



**OLAM**  
Improving the world. Together.

# UNPRECEDENTED RESPONSE AND COLLABORATION

Preliminary Lessons from Jewish and Israeli  
Responses to the Crisis in Ukraine

JULY 2022





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## MESSAGE FROM OLAM CEO

Within days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the ensuing humanitarian crisis had already elicited an unprecedented response within the global Jewish community. Dozens of Jewish organizations and Jewish-led groups, local and international, were spurred to action to meet the needs of those impacted by the war. At one point, 16 of OLAM's 65 partners — Jewish and Israeli organizations working in the fields of international development, humanitarian aid, and global volunteering — were on the ground, in Ukraine and bordering countries. Many of our allies in the Jewish engagement arena were also directly involved, due to their presence in and deep connections to Jewish communities in the region.

As a convener, one of OLAM's roles is to collect field-wide data. We commissioned this report from Rosov Consulting as a means of educating the general Jewish public about how their charitable dollars were making a difference, galvanizing continued Jewish philanthropic support for the crisis and its ongoing needs, and sparking conversations among Jewish groups and humanitarian aid organizations related to future crises.

This report tells a partial picture, and does not aim to be the final word on the Jewish humanitarian response to this crisis, which is still very much underway. It does, however, capture preliminary findings from the first weeks and months, post-invasion. Similarly, the list of interviewees is by no means comprehensive. When choosing which individuals and organizations to include, we opted for a diversity of organizations over depth within any particular type of organization.

*Front cover photo credits clockwise from left to right: Manhail, Rom Barnea, Yuval Cohen Harounoff, Yuval Cohen Harounoff*



*Photo: Yuval Cohen Harounoff*

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Yet, it is our hope that this report will catalyze important conversations, interventions, and collaborations, precisely as public attention on this crisis wanes and the needs increase.

In many ways, Ukraine is unique in terms of its multiple Jewish connections, historically and presently. Nevertheless, at OLAM, we hope it opens up greater consciousness in the Jewish community about the needs of all refugees and other humanitarian crises around the world – in Ethiopia, Syria, Venezuela, Yemen, and elsewhere.

OLAM's mission is to convene and mobilize Jewish leaders and organizations to take meaningful action in support of the world's most vulnerable people. But we cannot do this work alone. In the early days of this crisis, we partnered with two other umbrella organizations, the Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief (housed at JDC), and the Society for International Development-Israel to map the Jewish and Israeli response. As we consider the practical applications of this report, we are committed to continuing to do so in deep partnership with others.

We gratefully acknowledge our colleagues at Rosov Consulting, Yaakov Malomet and Dr. Alex Pomson, for their expert research, analysis, and guidance. Our deepest gratitude as well to all the individuals and organizations who were interviewed for this report. Your willingness to share your insights and experiences with us, in the midst of responding to a crisis, enable all of us to learn and do our work better.

Kol tuv,  
**Dyonna Ginsburg**  
**CEO, OLAM**

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*Photo: Rom Barnea*

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## 1 BACKGROUND

OLAM is a network of Jewish and Israeli organizations working in the fields of global service, international development, and humanitarian aid. Many of OLAM's partners, alongside other Jewish and Israeli organizations, are on the ground in Ukraine and in adjacent countries providing support and services to those who have been caught up in the war in that region. These organizations include legacy providers of humanitarian aid such as World Jewish Relief (WJR) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC); Jewish engagement organizations catapulted into humanitarian action such as Chabad and Hillel in the Former Soviet Union; and Jewish-led grassroots networks providing personalized help.

This report seeks to draw out preliminary lessons from the Jewish and Israeli efforts that have mobilized in response to this humanitarian emergency. Although the crisis remains ongoing and will likely continue to evolve over the coming months and years, this report seeks to provide initial insights on how Jewish groups have collaborated during the first three months of this crisis, and how they can collaborate most effectively in its next phases. It also seeks to capture wisdom gained through responses to this crisis that can inform how the Jewish community can respond to future crises in other parts of the world.



*Photo: World Jewish Relief*

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## 2 METHODOLOGY

Rosov Consulting conducted 25 interviews with a carefully selected sample of individuals representing a variety of international humanitarian aid organizations, umbrella organizations, Jewish engagement organizations, funders, Israeli government entities, and grassroots networks responding to the crisis in Ukraine. A pool of potential interviewees was identified by OLAM, and interviews took place within four months of the start of the war, from late April 2022 to early June 2022, on Zoom, in Hebrew and English, lasting 45 minutes to one hour. In most instances, one representative from each organization was interviewed; in a couple of cases, two people were interviewed. Their reflections are quoted throughout this report. Quotes from Hebrew interviews have been translated into English. Interviewees were informed that their comments would not be attributable, and all consented to being listed in Appendix A of this report.

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## 3 PRESENCE ON THE GROUND



Photos from left to right: Rom Barnea, Yuval Cohen Harounoff, Innovation: Africa

### 3.1 Most of the Jewish and Israeli entities interviewed can be classified as follows:

#### INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AID ORGANIZATIONS

These organizations focus on supporting people impacted by humanitarian crises, such as natural disasters (floods, famines, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.) and wars. Their work is generally cross-border and may include immediate relief, long-term recovery efforts, and programs aimed at promoting resilience. This group includes JDC, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), IsraAID, NATAN, United Hatzalah, and WJR.

