



# Kelsey Lemon's on the Ground Perspective

## How the Canadian Red Cross provides support to people living in Ukraine

**Kelsey Lemon**, Vice President, International Cooperation, Canadian Red Cross, recently visited Ukraine between November 12 and 21, 2023 and shared her reflections on the work of the Red Cross on the ground. The Canadian Red Cross works collaboratively with the Ukrainian Red Cross Society and its volunteers to provide relief, training and support to people affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine.

It has been two years since the escalation of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine has caused an unimaginable toll on millions of Ukraine's people. While the conflict is seen less in news headlines, air-raid sirens are frequent and people living in Ukraine are accustomed to spending their nights sleeping in bomb shelters. Overhead missiles and drones are part of the sounds of daily life. The end of 2023 and beginning of 2024 also saw the most

intense hostilities since the beginning of the crisis to remind us that the humanitarian situation is still dire.

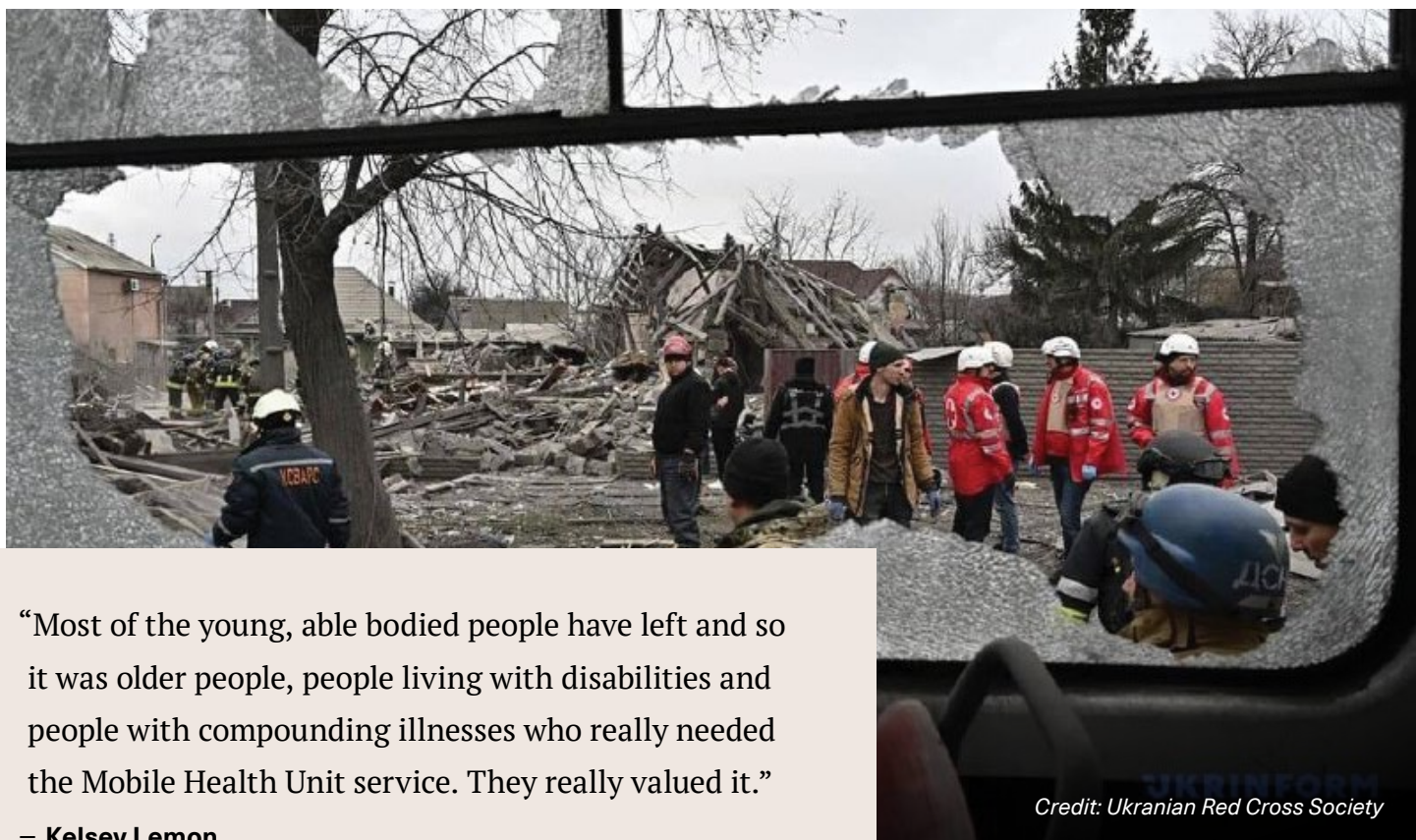
**Inside this very active conflict zone, people who can't leave or fight continue to live.** It is within this space that the Canadian Red Cross, along with other partner National Societies are filling gaps to deliver health care, cash assistance, psychosocial support and safe shelter.

