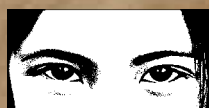




Ukraine emergency response

Terre des hommes helps families that fled the war

Excerpts from our magazine published in June 2022



Terre des hommes
Helping children worldwide.



Tudor Rosu

Head of the Multi-country
Delegation for Eastern
Europe (Romania, Moldova,
Ukraine)



Carmen Nechita

Emergency Response
Coordinator (Romania,
Moldova, Hungary)

A crisis like no other

The decision was self-evident. As soon as the first missiles tore through the skies of Ukraine on February 24, Terre des hommes (Tdh) began to develop an emergency strategy to respond to the consequences of the conflict. Tdh's mandate is to protect children and young people. We anticipated that many of them would cross the borders to Romania, Moldova and Hungary, where we have been present for a long time. Our projects in these countries have made us known to the authorities as a legitimate partner. Our knowledge of the local contexts and the tools we have at our disposal have allowed us to quickly deploy our first teams in key locations in Bucharest or Chisinau. Tdh's presence on the ground is being reinforced.

What we didn't know was that this crisis would be so different from all the other experiences we had faced as humanitarians, emergency specialists or development workers.

This refugee crisis is unusual in its suddenness and scale. In the first six weeks of the war, Unicef estimated that two-thirds of Ukraine's 7.5 million children were displaced, 2.8 million within the country and 2 million abroad, where they arrived mostly with their mothers, or sometimes alone. These children have left everything behind, their homes, their schools, and often their family members. They are traumatised by the crash of the bombs and the anguish of flight. Besides water or food, they need psychological support and activities to regain a semblance of normalcy.

«These children have left everything behind, their homes, their schools, and often their family members.»

Another specific concern is the profile of the displaced: 90% of them are women and children, who are vulnerable to criminal networks in the current chaos. This danger requires particular vigilance. In Romania and Moldova, displaced persons continue to arrive. Some are already heading back to Ukraine. For others, being outside their country is beginning to become a long-term process, creating new needs in terms of schooling, housing and employment. The intertwining of these phases challenges NGOs such as Tdh to adapt their responses continuously, in a context that the war makes unpredictable.

As for the host countries, they are extending their hands with a humanity that arouses deep gratitude in Ukrainians. This is not the least of the particularities of this crisis. In these pages, you will discover how some children and their parents are coping with the ordeal with the help of Tdh, thanks to your support. The effort continues, but we already thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Rosu Tudor'.

Tudor Rosu

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Carmen Nechita'.

Carmen Nechita

After having fled the bombs, relearning normality

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania have seen an unprecedented influx of displaced people, mostly women and children. Terre des hommes (Tdh) has been active in these countries for a long time and has set up children's spaces and baby corners in key locations to help those who have had to leave everything behind overnight.



 Child-friendly space and mother-baby corner

For several weeks, Tatiana and her husband Artur clung to the hope that the war started by Russia on 24 February 2022 would not last and that everything would eventually return to normal. But on 13 March, the deluge of fire intensified on Mykolaiv, the southern Ukrainian port city where the couple used to live with their five children aged between one and ten, Milana, Versavia, Luiza, Yasmin and Rustam, the eldest. *«We had no basement, no place to hide. Just our big upholstered sofa, which we pushed into a corner with blankets and cushions to hide the children,»* Tatiana recalls. That day, the family decided to evacuate the town. They were taken in by the Red Cross and arrived, penniless, in Chisinau, Moldova, a little over 300km drive from Mykolaiv.

«We had no basement, no place to hide. Just our big upholstered sofa, which we pushed into a corner with blankets and cushions to hide the children.»

24-hour information

Tatiana, Artur and their children are staying at MoldExpo, the large exhibition centre in the Moldovan capital that the authorities have hastily converted into a reception centre after housing patients during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this high-ceilinged hall bathed in blue light, thin partitions



Space dedicated to children at Bucharest train station.



