

One year of support



Dear Reader,

Last year, on February 24th, the territory of Ukraine was invaded by Russian troops. It was immediately clear that this encroachment will result in millions of people having their lives upturned. With each incident of mass murder or attack on civilian structures by the Russian army, the number of refugees travelling for the Ukrainian border increased.

Those fleeing who made for the Polish border were, for the greatest part, met with open arms. News of the invasion caused alarm throughout the country, and some of this tension found relief in spontaneous acts of help and grassroots self-organisation. Local NGOs set out to create structures that would help collect and provide refugees with food, shelter, transportation or clothes. Goodwill towards all displaced by Russian troops was palpable in Polish society, together with a feeling of compassion resulting from the memory of past injustices from the same aggressor inflicted upon the Polish population still in living memory.

Each passing month of military activity made it more clear that aid for Ukraine must continue in the long term. At the Federation of Polish Food Banks, we gave highest priority to growing our understanding of the refugees' needs and meeting them as they emerged. So far, we have directed almost 6,300 tonnes of food, worth almost €15m, to Ukrainian citizens both in Poland and in Ukraine. Local Food Banks carried out around 200 workshop sessions for almost 2,000 refugees aiming to inform, support and aid the persons displaced by the war in creating a safe refuge for themselves in Polish cities and towns, including help from Polish volunteers in finding lodgings and employment.

Today, a year after Russia encroached on the territory of Ukraine, it is still difficult to foresee when this phase of the war will end. What we do know is that aid for those affected needs to be sustained in the long run and provided every day. Our efforts at the Federation of Food Banks were noticed by the Office of the President of the Republic of Poland, as a result of which [the Federation was invited to attend the USA President Joe Biden's speech in Warsaw](#). Apart from Federation staff, ten refugees from Ukraine also attended the event as part of our delegation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who participated in the efforts of Polish Food Banks. None of our

