

European Lions Clubs bring electricity to Ukrainian schools

Updating a press release sent on Feb. 16, which mentioned the provision of over 1,800 generators to Ukrainian nurseries, schools, orphanages and temporary shelters by many Lions Clubs in Western Europe, reacting to the persistent Russian damages to the country's electrical infrastructure, we can now announce that the total number is going to reach more than 2,200 units.

March 17, 2023 – By next week, more than 2,200 power generators of between 3 and 9 KW should have been delivered to Ukraine since last December through a unique international fund-raising project worth over €1.5 million. This unique humanitarian project has involved more than 1,200 out of the 5,676 **Lions Clubs** that operate in the following 13 European countries (*in alphabetical order*) : Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine.

More than half of the generators have already been delivered since the project began in October, and most of them have been installed, but the operation has been extremely complex for several reasons. The last batch, which has been delayed by a shortage of components from Asia, is set to arrive in Kyiv from a Turkish factory, **Guçbir Generator**, sometime next week for immediate distribution.

Incidentally, Guçbir has also sent around 1,600 generators to the Turkish areas destroyed by a devastating earthquake on Jan. 6. Lions Clubs are participating in a separate disaster relief project in that part of the world.

The vast majority of the generators donated by the Lions Clubs to Ukraine have been set aside for schools, kindergartens and orphanages all over the country to allow them to cope as fast as possible with the frequent blackouts caused by Russia's constant bombings, which have paralyzed on and off much of the country's electrical infrastructure. Reportedly, they had also destroyed 286 schools and damaged 2,800 others by the end of 2022.

The generators are providing electricity for light and heat for the babies, the school children and their nurses and teachers. They are also used to keep refrigerators and kitchen stoves running and to recharge computers, tablets and smartphones. They are mostly portable generators, powered with gasoline or diesel oil, so they can be moved to other locations when needed. A few other generators are being used for temporary shelters occupied by victims of the destruction, including school children.

This unique European humanitarian project has been launched and led since October 2022 by **Björn Hägerstrand** (photo attached), a 56-year-old Past District Governor and a member of the Lions Club Åland Culinaria located in the Åland Islands, an autonomous and demilitarized Swedish-speaking region of Finland. The distribution of the power generators in Ukraine has been led by **Valentin Kravchenko**, a leading member of a Ukrainian Lions Club in Kyiv and a 20-year veteran of our movement. H the first District Governor for Ukraine.

The Lions who have been managing the generator project have insisted on making it 100% transparent. Throughout the process, **Daniel Isenrich**, Past International Director of **Lions International** (formerly called Lions Clubs International, or **LCI**) and Accountant for the Lions'

Europa Forum, has been reviewing all transactions to ensure maximum traceability of the donations and the purchases.

About Lions International

Lions International (formerly Lions Clubs International, or LCI) is the largest service club organization in the world. About 1.4 million members in over 48,000 clubs are serving in more than 200 countries and geographic areas around the globe. Since 1917, Lions have strengthened local communities through hands-on service and humanitarian projects, and they extend their service impact through the generous support of the Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF). Together, in addition to disaster relief efforts, they are focused on supporting vision, the environment, childhood cancer, hunger, diabetes and other pressing humanitarian needs to help address some of the biggest challenges facing humanity. For more information about Lions International, visit ***www.lionsclubs.org***.

You can ask me on Valentin to share some photos, most of which show donations of generators to Ukrainian schools by Lions Clubs in various countries. Your contacts in your countries can ask me any questions and I shall do my best to answer them. I can also help arrange interviews and video shootings for you with the interested parties.

Some video clips should become available soon.

You can find more background information about the development of the project here below, although most of its history was already reported in my initial press releases.

Regards

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How the European small generator project developed

The history of the European generator project for Ukrainian schools is interesting in itself. Before hitting many hurdles, it started last October in the Åland Islands, an autonomous and demilitarized Swedish-speaking region of Finland. **Björn Hägerstrand** (photo attached), a 56-year-old Past District Governor and a member of the Lions Club Åland Culinaria, proposed to raise funds locally to help Ukrainian citizens to cope with Russia's bombing of the local electrical infrastructure. After a few days, he saw on a Facebook post by Kent Benediktsson that his Swedish club, LC Reng Höllviken, had collected funds for generators being sent to Ukraine. Eventually, Kent became the project coordinator for all of Sweden.

