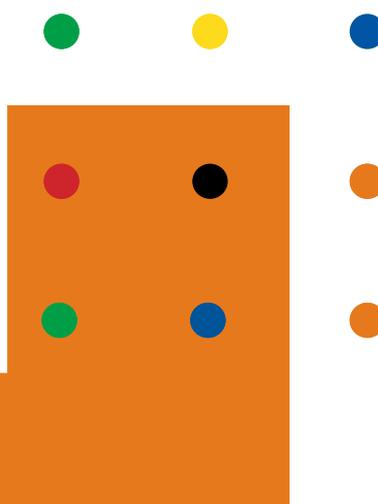
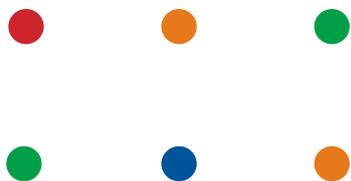
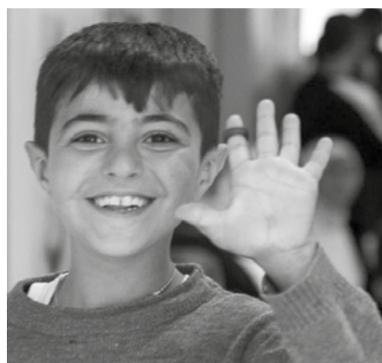
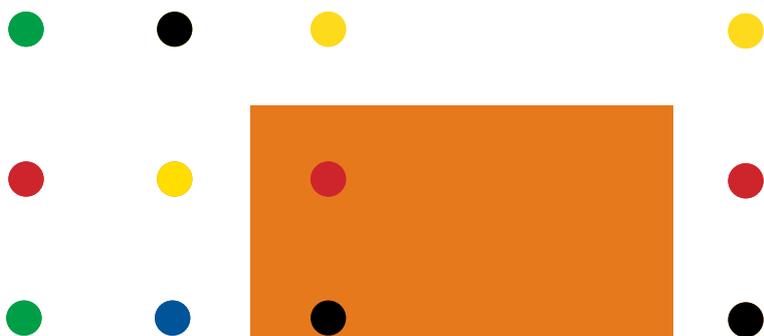




Solidarity Fund PL



Annual Report 2020

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Dear Readers,

We are presenting you the report on the activities of the Solidarity Fund PL in 2020. A year marked by the terrible coronavirus pandemic that rocked the entire world. From the very beginning Poland has decided that solidarity and aid were the only acceptable response to this global threat. One could argue that solidarity has become the Polish “vaccine” against COVID-19. Such was the idea behind a number of initiatives that Solidarity Fund PL has become an active part of.

As early as in March our offices in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine began identifying the needs of the communities with whom we have been collaborating. This knowledge allowed us to quickly purchase medical equipment for combating COVID, tailored to particular situations, such as the precious ventilators, as well as personal protection equipment, disinfectants, etc.

Also in March, Solidarity Fund PL joined the effort of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to arrange convoys with humanitarian aid. We organised convoys to Moldova, Georgia, the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and a spectacular convoy of over 40 HGVs to Belarus. The latter served as a gesture of support from the Polish authorities to Belarusian society at a time when President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was denying the existence of the pandemic.

Back then, we could not have anticipated the symbolic importance that our commitment in Belarus would gain over time. A few months later, thousands of people took to the streets to protest against elections rigged by the usurper regime—it became an awakening of Belarusian society and the second turning point for Solidarity Fund PL in 2020. After the 9th of August, we could not remain indifferent, moved both by the scale of the peaceful social protests and appalled by the brutality of the regime. The



Polish authorities reacted swiftly. At the beginning of September the “Solidarity with Belarus” government plan was launched in a display of sensitivity to violence and lawlessness, as well as in solidarity with those fighting for freedom. Once again, solidarity was at the heart of our actions.

By appointment of the Prime Minister, the Fund became one of the principal programme managers and took it upon itself to handle the cooperation with Belarusian communities by organising various forms of support for the emerging civil society. Building on our experience in development policies and by undertaking new forms of activities, we attempted to fulfil the wish expressed by Mr Mateusz Morawiecki in his declaration: that people who struggle for freedom and their basic rights should never be left to themselves, that they should know that we are not indifferent to their fate, and that neighbouring Poland is their friend and ally.

While facing this demanding task, we were determined not to abandon our usual activities.

In Ukraine, we successfully continued our work with hromadas, i.e. the lowest-tier local self-governments, in implementing and perfecting the social services system, with a

particular focus on social assistance. Our efforts in this field have already made a name for themselves and became a hallmark of proficiency. Under the EU4Skills programme we have been analysing the Ukrainian vocational education system and preparing resources to pave the way for its future reform aimed at adjusting the educational offer to labour market requirements.

In Moldova we have successfully continued works on applying the LEADER method for developing rural areas and, through the creation of the National LEADER Programme, on embedding it as standard practice for the central authorities. As for the second field of our activities, i.e. urban revitalisation, we created a theoretical and practical framework for integrating our experiences into the governmental programme of urban development. The highlight of these efforts came in December 2020 with the creation of the National Urban Network. In addition, we concluded the multi-annual “Access to Success” programme, as a continuation of our actions aimed at bringing together the communities on both sides of Dniester River—an area divided by a deep political conflict.

In Georgia we developed the potential of municipalities, i.e. the lowest-tier self-government units. We aimed our efforts at activating local communities through the highly successful Academy of Participation. Simultaneously, we launched a shrewd anti-covid campaign, comprising online videos and TV advertisements, which allowed us to have a meaningful impact on the rationalisation of the attitudes in Georgian society towards the threat of the pandemic.

As for the staff at Solidarity Fund PL, 2020 was a demanding year which brought new challenges that required navigating highly complex political environments and handling the pressure of tasks of national importance and proportions. This forced our team to continuously expand their competencies and to work under extreme psychological stress. Therefore, I wish to conclude by thanking all the members of our team for their dedicated commitment. A commitment to a job that we, at Solidarity Fund PL, see both as a mission and a duty.

Rafał Dzieciołowski

President of the Solidarity Fund PL

About the Fund

Solidarity Fund PL (the Fund), created in 1997, is a State Treasury foundation whose activities cover development cooperation with a strong focus on the Eastern Partnership Countries. It collaborates with social organisations, local-governments, central authorities, and international organisations. In Poland, the Fund's main partner is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Through its actions, the Fund aims to facilitate democratic transformations, the protection of human rights protection—in broad terms—social, civic, and economic development. It actively supports the free media and local-government reforms, and promotes European values in the states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

It organises observation missions with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR).

In **Ukraine**, the Fund assists local-governments in improving social services. In **Moldova** it supports the development of local communities and entrepreneurs. In **Georgia** it facilitates dialogue between the central government, local-governments, and the citizens.

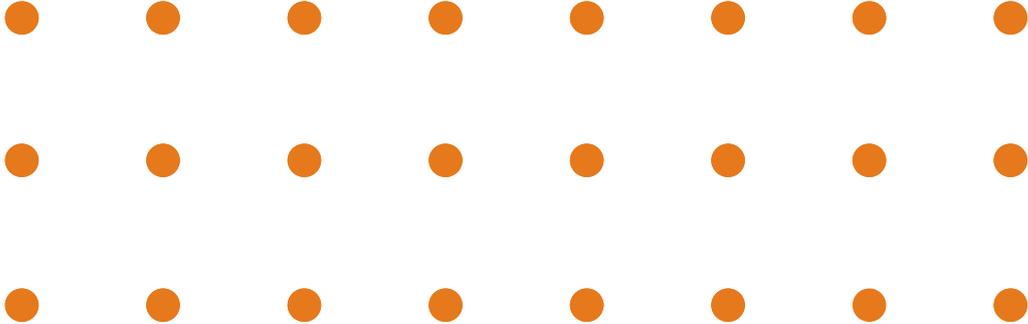
The Fund implements projects both on its own and in partnerships and, being a State Treasury foundation, it carries out tasks related to development cooperation entrusted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

www.solidarityfund.pl





Measures for preventing and limiting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic



First aid

Local and direct

Using our permanent Representative Offices in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, as well as an extended network of local partners, Solidarity Fund PL was able to promptly identify which communities suffered from limited access to personal protective equipment, such as masks, disinfectant liquids, bodysuits, and gloves. Essential materials were delivered to the towns and villages most in need without delay.

Support for Ukrainian hospitals

Our Representative Office organised aid for the neediest using funds released from projects whose scope of implementation was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A quick analysis of Ukrainian legislation concerning assistance provided by external entities, followed by tripartite agreements, allowed us to proceed with our actions.

The aid reached 11 hospitals, schools, and a social assistance centre in five Ukrainian oblasts and Kyiv. The hospitals are located in regions with which the Fund had established partnerships for the implementation of other projects before the pandemic. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Polish diplomatic posts in Ukraine provided us with assistance in selecting particular hospitals.

The Main Military Clinical Hospital in Kyiv received the largest support. It is located in a symbolic spot for Ukrainians and Poles, i.e. within the premises of Kyiv Fortress. Among its patients are the soldiers who fight in Donbass. Medical equipment sent to the hospital is used for treating patients both in Kyiv and in field hospitals.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Health indicated three hospitals that were key for combating the pandemic in Lviv oblast: the Pulmonary Health Centre in Lviv, the largest facility in western Ukraine specialised in treating pulmonary diseases; a regional hospital in Sokal; and a communal hospital in Rudky. Apart from PPE, (masks, gloves, bodysuits, protective shoe covers) the equipment sent as part of the programme included suction pumps, diagnostic monitors, pulse oximeters, IR thermometers, and even beds.

Support was also sent to veteran hospitals: the Lviv Regional Hospital for Disabled Veterans and the Victims of Repression (the largest hospital of this kind) as well as partner hospitals of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence in Vinnytsia, Berdychiv, and Klevan. Additional aid shipped to these hospitals included scrub caps, protective goggles, disinfectants, an oxygen concentrator, and a defibrillator.

Other units to receive support from the Fund were: the regional hospitals in Mena, Chernihiv, and the municipal hospital in Nizhyn.



In most of the cases, the handing over of the aid was celebrated in the presence of oblast and local-government authorities, and members of Polish diplomatic personnel. The events also received coverage in the local media. In the picture.



Apart from to medical centres, aid was sent to the Department of Education of the Drohobych City Council, which in turn transferred it to its subordinate education centres, and to the Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Koriukivka in Chernihiv oblast.



Activation of Moldovan entrepreneurs

To address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Representative Office in Chisinau established a EUR 50,000 Crisis Fund. Additionally, 3% of the EU-LEADER Rural Development Fund was earmarked for the same purpose.

Since supporting local entrepreneurs was one of the reasons behind the establishment

of the Crisis Fund, the orders for PPE and disinfectant liquids were directed to small, local businesses (local, rural sewing workshops, perfume manufacturers) and Local Action Groups. This has helped entrepreneurs to survive the difficult time of the pandemic.

The Crisis Fund was also used to finance the purchase of 38 oxygen concentrators for 30 Moldovan hospitals.



Medical equipment was officially handed over in the presence of the Minister of Health, Labour and Social Protection, Ms Viorica Dumbrăveanu and the Ambassador of Poland in Chisinau, Mr Bartłomiej Zdaniuk.

Support for Georgians who help others

Through 34 participants of the Academy of Participation from different regions of Georgia, the Solidarity Fund PL Representative Office in Tbilisi identified the most urgent needs that emerged in the wake of the pandemic. The survey revealed that, in first order, aid had to be delivered to health care professionals and local-governments that were aiding the neediest, as well as to the National Emergency Management Service. For this purpose the Representative Office designated PLN 100,000.

Collaboration with local self-governments allowed the equipment (heating systems for field hospital tents, disinfectant spraying devices, (PPE) to be distributed quickly and efficiently, even though it was necessary at times to reach secluded villages that were locked down due to the pandemic. These efforts were recognised by President of Georgia, Ms Salome Zourabichvili, who officially extended her gratitude to the President of Poland, Mr Andrzej Duda.



Reaching the isolated city

As in the case of many other localities in South-Western Georgia, the outbreak of the pandemic forced the town of Bolnisi and its approximately 14,000 inhabitants into lock down. Therefore, the entire operation of handing over the aid took place at the checkpoint at the city limits while maintaining special safety measures. Mr Giorgi Mazanashvili (in the foreground of the picture), the lawyer of the city council, had personally asked the Representative Office for assistance. Mr Tamazi Zhorzholiani, the head of the city council, took the responsibility for supervising the distribution of the aid.

Humanitarian Convoys

In the face of the escalating pandemic, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to send humanitarian aid convoys to Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Caucasus, and Central Asia. Given its long-standing experience in working with “eastern states” and an extensive network of contacts, Solidarity Fund PL was tasked with coordinating the effort, i.e. collecting the donations from donors, organising transport in cooperation with the State Fire Service, handling customs and legal formalities, drafting agreements with the recipients, and shipping the aid. Having local offices and a knowledge of the local situation made it possible to prepare the convoys promptly.

Humanitarian aid included sending personal protective equipment, such as masks, body-suits, gloves, medical equipment, and SARS-CoV-2 tests to 14 countries. The combined value of the donations in all nine convoys reached approximately PLN 55.8m.

