

Beat: News

Doctors Without Borders in Ukraine

Need for medical supplies

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USPA NEWS - Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is stepping up its medical humanitarian response to the deepening humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and in neighboring countries, where more than 4.1 million refugees have fled.

MSF has a longstanding presence in Ukraine, including in parts of the eastern region that have been affected by armed conflict since 2014. A large part of their work in Ukraine from 2014 to 2021 was responding to the needs of patients with HIV, tuberculosis or other chronic illnesses. Due to the current war, they have halted normal activities and have started emergency activities in Ukraine. They also have teams in Poland, Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia, Russia, and Belarus. MSF is an independent and impartial organization committed to providing medical humanitarian assistance to people affected by the war no matter who they are or where they are.

MSF staff in Ukraine are assessing humanitarian needs, delivering urgent medical supplies, providing training to hospitals on how to manage mass casualty incidents, and preparing to expand activities. On March 6, MSF's first shipment of emergency medical supplies was delivered to the Ukrainian Ministry of Health in Kyiv, and subsequent shipments have arrived since then. They supply surgical kits, trauma kits, and other basic necessities, including for hospitals in areas farther east where they are especially needed.

They are working with medical facilities in many parts of the country to help meet current needs and prepare for what might come next. So far the most urgently needed supplies are surgical, trauma, emergency room (ER), and intensive care unit (ICU) equipment and drugs. A broader picture of other key medical items is coming into focus as the conflict continues, including insulin for diabetes patients and medicines for patients with other chronic diseases such as asthma, hypertension, or HIV. Transportation of some of these essential supplies will require the added complexity of a cold chain.

Displaced people are now sheltering in Lviv and other towns in western Ukraine. Many have left their homes with only what they could carry. Local volunteers and civil society organizations are working hard to help them, but conditions are harsh, with available accommodations already past capacity. MSF is donating a large supply of cold weather items including sleeping bags, warm clothes, and tents to civil society organizations supporting displaced people.

On March 13 and 14, an MSF surgical team visited the 750-bed Okhmatdyt pediatric hospital in central Kyiv to begin providing training and advice related to trauma surgery and the management of mass casualty events. In Bilal Tsverka, about 50 miles south of Kyiv, an MSF team is leading a two-day training on managing mass casualties and donating supplies to health facilities in the region. In Chernihiv, northern Ukraine, they provided medical supplies to a regional hospital and a maternity hospital. In Kharkiv, northeastern Ukraine, they are preparing to run mobile clinics in subway stations where people are sheltering. Another MSF team is planning to provide mass casualty training for hospital workers.

MSF has assessed the needs in health facilities in Uzhhorod and Ivano-Frankivsk and are establishing a network to provide medical donations, including in front-line areas. They are carrying out training related to chemical, biological, radio-logical and nuclear risks for health professionals in Ivano-Frankivsk and have carried out a mass casualty training at the main referral hospital in Mukachevo. A team has started running mobile clinics along the border with Hungary, where displaced people are gathered. The needs include mental health care and continuity of care for patients who were on treatment for medical conditions before they were displaced.

In the southern cities of Odessa and Mykolaiv, they have donated medical supplies to hospitals preparing to accept wounded. On April 4, a four-person MSF team visited Mykolaiv to meet with city and regional health authorities. As they entered the city's oncology hospital, which has been treating wounded people since the beginning of the war, the area around the hospital came under fire. In Lviv, teams have donated medical supplies to health facilities and are providing mass casualty training to hospital staff. On April 1, nine people, including children, in serious but stable condition were transferred from a hospital in Zaporizhzhia in southeastern Ukraine, to major referral hospitals in Lviv on a dedicated two-car medical train that MSF developed together with the Ukrainian Railways.

Just before the war began in late February, MSF surgeons with experience in war zones provided training remotely to surgeons in key

hospitals in eastern Ukraine that have since received many wounded people. In Dnipro, an MSF team has conducted mass casualty trainings in hospitals and donated medical supplies to the regional hospital, helping prepare for future needs. In Kramatorsk, they have donated supplies to seven hospitals with the highest needs. In Orikhiv, they have donated first aid and surgical kits, and have provided mass casualty training for medical staff.

The humanitarian crisis in Mariupol is growing more and more desperate. The city in southeastern Ukraine remains surrounded by Russian military forces and subject to repeated artillery and aerial bombardment. Residents shelter in basements. Shops are closed. Food and clean water are difficult to find. Pharmacies have run out of medicines. People are lying dead in the streets. Gas and electricity have been off for days, in sub-zero temperatures. People are making fires to cook food and keep warm. Many ceasefire attempts have failed, trapping people inside the city and preventing humanitarian aid from entering. Civilian and medical infrastructure has been damaged, and communication is extremely limited.

More than 387,000 people have crossed into Moldova from Ukraine since the war began. Moldova, which has a population of just 2.6 million people, now hosts the largest concentration of Ukrainian refugees per capita, according to the UN Refugee Agency. At the Palanca border crossing, an MSF team is supporting Moldovan health staff on site and offering psychological first aid to refugees escaping the fighting in southern Ukraine. They also set up a health post near the border crossing in Otaci this week, offering similar services. Teams in the capital, Chişinău, have provided psychological first aid to people in reception centers and are evaluating how to improve access to health care for refugees in hospitals.

More than 2.3 million people have fled Ukraine to Poland so far. MSF initially donated non-food items to the Red Cross Lublin and to a reception point in Horodlo, near the Zosin border crossing. Staff in Poland have assessed needs at border crossings, transit centers, and train stations, and are also supporting emergency response in Ukraine.

As of March 29, nearly 365,000 people having crossed as refugees into Hungary. While the initial assessments indicated that many of the immediate needs of refugees are being met, they have started working with the support of Hungarian doctors, in partnership with local organizations, to provide primary health care and psychological first aid.

More than 280,000 people have crossed into Slovakia from Ukraine as of March 29. An MSF emergency team arrived in the country at the beginning of March to assess the medical and humanitarian needs. They signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health in order to import medical supplies and enable our possible work in the future. For the moment, critical medical and humanitarian needs in Slovakia are being met by local authorities and civil society groups.

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