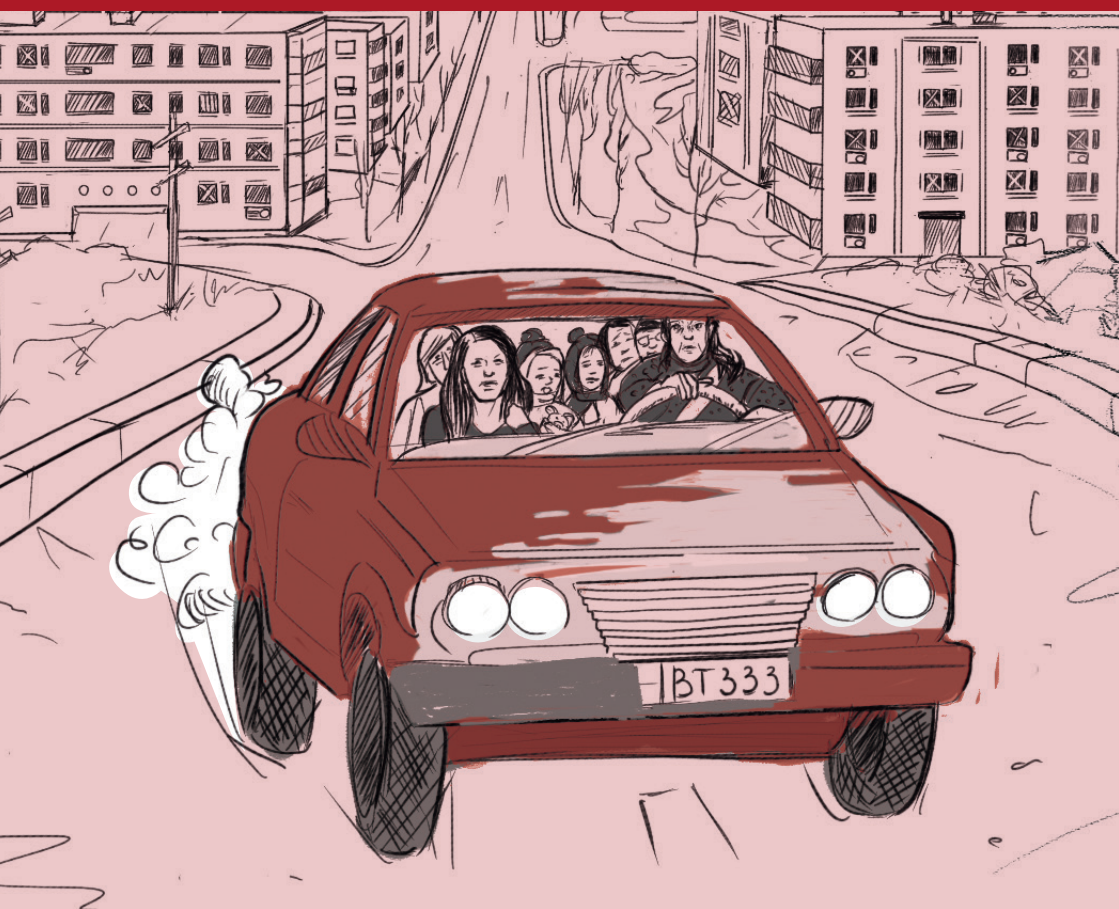


# VOICES OF UKRAINIAN MOTHERS WHO LEFT HOME DUE TO THE WAR



*This booklet has been produced by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) with funding from the Ole Kirk's Fond. However, the views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Ole Kirk's Fond or DRC.*

*Please note: an asterisk (\*) next to names indicates that they have been changed to protect their identity.*

**Illustrations:** *Kateryna Tsygankova*

# INTRODUCTION

In western Ukraine, psychosocial support specialists from the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) conducted a series of trainings for more than one hundred single mothers. During the sessions, the participants improved their emotional awareness and stress management skills, as well as learned positive parenting practices and conflict resolution techniques. Psychologists also informed participants about measures to prevent sexual exploitation and gender-based violence.

The final exercise with each group was storytelling. The participants were asked to describe the journey they were forced to embark on by the war; or share any other story that was important to them. They willingly agreed because they wanted these stories to be heard. These «voices of mothers», written directly by them, as well as several more extensive interviews and stories, are collected in the booklet you are holding in your hands.

After the final session of psychosocial support for the mothers, other DRC programmes were presented to the women, including, for example:

- Registration for financial support or hygiene and clothing kits for their young children ;
- Individual Protection Assistance;
- Individual legal consultations, for example, on topics related to access to social benefits, employment, etc.

This integrated approach allowed DRC to provide them with more comprehensive assistance. Also, after the psychological support sessions, closed chats on social media were created to ensure continuous communication between the mothers. This helped the participants to continue communication and become a «circle of support» for each other.

The organisation and implementation of the psychological support sessions were made possible by funding from the Ole Kirk's Fond.

# THE JOURNEY OF KATERYNA FLEEING THE FRONTLINE KHERSON CITY

**War always leaves scars, whether they are physical or mental. For those who experienced the heavy battles in the city where they grew up and lived all their lives, it is hard to feel safe again, even far away from the frontline in Ukraine.**

War always leaves scars, whether they are physical or mental. For those who experienced the heavy battles in the city where they grew up and lived all their lives, it is hard to feel safe again, even far away from the frontline in Ukraine.

Kateryna\*, 35, now lives in Novyi Rozdil town located in western Ukraine, where she fled from Kherson city in Ukraine's south. She has just completed a psychological support training consisting of 6 sessions. The last session focused on storytelling, where participants were encouraged to tell their life experiences—and Kateryna had much to tell.

For instance, her hometown was under bombardment, and she saw the explosions from the windows of her apartment, which faced the local Chornobaivka airport, heavily bombed during the first months of the Russian Federation military offensive. She can tell you about the helicopters that came and shot the city. Or how she took her boys, aged 5 and 9 years old, to a shelter, which was cluttered, dirty, and dusty. They hid there because Kateryna did not know what to do when her city underwent shelling; she was panic-stricken. “I had no clue from which side the rockets came and where we could be safe. Everyone who had a car fled, but we did not have one and could not leave the city,” she says.

After two weeks in the shelter, her younger son Ivan\* started biting his cheeks. Kateryna thought it was stomatitis, but in a hospital near the shelter, a doctor told her it was Ivan's way of reacting to the stress.

“I decided to stay with the kids in a hospital. I thought it would be better to be near doctors—they could provide first aid in case of injury. But in the hospital, the children saw many seriously wounded people being brought in and carried along the corridors,” adds Kateryna with a trembling voice.