All medical equipment, PPE, and tests were donated to institutions responsible for combating the pandemic and which were nominated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

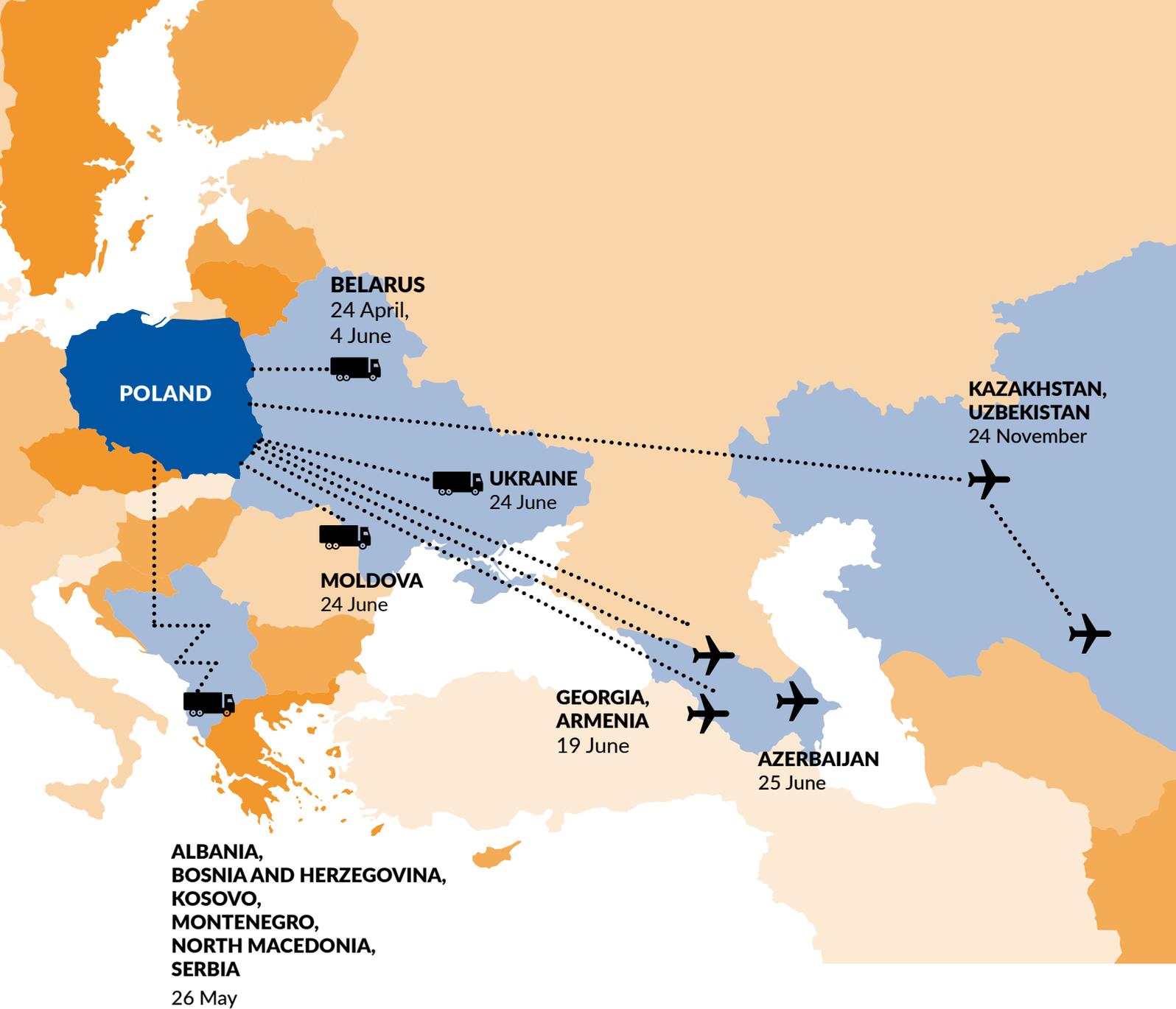
The first convoy to carry aid for Belarusian people departed on 24 April. The second was on 4 June. It was the largest humanitarian aid convoy in the history of Poland: 40 vehicles carrying 300 tonnes of protective equipment, medical devices and medication. In order to ensure quick transit, the convoy was divided

into five sections led by police cars. 96 officers and civilian workers of the State Fire Service, Police, and Border Guard took part in the effort.

Long columns of HGVs traversed Poland in the directions of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Balkans: 70 tonnes of medical supplies reached Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania. Medical supplies to Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and the Caucasus were shipped with military CASA and Hercules aircrafts.

Donors:

- Polish Embassy in Ukraine
- Foundation of PERN Group
- KGHM Polska Miedź Foundation in Lublin
- LOTOS Foundation
- PGNiG Foundation
- PKO BP Foundation
- PZU Foundation
- Krajowa Spółka Cukrowa
- Ministry of Health
- Orlen Oil
- Polish National Foundation
- TZF Polfa S.A.



14

countries

9

convoys

**PLN
55.8m**

**total value
of donations**





Transport secured by:
Ministry of National Defence, Ministry
of Foreign Affairs, State Fire Service,
Police, Border Guard.



“Be a real jigiti...” social media campaign



The first thing that comes to mind when thinking of Georgia, apart from wine and khachapuri, are Georgian warriors, the jigits. History stands as testimony to their bravery and valour. In spite of efficient handling of the pandemic by the Georgian institutions between March and August, September brought a dramatic increase in the number of new cases. The worsening epidemic situation made it possible to metaphorically see COVID-19 as a 21st century “invader” who came to threaten the lives of Georgians.

In the light of people’s lax attitude and common disregard for the recommendations of the healthcare services, the Fund’s Representative Office decided to design a social campaign titled “Be a real jigiti, protect yourself and your loved ones!” The goal was to focus on the simplest way of fighting the “invader”, i.e. wearing masks, while appealing to Georgian valour and bravery.

There had been a host of information campaigns on protective equipment, but all proved

ineffective. Instead of referring to honour and pride, which represent significant elements of national identity, they lectured society—which Georgians tend to dislike. The logo of the campaign was designed as a Georgian warrior-dancer, sporting a mask instead of a traditional dagger in his sheath.

Three videos were produced as part of the campaign. To increase reach, popular celebrities were invited, such as Nuki Koshkelishvili, an influencer, Giorgi Vardosanidze, a TV host and comedian, and the Shushpari dance ensemble. All of them agreed to participate pro bono.

Young people were the primary target of the campaign since, although they run the lowest risk of post-COVID-19 complications, they pose a threat to the elderly, especially given the Georgian cultural context, where multi-generational families live under the same roof. The ads appealed to Georgian values while promoting citizenship and a sense of responsibility for oneself and others.



Social mini-campaigns

The Representative Office supported 21 social mini-campaigns across Georgia. Under the initiative some 21,000 masks, as well as thousands of small bottles of disinfectant and leaflets on how to avoid infection were handed out. The activists made sure that

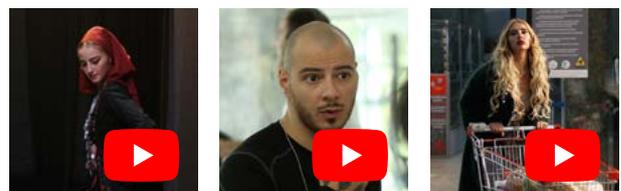
the municipal cleaning services, the police, bus drivers, and pedestrians received masks with the jigit logo. “Be a real jigit...” campaign give-aways also served as prizes in competitions and mini-marathons.

The spots were published in social media, on large outdoor LED screens, and using free airtime on the four main public and private TV channels. Thanks to the assistance of a social media expert, the campaign reached almost 150,000 social media users. Additionally, the owner of the ALMA company, an operator of large outdoor LED screens, covered 90% of the screening costs, allowing the ad to be aired on eight screens located in Tbilisi, Zugdidi, Batumi, and Kutaisi in December.

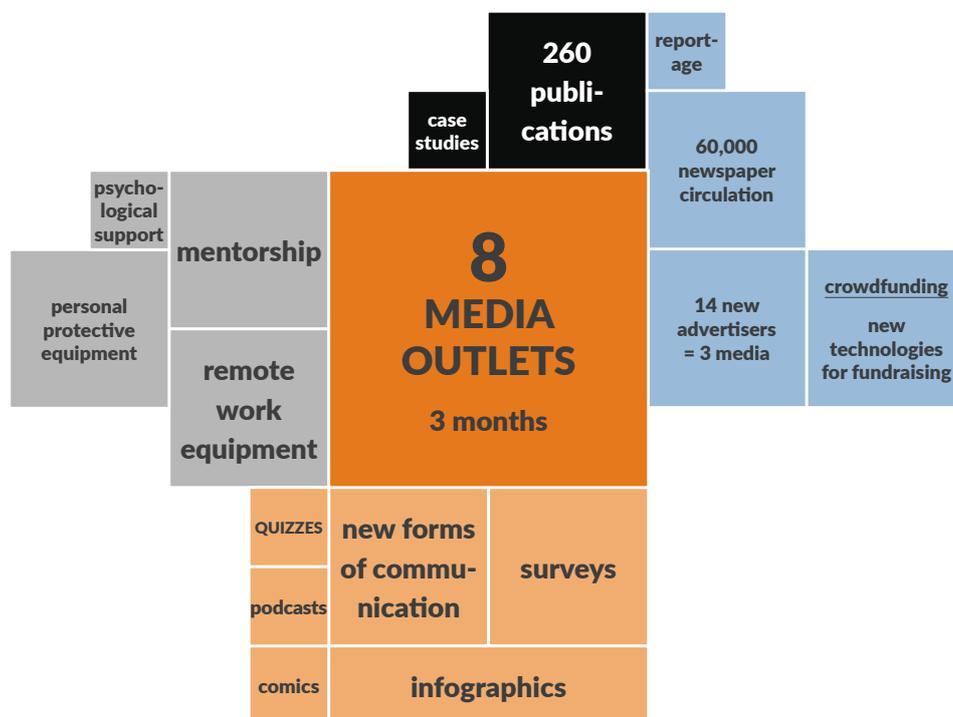
The campaign was accompanied by training sessions dedicated to the virus. They were held in 13 locations across Georgia and attracted 1,022 young people. The Fund reached out to those who disregarded the importance of wearing masks. We provided information on the ways of remaining active under the sanitary

restrictions, on how to benefit from the opportunities created by the pandemic, and on how to observe the guidelines from the Georgian government and the WHO. In most cases, the training was organised offline, while maintaining precautionary measures. Once a growing number of participants began cancelling due to infections, online training was organised for those who could not attend.

Campaign videos are available on the Solidarity Fund PL’s YouTube channel:



Crisis as an impulse for growth



The media was hit particularly hard by the pandemic. This was especially the case with smaller, regional outlets. The Fund reacted by organising the “Regional Media Response to COVID-19” project. Its goal was to enable the outlets to function and to grow in spite of the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. The following eight Ukrainian media outlets, with whom the Fund had collaborated before the pandemic, took part in the project:

- newspapers: [“MIG”](#) from Zaporizhia, [“Per-vaia Gorodskaia Gazeta”](#) from Kropyvnytskyi, and [“Slobidsky Krai”](#) from Kharkiv,
- radio stations: [“Velyki Lug”](#) from Zaporizhia, [“Vilnoie Radio”](#) from Bakhmut,
- the [0629.com.ua](#) website from Mariupol,
- press agencies: [“Ostrov”](#) from Kyiv, [“Vchasno”](#) from Pokrovsk.

Project participants dedicated much of their columns and airtime to counteracting disinformation regarding the virus and the illnesses it

caused, while also providing information about steps taken by the local authorities and institutions responsible for combating the pandemic. The diversity of these activities is best seen in the infographic above.

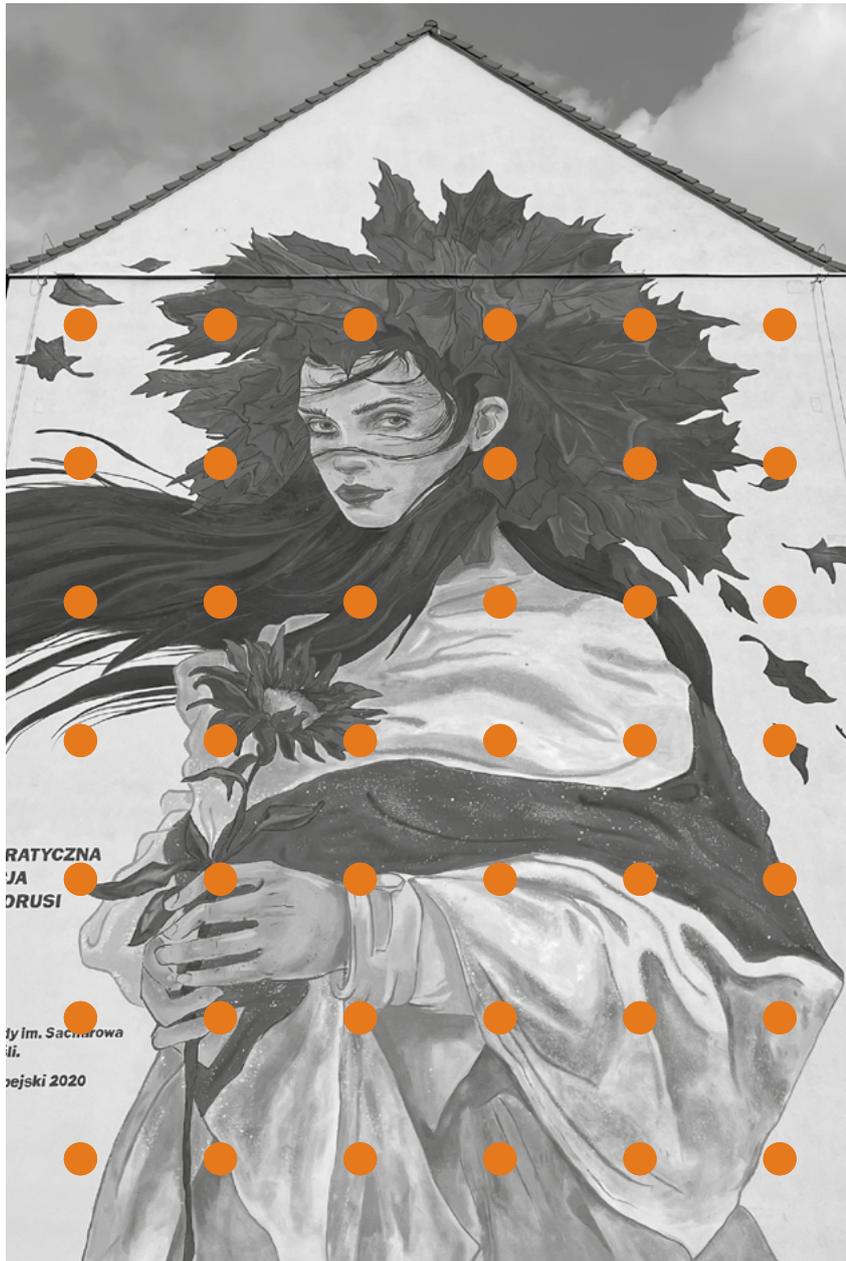
Meanwhile, joint efforts by the editorial teams and mentors, i.e. local experts, highly specialised in media- and market-related issues, led to new business models being forged.

