

ChildAid to Eastern Europe Ukraine Project

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Overview of the impacts of the war in Ukraine on child welfare

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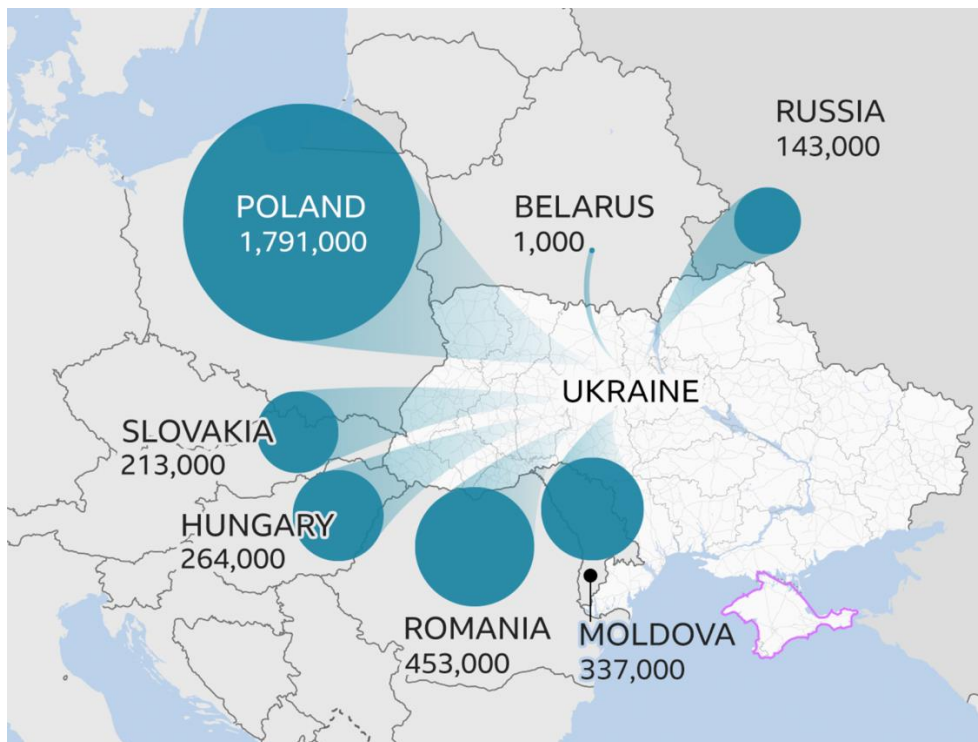
Executive summary

Thomas Woodlock

On the 24th of February, the Russian Federation conducted a “special military operation”, otherwise known as an invasion, into Ukraine. There has been unprecedented condemnation from Western governments, and this has been accompanied by far-reaching sanctions designed to punish the Russian state. Since the invasion, there has been a mass exodus of civilians from Ukraine, the majority heading for Eastern Europe.

For the purpose of this report, children will be considered as individuals under the age of 18 as defined by the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). The report covers a number of aspects concerning the war in Ukraine but specialises on analysing the impact of the conflict on children. This has been split into three categories, each tackled by an individual research analyst at London Politica. These categories are; the immediate impact of the conflict on children and single mothers, the impact of being outside of education, the short and long term impacts on children’s mental health.

Ukrainians fleeing to neighbouring countries as of the 15th of March, 2022



Source - [BBC](#)



Immediate impact of the conflict on family separation and single mothers

Arslan Sheikh

As the Russian army [storms](#) into Ukraine from the north, south, and east, the costliest impact is apparently evident on families and single mothers. As the [maternity wards](#) in Ukraine are turned into bomb shelters, the future of children lingers in danger.

As some Ukrainian women call it ‘a little death’, men between [eighteen to sixty-years](#) old are not allowed to leave the country while women and children are fleeing the warzone causing family separation at an immensely increasing rate. Children experience multiple [traumas](#) because of family separation. The untreated traumas can have chronic effects on both adults and children. The traumas, especially among [children](#) negatively impact their physical, mental, developmental, and behavioural health. They have higher rates of chronic [medical conditions](#) such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and premature death. There is also increased risk of [psychiatric disorders](#) such as anxiety, depression, and psychosis. In addition, detrimental [coping behaviours](#) such as smoking and use of alcohol or drugs could become more prevalent. There is also a [heightened risk](#) of violence, abuse, and exploitation.

An estimated [one million](#) children have been forced to [flee](#) the country, many unaccompanied and [separated from](#) their families. According to an [aid worker](#), the children have been forced to carry their suitcases for long distances on foot to leave Ukraine. Many [volunteers](#) are helping these refugees through providing them with food and transport, especially in Moldova. Parenting [experts](#) from the University of Oxford have been at work with international colleagues to deliver easy-to-use [information](#) for families on helping children in the existing crisis. Many [buses](#) with Moldovan licence plates are taking refugees to the larger Romanian city of Galati, about 30 minutes away. Many [individuals](#) are also helping the refugees in crossing the border.

