

MEDIA RELEASE: Caritas warns of increased risk of human trafficking for people fleeing Ukraine

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The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has caused over three million people to flee the country – mostly women, children and the elderly.

An astonishing 1.5 million children have fled Ukraine, which is close to one per second, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Children are especially vulnerable to human trafficking.

"Caritas Ukraine is supporting women and children crossing the border into neighbouring countries like Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, to try to prevent human trafficking. Right now, there is a very high risk that people might become a human slave," said Vladyslav Shelokov, Caritas Ukraine's Resource Mobilisation Director.

"More than 230,000 Ukrainians have been the victims of human trafficking since 1991, when Ukraine gained independence. We are now distributing information and advice on how to avoid this."

The leaflets and other materials outline key guidelines such as information about not handing over identification documents to the person who is offering accommodation and registering where they stay with local authorities.

"We are also providing support to internally displaced people, such as temporary shelters for people who have fled their homes, particular in cities close to the contact line where there is a high risk of violence. The Caritas offices in these cities are supporting people with food parcels and hygiene kits, and helping to support the large number of people with small children."

"Baby food and formula are a real challenge, because there are limited stocks on shelves and it is even challenging for us to find them and deliver them to areas in need."

"We are also organising hot meals, drinking water and other necessary things like warm clothes for internally displaced people. People are leaving their homes with almost no additional clothes for themselves, and the temperatures are really low here. Before it was minus 4, now it's minus 8 degrees. It is a really big problem for people to stay warm in premises which are not normally for accommodation."

Caritas Australia is working directly with Caritas Ukraine and its local partner Caritas Spes to support Ukrainian families with food, hygiene kits, clean water, psychological support, and emergency shelter to displaced families. Protection of women, children and the elderly continues to be a focus of Caritas Ukraine programs during the conflict. Since the beginning of the conflict, Caritas Ukraine has assisted more than 70,000 people across the country.

Donations can be made at: www.caritas.org.au/ukraine/

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Note:

Kirsty Robertson, Caritas Australia's CEO is available for interview.

Vladyslav Shelokov, Caritas Ukraine's Resource Mobilisation Director is available for interview from Ukraine.