She says that after a week, she started to adapt to the situation, understanding where they could walk and when. At this point, Kherson was beyond the control of the Ukrainian government, but Kateryna thought they could hide and wait out the fighting. Nevertheless, everything changed when the Russian soldiers knocked on her door.

“They searched for people named on some of their lists and could take the whole family when they found the persons they needed. It was then that I realised I was in danger, not just from the rockets. I started searching for a way to get out of the city,” says Kateryna. However, she did not have the cash to pay for evacuation—the cash in

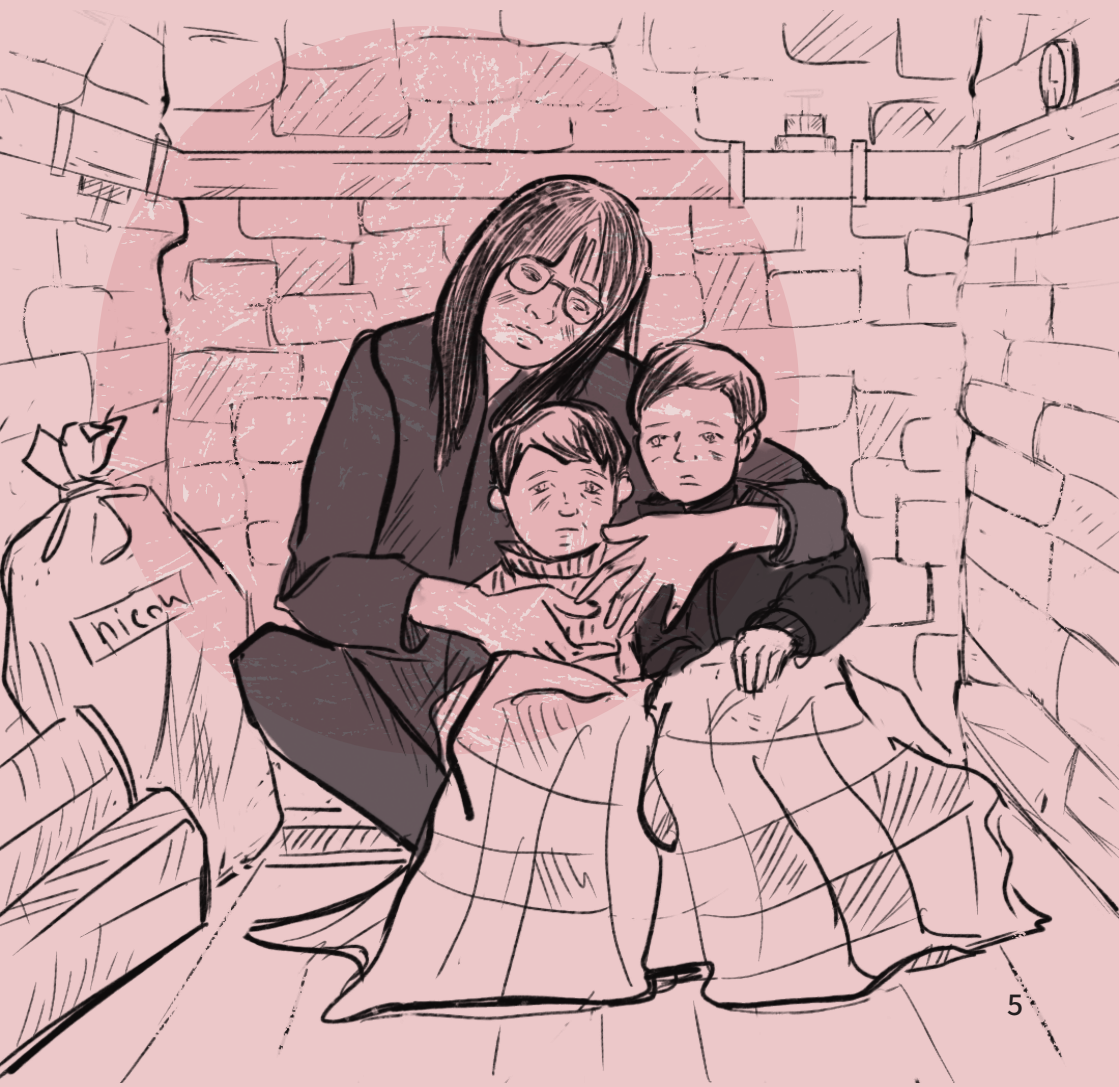


ATMs had run out. She was lucky that her friend sold her car right before the military offensive outbreak and could lend her the sum needed.

“My cousin was leaving by car and saw the cars next to her being shot at. So, it was scary when we were travelling. But we travelled without incidents, if not counting the checkpoints. We left on the 6th of April. First, we went to Mykolaiv and passed more than 40 checkpoints. Then we took a taxi to Odesa because Mykolaiv was heavily shelled. From there, we travelled by train to Lviv (western Ukraine) and met our friend there. Although the journey took a few days, it seemed like a month,” says Kateryna, and her hands start shaking.

She was afraid to stay in the big city of Lviv because it could be the target for rockets as well, so she decided to go to Novyi Rozdil town.

“It was impulsive and not thought out; we were just running away. Even when we arrived in Novyi Rozdil, for another 2-3 months, I felt like I had to run away,” she adds.



## Time to let go of stress

In this town, DRC provided Kateryna and 11 other single mothers who became internally displaced persons (IDPs) with psychological support sessions. The sessions aimed at increasing resources, stress resistance, conflict resolution, and understanding emotional states. Six sessions are the minimum to provide people with psychological support and increase their coping mechanisms and emotional awareness. In total, thanks to funding from the Ole Kirk's Fond, DRC reaches more than a hundred single mothers in western Ukraine with this support.

“Our goal is to stabilise people a little bit so that they feel comfortable. When IDPs arrive here, often they do not communicate with each other as a group. Thanks to these sessions, they get to know each other and become a circle of support for each other. They begin to share tips, for example, where is a good kindergarten, where is a good teacher, and where to find some additional classes for children,” explains Stepan Pasichnyk, a Psychosocial Support Officer at DRC.

Kateryna underlines the need for such support and says it helps her to adapt. Her children also undergo adaptation—thanks to psychological support, Ivan stopped biting his cheeks.

“Such psychological assistance programmes are very much needed. During such training, I relax and unwind. Each session included some time for relaxation when we let go of stress. During the activities, for instance, when we were weaving a tree or drawing something, positive associations came up. You gradually realise that there are other things besides war and fear. I could switch my mind as children do. Anxiety goes away at such moments and an inner resource appears,” Kateryna described the positive effect of the sessions.

She also liked that the training was in a group of other IDP mothers. They laughed together, and it helped to relieve the tension.