The project became an impulse for growth and the activation of editorial staff. The outlets used this opportunity to rebuild their websites and introduce modern communication methods, such as magazines and podcasts. As a result, editorial offices overcame the crisis, increased their revenues, and substantially improved their operating model. They devised new ways of monetisation, attracted advertisers, improved their position across social media platforms, and optimised search engine results.

The project was financed under the Free Media Programme.



Solidarity with Belarus



In response to the events that rocked Belarus in August and the wave of repression against participants of pro-democracy social movements, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs entrusted Solidarity Fund PL with a new task: supporting Belarusian people. 19 projects were selected through a grant competition. The authors of these projects organised various support activities for Belarusians who fled to Poland after facing prosecution in their home country. The best way of demonstrating the scale of the needs is to tell the story of those who received support from Fund's partners. The story of these efforts reflects not only the magnitude of what is required but also the commitment of our partners.

Belarusian House Foundation in Warsaw

Ales Zarembyuk, the president of the Foundation outlined the characteristics of various groups of Belarusians who came seeking assistance, as well as the priorities in providing support.

Those who came in August were harmed physically after the police had brutally quelled the protests. Hit with rubber bullets, stun grenades, injured, beaten up and bruised. They needed treatment and rehabilitation. First, we had to secure their visas and carry out SARS-CoV-2 testing. Once they recovered, some returned to Belarus. For some, the return home proved temporary. In November and December we saw them again. Their plans had changed. They would not be left in peace. They lost their jobs for participating in the protests, as did their spouses. The authorities harassed them.

The second group to reach the Foundation consisted of those who were unaware of what

kind of country they were living in. They did not know what the consequences of participating in peaceful protests would be. They took to the streets to show their dissent in hope of change. These people arrived psychologically scarred. Some of them had gone through the ordeal of arrest. The priority was to provide psychological assistance. Each of them required an individual approach. In some cases, they needed pharmacotherapy and rehabilitation.

Families with children formed the third group. The parents were threatened that their children would be taken away from them. They would pack their belongings in haste and leave for nowhere in particular. Often without important documents. They had to be helped in everything: official formalities, finding apartments, jobs, etc. And first of all, they needed benefits.

Among the students who came to us, we had some who had been beaten up by the police. For them, the priority was to learn the language, to enrol in Polish universities. For the time being, they are learning Polish, and since they received scholarships, they see their future here. Often, a little advice was enough for them to thrive, but some had to be guided a little more.

We also had people who could not see any future for themselves in Belarus and heard rumours that they would “get everything” in Poland and simply took the opportunity to improve their lives. If the verification revealed that they had suffered in any way, they would be given the most necessary assistance.

“Belarusian House” employees had to learn how to carry out meticulous checks on those asking for help, so as to be sure that the assistance reached those most in need.

To ensure effective support, the Foundation has assembled a special group of mentors to help Belarusians who wish to settle in Poland.

SUPPORT PROVIDED TO THE ARRIVING BELARUSIANS UNDER THE “SOLIDARITY WITH BELARUS” PACKAGE

As part of project activities, the Fund has assisted **1,200 Belarusians**.

August-December 2020:



1 in 8 Belarusians arriving in Poland benefited from the support offered by the Fund's partners (> 10,000 Belarusians had arrived in Poland, by autumn 2020)



a total of **5,160 hours** of counselling were provided (lawyers, psychologists, translators, career guidance)



an average of **4 hours and 18 minutes** was dedicated to each person in need



746 people received financial support (benefits, shopping allowance or a phone subscription, reimbursement of costs of travel to Poland, covering short period apartment rental fees)



133 people received medical assistance or were granted stays in health resorts in Poland



166 people received support in obtaining humanitarian visas



25 people received support in the form of representation before the Polish authorities



274 people have been given the opportunity to participate in integration events

These figures cannot be summed together, as some people received support multiple times and in different forms.

Happy Mother's Day, Belarus

The initiative was launched on 14 October, i.e. the date when Mother's Day is celebrated in Belarus. After all, it is women who are at the forefront of Belarusian revolution. Their compatriots in Poland feel a moral obligation to support them and to keep global public opinion interested in the processes of democratic change.

The initiative consisted of sending "post-cards" depicting the bravery of Belarusian women fighting for freedom to major global opinion leaders among the media and international organisations. A dedicated website, mothersdaybelarus.pl, allowed visitors to generate one of the specially prepared postcards and to send it to newspapers such as the New York Times, The Guardian, Le Monde, and Der Spiegel. On the back of the cards, the organisers of the initiative asked for the card to be published on newspapers' and websites' front pages, to remind the world that Belarus is fighting. The front side featured graphic designs based on photographs by Nadia Buzhan.



The Awakening of Belarus

The exhibition titled "The Awakening of Belarus" in Warsaw featured 66 works by 14 authors, such as Pasha Cas, Gleb Kashtanov, Hanna Kruk, Lilia Kvatsabaya, Yury Ledzian, Hanna Murajda, 84n30, Maxim Osipau, Anna Redko, Yana Vyrzhemkovskaya, Marharita Tichanovic, Alina Shulhouskaya, Darya Trublina, and Street Wind.

The works illustrate the atmosphere of the protests that have taken place in Belarus since 9 August 2020 and tell the story of the heroes of the Belarusian revolution and the henchmen they face, of the regime's crimes, and of the valiant deeds of the people who are not afraid and keep on fighting





Murals

“Tactical art for Belarus” (Hodny art) allowed young Belarusian street artists to develop new designs for murals and posters dedicated to the situation in Belarus. The image shows a mural in Wrocław by Anna Redko.

A mural in Białystok (two-fingered peace sign) was created during a meeting of artists in Podlasie region organised by Belarusian House. The artists were divided into groups tasked with developing new ideas for future artistic projects.

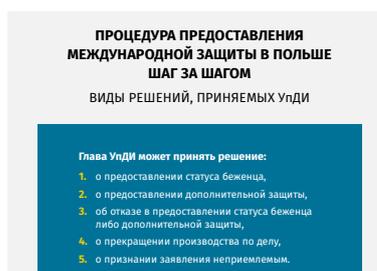


Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

How can I receive protection and refugee status? How can I settle in Poland legally? How can I settle in Poland without losing the possibility of returning to Belarus? How can I receive a humanitarian visa? What are the necessary documents? Will Poland be a safe country to stay in? Is there a chance of receiving any assistance? These were the questions that the lawyers of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights heard most frequently. Each of these seemingly simple questions represents an individual drama, and different legal and life circumstances. Thus, providing information and legal support to victims of repression who are either planning to leave Belarus or have already arrived in Poland has become an important aspect of the project.

Not only because of the pandemic, some Belarusians wished to avoid personal contact. Even a mere phone call to some sort of organisation was a major strain for people who had suffered this much. Still, once the formalities have been taken care of, these people would express their gratitude for the possibility to breathe and walk freely again, without the fear of being snatched off the street.

The Foundation wanted the persons receiving legal counsel to be aware of their rights and obligations, and to be well-informed on how to cross the border, how to obtain a visa, how to apply for international protection, and on how to find employment and start studies. A special information package was developed, describing procedures and formalities that Belarusian citizens needed to go through upon their arrival in Poland.



International protection procedure

The information package prepared by the Foundation for people applying for international protection in Poland and for people who already have received this status comprises six infographics in two language versions (Polish and Russian) as well as infographics concerning legal assistance provided by the Foundation, i.e.:

- step-by-step procedure for granting international protection;
- rights and obligations in the procedure for granting international protection;
- rights granted upon obtaining international protection, either as a refugee or under subsidiary protection status;
- withdrawal of refugee status or subsidiary protection;
- decisions issued by the Head of the Office for Foreigners;
- organisations providing assistance to foreigners.

Although the Polish legislation on foreigners is complicated, Belarusians receive basic knowledge in a clear manner. They may extend their knowledge at later stages through other publications from the Foundation, such as those on family reunification.

Infographics are available at the Foundation's website here:



Foreigners Support Centre by the “Window to the East Foundation”

Most of those who reached the Białystok-based Foundation, were ordinary people that sought shelter just for a while. At the time they would think that since Białystok was close to the border, they could wait everything out, and quickly go back home. They fled out of concern for the safety of their families. For many, leaving their homeland for the first time ever, came as a socio-cultural shock. Without following the political situation, many lived a passive existence, minding their own business. They felt quite helpless, and in Poland everything seemed alien.

The Foundation chose to focus on the families, as families represented the largest “bundles” of issues. What does a couple with two or three children— their ages spanning from infants to young adults—need apart from shelter, legalisation of stay, and jobs? A family medical care package, including paediatric care, kindergarten, schools, etc... And here comes a shock: the Polish health care and education systems are quite unlike their Belarusian counterparts. The matriculation exam in Belarus is a formality—in Poland it is an exam that determines one’s future.

The support had to be comprehensive. Each of the five consultants at the Foreigners Support Centre was assigned to one family. Their task was to identify its needs and develop an action plan. The consultant would guide the family through the procedure of legalising their stay while simultaneously making use of the tools available under the project: financial benefits, Polish language courses, and specialist counselling (such as employment counsellors, employment agents, psychologists, lawyers, translators) The activities had to be synchronised. The consultant would assist the family up to the point when the family declared they were able to handle the situation on their own.

This way many of them got back on track. However, upon first contact with the Foundation, the newcomers would be reluctant to talk about themselves. All they wanted was to get some kind of a benefit to survive. It was the

consultants who would come forward with an entire assistance scenario. The consultants would explain that, due to the pandemic, Poles were having a hard time finding employment too; that in order to get a job, one needed to invest some effort and to speak the language; that one could either send out CVs and wait or search actively and visit companies. Employment counsellors would offer training for interviews with potential employers. They also gave advice on how to avoid abuse, how to sign an agreement to secure medical insurance, etc. The profiles of people assisted by the Foundation were highly diverse: from students to pensioners. Preparing resettlement for those who had reached out to the “Window” from Belarus, held the “Polish Card” (Karta Polaka) or had full documentation was easier. In turn, those who were forced to take the decision to leave their country within hours—carrying only a tiny backpack—required much more support. They would cross the border with Russia or Ukraine, eventually reach Poland, and turn themselves in to the first police officer they met. These people were those most affected psychologically.

Paweł Mickiewicz, the president of the Foundation, told us that awarding financial assistance was the most difficult task. The consultants would keep asking themselves if the aid was being given to those who actually needed it the most.

Still, today, those who were among the first to reach the Foundation speak proudly of the jobs they found, of their apartments, and of their children’s first achievements. They also feel free to talk about their lives.



Foundation Z

156 people, including mothers with children, were accommodated during the three rounds of rehabilitation stays organised by Foundation Z (the real name of the Foundation has not been disclosed to Solidarity Fund PL). The programme reached out to people being persecuted for participating in the protests. Among them are members of the sports community, Polish diaspora, and entrepreneurs who were denied the possibility to continue their businesses or were otherwise harassed by the authorities. There are also doctors, teachers, IT specialists, etc.

As the head of the project told us, “Each person had their own story”. The Foundation chose to focus its efforts on women. Often shaken and terrified, broken during interrogations, when they were, for instance, forced to undress. Trauma, upon trauma. Single mothers needed particular attention. They required psychological assistance, psychiatric treatment, and psychotropic medication.

Apart from sports and Nordic walking activities, meetings were organised to offer more than physical renewal. There were workshops and lectures on healthy eating habits and building resilience, as well as mindfulness training, focused on attaining inner peace. History lectures and meetings with HR specialists were offered too.

A classy resort, tasty food, and an abundance of interesting things for children to do—all of this as part of a comprehensive and coordinated effort to offer respite and to restore dignity, strength, and faith in other human beings.

As everyone adhered to anti-COVID precaution measures, no-one got infected, in spite

of a major spike in the general infection rate and frequent contact between participants. Also, round-the-clock medical surveillance was provided.

