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Ukraine: Insights and implications

Forced Migration Review

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Cover image: People fleeing the conflict in eastern Ukraine board a train at Lviv train station, March 2022. Credit: UNHCR/Valerio Muscella



From the Editors

The war on Ukraine has caused forced displacement on a scale and at a speed not witnessed in Europe since World War II. This issue of FMR seeks to address questions that have arisen out of the crisis, reflecting on the lessons learned from the immediate response and the implications for the international refugee and asylum system.

A key concept in this issue is the 'temporary protection' – permission to stay that falls short of asylum – afforded to Ukrainian refugees. Where temporary protection can be revoked at the discretion of a government, asylum grants permission to stay for as long as the conditions that gave rise to a need for it persist.

Exploring this and other provisions for Ukrainian refugees, several articles examine the situation of Ukrainian refugees in various European countries, the USA and Russia. Some discuss positive examples, such as innovative hosting initiatives and access to rights, while others reflect on Ukrainian refugees' needs for greater integration, including access to decent work, education, and social and financial services.

Another set of articles addresses the displacement experiences and gaps in support for different marginalised groups, including stateless people, minority language speakers, youth, children, older people, internally displaced people, people with disabilities and nationals of other countries. These articles collectively highlight the importance of inclusion and equity in forced displacement response.

Finally, several articles consider issues that intersect with forced migration, such as gender-based violence, trafficking, localisation, and the role of media, communications and digital technologies – the latter a theme we will revisit in our forthcoming feature on **Digital disruption and displacement**.

The ultimate implications of the war on Ukraine, both locally and globally, are unclear. Amid this uncertainty, we hope the articles in this issue will generate discussion and fresh insights and, most importantly, improve policy and practice for people affected by forced migration.

With best wishes,

Emily Arnold-Fernández and Catherine Meredith
Editors, Forced Migration Review

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Foreword

Pascale Moreau – UNHCR Regional Refugee Coordinator and Director for Europe

The war on Ukraine has uprooted people and wrought hardship, separation and suffering on millions of households on an epic, historic scale. Social theorists have long noted that disasters have a paradoxical tendency to bring out the best in humanity, providing 'a glimpse of who else we ourselves may be and what else our society could become.'¹ The range of topics covered in this special edition on Ukraine attest to how much has been accomplished – but also to the challenges that lie ahead.

The European Union's decision to trigger the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for the first time created a common legal basis for refugees to access protection, enjoy rights immediately upon arrival and be included in host communities. The Directive has demonstrated that swift and effective access to international protection and other rights is possible in large-scale influxes, particularly if the will to make crucial investments exists.

States in Europe and beyond have demonstrated that they have the tools, capacities and 'space' to protect and include refugees, and to manage large-scale population movements effectively. To varying degrees, refugees have accessed services and national social safety nets, entered the workforce, become self-reliant, and contributed to the social fabric of host communities quickly and productively, albeit with variations across host countries. The political will and commitment shown by European states and regional institutions has been matched in the response of municipal authorities and civil society.

Within Ukraine, the inter-agency, multi-partner response under the leadership of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator provides lifesaving assistance to millions of families impacted by fighting, often in high-risk, dangerous locations, particularly among the networks of local organisations serving communities on the frontlines of the conflict. In neighbouring host states, the Refugee Coordination Model has facilitated a collaborative response, with local authorities and civil societies often at the fore.



In Poland, a UNHCR protection monitor assesses the needs of refugees from Ukraine. Credit: UNHCR/Anna Liminowicz

In terms of challenges, the risks of trafficking and potential sexual exploitation and abuse continue; prevention of these must remain a key shared priority. For the vast majority of refugees and internally displaced people, daily life remains challenging and the trauma of being uprooted from homes and communities and separated from loved ones is real. As return may not be imminent, humanitarian actors, host States and communities have to plan for the medium and long-term, including what protection arrangements will follow the expiry of the TPD in 2024.

The response to the forced displacement of millions of Ukrainians is often described as exceptional. But the pattern of displacement, and what Europe has done in response, is the norm in many parts of the world. Neighbouring states generously host some 70% of the world's refugees, with 75% hosted in low and middle income countries. The factors that stand out in the response to the Ukraine war are the mobilisation of sustained political will and substantial resources, innovative protection tools and technology, rapid response mechanisms such as cash-based interventions, the engagement of the private sector, the role of local leadership and the robust inclusion of refugees in national systems.

As the number of the world's forcibly displaced people continues to climb, we should consider how the lessons of the Ukraine response might influence future reforms and possibilities for all asylum seekers and refugees in Europe and beyond.

1. Solnit, Rebecca (2009) *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*

Ukrainian youth and war: how to turn fears into strengths?

Mariia Didenko

Youth in Ukraine are supporting each other and their communities. Their experiences offer insights and coping strategies for all those dealing with the challenges of war.¹

I work with Ukrainian youth, supporting their projects and creating safe spaces for them during the war. I too am a young Ukrainian, and was internally displaced by Russian attacks in the Kyiv region. During the first months after the invasion in February 2022, shock and uncertainty froze people's minds but there was one thing that gradually provided some relief – communication. I am involved in the Ukrainian-Danish Youth House, a platform for exchanging culture, knowledge and ideas between young Ukrainians and Danes in order to support participation and democratic engagement.

One of the reasons why Ukrainian culture is so rich is that historically Ukrainian territories were under the control of several different States. This introduced many influences that mixed with traditional customs. Having survived years of Soviet repression of intelligence, propaganda and exploitation of our traditional culture, and having finally gained independence in 1991, Ukrainians are in a state of inner reflection about their national identity. The war which started in 2014 sharpened our perception of our national values, and the full-scale invasion in 2022 challenged them. Now, although some people are living in safety where they have always lived, millions have fled to other countries, some are living in frontline cities, over one million are in temporarily occupied territories, many are internally displaced and many have lost their homes and belongings.

Learning from our experiences of war

In September 2022 the Ukrainian-Danish Youth House² organised a panel discussion at the annual Opinion festival.³ This annual event provides a platform for discussing important social issues; this year, because the usual host city of Severodonetsk is

temporarily occupied, the festival was held in Dnipro, in person and online.

We chose the topic 'Youth and war: how to turn fears into strengths?'. We wanted young people to share their different experiences, so we invited a human rights activist (whose apartment in Kyiv had been destroyed by Russian missiles); a director of the All-Ukrainian Youth Center, who coordinates volunteering through local youth centres in different regions of Ukraine; a student, who co-founded Kyiv Humanitarian Shtab (a centre which provides food, hygiene materials and other necessities) and opened a youth-friendly co-working space; an artist and art researcher, who continues to organise cultural events and art exhibitions; and a student from Kherson region, who fled to Denmark and now works with the Danish Youth Council to spread information about Ukrainian culture and war. We were interested in hearing young Ukrainians' personal stories and were looking in particular for coping mechanisms, changes in life strategies and thoughts that give strength. Here are some of the themes that emerged from the discussion.

Youth are a force for change: Fresh ideas are introduced and implemented by young creative minds. The volunteering movement which plays a significant role in war and resistance is also youth-driven. Youth centres became a meeting point for those who are willing to help and soon developed into humanitarian hubs. There is a strong belief in society now that everyone can contribute to victory even by doing small things. This benefits young people, who are sometimes portrayed by older generations as naive or inexperienced. Now with their skills, knowledge of digital technologies, languages and creativity they



Young Ukrainians take part in a workshop in an air raid shelter in Chernivtsi during a power cut, October 2022.
Credit: Ukrainian-Danish Youth House

are creating fast, efficient solutions to societal problems and challenging stereotypes.

Focusing on things they can control: Youth attracts youth, so displaced youngsters tend to join volunteering communities in their new host cities or villages, receiving support from their peers and learning new skills. Being involved helps them deal with loneliness and gives a feeling of ownership that restores a sense of control. This is especially important because the inability to influence daily events and plan ahead makes it hard to envisage a bright, better future. As a coping mechanism many displaced youth have started focusing on small routine tasks like brushing their teeth, choosing which t-shirt to wear (even if choosing between only two options) or deciding where to shelter during missile attacks. Being part of a community of young people and seeing the results of their work gives them hope, whether they are internally displaced or refugees abroad.

Changing priorities: Young people affected by war have started to review their priorities. Facing events such as air strikes, bombing, flight, violence and loss, they gained a clearer

understanding of what they want from life, their dreams and aspirations, which people care about them and who they can rely on. In these extreme conditions grey areas disappear and bolder decisions happen. The number of weddings and divorces increases, many people start new professions, some people decide to stay in Ukraine and rebuild, and some decide not to return.

This process of reassessment also applies to personal values. During our discussions, participants mentioned that they no longer fear starting new projects which they had previously postponed due to fear of making mistakes. There are many young people who are still struggling and in need of professional psychological support; on the other hand, those who have overcome severe difficulties may be feeling more resilient and able to achieve higher goals.

Material belongings are not considered to be so precious. After spending weeks in the same pair of jeans, living in metro stations and packing only essentials into a small backpack, we reconsider minimalism. And reflecting on what things we have put into our backpacks while being evacuated gives new insights into what is really important to us.

Building trust in Ukrainian society: Ukraine's history of repression and mistrust resulted in the widening of the gap between people, State, businesses and other stakeholders. But since establishing a visa-free regime with the EU in 2017, the number of Ukrainians visiting European countries has increased. Cultural exchange has reinforced the idea of strengthening democracy and developing clearer relations with the government. We can see how best practices and solutions can emerge from – and be implemented by – both the State and its citizens. Many Ukrainians now have more trust in the government from seeing it act effectively and from seeing how it has gained diplomatic support from countries around the world.

I am convinced that trust in all these forms can contribute towards fostering a safe space for dialogue, towards accepting different war experiences among Ukrainians, and towards building a strong democratic society.

The coping mechanisms and life strategies that help Ukrainian youth to keep going may be recognised by those who have fled other countries and continents, and thus the dialogue may help all these people to heal. The Russian invasion has brought death, destruction and violence but the bravery and dedication of Ukrainian youth offers hope for a bright future. After victory there will be so many questions to be answered and so many topics to be discussed. The key to it all is to respect others' experiences, life choices and coping strategies for they are what have helped them to survive.

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1. This article was written in January 2023 and reflects on the context at this time.

2. theyouthhouse.org/

3. vostok-sos.org/en/opinion-festival/

Implementing the Temporary Protection Directive

Gemma Woods and Meron Yared

The lessons that have emerged from the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive have implications far beyond the Ukraine refugee crisis.

The war in Ukraine has triggered unprecedented displacement, with millions of refugees recorded across Europe. The unanimous decision of EU Member States to implement – for the first time – the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in response to the mass influx of refugees from Ukraine has helped ensure swift access to protection and rights in a coordinated and efficient manner, avoiding an overload of national asylum systems. Amidst extraordinary levels of displacement not seen in Europe since the Second World War, more than three million beneficiaries of temporary protection were recorded in EU Member States in just the first half of 2022.¹

Temporary protection arrangements are pragmatic 'tools' of international protection, complementary to the international refugee protection regime. The TPD is a tool which allows the EU, in exceptional situations, to

provide immediate and temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons from non-EU countries who are unable to return to their country of origin. UNHCR has been monitoring the implementation of the Directive through consultations with national and local authorities, civil society organisations and partners engaged in the refugee response, and refugee communities in EU Member States.² Findings have been made publicly available to help inform evidence-based decision-making and policies which incorporate the direct experiences and priorities of refugee communities.

The lessons to be drawn from the implementation of the TPD have three key applications. Firstly, they can be used to inform the kinds of tools and approaches the EU will need to have at its disposal to effectively respond to similar crises in the future. Secondly, several of the

innovative approaches employed by States to manage the huge demand for registration and services during the Ukraine refugee crisis have the potential to bring much-needed efficiencies to national asylum systems. Finally, the experience emphasises the importance of securing possible 'exit strategies' from temporary protection and transitions to other forms of legal status which respect the rights of refugees under international law, whilst preserving some of the most notable achievements of the whole endeavour – the extraordinary level of solidarity, cooperation and burden sharing demonstrated by EU Member States.

Gaps and challenges

UNHCR's findings indicate that the TPD is an efficient and practical tool for facilitating the efficient management of mass flows of displaced persons, providing immediate protection from refoulement, recognition of international protection needs, and swift access to safety, documentation and rights. The scale and complexity of the Ukraine refugee response has additionally demonstrated the value of temporary protection regimes more generally as effective tools of international protection, complementary to the international refugee protection regime.

The positive lessons learned from the application of the TPD, however, should not mask its challenges. UNHCR has identified the need for greater coherence in its application, citing a lack of harmonisation between Member States in their approach to some rights protected under the Directive.³ Increasing coherence in the way that the Directive is implemented is important both to preserve solidarity and burden sharing between States and to avoid unnecessary secondary movements (which would occur if refugees are unable to fully exercise their rights in all locations).

UNHCR has also identified a series of practical, administrative and legal barriers which impact the ability of refugees from Ukraine to access their rights under the Directive, with common challenges around a lack of information, language barriers, difficulties in securing a permanent address, limited child-care options and the inability to produce certain forms of identification.⁴ Addressing

these barriers will help support refugees from Ukraine to be included in national systems and could positively impact refugees from other countries who face similar challenges in accessing their rights in the EU.

Gaps and challenges in the implementation of the TPD were inevitable, as this is its first application. In UNHCR's view, these challenges are surmountable with innovation and resources, continued collaboration among States to share promising practices, and the political will to move forward.

Innovations and efficiencies

UNHCR has documented several innovative approaches deployed by States to address the demand for temporary protection – including scaling up registration capacities, frontloading data collection and data management, and allocating sufficient human and technical resources in the initial stages of procedures.⁵

Setting up integrated systems with multiple service providers (the 'one-stop shop' or 'under one roof' approach) at the moment of reception or registration is one method to maximise efficiency in information exchange and collaboration between different entities. This approach can include services such as registration, identification of specific needs and referral to appropriate services, issuance of documentation, provision of legal aid or assistance and legal representation, and information on services and assistance. For instance, a support centre was established in Latvia where all necessary services were provided in a single location. In the Czech Republic, a mass scale-up of registration capacities led to a network of assistance centres (KACPU) which facilitated the registration and documentation of over 350,000 people in approximately two months.

Several countries (including Greece, Croatia and Slovakia) also invested in online systems to facilitate registration, which helped prevent backlogs and enhanced communication with temporary protection claimants on the status of their application. The Ministry of Interior in Romania, in coordination with civil society and UN agencies, launched a dedicated multilingual web platform to support refugees from Ukraine with information about services,



Drawings by children from Ukraine that they made in a shelter in Krakow, December 2022. Credit: UNHCR/Anna Liminowicz

legal status (including how to apply for temporary protection and asylum), and the rights associated with residence in the country. The web platform also provides information about helplines and websites run by NGOs, UN agencies and other government entities.⁶

The global asylum system is currently facing charges that it is 'broken'. Protracted processing times for asylum claims can irreparably damage already fragile asylum systems. Delays can also erode public confidence in these systems and make it more difficult to repatriate or find other solutions for those found not to be in need of international protection. At the end of 2022, nearly 899,000 asylum applications were awaiting a decision in EU countries, an increase of almost one-fifth compared to a year earlier.⁷

UNHCR has previously recommended that effective processing of asylum applications can be achieved through better system design, innovative tools and measures, and practical responses to systemic challenges.⁸ Several of the approaches deployed in the context of temporary protection have the potential to bring efficiencies to national asylum systems, help alleviate backlogs and speed up processing times. UNHCR recommends that European

institutions and States build upon these experiences and, where applicable, extend them to asylum procedures. Faster and more efficient systems will help identify those in need of international protection more swiftly, and will improve opportunities to enhance self-reliance and inclusion, and reduce dependency on reception, relief and social protection systems. Such systems will also be more effective in better identifying those not in need of international protection and in supporting their return or other solutions.