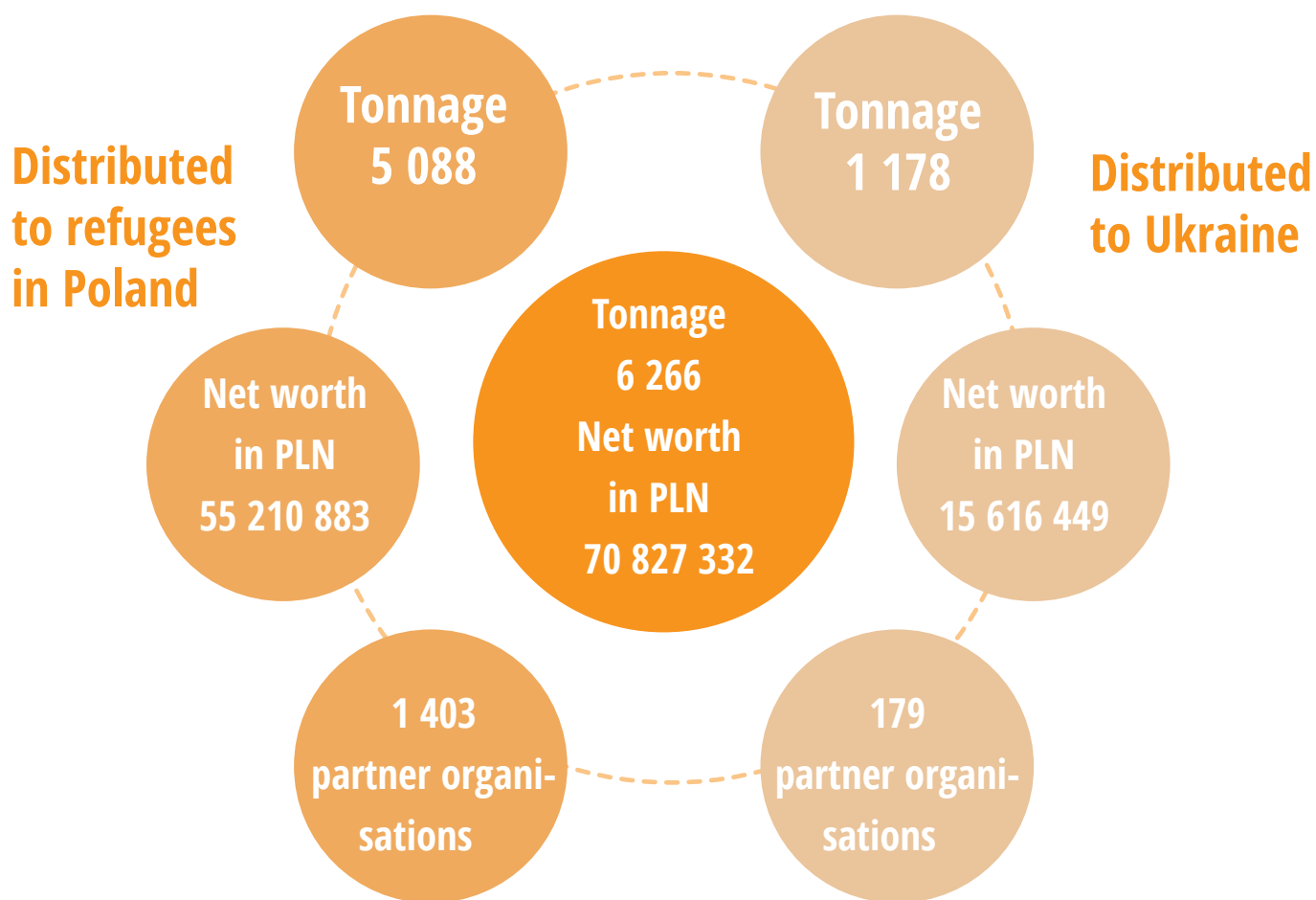


**Beata Ciepla, Chairman
of Board of the Federation of Polish
Food Banks**

goals would be achievable without the numerous corporate entities and their employees that committed to helping, or without the tireless work of our volunteers.



Food aid for Ukraine



Food aid for Ukraine



Unity-building workshops

The Trójmiasto Food Bank

Three snippets from culinary workshops

Valeria learns to cook

At one of the culinary workshops the Tricity Food Bank has organised during the last year we had the opportunity to meet Valeria, a little Ukrainian girl brought to the event by her grandmother. At first, Valeria had to be content with watching the rest of the group cook together, as her grandmother felt uncomfortable with allowing her to participate in the cooking herself. Finding herself in an unfamiliar surrounding, and feeling responsible for her granddaughter, she was, understandably, on guard.

We were determined to make our guests feel more at ease, and made efforts to connect with them, and so it did not take long for the ice to start breaking. Seeing Valeria's interest in the workshop activities, her grandmother gave her permission for her to start participating, so long as there would always be an adult present to make sure she is doing so safely.

And so Valeria had her first opportunity to cook Polish-style pancakes. Our hearts warmed as we watched the girl, visibly excited about the cooking and proud of the results of her work. Her enthusiasm strengthened with early success, Valeria went on to prepare spaghetti with tomato sauce.

Valeria travelled to Poland with her mum and her grandmother. Her dad stayed in Ukraine and joined the military auxiliary services. It was clear to everyone at the workshops that his daughter was the apple of the eye of both women, so much so that she would not be allowed to boil water for tea, just in case she got scalded.

At our workshops we saw Valeria discover herself as a natural in the kitchen. Her grandma couldn't contain her emotion when the girl served her pancakes, and was clearly proud of the child and happy to see her engaged and carefree.

A neighbourly gathering

Pavel, who arrived in Poland from Ukraine in 2020 to start his studies, was a key player on our team when it came to organizing the cooking workshops. As an open-minded young man, and a bit of a social butterfly, he was ideally suited to translate between volunteers and participants. On top of that, it quickly turned out that cooking is something of a passion of his.

What kind of a person is he? It's enough to say that the next time we revisited the same group of refugees with another edition of the workshop all the kids were ecstatic to see him again. They all wanted his help, and his help only, with their cooking efforts.

During one of the workshops we saw Pavel meet someone from his own hometown. The woman turned out to have lived two streets over from where his family home was. They've never met back then, or perhaps they haven't noticed one another, but were now brought together by historical turmoil a long way from home.

