Humanitarian aid

Immediately after the beginning of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, members of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA) assessed needs in Poland and Moldova and, in close cooperation with the Swiss embassy in Kyiv, set up hubs to provide concrete support to people affected by the war. Deliveries of relief goods were coordinated from there. To date, Swiss Humanitarian Aid has transported over 1,000 tonnes of aid from Switzerland to Ukraine and purchased over 4,765 tonnes of essential food in Ukraine to support the population.

The relief supplies included:

– Multi-purpose and winter-proof family tents with household items
– Generators
– Medical material (e.g. hospital beds, medicines, respirators, defibrillators and burn dressings)
– Fire-fighting material (protective jackets and trousers, fire hoses)
– Material to prepare for winter (insulation material, replacement windows, heaters)
– Winter clothes (gloves, socks, blankets) from the Swiss Armed Forces’ stock.

As part of the Winter Aid Action Plan, Switzerland also supported projects for the urgent repair of destroyed civilian infrastructure (e.g. emergency repairs in the energy, road and health sectors). Various Swiss Humanitarian Aid projects were started to enable this where development cooperation was already active and strong partnerships existed.

On 21 February 2023, the Federal Council also requested a new emergency aid package. The 2023 Action Plan, amounting to CHF 140 million, is intended for Ukraine and Moldova. It includes measures in the areas of peacebuilding (e.g. demining), health (e.g. repairs to hospitals), economic development (e.g. small loans to agricultural SMEs), sustainable cities (e.g. repairs to schools) and multi-sectoral support (e.g. delivery of requested material). Additional funding of CHF 92 million required for this still has to be approved by Parliament. Since February 2022, more than 70 SHA specialists have been deployed in Ukraine and Moldova to reinforce Swiss representations in both countries and support humanitarian organisations on the ground (ICRC, UN, NGOs).

Development cooperation

Switzerland has been carrying out international cooperation work in Ukraine since the 1990s. Its current activities are based on its 2020–23 cooperation programme and include the following key areas:

– Strengthening democratic institutions
– Improving health (improving basic services)
– Sustainable urban development (e.g. energy efficiency, sustainable mobility)
– Strengthening the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (agricultural SMEs, access to financial services).

This work is proving to be highly relevant and will continue to evolve and adapt as necessary. In the area of development cooperation, for example, a project for war trauma rehabilitation has been adjusted accordingly. Another project delivers chemicals and hygiene products for milk production to different regions, which should enable the dairy sector to survive financially.

Financial assistance and multilateral support

In providing financial assistance, Switzerland makes use of instruments of international organisations such as the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which have set up funds to pool the contributions of various countries to Ukraine.
As tax revenues in Ukraine have collapsed due to the war, the World Bank’s Peace Fund ensures that Ukraine’s state budget can be maintained and that, among other things, public sector employees – such as teachers and the police – can continue to receive a salary. Switzerland supported the fund with CHF 10 million in 2022 and plans to provide a further CHF 20 million in support to the Ukrainian state budget in 2023. Through the Ukraine Relief, Recovery, Reconstruction and Reform Trust Fund, Switzerland is helping to urgently repair destroyed energy infrastructure. It is also contributing CHF 2 million to a World Bank initiative that is assessing the damage caused by the war and evaluating which repairs need to be prioritised.

Through the EBRD, Switzerland’s commitment is primarily directed towards the private sector in Ukraine. The Small Business Impact Fund is helping to improve framework conditions for SMEs. This is done through advisory services, strengthening supply chains, access to financing and the establishment of industrial parks. Through the IFC (International Finance Corporation), Switzerland supports a mixed financing instrument with CHF 10 million, through which loans can be granted to farmers and other businesses in the agricultural sector. Through the Swiss Investment Fund for Emerging Markets, Switzerland invests in the Horizon Capital Growth Fund, which supports start-ups in the IT and export sectors.

**Peace, human rights and international humanitarian law**

Without justice, lasting peace will not return to Ukraine. Switzerland therefore supports mechanisms and processes for the prosecution of crimes under international law, including war crimes and the crime of aggression. For example, Switzerland, along with 42 other states, referred the situation in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court. This was the prerequisite for the ICC prosecutor to start the investigation immediately.

However, given the scale of crimes related to Russia’s military aggression, it will be impossible to prosecute all cases. Switzerland is therefore supporting Ukraine in adding further mechanisms and activities to address criminal accountability. In this respect, Switzerland is for example supporting the Ukrainian authorities in the search for and identification of missing persons. Humanitarian demining activities are also being supported to enable the rapid return of civilians to their homes and property. In addition, Switzerland is providing support to investigative mechanisms of the OSCE and the UN.

**Recovery process**

At the beginning of July 2022, the then president of the Swiss Confederation, Ignazio Cassis, together with the Ukrainian prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, brought all major partners (EU, international organisations) to the table for the first time in order to advance the political process of Ukraine’s recovery. The Lugano Declaration proposed the political framework, noting that Ukraine was responsible for steering the process, but that reforms must continue in parallel. The Lugano Principles, which are contained within the Lugano Declaration, list common benchmarks for the future. At the conference in Lugano, 59 states and organisations were represented by delegations.

The Lugano Principles were taken up at the conferences in Berlin (October 2022) and Paris (December 2022), each of which focused on supporting Ukraine and continuing the recovery process. Switzerland will actively participate in the next Ukraine Recovery Conference, which will take place in London in June 2023.

**Support for future measures**

Within the framework of the next IC strategy period 2025–28, the Federal Council has reserved funding of around CHF 1.5 billion for Ukraine. The amount comprises 5–10% of the total IC budget, which will be allocated to support actions (humanitarian aid and development cooperation) in favour of Ukraine and the surrounding region, plus an additional contingency fund of around CHF 650 million in this strategy period for reconstruction in Ukraine.

