

March 2, 2022 – A visit to the Hungarian-Ukrainian Border
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On February 24, 2022 – Russian Federation launched an attack on Ukraine. But the conflict between Ukraine and Russia goes way back; beyond this date and beyond 2014.

We do not fully understand the complicated and underlying exchanges between these two countries and other agencies, associations in the world. This is not a political piece. It is an account of our trip to the Hungarian-Ukrainian border after waking up feeling that we ought to help those who are packing up their lives in fear and fleeing their homes. Regardless of opinions on the situation everyone should have food and safe shelter away from the war brought on by bureaucracies.

A day before the trip we checked on various websites what was needed (blankets, nappies, feminine supplies, wipes and food/drinks) and went to purchase those items. We also made 200 sandwiches to give out. We travelled on M5 and M3 motorways to cover the big chunk of the road before entering the undersupplied villages of the North-East of Hungary. What they lack in money they make up in character (some of them and others are just struggling to survive).

Our first stop was Zahony. The crossing was fairly empty at the time but some cars were waiting to pick up people. We also saw buses at the nearest petrol station waiting for people to be transported to the shelters and processing facilities. We met an American guy, who was hitchhiking his way into Ukraine and was having trouble to enter the country on foot (as foot crossing was banned at this crossing). We have chatted with him and gave him supplies for his trip then we moved on to see what was happening at the train station. There were approximately 200 people. Some of them were foreign citizens from India, Pakistan, Africa and Middle Eastern countries leaving Ukraine. There were few Ukrainians and Hungarian-Ukrainians but they were mostly outside the station waiting for friends and family members to pick them up. Many Roma families were hanging around inside with numerous children and they had been there for days (as we found out from the aid staff). The Roma families complained to us about not receiving any more help from the aid agencies. We gave them supplies

and they kept asking for more and money. The aid agency camped outside the train station informed us that these families have been there for about 4 days and refusing to be moved on to refugee facilities.

We wanted to help but felt a bit used when we found this out.

Our next stop would have been Lonya but the ferry across the river was broken and was not in service. They were working on repairing it but we decided to take a detour to the next crossing.

Barabas was the next point and the ferry to it was working. On the way there we came across military ambulances headed towards the border. This stop had a few cars coming into the country and the pedestrians were transported by buses and vans to the village facility helped by Caritas Hungarica (a catholic charity) and other governmental disaster agencies. They were well prepared with lots of donations and helpers. There were approximately 100 people at the time but they were all spread out. We were given a tour by one of the aid workers and saw people being well taken care of. Managing traumatized families is not easy and holding them with care and reassurance for an unknown tomorrow is complicated. It was good to see the resilience of children as they were jumping on beds or running around. Some were clearly withdrawn and in shock. We left some blankets and thermo sheets with them and travelled on.

Beregsurany had some cars lined up to enter Hungary and a bus was waiting for passengers to take them to the local facility. The original aid station at the border by now was abandoned and blown away by the wind. They moved to the community hall in the village to be able to handle to number of people they were receiving which again had plenty of donations and helpers. We saw presence of Caritas Hungarica, Baptist Good Will and governmental disaster agencies. This was the biggest crowd of people of all facilities we have seen that day. Numbers are hard to guess as they were continuously processing them and many were also waiting to be picked up or moved onto more permanent refugee facilities. We have left food supplies here and were told about Tivadar.

On the way to Tivadar we came across Tiszabecs. Another community hall where people were welcomed and processed according to their plans. Most people, by this time, we understood, had somewhere to go either in Hungary or beyond to another country. It is important to know, Ukrainian economy-based migrants have been coming to Hungary in large numbers for years and most Hungarian-

Ukrainians have family members in Hungary to help them. So we didn't meet many of these groups. Even in this facility the most mothers and children we saw were Roma people. And as life has it one woman was in labor on one of the beds of the community hall by the stage. Our heart went out to her to be in such a vulnerable state in such a chaotic situation. An ambulance was called for her and while they waited for it she moaned on with aid workers around her. Outside were many buses waiting for people to be taken to their destinations.

Tivadar was not a crossing town but the local church offered their summer holiday facility for people to be housed there. In Beregsurany we heard that many women and children were stationed in Tivadar for the time being. As we arrived two vans full of supplies were off loading donations and we left all our remaining supply items there. Once again, the temporary residents (about 40 and were awaiting 30 more the next day) there were all Roma and while they thanked us for bringing things to them they also complained that they are not getting enough. They asked us for money, TV and baby-carriage. The staff who were taking care of them and living with them there for the time being were frustrated as these families continually asked for more while throwing unwanted stuff out the windows.

Driving back we noticed on the motorway the number-plates on cars were in large numbers Ukrainian which allowed us to think that those who had means to drive out of their country they did. On the way home we tried to sum up the day and reflect on what we have accomplished with this trip. We settled on the fact that we didn't want to give to a big organization and wanted to see that supplies will go where they are needed. It was good to see that Hungary has responded well and activated its resources. Many of these community halls have playgrounds where children could play. One of the most important things is to facilitate the energy and resilience of children. People have sent many supplies and we were amongst many delivering with their own cars. The sad part of it was to see some are blatantly taking advantage of a devastating situation.

At the moment we are following the events to see if any particular need is voiced before we respond with more donations and/or help. We don't want to let the actions or greed of the few to take away from the need of the many who are truly facing hardship and displacement; not to mention the long term effects of the trauma they have endured. There is and will be a need for various support for

these people and as the war continues there may be more of them seeking refuge.