

Sewa International Helps Over 3,200 People Evacuate Ukraine Amidst War



SEWA IN ACTION #SEWAFORUKRAINE



HELPLINE ASSISTANCE
5200+



EVACUATION IN PROGRESS
9000+



FOOD KITS DISTRIBUTED
1500+



VOLUNTEERS
250+



CITIES CONNECTED
18+

As war continues and people flee Ukraine in large numbers, Sewa International volunteers in Europe began helping people cross the border to reach safety. Within six days of the beginning of war, Sewa volunteers helped more than 3,200 people to leave Ukraine.

Over 250 Sewa volunteers spread across many countries in Europe are coordinating the relief efforts in 18 Ukrainian cities. Working closely with Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) volunteers, Sewa units in Ukraine, Finland, Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Denmark have fielded calls from stranded students and other people seeking help and have been directing them to volunteers who live close by to them for further assistance.

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Giving is a Vital Element of Happiness

Executive's Corner

The unprecedented scale of COVID-19 has led to the deaths of millions across the world and has added suffering to several other millions. The effect of the coronavirus pandemic on India has been both in terms of economic activity and the loss of human lives. The pandemic affected almost all sectors, as domestic demand and exports sharply dropped, people were laid off work, and many stayed at home.

Sewa International, with the help of its generous donors, a strong network of local organizations, and a dedicated group of volunteers accepted the challenge and mobilized immediate relief efforts across India.

They have also tried to ensure that Sewa International is getting ready for carrying out some long-term initiatives to strengthen the community and the country's defense against any such future pandemics or disasters. Sewa volunteers and leaders have planned and executed measures to enhance the skills and increase the resilience of people and systems to deal with such situations in the upcoming days. Sewa has done an excellent job conducting vaccination drives, food distribution drives, etc., and have in many ways lessened the impact of this pandemic.

Helping others leads to increased social integration, and physical well-being lets people lead more energetic lifestyles. Scientific studies indicate that helping others can contribute to our contentment in diverse ways. These include increasing our sense of meaning and fulfillment with life and boosting our self-confidence. It can reduce stress and help us feel calmer too. When we see divinity in every living being, a helping mindset will naturally relieve the impacted individuals and family members.

Sewa considers giving as a much more vital element of happiness than receiving. By giving, we make a better impact on someone's life. It also encourages us to do better and uncover a different perspective of happiness. Humanity needs individuals and organizations to step up their effort to absorb the mental and physical sufferings of COVID impacted families. Donors want to feel good about their giving experience and supporting our cause. They want to know that they made a good decision by giving us. So, we accomplish greater things with the donations we receive.

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Sincerely,



Gopakumar Krishnapillai
Director, Donor Relations



Giving is a Vital Element of Happiness

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The most common reason cited for not wanting to donate is mistrust. Thus, Sewa never regards the work of non-profits as businesses. We do not want to “profit” ourselves when we gather and organize to provide help. We simply have to help because the situation demands so. Nevertheless, donations, large and small, allow us to be innovative, provide high-quality services, and sustain our work when other resources are unavailable. Individual donations enable us to help people and families. Our attitude drives our efforts -- through language, behavior, and all of our actions. It is time for everyone to embrace the sewa/service mindset and offer without expecting anything in return, time, money, skills, or any in-kind donation to help those in need.

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On February 26, Sewa helped a group of 150 students to travel from Vinnitsa to Chernovtsy by bus. Sewa volunteers provided them shelter, food, and transport for their onward journey to the Romanian border. To ensure that these relief efforts are conducted expeditiously, Sewa International released \$10,000 and started a Facebook fundraising campaign. For its Ukrainian relief efforts, Sewa has collected over \$36,000 through its website and the Facebook campaign.

Commending Sewa volunteers in Europe for their tireless efforts to help students and people stuck in the warzone, Arun Kankani, President, Sewa International, said, “The messages and videos we are getting from Ukraine show the fear, anxiety, and danger people are facing as they run to safety. I am really happy to note that the global Sewa network has proven once again that Sewa is at the forefront of disaster relief efforts in many countries. I request people to support Sewa in this rescue effort”.