#### JEWISH ENGAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

These organizations focus on building Jewish identity and community. Some of the engagement organizations interviewed for this report are local entities, based in Ukraine and the region. Others are headquartered abroad, with local staff and community members in Ukraine and the region. This group includes Chabad, Hakhel (Hazon), Hillel International, JCC of Krakow, Moishe House, Project Keshet, the Puszke Foundation, and the World Jewish Congress (WJC).

#### GRASSROOTS NETWORKS

These ad-hoc networks, initiated and funded partly by Jews, have emerged in response to the crisis in Ukraine. Some of the members of these networks are individuals, unaffiliated with any organization. Others have organizational ties. This group includes HaTashtit, Nitzanim, and Ukraine Support Teams (UAST). Certain informal efforts connected to Chabad, Hakhel (Hazon), Hillel International, Moishe House, and Project Keshet are also included in this group.

### 3 PRESENCE ON THE GROUND

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In addition, we also interviewed two **Israeli governmental entities** responsible for implementing the State of Israel's worldwide development and cooperation programs in developing countries (MASHAV, Jewish Agency for Israel [JAFI]); **an umbrella organization** that brings together over 170 entities working in the spheres of international development and humanitarian aid (The Society for International Development-Israel); and two **funders** that were involved in operations, in addition to grantmaking, during this crisis (The Jewish Federations of North America [JFNA] and Leichtag Foundation).

Most of the organizations interviewed had previous experience in humanitarian aid and disaster relief, with the exception of most Jewish engagement organizations. International humanitarian aid organizations had professional experience in this area. A minority of Jewish engagement organizations had experience responding to crises on an ad hoc basis, providing initial response to severe crises elsewhere in the world. Most of the Jewish engagement organizations that we reviewed did not have previous experience in humanitarian aid or disaster relief.

Most organizations had a presence in Ukraine before the current crisis. This presence varied from extensive Chabad networks present in Ukraine since before the Second World War, to other Jewish

engagement organizations that have run significant operations in Ukraine since the end of the Cold War, to a small number of organizations present in Ukraine since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Those that were present in Ukraine before the current crisis often have chapters or branches elsewhere in the Former Soviet Union or other Russian-speaking Jewish communities. Many interviewees mentioned that this presence is a key element influencing the effectiveness of response in Ukraine during the current crisis. *Organizations and networks "that operated previously in Ukraine, have local infrastructure, local employees, they can play a significant role in the response. They already have the tools and relationships on the ground that can be leveraged."*



#### 3.2 Preparedness

Most interviewees reported that their organizations were unprepared when the crisis escalated in February 2022. A smaller group, however, consisting mostly of international humanitarian aid organizations, and some organizations with a significant presence in Ukraine prior to the crisis, reported a high level of preparation. Neither group expected that the crisis would reach such a level of intensity or scale. *“We were prepared, within some limitations, but the scale and magnitude of tragedy of the war was beyond our worst fears.”*

Several interviewees from international humanitarian aid organizations reported that they expected the escalation as a result of dedicated monitoring of the situation during December 2021 and January 2022. This monitoring allowed them to develop contingency plans and emergency protocols, and to determine what steps they would take if the crisis escalated. These organizations stockpiled supplies, mapped scenarios,

**“We were prepared, within some limitations, but the scale and magnitude of tragedy of the war was beyond our worst fears.”**

prepared evacuation plans, prepared to launch fundraising campaigns, and mobilized response teams.

Other organizations reported that they were less prepared for this specific crisis but found that their existing organizational infrastructure or networks provided them with a good foundation to launch a response in February and March 2022. *“We didn’t have a clear plan. We did have the infrastructure to do the work. We just needed to execute on the fly.”*

Interestingly, several interviewees mentioned that earlier responses to the Covid-19 pandemic provided a positive model for responding to the crisis in Ukraine. During the pandemic, organizations of all types began to collaborate in new ways, and informal networks began to organize on WhatsApp groups and Signal channels. Similarly, larger organizations became more flexible in their ways of working: *“Covid taught us that we are well-placed to respond quickly. By the next day [following the invasion] we transferred funds to our partners; we had a flexible, responsive funding structure. We had funding available to do what they think is necessary.”* These experiences and lessons from the pandemic proved beneficial in responding to the crisis in Ukraine as well.

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## 4 JEWISH FOCI

### 4.1 Population Served

A small minority of organizations reported providing services primarily to Jews. These organizations were also most likely to partner with other Jewish or Israeli organizations in delivering responses. Some interviewees reported that often this dynamic emerged from donors who were primarily interested in supporting efforts dedicated to providing aid to Jews.

Approximately half of those interviewed reported primarily serving their extended networks, which happen to mainly include Jews. This group consists mostly of Jewish engagement organizations, most likely to have had a presence in Ukraine prior to the crisis. *“It was more a network thing. We wanted to help people that we knew beforehand, who happened to be Jewish.”*

Close to one-third of those interviewed reported that they serve all populations affected by the crisis in Ukraine. Most interviewees expressed discomfort with the concept of prioritizing aid to Jews, emphasizing that their organizations and networks were truly providing aid to all refugees, regardless of Jewish identity or affiliation. *“When there is a refugee, you can’t check if someone is Jewish or not Jewish. The focus is on people whoever they are, whatever their need is.”*

**“When there is a refugee, you can’t check if someone is Jewish or not Jewish. The focus is on people whoever they are, whatever their need is.”**

### 4.2 Collaborations

Approximately a quarter of the organizations interviewed reported collaborating mainly with other Jewish or Israeli organizations. These collaborations often focused on providing unique services specific to Jewish needs, such as providing kosher food or facilitating the resettlement of Jewish refugees through aliyah to Israel. *“Our goal is helping Jews, specifically in making aliyah if they want to. So, we primarily look to collaborate with Jewish communities.”*

