

# I scream into my pillow at night

One month of the Russian war on Ukraine in the words of families  
of people with intellectual disabilities

*Testimonies edited from messages Inclusion Europe received via email, and messaging apps, or of notes from phone calls. The testimonies are organised by regions, and presented in chronological order to provide a picture of how the situation evolved. The testimonies from one city or region may be from one, or multiple persons. Pictures were provided by the families.*

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## **Cherkasy region**

### **3 March, Cherkasy region**

Starting from February 24, my children and I very often go down to bomb shelters, some to basements. Our children with intellectual and physical disabilities are frightened, they have panic attacks. It's hard for both children and parents!!! Sometimes you must drag these grown-up children into hiding.

I know that refugees from Kharkiv and other cities of Ukraine have started arriving in the city, which are now being heavily shelled. These people need a lot of things: clothes, blankets, etc.

## **Chernihiv region**

### **3 March, Chernihiv region**

They bomb outside the window; we sit in apartments with adult children who do not understand why you can't go outside, why you can't go to the centre. They have problematic behaviour and epilepsy seizures.

We can't go to the store because we cannot leave adult children alone. There are queues in stores. Not all products are available, and there are long queues and no way to survive.

We need food that is long-term storage, medications-anticonvulsants, anti-inflammatory, soothing. There is still water, but not good enough for drinking, so we also need that.

Most of the organisations that function are aimed at volunteer assistance to the Defenders of the city, this is the most important thing for everyone, our protection and our victory. We find neighbours, friends or family who can go to the stores for us.

The needs of families are growing every day.

Heating and food are running out. The situation is bad.

There is a big demand for financial support. After the war, we will have to restore the premises that have been damaged by a rocket explosion.

I have a son with intellectual disabilities, behavioural disorders and epilepsy, the lives of our children and their families are very painful, and for me as well.

## **Dnipropetrovsk region**

### **11 March, Dnipropetrovsk region**

The head of the organisation is working closely with the coalition to organize the evacuation of all kids and mothers. Ukrainian authorities are helping us to do so at the moment.



Chernihiv

## Donetsk region

**21 March, Mariupol** *(after several days without communication)*

I'm from Mariupol. The situation in the city is critical, there was no water for 25 days. City is bombed from planes, no one is organizing the evacuation, there is no communication. There are no banks.

It is hell.

The Russians control the area and don't let anyone in or out. Right now, I can't help the people who stayed.

But some people in my organisation have managed to leave.

The city of Mariupol no longer exists.

## **Ivano-Frankivsk region**

### **17 March, Ivano-Frankivsk region**

My organisation for support of persons with intellectual disabilities is in western Ukraine. There are currently no active military operations on the territory. However, the situation is difficult.

Access to life-saving medicines has become more difficult, and funding for educational and rehabilitation programs and social services has been reduced. People are in stressful situations due to loss of sleep and peace of mind.

## **Kharkiv region**

### **7 March, Kharkiv**

Just this week, families with children (adults) with disabilities left by themselves: via caritas, by trains, cars and by any available means.

They were either very strong, or stupid (including me).

### **8 March, Kharkiv**

There are practically no working branches of any banks in Kharkiv. If there are, it is in areas that are occasionally shelled.

In short, many people in our city have enough food, and people share. Someone buys and distributes. The shops somehow work, although there are very few goods. Mostly cash payments.

Humanitarian workers come to some areas more often with food. With things, too, everything is somehow relatively normal.

Pharmacies work both by cash and by bank transfer.

You can't go outside since we can't leave our relatives at home or anywhere else. There is no help and support system.

Constant bombing, and there is no understanding of what will happen tomorrow. Who will be alive. Every morning we do a roll call, who is alive and where they are, who has left. A lot of children are taken out, but not young people with disabilities.

### **8 March, Kharkiv**

One of our mothers has a son with Down syndrome (20 years old). They went to western Ukraine together with the school and are now near Lviv. They need money, because they only have the child's pension and the mother lost her job. They started caring for the girl from this school and she has Down syndrome. But she is an orphan and, as I understand it, this girl does not have a bank card. That is, this mother took care of the orphan on her own.

### **8 March, Kharkiv**

I am from Kharkiv but left to 100km away. There is no battle. I can hear the explosions from afar.

People are shocked, came from different places with nothing. I am staying at friends; we are 11 in the house.

I maintain contact with the 15 families with children and adults with disabilities from the organisations, and know where they are. Some are still in Kharkiv, some left to the region, or to western Ukraine, but not abroad.

We have a difficult situation: Mother of a girl with Down syndrome has cancer, and no medication.

We have difficulties communicating, everything can freeze.

### **9 March, Kharkiv**

I'm on the road all day. Often without communication. Today I plan to reach the destination where I will be for a while. Probably tomorrow.

There are families left in Kharkiv.

### **12 March, Kharkiv** *(during this call we could hear shelling in the background)*

I am in Kharkiv, there are bombs and shooting. Products are more expensive, there are not enough means for families, we don't have money. Banks work but it is impossible to go, and everything happens with online banking, there is no cash.

I help families with the organisation, there are 3 organisers and 15 members.

