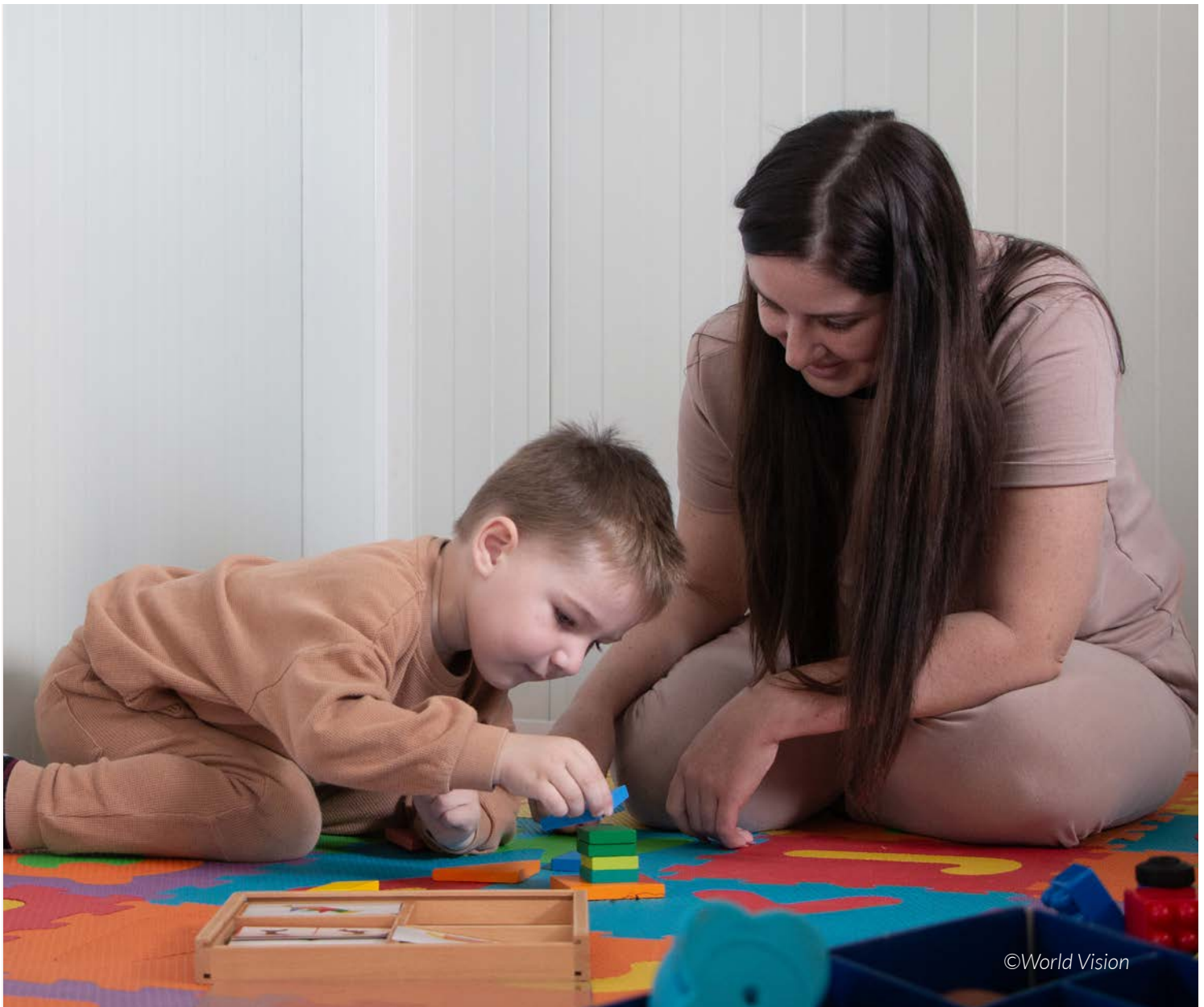


A photograph of a woman with long dark hair and a black top standing behind two children. On the left is a young girl with long brown hair wearing a grey sweatshirt with 'EV/USE' printed on it. On the right is a baby sitting in a wooden chair with an orange cushion featuring a red cardinal. The background is a dimly lit room with windows.

