



Voices of Children Charity Foundation

Kharkiv Institute for Social Research

# CHILDREN AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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## Introduction

Ukraine has been at war for a month already. Millions of people have become internally displaced persons and refugees in other countries, many of them are children. Even more children are suffering from occupation and active combat in many regions in eastern, southern and northern Ukraine.

The extreme cruelty of the invaders, the constant attacks on civilians and civil infrastructure objects have resulted in significant numbers of victims among both adults and children. Children are forced to live in basements, subway stations, limit themselves to drinking water and food, and do not have access to medical care. Many children have already come under shelling, have been taken hostage by the Russian military, have been seriously injured and even killed. During the first month of the war, 128 children died.

This report aims to outline the key problems and needs of children in different situations of war – during relocation or evacuation,, under occupation, in areas where active combat are taking place, as well as in institutional care facilities.

The methodology is based on the analysis of statistics, open data of regional military administrations, as well as on gathering information from the staff of 6 organization of institutional care. Twelve persons were interviewed individually in the temporarily occupied and in the active combat areas, as well as families who were forced to move to the west and center of Ukraine or abroad.

## Children in the temporarily occupied areas and in the active combat areas

According to UNHCR, some 13 million people remain in the worst-affected areas in need of protection and humanitarian assistance<sup>1</sup>. Many of them are children of different ages and with different needs. It is currently impossible to count the exact number of juveniles in the temporarily occupied areas and in the active combat areas but we can not estimate that at the moment.

Numerous violations of children's rights in these areas is possible through the prism of analyzing the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. And here we can confidently say about the creation of conditions when the aggressor country, for its part, commits acts that violate the rights of children in Ukraine, or make it impossible for Ukraine to comply with the Convention, which leads to non-compliance and gross violation of its main articles. The following are just some of the typical cases of the children's rights violations under the selected articles and descriptions of some personal stories of the people who participated in or witnessed the events described. There are thousands of such stories...

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### *Article 6. Every child has an inalienable right to life.*

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According to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, at least 5 children die under shelling every day. As at the morning of March 24, 2022, the official number of child victims is 128 killed as the result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation. 172 children received injuries of varying severity. Children suffered the most in the regions of Kyiv – 64, Kharkiv – 43, Donetsk – 43, Chernihiv – 32, Mykolaiv – 24, the City of Kyiv – 16, Zhytomyr – 15, Kherson – 15 and Sumy – 14<sup>2</sup> and we have no information from Mariupol.

The main risks for children in the active combat areas are the risk of falling under shelling, being blocked under the ruins of building that the occupiers hit, explosions of mines or shells left in the streets of cities and towns. No less traumatic are cases of violence and exploitation of children by Russian invaders.

**So, on March 16, the military of the Russian Federation illegally seized the house in the village of Kolonshchyna, Makariv OTG, Kyiv Region, killing two residents, including a 16-year-old boy<sup>3</sup>**

**On March 18, in the village of Lotskine, Bashtansky District, Nikolaev Region the 16-year-old boy died as a result of an anti-tank mine rupture. The same day,**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2022/3/623453f14/unhcr-warns-rising-needs-ukraine-neighbouring-countries-calls-cessation.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/yuvenalni-prokurori-cerez-zbroinu-agresiyu-rf-v-ukrayini-zaginulo-128-ditei>

<sup>3</sup> <https://gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/yuvenalni-prokurori-112-ditei-zaginulo-cerez-rosiysku-zbroinu-agresiyu>



rescuers pulled the bodies of 7-year-old twins – a boy and a girl – from under the ruins of the Chernihiv dormitory<sup>4</sup>.

On March 19, in Mykolaiv as a result of shelling by the RF military from the Smerch installation the man and his 8-year-old son were wounded<sup>5</sup>.

On March 22, 2022, an enemy shell hit a high-rise building in Rubizhne, Luhansk Region. Three persons died, two of them were children<sup>6</sup>.



*Photos of the twin brothers who suffered from the invaders shelling of the hospital in Severodonetsk, Luhansk Region<sup>7</sup>.*

However, the most terrible cases are the direct destruction of children by the Russian invaders – the shooting of children, dropping bombs on places where children are.



On March 14, 2022 in the village of Mokhnatyn the military of the aggressor country shot three young men. Two of them were 17 years old and the third one was 19<sup>8</sup>.

On March 16, at about 3:30 p.m., a column of civilians was fired upon by the Russian invaders from the multiple launch rocket system fire BM-21 Grad<sup>9</sup>.

*Photo of a child injured after the shelling of a column of civilians by the Russian invaders.*

<sup>4</sup><https://gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/yuvenalni-prokurori-112-ditei-zaginulo-cerez-rosiisku-zbroinu-agresiyu>

<sup>5</sup><https://gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/yuvenalni-prokurori-cerez-zbroinu-agresiyu-rf-v-ukrayini-zaginulo-115-ditei-2>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/yuvenalni-prokurori-121-ditina-zaginula-za-cas-zbroinoyi-agresiyi-rosiyi>

<sup>7</sup> [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=560154868799696&id=100044155643408](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=560154868799696&id=100044155643408)

<sup>8</sup><https://gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/viiskovi-rf-rozstrilyali-tryox-pidlitkiv-na-cernigivshhini-rozpocato-rozsliduvannya>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.facebook.com/100069092624537/posts/273786741601078/>

On March 17, 2022, the Russian invaders ruthlessly killed the father of a large family in front of his 14-year-old son. The boy got bullet wounds. This happened when they went for humanitarian aid and medicine to the center of the occupied city of Bucha, Kyiv Region, where the family lived, because there was no gas, electricity or water in their house for almost two weeks.<sup>10</sup>.