The population is constantly under fire, and many homes and infrastructure facilities have already been destroyed.

Nothing works in our city for 17 days, there is no transport connection. There is a shortage of food, medicine, and fuel. Volunteer organisations try to organise assistance to the elderly, children, and people with disabilities.

Almost all of them do not work, because the threat to life is very high. Air alarms are constantly heard, and strikes are carried out from rocket launchers, or aircraft. Many people were left homeless (houses were destroyed, there is no heating, light, water).

Women with children who wish so are taken from Kharkiv to other Ukrainian cities, or abroad.

Many families with children with disabilities remain in the city.

### **15 March, Kharkiv**

Unfortunately, my families did not send either information. I can't get through. I got through to only one mom a few days ago, and she had to help a few more of us.

Apparently, everything is very bad there, and not only with the connection.

### **15 March, Kharkiv**

We have shelling, I'm hiding in a shelter.

A family needs somewhere between 450-600 euros per month, depending on the number of family members.

Banks only work via the Internet.

In the following days, we are forbidden to go out and move around the city, because there will most likely be a strong rocket attack.

Therefore, receiving funds and distributing them is only possible through bank cards.

## **Kherson region**

### **9 March, Kherson**

The situation is bad. It is very hard. Banks don't work. Shops still function but only with cash.

We need everything.

Everyone stayed. There are 42 children.

### **16 March, Kherson**

There is no humanitarian help, occupants are all around, you can go to Crimea if you have family there, but nobody wants to.

## **Khmelnyskyi region**

### **23 March, Khmelnytskyi**

I live in the big city of Khmelnytskyi, where life is bustling regardless of the season. There are always lots of people on the streets who are in a hurry, there is a lot of traffic on the roads, the streets are crowded with houses. When spring comes to my city, it becomes truly magical. Numerous trees bloom and turn green in the streets and avenues, in parks and gardens. There are long alleys of chestnuts and wild apple trees, cherries, and bird cherry trees. We have a wonderful botanical garden that becomes a fairy tale in spring, and in general, our city becomes one big flower garden. And not only trees bloom but also flowers in flower beds - tulips, daffodils, peonies, roses, lilacs, and others. Oh, how I love my city. My children were born here. Every day I went out with my «Special» girl. We walked the streets. I showed her the beauty of nature and on the way we talk about each season.

And then this terrible black day of February 24 came, which turned everything upside down in our lives. The monotonous everyday life to survive started. We hear sirens every day in our city. They frighten not only children but also adults. We have never known what war is before. We have never held weapons in our hands. And now we have this daily fear of a horrible war. We had to bury the patriots of Ukraine every day. Our hearts hurt and bleed.

Only prayers and words to God – forgive and save Ukraine! It is how I feel, and what I think when my daughter has to run to a damp basement, and she refuses, she does not understand what is happening, never understands the word «aggressor», she says: «A man is good, he will not harm me».

I was left alone with my pain. I have to go to work with my daughter to help internally displaced persons whose homes have been destroyed by Russians, and now they are homeless. I do it with my daughter because she will not be with anyone except her mother. She will not eat, drink, or sleep if her mom will not be close.

I scream into my pillow at night, and it seems to me that the whole planet is trembling with pain, with my helplessness, that there is nothing I can do, I cannot stop the war.

But today my daughter asked me: «why are you crying?». I wiped away my tears and replied: «Honey, there is a war on the street». She asked again: «Does war hurt?» And I had no answer!

She immediately drew a few pictures and handed them to me: «Take them, mom, don't cry».

I noticed the fear in these drawings, which was hidden in her imagination.

We have gone through a lot of suffering in our lives, but such suffering that is happening now in Ukraine, it is horror, constant pain, tears, despair, fear. Only faith in God gives us strength!

We have had enough deaths: the Ukrainian nation is dying, innocent people are dying, innocent children are dying! We believe that the time will come, the sun will shine, and we will grow flowers again, plant gardens, and give birth to children. But now we need help, support, and understanding!

## **Kirovohrad region**

### **3 March, Kirovohrad region**

I am the chairman of the organisation of mothers of disabled children and disabled people.

In the Kirovohrad region, thank God everything is calm.

Today, for the first time in 8 days, there was no air alert.

We need medicine, diapers first! There is nothing in pharmacies.

Parents write that their children are not feeling well.

## **Kyiv region**

### **4 March, Kyiv region**

The city was surrounded. We are on the border territory with Belarus. Fighting is taking place nearby in the surrounding villages and the city of Chernihiv.

Necessary medicines we need have run out in pharmacies and in general, all the available stocks in stores have already been running out of empty shelves for several days. The city administration has

established bread baking, delivery of milk from the farm and potatoes in local mini bakeries. There are long queues for these products and not always enough for everyone.

There is an arrangement so that milk and bread are delivered to the Centre. I work as a director of the Centre, and take an active part in the distribution of products. The Centre is a municipal institution. In 2021, the Centre provided social rehabilitation services for 265 people. [...]

Today, residents of the city need food, medicines, drinking water, hygiene products, diapers.

