



# Voices of Children & Young People Affected by the War in Ukraine

Monthly Contacts with Child Helplines in the Region



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## Monthly Contacts with Child Helplines in the Region



June 2023

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### Disclaimer

Data presented and statements made do not capture the full scope of practices and policies of all countries and cases handled by child helplines and other child protection organisations at the national level. The exact data can be requested from Child Helpline International.

Child Helpline International's work is firmly grounded in the principles and values enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including children's right to privacy and protection from harm. To preserve the trust and confidence children and young people place in child helplines every day, any personal details cited in case summaries has been altered and anonymized.



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## BACKGROUND

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation escalated its conflict in the Donbas region to a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As a direct result, UNHCR<sup>1</sup> estimates that, from 23 March 2022 onwards, approximately 5.9 million Ukrainians have been internally displaced and 8.1 million Ukrainians have fled to neighbouring countries.

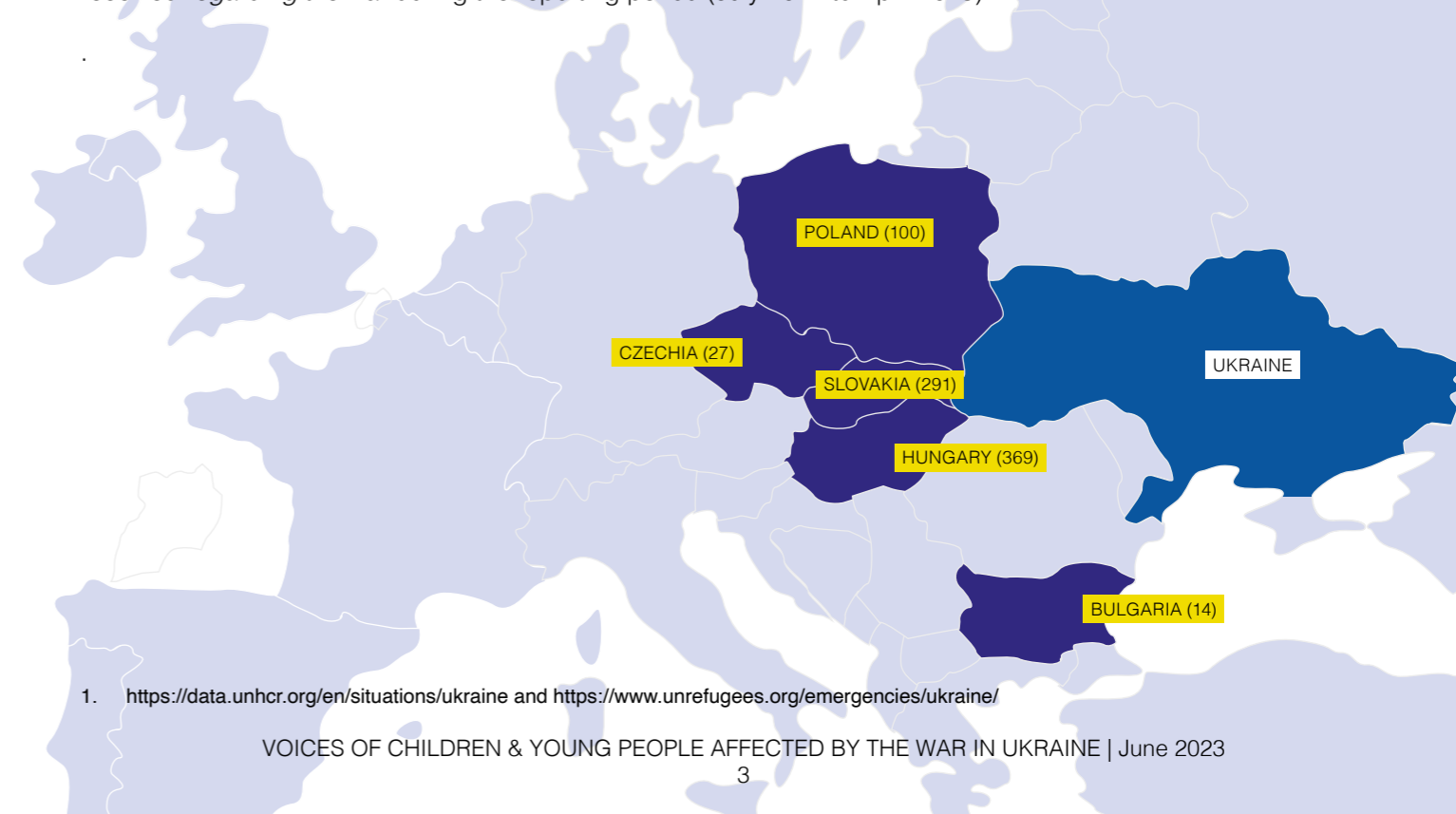
In response to this ongoing crisis, UNICEF's Europe and Central Asia Regional Office initiated the project *Hearing the Voices of Ukrainian Children and Young People: Child Helplines Responding to the Ukraine Crisis*, coordinated by Child Helpline International.