*Photo of a 14-year-old boy who was wounded by the Russian military<sup>11</sup>.*

On March 21, in the village of Malynivka, Pology District, Zaporizhia Region, the invaders fired with automatic weapons at two cars with local citizens who were moving along the humanitarian corridor. Two children, three women and a man were injured in the shooting<sup>12</sup>.

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**Article 24.** *The right of the child to use the most advanced services of the health care system and means of diseases treatment and rehabilitation.*

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/yuvenalni-prokurori-121-ditina-zaginula-za-cas-zbroinoyi-agresiyi-rosiyi>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ndslohmatdyt/posts/3029573810686669>

<sup>12</sup><https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/816603.html>

Since the beginning of combat operations on February 24, 135 hospitals have been shelled, 9 of which have been destroyed. 43 ambulances were also fired at<sup>13</sup>.

Since the beginning of active phase of invasion there 15, 300 babies were born<sup>14</sup>, many of them in extremely unfavourable conditions – in bomb shelters, in maternity wards which were shelled. Many babies died right after their birth.

**Thus, on March 9, the maternity hospital and the children's hospital in Mariupol were bombed. Among the dead were three civilians, including one child, and 17 others were injured<sup>15</sup>.**



*Photo from Mariupol<sup>16</sup>*

**On March 21, Russian troops shelled at the children's hospital in Severodonetsk. As a result, the roof caught fire. The staff, mothers and children were evacuated<sup>17</sup>.**

In such circumstances, children and their families cannot feel safe in medical facilities, besides hospitals that have been damaged or destroyed by shelling cannot provide full or partial services. Some health workers left their jobs to save their families. As a result, the burden on those who remained has increased significantly, which has a negative impact on the ability to provide high-quality and timely services to children.

Besides, staying in basements, which are often cold and damp, has a significant effect on children's health. Restricted food intake and irregular access to drinking water can also cause a variety of health problems, from vitamin deficiencies to poisoning and indigestion.

*We stayed in the basement for about 6 days. On the fourth day, my back hurt a lot, but we stayed, it was uncomfortable, everything was numb. And the baby started cystitis. The walls, the floor, everything was cold. It's good that people nearby gave her a pain killer, it became better.*

***From the interview with parents***

<sup>13</sup><https://suspilne.media/220053-rosiani-nisat-likarni-vbivaut-ta-berut-u-polon-likariv-lasko/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=342422957923803&id=100064683039907](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=342422957923803&id=100064683039907)

<sup>15</sup><https://hromadske.ua/posts/rosijski-okupanti-skinuli-na-pologovij-ta-likarnyu-v-mariupoli-kilkist-postrazhdalih-nevidoma>

<sup>16</sup> Photos by Mstyslav Chernov and Yevhen Maloletka

<sup>17</sup>[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=5325447644155030&id=100000695401534](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=5325447644155030&id=100000695401534)



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## Article 28. The child's right to education

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The bombings and shelling damaged 566 educational institutions, 73 of them were completely destroyed. Among educational institutions, more than 230 schools and 155 kindergartens were damaged and/or destroyed. The most damaged ones were in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Sumy, Kyiv, Kherson, Chernihiv regions and in the city of Kyiv. In addition, more than 40 children's facilities were destroyed, including medical facilities, art schools, sports facilities and libraries. And these data are not conclusive due to the lack of opportunity to inspect the sites in the active combat areas and in the temporarily occupied territories<sup>18</sup>.



Photo of the school in Mерефа, Kharkiv Region<sup>20</sup>

Photo of a kindergarten in Kharkiv<sup>19</sup>



Thus, on March 4, in Zhytomyr as a result of shelling the school building was destroyed<sup>21</sup>.

On March 13, the Russian troops fired at school in one of settlements of the Nikolaev Region<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup><https://gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/yuvenalni-prokurori-cerez-zbroinu-agresiyu-rf-v-ukrayini-zaginulo-117-ditei>

<sup>19</sup> Photo by Andriy Bashtovy

<sup>20</sup> <https://2day.kh.ua/kharkow/v-merefe-okkupanty-unichtozhili-shkolu-i-dom-kultury-pogib-21-chelovek>

<sup>21</sup><https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-zhytomyr-shkola-obstril/31735723.html#:~:text=%D0%96%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80%20%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%BB%D1%96%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BA%20%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D1%96%D0%BB%D1%83%20%D1%82%D0%B0%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%BD%D0%BD%D1%8F,%C2%BB%2C%20%E2%80%93%20%D0%B9%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%81%D1%8F%20%D0%B2%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D1%96>

<sup>22</sup><https://www.slovovidilo.ua/2022/03/13/novyna/bezpeka/okupanty-obstrilyaly-shkolu-mykolayivskij-oblasti>

On March 14, the troops of the Russian Federation fired at a kindergarten in Chuguiv of the Kharkiv Region, a 15-year-old boy was killed by the fragments from shells<sup>23</sup>.

On March 17, a city school in Merefa, Kharkiv Region was attacked by rockets. It has caused a fire on the area of 400 square meters. Besides, several other buildings nearby and the building of the Institute of Vegetable and Melon Growing were damaged. 25 people were killed and 21 others were injured during the shelling in Merefa<sup>24</sup>.

One of the opportunities to continue teaching children is to connect to distance learning in those schools that continue their work, or use educational Internet platforms ("All-Ukrainian School Online" and others). However, due to the lack of Internet access and / or computers / laptops, a significant proportion of children miss a lot of school material. Study is also slowed down by changing the usual routine, when you need to constantly hide in a bomb shelter.