Since active fighting is underway near the city of Slavutich, siren and air alerts ring daily. At this time, some of the people in our wards go down to the basements, and some stay at home (located in the corridors or bathrooms).

### **10 March, Kyiv region**

Currently, a large number of members of the organisation have temporarily taken their children abroad. Those families who remain do not have enough medicines, or medicines become very expensive. Prices are rising every day.

For products: we can still buy them in stores, but prices have started to rise, I think parents will have no money soon.

We have a connection with some of our members. Those who stayed in Ukraine, in Kyiv, live mainly in 2-3 districts near our organisation.

In our opinion, we will have a very strong need for psychological support for parents after the end of hostilities. The situation is very difficult now with the help of children - many of them have experienced stress and much more resources will be spent on restoring their psychological state than before. There is no resource for this yet. Our adult students will need more intervention from teachers.

### **10 March, Kyiv region**

I try to keep in touch with everyone I can contact and see that the state of our families is changing. In the early days, we were all shocked. Then they began to learn to live in such a terrible state. Now there is more and more pain, because we receive news of death and destruction from friends and relatives from the suburbs of Kyiv and other cities of Ukraine.

Today, those families who have been contacted have food and water. For medication, it is more difficult because they are difficult to purchase. But not critical.

The most problematic thing is that this situation is unstable and can get worse at any time.

Most of all, we need help in supporting and normalising the daily life of people with disabilities. In Kyiv, there are volunteer initiatives that help with ideas and things, people help each other.

But the situation is very different in the city. It depends on where the family lives geographically. The district or street matters.



To provide families with food and things, distance is an obstacle. The city is large, communication between residents of the right and left banks is difficult; there is a shortage of fuel for cars; walking distances are long, and it is dangerous.

The main activity of our organisation is to support and provide daily activities for children and young people with disabilities, in particular those with severe, complex, and intellectual disabilities.

Up to 20 families received this service. Many other families received counselling.

Now many families have been evacuated, some have stayed in Kyiv. Some, unfortunately, do not get in touch.

Help is needed both for those who are in Kyiv, and for those who find themselves all over Ukraine in safer places.

Every day, help becomes more and more necessary, because problems accumulate.

And I worry that with the end of the war, it will be very difficult financially for some time, because most of them will be extremely exhausted financially and intellectually.

Employees of our centre, who are now left without wages, need help too.

### **11 March, Kyiv**

I founded a special "school-life" for children and young people with autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and other disabilities. Our "school-life" trains children with severe disabilities. Those children whose mother work the night shifts stay in the premises of the "school-life" at night.

Today, all children and adult children are with their mothers. [...]

Teachers, educators, and social workers will not receive a salary, because we are not a governmental organisation, but a private one.

### **11 March, Kyiv region**

Due to the lack of electricity, mobile communications, and Internet stopped for the third day. [...]

The city has an urgent need for mobile power generators, flour and bakery equipment. I keep in personal contact with families.

### **11 March, Kyiv region**

Our organisation consists of 50 families with a child or a person with a disability. We keep in touch with everyone and try to help with food.

Until today, we were relatively calm, but sabotage and air attacks have already begun.

Unfortunately, I think that our city still has the worst to come ahead, since we have in the city an international airport, which the invaders will definitely try to occupy.

The situation with food is currently more or less controlled, there are many local volunteer organisations that help on the ground with food and water.

At the moment, the problem is with medicines, since many drugs are not available in pharmacies, or there is no way to buy them due to lack of funds. This is something that is urgently needed, something that people have to take on a daily basis and without which they cannot continue.

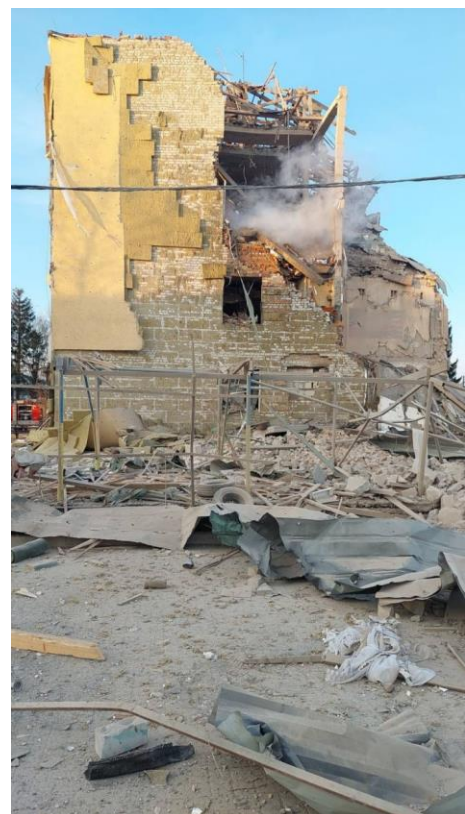
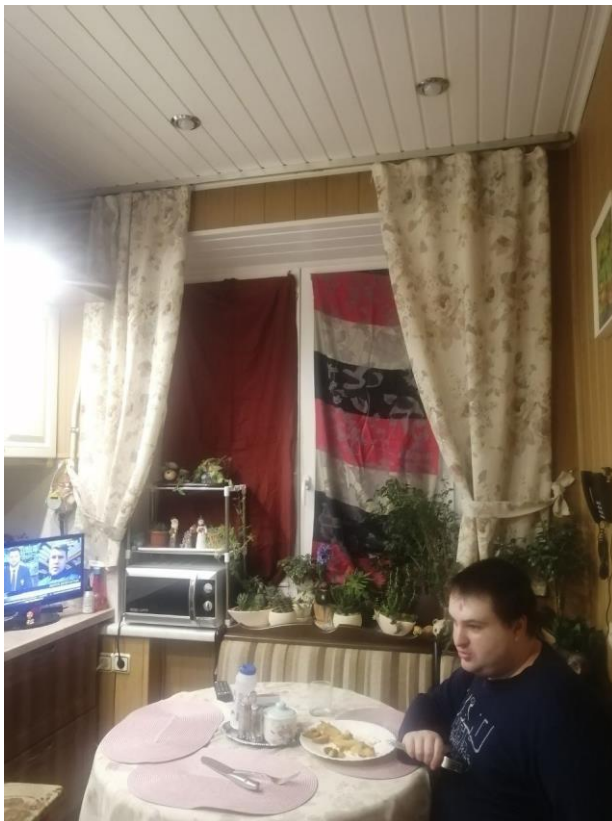
### **11 March, Kyiv region**