Into the future

As part of the reflection process, important questions are being raised on possible 'exit strategies' from temporary protection. According to the Directive, the application of temporary protection will automatically cease after a maximum of three years. Refugees from Ukraine frequently report challenges with accessing accommodation and employment due to the 'temporary' nature of their stay. A transition, therefore, from temporary protection to an alternative and more durable form of legal status, could help facilitate the enhanced socio-economic inclusion of refugees in host countries.

In the post-temporary protection period, it is crucial that discussions on possible exit strategies recognise the refugee nature of the situation and the rights which refugees from Ukraine have under international law.

Those who continue to be in need of international protection must have effective access to it, without needing to transition to less secure forms of legal status or downgrading the rights to which they currently have access. Available options – once temporary protection comes to an end – also need to be inclusive of vulnerable groups within the refugee community (such as older persons, people with disabilities, minority groups and people at risk of statelessness) and of non-Ukrainians who have been granted temporary protection. The absence of a clear legal framework built into the TPD for the post-temporary protection period is a challenge. It creates a possible scenario where each Member State applies a different ‘formula’, with varying levels of legal status and rights available for former temporary protection beneficiaries.

The benefits of solidarity, cooperation and burden-sharing have been perhaps the most valuable lessons to be drawn from the approach taken by States towards the Ukraine crisis and the implementation of the TPD. It is crucial that a similar approach is applied to the post-TPD period. Without a coordinated and harmonised approach to the question of what happens when temporary protection

comes to an end, there is a risk of significant secondary movements, increased asylum applications which may overwhelm the capacities of national systems and premature decisions to return. Such outcomes risk undermining the gains currently enjoyed by both States and temporary protection beneficiaries alike.

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1. European Commission (2023) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Temporary protection for those fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: one year on* bit.ly/temporary-protection-one-year-on
2. This responsibility is in line with UNHCR's global mandate and its specific role under Article 3(3) of the TPD.
3. See UNHCR (2022) *The Implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive – Six Months On* data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/96266 and UNHCR (2023) *Displacement Patterns, Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine – Regional Protection Analysis #2* data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100191
4. Ibid
5. UNHCR (2022) *The EU Temporary Protection Directive in Practice* data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/93633
6. Help for Ukrainians in Romania - Dopomoha
7. European Union Agency for Asylum (2023) *Asylum Report 2023* euaa.europa.eu/publications/asylum-report-2023
8. UNHCR (2022) *Effective processing of asylum applications: Practical considerations and practices* bit.ly/processing-asylum-applications

A Dutch community's creative collaboration to host Ukrainian refugees

Adrian Pais, Doreen Pais, Monique den Otter, Frans Schoot and Inna Borovyk

A local municipality, a faith-based organisation and a secular grassroots organisation have combined their strengths and capabilities to provide for Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands.

When the war broke out in Ukraine in February 2022, the Dutch government instructed its 25 regional safety authorities¹ to arrange 50,000 emergency shelter places for Ukrainian refugees. Due to the large influx of refugees that followed, this figure was increased to 75,000 places in March 2022. By July 2023, there were

approximately 95,000² Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands. This includes around 77,000 staying in shelters managed by municipalities within each region.

The municipalities faced a huge undertaking. The Netherlands was already experiencing a housing crisis with a shortage of nearly 400,000

homes. As well as providing housing, the municipalities were asked to support refugee integration by providing services including registration, medical care, financial support, job searching, and education. A concerted and coordinated effort involving many stakeholders – government, private business, civil society, charities and grassroots volunteers – was needed to respond effectively to the emergency.

The municipality of Vught, with around 25,000 residents, was initially tasked with housing nearly 100 refugees; this was subsequently increased to 340 refugees by the end of 2023. The quest to find suitable housing led the municipality to reach out to Emmaus, a Catholic retreat centre whose primary mission is to provide hospitality to Christian groups, churches and communities in its 100-year-old buildings. With the support of Welzijn Vught (Well-being Vught), a secular grassroots organisation, a three-way partnership was set up in a matter of days to organise and operate a refugee programme at Emmaus.³

To date, more than 130 displaced Ukrainians, mostly women and children, have been housed and cared for at Emmaus. The success of the initiative so far, and the decision to continue hosting refugees for the coming years, has been characterised by ‘five Cs’: collaboration, creativity, care, community and commitment.

Collaboration

The need for collaboration stemmed from a recognition that the task at hand was too large for any one organisation. The sudden influx of refugees required quick and decisive action with the people and resources available; there was no opportunity for first developing a relationship, nor was there any clarity about possible role sharing or organisational structure. In fact, the first formal meeting involving all three organisations only took place after the first group of 20 refugees arrived at Emmaus.

Developing a common understanding of each other's organisation and capabilities proved essential for fruitful collaboration. This began with a dialogue concerning mission and purpose. The question “Why am I here?” led to conversations that promoted mutual understanding and trust and also a shared purpose.

Emmaus is inspired by Catholic social teachings which advocate the care and protection of refugees, based on the fundamental belief in the dignity of every human person as a creation of God and in promoting the common good.⁴ The municipality of Vught, meanwhile, has not only an obligation but also a genuine desire to arrange high-quality shelter and care for the refugees. Last but not least, the more than 50 volunteers provided by Welzijn Vught are motivated by the desire to give their talents and time to this worthwhile cause.

By recognising the capabilities, strengths and resources available, an appropriate organisational structure was set up. The municipality of Vught would have overall responsibility for the initiative, providing financial, social and security support, and arranging job training, and access to health and education services. Emmaus would provide accommodation, meals and pastoral or spiritual care, and would build a sense of community. Welzijn Vught would engage and coordinate volunteers to provide day-to-day care and support for the refugees, including transport, assistance with registration, and social activities.

Creativity

‘Out-of-the-box’ thinking is a hallmark of the initiative. Prior to the refugees’ arrival, Emmaus was fully booked by regular groups for most of the year, but with these groups’ support, one of the three wings of the retreat centre was made available for the refugees. This provided fully contained, private accommodation for the refugees while ensuring the privacy of groups staying in the other wings.

Emmaus initially committed to providing emergency shelter for a six-month period, after which the refugees would be moved to longer-term accommodation elsewhere. However, the prolonged war in Ukraine and the difficulty faced by the municipality in finding longer-term accommodation led to two extensions to the refugees’ stay at Emmaus.

Concern for the refugees’ well-being and the need to allow Emmaus to make facilities available for other groups led to an ‘out-of-the-box’ idea to build a separate, semi-permanent facility on-site specifically for the refugees.

This required expedited approval procedures taking three to four months instead of years.

The new facility will consist of four buildings built around a courtyard, providing a sense of both community and privacy. The construction of the new facility was made possible through an investment by Emmaus backed by a rental agreement with the municipality of Vught. The initiative demonstrates that a creative and innovative approach can help overcome the challenges that arise when responding to an emergency situation.

Care

Providing care for refugees goes beyond simply providing material support in the form of shelter and food. It requires a holistic approach that considers the refugees' physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Emmaus provides pastoral care and spiritual support, which has been well received by the refugees. The municipality organises access to health-care services and specialised social care where needed. In addition, almost all the adult refugees are employed by local businesses and are supported by job coaches. Meanwhile, the volunteers from Welzijn Vught play a crucial role in providing day-to-day care and support for the refugees, organising activities such as language classes, cooking workshops and excursions to local attractions. These activities not only help refugees to integrate into the local community but also provide a sense of normality and purpose in their daily lives. Volunteers have also provided practical support, such as accompanying refugees to appointments, helping with paperwork, and providing transport.

Community

Building a sense of community among the refugees and between the refugees and the local community has been an important aspect of the initiative. The refugees come from different parts of Ukraine and from a variety of social backgrounds, which can make it challenging for them to connect with one another and integrate with the local community. Community is central to the identity of Emmaus, and this has given the refugees a sense of belonging, especially those who

have been involved in some of the activities at Emmaus.

Efforts have been made to connect the refugees with the broader local community. Emmaus organised an Open Day in which the refugees were actively involved. This helped break down barriers and build understanding. The initiative has also received support from local businesses and individuals who have donated funds, resources and time.

Commitment

The success of the initiative has been due to the commitment of all the stakeholders involved. The municipality of Vught, Emmaus and Welzijn Vught have all shown strong commitment, going above and beyond what was required of them. The volunteers have given their time and energy generously, often outside regular working hours; Emmaus has made significant changes to its regular operations to accommodate the refugees; and the municipality of Vught has provided the necessary financial and administrative support.

Lessons learned

There are a number of lessons – with wider implications – that can be learned from this initiative.

- Faith-based organisations, government and secular grassroots organisations can and should collaborate more to provide care for refugees, using their complementary strengths and capabilities.
- Providing a sense of community and integration is essential for the emotional well-being of refugees. The importance of involving volunteers in building community cannot be overstated.
- Given the shortage of suitable housing, there is a pressing need for structural mechanisms and models to support the construction of semi-permanent facilities for refugees. This could include public-private partnerships to finance construction, the establishment of standardised semi-permanent housing models, and expediting the process for issuing building permits. These initiatives

could be collaboratively implemented by national and local governments, the private sector, and charitable organisations working in the field of refugee assistance.

The success of the refugees-hosting initiative in Vught is due to the recognition of each organisation's strengths and resources, the willingness to be flexible and creative in finding solutions, the holistic approach to caring for refugees, the building of a sense of community, and the strong commitment of all involved. The initiative provides an example of how different organisations can come together to respond to a crisis, and how a community can show compassion and hospitality to those in need.

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1. In the Netherlands, a regional safety authority (*veiligheidsregio*) is a public body responsible for ensuring safety and dealing with crises and disasters in its region. Each safety authority is governed by the mayors of the municipalities in that area, chaired by the mayor of the biggest municipality.
2. Rijksoverheid (2023) *Cijfers opvang vluchtelingen uit Oekraïne in Nederland* bit.ly/cijfers-opvang-oekraïne-nederland
3. The 'three-way partnership' involved three types of partners: government (municipality of Vught), faith-based organisation (Emmaus) and civil society/grassroots organisation (Welzijn Vught).
4. Catholic Social Teaching on Refugees & Asylum Seekers social-spirituality.net/catholic-social-teaching-on-refugees

The UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme: a model for the future?

Krish Kandiah

Tens of thousands of people in the UK have opened their homes to Ukrainians. An examination of this historic welcome offers important insights for future schemes aimed at helping refugee groups and vulnerable people.

After the invasion of Ukraine, the UK was at the forefront of countries providing military, diplomatic and humanitarian assistance to the Ukrainian people. There was a simultaneous groundswell of solidarity from tens of thousands of UK citizens offering to provide sanctuary in their homes and communities. In response to this, a new government support scheme, Homes for Ukraine (HFU), was developed and launched 18 days after the start of the war. Apart from this scheme, there was a family scheme, which allowed Ukrainian families who had settled in the UK before the war to sponsor their families to come to the UK.¹

The scheme enabled British people to commit to hosting Ukrainians for a minimum of six months, for which they would receive up to

£500 a month for hosting a family.² At the time of writing, it has enabled 127,600 Ukrainians, predominantly women and children, to come to the UK.³ While this scheme reflects a longstanding British tradition of providing sanctuary and asylum to those in need, it also represents an innovative and highly effective shift in approach. Ministers and civil servants across various British government departments joined forces with each other and with civil society to collaboratively deliver a scheme that has not only served Ukrainians well but has also enabled major savings and better outcomes compared with alternative refugee accommodation options.

Sanctuary Foundation conducted a large-scale survey with Whitestone Insight to



Gifts brought by Ukrainian refugees for their hosts in the UK. Credit: John Bowen

understand the experiences of 1,920 Ukrainian refugees hosted through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. There is much to be gleaned for future crisis response from examining the scheme in depth.

Successes

A number of strengths in the scheme have contributed to its enormous success.

Response from civil society: HFU mobilised unprecedented numbers of people to respond with compassion and hospitality. Not since the Second World War has there been such a large-scale civilian hosting programme. (For context: the Kindertransport of 1938-39 saw approximately 10,000 children from Europe hosted by families in the UK to escape the Holocaust.)

Most HFU hosts had no involvement with refugees before. The surge in hospitality was offered despite a national cost-of-living crisis and the additional struggles many people face due to the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also took place at a time when the government was endeavouring to introduce controversial initiatives to refuse the right to claim asylum for spontaneous arrivals and to initiate their removal to Rwanda. These

factors make the scale of the HFU hosting programme even more remarkable.

Social capital and integration: Unlike many other asylum seekers and refugees who have struggled to integrate into British society, those moving to the UK with HFU have fared very well. Living in people's homes enabled strong friendships to be formed and accelerated refugees' language acquisition and cultural understanding. It also allowed many British citizens to have first-hand experience of the challenges and rewards of supporting refugees. Many hosts have become both highly motivated and highly innovative in their refugee support.

In addition to the individual household relationships, large numbers of community groups were formed, often called Ukrainian hubs or welcome hubs. These hubs catalysed collective support and action, from organising social events to providing transport, furniture and childcare. Most evolved organically, spearheaded by volunteers with no support – financial or otherwise – from central or local government. These hubs were often able to rally support from local businesses and charities.

Visa approval: The government's decision to allow and empower civil society to conduct matching between sponsors and guests was initially met with fear, scepticism and delays. However, government staff worked collaboratively with civil society to help accelerate the process and address any glitches. The resulting speed and scale of the visa roll-out are unprecedented in UK history.

The visa programme initially took five weeks from application to approval but it is now not unusual for a decision to be made within days. This efficiency is due in large part to a surge of capacity in the Home Office and a willingness to rethink existing practices. It is a significant improvement on the process for Syrian refugee sponsorship which took some 12-18 months.

Allowing informal matching, mostly by social media, ensured HFU took off very quickly and gathered momentum. The vast majority of hosts were deemed suitable, were welcoming and have continued to offer a safe haven to their matched refugee families.

Value for money and better outcomes: Compared with the Afghan resettlement scheme, HFU was far better value for money. Housing 10,000 Afghan refugees in hotels cost around £438 million per year (£120 per night per refugee). Housing 117,100 Ukrainians in this way would have cost £5.12 billion a year. A conservative estimate puts HFU hosting cost (£500 a month per family) at £702 million a year, therefore saving around £4.4 billion a year.

HFU also produced better outcomes, such as stronger integration. The Afghan families were left in hotels for over 18 months, unable to settle in work, school and communities. Many became socially isolated, targets of far-right aggression and at risk of becoming institutionalised. This has had some serious financial, political, social, educational and emotional knock-on effects. The sharp contrast should inform future policy- and decision-making.

Collaboration: From the earliest point possible there was excellent open communication between government and civil society. This led to collaboration across different government departments, between senior civil servants and

with a range of NGOs, groups and organisations including those initially sceptical or even openly hostile to the scheme. HFU has been run by a truly collaborative cross-government entity, with strong ties to local government, which has enabled its relative success.

Challenges

Despite the triumph of HFU, there were challenges (some of which persist).

Matching: The matching process is not straightforward. Experienced organisations were overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the response when they had to rapidly scale up and develop a digital matching mechanism. Digital agencies and localised groups coped better. Most matches, however, were done through social media.⁴

Safeguarding: Local authorities rapidly created safeguarding and mandatory welfare-checking mechanisms that ruled out many inappropriate hosts before they received refugees. However, a few incidents still arose, casting a shadow over the scheme. The continuing safeguarding of hosts and guests remains vitally important, especially as Ukrainians move to longer-term accommodation options with less support.