Children's area «Blue Dot» at the MoldExpo reception centre in Chisinau.

separate the families' «rooms». The vinyl curtain that serves as a door is not enough to keep them from the constant hubbub. Showers and toilets are shared. But at least the families have a place to sleep, meals, and people to talk to 24 hours a day about their rights, travel routes, and security.

It is in this centre with a capacity of 600 people, Terre des hommes runs a «Blue dot» space, opened through the

partnership with Unicef Moldova. The space has been designed to anchor children, from the youngest to the oldest, in a new routine through games and activities, whether physical, creative or educational. The aim is to enable them to return to normality as quickly as possible, to relieve the stress caused by the war. Between twenty and thirty children attend the centre every day. The most impatient have even taken to watching for the arrival of the team members every morning at 9am. *«I really like being here,»* says three-year-old Versavia, the second

Artur and Tatiana with their five children in their room at MoldExpo.



< Versavia, Tatiana's daughter, is three years old. *«I'm happy to have my mom, dad and my brother and sisters with me,»* she says.



Helping others to overcome anxiety

Yana Smelianska would not dream of complaining since she started working for Tdh as a child protection specialist at MoldExpo, one of the main Ukrainian refugee centres in Chisinau. On the contrary: *«The children stimulate me all the time. The fact that I can pass on some normality to them is a source of joy,»* she explains.

In fact, Yana is not new to Tdh. Based with her husband and daughter in Kharkiv, in the north-east of Ukraine, she was already working for the organisation in the Donbass, helping families who had fallen victim to landmines. Forced to flee the war, she arrived in March in Chisinau after a trying journey, with her daughter, her parents-in-law, her dog and her cat, but without any plans. She was in contact with Tdh that helped her find accommodation and offered her a job. *«I am immensely grateful to the people of Tdh for their humanity,»* says Yana today. *«At MoldExpo, I work with children and their families who have had and are having similar experiences to mine. In fact, working with them in Moldova suits me well. It takes my mind off what is happening at home,»* she says, adding, *«I don't have time to suffer.»*

youngest daughter of Tatiana and Artur. *«I play every day with new friends in the children's room. The animators play with us all the time.»*

The older brother, Rustam, an athletic figure in a tracksuit jacket, says: *«What is missing in the game room is a punching bag.»* It must be said that this ten-year-old boy used to practice competitive boxing in Ukraine. He even became champion in his category. Overnight, the war interrupted his training. In the rush to leave, the family didn't forget to pack his equipment, the mouth guard, bandages, gloves and uniform. After talking to Rustam at MoldExpo, Tdh representatives helped his parents find a sports school in Chisinau that invited the young champion to attend classes for free. To his great relief, Rustam returned to the sport.

At work from the start of the war

The country did not hesitate to open its borders wide to refugees by introducing simplified procedures. *«There are cultural reasons. Most Moldovans have family or friends in Ukraine; they have travelled there. We have a common regional history,»* explains Elena Madan, Tdh country director in Moldova. For this small country of less than three million inhabitants, the challenge is great. Traditionally, it is not a destination country, and between 24 February and 17 April, Moldovans welcomed 424,000 Ukrainians. Most of them only transited through Moldova, but almost 100,000 stayed.

The Tdh team was at work from the moment the first Ukrainian families arrived in Moldova. *«At Tdh, on the first day of the war we were all overwhelmed by our personal reactions. From the second day onwards, we started to think in a professional perspective,»* Elena continues. Unicef quickly approached Tdh. The two entities have long-



^ Activities in the Blue Dot space are implemented by Tdh's protection professionals and its local partner, Amici dei Bambini, together with volunteers.



^ Katya, 19, with her six-month-old daughter at the MoldExpo centre.

standing ties of partnership and trust. «It was mainly children and their mothers who were on the run,» stresses the Tdh manager. «Children are the most vulnerable group in the refugee community, as they are the most exposed to risks such as trafficking or exploitation. They need to be specifically protected.»