A Sewa volunteer from Ukraine, closely involved in coordinating the relief work said that the situation on the ground was very challenging. Over a WhatsApp call, he explained that Sewa and HSS volunteers were taking calls from people in distress and working 24 x 7 to help them reach the border. More than 35 Sewa volunteers are working on the ground in Ukraine and Sewa is seeing an increased call volume as the war intensifies.

Sewa is helping people to reach Ukraine’s western border by bus, train, or some other modes of transport. They are arranging food packets, establishing temporary shelters, or working with local hotel owners to provide fleeing students a place to stay until they leave for their home country.

Heightened Fear

After a student from India was killed in shelling in Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine and an epicenter of the current war, there was a heightened fear among students. As Heramb Kulkarni, a Sewa volunteer from Finland put it, “Helping people leave Kharkiv has been Sewa’s top priority. In nearly 80 percent of the situations, Sewa volunteers have been able to help the caller when they call the help number for the first time”.

As per reports, there were about 18,000 students from India in Ukraine at the beginning of the war and over 15,000 had reached India by the end of the first week of March. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, over 660,000 people, mostly women and children, have left Ukraine within five days of the beginning of the war. Students stranded in Ukraine are facing multiple challenges, including threat to their lives, non-cooperation from local officials, not being allowed to cross the Ukrainian border, lack of food, and money.



International Students in a bus and gathered in an unidentified place and at the Ukrainian border

Shyam Parande and Venkatesh Murthy Join New Sponsor A Child (SAC) Advisory Board

Sewa International's Sponsor A Child (SAC) team announced the new advisory board and roles and responsibilities for the year 2022. In an email message sent to Sewa volunteers, Prem Pusuloori, Director of Projects and Programs gave details of the new board. Sewa International, India's president Shyam Parande, Youth For Sewa (YFS) founder Venkatesh Murthy, SAC's former director Ravi Chakinala, and Sewa volunteer Swati Ram are the members of the newly-constituted advisory board. SAC has been implemented under the umbrella of the Samarpak initiative by Sewa International, India.

As part of the SAC executive team, Jayanth Korlimarla from Bay area is assigned to coordinate the Chapter and Donor Relations work. A Sewa volunteer from New Jersey, Shirisha Siluveru, is responsible for managing Systems and Technology. SAC Mission Oriented Staff from India have the following responsibilities. Saravanan Dakshinamurthy – Program Manager, Ranjani Kapur – Donor Relations, Hari Prasad Toram – Field Coordinator and Parul Rajawat, who joined the SAC team recently, will look after Documentation and Content Writing.

Doctors For Sewa (DFS) and Sewa Houston Chapter Organize "Ask A Doctor" Webinar

In coordination with Sewa International's Doctors For Sewa (DFS) program, Sewa International Houston Chapter conducted Ask the Doctor webinar to answer the questions about the COVID-19 and its omicron variant. Over 250 participants attended the live event.

Physicians Dr. Shilpa Rajagopal, Dr. Atasu Nayak, and Dr. Pranav Loyalka, all from Houston, answered many questions about the new threats posed by the Omicron variant and how to stay safe. Attendees raised questions on effectiveness of the booster doses, cloth, N-95 and other masks, isolation guidelines, herd immunity, RTPCR and Antigen tests, and vaccination for children under five years.

Thanking the physicians for answering questions in the webinar, Sewa International's president Arun Kankani encouraged other Sewa chapters to organize similar events to spread correct information and lessen the anxiety about the pandemic. Pranjali Dani, a medical student and the Coordinator of the Doctors For Sewa program and Nikhil Jain, Sewa Houston Chapter Coordinator were present in the webinar.

Marketing & Fund Development Volunteer Positions

Creative Content Writer - Social Media & Website Track

This person will support the marketing team in expanding its digital footprint through creative content writing for Social Media. The selected applicant needs to create content for social media postings and develop social media testimonial material and stories. The job seeker should have a strong commitment to Sewa's vision/mission and guiding principles.

SEO Expert – Sewa Marketing Team – The Search Engine Optimization (SEO) expert would assist the marketing team in performing keyword research, web research, and competitive analysis to discover the best keywords that will drive targeted visitors. The selected applicant should provide SEO analysis and recommendations.

