



## Situation of Children's Rights in Ukraine





## INTERVIEW WITH THE ASSOCIATION AMIGOS LEONESES UCRANIANOS DAMNIFICADOS (AALUD)

On February 24, four years have passed since the start of the full-scale war on Ukrainian territory. In this context, we consider it essential to continue informing and raising public awareness about the current situation in the country, focusing on human rights, especially children's rights, humanitarian access, basic services, education, and the ethical communication of the conflict.

Which children's rights do you see being constantly violated in the country?

Since the beginning of the conflict, children in Ukraine have consistently seen their fundamental rights, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, violated.

Among the most affected rights are:

The **right to life, safety, and protection**, due to ongoing attacks on civilian areas, including places where children live and move around. All children are aware of this danger and live daily with air-raid sirens, hiding in shelters at night, witnessing adult family members dying in the war, and seeing hundreds of people without arms or legs, or with severe injuries.

**The right to health, seriously compromised** by the destruction of healthcare infrastructure, the shortage of medical staff, and the difficulty in accessing medicines. Doctors are overwhelmed by the unstoppable flow of war casualties.



The right to a dignified life, as a significant number of children lack regular access to drinking water, heating, adequate food, and safe housing. Especially in winter, due to Russian bombings of electrical infrastructure, many cities are left without consistent heating, sometimes for days or even weeks.

The right to mental health and emotional well-being, due to prolonged exposure to violence, forced displacement, the loss of family members, and constant fear. The ongoing danger and daily tragedies across Ukraine instill in children fear for the future and a loss of sense of purpose in life.

What difficulties do you face as an NGO in carrying out your work today?

From our experience as a non-profit association made up mainly of Ukrainians living in Spain, we would like to highlight some of the main challenges we face in our solidarity work. One of the greatest challenges is the lack of stable funding. We do not receive regular grants, and our activities depend almost exclusively on our own resources and small fundraising initiatives. In many cases, the actions we carry out are financed through personal contributions from members of the association.

In addition, there is a lack of time, volunteers, and trained human resources. Most collaborators work on a voluntary basis, in their free time and after their regular working hours, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find people willing to work consistently and without pay.



In addition, a significant part of our volunteering time is devoted to the constant search for resources to respond to the urgent needs of the population in Ukraine, which limits our capacity to carry out other activities.

On the other hand, many of us who are part of the association joined the volunteer work following the outbreak of the war, without prior training in organizational management, humanitarian action, or fundraising. In many cases, we learn “on the go,” doing the best we can with the knowledge available, which entails additional effort and creates difficulties in organizing and planning our work.

The combination of limited financial resources, lack of time, scarcity of volunteers, and absence of specialized training limits the sustainability of our actions, which largely depend on the personal commitment of those involved in the association.

Despite these difficulties, we continue to work responsibly and with dedication, aware of the importance of solidarity support in the current context.

**What is the situation regarding the provision of basic services to ensure the protection of the population (health, water, etc.)?**

The situation regarding the provision of basic services in Ukraine continues to be extremely serious and uneven across regions. This information is confirmed both through the Ukrainian press and through direct, ongoing contact with family members and people who remain in the country.



The main cause of the lack of essential services is the constant bombing of critical infrastructure, which directly affects the supply of water, electricity, energy, and the healthcare network. Areas closest to the front, as well as large parts of central, eastern, and southern Ukraine, are severely damaged or partially destroyed.

In many of these regions, **the population lacks access to safe drinking water or running water, experiences prolonged power and heating outages, and has very limited access to healthcare services and medicines.** The situation is particularly critical during the winter months.

In occupied areas, the reality is even more alarming. In many cases, **the population is left without almost all basic services:** there is no regular supply of water, electricity, or heating; there is a severe shortage of food; and access to medical care is minimal or nonexistent, leaving people in a situation of extreme vulnerability.

This ongoing precariousness seriously compromises the protection of the civilian population and violates fundamental rights, **affecting children, the elderly, and low-income families in particular.**

### Right to Education and Schools as Safe Spaces

The war has had a devastating impact on the right to education: millions of children and adolescents have had their educational process **partially or completely interrupted.**



A large number of schools remain closed, damaged, or destroyed, especially in regions near combat zones.

