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TRANSNATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF UKRAINIAN DISPLACED CHILDREN

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TCUP Report: Transnational Experiences of Ukrainian Displaced Children

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Transnational Experiences of Ukrainian Displaced Children

The Russian Federation's war in Ukraine has created the largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II, forcing over 14 million Ukrainians to flee their homes. As Russian Armed Forces carry out brutal campaigns against civilians, children suffer the consequences. This research documents the individual experiences of 63 Ukrainian children displaced by the war. Firsthand accounts were collected from an online survey completed by their parents or guardians, as well as an interview with a humanitarian volunteer who helped hundreds resettle. Five periods of each child's life were examined: life before 24 February 2022; journey to the host community; adaptation to the host community; confrontation with physical or psychological trauma; and prospects for the future. The findings illustrate a heartbreaking picture of loss, endurance, adaption, and hope. Children will likely experience long-term consequences from the Russian Federation's volitional war in Ukraine. National governments can help alleviate suffering and ensure that future generations do not face a similar war-torn fate by assisting Ukrainian displaced families and supporting Ukraine's victory.

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation initiated the unprovoked, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Shortly after Russian leader Vladimir Putin announced a "special military operation," missiles began targeting Ukrainian cities. Two years later, the Russian Federation has failed to secure any major military victories but has created the largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II.¹

Russian military strategy indiscriminately targets densely populated areas, subjecting civilians to disproportionate

harm.² Over 14 million Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homes, among which are about five million children.³ The war's impact on Ukrainian children is well documented: Russian Armed Forces kill, torture, rape, unlawfully confine, and deport them, inflicting extensive and long-lasting psychological trauma.⁴

This research examines the experiences of 63 Ukrainian children displaced by the war. It synthesizes dozens of firsthand accounts from the parents or guardians of

displaced children, as well as a humanitarian volunteer who helped hundreds resettle. The study reminds us that behind every general statistic are the individual experiences of distinct persons. At the same time, the study uncovers several trends. Whether internally displaced or a refugee abroad, each child fled unexpectedly, left behind loved ones, arrived in unfamiliar locations, and struggled to rebuild their lives. Each respondent also expressed an intent to return home when the situation allows.

In this report, I demonstrate the human price of Russia's aggression at the individual level. First, I explain the methods for documenting the experiences, including an online survey and a qualitative expert interview. Then, I organize the accounts into five periods, highlighting particular stories alongside common trends. Building on the findings, I offer two evidence-based recommendations on how national governments can support Ukrainian displaced children and help ensure that future generations do not face a similar war-torn fate.

"I'm writing this now, and I'm crying again. It is very scary when you have to go somewhere and leave your child at home, and you do not know if you will return home because of the occupiers. I always took a photo of the child with me so that if I was taken away, at least I would have a photo."

Methods

To document the experiences of Ukrainian displaced children, non-random sampling techniques were employed. An online survey in Ukrainian (Ukrsurvey.com) was disseminated via web link through my networks in Europe and North America. Parents or guardians of displaced children participated through voluntary response sampling. All respondents were given the option to remain anonymous. The survey asked questions relating to the child's life during five key periods:

Life before the full-scale war. Where did you live in Ukraine? What were the day-to-day activities of your child?

The journey to the host community. When did you decide to leave and under what conditions? How long was your journey? What mode of transportation did you use? Who traveled with you? Did any family members remain in Ukraine?

Adaptation to the host community. Does your child like his or her new community? Has it been difficult to adapt to the language or culture? Has your child made any new friends? What is the biggest difference between this residence and your home? Has your child asked about why they left home? If so, what have you told your child?

Confrontation with physical or psychological trauma. Have you or your child experienced physical injury or emotional suffering? Have you experienced the loss of a loved one? Is there any significant change to your child's demeanor? How have you addressed these challenges? Has there been any improvement?

Prospects for the future. Do you plan to return to Ukraine after the war or do you prefer to stay in this location?