“We discovered more about each other, and I realised that I was not alone and that there were people like me around, and we had the same problems. We shared our vision of the way out of the situation,” she says.

## The unbeatable desire to be back home

In Novyi Rozdil, it is relatively calm now. The last time it was hit by a rocket was in October 2022, when it damaged the church on the town's outskirts. However, Kateryna feels anxious because there are no guarantees that a rocket will not hit the town again today or tomorrow—the media reports everyday shelling of Ukrainian territory.

“I realise that I'm not safe. Even if I think about opportunities to work in Lviv... I'm afraid that the children are alone here. I don't want to leave them for a day— it's so scary to think that something can happen to me or them when we're apart,” says Kateryna.

In Kherson, she earned her living by doing sociological surveys. Having two children, she could not spend a lot of time on a job, so she moonlighted for several working hours a day. It is worth mentioning that Kateryna has a degree in metrology engineering and worked at Kherson Water Utility before maternity leave.

“I'm not working now, because I need to look after my children, take them from school or kindergarten. So, I live on IDP benefits. But I plan to find a job as a tailor—I passed a special course and plan to earn money by repairing clothes. I must adapt somehow,” she says.



The latest Protection Monitoring Report conducted by DRC in July-September 2023 shows the limited availability of livelihood opportunities as a prevalent concern raised by household respondents. A considerable percentage of individuals surveyed find themselves out of work and actively searching for employment, a figure that remains notably high at 18%, climbing to 28% in Lviv Oblast and 26% for IDP respondents. In Lviv Oblast, 5,000 IDPs have registered with the regional employment centre according to OCHA.

The primary contributing factors to unemployment were identified as the scarcity of job opportunities (60%), followed by responsibilities related to housework and caring for children (21%), and physical impairments or limitations (12%). Among single female caregivers, a significant proportion of 39% reported housework and childcare responsibilities as the key factor influencing their employment status, directly linked with the lack of kindergartens.

Even though Kateryna tries to adapt to the new town, she dreams about coming back home. She has a flat there and a summer house near Kherson city. Nevertheless, while the city is shelled every week with registered deaths among civilians, she stays in western Ukraine.

“I want to go home, even if there is nothing left there. It’s my land, I grew up there, and my children always talk about Kherson. We had a summer house with many fruit trees: apple trees, pears, cherries, nuts. We had vineyards there, and I grew strawberries. In the autumn of 2021, I just planted strawberry seedlings. I had a well-established life,” she says.

However, what she misses the most is not the flat, house, or garden, but the relatives, friends, and neighbours. She misses the warmth they shared when they all gathered at the entrance of the house and talked all evening. They were all «her people,» and she said she hoped one day she would meet them all again in peaceful Kherson.

# MARTA'S STORY: LEAVING ZAPORIZHZHIA FOR LVIV

**Marta\*, 41, hails from Zaporizhzhia in the South of Ukraine but currently resides in Lviv, western Ukraine**

“With me here is Olga\*, my elder daughter. She is 16 and has started studying sewing in Lviv. My two other children, aged 13 and 11, are abroad with my ex-husband. While I was in Lviv, he divorced me without my knowledge, deprived me of parental rights, and took them to Germany [men with three children can leave Ukraine]. Now, together with DRC lawyers, I am trying to figure out what can be done in this situation.

We left Zaporizhzhia when active combat operations began. We witnessed how the airport and the nearby factory were shelled, just two kilometres away from us. We saw it through the window, and the blast wave shook us. At that time, we were visiting a town near the airport, and windows and doors flew off due to the explosion.

We decided to evacuate—packed our stuff and took an evacuation train from Zaporizhzhia to Lviv. We travelled with 14 people in a compartment, and it was a very difficult journey.

In Zaporizhzhia, I have an apartment, but it also suffered from shelling: windows were blown out, and doors were damaged. The area where our apartment is located is frequently shelled because it is situated at the exit of the Moscow-Simferopol highway. It is near Orikhiv, Melitopol. When I say ‘frequent shelling,’ it’s every other day.

## **Zaporizhzhia became empty – all neighbours left**

At home, I worked in a store, selling clothes. As soon as we arrived in Lviv, I got a job as a cook. I worked there for six months, but then we had to leave the shelter where we lived, and through the Centre for the Provision of Administrative Services, we were directed to a modular shelter.

We live in a 9-square-meter room with other people. It’s mentally and psychologically challenging here: many different people with whom you have to communicate very closely. In March [2023], it will be almost a year since we have been living here. However, we cannot afford to rent a separate place, so we have to live in these conditions.

It was good to go through the DRC training—we were just settling in, and it was difficult for us. I saw an announcement with topics like ‘How to deal with panic attacks,’ ‘How to find a common language with children,’ and I found it interesting, so I decided to join.

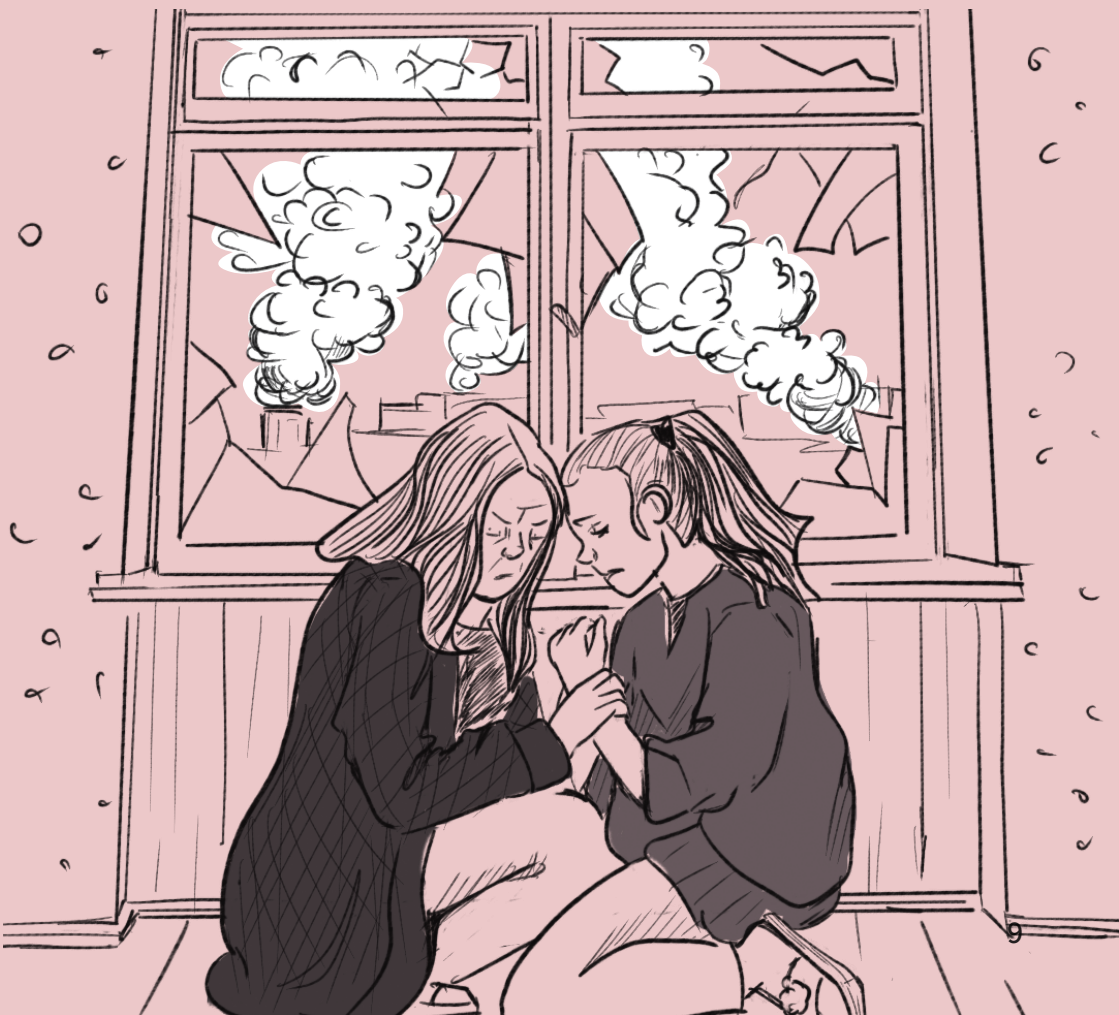
Currently, displaced people need this kind of help a lot. People have experienced stress at home, then moved, and now they are in other cities. They need help with adaptation, and such sessions are helpful. Not everyone can cope with such situations themselves. There are many new people here, and it is necessary to find an approach to them, to find common ground.