Finance: Given that the war in Ukraine continues, and with the UK facing a cost-of-living crisis and limited local housing authority capacity, there remains a significant risk of the hosting scheme not being sustainable. Some hosts are terminating their hosting commitments early. An increase in thank-you payments for hosts helped to mitigate this risk but financial pressures continue to present a challenge for some hosts and guests.

Long-term housing: The lack of available social housing and affordable private rental properties for Ukrainians to move into after they leave their hosting arrangements has caused many hosts and guests to ask the government for urgent help for refugees trying to secure appropriate long-term accommodation. There is still huge goodwill from the majority of hosts who are willing to extend their hosting

but a growing number of refugees do not have secure housing.

Support services: Despite the generous funding provided to local government by central government to support refugees, the services available varied considerably from area to area and the burden often landed on hosts and community hubs when it came to meeting the day-to-day support for language acquisition, childcare, mental health, integration and transport.

Mental health: Many of those fleeing war in Ukraine have suffered bereavement and trauma, yet our mental health systems are already at capacity. Most hosts have received no training in hosting, identifying sexual exploitation or trafficking, providing cross-cultural support, dealing with trauma or promoting successful integration. The provision of basic training before and during hosting arrangements – and making such training mandatory – might have helped reduce mental health difficulties.

Employment: Many Ukrainians in the UK left behind well-paid jobs yet have been unable to secure equivalent employment here. Many are taking up entry-level jobs as cleaners and carers, or other jobs for which they are overqualified. While this may be of some help to local communities, and can help the Ukrainians financially and with integration, there is growing frustration over this lack of fulfilment for refugees and the waste of skills which would be valuable to the UK economy. Because many Ukrainian refugees in the UK are women with children, they may face additional difficulties in finding employment that is flexible. They do not have the support networks or financial security to seek help outside school hours or during school holidays. English language difficulties and mental health struggles exacerbate the issue.

What next for Ukrainians in the UK?

Despite these challenges, the vast majority of Ukrainians have experienced a warm welcome in the UK and have achieved unprecedented levels of integration given the timescale and

numbers involved. As the war continues, public sympathy should not be taken for granted, however. Hosts were initially asked to welcome Ukrainian guests for six months but for some this has tripled because of challenges in sourcing longer-term housing. This situation risks losing goodwill, and it is vital that the UK's compassionate, innovative and collaborative approach be extended. There are four interrelated areas of need to be addressed:

Welcome: Ongoing support for hosts and new arrivals is needed. This could include continued initiatives offering practical support and welcome from the public, best-practice sharing between different local government and community groups, and investment by national government in integration.

Welfare: Many Ukrainian refugees face employment, housing and communication challenges, adding to the anxieties they already have about friends and family in Ukraine and their own uncertain future. Investing in the provision of sufficient, appropriate and timely welfare support would benefit the Ukrainians, including the large cohort of traumatised children, and increase their chances of becoming happy and productive members of our society and workforce.

Work: Many Ukrainians in the UK are now feeling exhausted, frustrated or humiliated with their work situation. Implementing measures to support refugees in finding employment that is more aligned with their skills and qualifications is crucial. Accelerating pathways into work through continued ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) support, faster recognition of qualifications and provision of transferable skills workshops would promote greater financial independence and the entry of Ukrainians into the UK workforce, especially in areas where there are shortages.

Worthwhile housing: Affordability and location of housing are key obstacles, with many Ukrainians in the UK struggling to find landlords prepared to take a tenant on benefits. Providing additional incentives may enable

and encourage hosts to continue, or landlords to come forward. Further measures, such as the possibility of demountable (modular, moveable) homes, need to be explored to ensure sufficient housing stock in the long term.

Potential for future initiatives

HFU has been more successful and cost-effective than any other method of refugee hosting used in the past 70 years in the UK. The government's willingness to take risks, act with compassion, collaborate with civil society and optimise processes can and should be redeployed for other refugee groups and vulnerable people.

A best practice guide – documenting the approach used to construct the programme; delineating the roles of central government, local government and community groups; and outlining both the successes and potential for improvement – could provide a step-by-step plan to be rapidly put into action in the event of future crises.

So far, the HFU scheme has not been used for other vulnerable groups. Sanctuary Foundation has called on the government to extend the scheme to include Sudanese refugees, especially those who have family that have settled in the UK already. There does

seem to be a special openness to Ukrainians that is different to other groups. Some attribute this to racism, others to the strategic significance of a war in Europe.

There is evidence to suggest many HFU hosts would be willing to step forward again. By preserving their experience and knowledge in a database, we can optimise the chances of responding in a similarly effective and efficient fashion should the need arise. Meanwhile we should also celebrate. The UK has rolled out a generous and hugely beneficial scheme of which we can all be proud.

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1. Around 53,000 have arrived this way:
bit.ly/ukraine-family-scheme
2. gov.uk/register-interest-homes-ukraine
3. Total arrivals of Ukraine Scheme visa-holders in the UK was 180,600 as of 10 July 2023. This included 53,000 arrivals via the Ukraine Family Scheme and 127,600 arrivals via the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: bit.ly/ukraine-family-scheme
4. In November 2022 The Office of National Statistics reported: "Over one-third (36%) of those who are currently hosting guests reported meeting their guests directly through social media. Other commonly reported routes included through a formal matching service or organisation (19%), and through an informal local network or organisation (16%)."
bit.ly/experiences-homes-for-ukraine

Pro bono collaboration within the legal community's response to displacement from Ukraine

Anna Kalinichenko, Jasmine Simperingham and Philip Worthington

Lessons about collaboration and refugee inclusion from the legal community's response to the needs of people displaced from Ukraine could help inform future responses.

The private sector legal community, other actors within the legal ecosystem and people with lived experience of displacement have collaborated, to an unprecedented level, to address the diverse legal needs of those fleeing Ukraine. The impact of these efforts demonstrates the value of greater engagement with non-traditional refugee response actors.

The authors of this article represent different actors within the legal ecosystem. They have all been involved in collaborative initiatives

responding to the needs of people displaced from Ukraine. One of the authors, Anna Kalinichenko, is a Ukrainian lawyer who fled Ukraine and now works as a pro bono lawyer at the international law firm DLA Piper, where she leads initiatives to address the legal needs of refugees from Ukraine and other countries:

"I know from personal experience that when you are completely lost and frustrated, legal and informational support can be as important as humanitarian help. Fleeing your home

country to start a new life in a new place comes with legal challenges. Often, people don't have access to legal advice or a lawyer and that's where different pro bono players can step in."

The rise and evolution of refugee rights pro bono

In recent years, 'refugee rights pro bono'¹ has become a priority for many private sector law firms. In a global survey in 2022, 42% of law firms ranked immigration, refugees and asylum among their top five pro bono focus areas, up from 24% in 2014.

As refugee rights pro bono has grown, it has evolved. Many firms have shifted from providing indirect assistance only (for example, helping NGOs with legal compliance) to additionally offering direct assistance to displaced people. As many private sector legal actors are not experienced in asylum or immigration law, however, firms need to invest in new partnerships with specialist NGOs to train and supervise the law firms' staff. Pooling resources between firms can help to maximise their reach and impact. Law firms have also started working more closely with public interest legal organisations and networks, like PILnet, that can connect lawyers to pro bono opportunities.

Most recently, actors involved in refugee rights pro bono have explored different ways that refugee inclusion and leadership can be embedded in their work. For example, DLA Piper hires lawyers with lived experience of displacement to lead its Know Your Rights training programme, which aims to empower asylum seekers and refugees to better advocate for themselves.

Collaborative legal projects

The legal community has developed numerous collaborative projects in response to the mass displacement of people from Ukraine. Here we reflect on three initiatives:

Country-level legal information factsheets:

With the activation of the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), temporary protection arrangements were put in place throughout Europe to enable displaced Ukrainians to access legal stay and certain minimum rights.

However, many people urgently sought information about how the TPD would be applied and what protection was available in countries where it was not activated. To address this, PILnet and DLA Piper developed a collaborative project. Private sector lawyers – from the national offices of DLA Piper and other firms – prepared general legal information about rights and entitlements. The multi-stakeholder, multi-country initiative was coordinated by PILnet, which published and disseminated the factsheets. Experts from local refugee-led and other community-based organisations provided practical input. The project required coordinated effort from a variety of legal and refugee actors to achieve its goal of addressing information gaps within a very short timeframe. The first information sheets² were published within weeks of the invasion and were downloaded by tens of thousands of people within the first year, including via UNHCR's Digital Blue Dot³.

Know Your Rights training: After Anna was displaced from Ukraine DLA Piper hired her to co-design and deliver legal education workshops for Ukrainian refugees in Romania, Poland and Hungary. Anna worked with local non-profit organisations and UNHCR, which supported the project by conducting pre-event research, disseminating information and identifying participants. In each country, locally qualified legal experts delivered the training alongside Anna. She applied her knowledge and lived experience of displacement to shape the workshops and connect with the participants culturally and linguistically. Approximately 100 participants learned about their rights and opportunities. They were also able to build their confidence and personal networks through meeting other displaced individuals and members of their host communities.

Direct legal information and assistance:

Following a request from UNHCR to explore how the private sector legal community could help respond to the pressing legal needs, PILnet worked with the legal assistance NGO European Lawyers in Lesbos (ELIL) to develop a collaborative pro bono model

based on their experience assisting asylum seekers in Greece.⁴ The resulting Ukraine Pro Bono Collaborative (UPBC) sees Polish and Ukrainian lawyers providing one-on-one legal information and assistance to people from Ukraine arriving in Warsaw. The purpose is to provide high-quality, individualised support to help people resolve their legal queries, access their rights and navigate the legal procedures in Poland. The assistance covers a wide range of legal issues, with a particular focus on those with complex legal situations, such as third-country nationals, undocumented individuals and unaccompanied and separated children. Six international law firms participate in the project,⁵ providing volunteer lawyers who are trained and supervised by local ELIL staff. In the first eight months, over 30 lawyers participated and assisted over 2,250 people. The lawyers work closely with Polish Bar Associations and local legal actors to ensure that specialised cases are referred as appropriate.

Lessons learned

While the three projects varied in the type of actors involved and the legal services provided, some common themes emerged:

Build partnerships, collaboration and coordination: One legal actor alone would not have been capable of rapidly developing such detailed country-level legal information factsheets. The ability to mobilise lawyers and firms from multiple countries was key and could be replicated in future situations of mass displacement. The UPBC was only possible due to multi-firm collaboration – by pooling resources and lawyers the firms were able to assist far more people.

Develop replicable and flexible models: All three projects drew on the participating organisations' previous experience of responding to the needs of displaced people and building collaborative legal projects. What worked in one crisis however, will not always work in another. For example, ELIL found that the model they used in Greece of lawyers from across Europe volunteering, was not feasible in Poland, where due to the context, participating

lawyers had to be either Ukrainian or Polish. Nevertheless, their model provided a basic blueprint on which to build, and which could be used in other mass displacement situations.

Respond to the local context: Non-traditional refugee response actors, such as private sector lawyers, may be eager to start providing assistance immediately without undertaking the necessary preparatory work, such as needs assessments and context analysis. These projects were most impactful when they were needs-driven and developed in collaboration with local actors. The UPBC was developed to provide additional capacity and triage cases. It worked closely with local actors to develop referral pathways for specialised cases and ensured their initiative was complementary to, and supportive of, those actors.

Understand needs: After the first Know Your Rights workshop, Anna realised she had not devoted enough time to evaluating needs and reviewing the existing information available. This led to gaps in coordination and some misunderstanding about the scope of the project. Running a survey about what information displaced people most wanted, and in what format, would have avoided some issues. These steps were built into the planning of the later workshops, leading to better outcomes.

Involve lawyers with lived experience: All three projects involved lawyers with lived experience of displacement and sought the perspectives of other displaced people in their design and delivery; this improved the efficiency and impact of the projects. Anna's knowledge, experience and language skills were valuable assets when deciding on the questions to be included in the factsheets and the content of the workshops. Her ability to define the problems and find effective solutions at the projects' initial stages saved considerable time and resources. She also built a rapport with the workshop participants and got frank feedback, which will inform the design of more effective programmes and improve future collaboration. ELIL also worked with Ukrainian lawyers. This helped build trust and ensured the assistance provided was appropriate and

relevant, including when responding to more complex legal questions.

Ways forward

The diversity of actors, the breadth of collaboration, and the involvement of lawyers with lived experience of displacement increased the effectiveness of the legal community's response to displacement from Ukraine.

- The legal community could take steps to learn from this response in order to be better able to address the legal needs arising in other such crises:
- Develop robust modalities of collaboration and create replicable and flexible models that can be deployed quickly to start responding immediately in future situations of displacement.
- Centre the expertise of displaced lawyers and other displaced people in the development and implementation of future collaborative pro bono projects.
- Build relationships with NGOs, refugee-led organisations and other actors from the refugee response sector to expand the pool of potential pro bono partners.
- Create platforms for knowledge sharing to improve the efficiency of future responses.

- Develop coordination mechanisms to enhance collaboration.
- Work with local legal actors to understand barriers and provide support to strengthen refugee rights pro bono.

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1. The free legal services provided to advance access to rights, justice or solutions for refugees and other forcibly displaced, or to address legal needs of refugee-led organisations or other organisations supporting refugees (PILnet definition).
2. Available, together with other resources created by PILnet and law firm partners, at: www.pilnet.org/resource/cso-resilience-resources/
3. bluedothub.org/
4. Since 2019, ELIL has been running the Greece Pro Bono Collaborative (GPBC), a joint initiative with six international law firms (Dentons, White & Case, Allen & Overy, Orrick, Ashurst and Charles Russell Speechlys) to provide free legal assistance to refugees in Greece.
5. Dentons, White & Case, Allen & Overy, Norton Rose Fulbright, Hogan Lovells and Bird & Bird

Equality versus equity: a case study from Poland

Aleksandra Minkiewicz, Pietro Mirabelli, Agnieszka Nosowska and Larissa Pelham

Poland responded generously to the influx of refugees from Ukraine, providing significant access to its social protection system. Despite this, however, hardship among refugees persists. There are lessons to be drawn from Poland's approach.

Few countries have opened their social support and employment benefits systems to refugees as generously as Poland has done since the war in Ukraine escalated. The country currently hosts approximately one million registered Ukrainian refugees.¹ Poland implemented the EU's Temporary Protection Directive under the Special Act of 12th March 2022. This Act entitled Ukrainian refugees

and their spouses who crossed from Ukraine to Poland after 24th February to one-off cash support to meet immediate needs;² temporary payments to Polish households to subsidise the cost of hosting Ukrainians; and eligibility for Ukrainians to access the State welfare system.

In principle, the State welfare and employment systems for Polish citizens were made equally available to Ukrainian refugees.



The enrolment centre in Lublin, where NRC's partner PCPM is leading the 'Cash assistance for vulnerable refugees from Ukraine in Poland' project. Credit: Grzegorz Zukowski/NRC

However, refugees still face barriers to accessing the range of benefits they need, and we argue that 'equal' access to state social assistance is not enough.³

Limitations on social protection

Policy: There are a number of difficulties relating to the programme's policies. For example, Third Country Nationals (TCNs) who were legally working, studying or seeking asylum in Ukraine were excluded from the benefits provided by the Special Act and were not legally allowed to remain in Poland or claim support. Around 4% of all those fleeing Ukraine are TCNs; although the majority subsequently left Poland (for other EU countries or to return home), those who remain lack adequate assistance.

