

A Journey of Humanitarian Support and Integration

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Please tell us about your organization and your role during the humanitarian crisis.

I work with Radautiul Civic, which was founded in 2017 to promote active citizenship. We build minimum civic infrastructure in the region to develop communities and make people more aware of their role as citizens. Since 2017, we have developed many projects related to local good governance, like monitoring decision-makers, promoting transparency, and conducting workshops and training for citizens on civic engagement. In the past years, we have built a community with more than 150 occasional volunteers.

Already, the pandemic was a good occasion to practice our responsiveness. We worked with state institutions, hospitals, and the sanitary system. When the war started in February 2022, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we started offering basic humanitarian support for refugees. In addition, in collaboration with the Red Cross, we installed tents.

In the first few weeks of the war, we rented a warehouse. Using it as a humanitarian hub, we sent over 270 shipments to Ukraine. Since the start of the war, more than 150 volunteers have been present on the border until the summer of 2023. Following the decrease in the wave of refugees, our operation halted at the border. In general, we had four major directions, including support at the border, running the humanitarian hub, support for refugee camps, and integration activities such as language classes, psychological counseling, legal assistance, and intercultural activities.

Which were the most difficult moments?

First and foremost, the coordination of efforts was the major challenge since there was a duplication of efforts. Secondly, finding qualified humanitarian workers was also another challenge that we faced.

What worked well in regard to the (Romanian/regional) efforts to address the humanitarian crisis?

The response from civil society in the form of solidarity and mobilization was beyond expectations. It helped the Romanian state develop a public policy for tackling long-term humanitarian

challenges. Furthermore, the communication channel that was established and improved with the public authorities also contributed largely to having an institutional solution for future emergencies. Finally, another effective aspect of the efforts was enhancing communication between Romanian civil society and international organizations such as UN agencies.

What could have worked better?

To begin with, joint efforts or so-called humanitarian efforts could have worked better through close cooperation to realize our strengths and weaknesses for a better response to the situation. Moreover, the availability of similar effort stories around the world could have also been useful for better preparation and response. Finally, from the perspective of organizational capacity, the burnout or overloading of core members of the efforts could have been avoided.

What are you focusing on in your work at the moment?

Our organization's key focus right now is integration. Approximately 80,000–90,000 Ukrainian refugees live in Romania and want to integrate into society. Thus, language courses constitute a major part of our focus because language is the main barrier to their smooth integration. Similarly, we also empower the local Ukrainian communities to become more autonomous and create their NGOs by providing legal assistance.

Using the community hub, they organize events that include activities for children, intercultural activities, and training and workshops. The goal of the integration is to empower the local Ukrainian communities and help them better represent their interests before decision-makers.

What needs do you see at the moment that could be addressed better?

The main needs are resources that would enable us to continue supporting the integration efforts for the Ukrainians in northern Romania. Financial resources are important as they enable us to ensure the continuity of our efforts, such as paying the language teachers. What is more, it is difficult to find qualified human resources who are aware of the legislation and public policies that are linked to integration.

Any other thoughts and suggestions?

The Romanian Civil Society should assess this effort to draw key lessons for future responses by building and improving their capacity.

Interview by Siyawash Obaidy

Photo by Alexas_Fotos

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