Just talk

In addition to the children's room, the «Blue dot» space includes a room

dedicated to psychological consultations coordinated by Tdh as well as a corner for mothers and their babies. «I come here almost every day with my six-month-old daughter to get porridge, games, dummies, wipes or nappies. Or just to talk. It's a must. It's also important to know that there is always someone who can look after my baby. It even gives me time to take a shower in peace,» says Katya, a 19-year-old mother who also came from Mykolaiv. Any plans for the

future? «Let's wait until the war is over. Everything else is secondary,» replies the young woman.

Just over 400km from Chisinau, on the other side of the border with Romania, in Bucharest, 17-year-old Shasha has already started making plans again. «We need to find a job, a way to earn money,» says the teenager. She fled Odessa two weeks after the war started with her 16-year-old boyfriend, Nikita. «Odessa had become an empty city with no one on the streets. It was forbidden to go out. That's why I wanted to leave. I am old enough to start living, not to stay at home without the possibility to study, work or walk,» notes Shasha. On their arrival, the two young people volunteered at the children's space opened by Tdh at Bucharest Central Station.



Volunteering to help experiences turn from bad to good

Andrei, who is volunteering in Moldova, is originally from Odessa. He could no longer bear to live in fear of a Russian attack. The 17-year-old crossed the Moldovan border alone, leaving behind his father who could be mobilised. Staying

with an aunt, Andrei immediately started volunteering at MoldExpo. «My fellow citizens are left without a home, without anything. Literally. After being bombed, they need shelter, money, psychological support. And they are afraid because they don't know what will happen tomorrow,» he says. Being helpful makes Andrei feel better. He adds: «I want to thank all the countries and organisations that work with our refugees. Like Tdh. I see what they do for our children. Their work helps them not to think about the horror that many of them have gone through, and to turn experiences from bad to good.»

«Let's wait until the war is over. Everything else is secondary.»

Balancing the needs of children and parents

For the first few days, the atmosphere at the station was one of chaos, as crowded trains from Ukraine began to

arrive. The wave has since subsided, but Romania is still registering several thousand arrivals a day, which is still considerable for a country that handled only 10,000 asylum applications last year.

The Tdh space is located in a designated area in the station's large waiting room. In the adult section, a few beds and chairs have been set up to allow those who wish to doze off or watch TV. The place is immersed in a morose calm, which contrasts with the shouts and laughter escaping from the playground, where the children draw, kick the ball around and participate in the games proposed by the animators. After hours of travelling by train or car, often interspersed with long waiting periods, the children have energy and stress to release. Their parents, on the other hand, need to relax and focus on what's next. The children's area has been designed precisely to reconcile these requirements.

«The space is now better structured than it was at the beginning,» observes Cristina Panov, team leader in Bucharest. The children enter at first intimidated. Then they take over the playground to the point of not wanting to leave.



^ Ukrainian children play in the space opened by Tdh at the Bucharest train station.

«I realised children have the need to talk,» Cristina continues. «A two-year-old grabbed me and sat me down. He was trying to explain something to me, holding me. He seemed happy to be listened to. Other children wanted to share their experiences. A nine-year-old girl told me that a bomb had exploded near her and that shrapnel had hit her face and eyes. Many want to tell stories, but they have no one to listen.»

«He seemed happy to be listened to. Other children wanted to share their experiences. A nine-year-old girl told me that a bomb had exploded near her and that shrapnel had hit her face and eyes.»

Tdh's social workers play with the children and listen to them, a primary need.



«What do you need?»

Ukrainians arriving at Bucharest Central Station spend an average of only eight hours there and most never return. Not far from the station, Tdh has opened another centre for families who plan to stay longer in the Romanian capital. «We try to get to know these families, to develop a relationship of trust with them,» explains Cristina. «We don't want to impose ourselves by telling them what they need. Instead, we ask them to tell us what they need. Faces often light up when they hear this, because it's a question no one asks. Everyone tends to give without asking.» Many Ukrainian women have been affected by the bombings and suffer from having left their husbands, sons or brothers behind. They courageously express a need for psychological support, which Tdh can provide.