*Our daughters practically do not study, we moved to the village, and here the Internet is very weak, one laptop for two children. They watch something in turn, something I can tell, show, solve tasks together. I still try to read at least 2 pages a day. But I do not know how to finish the school year with such training. Moreover, our day is almost all in stress – we have to run to the basement, then we need to bring water, then wash, then get food, then cook, then again in the basement, then wash. I don't have much time to think about lessons at all..*

#### **From the interview with parents**

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**Article 31.** *The child has the right to rest and leisure, the right to take part in games and entertainment activities appropriate to his or her age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts..*

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Obviously, any activities that involve children are not realized now because they are life-threatening. Besides, the cultural and entertainment infrastructure is being destroyed by the constant shelling of the aggressor country's troops.

**Thus, on March 16, an aviation bomb was dropped on the Drama Theater and Neptune Swimming Pool in Mariupol, where hundreds of people, mostly women, children and the elderly, were hiding. After the attack, the central part of the theater was destroyed, the entrance to the bomb shelter under the building was destroyed<sup>25</sup>.**

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<sup>23</sup><https://suspilne.media/217469-u-cuguevi-na-harkivsini-cerez-obstril-zagynuv-15-ricnij-hlopec-prokuratura/>

<sup>24</sup><https://2day.kh.ua/kharkow/v-merefe-okkupanty-unichtozhili-shkolu-i-dom-kultury-pogib-21-chelovek>

<sup>25</sup><https://hromadske.ua/posts/ce-bulo-ukrittya-dlya-soten-zhinok-ta-ditej-yak-rosijski-vijska-rozbombili-dramatichnij-teatr-u-mariupoli>



On March 19, aviation bombs were dropped on the Art School №12 in the Left Bank district of Mariupol, where about 400 Mariupol residents were hiding – women, children and the elderly<sup>26</sup>.

On March 20, a shopping mall with a sports complex and supermarkets in the Podilskyi district of Kyiv was bombed. One of the buildings of the shopping mall was completely destroyed, the other was significantly damaged<sup>27</sup>.

*The Drama Theater in Mariupol*

*Photo of the Drama Theater in Mariupol<sup>28</sup>*

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**Article 38.** In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law, the States parties are obliged to take all possible measures to ensure protection and care of children affected by armed conflict.

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As the events of all the days since the beginning of the war show, there can be no chance for any protection or proper care of children in the temporarily occupied territories and the active combat areas. The non-selective shelling of residential areas, social infrastructure, civilian livelihoods and evacuation civilian convoys demonstrates the aggressor's cynical attitude toward any international norms, or even universal humanitarian values. Hundreds of evidence when the families who have experienced horrific moments of real threat to health and lives of their children vividly illustrate these realities.

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<sup>26</sup><https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/3434715-u-mariupoli-rosijski-zagarbniki-skinuli-bombu-na-skolu-mistectv-de-hovalisa-ludi.html>

<sup>27</sup><https://rubryka.com/2022/03/21/kyiv-obstril-trts/>

<sup>28</sup><https://hromadske.ua/posts/ce-bulo-ukritya-dlya-soten-zhinok-ta-ditej-yak-rosijski-vijska-rozbombili-dramatichnij-teatr-u-mariupoli>

Our area has been under shelling since the first day of the war. It is located in the suburbs of the city [Kharkiv], at the side that is closer to the border with Russia. With each passing day, the shelling became harder and denser. My family and I hid in the basement where the barber shop was located. Together with us about 30 more people were hiding, in the premises of 200 square meters, some of them were with their pets. Almost a third of them were juveniles. Every morning I with my wife and our 12-year-old son would return home to get some things, wash and eat. And each time the shelling began. Several neighboring houses have already been partially or completely destroyed. On the third day, when we were at home, mortar shelling covered the neighboring yard and an apartment building. We realized that returning home has become very dangerous...

**From the interview with parents**

Photo of the quote author's building a few days after his family left.



There are a lot of such stories, some of them have already been published in various information sources, others will be published when people recover a little bit from their experiences and will be able to regain the ability to remember all the events. But it is already clear what unites them – fear for their family and children in extremely dangerous situations, and the desire to protect them at all costs. One story of life in the occupation and escape from it under the bullets, published on Facebook, which shows all the stages of these circles of hell, is quite revealing. We are spreading it here because the author welcomes the publication of true stories about this war. Here are just a few short quotes from it.

On March 1, they (Russian soldiers) started driving around (our) village, but the worst day was March 2, when the barbarians stupidly drove around the town and the village, and fired at houses and civilians as they can do, and it became the worst and scariest day for us ... So, there were 6 of us: 2 children and 4 adults. For a couple of days we lived like everyone else at the time, listening to the shelling, the work of artillery and air defense... But when the barbarians came to us, approximately on March 1, we completely moved to live in the basement. We went upstairs only to cook and to look around through the windows. On the first floor of the house there were external metal blinds, which created a complete light insulation, we pretended that we were not there, and it saved us, as it turned out... And then it began: we heard them firing ... then the shots stopped for a while, and literally a minute or two later we heard a few shots and howling of the dog... everyone understood – our dog was shot ... And



at the same time they began firing at the house... The next point of shock for me was the moment when the light came on, and I realized that they were in the house. In one second I told everyone to move to a bigger basement, we locked ourselves in, we hid the children behind a broken water heater, it was the only place where they were somehow protected, and we all just froze for an hour or more, no one knows for sure. The children were very frightened, they were shaking and trembling for a long time at night...<sup>29</sup>.

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**Article 39.** *A child has the right to physical and psychological recovery and social integration if he or she became a victim of the armed conflict..*

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The article stipulates that such recovery and reintegration should be carried out in conditions that guarantee health, self-esteem and dignity of the child. But in conditions of temporary occupation or active combat in the area where the child is, such measures are impossible or very risky.

