

# Russian invasion of Ukraine

## After months of tension Russia attacks its neighbor

On Thursday, February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine, a European democracy of 44 million people. For months, President Vladimir Putin had denied he wanted to attack his neighbor, but then he went back on his word and sent forces across Ukraine's northern, eastern, and southern borders, resulting in the first major war in Europe since the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

Let's take a look at how all this began.

Ukraine was part of the Russian empire for centuries before becoming a Soviet republic. It became a fully independent country in 1991. In 2014, its pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, was removed from power after months of protests against his rule, which Putin saw as a Western-backed coup.

He retaliated by seizing the southern region of Crimea and triggered a rebellion in the east, backing separatists in the two regions Donetsk and Luhansk. The separatists have fought Ukrainian forces in a war that has claimed 14,000 lives, according to Ukrainian authorities.

Most of the country enjoyed peace until the spring of last year when a massive build-up of Russian troops near the Ukrainian border raised concerns. But the troops eventually pulled out after a few weeks. Then in November 2021, satellite imagery showed a new build-up of Russian troops on the border

with Ukraine, around 100,000 soldiers along with tanks and other military equipment. Over the next few months, the US insisted that Russia intended to invade Ukraine, while Russia maintained its troops were carrying out military exercises.

On Monday, February 21, after months of speculation about his motives, President Putin suddenly recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as independent and the Russian parliament granted him permission to send in what he called "peacekeepers." The West called this the start of an invasion. Then, after the separatists asked Russia for help to stop Ukrainian aggression (which the US dismissed as Russian propaganda), Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Putin gave a number of reasons to justify his actions. Among them, he wanted to make sure that Ukraine never joins the West's defensive military alliance NATO, which he argued was a threat to Russia's security. But he also gave several other irrational arguments, including the need to protect people from genocide and Ukraine's "Nazi" leaders, even though there is no evidence of any genocide in Ukraine and the country is led by a president who is Jewish. American president Joe Biden simply believes that Putin secretly wants to rebuild the Soviet Union.

Sources: BBC, AlJazeera, Euronews

## Checking understanding. Answer the questions below.

1. Why was Putin against the removal of Ukraine's president, Yanukovich, in 2014?
2. How did he respond to this event?
3. What was Putin's excuse for moving his troops to the Ukrainian border in November 2021?
4. What event happened just before Putin decided to send "peacekeepers" to eastern Ukraine?
5. What reasons did Putin give for invading Ukraine?
6. What is Putin's long-term ambition according to Joe Biden?

### Watch and summarize briefly

<https://www.linguahouse.com/esl-lesson-plans/general-english/russia-invades-ukraine/videoplayer/refugeesmp4>

### Read and summarize

#### What is the UK doing to help Ukrainian refugees?

In the UK, somewhat further away from Ukraine, the situation is a little different. The British government has **set up a scheme** where they will pay people to take Ukrainian refugees into their homes for six months or more, but this scheme isn't yet operating at any practical level.

So far around 80,000 people have volunteered, have come forward. So it's clear that British people want to help too. But they're awaiting instructions on how to proceed, which is disappointing as the Ukrainians need help now. And there is a visa process in the UK and the government has **been criticized** for the delays which this has introduced.

Information about how and where to attend visa appointments has been misleading and disorganized and there are nowhere near enough visa appointments available. The intention now is to set up a visa processing centre in Lille in France.

I guess the intention being that refugees could then be brought to the UK on trains that operate from Lille through the Eurotunnel, straight through to London. Hopefully that will happen soon. At least the UK has extended the visas of Ukrainians who are already in our country and set up a Family Scheme for people with relatives already here.

### Read and summarize

1 hr 19 min ago

From CNN's Olga Voitovych in Kyiv

**At least two people were killed in attacks on Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region, according to a local official.**

**One of the two people who were killed was a man who died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. And at least one person was**

hospitalized with injuries, the head of the regional military administration Oleh Syniehubov said on his Telegram account.

“Incoming hits of enemy missiles were recorded in the region. All of them were targeted at our critical infrastructure facilities,” he said.

### Read and summarize.

#### 3 Mines



A TYPICAL ANTIPEOPLE LAND MINE IS an innocuous-looking piece of plastic that weighs about a kilogram, fits in the palm of the hand and costs only a couple of dollars to manufacture. When stepped on, it explodes with enough force to rip the legs off an adult or reduce a small child to pulp. Those not killed by the blast or loss of blood frequently succumb to infections caused by shrapnel forced deep into body tissues. Rarely in the annals of human conflict has there been a simpler way of killing or maiming so many.

Though many regional conflicts are over, the mines remain – millions of them. According to US and UN estimates, between 85 million and 100 million antipersonnel land mines lie scattered in 62 countries; as many are presently stockpiled. The estimated bill for the worldwide clean-up is \$85 billion or more, and that does not include the huge cost of assisting victims in need of hospital treatment and rehabilitation.

### Talking point

- Is there a cause you would fight/die for?
- Can you think of a war that you believe was justified?
- Does war have any positive consequences for mankind?
- If war could be eliminated entirely, would there still be a use for armies?
- Is military service compulsory in Poland? Should it be?

- Who suffers most during a war?
- How do you think war affects everyday people?
- How can we help refugees?
- How do you think we can reduce the amount of wars and conflict that happens globally?
- In general, who do you think is responsible for most wars?
- Why do terrorists take hostages?
- Should governments agree to terrorists' demands?

### Read and summarize

#### Refugees are leaving Ukraine and arriving in Poland

The situation is that Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 years old must stay behind to fight the war - it's illegal for them to leave, while the women and children have to make a long journey to safety, without knowing where they're going to end up. There are also amongst the refugees many international students, who were at universities and colleges in Ukraine, many from India, Morocco and Nigeria. It's estimated that around 100,000 refugees a day are crossing the border from western Ukraine into Poland, many of them on foot. And the Polish people by and large are welcoming them.

These refugees are people who not many days ago had normal lives, jobs and professions, friends, children in school, pets, cars, a good standard of living. And they've been hiding out in basements, listening to bombs, shells and rockets overhead. Then there's the painful separation of the families.

The men must stay and fight - and the women and children must make the dangerous journey to safety, looking out for shells and without knowing where they're going to end up. More than 1.5 million people are estimated to have crossed the border from Ukraine into Poland, trying to reach safety. Reception centres for refugees have been springing up in Poland. They include medical facilities, nappy changing places, food, donated clothes, medicines and a place to sleep. Once the Ukrainian refugees have recovered a little from their journey and perhaps decided what direction they want to travel in next, Polish volunteers provide transport for them.

Some Ukrainians have relatives in other countries that they hope to join. Others don't, but have ideas of which country they want to go to. Although Poland has a mixed history with refugees, there's believed to be 90% backing for the government decision to accept Ukrainian refugees. But the refugees are received mainly by Polish volunteers

and many Poles are opening up their homes to take in refugee families. A bill was passed recently to enable refugees to stay in Poland for up to 18 months.

### Watch and summarize