*Please note: this article discusses injuries that some may find difficult to read.*

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# Filling a Healthcare Gap

## Canadian Red Cross funded Mobile Health Units



*Credit: Ukrainian Red Cross Society*

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– Kelsey Lemon

### **In the regions of Cherkasy and Poltava Oblasts, the Canadian Red Cross is enabling accessible healthcare in remote areas with no or limited healthcare capacity.**

As Kelsey remarks, “most of the young, able bodied people have left and so it was older people, people living with disabilities and people with compounding illnesses who really needed the Mobile Health Unit service. They really valued it.”

Some of the people the Mobile Health Team treats are unable to leave their beds. The medical team at the Mobile Health Unit provide health services inside the patient’s home. They work in close coordination with the social helpers from the Ukrainian Red Cross who are providing

home assistance to these people. This initiative is part of the Home-Base Care program which is also supported by the Canadian Red Cross. The team knows everyone by name.

Mobile Health Teams are not treating wounds, rather they are providing routine mobile and home-based care for heart conditions, performing electrocardiograms, treating pneumonia and chest infections – many common illnesses and conditions that affect older populations. With no doctors or nurses, no public transportation, no hospitals or grocery stores – people are relying on this essential Red Cross service, provided by the Ukrainian Red Cross staff and volunteers with technical and financial support from the Canadian Red Cross.



Since August 2022, the Canadian Red Cross has provided funding for more than **38,000 primary healthcare consultations through 9 Mobile Health Units**. Each unit visits approximately 15 to 20 different locations each month.

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# Providing Mental Health Support at the Unbroken Centre



“Every young man I saw had one to three limbs missing, which was really intense. It was amazing to see some of them recovered and being mentors to others and learning how to use their new prosthetics and try to live a fully functioning, productive life.” – **Kelsey Lemon**

*Credit: Ukrainian Red Cross Society*

**The Canadian Red Cross is no stranger to the benefits of psychosocial support to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Canadians.** However, in a conflict zone, psychosocial support looks much different and is vital.

At the Unbroken Centre, part of the First Medical Union of Lviv, Ukrainian people from all walks of life are being treated for bodily injuries and mental health challenges because of the trauma they've experienced.

Dr. Oleh Berezyuk, chief of the Psychotherapy unit and one of the psychotherapists at the centre explains that all of the team's patients are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder in some form. For some people, this manifests as depression and anxiety; for others, it means flashbacks and nightmares. These symptoms often come in waves – patients will have a stretch of good days and then a stretch

of tough ones. As Kelsey remarks from her visit, “every young man I saw had one to three limbs missing, which was really intense. It was amazing to see some of them recovered and being mentors to others and learning how to use their new prosthetics and try to live a fully functioning, productive life.”