In many cases, education takes place online or in a hybrid format, with constant interruptions due to power outages, lack of internet connectivity, or air raid alerts.

In the current war context, schools play a fundamental role not only in education but also as spaces for protection, emotional stability, and psychosocial support for children.

## Ethical Communication and Visibility of the Conflict

Although the conflict in Ukraine continues to generate serious humanitarian consequences, there is a growing perception of information fatigue among parts of the international community.

From our experience and observation of media coverage, we believe that in Spain the war in Ukraine currently receives limited and sporadic media attention, mainly focused on moments of particular severity or specific events. This reduction in media presence can lead some citizens to perceive that the conflict has diminished or is no longer an active emergency, even though the situation on the ground remains extremely complex.

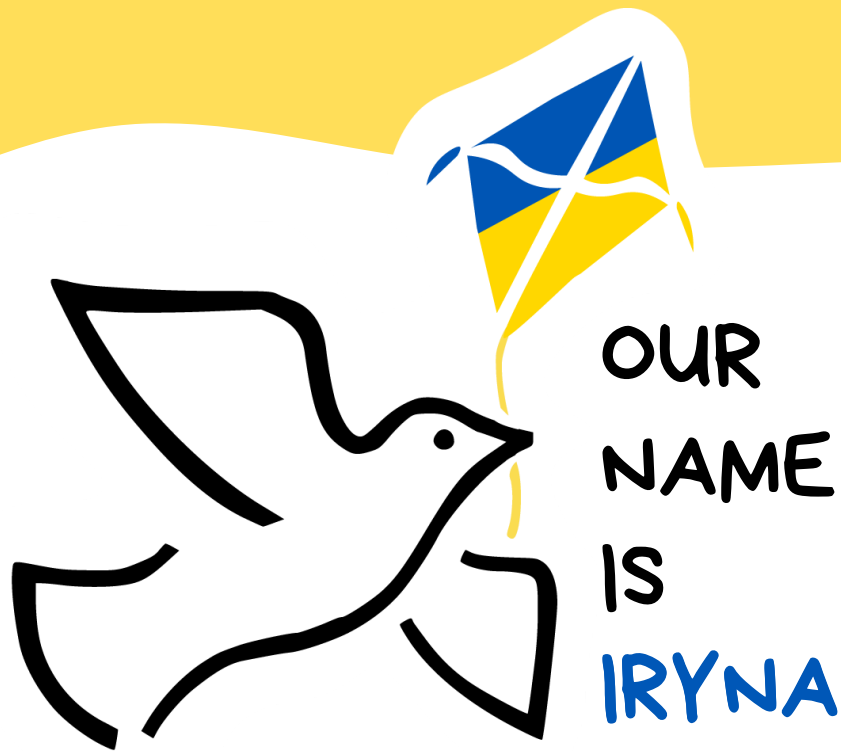
Compared to other European countries, where media coverage of the conflict is more consistent, we perceive that in Spain information about Ukraine appears less frequently and with less depth.



Likewise, we observe that in some media or opinion spaces, **approaches or narratives may appear that tend to downplay the severity of the aggression and its humanitarian consequences.** This diversity of interpretations, when not sufficiently contextualized or verified, can contribute to social confusion and make it difficult to fully understand the real situation faced by the Ukrainian population.

For this reason, we consider it essential to **promote ethical, rigorous, and responsible communication that places affected people, especially children, at the center, while avoiding the dissemination of biased information, misinformation,** or the re-victimization of those who share their testimonies.

Maintaining accurate and continuous information is key to sustaining social awareness and solidarity with those affected by the conflict.



## Stories of Life





## Ukrainian Woman Refugee

“I am from the Ivano-Frankivsk region. I have four wonderful children.

Before the war we lived in Chernivtsi. When the war began, I left with my children because I was afraid for them.

Personally, it was very hard for me to leave Ukraine, but I had no other choice. The adaptation in Spain was very difficult for me. However, over time I gradually adapted. I took Spanish courses, then cleaning courses, and little by little everything started to fall into place.

For the children, the adaptation was easy; they learned the language and everything is going well at school. Last year, Karolina went on a five-day school trip to Portugal and she really enjoyed it. This year, Andriy is going on a school trip to Austria. The school helped Andriy with a speech therapist and allocated funds for it; he is now receiving support.