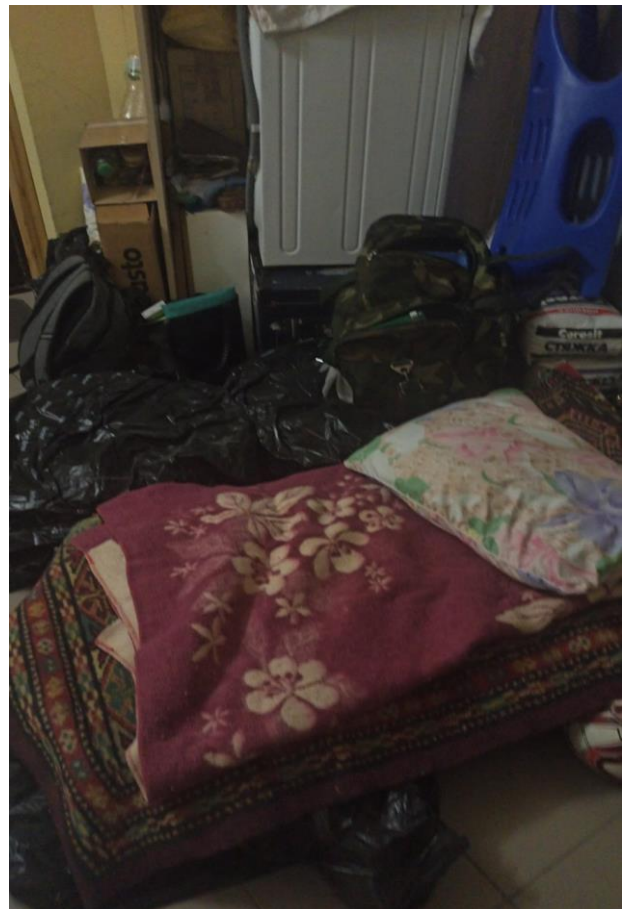
There are mostly single mothers with kids. The organisation is trying to help them leave the country by driving them to the Romanian and Polish borders.

Most families are stranded in Kyiv and unable to move around. We are still able to organize help and support, banks are still working.

### **16 March, Kyiv region**

So far, there is no landline internet connection in our city of Slavutich. The lines are damaged, and we don't know when the problems will be fixed. Therefore, banks are not working yet.







## Lviv region

### 3 March, Lviv

People with disabilities and their families need medicines, food, toilet paper, etc. that are not available in our stores now. Most parents were out of work in March. They will not have enough funds to purchase medicines, hygiene products and food. They also need adult diapers (S, M, L, XL).

There is also a need for things that are needed during their stay in a bomb shelter (sleeping bags, lanterns, power banks, drinking water, mats, folding chairs and table, thermos flask).

The approximate number of people in need is 30 (low-income, with children, or adult people with moderate or complex disabilities).

We also have refugee families from other cities of Ukraine in our city and nearby villages. There are about 400 families. Approximately 150 of them really need help.

### 3 March, Lviv region

Since the introduction of martial law, social workers switched to online work mode. We are constantly working with families who raise children/young people with intellectual disabilities - over the phone, Messenger groups.

Volunteering-employees of sewing and cooking workshops have started sewing towels and baking gingerbread for the needs of our community from the materials that remained in the organisation.

Families are always staying at home because our city has also been shelled and air alarms are constantly heard. Our beneficiaries are families of children and young people with intellectual disabilities (severe forms of autism, epilepsy, intellectual disability).

Families are now in a state of shock, misunderstanding, and helplessness; businesses have stopped working, and parents are not working. Only 2 families from our list of members of the organisation left (one abroad and one in Ukraine).

Almost half of our families are families living in rural areas and the opportunities to buy the most necessary things are very limited. Many of the families living in the city (many families are from rural areas) have started accepting people from Kyiv and Odesa. And there are already many requests asking for necessities – food, medicines, hygiene products, adult diapers.

