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VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN UKRAINE DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR (2014–2025)

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Abstract. The article analyzes the volunteer activities of religious organizations in Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014–2025. Two stages are identified. In the first stage (2014–early 2022), volunteer initiatives of religious organizations adapted to the localized conflict in Donbas. In the second stage (early 2022–2025), under the conditions of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, volunteering by religious organizations took on the character of humanitarian mobilization. The role of interfaith structures—above all, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO)—in shaping and supporting volunteer initiatives is demonstrated. It is argued that humanitarian assistance to civilians and military personnel was implemented primarily at the level of individual denominations. The article concludes that religious organizations became an important component of the volunteer movement and a factor of Ukraine’s national resilience in the humanitarian dimension.

Keywords: religious organizations, volunteering, All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO), internally displaced persons, chaplaincy, Russian-Ukrainian war.

Introduction

Since 2014, following the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine, and since 2022 under the conditions of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the traditional areas of social activity of religious organizations in Ukraine have undergone significant changes. Religious organizations initiated volunteer activities aimed at addressing the humanitarian consequences of the war. This involved not only forms of charity typical of religious institutions in peacetime, but also systematic participation in supporting internally displaced persons, military personnel and their families, facilitating the release of military and civilian captives, and developing the institution of

military chaplaincy, among other efforts. Such volunteer activity unfolded both at the level of interfaith organizations and within individual religious denominations. The first stage of volunteer activity by religious organizations in Ukraine lasted from 2014 to early 2022; the second stage began in early 2022 following the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Under wartime conditions, religious organizations effectively became part of the nationwide volunteer movement. Unlike previous years, when charitable work was predominantly social in nature, after 2014 it became directly linked to wartime challenges and to supporting the security and defense sector in the humanitarian dimension.

Within the framework of this article, the volunteer activity of religious organizations in Ukraine is understood as a set of initiatives aimed at providing free humanitarian, social, spiritual, and organizational assistance to civilians and military personnel under the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war. This includes both activities carried out directly by religious institutions and the work of affiliated charitable foundations and civic organizations.

Volunteer Activities of Religious Organizations in 2014–Early 2022

The outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014 posed a challenge for religious organizations in Ukraine to transform their traditional social role in a time of crisis. Responding to humanitarian challenges caused by hostilities in eastern Ukraine, religious organizations joined volunteer activities that combined interfaith initiatives and confessional programs, including local parish-level assistance. Thus, in 2014–early 2022, the main directions of volunteer activities by religious organizations were formed; these later became the foundation for their large-scale mobilization under the conditions of the full-scale phase of the war.

Already at the initial stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war in eastern Ukraine, an interfaith position was articulated in appeals issued by the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO), which called for stabilizing the socio-political situation in the country and searching for peaceful ways to settle the conflict.¹ Similar statements were made by representatives of other interfaith associations, in particular the Ukrainian Interchurch Council (UIC). The resolution of the All-Ukrainian Conference of the UIC, “The Church in a Time of Social Upheavals” (3 June 2014), emphasized the need to stabilize the situation and organize charitable service in eastern Ukraine, envisaging spiritual-psychological, medical, legal, and material assistance to those affected, including the provision

¹ Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій. Збірник документів 1996–2021. [All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Collection of Documents 1996–2021]. Київ: Медіа світ, 2021. 183-184.

of temporary housing.² On 9 July 2014, AUCCRO publicly stated its readiness to join the peace-settlement process, calling on illegal armed formations (supported by Russia) to cease violence and begin the release of captives.³ The communiqué of the AUCCRO meeting of 9 July 2014 expressed solidarity with those affected by the war in Donbas and proclaimed an appeal to “their faithful for active assistance and works of mercy to brothers and sisters from eastern Ukraine.”⁴ Thus, these interfaith appeals effectively marked the beginning of large-scale volunteer activity by religious organizations in the combat zone.