From October 2022 to September 2023, a total of 46 responses encompassing the experiences of 54 children were recorded. Responses were submitted by parents or guardians of displaced children between the ages of 7 months and 18 years. Before the full-scale invasion, the respondents resided in various regions across Ukraine. The largest concentration of respondents lived in eastern Ukraine, including in the oblasts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia. Following their displacement, the respondents settled in eight countries: the Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The primary limitation of this research involves the willingness of individuals to disclose sensitive information about their children. I have attempted to mitigate this gap through an in-depth, qualitative interview with one individual who helped hundreds of displaced children resettle. Maria Polishchuk is the Director of Communications and Outreach at The Children of Ukraine Foundation, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization sending humanitarian aid to Ukrainian children. She regularly interacts with the parents and guardians of displaced children, as well as orphanages and grassroots organizations that support them.

During a structured interview, she discussed general trends she has observed since the full-scale invasion. She also spotlighted the stories of nine children between the ages of 10 months and 15 years who currently reside in Poland, Ukraine, and the United States. The stories of these nine children are combined with the 54 survey accounts to show that all 63 children faced hardship throughout their displacement.

While the research is not generalizable, it aims to capture diverse perspectives. To show how the individual accounts relate to general trends, I incorporated into the findings recent publications about Ukrainian refugees. Particularly, I included reports from international organizations and academic literature. Synthesizing the original data with statistics and analyses contextualizes the responses and reveals implications for each child's journey.

Findings

Life before 24 February 2022

Respondents revealed a comfortable life before the war. Undivided families were building futures together. As children attended school, they were developing a love for learning. Children filled free time with art, dance, and music lessons. They engaged in hobbies such as gymnastics and soccer. One new mother, Vitalina, described her daily routine with her one-year-old son Dmytro: feed the birds, play on their favorite swing, and visit the sea to search for beautiful stones. Teenagers Oleksander (18 years) and Krystya (15 years) dreamed about their futures, regularly connecting with friends, visiting museums, and enjoying picnics in the forest.⁵ New mothers were overjoyed by the births of their children: "We were so happy because God gifted us a son for whom we were waiting 11 years," one mother shared.

After the full-scale invasion, life stopped. Within one month, over 4.3 million children were uprooted from their homes.⁶ All mothers surveyed disclosed stories of significant change, including the separation of families and the loss of livelihoods. While fathers volunteered to defend Ukraine on the frontlines, mothers searched for ways to bring their children to safety. Children left behind their lives at a moment's notice without knowing whether they would see their relatives again. Marysia's husband, who is fighting on the frontlines, has only held his son for a total of two weeks since the son's birth almost a year ago.

One mother wrote, "Sadness and tears have not left us [since the beginning of the war]." As of 31 December 2023, over six million Ukrainian refugees are beyond Ukraine's borders, and another five million are internally displaced.⁷

The Journey to the Host Community

All parents reported that they intended to remain in their homes, but unbearable or dangerous conditions forced them to leave. Ksenya (10 months), Maksym (7 years), and their mother fled after Russian soldiers put automatic weapons to their heads. Viktoria (2 years) and Dmytro (8 years) left because Russian soldiers patrolled the streets drunk and harassed people in the early hours of the morning. Natalya (15 years) and her mother began their journey after a missile landed a few meters ahead of their path home from the grocery store. Anastasia (14 years), Mykola (6 years), and Olena (2 years) escaped an occupied village near Bucha⁸ and walked 20 kilometers at night through a forest to reach a train departing for western Ukraine.

Parents disclosed that they tried to create safe conditions for their children, but insecurity prompted their departure. Uriy (15 years old) and Mykola (8 years) were left homeless because all of their city's infrastructure was destroyed by missiles. They spent many sleepless nights traveling between bomb shelters without light, water, or gas before beginning a five-day journey to the Czech Republic. Oleksander (18 years), Krystya (15 years), and Olena (8 years) heard constant explosions outside of their home and lived their lives out of emergency "go bags," anticipating the moment when danger would force them to leave. Vladyslav (9 years), Vasylyna (6 years), and Mykyta (8 months) alternated between living in a hallway, basement, and bathtub for four months until they secured passage to western Ukraine by train and bus.