Culinary discussions

Ukrainian participants were often very happy to share stories related to traditional cuisine back home. It was rare, however, for any such story to go uncontested by someone from a different region of Ukraine. Mentions of staple foods like the Ukrainian Borscht or pelmeni dumplings have resulted in heated discussions over nuance baffling to an outsider. One of the most controversial dishes, though, was Ukha, a type of fish stew of cossack origin. Debate points are aplenty. At which precise moment does one tip the shot of vodka into the pot? Does one use fish heads, or tails, or both? Is it permissible to add carrots?

Among participants and volunteers at our culinary workshops it was common to discuss the cultural importance of cooking. Many admitted that, up until the workshops, they found the topic mundane and uninteresting. Seeing the small crowd joined in celebration of the culinary arts made many of us realize how important this aspect of our lives is for forming and sustaining social bonds. How it can serve as a portal back home in times when the journey back is long and dangerous.

As a thank you to our volunteers, Ukrainian participants made sure that they all had tried their favorite local dish, freshly prepared during the course of the workshops. In return, we shared stories of how we typically spend Christmas in Poland, including, with some embarrassed realization, our custom of setting the table with an additional plate meant for any weary traveler who might seek refuge on Christmas 'Eve.



The Łódź Food Bank

A new kids' rec room

Thanks to a grant of €76,000 received by our organisation from Foundation de France, the Łódź Food Bank was able to furnish a recreation room for refugee children fleeing from the crisis in Ukraine and enlist the help of a local NGO, the 'Joint Aid for Ukraine' Association.

The rec room is open to children accompanied by parents every Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 2 and 6pm with a capacity of 20 children participating at any one time. The recreation room staff consists of three members from the Łódź Food Bank and two from the 'Joint Aid for Ukraine' Association.

Parents are encouraged to join in the playtime and Polish lessons planned by the organisers, as well as the catering provided at the rec room. Apart from that, monthly excursions are held for the children, inaugurated by a trip to Kino Helios, a local cinema which offers screenings of cartoons dubbed in Ukrainian.

One of the main priorities of the rec room initiative is to ease the participating children into playful interaction using the Polish language. Our hope is that this will allow them to be better prepared for the challenges that await them at school when learning mathematics, biology, or English.

The grant we received also allows us to finance medical care for the children and parents, in cases where the Polish National Health Fund does not do so.

'We are still here.'

One of the participants of our workshops bursts into tears at the sound of the word 'home'. The block of flats where she used to live has been struck down by Russian rockets.

'Come here.' another woman puts her arm around her. 'Your flat is gone. My town is gone. Us, we are still here.'

'Stupid'

At one of the workshops all the kids were making noise and running around, as they do. All except for Oksana, who, all alone, was sitting down with a miserable expression.

'Oksana, come over, why don't you join the other kids?'

'The other kids are stupid.'

'We're about to start a really fun activity any moment now!'

'Activities are stupid.'

'Maybe later then? We're going to take a walk together around Łódź, it's going to be very beautiful!'

'Łódź is stupid.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Łódź is stupid because my daddy's not here.'



The Ciechanów Food Bank

A new Aid Center

The Ciechanów Food Bank has established a stationary Refugee Aid Centre which caters to all persons who arrived in Poland after February 24th with extensive food aid. It is intended to be a good starting point for anyone feeling lost in the new circumstances, with no local connections and little command of Polish. We aim for our Aid Centre to be more than a distribution point by supporting our visitors with information, advice and support. We wish to make our guests feel safe and at home, as far as they can, and to connect with them, if only through a short conversation or small expressions of sympathy and warmth.

We met an elegant elderly woman, owner of a shoe shop in Kiev, who expressed relief at the clear weather, as the soles of her own shoes were now worn through. We cried together with another, who was just reached by news of her husband killed in the war. We tried to cheer up the dutiful, taciturn boy who visited us with his disabled sister and their mum. We helped Katryna, one of our volunteers and a talented painter, get in touch with the local artist community, who made it easier for her to start selling her paintings.

Although these modest gestures seemed to brighten our guests' lives a little, we feel helpless a lot of the time. Grief, shame and anger are not hurts that can be so easily healed.

