

A small Valencia toy store sits on a narrow side street off Carrer de Sant Vincent Màrtir, a two-minute walk from Plaça de la Reina.

When you enter the front door you are met with small and big light-wash wooden and mechanical toys, beautiful puzzles, and a wide assortment of artwork created by local artists. As you continue into the store, called UA Juguetes, a flag appears on your left-hand side: a Ukrainian flag.

Iryna Havrylyshyn, a Ukrainian refugee who has lived in Valencia for almost nine years, is the business's owner. Prior to her family's move to Spain in February of 2014, when Russia's first attack on Ukraine occurred, Havrylyshyn had been regularly traveling to Germany and Poland, and then back to Lviv, Ukraine, due to her daughter's rare genetic disease.

When Russia's aggression toward its Eastern European neighbor increased, travel became a lot more complicated for Havrylyshyn and her family. Eventually, they decided to move to a country where her daughter "will have everything," including an entire toy store to enjoy.

Once Havrylyshyn and her family settled into their new home in Valencia, they began to help others in both the Valencian and Ukrainian communities find safe homes.

## Securing a future for her fellow Ukrainians

By Lilliana Solovay

Then came the current, more extensive Russian invasion, with bombings and attacks hitting all parts of Ukraine. When the danger of living in her home country increased beginning in February 2022, Havrylyshyn became even more involved to help other refugees escape or to offer support for those who chose to stay and fight for their homeland.

Havrylyshyn's friends began to help other refugees in Ukraine as well, and asked her to "arrange everything for them," she says. Havrylyshyn does what she can for them, telling the refugees who come to Valencia "where they have to go, what they have to do, which documents they have to prepare."

Those acts of kindness are not enough to establish a stable and enjoyable life in a new country, however, so Havrylyshyn links them up with local community organizers that work with refugees. The groups help them



A decision to obtain better health care for her daughter led to a safer life in Valencia

**Iryna Havrylyshyn has lived in Valencia for almost nine years, after leaving Ukraine during Russia's first acts of aggression toward her home country. In addition to helping other Ukrainians move to Valencia, she sells items in her store that support her belief that Ukraine will emerge victorious in its war with Russia.**

with resources, such as directing them to areas where they "can settle, to find jobs, and to find some courses where they can start learning Spanish," she says. Havrylyshyn knows firsthand that without Spanish, life in Valencia is "very complicated."

According to Statista.com, as of December 26, 2022, more than 160,237 people who have fled the war in Ukraine since March 2022 are living in Spain. *In Spain News* reported on

December 30, 2022, that the Valencia region has granted temporary protection to 42,739 of those refugees.

Havrylyshyn also has been in contact with pharmaceutical companies to gather necessary medications to help individuals still living in Ukraine. Fortunately, citizens of Valencia are taking it upon themselves to help Ukraine, rather than needing Havrylyshyn and others like her to prompt them. Not only are Va-

lencians sending donations, but they also are taking their own cars "to the border to collect the refugees on their own will," she says. "The people who know people help other people."

Although many important needs of Ukraine and its refugees are being fulfilled, more complicated issues call for even more assistance. Often, people in the Valencian community bring clothes, foods, or medications to donate to Ukraine. However, there is only so much room in the transportation services that are delivering goods to Ukraine.

This means they can transport only the donations that are of critical assistance. Some days Ukrainians need medications, some days they need more food, and some days materials more important than food or medicine need to be brought to Ukraine.

A crucial necessity that is always required to help the Ukrainian community is funding.

"There were many people willing to donate their clothes or something," Havrylyshyn says, "and we just didn't want to offend them, but we said I'm sorry, we're not taking any clothes because we have no opportunity to send it because the cars are filled with something more important that we need at the moment."

In the U.S., the Biden Administration has committed more than \$19 billion in security assistance since the start of the 2022 war, according to the Congressional Research Service in a December 7, 2022, press release. On November 15, 2022, President Biden submitted to Congress a fourth request for Ukraine-related emergency supplemental funds including almost \$15 billion in new security assistance.

Despite the immense help of the U.S. government, more funding is needed to not only continue the fight against Russia but also to win the war for Ukraine, Havrylyshyn says.

"What we lack now is not only the weapon that we can use to protect, we need the weapon that we can fight," Havrylyshyn adds with pride. "That can reach larger distances, so that we could reach Russia, not only to make the

fight on the territory of Ukraine, but also to show that, 'yes, this is a war and you're going to suffer and we're going to disrupt your country because you came into ours.'"

Havrylyshyn expresses confidence that Ukraine will win this fight; her only concern

is getting the help Ukraine needs to do so. Succeeding is not a question of will, according to her; the question is how and when Ukraine will emerge victorious.

And visitors to her toy store will continue to see the pride she carries for her country.



Photo by Lilliana Solovay



Photo courtesy of UA Juguetes

**UA Juguetes sells wooden and mechanical toys, such as the car to the left, and the shop is decorated with a wide assortment of artwork created by local artists.**