During combat operations, children are the most vulnerable categories in terms of psychological stress and traumatic consequences that will be felt for a long time yet. According to Kharkiv volunteers who help and provide humanitarian aid to the citizens looking for refuge in the subway stations, the number of adults and children who demonstrate signs of constant stress and psychological pressure is constantly growing. One of the symptoms has been informally called "Gorlum syndrome", when people spend weeks in an underground shelter without sunlight for fear of being bombed. They even change their appearance - pale, walk stooped, psychologically depressed, passive. Unfortunately, systematic medical and psychological support has not yet been provided in such crowded places. At some stations there are medical staff and psychologists from among the volunteers, but these are still isolated cases, their efforts are extremely insufficient.

## Conclusions and recommendations

- As long as there are regular aviation attacks on settlements in Ukraine, the number of child deaths will only increase. A key recommendation is the CREATION OF A NO-FLY ZONE OVER UKRAINE BY NATO
- Due to the destruction of a large number of hospitals, schools and other children's institutions, the evacuation potential of the state should be strengthened, especially for children from the temporary occupied territories. We must use all the safest possible opportunities to move children from the active combat areas or temporarily occupied areas.
- Due to the significant burden on the psycho-emotional state of children, it is necessary to arrange permanent access to psychological assistance

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<sup>29</sup><https://www.facebook.com/irina.zubets>



and support for children in the active combat areas. Particular attention should be paid to the possibility of regular provision of medical and psychological services (examination, consultation, referral, etc.) in the places where large numbers of people stay - in the shelters (subway stations, bomb shelters, basements of large buildings). To do this, it is necessary to involve both employees of medical institutions and volunteer structures.

- Damage of schools, lack of staff and the necessity to hide in bomb shelters cause the slowdown or even impossibility for children to continue their studies. It is necessary to promote the connection of children to online education in those schools where such education is provided. This process should include also providing access to the Internet and appropriate equipment (tablets, laptops) to those who need it. It will also distract the child from negative emotions through the usual practices and creative tasks.
- Due to the numerous dangers of occupation and combat operations, it is necessary to implement informational and explanatory activities with parents. It is important to emphasize the importance of children's hygiene and sanitation rules to avoid infectious diseases, as this requires special medical services, which in these circumstances may be limited or unavailable. Parents should limit their children's stay in places where they may be injured or injured. It is also necessary to provide a child who still has difficulty remembering their personal data and family ties, with the information in the form of a piece of paper with personal data, address, residence, details of close relatives and people who can be contacted to identify the child and transfer the information, if necessary.

## Relocation of children in Ukraine and abroad

A significant part of Ukrainian families with minor children have chosen to move from the active combat areas to the west and center of Ukraine, as well as abroad. According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, as at March 20, about 10 million people had been forced to leave their homes in Ukraine<sup>30</sup>. 4.3 million of them are children, which is more than half of the country's 7.5 million children population<sup>31</sup>. According to UNHCR, more than 3.4 million Ukrainians, mostly women and children, have left the country since the Russian invasion on February 24<sup>32</sup>. The United Nations Children's Agency (UNICEF) reports that more than 1.8 million children have gone abroad. According to their estimates, 70,000 children in Ukraine become refugees every day. This is equal to 55 children leaving the country every minute, i.e. almost one child every second<sup>33</sup>.

The largest internal replacement of citizens took place into Lviv region, then – into the regions of Zakarpattia, Chernivtsi, Poltava and Ternopil, even less – in the regions of Volyn, Khmelnytsky and Dnipropetrovsk. It should be added that there is also constant relocation within the current active combat areas, but it is very difficult to monitor the extent of such relocation and, consequently, the needs of migrants in those areas.

After a decision sion about relocation, a significant proportion of residents face a lack of information on safe and possible ways out, especially in small settlements. The deepening of the Russian invaders into the territory of Ukraine and the constant shifting of enemy positions change the known transportation routes within these territories. Many bridges have been blown up, most roads have been mined or occupied by military equipment. Some of the interviewed families said that they had been looking for information on possible ways to leave dangerous areas for several days.

*It was very difficult to leave. We just couldn't leave because all the roads were cut off. Both the road bridge and the railway were blown up. Nobody wanted to go there. Some demanded a lot of money, some wanted money and gasoline. Only after some time we learned that the route drivers found some bypass roads, they have taken us out by tricksters. The most difficult thing was to get to Zmiiv [Kharkiv Region]. And from Zmiiv to Kharkiv it was already easier. There is information about big cities, you can find out where and how to evacuate. But it is very difficult to leave the rural area, we were miraculously able to. Now the house where we were hiding has already been blown up.*

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<sup>30</sup><https://twitter.com/FilippoGrandi/status/1505455082778812417?s=20&t=orHP8bhN7pMHQhgQZBV9yg>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/more-than-half-of-ukraines-children-displaced-after-one-month-of-war-unicef/?fbclid=IwAR3SNfTYaD50g8k9eHmqw8uKpLjFt8m1oNcDy0y2-ryRFPnj4WqB1aDarDw>

<sup>32</sup><https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

<sup>33</sup><https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/more-than-half-of-ukraines-children-displaced-after-one-month-of-war-unicef/?fbclid=IwAR3SNfTYaD50g8k9eHmqw8uKpLjFt8m1oNcDy0y2-ryRFPnj4WqB1aDarDw>

### ***From the interview with parents***

The main difficulties in the process of relocating families with children, and especially children who move independently, are different degrees of danger: falling under fire, being deliberately shot, kidnapped and/or captured, subjected to violence and ill-treatment by the Russian military. Additional danger is the possibility of exploding mines, shells or their remains, when moving both by transport and on foot.



