https://www.newsela.com/articles/russia-ukrainianimmigrants/id/5225/

<p>DONETSK, Russia—Tatiana Poludnitsina fled her home in the eastern Ukrainian town of Luhansk in her robe and flip-flops after artillery shells hit it in mid-August.</p>

<p>With the help of strangers, she crossed the border into Russia, where she now resides in a temporary refugee camp outside the small border town of Donetsk.</p>

<p>“I have nothing anymore, nowhere to go, no apartment … and all my documents and personal belongings were burned,” Poludnitsina, 25, said as she sat in a tent she shares with a family of four.</p>

<p>It is a story that echoes among the tens of thousands of Ukrainian residents who fled their homes when fighting intensified in August between pro-Russia separatists and Ukrainian government forces.</p>

<p>An estimated 814,000 Ukrainians have entered Russia since the beginning of the year, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, citing data from Russian migration authorities.</p>

<p>It is unclear how many of them are ethnic Russians, but local humanitarian workers confirmed that most aid recipients appeared to have ethnic or family ties to Russia.</p>

<p>The number of residents displaced within Ukraine doubled during three weeks in August to 260,000 since Jan. 1, the U.N. agency said. But the number is probably higher since many people were “staying with families and friends and had chosen not to register with the authorities,” the agency said.</p>

<p>The camp in Russia near Donetsk is one of four temporary settlements opened by Moscow since the separatists seized cities across Ukraine’s eastern region and Ukrainian security forces fought back. About 100 tents are meant to house 1,000 people, camp administrators said. At times, however, the tents have held 3,000.</p>

<p>The population dropped to 130 in recent weeks as many refugees found shelter with friends, relatives or host families or managed to rent apartments. Most who remain lack passports or other official documents that would allow them to move on or be resettled by the Russian government in cities elsewhere, said Natalya Vyacheslavovna Kim, a senior camp manager.</p>

<p>“They are waiting for their document situation to be resolved,” Kim said. “Then it’s up to them to decide whether they want to be here permanently. They can decide whether to keep their Ukrainian documents or apply for Russian citizenship.”</p>

<p>As they wait, flies swarm the stuffy canvas interiors of tents, where the temperature some days soars to nearly 90 degrees. Board walkways traverse the sand and dirt between the shelters, but the stifling heat and frequent wind gusts make it nearly impossible to stay clean.</p>

<p>“We wash our hair with cold water,” said Yevgenia Melikyan, 35, who arrived at the camp from Luhansk in early August with her 76-year-old father and teenage son and daughter. “Mothers heat the water to bathe their children.”</p>

<p>There are no books, no television, no Internet. Youngsters play in the dirt. Many appear frightened by loud noises, camp administrators said.</p>

<p>“There’s not a day that we don’t hear explosions,” Melikyan said.</p>

<p>Meals include millet porridge enhanced with stewed canned meat. Poludnitsina said she longed for a hot dog.</p>

<p>Forced to share tents, strangers bond over stories of near-death, survival and escape.</p>

<p>Melikyan, whose family camps with Poludnitsina, said they left Luhansk after food became scarce, the water supply was shut off and electricity became sporadic. Most nights the family huddled in the basement of their home terrified by the sound of gunfire and bombs exploding above.</p>

<p>Melikyan said she feared for her husband, who chose to remain in Luhansk. The family has had no contact with him since they left.</p>

<p>Many of the refugees in Russia blame their plight on Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, President Barack Obama and leaders of other Western nations that have sided with the government in Kiev.</p>

<p>“I wish they could live for one day like we lived, hiding from shelling in the basement,” said Irina Pavlenko, 30, who arrived at the camp Aug. 26 with her husband, Maxim; 9-month-old son Kostya; daughter Darina, 5; and other relatives. “I wish their children would suffer the same way our children have suffered.”</p>

<p>A common sentiment conveyed by many of the refugees was that the pro-Russia fighters were ordinary citizens, volunteers who were fighting to protect the lives and interests of ethnic Russians who live in Ukraine. They express gratitude to the government of Vladimir Putin, whom Ukraine blames for backing an invasion of the country.</p>