### **9 March, Lviv**

Today we are facing new challenges related to the military aggression of Russia against Ukraine and the introduction of martial law. The situation is extremely complex and not very optimistic. Alarms sound several times every day, regardless of whether it is day or night.

Most mothers, having no physical strength, simply stay in apartments with adults during air attacks.

Many of the people from our institutions, about 300 people, including children and young people with disabilities and their families, were left without basic means of subsistence, and without medical care and medicines.

This is a very difficult time for all children of Ukraine, and we must do everything possible to help them. Children and young people with disabilities, like all of us, want to be able to meet at least their basic needs. They know they deserve it because everyone should have this chance. Many of them are now abandoned and unable to evacuate due to their “special needs”.

Together, we must prove that having a disability does not mean it is a problem.

### **9 March, Lviv**

The Centre operates in this crisis situation. We provide support to our 400 clients and their families who stay in Ukraine, and to temporarily settled refugees who intend to travel abroad.

We feed them, our employees are on duty at the railway station and meet people with disabilities.

### **9 March, Lviv region**

The situation in our region is more or less calm. Our organisation is active. Before the war, our members of the organisation came to our Centre for stay and communication, partial training by volunteers. We have a room. We need help with medicines, because the pharmacies have sold everything out.

A very heavy psychological burden for parents and family members.

**11 March, Lviv**

We are still in Lviv working with children who don't walk or talk, children with severe disabilities.

Everything is still open, but people don't have a lot of money left.

We have a stable situation, there are a lot of refugees, more than 200 thousand. We have water, gas, electricity.

In times of peace, all organisations functioned well, but now we stay at home with our children.

**16 March, Lviv**

We are a transit stop for people with disabilities and children with disabilities traveling abroad. They stay with us from 1 to 7 days. We have 20-40 such families a week.

There are now 250 families living in Lviv and we support them.

**18 March, Lviv**

We are managing to meet our basic needs, but the whole country is under a lot of pressure even outside war zones because of shortages, and displaced people.

Shooting was heard for the first time today.

**18 March, Lviv**

The situation for families with people with disabilities has now become more complicated. Some families went abroad. Those who remained, suffer from the consequences of martial law. Some families do not have the opportunity to buy food and hygiene products. Most families need more involvement, support, and assistance.

We need help with food, food packages, medicines, hygiene products.

**21 March, Lviv**

We would like to inform you that despite the situation created by the actions of the occupiers- Russia, the organisation continues to implement rehabilitation programs. Rehabilitation of women with breast cancer, rehabilitation of patients with musculoskeletal disorders, rental of rehabilitation facilities, rehabilitation of young disabled people with intellectual disabilities and cerebral palsy.

## **Mykolaiv region**

### **8 March, Mykolaiv region**

The situation in the city is difficult. There is shelling every day, there is an air alert every hour. There are about more than 3 thousand children and people with intellectual disabilities in the city.

Families are afraid to leave children and old people to go outside for food and necessary medicines. The situation in families is alarming. Children with autism become aggressive. Children with Down syndrome fell into a deep depression.

It is very problematic to transport children with cerebral palsy to bomb shelters.

In addition, there is a shelter for lonely old people - the city geriatric centre. And 3 specialised boarding schools. All these people are taken care of by volunteers of these foundations.

There is a room for distributing humanitarian aid. We have round-the-clock communication.

### **16 March, Mykolaiv region**

There are 310 families with special children and 350 displaced persons from the affected areas, who are now being placed in boarding schools.

Due to interruptions in communication and light, I will contact you later. Now, all the efforts are focused on the organisation of evacuation and placement of people who come from the abyss, trying to put a roof over their heads.

## **Odesa region**

### **9 March, Odesa**

The organisation helps people who have not been able to leave the city (20 people). But we have no more money.

The situation is difficult, people are scared, many of them have not received their pension payments.

We need help, we have water. We don't get things.

### **19 March, Odesa**

Young people with disabilities are weaving camouflage nets for our soldiers. Their parents also join.

## **Poltava region**

### **10 March, Poltava**

The sirens are ringing constantly, 8 times today, but there is no fighting, no Russians. It is still quite quiet.

Shops and banks are working

The organisation helps young children with disabilities.

### **11 March, Poltava**

Our institution has not been working since the beginning of the war. Like during the Covid-19 quarantine, children and persons with disabilities are at home. The staff also stopped working. It is very difficult to organize remote classes for children and people with intellectual disabilities.

Of course, we need help with food packages and hygiene kits. Humanitarian aid by charitable and volunteer organisations is provided mainly to internally displaced persons. It is mainly food and hygiene products.

Currently, there is a need for social support for children and persons with disabilities but given the constant threat of air bombing (several times a day) and the inability to quickly hide from the bombing, we cannot risk personnel.

### **12 March, Poltava**

Even though thousands of people have left Poltava, mothers with children with intellectual disabilities remain in the city. These children find it difficult to cope with stress on the road and be in a strange city. So we try to stick together and stay at home. There are 114 people.