Another policy challenge is that the structure of Poland's social assistance heavily favours support for families with children. The four main social welfare benefits are for households with children and are not means-tested. However, benefits for the elderly and people with disabilities or severe medical conditions are means-tested (meaning an applicant

must prove their income falls below a certain threshold), and it can be difficult for Ukrainian refugees to prove their income. They may also need to have documentation translated into Polish or, in some cases, certification from Polish doctors or social workers to confirm eligibility. Furthermore, the cut-off thresholds for means-tested benefits are very low, placing those who receive humanitarian aid at risk of being ineligible for social protection (despite this aid being woefully below the cost of basic needs).

Resource challenges: The value of government social assistance is already low, and is inadequate to meet the rising costs of living that Polish families face. For Ukrainians, who have arrived with few belongings, these costs are even higher as they try to rebuild their lives from scratch.

There is growing evidence of refugees resorting to negative coping mechanisms. In a survey of Ukrainian refugees in Poland conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council, 45% of refugees said they were skipping meals or eating less nutritious food, and some

reported borrowing money. Poland's pre-existing scarcity of affordable housing has been exacerbated by the large influx of refugees and many refugees are living for prolonged periods of time in substandard accommodation or collective shelters.⁴

Access: It is difficult for Ukrainian refugees to access some of the support available. Ukrainians are required to apply for a registration number to receive support. However, application forms for a registration number and for some employment and social assistance benefits are not necessarily available in Ukrainian or Russian, and applicants have difficulty submitting their information.

Employment: Poland has the second lowest unemployment rate in the EU, so it was assumed that if Ukrainians had full access to the labour market, they would become self-sufficient relatively quickly, thereby alleviating the need for State support or humanitarian aid. However, availability does not necessarily mean that individuals have access to these jobs.

Ukrainians seeking jobs are predominantly women who have caring responsibilities for children or elderly parents.⁵ Many jobs are in sectors such as transport and construction, which are not suited to the schedules of those with caring responsibilities. Moreover, the jobs available are predominantly in lower or manual skills. Many Ukrainian refugees are highly qualified; 66% are educated to a tertiary level and only 15% are low-skilled.⁶ Taking jobs that do not match their skills and capacities could detract from economic self-reliance in the long run. Furthermore, many Ukrainians are unwilling to take – and employers unwilling to offer – better paid long-term jobs, as they intend to return to their home country once it is safe and secure.

Equality versus equity

Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognises that each person has different circumstances and therefore allocates the resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. The design of

support based on equality rather than equity resulted in cases of Ukrainian refugees' basic needs not being met, leaving many households vulnerable. The difference between the availability of social protection versus access to and adequacy of it needs to be closely analysed.

The humanitarian system is there to plug the gaps and deliver assistance to people where a government's social protection fails – but there is an assumption that if social assistance is available to Ukrainians, then it must be both adequate and accessible and therefore little additional support is needed. Humanitarians and government need to exchange information in a more effective and coordinated way and accurately identify people with the greatest needs.

In terms of the policy elements discussed above, TCNs need equal status and access to benefits as Ukrainians have; access to basic social assistance must not be based on income; and there should be more consistent support to help Ukrainians enter employment.

Improving equity in State support for refugees to ensure they can meet their basic needs will require improved data collection, sharing and coordination so that agencies can identify whose needs fall short.

At the international level, donors need to be clear about what level of support they can provide and for how long. There needs to be far better communication and coordination between government and non-government agencies, better coordination within the international humanitarian system at multiple levels, and far stronger referral processes between humanitarian agencies and government. Local NGOs should play a central role in all this, not just for the Ukrainian crisis but also to provide long-term improvement to Poland's social protection system. As such, ensuring consistent and predictable funding for local NGOs and civil society in the coming years will be critical.

Conclusion

Poland's response to Ukrainian refugees was swift, equal and generous. But this crisis has shown that we must understand and monitor access to that assistance and its appropriateness and adequacy for refugees, whose needs

are different from those of vulnerable Polish citizens for whom this assistance has been designed.

The right to social protection for all has been overlooked for too long in migration contexts. Poland's example demonstrates that where governments are willing, it is possible to deliver social protection. The key lesson is that there is a limit to the use of social protection in a humanitarian refugee context, even in countries with advanced social assistance systems. The effective use of social assistance for refugees depends upon its inclusiveness, accessibility, adequacy and appropriateness, and these four elements need to be constantly monitored to determine how international responders can best support government efforts.

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1. UNHCR Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation bit.ly/unhcr-situations-ukraine

2. The one-off benefit of 300 PLN was paid out to 1.06 million Ukrainians (with the total value amounting up to €80 million). Over 400,000 Ukrainian children received child support.

3. This article is based on: NRC and Polish Center for International Aid (2022) *Equality versus equity. How complementary approaches are required to support vulnerable Ukrainian refugees.* bit.ly/nrc-equality-v-equity

4. NRC (2023) *Hidden Hardship: 1 Year Living in Forced Displacement for Refugees from Ukraine* bit.ly/nrc-hidden-hardship

5. NRC (2022) *Economic Inclusion of Ukrainian Refugees in Poland* bit.ly/nrc-economic-inclusion

The needs of Ukrainian refugees in urban areas of neighbouring countries

Nataliia Makaruk and Louise Thaller

Ukrainian refugees settling in major cities in neighbouring countries require a more consistent, sustainable local response and integration opportunities.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has created the greatest refugee surge to European countries since World War II. Seven in 10 of the more than six million refugees who have fled Ukraine now reside in neighbouring countries, including Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Moldova.¹ In each of these countries, major cities are hosting the biggest numbers of refugees, becoming hubs for international humanitarian assistance. This phenomenon is not surprising, as six in 10 refugees worldwide live in cities.²

The sudden influx of vulnerable populations into urban centres has generated an unprecedented wave of international and local solidarity. Public service providers and communities have adapted, but assistance

and protection are not evenly available to those in need. Most refugees have self-settled in Krakow (Poland), Bratislava (Slovakia), Bucharest (Romania) and Chisinau (Moldova) with the help of their relatives and friends, finding private accommodation themselves or being hosted by members of supportive local communities. They tend therefore not to be on the radar of international humanitarian actors and local authorities in charge of social protection.

IMPACT initiatives conducted mixed-method research on urban refugees in these four refugee-hosting cities.³ The research was designed to provide a comparison of the different ways in which, on the one hand, Ukrainians experience daily life as urban refugees and, on

the other hand, the refugee influx may have impacted the urban ecosystems and daily realities of local actors and communities. Testimonies from urban refugees, local community members, and authorities in charge of running public services and social assistance were gathered between September and November 2022. This research sheds light on the gaps that remain between what the official refugee protection policy provides and what is experienced by vast numbers of refugees who do not stay in directly serviced collective accommodation centres, it also highlights the solutions that have been introduced by hosted countries.

Policy versus reality

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU triggered the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time since its adoption in 2001. It is meant to guarantee quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war, providing temporary protection, including access to residence permits, employment, accommodation, social welfare or means of subsistence, medical care, education for those under 18 within the State education system, and banking services.

The responsibility to translate nationally established protection policies into concrete social protection at the local level lies with local governments, while the international aid community has stepped in to ensure the provision of essential assistance, most often organised through collective accommodation centres. However, with refugee population groups self-settled and dispersed across large urban centres, the reality is more challenging. Refugees may not be aware of – and enjoy – the full breadth of the rights to which they are entitled, while local actors (authorities, service providers and civil society) struggle to meet the specific needs of large numbers of refugees on top of their usual responsibilities.

The attraction of cities

The proximity of Krakow, Bratislava, Bucharest and Chisinau to Ukraine was among the main pull factors for Ukrainian refugees as it permits easy movement back to their home country. The presence of friends and relatives,

and the availability of services and humanitarian assistance, were also frequently cited, particularly in Chisinau.

In cities like Bratislava, Krakow and Bucharest, where nearly all refugees obtained temporary protection status, most respondents declared an intention to remain in the hosting city for at least six months from when we interviewed them. Their primary reasons included the availability of permanent accommodation, employment, and the presence of friends and relatives (Bratislava), or the availability of humanitarian help and access to services (Bucharest). In contrast, a large proportion of refugee families in Chisinau (Moldova) reported their intention to return to Ukraine within six months – or they did not have concrete plans. As Moldova is not an EU member state, TPD does not apply there, and obtaining formal refugee status to access essential services requires applying for asylum, which takes on average six months.

Refugees' plans to move or stay in the host city are reflected in their efforts to integrate. Refugees in Chisinau were more likely to report having limited interest in integrating and wanting to return to Ukraine than refugees in Bratislava, for example, where Ukrainians stated their intention to stay for the long term, having already enrolled their children in local schools and with plans to participate more in local social cohesion activities. The research shows a positive correlation between legislation processes facilitating access to basic services and refugees' intentions and efforts to integrate locally.

Finding a new home

Access to long-term housing is among the most important concern for refugees arriving from Ukraine. In Bratislava, a third of surveyed refugees acknowledged that the presence of people they already knew, who could help them find housing, impacted their decision to settle in the city. In Bucharest and Krakow, where most refugees reported not having social connections, online local solidarity initiatives, volunteers and word of mouth played important roles in helping refugees find housing. Government housing programmes in Slovakia, Romania and Moldova also played



A scene from the Palanca-Maiaki-Udobnoe border crossing point, between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on 4 March 2022.
Credit: UN Women/Aurel Obreja

a significant role. In Bucharest, eight in ten refugees surveyed benefitted from the national housing programme, which provides an allowance to host families to cover refugees' rent and food expenses. In Bratislava, these public subsidies were also granted to landlords hosting refugees. In Chisinau, similar financial incentives for host families were provided by UN agencies. In Krakow, in the absence of any housing programme, some refugees were allowed to stay in hotels for free.

However, refugees who benefitted from housing support initiatives in all four cities reported concerns around their sustainability. In Bratislava, the housing initiative programme has been extended by the government as many refugees cannot secure housing using their own resources. If the housing programme ceases there is a risk that collective accommodation centres will be overloaded, it could also lead to tensions in relationships with the host community around rent prices and housing availability.

Barriers to accessing basic services

As the survey results show, having a right to something does not necessarily mean it will be enjoyed. Although all refugees in Poland,

Slovakia and Romania are entitled to free health care, the vast majority stated that they suffered from not having health insurance coverage. This demonstrates that the lack of information and awareness of refugees' rights acts as a barrier to accessing basic services.

In Moldova, only refugee children and pregnant women are entitled to free health care. Refugees in Chisinau reported concerns around the cost of medical consultations or treatment; they were also more likely to report financial assistance and access to health care as their priority needs.

Long waiting times for appointments and language barriers were the main obstacles refugees reported in Bratislava, Krakow and Bucharest. Meanwhile, Ukrainian medical diplomas are not recognised in Slovakia and Poland, preventing health facilities from hiring Ukrainian refugee doctors. Local residents frequently reported that waiting times for health care have increased since the refugees' arrival.

In all the cities surveyed, the number of Ukrainian children enrolled in local schools fluctuates between 30% and 70%, with many children continuing their Ukrainian education online, often in addition to local schooling. The main reported barriers to accessing education

were language (specifically, the lack of staff who speak Ukrainian or Russian) and lack of capacity in schools. In Chisinau, school enrolment was reportedly lower than in other cities, as children are required to have a formal residence permit to attend local schools.

Local authorities and humanitarian actors have made a significant effort to provide integration programmes and intensive language courses for children. In Bratislava and Krakow almost half of respondents reported that their children attending school benefitted from such programmes. In Bucharest, NGOs and local government education services hired Ukrainian refugees as teachers in municipal schools and educational hubs, allowing children to follow the Ukrainian curriculum in their native language. Such initiatives also contributed to providing livelihood opportunities, with almost a third of refugee respondents reporting being employed in the childcare or education sector. However, the newly created educational facilities, such as hubs, are not recognised by either the Romanian government or the Ukrainian government, and therefore children also need to be attending the local school or doing distance learning through the Ukrainian education system.

Host communities share concerns about the decreasing quality of the education system due to the arrival of large numbers of Ukrainian refugee children in local schools, causing the average class size to increase sharply and a drop in the average budget per student. However, in the higher education sector, the municipality of Bratislava has opened new study programmes at local universities in response to increased demand.

Making a living

Access to employment was reportedly more challenging for refugees in Bratislava than in other cities. Apart from the lack of available jobs and the language barrier, refugees also complained that employers often offer lower salaries for refugees. In Bucharest, the host community was more likely than in other cities to report high levels of competition in the job market with refugees, causing potential tensions. The lack of childcare options and the shortage of part-time jobs were the two other

barriers most reported by women, especially in Bucharest and Chisinau.

Despite access to full or part-time employment, 80% of refugees in Bucharest and Krakow reported still relying on humanitarian assistance as their main source of income; the same proportion stated that financial assistance was their priority need. In Chisinau, far fewer respondents rely on government cash support, while many use their savings or NGOs' and other agencies' cash support to meet needs. Meanwhile, host populations in Krakow and Chisinau mentioned that the shift in funding by local NGOs towards assisting refugees has considerably decreased resources available for low-income families, marginalised groups and homeless people; refugees were therefore perceived as competing with local vulnerable groups for aid provision.

The role of local governments in urban refugee response

Although in all cities local authorities are directly responsible for ensuring refugees have access to whatever basic services they are entitled to, refugees surveyed in Bratislava, Bucharest and Chisinau reported that most aid came from the UN, local NGOs and international NGOs. However, this may be because such actors have provided more 'visible' recreational activities and courses, accommodation services, psychosocial services and core humanitarian assistance, with local governments coordinating support in the background. In Krakow, in contrast, refugees mentioned the local government as the main provider of social assistance.

The survey from the four European cities highlights that the impact of the refugee influx on cities and the socio-economic situation of urban refugees are highly dependent on the availability and adaptability of existing local services. Although local governments play a critical role in organising social protection, many support initiatives remain dependent on support from international humanitarian aid agencies. In most cases, existing coordination initiatives between local governments and international humanitarian organisations were reported to be scarce or completely absent at the city level, which raises concerns

about the sustainability of the humanitarian aid programmes that many urban refugees still rely on.

With the war in Ukraine showing no signs of coming to an end, compounded by a probable, imminent shrinking in international humanitarian funding for the refugee response across Europe, it is particularly important to ensure that support services for Ukrainian refugees can be sustained in the cities where they reside. These should be complemented by policies and programming to encourage refugee self-reliance, especially for women with children. Ukrainian refugees will then be better placed to contribute to the economic and social life of cities.

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Life in limbo: temporary protection for Ukrainians in the US

Daniel J Beers

Temporary protection mechanisms have offered Ukrainians safe harbour in the US but leave them in a precarious state of legal limbo.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, policymakers in the US proclaimed solidarity with the Ukrainian people and pledged to support refugees fleeing the war. More than a year later, the US government has granted protection to more than 250,000 Ukrainians. However, conventional refugee resettlement has accounted for only a minuscule share of recent arrivals.¹ The vast majority of Ukrainians have been admitted through a patchwork of temporary protection mechanisms that confer lawful entry and some assistance but leave the participants in a precarious state of legal limbo.

This article discusses the evolution of these temporary protection programmes, highlighting the complex and unpredictable nature of the policy environment and its impact on refugees and refugee-serving agencies. The analysis draws on several months of first-hand interactions with Ukrainian refugees and refugee-serving organisations in the Shenandoah Valley region of Virginia, as well as semi-structured interviews with refugee families, community advocates and legal experts.

Parole at the US border

Within days of the invasion on 24th February 2022, a small but steady stream of Ukrainians began making their way to the US border. In response, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents began admitting Ukrainians at ports of entry with a 12-month 'humanitarian parole'² designation, ultimately 'paroling' an estimated 25,000 Ukrainians in the first two months of the war.³

Similar parole mechanisms have been used by the US government in past crises to allow expedited processing for specially designated groups – most notably following US military withdrawals from Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. However, humanitarian parole has never before been used to admit asylum seekers en masse at the US border. In part, that is because humanitarian parole is not actually a legally recognised immigration status. When parole is issued, the individual in question is not officially inspected and admitted for entry, as required by US law; rather, parole simply means that a decision about their legal status has been delayed until a future date. In other

words, parole is best understood as a 'non-status'.⁴ Consequently, its widespread use at the US border brought with it a great deal of confusion and uncertainty for both parolees and refugee-serving agencies.