Slightly more than one-third of the organizations, including Jewish engagement organizations, international humanitarian aid organizations, and funders, reported mainly collaborating with organizations with which they had previous relationships and that happened to be Jewish. These organizations did not necessarily prioritize partnerships with other Jewish organizations, but because their preexisting network of partners typically consisted of Jewish organizations, they ended up mostly cooperating with other Jewish organizations in response to the crisis: *“You look within your network, look for: who do you have things in common with? We are building on previous relationships in this space. Jewish organizations that are established locally, looking to collaborate with those that have the most local connections and resources.”*

Close to one-third of the interviewees reported collaborating with nonsectarian organizations. This group mainly consisted of international humanitarian aid organizations, rather than Jewish engagement organizations. They reported being active members of the UN OCHA cluster system, coordinating with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), or being in close contact with local government authorities inside and outside of Ukraine.

**“You look within your network... who do you have things in common with? We are building on previous relationships in this space. Jewish organizations that are established locally, looking to collaborate with those that have the most local connections and resources.”**

### 4.3 Motivation

Approximately one-fifth of interviewees mentioned that their principal motivation for responding to the crisis was the fact that Jews were directly affected. These organizations mostly collaborated with other Jewish organizations and were more likely to prioritize providing aid to Jews.

Slightly more than one-third of interviewees were motivated to respond because their network, which happens to consist primarily of Jews, was directly impacted by the crisis. These organizations had a significant presence in Ukraine before the crisis and were more likely to prioritize serving the members of their networks, regardless of their Jewish identity.

Less than one-third of interviewees reported that they respond to all humanitarian crises, regardless of a Jewish connection. This group, consisting mainly of international humanitarian aid organizations, mostly seeks to serve all populations, and is also most likely to partner with nonsectarian organizations.

International humanitarian aid organizations and Jewish engagement organizations differed the most in their relationship with the Jewish dimensions of crisis response. International humanitarian aid organizations were most likely to serve all populations, collaborate with nonsectarian,

rather than Jewish or Israeli organizations, and respond to most crises. In contrast, Jewish engagement organizations were most likely to prioritize serving Jews, collaborate primarily with Jewish or Israeli organizations, and respond to crises where Jews were directly affected.

## 5 FORMS OF RESPONSE



Photos from left to right: Manahhai, Innovation: Africa, World Jewish Relief

Moldova and Poland served as hubs for Jewish and Israeli responses to the crisis, for contrasting reasons. Several organizations chose to locate their response efforts in Moldova specifically because of its lack of response infrastructure, as a less developed country that is not an EU or NATO member state. At the beginning of the crisis, Moldova's airspace remained closed, further limiting the ability to transfer supplies in and refugees out. As a result, several organizations, including IsraAID, Hatzalah, and others, chose to focus on where the need might be greatest.

In contrast, Poland, as an EU and a NATO member state with developed local infrastructure, served as a natural staging point for many Jewish and Israeli organizations. These organizations leveraged the resources available in Poland to launch their response in the early days of the crisis, which often expanded to other frontline countries, such as Romania, Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria, and elsewhere throughout Europe.

### 5.1 Fundraising and Grantmaking

All response efforts, including grassroots networks, sought to address the crisis through fundraising and grantmaking. Although organizations were often able to raise larger sums of money from more diverse groups, grassroots networks were often able to raise and distribute money more quickly.

Interviewees representing larger organizational response efforts reported distributing funding to local partner organizations in Ukraine and in border countries, very often focusing on providing operational support. As the local organizations were leading the early stages of the response, larger organizations stepped in to ensure that they maintained their operational capacity. One funding organization described this well, stating: *"We were critical in preventing the breakdown of civil society activists and organizations. We made sure that they could remain operational during the crisis. We have been maintaining civil society, Ukrainian networks that were in danger of collapse."*

These organizations also often stepped in to support local Jewish communities that were leading the effort to evacuate, accommodate, and resettle refugees in the early days of the crisis. These communities, especially those in Poland and Moldova, were often overwhelmed by the needs they were supporting, and these grants provided vital assistance to purchase supplies and support operations.

Interviewees that represented smaller organizational efforts organizations and grassroots networks were more likely to provide cash grants directly to individuals. Especially in the early phases of the crisis, when systems for distribution and quality control were not in place, these grants provided needed funding for food, shelter, medicine, transportation, and other assistance. Often these networks felt comfortable providing direct grants because of the trust built into their pre-existing relationships.

### 5.2 Healthcare

Healthcare was a significant form of response, mostly led by larger organizations and Israeli government entities. These organizations sent delegations of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers to Ukraine and border countries as well as several mobile clinics and a civilian field hospital. International humanitarian aid organizations and Israeli government entities also organized shipments of medicine and medical supplies, which often required higher-level coordination with local authorities, licensing requirements, and bureaucracy.

Smaller organizations and grassroots networks also organized similar shipments, and more often coordinated a variety of psychosocial responses, emotional support, and trauma response, particularly in border countries.