AUCCRO played a decisive role in coordinating these processes. On 31 October 2014, it issued a special appeal in support of charity and volunteering, stressing the exceptional importance of mutual assistance, mercy, and solidarity during one of the most difficult periods in Ukrainian history. Similar ideas were developed in AUCCRO’s appeal of 10 February 2015, dedicated to the duty to assist in the defense of the state.⁵

At the same time, other interfaith associations—notably the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine—announced in June 2014 an initiative to focus primarily on supporting internally displaced persons, especially those of Evangelical faith. This task was addressed by the newly created Interchurch Committee for Assistance to Refugees from Eastern Ukraine.⁶ In addition, in the summer of 2014 the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists established a Coordination Center for Assistance to Eastern Ukraine. It provided humanitarian assistance to displaced persons, organized the delivery of humanitarian aid to the east, and supported Ukrainian military personnel.⁷

Interfaith appeals issued by AUCCRO regarding assistance to victims in eastern Ukraine were regularly addressed to state authorities. An important development for volunteer assistance in the east was the off-site AUCCRO meeting held in Kramatorsk (Donetsk Oblast) on 2 November 2016. Following this meeting, a programmatic document was adopted aimed

² Резолюція всеукраїнської конференції Української міжцерковної ради “Церква у час суспільних потрясінь” [Resolution of the All-Ukrainian Conference of the Ukrainian Interchurch Council “The Church in Times of Social Upheaval”]. *Українська Міжцерковна Рада*, 03.06.2014. <https://umrada.org/03-06-2014-rezolyutsiya-vseukrayinskoji-konferen/>

³ Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій. Збірник документів 1996–2021. [All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Collection of Documents 1996–2021]. Київ: Медіа світ, 2021. 190.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 196-197.

⁶ Міжцерковний комітет з питань допомоги біженця зі Сходу України дозволить церквам діяти ефективніше [Interchurch Committee on Aid to Refugees from Eastern Ukraine Will Allow Churches to Act More Effectively]. *Українська Церква Християн Віри Євангельської*, 20.06.2014. <https://www.chve.org.ua/komitet-bijency/>

⁷ На Сході і для Сходу [In the East and for the East]. *Всеукраїнський союз церков євангельських християн-баптистів*, 06.2014. <https://www.baptyst.com/na-shodi-i-dlya-shodu/>

at peacebuilding and the development of Ukrainian society. In this document, the leaders of the largest churches and religious organizations of Ukraine called on the parties to the conflict to pursue peace.⁸ Ukrainian scholars have described this appeal as a conceptually coherent text demonstrating AUCCRO's self-positioning as a unified spiritual institution responsible for the moral condition of society.⁹

Alongside interfaith initiatives, individual religious organizations implemented their own humanitarian programs.¹⁰ Such activities were carried out by many denominations, both the largest and comparatively small ones—Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and others. A few examples include the following: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) carried out volunteer activities through the public organization Eleos-Ukraine;¹¹ the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) engaged in volunteer work through the charitable organization Caritas Ukraine;¹² in autumn 2014 the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) launched the charitable mission “Mercy Without Borders”;¹³ as of October 2014, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provided USD 1.5 million to support those affected by hostilities in Donbas.¹⁴ After its institutional establishment in late 2018—early 2019, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) began volunteer activities under the conditions of Russian military aggression, in particular through Eleos-Ukraine.¹⁵ There is also abundant evidence of

⁸ Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій. Збірник документів 1996–2021. [All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Collection of Documents 1996–2021]. Київ: Медіа світ, 2021. 201-203.

⁹ О. Горкуша, Л. Филипович. Геополітичний українсько-російський конфлікт: реакція українських церков [Geopolitical Ukrainian-Russian conflict: reaction of Ukrainian churches]. *Українське релігієзнавство*. 2016. № 79. 16.

¹⁰ Dmytro Vovk. Religion and Forced Displacement in Ukraine. *The Foreign Policy Centre*, 23.07.2020. <https://fpc.org.uk/religion-and-forced-displacement-in-ukraine/>

¹¹ У “Eleos-Ukraine” стартує проєкт з реабілітації військовослужбовців, що повернулись із зони АТО “Дорога додому” [“Eleos-Ukraine” launches a project to rehabilitate servicemen who returned from the ATO zone “Road Home”]. *Eleos-Ukraine*, 2016. <https://eleos.com.ua/u-eleos-ukraine-startuye-proekt-z-reabilitatsiyi-vijskovosluzhbovtiv-shho-povernulyis-iz-zony-ato-doroga-dodomu/>

¹² Сьогодні не уявляю обличчя нашої Церкви без “Карітас України”, – Глава УГКЦ з нагоди 30-річчя мережі благодійних організацій [Today I cannot imagine the face of our Church without “Caritas of Ukraine”, – Head of the UGCC on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the network of charitable organizations]. *Католицький оглядач*, 25.07.2024. <https://catholicnews.org.ua/sogodni-ne-uyavlyayu-oblichchya-nashoyi-cerkvi-bez-karitas-ukrayini-glava-ugkc-z-nagodi-30-richchya/>