One of the main objectives of the project was to ensure the inclusion and amplification of children and young people's voices and **generate evidence** to influence policymaking through **reliable national and regional data collection, analysis and sharing**. This report presents the outcomes of this objective: data collected from child helplines in countries hosting Ukrainian refugees on the issues concerning both local and Ukrainian children and young people.

Six child helplines participated in the project: The **National Child Helpline of Bulgaria 116111** in **Bulgaria**, **Linka Lia** in **Czechia**, **Kék Vonal Child Crisis Foundation** in **Hungary**, **Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę** in **Poland**, **Linka Detskej Istoty** in **Slovakia** and the **National Child Toll-free Helpline** operated by **La Strada Ukraine**.

Unfortunately, La Strada Ukraine could not submit any data due to workload and infrastructure issues, all direct consequences of the war. They were able to share with us informally that, in the first three months of 2023 alone, La Strada Ukraine received 29,154 counselling contacts, and 178,637 in the entire year of 2022. Most of these contacts concerned issues of mental health.

The map presents the countries where the participating child helplines are located, with the number of contacts they received *regarding the war* during the reporting period (July 2022 to April 2023).



1. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> and <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/>

# DATA COLLECTION: THE NUMBERS

## CONTACTS FROM CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

### OVERALL CONTACTS

Through a monthly online survey (on Qualtrics), the five child helplines mentioned on page 3 reported on the contacts they received each month from children and young people up to the age of 18. They reported, among other things, the number of **counselling and non-counselling contacts** they received overall, and the number and nature of contacts that specifically related to the Russia-Ukraine War. The reporting period was July 2022 through April 2023 (10 months).

Together, the five participating child helplines received **81,451 counselling contacts** over the entire reporting period. Counselling contacts are contacts for which the counsellors and staff of the child helplines were able to provide assistance, whether by listening, advising or supporting. 52.5% of these contacts concerned boys (42,782 contacts), 46.1% concerned girls (37,549) and 0.5% concerned non-binary children and young people (379 contacts). The gender of the remaining 741 contacts (0.9%) is unknown. In terms of age, 81.2% of counselling contacts concerned the older age bracket of 12-17 (66,004 contacts), 16.0% concerned children aged 6-11 (13,031), and children under 6 were involved in only 2.7% of counselling contacts (2,228). The child helplines also received non-counselling contacts. These are contacts for which the child helplines were not able to provide assistance to the caller because of the nature of the contact. Non-counselling contacts include silent calls, abusive calls, test calls, missed calls and information requests. Together, the child helplines reported 157,333 such contacts during the entire reporting period.