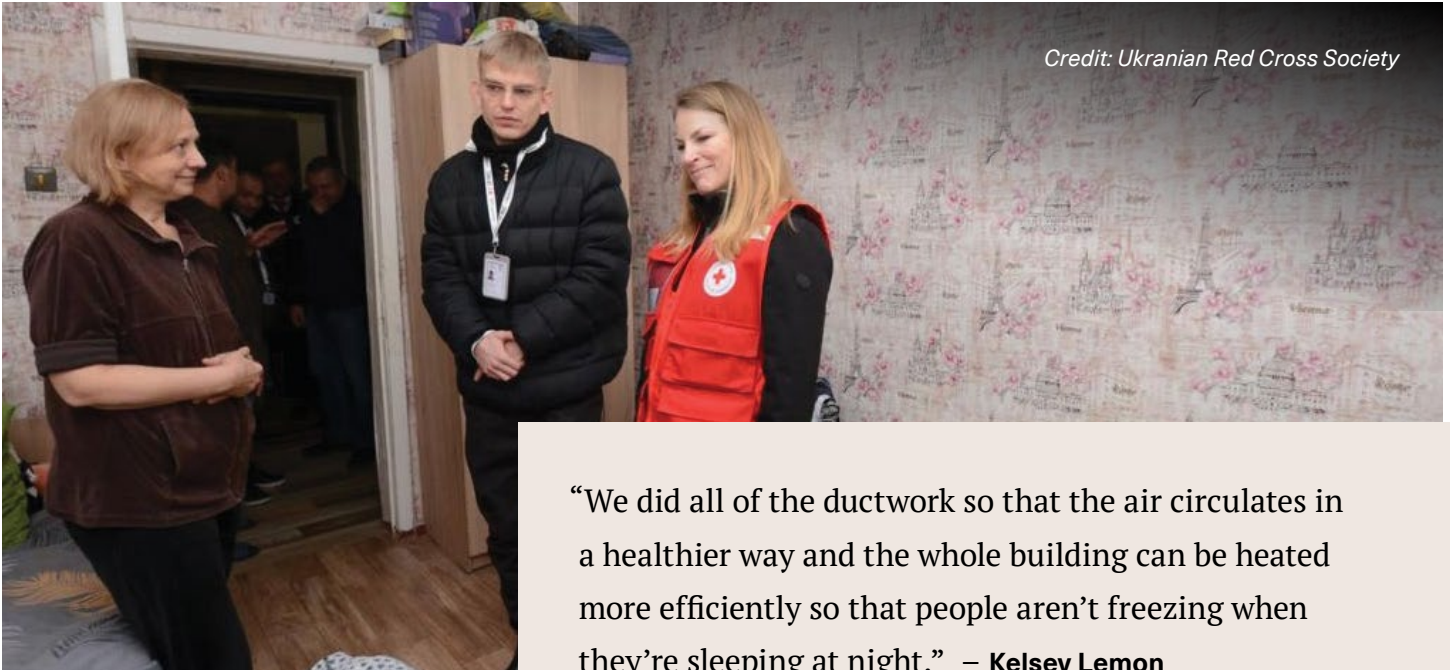
In addition to supporting people staying at the hospital, the team also operates an outpatient treatment clinic. Programming includes talk therapy, art therapy, and full-body therapy. Khrystyna Ruda, the leader of the interdisciplinary team of psychotherapists, tells us that full-body – or psychosomatic – therapy is often used when treating former prisoners of war. After their experiences, they tend to not feel safe in their bodies, and the therapy can help with that.



The Canadian Red Cross has provided funding for the **salaries of 15 psychotherapists** at the Lviv Clinical Hospital of Emergency and Intensive Care. To date, the team has provided more than **9,900 therapy sessions to more than 1,900 individuals** which has contributed to improving the wellbeing of patients who have experienced traumatic events.

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# Canadian Winterization Efforts in Action



*Credit: Ukrainian Red Cross Society*

“We did all of the ductwork so that the air circulates in a healthier way and the whole building can be heated more efficiently so that people aren’t freezing when they’re sleeping at night.” – **Kelsey Lemon**

**Across Ukraine, there continues to be displaced population movement of people seeking safety.** Every day, people arrive to Red Cross reception centres, with nowhere to live and with nothing except the clothing they’re wearing.

A local Ukrainian Red Cross branch in Poltava remains permanently open and offers relief supplies like winter clothing, hygiene kits, food kits and bedding – the necessities needed for staying in a collective shelter centre for people who are internally displaced. In partnership with the Ukrainian Red Cross Society, the Canadian Red Cross supported winterization efforts through the provision of stoves, bedding kits, towels, boilers and through the rehabilitation of heating system in certain infrastructures. It has also provided support to the Cherkasy Children’s hospital by replacing water pipes to reestablish its hot water supply, which also heats the entire hospital.

As Kelsey remarks on the Canadian Red Cross’ role “when the Canadian Red Cross did the Winterization Appeal last year, I saw a lot of that work in Poltava, which was so badly needed. We did all of the ductwork so that the air circulates in a healthier way and the whole building can be heated more efficiently so that people aren’t freezing when they’re sleeping at night and trying to make their way to the latrine.”

Collective shelters are not long-term solutions, and many people living there hope that they will be able to return home. In Cherkasy, Kelsey saw two facilities that were renovated into single family apartments with support of the Canadian Red Cross. As she reflects “to me, that’s a much, much better solution for people to have dignity and privacy and live like a family should, without sharing bathrooms and kitchens, for example.”

## **With thanks to your support**



In partnership with the Ukrainian Red Cross Society, the Canadian Red Cross provides support for light repairs and utility costs for emergency shelters in Cherkasy, Poltava and Vinnytsia Oblasts to help improve the living conditions of those who have been displaced by the conflict, accommodating **3,230** people who are internally displaced.

Credit: Ukrainian Red Cross Society



**While the armed conflict continues,  
so does the work of the Red Cross.**

[Click here](#) to learn more about how your support makes a lifechanging difference for people affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine.

**Kelsey Lemon**

**Vice President, International Cooperation, Canadian Red Cross.**

Kelsey has been a part of the Canadian Red Cross for eight years. In this time, she has visited and worked in dozens of countries facing humanitarian crises. Recently with the Canadian Red Cross, she has traveled to Ethiopia, Bangladesh, South Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine. Kelsey is responsible for Canadian Red Cross' international activities, from emergency response to recovery and resilience building.