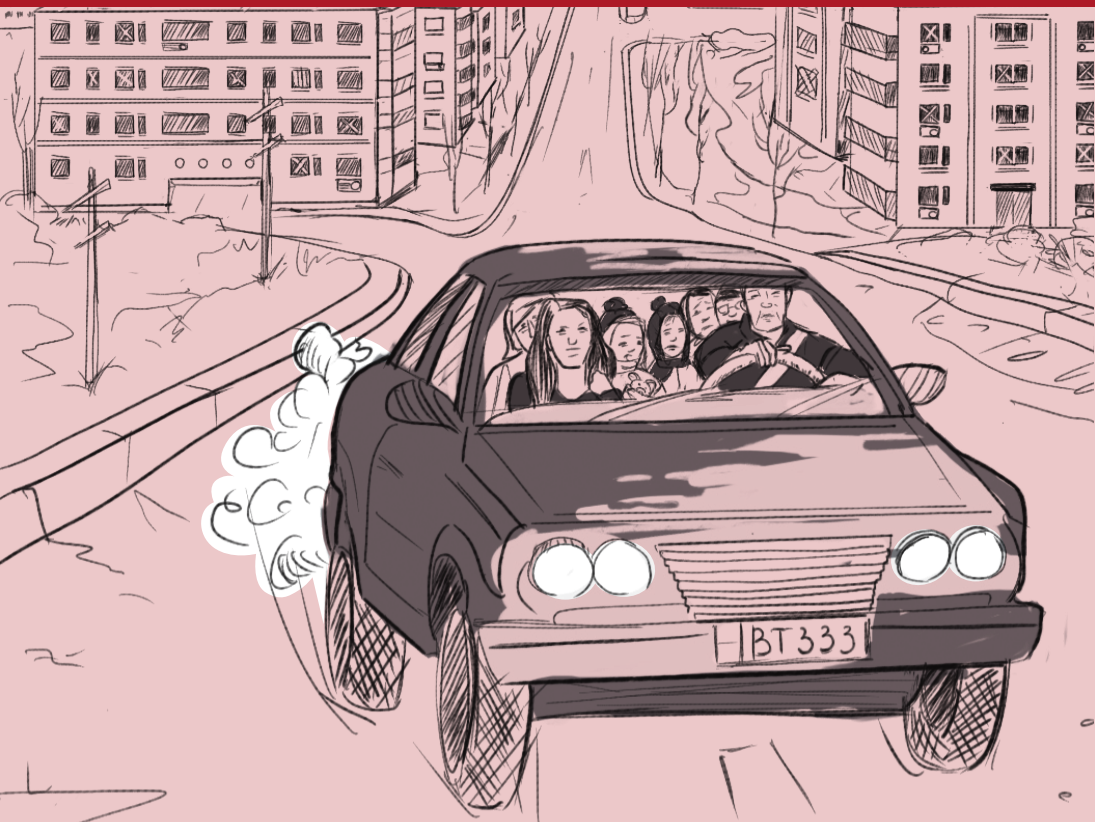
Work also helps cope with stress. I got a job as a sushi chef, making sushi. It's tough, but it's better than sitting at home. It helps distract from all the negativities. My shifts are from 2 pm to midnight. But I am still an intern and haven't received a salary yet, so I live only on state payments.

We transported some stuff from Zaporizhzhia, but much of it remained there. There's just nowhere to transport everything, no opportunity to create comfortable conditions here. I would like to rent my place, but the rental prices in Lviv are very high [around 12-15,000 UAH (€280-360) per month]. If I rented an apartment, my entire salary would go to rent. Besides, apartments are mostly rented through agencies, and they ask for the same amount for their services. So, for now, we stay in the modular shelter, where we don't have to pay for anything. We also have a free meal once a day. I hope that this way I can save some money because I have no savings.

For now, I plan to stay in Lviv. There is a place to live, and it's much safer. And there is work here. There are few jobs in Zaporizhzhia—it's an empty city. Most of my neighbours left; only some, mostly pensioners, stay there and watch over the apartments of others."



# JULIA'S STORY: LEAVING KHERSON FOR BORYSLAV



**Julia\*, 28, originally from Kherson in the South of Ukraine,  
now resides in Boryslav, Lviv Oblast.**

“Before the war, I worked as a sales manager for interior doors in Kherson. On February 24, a friend called me at five in the morning: ‘Take what you need, the war has started.’ I thought nothing extraordinary could happen overnight and wanted to go back to sleep. Then she called again. ‘The war has started,’ she repeated.

My husband and I didn’t initially plan on leaving, but then we saw what happened in Chornobaivka, where we were renting a house nearby. When missiles hit the airport, you could see the smoke, and our house windows shook. It felt far away, but the sound was terrifyingly close. We monitored the information and understood that

Russian troops were advancing towards Kherson.