### CONTACTS RELATING TO THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Across the reporting period, **801 children and young people** contacted the child helplines participating in the project with **concerns relating to the Russia-Ukraine War**. These concerns ranged from fears about the war itself to questions about making friends with new Ukrainian schoolmates. Of these contacts, 57.6% were made by girls (461 contacts), 40.6% by boys (325) and 1.9% by non-binary or unknown genders (15).

For 305 contacts, we do not know whether they were made by a Ukrainian child or young person, or a local one. Out of the 496 contacts whose nationality we **do** know, the majority of contacts were made by local children and young people (360 contacts, or 72.6% of known nationality contacts) and a minority came from Ukrainian refugees (136 contacts, 27.4%). In terms of age, similarly to the pattern we observe in the overall number of counselling contacts in the child helplines, the vast majority of war-related contacts, amounting to 85.5%, concerned children 12-17 (679 contacts); 12% concerned children aged 6-11 (95 contacts), and only a handful concerned children under the age of 6 (20 contacts, 2.5% of contacts).

Throughout the 10-month period, the frequency of war-related contacts with some child helplines remained fairly consistent and low (Bulgaria, Czechia). For others, the frequency of such contacts started at a high level and then steadily decreased over time (Hungary, Poland). In Slovakia, which also saw an increase in overall counselling contacts to its child helpline, war-related contacts have more than doubled over the reporting period (from 20 in July 2022 to 41 in April 2023).

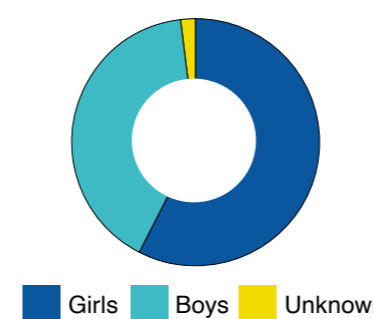
### OVERALL COUNSELLING CONTACTS

COUNTRY	TOTAL	GENDER				AGE		
		Boys	Girls	Non-binary	Unknown	0-5	5-11	12-17
Bulgaria	4,209	1,961	1,763	205	280	739	712	2,610
Czechia	24	12	10	0	2	5	11	8
Hungary	8,307	3,827	4,214	0	266	2	50	8,215
Poland	22,797	8,779	13,651	174	193	14	2,518	20,265
Slovakia	46,114	28,203	17,911	0	0	1,468	9,740	34,906
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81,451</b>	<b>42,782</b>	<b>37,549</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>741</b>	<b>2,228</b>	<b>13,031</b>	<b>66,004</b>

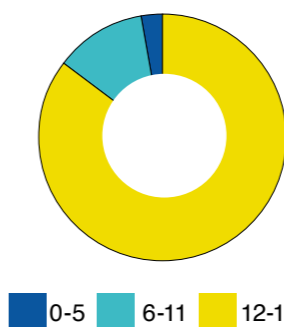
### WAR-RELATED COUNSELLING CONTACTS

COUNTRY	TOTAL	GENDER				AGE			NATIONALITY	
		Boys	Girls	Non-binary	Unknown	0-5	5-11	12-17	Ukrainian	Local
Bulgaria	14	1	1	0	12	2	1	4	1	4
Czechia	27	12	12	0	3	5	13	9	20	0
Hungary	369	92	277	0	0	0	2	367	68	303
Poland	100	48	52	0	0	1	27	72	47	53
Slovakia	291	172	119	0	0	12	52	227	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>801</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>679</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>360</b>

