

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

Ukraine: Save the Children calls for halt on intercountry adoptions to keep children safe

Kyiv, 22 March 2022 – Save the Children has called for an immediate ban on intercountry adoptions of children uprooted by the war in Ukraine to protect them from further risk of harm at the hands of traffickers or child abusers until appropriate safeguards are in place.

The child rights organisation warned that during the mass movement of refugees, well-meaning people may attempt to ‘rescue’ children from the crisis-affected area in the mistaken belief that they will be better cared for in other environments.

But the child rights organisation stressed that the best place for children is with their families and communities and adoption is not an appropriate response for unaccompanied children until authorities and agencies have made all efforts to trace and reunite them with their families.

The organisation also warned that not everybody attempting to foster or adopt children from Ukraine does so with the best intentions, and that child traffickers can exploit a lack of rigorous safeguarding systems in place at the early stages in a crisis.

Save the Children is calling on states to support a moratorium on all adoptions until appropriate safeguards can be reinstated for the unaccompanied children who have fled Ukraine and those who have been uprooted within the country.

Save the Children staff in Romania have seen some children arriving from Ukraine unaccompanied, having been sent by family members unable to leave the country but wanting their children to be safe from ground attack and aerial explosions. Other children have been separated from their families in the chaos of fleeing their homes. Many of those arriving are aged under 14 and showing signs of psychological distress, the organisation said.

Amanda Brydon, Global Head for Child Protection Advocacy for Save the Children said:

“As in any crisis, children on their own in Ukraine and neighbouring countries are at increased risk of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and neglect. Every effort must be made to ensure safeguards are in place to protect them from abuse.

“Sadly, we have seen this before in other humanitarian emergencies: children are often mistaken as orphans or are ‘rescued’ out of crisis-affected areas in the mistaken belief that they will be better cared for away from the devastation caused by conflict or natural disasters all while family members are still looking for them at home.

“There is so much upheaval in a child’s life during this time that the best place for them is with their families, relatives and communities, rather than being removed to a foreign country and language. The most protective environment for a child is the safety and stability of their own family.

“At this stage of this crisis, an immediate moratorium on intercountry adoptions is critical to ensure that children are safe, and that where possible and in their best interests, they are reunited with their caregivers or verified family members. Sending funds to trusted humanitarian agencies for their response to this crisis is one of the best ways to be able to support such children currently.”

Ukraine has suspended its intercountry adoption program until further notice in light of the Russian military operation that began on 24 February. However, it is important for receiving countries to also suspend intercountry adoption proceedings to ensure the appropriate international standards and safeguards, Save the Children said.

Save the Children is working to support families to stay together as they move from Ukraine and to ensure protection when children are identified as unaccompanied in Poland and Romania, working in close coordination with child protection authorities in these countries.

So far more than 1.5 million children have fled the war in Ukraine in the past four weeks while an estimated 6 million remain in the country, in grave risk of physical and emotional harm.

Hinweise für die Redaktion:

Save the Children has been operating in eastern Ukraine since 2014. Throughout the eight-year conflict, we have been delivering essential humanitarian aid to children and their families, including distributing winter kits and hygiene kits, providing cash grants to families so they can meet basic needs such as food, rent and medicines, or so they can invest in starting new businesses. Our specialist support children in having access to safe, inclusive, quality education and are working with schools and community centres to help children overcome the mental and psychological impacts of their experiences of conflict and violence and increase their resilience and ability to cope with stresses in their daily lives.

We now have a team in Poland, coordinating with local partners to assess the situation and respond to needs as quickly as we can. Save the Children is working here to establish family tracing and reunification procedures with other agencies to help reunite children with extended family and friends in Poland and neighbouring countries, as well as to establish child protection systems and reporting mechanisms to keep children safe.

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 children are protected.

Unterstützen Sie unsere Nothilfe in der Ukraine und anderen humanitären Krisen:

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Bei Interviewanfragen wenden Sie sich bitte an unsere Pressestelle.

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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.