¹³ Місія “Милосердя без кордонів” доставила 60 тон гуманітарної допомоги мирним жителям Сходу України [The “Mercy Without Borders” mission delivered 60 tons of humanitarian aid to civilians in Eastern Ukraine]. *Українська Православна Церква*, 17.10.2014. <https://church.ua/2014/10/17/misiya-miloserdy-bez-kordoniv-dostavila-60-tonn-gumanitarnoji-dopomogi-mirim-zhitelyam-sxodu-ukrajini/>

¹⁴ Мормонська Церква виділяє 1,5 млн. доларів на гуманітарну допомогу переселенцям з Донбасу [Mormon Church allocates \$1.5 million for humanitarian aid to displaced people from Donbas]. *Церква Ісуса Христа святих останніх днів*, 25.10.2014. <https://www.mormonnews.org.ua/стаття/mormon-church-helps-refugees-from-donbass>

¹⁵ Кількість парафій за часи війни на Донбасі збільшилася вдвічі – митрополит Донецький Сергій [The number of parishes in Donbas has doubled during the war – Metropolitan Sergiy of Donetsk]. *Український церковний вісник*. 2021. № 3. 12-21.

volunteer activity carried out by members of specific religious parishes under the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war. For instance, by early February 2017, a single Roman Catholic parish of St. Anthony in Lviv had delivered equipment for two dental offices to eastern Ukraine, along with shipments of food, clothing, and medicines.¹⁶

The main source of resources distributed by religious organizations among those in need was donations from believers.¹⁷ Volunteer campaigns in support of affected civilians and soldiers in the combat zone were conducted throughout Ukraine. International support arriving through foreign religious organizations also played a significant role. At the same time, the implementation of humanitarian programs encountered bureaucratic difficulties, primarily related to customs clearance of shipments. Following AUCCRO's appeals to the state leadership in October 2014, measures were taken to simplify the relevant customs procedures.¹⁸

A separate and exceptionally important area was the participation of religious organizations in efforts to release military and civilian captives. Owing to its organizational capacities, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) played a prominent role in this sphere, while other denominations joined these initiatives in part through AUCCRO mechanisms. For the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), amid sharply ambiguous assessments of its activity by segments of Ukrainian society under conditions of Russian military aggression, this became an opportunity to preserve its own authority. Efforts by the religious community to secure the release of Ukrainian military personnel and civilians from Russian captivity were carried out in close coordination with Ukrainian state authorities and international structures. One of the first interfaith appeals regarding the need to release captives was expressed by AUCCRO as early as 9 July 2014.¹⁹ At the same time, activities aimed at releasing Ukrainian political prisoners held in Crimea and in the Russian Federation were limited, since they largely remained within the realm of international diplomacy.

¹⁶ Парафія св. Антонія передала обладнання для ще одного стоматологічного кабінету на Сході України [St. Anthony Parish donated equipment for another dental office in Eastern Ukraine]. *Львівська Архідієцезія Римсько-Католицької Церкви в Україні*, 06.02.2017. http://www.rkc.lviv.ua/news_view-Parafiya_sv_Antoniya_peredala_obladnannya_dlya_shhe_odnogo_stomatologichnogo_kabinetu_na_Sxodi_Ukrainu-ua

¹⁷ Сергій Філіппов. Церква й АТО [The Church and the ATO]. *Україна молода*, 06.08.2014 <https://umoloda.kyiv.ua/number/2505/405/88735/>

¹⁸ Релігійні лідери закликали Уряд до взаємодії у справі благодійництва [Religious leaders called on the Government to cooperate in charity work]. *Інститут релігійної свободи*, 10.10.2014. http://old.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1469%3A1&catid=34%3Aua&Itemid=61&lang=uk

¹⁹ Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій. Збірник документів 1996–2021. [All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Collection of Documents 1996–2021]. Київ: Медіа світ, 2021. 190.