<p>“America and Ukraine did not take in any of us refugees or give us any humanitarian assistance. It’s only Russia that’s helping us,” said Poludnitsina, who wants to remain in Russia and become a citizen.</p>

<p>Citing data from the Russian migration services, Adrian Edwards, spokesman for the U.N. agency on refugees, said at a recent briefing that 121,190 Ukrainians had applied for refugee status or temporary asylum in Russia since the beginning of the year. An additional 138,825 Ukrainians had applied for other forms of legality such as residence permits under a “resettlement of compatriots” program, Edwards said.</p>

<p>Many Russian citizens have stepped forward to help.</p>

<p>In the Russian town of Rostov-on-Don, about 100 miles south of Donetsk, Anatoly Kotlyarov started sheltering friends four months ago. Word spread and soon friends of friends and strangers were being sent his way.</p>

<p>So Kotlyarov helped establish a volunteer organization that provides emergency help to refugees through private donations. They set up shop in his construction office, where baby formula, disposable diapers and other goods are stored. The group has helped 5,000 refugees relocate to various parts of Russia by providing tickets for transportation, Kotlyarov said.</p>

<p>“The biggest problem for them is money and information,” he said. Refugees “arrive here and they’ve lost contacts. They don’t know what they’re going to do or where they’re going to go.”</p>

<p>On a recent afternoon at Rostov’s central train station, dozens of refugees curled up in chairs or slept on the floor as they waited for trains to take them to destinations across Russia.</p>

<p>Marina Dolgopolova, 29, and her fiance, Constantine, were preparing for their Sept. 12 wedding when their home in the Donetsk region of Ukraine was bombed. Dolgopolova said the couple, both former mine workers, sold their wedding rings to pay for bus tickets to Rostov.</p>

<p>She arrived with a pair of jeans, two T-shirts and a laptop computer. Constantine appeared nearly comatose as he lay nearby on an inflatable mattress, where they took turns resting. Sleeping on the air bed was better than the three nights they spent in the basement sheltering from shelling, Dolgopolova said.</p>

<p>Tears welled in her eyes as she spoke of the parents she left behind. Her mother refused to abandon the family dog and seven cats. Four of the felines belonged to a neighbor who fled.</p>

<p>The young couple was headed to Samara, about 650 miles from their hometown. It was one of three towns that Russian emergency services allowed them to choose from to resettle.</p>

<p>They don’t know anyone in Samara.</p>

<p>But that didn’t matter, Dolgopolova said. “The main thing is to find a job and somewhere safe to live.”</p>

<https://www.newsela.com/articles/syria-snowstorm/id/2232/?needle=refugees>

<p>BEKAA, Lebanon — People with buckets hauled 14 pails of mud and slush from the tent that Um Mahmoud shares with a dozen other Syrian refugees in a settlement here in the Bekaa Valley. The area is blanketed with snow. It brings a touch of the Alps to the rugged stretch that extends to the Syrian border.</p>

<p>Holiday-makers from Beirut came to the hills with sleds and toboggans. They piled souvenir snow onto their vehicles for the drive home. But there was nothing merry about the weekend blizzard for the multitudes of Syrians living in makeshift camps scattered throughout the region.</p>

<p>“It was like a sea here yesterday,” Um Mahmoud, a mother of 10, said with an easy smile Sunday. She and other women were showing visitors the interior of their mud-floor tent, damp and messy after the storm. “How can we cook in such a mess?” she said. She pulled back a curtain to show a bare kitchen stocked with meager provisions and subject to rat attacks.</p>

<p>The sun was shining Sunday in the Bekaa, exposing a landscape of white-capped peaks and snow-dusted plains. The views were of little relief to displaced Syrians. Many of them were clearing out the snow, slush and mud that had made an already difficult life more grueling.</p>

<h2>Freezing Cold, Snow And Mud</h2>

<p>The next storm cannot be far off. The weekend’s blizzard was but a preview, and the muddy mess that it left behind is certain to be seen again.</p>

<p>Tiny Lebanon is now home to more than 1 million Syrian refugees, officials say. That means that about 1 in 5 residents of the country is a Syrian. They have fled the civil war in their country. Rebels there are fighting against troops loyal to Syria's president.</p>