One mother stated that she decided to flee occupation after she saw how Russian occupiers murdered and raped innocent civilians in Bucha and Irpin. She could not let her one-year-old daughter face a similar fate. Routes through Ukraine were no longer viable due to shelling and landmines, so they traveled through Crimea and underwent filtration camps.⁹ Her family members were taken away, interrogated, and harassed. But the mother stated that the one-year-old daughter in her arms saved her from detention. Even her phone, which contained patriotic content prohibited by the Russians, was not inspected. She described this as a "miracle," since searches for such content are a routine procedure in the filtration camps. If detained, the mother would likely have been separated

from her child, and the child deported to the Russian Federation.¹⁰ In the Russian Federation, her child would likely be subject to political reeducation and placed in a foster family for permanent integration into Russian society.¹¹

Respondents revealed that their journey was longer than anticipated because they encountered countless delays. Children who crossed international borders were separated from their fathers, brothers, and uncles.¹² If traveling by car, families waited at checkpoints for up to a week as soldiers scrutinized their documents.¹³ If traveling by bus or train, families stood in queues for days to buy tickets. In the trains, suitcases were thrown out the window to make room for more people. When the bus of Margarita (16 years) and Viktor (1 year) was shelled, they were forced to spend a night in an open field. When Vitalina's (11 years) car was shelled, she developed a hematoma which required removal through emergency brain surgery.

During the first three weeks of full-scale war, one Ukrainian child became a refugee almost every second.¹⁴ The survey data reveals that many children fled

their homes to avoid missile attacks or harassment by Russian soldiers. Other children left because they could not gain access to food or medication in the occupied territories. But despite such challenges, respondents revealed that strangers often offered assistance. Heart-warming acts of kindness—such as lending a car for an escape or volunteering homes for overnight accommodation—helped families arrive safely at the next location.

Adaptation to the Host Community

All parents reported difficulty adapting to the new places of residence. However, mothers again drew attention to the compassion of strangers. When Daria arrived at the Polish border, she was shocked to see a nation welcoming her with open arms. Strangers offered her water, clothing, hygiene items, and even a carriage for her baby. Others gave her a bed in which to sleep. Fortunately, most countries in the European Union maintained an open border policy and provided refugees with access to housing, education, and healthcare.¹⁵ But even with such assistance, parents shared that starting a new life in a foreign land with no money and few belongings is difficult. Children constantly cried for family members who remained in Ukraine or were killed during the war.

"He wants to go home. He does not have anything here," the mother of Maksym (7 years) shared.

Since over 70% of adult refugees are women and over 30% of all refugees are children, securing a source of income for mothers with dependent children is a significant challenge.¹⁶ The story shared by the mother of Sofia (1 year) illustrates this hardship. She fled Ukraine with one suitcase, a baby carriage, and a bag of baby food. She settled in a small Polish village where there is no humanitarian assistance. She must repurchase all essential items but has no income and depends on only 500 zlotys per month (approximately 122 USD) from the Polish government. She struggles to pay for rent and food. She cannot find work because language barriers make it difficult to communicate. At the same time, she must continue to care for her young child.

Children who crossed international borders were placed in unfamiliar environments. When Anton (5 years), Bohdan (10 years), Kyrylo (12 years), and their siblings arrived in

"We, like everyone else, had a bookbag waiting near the door for the moment we had to leave."

a small Polish village, they could not understand anyone, refused to accept the new life, and longed for their native home. For Mathew (10 years) and Ilya (16 years), adaptation to a foreign language was most difficult. Reports show that knowledge of the local language is one of the most significant barriers to adaptation,¹⁷ but also one of the most critical for childhood development.¹⁸ Fortunately, many surveyed parents reported that their children acclimated to the local language over time. In Poland, for example, the first month was the hardest for Timothy (6 years) and Abramyk (3 years). But after a few weeks, they began to speak Polish, gained new friends, and grew to like their new residence.