As parolees, Ukrainians admitted in the early days of the war were granted legal entry without any guarantee of further assistance. Lacking official immigration status, they were unable to access public benefits such as cash assistance or food stamps. Moreover, because they were admitted by CBP agents at the border rather than as refugees resettled through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), parolees were initially ineligible to receive ORR-funded assistance from refugee-serving agencies. While parolees were eligible to apply for temporary work authorisation, long waiting times and confusion about their legal status meant that many waited for months without the means to support themselves financially.

Most importantly, the uncertainty surrounding the process left parolees in a precarious state of legal limbo. Lacking formal legal status, parolees have no pathway to permanent residency in the US – unless and until Congress passes an act to alter their status, which it has so far failed to do. Furthermore, parole comes with no clear process for extending one's stay. As the end of their initial 12-month parole period approached, this confusion caused many parolees tremendous stress and anxiety. Some attempted to return to the border crossing where they first entered the country in order to ask for an extension; others waited and hoped for an executive order extending their stay; still others made plans to leave the US and seek protection elsewhere. No one knew for certain what would happen when their parole expired.

Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

Two weeks after the start of the war, the Biden administration announced the first formal protection mechanism for Ukrainians in the US, extending eligibility for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Ukrainian nationals. The TPS programme, which dates back to 1990, was designed to protect foreign nationals residing in the US from forced expulsion when conditions in their country of origin were

deemed unsafe for return, typically because of war, natural disaster or political instability. Currently, TPS covers approximately 610,000 participants from 16 countries. As its name suggests, TPS provides temporary protection – for up to 18 months at a time – to citizens from TPS-designated countries. Like humanitarian parole, it is not a legally recognised immigration status, and it comes with no pathway to permanent residency. However, TPS eligibility may be renewed indefinitely when dangerous conditions persist.⁵

The TPS designation for Ukraine was originally set to include only Ukrainian nationals residing in the US on or before 1st March 2022, effectively limiting eligibility to those who were already in-country when the war broke out. However, the policy was later amended to include Ukrainians who established residency in the US on or before 11th April 2022 – that is, those who arrived in the first six weeks following the Russian invasion. According to government officials, there are approximately 26,000 approved TPS holders from Ukraine currently residing in the United States.

Like humanitarian parole, TPS offers temporary legal residence and the ability to apply for a work visa. However, participants are not eligible for public assistance, and there is no direct pathway to permanent residency. Moreover, there is no guarantee how long TPS holders will be eligible to remain in the US. Though the Department of Homeland Security recently renewed TPS eligibility for Ukrainians for an additional 18 months, extending the programme through April 19, 2025, it is unclear what will happen to TPS holders thereafter.⁶ In short, TPS holders have found themselves in a similarly precarious position to those paroled at the US border.

Uniting for Ukraine (U4U)

Two months after the Russian invasion began, the Biden administration announced a more expansive temporary protection programme for Ukrainians: Uniting for Ukraine (U4U). This programme would grant 24 months of humanitarian parole to at least 100,000 Ukrainians seeking protection in the US, with the support of private US sponsors. Billed as an efficient way to minimise costs, increase

capacity and leverage community involvement, the U4U programme has proven a fast and efficient mechanism for allowing Ukrainians to legally enter the US. By early January 2023, nearly 200,000 Americans had applied to serve as private sponsors, and approximately 140,000 Ukrainians had either entered or been authorised to enter the US through the programme.⁷

U4U has also proven an effective tool for controlling the flow of Ukrainians seeking to enter the US. The programme, designed to discourage spontaneous arrivals, requires that applicants remain outside the US until they are approved for entry as parolees. As of 25th April 2022, Ukrainians who crossed the US border without prior authorisation would be forcibly expelled and would forfeit their eligibility for future humanitarian parole. Judging by the 98% decline in spontaneous Ukrainian border-crossings between April and May of 2022, the programme appears to have succeeded by offering a more predictable and organised channel of entry.⁸

However, because the U4U programme utilizes the humanitarian parole mechanism, participants have no formal immigration status in the US and no clear path to permanent residency, and they were initially restricted from receiving public benefits and ORR-funded refugee assistance services. More broadly, critics have argued that U4U's reliance on humanitarian parole violates the spirit of the parole mechanism, which is meant to be used only in exceptional circumstances as a "tool of last resort",⁹ while others take issue with U4U's sponsorship model, cautioning against the neoliberal 'privatisation' of refugee assistance.¹⁰

Moving targets and dashed hopes

One of the greatest challenges for both programme participants and refugee-serving agencies has been the opaque and profoundly uncertain nature of the policy environment. This is most clearly visible in the unresolved question facing nearly every holder of temporary protection: "How long will I be able to stay?" But it is also exemplified by the last-minute nature of critical policy announcements, the shifting rules and parameters of programme eligibility, and the fundamental

mismatch between refugees' expectations and the reality of their experiences.

All the programmes discussed here are predicated on the basic assumption that Ukrainians driven from their homes by war will require only temporary protection. This approach has merits, both political and practical, but it also has costs – costs which are mostly borne by the very people these programmes are meant to protect. Time and again in my conversations with Ukrainian parolees and refugee advocates, I heard about the stress and anxiety caused by not knowing when, or if, their legal right to remain would expire. Lives were put on hold. Decisions about work, schooling and housing were delayed. And capable and motivated individuals chose not to invest in their lives in the US, fearing that whatever they built could be lost at a moment's notice.

For some groups, the uncertainty has been particularly acute. An unlucky cohort of parolees who arrived after 11th April (the cutoff for TPS) and before 25th April (the start date of U4U) endured a period of acute anxiety as the one-year anniversary of the war came and went, and there was still no word about whether their 12-month parole would be extended. When, on 13th March 2023, the Biden administration finally announced an additional 12-month extension, it was welcome news but far too late to alleviate the fear and uncertainty of not knowing what would come next.

Confusion and uncertainty have also resulted from major policy shifts regarding eligibility for benefits and assistance programmes. Most notably, after denying Ukrainian parolees access to federal government benefits and ORR-funded support services for three months, policymakers reversed course with the Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act of May 2022, which earmarked funding for federal benefits and ORR services. This policy change was an undeniably positive development for parolees in need of support. However, after months of telling Ukrainian newcomers they were ineligible for benefits, refugee-serving agencies were sent scrambling to communicate the changes to potential recipients, hire new case workers, and set up new support systems.

Most fundamentally, nearly all of the Ukrainian refugees and community advocates I have encountered in my work have noted the deep disconnect between the rights and opportunities that Ukrainians expected to find in the United States, and the reality of their circumstances upon arrival. While more recent arrivals have benefitted from increasingly robust support systems and the wisdom of those who preceded them, they are still faced with a broken immigration system and the painful uncertainty of short-term solutions to long-term problems.

Policy implications

One of the most obvious conclusions from this analysis is that lawmakers should make it a priority to provide more advanced notice of anticipated parole extensions and changes in programme eligibility, in order to reduce the uncertainty and confusion experienced by programme participants. Clearer official messaging in relation to the limited legal protections available to Ukrainians in the US may also help to better inform and prepare asylum seekers. However, the clearest way to improve policy outcomes for refugees and host communities alike is for Congress to create a legal pathway to permanent residency for Ukrainians currently subject to temporary protection. It is not only the best way to preserve the dignity and well-being of those displaced

by the war, but it would also encourage countless talented and hardworking Ukrainians to invest in their communities in the US, paying dividends to all involved.

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War-displaced Ukrainian citizens in Russia

Lidia Kuzemska

Without support from international actors, displaced Ukrainians in Russia are in a precarious situation reliant on volunteer help and on State aid that is conditional upon the acquisition of Russian citizenship.

While international attention is – rightly – focused on the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, less is known about the overall situation and needs of other war-displaced Ukrainian nationals in Russia. They remain largely beyond the reach of the international protection regime and without support from the Ukrainian State since diplomatic

ties between the two countries were cut in February 2022. Russia has subsequently closed all humanitarian corridors between the occupied territories and government-controlled territory of Ukraine. Most civilians fleeing war had little choice about their route of escape from the active war zone and many were deported by the Russian authorities.¹ All had

to undergo ‘filtration’: a mandatory screening process that involves checking documents, taking fingerprints and photos, checking phones, body searches, questioning, (often arbitrary) detention, and occasionally torture.²

Official information about the number of war-displaced Ukrainians in Russia and their needs is scarce. Russian data on population movement and socio-demographic changes is considered unreliable; it is also increasingly hidden from public scrutiny. The activity of major humanitarian organisations, including UNHCR, is limited by the Russian government to sporadic monitoring visits to State-run Temporary Accommodation Points (TAPs), always accompanied by Russian officials.

The last number provided by UNHCR (through its Ukraine Data Portal) for total border crossings from Ukraine to Russia was 2.85 million; this was on 3rd October 2022 – two days before Russia declared that the occupied regions were part of the Russian Federation and all residents were declared Russian citizens. Since then, there have been no UNHCR updates on the number of border crossings, perhaps because Russia now considers displaced Ukrainians to be Russian citizens moving within Russian territory. In June 2023, UNHCR finally updated its portal stating that 1.27 million ‘refugees from Ukraine’ were recorded in Russia. However, this number does not correspond with the total number of Ukrainians who received any kind of documented status in 2022.

Legal status options

Ukrainian nationals can enter and remain in Russia without registering for a legal status for up to three months. However, they will not be able to access any State support or services if they do not regularise their stay through one of the following statuses.

Firstly, but almost non-existent in reality, is **refugee status**. Only five Ukrainian nationals received it in 2022. In total, 26 Ukrainians have received refugee status since 2014. The application process for it is lengthy, and strongly discouraged by Russian officials.

Secondly, displaced Ukrainians can apply for **temporary asylum status**. After receiving it, a person can stay in Russia for one year

(with the possibility of extension), can apply for a one-off cash allowance of RUB10,000 (approximately US\$123), and can work or study, but cannot leave Russian territory without losing this status. In total 97,591 Ukrainian nationals received temporary asylum in Russia during 2022, but only 65,374 held it by the end of the year. Some had left the country; others had applied for other statuses or were naturalised.³

The third option for displaced Ukrainians is to apply for **temporary or permanent residency**. This is not very popular due to lengthy procedures with few immediate cash and service benefits and many restrictions on travel and work.

Finally, the fourth option – most favoured by Russian officials – is **naturalisation**. Since 2019, Russia eased its naturalisation requirements for Ukrainian nationals, especially for those coming from the occupied Donbas region. In May to July 2022, after the occupation of the south-eastern Ukrainian territories, the naturalisation procedure for Ukrainian nationals was further simplified and became de facto mandatory in the occupied territories. For the war-displaced Ukrainians already on Russian territory, naturalisation is often the only way to access services – such as full State medical insurance, free medications, social benefits and pensions. Similarly, access to legal employment, education, mortgages and bank loans is facilitated for citizens with permanent residency but difficult to access by foreigners with temporary residency.

Overall, 300,000 Ukrainian nationals received Russian citizenship in 2022. Many refuse to apply for naturalisation as they are afraid of repercussions back in Ukraine, where they left family members and property, and where they expect to return. Others are afraid of being drafted into the Russian army or not being allowed to leave Russian territory.

Constraints and assistance

Ukrainians applying for any status in Russia need to undergo mandatory fingerprinting and medical examinations and provide officially certified translations of relevant documents from Ukrainian into Russian. However, displaced Ukrainians’ documents

might have been destroyed (while living in a war zone), lost during the journey, or taken away by Russian authorities during the 'filtration' procedure. Furthermore, Ukrainian bank cards and SIM cards do not work in Russia, and displaced Ukrainians are not allowed to exchange Ukrainian cash. People with HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis or hepatitis are unlikely to pass the medical examination and access the health-care services they need. Vulnerable groups of people – such as those with disabilities, elderly persons, orphaned children and all those under State care – who were 'evacuated' by the Russian authorities have little say in where they will be evacuated to and which status they will receive.

Once in Russia, displaced Ukrainians' options depend on their social ties, available resources, and socio-demographic characteristics. Those who have relatives or friends in Russia, or have sufficient financial means, can try to evade the standard pathway of being mandatorily distributed across the Russian regions and settled into one of the State-run accommodation options (TAPs) – hostels, summer camps, sanatoria or sports facilities. TAPs provide free accommodation and meals but are usually located in remote areas far from employment opportunities, education and health-care facilities. Reportedly, by the end of 2022, there were 42,000 persons, including 12,000 children, residing in 807 TAPs across 58 regions in Russia.⁴

War-displaced Ukrainian citizens in Russia cannot rely on the international organisations that usually operate in situations of mass refugee influx, such as UNHCR or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Even though UNHCR does have an office in Russia, it does not (or rather is not allowed to) work directly with Ukrainians. Instead, UNHCR in Russia relies on cooperation with local Russian organisations such as Graždanskoje sodejstvije (Civic Assistance), the Russian Red Cross, Zdorozje I zhyzn (Health and Life Charitable Foundation) and SILSILA Foundation for the distribution of humanitarian aid.⁵ According to monitoring visits undertaken by UNHCR's Russian office, Ukrainians residing in TAPs have difficulty accessing the necessary documentation,

pensions, social benefits, and compensation for lost or destroyed property back in the occupied territories. Obviously, few feel able to voice objections while living under close State surveillance and being fully dependent on State aid.

Ukrainian citizens outside the government-run TAPs struggle to access any public services without first legalising their stay in Russia, which can take up to six months in the case of citizenship applications. Official employment and long-term renting require legal status too. Kindergarten and school places for war-displaced children are only available if they officially register as residing in the same district – which is not always possible due to landlords' unwillingness to register temporary residents who often have no income. While waiting for their documentation, many take precarious informal jobs; displaced Ukrainians often earn just enough to cover necessities but cannot afford medical care or clothes. NGOs report that it takes months to receive the one-off cash support of RUB10,000 promised by the Russian government. Meanwhile people rely on donations from volunteers.

The Russian Red Cross and the Russian Orthodox Church – operating in close cooperation and with financial support from the state authorities across Russia, including on forced relocations⁶ – are major actors in providing basic aid to the war-displaced both inside and outside the TAPs. Local volunteer groups and newly emerged NGOs also play a role in providing basic humanitarian aid, psychological support, and help with employment, accommodation and transit options for those who want to leave Russia. For instance, in Moscow, the Mayak Foundation uses the donations it receives to support 7,000 war-displaced Ukrainians through a system of local volunteers who guide families through the various services available to them at the foundation, aiming to help them become independent within six months.

Transnational networks of volunteers, such as Rubikus⁷ and Helping to Leave⁸, organise travel for Ukrainians, including those with reduced mobility or travelling with pets, from the occupied territories or from Russia to the

EU or other countries (such as Georgia or Turkey). Technically Ukrainian nationals are allowed to leave Russia with any document confirming their identity and citizenship, but there are often artificial obstacles and delays, and those without identity documents, or with Russian citizenship, may not be allowed to leave. Some Ukrainians remain in Russia because of family networks, their knowledge of the language, their health situation, a desire to stay close to their home region and eventually return, the lack of finances for further travel, and general exhaustion from being on the move.

Numerous challenges remain for Ukrainians living in a country that caused their displacement. They must navigate State bureaucracies that primarily aim to naturalise them rather than provide comprehensive support for local integration or enable their eventual return home. It is not yet clear how the Ukrainian State will regulate the possible return and reintegration of its (de facto dual) citizens.