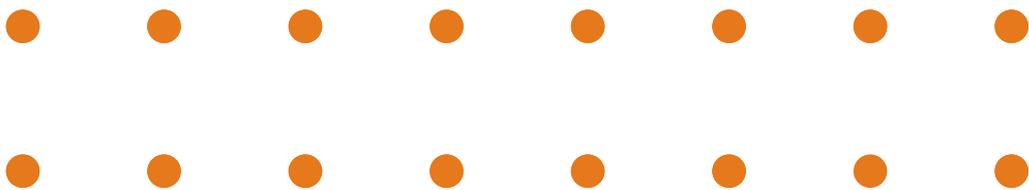
Apart from activities facilitated by the foundation, Belarusians themselves started organising resilience training (improving stamina, strength, and balance) in order to preventively reinforce the body, avoid coronavirus infection, and build up strength.

Political problems did not make people’s regular, everyday struggles disappear: quarrels, infidelity, divorces, alimony, etc. Life goes on, and political tensions only add to the uncertainty, and stress, aggravating common life challenges. Therefore, at times, the Foundation had to take extra efforts, such as organising legal assistance, helping to open bank accounts, or referring people to the proper authorities. The Foundation even managed to find a job for a couple of people.

The “Metamorphoses”, i.e. professional photo shoots organised at the end of each round turned out to have a tremendous therapeutic impact. Under the watchful eye of make-up artists, the ladies got the opportunity to dress up, get make-up and have their hair done. The women responded to this idea with great enthusiasm. The photo shoot allowed them to briefly forget all that they have been through, vent the stress, and look at themselves differently, and gain more confidence to face their uncertain futures. Some of them have decided to stay in Poland and restart their lives. Others, in spite of being terrified of going back, coolly assessed their chances in Poland: here they had nothing, in Belarus at least they used to have “something”.



Programmes and processes undertaken by Solidarity Fund PL Representative Offices



The outbreak of the pandemic did not upturn the longer-term plans of the Fund, and all the projects scheduled for 2020 were duly delivered. This was only possible due to the permanent presence of our Representative Offices. Project activities were being carried out in line with the sanitary restrictions and using the previously implemented digital solutions.

Georgia

Solidarity Fund PL in Georgia continued its collaboration with local self-governments that has been taking place for several years. One of the key activities was supporting partners in applying digital tools and technologies in their day-to-day work.

Active residents – strong municipality

As part of this project, the Representative Office carried out another edition of the Academy of Participation. It gathered 50 participants from 9 regions of Georgia. Since the Academy was joined both by experienced persons as well as seasoned local community activists, participants were divided into a basic and an advanced group. Training sessions were conducted by a team of international experts.

The participants took part in a series of workshops on effective communication, engaging in and influencing local affairs, as well as collecting feedback.

The trainers have also dedicated a lot of attention to new technologies, such as the Zoom application.

Both groups underwent practical field training consisting of co-facilitating meetings between residents of remote villages and co-creating the www.participatoryhub.ge dialogue

platform. The meetings allowed the participants to identify what the residents of Adjari villages considered important, how the community would usually address its own needs, what was expected of the authorities, and which issues should be handled first.

Additionally, the participants worked on specific modules of the dialogue platform, such as the knowledge base, audiovisual materials, document templates, good practices of Georgian local governments, and the forms of engagement in activities in local villages and towns. The overarching goal was to make local governments more resident-friendly and better adjusted to community needs.

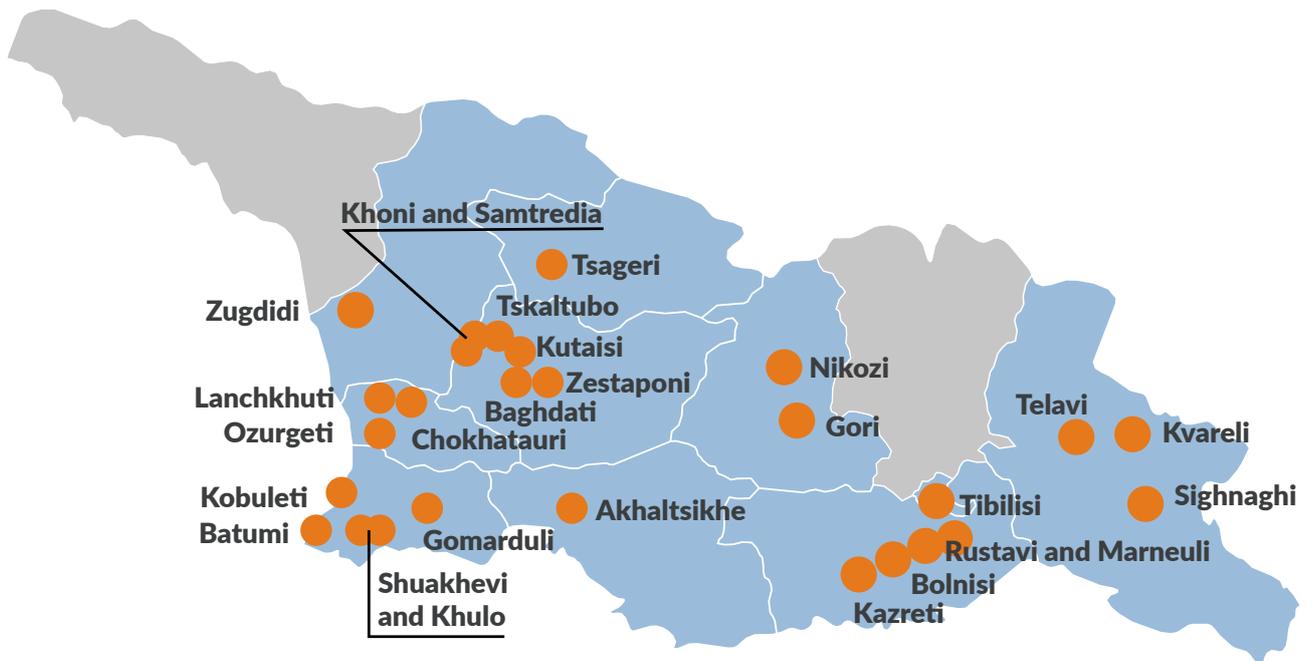
The Academy of Participation also features a series of networking meetings called “Participatory Café”. The 2020 series comprised five on-line meetings. The meetings allowed the participants to share knowledge and to put questions to international experts.

Academy activities culminated with an exam that featured a knowledge test and required the candidates to write a mini-project as a practical part. The knowledge of the participants was tested via an online platform provided by Orbeliani Georgia, a partner organisation. The best mini-project was selected through a vote among the participants themselves. The authors of the winning concept received a grant of approximately EUR 1,600 in order to implement it.

The winning project titled “Be active, be engaged” focuses on education actions. Its goal is to improve the cooperation between the government and the citizens, and to encourage activities among the residents of the Khobi and Tsalenjikha local governments. Councillors and workers of Zugdidi city hall will act as educators: Zugdidi, with support from our Fund, has introduced participatory budgeting that allows the residents to have a say in spending from the local city budget.



ACTIVITIES OF SOLIDARITY FUND PL IN GEORGIA





Digital dialogue centres

www.participatoryhub.ge digital dialogue centre is a platform for presenting, in a clear and intuitive manner, the collaboration between local authorities and residents across all Georgia. Its users can benefit from its experts database and learn on the effectiveness of different forms of collaboration with city halls used in their own or in neighbouring local government units.

The platform's interactive map enables quick access to whichever content the user finds attractive: knowledge, contacts, training, document templates, free digital tools for local governments and residents (e.g. SMS gateways, surveys, "geo-surveys", online meetings, tools for scheduling meetings, events, and processes).

Using digital tools for strengthening local governments' information capacities and communication with residents

The Fund, working alongside public servants and a Georgian architect, carried out workshops on the implementation of projects selected under the 2019 participatory budgets. The main issue was to adjust them to the new reality of sanitary restrictions. The Fund supported its partners in communication: the residents were given the opportunity to contact their city hall through Facebook and to organise Zoom meetings. The architect created a number of mock-ups and visualisations for the residents to

comment on online. These sessions allowed the authorities, along with the residents, to work out methods for the successful implementation of projects selected under the participatory budget, i.e. the implementation of new investments.

Meanwhile the sessions of the city council went online. The Fund offered technical support to partner local governments, which allowed them to use the Zoom application for live streaming of the sessions via Facebook, thus allowing the residents to ask questions and comment. For many Georgians, who cherish live, in-person meetings, switching to digital communication was a quite peculiar experience.



Promotion of active attitudes and improving the quality of participatory processes

As part of these activities, the Representative Office has elaborated a set of criteria for the participants to obtain individual certificates and for local governments to obtain institutional certificates. Individual certificates were issued based on the assessment of one's level of independence, responsibility, and initiative. The Fund has recommended seven persons who had signed up for improving their competencies.

Additionally, a video promoting the Academy of Participation was created. It shows how Academy training contributes to establishing

dialogue between the authorities and the residents and brings together people who value joint actions for the benefit of their communities. Another purpose of the video promoting the Academy is to facilitate putting actions for improving the functioning of these communities into practice.

The Representative Office has also provided support to the Georgian delegation to the 4th Forum of Participatory Budgeting Practitioners in Ukraine and co-organised the 5th edition that was conducted online. The delegates of Georgian local governments shared their experiences regarding participatory budgeting during the online event organised by the Ukrainian "Association for Communities Participatory Development".

“My Georgia, the country I care about – good participatory budgeting practices”

The Representative Office has put together a set of good practices regarding the implemen-

tation of participatory budgeting. To present the best practices of good governance short documentaries will be created using the modern formula of storytelling.

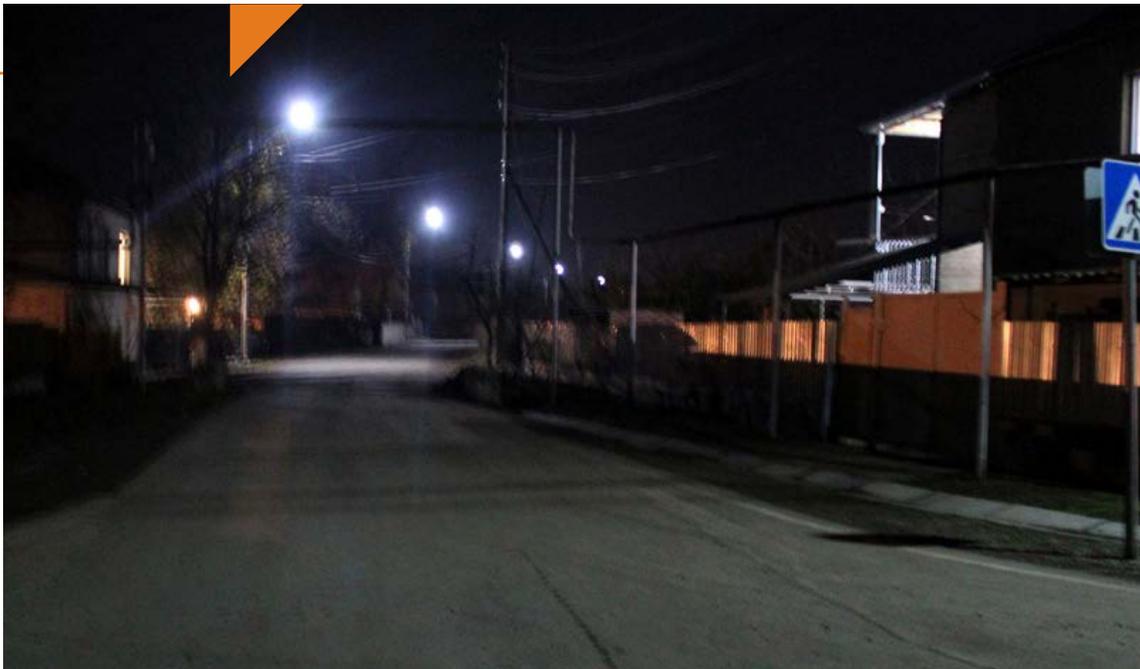
Tsitelsopeli Village

Night. The street is paved and the lights are on. Such is the result of an initiative by Aram Akopian, a local football team coach. He was a student when Olga Endeladze, a Solidarity Fund PL’s collaborator and a local coordinator of the Fund in Marneuli and Signagi, told him of participatory budgeting for the first time. He wanted the village to have a decent stadium, paved roads, and street lighting. Yet, whenever he mentioned that to the villagers, all he would get in response was an ironic look. Regardless, he underwent special training with several other, like-minded people, where he learned how to write projects,

and how to apply for PB funding.

The residents still refused to believe in him even as the lamp posts were being erected. The village had existed for 130 years and there was never any lighting. Until, that is, one beautiful night the lights went on.

The villagers’ scepticism shrank further yet when Aram, along with his like-minded colleagues, decided to pave the streets in the village. He remembered that on rainy days he would wade in mud to get to school. Next year, the residents are planning to renovate the stadium and arrange a park. And set up an open air gym—a step to attract young people.



Zugdidi

They have organised an entire electoral campaign. Some 1,300 families live in the area, and they visited almost every house rallying support. Eventually, over 1,400 people went to the polling stations and they won. Yet, the story told by 75-year-old Tamaz Kharkviani has nothing to do with parliamentary or local elections. The residents of Zugdidi used voting to decide on the construction of a drain channel.

After every rainfall, the neighbourhood looked as if it had undergone a major flood. Carrying a stack of documents, Tamaz would bounce from one public office to another in vain. Until he met Ketii Esarti, a Solidarity Fund PL collaborator, and the Fund's coordinator in Zugdidi. She advised him to prepare a project and solve the issue with participatory budgeting. "Participatory budgeting" "develop project" "ample social participation"—these terms sounded alien and incomprehensible. "Why use a project if the local government would benefit from solving these problems anyway?" thought Tamaz. Still, he signed up for training. Along with other engaged individuals, he consulted every step with the Fund. They launched an information campaign, drew up a project, and won. The local self-government provided approximately EUR 39,000 and, just like that, they solved a decades-old problem.

