

## Life in a country at war

### Interview – with Yuliia Batalina, ETF aviation worker in Ukraine

**Do you feel safe for the moment? Do we know you and your family are only 120 km away from the confrontations in Kyiv? How do you manage life daily: do you have food, water, a place to sleep? How are you holding on since the Russians invaded Ukraine?**

At the beginning of the invasion, my family and I were still living in Kyiv. Sirens sound in Kyiv almost every hour. Then we saw what had happened in Kharkiv. A few days later, a rocket fell nearby our apartment, shaking us big time, and my younger brother was terrified.

So, we finally decided to leave the city. We took all the food from home, and we are currently relocated in a village, not far from Kyiv. There is no bunker or any shelter where we could hide here. Planes are flying over, and we can hear the noises of the shots. Yet, we think this far-away village could be a place they may bypass. Still, there is no guarantee that a missile being shot down will fall here. It's like roulette.

Yet, we feel safer than most people living in other cities, such as Chernihiv, Slavutich, Brovary, Mariupol, Kherson, Kharkiv. I can't even imagine what these people must feel while living in the basement for weeks.

Yet, I guess we are still lucky we have a place to sleep: a country house made of wood, so we hope for the best because we have nowhere else to go in case the sirens start sounding the alarm.



In the meantime, we can still buy some food at least from time to time from the small shops in the village. Yet, most essential goods like bread, meat, cereals, pasta and water were are missing or available only in minimal quantities. And we have a well, so we are lucky enough to use the water from there. From time to time, we still have to go to Kyiv for provisions from the supermarket or to get medicines from the pharmacy.

We have enough, of course, it is not comparable to our ordinary life, but we are thankful for what we have.

**How did you and your family manage to escape from Kyiv? What was the most difficult thing for you to do since the beginning of the conflict? Could you describe how your days are currently?**

My dad had suggested that my mother and brother go somewhere in Europe for as long as there is a war in Ukraine. But we decided to stay here, with our city and our people fighting for our country.

I was even offered a job at a company I would like to work for. I was supposed to start my new job about early in March. But I refused because I couldn't leave my family and my country. I think loved ones should not be abandoned. So, we finally agreed with my family to just leave Kyiv together. Leaving the city was the most difficult decision, I think. Because we heard and we saw the news on television about people being shot in their own cars while they were simply trying to escape from the city.

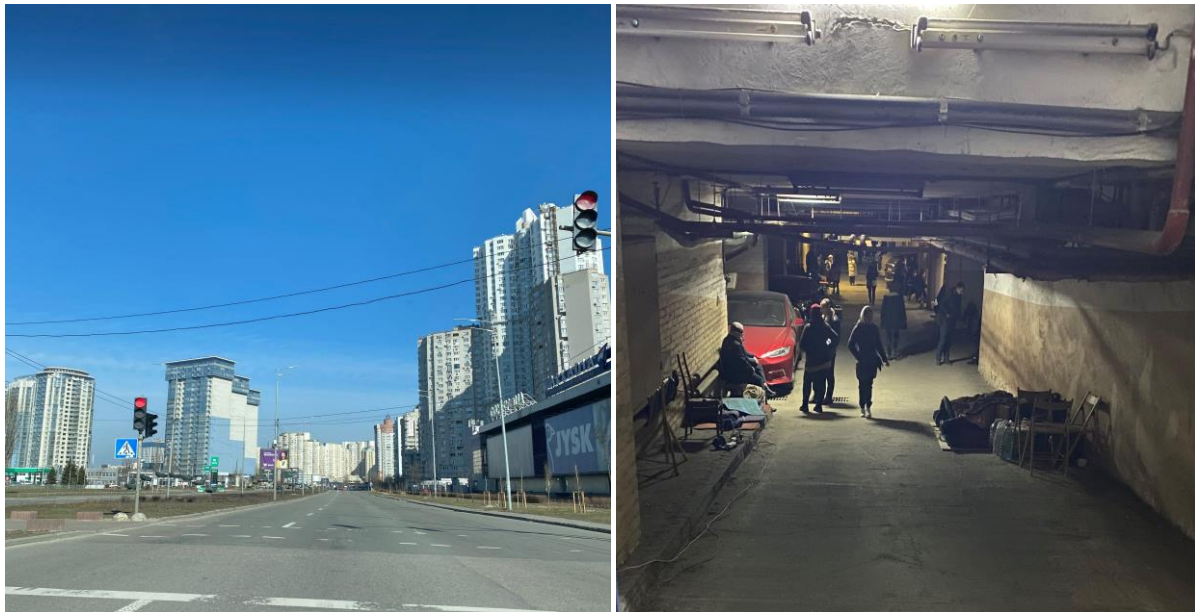
There were a lot of checkpoints along the 120 km of road, but thank God; we made it through after four hours. My father joined the defence troops, my mother and I we are trying to help them with the food.

