

Children and young people affected by the war in Ukraine need peace and a vision for their wellbeing, childhoods and future

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As we reach the grim mark of 365 days of war in Ukraine, **Terre des Hommes (TDH) urges the International Community to make every effort to help secure peace for the children of Ukraine** whose lives are at risk, whose rights are being undermined, and who are living in very harsh conditions, with ongoing insecurity and uncertainty about the future.

As a young boy in Terre des Hommes' child-friendly space in Bucharest wrote to his dad in Ukraine: "I want to come back and see you there. I know it's not possible, mum said we still need to wait here a while. **I wish I knew what we are waiting for ...**"¹.

With no sign of an end to the war in sight, the International Community must adapt and plan to support **children, young people and their families with long-term protection and social services. This support should be tailored to the individual needs of each child, with consideration for their age, gender, and diversity, and crucially, it should be defined in partnership with children and young people.**

Children and young people's needs cannot wait

Protection issues and risks for children in Ukraine - including those who are internally displaced - and those who have left the country are considerable. Children fleeing hostilities are at increased risk of human trafficking, gender-based violence (particularly girls), and exploitation. Children who are unaccompanied by or separated from their caregivers are more vulnerable still. Children who have been living in institutions in Ukraine, already potentially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, may be at heightened risk still as they move.

¹ [Letters to our Dads in Ukraine, Terre des hommes Foundation, 2023](#)

The war is taking its toll on the **physical, mental and emotional well-being** of children and young people. One thousand two hundreds and eighty children have been killed or injured since February 2022². An estimated 17.6 million people are expected to be in need of humanitarian assistance in Ukraine in 2023, of which 23% are children³. Almost one and a half million children are displaced internally⁴ and over 3 million have found refuge in other European countries⁵.

Millions of Ukrainian refugees, 90% of whom are women and children, have benefited from support and asylum through the European Union Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). However, its implementation has been challenging. In some contexts, we see **refugees living in inadequate conditions** with insufficiently monitored public housing schemes that are open to abuse, lack of affordable accommodation options and insufficient cash assistance to cover living expenses. Access to the labour market - also granted by the TPD - is crucial, but language barriers can prevent people from getting a job in practice. Unsafe and poor housing and lack of funds puts refugees - particularly women and children - at heightened risk of exploitation.

As the war continues, **children's education – which is a core part of child protection - and social development are in jeopardy**. Today, an estimated 5.3 million **children in Ukraine** face barriers to accessing education⁶. Going to school is often not possible as many **schools are destroyed or unsafe to attend**. The alternative - online learning - is often hampered by connection and electricity disruptions.

Barriers preventing refugees' access to education in host countries include language, delays in acquiring the necessary legal status through the TPD (which grants access to education), and a lack of capacity in schools. In some cases, Ukrainian families opt for remote learning in Ukrainian, as they are hopeful of returning home soon and want to avoid a language issue. But this option is also challenging as Olga, 16, a refugee from Mariupol in Moldova explains: "[The] online education that we have right now is not very efficient or of good quality. Due to the frequent interruptions caused by air strikes in Ukraine and the connection issues we face, we encounter serious problems. Unfortunately, we do not have any other choice, especially if you are in a graduation class. And going to a Moldovan school is not an option because of the language barrier and also because the diploma we can eventually get here will not be recognized in Ukraine."

Children are experiencing mental health and psychosocial issues as a result of war. Living in a conflict zone, being forcibly displaced to an unfamiliar environment, and leaving everything behind, and worrying for loved ones are war consequences that often have a very strong impact in this regard. Teenagers are especially vulnerable and tend to feel guilty for fleeing their home. As Ana, 17, a refugee from Odessa, currently living in Bucharest says: "Usually when I see news, I feel very sad, and I feel that something is wrong because there are so many people in Ukraine living in awful conditions and I had a chance to go abroad". And despite the significant need to address mental health issues, psychosocial support is not always available, accessible (with language barriers once again a factor), regular or sustainable. As Olena Efimenko, Psychosocial Support Coordinator with TDH in Ukraine explains: "Children's emotional state improves after participating in psychosocial games. Adult caregivers gain experience in supporting children through play, improve their knowledge of self-help and supporting children in stress".

Not being able to speak the local language affects children's **integration in host countries**, including in schools, as well as their access to other services such as healthcare. In some cases, as the war drags on for longer than expected, willingness to support children and caregivers who fled Ukraine as refugees by host communities has waned.

Support is not always tailored to the diverse needs of children. For example, we work with **Ukrainian Roma refugees** who have spent many months in temporary reception facilities, in the absence of integration support. An estimated 1 in 5 children who are internally displaced in Ukraine has a **disability** and is in need of specialized support. Children with special needs, especially girls, are also at heightened risk of violence, abuse and neglect.

Many **adolescents affected by the war** who remain in Ukraine have lost their support network as they have had to leave their homes or because their schools are closed, and it is too dangerous to meet up with friends. And in war time, we often see budgets for children's services redirected to the military. Many families we work with live in temporary shelters and adolescents in these situations are unlikely to have the space they need to grow.