While internally displaced children may not face the same culture shocks or language barriers as those who fled to neighboring countries, parents reported that children who remain in Ukraine continue to feel the effects of war. Consistent with internal displacement trends,¹⁹ many children who fled occupied territories or active hostilities settled in eastern Ukraine, particularly in the neighboring oblasts of Poltava, Zaporizhzhia, and Dnipropetrovsk. Parents reported that children frequently hear explosions and air raid sirens. Others are constantly on the move. Vitalina's (11 years) home was destroyed when the Russian Feder-

ation first invaded Ukraine in 2014. As the frontlines shift, she relocates from one residence to the next. Nevertheless, parents observed that relocating to residences outside of active combat zones improved the security and well-being of their children. Mykola (6 years) could not contain his excitement when he first saw Ukrainian flags and no foreigners in unoccupied territory.²⁰ Dmytro (8 years) shouts “Slava Ukraini!” (translation: Glory to Ukraine) at every free moment.

Despite challenges, many respondents affirmed that their child’s safety is most important. To everything else, they can adapt.

Confrontation with Physical or Psychological Trauma

“What do you think it is like sitting in a hallway with a bookbag, waiting for either a siren or the arrival of a missile? From the age of three months, my child is afraid of every noise. But how could she not be? Even I jump at every little sound,” one mother wrote. Parents disclosed that their children fear loud noises, even if they currently reside in safety. Children exhibit the same reaction to a knock on the door as they do to nearby explosions. They yell, cry, widen their eyes, and hide. One mother reported that she tried to do everything possible to shield her children from discomfort, but “a child cannot be sheltered from a world turned upside down.”

Parents reported that their children suffer psychologically, citing symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Several

respondents shared stories illustrating the physical manifestations of these impairments. On Taras’s (8 years) first day of school in the United

States, he encountered his first fire drill. Not knowing the purpose of the alarm, he began to shake uncontrollably and look for cover. He would not stop staring into the sky as if anticipating something to fall from it. After reaching Poland, Vanya (13 years) stopped eating and speaking, losing five kilograms in a few weeks. Periodically, something triggers her, and she crouches into a ball, rocking back and forth. Ivan (11 years) rarely shows emotion. He feels indifferent about issues that normally frustrate or excite children. During conversations, he becomes disengaged and unresponsive.

“From the age of three months, my child is afraid of every noise. But how could she not be? Even I jump at every little sound.”

Parents reported that fathers, uncles, and other family members were killed in the war. Katya was two months pregnant and Larysa was seven months pregnant when they lost their husbands. They could not describe the unbearable pain of losing someone so dear to them. Larysa feels that a part of her died with him. “My son will never meet his father, ...but he will know his father, and he will know the sacrifice his father made for him,” she said. Many mothers shared that they experience a constant, aching worry for the relatives who remain missing. Children constantly cry for their grandparents or other relatives who remain in Ukraine. One mother expressed hope that a miracle would one day reunite her family: “When we found out that the children’s uncle died, this was the most difficult. We cried, talked, and remembered. But we are still looking for his body. If there is no body, there is still hope!” she wrote.

To help address trauma, mothers shared that they constantly explain to their children what is happening, even if the child is very young. Mykola (6 years) fled from occupied territory to Zaporizhzhia but continues to hear explosions almost every night.²¹ Mykola often becomes scared, but his mother comforts him. She says that love, support, and trust are most important to help get him through these moments. Mykola understands everything that is happening. He believes that good will defeat evil and that the future is bright. “I feel that it is difficult for him, but he has done so well. He has grown so much even though he is still a small boy. We are so proud of him,” his mother shared.

In July 2022, World Vision estimated that over 1.5 million children are at risk for developing mental health disorders, but warned that this number is

“growing daily.”²² Children’s constant fear of death, injury, separation, and displacement activates stress hormones for prolonged periods of time which reduces neural connections in the brain.²³ This hinders the development of major organs and contributes to long-term psychological impairments.²⁴ Consequently, children face an increased risk of developing learning and reasoning disabilities, attachment and relationship issues, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), maladaptive coping skills, and other mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety.²⁵ If left without support,

children will suffer lifelong consequences.²⁶ Children can avoid developing these issues with early intervention and appropriate psychosocial support.²⁷

However, the most significant factor that determines the success of a child's recovery is a stable adult presence who can support and respond to the child's needs.²⁸ Since most displaced children are accompanied by adults who also experienced traumatic events and struggle to cope with the consequences, Ukrainian displaced children are less likely to receive the support they need.²⁹