But the most important thing we are grateful for at the end of each day is that we are alive.

**Do you have any news about your friends or colleagues?**

I try to stay in touch with my relatives, friends and colleagues every day. We share news about them and their relatives living in cities where the fights are ongoing. In Mariupol, someone's grandmother lives in a basement with no water, electricity and almost no food. My deputy, Anya has a brother in Kherson; our lawyer, the one helping us with Wizz Air, also has a family in Kherson. A friend from Chernihiv had a rocket

landing right into his house. Most of the house was destroyed, but fortunately, there was no detonator, and the specialists were called and disarmed the rocket away. One of my best friends was killed when he and his friends were trying to deliver food to a nursery. Our neighbours' family was shot while trying to escape... It is our reality. I was in Kyiv some days ago. I have never seen the city so empty. A beautiful city turned into a fortress. I could barely recognise my city.



### **How do you feel about what is happening to your country?**

It is a tragedy! A great tragedy for my country.

To be honest, I have never considered myself a patriot; I am well aware of all the advantages and shortcomings of Ukraine. Whether we like it or not, our country has always been a third world country, and they don't always want to take us to work. BUT I really love my city. I grew up in Kyiv; the city has become so beautiful, there are so many very nice places, and people are amazing.

Now I am proud of our country and our president, we were attacked unexpectedly, and our army is defending us bravely, fighting for our freedom and peace. Of course, I suffer because of what is going on here.

Peace is what I want more than anything now! It is what I dream of. I want this horror to stop; I want people to stop dying and cities to stop being destroyed. I'm horrified...

The first few days after the war started, I could not stop crying. Now, I have no tears left. It's awful.

A month ago, we had our lives ongoing; we were making plans for the future. We had hopes...Then, we were attacked. No one was waiting for Russia here; no one came to "liberate" us; they are uninvited guests coming here and taking everything away.

It hurts a lot...everything that is happening hurts all the deaths, destroyed cities, and children who are now orphans. They have not asked for it!

**What are your plans for the near future: do you plan to stay there or consider leaving the country?**

It's hard to say now, for as long we don't know how it will end. And we cannot know that.

Will we be still alive when the war ends? Will our house still exist in the city where I was born and where we grew up? If so, I would like to go back home and try to take everything from where I left. I hope we still have something to return to. And continue with my life, with everything I was doing before the war. Continue the trial/dispute with Wizz Air for justice to be done.

I hope and pray they don't turn my country into ruins and the Ukrainians not to be wiped off from the face of the earth.

Do you know? Before, I used to dream of visiting New York; now, I only dream of returning to Kyiv. Yet, I have to be pragmatical, so I do not rule out the possibility of working abroad, somewhere in Europe until my country's situation calms down. I am well aware the country's economy is hugely affected by this war. And, with all the financial support my country is getting, it will take us a long time and enormous efforts to have our lives as before the war.

**How can Europe, people from the neighbouring country or even the whole world can help? If there were some specific things you would like to ask, what would you ask us to do to help?**

Europe is already helping Ukrainians a lot with everything possible: by sanctions on Russia, via humanitarian aid, supporting refugees, rallies, or trying to provide jobs.

Of course, as Ukrainians, we would want the sky over Ukraine to be closed. I understand Europe's evaluating its risks and why not join Ukraine into it. But, as far as

I know, the situation, this is not just a war between Russia and Ukraine, it is a war declared to the whole world. Yet, it's just Ukraine protecting everyone now. But, if Russia is not stopped, they will move on.