting, but although I understood the danger, my body wasn't listening. My brain was cold, I was shaking, and my tears were flowing.

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Iryna Hordiienko, Project Manager (and volunteer), Icelandic Red Cross



That night, in the early spring of 2022, Iryna, a TV producer and TV host in Ukraine, realized that she would have to flee her home country. Until then, even after continuous bombings had kept her in an underground garage for several weeks, Iryna did not want to leave: "I understood the danger, but I was in denial, and it wasn't until my best friend gave me psychosocial support, that I decided to leave."

After three months in Athens and a brief return to Ukraine, Iryna made it to Reykjavik, Iceland, "When I arrived, I felt vulnerable and lost, and only due to the help of a close friend, did I manage my feelings and all the things you have to go through when you move to a new country".

One month after arriving in Reykjavik, Iryna began volunteering for the Icelandic Red Cross: "I saw the vacancy announcement, and I felt that I could contribute because of my education, my experience as a journalist, as a Ukrainian, and as somebody with prior experience as a volunteer."

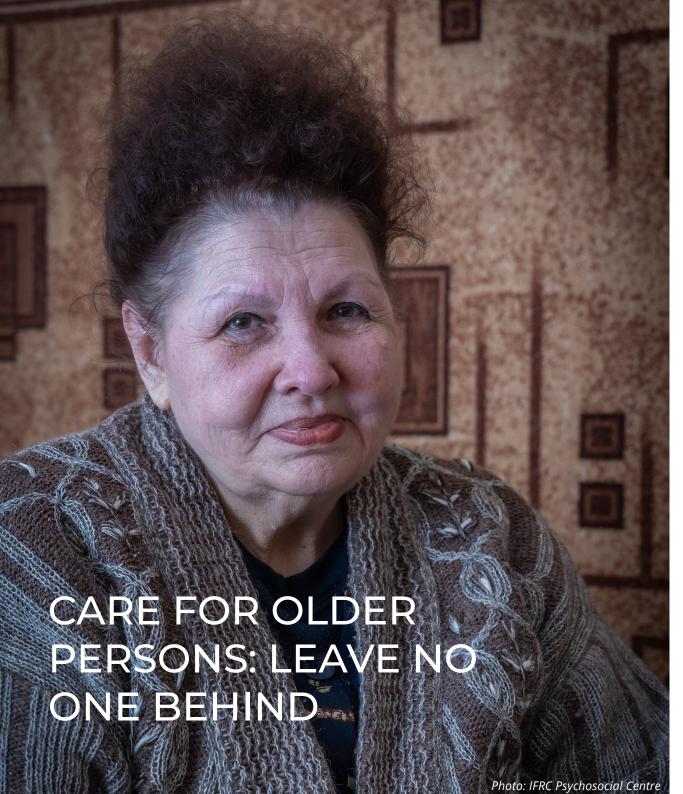
As a volunteer in the Icelandic Red Cross, Iryna and the department she works for, meet refugees and immigrants when they first arrive in the country, when they are in the same situation Iryna recently had been in herself: "First, we give them psychological support, and we clarify for them what is going on, how we can help them, and how they can help themselves". The Icelandic Red Cross' support for immigrants includes confidential talks, language classes, drama classes, dancing, yoga, specific groups for women and youth, and other social activities – all of which provide stress relief and create a space for immigrants to express themselves, build confidence, and

make social connections and friendships.

In addition to psychological support, the Icelandic Red Cross also hands out clothing cards, since many immigrants arrive in Iceland with limited knowledge of how cold and windy the climate can be there: "In the beginning, I would make Icelanders laugh, especially my colleagues, because despite it being summer, with Icelanders wearing shorts and t-shirts, you would see me walking down the street wearing several knitted sweaters, extra layers of pants, hat and scarves – but now, I don't feel the cold anymore."

Despite missing her former life, her family, her boyfriend, her home, her job, and friends, Iryna has found fulfillment and purpose in her new situation: "Volunteering and working for the Red Cross returns your dignity – you understand that as a person you can help others. When you feel that you have really made a difference for another person, and when they tell you, what it has meant for them to receive my support – it makes me very happy."

Not knowing whether she will stay in Iceland or get the opportunity to return to Ukraine, Iryna is certain that she will continue working for the Red Cross: "I would like to stay within the Family of Red Cross. I don't know how the future will be, but I am sure that even if I have the chance to return to my TV work, I can combine these two structures, because now I understand that I can do something more than just entertainment, something more important, and leave my trace in this world, not just as an entertainer, but as a person that can support others and do something good".



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The Red Cross volunteers are golden people. They are always positive, and they bring gifts, they smile, and ask me how I am doing. The only thing I could ask for now is peace – so all people would be safe and healthy.

Liubov Stepanivna, living in Myronivka Community Centre Many older persons in Ukraine have limited mobility and are dependent on others for help. Many older persons also struggle with loneliness – and for a large group, the Russia-Ukraine international armed conflict has amplified the dependency – and the loneliness.