# IMPACT OF WAR ON UKRAINE'S CHILDREN

A Child Protection Report



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## Overview: the situation for Ukrainian Children

Since 24 February, **7.5 million children from Ukraine**<sup>1</sup> have been victims of the largest human displacement crisis in the world today, with lasting consequences for generations to come. Attacks with explosive weapons in populated urban areas continue to inflict civilian casualties, including children, and cause considerable damage to essential infrastructure and services. As a result, homes, schools, hospitals, water systems, power plants, and places where civilians seek shelter are damaged or destroyed. Children and families have taken refuge in neighbouring countries, fled to other

parts of Ukraine, or trapped in areas of escalating hostilities. Approximately **5 million children** are **displaced inside and outside Ukraine.**<sup>2</sup>

All these children are at heightened risk of physical harm severe emotional distress and displacement. Without comprehensive action children are at potential risk of separation from their families or primary care givers, gravely neglected if disabled and left in residential institutions that lack essential services and care. For those living in conflict areas the consequences are even more dire. **This report outlines the impact of the conflict in Ukraine on children and actions that must be taken to mitigate its consequences in the short and longer term.**

<sup>1</sup> UN (UNHCR & UNICEF) Advocacy Agenda for Children Fleeing Ukraine <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/92243>

<sup>2</sup> Within the first two months of conflict, almost two thirds of children in Ukraine have been displaced (2/3 of 7.5 M=5M) CPHA Advocacy Messages [ukraine\\_crisis\\_child\\_protection\\_advocacy\\_messages\\_the\\_alliance.pdf](https://www.alliancecpa.org/ukraine_crisis_child_protection_advocacy_messages_the_alliance.pdf) ([alliancecpa.org](https://www.alliancecpa.org))

# Children caught in the crosshairs: risks in Ukraine and beyond

## Exposure to violence, conflict, and physical harm

The greatest physical risk to children is the conflict itself. Many have been caught in the crossfire, caused by the broad use of explosive, shelling from heavy artillery, multiple launch rocket systems, missile and air strikes. UNICEF estimates that on average, two children are killed daily. From 24 February to 4 December 2022, OHCHR recorded 17,181 civilian casualties in Ukraine: 6,702 killed and 10,479 injured. A total of 6,702 killed (2,626 men, 1,794 women, 174 girls, and 212 boys, as well as 38 children and 1,858 adults whose sex is yet unknown)<sup>3</sup>

The impact of the conflict on Ukraine's health system is severe as access to trauma care for injured children is limited and pharmacies closed because they no longer have medical supplies.<sup>4,5</sup> Seriously injured children could take months or even years to recover without proper health care in a timely fashion. Delays in treatment and care, reduce their chances of surviving. These injuries are not only physical, but psychological. World Vision estimates that 1.5 million children are predicted to require mental health and psychosocial support because of their experiences during the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

Gender-based violence has long been a serious problem in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an increase in domestic violence against women, children, and older people; calls to domestic violence helplines grew by 50% in the conflict-affected Donetsk and Luhansk regions and by 35% in other regions of Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> Pre-conflict prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 was doubled the EU average in Ukraine compared

(15% vs eight). A national GBV hotline in Ukraine supported by UNFPA received a total of 3,735 calls and online requests between 11 March and 24 April. 79% of these cases are GBV-related out of which 63% are reported by women.<sup>9</sup> With the pressures of the conflict parents are increasingly turning to negative coping mechanisms, such as alcohol abuse, aggressive behaviours and domestic violence.

Ukraine's formal child protection system is overwhelmed by the scope of the crisis as many care professionals have left the country for their own safety. In addition, large refugee populations have placed an enormous strain on child protection systems where social workers and psychologists are not equipped to respond to the new demands of traumatised refugee families and children.

