

Solidarity with Ukraine: railways provide free travel to over 1.3 million refugees and carry over 10,000 tonnes of aid

Over 4 million people have now fled the war in Ukraine. For those remaining, humanitarian aid into the country is providing a vital lifeline. Railways across Europe continue to open up their trains and their stations to ease the refugees' passage and reorientation, and many are also involved in organising and transporting aid shipments. The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) continues to work closely with its members to track the transport situation on the ground.

With over 2.3 million refugee arrivals in Poland and some of the busiest **border crossing points**, Polish State Railways PKP remain on the front line of humanitarian relief efforts. They have launched over 1,000 trains, including special services and regular trains with reinforced capacity, to help carry over half a million refugees within Poland and beyond, mostly to Berlin and Prague (data up to 30 March). Also on the border with Ukraine, Hungarian railways MÁV and Slovak operator ZSSK have increased services to Budapest (MÁV) and Košice (ZSSK) and respectively issued approximately 192,000 (MÁV, 31 March) and 160,000 (ZSSK, 27 March) free tickets, while the number delivered by CFR Călători has reached 92,000 (31 March).

Germany remains a busy crossroads for refugees and Deutsche Bahn (DB) has also stepped up capacity with extra coaches on regular services and special trains. Their '**helpukraine**' tickets continue to allow free travel to passengers with Ukrainian ID on long-distance trains (ICE, TGV, RJX, IC/EC) and all regional and local trains in Germany, as well as international trains where it is recognised by DB's partners. The 'helpukraine' ticket has to date (31 March) enabled more than 223,800 people from Ukraine to travel free of charge on trains and buses.

Other rail operators, also offering **free transport**, are seeing a steady increase in the number of refugees travelling on their networks as well: Austrian federal railways ÖBB has issued 88,000 tickets (30 March); France's SNCF 24,000 tickets (30 March) with an additional TGV train now running from Paris to Barcelona each day; Spanish operator Renfe 15,000 tickets (24 March), while Danish rail operator DSB has carried around 3,200 refugees from the Danish-German border (27 March), and Slovenian Railways SŽ over 2,000 refugees (27 March). The passage from mainland Europe to the United Kingdom is being facilitated by Eurostar, who has enabled close to 400 free journeys so far (28 March). In the UK, Rail Delivery Group reports that a scheme is now in place to allow newly arrived Ukrainians to travel for free on the national rail network.

Overall CER member railway companies in no less than 26 countries¹ offer free travel and/or recognise other operators' free tickets to ease the arduous journeys of Ukrainian refugees. **Special care** is taken to provide relevant information, also in Ukrainian, on

¹ Austria (ÖBB), Belgium (SNCB/NMBS, Thalys), Bulgaria (BDŽ), Czech Republic (ČD), Croatia (HZPP), Denmark (DSB), Estonia (Elron), Finland (VR Group), France (SNCF, Eurostar), Germany (DB), Hungary (MÁV, GYSEV), Italy (FS Italiane, FNM), Ireland (Iarnród Éireann), Lithuania (LTG), Luxembourg (CFL), Moldova (CFM), Netherlands (NS), Poland (PKP), Portugal (CP), Romania (CFR Călători), Slovakia (ZSSK), Slovenia (SŽ), Spain (Renfe), Sweden (SJ AB), Switzerland (BLS, SBB), and the United Kingdom (RDG members)

board trains, in stations, on websites and even via dedicated hotlines. Many of the busiest arrival stations are also set up with reception zones where railway staff and/or aid workers from the Red Cross and other NGOs provide on-site information, refreshments and other support such as counselling or finding accommodation. Rail companies are also making donations and organising aid collections.

In what they have described as the “*largest relief operation in DB’s history*”, Deutsche Bahn has put in place a rail bridge bringing **aid into Ukraine** on container trains loaded with food, blankets, first aid kits, power banks and warm clothing. The goods are donated by companies and many private individuals at collection points set up around Germany by DB Schenker. Ten thousand tons of relief supplies have already been transported in the first two weeks of operation. Moreover, a range of **solidarity initiatives** involving hundreds of DB employees is coordinated by a group-wide crisis team. Help includes assistance with **social integration** and a new programme has been set up offering advice on the German labour market, qualifications for railway-specific professions and job placements.

The **rail bridge to Ukraine** in fact extends across Europe thanks to cooperation among a number of railway undertakings. Aid is transported by train all the way from Spain, with Renfe reporting a first 400-tonne shipment from Madrid on 24 March, linking up via France to the solidarity corridor set up by DB Cargo from Germany. SNCF too has sent a first humanitarian train to Romania, in collaboration with DB, with a second convoy scheduled. FS Group is also active on this front, in collaboration with the Italian Department of Civil Protection, as is ÖBB’s Rail Cargo Group via its Czech subsidiary working in collaboration with ČD Cargo, which has also dispatched humanitarian trains. Such rail corridors are enabling the transport of large volumes of donations, making it possible to free up warehouse space, ready to receive new waves of solidarity.

Much of the aid transits through Poland, where PKP Cargo helps with the handling and delivery to Ukraine. Both PKP Cargo and PKP LHS run humanitarian aid trains. Inside Ukraine, Ukrainian Railways continue to transport the aid where it is needed around the country reporting over 1,600 cargo wagons transported to date (27 March) and several thousand tonnes carried on passenger trains. In cooperation with the Polish Ministry of Health, PKP Intercity has prepared a special medical train stocked with provisions and blankets for refugees and cars that have been equipped for the care of injured persons. Trenitalia has also put its medical train at the disposal of authorities managing the Ukrainian emergency.

The European rail community remains committed to expressing its solidarity towards Ukraine and its people and will continue supporting the ongoing international aid efforts in close cooperation with local, regional, national and EU-level authorities as well as with fellow rail companies and other transport actors. Strong coordination remains key in responding to the crisis and its developments.

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About CER

The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together around 70 railway undertakings, their national associations as well as infrastructure managers and vehicle leasing companies. The membership is made up of long-established bodies, new entrants and both private and public enterprises, representing 79% of the rail network length, 77% of the rail freight business and about 90% of rail passenger operations in EU, EFTA and EU accession countries. CER represents the interests of its members towards EU policymakers and transport stakeholders, advocating rail as the backbone of a competitive and sustainable transport system in Europe. For more information, visit www.cer.be or follow us on Twitter [@CER_railways](https://twitter.com/CER_railways) or [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cer).