

There is good in the Małopolska Region. In solidarity with Ukraine

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says WITOLD KOZŁOWSKI, the Marshal of the Małopolska Province



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Mr. Marshal, what are your memories of the 24th of February 2022? Were you surprised with the military invasion of Ukraine?

Naturally, I was. In spite of all the information coming from the media and through diplomatic channels, everyone was deeply convinced that ultimately, there would be no war and the tense situation could be defused in a peaceful way. However, this turned out not to be the case. The signals we had as a local government, pointing to an imminent disaster, became a horrible fact on Thursday, the 24th of February 2022.

What were those signals?

The administration of the Governor of the Małopolska Province asked for analyses concerning the situation of the local government in the context of e.g. accommodation for refugees in the Province. As the local authorities, we immediately produced such an analysis – not only in the context of the available beds, but also in a wider sense, considering other aspects. The idea was to create a road map, to plan the assistance that would be provided from a number of perspectives: social, educational, labor market-related, also taking into account logistics.

What does the assistance provided to the refugees from Ukraine look like?

Naturally, we got involved in helping war refugees from Ukraine right away, from the first day, and we have been helping them ever since. We wanted to make sure that our support is complete and answers real needs, so we created the Małopolska Humanitarian Shield. It covers five aid packages in terms of education, the labor market, transport, support for NGOs and volunteers, and broadly understood social issues. We have appointed a Steering Committee for the Coordination of Systemic Support for Ukrainian Refugees, which coordinates long-term actions for the benefit of the victims of the war. Immediate, direct, and quick aid was also sent to the Lviv Oblast. We provided our regional partner with PLN 3 million.

Do we know how much this aid will cost?

In total, we are planning to spend approximately PLN 100 million on aid through the Małopolska Humanitarian Shield. Of this, PLN 10 million has been secured in the budget of the Province; we want to raise the remainder from external sources.

Understand that the aid has been given a structure on purpose. Which of the packages is most important?

There is no single “most important” package. The general principle of subsidiarity applies. Each of the packages of the Małopolska Humanitarian Aid has specific goals intended to achieve the overall aim, which is to provide support and aid to our Ukrainian neighbors.

The province almost immediately launched special trains to transport refugees. I understand that the package transport was the first one to be implemented.

That is correct. Not only did we allow the refugees to use the trains and buses of the Małopolska Railways for free, but we also launched special humanitarian trains. Between the 27th of February and the 21st of March, 38 trains transported more than ten thousand people, mostly women and children.

Could you say a little more about the package concerning NGOs, volunteers, and cooperation with local government entities?

Through this package, we want to provide financial assistance to Małopolska-based NGOs, which are already carrying out or will be carrying out activities related to providing assistance to Ukrainian citizens. Their tasks primarily include broadly understood social activation, as well as adaptation and integration of the refugees with the residents of Małopolska. NGOs can apply for financial funds in the form of small grants and through open contests for proposals.

The number of refugees that went through the Polish border is now counted in millions. This number changes because some people return to Ukraine and some decided to move to other European countries; however, most of them have stayed in Poland. Do you think they will decide to take up a job here?

I would like to answer with a yes, but things are not that simple. We mostly have women with children. We have even carried out questionnaire-based research with respect to the will to take up a job. It has shown that 54% of the women wanted to have a job, even below their qualifications. However, language is often a problem, training for a new job is usually required, and the issue of taking care of children is also there. In this respect, we provide assistance through the labor market package. A number of activities are carried out by the Labor Agency of the Province. In Kraków, Tamów, Nowy Sącz, and Oświęcim, information and counseling points have been opened for Ukrainian citizens. A special issue of the Work in Małopolska newspaper has also been published in the Ukrainian language.

What about the children of the mothers that will go to work; how can they be prepared for education in Polish schools?

We need systemic solutions. There are naturally a lot of problems in this respect. On our part, we are focusing on preparing the teachers to rise up to the occasion. As part of the education package of the Małopolska Humanitarian Shield, special training seminars and courses will be offered to teachers, focusing on teaching Polish, integrating Polish and Ukrainian pupils, working with parents on physical and mental safety, as well as psychological and pedagogical assistance to Ukrainian pupils. We have also planned to launch an information hotline in the Ukrainian language that will provide support to Ukrainian pupils and teachers.

What are the options for refugees in terms of medical care?

We are trying to do everything we can, making sure, however, that the influx of refugees does not hinder the access of the residents of Małopolska to doctors.



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In any way, the citizens of Ukraine can take advantage, free of charge, of the health care benefits provided by the Healthcare Facilities of the Province. This assistance is provided on the same principles that apply to Polish patients. Additionally, refugees are provided with free psychological support.

Will these activities be continued? Is there a plan allowing for quickly adapting the refugees to the Polish reality?

Yes, each of the packages will be modified – we will be reacting on an ongoing basis, considering the current

needs. There are a number of problems related to the adaptation of refugees, but we see this as a challenge and respond. Soon, as part of the transport package, the Ukrainian language will be added to ticket vending machines and the mobile application of the Małopolska Metro Area Railways.

How about the linguistic problems of the youngest refugees? They function on the basis of different alphabets. How are you planning to help young Ukrainians to integrate with their Polish peers at school?

In addition to the activities planned as part of the particular packages, we are currently preparing a grant project addressed to the operators of public and non-profit primary and secondary schools of various types. The target group are the pupils who arrived from Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022 and learn in Małopolska schools. We hope that interesting projects leading to integration of the youth, especially in terms of language, will be submitted in the contest. I would also like to mention the activities of one of our institutions, the Małopolska Center for Teachers' Excellence. The Center has prepared a comprehensive offer for teachers, principals, and pupils, covering psychological support for Polish and Ukrainian children and adults related to coping with emotions and stress, as well as support for the adaptation of Ukrainian pupils and their integration and relations-building with Polish pupils.

What would you like to wish the refugees in Małopolska?

Most of all, I wish them peace – that the war ends as soon as possible with Ukrainian victory. I wish all Ukrainian mothers and wives who we have here in Małopolska as guests that they see their sons and husbands safe and sound. Naturally, I also wish Ukraine and the Ukrainians a quick reconstruction of their country and the implementation of standards that will allow for commencing talks leading to Ukraine becoming an EU-associated country.

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