Initiative is contagious. The residents became more organised. A swing for people with disabilities was set up, and the park got a new, beautifully arranged gazebo. Now there are plans to create a new park. And since the residents want to take part in all the stages of the project, they are designing it all by themselves.



Moldova

The Solidarity Fund PL Representative Office in Moldova was established in 2013. Its activities are primarily focused on local development. 2020 proved to be an important year, as the Moldovan government and international donors have agreed to extend their support for the Rural Development Programme. Additionally, the Representative Office continued its Urban Development Programme and the programme of strengthening trust between the two banks of the Dniester River.

Rural Development Programme

The Representative Office considers rural development as one of its key priorities. Together with local community activists and Solidarity Fund PL partners, the Office implements programmes aimed at improving the quality of life in rural areas, fostering the emergence of new services that are adjusted to the needs of local residents, as well as creating jobs. European developmental solutions, tailored to local context, are meant to stimulate the mobilisation of rural communities and their economic growth.

Solidarity Fund PL achieves these goals through the LEADER approach. This methodology for local development covers the development of strategies, decision-making, and the allocation of resources for the development of particular rural areas. The decisions regarding where and how to direct the funding are taken at the level of local communities, provided they organise themselves into a form of partnership known as Local Action Groups (LAGs). These groups bring together public and private participants who work together to devise strategies and action plans. LAGs, composed of professionals and equipped with decision-making powers, as well as their own budgets, exemplify a new model of organisations capable of not only shaping regional development, but also influencing the institutional and political balance

of power in a given area. The share of the private sector in a LAG must be no less than 50%. Since 2017, using the LEADER approach, the Fund has been able to tap into existing local resources to support the economic development of rural areas. The approach also activates local communities through the creation, formalisation and functioning of LAGs; the LAGs, in turn, manage local development processes. When LEADER was first piloted, the Fund, along with other development partners, directly supported the creation of LAGs and funded their activities, thus contributing to defining the ways of implementing the LEADER approach across the whole of Moldova.

Throughout 2020 the Representative Office has been supporting the process of institutionalising the LEADER approach as a systemic element of the official rural development policy.

The government of Moldova has changed legislation so as to enable the launch of the National LEADER Programme with co-financing from the public budget. Before this happened, however, the Representative Office assisted its partners at the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development, and the Environment in creating an adequate legal environment for the deployment of the LEADER programme. Representatives of Solidarity Fund PL assisted in developing a legal analysis on granting legal personality to LAGs and participated in a working group that drafted the Law on Local Action Groups, which regulates the status and functioning principles of LAGs. The government gave the go ahead for the Law in late 2020.

Meanwhile, the parliament adopted amendments, drafted by the ministry in collaboration with the Representative Office, to the law on local authorities and the law on agricultural subsidies. Local authorities were granted the right to create and participate in LAGs, as well as the possibility to use local budgets to finance them. In turn, the modification of the law on agricultural subsidies introduces definitions of terms linked to the LEADER programme and secures an annual

financial allocation of up to 5% of the National Fund for Agricultural and Rural Development for the implementation of the programme. Thus, Moldova became the first non-EU state to finance LAGs from the state budget and to implement the LEADER programme as a tool of public rural development policy.

Solidarity Fund PL's efforts made it possible for the LEADER approach to become the main focus point of the campaign that promoted the EU's developmental support for Moldova's rural areas.

This was done in line with projects implemented through LAGs and the Representative Office. The EU, as with USAID, considers the creation of LAGs as one of its top priorities. This, in turn, allowed the Fund to receive a grant of EUR 1.25m from USAID and to initiate negotiations with the EU on receiving EUR 2m as further financial support. Carrying out these tasks would not have been possible were it not for the assistance of Polish Aid, which covered the Polish contribution to Solidarity Fund PL's activities.



The framework of the collaboration between the Representative Office of Solidarity Fund PL and the Moldovan Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development, and the Environment has been set in the *Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation for the implementation of the National LEADER Programme* in June 2020. The document was signed by Mr Dorin Andros, Secretary of State at the Ministry and Mr Tomasz Horbowski, the head of the Representative Office, in the presence of Mr Ion Perju, Minister for Agriculture, Mr Bartłomiej Zdaniuk,

Ambassador of Poland to Moldova, and the Head of the EU Delegation in Chisinau, Mr Peter Michalko. The Memorandum was signed for a period of three years. The ministry declared its wish to implement the National LEADER Programme, while the Representative Office offered to assist in the deployment by financing LAGs, contributing to the development of legal and implementation frameworks, as well as through extending other kinds of support necessary for the success of the National LEADER Programme.

Supporting the National LEADER Network was another aspect of Representative Office activities. Supporting the National LEADER Network was another aspect of Representative Office activities. The Network brings together and represents Moldovan LAGs, fostering partnerships on the local, national, and international levels. It facilitates communication throughout the regions, country-wide, and abroad, enabling experience sharing and learning from others. Currently the Network is tasked with promoting the LEADER approach across the country by means of organising new LAGs and creating favourable conditions for their development. By 2022 the number of LAGs is expected to grow and cover approximately 70% of rural localities.

In 2020 two of the Representative Office workers were transferred to the National LEADER Network to support the Network with their expertise and know-how. Additionally, the Office provided on-going consultations for the organisation's director and their team regarding policies and internal regulations. The Office shared documents on the methodology of creating new LAGs and supported the implementation of this methodology.

The Office also carried out studies on the Network's institutional capacities and drafted recommendations for the year 2021 (annual plan for institution-building and the organisation's development strategy).

Another step was to provide the National LEADER Network with funding for the creation of new LAGs. To foster establishment of LAGs in rural municipalities, the Network opened three regional contact points and organised a call for applications. Out of the 38 applications received (representing up to ca. 300 municipalities), seven were selected.

Solidarity Fund PL has also designated an institutional grant to secure the Network's operations from March to December and support its core activities.

In turn, these actions also motivated the Network to devise a self-financing strategy.

Independently, the Network also initiated four projects dedicated to the development of LAGs, and the cooperation and exchange of experiences with Georgia, Armenia, and Latvia.

The Representative Office continues to support the Network with institution-building efforts, since the Network is meant to ensure an adequate level and sustainability of all LEADER-related processes.

2020 saw higher than usual interest in our activities. This was reflected not only in the number of inquiries we received, but also in a growth of participation, i.e. the activation of local communities. More and more partners are submitting their initiatives to Solidarity Fund PL-funded projects.

– In February, the Representative Office launched the EU-LEADER Rural Development Fund for financing development projects carried out with the participation of LAGs. The Fund's information campaign comprised ca. 160 in-person and 40 online meetings with residents that reached a total of 2,500 people. Some 600 applications were turned in, and 230 initiatives from 23 LAGs received funding.

After signing agreements with LAG partners, the Representative Office also provided the necessary training. The Office supported partners in carrying out environmental and technical analyses of their projects, obtaining certificates, and introducing necessary modifications.

The entire process was managed so as to encourage as much participation as possible. The projects were selected by commissions set up in individual LAGs and any decision required the acceptance of all LAG members. Around 700 people determined to have a say in the development of their localities became involved in the project. Among them were heads of communes, teachers, entrepreneurs, activists, farmers, culture animators, etc.

The goals of the projects included the development of small infrastructure (parks, playgrounds) and social services (libraries, education), support for small businesses



THE IMPACT OF ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT UNDER THE LEADER APPROACH IN MOLDOVA IS:



32 LAGs



35% of country's rural areas



700 micro-projects implemented



out of which 500 with Solidarity Fund PL funding



> 400 new jobs generated

Most of the jobs were created in business, while the rest in civic, and public sectors. Local micro-projects have motivated several people who received support to register their businesses.



(purchases of equipment, construction of greenhouses), and for non-agricultural businesses (agrotourism, new services).

The total value of investments clearly exceeds EUR 1.3m. The Fund's contribution amounted to EUR 800,000 (25% of funds were provided by Polish Aid and 37% by EuropeAid). The remaining 38% was covered from partners' own contributions.

In May, Solidarity Fund PL launched a pilot EU-LEADER Flagship Initiatives Fund, aimed at supporting initiatives implemented directly by entrepreneurs. 120 applications were filed for the grant competition. The 12 selected projects focused on rural tourism, energy efficiency solutions, small-scale dairy processing, apiculture (indigenous bee species), and the cultivation of rare crops, such as sea buckthorn or almonds. Some of these projects are carried out by LAGs' local partners, which allows the entire history of support received by companies to be traced, i.e. from the activation stage

to the intended outcome. The support from Solidarity Fund PL amounted to EUR 200,000 (with 40% of funding from Polish Aid and 37% from EuropeAid).

Solidarity Fund PL continuously strives to develop new tools that will contribute towards the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas, the promotion of role models for local communities, the identification and consolidation of local sectors of the economy, and the introduction of innovations in rural communities through LAGs. Pilot programmes facilitate the testing of various solutions which, if successful, may be introduced on a larger scale. This is exemplified in the concept of a fund for LAGs' innovativeness and development, launched in December 2020. Funding will be granted to three LAGs (or partnerships), which will then deploy a comprehensive programme of innovative solutions within the LAG's territory. The fund is to be deployed in 2021.

Promoting the LEADER approach and the impact of LAGs' activities

In total eight videos were created to illustrate the stories of local entrepreneurs, mainly women, who benefited from LAG support. A further eight documentaries were aired on major Moldovan TV channels. Below we present the stories of two initiatives:



Small construction company

The company of Alexandra Burca, a young teacher and entrepreneur, provides an example that, with a little bit of courage—and with the help of a Local Action Group—a business in Moldova can thrive. Alexandra's company produces "LEGO" bricks, i.e. a construction material manufactured using modern, high-precision hyperpressing methods. It is the first company to produce such materials in the southern part of the country. The company operates smoothly and generates jobs for local residents.

Initially, it seemed to Alexandra that it was impossible to make the first step. However, the funding and support from the "Cismeaua Sudului" LAG, i.e. the partner structure for the implementation of the LEADER approach, convinced this young businesswoman to pursue her plans.



Weaving business

Aliona Plamandea lives in the Gura Bîcului village in the Anenii Noi region. Her company manufactures ornamental weaved furniture: hammocks, swings, and other accessories. Weaving used to be her passion, but no more than a spare-time activity. She posted pictures of some of her work online, got some "likes", and eventually someone asked her to make one item for them. And that is how her business got going.

Thanks to support from the LEADER approach and the "Serpentina Nistrului" LAG, she dedicated herself fully to her passion and today she is running a dynamic company. Aliona's weaved furniture is available in stores throughout the country.

She used to purchase raw materials in Ukraine but, due to the pandemic she was forced to switch to local suppliers. She also discovered synthetic rattan as a material for her new designs.

As more and more orders were coming in, she realised that she and her employees needed better equipment. They have submitted a project for a small company producing ornamental furniture. They succeeded on the third try and bought all the necessary tools.

Urban Development Programme

Solidarity Fund PL activities include facilitating access to European funds for local citizens, supporting the development of civil society, improving living conditions, and stimulating entrepreneurship. The Urban Development Programme is one of these activities. It covers support for the implementation of regional development policies and assistance in urban revitalisation. The goal of the programme is to bring about the transformation of urban areas that are either neglected or in downright critical states and require architectural, economic, and, above all else, social changes. Urban renewal is not only about public spaces and infrastructure, or introducing innovation—it is also about rallying communities around change processes.

The urban revitalisation programme was initiated in Moldova in 2017 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment with the support of Polish Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy and in collaboration with the Solidarity Fund PL Representative Office in Chisinau. The Programme consists of three stages:

- 1) establishing dialogue between local authorities, residents, and local entities in order to reflect on the city's development, to determine the area that is to be revitalised, and to come up with a comprehensive diagnosis;
- 2) exploring the needs and resources of local communities in order to develop a revitalisation programme, which is based on a shared vision and which includes a series of integrated activities (revitalisation projects);
- 3) implementation of the programme and the creation of local and national partnerships.



The Fund has supported programme participants throughout all these stages by holding workshops, working meetings, internships, and through collaboration with city representatives on devising revitalisation plans. The methodology for creating new plans was based on the experiences of the cities that carried out their first initiatives in the 2018-2019 period.

The Fund has also been involved in fostering cooperation between the ministries, the organisation of training, missions of Polish experts/professionals to Moldova, and in internships in Poland that allowed Moldovans to study successful revitalisation cases.

Representative Office personnel also took part in updating urban renewal guidelines for cities that are preparing for the process, as well as in developing a manual on the implementation of revitalisation programmes in Moldova. Both documents, created in 2019-2020 as a result of cooperation between Moldovan cities and the Polish Ministry of Development Funds

and Regional Policy, are based on Polish and Moldovan experiences in this field.

All the actions listed above paved the way for incorporating revitalisation as a priority of the ministerial Urban Development Programme financed by the 2021-2023 National Regional Development Fund. The Fund will finance projects in cities whose revitalisation programmes have been developed in line with ministerial guidelines and the revitalisation manual.

Revitalisation projects in 2020 were implemented in eight successive cities: Bălți, Ceadâr-Lunga, Cimișlia, Drochia, Edineț, Reziņa, Strășeni, and Ungheni. They covered the development of small infrastructure (roads, sewage, and lighting systems), the revitalisation of green areas and public spaces, and schools and kindergartens. For instance, in September four kindergarten groups were recreated in a revitalised building that used to serve as a kindergarten but had been shut down for several years.

