



"For the Lord your God ... defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt." Deuteronomy 10:17-19 (NIV)

Dear Canopy Readers throughout Europe,

The Bible clearly states the duty of God's people towards those in need: the weak and helpless and the foreigners. "The poor will always be with you," says Jesus. There will always be people in our lives, who need our attention and care, both verbal and physical. This characterized God's covenant people in the Old Testament as well as God's New Testament people at a time when human life was not valued. John Wesley called it the 'works of mercy' meaning that loving others was a way to fulfil the second part of the Great Commandment, "Love your neighbour as yourself" and to become more like Christ. In this article, I would like to draw your attention to a recent opportunity to fulfil this commandment. The 'foreigner residing among you' refers to Ukrainian refugees who have fled a war. As you read the article, please consider how you might be able to help practically as well as praying for them.

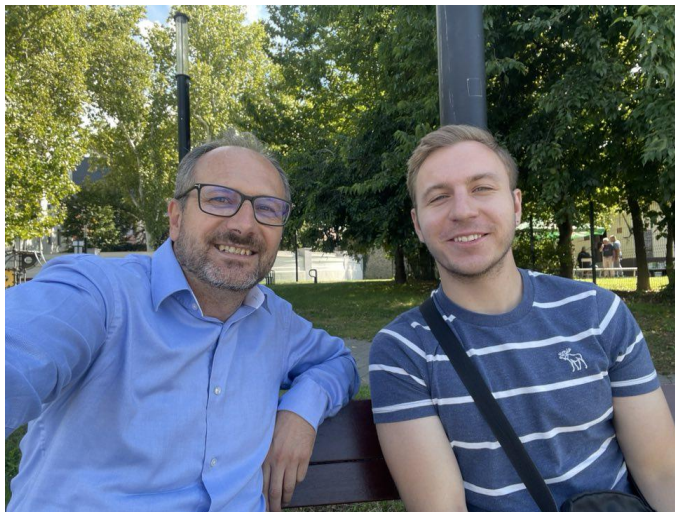
Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Europe has been facing enormous social challenges. The war has forced 5.7 million Ukrainians to flee their homeland — 11% of the country's total population — not to mention the millions more who have moved to safer areas within Ukraine. Those leaving the country are considered refugees. They are under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), adopted by all EU member states and EFTA countries on 4 March 2022. The TPD grants refugees from Ukraine temporary rights to shelter, medical care, employment and education in all EU member states. Those who do not cross an international border are called Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). Unlike refugees, IDP's are not protected by international law. The majority of those fleeing the country have settled in Europe, with around 1.4 million of them being under the age of 18 at the time they left. In most cases, refugees were able to integrate into host societies, particularly as there were already Ukrainian communities in most countries. The largest Ukrainian refugee communities are in Germany (1.2 million) and Poland (1.0 million). Czechia and the UK also host hundreds of thousands of refugees. Relative to its population Czechia has taken the most refugees.

INTERVIEW WITH A YOUNG UKRAINIAN REFUGEE

I'm sitting on a bench on the riverbank in Győr, a city in western Hungary, talking to Maksym K. Canoeists are training on the river, and birds are landing on the riverbank. Against this idyllic backdrop, listening to Maksym's account of his family's escape seems almost unbelievable and very distant. He is a 21-year-old university student studying at the University of Győr. Maksym is Ukrainian. He is a Ukrainian refugee. Under normal circumstances, he lived with his parents, younger brother, and grandparents in a small eastern Ukrainian town close to the Russian border.

Hello Maksym, could you tell us when and why you decided to leave Ukraine?

For weeks, we had been listening to worrying news reports about Russian troops gathering on the Ukrainian border. I didn't believe they were going to attack our country, but my 14-year-old brother at the time warned the family that it was a real danger. During the first weeks of the invasion, we had no access to reliable information. All we heard was Russian propaganda claiming that Russian troops were occupying Ukrainian cities one by one, and that the entire country would soon be occupied. Later, we were able to read accurate news on a Telegram channel. We lived very close to the Russian border. When the Russians besieged the neighbouring town, the ground shook so much at night that we could not sleep. That's when my family decided to leave. We had to choose between two options: staying or fleeing. Both seemed very uncertain. We made the difficult decision that my father would stay with my grandparents while my mother left with my younger brother and me in an attempt to cross the Hungarian border. When we arrived at the Hungarian border, we were welcomed with love and care. I remember a young man who spoke only Hungarian, a language we had never heard before. His acceptance and kindness meant a lot to us in that situation. The Hungarian state provided us with free train tickets to Budapest. In Budapest, we were placed in a refugee centre for a few days and from there we were taken to another refugee centre in Győr.



How did you come to terms with becoming a refugee?

For me, it was the realisation that there's no shame in needing or accepting help. Today I need help; tomorrow it may be the person who is helping me now who needs it. Also, I am still very young and can adapt more easily to different circumstances. For example, I didn't speak any foreign languages before, but I have started to learn English here. Unfortunately, I found Hungarian an extremely difficult language to learn.

So, you were taken to Győr. What happened next?

A Hungarian charity organisation offered us a place to live and a monthly support. We got in touch with the local Lutheran church, which helped me learn English on a language course so that I could apply to university. We have a lot to thank Migration Aid, the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service, the Győr Lutheran Parish, and many individuals who helped us during this difficult period.

Do you know what happened to your friends and classmates?

Yes, I'm still in touch with my three closest friends. One is in Bulgaria, one is in Germany, and one is in Poland. I also know many others who have fled Ukraine, as well as some who have stayed. Thank God, my father and grandparents are safe.

Finally, what are your plans? Would you like to return to your country once this war has ended?

Yes, I definitely want to return to my homeland. I want to see my relatives and I hope that my family will be reunited. Also, Ukraine will need to be rebuilt after the war. As a logistics engineer, I will be needed there. I am very grateful to this country for accepting me, but Ukraine is my home.

Thank you, Maksym, for sharing your amazing story with the readers of The Canopy of Prayer. May God bless your studies abundantly, and we will continue to pray for peace in your country.

Prayer points:

- First of all, let us pray for the millions of people who have been forced to flee their homes and settle as refugees in foreign countries. May they be able to live with dignity and have their needs met. But let us also pray for the millions displaced within Ukraine due to Russian threats.
- Let us pray that the aid workers serving in host countries and inside Ukraine will not burn out but will be able to carry out their work with joy.
- Let us pray that world leaders will take their responsibility to mediate between Russia and Ukraine seriously, so that a just peace can be achieved.
- There are news of a disturbing trend among refugee women: as their husbands have stayed in Ukraine and are often fighting on the front line, they are getting in touch with men in the host country, divorcing their husbands and trying to improve their lives. Therefore, we pray that Ukrainian women take responsibility for their marriages, husbands, families and country, and return home once the war is over.



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