

ESI newsletter 3/2022 22 March 2022

An urgent airlift for Ukrainian refugees – how Putin's cynical plot will fail



Ukrainians displaced in Lviv

Dear friends,

Four weeks into Russia's assault, more than <u>3.5 million people</u> have already fled Ukraine. If things continue as they are going, a total of 5 million Ukrainians will have fled to the EU by the end of March. It could be 10 million refugees reaching the European Union within another few weeks after that.

Knowing the numbers is one thing. Understanding their importance is something else entirely. Some in Europe still find it difficult to understand their significance: what it means to experience the biggest refugee catastrophe in Europe since the end of the Second World War. However, European leaders do not have much time to adapt to this new reality. They must, immediately, act and think in ways appropriate to the scale of this humanitarian challenge.

During the equally historic refugee movement in 2015, one million people crossed the Aegean from Turkey in 12 months. Since the beginning of Vladimir Putin's attack on Ukraine on 24 February, more than 100,000 people – mainly women and children – have fled from Ukraine to the European Union and Moldova every day. That is 1 million people a week.

Location name 🔷	Source	Data date 🔷	Population 🔻
Poland	Government	21 Mar 2022	2,113,554
Romania	Government	21 Mar 2022	543,308
Republic of Moldova	Government	21 Mar 2022	367,913
Hungary	Government	21 Mar 2022	317,863
Slovakia	Government	21 Mar 2022	253,592
Russian Federation	Government	21 Mar 2022	252,376
Belarus	Government	21 Mar 2022	4,308

UNHCR: Total Refugee influx from Ukraine in neighbouring countries

The practical question is: how can the rest of Europe respond?

Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary, and Slovakia cannot be expected to take all these people in. In Warsaw (population before this crisis: 1.8 million) there are already 300,000 refugees, 90,000 of them children of school age. In Poland alone, there are an estimated 2.1 million refugees. Europe's poorest country, Moldova, is now hosting more than 100,000 refugees; more than wealthy Austria took in during the whole 2015 crisis.

10 million refugees



Interview on German TV on 5 March

www.esiweb.org

A few weeks ago, we predicted that 10 million Ukrainians might flee their country. This was based on the experience of the wars Vladimir Putin had previously waged, such as in Chechnya in 2000. In Syria, where Putin's forces back Bashar al-Assad, a fourth of the population had to flee abroad because of the massive brutality and wanton destruction of civilian infrastructure. One month into the war in Ukraine it is becoming clear that 10 million refugees is, unfortunately, an all too realistic assumption.

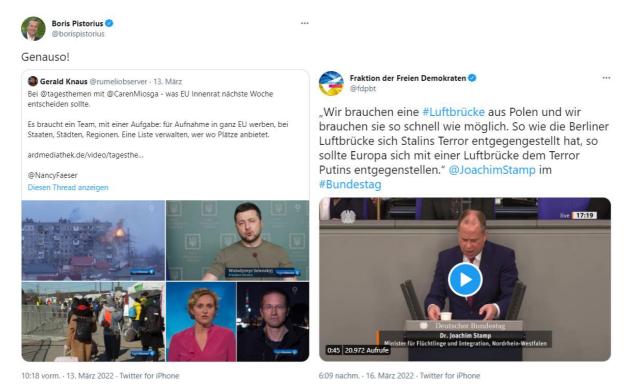
Millions of people, mainly women and children, will thus be looking for accommodation and reception in the coming weeks. Where, and how, will they find them? Poland has taken more than it will be able to look after already. So have other neighbours of Ukraine. Neither Central-European EU members nor Germany alone will be able to provide all of them with adequate shelter and services, including schooling for the very larger number of children, unless there is a broader mobilisation of European and North American democracies.

Last week, we published a <u>call for a massive airlift for Ukrainian refugees</u>.

An airlift 2022 for Ukrainians Proposal for a Macron-Scholz Plan

If another 2 million people arrive in the next two to three weeks, then one million is likely to make its way to Austria and Germany by train or car. Another million, however, should be offered to board planes (or buses) to be taken directly to other counties in Europe: to Spain, Portugal, Ireland, or Sweden, but also to the UK, perhaps even to the United States and Canada.

Is that realistic? If Spain and Portugal together were to agree to take in 160,000 by the end of March, and France and the UK each did the same then yes, it would be possible. This would mean: 1,500 flights with 300 people on board by the end of March to those four countries alone.



