



Ukraine Refugee Response

Daily Diary of an IPPF Field Visit



Since the start of the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in February 2022, IPPF has supported partners in Ukraine and surrounding countries to provide access to essential sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services for those affected.

Over the course of two weeks, an IPPF surge support staff member visited our partners responding to the refugee crisis in Poland, Hungary, and Romania. This is the daily diary of her observations, photos and interviews with staff, volunteers and refugees.

POLAND

Monday, 5 December 2022

It's 1°C in Warsaw, and it's set to snow in the next few days. The days are short as we near the winter eclipse, and night sets in by 4pm. 8.1 million refugees from neighbouring Ukraine have arrived in Poland since the start of the conflict in March 2022. Activists, service providers and NGOs are run off their feet, trying to keep up with the demand placed on them by their neighbours in need. One of these people is Krystyna, the President of Federa, and a thirty-year veteran in the sexual and reproductive health space. She is a feminist and activist to her core, and this sense is obvious in any interaction with her. The Foundation for Women and Family Planning FEDERA is a non-governmental organisation fighting for reproductive health and rights. The FEDERA office has doubled its staff in the last few months alone but it's still not enough.

She says she needs to 'lie down and close her eyes' for thirty minutes after some interactions with refugees, as their stories are so harrowing and her responsibility to them so large. IPPF has been partnering with Federa since the start of the war, providing funds to enable them to run their hotline and create IEC materials for incoming refugees.

"We helped, for example, two teenagers, 14 and 15 years old who were raped by Russian soldiers on their way to the Polish border... I met the young girls at the Warsaw railway station in the dark of the night, and we went together to a private clinic, which opened during the night for us. They were provided with medical procedures for survivors of rape, antiretroviral injections, and HIV tests. They were so thankful; they had no words to thank us"



Krystyna Kacpura
President of Federa



Tuesday, 6 December 2022

The Ukrainian refugee reception point is housed in a large white tent, directly across the road from the Eastern Warsaw train and bus station. Inside, it's warmed against the bitter cold outside, and there is a food station, lockers for items, and rows of beds and chairs. In the corner, there is a play area for children. Along the side are reception kiosks, where Polish Women's Strike (an IPPF collaborative partner) is partnering with a small organisation to register and care for refugees. They can sleep here for a night, before their onward journey to another European country, or elsewhere in Poland.

Justyna Grabowska, Founder of Asymmetrical, greets me warmly, and spends the next few hours passionately talking about her work with refugees and the situation they have



Justyna Grabowska,
Founder of Asymmetrical

fled. "We've been working from this shelter since August, providing refugees with referrals to safe places to sleep, food and other items they need like sanitary products. Some days we have thousands of people come through this reception point. We take care of them from the first conversation here to when they leave for other countries or when we place them in a safe place in Poland."

Wednesday, 7 December 2022

The city of Wroclaw is a three hours drive to the south west of the Polish capital Warsaw. Polish Women's Strike Vice-President for the region, Marzanna Lukaszewicz, has been volunteering with the agency since before the war broke out. As soon as women and children started arriving in Wroclaw, she dedicated her time to distributing items to women such as food, nappies and pads from the makeshift warehouse in a disused tram terminal. The warehouse, now about a quarter full, was once overflowing with donations from around the world. Little Ukrainian flags hang from the shelves.



Marzanna Lukaszewicz
Polish Women's Strike

Upon realising the women needed somewhere for their children to play whilst they were in the warehouse, Marzanna established a little kindergarten area in the back and enlisted the support of friends and her daughter to volunteer, both in the warehouse and also the kindergarten.

I asked her how it must feel to know she is making an impact on refugee women and she immediately teared up. She deeply loves and cares for these women and their new babies, and says after the war is over, she plans to visit each woman in Ukraine. "Half of my year will be spent going around Ukraine then!".