As many as [15,000](#) people, most of them women and children, have taken up residence in Kyiv’s subway system to escape the grim conditions in the city as Russian forces bear down. And the subway is not the only subterranean refuge. Moreover, many [single mothers](#) are also facing extreme hardships when fleeing the war zones. Already being the most [vulnerable](#), with the increasing poverty rates during the pandemic, children and single parents are the most at risk as a consequence of this war.

Prior to this conflict, children had been [disproportionately](#) affected by poverty in Ukraine. As of 2019, the absolute poverty rate of families with children in Ukraine was [47.3%](#). These numbers are likely to increase due to this conflict. Initiatives such as [A Heart for Children](#) have been working to help children and parents fight poverty by providing housing, but initiatives such as these are also at risk of failing due to the destruction of housing units.



Several [attacks](#) on the maternity and child health facilities in Ukraine have exacerbated the situation, depriving the people of healthcare, especially children. There are also [reports](#) of shortages of food and medical supplies. For those who require insulin and other prescription drugs, it is a matter of life and death. In the city of Kamyanske, the logistics chain for medicine delivery has been [disrupted](#) due to the hostilities. Where regular deliveries are impossible because of fierce fighting, volunteers or the military try to deliver insulin and other drugs to those who desperately need it. The situation and assortment in pharmacies has slightly improved, but there are still shortages of certain drugs, for example, those related to the regulation of thyroid hormones. Many drugs are imported from other countries, and therefore the price of medicine has rapidly increased in the wholesale markets where pharmacies buy them. As a result, Ukrainian pharmacies have to sell drugs at new, higher prices.

Concerning access to food, the USAID 2019 report found that approximately [558,000](#) people in Ukraine were food insecure and [103,000](#) people were severely food insecure. The conflict has greatly worsened food security in the country. In response, the Ukrainian government has [banned](#) the export of several grains, but if the war continues, the insecurity will continue to worsen. As Russia began its invasion, locals rushed to sweep food off supermarket shelves, fearing supply disruptions. Almost immediately, fresh meat, canned food, cereals and pasta [disappeared](#) from the shelves. Most people in Ukraine simply do not have the resources to make any significant food supplies, with at least [60%](#) of the population living in poverty. Long lines at supermarkets and pharmacies occur daily during the lulls in air raid sirens.

Children sheltering in the Kyiv underground





Impact of being outside of education

Laveesh Sharma

“We’re all leaving the university now with no clarity on our [future](#)”, remarked a medical student from Zaporizhzhia State Medical University. They join an innumerable list of students who have had to leave their schools and colleges in order to either leave the country or take shelter at safety points. Well before the raging war in Ukraine, a parallel conflict in Eastern Ukraine has been ongoing since 2014 in the Donbas and Luhansk regions, where children have suffered psychological impacts of the fighting much before the wider impact faced by the student community in Ukraine. For children living in this part of the country, the sound of shelling echoing through playgrounds has become normal. In Avdiivka, a city in Donetsk region, the effects of conflict on children have been lamentable. Olga Prais, a teacher recounts during the winter of 2015, “children would apologise for not being prepared for class because they spent the entire night in the basement to take shelter from the [shelling](#)”. Moreover, in this conflict an unfortunate target are establishments of education; going by reports, kindergartens and schools have been hit and damaged. In Vrubivka, located in the Luhansk region of Eastern Ukraine, a [school building](#) was damaged with 53 children and 16 adults inside, fortunately none were injured. Moreover, according to a UN statement, people living in Eastern Ukraine live in some of the [most mine-contaminated stretches of land](#) in the world. This coupled with the renewed offensive will have an irrevocable psychological impact on an entire generation of children.

As per the 2021 [UNOCHA report](#), the impact of conflict on children has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which led to complete lockdowns which included the closure of educational facilities, public places and markets. Coupled with the lack of affordable PPE kits and the loss of jobs, an increasing number of poor households are unable to access the news as they cannot afford internet access, smartphones or televisions. Per the [report](#), the circumstances in Ukraine's government-controlled areas (GCA's) means there is a shortage of teachers. This is also prevalent in the non-government-controlled areas (NGCA's), especially in rural areas. Teachers face a paucity of psychosocial support to cope with the stress and the increased responsibility of their students' safety. In some communities of GCA's and NGCA's there were reported deficiencies in the capacities of Early Childhood Development facilities, which is detrimental to pre-school education and skill development. Lack of access to learning materials is another stumbling block. At least 27% of [households](#) in GCA's were unable to afford school books and kits, besides this, the need for teaching supplies and learning equipment remains high in conflict-affected areas.