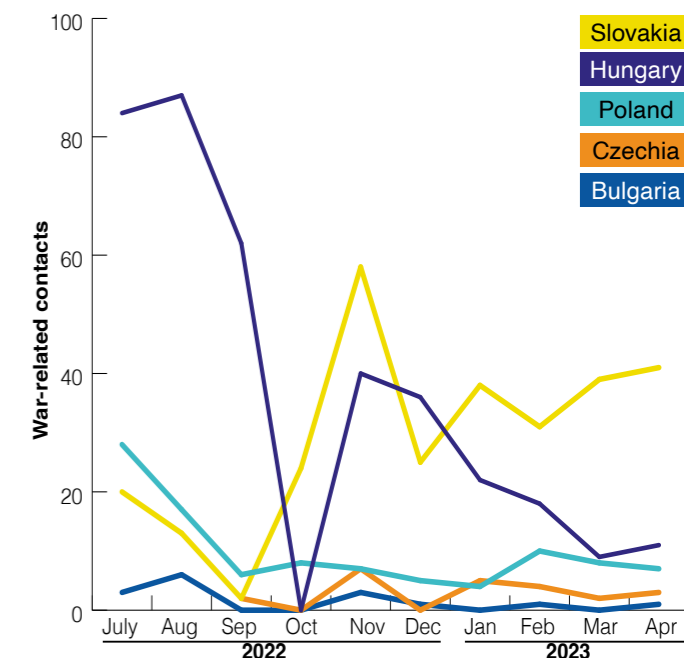
WAR-RELATED CONTACTS BY GENDER



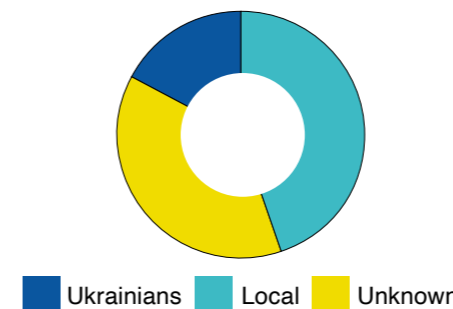
WAR-RELATED CONTACTS BY AGE



WAR-RELATED CONTACTS BY MONTH AND BY COUNTRY



WAR-RELATED CONTACTS BY NATIONALITY

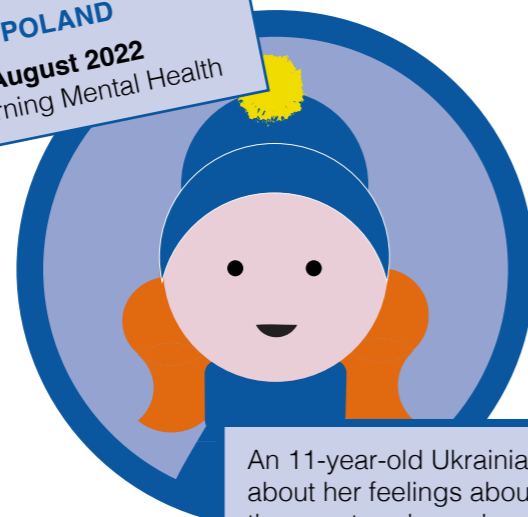


## THE VOICES BEHIND THE NUMBERS

### THE VOICES OF CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & THEIR CAREGIVERS

The child helplines participating in the project submitted a case summary each month. Case summaries are short texts that describe a specific contact the child helpline received, and the response by the child helpline to the child or young person in question. We provide here a sample of these, representing the variety of issues that the war in Ukraine has brought upon the lives of both Ukrainian and local children and young people.

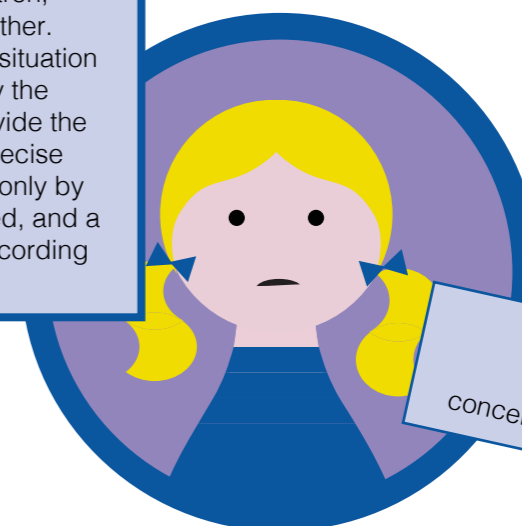
**POLAND**  
August 2022  
concerning Mental Health



