



UKRAINE FOUR YEARS AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE CONFLICT

THE RIGHT TO DREAM FOR CHILDREN IN UKRAINE: WAR STEALS THEIR SLEEP AND THEIR FUTURE

In Ukraine, war robs children not only of their future, but also of their sleep. Ensuring safe spaces, protection, and psychosocial support means defending their right to dream.

PRESS RELEASE

Milan, February 2026 – Four years into the conflict, the crisis facing children in Ukraine is not only ongoing, it is deepening. What was already a fragile reality shaped by insecurity, displacement, and prolonged school closures has been made even more severe by one of the harshest winters in recent years. Temperatures have plunged to -20°C , while renewed attacks on energy infrastructure have triggered widespread blackouts and left many communities without reliable heating or water. For millions of children, daily life now means more than the constant sound of air raid sirens. It means trying to learn in unheated classrooms, sleeping in freezing homes, and seeking refuge in underground shelters to stay safe.

According to UNICEF data, approximately **4.6 million children** are entering their fourth consecutive school year disrupted by war. More than one in three students did not attend classes regularly over the past year, and many have been limited to online learning. **Around 10 percent of school facilities** have been damaged, further undermining access to safe, stable education. Ensuring continuity of learning, and safeguarding children's psychological well-being, remains among the most urgent and pressing challenges.

In this context, sleep - and therefore dreams - become a primary need that is denied.

*"When we talk about the right to dream in Ukraine, we are not only talking about hope for the future: we are also talking about the right to sleep peacefully. Today, for many children, every night is interrupted by alarms and attacks. Even with temperatures as low as minus 20 degrees, they have to wake up, go out into the cold, and go down into bunkers with a small light, waiting for everything to pass. Think about what it means to face this without a parent to reassure and protect them," explains **Piero Meda, Country Director for WeWorld Ukraine**. "That's why we create safe spaces where they can meet, study, play, and build relationships in a protected environment. These are places that restore routine and trust after years of isolation. With children without parental care, the work is even more delicate: it is not just a question of reintegration into school, but of reintegration into social life. In war, they are among the most vulnerable people and need continuity, protection, and psychological support to feel safe again and start imagining the future."*

Today, more than **330** children and adolescents are supported in Kyiv thanks to the work of **WeWorld**, an Italian organization that has been committed to defending the rights of women and children for over 50 years, from the margins to the centre. In coordination with the city's Child and Family Services, the intervention reaches **130 minors in 19 foster homes** and **200 children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 18 in 4 institutional facilities**, with educational programs, protection, and psychosocial



support.

In recent years, the organisation has conducted several mental and psychosocial health support sessions with adults and minors, reaching a total of **7,344 people** in the country.

In response to the emergency, WeWorld, together with its local partner PHK, has set up safe centres for children in protected and underground spaces in the areas most affected by the conflict, where educational, recreational, and psychological support activities are offered every day. After years of interrupted or distance learning, these centres, thanks to the constant presence of educators, social workers, and psychologists, **represent spaces of normality and connection, where children can return to socializing and feel safe.** Parents can also access psychological support, which is essential in a context of prolonged stress.

The story of Illia, 9 years old

"I'm afraid to close my eyes... because I see us running away from our destroyed home again." Illia is a child who fled the Kharkiv region after his home was destroyed by bombing. He now lives with his mother in a small temporary room and, due to trauma, barely sleeps at night. During the psychological support sessions that WeWorld runs with the population affected by the conflict, and with children in particular, Illia began to express his fear of reliving the escape and the loss of his home, allowing him and his mother to share their pain and grief. Through play, art, and constant care, WeWorld builds "islands of safety" to help children feel protected and process their emotions, giving them the chance to start living again.

"The school was always closed and I couldn't meet my friends in the afternoon. Now I'm happy to go to the recreation center with other children my age."

- David, son of Eugenia

In Kyiv, work with **foster homes and institutional facilities** is aimed in particular at **orphaned children or those without a family environment**, who are among the most vulnerable to the effects of the conflict. The goal is to accompany them in **their reintegration into school and society**, helping them to live as well as possible in a prolonged emergency situation.

BEING GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN DURING THE WAR

The impact of the crisis also has a gender dimension. In conditions of extreme cold, energy shortages, and interrupted services, the burden of care on women increases and daily hygiene and health conditions worsen. For adolescent girls, managing menstruation also becomes more complex when adequate services, hot water, private spaces, and adult role models are lacking. Forced displacement and staying in shared facilities also increase risks to personal safety.

This is why WeWorld has developed **Maria's Diary**, an educational tool in Ukrainian that accompanies girls through their first menstruation with accurate information and practical advice on menstrual hygiene, even in emergency situations, helping to restore normality, awareness, and dignity to an important stage of growth.

Defending the right to dream today means ensuring protection, educational continuity, and psychological support, so that children and adolescents can once again imagine tomorrow - and sleep without fear.



WeWorld's intervention in Ukraine

WeWorld intervened immediately in March 2022 to help people forced to leave their homes in the eastern parts of the country, activating its local partners from the very beginning and subsequently establishing a stable presence to respond to the emergency. Together with ChildFund Alliance, it took immediate action to deal with the emergency at the start of the conflict and has continued its commitment in **Ukraine** alongside the population affected by the war. WeWorld currently has operational offices in **Kyiv, Kherson, Mykolayiv, Kharkiv, and Donetsk**. WeWorld works alongside those who, despite the ongoing conflict, have decided to stay, and those who have returned after fleeing their homes under attack.

WEWORLD

WeWorld is an independent Italian organization that has been involved in development cooperation and humanitarian aid projects **in over 20 countries**, including Italy, **for more than 50 years**.

In the last year, WeWorld has carried out over **160 projects**, reaching more than **5.6 million people**. The organization is active in Afghanistan, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Jordan, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Moldova, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Palestine, Peru, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Thailand, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

Girls, boys, women, and young people, agents of change in every community, are at the heart of WeWorld's projects and campaigns in the following areas of intervention: access to water and sanitation; education; food security, livelihoods, and local development; gender and protection; environment and climate.

MISSION

We stand alongside those who find themselves on the geographical, economic, or social margins, working together to overcome inequalities and build a more equitable future that respects the dignity and diversity of people and the environment. We support individuals and communities with humanitarian assistance in crisis situations and promote self-determination and development to contribute to structural change and generate opportunities for all.

VISION

We want a better world where everyone, especially children and women, has equal opportunities and rights, access to resources, health, education, and decent work. A world where the environment is a common good that is respected and defended; where war, violence, and exploitation are banned. A world, a land belonging to everyone, where no one is excluded.

For information:

WeWorld Press Office

Greta Nicolini - Press Office Manager - Mobile: 347.52.79.744 - greta.nicolini@weworld.it