



The Russian Invasion of Ukraine Triggers the Largest Refugee Crisis in Europe Since World War

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With the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, the resulting refugee crisis continues to worsen as the number of people fleeing the country has now exceeded 2 million. Russian forces have been heavily criticized for the targeting and attacking of civilian areas, which has intensified the humanitarian disaster, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees grimly estimating that the figure could grow to 4 million. While many have been able to escape the violence, others have remained trapped in Ukraine. The decimation of non-combatant infrastructure has led to a disturbing civilian death toll, hindered the efforts of those trying to leave, and deteriorated the existing living conditions. Attempts to establish humanitarian corridors have also had major shortcomings, as these supposedly safe pathways out of the country have been largely ineffective, with fighting still spilling over into them. All told, the mass exodus of refugees from Ukraine marks the largest such crisis in Europe since World War II, as besieged citizens evacuate at an alarming rate.

Comprising considerably of women and children, the refugees fleeing Ukraine make up nearly 5% of the country's population. Poland has accepted the greatest number of refugees, welcoming more than 1 million. People have fled to other countries as well, like Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova, and Romania. Some of these nations have been more accommodating than others, with the United Kingdom for example facing criticism for only granting 300 visas to Ukrainian refugees so far. Refugees who want to enter the U.K. must have a family member living there or a sponsor to apply for a visa. The U.K. has indicated that they will begin to ease entry requirements for Ukrainians fleeing the war, but many are still stranded in ports around Europe.

The refugees face an array of dangers, including a lack of supplies and cold weather. Though many neighboring countries are making notable efforts to house and care for the refugees, analysts have pointed out that there is a very real possibility they could soon become overwhelmed, particularly if the troubling rate of asylum seekers continues on its current path. This would therefore further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. Many people have also remained trapped in Ukraine, with the conditions a concern for those in the besieged city of Mariupol, among others. Efforts to send aid to the estimated 400,000 people trapped in the city have failed. There is no heat or electricity, and food and water are running low as well. This compounded with freezing temperatures has created dire conditions.

Even during tries to create a humanitarian corridor, a maternity hospital was destroyed in Mariupol. Two more hospitals were also bombed in a city near Kyiv, with reports of frightful conditions for civilians in the suburbs of the capital. Indiscriminate attacks and mass graves are becoming more common, with many who are being buried appearing to be civilians. Despite their dreadful war efforts, Russian forces seem to be making little progress overall, having only made gains in the cities of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv.

Though there have been a series of meetings in an attempt to find a diplomatic solution, they have so far been unproductive. The most recent of these took place in Turkey between the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba. These are the highest-level talks so far. While multiple Russian officials have claimed that the invasions are going as planned, impartial observers note that it has in actuality largely stalled. Regardless though, there are still fears that the refugee crisis will likely continue to escalate as Russia employs siege tactics that trap many civilians and put them at great risk.