Prospects for the Future

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported in July 2023 that 76% of refugees and 82% of internally displaced persons intend to return to Ukraine or their homes when the situation permits.³⁰ Consistent with this trend, all respondents described their displacement as temporary and expressed a longing to return home. "We had no intention of leaving Ukraine. This is our country, our land. We are waiting and praying for the good news of victory. We cannot wait to return home and have a restful sleep," one mother wrote. "No matter how nice it is here, we will absolutely return to our dear home," another mother disclosed. One family detailed their plans to return to Ukraine to visit relatives and the graves of loved ones, even as the war continues. Two parents stated that it is difficult to plan for the future because their homes are in ruins. At the moment, their priority is the safety and well-being of their children.

Several parents revealed that they feel shame and guilt for fleeing Ukraine, but they constantly search for ways to help those who remain. They send protective equipment to husbands, fathers, brothers, and friends fighting in the war. They donate to grassroots efforts that provide medical or other supplies to the frontlines. One mother regularly organizes collections for women with young children who continue to reside in her home city. She recognizes that every donation makes a difference, even if it is only enough to buy a few diapers. She added that every Ukrainian feels a duty to help, no matter how much they need it themselves.³¹

As of October 2023, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reports that Ukrainian refugees are facing an increasing number of challenges, including high living costs, access to public resources, and integration into host communities.³² Many refugees rely on the support of host governments.³³ While these

countries continue to accommodate them, the protracted nature of the war has put substantial pressure on existing social systems.³⁴ Some indicators suggest that support for hosting refugees is wavering.³⁵ If protection measures decrease, children risk falling into poverty.³⁶ Without support and integration, children are unlikely to receive the education, socialization, and psychological support they need.³⁷

"This is not our home, and it never will be."

Discussion

Children living in Ukraine prior to the 2022 full-scale invasion experienced a normal childhood. They engaged in ordinary day-to-day activities: attending school, reading books, playing sports, going for walks to the beach, and spending time with loved ones. Although life was not always ideal, each parent longed for a return to these days. The 24th of February 2022 marked an unforgettable change. Each child's life would never be the same.

Parents revealed that they did everything in their power to remain at home until it was impossible to do so. At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, children relocated to bomb shelters or safer spaces such as corridors and bathrooms. Most families decided to flee when their security was directly threatened: assaults or harassment by the Russian Armed Forces, destruction of homes, an inability to access food or life-saving medication. The journey to a safer location required several forms of transportation and lasted many days. During transit, children slept outside or in the homes of benevolent strangers. Many parents revealed that their car or bus was shelled while attempting to flee.

Adaptation to new residences was difficult for most children, but parents reported improvement after a few weeks. Language barriers and cultural differences were significant, but children acclimated to the new way of life. They gained new friends and started school. Parents were happy that their children were safe, and this made the children feel more at ease. Unfortunately, parents who fled with few belongings and no family abroad admitted to difficult financial situations. A few respondents disclosed that, outside of large cities, there is no humanitarian assistance. One mother revealed that it was especially

difficult for single mothers to simultaneously care for children, surpass language barriers, and work to afford necessities.

Parents disclosed that their children suffer from significant psychological trauma, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. A common consequence is a fear of loud noises, even if the child currently resides in safety. Many children experienced traumatizing events, such as assaults by the Russian military or the killing of family members. Parents tried their best to help the children through these difficult moments using explanations, physical embraces, and comfort. Parents revealed that this helps bring temporary calm. Fortunately, no parent surveyed reported that their child was injured directly by shelling or a missile. For this, many parents expressed immense gratitude.

Regarding prospects for the future, all parents disclosed a preference for returning to Ukraine. This, they said, was where their lives were, where their family resided, and where they belonged. They acknowledged that life in new countries was nice, but this was not their home. One parent expressed an intent to return to Ukraine during the war to visit relatives and the graves of loved ones. Two parents expressed difficulty in planning for the future because their homes are in ruins, and they prioritize only the well-being of their child. Otherwise, parents want to be reunited with their old lives and cannot wait until Ukraine's victory allows them to do so.