*Photo of 13-year-old Vova after the shelling by the Russian military<sup>34</sup>.*

13-year-old Vova was admitted to our hospital on February 26. He and his family were trying to leave Kyiv when their car came under fire. The boy's father and his 6-year-old brother died on the spot. Other relatives were brought to the Okhmatdyt Children's hospital for treatment. Vova was diagnosed with a gunshot wound to the right half of his face, a fire-fragmentation open fracture of the lower jaw, and a fragmentary fracture of the right cheekbone-orbital complex. Okhmatdyt's specialists performed a number of complex operations on the teenager. Vova will need a long rehabilitation to fully recover.

*From the Facebook page of NDSL Okhmatdyt<sup>35</sup>*

During an attempt to evacuate from the village of Peremoha (Baryshivka District, Kyiv Region) towards the village of Gostroluchcha, on March 11, the Russian

<sup>34</sup><https://www.facebook.com/ndslohmatdyt/photos/pcb.3022817968028920/3022817491362301/>

<sup>35</sup><https://www.facebook.com/ndslohmatdyt/photos/pcb.3022817968028920/3022817491362301/>

**invaders shot a column of civilians consisting exclusively of women and children<sup>36</sup>.**

However, even a safe road today is quite difficult for families with children, especially with infants or children with disabilities. Travel to the west of Ukraine can take more than 5 days due to the large number of checkpoints, curfews and a huge number of vehicles. Caring for and meeting the needs of children, especially in hygiene, nutrition, recreation and possible rehabilitation, is very limited along the way. Another possible way to evacuate is by train, but the number of people often exceeds the number of seats. Adults and children are forced to travel, sitting or standing for more than 15-20 hours. However, volunteers and train station administrations do their best to facilitate the more comfortable accommodation for mothers with infants and children with disabilities.

*We arrived at the station, all the mothers with small children were placed in the waiting room and the first to be taken to board so that the children would not be trampled. We were placed in a compartment car, each mother was given an individual berth. And only then they advertised boarding for the rest. I was even able to cram in the baby stroller. But it was already the 19th day of the war, before that people moved in much worse conditions. After arriving in Lviv, volunteers offered us a night accommodation and then to go free to Poland or Germany by train. But there was such a pounding, people were just throwing baby strollers and suitcases with things. Therefore, we immediately moved from the station and went to the border. We chose the paid option. During 4 hours we crossed the border on foot.*

#### ***From the interview with parents***

It should be noted that the local authorities of the regions that must accept refugees have promptly started work on their accommodation and placement. A humanitarian center/headquarters for the internally displaced persons has been established in every region. Temporary accommodation points have been set up, the possibility of providing people with food and warm clothes has been created, and volunteer assistance has been organized. There is no identified humanitarian crisis (lack of food, lack of basic necessities, basic medicines) in the central and western regions. However, this is largely due to humanitarian aid from abroad, the work of international organizations (Red Cross, UNICEF, UNHCR), as well as volunteer initiatives throughout Ukraine. Local hospitals are still provided with everything necessary. Children who are injured during the movement receive immediate medical care and support. Medical institutions in many countries around the world have also started accepting seriously ill Ukrainian children for treatment and rehabilitation – with serious injuries, cancer patients, etc. (Poland, Hungary, Italy, Germany, France, Spain, USA, Canada and others).

At the same time, the key problem for displaced citizens is to find a more or less permanent place of residence, as temporary accommodation is only

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<sup>36</sup><https://suspilne.media/216907-pid-cas-sprobi-evakuacii-z-sela-peremoga-zaginuli-sim-ludej-gur/>



acceptable for a few days. It is almost impossible to find housing for rent or the rent is very expensive. Because of this, people are forced to seek refuge, including abroad. Almost the only way to find housing is to look for it in the settlements in the rural areas through volunteer initiatives, where local residents agree to voluntarily resettle internally displaced persons.



*The sports hall of the Uzhhorod educational institution is a temporary shelter for internally displaced people<sup>37</sup>.*

Another problem full-fledged placement that already worries displaced families is finding possible sources of income. For now, regional military administrations do not have the possibility to create a sufficient number of jobs that will meet the qualifications of IDPs (internally displaced persons). Parents are also concerned about the situation with their children's education and development. Nowadays the full-fledged placement of IDP children in kindergartens and schools is just starting. Educational institutions register internally displaced students. The registration processes are different – somewhere you need to visit an institution to register, somewhere you can do it online. However, the education process is mostly online now. The reason is the war, the air strikes and the fact that many schools have been repurposed as temporary accommodation of internally displaced people. Some parents note that online education is not effective for their children who do not understand and remember most of the training material this way. In addition, many of those displaced children do not have tablets or laptops to study remotely. The final decision on this issue is on parents and volunteers. Currently there is no centralized resolution of this issue by the departments of education.

*My children do not perceive any learning through the monitor at all. They can't sit down. The youngest daughter in the 2nd grade, but she has little knowledge: first it was quarantine, now – the war. I don't know what to do. I hired private tutors before, they came and taught her, but now we just can't afford it. I hope*

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-ato/3434310-sportzal-na-sotni-kojkomest-kak-zivut-pereselency-v-uzgorode.html>

*that at least some schools will be able to resume normal (in person) studying and we will have the opportunity for our children to study there.*

#### ***From the interview with parents***

According to the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine, Serhiy Shkarlet, as of March 21, more than 44,000 displaced students had joined studies in different regions of the country, where they had been forced to relocate due to the combat actions.