In general, we like Spain. What we do not like is the hospital, because here you have to wait a long time to get an appointment.”



## Ukrainian Woman Refugee

“I am from the city of Bakhmut, a city that was one of the first to suffer the attack of Russian troops. It is currently almost completely destroyed. The city is under occupation and only Russian military personnel remain there.

Together with my family — my mother and my son — I was forced to leave our home one month after the beginning of the war. At the beginning of April 2022, we arrived in Spain, where at first we lived in a refugee center. A month and a half later, I began working in Spain, and I have not stopped for a single day. I attend Spanish courses and professional training courses, I discover new places and the beauty of Spain’s nature, I travel to visit friends in other European countries. I also help acquaintances who remain in Ukraine.

I used to be a director: a person who led, made decisions, and took responsibility for others. Now I work as a cleaner and, although it is honest work and I am not ashamed of it at all, my heart aches: I left behind my career, my position, and my comfort to protect my family. Every day I remind myself that this is the price of my son’s and my mother’s safety.

My son obtained his lower secondary education certificate (4th year of ESO) in Spain, his upper secondary diploma was officially recognized, and he is currently studying at the University of León in the Faculty of Economics. My son, who was only 16 years old, lost his home, his friends, and his hometown.



He had to leave everything he knew and travel a long way to Spain, adapting to a foreign country with new rules, language, and traditions. Every time I look into his eyes, I see sadness for Ukraine, longing for his friends, and for the life he lost.

My mother, despite her advanced age, found the strength to move forward: she walks in the park, goes to the supermarket on her own, and tries to maintain a routine. My mother, a woman of almost 80 years old, lost everything: her home, her hometown, and her usual life. She will never be able to return to the place where her adult life unfolded, where family memories, parks, and familiar streets were. In her eyes I see sadness, but also the courage to keep living, because we are together.

We meet new people, make friends, and set goals for ourselves. Life goes on. We are grateful to Spain for the new home and for the opportunity to work and study. The longing for Ukraine is always present, reminding us of everything we have lost.”



## STORIES OF UKRAINIANS IN UKRAINE

### Ukrainian Girl

“Between Ashes and Cold.

Before, my life smelled of salt and the sweet apricots of Kherson. I remember the sun shining over the Dnipro and the quiet afternoons when my only concern was a math exam. But in 2022, the sound of the wind was replaced by explosions. We had to leave everything: my room, my toys, the life I knew. We became shadows fleeing toward hope, and that hope was called Kyiv.

In Kyiv we tried to rebuild the pieces of our existence. I enrolled in Gymnasium No. 126. It was not just a school; it was my refuge. There, among the lit corridors and the voices of my new friends, the fear of war seemed to retreat a little. The teachers taught us that knowledge is a light that no one can extinguish.

The Tuesday the Sky Collapsed.

Everything changed on Tuesday, February 3, 2026. It was a gray day, as if the clouds already knew what was coming. Suddenly, the deafening whistle that all Ukrainians have learned to recognize tore through the air. A Russian missile struck our gymnasium directly.

They did not only destroy bricks and desks. They destroyed the place where we felt safe. The explosion was so powerful that it not only reduced our school to rubble, but also severely damaged the



neighboring residential buildings. My neighbors, ordinary people, workers who only wanted to rest, saw their windows shatter and their walls crack. Shrapnel does not distinguish between a military target and a child's bedroom.

### A Present Without Light or Heat

Today, the gymnasium stands in silence, covered in snow and ash. There are no classes. There is no laughter in the playground. We are trapped in our apartments, which have become icy concrete boxes. Russia has taken away our heat and our light.

The cold: It seeps into the bones. We sleep wearing layers of clothing, under three blankets, but the cold is still there, reminding us of our vulnerability.

The darkness: When night falls, the silence is absolute. It is broken only by the sound of a distant generator or the crying of a small child.

The uncertainty: My books lie under the rubble of Gymnasium No. 126. My future seems suspended in this endless winter.

### A Plea to the World

Sometimes I stand looking out the window toward where my school used to be. My friends and I no longer talk about video games or what we want to be when we grow up.