### 5.2 Supporting Refugees

Support for refugees was the most frequent and most intensive form of response mentioned by interviewees. Organizations of all sizes and types were involved in some element of the refugees' journey: evacuating individuals or groups from Ukraine, facilitating their crossing of the border, providing them with transportation and accommodation, and providing them with goods and services to facilitate integration in host communities. Most often, organizations are resettling Ukrainian refugees in Europe, often in Jewish communities throughout Central Europe. This form of response leveraged the resources, infrastructure, and connections of local Jewish communities to provide supplies, services, and accommodation for Ukrainian refugees. Organizations like Chabad and JAFI have focused primarily on resettling those who are eligible to make aliyah in Israel.

### 5.4 Challenges

Interviewees were most often frustrated by the involvement of other unnamed organizations that they perceived as "opportunistic," such as those lacking the relevant skills or experience for responding to the crisis in Ukraine, or those with no prior experience in the region. Several interviewees found it challenging to see *"whole delegations with no relevant skills, no language, they are a burden on the system, they just stand there and look at*

*people in the train station, they can't help them with anything!"* Many interviewees found it challenging to effectively conduct their operations in a field where *"with this much political attention and interests, every organization overnight became a humanitarian response organization."*

Similarly, many interviewees found it challenging to witness and manage the involvement of unqualified volunteers. While they appreciate the energy and goodwill brought by individual volunteers, they believe that these short-term and nonprofessional volunteers, *"do more harm than good. There is so much goodwill, but it is unproductive."* Without the correct language skills, professional qualifications, cultural competency, relationships, and commitment, these volunteers draw *"energy and time from our organization."* These volunteers often arrived with unrealistic expectations of their roles or the contexts they would be working in, and this resulted in tension with other organizations in the field.

**"As [the crisis] declines from attention, how will we raise funds to keep the response going? As attention fades, excitement has passed, sustainable financial elements will be a bigger challenge."**

As the crisis has moved on from its acute early stages, these additional organizations and their volunteers have

## 5 FORMS OF RESPONSE

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been less invested in the response. Most of the organizations and individuals remaining in the field are organizations with a prior presence in Ukraine, or with prior expertise in humanitarian response.

As the crisis continues, it is increasingly challenging to maintain public attention, awareness, and ongoing fundraising for their activities on the ground. In the words of one representative of a Jewish engagement organization, *“As [the crisis] declines from attention, how will we raise funds to keep the response going? As attention fades, excitement has passed, sustainable financial elements will be a bigger challenge.”*

Organizations are now investing resources in convincing their communities to continue supporting their long-term efforts, in leveraging meaningful preexisting relationships, and in pivoting toward the long-term rebuilding of Ukraine.

For many interviewees, especially those representing grassroots networks, and those directly involved with response efforts on the ground, the emotional aspects of the response have been particularly challenging. They are concerned about the safety of their relatives, friends, and colleagues who are living through this crisis, and they are working extra hours to provide as much assistance as they can. Many interviewees reported feelings of burnout and highlighted the challenge of continuing to do this work at significant personal cost.

*“We are not sleeping, constantly on the move, constantly trying to help with things. Your personal life and health suffer in doing this, you really make a sacrifice, because you’re trying to save lives. There is a challenge in maintaining the high level of energy throughout, the burnout risk is real.”*

Often, the resources and time dedicated to responding to the crisis in Ukraine have come at the expense of other programs, activities, or even responses to other crises. One international humanitarian aid organization reported: *“We have shifted capacity to respond [to Ukraine]. We are responding to other crises too, in Venezuela, Chad, Ecuador, and elsewhere. We are starting to be spread thin. We can’t divert too many resources to Ukraine just because there is attention there. The other crises are not going away.”*

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## 5 FORMS OF RESPONSE

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These organizations are figuring out how to continue providing a meaningful long-term response to the crisis in Ukraine, while maintaining their other priorities that may have recently been overshadowed.

### 5.5 Accomplishments

Many interviewees are proud of their ability to partner with a wide variety of other organizations effectively and efficiently in responding to the crisis. As one funder described: *“I feel proud of the agencies in demonstrating collaborations, JAFI, JDC, Chabad all servicing community in a way that hasn’t been seen before.”*

**“I feel proud of the agencies in demonstrating collaborations, JAFI, JDC, Chabad all servicing community in a way that hasn’t been seen before.”**

For most interviewees, the most meaningful elements of their response to this crisis have been the moments where they had direct contact with a specific person, and they can say that their specific intervention had an impact, or even saved someone’s life. One representative of a grassroots network reported that: *“This is a rare opportunity to do the most that I could to save lives. I had the ability to not just sit and watch, but to be active, look at people and say, ‘I saved their lives.’ It has been a real privilege for me to be able to do that.”*

For many organizations, this has meant greatly enlarging preexisting efforts and operations, or expanding into a new field of humanitarian aid and disaster relief. Many interviewees specifically highlighted the work of Jewish engagement organizations in Ukraine and in bordering countries that were thrust into providing disaster relief and have successfully provided support in critical moments. Interviewees feel proud of the way they have managed, and their newfound ability, to operate in areas and at scales that they never experienced before. As the representative of a Jewish engagement organization put it: *“We’re not a humanitarian aid organization, we are a volunteer, community-building organization. We became a part of people’s core needs, a part of saving people’s lives. We haven’t done that before. This was a new expansion and a stretch for us. ... We are really showing up for our community.”*

Grassroots networks are proud that their relationships and networks have held up and provided significant assistance throughout the crisis in Ukraine. They are encouraged by the fact that their networks remain connected and active, even while many of their members have dispersed throughout Europe.