There are no Russian troops in the city. The city is a transit point for refugees from the active war zone, so there are a lot of people.

For the needs of affected people, volunteers buy everything they need in stores and pharmacies, so a certain shortage of goods is created. Shops, banks, pharmacies, and hospitals are open.

Our educational and rehabilitation centre stopped rehabilitation programs for children temporarily. The administration is working. The organisation's premises are equipped with a bomb shelter and a humanitarian aid collection point.

People are running out of money. It is impossible to buy certain medicines, dietary food, hygiene products, especially diapers

Poltava is full of dogs and cats that have been left without owners. People fled the city and abandoned animals at the train station and in their homes. Also, a lot of animals are carried by people during evacuation. These are not only individual animals, but also entire nurseries.



## **Sumy region**

### **10 March, Sumy region**

Now our city is quiet, but there are threats of air shelling and shelling, sirens sound almost every evening, and we hide in shelters, all roads are blocked the delivery of medicines and food to stores is almost non-existent, store shelves are almost empty, there are long queues for the food that is available. Children are very afraid.

The utility system is working, the water is running, and the situation with medicines is difficult.

## **Volyn region**

### **4 March, Volyn region**

All people suffer from hostilities, but the most vulnerable are people with disabilities, children, the elderly.

Our NGO helps individuals with intellectual disorders and their families. We were active before the beginning of the invasion of Russian troops in Ukraine. We are located in western Ukraine, on the border with Poland and Belarus.

For now, our city has not been shot at, but air alarms are declared 5-7 times a day. Even if on the first day, we had rockets fired at the airfield. Several mothers and children with disabilities left for Poland.

Our organisation helps 60 families who have children and adult children with disabilities. Usually, these families have a small amount of money because they live on the pensions for children with disabilities. So, in the near future, their financial situation will deteriorate. Many have run out of food supplies. There is a need for food, or the means to buy food.

In pharmacies, there is not enough medications, or the prices are unreasonable for people with disabilities. It is the same for hygiene products.

## **Zakarpattia region**

### **4 March, Uzhhorod**

We live in Western Ukraine, and our region is quiet so far...

But we have a huge number of refugees in our region. However the statistics don't say how many of them are people with disabilities. People are going in refugee apartments, all dormitories are already full, and they settle in schools and kindergartens.

The number of officially registered refugees was of about 60 thousand people (according to statistics 7-10% of them are people with disabilities).

There is a crisis: the stores run out of products, insufficient antiepileptic drugs, hygiene products.

### **5 March, Zakarpattia region**

I am the chairman of an organisation which supports 60 families and adults with intellectual disabilities.

In our city there are 3 psychoneurological boarding schools, and a Regional Rehabilitation Centre for people with disabilities.

The situation in the city is extremely difficult. We have joined in helping refugees, who are now larger in numbers than our population, and their children. And also supporting the military.

There is a need for long-term storage products, food, diapers, medicines, clothing, blankets. Tools, bottled water, flashlights etc.

### **11 March, Zakarpattia region**

At the moment, we have contacts with families that take care of children and young people with disabilities. We had social workshops, but they are currently closed, and families are in psychological shock given the circumstances.

### **12 March, Uzhhorod**

Today at 5.30 there was an air alert for the first time.

There are seven families with people with disabilities. The list of families will continue to expand as people continue to arrive in large groups.

### **14 March, Zakarpattia region**

Sorry for being a little chaotic, the constant sirens make it impossible to concentrate.

### **17 March, Zakarpattia region**

I am the chairman of an organisation that has more than 200 families with children with disabilities and young people with disabilities. We keep in touch with them. Now we provide psychological assistance.

The city is under occupation. There is no gas, no heating, partially no light. We really need help. We have a problem with food, medicines, warm clothes, blankets, heaters. We have a connection with the families and will be able to distribute assistance among them.

## Zaporizhzhia region

### 11 March, Zaporizhzhia region

For now, our city is stable but tense. Sirens do not constantly ring, but many businesses have closed, people lost their jobs. Many left their apartments and evacuated to western Ukraine, or to Poland, Slovakia, etc. Those who remain are mainly involved in the creation of fortifications, work as volunteers, and help evacuees from the occupied territories.

In many cities of the region, fighting is taking place, or they are temporarily under the rule of the invaders. Parents of children with autism who live in these cities report they do not have heat, food supplies are running out, electricity is not available, there are problems with mobile communication and card payments.

But the worst thing is that the occupier began to control the population with propaganda - they seized the local radio and tell how everyone will be fine under Russia, play music for meditation on the air and tell the news using intonations that are used in neuro-linguistic programming.

Berdiansk, Orehov, Pologi, Gulyaipole and Tokmak are under occupation. People with children with autism do not have the opportunity to leave, because the invaders do not let them pass at roadblocks.

For today, in our city medications are out of stock, because in the first days of the war, people bought in advance and all the pharmacy leftovers were sold out.

Parents from the occupied cities of the region reported that the stores were running out of food and water because there was no supply, pharmacies in those cities were also closed because there were no goods. The occupiers do not allow humanitarian supplies to pass through, and do not try to provide for people of a socially unprotected category.