Nevertheless, religious leaders periodically initiated public appeals and individual acts of personal support for detainees. Thus, in September 2018, Archbishop Klyment of Simferopol and Crimea of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) visited the imprisoned Ukrainian civic activist Volodymyr Balukh in a pre-trial detention center in Simferopol.²⁰ On 25 July 2019, religious leaders participating in a roundtable held in Kyiv and dedicated to issues of religious freedom in Ukraine supported the Resolution on Ukrainian citizens illegally detained in the territory of the Russian Federation and in the occupied Crimea and Donbas. The document contained practical recommendations addressed to the Ukrainian political leadership and the international community regarding the optimization of the process of releasing Ukrainian prisoners and hostages.²¹

Spiritual care for military personnel was also implemented through the formation of the institution of military chaplaincy, which acquired practical form precisely after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war. From that time onward, chaplains of various denominations were systematically present in the combat zone, and the chaplaincy institution itself was formally regulated. As early as 2 July 2014, the Government of Ukraine issued the decree “On the Service of Military Clergy (Chaplaincy Service) in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard, the State Special Transport Service, and the State Border Guard Service.”²² This document, for the first time at the regulatory level, recognized the institution of military chaplaincy and initiated the chaplaincy service as an element of the military system rather than merely a volunteer practice. On 30 November 2021, the Law of Ukraine “On the Military Chaplaincy Service” was adopted.²³ This law established the legal status of military chaplains as a separate category of servicemen, defined their powers and principles of activity, and regulated the participation of religious organizations in ensuring the freedom of conscience of

²⁰ Павло Калашник. Архієпископ Климент відвідав Балуха у Криму: “Коли він зняв футболку, я побачив шкіру та кістки” [Archbishop Kliment visited Balukh in Crimea: “When he took off his T-shirt, I saw skin and bones”]. *Hromadske*, 17.09.2018. <https://hromadske.ua/posts/arkhiiepyskop-klyment-vidvidav-balukha-u-krymu-koly-vin-zniav-futbolku-ia-pobachyv-shkiru-ta-kistky>

²¹ Релігійні та громадські діячі України виробили рекомендації для звільнення українців, незаконно позбавлених волі в Росії, окупованих Криму та Донбасі [Religious and public figures in Ukraine have developed recommendations for the release of Ukrainians illegally detained in Russia, occupied Crimea, and Donbas]. *Релігія в Україні*, 26.07.2019. <https://www.religion.in.ua/news/vazhливо/44159-religijni-ta-gromadskiyachi-ukrayini-virobili-rekomendaciyi-dlya-zviltennya-ukrayinciv-nezakonno-pozbavlenix-voli-v-rosiyi-okupovanix-krimu-ta-donbasi.html>

²² Розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України “Про службу військового духовенства (капеланську службу) у Збройних Силах України, Національній гвардії, Державній спеціальній службі транспорту та Державній прикордонній службі” [Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On the service of military clergy (chaplaincy service) in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard, the State Special Transport Service and the State Border Guard Service”]. *Верховна Рада України*, 02.07.2014. <http://zakon5.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/677-2014-p>

²³ Закон України “Про Службу військового капеланства” [Law of Ukraine “On the Military Chaplaincy Service”]. *Верховна Рада України*, 30.11.2021. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1915-20#Text>

military personnel. The adoption of the Law of Ukraine “On the Military Chaplaincy Service” marked the final stage in the institutionalization of military chaplaincy in Ukraine under the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

According to information provided by the Center for Moral and Psychological Support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as of the end of 2021, 102 military chaplains served in official chaplaincy positions in the army. They represented the following religious denominations: the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the Ukrainian Evangelical Church, and the Evangelical Christian Church “Skyniya”. At that time, the youngest chaplain was 30 years old, while the oldest was 73.²⁴

Thus, during 2014–early 2022, the volunteer activities of religious organizations in Ukraine evolved from situational charitable assistance into a systemic, multi-vector social practice. The experience accumulated during this period, along with the established institutional mechanisms and networks of cooperation, became an important foundation for the large-scale mobilization of religious communities after the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022.

Volunteer Activities of Religious Organizations in Early 2022–2025

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 initiated a new stage in the development of volunteer activity by religious organizations. While since 2014 such activity had been gradually forming and adapting to the conditions of a localized armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, with the onset of the full-scale war it acquired the character of humanitarian mobilization. Religious organizations were forced to rapidly reorient their activities in response to unprecedented mass internal displacement and a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

During the first weeks of the full-scale war, many religious communities throughout Ukraine began collecting humanitarian aid for internally displaced persons and military personnel. Churches, monasteries, and parish buildings often became centers for collecting aid and functioned as volunteer hubs. Such activities were especially important in frontline regions and areas that received large numbers of internally displaced persons, where religious facilities