For some families, the issue of psychological assistance to children who were taken out of the temporarily occupied areas and active combat areas is also crucial. Thus, some parents record the unpleasant consequences of stress experienced by children: sleep and appetite disorders, feelings of fear, outbursts of anger, distraction, depression, helplessness or, conversely, significant excitement and hyperactivity. Some NGOs and charitable foundations have already started to provide psychological support to such children, including not only the help of a psychologist, but also a variety of educational and creative activities; they create opportunities for communication with peers.

*We were under occupation for more than 9 days, I didn't know if it would be safe to leave. We were sitting in the basement, when we went outside to eat, we heard very intensive shooting. My son seemed to react normally to everything, he was worried, but I didn't see anything critical in the first days. And then I noticed that he was constantly thinking about something, sleepy. I started to watch him, and it appeared that he hardly slept. Then we decided to leave for sure. At the moment, the sleep has normalized more or less, although he still wakes up constantly and does not want to do anything, he also does not want to talk much.*

#### ***From the interview with parents***



*Photo of children in the shelter for IDPs<sup>38</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/vocukraine/posts/504006721333231>

**Psychologists of 'The Voices of Children' charity organization hold art therapy classes with children in a shelter for IDPs in Truskavets.**

**"Experiences that are difficult to express in words are sometimes easier to portray with a brush and paints. Drawing is a part of the children's mini universe", the members of organization note. <sup>39</sup>.**

As for the relocation of Ukrainian citizens abroad, most popular border checkpoints are with Poland (over 2 million), then goes Romania (527,000), Moldova (363,000), Hungary (306,000) and Slovakia (246,000). The lowest number of Ukrainians crossed the border with the Russian Federation (185,000) and Belarus (2,500) <sup>40</sup>.

It should be noted that there are facts of forced relocation of some Ukrainian citizens to the territory of the Russian Federation. According to the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, since the beginning of the full-scale military aggression under the pretext of evacuation, Ukrainian citizens who found themselves in enemy-occupied territories of Donetsk region have been forcibly relocated to Russia by the representatives of the invading country. Thus, only on March 19, the Russian occupation forces illegally relocated 2,389 children<sup>41</sup>.

The key problems Ukrainian citizens faced while crossing the border include long queues and long waiting times. At the beginning of the war, car queues reached more than 20 km in length. People had to wait several days on the road, without the opportunity to eat hot food, with limited access to drinking water and toilets, without any conditions to have some rest. It was possible to cross the border a little faster on foot. Crossing the borders for families with infants and children with disabilities has also been significantly accelerated.

*We crossed the border through Porubne-Siret, which is the Romanian border. We have been standing for 61 hours. The problems were different, from people who did not follow the queue to the lack of opportunities to sleep, go to the toilet when you want and eat normal food. We went to the toilet and washed at gas stations on the highway, which we saw along the road in the queue. There were breaks at the gas stations or the cash register broke down, and it was impossible to buy food and refuel. On the second day, the Red Cross arrived and distributed food (cookies, buns, water). In general, we weren't that hungry at all, but there were significant problems with drinking water and inability to sleep properly. The children were exhausted, they did not understand what was happening and why we had to forbid them to drink. We were just saving water.*

***From the interview with parents***

It is also necessary to note the existing cases that indicate the risks of fraud, exploitation and trafficking of adults and children who intend to cross the border.

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<sup>39</sup><https://www.facebook.com/vocukraine/posts/504006721333231>

<sup>40</sup><https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

<sup>41</sup>За даними Міністерства закордонних справ України  
<https://www.facebook.com/UkraineMFA/posts/342047567965715>

Police in Wroclaw, Poland, have detained a 49-year-old man suspected of raping a refugee from Ukraine. According to preliminary information, a man lured a 19-year-old Ukrainian woman with the offer to help that he made via the Internet. According to local authorities, the suspect faces 12 years in prison for this "brutal crime." Another case - a person promised a 16-year-old refugee girl a job and a room, but the authorities intervened in time. The third case was on the border with Poland in the town of Medica. The suspicion was raised by a man who offered help only to women and children. When police began questioning him, he got confused in his testimony<sup>42</sup>.

At the Porubne checkpoint in the Chernivtsi region, border guards stopped an attempt by foreigners to take babies out of Ukraine. Two Chinese citizens tried to cross the border from Ukraine to Romania on foot with two young children. Foreigners did not have any documents for infants. Employees of the State Border Guard Service found out that shortly before that both Chinese arrived in Ukraine without children<sup>43</sup>.

To prevent such cases, the UNICEF 'BlueDots' initiative has been set up for refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. These are info centers for children and families on protection and security abroad. However, such preventive measures are important even before crossing the border, especially for children who are looking for ways to cross the border and settle in other countries. From February 24 to March 17, more than 500 unaccompanied children were found crossing the border from Ukraine to Romania alone. The total number of unaccompanied children crossing neighboring borders is probably much higher<sup>44</sup>.



11-year-old Hasan from Zaporizhia crossed the border checkpoint on the night of March 6 alone because his mother was forced to stay in Ukraine. The child had only a small backpack and a plastic bag. The phone number of relatives who live in Slovakia and can take care of the boy was written on his hand. The boy is now reunited with his family<sup>45</sup>.

*Photo of 11-year-old Hasan<sup>46</sup>*

[oon/6482979.html](https://dpsu.gov.ua/ua/news/gromadyani-kitayu-namagalysya-vivezti-do-rumunii-dvoh-nemovlyat-bez-dokumentiv/)

<sup>43</sup><https://dpsu.gov.ua/ua/news/gromadyani-kitayu-namagalysya-vivezti-do-rumunii-dvoh-nemovlyat-bez-dokumentiv/>

<sup>44</sup><https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-fleeing-war-ukraine-heightened-risk-trafficking-and-exploitation>

<sup>45</sup><https://www.facebook.com/ministerstvovnutraSR/posts/336858941804178>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ministerstvovnutraSR/posts/336858941804178>



Identifying and working with such children require special training of border guards and cooperation with children's social protection organizations and law enforcement agencies to find parents and follow the principle of ensuring the best interests of the child.

