

P R E S S E M I T T E I L U N G

Ukraine: “They don’t understand what’s happening” – At least 400,000 children fleeing Ukraine at risk of hunger, illness, trafficking and abuse

Bucharest, 3 March 2022 – At least 400,000 children are on the move across Eastern Europe and at risk of hunger, illness, trafficking and abuse, Save the Children said today, as the number of people fleeing the Russian military operation in Ukraine passed one million.

Save the Children estimates that at least 40% of the people who have fled Ukraine to Romania, Poland, Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia and Lithuania, to seek safety are children, some arriving with nothing but the clothes on their back.

The United Nations, reporting that one million people have now crossed the borders, said this scale of movement by people could become [“Europe’s largest refugee crisis this century”](#). This number does not include those displaced within Ukraine.

The massive exodus has led to 24-hour queues at border checkpoints with refugees being sheltered in repurposed schools once they get out of Ukraine as well as in private homes, makeshift camps, and conference centres, but this has raised concerns for children.

Anna*, 29, has fled to Romania with her four-year-old daughter Daryna* and two-year-old son Danilo*. They fled their home in Ukraine when fighting approached a nuclear power station, alongside Anna’s sister and mother.

Anna said: *“We fled because we were scared. There was bombing in the area. The airport had been bombed and fighting was getting near to a nuclear power station.*

“On the way we saw planes overhead and the roads were very busy. We saw rockets being fired and destroying buildings. There were sirens blaring constantly. My husband stayed behind. He drove us to the border before going back. We could only bring a few clothes and some medicines. “The children don’t understand what’s happening. But we feel very bad.”

Anna told Save the Children about the reaction of her daughter Daryna: *“Sometimes when she heard bangs she’d say she was scared. When we were running to hide in the cellar she said she was scared and talked about tanks coming. We just hope the fighting will end and we can return home.”*

Anna hopes they can continue onto Czech Republic where they have friends who can help them.

Irina Saghoyan, Save the Children’s Eastern Europe Director, said: *“We know that when children are on the move, they are at heightened risk of trafficking, abuse including sexual violence and serious psychological distress.*

“It is also unconscionable that some children and their families are forced to be outside with no shelter in such freezing temperatures. We are incredibly worried about the risks of illnesses like hypothermia.

“This is before we even start to comprehend the enormous impact of the events of the past week on these children’s mental wellbeing. Their homes, schools and communities have been destroyed, they have been separated from family and friends – their entire lives and everything they hold dear have been ripped from them in the space of a week.

“For now, it is vital that all these children entering neighbouring countries are protected, and have access to life-saving food, clean water, shelter and mental health support. But the catastrophe that we are seeing unfold before our eyes will not stop until the violence stops and children and their families are safe. In every conflict it is children who bear the brunt and this needs to stop.”

Anna and her children stayed at a temporary camp before moving to a Reception Centre where they are now staying and where Save the Children runs child friendly spaces, where children can play and recover from the traumatic experiences they have been through.

Save the Children also provides families like Anna's with advice and information, as well as food and other essentials.

**names have been changed*

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- Save the Children has been operating in Ukraine since 2014, delivering essential humanitarian aid to children and their families. This includes supporting their access to education, providing psychosocial support, distributing winter kits and hygiene kits, and providing cash grants to families so they can meet basic needs such as food, rent and medicines, or so they can invest in new businesses.
- We now have a team in Poland, coordinating with local partners to assess the situation and respond to needs as quickly as we can. In Romania, Save the Children staff and volunteers continue to help refugees arriving from Ukraine at the border and in reception centres with provision of basic non-food items and other outreach services.
- For many years now, Save the Children has been working with refugee and migrant children inside and outside of Europe, aiming to support vulnerable children with the greatest needs. We run reception centres providing child friendly activities and work on informing children about their rights in Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy and Norway. In Italy, we also support relocation efforts, train temporary legal guardians who assist children during their asylum procedures, and work with UN agencies to ensure unaccompanied migrant children are protected.

Zusatzmaterial zum Download:

Case study 1 - Anna*, her children Daryna*, 4 and Danilo*, 2 - 02 March 2022:
<https://www.contenthubsavethechildren.org/Package/2O4C2SSP3ZUW>

Case study 2 - Artem*, Nadia* and their three children - 02 March 2022:
<https://www.contenthubsavethechildren.org/Package/2O4C2SSP3DSO>

Dan Stewart, Save the Children's UK Head of News, is in Siret, at the Ukraine - Romania border. In this Location Vlog, he describes the "steady stream of refugees coming across" in the bitter cold, and what Save the Children is doing to support these families:

<https://www.contenthubsavethechildren.org/Package/2O4C2SSP8P8P>

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www.savethechildren.de/spenden/ukraine

Bei Interviewanfragen wenden Sie sich bitte an unsere Pressestelle. Für mehr aktuelle Informationen folgen Sie uns auf Twitter @SaveChildrenDE.

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Über Save the Children

Im Nachkriegsjahr 1919 gründete die britische Sozialreformerin und Kinderrechtlerin Eglantyne Jebb Save the Children, um Kinder in Deutschland und Österreich vor dem Hungertod zu retten. Heute ist die inzwischen größte unabhängige Kinderrechtsorganisation der Welt in rund 120 Ländern tätig. Save the Children setzt sich ein für Kinder in Kriegen, Konflikten und Katastrophen. Für eine Welt, die die Rechte der Kinder achtet. Eine Welt, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben und frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen und lernen können – seit über 100 Jahren.