We decided we had to leave. They were already capturing Kakhovka, and the sound of bombs was horrifying. We drove for 4 days, sleeping both on the road and in the field. It was incredibly hard. I was pregnant, and my husband's daughter from his first marriage was with us too.

When leaving, we just took underwear, some documents—not all—and left. We hoped to return for the rest of our belongings once Kherson was liberated, but then the Kakhovka dam was blown up, flooding our house. The houses we rented, partially made of clay, were heavily damaged. After such flooding, there was nothing left to salvage. We kept postponing moving our stuff, thinking we would return home. But then my husband left, and I stayed in Boryslav.

I cannot return there because I feel responsible for my child. I think I will not go back to Kherson because there won't be a full life there. My property is on the left bank, which is now occupied. So, you can say I have nothing.

### **“After the sessions, I was a bit happier”**

In Boryslav, they provided us with shelter—a large room with a kitchen above a store. We only pay for utilities. There's a stove, both for firewood and gas. For now, I live only on state payments and humanitarian aid. I cannot work because I take care of my child. I plan to find a job in the spring—maybe then I'll put the child in daycare.

Since I have no close relatives, acquaintances, or friends here, joining the psychological help sessions was interesting. The participants were in the same plight as me, so we understood each other well. The sessions helped me not to give up and inspired me to move forward. We had many interesting exercises, like art therapy—it's a wonderful technique. I never thought I could draw. Thanks to the sessions, I feel that someone needs me in this world.

The exercises helped me learn more about myself. For example, there was an exercise called 'Find your safe place.' After the sessions, I felt happier. I understand that my situation could be much worse.

It helps me not to fall apart, focusing more on the subconscious, and to emotionally stabilize myself. Taking care of the child on my own is difficult both morally and physically. When crisis moments happen, I now breathe and stabilize my psychological state, and it helps me cope with difficulties. Psychological help for displaced people is much needed now. It's better to meet, talk, discuss problems, and not just cry somewhere.

I also write in a diary that helps me deal with stress. Despite the war, life must go on. I must build up a life because there is a little child. I need to give him something and not be constantly in negativity and tears. He takes an example from me.

I thought for a long time that I would return to Kherson, but now I no longer believe it. We were constantly told that the war would end soon, but I see that there is no end to it. And the thought that I 'can return' doesn't allow me to live fully. For example, I didn't buy good dishes for a long time because 'at home in Kherson, I have them.' It's not life, it's existence to be in such a 'suspended state.' And when I finally realised that I wouldn't go back there, I started to live.”

# ANNA'S STORY: FROM MYKOLAIV TO BORYSLAV

**Anna\*, 26, from Mykolaiv in the South of Ukraine, currently lives in Boryslav, Lviv Oblast.**

"I studied law in Lviv [in western Ukraine] and worked part-time as a waitress. When I got married, I returned to Mykolaiv to change documents in November 2021 and stayed there until March 2022 when it became unbearable to stay.

In the first days of the war, they destroyed the railway there. When we gathered for an evacuation bus, an air raid started, and the assembly point was moved. My father had a minor stroke during this time, and he was falling. Volunteers took us in their car, and there were so many people in the car that my brother held my father on his knees all the way. We reached Odesa, and from there, by train through Moldova, to Lviv.

In Mykolaiv, we lived in a dormitory—a single room [in Ukraine, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, dorm rooms were allowed to be privatised]. My father had a one-room apartment, and, of course, he hardly took anything from there [Anna's parents are divorced].

I did not return to Mykolaiv—I don't want to go there with a child. My mom went in April, and it was also very challenging. Firstly, due to the war, there is no drinking water in the buildings, and you have to carry it yourself, and she has joint problems. My brother also constantly worries; he is on medication and has a disability. They stayed there for a month and wanted to take things, but there was constant shelling.

## **Art therapy allowed me to switch and find peace**

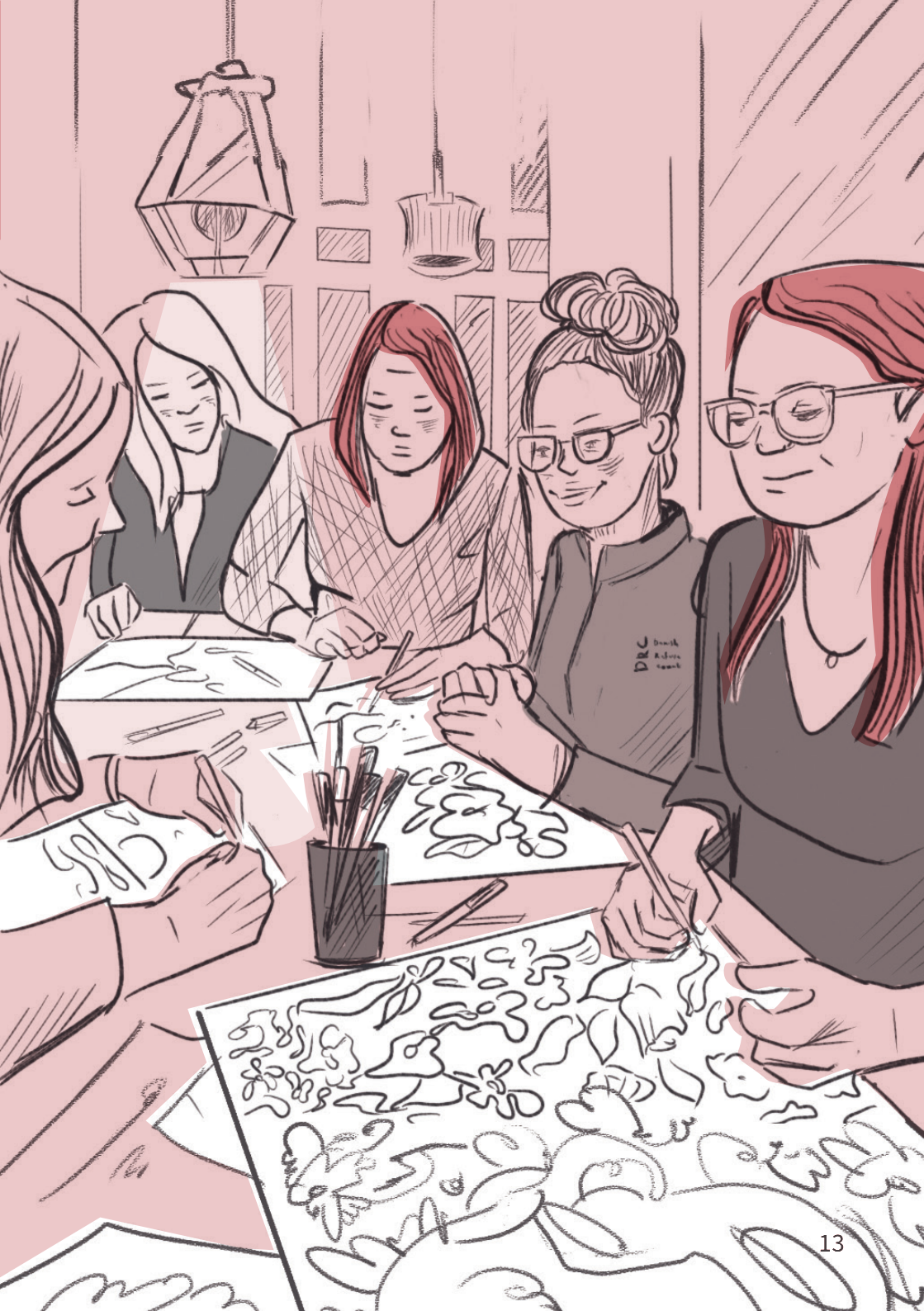
In Boryslav, my husband's brother sheltered me in his one-room apartment. My husband and I live separately. My mom is a seamstress, so she quickly found a job and now rents an apartment with my brother. My father found a place to live because he had savings.