²⁴ Олександр Беккер. 102 капелани офіційно працюють у Збройних Силах України [102 chaplains officially work in the Armed Forces of Ukraine]. *Армія Inform*, 03.12.2021. <https://armyinform.com.ua/2021/12/03/102-kapelany-oficijno-praczuuyut-u-zbrojnyh-sylah-ukrayiny/>

frequently served as vital shelters for civilians. This is clearly illustrated by the experience of volunteer activities of religious organizations in early 2022 in Donetsk and Kherson oblasts.²⁵

At the interfaith level, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) continued to play a key coordinating role, including in the sphere of volunteer activity. Among Ukrainian interfaith structures, AUCCRO during this period consolidated its position as the leading interfaith coordinating and representative platform. In addition, it focused on the moral and value-based legitimation of societal resistance. Notably, unlike in 2014, when AUCCRO's statements primarily emphasized the search for peace, in 2022 they clearly affirmed Ukraine's right to self-defense and the legitimacy of resistance to aggression. Already on 24 February 2022, the first day of the full-scale Russian invasion, AUCCRO stated: "We support the Armed Forces of Ukraine and all our defenders, bless them in their defense of Ukraine against the aggressor, and raise our prayers for them."²⁶

Alongside calls for the mobilization of Ukrainian society and the expansion of volunteer activity, from early 2022 AUCCRO also appealed to the international community to engage in assisting Ukraine, both militarily and humanitarily. In one of its first such statements, issued on 3 March 2022, the interfaith organization called on various international institutions to establish humanitarian corridors in Ukraine for the evacuation of children and women. At the same time, AUCCRO emphasized that, in order to avoid provocations, the evacuation of civilians through such corridors could be carried out by civilian volunteers and clergy of religious organizations.²⁷ Similar appeals were made subsequently. On 22 April 2022, AUCCRO addressed Russian religious leaders, requesting that they facilitate the creation of humanitarian corridors for the evacuation of civilians and wounded Ukrainian soldiers from the Azovstal metallurgical plant in Mariupol.²⁸ These appeals, however, remained unanswered.

²⁵ Inga Pavliy, Nataliya Maistrenko, & Serhiy Nikitenko. Not only by prayers: how churches are helping residents of frontline communities in Kherson and Donetsk. *МОСТ*, 12.10.2025. https://most.ks.ua/en/news/url/ne-tilki-molitvami-jak-tserkvi-dopomagajut-meshkantsjam-prifrontovih-gromad-hersonschini-ta-donechchini/#pll_switcher

²⁶ Звернення Всеукраїнської Ради Церков і релігійних організацій у зв'язку з військовою агресією Росії проти України [Appeal of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations in connection with Russia's military aggression against Ukraine]. *Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій*, 24.02.2022. URL: <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/uccro-address-regarding-russian-military-aggression-against-ukraine>

²⁷ Рада Церков закликає створити гуманітарні коридори в Україні для евакуації дітей і жінок [The Council of Churches calls for the creation of humanitarian corridors in Ukraine for the evacuation of children and women]. *Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій*, 03.03.2022. <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/uccro-calls-to-create-humanitarian-corridors-in-ukraine-for-evacuation>

²⁸ Звернення Всеукраїнської Ради Церков і релігійних організацій до російських релігійних діячів про евакуацію з Азовсталі мирних мешканців і поранених захисників Маріуполя [Appeal of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations to Russian religious figures on the evacuation of civilians and wounded defenders of Mariupol from Azovstal]. *Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій*,

AUCCRO also elevated to the international level the issue of releasing Ukrainian civilians and military personnel from Russian captivity. In particular, on 23 September 2022, AUCCRO, together with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a joint statement calling on the international community and international organizations to facilitate the release of Ukrainian civilians and military personnel held in Russian captivity.²⁹

During this period, volunteer activity at the level of individual denominations became systematic and turned into one of the most important areas of their humanitarian work. The largest religious denominations, drawing on the experience of previous years, significantly expanded humanitarian programs through networks of charitable organizations, including Caritas Ukraine (UGCC)³⁰ and Eleos-Ukraine (OCU).³¹ Protestant churches, as well as Muslim and Jewish communities, also actively engaged in volunteer activities, demonstrating interreligious solidarity in resisting Russian military aggression. In particular, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine united Jewish communities to coordinate their activities and provide assistance to those affected by the war. During the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Federation developed a wide volunteer network aimed at rescuing the Ukrainian population. During this period, it evacuated more than 30,000 people to safe locations, provided assistance to over 10,000 internally displaced persons, and delivered humanitarian aid packages to more than 35,000 families on a monthly basis.³²