Ukraine Red Cross Society (URCS) staff and volunteers are helping at a local community centre and providing home-based care to older adults and persons with limited mobility in Kyiv. Acts of service involve everything from picking up medicine, doing groceries, and cleaning – to emotional support.

"We are here to make all things possible for as many people as we can. We provide everything from a talk and a hug to humanitarian assistance and referrals to crisis centers, and though we know that if we don't help with all of this, no one will, we continue to do it with genuine sincerity. Every day" says Nadiya Kovalska, a social worker and URCS volunteer.

At the local community centre for older persons in Myronivka, a city on the outskirts of the Kyiv Oblast region, the staff and habitants worry for the future of the centre, but despite the omnipresent conflict, the habitants remain positive and grateful – especially for the Red Cross support.

"The Red Cross volunteers have become our friends. Through chatting, little gifts, and treats, they bring joy to our "grannies". We have grannies saying that even if the war closed the centre, they would sit at the closed door and never leave. The love we feel here provides a pause and distraction from the

war", says Sichkar Lyibov, staff at Myrovnika Community Centre.

Liubov Stepanivna is one of many older persons who couldn't leave her home, but as war came to her doorstep, the Ukrainian military brought her to the centre: "It began in February. Fighting could be heard around my house. The rockets were falling, and windows were shattering all around us. A family died. My home had become a place of danger, and I knew I had to leave, but I'm old and disabled. I had never imagined that I would have to go through something like this at my age. But here at the centre, I have been met by sunshine. The Red Cross volunteers are golden people. They are always positive, and they bring gifts, they smile, and ask me how I am doing. The only other thing I could ask for now is peace - so all people would be safe and healthy".

The inhabitants of the centre and those at home alone are grateful for the Red Cross visits, but as Nadiya remarks "the gratefulness we're met with is something we, the volunteers, feel deeply as well, because when you're busy helping others and you know you're needed - it leaves you with no time to sit at home and overthink if the alarms are false or not". Though Nadiya and her fellow volunteers continue to support those in need for as long as they can, resources are limited: "We are a small team of six volunteers, covering a whole city, alone, but there is no other way than to keep doing what we do because when you see the PSS work you're doing is working, bringing a bit of life and joy back to people who needs your help - you give yourself completely to them."

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS - THE HEARTBEAT OF THE RED CROSS RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

More than 16 million people volunteer for the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement making it the largest volunteer-based organization in the world. With passion and dedication to support other people and assist in emergencies, this group of people is the very heart and soul of the Movement. In Ukraine, close to 10,000 staff and volunteers in the URCS provide assistance to people in shelters, community centres, Child Friendly Spaces and through helplines and home-based care.

But often, staff and volunteers forget to take care of themselves and especially in emergencies the needs of others tend to take priority over the needs of the carers, sometimes leading to stress, depression and feelings of anxiety and loss of control.

Ganna Goloktionova, Technical Advisor in the PS Centre: "Recognition and appreciation of the work of volunteers plays a crucial role in supporting their well-being, and self-care promotion is a basic element for creating a culture of care for staff and volunteers that fosters resilience of helpers."

From the beginning of the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine International armed conflict, the PS Centre has developed tools and trainings for staff and volunteers in Red Cross Societies in Ukraine and affected countries. Through trainings, webinars, guides, infographics, podcasts and videos, the PS Centre has offered self-care exercises and advocated for the importance of staff and volunteers taking care of themselves – and each other.

Every week, the PS Centre releases a self-care exercise on social media and in 2023, in cooperation with URCS and Danish Red Cross, the PS Centre produced a series of videos promoting the importance of 'caring for the carers' including staff and volunteers sharing their own self-care advises with their colleagues.

Taisa, social worker in URCS: "My work gives me a lot of meaning. It is important to me to be able to share positive feelings with my family, my children and grandchildren. I believe that during the war it is very necessary for us to work, to be part of a team, and to have the opportunity to communicate and support each other."

With the right support from team members and managers, the Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers can provide better assistance to all.

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It is important to find your small daily rituals and it is equally important to allow yourself to do these rituals every day. For example, to spend 10 minutes taking care of yourself. I spend 10 minutes drinking coffee every morning. It is just my time.

Den, MHPSS Technical lead, URCS

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I believe supporting volunteers is very important right now. And to appreciate the importance of their work. They work so hard. It inspires me, and it inspires our entire community.

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Vlad - Chief Specialist, The Volunteer and Youth Development Department (URCS)





The IFRC Psychosocial Centre (PS Centre) contributes knowledge and provides service to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. It assists in facilitating mental health and psychosocial support, promotes psychosocial well-being for affected groups, staff and volunteers, and increases awareness of psychological reactions in times of crisis or social disruption.

The PS Centre is hosted and supported by Danish Red Cross. It receives financial support from a number of National Societies, and institutional and private donors including the European Commission and DANIDA.



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