At some point, I probably felt that I was psychologically 'burning out,' so I decided to go for psychological help sessions. I liked it when we were drawing. Such activity allowed me to switch and find peace. Today, psychological help training is needed, however, many displaced people find it difficult to admit that they need such aid.

For now, I plan to stay in Boryslav. During the war, I managed to give birth to my second child and get a job. I'm comfortable here for the time being: I enrolled my older child, who is 2.5 years old, in kindergarten, and I work as a lawyer, providing legal support at the Free Legal Aid Centre. I often help IDPs myself, for example, with compensation for damaged property.

I won't go abroad because I can't imagine how I can live there with two children—here, at least, I have family, and there I have no one. If the war ends, I would like to return to Mykolaiv. But if the situation worsens, I don't even know what I will do."





# **YANA'S STORY: FROM KOSTIANTYNIVKA TO DROHOBYCH**

**Yana\*, 39, from Kostiantynivka, eastern Ukraine, now resides  
in Drohobych, Lviv Oblast.**

"Kostiantynivka is 10 kilometres from the frontline. The first cassette missiles landed close to my home. I am raising four children on my own, and it was challenging for them to go through all of this. During air raids, we moved to the corridor between load-bearing walls. I laid blankets there, and we were hiding.

Then, my friend convinced me to evacuate: 'They are bombing us, and I won't go anywhere without you; let's go together.' I started packing belongings in a hurry, but you can't take much with you.

We left Kramatorsk by an evacuation train. We waited for it for a long time. Dmytro\*, the eldest son, even fainted at the station—there were so many people, like sardines in a can. Most were elderly people and mothers with children.

We managed to get on the train, and later I saw on the news that the train behind us was shot. The conductor was killed, but there were no passengers—they hadn't had time to sit yet. So, we were lucky that we had departed earlier. There were 11 people in the compartment: four adults and seven children. For the night, we just put mattresses in the aisles and slept like that—just to get away from the frontline.

We travelled to Lviv, then moved to Boryslav town. In August 2022, we found an apartment through OLX [an online platform for advertisements]. We were fortunate to find it directly from the owner, as real estate agents here charge a huge commission. That is how we moved to Drohobych.

## **We could take only clothes, TVs, and a dresser**

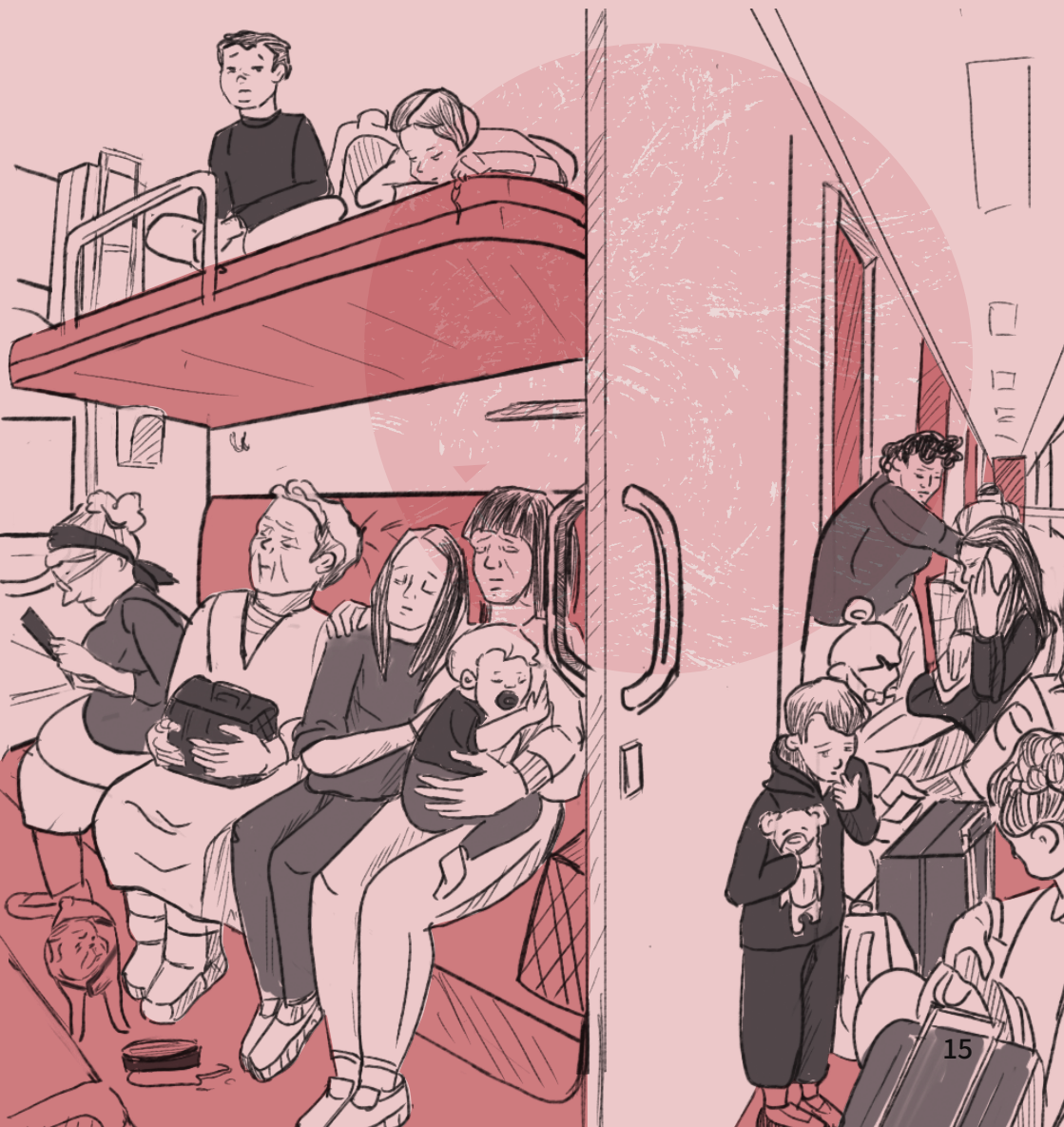
We've adapted a bit. But rockets reach even here. At the beginning [of 2024], when they shelled the whole of Ukraine, a rocket hit Drohobych. I even woke up from the explosion—it gave me goosebumps. God forbid going back to where this happens every day.