Together with the approximately CHF 300 million allocated for 2023–24, this brings the estimated total to around CHF 1.8 billion.

**Good offices**

Switzerland offered its good offices to both parties at the beginning of the war, including the following:

– serving as host for talks and meetings. To this end, it offers an established platform in International Geneva. As the European headquarters of the UN, Geneva
offers considerable added value for peace processes, bringing together in one place continuity, expertise, infrastructure and the relevant actors;
– providing substantial support and contributing expertise to possible negotiations;
– protecting power mandates. Ukraine requested that Switzerland assume a protecting power mandate for it in Russia. For the protecting power mandate to come into force, Russia would have to give its consent. As set out in the Vienna Convention, protecting power mandates require the consent of all three participating states. If Russia agrees, Switzerland will be able primarily to provide consular services for Ukrainians in Russia via an interest section within the Swiss embassy in Moscow.

International organisations

Since the start of Russia’s military aggression, the situation in Ukraine has also been repeatedly discussed in various organisations. The UN Security Council, for example, has regularly debated the situation in Ukraine.

A resolution condemning Russia’s war of aggression, co-sponsored by Switzerland and 79 other states, failed in the UN Security Council at the end of February 2022 due to Russia’s veto. As a result, the UN General Assembly convened an urgent special session on Ukraine. To date, six resolutions have been adopted, including one condemning Russia’s aggression, and others on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, on the issue of reparations and on the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The resolutions were all adopted by a clear majority, with Switzerland voting in favour in each case.

In the UN General Assembly and, since the beginning of 2023, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Switzerland has strongly condemned the military aggression in its statements on Ukraine and called for compliance with international law and the protection of the civilian population.

The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva – also with the support of Switzerland – has set up a commission of inquiry to gather information on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in connection with the conflict.

Switzerland has also taken a stand each time the situation in Ukraine has been discussed at the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

Research and conservation of cultural heritage

A credit of CHF 9 million for scientific solidarity in favour of Ukrainian researchers in Switzerland has been set up via the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

The Swiss government has been working to protect Ukraine’s rich cultural heritage by funding projects run by Swiss civil society actors and by providing financial support to international organisations such as UNESCO and the OSCE. In order to prevent the destruction or illegal transfer of Ukrainian cultural property, funds have been allocated to increase border controls and to establish an online platform to facilitate the exchange of information between countries.

Protective and packaging materials that are no longer available in Ukraine have been delivered to over 50 museums in the Odesa and Kharkiv regions. In addition, several unique works from the collection of the National Art Museum in Kyiv have been brought to Switzerland for conservation and public exhibition. They have been on display at the Kunstmuseum Basel since December 2022. A collection of books in Ukrainian has been built up in public libraries in Switzerland with financial support from the Swiss government.

Sanctions

On 28 February 2022, the Federal Council decided that Switzerland would adopt EU sanctions against Russia and Belarus, thus strengthening their effect. Switzerland also applied the EU’s subsequent sanctions packages within a very short period of time.

The sanctions include targeted measures against over 1,450 individuals and 206 organisations (freezing of assets and travel bans), numerous measures in the financial sector, trade bans on certain goods, and a ban on providing certain services to the Russian government or Russian companies. In addition, Switzerland participates in the price caps on Russian crude oil and petroleum products. Switzerland ensures that sanctions contain exemptions so as not to hinder humanitarian activities.

Switzerland’s adoption of EU sanctions does not alter its neutrality in any way. Switzerland continues to fully uphold its neutrality in the strict sense of the term, i.e. the law of neutrality. It does not favour any warring party militarily. However, the Federal Council used
the leeway allowed by its neutrality policy in deciding to adopt the EU’s sanctions against Russia, taking into account the fact that Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine is a serious violation of the most fundamental norms of international law.

Full, effective implementation of the sanctions imposed is a priority for the Federal Council. Cooperation between Switzerland and its international partners functions smoothly in this area at the technical level, with those responsible in the Federal Administration exchanging information with sanctioning authorities from various countries on a daily basis. The exchange of information is possible under the Embargo Act and is actively practised by the Swiss authorities. Switzerland is determined to continue its good cooperation with partner countries in a constructive manner, based on shared values and objectives, and to intensify it where necessary.

Migration

In March 2022, the Federal Council decided initially to activate protection status S, which grants asylum seekers from Ukraine a right of residence without having to go through the usual asylum procedure. In November 2022, the Federal Council announced that it would keep the S protection status in place until March 2024, unless long-term stability returns to Ukraine before that date. By the end of April 2023, Switzerland had granted protection status S to more than 79,000 people from Ukraine, of which more than 65,600 had active S status at the end of April 2023.

Within the framework of the Moldova Support Platform, Switzerland has also agreed to take in 500 Ukrainian refugees who are currently in Moldova. Furthermore, Switzerland has taken in civilians from Ukraine for treatment of acute physical illnesses. In addition, other particularly vulnerable groups including orphans and foster children have found refuge in Switzerland.

The reception and care of Ukrainians seeking protection and the high number of asylum seekers in Switzerland are placing a significant demand on the asylum system. Since January 2023, the Swiss Armed Forces have been offering additional accommodation, also providing support in setting up and managing this infrastructure.

In order to facilitate the integration of persons with protection status S into the labour market, self-employment is permitted in addition to salaried employment, and the waiting period of three months has been abolished. Furthermore, in April 2022 the Federal Council decided on additional support measures for persons with protection status S, in particular for promoting language learning.

Switzerland is also funding a UNICEF project in neighbouring countries of Ukraine which focuses on the protection and integration of people who have fled Ukraine. This funding comes under the Rapid Response Fund of the second Swiss contribution to selected EU member states.