The Representative Office funded these projects under the Small Project Funds—Urban renewal, at a cost of approximately EUR 700,000 out of which Solidarity Fund PL subsidies amounted to EUR 290,000. Apart from the funding, the Representative Office has contributed with consultations and mentoring.

The experiences gathered during the implementation have motivated 13 cities involved in the project to sign a declaration establishing a National Network for Urban Development and Revitalisation. Its purpose is not only to promote revitalisation projects, but also to guarantee an adequate quality of developmental

and revitalisation processes. A member of the Solidarity Fund PL team in Chisinau was invited to sit on the board of the Fund.

By adopting the Urban Development Programme, the ministry chose to build regional development in Moldova on the experiences of the cities that it considers to be focal points for growth. Six such cities were named. In cooperation with these localities, the Representative Office has developed a report on their institutional capacities.

The report features local-level programme implementation models, including models for establishing implementation departments within city halls. The report also offers scenarios for organising such departments and describes their needs. The aim is to support the implementation of the Urban Development Programme on the local level.

Additionally, Solidarity Fund PL carried out a project with the goal of collecting cities' good practices for strengthening SMEs during the economic recession caused by the coronavirus outbreak. After developing a survey methodology, a legal analysis was carried out and some 40 cases of solutions for supporting entrepreneurs from different cities were gathered. The project, coordinated by the Masovia Development Agency (Agencja Rozwoju Mazowsza S.A.) in collaboration with partners from the Visegrád Group states and Ukraine concluded in May 2021. It was financed from the Visegrád Fund. Its following stage will consist of assisting the cities in implementing selected solutions aimed at strengthening local entrepreneurial spirit.



Building trust between the residents on both banks of the Dniester River

In 2020 Solidarity Fund PL concluded the “Access to Success: Partnership for Sustainable Community Development (A2S)” project that had been underway since 2017. The main objective of the project, implemented in collaboration with Moldovan-based EcoContact, Ecospectr, and Mostenitorii organisations, was to foster the social development of 42 local communities in localities set on both banks of the Dniester River, one being controlled by the Moldovan authorities and the other by Transnistria. Another goal was to improve the quality of life by supporting joint socio-economic initiatives and to use local development to strengthen trust between the communities from both sides of the river. Project activities, designed in line with the Asset-based community development method, included the organisation of workshops for local leaders, i.e. representatives of NGOs and informal groups of residents, and the creation of local and inter-municipal partnerships, project writing and management, how to fill in funding applications, tax regulations, and reporting on

concluded projects. The project also comprised a series of study visits of Polish experts to local communities, as well as visits of Moldovans to Poland (2018). The Representative Office provided funding to local projects (2019).

All these efforts resulted in the creation of 42 local community development plans in areas such as culture, youth activities, and the reorganisation of public spaces.

Meanwhile, 17 partnerships from both banks of the river carried out joint projects dedicated to local public infrastructure (the revitalisation of parks, creation of playgrounds, renovation of a healthcare centre), cultural activities (cooperation of cultural centres from both banks), young people (school sports fields), and tourism.

In February 2020, during the project’s closing conference, the representatives of Solidarity Fund PL presented a study on increasing the effectiveness of cooperation of localities from both banks of the Dniester River, and strengthening trust in disputed areas. From the experiences gained throughout the project, the study gathered good practices and principles for trust-building actions.

The ca. EUR 645,000 initiative was financed by EuropeAid (80%) and Polish Aid (20%).

March 2017-March 2020:



42 communities involved



21 partnerships established



15 partnerships receiving funding



ca. EUR 387,000 in subsidies for projects



approx. 450 local entities directly engaged in activities

6 priority areas for actions:

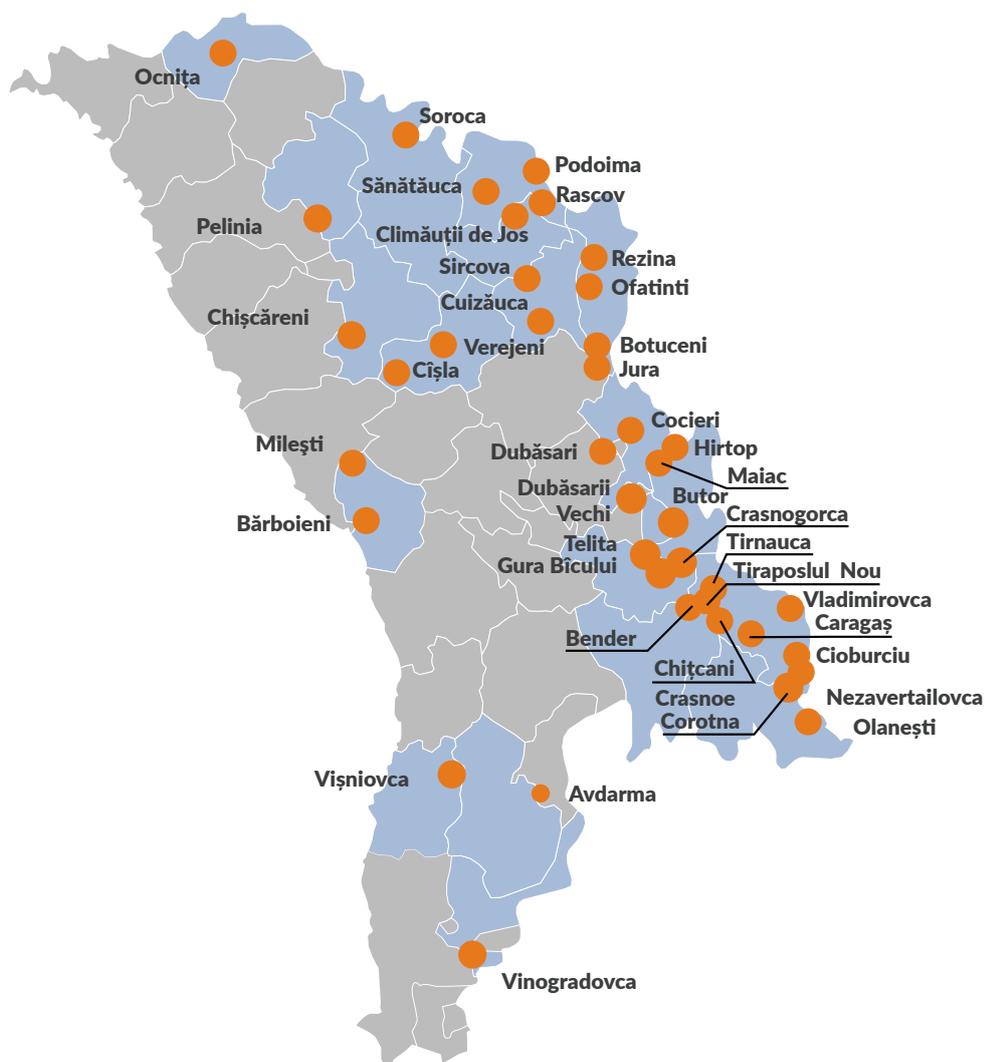
- culture,
- social affairs,
- tourism,
- youth,
- sports,
- the environment



30 implemented projects



12 non-governmental organisations registered in A2S





Ukraine

The Solidarity Fund PL Representative Office in Ukraine has dedicated one more year to support the two reforms taking place in the country: social policy and vocational education.

Support for social policy reform

As part of its efforts to support the reform, Solidarity Fund PL has implemented three complementary projects.

The first project addressed the development of hromadas' competencies regarding the provision of social services. It targeted hromadas (self-governing territorial units) in Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, and Cherkasy oblasts. Its goal was to use the Common Assessment Framework to increase the competences of

personnel responsible for the provision of social services in hromadas.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, it was necessary to modify the plans and to carry out most activities online. Despite initial uncertainty, the project attracted substantial interest. The Fund received inquiries about the possibility to join the project from oblasts outside of the originally intended area.

Eventually, 27 hromadas (40% of applications) were qualified to join the project and each of them was represented by two workers.

All the participants underwent a six-month training cycle comprising four webinars and two rounds of small-group consultations. The participants were given the opportunity to learn self-assessment methods in regard to their potential and effectiveness and to test them in practice: the participants carried out an analysis of the results of interactions with social services users.

In the face of numerous reports from partner hromadas concerning difficulties in carrying out their duties caused by the pandemic, Solidarity Fund PL decided to launch a special, one-off support project. Each of the hromadas received funds for purchasing IT and personal protective equipment. This allowed for the efficient implementation of the project and supported the everyday work of the personnel responsible for social services.

The training will also continue throughout 2021. It will be focused on the practical aspects of the project, i.e.: implementation of participant-developed solutions to problems in the provision of hromadas' social services.

The project is co-financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and the US Department of State.

The second project dedicated to social services reform addressed the issue of planning and implementing social services in Chernihiv oblast. Its focus points included the provision of services to the elderly, strategic planning, and the capacity to secure and properly manage external aid measures. The initiative was conceived in response to the needs communicated by the participants of the 2019 competency-building project. The 2020 activities are a pilot project, and experience gained in Chernihiv oblast will be used in other regions.

A series of training sessions brought together representatives of authorities and entities

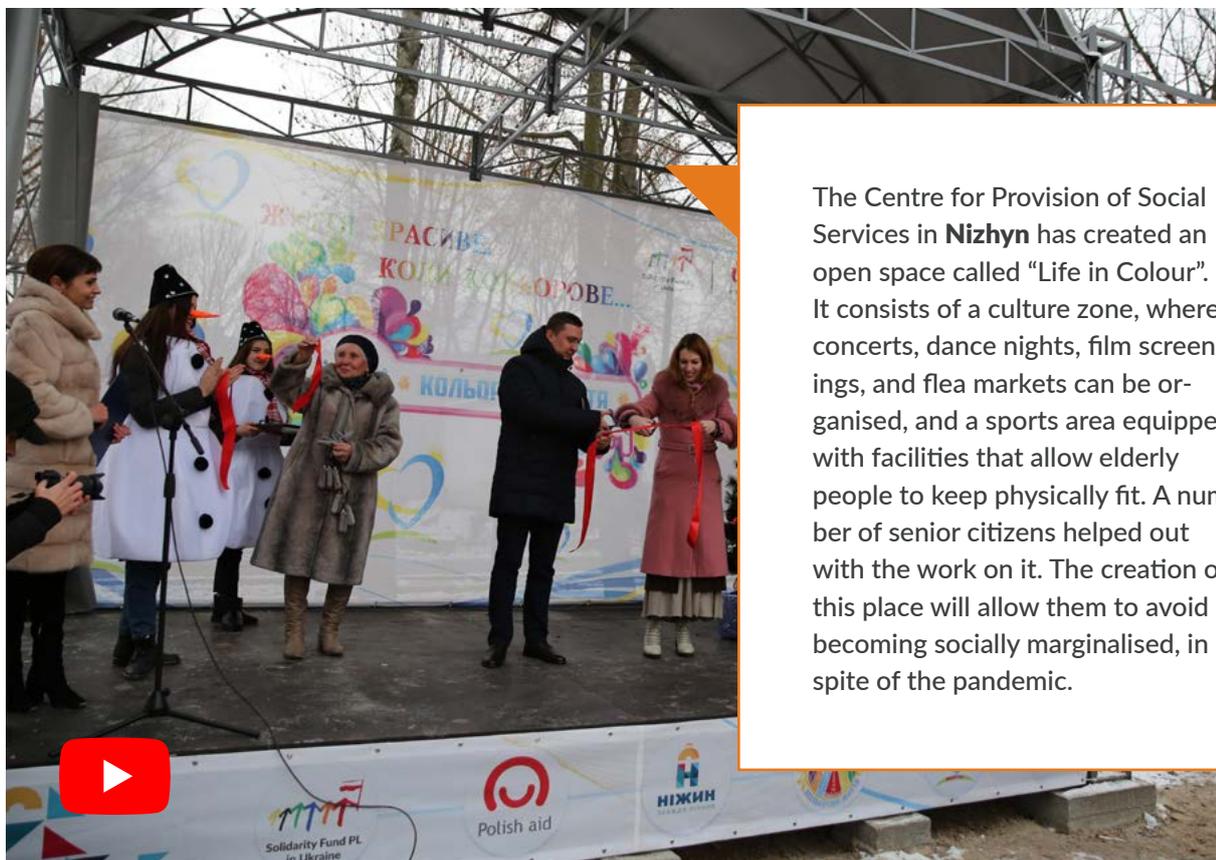
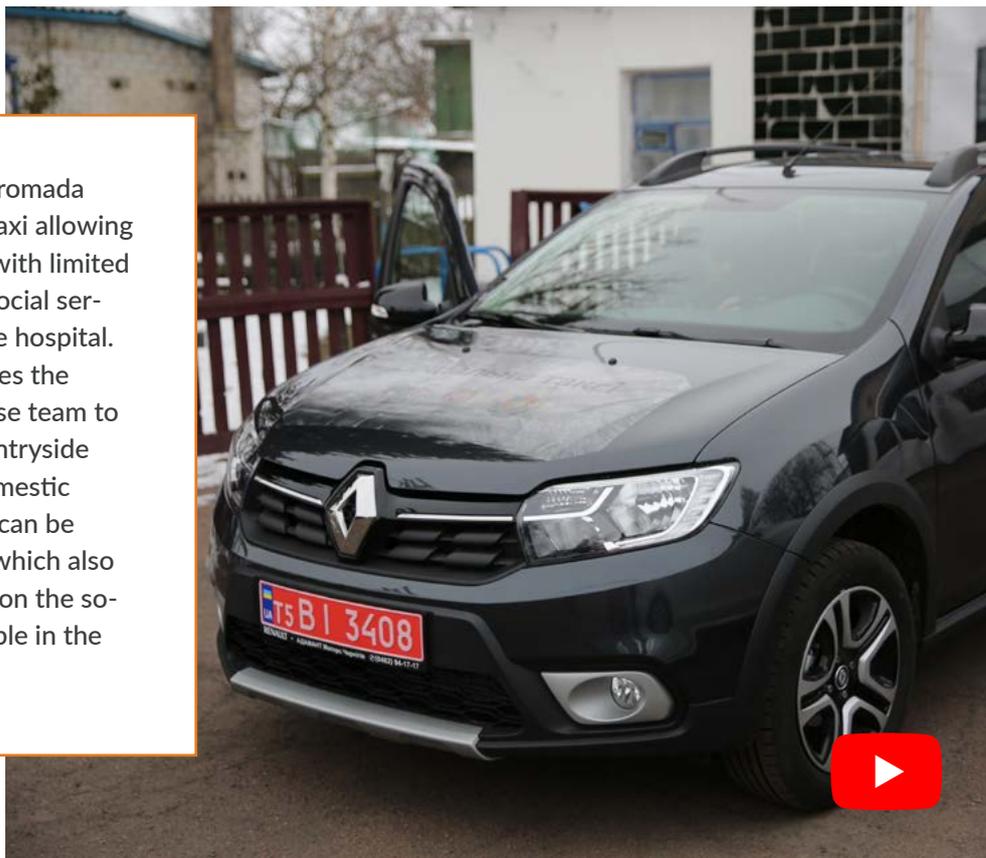
responsible for the provision of social services from 15 hromadas. The online training sessions consisted of webinars, practical activities, and individual consultations. Some of the issues were presented by professionals from Poland.