A significant achievement of Ukraine's diplomatic efforts was the introduction of a "temporary protection" mechanism on March 4, 2022 by the European Union. Citizens of Ukraine and persons fleeing the war in Ukraine may stay in the EU for one year. If the war lasts longer, the term can be extended to three years. Such a mechanism provides the right to education, health insurance, access to the labor market and social assistance. The scope and nature of such guarantees depend on the host country. Currently, most Ukrainians have moved to neighboring countries - Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova and Romania. Popular destinations for relocation are also Germany, the Czech Republic and the Baltic countries<sup>47</sup>.

When abroad families with children are experiencing, above all, problems with finding a place for long-term residence, the difficulty of obtaining social assistance, difficulties in understanding the language and adapting to unusual living conditions. Parents are also concerned about the process of educating children abroad. Currently, children can join remote studying in Ukraine. However, many families are considering enrollment of their children in local schools. Some countries are already meeting Ukrainian citizens, providing opportunities for children to study at various levels, including developing materials in Ukrainian.

*We came to the west of Germany to our friends. This is a small town, so social benefits were issued quite quickly. We came to the center, luckily our friend helped with the language. I don't know either German or English. The next day they received a check. 183 euros per adult per month and 133 euros per child. In the big cities of Germany and those closer to Poland, the lines are much longer. My sister in Leipzig got registered for a reception at the social center only on April 16. It is unclear how she can live before that. No money, no health insurance, no certificate as to why they are there. It's good that she lives there with relatives. In general, I think the payments will be enough if they can provide a free housing, but for how long they can provide it and on what terms is unclear. So far, nothing has been offered at all. If you have to pay for accommodation, you will definitely not have enough money. And how much more I can live with friends, I don't know.*

**From the interview with parents**

## Conclusions and recommendations

- The number of IDPs is very unevenly distributed among regions. If to speak about a few weeks, this may be not critical, but it will become critical in a few months due to the load on the employment market, the medical

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<sup>47</sup><https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-60793997>

system, social services and education. IDPs should be redirected to less congested regions of Ukraine.

- It is also necessary to record information on the movement of children and adults in areas where active combat actions are taking place. The formation and direction of humanitarian aid should take into account such changes in the number of inhabitants in the cities of such areas.
- Most parents are already concerned about pre-school and school education. This issue is especially crucial abroad, where there is a language problem and general difficulties in adaptation to an unusual environment. The way out of this situation is to use online educational platforms, but many parents consider them ineffective for their children. Some countries are already preparing opportunities for the education of displaced children at various levels, including with the use of materials in Ukrainian. It is necessary to further promote the creation of such opportunities abroad.
- Some people spend a lot of time looking for safe evacuation routes, especially from small towns. It is necessary to organize a prompt informing of local residents about safe ways to leave every day, as well as to assist in the relocation of people, especially with children, from places where there are combat actions or their high probability.
- In the event of an aggravation of the situation in Ukraine and a possible increase in the flow of IDPs and refugees from Ukraine, more evacuation vehicles should be thought through and planned, as well as an increase in the number of assistance points on the way to border checkpoints.
- Due to the possibility of kidnapping, exploitation and trafficking in children, awareness-raising campaigns should be held to prevent such incidents after crossing the border.
- There are cases of unsupervised movement of children both on the territory of Ukraine and abroad. It is important to establish cooperation between law enforcement agencies, social services for the protection of children and border checkpoints on the issue of identifying and ensuring the best interests of such children.

## Children in institutional care

As of March 19, 4,894 children had been evacuated from 179 institutional care facilities. 2,522 of these children were relocated within Ukraine, and 2,372 children from 116 institutions were relocated abroad. In particular, children were evacuated from:

- 14 facilities under the Ministry of Health of Ukraine;
- 75 institutions under the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine;
- 85 institutions under the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

Within Ukraine most children were relocated to: Zakarpattia region - 24%, Lviv region - 24%, Ivano-Frankivsk region - 15%, Dnipropetrovsk region - 9%, Chernivtsi region - 8% and Volyn region - 5%.

As for evacuation abroad, children from vulnerable categories from Ukraine are in 12 foreign countries. Most children from institutional care were admitted to: Poland - 71%, Germany - 13%, Romania - 4%, the Czech Republic - 2%, Italy - 2%, Lithuania - 2% and Spain - 1%.

Also since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine from institutions with round-the-clock stay of children, 30,582 children have been returned for upbringing to parents or other legal representatives:

- 30,078 children are from institutions under the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine;
- 95 children are from institutions under the Ministry of Health of Ukraine;
- 409 children - from institutions under the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine <sup>48</sup>.

According to the heads of children's institutions, at the beginning of the war they had some food supplies. Given that, as well as the help of local authorities, in the first month of the war they managed to avoid a general shortage of food.

*We withstood the first psychological blow. When necessary, psychologists work with children and staff. We bake our own bread, for the neighboring orphanages, for the residents of the community who need it. We help the community, the community helps us. At the beginning of the war, people distributed milk and sausage for free. Now they sell it in most cases.*

### ***From a conversation with employees of institutional care institutions***

At the same time, it should be taken into account that in the near future the need in food and hygiene products, detergents, diapers and medicine will still arise. This is especially true in regions affected by shelling or close to areas of active hostilities. At the same time, according to the management of children's institutions, the direction of humanitarian aid should not be chaotic, it should be carried out in accordance with the stated needs, creating reserves in case of

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<sup>48</sup><https://www.msp.gov.ua/news/21581.html>

limited access to resources, including essential products. This also applies to institutions and establishments that have not been evacuated and remain at their location in the territories controlled by Ukraine.

