

**JUNE 2016**

American Jewish  
Joint Distribution  
Committee



# **CRISIS IN UKRAINE**

## **Providing a Lifeline for Internally Displaced Jews**



Prepared for:  
Greater Miami Jewish Federation  
**REPORT | UKRAINE**



## COPING WITH A NEW REALITY

More than two years after an armed conflict erupted in Ukraine, claiming almost 10,000 lives and injuring some 20,000, the state of affairs in the country continues to deteriorate. The ongoing economic crisis has resulted in skyrocketing inflation and widespread unemployment, leaving many once independent families and individuals struggling to cope. For those who live in Ukraine's conflict zone, or for those who have fled their homes in search for safety, daily life is that much worse.

JDC has been on the ground in and around the conflict zone since the outbreak of the crisis, caring for the tens of thousands of needy and impoverished Jews served by JDC's social welfare centers (locally referred to as *Hesed*), as well as providing emergency relief to thousands of new clients who suddenly faced displacement, unemployment, and poverty.

During the past two and a half years, thanks to your generous support along with Jewish Federations of North America, foundations and individuals, JDC has provided a variety of vital aid. Together, we provided food, medicine, medical care, clothing, housing subsidies, post-trauma care, and Jewish community connections **to more than 8,000 Jews in the conflict zone and more than 4,000 displaced Jews in Ukraine and Russia. JDC thanks the Greater Miami Jewish Federation for its commitment to helping Ukraine's most vulnerable Jewish families during this time of uncertainty and instability.** The following report provides an update on

JDC's critical assistance within the conflict zone and to internally displaced people (IDPs) between January and May 2016.

## UPDATE FROM THE CONFLICT ZONE

The conflict zone, despite a marked decrease in violence, remains an ever-shifting political landscape. No longer considered a state of emergency, the situation has become a perpetual reality with far-reaching economic, political, and social challenges. Currently, the region is divided into the Lugansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic, each with its own laws and policies. With a modicum of stability restored, scores of Jews who have relied on JDC's aid during the height of the conflict have seen pensions reestablished, found viable employment and secured new residences. Moreover, food – once scarce and expensive – has become more available in the conflict zone.

This apparent economic upswing has a limited reach, however. Though more people now have access to money, good jobs remain scarce, pensions are devalued, and inflation remains at an all-time high. For the most vulnerable Jews in the region – the poor, elderly, and families with young children – many essential items remain cost-prohibitive.

**Today, JDC continues to serve 4,500 people in the conflict zone, providing both the material and emotional support necessary to help them weather the protracted crisis.** In addition, JDC stays in regular communication with those who no longer need immediate support, connecting them with Jewish community activities, JCC programs, holiday celebrations, and family camps.

## THE PLIGHT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

At the onset of the crisis, intense violence and economic instability in the conflict zone forced over a million people to flee their homes. Although they escaped from the epicenter of the war, they faced tremendous challenges establishing themselves in new communities. High unemployment rates and local disdain for refugees made it difficult for many IDPs to compete in the job market. Most could not afford to furnish new apartments or send their children to school; and many did not even bother to start anew, always hoping for an imminent return home.

**In 2014 and 2015, JDC assisted 4,000 displaced Jews who found refuge in other parts of Ukraine, as well as those that fled and sought refuge in neighboring countries.** JDC's extensive

network of *Heseds* took on these new clients with compassion and skill, helping them to find new homes, schools, and jobs, and providing emergency aid such as accommodations, food, clothing, furniture, and medicine.

Over the past six months, JDC has begun to scale back its services for internally displaced people. Some have returned home to attempt to reopen their businesses and to reunite with family members left behind during the surges of violence. Others have made Aliyah, hoping to rebuild their lives in the Jewish homeland. Many have resettled in other parts of Ukraine and Russia finding new jobs or even attempting to open their businesses (with JDC help). **Today, JDC continues to provide assistance to approximately 1,400 IDPs across the region.**

## JDC IN ACTION

### Conflict Zone

In the first quarter of 2016, JDC provided services to 5,000 people in the conflict zone via its Hesed Relief Centers in Donetsk and Lugansk



**4,500 clients** received food support services through bank cards, food cards, and food packages

**2,300 people** received assistance with medications and medical services



**130 people** received assistance with utility payments and accommodation subsidies

**610 elderly** received homecare assistance



### Internally Displaced People

In the first quarter of 2016, JDC provided services to 1,700 internally displaced people via its Hesed Relief Centers in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus



**1,130 IDPs** received food assistance

**147 IDPs** received assistance with medications and medical services



**85 elderly** received homecare assistance

**1,040 IDPs** received accommodation subsidies





## Long Term Impact

JDC's current priority for IDPs is to help them get back on their feet in their new locations. In order to avoid a situation of enduring dependency, JDC provides material relief when necessary, while placing emphasis on long-term solutions for employment, housing, and education. By keeping IDPs active in the *Heseds*, Jewish Family Services, and JCCs, JDC has provided a range of ongoing non-material services, including post-trauma counseling, vocational training, and Jewish community engagement. Each IDP family or individual undergoes a comprehensive review every three to six months to determine their specific needs.



### DISPLACED FROM DONETSK

Raisa Libenson, age 79, has lived her entire life in Donetsk. After Raisa retired from a career as a mining engineer, she began volunteering in the dining room of the local *Hesed* – a role that she has proudly served for over 12 years.

In August 2014, Raisa's life was turned upside down by the war. With her family's home destroyed by heavy shelling and all transportation terminated, they hid in a neighbor's basement for six weeks, surviving only on basic necessities provided by the *Hesed* where Raisa volunteered. Eventually the *Hesed* offered to move Raisa and her husband to Pavlograd (a suburban area of Dnepropetrovsk). Today, they live in a rented apartment in Pavlograd, and do not know if they will ever be able return to their Donetsk community of nearly 80 years.

With a combined monthly income (two state pensions), of only \$100, the couple is grateful to receive assistance from the local *Hesed*. Support includes rental assistance, bankcards, homecare services (critical for Raisa), warm home and a caring local Jewish community.

*"We are very grateful to Hesed, which provided for us in hard times," Raisa says. "Maybe it will not be for long, but it is like a breathing period for us. We would not have survived for these few months in Donetsk without Hesed."*

## THANK YOU

On behalf of the needy families displaced by the conflict in Ukraine, and those remaining in the conflict zone, JDC extends its heartfelt gratitude to the Greater Miami Jewish Federation for generously providing a lifeline of material and emotional support. As they begin to rebuild their lives, they are strengthened by the knowledge that you are there to help them forge a new path for themselves and their families. Thank you for your compassion and commitment.