Cristina Panov, team leader in Bucharest, talks with Ukrainian children in transit in the Tdh space at the Bucharest train station.

As part of the emergency strategy and in order to offer the Ukrainian families the most appropriate follow-up, Tdh is deploying mobile teams in Moldova, Romania and Hungary. In addition to the team leader, each team includes a psychologist, a social worker, a translator and a facilitator. By July, several children's spaces and corners

for mothers and babies will be established in each of the three countries. Until the dream of Artur, Tatiana and their five children becomes a reality: «That everyone can go home soon.»

Angélique Mounier-Kuhn



«If all the humanitarians leave, who will help our fellow citizens in Ukraine?»

For security reasons, Olga cannot reveal her family name or her face. While the activities of Terre des hommes (Tdh) were interrupted by the war, this employee chose to stay in Kyiv to plan the resumption of operations to help children and families. In a firm voice, sometimes interrupted by sighs, the young brown-haired woman talks about the disrupted daily life of the Ukrainian population.

«I joined Terre des hommes in September 2021, but I have been working in the humanitarian sector since 2014. For me, the war did not start on 24 February 2022. It started in the spring of 2014, when the conflict in eastern Ukraine began. I was then living in Donetsk, a city occupied by Russia. Since I chose to be an aid worker, I now prefer to remain available in Kyiv to help Tdh set up activities for vulnerable people, as long as my safety is not critically threatened. If all aid workers leave Ukraine, who will be left to support Ukrainians who cannot afford to leave or those who refuse to leave behind fragile people such as elderly relatives?

Before 24 February, Tdh had 23 employees in Ukraine. Activities were concentrated near the front line in the east. They were aimed at the most vulnerable children and families. In particular, we provided psychosocial activities to children and their families affected by the conflict and trained teachers to improve child protection. We also set up several FabLabs, fabrication laboratories, to enable young people to develop their skills and help them find work.

We had two offices, one in the Lugansk region, in Severodonetsk, and the other in the Donetsk region, in Mariupol. As soon as the war started, these two cities were severely attacked and we had to close down. Only our representative office in Kyiv remained open.

Kyiv is a very large city, where traffic jams were frequent. Since the beginning of the war, it has been deserted and the centre is controlled by numerous checkpoints. In April, the bombing had stopped and food distributions were organised and pharmacies reopened. But we were still under curfew.

«As a humanitarian, I have undergone a lot of security training. I know how to stay informed and protect myself psychologically. But I have seen most people fall into a terrible state of panic and anxiety.»



I am not very representative of what the people of Kyiv are going through, as I already had experience of life during the conflict. As a humanitarian, I have undergone a lot of security training. I know how to stay informed and protect myself psychologically. But I have seen most people, including my neighbours in the building, fall into a terrible state of panic and anxiety, especially the mothers, who are very worried about their children. People are lost. They are frustrated and cry a lot. They are also exhausted by the incessant news. Everywhere and all the time there is nothing but talk about the war.

During the first weeks, Tdh focused on the evacuation and sheltering of its Ukrainian employees. Most of them were resettled in the west of the country and took time to recover psychologically. All of them and their family members have been able to benefit from very professional psychological support, organised by Tdh from the headquarters. The Ukrainian team itself has several psychologists, but none of them were immediately able to help. They themselves needed support.

With the staff in the west, we are now resuming activities, focusing on children and families who are not receiving any assistance. There are several million displaced people in the region. We have carried out an initial assessment

of the needs that we feel are priorities for intervention. We have observed that many children suffer from bedwetting after having been subjected to the intense stress of the bombings and the displacement. The need for nappies, hygiene kits and baby food is also considerable. If people are surviving, it is thanks to humanitarian aid. This aid is saving lives.