## 6 COLLABORATION MORE THAN COMPETITION



Photos from left to right: World Jewish Relief, CADENA International, The Israeli School of Humanitarian Action

Many interviewees point to a general culture of coordination. They highlight several bright spots of collaboration between major organizations. Interviewees most frequently mentioned collaborating with JDC and JAFI, as well as partnerships with local Jewish communities throughout the region, primarily in Poland and Moldova. Interviewees also most frequently mentioned collaborating with the Ukraine Support Team coordinated by Shawn Landres, and the World Jewish Congress (WJC) Junior Diplomats network.

Reflecting on their collaborative efforts, several interviewees mentioned the JDC Logistics Hub in Lviv. They report being greatly impressed with how many organizations have supported and benefited from the supplies, processes, and coordination facilitated by this hub. Another example cited by many interviewees is the coordination and collaboration in refugee resettlement. In the words of one interviewee: “If you

*are a Jew in Ukraine, between all of the organizations involved, someone is going to provide you with a response. And they may all do it together: JDC gives us the money, someone else gives us the food, at the border JAFI puts you on a plane, and another organization supports you when you arrive in Israel.”*

Similarly, interviewees have reported exemplary collaboration within and between grassroots networks. In the words of another interviewee: “*Leichtag and Impact Cubed set up something extraordinary. I’ll get a call at 3 AM. My person in Israel says I have someone coming to Romania and need to get them a van and a meal, can you make that happen? I get on my Leichtag thing, and I type in, ‘ETA 3 hours at the Romanian border, family of 5, need hot meal and transport.’ Ten minutes later I get a message with a person’s name and when they will be there, and notification of their safety. Within ten minutes we set someone up.”*

**“If you are a Jew in Ukraine, between all of the organizations involved, someone is going to provide you with a response. And they may all do it together: JDC gives us the money, someone else gives us the food, at the border JAFI puts you on a plane, and another organization supports you when you arrive in Israel.”**

Many interviewees also believe that the level of collaboration and coordination in responding to this crisis has improved significantly relative to past crises: *“In general, Jewish organizations collaborate right now better than they have in the last 10 years.”*

They report that organizations are identifying and coordinating various needs, recognizing their appropriate roles, and communicating effectively with each other: *“If one organization identifies the need for psychosocial services, they call on another organization that specializes in that.”*

Several interviewees, especially representatives of international humanitarian aid organizations, report that this level and scale of collaboration is consistent with how they operate in response to other crises. However, they note that their operations in Ukraine are slightly different.

because *“this response has much higher density of Jewish and Israeli organizations. We usually are the only Jewish organization where we work. This is different. There are more Jewish and Israeli organizations on the ground, which allows for more partnerships.”*

Many interviewees also highlighted informal collaborations between organizations and grassroots networks. Staff members of larger Jewish and Israeli organizations are likely to be members of informal grassroots networks, WhatsApp groups, and coordination efforts in an individual capacity. As a result, they often leverage their professional connections or resources to match needs and responses between organizations and grassroots networks. For example, many staff members at the JDC or at JDC-supported agencies engaged in grassroots relief efforts through informal connections and networks they developed in various Jewish engagement organizations they, or their friends and relatives, are involved in. Through these multifaceted connections, these individuals can coordinate responses through various informal networks of which they are a part; they can connect individuals to formal efforts sponsored by larger organizations.

**“In general, Jewish organizations collaborate right now better than they have in the last 10 years.”**

Several interviewees highlighted that in a crisis of this magnitude, in the context of an active conflict, and in a response of this scale, some amount of competition, duplication, and lack of coordination is natural: *“It is a fact of life, you can minimize but not eradicate, it’s part of the cost of doing business.”*

A couple of interviewees emphasized that especially in this crisis, some element of redundancy can be quite helpful, especially with respect to financial resources, as one interviewee remarked, *“It’s better to err on the side of too many volunteers, than on the side of not enough.”* Another interviewee put it similarly: *“It’s hard to be overfunding things right now, everyone needs more resources.”*

Additionally, although many reported seeing some duplication of efforts during the early stages of the crisis, most agree that collaboration and coordination have greatly improved over time. At the beginning of the crisis, most entities were trying to provide emergency responses, and there was a serious lack of information. Several interviewees reported setting up parallel efforts, especially in Moldova and on the Poland-Ukraine border. Several months into the crisis, they report that there are now systems to allocate resources and distribute information, in addition to active efforts to eliminate duplication.

**“It’s hard to be overfunding things right now, everyone needs more resources.”**

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## 7 ORGANIZATIONS VS. GRASSROOTS NETWORKS

Most interviewees highlighted the complementary benefits of having both organizations and grassroots networks responding to the crisis. Although they acknowledged the advantages and disadvantages of each organizational form, interviewees believe that both types are necessary. In the words of one interviewee from a larger organization, it is important to “have a balance, a diversified portfolio between major organizations and grassroots, those in the middle, focusing on many populations all at once.”

