

BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE



A doctor at a Kyiv hospital stands in the children's ward, which was moved to the basement to avoid Russian airstrikes

RUSSIA has invaded Ukraine and started a war. Why did they do that and what's going on?

● **Why is Ukraine in the news?**

Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. But the lead-up to war began last year when Russia began positioning tens of thousands of soldiers along its border with Ukraine – then more inside the country of Belarus, a Russian ally (supporter). Western leaders were worried the Russians were preparing to invade Ukraine. Now that has happened. But why?

● **Why did Russia invade?**

Russia says it wants to know that Ukraine won't join NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). NATO is an international organisation that guarantees the freedom of its member countries. Russian president Vladimir Putin thinks that, if Ukraine joins, it will give the USA and its allies too much power right next to the Russian border. Russia has also demanded NATO removes all troops from Bulgaria and Romania.



Jens Stoltenberg, the head of NATO

NATO members and other countries are against the invasion of Ukraine. They argue that Ukraine should be free to do what it wants and Russia shouldn't interfere. Western leaders say if Ukraine wants to join NATO, it should be free to do so.

Also, thousands of Russian people who don't agree with President Putin's decision to go to war have been protesting in cities across the country.

● **Are world leaders trying to resolve the crisis?**

Yes. There have been talks between Russia and Ukraine to try to stop the conflict. The UK, EU, USA and other countries are making it tough for Putin by bringing in sanctions – penalties given to a country that is behaving badly. Sanctions make it difficult for a country to make money, so it can't carry on as normal. NATO has said it won't get involved directly with fighting.



Sanctions on Russia are making it tough for Putin to make money, so it can't carry on as normal. NATO has said it won't get involved directly with fighting.

● **Where is Ukraine?**

Ukraine sits between Russia and the central European countries of Romania, Slovakia and Poland. To the north is Belarus.



From 1919 until 1991, Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union (also known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – USSR). This was a giant country formed after the Russian Revolution began in 1917. In total, it was made up of 15 states. All of them became independent when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. These former Soviet states include Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Kazakhstan.

Russia was the biggest power inside the Soviet Union. Many Russians lived and worked in other Soviet countries. There are still large Russian communities in many of these countries, including Ukraine.

● **What was the Cold War?**

The Soviet Union was very powerful. After the Second World War, another global conflict began, known as the Cold War. But this wasn't a normal war. The main countries involved didn't fight each other, but there was always tension because both sides feared the other would try to invade them or, worse, launch a nuclear war and wipe them out.

The Cold War saw the Soviet Union and many eastern European countries, like Poland and Hungary, pitted against NATO, which included the USA, Canada, UK and other western European countries, like France and West Germany.

The Cold War ended in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed.

● **But isn't NATO still in existence?**

Yes, very much so. Although it was set up at the start of the Cold War, NATO didn't break up when the conflict ended. In fact, it has got bigger.

In 2004, former Soviet states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined NATO. Russia was not happy about this. It meant that an organisation it thought of as an enemy now had troops on its western border.

The decision to allow former Soviet states to join NATO also upset Russia because, back in 1990 and 1991, many Western leaders told the Russians they would not look to grow NATO eastward.



USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev (left) and US President Ronald Reagan helped to bring the Cold War to an end

● **What happened to Ukraine after the Cold War?**

Since it became its own country after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has mostly been quite friendly towards Russia. But some Ukrainians want to be closer to the European Union and to join NATO.

When an uprising in early 2014 forced the pro-Russian president of Ukraine to quit, it seemed the country might change direction and become very pro-Western. Putin acted fast and sent in Russian soldiers to take control of Crimea. This region of southern Ukraine used to be part of Russia. It remains under Russian control today.

Russia also sent its troops to support pro-Russian rebel fighters in their war against Ukrainian government forces in the eastern part of Ukraine. This conflict, which began in 2014, is ongoing.

There are many Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine who prefer to be close to Russia, not the West. But Western leaders say that is no excuse for Russia to wade in and support a war.

Every week, First News will help you to make sense about what is going on in Ukraine. You can also watch FYI, the Sky Kids children's news show, at first.news/educationTV to find out more.

If you are worried, speak to an adult you trust or contact Childline on 0800 11 11.