Thursday, 8 December 2022



Anna Gwizolz, translator
and volunteer from Polish
Women's Strike

Challenging Hope Hostel is housed in a five story grey brick building in Krakow, Poland. Unassuming on the outside but once inside, the cacophony and vibrancy is immediate. The hostel is able to accommodate up to 200 people, but normally has around 140 guests, mostly women and children from Ukraine. Anna Gwizolz, 37, translator and volunteer from Polish Women's Strike runs off her feet day and night, as she makes sure the guests are well cared for and their needs met. She is fully immersed and invested in dedicating her life to Ukrainian refugees. Prior to the conflict, she formed the PWS Chapter in Krakow during the abortion protests in 2016.

Friday, 9 December 2022

Rybnik is an industrial city on the western side of Poland. Though not the closest town or city to the Ukrainian border, there are strong cultural and historical links between the two areas, and as such, Rybnik has received many refugees from Ukraine since the start of the conflict. Hanna Kustral, one of the founders of Polish Women's Strike, said "this centre provides humanitarian assistance, food, clothes, hygiene items, and individual assistance from mental health support, legal assistance, shelters or places to stay, dealing with State or Municipality. Its general adaptation advice for refugees, where to go to school, where to find a doctor, and referral to SRH and GBV services. Each of the families that come here can get goods and assistance on how to get rooted here in their daily lives. We are first responders. We make appointments for doctors for them, interpreters, if they need to go to the bank, get a social security number. We either go with them personally or arrange it for them. For people with disabilities, it is a lot of work to arrange their medical care and we also assist them with getting their disability papers."



Hanna Kustral, one of
the founders of Polish
Women's Strike

"I walk the streets and people
come up to me and thank me. It's
gratitude."

HUNGARY

Tuesday, 13 December 2022

EMMA - refugee hostel & interview with staff

Today we moved from Poland to Hungary. The pictured building is a refuge high up on a hill in Pilisszántó, a village in Pest County, Budapest metropolitan area, Hungary. Formerly a castle and hunting lodge, it is now reserved for the Roma community who have fled the war in Ukraine. Dual Hungarian and Ukrainian citizens but residing over the border in Ukraine, the Roma community suffer from intersectional discrimination and mistreatment by the Hungarian healthcare system - which is overly complicated to navigate even for someone who lives in Hungary.

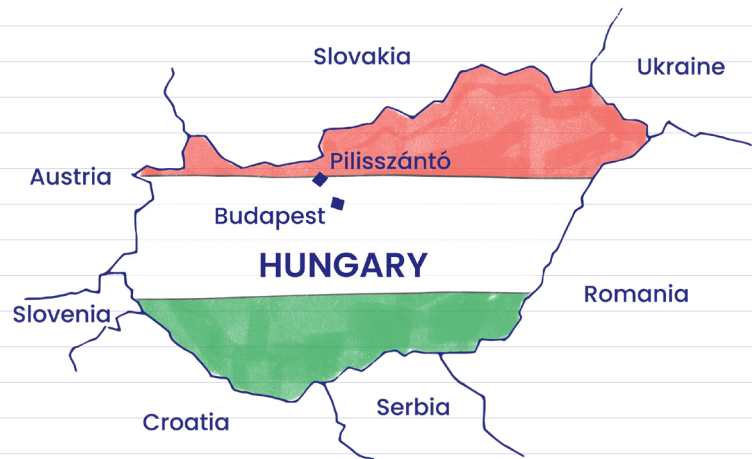
EMMA Association is a national women's organisation, which works for the fundamental rights and societal equality of women, paying special attention to gender-based oppression and violence against women during the childbearing and childrearing period. The staff of EMMA immediately sprang to action at the onset of the war, distributing flyers by volunteers at the main refugee care points and accompanying women to healthcare appointments to help advocate for their rights.

Some of the successes of EMMA's work with refugees include:

- 200 women have been helped personally during their child rearing period for weeks or months through the doula system or after giving birth
- 500 - 1000 women have been reached with IEC materials for expectant mothers all over the country in every refugee reception centre and healthcare providers, travelling 100s of kms to reach these Roma women.