The doyen of Ukraine's economy is its affordable medical education that comes at an extremely low tuition fee, catering to a plethora of students from countries like China, Morocco, Turkmenistan, India, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, and Turkey. The foreign student community contributes to a notable portion of [Ukrainian GDP](#), producing \$542 million in revenues to the country. Several of the students being evacuated were either in their final stages of achieving their degrees or had just a few semesters left. Returning to their homelands is just the first



battle, they must now find a way to complete their education from home and have their degrees accredited. Archita, a first-year medical student from India was enrolled at Uzhhorod National University. She recalls how her father took out a loan to get her enrolled, but now stares into a future ridden with [uncertainty](#). Sandesh, another medical student from India, is dismayed at how his father made immense sacrifices, working double jobs in order to cover his [education expenses](#). For Hasan Abu Zaanona, it was his third experience of escaping a war. Having grown up in Palestine, his family fled to Yemen, where he pursued medical education and when the country lamentably descended into a civil war, came to Ukraine. His experience helped others to escape the conflict zone, resulting in the rescue [of 50 students](#). Despite facing insurmountable struggles Hasan remains hopeful and optimistic, but also remains doubtful about his future.

Several attempts are being made by governments to aid the continuation of student's education. The governments of [Poland and Hungary](#) have offered to absorb students into their colleges, where they can then continue their education. Whereas the [Indian government](#), as per last update, is deliberating on absorbing the students returning from Ukraine into government and semi-government colleges and universities. During the pandemic, many [Ukrainian universities](#) made the shift to hybrid classes. This helped prepare the nation's education system for the crisis it now faces. However, students that require practical lessons for their education, such as in medicine, face a daunting task of completing their education.

The hardships of war excessively burden children, students and women who struggle with fear, stress, harassment. Many of these people face the risk of never returning to education.

Ukrainian woman with two children crossing the Slovak-Ukrainian border





Impact of the conflict on children's mental health

Caleb Adegbola

The conflict in Ukraine has been devastating for those involved, resulting in over [1.5 million children fleeing the country](#). This number will undoubtedly be higher in the coming weeks and months. A report from [Save the Children](#), highlights 1 in 6 children live in a conflict zone and that children are at more risk of conflict now than at any point over the last 20 years. The differentiation between short and long term will help to. [Mental health](#) is a reflection of our emotional, psychological and social well-being. This can affect various aspects of our life, such as decision making, how we deal with stress and how we relate to others. This section seeks to understand how war impacts children in the short and long term.

Short term impacts of the conflict on children's mental health

In the short term, children can be affected in a number of ways, the most obvious ones relate to [loss of parents](#) or parental figures, this affects children massively as [familial stability is the leading factor in helping children deal with stress](#). Change and uncertainty mean children feel as though they have no control over their lives. Children have also gone from being able to travel to school with relative ease to a life of displacement in refugee camps. Many children have witnessed horrors such as the destruction of homes and dead bodies, this will undoubtedly have a negative effect on their future behaviours. This is especially relevant to areas with intense fighting. Children benefit greatly from routine. This has been heavily disrupted due to the attacks from Russia and the uncertainty that follows. Parents struggle to provide the same level of care as they usually would and this suffering is transferred to the children. Sudden job loss or emotional distress greatly reduce the capabilities of their ability to parent.

According to the UN, as of the 13th of March, at least [85 children have been killed and more than 100 injured](#) due to Russian attacks. Experts fear the increased feeling of fear, anxiety and stress for Ukrainian children will impact their ability to make sensible choices and their general mood. Children can be less cooperative and willing to interact. The severity of this relates to their pre-war condition and pre-war mental and physical state.

Dr Jack Shonkof, director of the developing child centre at Harvard University stated, that the focus should be on [“the adults caring for children in these war torn circumstances, this concerns not just parents but also teachers attempting to maintain some form of education for the children”](#). Babies, despite not being fully aware, can be at extreme risk if their carer is undergoing additional stress or trauma. It is important to note that all children will react differently, nonetheless they are all at high risk. Schools, orphanages and [hospitals are under attack](#), which are all key to the lives of children. The reduced access to crucial components of development infrastructure will hamper the ability of Ukrainian parents to successfully raise their children. The lack of routine and normality, alongside insufficient access to basic necessities paints a bleak short term future for these children.



Long term impacts of the conflict on children's mental health

The long term impacts of war on children can filter into subsequent generations, this occurred following major conflicts, such as WWI. German children developed mass resentment against the allied nations due to the treaty of Versailles and their catastrophic losses. This contributed to the breakout of WWII and is one of the reasons Hitler was able to capitulate the nation, referring to the sins of the past leadership and promising redemption for the German people, citing that he wanted to make Germany great again. Those whose lives transformed were more inclined to feel a strong sense of patriotism; they may have lost family members or seen their socio-economic standing fall. Such picturesque violence also can cause long [term trauma such as PTSD](#). This can lead to increasing likelihood of violence through participation in war and also other avenues such as domestic violence. The use of explosive weapons by Russia, in particular ballistic missiles, only intensifies this probability. In the long term, uncertainty plays a large role in impacting children. They have no idea when they may see their parents again, if at all, or when they will return to school to see their classmates and be able to learn again. Those who have fled Ukraine will be unsure if they are even able to return. Additional long term effects relate to children being at an increased risk of suffering from anxiety or depression. The long term effects from the [breakdown of local economy and infrastructure](#) will also have lasting effects on the livelihood of entire communities and children in turn.

Ukrainians manoeuvring across destroyed transport infrastructure





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