<p>Aid groups have applauded Lebanon for letting so many Syrians come to the country. But Lebanon has no established refugee camps, like those found in several of Syria’s other neighbors, notably Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. Refugee camps are not allowed here.</p>

<p>A generation ago, Palestinian camps helped lead to a civil war in Lebanon. Now, Lebanese officials are wary of any settlements that might turn into permanent communities. This is a nation where political power is carefully allocated among Christians, Druze, Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims. Refugees could alter the balance.</p>

<p>The Syrian war is entering its third winter. Meanwhile, desperate refugees in Lebanon who cannot afford apartments or don’t have loved ones to host them face grim prospects. Scores of camps have sprung up to provide for basic needs. The camps are not permanent and are far from reliable. Aid arrives irregularly, refugees say, despite the work of United Nations relief teams and humanitarian agencies. Many tents have heating stoves, but fuel has been in short supply.</p>

<p>“It has been freezing cold here and fuel was like gold,” said Ahmad Awadh. Awadh lives in a another Bekaa-area camp.</p>

<p>Awadh’s site is slightly more developed&nbsp;than the abandoned factory grounds that host Um Mahmoud and others. The camp has 39 tents with concrete floors and blue plastic sheeting. The plastic provides some protection from the rain and snow.</p>

<h2>"We Escaped From Death"</h2>

<p>About 500 people live in the camp. Most appeared to be from the embattled suburbs of Damascus, the Syrian capital. A majority of the tents appear to have both portable heaters and stoves and some have electrical connections. Different aid groups provided the stoves and heaters. Still, residents complain that aid only comes occasionally. Also, enrolling children in schools is next to impossible, and finding a job is only a dream.</p>

<p>As the sun shone, residents cleared debris from the storm out of their tents. They hung their wet clothes to dry and gathered firewood. For many this is not their first winter away from home. Their situation is difficult, they say, but not life-threatening. Their thoughts remain with loved ones back in Syria, where so many in besieged, rubble-strewn communities cope with daily explosions and clashes, as well as being cut off from regular supplies of food, fuel and water.</p>

<p>“We watch the news, and we hope something will happen, but in truth we have no confidence,” said Um Ammar, a mother who, like others interviewed, preferred to be identified by a nickname for security reasons. “People are laughing at us.”</p>

<p>Back in the suburbs of Damascus, she has been told, desperate residents are burning school desks and clothing for heat. The situation is terrible. Yet Syrians here seem to want to go back as soon as possible.</p>

<p>Many ask foreign visitors about the prospects for peace. Will there be United Nations negotiations in Geneva next month, they ask. They are keen for any sign of progress in the war.</p>

<p>Given the terrible situation in Syria, many reckoned they were lucky to be in Lebanon.</p>

<p>“We cannot complain too much,” said Um Mahmoud. “After all, we escaped from death.”</p>

<https://www.newsela.com/articles/refugees-garden/id/4723/>

<p>CHICAGO — It could be a scene from a distant land: Women in long, colorful skirts and men in traditional garments are tending to a small, lush farm, where chopped, fermented daikon is spread out to dry. A daikon is a large white radish.</p>

<p>But this scene takes place off Chicago’s Lawrence Avenue.</p>

<p>Hidden in a quiet corner of the city’s busy Albany Park neighborhood, the Global Garden Refugee Training Farm is tended by natives of Congo, Bhutan and Burma. It is the only refugee farm in Illinois.</p>

<p>Founded with government funding, the 2-year-old farm covers slightly more than an acre. It gives refugees living in the city an opportunity to return to the farm lives many left behind. It allows them to grow fresh vegetables for traditional dishes, to get fresh air, exercise and socialize.</p>

<h2>"I'm So Happy"</h2>

<p>“When I get here, I’m so happy,” said Matun Myint, 43, a refugee from Burma, who spoke through an interpreter. “I don’t have any worries.”</p>

<p>She and the other refugees have had plenty of worries elsewhere.</p>

<p>The Burmese refugees escaped when their country, now known as Myanmar, was under military rule. They spent as many as 20 years in a refugee camp in Thailand.</p>