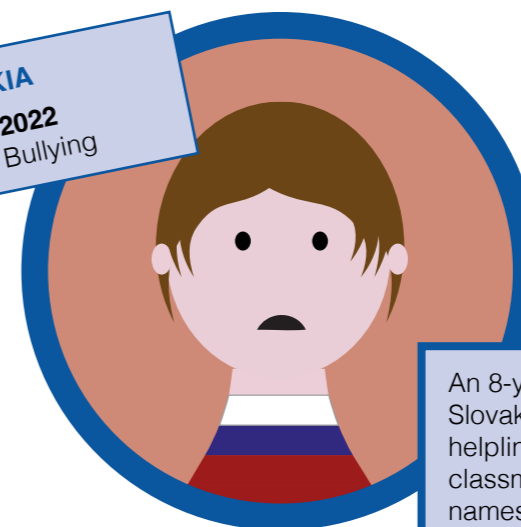
An 11-year-old Ukrainian refugee wanted to talk about her feelings about going to a new school in the country where she was now staying. She had many concerns about being a pupil in a foreign country, about her relationships with new teachers and with other children, and about her future in general. She also mentioned having been bullied at school in the past, which made her even more anxious now. She needed to share her anxiety with a supportive and understanding adult, and to be assured that she was not alone in this new and intimidating situation. The counsellor listened to her carefully and normalized her feelings. During the conversation the girl and the counsellor looked for the best solution to take care of her wellbeing. She decided to ask her school about the possibility of seeing a school counsellor and talking about her feelings with them.

The child helpline received a call from a Ukrainian girl who had left her home in Ukraine in March, and was now living in Bulgaria with her mother. The girl was seeking support regarding a situation of risk, citing systematic physical abuse by the mother towards her. She was afraid to provide the child helpline with information about her precise whereabouts and wanted to be contacted only by phone. Psychological support was provided, and a record of a child at risk was generated, according to Bulgarian legislation.

**BULGARIA**  
August 2022  
concerning Physical Violence



**SLOVAKIA**  
October 2022  
concerning Bullying



An 8-year-old Russian boy who had been living in Slovakia for the past two years contacted the child helpline about being bullied at school. Ukrainian classmates were attacking him and calling him names, blaming him for the war because he was Russian. The child helpline counsellor asked the boy if there was any one he trusted he could talk to about this – other schoolfriends, teachers or his parents. The counsellor assured him that nobody had the right to hurt or bully him, and they discussed potential courses of action in the event that it happened again. The boy calmed down, and the counsellor invited him to call the child helpline again, anytime he needed their help and support.



**HUNGARY**  
**August 2022**  
concerning Mental Health



A 16-year old girl contacted the child helpline's chatroom. She was concerned about the war, reading and following everything related to it, and felt that she had become obsessed by it. Now, she was beginning to worry about nuclear warfare as well. She was anxious and worried about the future, and needed some comfort and reassurance; she had tried to share her concerns with friends, but did not feel that they understood her. During their conversation, the child helpline counsellor learned that the girl had had panic attacks in the past, and had been receiving psychiatric treatment until the covid pandemic had made it impossible for her to visit her psychologist. The counsellor talked with her about her fears, and confirmed that she was not the only one having these worries. They talked about her previous experiences, what were good coping mechanisms she could try out, and how she could contact the professionals she already knew so that she could resume her therapy.