Truckloads of food aid

In 2022 the Ciechanów Food Bank sent out 150 transports to various locations in Ukraine: Kiev, Lutsk, Novovolynsk, Zhmyrovka, Chernikhiv and Ivano-Frankivsk. This aid is picked up at our warehouse by NGOs from Ukrainian towns where waves of internal refugees are taking shelter. Each month we are visited by representatives of 31 such organisations, and we strive to provide as much support for their efforts as we can. The names of those cities and towns are now linked in our minds with the faces of those who visit us on their behalf.

There's Kola from 'MisjaZoria' from Rivne who delivers humanitarian help to the most dangerous regions, not far at all from the ongoing military activities. He tells stories of people who, not having seen bread in weeks, fall to their knees

thanking him for this. He sends us videos where gunfire and explosions can be heard. His own bus, too, has been fired at, though Kola luckily managed to get away with no damage other than to its windows.

There's also Jacek from the coastline regions of Poland. Since the start of the war, he regularly travels to Ukraine with convoys transporting aid for various NGOs. We met when he arrived to make a pickup for one of our partner organisations, and from then on we have been filling up his truck every time he travels to Ukraine. So far, he's made the trip 25 times.

One of the local partners of our Bank has contributed with a shipment of frozen Norwegian cod. Because of the special transportation requirements of this gift we decided to use our fleet to transport it directly to Lutsk. We sent a mini-convoy of two delivery vehicles and delivered the fresh and frozen products. Apart from Lutsk, we also dropped some of the food at the army hospital in Berezne. This trip will remain vivid in our memories, as will the people we met there who are so clearly in need of aid.

The war does not seem likely to end soon, and even if it does, it will be long before the affected Ukrainian population no longer needs our help.

'True hospitality'

In one of the workshops our Bank has organised we attempted to create a context for inter cultural bonding through cuisine. We were surprised to see one of our participants join us carrying an enormous bag full of zephyrki and other traditional sweets that she had been preparing late into the previous night. She explained that she wanted to give us a taste of true Ukrainian hospitality. Another time, a group of girls offered to make us some of their favourite local specialties. They prepared varenyky and pelmeni dumplings, the olivia salad and a cold dish of herring and beetroot. We had a great time together, learned new things, discovered new tastes and exchanged recipes. We took a great amount of photos to remember this day. The distant sounds of war muffled, and then, for a brief moment, ceased to be audible.



The Olsztyn Food Bank

People and aid

Marek Borowski, chairman of the Olsztyn Food Bank: 'The war in Ukraine put the efforts of all non-government organisations on a new track, and the same happened at our Bank. We became a part of the aid effort immediately after the invasion started.

'Our warehouse became the crisis warehouse for the entire voivodeship. All entities and institutions which collect food or other donations to Ukraine aid direct those items to us. The bank then either passes those to central warehouses or distributes them to its partner organisations in Ukraine.

'At the beginning of the war the stream of aid was very strong. Apart from our regular activities connected to food products we handled clothes, chemical and hygiene products, as well as bandages and other medical items. At the same time we established contact and started cooperating with organisations which took it upon themselves to aid refugees in Olsztyn and the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship in general.

'In time the amount and variety of aid we received began to normalise, and the Bank returned its focus to food products. We established distribution channels for delivering food to Ukraine and to refugee aid organisations. We travelled to Ukraine in order to see the locations and NGOs that we agreed to deliver food to. This allowed us to come to the conclusion that smaller deliveries distributed directly to the victims of war are the most effective way to aid them with food.

'Another change to our operations concerned the nature of food aid that we receive. We started collecting mostly non-perishable foods with a long expiration period, or those that can be prepared easily, one-pot meals, canned goods, but also sweets.

'Up to this moment we have sent out 50 transports with aid for Ukraine comprising a total of 300 tonnes of aid.'

Anna Archutowska, director of the Olsztyn Food Bank: *'I would like to share the story of one of the participants of an eight week long culinary course we organised. After the course was over, all of the ladies who took part seemed to*

have become fast friends and some mentioned that they feel like family now. One, however, kept to herself, barely ever smiled and seemed lost and confused.

