

Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade – References Committee

Submission: Inquiry into Australian support for Ukraine

Introduction

As the war in Ukraine enters its third year, the rising human toll of this conflict is creating a greater humanitarian need, in particular psychological support for children, than first predicted two years ago.

The toll on the future generation, the children of Ukraine is vast. This year, **3.3 million children** will need support to deal with the effects of war. Children are spending up to **10 days a month** or a **third of their time** in **bomb shelters**.

As a result of this prolonged war, there is an ongoing need for long term funding for **psychosocial support services**. These services are an essential part of World Vision's work and its wide network of local partners who operate across Ukraine. World Vision believes that humanitarian funding should be prominent in any future funding packages, for example the recent \$100 million pledged by the Australian Government did not include a humanitarian aid component.

Whilst the initial two-year support by the Australian Government was welcomed, it is important to continue to provide these services into the future. The rebuild of Ukrainian society will involve bricks and mortar, but it will also involve psychological recovery. It is important we look to the future and support children and families now by providing stability for children growing up in this environment.

Background

Heading into its third year from the start of the Ukraine conflict, over **14.6 million** people remain in need of humanitarian assistance. **3.6 million** are displaced internally and **6.3 million** are displaced in neighbouring countries including Moldova, Romania, and Georgia where World Vision has humanitarian operations.

The frontlines of the conflict are moving constantly with heavy and intense bombardments continuing in the eastern part of the country. The conflict continues to cause widespread destruction of infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, energy units and other civil targets. The Russian offensive is expected to get worse in the coming weeks and months, causing even more displacement and lost lives, which continues to complicate the delivery of aid.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis is now considered to be "the largest displacement in Europe since the Second World War. 3.8 million- formerly displaced people have returned to their homes, but face challenges around protection, employment, livelihoods, and housing. Of the 3.3 million children impacted by the crisis, 1.2 million require education support and 3.2 million need protection services.

[UNICEF's 2024 Humanitarian Action](#) for children report identified the **mental health** of children as a key challenge along with learning, access to services, risks from disease and separation and violence and the need for **safe spaces**.

Ukraine Humanitarian Response Plan calls for \$3.1 billion to reach 14.6 million people with much needed assistance, of which only 17.2 per cent is met so far. The multitude of other foreign security concerns, major global crisis, and decreasing humanitarian funds globally raise concerns about the future of humanitarian funding inside Ukraine and in countries hosting refugees.

World Vision's Ukraine Crisis Response

World Vision has reached over **1.6 million people** as of January this year and **more than half** of these are **children**. That includes 1,021,688 people affected by the conflict in Ukraine and 305,897 refugees and host communities in Romania, 290,464 in Moldova, and 24,165 in Georgia.

World Vision's Ukraine Crisis Response (UCR) continues to engage with **78** local and international partners in a span of over two years, enabling us to respond even in the most difficult of circumstances and including areas near the frontline. During the crisis's second-year anniversary, World Vision's work and the plight of Ukraine's children were shared across various media outlets in Australia including Radio National, Channel 9, Sky News Australia, and The Sydney Morning Herald.

Mental health and the development of children is emerging as a critical issue due to the long-term nature of this conflict, with a need to maintain as much as possible a stable life for kids growing up in this environment.

With our partners on the ground, including NGO girls - Divchata, we run 37 child-friendly spaces which are like kindergartens or preschools that are run in buildings that are protected from air strikes. They provide activities that support children's learning and mental health and wellbeing.

"These child friendly spaces mean that kids can get some normalcy despite the constant air raid sirens and bombing raids. Mums (and some dads too) also receive much needed support in the most difficult circumstances," says CEO World Vision Australia, Daniel Wordsworth.

"More attention must be paid to the women and children living in stressful war conditions. I started receiving calls that there were many raped women and girls who needed help. It wasn't as much about medical aid, but primarily about psychological support," she says. CEO NGO Girls – Divchata, Yuliya Sporysh.

The needs of children and the most vulnerable Ukrainians besieged by this crisis are deepening with little or no peaceful solutions in sight. World Vision will continue to respond to these needs and asks for proactive and concerted support.

World Vision needs assistance as it aims to raise over US\$40 million per year, to support the needs of those affected by the crisis. The updated response plan will focus on provision of basic needs, protection and education, early recovery, and economic development, whilst enhancing partnerships and improving localization in our programming.

Continued humanitarian support will enable us to maintain our local partnerships of **thirty-seven child friendly spaces**. The recent [World Vision report](#) on children in Ukraine emphasizes the need of children as they have already lost over two years of ongoing education and a normalcy in their everyday life with families and friends. **Fifty-six percent** of parents in eastern regions sharing that their children are **anxious or tense**.”

Viktoriia, 12, now lives in Kyiv after fleeing Bakhmut with her parents. For months, she quietly suffered from loss and fear, and how to adjust to her new home, having left her friends and everything behind. The child-friendly space and activities organized by World Vision’s local partner [NGO Girls](#) gave her hope. She realized she was not alone, and that she can still dream big despite of the war. “I want to become a diplomat,” she shares with conviction as she proudly shared her volunteering experience to help other children.

Two years on, we now better understand the needs of both the child and their caregivers. We will now provide mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) to caregivers taking advantage of the waiting time while their children are in activities, in order to make sure we are providing wraparound support. We are also pivoting strongly to providing economic recovery – including vocational skills training and microloan support.

As the war carries on, World Vision will continue to focus its work in Ukraine on improving the lives of children and other vulnerable groups.

We cannot afford to see Ukraine fail and we cannot afford to forget about the future of its children.

About World Vision

For over six decades, World Vision Australia has been working towards eliminating existing poverty and its root causes.

As Australia's largest International Non-Government Organisations (INGO), with over sixty years' experience in the sector, and working with the help of everyday Australians as a leader in the industry, World Vision has helped to change the lives of over 27.1 million children around the world.

With over **100** locations **worldwide**, World Vision delivers an impact where others cannot. We go where the need is greatest – where many others cannot go or will not go – to help the world's most vulnerable. With our focus on the sustained wellbeing of children, especially the most vulnerable, we channel our efforts into four main categories:

1. Humanitarian and Emergency Relief.
2. Child Community Development (Child Sponsorship, Child Rescue, Chosen program).
3. Our Australian First Nations Program.
4. Climate Change.

Globally, our work is supported by 35,000 staff and 3.3 million people who volunteer their efforts to make a difference. The global reach and impact of the charity is vast. In 2022, the organisation's work meant that 29.6 million people received humanitarian assistance and 10.3 million people in 52 countries were reached with food support, 3 million people accessed clean water and 1.6 million children were safeguarded by child protection activities.

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