

Interview with Mihai Lupu; How technology had an instrumental role in the first response of the Department of Emergency Situations during the Ukrainian Humanitarian Crisis

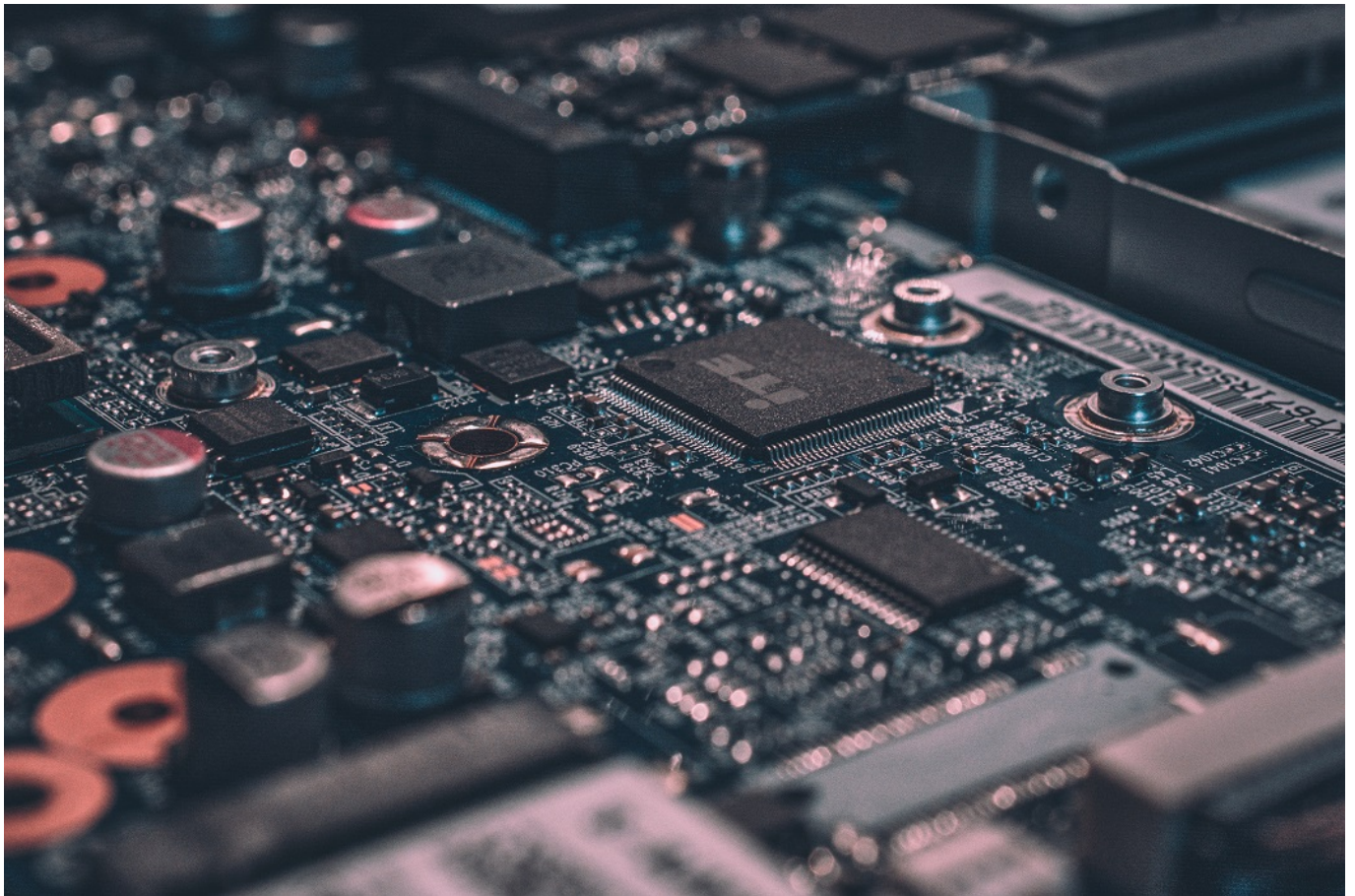


Photo credit: [Alexandre Debiève](#)

Date: May, 2023

Mihai Lupu is the Advisory to the Secretary of State, Raed Arafat, who is the chairman of the Department of Emergency Situations (DSU) and the Secretary of State for the Ministry

of Internal Affairs. His role is instrumental in coordinating the DSU response to the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis.