In Drohobych, we have a two-bedroom apartment, but it's very cramped. It is me, four children, and my mom who live here. Mom didn't want to leave home until the last moment, but I persuaded her. I told her that if she didn't go, then we would stay too. When we left, we took just clothes and the necessities. Later, my brother helped send TVs by post. Then a volunteer sent us a dresser.

I'm on maternity leave because my youngest son is not three yet. When we left, he was 11

months old. We live on state payments. Unfortunately, we had no savings. Right before the war, our household appliances broke, and we needed to buy new ones. But they were left at home.

In Kostiantynivka, I rented out apartments on a short-term basis. Now, no one rents them anymore. These apartments are still not damaged heavily, but rockets exploded nearby. Luckily, the shockwave went not directly to my apartment but more to the neighbouring building. There, windows were blown out, and in our place, only the insulation was damaged, and the window frames shifted, so they let the cold inside now. There is a kindergarten nearby, and they hit it. In Kostiantynivka, there are only 3-4 schools out of 15 remain intact. As acquaintances tell me, the city is shelled every



## **"When someone listens and supports you, it is easier to handle everything"**

I take care of my children, so there's no time to think about bad things around. But the climate here doesn't suit us well— it's significantly more humid, and the children are constantly getting sick. And about going back... Unfortunately, I no longer believe that there will be anything intact at home to return to.

I try to settle down here. My son's godmother told me, 'Let's go to the psychological training to unwind a little.' And she was right; it helped me a lot. DRC trainers were so open that I wanted to speak out. They helped me share my anxieties and talk about them. It felt like I had known these people for years.

We not only talked about ourselves, but they also shared their stories and participated in various activities with us. It's great that the facilitators put their soul into work. I think psychological support is very needed now for displaced persons. Many of them have already become disillusioned. There are many people who were forced to leave home for the second time due to the war. They feel frustrated and it seems that nothing good will happen.

For example, I have apartments in Kostiantynivka, but here, I'm homeless. And I'm not the only one. It's very difficult. When someone listens and supports you, it is easier to handle everything.

The aid from humanitarian organisations helps us 'stay afloat.' There was financial aid for children, and we could buy them new clothes because children grow up. And medicines are very expensive.

If it's possible, I would like to move to the central part of Ukraine, where it's relatively safe. I think the climate there will be better for the children. But to buy housing is very expensive. Even if apartments remain intact in Kostiantynivka, I won't sell them. No one needs them now; it's a 'grey zone.'"





## MOTHERS' STORIES

Every time something does not go according to plan, I no longer get angry or upset but observe what life has in store for me. Everything usually turns out better than planned. That's why I often wonder what awaits me instead of what could have gone my way.

At first, I just looked out the window, watching tanks driving through the city, shell fragments flying outside my window, and traffic jams from cars leaving Kyiv. The military conflict seems to have unmasked all the crooked mirrors and all the "friendships" that did not pass the test. Despite being terrified, my son and I decided to move to Lviv, as there was no way for us to stay in Kyiv. Even then, my son continued his studies and attended clubs despite blackouts and our dire financial situation. My book was rejected by publishers, which was the tipping point that led to a new life in Lviv. Here, I got to know the volunteer spaces, which are very active. I really wish to help those people in what they are doing, grieve together with them for each person who died, and dream about the moment when the poetry of Ukrainian authors will be featured on the main Rynok Square of the city instead of photos of fallen soldiers, meaning that no one has died. I want to do at least something to bring this moment closer. As for the atmosphere of the DRC events, I enjoyed embodying the role I needed to fulfill to feel free. We know that Denmark is home to LEGO; my son and I collected them when he was little. Thanks for your support! ❤️❤️❤️

**Hello everyone, my name is Olia\*!** I am an IDP from Berdyansk. My life changed after February 24. My children and I had to leave my hometown, leaving my husband with his sick parents and my parents with my grandmother, who is also very sick. We were going blind, not knowing what awaited us, but everywhere there were good people, volunteers, who help us to this day. We made new friends. We've built a new life!

### **A brief history of my life:**

I was born in Lviv. My father abused alcohol, living from binge to binge. I decided to leave home and got married, thinking life would get better. But it didn't. It got worse, and my old home life felt like paradise compared to my married life. A year later, I fled the house that wasn't mine and gave birth to my children in my own home. Four years after the birth of my children, I divorced. My children weren't of school age yet. Then came attempt No. 2. I dated another man, and that's how I had my other son. But I am happy to have children like mine. What can I say? Happiness is having healthy children.

Katrusia\* lived in a small town. As a mother of a baby with disabilities, I was dissatisfied with the options available for my baby's development. It was difficult to plan for the future. Decisive steps had to be taken. Then a war broke out, completely shattering all my plans. The future seemed ruined. Having recovered a little from the shock, I began to consider the options available to me at the time to turn my life around. At this time, my relatives offered me to live in another, completely unfamiliar city. Despite all the difficulties, we left and adapted over time. Thanks to Facebook, I found psychological support groups. Training helped me gain confidence in new circumstances without friends or family. Most importantly, my child has a better future than in our hometown.

**My name is Veronika\*.** I came to Lviv from Kharkiv. My son and I are here because of the war. I never thought I would live here, let alone that I would like it. In the year and a half that we have been here, many things have happened — mostly overcoming difficulties and striving to improve our everyday circumstances. Settling in a foreign city with a child is difficult. I had to pull myself together and look for housing, then enrol my son in school as a first-year student, and sign him up for various clubs. My son is very active and energetic, so it's great that he made friends with local children. I am grateful to many people who supported and helped us. We thought that we would return to Kharkiv, but the circumstances are against this. We have now moved to another flat in a much better neighbourhood, close to all the infrastructure. I never thought that I would have to fix up our previous flat myself, heat the furnace, and manage through the blackouts, but we endured everything; we survived. We hope that we will endure in the future as well.