*The social protection system is not adapted to such conditions as the current situation at all... Of course, no one could have suggested anything like that! Of course, workers are not to blame for the lack of food and medicine, and people should not be under the threat of bullets, they also have families! However, this primarily affects children.*

### **From a conversation with employees of institutional care**

In addition, there is a need to increase the expenditures of institutions and establishments that have accepted the children from internally displaced people, including institutions evacuated from areas of active combat. Given that today the maintenance of municipal institutions providing social services is carried out at the expense of local budgets (regional budget, budget of territorial communities), it is desirable to provide additional funding for host institutions from the state budget.

Another problem is the poor arrangement of shelters in some institutions for children. In the case of air alarms, which are heard in almost all the territory of Ukraine, children are in shelters that are not fully adapted to stay there for some time. This is especially true for children with disabilities who have physical disabilities and intellectual disabilities.

That is why timely and well-organized evacuation to safe areas is an important component of ensuring the safety of children in orphanages and other inpatient facilities.

The Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine, Maryna Lazebna also calls for this: *"Some heads of institutions where children stay 24/7 refuse to transfer them to safe places, do not coordinate their actions with regional military administrations and central executive committees. This is not an issue that can be debated. Children need to be protected. As a result of discussions on this issue with all key people in the country responsible for the protection of children's rights, today I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister with proposals to address this situation."*<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup><https://www.msp.gov.ua/news/21581.html>



*Photo of evacuation of Chernihiv orphanage wards<sup>50</sup>.*

**On March 11, 19 children were evacuated from the Volyn Regional Orphanage. The children are currently in the Polish town of Kshedlina Mala. A total of 19 children were evacuated, accompanied by four nurses and a doctor<sup>51</sup>.**

**On March 13-14, pupils of the Druzhkivka orphanage were evacuated. This is 193 people: 121 children and 72 people with disabilities, among children 77 orphans and children deprived of parental care <sup>52</sup>.**

**On March 19, 30 children were evacuated from the Chernihiv Child's Home to Ivano-Frankivsk<sup>53</sup>.**

In addition, the difficulties of evacuation are related to the health conditions of some children (inability to move independently, care for themselves and make informed decisions about their actions), the need for special life support for individual wards, a significant number of children to be displaced, in some cases, a limited number of staff willing to evacuate with the facility. It should be understood that the late evacuation of children can be very dangerous, because it can take place during active combat actions while looking for opportunities for "green corridors". In such circumstances, it is difficult to ensure

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=7152853991455489&set=pcb.7152820964792125>

<sup>51</sup> <https://zaxid.net/cherez-nebezpeku-sirit-iz-volinskogo-budinku-ditini-evakuyuvati-do-polshhi-n1538129/amp>

<sup>52</sup> <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/evakuaciya-u-volnovaskomu-ranyoni-z-vugledara-vivezli-ponad-160-lyudey-sered-nih-48-diti-foto-2008060.html>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/svikana.svikana/posts/7152820964792125>



the necessary conditions of relocation and the appropriate level of safety for the life and health of children.

We should also note the absence of regulatory guidance and regulations for the management and personnel during man-made and natural emergencies including warfare. The management of some children's institutions do not understand the time and how to start the evacuation, with whom to coordinate it, what to take and where to look for transport opportunities to move children, staff and necessities.

*Some people are just afraid to move. I communicate with my colleagues in another institution that are similar to ours, and I understand them in some way. We were approached by volunteers, then the local authorities joined in and we were able to work together to organize the departure of children, although this is not easy, since kids need special care and attention. And if I had to do everything myself, I'm not sure I could do it.*

### **From a conversation with employees of institutional care institutions**

#### **Conclusions and recommendation:**

- Due to the absence of necessary regulations of action during a military conflict the administration of institutional care does not understand what needs to be done in the first place. It is extremely important to develop instructions and determine the basic conditions for organizing and conducting timely evacuation of children's institutions and establishments (pre-designed evacuation routes and places within the oblast and other regions), as well as determining responsible people for evacuation activities and evacuation lists of children with the information about bed-ridden patients and those who move with the help of technical means and use special care products, are on a special diet, need constant medication, etc.
- For institutions that do not plan to evacuate yet, it is also necessary to conduct outreach informational activities with staff on the organization of their work and the provision of services to children in military state and emergencies.
- Shelters in some children's institutions do not meet the established standards. It is necessary to inspect and upgrade bomb shelters on the territories of such institutions, including taking into account the requirements for the placement of children with disabilities who have physical disabilities and intellectual disabilities.
- In the near future, institutional care facilities, both in the areas where combat actions are taking place and all the other cities (due to the reception of internally displaced people) may experience a shortage of food, hygiene products, detergents and medicines. To prevent this, it is important that the heads of institutions gather the lists of important

necessities and organize the provision of appropriate humanitarian assistance. It is also necessary to develop a mechanism of financial support from the state budget for institutions and establishments that accept children evacuated from the war zone (emergencies and man-made disasters).

Voices of Children Charity Foundation

Kharkiv Institute for Social Research

**The report compiled by:**

Svitlana Shcherban

Olena Rozvadovska

Anna Levkina

Roman Sheiko

Andrii Chernousov

More info at [www.voices.org.ua](http://www.voices.org.ua) and [www.khisr.kharkov.ua](http://www.khisr.kharkov.ua)