### 7.1 Advantages of Organizational Responses

There are evident advantages in being able to implement responses at a significant scale. Organizations like the JDC and JAFI can provide responses that meet the needs of thousands of people: *“JDC has an advantage in having a presence everywhere in the field. We have a really wide reach; every organization comes to us. There is no one else with the scale of operations. ... Even among other big organizations... we have really critical information, key reach in responding.”*

A representative of another large organization put it similarly, *“Many organizations are helping with targeted needs, food, or medicine, specifically. That is great. But none of them can look at the*

*whole journey of the refugee from beginning to end. ... No one else can see the big picture like we can.”*

Similarly, veteran organizations often have access to significant financial and professional resources. Their scale allows them to *“put up the money and raise it back later. We have more resources to operate. We are not dependent on raising money right now in the moment, to support our current activities. We have funds, and established funding sources, established relationships with donors, that we know we can rely on later on down the line to fund this activity that has to happen now.”*

**We have funds, and established funding sources, established relationships with donors, that we know we can rely on later on down the line to fund this activity that has to happen now.”**

These organizations can also provide technical and professional expertise in applying best practices and lessons learned from previous crises: *“We have a technical bench, expertise. We have been working on this for years in complicated environments. We can replicate and contextualize them to Ukraine.”*

Each of these elements allows organizations to commit to a long-term response within communities in Ukraine. Their scale, access to resources, and expertise allow them to develop responses with longer time horizons, focusing on needs that may emerge in the future in addition to immediate needs in Ukraine today. As the crisis evolves into its next phases, and the focus in Ukraine shifts toward long-term rehabilitation and rebuilding, these organizational strengths will remain significant.

### 7.2 Disadvantages of Organizational Responses

In contrast to grassroots networks, organizations often are slower to respond and can be limited by their internal bureaucracy and procedures. One interviewee described this phenomenon generally, referring to Jewish and Israeli organizations as well as, *“International NGOs, ICRC, those big organizations, they have not done much yet. They mobilized and made assessments, coordinating, and have staff, but concretely, most of the action was done by community grassroots organizations, volunteers, for better and for worse.”*

Another interviewee expressed this sentiment more provocatively in relation to Jewish and Israeli organizational responses: *“The larger organizations took too long to react. They have regulations*

*for support. While you wait for all of that to get in line, people are dying.”*

### 7.3 Advantages of Grassroots Networks

Grassroots networks often have a greater number of deep connections with communities on the ground. These relationships can play critical roles in crisis response, especially in the earlier phases of the crisis. These connections allow them to have a higher-resolution understanding of the current situation on the ground, relevant needs, and areas and populations where the need is most acute. As one representative of a grassroots network put it, *“People come to us to get a sense of real-life experience on the ground.”*

For most grassroots networks, these relationships preexisted the crisis and incorporated deep levels of trust. For example, when delivering aid, these networks can distribute supplies and resources through *“our preexisting community network, people we directly know could serve as addresses for humanitarian aid. ... I talk to the person receiving the money directly, there are no intermediaries there.”*

Due to their informal nature, grassroots networks have greater flexibility. They can pivot quickly to address new needs as they arise, or adapt their response accordingly, when new crises or obsta-

cles appear. *“If systems break down... a network can find patches for holes in systems. If you’re an institution with an assumption that you have a warehouse, and it gets bombed, you’re done. As a network we can figure things out to fill in gaps.”*

This structure allows them to *“innovate and do whatever they want, iterate based on lessons learned from early mistakes.”* These networks *“have the ability to be nimble, deliver something specific, very quickly.”*

Similarly, grassroots networks can operate quickly, responding to needs as they arise in real time. A representative of one network reported, *“We were able to react really quickly, because we are independent, we didn’t need to report to anyone. I saw major organizations not really responding. [One organization] promised money that never came. [A second organization] promised money that never came, at least at the beginning. As a network we were able to raise 1.5 million shekels quickly. We were there before the institutions.”*

Another network reported that *“we are way faster in making decisions. Our decisions are immediate. Because we are very small, we can make fast decisions on tactical choices.”* A third grassroots network mentioned that: *“Sometimes the grassroots network outpaces the establishment organizations in their response.*

*The establishment is talking about it at the top level, but the grassroots network is already implementing it before the top level even knows what’s going on.”*

**We were able to react really quickly, because we are independent, we didn’t need to report to anyone.**

Grassroots networks also benefit from their wider access to a variety of volunteers with relevant specialized skills. As one representative described, *“Our network includes people who are professionals in sourcing and transportation, people with refrigerated trucks, we have all the skill sets, people who run supermarkets.”*

This diverse set of backgrounds and abilities allows grassroots networks to have more tools at their disposal to respond to various challenges that may arise. As another grassroots network highlighted, *“The JDC partnership is a win-win situation. They have money, and a presence on the ground. But they needed access to a large pool of Russian-speaking volunteers with special skills. We could provide that. Everything they asked we could deliver. We could cover their needs with our network.”*

## 7 ORGANIZATIONS VS. GRASSROOTS

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Additionally, while organizations focus on providing a response at a scale that addresses general needs faced by most of the population in Ukraine, grassroots networks can address equally important needs that may be more niche and faced by individuals.

*“Smaller organizations can come in niches, and provide specific needs, within the larger picture that is held by the larger establishment organizations. ... We help people who fall through the cracks. We are not helping the vast majority of refugees.”*

### 7.4 Disadvantages of Grassroots Networks

Because they depend on individual efforts and volunteers, grassroots networks are more likely to lack stamina and burn out quickly. They can only sustain their level of activity, time, energy, and dedication for so long. While they can provide a quick and flexible response, sometimes outpacing organizations, *“they can’t sustain that level of response, because of capacity and funding issues, energy and focus issues. They are all volunteers. They might be pretty exhausted by now.”*

Similarly, these networks lack the resources or capacity to expand their efforts or sustain a long-term response. As a member of one network put it, “We

*don’t have enough money for the unpredictable waves of people. This limits our ability to respond and help.”* A funder described a similar dynamic, *“[One foundation] supported a specific organization with \$40,000, but they couldn’t do more, because that organization didn’t have capacity to use more. They didn’t have the reach or staff.”*

Often, grassroots networks also operate with less-formal quality control, less due diligence, and a lack of adherence to best practices. Although many Jewish grassroots networks have implemented systems of due diligence, other well-meaning WhatsApp groups trying to facilitate evacuation and relocation of refugees do not adequately vet their volunteers, which can lead to liability issues, exploitation, and possible trafficking concerns.



