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From Crisis Response to Institutional Resilience: The Wroclaw Medical University Case

Wroclaw Medical University's response after February 2022

When a crisis makes existing plans obsolete, what allows an institution to continue acting effectively and responsibly?
Short answer: Values

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The crisis placed several responsibilities under pressure

2 million

refugees in Poland in 2022

90%

women and children

Responsibilities at risk

Healthcare capacity
Accommodation and logistics
Continuity of education

The crisis crossed institutional boundaries

Patients needed care, displaced families needed safety, and students needed educational continuity. Each need created different risks, but all required a coherent institutional response.

Crisis conditions created predictable institutional risks

The central problem

Urgency can weaken institutions, especially those without a shared system of values

Shock, paralysis and delayed decisions

Fragmented initiatives and duplicated effort

Centralised control, fatigue and loss of trust

Further risks included unsafe assistance, misuse of sensitive data and a return to the pre-crisis status quo.

Values provided a stable basis for decisions

VALUES

Life/health
Dignity
Freedom
Truth
Empaty
Physician ethos

ETHICAL LIMITS

Safety
Privacy
Non-discrimination
Accountability

LEADERSHIP

Clear responsibility
Shared decisions
Support for initiative
Cooperation over competition

Values replaced rigid objectives with principles that remained useful as conditions changed.

Each major threat required a specific safeguard

CHAOS	DELAY	HARM	FATIGUE
One coordination team	Direct communication and delegated action	Safety standards and ethical oversight	Partnerships and shared workload

Coordination

The Aid to Ukraine Team verified needs and aligned institutional and grassroots initiatives.

Communication

Dedicated channels and direct meetings supported fast decisions and reduced duplication.

Safe assistance

Health standards, privacy protection and trauma awareness limited secondary harm.

Partnership

Universities, public authorities and NGOs contributed complementary resources.

Crisis management requires four connected phases

1 PREPAREDNESS

Values, trusted partners, communication channels and decision authority

2 IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Triage of needs, medical aid, shelter, educational continuity and coordination

3 SUSTAINED RESPONSE

Integration, mental health support, intercultural competence and stable partnerships

4 RECOVERY AND LEARNING

Research, curriculum change, policy revision and institutional memory

The phases overlap. Recovery should strengthen preparedness for the next crisis – building resilience

A value-based crisis response becomes a system

1. Preparedness: establish values, partnerships and decision authority before the crisis
2. Immediate response: coordinate rapidly while protecting safety, dignity and privacy
3. Sustained response: distribute responsibility and protect staff and volunteers from fatigue
4. Recovery: integrate successful practices into policy, research, curricula and future planning

A responsible university does more than react. It learns how to remain useful when society needs it most.