Please tell us about your role(s) during the humanitarian crisis.

The DSU is an umbrella organisation that responds to every emergency that may occur at the level of the state in coordination with the affiliated partners. Several institutions are part of the integrated response/ reaction, like the General Inspectorate of Aviation, the Emergency Reception Units (UPU), SMURD, the Romanian General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (IGSU), etc. As an Advisory to the Secretary of State, my area of expertise is in relation to the private sector, non-governmental institutions, and civil society. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I have been the contact person that creates the lines of communication between civil society, NGOs, and the DSU. We started with a Whatsapp group, which has gathered more than 200 members in the first week, as a temporary measure for various organisations to communicate and find solutions. Meanwhile, we looked for alternatives, and contacted the Employers' Association of the Software and Services Industry (ANIS). We moved our platform to Microsoft Teams. Receiving 1000 licences from Microsoft, we expanded the group and detailed our work. The aim was to systemize all coordination efforts into an interdisciplinary inter-sector platform structured on different areas of crisis response. We, therefore, replaced the old WhatsApp group with a platform where people could easily find the requested information. Within the platform, there are sections related to border patrols, medical services and first aid, legal and psychological assistance, integration at the level of society, and logistics, all offered to the refugees. Also, there is an infographic detailing the first response process in case of an emergency like the current humanitarian crisis.

Did the use of technology make any difference?

We have established relations with different NGOs and academic structures. I will share a link where you can find more details about the role of technology. Mainly, the role of the DSU is to inform and protect the population, as we are in constant talk with many organisations. Apart from communicating with them, there are general meetings and common exercises to prepare a better response in case of an intervention. It is all about following the standard protocol and organising better. Regarding the digital ecosystem for Ukraine, there are shared practices with 20 organisations, as we want to keep them close and form protocols. Many have been invited to participate in the series of exercises in Targu Mures in May. We are undertaking these actions to calibrate our response.

Is there any need for better communication?

There is always a need for better communication between organisations. We should do this by engaging in similar projects and learning from each other. It is only natural to take part in concrete actions. For example, if an area from Greece is covered in fire, then through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, Romania can send its help. In that case, you have to react instantly and use the knowledge of our experts from institutions and NGOs. Another example would be the recent events in Turkey with the earthquakes, as many organisations contacted us via the platform for Ukraine. As these associations did not have any background, we could not provide them with any recommendations. I know it was all the emotional hype back then, but we did not know with whom we were dealing. Besides the communication at the level of our institution, we have to inform our citizens and keep them updated. We launched an app for DSU and a new website called fiipregatit.ro, where people can find all sorts of useful information. We collaborated with CivicNet to create this online platform and continue to work on it. Also, starting from the end of March, the qualified personnel of Fiipregatit

and SMURD launched two fully equipped vans where people could learn and simulate different emergent activities. We were able to reach many communities and want to extend the number of vans to four.

Can you tell us a meaningful moment from your experience with addressing the humanitarian crisis?

An important moment was starting to calibrate our response with the other organisations. It took a while to organise ourselves, but we understood the situation. As we were alone and needed to cooperate. The whole process taught us how to act efficiently. This is what I would call a meaningful moment.

Can you tell us a difficult moment?

A difficult moment is happening now. The transition from the 50/20 program was not easy at first. It was introduced as a measure to encourage the Romanian people to accommodate the Ukrainian refugees and to distribute them more easily. Yet, there are no conditions stipulated in the program to start the process of integration for these persons. Right now, they are changing the system, but there will still be a lot of pressure on the reception centres. Many people will potentially get evacuated from their current accommodation.

Last year was a difficult one for us. We always had to react quickly and adapt to each new challenge.