The first buses with evacuees are already arriving in our city, and volunteers are buying food and medicine at their own expense to help these people.

Supermarkets are open from 9:00 to 16:00, rarely until 17:00 – and at the end of the working day the shelves are empty.

Several volunteer organisations work here, and our families are still taken care of by the social protection service.

Now it is difficult to say what needs are a priority or will be needed soon.

Our families faced a difficult choice:

- stay at home and prepare to protect your city, your home, your child and family,
- evacuate together with all people to western Ukraine or abroad with a clear awareness that no one is waiting for us and our children there and we will be a heavy social burden there.

Few of our families agree to leave, because evacuation can cause children and young people with autism to break down and worsen their condition.



*Zaporizhzhia*

## **Zhytomyr region**

### **4 March, Zhytomyr region**

I am the head of the charity organisation engaged in helping children and young people who are socially vulnerable. We have a day centre for young people with intellectual and physical disabilities. We are also engaged in physical rehabilitation of children and young people with disabilities.

Now we can't conduct classes because of the martial law. We maintain telephone contact, visit with volunteers to help if necessary.

A few more days of war and we will be running out of food supplies, we need personal hygiene products.

### **16 March, Zhytomyr region**

Disabled people and children who were able to leave already left, only the most disabled were left behind because of lack of transport (special vehicles are needed to move people with body paralysis and/or in wheelchairs).

Volunteers help as much as possible, but they need vehicles to be evacuated.

### **16 March, Zhytomyr region**

Bombs fell on our city yesterday. One person was killed and three wounded.

Our organisation operates, we receive assistance directly through the Coalition, and from a foreign volunteer who collects humanitarian aid for our children with disabilities by himself.

There are humanitarian centres where people with a child's ID card or persons with disabilities can ask for what they need. But not everything and not everywhere is there.

We distribute everything that we receive from benefactors among the members of our organisation, which currently has 128 people with disabilities and their family members. (Those who remained in Ukraine out of the 202 people who were before the war.)

People we didn't know before the war also come to us.

### **16 March, Zhytomyr region**

Many families stayed in Ukraine, there are those who went to the villages to stay with relatives, there are those who live in the city. There are 25 families in the organisation, and all of them of course need help.

Even those who have gone abroad have difficulties, such as housing, food, rehabilitation.

Children are locked between four walls, do not have proper communication. After the explosions, many people have a fear of going out in the streets. All our achievements have come to nothing.

### **17 March, Zhytomyr region**

The situation is more or less calm.

Sirens and alarms are on often, day and night. The city and region suffer from rocket and bomb attacks. The civil defence stops some. Our defenders adequately defend the sky, we only learn about the downed missiles and planes the day after. We are very grateful to our defenders.

The food situation is normal. In shops and markets you can buy almost everything you need.

There are some problems with medicines, but they promise to provide all pharmacies soon. Medicines and food can be found in the city's volunteer centres, and there are enough of them in the city now. Clothing and personal hygiene items can also be obtained from these organisations.

Most families stay in the city, around 40 families.

The biggest problem we have is for one of our families with two children with intellectual disabilities. They are now homeless after a rocket explosion. This family left for the village in the region. There is nowhere to go back, the house is destroyed.

All other members of our organisation live at home. During alarms, they hide in basements or at home in bathrooms.

It probably sounds scary, but everyone is already tired of being scared. We lived a day, and thank God.

## Outside of Ukraine

### 23 March, Czechia

I am in Czechia with my younger children. I can't get a job yet, there is no inclusion in this country, and the child will be taken to kindergarten only with an assistant. Unfortunately, I can't be one.

But I'm considering vacancies and I hope that shortly I will be able to work.

Your help will allow us to live in a foreign country for some time and continue our classes online. Thanks a lot. Glory to Ukraine! We are all looking forward to victory, looking forward to when we can return to our native Ukraine!

### 23 March, Poland

The child is really reaching for the kids right now, he is playing with neighbour children even without knowing the Ukrainian language. We learn new Polish words.

But there are some problematic aspects for us. They are connected with a special school or special kindergarten for my son. The child is adaptive, he went to a regular kindergarten in Kyiv, but some questions can appear about his behaviour here in Poland. That's why we are looking for a specialized school here. A boy is 6 years old, He can already go to the first grade. We are searching for a special school for him, which is very difficult to find. But first we need to find housing, and housing must be rented for six months, this is at least. There are very few special schools, most for Polish children.

We went to one paid kindergarten, they were not against taking him, but they do not have a Ukrainian-speaking teacher, therefore the problem can be in interaction. Now they are looking for a few more children and a teacher at an urgent and fast pace.

Since February 26 we have been living with one family in Poland, I think this family is burdened by us. They translate everything for us, they solve all the problems related to the Polish language for us.

We have sent more than 30 emails to arrange for the child. If I arrange my son, it will be a starting point to look for housing, to look for a job. We do not want to take refugee status, and bring an additional burden to Poland, it is now very overloaded with our people. But we are in this position, we give up, because if I do not find an opportunity for the child, then I will also be left without the opportunity to have a job, so I really want to. It would be great to go to a regular school, but how will he manage all the stress, also because of the language...?