Video Editor – Marketing Team - will help the marketing team with videography and editing, as well as other creative dynamic content forms such as GIFs, Videos, and banners. The candidate will help with editing and compiling recorded raw material into an appropriate, final product that can be shared on social media. The selected applicant has to create video testimonials from sponsors, well-wishers, and beneficiaries. Creating promotional videos for Sewa's branding and cause promotion and working with teams in different times zones is a must. This should have experience in videography.

Graphic Designer – Marketing Team - This volunteer will help the marketing team with creating graphic content for social media, marketing & promotional materials. Creating Sewa event and program flyers, Sewa branding and promotion material and developing and sharing editable design templates with Sewa chapters is required. The selected applicant should work with teams in different times zones. The chosen applicant should have the ability to work through multiple partner organizations.

Grants Coordinator - National Grants Track - The selected applicant would have experience in this track and need to coordinate with project teams to define/redefine and document the project mission and goals. Sewa expects this person to follow up with the grant implementing team (internal to Sewa) to ensure timely submission of periodic status and impact reports, pictures, and videos as per contractual obligations. The chosen aspirant should have proficiency in Microsoft Office (Excel, PowerPoint, Word).

Grant Specialist - National Grants Track – This person would be the point of contact to whom the Sewa Grants team will reach out for any grant-related activities. The selected applicant has to Coordinate for project teams to define/redefine and document project mission and goals. The job seeker needs to have a keen attention to detail. The aspirant should have experience with event planning, administration, and office management.

Data Analyst - Donor Relations Track needs analyst to analyze data which is in excel format and extract donor relations specific KPIs, trends, and best practices. The selected applicant will be responsible for preparing stats and reports based on KPI. The job seeker will be responsible for preparing charts to represent trends, opportunities, etc. The chosen aspirant should have experience with data privacy and compliance, an optional requirement.

The PR Writer is required to assist in PR efforts by jointly brainstorming possible ideas, given current events, and writing regular articles and op-eds for publication in mainstream media. The selected applicant has to work with the internal PR/Marketing team to refine ideas and translate big picture concepts into written, publishable articles. The job seeker should Write and edit market-facing communications as needed (e.g. articles, reports, surveys, white papers, invitations, etc. The chosen aspirant has to explore and draft strategic communications regularly, from where to position them to the language used to communicate core messages.

Content Coordinator will support the PR efforts by internally working with Sewa team leads and chapter coordinators across Sewa teams and projects to generate content for various projects and initiatives. The selected applicant has to conduct research and meet with internal team leads, chapter coordinators, and subject matter experts to gather interesting facts and statistics, as well as stories and anecdotes that can be used in publishable material for external consumption. The job seeker needs to organize all materials and data in an easy find and analysis manner. The chosen aspirant has to collaborate and brainstorm with other team members on possible ideas to explore and develop.

Data Miner/Researcher – Public Relations Team - Sewa is looking for individuals who can proficiently use research tools on all available domains to conduct open-source research to support Sewa's PR efforts. The selected applicant has to collect and analyze publicly available information to identify trends, patterns, and relationships that provide insights into potential issues related to Sewa or the nonprofit world. The job seeker needs to research and evaluate currently available and/or emerging best practices to best amplify Sewa's current efforts in PR and media promotion. The chosen aspirant should develop reports, as needed, to support the overall efforts.

Corporate Relations Track is looking for a Corporate Relations Volunteer. This person has to help motivate individuals with fund development and establish a communication channel with corporate employees, CRS Managers, and corporate foundations. The selected applicant has to identify and evaluate corporate matching programs and steward prospective corporate donors, CSRs. The job seeker should create innovative ways to attract corporates to learn and raise funds for Sewa International activities. The chosen aspirant needs to establish communication channels with CSR managers, corporate foundations, and donors through quarterly update emails and identify Corporate foundation grants. The selected candidate must be comfortable making calls and recording data.

War is hell, they say.