The largest-scale area of volunteer activity of religious organizations in Ukraine during early 2022–2025 was assistance to internally displaced persons, whose number, according to official statistics, exceeded 4.6 million by mid-2025.³³ Religious organizations provided

22.04.2022. <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/uccro-appealed-to-russian-religious-figures-to-evacuate-citezens-from-azovstal-plant>

²⁹ Спільна заява Уповноваженого Верховної Ради України з прав людини та Всеукраїнської Ради Церков і релігійних організацій [Joint statement of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations]. *Уповноважений Верховної Ради України з прав людини*, 23.09.2022. https://www.ombudsman.gov.ua/news_details/spilna-zayava-upovnovazhenogo-verhovnoyi-radi-ukrayini-z-prav-lyudini-ta-vseukrayinskoyi-radi-cerkov-i-religijnih-organizacij

³⁰ Сьогодні не уявляю обличчя нашої Церкви без “Карітас України”, – Глава УГКЦ з нагоди 30-річчя мережі благодійних організацій [Today I cannot imagine the face of our Church without “Caritas of Ukraine”, – Head of the UGCC on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the network of charitable organizations]. *Католицький оглядач*, 25.07.2024. <https://catholicnews.org.ua/sogodni-ne-uyavlyayu-oblichchya-nashoyi-cerkvi-bez-karitas-ukrayini-glava-ugkc-z-nagodi-30-richchya/>

³¹ Кількість парафій за часи війни на Донбасі збільшилася вдвічі – митрополит Донецький Сергій [The number of parishes in Donbas has doubled during the war – Metropolitan Sergiy of Donetsk]. *Український церковний вісник*. 2021. № 3. 12-21.

³² Програма гуманітарної допомоги населенню України [Humanitarian assistance program for the population of Ukraine]. *Федерація єврейських громад України*, 2025. <https://www.fjc.in.ua/ua>

³³ Віктор Волокіта. В Україні офіційно переселенців 4,6 мільйона, а фактично їх на мільйон менше: причина [There are officially 4.6 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine, but in fact there are a million

temporary housing, food, clothing, psychological and spiritual support, and facilitated the social adaptation of displaced persons in new communities. Unlike the previous period, assistance to internally displaced persons was not episodic but systematic and long-term. Examples of such comprehensive volunteer activity include programs implemented by the Caritas Ukraine network in cooperation with the UGCC. In addition to providing temporary housing, Caritas Ukraine offered hot meals, food packages, hygiene kits, and other forms of assistance. Particularly important in this regard was the project “Multi-Sectoral Assistance to War-Affected People in Ukraine,” which supported internally displaced persons in Dnipropetrovsk and Poltava oblasts.³⁴ Systematic assistance to internally displaced persons was also provided by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and its affiliated social mission Eleos-Ukraine and its regional branches.³⁵ In mid-May 2022, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine initiated the construction of temporary modular housing in Kyiv Oblast for displaced persons whose homes had been destroyed as a result of hostilities.³⁶

Another important area of volunteer activity of religious organizations in Ukraine was support for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other components of the security and defense sector. Religious organizations participated in fundraising and the provision of material resources for the military, including essential supplies, medical equipment, and vehicles. Protestant churches, for example, were actively involved in volunteer initiatives supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine by supplying food, warm clothing, vehicles, and other necessary items.³⁷ On 18 March 2025, one of the archdioceses of the UGCC transferred six specialized vehicles to military units.³⁸ Although such activities formally went beyond the classical understanding of charity, they were perceived as an expression of civic responsibility and volunteer service under conditions of an existential threat to the state.

fewer: the reason]. *Економічна правда*, 15.05.2025. <https://pravda.com.ua/power/v-ukrajini-oficiynopereselenciv-4-6-milyona-a-faktichno-jih-na-950-tisyach-menshe-806744/>

³⁴ Підтримка з орендою житла полегшує інтеграцію ВПО у нових громадах [Rental housing support facilitates the integration of IDPs in new communities]. *Карітас України*, 29.10.2025. <https://caritas.ua/news/pidtrymka-z-orendoyu-zhytla-polegshuye-integracziyu-vpo-u-novyh-gromadah/>

