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UIC Refugee Task Force work after one month of activity

UIC supports its members by encouraging discussion and preparing deliverables

(Paris, 14 April 2022) Reflecting one of the components of its DNA - cooperation - and one of its values - solidarity - the International Union of Railways (UIC) has set up a Refugee Task Force as its first action relating to the conflict in Ukraine. The Task Force held its first online meeting on 10 March 2022. Since then, it has exchanged relevant information on a regular basis in order to support UIC member companies, partner associations and organisations in tackling the challenges arising from the humanitarian crisis. 92 representatives from 29 countries (from Estonia to Portugal) and 44 companies are currently taking part in the Task Force to exchange information.

Marc Guigon, UIC Passenger Director, Coordinator of the Middle East and Latin America Regions and Coordinator of the UIC Refugee and Covid-19 Task Forces, together with Vanessa Pérez Miranda, UIC Senior Passenger Advisor, are coordinating the work of the Task Force in cooperation with the UIC Security Division, as well as the Communications and Freight Departments, to create a forum to exchange information on the efforts made by the railway community to face the current situation: these discussions include updates on migration flows, sharing of good practice and know-how on managing such flows, real-time exchange of information between train operators and infrastructure managers in order to welcome Ukrainian refugees in railway stations and trains as effectively as possible, preparation of communications plans, and ways of addressing any security issues.

The added value of the Task Force

Taking into consideration that human trafficking is an increasing issue worldwide and traffickers have been seen at stations attempting to lure Ukrainian refugees, a UIC survey was circulated through the security platform to share practices to raise the awareness of refugees on this threat in stations and trains. UIC is also working on a guidance on measures to be taken for refugee crises, which will be released shortly reporting on all Task Force activities.

Member representatives from all European countries provided information. The participation of Ukrainian Railways and Polish Railways should be highlighted.

Representatives from Ukrainian Railways (UZ) regularly provide an overview of what UZ is doing to help refugees get to a safer place, for example running passenger trains to help transport people and providing humanitarian aid in cargo wagons.

Last Friday, Kramatorsk station was attacked and 52 civilians killed. In memory of the victims, UZ ensured that seat number 52 was left vacant on trains across the country and were marked with a commemorative note and flowers.

UZ has two dedicated websites: the first concerns humanitarian aid (uz-vezemo.com) and provides a list of items most urgently needed, as well as a phone number to call to provide aid for both passenger and freight transport and the volume of aid received to date. The second website provides information on train schedules, passenger traffic, daily updates on routes and ticket availability. UZ representatives continue to express their gratitude for all the support provided by the UIC Task Force and the importance of the railways' role. Ukraine has shared a letter from Ukrainian Railways calling on investors and partners to provide financial support to the company for evacuation, shelters and worker support, together with a list of technical materials and equipment necessary to ensure the continued functioning of JSC UZ. SBB will organise a call with other members in relation to the materials needed in Ukraine to ensure effective coordination and avoid duplication of efforts. The list of materials has been updated with information on items already delivered.

Poland is the most affected neighbour country. **Polish Railways (PKP S.A.)** therefore regularly provides updates on the situation and how it has been affecting Poland, with 2.6 million refugees now on Polish territory (4.5 million people have left Ukraine and 322,000 have crossed the Polish border by train). They continue to describe what the railways are doing to help refugees in stations, providing information on free travel and the number of trains dispatched, services being provided such as information and medical stands, as well as tents set up on platforms with hot meals and drinks for those who wish to eat and rest before continuing their journey. A new system is now in place: free tickets from PKP Intercity are available for women, children, people with disabilities and those over the age of 60. The flow of refugees has decreased significantly since the beginning of the crisis, with less congestion, but in order to ensure smooth flow of passengers, PKP is providing humanitarian trains in close cooperation with government and with local forwarding by bus to relieve stations. Border stations have been reinforced to streamline the process, and security office employees and security guards remain stationed at the borders even if the situation is now stable. PKP has had to deal with a major increase in unattended luggage in comparison with previous years, with a 24/7 contact point in the crisis management system.

Security: Marie-Hélène Bonneau, Head of the UIC Security Unit, has shared experience of how crisis management has been addressed in past refugee crises in the context of the UIC Security Platform and the measures that can be taken during such crises. Challenges in past crises included coping with large flows of migrants at stations, preventing unauthorised boarding of international trains, language problems, media attention, making use of unused infrastructure and disruption to existing passenger flows.

Freight: Sandra Géhénot, UIC Freight Director, and Philip Van den Bosch, UIC Senior Freight Advisor, will team up with the International Union for Road-Rail Combined Transport (UIRR) to monitor the impact of this crisis on freight volumes, itineraries and interchangeability of corridors.

They are also addressing the Asia-Europe corridor issue. The Task Force will develop a survey in order to provide better insights for the members on the impact of the war on freight business, including how to find alternative routes.

Ticketing: David Sarfatti, UIC Senior Advisor and IT expert, has shared an initial proposal for members to facilitate the passage of refugees through Europe with a digital solidarity ticket for a limited time, based on an existing solution to avoid surcharges and fraud.

The UIC Management Board attended a high-level meeting with PKP last week in Warsaw. The meeting provided an opportunity to visit the station to better understand and learn from the situation in Poland and to directly support the refugees. This symbolic participation was very much appreciated.

The situation in all affected countries is now under control, with no major security concerns apart from the cybersecurity risk, which is being closely monitored, along with the risk of fraud and human trafficking noted by several UIC members.

As in previous crises such as the pandemic, UIC is keeping very close to all its members, especially those directly affected by this situation, by continuing to work together within the Task Force.

A Task Force LinkedIn group is open to all UIC members. Feel free to join the group and share your thoughts: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/14061600/>

A dedicated Refugee Task Force webpage is available on the UIC website and provides details of actions being taken by members to help refugees: <https://uic.org/refugees/>

Report from OCHA Ukraine: Humanitarian Impact Situation Report

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-impact-situation-report-1200-pm-eet-8-april-2022>

Rail Security Hub: Easily find, access and share solutions and information on railway security issues on a secure, user-friendly, comprehensive and interactive platform from the UIC Security Division.

<https://railsecurityhub.org/>

CONTACT

For any questions or proposals for contributions to the meetings of the Task Force, please email refugees@uic.org
