

Context Note: Homeless children and children as victims

As famine conditions in Ukraine became ever more severe in the 1930s, the number of homeless youth increased dramatically. Some starving parents from the countryside dropped off their children in urban areas in the desperate hope that they would have a better chance of survival there; perhaps they would be taken in by a kind stranger or an orphanage. Older children sometimes left their dead or dying families in the villages of their own accord, also in the hope of finding the means to stay alive in the city. Abandonment and runaways occurred among urban families as well, although to a lesser extent.

The older children tended to band together, begging, scrounging for scraps, and stealing to survive. Living and sleeping on the streets in unsanitary conditions, they were susceptible to diseases, some fatal, carried by lice or caused by unclean drinking water. Prostitution was not uncommon.

Officials in Kharkiv reported 9,000 children picked up off the streets in one week alone in May of 1933. There was a severe lack of bedding, staff, and provisions in the overcrowded orphanages, where the death rate was 30% and higher from disease and starvation. Conditions were so appalling that more able-bodied children often escaped, preferring their chances of survival on the street. Witnesses recalled children housed in railcars in unspeakable conditions, a fact confirmed in official reports. As Whiting Williams described in his article, "My Journey Through Famine-Stricken Russia," some children were simply carted off to an open space in the countryside where they were left to fend for themselves.

Sources:

Applebaum, Anne. *Red Famine : Stalin's War on Ukraine*. New York: Doubleday, 2017.

Conquest, Robert. "Children." In *The Harvest of Sorrow : Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, 283–98. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

"No. 42. Stenohrama Zasadannya Osoblyvoyi Narady Pry Pobutoviyi Sektsiyi Kharkivs'koyi Mis'koyi Rady, Prysvelyachenoho Nadzvychnomomu Stanu Dytyachoyi Bezprytul'nosti i Smertnosti Na Kharkivshchyni, 4 Lypnya 1933r." In *Natsional'na Knyha Pam'iyati Zhertv Holodomoru 1932-1933 Rokiv v Ukraïni. Kharkivs'ka Oblast' Obl. Redkol.: M. YE. Chernyak, L. B. Rovchak, V. V. Annopol's'ka Ta in. ; Avt. Kol. Ta Uporyad.: L. B. Rovchak, I. V. Shuys'kyi, N. V. Lapchyns'ka Ta In.*, 868–75. Kharkiv: Zoloti storinky, 2018.

https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/holodomor_kharkiv_2_2018_2.pdf

"No. 581. Lyst Kharkivs'koho oblyvkonkomu do TSK KP(b)U pro zakhody, spryamovani na borot'by z dytyachoyu bezprytul'nistyu; 30 travnya 1933r." In *Голодомор 1932-1933 Років в Україні : Документи і Матеріали /Holodomor 1932-1933 Rokiv v Ukraïni : Dokumenty i Materialy. Упорядник Руслан Пуріг.*, 856–57. Kyiv: Vydavnychyï dim "Kyïevo-Mohylians'ka akademiia, 2007. <http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0002064>

Williams, Whiting. "My Journey Through Famine-Stricken Russia." *Answers*, February 24, 1934, 16–17, 28. <http://vitacollections.ca/HREC-holodomorphotodirectory/3645637/data>