Considering the harsh authoritarian regime inside Russia, its withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Criminal Court investigation of the war crimes against Ukrainian civilians, including deportations, the international

community cannot rely on existing international instruments and practices to promote a rights-based approach to the displaced Ukrainians in Russia during the war. It can only keep the borders with Russia open for those who can leave its territory, providing access to protection, or facilitating a return to Ukraine.

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The protection needs identified by displaced Ukrainian children and adolescents

Lauren Murray, Jasper Linke and Raluca Stoican¹

Research with displaced Ukrainian children and adolescents demonstrates that humanitarian actors need to provide opportunities for them to express their concerns, feelings and opinions.

The eagerness of displaced children and adolescents to express their concerns and discuss solutions with researchers illustrates the value of direct consultations as a method of assessing their needs. The humanitarian community has an obligation to listen to these voices and to integrate children's consultations more actively in their programme planning and design, in line with the UN Convention on the

Rights of the Child, and as outlined in the Core Humanitarian Standard.

In partnership with Save the Children (SC), IMPACT conducted consultations with Ukrainian refugee children, adolescents and their caregivers in Poland and Romania, and conducted a phone survey with caregivers, between December 2022 and January 2023.² Age-appropriate and sex-and-age-separated



Yana, 9 (name changed). The Ukrainian school, Warsaw. Credit: Paul Wu / DEC

consultations were conducted in schools and counselling hubs in each country.³

Safety and well-being concerns

"I miss my dad and my friends very much. That worries me the most." (Boy, 12-14, Romania)

Our research demonstrated that respondents generally feel safe in their new environment. However, all children, adolescents and caregivers voiced a range of concerns about their safety and well-being related to the uncertainty of their situation and the ever-evolving context in Ukraine. They were especially worried about the future and missed their family, friends and pets. Even younger children were well informed about the situation in Ukraine, and reported hearing family members talk about the conflict and described videos they had watched. Children appear to be exposed to the situation in Ukraine on an ongoing basis. For some this is compounded by recalling traumatic events such as their houses being attacked and destroyed; others mentioned that loud noises scare them.

"There were situations when Poles called Ukrainians names, even me." (Girl, 15-17, Poland)

Children, especially adolescents, explained that they not only miss their friends from Ukraine but also experience loneliness and

discrimination. In Poland, children of all ages reported not having many friends, while in Romania this was especially prevalent among adolescents. Some participants also described rude behaviour by local children and adults.

In Romania, most discrimination seems to take place outside school – in playgrounds, in the street and on public transport – perpetrated primarily by local children; boys also reported experiencing physical violence. In Poland, participants reported verbal harassment and abuse both inside and outside schools, perpetrated by both adults (including teachers) and children. Children in Poland were concerned about unwelcoming host communities and verbal discrimination, such as xenophobic or upsetting comments about the war. In addition, participants in both countries said one of their biggest challenges was not knowing the local language, making it difficult to get help, travel around, and run errands by themselves.

While respondents mostly indicated that they feel physically safe, they still face significant barriers to feeling accepted and comfortable in their new environment. With no immediate end to the war in sight, it is critical that humanitarian actors promote social cohesion through the design and targeting of their programming. This could include joint activities, cross-cultural learning, and language courses for children.

Protective factors

"My opinion has more value now. My parents ask my advice. It wasn't like that in Ukraine." (Boy, 15-17, Romania)

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that their family served as their primary source of protection, reporting that they discussed concerns with their parents. Most adolescents indicated that they are familiar with the challenges facing the family and they feel listened to and involved in decision-making. However, there were signs of gendered differences in the perception of autonomy. In Poland, adolescent boys tended to say that they were not sufficiently involved in household decisions, while adolescent girls often felt that their gender had a negative impact on their participation in family decisions and autonomy.

Friends were reported as the second major trusted source of help and comfort. The respondents were able to build and maintain new friendships with other Ukrainian children and rely on them for emotional support. While some respondents described experiencing discrimination, some mentioned the host community as an important protective factor, reporting that they feel welcomed and supported by locals.

Finally, children in both countries stressed the importance of spending time outdoors. This shows the potential of joint outdoor extra-curricular activities for Ukrainian and host community children both to promote increased well-being and to facilitate more sustained social connections that do not require a shared language.

Services need to target not only the child but the surrounding layers of support – namely the primary caregivers and individuals and organisations which are in daily contact with children.⁴ Additionally, while provision of basic needs remains a priority in any response, it is critical to ensure that children can build social connections and engage in psychosocial and recreational activities.

Pressing needs and access to services

Respondents in both countries highlighted the need for more extra-curricular and peer activities. The main barriers to engaging in

such activities are a lack of financial means and a lack of availability. In Poland, children wanted more opportunities for sports other than football. Children and adolescents also wanted longer and better-scheduled leisure time. In Romania, children who attend both Ukrainian online and in-person schooling generally complained about not having sufficient free time. Children in Poland who attend the second school shift mentioned they cannot benefit from their free time in the morning as most extra-curricular activities are scheduled for the afternoon or evening.

"I want to see a psychologist but I'm afraid to tell my mum." (Girl, 12-14, Romania)

Some children in both countries expressed that they required increased access to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services. Some of the adolescents explained that they did not know how to reach out to a mental health professional, and some said their parents disapproved of them accessing this service. In contrast, caregivers had much less of a focus on children's MHPSS needs when asked about key concerns. This potentially points to a difference in perception between refugee children and their caregivers regarding the urgency of psychosocial needs and their access to MHPSS services.

"We are short of money. Prices went up drastically." (Boy, 15-17, Romania)

Respondents in both countries stressed the need for additional financial resources for their families; this would help in accessing services – especially health care (including dental care) and extra-curricular activities. Children in Poland explained that high costs, poor quality of services and long waiting times hinder their access to health-care services, and households sometimes even return to Ukraine for treatment. It is critical that children and adolescents' perspectives are sought independently from their caregivers to ensure services can be tailored to their needs. In not addressing these, we run the risk of children facing ongoing and compounding stress as well as families being forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as travelling back to an area of conflict to access services. It is essential that financial assistance takes these various barriers into account.

Children's and adolescents' recommendations

Financial aid was the most common solution that children proposed for better access to services. In Poland, respondents reported needing funds to access health care. In Romania respondents priorities varied, they reported needing more money to access extra-curricular activities, to enable their household to purchase better quality or more food, or for specific needs such as internet and phone expenses. Some adolescents in Romania mentioned they were searching for part-time work to contribute to their household's income. Children also stressed the need for financial aid for more vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, households with many children, people with disabilities or recently arrived refugees.

In regard to extra-curricular activities, participants suggested that new premises or courses could be established for activities that are not available where they are currently living. A few children specified that they would like Ukrainian-speaking facilitators. Children and adolescents in both countries mentioned their desire for language classes to learn their host community's language and English. They often explained that such classes would be important for their caregivers as well, to help gain access to employment.

The issues flagged by children and adolescents could be the result of a lack of available activities, or a lack of information about what is available. Across the response, inter-agency service mappings are underway to ensure activities, locations and requirements are accessible for refugees, but wider dissemination of this information may be needed. The findings, however, suggest that services are strained. Additional services may be required, specifically with language capacities to accommodate the growing population.

Conclusion

The Ukraine response has suffered from a lack of visibility of the voices of children throughout their journey. The study found that while most children and adolescents generally feel safe in their host country, they are often deeply affected by the uncertainty of their situation

and struggling with separation, loneliness, and discrimination. Those consulted reported a lack of psychosocial support and limited access to leisure activities, especially sports. They struggle to exercise their right to "rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child"⁵ during their displacement.

Key recommendations for humanitarian, government and civil society actors supporting Ukrainian children and adolescents include:

- Provide age-appropriate opportunities for children and adolescents to share their experiences with those seeking to support them.
- Provide opportunities for extra-curricular activities.
- Strengthen and expand MHPSS services with a focus on dealing with worries about the situation in Ukraine and general uncertainty in children's lives.
- Reduce financial and time barriers to children's and adolescents' access to health care and extra-curricular activities.
- Provide better access to language courses and opportunities to socialise with their peers in the host community.
- Provide age- and gender-appropriate information on existing activities and services and ensure it is disseminated in a child-friendly manner.

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2. See Poland briefing bit.ly/pol_ukr_refugee_cp_brief_june23 and Romania briefing bit.ly/rou_ukr_refugee_cp_brief_june23

3. IMPACT conducted 20 age-appropriate consultations in Romania (50 girls, 64 boys) and 26 in Poland (95 girls, 97 boys), separated by sex and age (8-11, 12-14 and 15-17). The research was approved by an independent ethics review committee. A referral pathway was in place to help provide support should serious concerns or unmet urgent needs be disclosed. The research has some important limitations, mainly that a) participants were

among those receiving support from SC and partner organisations and b) no children with disabilities and only almost exclusively children of Ukrainian origin were consulted.

4. Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Alliance CHPA, 2019

5. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31

The forgotten victims of war: Ukraine's stateless

Aleksejs Ivashuk, Sofiia Kordonets and Jyothi Kanics

War has exacerbated the severe difficulties faced by stateless people in Ukraine. Barriers to accessing humanitarian aid, safe passage and protection need to be addressed.

Due to the challenges that stateless people face with their lack of or limited documentation, many of those living in war-torn Ukraine have been unable to flee; they also face obstacles in seeking international protection and are often unable to receive humanitarian aid.¹ Despite the gravity of the situation, however, the issue is not receiving sufficient attention.

Statelessness has a grave impact on millions of people worldwide, depriving them of fundamental rights such as identity, education, child protection, development, health care, employment, property, freedom of movement and freedom from arbitrary detention.² As is often the case around the world, it is difficult to accurately assess the numbers of stateless people in Ukraine; this is due to the nature of statelessness, the difficulty of locating stateless people, and muddled documentation mechanisms. The last census in Ukraine, in 2001, recorded 82,550 stateless people while UNHCR in 2021 estimated there to be "at least 35,000 stateless and people with 'undetermined nationality'".³ These estimates fail to account for some groups, such as children born after 2014 in the territories of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, and a significant proportion of the Roma population.⁴ The issue is compounded by the fact that many stateless people may not want to be identified because they fear the consequences of residing in Ukraine without papers or with non-standard forms of identification.⁵

The historical demographics of stateless people in Ukraine are diverse, and include those who were not able to prove their registration in Ukraine after the demise of the Soviet Union, those who were caught in complex

bureaucratic processes, formerly deported people such as the Crimean Tatars, and the Roma. Although systemic issues of discrimination are present, statelessness in Ukraine has more to do with regulatory and administrative gaps, which emerged due to the geopolitical and territorial upheaval following the dissolution of the former Soviet Union.

The different successor States of the former Soviet Union passed migration and nationality laws at different times, and also began to issue passports at different times, exacerbating the risk of statelessness. Some Ukrainians effectively became stateless when they returned to their homeland after the collapse of the Soviet Union to discover that they were considered as foreigners in the newly independent Ukraine.⁶ It was also not uncommon for people to hold passports of the defunct Soviet Union without being able to acquire a passport of any newly formed State.⁷

The current situation in Ukraine

Efforts to enable the voices of stateless people in Ukraine to be heard are not new⁸ and may indeed have had a positive impact on domestic policy, which now recognises that stateless people exist and may have rights. At the same time, there are still barriers to exercising these rights, notwithstanding the legal and policy changes. Whether or not a stateless person may access their rights depends heavily on such factors as documentation, proof of residence, ethnicity, and the competence of authorities dealing with their application. In addition to inconsistent practices, discrimination is also a problem. There are reports of stateless

people, Roma and third-country nationals being turned down at the EU border, facing detention-like conditions, and/or being subject to secondary screening.⁹

In a welcome sign of progress, in May 2021 the Ukrainian government introduced a Statelessness Determination Procedure (SDP). An applicant must first successfully go through the SDP and then apply for temporary residence. These are two separate procedures. It is important to note that the whole process does not guarantee a permanent residence and thereby the possibility of acquiring Ukrainian nationality. The process is time and resource-intensive, offering no guarantees for regularisation of residence status; at the same time, those applying may face risks such as detention. This explains in part why few stateless people in Ukraine have gone through the process. Up to the time of the Russian invasion on 24th February 2022, only 55 people had acquired temporary residence in Ukraine through the SDP, while 1000 applications were pending.¹⁰ There has been little progress since then. Due to the invasion, population registers in Ukraine were closed for some time and the SDP was halted, although it was later restarted in select areas. Government services are overwhelmed due to the war.

The vast majority of stateless people in Ukraine do not have a regular residence status or standard forms of identification. This leaves them vulnerable in the current war. In addition to an already dire restriction of rights, in practice it means that they do not have access to international protection. Worse yet, it can also mean that they have no freedom of movement and cannot even become internally displaced because in order to travel outside of their locality, people currently have to pass military checkpoints where standard forms of identification are required.

Due to the difficulties of functioning in a war zone, Right to Protection (R2P), one of UNHCR's implementing partners in Ukraine, lost contact with a third of the stateless people with whom it had been in contact. Of those with whom R2P managed to re-establish contact, about 75% had not moved anywhere and had not been able to seek safety. In interviews, these people cited fear of being detained and

interrogated while crossing military checkpoints due to lack of valid identity documents; lack of knowledge about safe routes; fear of separation from their children when they have no proof of parentage; and, lastly, lack of any assistance at destination. Since most stateless people do not possess standard documents, they do not have access to housing for displaced persons, cannot register as internally displaced and cannot access humanitarian assistance. The interviews revealed that stateless people feel safer in the neighbourhoods that they know.

Lack of access to humanitarian aid alone is a serious challenge for stateless people in Ukraine. Ukrainian legislation requires NGOs to report on all aid distributed to people, identifying recipients by their tax number. Aid recipients are required to provide their tax number in order to receive any kind of assistance, no matter how small or essential that assistance may be, such as foodstuffs or medicine. Stateless people can therefore only survive by finding unofficial jobs, which is practically impossible in wartime, or by relying on private volunteers who do not have strict reporting rules (although this can lead to abuses and fraud).

Outside Ukraine

According to R2P, less than 10% of undocumented stateless people left Ukraine in March 2022, when the border crossings were relatively easier. Even if a stateless person is able to leave his or her locality and is not turned back at the border, they are likely to encounter new challenges once outside Ukraine. The implementation of laws such as the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) can vary substantially depending on country, border crossing, immigration office, municipal authority, or even the attitudes of these authorities.

As mentioned above, only 55 stateless persons were recognised and granted temporary residence status in Ukraine prior to 24th February, 2022 (the date of Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine). Therefore, the vast majority of stateless people in Ukraine are not eligible for protection under the TPD as they lack the necessary documentation and proof of residence. The issue is compounded because

not all European countries have a Statelessness Determination Procedure. Those that do may not have a formal statutory mechanism, often lack knowledge and sufficiently qualified staff, and do not provide any information or free legal aid to stateless people.

To make matters worse, Ukrainian consulates are only dealing with requests from Ukrainian nationals and the State Migration Service has no regulations on the issuance of documents to stateless people abroad, even for those who were recognised as stateless in Ukraine. All this creates a vicious circle for stateless people who have fled Ukraine.

There is also fear among those without sufficient documentation that even if they are able to leave Ukraine to seek safety, they will not be able to return. Given the lack of proper regulatory frameworks to safeguard stateless people's rights, that fear is well grounded. It could create a limbo for such people, where they cannot return to Ukraine but would not be able to stay in the country that is temporarily hosting them.

Recommendations

We propose three main recommendations for action.