**SLOVAKIA**  
**March 2023**  
Reporting back good news!



A child helpline service set up for children, young people and their caregivers who wanted to talk in Ukrainian or Russian received a call from a 13-year-old girl. She had called the child helpline several times previously to talk about, among other things, how she could find new friends now that she was living in Slovakia. She wanted to report back that she had now made friends with another Ukrainian girl who she had a lot in common with, and that she had also started to visit a school club where she was also making new friends. The counsellor shared in her joy with these positive developments, and encouraged her to continue to engage in other new activities. The counsellor welcomed the girl to call back whenever she wanted to talk about anything, not just any problems she might be facing but also to share her good news..

An 18-year old young woman now living in Budapest was feeling anxious and alone, as her family and friends had remained in Ukraine. Her parents were trying to offer her support, but there were things she wasn't telling them. She was working in a restaurant, where she had fallen in love with one of her colleagues. However, he already had a girlfriend, and now she found it very hard being in the same place with him all day, unable to imagine how she could be happy without being in a relationship with him herself. The counsellor provided her with emotional support, and talked with her about the possibilities of getting to know other people in Budapest with whom she could spend her time.



**HUNGARY**  
**February 2023**  
concerning Peer Relationships

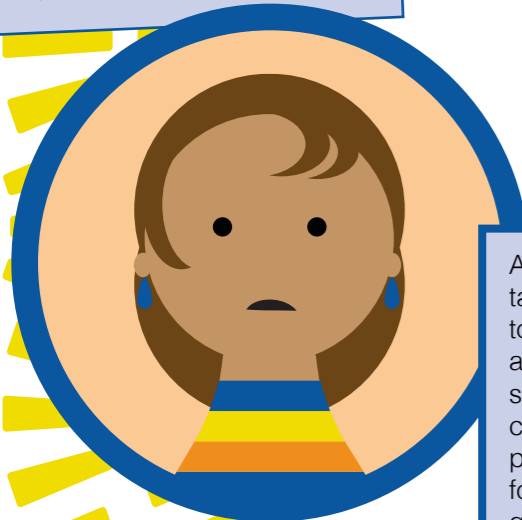
A man contacted the child helpline on behalf of his 10-year-old daughter. She was a wheelchair user, and they had been having difficulty finding her a new school in the country, because they could not find a Ukrainian-speaking person who could assist her at the school. The father was unsure who they could turn to for help. The counsellor encouraged him to talk directly with the principal of the school the girl was particularly keen to attend, and also suggested that he might consider the possibility of being his daughter's assistant himself, an option he could also explore with the principal. Finally, the counsellor suggested that the girl should also feel free to call the child helpline at any time if she ever wanted to talk to somebody.



**SLOVAKIA**  
**February 2023**  
concerning Access to Services

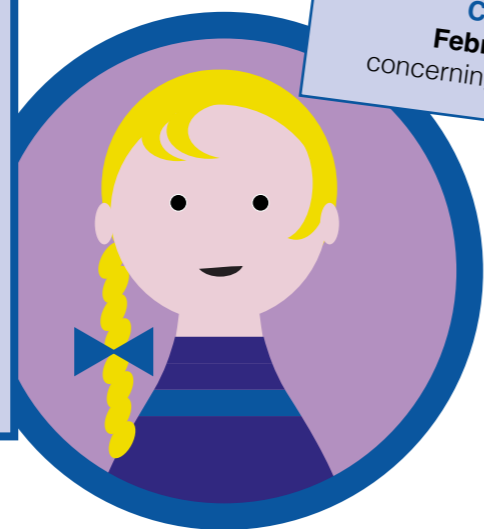


**SLOVAKIA**  
**October 2022**  
concerning Mental Health



A teacher's assistant from the Ukraine contacted the child helpline to talk about a 12-year-old boy at her school who was finding it difficult to make any friends, and who subsequently was feeling very sad and lonely. She wanted to know how she could help him, and what she could do to make him feel better. Together with the child helpline counsellor they discussed how she might try talking with the boy's parents about his situation, or even ask the school psychologist for additional help and support. The counsellor also suggested she gave details about the child helpline's Ukrainian-language service to the boy himself, so that he could contact them directly if he wanted to talk to somebody.