³⁵ Житло та психосоціальна підтримка для ВПО [Housing and psychosocial support for IDPs]. *Eleos-Ukraine*, 01.2022. <https://eleos.com.ua/zhytlo-ta-psyhosotsialna-pidtrymka-dlya-ukrayinskyh-vpo/>

³⁶ Наталка Лотоцька. ПЦУ збудує тимчасове житло для переселенців, зведення розпочнуть на Київщині [The Orthodox Church of Ukraine will build temporary housing for displaced people, construction will begin in the Kyiv region]. *LB.ua*, 12.05.2022. https://lb.ua/society/2022/05/12/516548_ptsu_zbuduie_timchasove_zhitlo.html

³⁷ Українські протестанти в умовах війни: служіння і допомога Україні [Ukrainian Protestants in times of war: service and assistance to Ukraine]. *Церква Адевістів сьомого дня*, 2024. <https://adventist.ua/news/analytics/ukrainski-protestanty-v-umovakh-viiny-sluzhinnia-i-dopomoha-kraini/>

³⁸ Церква передала 6 автомобілів для ЗСУ [The Church donated 6 vehicles to the Armed Forces of Ukraine]. *Тернопільсько-Зборівська архієпархія Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*, 18.03.2025. <https://tze.org.ua/2025/03/czerkva-peredala-6-avtomobiliv-dlya-zsu/>

Military chaplains played a particularly significant role during 2022–2025, working directly in combat zones, hospitals, and permanent deployment locations of military units. The Law of Ukraine “On the Military Chaplaincy Service,” adopted on 30 November 2021, created the legal conditions for the full functioning of this institution during the full-scale war.³⁹ Chaplains of various denominations not only ensured the exercise of freedom of conscience for military personnel but also played an important role in maintaining their moral and psychological resilience. According to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as of October 2024 more than 300 chaplains from 13 religious organizations were serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.⁴⁰ However, in early 2025 the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience reported that only 36% of chaplaincy positions in the Armed Forces of Ukraine were filled.⁴¹ Thus, religious organizations retain significant potential to supply the Ukrainian army with chaplains. Notably, at the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, Said Ismagilov, Mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine “Umma,” became a chaplain of the Muslim Territorial Defense units of Kyiv.⁴²

As before, donations from the population remained an important source of resources for volunteer activities of religious organizations in Ukraine. However, after the start of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, international support reached unprecedented levels. Through foreign—particularly religious—organizations, religious organizations in Ukraine received financial assistance, humanitarian aid shipments, and medical resources, enabling them to carry out volunteer activities effectively.⁴³ Significant financial support for volunteer initiatives in Ukraine, including those of religious organizations, was provided by the Vatican. At the end

³⁹ Закон України “Про Службу військового капеланства” [Law of Ukraine “On the Military Chaplaincy Service”]. *Верховна Рада України*, 30.11.2021. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1915-20#Text>

⁴⁰ Ксенія Золотова. В ЗСУ служать понад 300 капеланів від 13 релігійних організацій, – Генштаб [Over 300 chaplains from 13 religious organizations serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, – General Staff]. *Еспресо*, 12.10.2024. <https://espresso.tv/suspilstvo-u-zsu-sluzhat-ponad-300-kapelaniv-vid-13-religiynikh-organizatsiy-genshtab>

⁴¹ У ЗСУ посади військових капеланів заповнені на 36% [In the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the positions of military chaplains are filled by 36%]. *Укрінформ*, 04.02.2025. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3956206-u-zsu-posadi-vijskovih-kapelaniv-zapovneni-na-36.html>

⁴² Mufti of the RAMU “UMMA” became Imam-Chaplain of the Kyiv Territorial defense. *Islam in Ukraine*, 29.03.2022. <https://islam.in.ua/en/ukrainian-news/mufti-ramu-umma-became-imam-chaplain-kyiv-territorial-defense>

⁴³ Українські протестанти в умовах війни: служіння і допомога Україні [Ukrainian Protestants in times of war: service and assistance to Ukraine Ukrainian Protestants in times of war: service and assistance to Ukraine]. *Церква Адвентистів сьомого дня*, 2024. <https://adventist.ua/news/analytics/ukrainski-protestanty-v-umovakh-viiny-sluzhinnia-i-dopomoha-kraini/>; Житло та психосоціальна підтримка для ВПО [Housing and psychosocial support for IDPs]. *Eleos-Ukraine*, 01.2022. <https://eleos.com.ua/zhytlo-ta-psyhosotsialna-pidtrymka-dlya-ukrayinskyh-vpo/>; More than 10 million war-weary Ukrainians have received food, water, shelter, medical care, fuel, and more from Samaritan's Purse in the last three years. *Samaritan's Purse*, 2025. <https://www.samaritanpurse.org/our-ministry/ukraine-response/>

of 2025, the Apostolic Nuncio to Ukraine, Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, noted that the Vatican had provided more than one billion US dollars in financial support over nearly four years of the full-scale war.⁴⁴ Thus, religious organizations in Ukraine acted as intermediaries between Ukrainian society and foreign religious and charitable institutions.

