

Zorya Luhansk: A football club in exile

Sports

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Over a million people have fled eastern Ukraine since the fighting broke out there in 2014. However, football continues in Ukraine, even for a team like Zorya Luhansk, who now play their home games a long way from home.

By Matt Ford for Deutsche Welle, Jan 6, 2017 A sleeper train from Kyiv to Odessa speeds south through a frigid December night. As the temperature outside plummets to -12 degrees Celsius (10 degrees Fahrenheit), rumors spread that the pitch at Chornomorets Stadium is frozen and that the match could be called off. "No chance!" scoffs Vladimir, who is traveling to see his team, FC Zorya Luhansk, play Manchester United in their return match in the Europa League. "I'm mostly worried for Zlatan [Ibrahimovic] and the United players - they've probably never seen snow before," he says. The freezing temperatures are the least of FC Zorya's worries. When [Russian-backed separatists](#) took control of their home city of Luhansk in 2014, their stadium was damaged by a mortar strike and the club was forced into exile. They now play their European fixtures 966 kilometers (600 miles) away in Odessa. "It's extremely difficult," Zorya's CEO, Sergei Rafailov tells DW after we have reached Odessa. "Our entire club infrastructure is still at home in Luhansk. Playing in a different city brings additional costs. We must rent the stadium, the training pitches, the facilities, accommodation." Drawn in a tough group with Fenerbahce, Feyenoord and Manchester United, Zorya are playing for pride on this night, having already been knocked out of the Europa League. However, they are third in the Ukrainian Premier League and haven't given up hope of qualifying for next season's Champions League. [⋮] <http://dw.com/p/2VLIk>