Now we are setting up humanitarian aid activities for internally displaced children and their families by ensuring basic life needs items, providing psycho-social support and information to increase their resilience. Tdh also supports local frontline workers who work directly with children by developing their capacity.»

Interview conducted by Angélique Mounier-Kuhn

In eastern Ukraine, Tdh was already implementing psychosocial activities for children affected by the conflict that has lasted since 2014. We would also like to resume them as soon as possible.

▼



Emergency, instructions for the humanitarian response

On 24 February 2022, the whole world learns with shock that the Russian army has gone on the offensive in Ukraine. Terre des hommes (Tdh) anticipates the displacement of Ukrainian citizens in neighbouring countries and immediately takes the decision to act. But when time is short and the needs are considerable, how can an adequate response be developed?

Natural disasters, conflicts, massive population displacements... Directed by Laurence Gaubert-Henry, the Tdh emergency service is on the front line when the organisation decides to provide an emergency response to a major crisis, but it does not act alone. Implementing an appropriate response strategy requires a full range of skills from the field teams who know the context to the programme teams who have the expertise at headquarters, not forgetting the essential support services – human resources, logistics, fundraising and communication. Thanks to coordination between all these teams and skills, the emergency response is effective.

Identifying needs and risks

«The first two weeks are critical, as this is when decisions are made about the response strategy, planning and resources. These measures will become the anchor points for the development of the response in the longer term,» says Laurence. This first phase begins with an analysis of the risks linked to security and access for the teams and by a quick exploratory mission to assess the needs of the population. The objective? To identify the needs not covered by other actors in order to avoid duplication and to respond to immediate needs. Tdh can then define its strategy, draw up a list of activities to be carried out, the financial means to achieve this, and launch the necessary recruitment. The supply of materials and equipment is organised in parallel.

In the specific case of Ukraine, a multidisciplinary task force was set up on 24 February to divide the priority tasks into two categories: the safety and monitoring of our Ukrainian colleagues trapped in the war; and the setting up of the emergency intervention in the host countries of the Ukrainian refugees.

Coordinating with other organisations

In any humanitarian crisis, the issue of coordination – with the authorities of the countries concerned, with UN agencies and other NGOs – is crucial. *«There tends to be a certain amount of chaos in the first few weeks,»* explains Laurence. *«But then the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) plans coordination meetings of humanitarian actors in consultation with the country authorities. This makes it possible to identify who does what and encourages partnerships. For the Tdh teams, it is a question of finding the right balance between their participation in these meetings, which are sometimes too numerous, and work in the field, the priority being to alleviate the suffering of the people.»*

«Thanks to coordination between all teams and skills, the emergency response is effective.»

Long-term impact

The emergency response is not intended to be permanent. When security conditions are met, and activities are launched and immediate needs are covered, the «regular» teams take over from the emergency teams according to transitional arrangements such as the adaptation of staffing levels and adapted budgetary resources to enable families to return to normality, wherever they are.

Angélique Mounier-Kuhn





How you can help

By making a donation, you will contribute to our response for the families affected by the Ukrainian crisis.

Here's how you can support us:

By online bank transfer: **CH58 0076 7000 R047 0535 0**

At a post office in Switzerland

Via www.tdh.ch/donate

With
50 EUR

we can for example provide hygiene materials for a mother and baby for two weeks

With
80 EUR

we can for example equip a child-friendly space with a children's house

With
150 EUR

we can for example provide educational games for group activities for five children



Writing and realisation

Resp. editor: Joakim Löb
Coordination: Tatjana Aebli
Writing: Angélique Mounier-Kuhn
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Helping children worldwide.

Siège | Hauptsitz | Sede | Headquarters
Av. Montchoisi 15, CH-1006 Lausanne
T +41 58 611 06 66, e-mail: info@tdh.ch
www.tdh.ch, CCP: 10-11504-8