



March 1st 2022

Educo Statement

■ Ukraine: conflict and humanitarian crisis

Educo and child protection



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In the face of the humanitarian crisis that has erupted in Ukraine and the escalation of hostilities and clashes in this European country, Educo, as an organisation that defends and promotes the Rights of the Child and their wellbeing would like to reiterate its firm commitment to and support for all the children, adolescents and families affected by the armed conflict. Aware of the devastating consequences that it will have on the lives of millions of people, especially on children, we will continue to work now and in the future to alleviate their suffering and ensure their comprehensive protection.

At Educo we are extremely concerned for the lives of the people who live in Ukraine, especially children and adolescents. Many families are being forced to flee and abandon their homes, and both they and those who stay behind may not be safe and may not have the conditions to ensure a dignified life, adequate food, and shelter and care.

The attacks over the last few weeks are a real threat to their physical integrity and their lives. Hundreds of people could be seriously injured or die if measures are not taken. We are also concerned about the impact the conflict will generate for the wellbeing and mental health of children, as well as the potential trauma it will cause in their lives. **Additionally, millions of children will see their education interrupted, an essential key element for their development and wellbeing.**

This crisis, as in any humanitarian crisis, exacerbates risks for children and could have an accumulative impact on their development. Displaced children and adolescents are faced with various types of threats and are in a very vulnerable situation, especially those who are separated from their families or unaccompanied. Additionally, we must take into account that, in the context of the crisis, children, especially girls, are the people who suffer the most from sexual and gender-related exploitation and violence.



Therefore, in the light of the severe Human Rights crisis we are experiencing, the terrible impact this crisis will have on children, and in accordance with the basic Human Rights principle to protect **life, we ask governments and all the parties involved in this crisis for:**

- An immediate and urgent end to all violence and military offensives, as well as respect for International Humanitarian Law, which reminds us that the civilian population can never be a target.
- Compliance with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which obliges all parties to ensure the protection of children and their survival and best interests.
- The creation of safe routes for families, women, children, adolescents and young people who are trying to leave Ukraine or move to safer areas within the country. It is absolutely necessary that the borders are kept open and that host countries are prepared to offer assistance and protection to refugees. To achieve this, the cooperation of all European and non-European states is essential. The ultimate expression of solidarity must be reflected in the sending of funds and resources both to the borders with Ukraine and within the country.
- Maximum respect for the work of humanitarian organisations in Ukraine. Humanitarian aid workers must not be targeted and their protection and access to the places most in need of assistance must be guaranteed.
- Acknowledgement and compliance with the Principle of Non-Discrimination, so that all persons, including children and adolescents, who want to flee Ukraine can do so through EU assistance mechanisms irrespective of their origin, race, age, etc.
- In addition, as a children's organisation, we demand special attention for those children who are unaccompanied or who leave the country accompanied, but who, once in the host country, are left in the care of families or friends because their parents return to Ukraine. It is essential to guarantee the protection of every single one of those children and ensure that their rights are fulfilled. We place special emphasis on the importance of reinstating their education as soon as possible, through the education system in the host country or, if this is not possible, through emergency educational alternatives that will help them to regain a certain degree of normality as soon as possible.

A coordinated response to protect children

Children from and in Ukraine are being exposed to all kinds of violence, both physical and emotional, that will leave them with lifelong scars which they will carry with them all their lives if they do not receive appropriate support, and if this situation continues. **That is why it is vital for the international community and humanitarian actors to carry out a coordinated response in order to:**

- Set up all the necessary mechanisms to protect the most vulnerable populations: children and women. Prevent them from falling into the hands of trafficking and smuggling networks on route and in exile. To achieve this, it is essential that refugees, especially unaccompanied children, are received under the protection and mechanisms of the EU in an agile and rapid manner, guaranteeing institutional channels for the protection and security of refugees and ensuring that they are not left unprotected. Also, in the case of children, it is vital to take into account the best interest of the child for any action that it going to be carried out.
- Ensure, from the start, safe shelter, food, warmth and all the basic needs for all children, adolescents and adults fleeing Ukraine.