Conclusion

The Russian Federation's war in Ukraine has devastated the lives of an entire generation. This research showed that no part of a Ukrainian child's life was left untouched: his or her security threatened; parents killed; homes or cities destroyed; friends scattered all over the world; education disrupted; access to food, water, healthcare, and other necessities lost. It is unclear when Ukrainian children will return to a sense of normalcy, but a difficult road lies ahead. They will likely carry these traumatic experiences for the rest of their lives.

War is not a child's fault, but children are forced to suffer its consequences. To alleviate the suffering of Ukrainian displaced children and help ensure that future genera-

tions do not face a similar war-torn fate, national governments can:

Continue supporting Ukrainian families. Many countries around the world generously welcomed Ukrainian children into local communities and provided much-needed humanitarian assistance. But Ukrainian children and their families continue to need safe spaces, structured support systems, mental health services, and guidance with foreign language acquisition. As the war drags on, the cost of these programs is mounting.

National governments must continue funding existing programs, but they can offset costs by enacting policies that integrate Ukrainian adult refugees into the labor market. Expanding each country's labor force will boost economic growth, increase tax revenue, ease labor shortages, and augment consumption.³⁸ In fact, estimates show that Ukrainian refugees can grow Europe's labor force by 0.6%.³⁹ Given that most Ukrainian refugees are educated single mothers with dependent children, national governments should adopt policies favorable to this demographic, including affordable care services, language training, recognition of qualifications, and job matching.⁴⁰

Continue supporting Ukraine's victory. Displaced children cannot return to normalcy until the Russian Federation ends its volitional war in Ukraine. Anything but steadfast support for Ukraine's victory signals: (1) the use of force for territorial gain is acceptable; (2) powerful countries can topple smaller ones; (3) serious violations of international law are permissible. Consequently, autocratic leaders will use force for geopolitical gain. Sooner or later, the consequences will be felt across the globe.

To help displaced children return home, governments must support Ukraine's inherent right to self-defense against Russian aggression. This includes providing military and financial assistance to Ukraine and holding the Russian Federation accountable for its violations of international law. By doing so, Ukraine will continue to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, the international community will signal that aggression is not tolerated in the post-World War II order. The sooner Ukraine can welcome its children home, the sooner it can help them rebuild their lives.