<p>The Bhutanese refugees fled Bhutan after a government campaign forbade free expressions of their original Nepalese culture in 1989. They spent years in refugee camps in Nepal before being invited to settle in the U.S. beginning in 2008.</p>

<p>“These are people who never chose to leave their homes; they were kicked out, and then invited to come here,” said farm manager Linda Seyler. </p>

<p>“When they arrive here, they don’t speak English," she said. </p>

<p>Along with reconnecting them with the land, the farm encourages meetings among refugees and with neighbors at the twice-weekly farmers market, she said. </p>

<h2>Socialize, Learn, Relax</h2>

<p>“You come to the market stand … and there is so much that happens between the farmers and their neighbors,” she said. “They’re sharing recipes, they’re meeting people from other ethnicities — people who use the same vegetables in different ways.”</p>

<p>“This is a place to socialize, to learn, and a place to relax,” said Hasta Bhattarai, who until recently was the program coordinator of the Bhutanese Community Association of Illinois.</p>

<p>Some 100 families — about half from Bhutan and half from Burma, plus two families from Congo — farm on 40-foot plots. Another section of the farm is planted and worked communally. Vegetables grown there are sold at twice-weekly farmers markets. The proceeds from the sales pay for the farm’s operation.</p>

<p>Families can sell their extra produce at the markets too. Last year, farmers earned as much as $980 in a season, Seyler said, and this year, when farmers are also selling at the Horner Park Farmers Market, they could earn even more.</p>

<p>Many of the refugees were farmers in their native lands, some on a large scale. “Most of us, including myself, had big plots in Bhutan,” Bhattarai said.</p>

<p>They grew rice, millet and wheat. Some raised cows and made their own butter and cheese. Sha Darnal, 26, said his father had 20 acres in Bhutan and plowed the fields using bulls.</p>

<h2>Let's Eat Some Snow!</h2>

<p>Farming in Albany Park is different because of the size of the plots and the weather.</p>

<p>The refugees from Burma had never seen winter. The first time Myint saw snow on the ground, she was so curious that she ate some.</p>

<p>They were used to planting year-round, said Tah Mae, 40. “Here, when the weather gets cold, all the plants die,” he said.</p>

<p>Working such small plots has taken some adjustment. In Bhutan, “we had big land, and this was our lives,” said Buddhi Darjee, 42, who spoke through an interpreter. “Here we have a very limited space.”</p>

<p>Even so, it is a space she treasures. “Once I am in the garden, I don’t want to go home,” she said. </p>

<p>Naina Darjee (no relation) feels just as strongly about the garden,

which he visits almost every day. It is his connection to the world he

came from.</p>

<p>“Sometimes I forget my life in Bhutan,” said Darjee, 66. In the garden, he remembers.</p>

<p>The farm is good for refugees’ physical and mental health, said Yvette Kyaw, a health promoter for the Heartland Alliance, who serves as an interpreter for families from Burma.</p>

<h2>Shrugging Off The Stress</h2>

<p>“They come here and they are depressed. They miss their country,” she said. “But they say, ‘When we get stressed out, we just come down to the garden.’”</p>

<p>The refugee farm was born when Seyler saw a notice about grants from the Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement.</p>

<p>RAPP supports small farms across the country to help refugee families grow healthy food and obtain additional income, and to promote better physical and mental health and encourage greater community integration.</p>

<p>Seyler, a former Peace Corps volunteer in rural Thailand with degrees in agronomy, wrote a letter asking for grants. In 2010, they received a three-year nonrenewable startup grant for a refugee farm in Chicago.</p>

<p>In 2011, refugees began working on the plots at four community garden sites, including 10 plots donated by the Peterson Garden Project. Then, garden project founder LaManda Joy spotted a vacant lot in Albany Park, an area home to many refugees.</p>

<p>It turned out the plot was owned by the city. The City Council approved its use for the refugee garden, Seyler said, and in 2012, volunteers and refugee farmers began their work. </p>

<p>Forty truckloads of mushroom compost were brought in and the farm finally became a reality.</p>