'Despite this, she continued to take part in further courses organised by the Bank: a Polish course and two specialised courses linked to bakery and confectionery skills. In that period she spent most of her days at our facilities. After a while, once she regained her self-confidence, she no longer avoided speaking Polish, and turned out to be an exceptionally social and chatty person. The change was unbelievable! I asked her what happened and said I don't recognise her. She said that she has no recollection at all of the first three months after arriving in Olsztyn. She was struck by the situation she suddenly found herself in. Anything she would normally need to do herself was done for her by the staff of various NGOs, including signing up her daughter to a local school. It took time for her paralysis to wane, and only then was she ready to start opening up.'

Marek Borowski, chairman of the Olsztyn Food Bank: – *One participant of our culinary course used to be employed as an office worker back home. She decided to look for a job in Poland right after arriving here and started work at three different catering establishments. However, because of her lacking culinary skills and a poor command of Polish, she was let go from all three. This made it clear to us that we should take a more comprehensive approach to preparing the women at our courses for the Polish job market. We expanded our cooking courses with career consulting and language lessons. This turned out to be just what that participant needed. She soon found a job in gastronomy and enrolled at a vocational school where our Bank helped her to gain a stipend.'*



The Kielce Food Bank

The central warehouse

Right from the start of the war the Food Bank in Kielce began actively aiding Ukrainian refugees in Poland, as well as those who decided to remain in the territories invaded by Russian troops. By March 2022 the city of Kielce has already become the international logistical hub for humanitarian aid travelling to Ukraine from Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal and Malta. We received almost 500 tonnes of aid of a total worth nearing zł8.5m and distributed it to refugees who found shelter in our region, but also to other Food Banks in Poland and various locations in Ukraine.

Along with the local branch of Caritas we were able to establish a stationary Refugee Aid Center for those fleeing from the war. All refugees who visit are offered food and hygiene products, as well as clothes and other daily use articles. The Center is also meant to serve as a context for the exchange of local experience and knowledge, with the staff trained and ready to support all visitors in any difficulty they may have, being so far from their homes.

Some visitors stayed with us for a good bit longer, as was the case for Oleg, who fled the war with his family, and in April found employment at the Kielce Refugee Aid Center, where he can use his perfect Polish to provide practical aid to others fleeing from Ukraine. He is a key asset for us when it comes to solving any communication issues our visitors may have, and his efforts go a long way towards making this difficult transition less harsh for them, which is particularly crucial in the first weeks after crossing the border. Mirka, Oleg's wife, received her MA in history at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and then returned to Lviv where she found work and started building a life for their family. After February 24th, though, they fled for Poland. Mirka helped out as a translator during our 'Travels through Ukraine' culinary workshops, where her warmth and sensitive personality turned out to be just as crucial as her language skills.

In September and October 2022 the Kielce Food Bank has focused on organising meetings and workshops aimed to foster connections between Ukrainian visitors and their new Polish neighbours. During that time we held ten such events, where Ukrainian guests of different ages were welcomed by citizens of Kielce, as well as members of our various

partner foundations and NGOs. Together, we set out on culinary journeys throughout Poland and Ukraine, preparing our favourite staple foods and sharing them with each other. This simple act allowed us to connect better, regardless of the differences in cultural background and personal history. We were happy to notice that the language barrier wasn't enough of a difficulty to prevent us from bonding on a deep level, and that our guests, among them chiefly women and children, seemed to have forgotten their troubles for a little while.

Participants told heartbreaking stories of mothers and wives at the border saying good-bye to their sons and husbands, who decided they must stay and fight for their country's freedom. We could see that they were apprehensive about their future, but with each modest sign of compassion they encountered their anxiety seemed to fade a small bit. Cooking and feasting together allowed for the ice between us to break altogether. We joked about the similarities and differences between our languages, which often led to comical misunderstandings and absurd-sounding dialogue. This, too, allowed us to get to know each other better and establish new friendships.

The aid that our Food Bank directs to Ukraine is coordinated by the Kielce Municipal Office, the Voivodeship Office, and other entities such as local associations, NGOs, church communities and private persons wishing to help their family or friends in Ukraine. We also employ the help of the 'Winnica' church community, the Congregation of Dominican Sisters, the Kielce branch of the Society of Lviv and South-Eastern Borderlands Enthusiasts, as well as a Bodzentyn-born priest who works in Tyrviv near Lviv.