## Leaving Ukraine's most vulnerable children even more vulnerable: unaccompanied or separated children, children in residential care, children with disabilities

According to UNICEF's August report since 24 February, around 4,620 unaccompanied children arrived in Romania, out of which 202 were in the state protection system.<sup>10</sup> In the early wave of Ukrainians seeking asylum in Moldova an estimated 140,000 children passed through the country as 36,000 remain. Child Protection partners estimate that at least 2% of children would be separated or unaccompanied, which would mean at least 780 UASC and over 1,000 children at risk currently in Moldova.<sup>11</sup>

However, the numbers could be a lot higher. For instance, in Romania where over a million people have crossed the border, records did not begin until March 18, three weeks after the start of the conflict. In those first crucial three weeks, there are unverifiable accounts of mothers dropping their children off at the borders, before returning home to their older sons and husbands. Similar stories exist of children entrusted to the care of neighbours or grandparents,

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2022/12/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-5-december-2022>

<sup>4</sup> [One hundred days of war has put Ukraine's health system under severe pressure \(who.int\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Emergency in Ukraine: external situation report #13, published 26 May 2022: reporting period: 19-25 May 2022 \(who.int\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Looming mental health crisis for 1.5 million Ukrainian children | Ukraine | World Vision International \(wvi.org\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Ukraine steadfast in tackling gender-based violence, despite pandemic-related increases | United Nations Population Fund \(unfpa.org\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Microsoft Word - Ukraine Rapid Gender Analysis Brief Final.docx \(care-international.org\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/SitRep%238\\_29%20April%202022\\_Ukraine.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/SitRep%238_29%20April%202022_Ukraine.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/romania/stories/unicef-support-romania-refugee-children-women-and-families-coming-ukraine>

<sup>11</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/moldova/moldova-refugee-inter-agency-child-protection-update-01-march-2022-enr>



while parents stayed behind to fight.<sup>12</sup> Children who were handed over at the borders may be left in the custody of people who are unable to properly care for them, especially if their new informal guardians are ill or aged have cultural differences or lack experience to meet their needs on account of trauma or disability. There is a likelihood of children accidentally separated from their caregivers in the first few chaotic days at the border.<sup>13</sup>

Unaccompanied children are at high risk of various forms of violence and exploitation, such as being trafficked, sexually exploited and forced to work or beg. If they slip through the registration system and are consequently not referred to the host country's children's services, they are at risk of losing their identity and nationality. This makes the chances of them being reunited with their families virtually impossible. The problem of refugee children disappearing in Europe is not new, between 2014-2016 scores of children from Libya, Syria, Afghanistan and other conflict zones entered the region, and an estimated 10,000, or one in nine children went missing.<sup>14</sup>

The risks faced by children in institutional care are enormous. Ukraine has the highest number of vulnerable children in care in Europe. Over 90,000 were living in institutions, orphanages, boarding schools

and other care facilities prior to the war; nearly half of them are children with disabilities.<sup>15</sup> As the conflict continues, Ukraine's economy weakens, essential services damaged or destroyed, and staff flee for their safety, children living in institutions could suffer neglect and deprivation. Children with disabilities in institutions are more susceptible to respiratory and malnutrition related illnesses. During the colder months those who remain in poorly heated, crowded settings are at greatest risk of mortality.

The majority of children in residential care have parents and families. Less than 10 percent of these children are in residential care because they do not have parents or their parent's rights have been terminated by the authorities.<sup>16</sup> Children in institutions face many risks, including being killed or injured during attacks, abused, trafficked, or adopted inappropriately outside of Ukraine resulting in the loss of their identity and permanently separated from their families.<sup>17</sup>

Some children who were in institutions prior to the conflict were evacuated from Ukraine with the staff. Since the numbers of institutionalised children without families are low, there is a real risk without proper registration in host countries they could lose connections with their parents or legal guardians, who may, or may not be in Ukraine.