Poland still requires the translation of all documents into Polish, certified by a notary, all this is not cheap, and this is not done quickly, we did not have time for the commission, which we had to go through on February 25, in Kyiv. This would allow us to have a document about my son's special needs. He was examined by specialists, but we don't have a document about his needs. Thus, I don't understand clearly which institution is the best place for him, moreover, Poles also demand the results of this commission. At least we are ready to go through this commission online. I called the Ukrainian authorities, because without this I cannot arrange it, I cannot also get access to employment.

As for other aspects of our life, the Poles are very good-natured, we don't need anything, but I don't want to be a burden. I also want to find my own place and live a life in which I can fully function.

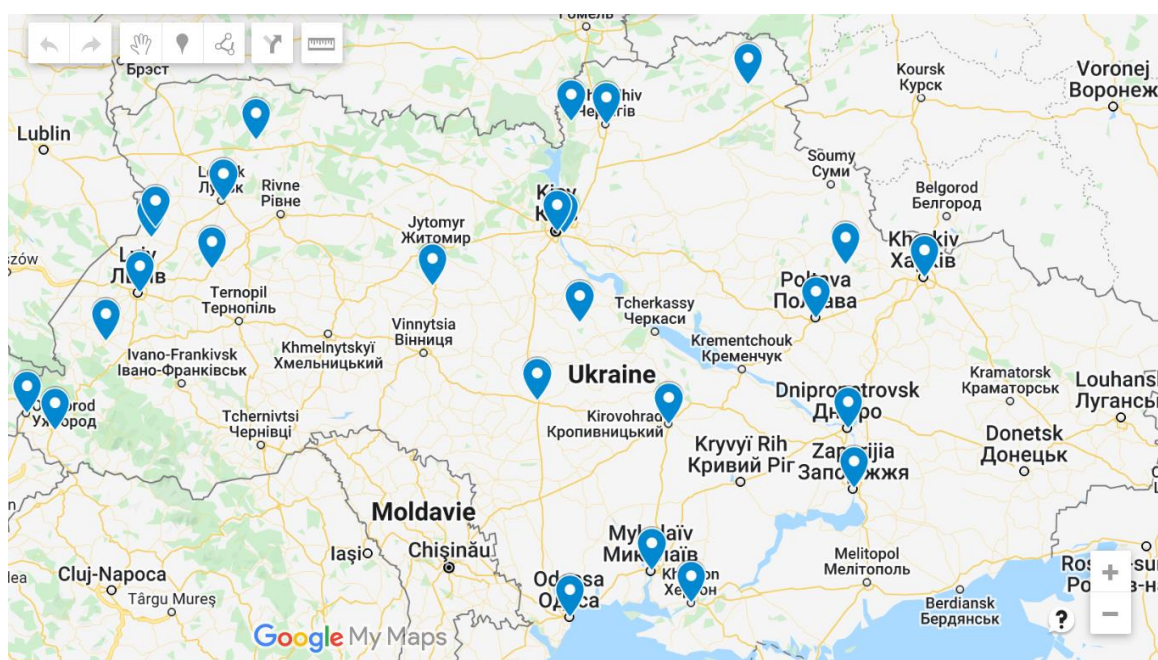
## How we learned these stories

Before the war, the Coalition contacted Inclusion Europe, drawing attention to the situation of people with intellectual disabilities and their families, and how pre-war situation was affecting them.

When the war started, Inclusion Europe remained in close contact with the Coalition.

We also started contacting the Coalition's members, to have a direct line of communication.

2 persons who speak Ukrainian and Russian contacted these organisations by phone, or messaging apps. Communication was often difficult because of bad connection, people sheltering etc.



Map showing locations of organisations in Ukraine, which Inclusion Europe spoke to.

## All-Ukrainian Coalition

The Coalition brings together 118 local organisations from all over Ukraine.

- These are mostly family-based organisations for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Together they represent 14,000 families.
- The Coalitions is member of Inclusion Europe since 2019.

Full name: All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disability

- Director: Yulia Klepets
- President: Raisa Kravchenko
- Facebook: [Коаліція захисту прав осіб з інвалідністю внаслідок інтелектуальних порушень](#)
- Website: [www.intelldisabilities-coalition.com.ua](http://www.intelldisabilities-coalition.com.ua)

More about the [Coalition and what they need](#).

## Support provided by Inclusion Europe

The Coalition have told us that the best way to help is to [make a donation](#). Inclusion Europe have agreed that we will coordinate this. 100% of the money collected is used directly to assist Ukrainians with intellectual disabilities and their families impacted by war in Ukraine.

By 24 March, we were able to distribute € 160,000 to people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine.

Jyrki Pinomaa, president of Inclusion Europe:

I wish to thank you all – private persons, associations and organisations, entrepreneurs, companies – who have supported our campaign with your generous donations, and in many ways expressed support to people in Ukraine.

I also wish to thank all who have been able to give direct help to people in Ukraine, and you who have [helped Ukrainian refugees](#) on their painfully heavy journey away from the war.

Thank you all for your solidarity towards Ukraine!

### Inclusion Europe

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