We are continually receiving feedback from our partners in the Ukraine which confirms that our aid was well-directed and went a long way to alleviate the situation of those who ended up receiving it. Those signals help us keep our eyes on the goal and maintain a high level of motivation. Since the start of the war, our daily work at the Kielce Food Bank has been an unceasing flurry of deliveries, pallets of products, incoming and outgoing trucks and buses, and endless, endless paperwork. All this is easy to bear, knowing that each food package distributed from our warehouse finds its way to those who need it the most in this difficult time. We had many opportunities to meet the people we are helping, and this has given us strength. Over these past 12 months we developed endurance that will allow us to keep going as long as is necessary.



The Kraków Food Bank

Providing help every day

The Kraków Food Bank has been providing aid for Ukraine for a full year now. Together with partner organisations we deliver food products to refugees who found shelter in Kraków and Lesser Poland in general. We also dispatch from our warehouse transports of food products, pet foods and other useful items to the territory of Ukraine.

Our Bank has aided refugees fleeing from the war in Ukraine, both in Poland and back home, by delivering, among others, the following:

- Over 400 tonnes of food products with a total worth of zł 4.5m
- 40 tonnes of pet food worth nearly PLN 300,000
- 3,500 rucksacks equipped with everyday articles most useful for refugees with a total worth of over PLN 230,000

A year after the Russian aggression on Ukraine our Bank continues its efforts to aid Ukrainian citizens. Any day now we will dispatch over 2,000 food packages weighing 10 kg each to Ukraine. Our aid operations are made possible by donors in Poland and abroad, as well as volunteers provided by companies based in Kraków and the support of the Polish and European Food Bank Federations.

Ania Patrzalek, workshop coordinator

I was especially struck when some of our participants told of how they spent many days with their children hiding in a cellar, waiting for their evacuation to become feasible. People with similar stories have a very high appreciation for the reception they found in Poland. During our workshops, the refugees often expressed their sympathy and were glad to participate, learn about Poland and its cuisine, but also cook staple Ukrainian foods, which served as a pretext to remember and share stories about life back home. Some participants have gone a long time without eating a traditional Ukrainian dish. All workshops ended with a feast where participants and organisers could bond over the meals they prepared, and it was apparent to us at the Food Bank that this

shared meal went a long way to make the refugees feel safe and welcome.

Marta Lutak, workshop coordinator

-One time when I was organising workshops at the 'Mayday' Association I was approached by a woman who wanted to cook Ukrainian Borscht as her chosen dish. She provided me with a recipe so that I would know what products to buy to make that possible. That evening was very dark and the weather was harsh, with heavy snowfall and below-zero temperature. As I was headed home, I saw the same woman going to catch a tram with her children, and offered to drive them home. To me, this was a very minor favour, so I couldn't help but feel a little awkward when the family expressed their deep and heartfelt thanks for it. Situations like this are not exceptional, it seems that refugees tend to be deeply moved by these gestures that Polish people make and our involvement in aiding them.

At the Church of Jesus Christ a mass in Ukrainian was held before every meal. I don't know the language, but could still partly understand what was being said. The mass included expressions of gratitude to the Polish people, which made me feel very emotional. My name was mentioned, too, as I was thanked for organising the workshops.

One woman from Ukraine whom I met at the Albertine Sisters' congregation said that they were happy to have the opportunity to cook a little, as so far they have mostly been provided ready meals by catering services. She said it was nice to rest for a week or two, but that she will be happy to go back to cooking on her own.

At the next session I met a woman who fled from Mariupol and meant to stay in Poland for a short time only and then move to Canada. However, it took longer than expected for her to obtain the necessary documents, and after seven months she was still with us. Hearing of this made me realise how easy it is to lose everything and suddenly find oneself in a foreign country.



The Konin Food Bank

A year spent together

Our efforts to aid Ukraine started right away after the war started in February 2022.

