

Yuliia's story



Yuliia is seven and lives with her mum and dad, Maria* and Stephan* as well as her brothers Andrii* and Oleh* and sister – Varvara*. They have moved many times over the past few years but have finally settled in Bulgaria.

Two years ago, Yuliia and her family along were evacuated via a Red Cross route from their home in Ukraine due to the conflict. The family left their beloved home and made a traumatic journey to a village in another part of Ukraine. This was not their first evacuation.

The young family were helped by their new community to grow vegetables, however one of the greatest challenges the family faced, like many others was the winter. It gets very cold in Ukraine during the winter and so the family have to be careful to stay indoors when it gets cold. With very little money, they knew they would struggle to buy fuel for the home as well as to cook meals.

“My dream is to have peace over our heads.”

Yuliia, aged 7



CAFOD's partner Caritas Khmelnytskyi helped the family to get enough fuel to heat the home.

Caritas Khmelnytskyi is the Church partner organisation CAFOD works with in Ukraine. They delivered firewood to families in east Ukraine, to help them through the cold winter.



Firewood being processed and loaded before distribution to local families.



CAFOD support families, like Yuliia's, who are living through extreme winters using our Firewood World Gifts. For £20, this gift can provide much needed firewood for a family to survive the harsh weather.

Three years since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, at least 6.8 million people have fled abroad to escape the conflict and another 3.6 million people are internally displaced. As the fighting continued Maria and Stephen's family decided to move to Bulgaria.



Yuliia and her Mum, Maria, walking in Bulgaria. They still long for the war to stop and return back to Ukraine but they are grateful for the support they received from CAFOD and our partners. Photo credit: Maria

*CAFOD use pseudonyms for safety reasons
Photo credit: Svitlana Dmytrenko, Caritas Ukraine

'We just came to the village office, there were some kind people. They called around and said, 'There's a house.'

Maria shared that Yuliia, and her other children, struggled with the move. Where they lived previously, they had all they needed to live comfortably. But in their new community, they had to adapt to sharing a kitchen and bathroom and a bedroom with a wardrobe for a partition.

Yuliia said it was very cold in the winter and so the family have to be careful to stay indoors when it gets cold.



Yuliia and her siblings open some presents on Christmas Day.

Yuliia, like every child has many hobbies, including playing with playdough! She wants to be a baker when she's older as she enjoys making pastries with her mum and grandmother. Having settled in Bulgaria now, Yuliia and her family have sent through an update to say they are, once again, having to adjust to living in a new place.

Yuliia's story reminds us how conflict and extreme weather often coincide to produce incredibly difficult conditions for families who have already faced significant upheaval and trauma. In 2024 CAFOD reached 83, 281 people in Ukraine. Our Ukrainian partners, all affected by the war themselves, helped 17, 038 by distributing emergency food packages and hot meals and 14, 296 Ukrainians received firewood support just like Yuliia's family. CAFOD have been able to repair homes that have been damaged by shelling and provide psychological support to children and adults through trained psychologists. Yuliia's story is a reminder that when crisis hits, it needs all of us.

Next steps...

- **Watch the Refugee animation at cafod.org.uk/refugee-resources**
- **Listen to Maria telling her story at cafod.org.uk/maria**
- **Fundraise for CAFOD's Ukraine humanitarian appeal**