Notes

- 1 Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], "Ukraine Situation," <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/ukraine-situation#:~:text=The%20Russian%20invasion%20of%20Ukraine,forced%20to%20flee%20their%20homes> (accessed 1 September 2023).
- 2 See Report of the Indep. Intl. Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, UN Doc. A/77/533, 18 October 2022, 9–11.
- 3 United Nations [UN], "Ukraine: 'Senseless War' Has Triggered 'Colossal Torment': Griffiths to Security Council," 6 December 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/12/1131412>; UN International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], "UNICEF Briefing Note on the Situation of Children in Ukraine," 14 June 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-briefing-note-situation-children-ukraine>.
- 4 Report of the Indep. Intl. Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, UN Doc. A/77/533, 2, 18–19.
- 5 Names have been changed to protect identity.
- 6 UNICEF, "More Than Half of Ukraine's Children Displaced after One Month of War," 24 March 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-half-ukraines-children-displaced-after-one-month-war>. Many of these children crossed into neighboring countries. In May 2022, over 5.5 million Ukrainian refugees were recorded in Europe. Most arrived in Poland (3 million), Romania (836K), and Moldova (448K). See UNICEF, ECAR, "Humanitarian Situation Report No. 9 - 2022, Ukraine Refugee Response in Neighboring Countries," <https://www.unicef.org/media/119906/file/ECARO-Humanitarian-SitRep-Refugee-Response-3-May-2022.pdf>. Over time, refugees traveled further west. As of 31 December 2023, 5.9 million are recorded in Europe. Most are located in Germany (1.1 million), Poland (956K), Czech Republic (373K), and the United Kingdom (250K). See UN High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], "Ukraine Refugee Situation," <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> (accessed 31 December 2023).
- 7 USA for UNHCR, "Ukraine Emergency," <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/> (accessed 2 January 2024).
- 8 Bucha is a small town northwest of Kyiv that was occupied during the first days of the war. Following the retreat of the Russian Armed Forces, it was revealed that Russian occupiers tortured and killed hundreds of civilians, including many on the city's streets with their arms tied behind their backs. See, e.g., Human Rights Watch, "Ukraine: Russian Forces' Trail of Death in Bucha," 21 April 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/21/ukraine-russian-forces-trail-death-bucha>.
- 9 "Filtration" is a "system of security checks and data collection" of Ukrainian citizens by Russian Armed Forces or their proxies in Russian-controlled territory. It aims to identify members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, law enforcement agencies, or government services. In practice, however, any person with pro-Ukrainian or anti-Russian views can be detained and subject to human rights abuses, such as torture, execution, and deportation to the Russian Federation. See OHCHR, "Update on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August–31 October 2022," https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ua/2022-12-02/HRMMU_Update_2022-12-02_EN.pdf, p. 3; OHCHR, "Situation of Human Rights in Ukraine in the Context of the Armed Attack by the Russian Federation: 24 February–15 May 2022," 29 June 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ua/2022-06-29/2022-06-UkraineArmedAttack-EN.pdf>, p. 26. The U.S. estimates that between 900,000 and 1.6 million Ukrainian citizens have been detained, interrogated, and deported to the Russian Federation, including over 260,000 children. See Antony J. Blinken, "Russia's 'Filtration' Operations, Forced Disappearances, and Mass Deportation of Ukrainian Citizens," U.S. Department of State press statement, 13 July 2022, <https://www.state.gov/russias-filtration-operations-forced-disappearances-and-mass-deportations-of-ukrainian-citizens/#:~:text=Estimates%20from%20a%20variety%20of,regions%20in%20the%20Far%20East>.
- 10 OHCHR reports that the filtration process is one of the ways by which Ukrainian children are deported to the Russian Federation. See, e.g., Report of the Indep. Intl. Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, UN Doc. A/HRC/52/62, 15 March 2023, 15; OHCHR, "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022–31 January 2023," 24 March 2023,

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2023/23-03-24-Ukraine-35th-periodic-report-ENG.pdf>, pp. 18–19; Reliefweb, “Deportation of Ukrainian Children by Russia,” 1 June 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/deportation-ukrainian-children-russia-joint-statement-enuk>. For more information on Russia’s deportation of Ukrainian children, see Humanitarian Research Lab, Yale School of Public Health, “Russia’s Systematic Program for the Re-Education and Adoption of Ukraine’s Children,” 14 February 2023, <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/97f919ccfe524d31a241b53ca44076b8/data>.