Björn, a dynamic person with 30 years of experience in international trade, discussed the idea of a joint project with other Lions in other Nordic countries, as he is the Lions Clubs' coordinator for the Nordic region. They agreed in principle to target schools and

kindergartens after discussing the project with **Valentin Kravchenko**, a leading member of the Ukrainian Lions Clubs based in Kyiv. Valentin, a 20-year veteran of our movement, was the first District Governor for Ukraine.

The program was finally launched on a voluntary basis under Björn's leadership in early November under the title "Winter is coming to Ukraine." Other countries joined the project after it was debated during the annual Lions Europa Forum, which took place at the end of October 2022 in Zagreb.

A total of 18 generators donated by Estonian Lions Clubs were collected and delivered to Ukraine by the LC Saku club before Christmas. About 40 generators donated by Swedish and Norwegian Lions Clubs were personally delivered to Ukrainian schools via Hungary by a Swedish Lions Zone Chairperson, Anders Rendik.

In December and January, many Estonian Lions Clubs organized Christmas parties in Estonia's national style for Ukrainian refugee children to introduce them to the country's Christmas customs and to give them many Christmas gifts.

In general, Lions Clubs have been able to collect the funds for the generators donated to Ukrainian schools – without engaging in any big marketing campaigns – on top of many other smaller individual, regional and national actions that they have already undertaken or planned to support the victims of Russia's invasion of the country.

For example, a French Lions Club based at Bry-sur-Marne donated €800 for wood stoves made in Ukraine due to be installed in refugee shelters before being informed about the European generator project. Swedish Lions are planning to donate seeds and food to Ukraine by the springtime.

Many Lions Clubs all over Europe have collected and are still collecting funds, warm clothing, food, candles, water purification pills and medication for Ukraine on an individual, regional or national basis, while continuing to serve for other causes. For example, German Lions have been collaborating with Czech, Slovakian, Polish and Romanian Lions to help the people in the Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees in Europe.

While there have been a few individual big and small donors for this purpose, including a famous theater in Munich, most of the funds had already been raised by the participating Lions Clubs for other local, national or international humanitarian causes through charity events such as concerts, conferences, lotteries or the sale of Christmas trees or pancakes. Most Lions Club members are not rich, but they all have a big heart.

In most cases, the funds were redirected from other causes for this urgent relief mission. In Switzerland, for example, a Lions club in Sursee diverted a donation of 12,000 Swiss francs (about €12,200) to the European generator project from the funds that it had already collected to buy a used ambulance for Ukraine by staging a nice Indian dancing show.

On the other hand, some clubs didn't hesitate to organize new events and solicit new donations specifically for this project. For example, members of a Finnish club collected €700 in only two hours from the public in a shopping mall, asking for the donations by holding funding boxes in their hands.

Some Lions Clubs in Belgium, Finland and Poland donated a few large generators to power hospitals and other large institutions, even before the execution of a similar joint program decided by member governments of the European Union.

Two big second-hand generators were secured by the Belgian Lions from a local bank. Two big ones were donated by Polish clubs in an effort led by LC Opole and LC Krakow Srodmiestcie. Working largely on the logistic side, Lions Clubs in Poland were involved in 66 other humanitarian actions worth more than \$1 million in Ukraine during the 2021/22 Lions year alone, and many others since then. They have been mostly financed with grants provided by the **Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF)**, but also with funds coming from Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and Japan.

The LCIF has been particularly active in Ukraine, including the provision of food and shelters for Ukrainian refugees. You can check here a video about this service action conducted by the LCIF, changing the language for the subtitles in the Parameters slot on the bottom right of the frame: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m26i8SqjLwE&t=53s>

The LCIF quickly awarded booster grants for the European generator project to some Lions Clubs that had donated \$5,000 or more to the foundation.