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## 8 UNIQUE ELEMENTS OF THE RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

Ukraine's geographic location in Central and Eastern Europe makes it highly accessible to European Jewish and Israeli organizations. Ukraine also has relatively well-developed general infrastructure, significantly easing the logistical and operational challenges of providing response efforts during an active crisis. These elements have played a significant role in the scale and intensity of Jewish and Israeli response to the crisis. *"There is no problem to take a train or bus from Germany and come to the border. The same thing happened in Greece, there were the same dynamics of established organizations competing with volunteers. That doesn't happen in [Democratic Republic of the Congo] or Ethiopia. Volunteers can't just arrive there. ... [Ukraine is] in the center of Europe, accessible, logistically easy. This allows people to mobilize and go there. In other crises, this is not the case."*

**"[Ukraine is] in the center of Europe, accessible, logistically easy. This allows people to mobilize and go there. In other crises, this is not the case."**

Similarly, there is significant Jewish infrastructure in Ukraine. Several organizations have maintained extensive networks in Ukraine for decades. During the crisis, these communities and networks

have served as both foundation and scaffolding for other Jewish and Israeli organizations to provide an unprecedented level of response.

Most interviewees mentioned the direct impact on the Ukrainian Jewish community as a primary factor in sparking a unique Jewish and Israeli response: *"This is our community! We are the community there. This is the first time we are directly affected, and at the center of this. This is a very unique situation for us."*

Similarly, many Jewish and Israeli organizations have personal connections to communities in Ukraine, whether through historical familial ties to Ukraine; program connections with contemporary Jewish communities in Ukraine; or friends, relatives, and colleagues suffering the impacts of the crisis. They feel an intimate connection to the crisis.

These phenomena have been intensified by the resonance of the Holocaust for many Jewish and Israeli interviewees: *"We feel close to this. It's Europe, many Israelis and Jews around the world have ancestors from this part of the world. There is definitely a Shoah resonance: 'They didn't help us then, 80 years ago, so now we'll show them that we can help now.' There is a psychological element to it."*

**“We feel close to this. It’s Europe, many Israelis and Jews around the world have ancestors from this part of the world. There is definitely a Shoah resonance: ‘They didn’t help us then, 80 years ago, so now we’ll show them that we can help now.’ There is a psychological element to it.”**

Interestingly, all interviewees addressed the contribution of the Holocaust on their motivation to respond to this crisis. This theme is more powerful for organizations that did not have a presence in Ukraine before the current crisis. For organizations that were in Ukraine before the crisis, their more detailed understanding of contemporary Ukraine and their personal connections played a larger role. Organizations that did not have a presence in Ukraine beforehand were more likely to draw on the resonance of the Holocaust when describing the uniqueness of the crisis or their motivation to respond.

Several interviewees highlighted the crisis’s unique political, social, and economic implications for Europe, Israel, and the world at large. Many interviewees, especially those located in Central and Eastern Europe, felt that the response was unique because they perceived themselves to be personally implicated by the crisis itself. They were concerned about

the crisis playing out on their “doorstep,” and saw how the ripple effects of refugee resettlement, food prices, and economic contraction might affect their own local communities.

Many interviewees also highlighted the perceived factor of racism in leading to unprecedented world attention and response to the crisis in Ukraine. They believe that the greater level of empathy and response to this crisis, rather than to ongoing crises in Ethiopia, Venezuela, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, results from implicit or explicit racism: *“There is a huge difference with this crisis. These refugees are blond, Caucasian, white skinned, with blue eyes. That is all the difference. ... Hundreds of thousands of Afghani refugees trying to find shelter in Europe right now, they are also fleeing war. How many Jewish organizations or Israeli organizations are helping them?”*

**“There is a huge difference with this crisis. These refugees are blond, Caucasian, white skinned, with blue eyes. That is all the difference. ... Hundreds of thousands of Afghani refugees trying to find shelter in Europe right now, they are also fleeing war.”**

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## 9 RECOMMENDATIONS: FUTURE RESPONSE IN UKRAINE

### 9.1 Cultivate Flexibility and Constant Reassessment of Needs

Interviewees recommended that, as the crisis evolves, organizations and networks involved in the response should be constantly evaluating and reassessing the needs of their constituencies. Organizations must continue to adapt to changing circumstances. *“Shifting your tactics, change buildings, locations, operations,” to stay “updated and relevant to however the situation develops, remaining flexible while focusing on long-term needs.”*

### 9.2 Formalize Information Flow and Coordination

As the crisis continues, information flow and coordination between organizations and networks will continue to be a key factor in the response. Some interviewees hope that, as the response evolves, the specific roles of each organization will become clearer, allowing for greater coordination of efforts. Some interviewees called for a convening of the field, to allow organizations to share details of their efforts and lessons learned, and to formally coordinate future responses. Other interviewees added that as the crisis shifts from emergency response

to rebuilding, funders could play a role in planning and setting priorities for rebuilding efforts.

### 9.3 Maintain Funding as Attention Wanes

Many interviewees were concerned about how to maintain levels of funding as attention to the crisis wanes. Several interviewees proposed coordinating shared efforts to maintain awareness, or even shared strategies and platforms for continuing to fundraise to support future responses in Ukraine. These platforms can also serve as a foundation for broader and longer-term efforts to ensure that resources are being used most effectively and efficiently on the ground.