Firstly, address the barriers that endanger stateless people in Ukraine in order to ensure access to humanitarian aid and safe passage. Every person in Ukraine, whether displaced or residing in conflict-affected areas, should have access to humanitarian assistance regardless of their documentation. To ensure this, the Ukrainian government should lift the requirement for recipients of humanitarian aid to provide a tax number. International NGOs and UN agencies should include stateless people in their lists of people to receive assistance, taking into account their lack of standard documentation, and should work with State actors to raise greater awareness about statelessness.

Secondly, ensure an inclusive, human rights-based response in Europe. Everyone fleeing the war in Ukraine should be guaranteed access to the territory of Europe regardless of documentation or residence status, as mandated

by the EU and UNHCR, and in line with the principles of international law including the right to claim asylum. EU Member States should extend eligibility for temporary protection to all stateless people and those at risk of statelessness from Ukraine, regardless of documentation or residence status.

Thirdly, make progress on a comprehensive, integrated approach to preventing and ending statelessness. In March 2023, R2P gathered representatives from the Ukrainian government, UNHCR and civil society. This consultation paved the way for further steps towards ending statelessness in Ukraine, including commitments to: identify and recognise all stateless people in Ukraine; document the different profiles of stateless people; address possible gaps that could create new statelessness cases; and elaborate a joint roadmap to resolve existing cases and prevent new cases.

Moreover, progress is needed in all European countries to prevent and reduce statelessness. Governments need to take effective measures to determine who is stateless on their territory and grant them the protection enshrined in the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. SDPs should be established and strengthened. Safeguards should be established to guarantee that children of refugees do not grow up stateless, and statelessness among unaccompanied and separated children should be identified and their rights to a birth certificate and nationality guaranteed. States should also facilitate the naturalisation of recognised stateless people and make every effort to expedite proceedings and to reduce the charges and costs.

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How language affects access to services and information

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Effective support for people fleeing the war in Ukraine requires an understanding of their language and communication needs and preferences.

Ukraine is multilingual. Ukrainian, the official language, is spoken alongside Russian and minority languages like Romani, Crimean Tatar, Hungarian and Gagauz. Effective support for people fleeing the war in Ukraine requires an understanding of their language, and communication needs and preferences. Yet Ukrainians affected by the war face multiple language challenges, and barriers to communicating their needs and accessing information and services.

Firstly, the war between Ukraine and Russia has heightened language sensitivities. Since February 2022, growing numbers of Russian speakers have begun speaking Ukrainian. But, others are unwilling or unable to make that change.

Secondly, although Ukraine is a multilingual country, not everyone is multilingual. Language and literacy barriers typically exclude marginalised groups. Older people, people with disabilities, people from rural areas and certain marginalised language speakers are less likely to be comfortable using more than one language. Providing information and communication in marginalised languages and in accessible formats is crucial

to reaching the most vulnerable and preventing further exclusion.

Thirdly, the lack of easily accessible information means that people fleeing Ukraine rely heavily on social media networks and personal contacts. Even when host nations and international organisations provide translation and interpretation support, the over-reliance on untrained informal translators and interpreters creates unnecessary risks of confusion and miscommunication. While information access is a challenge everywhere, communication barriers vary by host country. To improve access to information and services it is essential to understand the specific challenges Ukrainians face in each host country. In this article we discuss findings from CLEAR Global's research on language use and communication practices in the humanitarian response in Ukraine, Poland, Moldova and Romania.¹

Sensitivities

There are sensitivities around whether an individual speaks Russian or Ukrainian. The 1996 Constitution of Ukraine recognises Ukrainian as the country's official language

and guarantees the free development, use and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities. After the escalation of the war in 2022, the sense of a national identity is even more tied to the Ukrainian language. Many Russian-speaking Ukrainians have decided to switch to Ukrainian for patriotic reasons or because of traumatic experiences. As one Ukrainian told us, “The Russian language is now associated with intense suffering”. Understanding the impact of these shifts can help service providers adapt their language strategies for service delivery.

A history of multilingualism, especially in the big cities, makes it possible for many in Ukraine to switch to Ukrainian, but this is not necessarily the case for Ukrainians in more rural areas, speakers of marginalised or minority languages, or ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. Some Ukrainians we talked to described having difficulties finding the right words or understanding legal, medical or other technical information, especially when under stress. This means people using services may need the option of switching to Russian, or another language, if their Ukrainian fails them.

Speakers of minority languages, such as Crimean Tatar, might face no issues at all to communicate in Ukrainian, whereas speakers of Azeri or Romani may use Russian as their second language and find it harder to switch to Ukrainian, though this also varies by region. Many ethnic Russians, educated during the Soviet era and living in predominantly Russian-speaking parts of the country, have used Russian their whole lives. While for younger Russian speakers, who were educated mainly in Ukrainian, the transition is easier.

With such sensitivities at stake, humanitarian organisations and host communities and authorities may struggle to know how best to communicate with people fleeing the war in Ukraine. They may find it helpful to learn from Ukrainian language policy, which states that the first exchange in any public setting such as a shop should be in Ukrainian, after which the speaker can use the language they are most comfortable with. In the current context, saying “Hello” or “Can I help you?” in Ukrainian sends a powerful signal that this

is a safe space, even if the conversation that follows is in Russian or a mix of Russian and Ukrainian.

Language and literacy barriers

Language and literacy barriers typically exclude marginalised groups. Ethnic minorities, people with lower levels of literacy and people with physical impairments more often face difficulties accessing information or communicating in a second language. In contexts of disaster and humanitarian crisis, where access to information is vital, these language and communication barriers further increase vulnerability and the risk of exclusion.

The Ukrainians we talked to had encountered numerous situations where language barriers made it hard or impossible to get information or access services. These ranged from getting health care to applying for cash assistance or registering a child at school – in finding out what is available, understanding the procedure, completing the paperwork and engaging with staff.

Romani speakers face particular difficulties. An estimated 400,000 Roma lived in Ukraine before the escalation of the war in February, and the vast majority speak Romani (or, more precisely, a variety of Romani dialects) as their main language. While many use a second language to some extent, not all do, and not all do so comfortably. To make safe, informed decisions about what to do, Roma people need support in Romani, which responders rarely provide.

Even for Roma who speak a second language like Russian or Romanian, access to information can be challenging. Due to educational exclusion, some Roma have low levels of literacy and struggle to engage with written information. This is especially the case for women, older people and people with disabilities. Difficulties engaging with written information leave them reliant on verbal communication and again reduce their options to verify information against available written sources. This makes them more vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation.

Moreover, Roma and people with lower levels of literacy in general are less likely to be familiar with different scripts. One Romani

speaker who had fled to Moldova, understood Romanian and was literate in Cyrillic, told us that he was still unable to access information made available in Latin script: “We understand the language but not the alphabet. I can’t read a single letter.”

Though responders are aware of communication needs and report a range of languages being spoken by service users, services rarely cater for marginalised languages such as Romani or Ukrainian Sign Language. Only one of 73 surveyed responders in Poland, Romania and Moldova said their organisation could communicate in Romani; none had any capacity in Ukrainian Sign Language.

Communication barriers in different host countries

People fleeing Ukraine need up-to-date information on a wide range of legal and administrative topics and on education and employment opportunities in their host countries. Yet the information resources provided by host countries and international organisations are often insufficient to their needs, hard to understand without an interpreter or further explanation, or are inconsistent, quickly outdated and not clearly signposted. Information is often not provided in the relevant languages, and includes terms relating to national systems and procedures that Ukrainians are not familiar with.

As a result, people rely heavily on social media networks and personal contacts. But finding relevant and reliable information for different host countries is a challenge. Older people who sometimes feel less confident with smartphones and internet browsing face even greater difficulties. While personal tips, online or in-person, from other people leaving Ukraine can be helpful, they may also be inaccurate or lack insight into the legal or cultural context of the host country. Ukrainians we spoke to voiced anxiety that a lack of understanding resulted in legal difficulties and missed opportunities relating to work, education and assistance.

Responders we surveyed in Poland, Romania, and Moldova were largely unequipped to address language barriers. In all three countries, providing information

even in Ukrainian was a great challenge, and many organisations reverted to communicating in Russian and English plus the national language of the host country.² Organisations also relied on staff, volunteers and affected people themselves to bridge the language divide – most with no training or guidance on humanitarian interpreting. This approach can create unnecessary risks and confusion for service users. Its effectiveness also varied depending on the linguistic context in each country.

In Poland, Russian language proficiency among an older generation of Poles and similarities between Slavic languages helped to bridge communication barriers, as did the sizable Ukrainian community that existed even before the war. Many service users have been able to hold simple conversations with Polish volunteers and aid workers without an interpreter. Research participants suggested this relative ease of communication had been a factor in the decision to come to Poland. But language and communication challenges still exist for marginalised language communities like Romani and Sign Language users, while government offices present some of the biggest communication challenges for many Ukrainians.

In Moldova, most people fleeing Ukraine are first or second-language Russian speakers, which makes it easier for them to access information materials in Russian. However, while Russian is spoken by older Moldovans, this is not necessarily the case for the younger generation, which created communication challenges with younger Moldovan humanitarian response volunteers.

In Romania, Ukrainians faced much greater communication difficulties than in Poland or Moldova. Romanian belongs to a different language family from Ukrainian, Russian and Polish. Few Romanians speak Russian, and even fewer speak Ukrainian. The Ukrainian community in Romania before February 2022 was also much smaller than in other countries neighbouring Ukraine. So for most of the roughly 1.5 million Ukrainians who have crossed into Romania, relying on speaking similar languages for partial understanding was not possible. For Ukrainians

with knowledge of English, using English was a viable option – but not everyone speaks English.

The importance of using the right language

Research participants highlighted how language was important not only for understanding and access to support in a new country but also for their sense of safety and well-being. Several Ukrainians described being heartened by signs of welcome and solidarity in Ukrainian at the border and even on the sides of buses. Some described their relief at hearing their own language spoken when they first crossed the border after a long and difficult journey.

To provide Ukrainians with the necessary information in the right languages, responders need data on language and format preferences, the specifics of communication in Ukraine and the sensitivities of using languages in wartime circumstances. They also need insights into the specific language challenges that Ukrainians face in each country, and the existing gaps in available language support. Providing basic training for staff and establishing links with professional language service providers can significantly improve communication and access to information.

The cooperation and involvement of Governments, NGOs and language service providers can all play a vital role in helping Ukrainian refugees to overcome language and communication obstacles, access the information and services they need, and start building their lives in new countries.

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1. We collected data between April and December 2022 from a total of 306 Ukrainians affected by the war, humanitarian responders, and language service providers. This research was funded by Oxfam. For more details and practical resources for addressing language and communication challenges for displaced Ukrainians, see clearglobal.org/ukraine-response/
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Unseen challenges: risks faced by IDPs with disabilities in Ukraine

Chiara Valenti

IDPs with disabilities in Ukraine face heightened risks. More initiatives are needed that prioritise disability-inclusive approaches, employ data-driven decision-making, and actively involve people with disabilities in response efforts.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in a severe and rapidly evolving displacement crisis, endangering the lives, dignity and well-being of millions of displaced individuals. People with disabilities are particularly exposed to these heightened risks.

By the end of 2022, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Ukraine reached 5,900,000. Significantly, a quarter of IDPs say they have at least one family member with a disability accompanying them, while 41%

indicate the presence of one or more elderly household members.¹ National and international organisations have made efforts to improve the assistance provided to people with disabilities. However, individuals with disabilities continue to encounter significant barriers when attempting to access bomb shelters and have become stranded in conflict zones because of financial limitations, lack of accessible transportation or absence of assistive devices. Even those who have

successfully fled the conflict continue to experience difficulties regarding hygiene, mobility equipment, and accessible housing.

The COVID-19 pandemic had already exacerbated existing patterns of discrimination, exclusion and inequality faced by people with disabilities, especially those living in institutions. In the first quarter of 2021, 67% of IDPs aged 60 and above, as well as 69% of people with disabilities reported dire economic situations and exhibited coping mechanisms for food insecurity.² Moreover, the digital verification system for pensioners in non-government-controlled areas was difficult to access for people with disabilities and older people residing in these areas, many of whom were internally displaced.

Challenges in evacuation and accessing support

In August 2022, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) held a meeting to address the increased risk of death or injury faced by individuals with disabilities during attacks on civilians. The discussion shed light on several obstacles, including a lack of access to evacuation support, separation from family, inadequate information on available aid, inaccessible bomb shelters, and the absence of alternatives to sirens for those with hearing impairments.³ A survey in mid-2022 by the National Assembly of People with Disabilities in Ukraine corroborated the CRPD's findings and showed that evacuees with disabilities also faced challenges in obtaining assistive devices in their new communities.

The limited involvement of individuals with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) in emergency preparedness and response planning further exacerbates the situation. The impact of this exclusion is reflected in the low proportion of IDPs with disabilities successfully assisted by protection responses. As of April 2023, of the 1,581,398 people reached by the protection cluster, 3% (42,000) were people with disabilities and 11% (176,000) were elderly.⁴ Given that the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) found that 25% of displaced households contain at least one member with

a disability, it is probable that the protection requirements of IDPs with disabilities are not being fully met. Recent research by the Protection Cluster underscores the persistence of three key protection issues faced by people with disabilities: inadequate access to specialised services, limited independence in accessing livelihoods and financial resources, and insufficient provision of safe spaces and privacy.

IDPs with disabilities in institutions

The challenges faced by IDPs with disabilities are further exacerbated when they reside in institutions. The poor living conditions and standards of care found in Ukraine's residential care system have long been a subject of controversy, particularly concerning orphaned and abandoned children. Many institutions lack suitable evacuation plans and routes, and the conflict has further intensified existing protection issues, including neglect, physical and sexual violence, and exploitation of vulnerable residents.⁵ The Ukrainian government had brought in some reforms, but these have been derailed by the outbreak of war, leaving IDPs with disabilities – especially children – who live in institutions doubly abandoned because of their displacement and their disabilities.

Lack of data

The lack of reliable, detailed data on IDPs with disabilities is one of the major barriers impeding their integration into policies and programmes. Collecting and utilising comprehensive national-level data is a complex undertaking but essential if governments are to mitigate the hazards that displacement may bring to IDPs with disabilities. It is equally important to consider how to derive meaningful insights from the data and adjust programming accordingly. Additionally, qualitative research plays a crucial role in identifying specific obstacles and shortcomings faced by IDPs with disabilities, providing valuable insights that can inform targeted interventions.

With the outbreak of war in February 2022, the IOM has conducted several rounds of representative general population surveys



Natalia and her son, displaced by war in Sloviansk, eastern Ukraine, found shelter in Lviv. At Lviv National University of Veterinary Medicine and Biotechnologies, they join 120 others in communal dormitories, June 2022. Credit: Christian Jepsen/NRC

to identify the needs, movements and intentions of affected individuals, including IDPs with disabilities. However, the exact number of IDPs with disabilities living in territories affected by war or occupation remains unclear due to various factors. One key reason is the lack of synchronisation in the IDP registration system at the county level, leading to inconsistent and incomplete data. Moreover, humanitarian organisations do not consistently report on indicators related to disabilities, further contributing to the lack of comprehensive data on this population.

Improved coordination among relevant stakeholders, enhanced data collection mechanisms, and standardised reporting practices would contribute to a more accurate understanding of the situation faced by IDPs with disabilities, enabling more effective and inclusive responses.

Promising practices and implications

The European Disability Forum (EDF) and Christian Blind Mission (CBM) have collaborated with OPDs in Ukraine and neighbouring countries to provide direct services and referrals to over 11,800 individuals and their families. This joint project has focused on meeting immediate needs and influencing the broader humanitarian response, with future

efforts aimed at promoting disability-inclusive recovery.