WHAT'S THE LATEST?

RUSSIA has attacked Ukraine, and hundreds of thousands of people have left their homes to escape the fighting.

We look at what's happening inside Ukraine, the effect it is having around the world, and what other countries are doing to try to stop the war and help Ukraine and its people.

A civilian block of flats in Kyiv that was damaged by a Russian rocket

Russia invades

Russian troops have attacked Ukraine from the north, east and south, including several attempts to enter Ukraine's capital, Kyiv. Russian forces control some sections inside Ukraine's borders, but Ukrainian

troops have put up a tough fight and stopped Russia's first attempts to take over Kyiv. However, lines of Russian tanks several miles long have been seen headed towards Kyiv.

Russian missiles have hit lots of civilian areas in Kyiv and other cities, including Kharkiv, the second-largest city. On Sunday, human rights organisation Amnesty International said that Russian weapons had hit at least four schools, killing several people and a child. The head of Amnesty, Agnès Callamard, said it was "stomach turning" and "should be investigated as a war crime". Many civilians have been hiding in subway stations and bomb shelters to avoid Russian airstrikes.



People taking shelter in a Kyiv subway station

Ukraine fights back

Although Russia's military is much bigger and has better equipment, Ukrainian troops are fiercely defending their country. They are also being helped by many civilians who have bought weapons and taken shooting lessons in recent months. Some Ukrainian businesses have even stopped producing goods so that they can make weapons instead.



A man is led away by police officers in Moscow, Russia, for protesting against the war

Anti-war protests – even in Russia

Ukrainians and their many supporters have been protesting in cities all around the world, with many people criticising

Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions.

Getting reliable news is limited in Russia, as the government runs much of the media and has closed down many independent news organisations. But even this hasn't stopped many people in Russia from protesting against the war. Protests have taken place in more than 50 Russian cities and towns, with police arresting hundreds of protesters.



Kyiv is 1,500 miles (2,414km) from London, about the same distance from the UK to the south of Spain, so it's really far away

The world unites against Russia

On Sunday, European Union (EU) leaders agreed to send millions of pounds' worth of weapons and other aid to Ukraine – the first time the EU has ever done this. Many countries around the world have also put financial restrictions called sanctions in place. This means that Russian companies and banks will struggle to carry out their normal business.

On Monday, it was reported that the European part of Russia's biggest bank, Sberbank, was in big trouble after so many people decided to take their money out. It was also reported that Russian citizens are already feeling the effects of sanctions, with prices rising in shops and some things being harder to find. Even though the Russian government controls a lot of the media, it can't stop people noticing empty shelves and higher prices.

A fuss over fossil fuel

The big problem with the sanctions is that many countries (including the UK) rely on Russia for lots of their oil and gas supplies. So, even while Western countries are protesting against Russia's actions and trying to restrict the country's economy, they are sending millions of pounds to Russia in exchange for fossil fuels. Many have

said that this is yet another reason why moving to greener sources of energy that we control ourselves is a wise move, as it would limit how much money Russia could spend on its military.

Bear vs bear

Russia as a country has often been nicknamed the 'Russian bear', but Ukraine also has a bear on its side – Paddington! Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, used to be an actor and comedian – and provided the voice for Paddington in the Ukrainian versions of the two hit movies.



An illustration of the 'Russian bear'



Mr Zelensky became famous for starring in a TV show called *Servant of the People*, where he played a teacher who became president after ranting about the state of politics. He also competed in the Ukrainian version of *Strictly* back in 2006!

Hugh Bonneville (on the right of Paddington in the picture above), who voiced Paddington for English-speaking countries, tweeted about Mr Zelensky's role as the marmalade-loving bear. He also posted a link to the website of children's charity UNICEF, which has Paddington as a children's champion. You can find out more about how UNICEF is helping the children in Ukraine or donate money by visiting www.unicef.org.uk.

The situation in Ukraine is changing rapidly, but you can keep track of events with our daily update at live.firstnews.co.uk.

UKRAINE: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

SOME of you got in touch with us to ask questions about the Ukraine situation (thank you especially to Portway Primary School), so we've answered some below to help you understand better what's going on.