German leaders – Boris Pistorius (SPD) and Joachim Stamp (FDP) endorsing airlift

<u>Joachim Stamp</u>, the refugee and integration minister in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous state, recently called on the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, to work with France to help evacuate 1 million refugees from Poland and Moldova for resettlement throughout Western Europe, and possibly North America. The Minister of the Interior of German state of Lower Saxony, <u>Boris Pistorius</u>, called for such a mobilisation to start right away.

In Sweden, the government has understood the seriousness of the challenge and is talking about a scenario of taking in up to 200,000 people. The Austrian government is referring to similar figures. Germany is preparing to accommodate one million people soon.

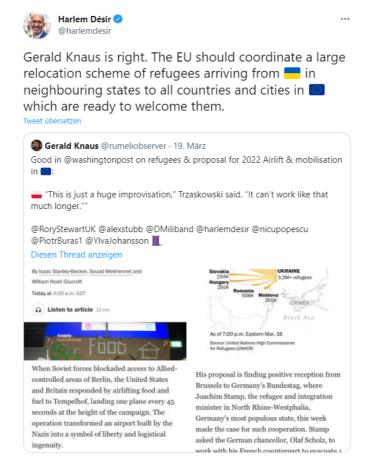
It is very likely that in the end a higher share of refugees will remain in the countries close to Ukraine, from Poland to Austria, from Moldova to Hungary. But to ensure that there is no chaos, that there are not hundreds of thousands of mothers and children (who constitute the bulk of the refugees) left out in the cold, that they are protected from exploitation, and that there is quick access to accommodation and to schooling, there needs to be a wider distribution.

The logistics of such an airlift for refugees from Ukraine are an enormous, but not an insurmountable, challenge.

It does not matter whether refugees end up being moved by Lufthansa or easyJet planes. In each participating country, a similar civil society mobilization to that already taking place in Poland and Germany would be required, with appeals to private individuals and cities to take people in. In the short term, there would be a need to mobilise temporary accommodation in empty halls, hotels, state reception centres.

For this to work, Ukrainian refugees would have to trust that it would be in their interest to fly from Chisinau, Iasi, Prague, Warsaw or Leipzig to Lisbon, Dublin, Madrid, Lyon, or Manchester. The communication and logistics needed require a level of collective organization the like of which has not been seen in Europe for decades. It is not comparable to any relocation or resettlement effort with which European or international institutions are familiar.

Thankfully, the legal basis for such a humanitarian effort already exists. With the entry into force of the EU Temporary Protection Directive, all those who flee to the EU have the right to be admitted anywhere in the EU. Switzerland and Denmark have adopted similar legislation at the national level. This makes things far simpler and constitutes a big departure from previous refugee policy, where national governments have sometimes blocked cities from taking in refugees on their own initiative. If all major cities in the EU announced today that they would want to take in more than two percent of their population, if someone could organise this, such an effort could begin immediately.



Harlem Désir, Senior Vice-President Europe, International Rescue Committee

The major challenge is not logistics, it's politics

The biggest challenge in making such a scheme work is not legal, nor even logistical, though logistics will be a huge challenge; it is political.

Which institution could, within days, coordinate such a historic effort for a successful Refugee Airlift 2022? Who will discuss with the Spanish prime minister how to move not 20,000 refugees in the next few months, but 120,000 in a fortnight? Who will talk with the government in London, where the EU's Temporary Protection Directive does not apply, how UK cities and citizens could participate in such an effort immediately?

Central to such an effort would be to communicate effectively in the many languages of Europe why such an effort is needed and what it is ultimately all about: a humanitarian endeavour to both help millions of people and to thwart Putin's cynical political calculations that democracies cannot handle these refugees and that millions fleeing Russian bombs might destabilize European societies and their institutions.



French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

This is why a small, flexible and political structure, preferably appointed to act in the name of both the EU and the G7, is needed immediately, best headed by an A-team of able, well-connected communicators - former heads of government or senior ministers. France's Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who fortunately currently chair the EU and G7 respectively, might appoint this team now. Wanted: a mixture of Lucius Clay, the American general of the Berlin Airlift, and Ernst Reuter, the charismatic West Berlin mayor at the time, both protagonists of the first major political and humanitarian test in the last Cold War.