In the practical part, the participants developed elements of social services provision plans and reported difficulties, and worked on problem-solving methods. They also carried out SWOT analyses in five areas: family, children and adolescents; the elderly and people with disabilities; poverty and unemployment; and social assistance institutions in hromadas (resources, services, management, and growth). For these areas, the participants created problems-and-objectives "trees".

Meanwhile, the two-day in-person training in Chernihiv addressed the improvement of project writing skills. 29 people from all the hromadas involved came together to learn about the principles of sourcing and managing external aid measures.

The participation of hromadas in the Small Project Fund served as a practical test of the planning and implementation skills gained throughout the course. 14 project participants filed their applications, and four hromadas qualified for the support. Each of them has received approximately EUR 14,000 (with a minimum 10% own contribution). The results of their actions are the following:

In **Losynivka** the hromada launched a social taxi allowing people in need or with limited mobility to reach social services centres or the hospital. The taxi also enables the emergency response team to travel into the countryside (e.g. in cases of domestic violence). The taxi can be hailed via hotline, which also offers information on the social services available in the hromada.



The Centre for Provision of Social Services in **Nizhyn** has created an open space called "Life in Colour". It consists of a culture zone, where concerts, dance nights, film screenings, and flea markets can be organised, and a sports area equipped with facilities that allow elderly people to keep physically fit. A number of senior citizens helped out with the work on it. The creation of this place will allow them to avoid becoming socially marginalised, in spite of the pandemic.

The hromada in **Sosnytsia** organised a free bike rental service. The residents can use 25 bikes and four parking stations equipped with repair facilities. The stations are fitted with cameras, and the bicycles have GPS sensors on board. Since Sosnytsia has no public transport, bike rental is also available to visitors from neighbouring villages.



The **Snov** hromada used the premises of an old dental clinic to create a space for educational activities, fitting it with IT equipment and a gym with sports simulators. The project facilitated the integration of the city authorities with non-governmental organisations involved in the works.



The third project of the Representative Office aimed at supporting social policy reform was consultations on family policy, in particular in regard to adoption. The consultations addressed the experts from the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy who are responsible for the implementation of selected aspects of the reform.

Legal consultations, carried out by Polish professionals, covered the issue of international adoption (legislation and practical activities) and family courts.

The project was a continuation of previous efforts. Cooperation between the Solidarity

Fund PL Representative Office and the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy had begun as early as in 2019.

Additionally, the Representative Office has prepared information materials and translations of Polish legal acts. The documents translated into Ukrainian included the Support for the Family and the System of Care Act and three information notes of particular importance to Ukrainian partners: “Professional foster families in Poland”, “Support for family and foster care in Poland”, and “Tax relief for families with children”.

EU4Skills: Better Skills for Modern Ukraine

The goal of the EU4Skills programme is to reform the system of vocational education in Ukraine.

Apart from central-level support for education reform, the project is being implemented in seven pilot oblasts (Lviv, Rivne, Vinnytsia, Poltava, Chernivtsi, Mykolaiv, and Zaporizhia).

The package of EU4Skills activities handled by the Fund, includes:

- the creation and development of a labour market intelligence system in Ukraine;
- the establishment of regional action plans for vocational education;
- the creation and implementation of careers counselling;
- the creation of an optimised, multi-channel vocational education funding mechanism; and
- a reform of the budget programming system.

In spite of pandemic-induced difficulties, the Fund successfully carried out the first stage of the initiative.

Together with its Ukrainian partners, the Fund analysed the situation of vocational education in pilot regions, devised a methodology, and supported the creation and official adoption of the vocational education development strategies. The methodology of developing these strategies has since been approved by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science and recommended for the remaining Ukrainian oblasts.

Developing a research methodology, asking some 6,000 employers from pilot oblasts to complete surveys, and tracing the careers of 10,000 alumni of vocational schools meant it was possible to create the Labour Market Information System (LMIS). The results of the study are not only applied in the policies on vocational education and the labour market

but are also used to support future vocational schools alumni and their parents in choosing career paths.

The introduction of careers counselling and professional orientation into the Ukrainian education system have become an integral part of the “New Ukrainian School” reform and may be considered as another milestone.

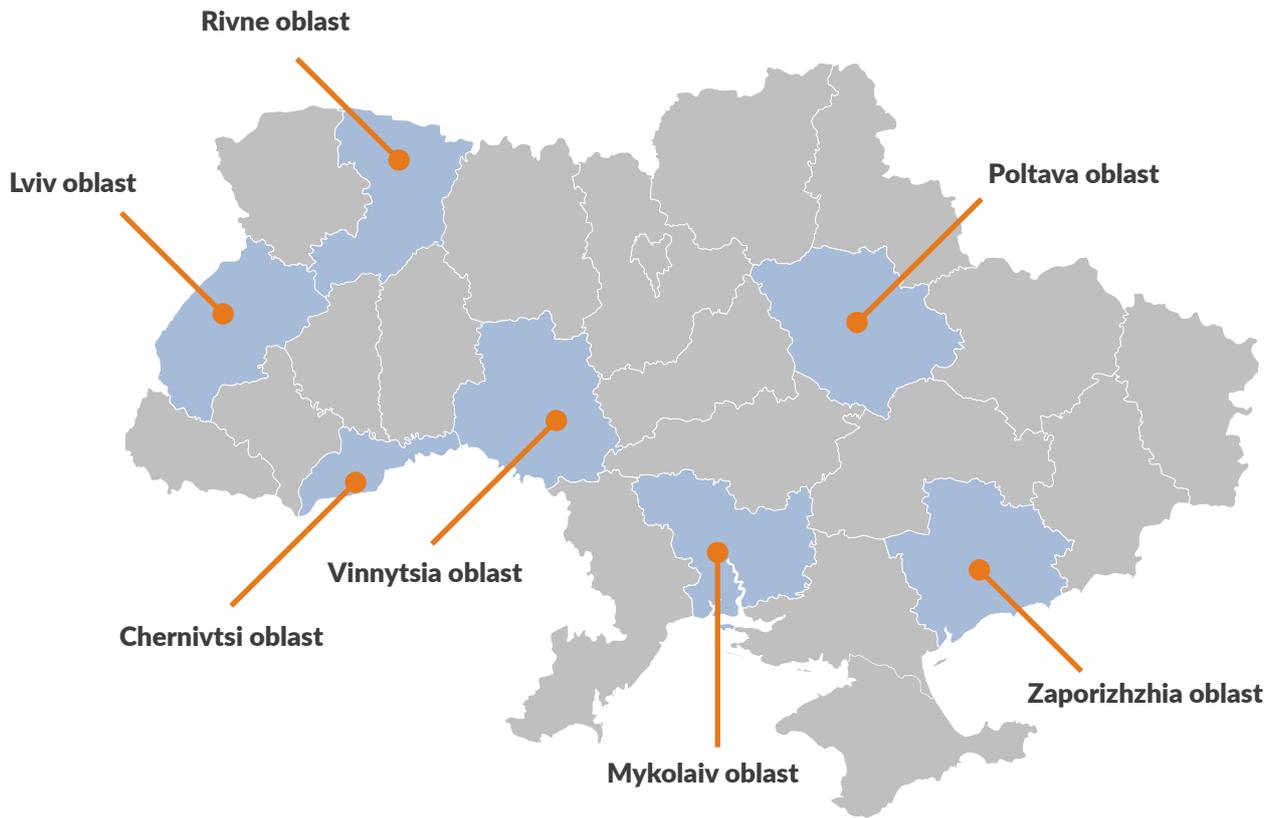
As part of EU4Skills, the financing system of Ukrainian vocational education also came under scrutiny. The analysis made it possible to define and address the shortcomings of the system. Measures included linking the financing of the schools with groups of professions and connecting the funding to the labour market and co-financing by entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, a textbook and a methodological guide for teachers about professional orientation for grades 1-4 of primary school were developed. The textbook is to be issued for initial testing as part of the reform in 2021.

The project, funded by the European Union, Germany, Poland, Estonia, and Finland, is being implemented by the German GIZ GmbH Development Agency and partners from the co-financing states listed above.

The project will be carried out until 2023.





Implemented by:



FINNISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION



Solidarity Fund PL



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA EDUCATION AND YOUTH AUTHORITY



Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland



Polish aid



МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОСВІТИ І НАУКИ УКРАЇНИ



Project spin-off activities

Following up on the efforts to support the decentralisation of Ukrainian education, and in partnership with Sweden’s SKL-International, Solidarity Fund PL co-financed the publishing of another manual for local education managers. The most recent edition is dedicated to the profiling of curricula in senior primary school grades and in secondary schools.

Additionally, a discussion panel was organised in February, during the 13th Poland-Ukraine forum in Rzeszów under the name “Unfinished reform. The dispute on the position of territorial local government in Ukraine”. During the

meeting, experts and representatives of local governments from Ukraine, Poland, Germany, and Sweden discussed the achievements of the decentralisation reform in Ukraine and exchanged views on future plans.

The Fund has also facilitated the participation of Ukrainian experts and professionals in the 3rd Polish-Russian Local Government Forum held online in December. The Representative Office in Kyiv helped to invite panellists from Ukraine to tell their Russian colleagues about the course of the reform. The Office also co-financed simultaneous interpretation during the Forum.

IV.

Providing Adequate Medical Care for Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq



The project included extending medical care to people in need in line with the idea of equal opportunities, i.e. regardless of their religion and ethnic background. Aid was offered to internally displaced persons as well as poor, local Kurdish, Muslim, and Christian populations from the area of Erbil and Duhok in Iraqi Kurdistan.

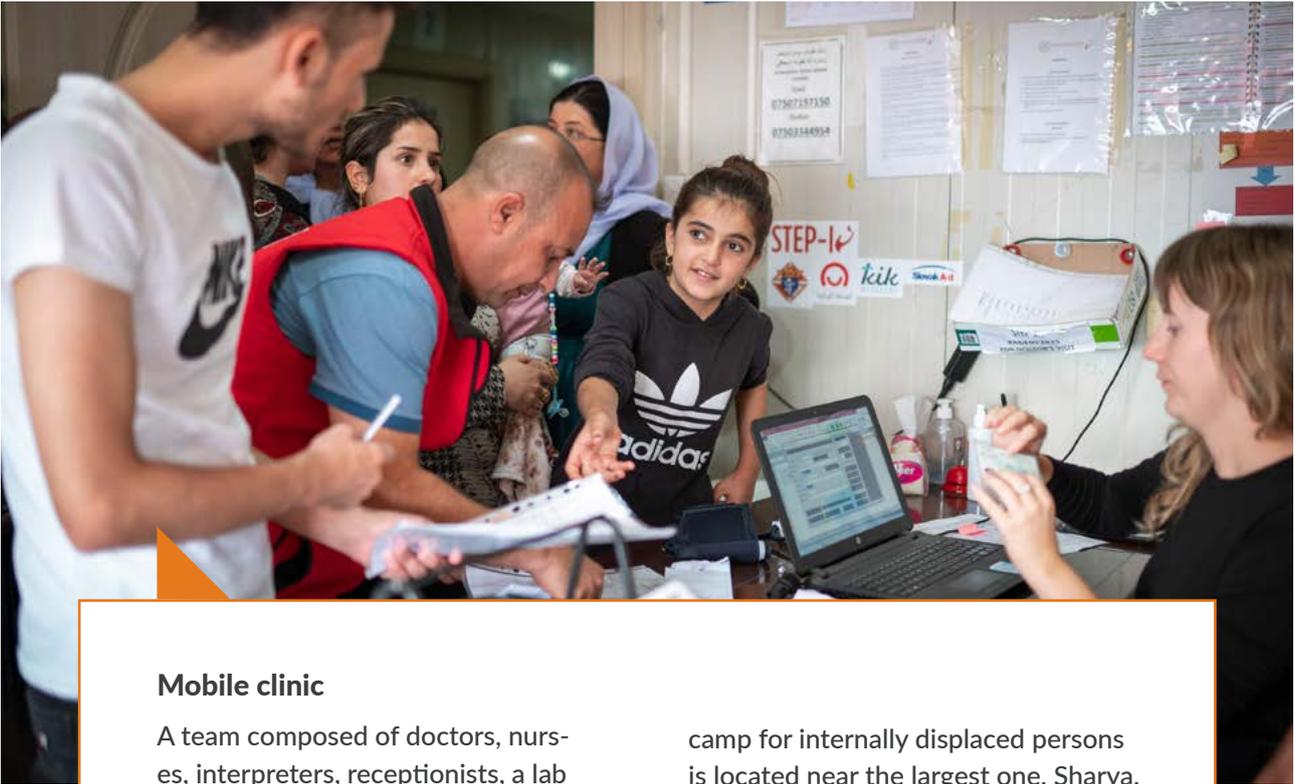
The activities were financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, and USAID, in collaboration with partner organisations: the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK), and STEP-IN from Slovakia.