<sup>12</sup> [Ukraine conflict: Children on their own, parents stay behind - BBC News](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Note on Unaccompanied Children Fleeing from Ukraine - KIND \(supportkind.org\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Children in crisis: unaccompanied migrant children in the EU \(europa.eu\)](#) 88,245 unaccompanied children applied for asylum in 2015 and 10,000 estimated missing unaccompanied children in the EU- 1 in 9 unaccompanied children are estimated by EUROPOL to be missing

<sup>15</sup> [Two months of war in Ukraine creating 'a child protection crisis of extraordinary proportions' - UNICEF Geneva Palais briefing note on the situation of children in Ukraine](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Note on Unaccompanied Children Fleeing from Ukraine - KIND \(supportkind.org\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Microsoft Word - 220330 ADVOCACY DOC Recommended response to children from institutions in Ukraine FINAL.docx \(edf-fep.org\)](#)

## Trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse

Prior to the conflict children in Ukraine are known to have been trafficked.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes they remain in the country, or their traffickers take them across the Ukrainian border to where trafficking is prevalent. Since the beginning of the conflict in February 2022 there have been reports of traffickers targeting children at borders.<sup>19</sup> With the flow of millions vulnerable displaced and refugee children may be easy prey for the criminal gangs operating before the war.

We know from prior experience and research that women and girls are at increased risk of trafficking inside a conflict affected country<sup>20</sup>, and that the greatest threat often come from inside the country

itself. The criminal networks operating in Ukraine and beyond are able to take advantage of people separated from their support network and who are desperately searching for ways to support themselves. People living in conflict zones may adopt negative coping strategies to gain access to food and other supplies, or for their own safety and security which makes open to being trafficked.<sup>21</sup>

Not everyone is using formal protections systems in host countries. Of the 7.6 million refugees from Ukraine across Europe, approximately 4.2 million registered for Temporary Protection (TP) or similar protection schemes.<sup>22</sup> Temporary protection gives refugees a legal status, and provides children access to education, healthcare and child protection services. The system also gives their parents or caregivers permission to work making them less likely to adopt negative coping measures.

## World Vision's Response

From its earliest days, World Vision's Response (UCR) has been driven by the humanitarian imperative and by World Vision's core value of responsiveness. The work in Georgia, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine aligns with the World Vision Our Promise Strategic Imperatives. One of these imperatives is to deepen our commitment to the most vulnerable girls and boys. The UCR response is child-focused, sensitive to vulnerabilities inclusive of and beyond displacement.

The UCR response is delivered through four overarching programming objectives to reach more than 900,000 people. These objectives include the provision of life saving relief assistance, protection, mental health and psychosocial and educational services, design to expand integrated, holistic programmes for greater impact.

Most of World Vision's work is undertaken through local partners. This is in line with a commitment to localisation. In Ukraine, the focus is on building partner capacity and enabling them to be effective agents for community development. Also central to the response in all four countries is empowering civil actors, including the local social protection institutions, to effectively protect vulnerable children and their families.



<sup>18</sup> <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/185732/Melnyk-THB-Ukraine.pdf> page 6

<sup>19</sup> Note on Unaccompanied Children Fleeing From Ukraine | Better Care Network

<sup>20</sup> [www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ukraine\\_gbv\\_sdr\\_27\\_apr\\_2022\\_final\\_sm\\_v2.pdf](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ukraine_gbv_sdr_27_apr_2022_final_sm_v2.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [Conflict\\_Ukraine\\_TIP\\_2022.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/conflict-ukraine-tip-2022.pdf) (unodc.org)

<sup>22</sup> [file:///C:/Users/angela/Downloads/TPD%20Presentation\\_Oct%202022.pdf](file:///C:/Users/angela/Downloads/TPD%20Presentation_Oct%202022.pdf) October 11, 2022

## Calls to action

The risks for children are many therefore both state and non-state actors share responsibilities in duty of care to mitigate these risks.

### Child protection systems must

- Ensure children remain with their families.
- Establish robust family tracing and reunification mechanisms, such as child-friendly reception, asylum and other procedures that are fast, safe for children and integrated in all aspects of the response
- Offer children and families safe spaces or shelters and immediate referral to services, including mental health and psychosocial support and gender-based violence support services.
- Create solid connections between child protection agencies across borders to strengthen identification, registration, and reunification protocols for unaccompanied and separated children and young people who are travelling across Ukraine and crossing over neighbouring countries' borders.
- Scale up training programmes for child care workers to meet the demands in both Ukraine and host countries.