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock calling on partners in the EU and the G7 to create an airlift for Ukrainian refugees

Such a coordination team does not need formal authority, as it should not compete with existing institutions, from the European Commission to international organisations, but cooperate with them. This is possible through persuasion and a focus on a common task. Success would require three things:

- 1. A public list on which all major commitments to the reception of refugees by cities, countries and regions are recorded every day: a *balance sheet* of solidarity, in the tradition of Jean Monnet, the father of European integration, and inspired by his efforts helping to coordinate the logistics of the allies during World War one and the reconstruction of France after World War two.
- 2. Direct access to governments and to public and private transport companies in order to coordinate their efforts so that any gaps are filled.
- 3. A team of filmmakers and communication experts to document, share and thus reinforce this mobilisation across Europe in real time. The most important ingredient for sustained success is the empathy of millions of people. Empathy thrives on attention and on gripping, emotional stories, told in a way that encourages and inspires.

All of this was achieved in 1948, when beleaguered West Berliners were supplied by more than 170,000 flights by allied pilots. The Berlin Airlift was a powerful political response that changed Europe's policy to this day. It gave rise soon after to the institutions of today's West: NATO, the Council of Europe, the first steps toward European integration. Stalin's blackmail failed.



U.S. Air Force transport planes during the Berlin Airlift in 1948

Ukrainian refugees and Putin's plan of attack

Today, Putin's cynical goal of blackmailing Ukraine and the EU through brutal warfare leading to mass displacement, as in Syria and Chechnya, must fail and must be seen to fail. Desperate Ukrainian refugees are part of Putin's plan of attack. His calculation is as ruthless as it is transparent: by expelling civilians, he hopes not just to demoralize Ukrainians and force them to surrender but also to make the EU turn against and betray Ukraine. This must not happen.

An Airlift 2022, a Macron-Scholz-EU-G7 initiative to implement the most generous refugee reception policy worldwide in decades, would be an appropriate response. It is about helping people, as well as bolstering the authority and credibility of the West as a community of values. It would be a humane response to inhumane cynicism.

Best regards,

Gerald Knaus

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ESI's proposal - recommended reading and watching

Nürnberger Nachrichten, <u>Migrations-Experte: Luftbrücke für Geflüchtete als Signal gegen</u>

<u>Putins zynisches Kalkül</u> ("Migration expert: Airlift for refugees as a signal against Putin's cynical calculations"), 21 March 2022



The Washington Post, Europe rewrote its migrant playbook for Ukrainian refugees. Some fear it's not enough, 19 March 2022

ZDF, "Das ist erst der Anfang" ("This is just the beginning"), TV interview with Gerald Knaus, 17 March 2022

Knack, <u>Migratie-expert Gerald Knaus: 'Leg een luchtbrug in voor Oekraïense vluchtelingen'</u> ("Migration expert Gerald Knaus: 'Set up an air bridge for Ukrainian refugees'"), interview with Gerald Knaus, 17 March 2022

Deutsche Welle, <u>TV interview with Gerald Knaus on Deutsche Welle on the Ukrainian</u> refugee crisis and what to do, 17 March 2022



Bis zu zehn Millionen Flüchtlinge aus der Ukraine? "Es müsste eine Luftbrücke geben – ähnlich wie 1948"

Der Migrationsforscher Gerald Knaus erklärt, wie Europa mit der historischen Fluchtbewegung umgehen kann. Ein humanitäres Chaos müsse verhindert werden, warnt er im Interview.

Der Tagesspiegel, <u>Bis zu zehn Millionen Flüchtlinge aus der Ukraine?</u>: "<u>Es müsste eine Luftbrücke geben – ähnlich wie 1948"</u> ("Up to ten million refugees from Ukraine?: "There should be an airlift - similar to 1948"), 15 March 2022

Swissinfo.ch, "No hay lugar para discursos vacíos" ("There is no room for empty speeches"), 12 March 2022

Телма ТВ, <u>Топ Тема 07.03.2022</u>, TV interview with Gerald Knaus on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its implications for the Western Balkans, 7 March 2022

aa.com, <u>AB-Türkiye 18 Mart Mutabakatı'nın mimarı Gerald Knaus Ukrayna mülteci krizini</u> <u>değerlendirdi</u>, ("Gerald Knaus, architect of the EU-Turkey 18 March Memorandum, evaluated the Ukrainian refugee crisis"), 4 March 2022

ZDF, Markus Lanz, 17 March 2022



ZDF, Markus Lanz – Ein Abend für die Ukraine, 10 March 2022

ZDF, Markus Lanz, 1 March 2022



Debate with German minister of the interior, Nancy Faeser

ZDF, Markus Lanz, 25 February 2022

MORE media coverage

The European Stability Initiative is being supported by Stiftung Mercator