Dawodiya Camp Clinic

Dawodiya Camp in Duhok has become home for approximately 8,000 internally displaced persons, including some 3,500 Yazidis. They have been forced to leave the Sinjar region, after it was overrun by ISIS in 2014. Not only did they lose their homes, but many have also lost their family members. These dramatic events have negatively affected the health of numerous people, triggering depression, and anxiety disorders. Among other things, the clinic provided such services as medical examinations, radiological tests, a biochemical

lab, a pharmacy, psychiatric consultations and treatments, round-the-clock ambulances, and on-call duties of nurses at times when the daytime medical team was not available. Additionally, regular health education on the healthy feeding of children under five years of age, imparted through social workers' home visits to local families, was made available to the residents. These services were provided from October 2019 until the end of April 2020. In March and April sanitary restrictions were observed, and the elderly would be visited in their homes.



Mobile clinic

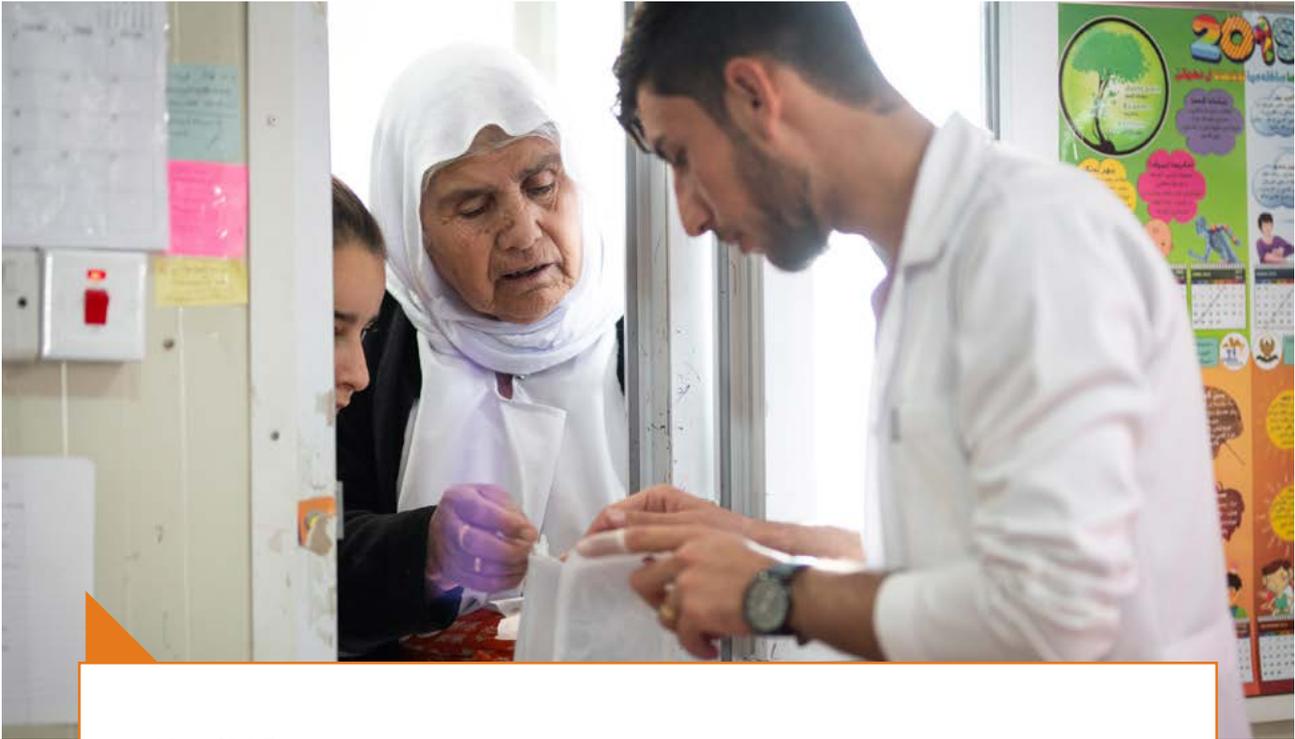
A team composed of doctors, nurses, interpreters, receptionists, a lab technician, a pharmacist, and a physiotherapist has held regular medical consultations in the localities in the vicinity of the Dawodiya Camp. The mobile team would follow a fixed schedule to visit four villages: Balqosh, Sina, Garshin, and Sharya. A namesake

camp for internally displaced persons is located near the largest one, Sharya, and is inhabited mainly by Yazidis. Most of the patients were received there and physiotherapy and psychiatric treatment also took place there. Basic biochemical tests and medications were also made available.



Physiotherapy centre

Rehabilitation in Ozal, on the outskirts of Erbil.



HandSAP

The activities of HandSAP (The Healthcare and Social Aid Program) covered ad hoc medical and medicine-related assistance for those in need from the Dawodiya camp, from neighbouring villages, and Erbil district. Among other things, the patients were given medication, people with poor eyesight received glasses, and

prosthetic limbs were handed to those who needed them. The assistance also included covering the costs of transport to medical centres, as well as testing and treatments. The list of refunded procedures included: dialysis, eye surgery, chemotherapy, insulin shots, and specialist diagnostics carried out at hospital, etc.



7 months

CAMP DAWODIYA CLINIC



4,705 medical consultations



107 psychological consultations



1,036 home visits

CENTRUM FIZJOTERAPEUTYCZNE



1,206 consultations and physiotherapeutic procedures

MOBILE CLINIC



3,478 medical consultations



psychological consultations



497 physiotherapeutic consultations

HandSAP ACTIVITIES

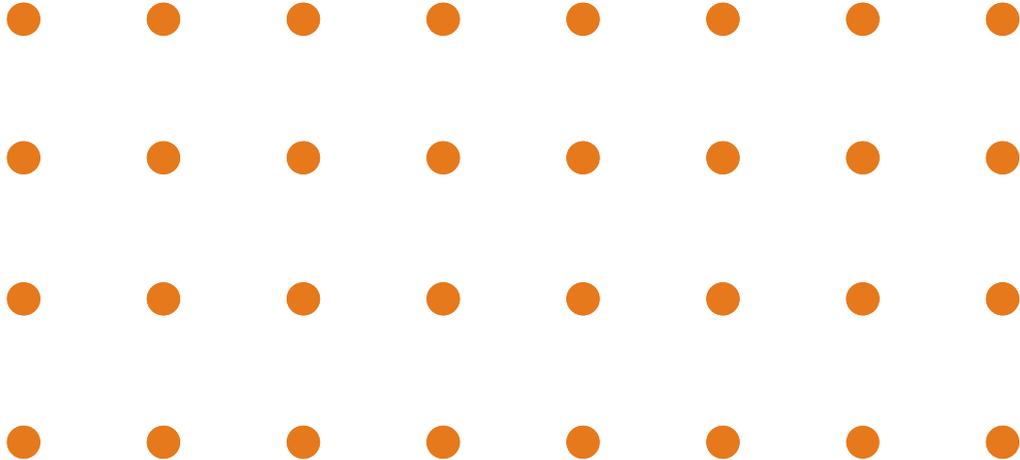


55 persons



V.

Election monitoring missions



Free elections are the cornerstone of democracy and the way they are held is an important test of the functioning and the robustness of democratic procedures in any country. Since 2012 Solidarity Fund PL, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, has been recruiting, preparing and sending Polish observers to monitoring missions.

Election monitoring is organised by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe ([ODIHR/OBWE](#)).

Short-term observations last for around a week and cover only the process of voting and counting votes. In terms of territorial scope, short-term observers (STOs) usually cover dozens of electoral commissions.

Long-Term Observations normally take ca. six weeks and cover a major proportion of the electoral process, including the registration of candidates, the creation of electoral lists, the electoral campaign, the proceedings of the electoral administration, and the examination of electoral complaints. During the elections, long-term observers (LTOs) supervise the work of STOs and are usually responsible for several electoral circuits (regions).

In 2020, due to the pandemic, ODIHR/OSCE made the decision to limit the monitoring missions to LTOs only.

Solidarity Fund PL was responsible for sending Polish observers to the following missions:

- parliamentary elections in Georgia (1st round: 31 October – 2 observers);
- local elections in Ukraine (1st round: 25 October – 4 observers);
- presidential elections in Moldova (1st round: 1 November – 2 observers; runoff: 15 November – 1 observer).

The observers were recruited through an open call and an internal recruitment process among Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff. The requirements for the candidates included, first and foremost, the knowledge of the vernacular language of the target region/country and experience in monitoring activities.

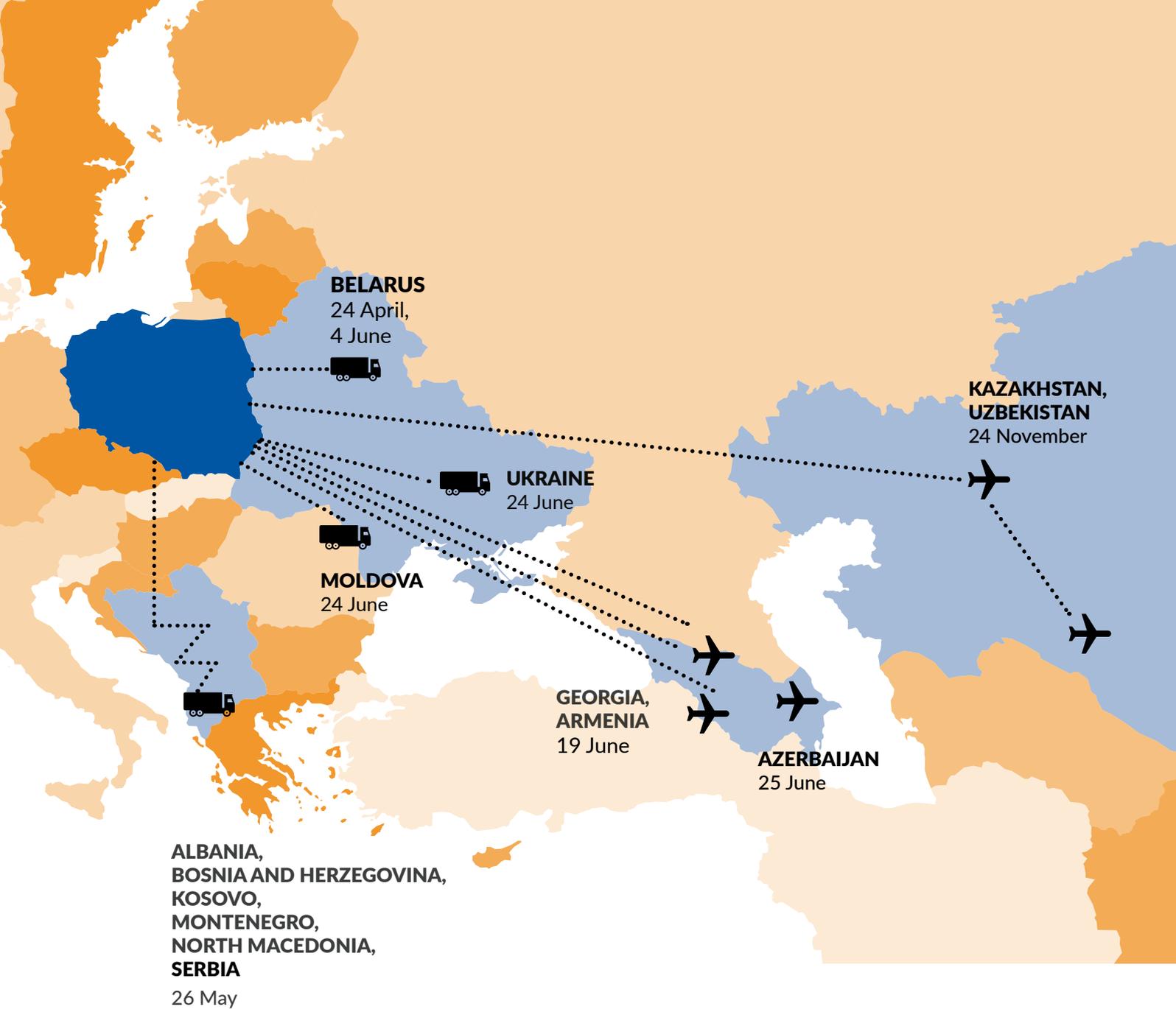
All the mission participants were tested for SARS-CoV-2 prior to their departure and were provided with personal protective equipment.

The ODIHR/OSCE has withdrawn from the long-term observation of the runoff of elections in Georgia. Also, Polish observers have not been sent to the runoff of Ukrainian elections. Although Solidarity Fund PL carried out recruitment for short-term observer missions in Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan these missions were cancelled in the light of the OSCE decision.



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14

countries

9

convoys

**PLN
55.8m**

**total value
of donations**