² [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\), Ukraine: Civilian casualty, Jan 2023](#)

³ [2022 Report OHCA](#)

⁴ [OCHA, Ukraine Situation Report, 19 December 2022](#)

⁵ [Ukraine Refugee Situation](#)

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/press-releases/war-has-hampered-education>

Children's rights and international humanitarian law must be respected and it's time to create a long-term vision for support - together with Ukraine's children and young people

Terre des Hommes calls on the international community to **partner with children, young people and their families and develop long-term support to ensure they can enjoy their rights without discrimination**. Specifically, we call on:

- States to ensure that **international obligations towards children are upheld**, including ensuring children's right to asylum, family reunification, protection, and adequate housing.
- **Ukraine and host countries to ensure children have access to strong child protection systems and social protection** that can respond to the needs of children affected by war, and notably to ensure that:
 - Mental health and psycho-social support services and programmes responding to gender-based violence are available for all children, including refugees.
 - Specialized support for unaccompanied and separated children, including appropriate accommodation and family-based care, is provided.
- Ukraine, host countries, and the international community to provide increased financial support for and ensure children's access to **education and a safe place to learn and socialize with other children**. Therefore, we especially call on:
 - All parties to the conflict, to respect international humanitarian law, the fundamental Principle of Distinction and the Safe Schools Declaration to protect all children and facilities where children are present, including schools and kindergartens.
 - Ukraine, with the support of the international community, to ensure access to formal online education for children and young people who are displaced through the establishment of safe learning spaces with reliable internet connection.
 - Host countries to remove all legal and practical barriers to ensure that every child's right to education is upheld and that they are in formal education, either through supporting their access to online education with schools in Ukraine or by integrating children and young people in the formal schooling system of the host country.
 - Ukraine to enter into agreements with host countries as necessary to ensure that educational qualifications from host countries will be recognized in Ukraine and vice versa.
- The International Community, to ensure children and their families have **access to mental health and psycho-social support and programmes**, whether individual or collective depending on their wishes, to help them process and mitigate the effects of war.
- Host countries, to **support the inclusion of refugees in national systems, support them to integrate, reinforce social cohesion with host communities** and counter discrimination, especially by:
 - Ensuring no discrimination in the support provided to children of other nationalities who fled the war inside Ukraine to neighbouring countries, people from minority groups, including Roma, or from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Every child has a right to be treated equally and without discrimination.
 - Ensuring refugee children's access to public services, protection and social systems, as nationals.
 - Helping refugees to settle, ensuring access to basic language courses, information and skills development.
 - Supporting access to socio-economic opportunities, particularly for mothers and young women.
 - Training teachers on inclusive teaching methods to support integration.
 - Encouraging refugee children to attend school even to access online classes from Ukraine, which will help them to be included and to integrate, providing opportunities to make friends and to feel part of the community they live in.
 - Developing programmes that assist host populations and encouraging donors, national and international non-governmental organisations to do the same.
 - Facilitating refugee children's access to recreational and cultural activities and play alongside children from the host community.
- All actors to ensure support is tailored in **consideration of age, gender and other forms of diversity, including** by:

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- Developing and implementing **child- and youth-focused interventions**, designed with children and young people, to support their needs and to uphold their rights, including the right to play, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. International actors can help reestablish youth facilities and services in safe spaces in Ukraine.
- Ensuring **younger children** have safe spaces to play and to be with friends.
- Responding to the needs of children living with **disability**.
- **Establish mechanisms to ensure child and youth participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of support they need.** Children have a right to participate in decisions that affect them, and their participation can strengthen protection responses and advise on the support they need. TDH has strong experience of facilitating child and youth participation and supporting their empowerment, particularly of those with lived experience of the issue, and of establishing youth and child advisory boards in different contexts, and is ready to assist with tools, advice and capacity building⁷.

Despite the challenges, children and young people affected by the war in Ukraine show determination and resilience. We hope they will soon find peace. Terre des Hommes will continue to accompany children and young people for as long as it is needed, supporting and empowering them to enjoy their childhood and youth, feel safe, be healthy, remain hopeful, deal with the effects of war, learn, and realize their dreams.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT

Caroline Horne, Head of Campaign, Terre des Hommes International Federation, email: caroline.horne@terredeshommes.org

ABOUT TERRE DES HOMMES

Terre des Hommes International Federation is a non-governmental organisation of 9 member organisations, working for the rights of children and equitable development with 730 projects across 67 countries. Terre des Hommes advocates for rights-based policies in all areas of children's lives.

Terre des Hommes works with children and young people in Ukraine itself as well as people who have fled as refugees in Europe, providing direct assistance and also working in partnership with many local and international organisations. [Terre des Hommes has worked in Ukraine](#) since 2009 through partners and has been a registered organisation there since 2015. In Ukraine and other European countries, we support children and their families with basic needs, emergency assistance, child protection, psychosocial support, access to education and health and child-friendly spaces where children can be children.

Read more from children in a Terre des Hommes (Romania) publication: <https://tdh.ro/en/letters-our-dads-ukraine> and see a video created by a young boy in Hungary about his journey (and others journey) through pain: <https://vimeo.com/776930324>

Watch this video that describes the first emergency and welcoming model implemented by Terre des Hommes in Italy, based on the successful experience of the FARO project aiming to protect unaccompanied migrant children arriving in Italy, through qualified psychosocial and psychological assistance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_dok8Ob8Xw

⁷ See, for example:

- TDH Foundation [You Create Methodology](#) for children's empowerment – with the objectives of strengthening wellbeing, resilience, and leadership among youth, a training for youth leaders, with the support of Adult Allies and the 'Art-kit' (training manual), to lead their peers in implementing arts-based activities to address issues of significance to youth in their community.
- Guide by IICRD and TDH network, Destination Unknown [Working in Partnership with Children and Young People on the Move: Strategies & Tools for Meaningful Participation](#)
- [TDH Schweiz MePower Project](#) - A project for young people seeking asylum in Switzerland, supporting their psychosocial needs and helping them to network, be aware of their strengths and abilities and identify concrete next steps to improve their situation.