I remember that the first weeks of their stay in Poland were especially difficult for the refugees. They were fearful, sad, and did not want to discuss the situation in Ukraine, because they would tear up as soon as they started talking about it. They did not want to go back to the bombardments or the fear that they felt. As time passed, though, they became more open to making new friends.

Now that almost a year has passed since many of them arrived we are seeing a pronounced change. The refugees tend to smile more, and have started to establish regular lives for themselves in Poland, even though they still aim to go back to Ukraine once it's safe. We became good friends with many of them, and some even joined our team at the Food Bank. They got involved in various aid initiatives right away after arriving in Poland, and organised their own independent ways to provide food aid to their hometowns on top of it.

Our Ukrainian volunteers are definitely in an easier situation compared to those who arrived here on their own and have not found a community to join yet. At our Bank they can become part of a multigenerational family now of 11 people. Throughout this year a few of our new family members found employment and are now able to independently rent homes and cover all their expenses.

Life was extremely difficult for refugees at the beginning of the war, and the food aid efforts we made turned out to be crucial. Today, thanks to government help and their own success in finding employment, most refugees are able to lead a normal life, with the aid provided by the Bank, though still much needed, starting to play a more auxiliary role.

Apart from providing food products, we have also organised culinary workshops for mixed groups of Polish and Ukrainian participants. At the outset in the spring of last year it was fairly difficult to motivate the refugees to participate. They were apprehensive about making new acquaintances among the Poles, and the ones who did join were, for the most part, silent and unwilling to engage in conversations. However, cooking together is a great context for bonding,

and as time passed the participants of both nationalities started to become friends. This was made clear by the great success of a cooking competition we held in September 2022. After participating in our workshops, the refugees started to frequently take part in other local events such as fairs and children's workshops.

One thing we in Poland could learn from the Ukrainians is how to not waste food. They are raised to know that food should never be thrown away. Any leftover fruit or vegetables get preserved for use at a later date. Polish participants were often impressed by the fact that items we treat as waste and put in the bin can in fact be used to cook delicious meals. A good example is the fruit that remains after cooking compote, which we would normally discard, and which Ukrainians use to prepare kutia, a traditional wheat berry pudding.



An even more difficult year ahead

Polish public debate has been dominated by the rapid rise of inflation rates and its consequences. Officially, overall prices rose by 18%. There are, however, products and services that showed larger price increases, such as food and energy. This has a direct effect on the numbers of people applying to our Bank for help, which are rising both for Polish nationals and refugees from Ukraine. In December 2022 the Federation of Polish Food Banks conducted a survey among aid organisations and their clients to investigate the current situation.

Almost a half of the surveyed organisations experienced a rise in client numbers over the past months, estimating the increase at around 20%. This is coupled with the problem of insufficient food products to be distributed, with 30% of organisations admitting that they have had to turn clients away for lack of food to give out. 80% of the surveyed institutions agree that the needs they see in their region are larger than the food available. Only one in five organisations can satisfy all clients with the amount of food they receive from donors.

Despite these facts, 60% of aid organisations do not decrease the amount of food rations placed per single package, deciding instead to distribute all of their stock in the same portions as previously. 18% of NGOs under survey, however, have been forced to limit the rations they distribute.

At the same time, despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, there was no sharp increase in Ukrainian clients at the surveyed organisations in recent months. Half of those noted that new applications are more often submitted by Polish rather than Ukrainian nationals.

The rapid rise of prices has a strong impact on NGOs, with 70% noting a 25-50% rise in operational costs. The clients' quality of life, too, has deteriorated as a result of inflation. 97% of respondents have felt this influence in their daily purchases and admit that they have had to adapt the way they do their shopping to counter it. This change most often involves buying less food or choosing exclusively the most affordable products.

The way the clients under survey use food products has changed as well. A fourth of the clients admit that at times they have to forfeit lunch, which is typically the main hot meal of the day in our region. 59% limit the number of ingredients used in preparing meals. 80% of clients estimate that the food aid they receive covers less than half of their household's needs.

The conclusion we draw from the above is that 2023 may be exceptionally difficult when it comes to maintaining the effectiveness of food aid initiatives, taking a toll on both Polish and Ukrainian recipients.