Therefore, after the full-scale Russian invasion, the volunteer activities of religious organizations in Ukraine acquired a systemic character and became an important factor in overcoming the humanitarian consequences of the war. These activities were implemented both at the interfaith level (through the representative activities of AUCCRO) and at the level of individual denominations, and included assistance to internally displaced persons, Ukrainian military personnel, and the civilian population.

At the same time, the study of volunteer activities of religious organizations in Ukraine in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war makes it possible to identify certain risks associated with these activities. Among the main challenges, it is important to note the uneven distribution of humanitarian assistance, which was conditioned by regional factors, including the security situation, logistical accessibility, and the concentration of affected populations. In addition, confessional factors also influenced this process, particularly the resource capacities, organizational networks, and priorities of individual religious communities.⁴⁵

In some cases, the lack of effective coordination between religious organizations and state institutions complicated the delivery of humanitarian assistance, especially at the initial stage of the full-scale war. In addition, as in any large-scale humanitarian activity, there may have been potential risks of non-transparent distribution of resources or the use of volunteer initiatives as instruments for enhancing reputational or confessional influence. Nevertheless, these risks do not diminish the overall significance of the volunteer activities of religious organizations in Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Conclusions

The volunteer activities of religious organizations in Ukraine during 2014–2025 evolved from predominantly local and situational charity into an institutionalized, multi-vector

⁴⁴ Про візит Папи Римського, віру під час війни і мирні переговори. Інтерв'ю з послом Ватикану [On the Pope's visit, faith during war, and peace negotiations. Interview with the Vatican ambassador]. *РБК-Україна*, 25.12.2025. <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/vizit-papi-rimskogo-viru-pid-chas-viyni-i-1766643094.html>

⁴⁵ Dmytro Vovk. Religion and Forced Displacement in Ukraine. *The Foreign Policy Centre*, 23.07.2020. <https://fpc.org.uk/religion-and-forced-displacement-in-ukraine/>; Inga Pavliy, Nataliya Maistrenko, & Serhiy Nikitenko. Not only by prayers: how churches are helping residents of frontline communities in Kherson and Donetsk. *МОСТ*, 12.10.2025. https://most.ks.ua/en/news/url/ne-tilki-molitvami-jak-tserkvi-dopomagajut-meshkantsjam-prifrontovih-gromad-hersonschini-ta-donechchini/#pll_switcher

practice integrated into the nationwide volunteer movement. During 2014–early 2022, key developments included the formation of an interfaith position (through statements by AUCCRO and other associations), the development of confessional humanitarian initiatives, the establishment of coordination centers, the overcoming of bureaucratic barriers to humanitarian aid delivery, as well as the participation of clergy in prisoner-release processes and the emergence of chaplaincy as a volunteer practice. After 24 February 2022, religious volunteerism reached the scale of humanitarian mobilization: churches and parish structures were transformed into shelters and logistical hubs, and support for internally displaced persons became a sustained, systematic activity.

Leading denominations expanded assistance through their charitable networks, while Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim communities intensified their engagement, demonstrating interreligious solidarity. During 2022–2025, AUCCRO primarily performed representative, consolidating, and advocacy functions: legitimizing the right to self-defense and appealing to the international community and international organizations regarding humanitarian corridors and the release of captives. A separate outcome was the legal and personnel strengthening of the institution of military chaplaincy, which enhanced the moral and psychological support of the armed forces, although the problem of understaffing chaplaincy positions in the Armed Forces of Ukraine persists. Overall, religious organizations proved to be important civil society institutions and intermediaries in attracting international resources, contributing to Ukraine’s humanitarian resilience and social cohesion under the conditions of the prolonged Russian-Ukrainian war.

***Statement on the Use of AI**

The authors used AI tools solely to improve the readability and language of the English translation. These tools were used under the authors’ supervision and control, and the results were carefully reviewed and edited. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article.

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