### 9.4 Focus on Russian-Speaking Jewish Communities

Interviewees also expressed concern with the growing crisis among Jews in Russia. As the economic, political, and social situation in Russia deteriorates, many interviewees, especially those with branches in Russia and Belarus, recommend that the field focus on providing appropriate responses to these populations as well.

More broadly, Jewish engagement organizations are concerned about how the crisis will continue to challenge existing ways of working with the Russian-speaking Jewish communities in the Former Soviet Union. Previously, some organizations integrated their communities in Russia and Ukraine with regional retreats and shared materials. They did not have a unique or independent infrastructure of operations in Ukraine; they were directly connected to operations in Russia and elsewhere. As a result of the war, these organizations have seen a significant break in their network, challenging their previous ways of working. Going forward, interviewees recommend building new independent Ukrainian Jewish infrastructure and examining new systems and strategies for Jewish engagement work elsewhere in the Former Soviet Union.

Much of the funding for Jewish engagement work in Russian-speaking Jewish communities was locally raised from sources in Russia. Some of these sources, are now under sanctions, presenting a significant challenge to future Jewish engagement work in these communities.

### 9.5 Ongoing Research and Documentation

Many interviewees also proposed continued follow-up research as the crisis evolves over time. They recommended continuing to check in with the field, analyzing the longevity and success of various response strategies, and documenting which networks and organizations maintain their presence on the ground. Continuing to “*keep a finger on the pulse*” would allow them to see which responses prove most effective in real time, and to provide possible direction for future responses in Ukraine and elsewhere.

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## 10 RECOMMENDATIONS: LESSONS FOR FUTURE CRISES

### 10.1 Predetermine Crisis Response Roles

Interviewees recommended that organizations involved in crisis response intentionally define their roles ahead of future crises. They recommend that organizations determine what resources they have, where they are best positioned to offer the most effective response, and what role they can play in the ecosystem of response.

### 10.2 Maintain Routine Financial Sustainability and Emergency Funding

Several interviewees recommended maintaining emergency funding that is set aside and dedicated for early response to crises. They described the challenge of lacking funding in the early moments of crisis response and see value in a dedicated disaster fund, available to organizations at the moment they need it most.

### 10.3 Integrate Organizational and Grassroots Responses

Several interviewees, particularly those representing grassroots networks, recommended that the field more intentionally bring together organizational and grassroots responses. They recommend

that organizations provide the economic and professional infrastructure for informal grassroots networks and channels of communication for organizations to gain the on-the-ground knowledge accessed by the networks. Additionally, they recommended developing and implementing a *“methodology for transition or handoff between grassroots efforts and institutions, to share information and relationships between the systems, between the smaller networks that are there on the ground first, and the larger organizations who come in later with scale and resources.”*

### 10.4 Invest in Local Networks as a Critical Element of Response

Because networks played a significant role in the response to the crisis in Ukraine, many interviewees recommended investing in the capacity of local grassroots networks on a routine basis. These networks can be trained in volunteer recruitment, vetting, and community management. Interviewees also recommend that organizations develop strategies to train volunteers, maintain relationships, cultivate volunteer networks, and continue to build trust, since these elements are frequently leveraged to produce the most effective crisis responses.

## APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name	Title	Organization	OLAM Partner
Pablo Weinstein	Chief Operating Officer	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee	✓
Stefan Oscar	Executive Director, FSU	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee	✓
Rabbi David Eliezrie	Crisis Committee for Chabad in Ukraine	Chabad	
Aharon Ariel Lavi	Founder and Director	Hakhel (Hazon)	
Inbal Freund	Director	HaTashtit; Nitzanim	
Ilan Cohn	Director	HIAS Europe	✓
Raphael Marcus	Senior Vice President of Programs	HIAS International	✓
Sara Teichman	Vice President, International Strategy and Advancement	Hillel International	
Michal Bar	Head of Emergency Response and Operations	IsraAID	✓
Yotam Polizer	Chief Executive Officer	IsraAID	✓
Jonathan Ornstein	Chief Executive Officer	JCC of Krakow	
Yehuda Setton	Chief Operating Officer, Chief Program Officer	Jewish Agency for Israel	
Rina Goldberg	Deputy Director and Associate Vice President, Israel and Overseas	The Jewish Federations of North America	
Charlene Seidle	Executive Vice President	Leichtag Foundation	
Aviv Ezra	Deputy Director	MASHAV	✓
Yana Tolmacheva	Senior Director of RSJ Programming	Moishe House	✓
Daniel Kahn	Chairperson	NATAN	✓
Karyn Grossman Gershon	Chief Executive Officer	Project Keshet	
Marcin Grynberg	Chairman	Puszke Foundation	
Margot Jin	Welfare Expert	Puszke Foundation	
Dana Manor	Deputy Director	Society for International Development - Israel	✓
Shawn Landres	Founder	Ukraine Support Teams (UAST)	
Raphael Poch	International Media Spokesperson	United Hatzalah	
Maya Cimesa Samokovlija	Director of Community Affairs	World Jewish Congress	
Stacey Swimer	Director of International Programmes and Partnerships	World Jewish Relief	✓



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*OLAM is generously supported by Adnim Foundation, Anne Heyman and Seth Merrin Family Fund, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, Laurie and Jeff Franz Fund, Pears Foundation, and Toleo Foundation.*