

## SUMMARY

# UNITE - for every child's right to crisis support and care services

## WHY "UNITE" STARTED

The "Unite" program by Save the Children Sweden was driven by a pressing need to address the deficiencies within Sweden's child protection system in providing adequate crisis support. Save the Children Sweden recognized long-standing gaps in Sweden's capacity to meet the needs of children requiring support and treatment after experiencing major crises and traumatic events, such as wars, natural disasters, and exposure to violence. Solving this societal challenge - fulfilling children's right to crisis support and mental health - requires new ways of working.

Save the Children launched "Unite" following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The aim of the programme is to provide crisis support to the children who come to Sweden fleeing from Ukraine and, at the same time, identify children who need more support and care services.



**17 000**

**CHILDREN**

came to Sweden from Ukraine since February 2022.

## A NEW WAY OF WORKING

"Unite" is an innovative programme that includes both crisis support and the opportunity to refer children in need of further support and care services. In groups, children are given the opportunity to create a better understanding of their life situation and are given tools to manage their well-being. The support is provided by group leaders from Ukraine who share the children's language and background. Being able to provide this type of support without an interpreter is unique.

For the first time, Save the Children Sweden has used task sharing, an approach, which means adults without previous formal skills in social or psychological work are trained and supervised to support children participating in the programme.

With this initiative, Save the Children Sweden wants to be able to quickly provide support to many children at the same time, while learning more about task sharing. This will allow us to develop and spread the approach to additional groups of children in need of crisis support.



**Räd Barnen**

## **THE CHILDREN WE MET AND THEIR NEEDS**

Save the Children Sweden has collaborated with municipalities, county administrative boards (länsstyrelser), other civil society organizations, schools, churches, its own member movement, among others.

”Unite” has been implemented for children between 7 to 18 years old, in over 30 locations across the country. We have currently reached over 370 children, the majority between the ages of seven and twelve. Most children report that it is important that support is provided by adults who share their background and speak the same language.

Like other groups of displaced children, the children in “Unite” largely report symptoms of mental health problems:

- Almost half of the children have high or moderate symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Two in five children describe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- One in ten children also report thoughts of not wanting to live or self-harm.

One third of the children who have participated in “Unite” have been assessed by the group leaders as needing more support. In these cases, psychologists working at Save the Children Sweden have taken over, for contact with the care givers and further assessment.

Approximately 15 percent of all children who participated in “Unite” needed more help and were referred to support and care services provided by other service providers.

In addition to symptoms of mental illness, children and parents describe vulnerability in terms of bullying at school, overcrowding, financial difficulties, lack of extracurricular activities, as well as missing fathers and other relatives left in Ukraine.



## LESSONS LEARNT ABOUT CHILDREN'S NEEDS AND TASK SHARING

- Save the Children Sweden has identified children in need of support and care services that society has failed to reach.
- The need for crisis support within the target group is urgent.
- Many children need more support and care services, in addition to crisis support.
- It is often difficult for families in need of care to access care services. Referrals by psychologists increase the chance that the children's right to care is fulfilled.
- Thanks to group leaders who speak the same language and share the same background, Save the Children Sweden has been able to build trust with families who have expressed strong fears and concerns about authorities.

## WHAT IS NEEDED GOING FORWARD?

“Unite” confirms that the work to strengthen the rights of refugee children needs to continue. The initiative has focused on children from Ukraine, but the lessons learnt are similar for many children on the move.

- Save the Children Sweden believes it is essential that society is equipped to ensure that all refugee children in Sweden have access to crisis support. All refugee children in Sweden should also have access to care services in times of need.
- Save the Children Sweden believes task sharing is a promising way of working and can play an important role in scaling up crisis support to reach more children in Sweden.

Save the Children Sweden wants to be a driving force in expanding similar work for children exposed to crises and difficult experiences of many kinds. Together with municipalities, the state and other actors, Save the Children Sweden wants to invest in further developing, researching, and scaling up the work with “Unite” and task sharing. In this way, high-quality and innovative crisis support can reach more children, regardless of the type of crisis and difficulties they have experienced.

**[READ THE WHOLE REPORT HERE \(in Swedish\).](#)**