Palma Fazakas
President of EMMA



"My favourite story that stands out for me, out of many, is the story of what happened to me and a woman [client] in the health care service. During the first visit the doctor wanted to do a vaginal ultrasound but the woman refused. When we went next time he didn't want to do it anymore. After the check up in the stairway the woman with me said to me: - "Now he knows what services I want, he learnt from me" "

Fanni Csonka, EMMA social worker





Lilla Kallós
Field Worker, PATENT

Patent Association and the Dévai Fogadó Community Centre

Today we met with the staff from PATENT Association, who have had to quickly pivot from being a development and advocacy organisation to humanitarian, all within the space of six months.

The name PATENT Association, coined from the Hungarian phrase Patriarchátust Ellenzők Társasága, means Society Against Patriarchy. They are women's rights defenders (lawyers) and psychologists, as well as gender based violence experts.

Now they are also humanitarian actors.

We enter the refugee reception centre down the end of a small alley on this blistering cold day, but it's difficult to enter as only minutes after the doors open, the first room is completely full of women waiting to receive their donations. Patent, who have set up a small office at the back of the building to allow for privacy when consulting with women about their SRHR needs and how they can assist, also have a display of pads, condoms and leaflets.

They are using this reception centre to gain access to refugee women so they can then refer them to the right medical facilities.



Zsófia Balogh, International
Relations Officer, PATENT

Поддержка женщин и девушек, бегущих из Украины

Мы поможем вам

Support for women and girls fleeing Ukraine

We will help you!

Feel free to contact us if:

- You are pregnant
- You are about to give birth
- You are raising a child under 1 year of age
- You have experienced sexual or intimate partner violence during or before your travel to Hungary
- You have been victim of human trafficking
- You need a contraceptive or an emergency pill
- You need any other gynaecological services or examination

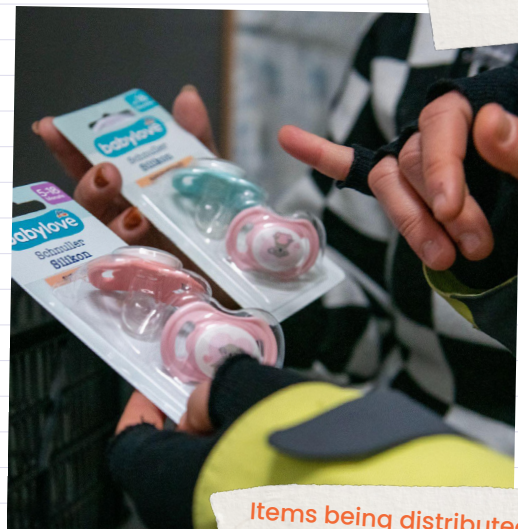
We can help you by providing:

- Information
- In-person support
- Listening and emotional support
- Professional assistance*
- Legal advice
- Access to medical services and medicines
- Access to essential hygiene products
- Russian/Ukrainian interpreters upon request

* psychologist, lawyer, obstetrician, midwives and maternity doula, breastfeeding counsellor, delivery counsellor

Contact information:

- Phone: +36 70 622 3346
- Email: help.women.ukraine@gmail.com
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/emmaegyesulet>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/patent.egyesulet.ngo>
- Website: <https://nokjoga.hu/ukrajna/>
- Website: <https://emmaegyesulet.hu/ukrajna>



