

Women fleeing war: "Our children ask us, when are we going back home?"



fled from Bucha, a town near Kiev that has been viciously hit by Russian shelling. Her account is a confused and hurting description of the fighting she saw in the sky and on the ground. Helicopters. Ukrainian anti-aircraft. Bombings. "People have been killed", she says. When the mayor urged residents to leave the city, she and her three-year-old niece got into the car and drove away. She escaped with what she had with her. The husbands have remained and are now fighting in the local defence divisions. "The soldiers storm into houses and destroy everything. There is no more water or electricity. It took me five days to get out of Ukraine. It will probably be impossible to ever return, we have nowhere to go." She stops. She lifts her gaze and says: "We used to lead a normal life. We had everything. Now we have nothing. That's what it means to be refugees. It's terrible."



, on-duty coordinator of the Order of Malta's volunteer workers. They were among the first to offer assistance, bringing warm beverages, food for adults and for children. People were arriving after a three- to four-day journey, often without eating or drinking. Many of them, including children, were found in a state of dehydration. However, the volunteers immediately became aware of the presence of looters and thieves in the area.



says Miroslav, who works as a book seller. The whole area is now under surveillance. The police are making extensive cross-checks and the Italian financial police have also been deployed on site.



Domcek is a four-house facility, all of the housing units have been renovated and furnished. The centre hosts every year five to eight thousand young people who arrive for spiritual exercises and meetings. Some stay for a year of voluntary work. A meeting on synodality was taking place when the news from Ukraine reached alarming levels.



["We contacted the mayor and proceeded to clean the structure and look for beds. That night, everything was in place, and we welcomed the first 38 children and their mothers. A total of over 400 people have stayed here. Now the facility is home to the volunteer workers who offer their help at the border. The women are very tired when they arrive. They only ask to be given a place to sleep and something to eat. They have been driving for long distances and are disoriented. For this reason, maps can be found everywhere in the compound, so the volunteers can show them where they are and which route to take to continue their journey. "We have seen mothers pushing a baby carriage with one hand and holding their child with the other," says the priest. "We have seen husbands drive back and women weeping for hours in their rooms." But the call of life was greater than surrender, stronger than tears. A mother with two children told us: "when we were hiding in the shelters, without food and water, we realised we would rather risk our lives and get out than starve in the underground shelters." Those are the women of Ukraine, they hold back their tears but never stop fighting.](#)

[M. Chiara Biagioni](#)