It doesn't matter if it's the soldier charging into battle, the innocents hunkering down to avoid being shelled by the enemy, or a visiting student trying to receive an education. War leaves nothing and no one untouched.

This war story takes place in Stockholm, where I'm from. As a volunteer for Sewa International, a U.S. based humanitarian organization, we were tasked with providing both moral support and directions to find safe ways out of the country to those stuck in Ukraine via a help line established by Sewa.

As we listened to cries for help and fervent appeals, the moral support quickly turned into planning an evacuation for students trapped in the middle of fighting. We knew nothing about evacuating students from a war zone, but when one realizes actual lives are on the line you quickly move out of your comfort zone and embark on the unthinkable.

We heard there were nearly 18,000 students of Indian origin studying in Ukraine, many of them studying and training to be doctors, dentists, and nurses. About 24 percent of international students in Ukraine are Indians, the largest group of international students in the country. In fact, Ukraine has been a destination for Indian students for more than three decades as it is both less expensive to study there, less expensive than even in India, and offering a good standard of education. Medical students pay about \$35,000 for a six-year education in Ukraine, while in India it would cost them around \$140,000!

What is more attractive to international students is that medical degrees earned in Ukraine are recognized across the world, including by the World Health Organization, and the European Council. Ukrainian medical training also offers these students chances of permanent residence and settlement in Europe.

They did not expect war to break out, and when it did, there they were, stranded.

It's more than 1,400 miles from Stockholm to Kyiv. None of us had ever been to Ukraine, much less know the names of cities and towns throughout the country or even how to pronounce the names.

Zaporizhzhia quickly became Zeph.

With the assistance of Google Maps and Translate, we were able to overcome those obstacles and chart out a journey to safety for these stranded students desperate for help. Our confidence boosted, we were then quickly and confidently able to advise anyone about the mode of transport, border situation, and border options.

City names became so important that our WhatsApp group chats took on their names: Mission Pesochin, Operation Zaph, Mission Poltava Rescue, and Evacuate Kharkiv.

We soon became experts in routing, remaining in close and regular contact with the students, and planning every minute detail of their journey. We set reminders for the arrival of their trains and employed a strategy of contacting two members in each group, where one was the leader and the other an informant. The informant did not necessarily travel with the group but was in touch with the members. Collecting information from two sources allowed us to compare notes, as details can get lost in a war zone.

Social media played a critical role. When a shelling or bombing occurred, we would often learn via Twitter or the Internet and would spring to action informing the students and their families.

We discovered that simply being students didn't provide them a free pass. Some were beaten, kicked, slapped, or even shoved in the stomach with a rifle.

With each call of terror and anxiety, our resolve hardened.

Some of the most difficult calls were trying to calm frayed nerves with reassuring words that they would survive. To divert their attention, we told them to close their eyes and imagine their home, their parents, their pets, or friends. Sometimes, we even asked them to push a little harder and imagine the endgame.

Many calls ended in tears.

Most nights were sleepless or filled with dreams of being unable to help someone. When sleep was not possible, we constantly checked in asking if they had crossed the border, caught a flight, or whether they were able to eat that day.

Each small victory was celebrated and applauded in our WhatsApp groups, and every time we felt low after hearing a student cry, someone would chime in to give us strength.

Through it all, we've managed to help many students find their way safely out of Ukraine.

Our work continues.

War is hell.

It changes people, communities, and the way we live.

Our volunteer experience performed from the safety of our home pales in comparison to what those brave students and so many other Ukrainians are enduring, but it still changed us.

We are a different version of ourselves than one short month ago.

It's not all bad.

Through this experience we became aware of human capabilities that too often lay dormant deep inside of us.

We never thought we would be witness to war or part of a wartime rescue effort.

Hopefully, we never will again.

Author bio: **Kajal Pradeep** (aka Kajal Kishore) is from Dubai, is a Swedish citizen, and her family, originally from India, has lived in Dubai for the past 130 years. She studied in India and the UAE. At present, she is a self-employed Life Coach and has been practicing in Dubai, different cities in India, and Stockholm, Sweden.

She tells people that she is Indian born, a Dubai kid, and a Swedish citizen. Kajal is a Sewa International volunteer.

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