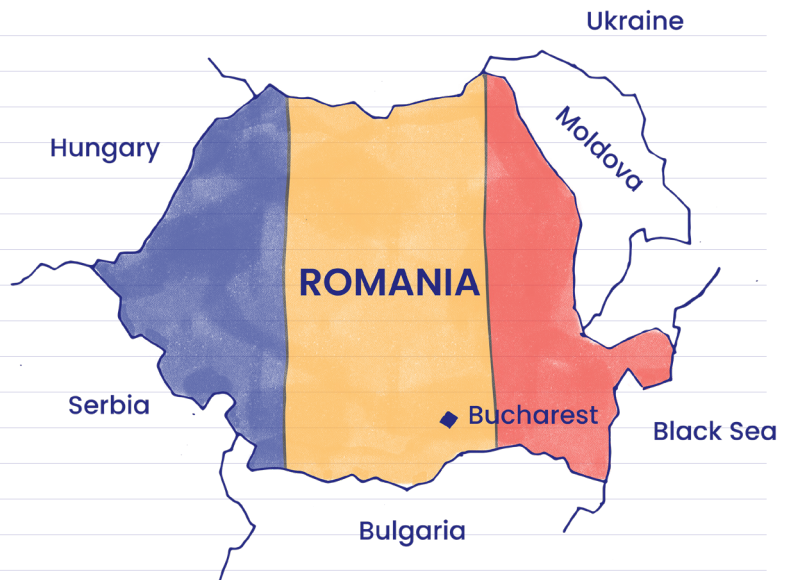
Items being distributed
inside the Dévai Fogadó
community centre

ROMANIA

Thursday, 15 December 2022

The Society for Contraceptive and Sexual Education (SECS) and Necuvinte, both partners of IPPF in Romania, work closely with the female refugee population as their patient advocates, ensuring women know of, and are comfortable, accessing SRHR through the Romanian healthcare system. They offer to drive women to their appointments and translate/advocate for them in person.

With the support of IPPF and UNFPA, they also distributed dignity kits to women at the start of the refugee crisis in March 2022.



"The moment the war started, they came immediately to Romania. So it took us by surprise, not just them but all the countries around Ukraine. The people of Romania were the first ones to help, people were at the border trying to help with food, water and blankets as it was winter when the war broke out. People offered their homes for people to stay. The first help was from Romanian people. It hasn't happened to us before, nothing of this scale. Everyone was so open and willing to help."



Alina Iordache, Project Manager for Necuvinte



Bianca Brisan, SECS



UNFPA Dignity Kits that were distributed by SECS and Necuvinte

"I feel very humble to be able to bring my own little contribution to a wide national, as well as international effort to support the refugee women affected by the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine as part of SECS. For the last five months, SECS has been responding to the reproductive health needs of Ukrainian women by facilitating access to gynaecological services and information, as well as treatment.

Our team has facilitated access to gynaecological services to over 80 women throughout the last months. Every woman I had the chance to support throughout the last few months has lost something or someone since the beginning of the war and yet every day they keep standing up, they keep showing a willingness to learn, they keep fighting for their children, they keep finding beauty in the quotidian. It is a duty and a great privilege to be able to give them support to take control of own their sexual health.

Being able to contribute towards building back up a sense of safety, care, and support around a woman who is starting again is a precious gift that I receive every day with gratitude and responsibility."

Friday, 16 December 2022

Home visits with Ukrainian refugee families



Alla with her husband, daughter, and newly arrived friend from Ukraine, Olenya, and her two children. Alla and her family are hosting them in their one bedroom apartment.



Alla, 35, is a Ukrainian refugee and volunteer with SECS

"Somehow I am the glue in this community, it is good to have someone to talk to. I have always been like this, it's my nature. Wherever I go I get acquainted with people and try to build the bridge of trust. Even if I have one dollar, or ten dollars, I try to donate it. You give how much you can give".



Rostyslava is an artist from Odessa in Ukraine. She is a single mother, and after enduring months of bombings on her city, made the decision to flee to safety to Romania with her daughter, cat and dog "I would never leave them behind" she told me of her pets, "they are family." She created a makeshift "pet wheelchair" for her pets out of a cardboard box and suitcase on wheels.

When she arrived in Romania, she didn't know anyone, but quickly heard about Alla. After going on a first date a man she had been talking to for months, Rostyslava realised she needed urgent SRH care. The first person she called was Alla, who through her work with SECS and Necuvinte, took her to the right doctors and got her the healthcare she needed.



Photographer Hannah Maule-finch accompanied me on this trip to capture the images in this diary