- Implement psychological first aid, mental health and psychosocial support measures and actions for affected children and adolescents, as well as their families and caregivers, strengthening their recovery capacities and resilience. As well as promoting access for all affected children and adolescents to safe and friendly spaces where they can play, learn and express themselves. It is important that these psychosocial support actions and supportive spaces respond adequately and in an adapted way to the specific needs associated to their age, gender or any other specific characteristics or conditions.
- Prevent the separation of children from their caregivers or families and support family tracing and reunification, ensuring that these processes effectively integrate and respect the best interests of the child.
- Provide all children affected by conflict with access to a continuum of care as they move across borders and link humanitarian systems with national child protection systems in transit and destination countries. These systems should include measures to support families to stay together, quality protection, education and alternative care for children who have lost parental care, and specialised support for children with disabilities. These efforts must be connected to longer-term plans to build strong systems for wellbeing and protection. **In this regard, the continuity of education and respect for the Safe Schools declaration are of particular importance.**





Given this urgent need for coordination and collaboration for an effective response, we are participating in the communication and coordination spaces promoted in Spain and Europe, such as the NGDO Coordinating Committee, AECID, CONCORD, ECHO and VOICE.

We are in constant coordination through these bodies and other networks such as the NGO umbrella organisation to join forces and provide the most effective response possible. We are also part of the Emergency Committee to coordinate our call for collaboration.

We are paying close attention to how refugees are received, we know that citizens, city councils and Autonomous Regions are willing to receive them and we will do everything in our power to achieve this.

Given the importance of coordinating all efforts and ensuring, above all, that the rights of children and adolescents are scrupulously respected and fulfilled, particularly in cases where they arrive alone in our territory, we call on the Spanish Government to:

- Ensure funds for humanitarian aid in Ukraine and bordering countries and take into account the special protection needs of refugee children.
- **Integrate children into the education system as soon as possible and facilitate their linguistic immersion, to minimise the impact the war will have on them.** We also call for safe and friendly spaces where children can support each other, enjoy a daily routine, play and adapt to a new life.
- Facilitate access to care, psychosocial support and adequate housing.
- Strengthen the system for receiving refugees so that it does not become overwhelmed and so that we can receive, swiftly and safely, all refugees arriving in our territory, whether or not they come from the war in Ukraine.

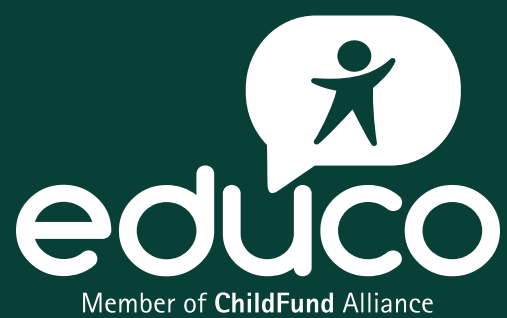
Our response

Educo, as a member of ChildFund Alliance, is providing a response to the crisis caused by the war through different actions in Ukraine. Although the safety and security of all staff is paramount at the moment, and our regular programmes are at a standstill, we are distributing food, medical supplies and medicines, as well as other basic items. We have also started to provide emotional support and psychological first aid to children and their families and to monitor their situation. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the population to access food and basic services, as well as safe shelter, mainly due to the curfew, restrictions on movement and supply shortages. It should be noted that it is mainly women and girls who face these severe difficulties in accessing goods, which makes them extremely vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence.

In addition, we are keeping a close eye on the situation at the borders in order to assess our actions in some of the neighbouring countries.

ChildFund has been running projects in Ukraine since 2004 and over the past few years ChildFund Germany has worked hand in hand with local partner organisations. Up until the beginning of the war, education projects were developed to strengthen the resilience of children and adolescents, to resolve conflicts without violence and to create “peace schools” that contribute to social cohesion. Projects were also developed to support children to improve their health and to support adolescents with vocational training.





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