"I hope all Lions realize that we can all start projects like this, as we get so much power when we reach out over our borders and do things together," said **Björn Hägerstrand**, Past District Governor and member of the Lions Club Åland Culinaria in Finland, who started the project and has been leading it since. "I really hope now that our project will be a sparkle for other big cooperative ventures, making borders invisible. If we do this, there will be a million more possibilities for projects when Ukraine will have to be rebuilt."

To ensure that the generators would be dispatched to the right locations, the project team has been working for most of the deliveries with 12 Ukrainian Lions Clubs and a local Ukrainian District Governor, Oksana Artemenko. The effort was coordinated by Valentin because of his good connections with local educational officers and authorities, as he is in charge of the Lions Quest program in Ukraine. It's a program under which Lions work with local schools to organize special workshops intended to build up good citizens. Ukraine's Lions Clubs have been working with up to 200 schools annually for each of the past seven years under this program.

With the harsh Ukrainian winter approaching and Russian rockets continuing to pound Ukrainian cities, interest about the project spread fast within the international Lions community, creating an overwhelming snowball effect. Much higher funds than expected kept pouring in. However, Björn was faced with a big problem: The whole European market was practically cleaned out of generators, due primarily to the war in Ukraine. On top of that, many European households had started buying generators for their own homes, fearing a shortage of gas or electricity due to geopolitical tensions.

The prices charged by the factories escalated, especially in Ukraine, but also in Germany and elsewhere, and Björn was eager to close the project by the end of 2022 to meet a deadline set by the EU to exempt NGOs from paying VAT on goods and services used for aid to Ukraine. He politely refused offers of cooperation made by Lions Clubs as far away as Hong

Kong, Malaysia and the Philippines, but he agreed to push forward the final fund-raising deadline for the European project to Jan. 31 to give him and his team time to find a solution.

Finally, Björn and his collaborators located a big manufacturer in Turkey, Guçbir Generator, - through Jyri Kurki, a Finnish Lion who is a professional in the sector. The Turkish company, which works for Jyri's employer in France, accepted to charge a reasonable price for the generators. Furthermore, Turkey doesn't charge VAT for such humanitarian causes. Björn then ordered 1,080 units from its two factories in the Istanbul area. He also allowed the French and Belgian Lions Clubs to join the project in mid-December, and he boosted the order to 1,355 units after getting additional support from them and from other clubs in other countries. Additional donations from Finland, the Netherlands and Switzerland allowed Björn to raise the total number of generators ordered from Turkey to 1,817.

Lions Clubs in Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Estonia, Poland and Germany were the first to get financially involved in the project, with logistical help from Lions Clubs in Poland and in Ukraine. With other countries offering their help, Björn told the European project team on Nov. 16: "It is so amazing when you work together. The energy just multiplies when others are joining in and all want to help as the Lions' DNA is loaded." Lions Clubs in Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, France and Belgium joined gradually the initial group, in some cases without asking permission from their national or regional hierarchy.

Many of the actions carried out by Lions Clubs go unnoticed by the media, but this particular Ukrainian aid project is unique because it has turned out to be their first major solidarity project on a European scale. It was built up gradually and spontaneously from the bottom up across national borders.

Meanwhile, immediately reacting to the disastrous earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria at the beginning of February, the Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) launched during the same week a big new humanitarian relief project in the area, starting with an initial \$200,000 grant to the Lions Clubs of Turkey. The grant is intended to help create a "Lions Village" for the survivors in the province of Hatay and to participate in the immediate and longterm clean-up, repair and reconstruction efforts. Swedish Lions have sent over 300 tents for this project. The LCIF has asked Lions Clubs and their members all over the world to make additional donations to help cope with the damage caused by the earthquake.

See https://lcifday.eu/Pages/earthquake_pictures.htm

You also can check this news item:

https://finance.yahoo.com/news/lions-turkey-earthquake-relief-lcif-215342524.html?quccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLnNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAAdAUily8sZI62Z6BQQkFEQ0Xwfl8nPfAnorVNI-u3RFwDZMmqSwboqs4TvTyhD7h5tMoW4ryHkeym6ePdhYLN6cbxNAtFlpXujE9oy3O13r90LlyjU8Anxi_5oRqIs9SbuMeddlcNnQWfARyWxhIrRdf3tACytG-4WKS12CH10p