We talk about surviving. We look at the sky not searching for stars, but fearing that another death of steel will fall.



We want only one thing: for them to stop tormenting us. We want Russia to stop firing missiles at our schools and our homes. We are not soldiers; we are children who only want to study, to have light to read and warmth to sleep without trembling.

How much longer will this winter in our souls last? We continue waiting, our fingers numb from the cold, hoping the world will not forget us and that tomorrow will finally bring an end to this pain.”



## Ukrainian Girl

“I would describe the current life of children in Ukraine in a single sentence:

Adult children, surrounded by surrealism.

To better explain what I mean, I will describe an everyday dialogue with a friend. She shares her joy at having found a good spring jacket for her eldest son on sale, and in the very next moment our conversation is interrupted by the sound of the siren informing us of an alert and the need to move the children to a safer place (yes, I did not choose the word safer by mistake instead of safe, because a completely safe place, in the full sense of the word, does not exist in Ukraine). The end of the conversation is logical: we ask ourselves whether it is really worth rejoicing over a purchase when the possibility of using it can be taken away at any moment.

I have shared this fragment so that you may understand the constant emotional and psychological ups and downs in which we live and raise our children in Ukraine.

The surrealism of the reality that surrounds us in Ukraine consists in the fact that, in the same restaurant hall, you can simultaneously see a soldier with an amputation enjoying a pizza and, at the table opposite, children waiting for the birthday cake of the person being celebrated to be served; meanwhile, in another central part of the city, a funeral procession slows down so that the mayor can pay tribute to the fallen Heroes.



You may wonder why I do not leave, taking my daughter to a safe country. Yes, I did: I took her out of the country in the first weeks of the war and we lived for more than a year in Poland. However, the development of an oncological disease and the need for immediate treatment forced us to return to Ukraine, where the healthcare system responds more quickly to the challenges of such a serious illness. It was a difficult and hardly understandable decision for those around us, but undoubtedly the right one in light of the outcome. At this moment, we have been in remission for a year after exhausting chemotherapy.

I do not consider returning to a safe country because of my daughter's desire to stay at home, in an environment that is understandable and familiar to her. In her own words, during that year in Poland she did not feel safe because she was afraid of getting lost in a foreign country with limited knowledge of the language. In Ukraine she has true friends; she had them there as well, but it was a forced friendship, not one born from the soul.

I suppose that the stress resulting from the relocation may have influenced the development of the illness, which had been detected earlier but did not require treatment. I believe that the impact of war and displacement of Ukrainian children on the development of oncological diseases requires independent scientific study, since the number of patients in the department where we received treatment increased exponentially during the years of the war.

My daughter will soon turn 12 and she confessed to me that she does not feel any excitement about her upcoming birthday; she does not



want to grow up. And do you know why? Because the war and the harsh circumstances of life have made her an adult before her time.

Our life in Ukraine is not on pause; we have learned to enjoy every moment:

- to rejoice at seeing the snow sparkle under the light of a night streetlamp,
- to value the possibility of going to school, even if interrupted by the need to go down into a stifling and narrow bomb shelter,
- to fully enjoy a walk in the park, if we are lucky enough that the sirens do not sound and we do not need to move to a safer place.

Thank you to everyone who helps Ukraine and, in this way, gives us the opportunity to continue living in our own home.”



## Ukrainian Woman Refugee

“I was born in the Donetsk Oblast, originally from Myrnohrad. I arrived in Spain with my son at the beginning of the war in 2022. Since then, many things have happened. We have learned the language, I started working, and my son goes to school. Last year, my parents arrived because a missile hit our house and it was completely destroyed by the fire.

My parents did not want to leave their homeland and, despite the fighting, they hoped that everything would end well. We lived in the city of Myrnohrad, near Pokrovsk and about 60 km from Donetsk. I have grown very fond of Spain and I do not want to return, but now I also have nowhere to go back to.

When we arrived, my son had just finished chemotherapy treatment, as he had leukemia. We were immediately referred to a hematologist, and since then he has been under constant medical supervision. Now everything is fine; seven years have passed, and I hope the illness will not return. My son plays sports, goes to school, and has big plans for the future.”

