

# **JRS/USA official visits Ukrainian children who are refugees in Romania**

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Ahead of World Refugee Day June 20, Joan Rosenhauer, executive director of Jesuit Relief Service/USA, talked about her recent visit with Ukrainian children in Romania.

A former hotel in Bucharest, converted to shelter housing, holds some 300 women, children ages 2 to 18 and some elderly people. After the Russian invasion began Feb. 24, the Ukrainian government asked able-bodied men to stay behind and fight.

“How unusual but delightful it was to hear children laughing and playing,” she told Catholic News Service.

They’re still getting their education online through Ukraine’s education ministry, and JRS has hired some refugees as teachers and mentors, but with no visible end to the conflict or even signs of winding down, the refugees’ uncertainty can be emotionally crippling.

The war has created an estimated 13 million refugees, most of whom have fled to neighboring countries.

Although President Joe Biden has promised that the United States would accept up to 100,000 – they have to be privately sponsored – only about 6,000 have arrived so far, through the “Uniting for Ukraine” program, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Most Ukrainian refugees are trying to wait out the conflict in countries near their homeland and that creates challenges for the many charities involved. Rosenhauer is trying to raise

\$4.5 million for JRS' Romanian effort alone.

In the first three months of the war, she said, the agency has handled a surge of 10,000 refugees at six facilities in Romania alone. JRS/USA provides two meals a day, and vouchers are provided for the third.

JRS seeks to provide stability and emotional support while the agonizing wait wears on.

"It's very hard for people to think about what's in the mid-to longer term, not knowing what it would take to go back if their homes are destroyed," Rosenhauer said.

"We're building a community together," she said. "Building a home together."

"We've all seen the pictures of children sobbing," she added. "It's the only home they've ever known, and now they've had to pick up their belongings and leave. Just little things help them be children and have fun together."

On this last trip, Rosenhauer talked to a mother named Tanya, who arrived with her 13-year-old daughter.

Tanya's initial concern was for her daughter, who was having panic attacks. And her idea of refugee housing was a huge tent in which people slept on cots.

The daughter got psychological support to deal with the panic attacks, and the last time Rosenhauer saw her, she was happily embracing a friend as they giggled looking at their cellphones.

"As much as we think of how brave the soldiers are on the battlefield, families are just as brave as they arrive with children to build a life in a new country with a different language and customs. They are a model for JRS staff every day," Rosenhauer said in a statement issued for World Refugee Day.

“Fear has become the common feeling among Ukrainian refugees – fear of death of loved ones, fear of destruction of their communities and fear of being forgotten by the world,” she added.

JRS provides programing that helps displaced individuals around the world, providing assistance to: refugees in camps and cities; individuals displaced within their own countries; asylum-seekers in cities; and those held in detention centers.

Based in Washington, JRS/USA provides support to JRS programs throughout the world with funding, oversight and monitoring.

The United Nations established World Refugee Day June 20, 2001, in recognition of the 50th anniversary of its 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The international observance celebrates and honors refugees from around the world.