### Unaccompanied and Separated Children

- Identify children at risk, including those who are separated or unaccompanied, immediately upon arrival, after access to territory has been granted.
- Special attention should be given to children belonging to minority Roma and Sinti groups, from Ukraine to prevent further deprivation and exclusion in host countries.
- Ensure family tracing and reunification, identify all children at risk or those who were not yet registered as unaccompanied, and develop reunification protocols for unaccompanied and separated children.
- Develop national child protection standard operating procedures (SOPs) for responding to the needs of unaccompanied children as soon as they are identified, referring them to child protection systems and providing access to temporary protection or other protection

procedures. The specific processes made by each national system will vary in line with the different models of child protection, guardianship and reception that exist in each country, and by the very dynamic situation. However, all countries will have a common need to have clear SOPs which will allow for coordination and accountability in the system.

- Child protection authorities should regularly follow up on all unaccompanied minors, as well as children travelling with extended family members and friends, to screen for potential trafficking and to work towards family reunification where it is in the best interests of the child. We encourage national authorities to closely collaborate with NGOs and other agencies on the SOPs that would lead not just to identifying and register unaccompanied and separated children, but also to facilitate their access to continued protective services and reunification with their families.

### Safeguarding of children, teenage girls and their families from any type of violence, trafficking, abuse, exploitation, xenophobia, and discrimination in host communities

- Services provided to children must be subjected to quality controls, child welfare and social protection periodic home monitoring visits to prevent and address any harmful risks on women and children refugee and raise awareness about these services.
- Create, maintain and promote confidential and child-friendly complaints mechanisms needed in case any violations should occur.
- Create and promote a 24/7 Helpline for Ukrainian children and women in both Ukrainian and Russian where they can report abuse, neglect, exploitation and can ask for support and guidance. In Romania the local Child Helpline (member of Child Help International) offers consultancy by phone from 8:00am to 8:00pm during weekdays, and 24/7 by email, but in Romanian and English only; Save the Children has a Helpline in Ukrainian for children from Monday to Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm.
- Protect children from the risk of gender-based violence and trafficking, by providing

child- and accessible-friendly information to new arrivals at the border entry points and railway stations and further dissemination as children move to lodging forms.

## Children from institutions

- The government of Ukraine make family reunification a priority, as well as the development of temporary foster care or all children living in institutions.
- Scale up partnerships between the Ukraine authorities and international partners to develop a plan to evacuate children with disabilities from high-risk areas.
- Extend and strengthen community-based services to mitigate the risks of disabled children being severely harmed or killed.
- Hosting countries to fully include all children in their national child protection systems and ensure they are provided access to care, protection, health and education services.
- Host countries develop temporary foster family programs for Ukrainian refugee children currently living in institutional settings, preferably with families from the Ukrainian diaspora and refugee communities.

## Accountability

- Periodic public reporting on registered UAC, transiting and residing in in the country (anonymous, numeric).
- Engage children and young people, safely and ethically, as key actors and partners in shaping the response.
- Create mechanisms for monitoring the rights of refugee children to healthcare, education, and child protection, with special attention to guarding against all forms of discrimination.
- Communicate with the public and target audience, especially at local level, where the awareness is much lower, about the importance and benefits of the temporary protection in host countries where the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) applies.



## European Commission

- European Commission to ask member states to report how they implement the Temporary Protection Directive, to monitor its implementation and adjust any pitfalls in its implementation or create mechanisms to monitor the implementation of TPD to identify and address in real time any critical gaps affecting children.
- Create mechanisms for monitoring the rights of refugee children and women as per the TPD at EU level.
- Create a Helpline in Ukrainian and Russian for Ukrainian children and women where they can report abuse, neglect, exploitation or can ask for support and guidance and disseminate the information to refugees.
- Similar protection standards for all protection seekers trying to enter the EU and similar protection for all unaccompanied children of any nationality.
- Reflect if the European Child Guarantee covers refugee children and include them in the framework, plan, and strategy.



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<https://www.wvi.org/emergencies/ukraine>

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