I don't really like to attend courses, so I hesitated whether I should come, but these meetings taught me some rather useful information. I felt quite comfortable here and I was able to mentally unwind, which is important, since it is sometimes difficult when raising my daughter by myself. I'm grateful for this opportunity.

Once upon a time, a mother lived with her little daughter in a small town. She had her own home and a great job. Then one day, the mother didn't get to go to work, and the daughter didn't get to go to her beloved kindergarten. The war came to us. I refused to believe it. I refused to leave my home, but it was inevitable. We had to run for our lives. It was a very long, very anxious trip. And here we were at the other end of the country. You don't know what to do and how to live on. Fortunately, we met nice people who picked us up and let us live with them. Fortunately, I got to keep my job and they let me work remotely. But we live in the belief that soon we will be home again. That we will rebuild our cities.

In my teenage years, I dreamed of a happy life, that everything would be great, as my childhood was hard. But my dreams did not come true. Having lost my parents, I thought that if you don't fight for yourself, you won't survive. That's how I survived despite all the difficulties and gave birth to two children, who to this day keep me afloat, even though I am raising them myself. For their sake, I now dream of a future life for them that's different from mine — a dear, happy one. Thank you very much for the meetings! They distracted me from my daily thoughts, and I was able to relax.

Russia's full-scale invasion of our country left its mark on everyone. I believe that it has been especially difficult for those who had to leave their homes, leaving their entire lives behind. It is especially hard to leave your familiar life with small kids who do not understand many things.

However, I believe that I've been lucky in the new place: my family and I received support from the locals, mainly with money and essentials, things that we really needed in the first days. I met like-minded people with whom we help others (we weave camouflage nets).

This allowed me to both help others and get support for myself (friends). I'm also sincerely grateful to all kinds of (international) organisations and all caring people who provide (primarily) moral support to cope with problems.

With our lessons learned, with faith in victory and a better life, we live on...

I am an ordinary woman (not a hero), with my experiences and problems, but I am coping. In our lives, we all go through different stages that shape who we are as a person. These include both difficulties and the setting of new goals, meeting new people, shifts in priorities, sometimes a radical change in where you live and the people around you. All this is necessary for the personal comfort of the person themselves and sometimes for the comfort of their loved ones.

Life before the war was comfortable, and the memories of it are filled with happiness. The event that, sadly, changed it was the war. Then everything turned unfamiliar, and the adaptation to the new circumstances unfortunately got stuck at the stage of adaptation. It is very difficult to move forward. Thanks to psychological training, I can and want to take steps forward. More support might be needed, namely people who can listen and offer support.

An ordinary Ukrainian girl lived her life. She got married, but not very successfully. Life didn't work out due to her husband's addiction to alcohol. She tried to help and support him, but it was all in vain. Eventually, she left him. She moved to another city, changed jobs, and her life in general. She achieved a certain level of success and prosperity. But the desire to have a family and children never left her. Finally, she gave birth to a long-awaited daughter—her happiness. And everything would probably have been even more beautiful if not for one BUT... War. Unfortunately, it changed all plans, opportunities, and achievements. But the most important thing in life is children and their happiness and health. So, once again, she tries to arrange her life and restore everyday life and relationships.

After finishing college, I went to my first job. I was very afraid of interacting with new people but wanted to expand my social circle and overcome my fear. Then, I moved to a new, unfamiliar city where I searched for a job and an apartment without the help of relatives. After that, I am not afraid to take responsibility for myself and find a way out of difficult situations. I believe in myself and my skills.

I lived with a family, always wanting to have a husband and a child, until I separated from my husband, who had alcohol problems. I thought it would be very difficult to stay alone with a little child. But the support of friends and parents helped! I became much more confident, bolder, and more persistent. I can achieve my goals...



I am a mother of 8 children; I have a wonderful family, but recently, I lost my brother due to the war. At first, it was very difficult, but having many children, I became stronger for them and did not lose spirit. I still have 4 sisters who support me, and we stick together.

In May 2021, my father passed away. Then, immediately, I found out about my husband's betrayal. It was very difficult because I relied on his support. But life had to go on, so I gathered myself and started living again, raising a child. Just when I moved on, the war started. Fear. But with a child by my side, I have no right to relax. I must live and look at everything differently. With a child who doesn't let me be sad, I must live for him.

War is a disaster for all of humanity. I lived with my elderly grandmother, who could no longer move or eat independently. We lived together for 1.5 months under occupation, and then she passed away. The whole occupation lasted 1.5 months, and then I left the city, crossing fields because the road was blocked. The problem for me as a pensioner is that I do not receive a status for a 20% pension supplement. I live with my daughter, and all the financial burden is on her shoulders. She works online, and I help with the children and cooking.

At the beginning of the war, there was a stupor. I didn't eat anything, didn't want to do anything. It lasted for two weeks. I lived under occupation for 6 months. Then, with my son, we left because he needed to continue school. We chose Striy town to live in because there are many adapted houses for rent. Since September this year, my son has started school. But there is no dream to stay here. Still, we want to go home. We don't unpack our bags, waiting for victory!

I lived a normal life. I went on walks, spent time with children, grandchildren, and travelled. And suddenly – war. It's hard to believe. But it happened. A month under shelling. It was very difficult to endure. I decided to move to a safe place – Stryi town. The first thing we faced was finding accommodation. But we found it. Locals wanted a lot of money from us because it's a resort area, as they said. The first six months were very difficult. Then we adapted. We received some humanitarian aid. We found cheaper accommodation. Psychologists started coming and providing support. And we just live. However, there are no shootings. There is something to eat, and the opportunity to walk in the woods. Just sleep peacefully. I became a different person, for whom it doesn't matter where to live, I learned to get by with the minimum. Having an apartment with everything [at home], I live in a 3x3 room. But you do not bother about it. Everything is fine. It's good there is no shooting. I am alive and healthy. And then we'll see. Everything will be better and better. You need to accept it and move on.

For me, the war began in 2014 when I had to leave Donetsk (the regional centre [in eastern Ukraine]) for the small town of Lymanske in Donetsk Oblast. In Lymanske, I met my future husband, and children were born. After February 24 [2022], our family hesitated to evacuate for a long time because, practically with small children, there was nowhere to go. In mid-April, after the capture of Izyum in Kharkiv Oblast, the storming of Lymanske began. After the first explosions in the city, we practically gathered and left within half a day. We travelled for three days and accidentally ended up in Stryi hromada. We don't have any specific needs; they are common to all displaced persons. I adapt thanks to my children. They take up 99% of my time.



**DRC** DANISH  
REFUGEE  
COUNCIL