- 11 Humanitarian Research Lab, “Russia’s Systematic Program,” 5.
- 12 This is because martial law requires males between the ages of 18 and 60 to remain in Ukraine. See Global Legal Monitor, Library of Congress, “Ukraine: Martial Law Introduced in Response to Russian Invasion,” 3 March 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-03-03/ukraine-martial-law-introduced-in-response-to-russian-invasion/>.
- 13 One family disclosed that they were expedited to the front of the queue due to their young children.
- 14 UNICEF, “‘Particularly Shocking’ - Every Single Minute, 55 Children Have Fled Their Country,” 15 March 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/particularly-shocking-every-single-minute-55-children-have-fled-their-country>. Between 24 February 2022 and 15 March 2022, over 75,000 children fled Ukraine; UNICEF estimates that 55 children fled every minute over this 20-day period (ibid.).
- 15 European Commission, “EU Countries Welcoming Those Fleeing Ukraine,” https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/eu-countries-welcoming-those-fleeing-ukraine_en (accessed 31 December 2023). For example, the Polish government provided Ukrainian refugees with access to humanitarian aid, housing, healthcare, education, and the labor market during the first few weeks of the war. For more information on Poland’s response, see Jolanta Szymańska, *Refugees from Ukraine in Poland*, TCUP Report, 2023, <https://huri.harvard.edu/sites/hwpi.harvard.edu/files/huri/files/tcup-szymanska2023-final-v1.pdf?m=1702328487>.
- 16 Org. for Econ. Coop. & Dev. [OECD], “What We Know about the Skills and Early Labour Market Outcomes of Refugees From Ukraine,” 6 January 2023, <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/what-we-know-about-the-skills-and-early-labour-market-outcomes-of-refugees-from-ukraine-c7e694aa/>. In the absence of a contributing partner, the integration of Ukrainian single mothers into the labor market is complicated by the burdens of childcare and local language acquisition (ibid.).
- 17 E.g., ibid.; Roman Vlasenko, “Overcoming the Language Barrier for Ukrainian Refugees,” GLOBSEC, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/Overcoming%20the%20language%20barrier%20for%20Ukrainian%20refugees.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2023). Ukrainian refugees have varying levels of foreign language experience. English and Polish are among the most common languages spoken by Ukrainian refugees. Significantly fewer refugees speak German or Romanian. UNHCR, “Lives on Hold #2: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine,” September 2022, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/99600>, p. 11; Vlasenko, “Overcoming the Language Barrier.”
- 18 Edina Krompák and Olena Marina, “Language Promotion and Development for Integration of Ukrainian Refugee Children in National Education Systems in Host Countries,” UNICEF, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/33351/file/Language%20promotion%20and%20development%20for%20Ukrainian%20refugee%20children.pdf>. Knowledge of the local language impacts socialization, school attendance, and meaningful participation in the host community (ibid.).
- 19 According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the greatest number of internally displaced persons are located in Kharkiv (689K), Dnipropetrovsk (625K), Kyiv (474K), Odesa (291K), Lviv (273K), and Poltava (256K) oblasts. IOM, UN Migration, “Ukraine Internal Displacement Report: General Population Survey Round 13 (11 May–14 June 2023),” June 2023, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-13-11-may-14-june-2023>, p. 2.
- 20 Names have been changed to protect identity.
- 21 Names have been changed to protect identity.
- 22 World Vision, “No Peace of Mind: The Looming Mental Health Crisis for the Children of Ukraine,” 5 July 2022, <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/emergencies/no-peace-mind>, p. 4. Today, this number is likely higher due to the protracted nature of the war and the increased number of children exposed to traumatic events.

- ²³ Ibid., 8.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid. These consequences create a cascading effect, increasing the child's susceptibility to other psychological issues such as substance abuse and generational trauma (ibid.).
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ UNHCR, "Lives on Hold #4: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees and IDPs from Ukraine" 6 July 2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101747>, p. 27.
- ³¹ This is consistent with other surveys from Ukraine. In one survey examining civilian contributions to the war effort, 60% of respondents stated that they have donated funds and 31% reported that they have volunteered in the community. See MOBILISE, "Ukraine Wartime National Surveys," 1 June 2022, <https://mobiliseproject.com/2022/06/01/ukraine-wartime-national-surveys/>.
- ³² UNICEF, ECAR, "Humanitarian Situation Report No. 24 - 2023, Ukraine Refugee Response in Neighboring Countries," [https://www.unicef.org/media/147796/file/ECAR%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%2024%20\(Ukraine%20Refugee%20Response%20in%20Neighboring%20Countries\):%2030%20August%20-%202023%20October%202023.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/147796/file/ECAR%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%2024%20(Ukraine%20Refugee%20Response%20in%20Neighboring%20Countries):%2030%20August%20-%202023%20October%202023.pdf), p. 2.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid. One scholar explains why support for Ukrainian refugees is waning: "The protracted conflict and deteriorating economic situation in Europe create conditions for the spread of Russian propaganda, which may further weaken public support for receiving and assisting refugees and lead to tensions between refugees and the host society." Szymańska, *Refugees from Ukraine in Poland*, 10.
- ³⁶ UNICEF, ECAR, "Humanitarian Situation Report No. 24 - 2023," 2.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Nicolo Bird and Neree Noumon, "Europe Could Do Even More to Support Ukrainian Refugees," International Monetary Fund Blog, 15 December 2023, <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/12/15/europe-could-do-even-more-to-support-ukrainian-refugees>.
- ³⁹ Ibid. This can increase up to 2.7% in countries hosting the highest number of Ukrainian refugees (ibid.).
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.



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