● **What is the reason for it starting? Who agrees and disagrees with Russia?**

Mahreen, Portway Primary

The main reason seems to be that Russia is worried about losing its influence over the countries that surround it, which will mean that Russia has less of a say in world affairs. Russia is basically on its own with this attack, although Belarus is allowing Russian troops based there to launch attacks on Ukraine. Even its big supporter, China, is trying to stay out of it, and has said that both sides should stop the fighting.



Vladimir Putin

● **What does Russia want from Ukraine?**

Simona, Portway Primary

Ukraine has a very long border with Russia, so Russian President Vladimir Putin seems uncomfortable

with the idea of Ukraine being more friendly with Western countries such as the UK and US. Although Russia fought on the same side as the UK and US in World War Two, since then they haven't really been on friendly terms. So, possibly, Putin is worried that countries he sees as opponents may, in future, have troops based over the border in Ukraine.

● **How long is it going to continue?**

Joy, Portway Primary

It's impossible to say. Russia has been funding small rebellions in eastern parts of Ukraine for years, but a full-scale assault is another matter. The attacks are seriously harming Russia's global reputation, and the world's countries



Cars queue as people try to cross the border into Poland

are increasing the pressure on Russia's economy, so Russian citizens and businesses are unlikely to support the war or want it to continue for long.

● **What's being done to stop Russia?**

Stopping the war is the main thing on



A girl calls for peace at an anti-war protest in Amsterdam, Netherlands

many people's minds right now. World leaders are being joined by business leaders to make it harder for Russia to make money (see p3). Sport is also helping to increase the pressure on Russia from all angles. Russian athletes are being banned from many international events, including the Champions League and the qualifiers for this year's men's football World Cup, which is the most-watched sporting event in the world. Sport, especially football, is big business and has huge influence around the world, so it all helps to pile pressure on Russia.

● **Why aren't other countries like the UK sending troops to help Ukraine?**

Russia has one of the most powerful armies in the world, so starting a war against it would be a bad idea. That's why world leaders are trying to talk to Russia, so that things can be worked out in discussions rather than on the battlefield. Russia also knows that Ukraine isn't yet part of NATO (see p2). Countries who are in NATO will join a war if another member is attacked, but Ukraine doesn't have that protection.

● **Could Russia invade the UK?**

No. Russia has no reason to invade the UK. Even if it did, it is a very long way away from the UK, with lots of countries and sea in between. It is much easier for Russia to invade Ukraine, as it can send tanks and troops the short distance by land and air. Also, the UK is a part of NATO, so could call on the help of other NATO countries such as the US, France and Germany. It might be hard to judge what Vladimir Putin is thinking, but he isn't stupid.

● **Will this lead to World War Three or a nuclear war?**

The world has come a long way since World War Two, and all countries realise that the risks of a world war are too great. After WW2, organisations such as the United Nations and NATO were set up to avoid the threat of future world wars. Only two nuclear weapons have ever been used in war, and both were in 1945 against Japan. People were horrified at the devastation caused by those two bombs, and huge efforts have gone into making sure that it never happens again. Putin knows that a nuclear war would only lead to the destruction of Russia, so he has nothing at all to gain from starting one.

● **Will my parents have to fight?**

No. A lot of people have asked this, maybe because Ukraine has barred men aged 18-60 from leaving the country, in case they are needed to fight. But there isn't even the slightest possibility of such a thing happening here. So, your parents won't be going anywhere. You'll still get your dinner every night and you'll still have to tidy your room!

● **What's happening to the families who are leaving Ukraine to escape the fighting?**

By Monday, more than half a million people had already fled Ukraine. Most have crossed into Poland, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. Organisations like UNICEF and the Red Cross have set up camps where people can shelter, warm up and get food. Countries around the world are taking Ukrainian people in, and many people who aren't from Ukraine, such as students who are studying there, are being helped to get back to their own countries.



Refugees being fed after leaving Ukraine and making it safely to Slovakia

We know many of you have questions about what's happening in Ukraine, so send us your questions at first.news.ukrainequestions and we'll answer more in an upcoming issue.

WORRYING ABOUT WAR?