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Interview with Javier Garcia; European support for addressing the Ukrainian Humanitarian Crisis

Author: Lutz Drieling

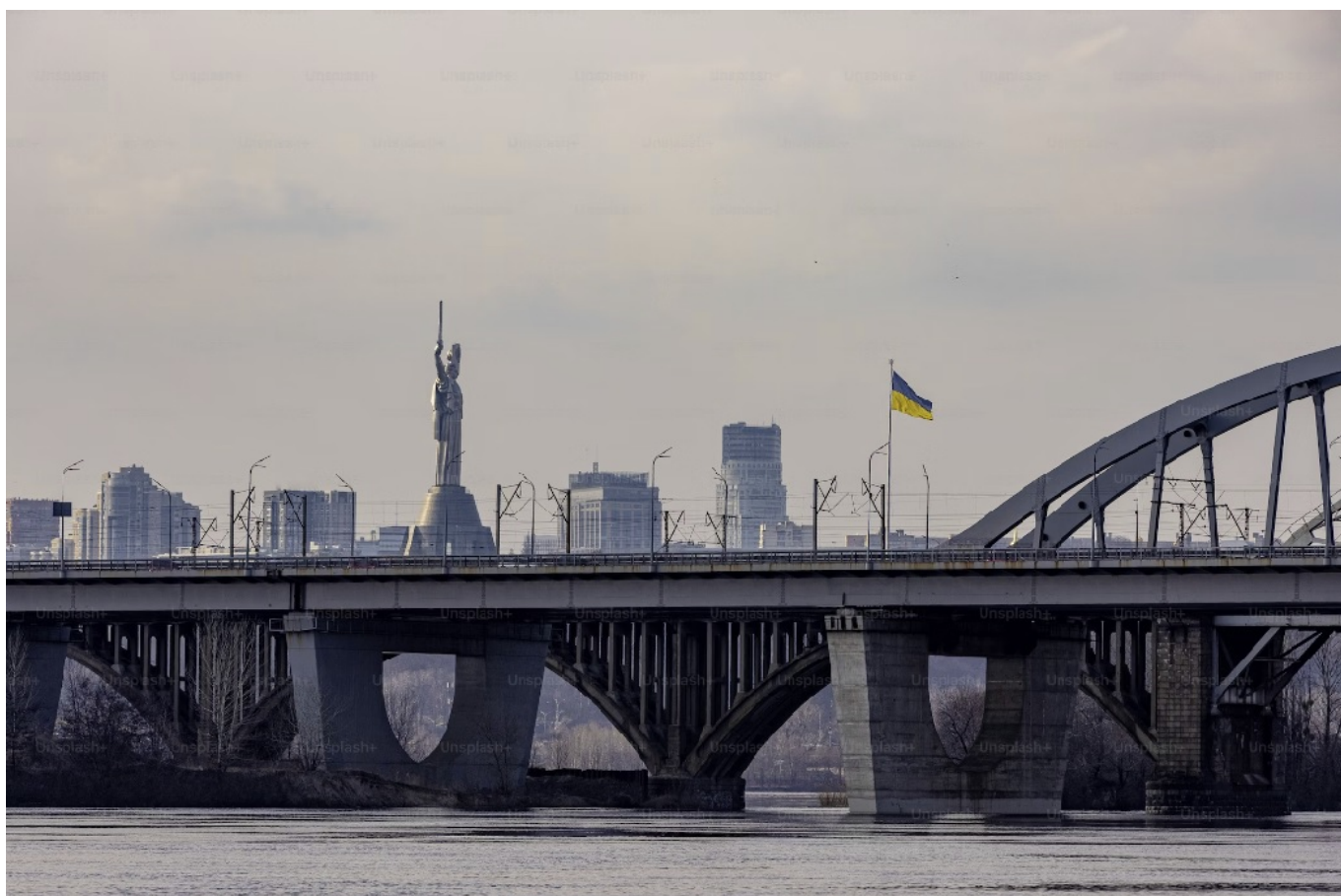


Photo credit: [Andrew Petrishev](#)

Date: May, 2023

Javier Garcia is the Head of Country Support in Europe and the Americas at ActionAid International. He is a trained economist with 20 years of experience in the development sector.

Please tell us about your role(s) during the humanitarian crisis.

In the Humanitarian Crisis in Ukraine, ActionAid is providing support to our members in Europe and the Americas and doing policy work. When the Crisis started ActionAid decided to intervene, even though we don't have ActionAid members in Ukraine or Romania. We wanted to support our local partners and provide help. I am part of the larger group of ActionAid, but I am not a member of the teams that directly carry out our humanitarian aid, I focus more on policy work.

