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Ukraine's Postal Service Is Saving Lives And Needs U.S. Help

By Paul Steidler

Since the war began, Ukraine's Postal Service, [Ukrposhta](#), has valiantly stood up to the Russians and provided vital services. Often wearing helmets, bulletproof vests, and carrying weapons while moving through bomb-ridden streets, Ukrposhta employees have delivered vast amounts of humanitarian aid, including much to the hard-hit eastern areas of the country, while continuing to deliver mail and packages.

I spoke at length yesterday with Ukrposhta's Chief Executive Officer, [Igor Smelyansky](#), and Director of International Operations, [Julia Pavlenko](#). Their resolute, graceful, strategic, and determined approach to carrying on and serving the people of Ukraine is inspiring. U.S. officials, policy makers, and media would all benefit tremendously from speaking with them.

Ukrposhta's work includes:

- Delivering [87 percent](#) of March pension checks, critical to the welfare of the elderly.
- Quickly distributing more than 200 tons of humanitarian aid [donated by Americans](#), which was first flown into Warsaw. Ukrposhta, though, has severely limited resources to pay for the flights and time is of the essence in getting aid to Ukraine.
- Providing a 70 percent cut in rates for packages shipped to many of those who have had to flee Ukraine.
- Instituting new practices so that the country's 11 million displaced persons get mail and financial assistance.

Indeed, Ukrposhta is ideally suited to deliver aid. With 11,000 facilities in Ukraine, it has nearly three times as many per capita as the United States, including many that are in the country's small villages. And while the Russians are ruthlessly attacking the Red Cross and other international aid agencies, Ukrposhta does not allow this to inhibit its delivery.

[Fourteen postal services](#) around the world are already helping Ukrposhta and the people of Ukraine by sending direct donations and providing other assistance. Unfortunately, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is not yet one of them and as of this morning has not announced any plans to help.

In addition to the 14 foreign posts helping Ukraine, [Amazon](#), [UPS](#), and [FedEx](#) are each providing millions of dollars in assistance. And on April 1, 38 CEOs and senior executives with European posts met with Ukrposhta's CEO to [show solidarity](#) and discuss ways to work closely together.

Ukrposhta needs a great deal of help. Five hundred of its post offices have been destroyed, as well as large amounts of postal equipment and vehicles. There are much higher costs for its day-to-day routine, particularly in places where electricity has been lost. Services have been expanded to include aid delivery and shipments to displaced people. Ukrposhta is also helping companies to relocate from east to west Ukraine.

Assistance to Ukrposhta can take many forms. For CEO Smelyansky, the most direct and effective way USPS can help is to waive, at least temporarily, terminal dues charges. These are the costs USPS charges Ukrposhta to deliver e-commerce packets in the United States. Posts in several countries, including Sweden, Luxembourg, and Estonia, have already done so.

Before the war, Ukraine had 30,000 entrepreneurs using the Internet to sell products to countries around the world. Approximately half of these items were shipped to the U.S., including many hand-crafted items. The terminal dues reduction will help Ukrposhta and be an economic stimulus to these businesses which are literally struggling to survive.

According to Mr. Smelyansky, the total cost to USPS to waive these costs for a full year would be \$18-\$20 million.

Mr. Smelyansky's request is not only reasonable. It should be doubled – to at least \$36 million in near-term help from USPS for items which it is ideally suited to provide.

There could hardly be a better time for USPS to help Ukrposhta.

On April 6, President Biden signed legislation that will relieve USPS of \$107 billion in costs and liabilities. That same day, USPS announced a 6.5% mail price increase. And USPS is sitting on [\\$24 billion](#) in cash.

Additional steps that USPS should take are:

- Promote the work Ukrposhta is doing to collect humanitarian aid – medical supplies, medical equipment, and food. It should provide website links and handout information in post offices and online so Americans can send help directly to the warehouse that organizes and ships this aid to Warsaw before it goes to Ukraine.
- Allow Americans, at no cost, to mail humanitarian aid directly to Ukraine.
- Provide spare equipment to Ukrposhta. USPS should send available items including forklifts, computers, vehicles, and warehouse equipment.

And USPS should provide Ukrposhta with money, immediately. It should commit to \$18 million so that 100 additional aid flights can go to Ukraine. This, and the \$18 million in annual terminal dues assistance, amount to \$36 million.

This \$36 million is 0.15% of the \$24 billion in cash USPS currently has on hand and less than 4/100ths of 1% of the \$107 billion USPS will be receiving from the new postal legislation.

The mission of USPS is to bind the nation together. By helping our friends in Ukraine defeat Russia, USPS will do its part to keep our enemies at bay and strengthen America.

And time is of the essence.

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