THE news from Ukraine is unsettling for everyone. We hope the information in *First News* this week has helped you understand everything a bit better. When you just hear a worrying headline, or scary words are thrown about, it can be upsetting. It's the "fear of the unknown". Knowing more about what's going on hopefully has helped you not to feel worried. But, if you are still feeling anxious, here is some advice from Childline, who have been talking to children who are worried about events in Ukraine.



by Childline

There's been a lot of news about Russia invading Ukraine, and how other countries might respond. Some things that happen in the world can make us scared, confused, and unsafe, or like we don't have any control. These are all totally normal and expected reactions.

Here are some things you can do to help when you're worried or upset about things in the news.

Talk to someone you trust

Share how you're feeling with an adult you trust and ask questions about what's happening.

Get the facts

You might hear people talking about what might happen next in Ukraine or the rest of the world. But some of that isn't based on fact. Double check the information on what's happening with sites you can trust to manage your reaction to the news. (*First News* and *FYI* at first.news/educationTV can help).

Want to talk about the news or what's happening? You can share your feelings safely and anonymously on the Childline message boards, or can speak to a counsellor on 0800 1111 or childline.org.uk. They are available 24/7.

Take a break

When the news is talking a lot about what's happening, it can be hard to get away from it.

Take media breaks, including from social media, and limit discussions, such as having discussion/media-free mealtimes.

Try doing something that relaxes you for a while, or turning off notifications so you're not getting lots of breaking news alerts and reminders.

Do something positive

There are some basic things we can all do. Ask an adult what you can do to help other people, support a friend who's upset or share something positive online. Doing things to help other people can help you to cope and feel more in control.

We may know people from Ukraine who are worried about loved ones. Check in on them. Let them know you are here to listen or talk if they need. Is there anything you can do for them?

ITV *This Morning's* clinical psychologist Dr Anna Colton has more advice for *First News* readers

Remember that while war is scary and the news makes it very real, you are safe. The UK is a long, long way from Ukraine and it is safe here.

If you are feeling worried or upset speak to your mum, dad, family or teachers. They will reassure you and talk things through with you.

It's natural and normal to worry, especially when there are big world events like the invasion of Ukraine happening. Know that you are not alone in feeling worried, and there's nothing wrong with you for feeling worried.

Although it might feel hard, try to find things to do to distract yourself from the news. When we focus our mind on something worrying or upsetting it gets stuck there. So, when we focus on something different that we enjoy, our mind gets filled with that and our anxiety reduces.

Stop the scroll. Bad news draws us in and we keep wanting to find out what's happening. But this doesn't

help us at all... we can't change the situation, so constantly watching the news or videos just makes us feel worse.

Look only once or twice a day, if that, and certainly no more.

Anxiety loves attention. So the more attention you give it – by thinking about whatever's worrying you – the bigger it grows. It's like watering a plant. To stop growing your anxiety, take away the attention. Talk to friends, engage in a hobby, be with family, play games.

Feelings blow in and then they blow out, so know that your worries won't stay forever.

Make sure you notice the times the worry isn't there as well as when it is.



FYI: UKRAINE VIDEO EXPLAINER



OUR partner weekly news show, *Sky Kids' FYI*, has made a short film that explains what is going on in Ukraine. You can watch it right now at first.news/educationTV, or by scanning this QR code.

In the film, presenter Braydon explains the background to the war and why it hasn't just come out of the blue, but has a long history.





WASHINGTON, DC, USA

FLOWERS, including sunflowers, the national flower of Ukraine, surround candles on the steps of the Ukrainian Embassy.



LIVERPOOL, UK

EVERTON and Manchester City players pay respect to Ukraine ahead of their game. Both clubs have a Ukrainian player, with both teams wearing the Ukraine colours of yellow and blue as support for the country and for their team-mates.



NEW YORK, USA



MADRID, SPAIN

TENS of thousands of adults and children demonstrate against the war in Ukraine.



SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

IN a sign of solidarity, famous landmarks around the world, including the Empire State Building (top) and Sydney Opera House, are lit up in the colours of the Ukrainian national flag.



KROŚCIENKO, POLAND

POLISH citizens put together individual packages from aid donations near the border crossing point from Ukraine. Clothing, food, and essential items have been donated in huge quantities from all over the country.