Which were the most difficult moments?

The beginning was the most challenging. The needs were high, and a lot of people left Ukraine in a short period of time. Help was needed and to respond on short notice with the right services was complicated. We also work with partners who did not work particularly on a humanitarian response before. Suddenly they had to shift their priorities and their way of interacting. No one was prepared and we and our partners had to adapt. It was also hard to bring the right team to the place. Our team members from non-European countries like India could come but getting work permits and visas was challenging. We also had trouble deciding where to start and on what to focus on and then to communicate our strategies.

Which were the most meaningful moments?

After the first three months, we were sitting together to reflect on what we did and what should be done differently, and how we want to go on with the team, and partners. This changed our humanitarian response. We discussed how to set up support in the future, we discussed the leadership, and how to protect our target groups. Overall, it was about what we can

do differently and how we can improve, this was meaningful to me.

Please tell us about your organisation and how it contributes to addressing the humanitarian crisis.

ActionAid interacts through members or partners in 70 countries. We provide relief in Europe for the Ukrainian crisis. Considering our long-term relations with our partners, it was our responsibility to act. We were no experts on Eastern Europe and the Eastern neighbourhood, but we could rely on partnerships and their knowledge. We worked on all related sectors like cash support, nonfood items, shelter, protection services, psycho-social support, and livelihood support. We tried to make it accessible to all these displaced people coming at the beginning to Romania, later than also to Moldova and Ukraine. We try to target as many people as possible, but we focus especially on women, youth, and everyone left behind by traditional humanitarian responses like LGBTQI+, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.

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

It is interesting that the capacities in Romania adapted and transformed from a development framework to a humanitarian response. This was great. We identified partners, collaborated with them, and empowered them to offer specialised support. It is important to work with youth groups for supporting youth, women groups to support women, etc. They are the best service provider for their individual target groups. We saw that the crisis would last and needed a sustainable response. I was surprised that Youth groups were prepared, and they showed they can have a meaningful role in their response to this humanitarian crisis.

What could have worked better?

We struggled to deploy our staff due to visa restrictions. We can deploy our European staff to the Global South, without any problem but the other way around it is quite challenging. In addition, Information was not spread fast enough. We needed and still need real data and qualified information as examples about women to create appropriate services or inform society how to support and how to not do harm. Professionalization was missing and people drove to the border for taking children and bringing them to safety endangering them to trafficking and abuse. They needed to be educated on how to do humanitarian response and what should not be done.

What are you focusing on in your work now?

We dedicate more capacities and resources to Ukraine and less to Romania, Poland, and Moldova. The most needs are in Ukraine now. The response is the same, Psychosocial support, information, and assistance. Just the focus on the location changed. We also try now to increase our long-term development approach in combination with our humanitarian response.

What needs do you see now that could be addressed better?

Compared to a year ago everything is better already. Access to help is different. We have better-established relations with local organisations. Now the recovery process has started. This is a challenge. We must discuss peace and recovery, but we must do this with civil society organisations and their role is not clear yet. How can you discuss recovery without them? This is something that must be worked on.

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Interview with Diana Tonea; When work comes home, suddenly there is a crisis.

Author: Lutz Drieling



Photo credit: [Julie Ricard](#)

Date: May, 2023

Diana Tonea is Interim Ukraine Cash Consortium Director (UCC). She worked for the Appraisal Monitoring and Evaluation, of the Syrian crisis and afterwards for 3 years in Iraq for the Norwegian Refugee Council. She was Head of Mission for IRC in Libya in Tunisia. And then Emergency Response Consortium Director in Colombia for the Mercy Corps. Now, Diana works, among other organizations, for Mercy Corps.

Please tell us about your role(s) during the humanitarian crisis.

I led a cash assistance response mission for Romania and Moldovan. In addition, I supported setting up cash assistance in Ukraine. I also wrote [three papers connected to the Ukrainian crisis and cash response](#) as the interim director of the Ukraine Cash Consortium.

Which were the most difficult moments?

