**War in Ukraine pushes generation of children to the brink, warns UNICEF**

**KYIV/NEW YORK, 21 February 2023 –** Almost one year since the escalation of the war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, a generation of children has experienced 12 months of violence, fear, loss and tragedy. There is not a single aspect of children’s lives that the conflict has not impacted, with children killed, injured, forced from their homes, missing out on critical education and denied the benefits of a safe and secure environment.

“Children in Ukraine have experienced a year of horror,” said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. “Millions of children are going to sleep cold and scared and waking up hoping for an end to this brutal war. Children have been killed and injured, and many have lost parents and siblings, their homes, schools and playgrounds. No child should ever have to bear that kind of suffering.”

An economic crisis, with a vast number of families reporting a significant loss of income, along with an energy crisis triggered by the war have been devastating to the well-being of children and families. A recent UNICEF survey saw 80 per cent of respondents noting a deterioration of their economic situation, while UNICEF analysis suggests the percentage of children living in poverty has almost doubled from 43 per cent to 82 per cent. The situation is especially acute for the 5.9 million people who are currently displaced within Ukraine.

The war is also having a devasting impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children. An estimated 1.5 million children are at risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues, with potential long-term effects and implications.

Children and families’ access to basic services have been devastated. More than 1,000 health facilities are reported to have been damaged or destroyed by shelling and airstrikes, with such attacks killing and causing serious injuries to patients – including children – as well as to medical personnel, and restricting access to care. Thousands of children fleeing conflict across the country are missing vital vaccines to protect them from polio, measles, diphtheria and other life-threatening diseases.

Since February 24 2022, UNICEF, thanks to the support of the international community, has provided learning supplies to 770,000 children, engaged 1.4 million children in formal and non-formal education, provided mental health and psychosocial support to 2.9 million children and caregivers, provided gender-based violence response services to 352,000 women and children, provided access to safe water for 4.6 million people, provided healthcare services to 4.9 million people, and provided multi-purpose cash assistance to 1.4 million people inside Ukraine and 47,494 households in neighbouring countries.

“Children need an end to this war and sustained peace to regain their childhoods, return to normalcy and begin to heal and recover,” said Russell. “Until that happens, it is absolutely critical that children’s mental health and psychosocial needs are prioritized. This should include age-appropriate actions to provide nurturing care, build resilience, and especially for older children and adolescents, give them opportunities to voice their concerns.”

Further compounding this issue, the war has disrupted education for more than five million children, denying children sense of structure, safety, normality and hope the classroom provides.  Limited access to schools come after two years of lost learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and more than 8 years of education disruption for children living in eastern Ukraine.

UNICEF continues to call for principled, safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, an end to attacks on children and the infrastructure they rely on, including schools, hospitals and water and sanitation systems; the avoidance of use of schools in this conflict; and to stop the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, directly responsible for killing and maiming hundreds of children. Above all, UNICEF  continues to advocate for an end to hostilities.

In December 2022, UNICEF launched its annual Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal. UNICEF requires US$1.1 billion to address the immediate and longer-term needs of 9.4 million people, including 4 million children, both inside and outside Ukraine  who remain deeply impacted by the war in Ukraine. Funding will enable UNICEF to provide, sustain and expand critical services in health, nutrition, child protection, gender-based violence, water and sanitation, and social protection alongside government relief and recovery efforts. It will ensure timely preparedness for additional internal displacements and refugee movements.