A girl contacted the child helpline, upset and scared about the war in Ukraine. She talked with the counsellor about her concerns and the catastrophic scenarios she feared would come to pass. The counsellor reassured her that she was safe in Czechia, and the girl calmed down a little. She went on to reveal that she had eating disorders, and was also seeing a therapist because she had been self-harming. Together with the counsellor, she was able to set out a plan for herself as to things she could do and enjoy – such as eating good food, and listening to music that she liked – which would help her take her mind off the war. The girl ended the call with a lot more optimism about her future, and with the knowledge that she could call back whenever she felt she needed to talk to somebody.



**CZECHIA**  
**February 2023**  
concerning Mental Health

## THE VOICES OF THE CHILD HELPLINES

In March 2023, we distributed a short questionnaire with open-ended questions to the child helplines participating in this project. We hoped to gain more insight into the influence of the Russia-Ukraine war on our members and on the children and young people they support.

We asked them three questions: on the content of contacts they receive (with and without direct relation to the war); on the barriers preventing Ukrainian refugees from contacting the child helplines in their host countries; and, lastly, on the counsellors' own mental health and wellbeing.

Here are the main take-aways from their responses:

**Question 1. In your experience, what are the most common reasons Ukrainian children (or their family members) contact your child helpline? And what are the most common reasons for local children to contact (regarding the war)?**

The overarching themes that concern Ukrainian children, as identified from the child helplines' responses are **access to services**, especially education (noted by Bulgaria and Hungary), **mental health** concerns, and especially feelings of loneliness and anxiety (noted by Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland). Other themes were violence, especially domestic (noted by Poland), and family relationships (noted by the child helpline in Czechia). The child helplines in Slovakia and Hungary both noted that local children, at the beginning of the war, were worried about it spreading to their own countries, and at a later stage, they were concerned about making friends with Ukrainian children.

**Question 2. Examining the data you've been submitting, it appears that relatively few Ukrainian children and young people contact child helplines. Why do you think that is? What are the barriers?**

Many child helplines identified the following barriers preventing Ukrainian children and young people from reaching the child helplines in their host countries: a **language barrier** (noted by Slovakia and Bulgaria); a lack of **awareness** of the existence of the child helplines and the services they provide (Bulgaria and Hungary); the **cultural norms** about asking for psychological support in Ukrainians (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary), and the operational **availability** of the child helpline, either in hours or platform (Czechia and Hungary). All of these themes resonated in the feedback we received from La Strada Ukraine, who are in contact with Ukrainian children who fled the country: "*Among the barriers that Ukrainian children see in accessing help abroad are: the language barrier, the inability to contact foreign lines around the clock, minimal opportunity to contact foreign lines through social media, certain days and hours of Ukrainian or Russian-speaking counsellors (which are not always suitable for Ukrainian children because they are at school at that time), and the inability to receive support abroad at night.*"

**Questions 3. What have been the counsellors' experiences working on Ukrainian cases? How has the war impacted their wellbeing? Do they feel they have the tools to cope with difficult cases, overwhelming emotions or just the overall workload?**

All five child helplines reported implementing tools for supporting their counsellors in their emotionally stressful work, in the form of trainings, supervision and group sessions. Some child helplines also mentioned that the few contacts they receive meant less emotional burden on their counsellors (Hungary and Bulgaria). Despite these factors, they still observe burnout and stress in their Ukrainian counsellors, given the uncertainty and stressful circumstances of their lives.



## **Every child has a voice. No child should be left unheard.**

Child Helpline International is a collective impact organization with 155 members in 133 countries and territories around the world (as at June 2023).

We coordinate information, viewpoints, knowledge and data from our child helpline members, partners and external sources. This exceptional resource is used to help and support child protection systems globally, regionally and nationally, and to help our members advocate for the rights of children and amplify their voices.

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