I used to be an international Humanitarian Aid expert, deployed in high-risk areas. I never expected to have a crisis like we have now in my home country. Suddenly international colleagues were deployed to my country. It seemed unreal. They do not speak the language, they need accommodation and support structures and suddenly, as a local, the aid system looked rather colonialist. People come, unable to call themselves a taxi, totally dependent on locals for doing their job. Of course, they bring a lot of expertise, but as a local, I suddenly had a totally different look at the work I did for years. I realised that we need more localization of our work and to advise local societies and small actors on how to offer humanitarian aid rather than deploying experts, with all its costs, to do the work and then go home.

Which were the most meaningful moments?

That I could bring in my experience from my work in Colombia to create partnerships, consortiums, and cooperation for targeting the Ukrainian crisis. I could follow a vision and

think big and finally implement all the ideas. Our work took over as soon as authorities and societies were exhausted and went back to their normal operation. With the Ukraine Cash Consortium (UCC) we created a 100 mil. USD emergency response portfolio. To succeed with something like that, together with a like-minded team just feels great.

Please tell us about your organisation and how it contributes to addressing the humanitarian crisis.

Mercy Corps was the last organisation I worked for. In the Ukrainian response, we have projects in Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. Here, at Mercy Corps, I work with local partners and implement cash-based assistance.

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

The initial response of the civil society and its eagerness to help was something I never saw in Romania. It was impressive how everybody mobilised and tried to do something. The enthusiasm was stunning.

What could have worked better?

Of course, there were gaps in the response of the people. Border points became “markets” offer-driven rather than driven by demand. We have to offer services people need. This was often a transportation opportunity to Italy rather than a Teddy bear. We must think about what people need, what they get on the market, and what they do not get. What they do not get on the market is what we have to offer. No one from the people, eager trying to help, knew the principle of offering support without doing harm, to understanding the specific vulnerabilities of women and children to Human trafficking or abuse. Accommodations must be divided by gender. The authorities tried to coordinate this help after some time. But they must learn how to adapt and how to coordinate support. The architecture of humanitarian aid in Romania must be

improved. We must use existing and functioning support architectures. There is a way to do Humanitarian Aid. I would have preferred if the Romanian authorities would have cooperated with the UN agencies rather than trying to keep control. I feel we could have done more by partnering up with local actors, to teach them how to do Humanitarian Aid. To exchange knowledge of local and international actors and how to support each other.

What are you focusing on in your work now?

I am collaborating with Mercy Corps on the response in Ukraine and for the Ukraine cash consortium as a director.

What needs do you see now that could be addressed better?

Financial assistance and humanitarian cash. Our markets work, people have access to it and that should be used. People lost their jobs, are displaced, and had to rebuild everything. By now they used their savings and are unemployed. They are in a tricky situation, and they need access to meet their basic needs but also opportunities to rebuild their lives. And of course, to link them to a social protection system. The Ukrainian system is quite strong and supports the most vulnerable. People who are now displaced still need this access to a similar net of social safety. We must map new vulnerabilities and act on them. Also, people at the frontline need support, they lack access to the market. The number one priority must be their safety.

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HelpAge

HelpAge is a global network of organisations which are focusing on the support of elderly which are affected by humanitarian crises and stand up for their needs and rights.

<https://www.helpage.org/>

Newsletter: <https://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/>

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**Meeting the health needs of
displaced people fleeing**

Ukraine: Drawing on existing technical guidance and evidence.

N. Kumar, Bernadette (2022)

“The invasion of Ukraine has unleashed a humanitarian crisis and the impact is devastating for millions displaced in Ukraine and for those fleeing the country. Receiving countries in Europe are reeling with shock and disbelief and trying at the same time to grapple with the reality of providing for a large, unplanned, unprecedented number of refugees. There is a need to constantly assess the situation on the ground. Therefore, the Lancet Migration European Regional Hub conducted rapid interviews with key informants to identify these needs, and in collaboration with the World Health Organization Health and Migration Programme, summarized how these could be addressed. This viewpoint provides a summary of the situation in receiving countries and the technical guidance required that could be useful for providing assistance in the current refugee crisis.”

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2022.100403>

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The humanitarian crisis in Kharkiv

Chumachenko Dmytro and Chumachenko Tetyana, (2022)

This paper emphasises that the international community must ensure the supply of humanitarian aid from European countries. Russia must comply with international humanitarian law, ensure the protection of the civilian population, and refrain from unlawful attacks. The space for neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian action must be protected so that humanitarian organisations can have access to civilians.

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.o796>

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