

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

Afghan family in Ukraine forced to flee conflict for second time in eight months

Suceava, 11 March 2022 – Vicious conflict has forced a family from Afghanistan to flee across borders twice in less than a year.

Fourteen-year-old Samad* and his family faced the unthinkable when fighting erupted in Ukraine just eight months after they fled violence in Afghanistan.

Samad's father Mohammad* said: *“My family came here for peace. But when they heard fighting would start here... nobody could believe it. That there would be bombing, there would be fighting. But it was real. It was not a dream.”*

Fighting in Ukraine has forced hundreds of thousands of children into neighbouring countries in the space of just two weeks. Hundreds of civilians have been killed, including children. Schools and [health facilities](#) have come under attack.

Away from the violence which has escalated to horrific levels in Ukraine, conflict rages in many places across the world. The number of children living in high intensity conflict zones is rising, reaching [193 million](#) according to the latest figures.

Samad and his family were in eastern Afghanistan when fighting escalated across the country in July 2021. Along with his father, mother and two grown-up siblings, Samad made it to Kabul where they spent three days outside the airport trying to secure their escape, with gunfire ringing out as the alarming pictures were beamed across the world.

Samad said: *“It was war and it was bombing, and very bad days. A lot of people were killed in this war. So we left Afghanistan.”*

When they finally made it inside and onto an evacuation flight their destination was Ukraine, where Mohammad had spent time living and working for thirty years. The thought that just months later they would be fleeing for their lives a second time was unimaginable.

But the unimaginable happened. Samad was settling into life in eastern Ukraine, going to school, making friends and starting to learn the language when suddenly he and his family found themselves in the path of approaching bombardment again.

Samad said: *“It was a very big thing for me to come from war, and live in a peaceful place... This was very good for me and my family. I made friends... I came to school. And the people were very kindly.”*

As the fighting started, Samad and his family heard explosions in the distance. They made the devastating decision to flee another country.

For Samad, the echoes of eight months ago are unavoidable. *“It was just like this in Kabul. A lot of people wanted to leave Kabul and go to a peaceful place. And [in Ukraine], a lot of people wanted to leave and go to a peaceful place, for their children, for themselves.”*

“When the war started in Afghanistan we left our house full of things.” Now, after rebuilding their lives once, they were forced to abandoned everything they own in Ukraine. *“We just closed and locked our house and came here,”* he added.

They drove for more than thirty hours on crowded roads before waiting three days at the border, sleeping in their car while temperatures plummeted outside. With shelves at roadside petrol stations emptying, they were glad they had brought food with them. That was all they had managed to bring apart from the clothes on their backs.

The overwhelming feeling of relief when they crossed the border was sadly all too familiar. *“I felt well, because we survived second war... Just like when I came to Kyiv, the feeling was the same when I came to Romania.”*

Gabriela Alexandrescu, CEO of Save the Children Romania, said: *“Children and families across Ukraine are facing impossible decisions every day. The choice between retreating below ground to try and survive a terrifying onslaught or abandoning everything and escaping as conflict rages is one no parent should have to make. To be forced to flee across borders twice in the space of months is almost impossible to conceive.”*

“Many people originally from outside Europe are fleeing Ukraine and they need Europe’s help and protection.”

Save the Children is calling on EU Member states to ensure that those who were seeking international protection in Ukraine will be granted temporary protection in the EU country where they have fled, and that they can apply for international protection in the EU if they wish to do so. That would grant Samad and his family the same protection and opportunities as Ukrainians who, like them, fled the country when the conflict erupted.

For now, it’s impossible for Samad to comprehend the impact of what he has been through. *“In the future I will miss a lot of things that I had there. [But] for us it’s a very big thing for us to be safe, it’s enough for us to be safe here.”*

Mohammad knows just how hard it has been on his family. *“Of course it is very hard to leave your home, your house, your country your city. But there was no option... We have seen two wars.”*

Samad, Mohammad and their family are currently seeking asylum in northern Romania, staying in a reception centre while their documents are processed as some of the family do not have passports.

With tens of thousands of people entering the country in a short period of time, the response of the authorities, Save the Children and other organisations helping at the border at least helped Mohammad and his family feel welcome in Romania in the midst of so much chaos and uncertainty.

Their future is not yet certain. Hopes and fears about what will come next exist side by side. *“We’re just in a camp, and I’m worried for my future. I want to study, I want to be a good man. For my family, for my future, for myself,”* said Samad.

Mohammad added, *“Everything will be right. I think so. I hope so.”*

Save the Children is encouraged by the response of neighbouring countries opening their borders to those fleeing horrific violence in Ukraine. Neighbouring states should ensure that all those fleeing

Ukraine, are granted unhindered access to territory, regardless of status and in accordance with International Humanitarian Law.

Save the Children works in the reception centre where Samad and his family are staying and provided them with information and guidance, clothes and shoes. The aid agency is also on the border distributing food, blankets and hygiene kits.

Notes to editors

- Save the Children staff and volunteers are distributing food, water and hygiene kits to IDPs inside Ukraine and refugees arriving at the Romania-Ukraine border and in reception centres.
- In Poland and Romania, we provide Child Protection services including targeted support for unaccompanied and separated children, psychosocial support and access to legal services.
- Save the Children works with refugee and migrant children inside and outside of Europe, aiming to support vulnerable children with the greatest needs.
- Individuals should not attempt private adoption as such services are unregulated. The best place for a child in an emergency is with their families and communities.

**Name changed to protect identity*

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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.