The Riga Declaration is another notable initiative with positive implications for disability-inclusive responses in displacement crises. Drafted by EDF and SUSTENTO, it highlights the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in Ukraine and those fleeing the war.⁶ The declaration emphasises the importance of accessibility, deinstitutionalisation, and meaningful participation for people with disabilities. It calls for comprehensive data collection, transparent emergency response plans, the active involvement of people with disabilities and OPDs in decision-making processes, and independent monitoring with the close involvement of OPDs.

ACTED, with support from Alliance2015, has helped renovate 120 collective centres to provide dignified and accessible accommodation for those affected by the conflict.⁷ Completed in January 2023, 7 rooms of a 24-hour shelter for young people with disabilities in Chernivtsi now offer improved living conditions – including recreations rooms and facilities tailored to individuals with disabilities, limited mobility, and the elderly – allowing displaced Ukrainians, including those with disabilities, to regain independence and experience greater comfort.

Sustaining and expanding such initiatives is crucial to ensure the full recognition and fulfilment of the rights and needs of IDPs with disabilities. By persistently prioritising disability-inclusive approaches, employing data-driven decision-making, and actively involving people with disabilities and OPDs in the response efforts, a more inclusive and resilient humanitarian system can be fostered, leaving no one behind.

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Supporting older people in Ukraine's conflict

Luciana Caffarelli, Hester Clark and Simon Harris

Humanitarian response in the current conflict needs to better recognise the diversity of experience among older Ukrainians, target assistance to their specific requirements, and provide support to them where they are.

The situation in Ukraine has been called the world's 'oldest' humanitarian crisis, with more people over 60 affected by conflict and displacement than any other country.¹ Since the escalation of the war in February 2022, gas, electricity and water infrastructure has been damaged and large swathes of civilian infrastructure destroyed. Access to pensions, health care and other basic services has been severely curtailed. With the demographics of Ukraine skewed towards older people, and particularly older women,² the impact on this group has been devastating.

Older people make up a disproportionate number of civilians remaining in areas of active hostilities and face a greater likelihood of being killed or injured.³ Older people who have remained in conflict areas face disruptions to supplies of food, water, medicine and electricity. For those who are displaced, the collective centres and other informal, unvetted sources of shelter that provide emergency accommodation are often unsuitable to meet their needs. Many older Ukrainians are also in a financially precarious position as they rely on the small State pension to survive.

Despite the high proportion of older people among the conflict-affected population, humanitarian support generally follows a one-size-fits-all model that fails to uphold older people's rights. Recent research by HelpAge International reveals the varied experiences of older people, including how specific sections of the older population, namely older women, people over 70 and older people with disabilities face disproportionate risks.⁴

Assumptions that older people are passive recipients of care and aid ignores the diversity and complexity of their lives and overlooks their active participation in responding to the needs of their communities. Many older people are performing crucial roles in the current crisis, whether as social care workers or as care givers for other older adults and/or children.

This article explores some of the key needs identified through research and from supporting older people in the Ukraine humanitarian response. HelpAge's trained social care workers deliver essential services to older people in their own homes and in shelters. These services include psychosocial support, home help and assessment for the provision

of multi-purpose cash, assistive devices, and hygiene products to support those living with bowel and urinary incontinence.

Displaced and remaining

Displacement poses many challenges to older people. Packing belongings, carrying cases and getting on public transport can be difficult. The facilities at shelters or the homes of friends and relatives may not be designed with the needs of older people and people with disabilities in mind.⁵ Access problems can include the absence of ramps, shower facilities without handrails, and corridors that are not wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs. Many older people are turned away by shelters because they cannot cater for people with incontinence. Other issues include the inability to access cash assistance when identity documents and pension books have been lost.

Those that remain in their own homes face specific challenges. There is the physical danger of being close to the conflict. There is also the reduction in services: health facilities may have been relocated, power supplies and other utilities may be cut or reduced, shops and businesses may have closed down. In addition, many older people lack the financial resources to repair or improve their damaged homes.⁶ Finally, friends, relatives and neighbours might have left. However, after a lifetime in their own homes, many older people are still reluctant to leave and would rather stay and face these challenges. Nina, 84, from a village in the east of Kharkivska Oblast that saw intense fighting in May 2022, reflected this feeling: "I'm never leaving, even the Russian shell that blew a hole in my roof couldn't force me out."

Psychosocial support

In a recent survey that explored a number of issues including the psychosocial support needs of older people because of the war, over 50% of respondents reported a negative impact on their mental health.⁷ Many reported experiencing nightmares, isolation, fear of the future and feeling unable to cope. The support of HelpAge trained social care workers, many of whom are older people themselves, can help reduce the psychological stress experienced

by older people. Social care workers visit older people in their homes once or twice a week and are a vital lifeline, they are also instrumental in collecting data and conducting needs assessments to determine whether additional services are required.

Hygiene and incontinence

Maintaining good personal hygiene is an important factor for the physical health, mental health and dignity of all people. In contexts of conflict and displacement, these needs are amplified and increasingly difficult to maintain. In Ukraine, a lack of income or inability to access funds, the reduced availability of hygiene products, and limited public transport or support networks to help purchase these products present huge barriers to good hygiene, especially in shelters and areas closest to the front line. For older people living with bowel and urinary incontinence, regular access to incontinence products is crucial to living a dignified life. Lyubov, 62, displaced from the East and currently living in a shelter in Lviv, explains the importance of such products:

"I have low mobility from arthritis and a stroke I recently suffered. This is a large shelter with many people, and the bathrooms are quite far away. The incontinence pads are essential for me and my husband with disabilities."

Devices that enable functioning and independence

The timely provision of assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, walking frames, sticks, adapted toilet seats and bathroom chairs, needs to be a key component of humanitarian assistance for older people in Ukraine. Assistive devices can have a positive impact on independence, reducing vulnerability and building older peoples' resilience.⁸ Out of 400 older people interviewed by HelpAge in Ukraine in December 2022, 43% faced barriers to accessing assistive devices. Although older people are in theory able to obtain government support for such items, the registration process is slow, bureaucratic and not adapted to catering for displaced people, people who have lost their documentation and those unable to easily access local health services for assessment.

Multi-purpose cash assistance

Multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) has been a critical part of the overall humanitarian response in Ukraine and has been identified by older people, and the affected population more broadly, as their number one need. However, our experience shows that older people's additional needs are not always factored in. The Cash Working Group in Ukraine (comprising national and international NGOs and UN agencies that provide cash voucher assistance) aims to promote the development of inclusive quality cash assistance; it has recommended the monthly amount of 2,220 UAH per person. For older people who frequently need to spend more on medicines and personal hygiene items, and often spend more time at home, which increases heating and lighting costs, this is not enough.

In addition, the most at-risk older people might not be able to access MPCA. Most older people receive monthly pension payments through the Ukrainian postal service – Ukrposhta. Due to its reach, HelpAge uses the same system to deliver MPCA, though there are challenges. HelpAge uses this same system to deliver MPCA. The service offers two options for payment – collection in person from a post office or cash delivery to a residence. However, opening and operating a post office account is contingent upon being able to provide identity documentation. For displaced people who have lost their documents this is impossible. The service is also address dependent and there are often delays updating addresses in the post office systems. Additionally, in many remote villages near the frontline, the postal system no longer operates. This means MPCA providers using this method often have to seek riskier alternatives such as distributing physical cash or providing transfers through the friends and relatives of the recipients in order to ensure no-one is left out.

Winterisation

The targeting of Ukraine's energy infrastructure has left millions of people without power for heating, lighting and cooking for extended periods, which creates particular challenges in winter. Older people face greater health risks associated with the onset of cold weather and

winter in wartime greatly amplifies those risks. Humanitarian winterisation programmes are often centred on providing warm clothing, but whilst displaced older people often need additional winter clothing, those remaining in their own homes generally do not.

What they do need is access to cash to pay utility bills and carry out essential repairs for improved domestic insulation. They also need the ability to stay in contact with friends and relatives, lighting and a way of cooking and staying warm during power-cuts. The most important winterisation interventions are the provision of low-energy rechargeable lighting, power banks for charging mobile phones and servicing traditional coal or wood burning stoves.

Insights and recommendations

Older people face specific challenges in situations of humanitarian crises and displacement. When there is a failure to consider older people and identify their particular requirements, they will continue to face barriers to accessing protection and assistance. In Ukraine, a far greater focus is needed on providing targeted support to this disproportionately large and increasingly at-risk group.

This can be achieved by all responding organisations promoting the engagement and participation of older people to incorporate their perspectives into the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes and policies. Collecting, analysing, using and reporting on sex, age and disability disaggregated data is critical to understanding the complexity of experience of all affected people and designing appropriate interventions.

Befriending, mentoring and counselling services could be added to existing protection programmes. The development of new shelters or rehabilitation of existing shelters should consider the needs of older people so that their use is 'universal', and access to assistive devices should be a part of every agency's programming through partnership with experienced organisations, such as HelpAge.

Finally, it is critical that humanitarian actors expand programmes that focus on delivering assistance to older people close to where they are living through community-based

services and support, such as assisted living arrangements and home-based health and care services, to empower them to live safely, with dignity, and as actively and independently as possible.

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How Black African students experienced forced displacement from Ukraine

Lindsey N Kingston and Igbo Ekakitie

The forced migration journeys of Black African students in Ukraine highlight the vulnerabilities that minority non-nationals experienced during the 2022 Russian invasion.

When Russia began its invasion in late February 2022 there were 76,548 international students from 155 countries enrolled in Ukrainian universities. Displaced international students are an important and interesting group because they are 'not quite' refugees. Their country of citizenship was not under attack, but they had to flee and their lives were uprooted. They had invested time and finances in educational programmes that have been interrupted or destroyed and they may lack the resources to simply start again.

This article draws on interviews with 15 Black African students, aged 19 to 29, who were displaced from Ukraine in February 2022. Interviews centred on the decision-making processes that brought them to safety and their migration journeys. Respondents primarily originated from countries in West and East Africa, and interviews were conducted via Zoom between May and October 2022.

Information gathering and decision making

The interview data suggests that the respondents – like many others – were unprepared for the 2022 invasion. African students were influenced by Ukrainian peers, local news and international news that underestimated the threat. Many respondents commented that Putin's aggressive comments were not taken seriously, especially because of the smaller-scale conflict in 2014. They did not expect widespread violence. "Who seriously thinks about war in the twenty-first century?" asked Moon (22, from Nigeria).¹ "Even the people who went home for Christmas, they came back afterward. We weren't really that worried." Kite (27, from Nigeria) reflected that it felt like social media was warning that "the whole world was burning" but people in Ukraine "were chilling, making summer plans, cooking."

Students used a variety of formal and informal sources to gather data. Social media and communication apps played central roles

in information sharing – including channels that were quickly created by displaced people. Respondents also used global news sources such as CNN, Al Jazeera, BBC and France 24. Sometimes social media translated the news from local Ukrainian news sources into English, and the Kyiv Post offered English language news. Others relied on personal networks, including local contacts within Ukraine and trusted friends and relatives outside the country.

The students engaged in information resilience² – that is, they reoriented and adjusted their knowledge base when their usual sources of information were disrupted by displacement. This involved reconstructing their information landscape³ (how a person gathers and processes information), developing coping mechanisms and pooling information from a range of sources. Some respondents delayed their journeys in the hope of gathering reliable information, while others felt driven to move even without a clear idea of where they were going.

Sunny (19, from Nigeria) reflected: “We didn’t really have time to filter what was right or wrong. We just tried to weigh options and think about what was best for us. Some information was false, some was accurate but stressful to attain... in the end we had to make decisions without proper thinking, just following the normal survival instincts.”

These findings support existing research on information sharing during displacement journeys, which emphasises the role of other people (especially knowledgeable friends, family and social contacts) and the use of smartphone apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook.⁴ Having many information sources to choose from, however, does not necessarily translate into having trustworthy data. People need reliable sources of practical information during emergencies.

Experiences of forced displacement

Students’ initial experiences of displacement were stressful and difficult, with fear of violence exacerbated by social chaos and extreme winter weather. Respondents waited in long queues to purchase bus or train tickets that were frequently not available; taxi drivers

charged exorbitant fares but were still blocked from border crossings by dense traffic. Many packed in a hurry and did not have enough food or warm clothing for long periods of waiting, especially outdoors. Destinations continued to shift in response to ever-changing information about border crossings and humanitarian aid. Panic often led to unsafe conditions in train stations and other gathering sites. Junior (22, from Rwanda) was taken aback by the sheer numbers of people in a train station, fearing a stampede as trains approached the platform. “People were getting stepped on, people were getting injured,” he recalled. Praise (23, from Ghana) had similar fears, reflecting: “I can’t run from a war and then die because I’m [suf-focated] from someone pressing me.”

Technological and logistical challenges compounded the situation. Initial internet blackouts limited access to news and their university accounts. When on the move, students were sometimes unable to recharge their phones, access mobile internet or access cash using ATMs.

Racial discrimination

Early media reports suggested that people of colour were treated differently from white Ukrainians and other white Europeans fleeing the Russian invasion. The African Union issued a statement on the “reported ill treatment of Africans trying to leave Ukraine”, urging “empathy and support to all people fleeing war notwithstanding their racial identity.”⁵ Students had mixed reactions when asked whether they experienced racial discrimination, both before and after the invasion began. Most respondents expressed positive feelings toward Ukraine and its people. Some noted underlying tensions even if their overall experiences were positive, while a few pointed to deeper problems with racism in Ukraine.

Respondents who had positive experiences in Ukraine before the invasion were sometimes surprised by their treatment during displacement. Peace (18, from Nigeria) was told to expect a “racial hierarchy” on trains, which privileged white Ukrainian women over Black African women. Indeed, her group had to sit near the train door while cabins were mostly occupied by Ukrainians, with many aisles

filled with Black African and Indian students. Yet she was also careful to note that Ukrainians came to her rescue when others tried to push her back onto the train platform; Ukrainians shouted “Why are you pushing them down? They are running for their lives” and helped the students board.

Some students attributed racial tensions to the realities of forced displacement, rather than reflecting broader or deeper patterns of discrimination. In Kyiv train station, Eli (29, from Liberia) observed security personnel “harassing foreigners to allow Ukrainian citizens to get on board.” Some noticed that travel was easier for Black students if they travelled with white companions.

Concerns about racial discrimination were sometimes factored into decision-making. Praise (who describes herself as “not light, not chocolate, I’m dark”) made travel decisions on the assumption she would face racial discrimination at border crossings. One of her friends had reported that some Black African and Muslim students “had to fight” to gain entry to trains, and she believed that a dark-skinned Black woman would have fewer options in transit. She was prepared to spend a lot of money if necessary, she reflected: “If I have to spend \$2,000 to save my life, that’s what I have to do”.

Onward journeys

After initially seeking refuge in border countries such as Poland and Slovakia, students continued their journeys and usually ventured further from the Ukrainian border. Some were in EU countries at the time of their interview, while others had returned to their home countries in Africa. Roughly three to eight months after the students were initially displaced, most students’ plans were still in flux. Many students had been given the option to continue their studies online with Ukrainian universities but such learning environments were not always ideal. Some were optimistic that they would return to continue their studies, or at least to celebrate graduation one day. Others, however, doubted they would return to Ukraine, at least as students.

The conflict initially created both opportunities and challenges for Black African students.

For some, it opened up possibilities for travelling within the EU and earning degrees at institutions with perhaps more resources or better reputations. For others, displacement meant interrupted studies or even the need to start again at great financial and personal cost. Several students mused about taking their chances and returning to wartime Ukraine to finish their studies, despite the risks, because they stood to lose so much if they could not complete their degrees. Junior reflected on the impact that his displacement experience had on his mental health and well-being:

“It was when I got home that I began to feel the mental effects of the war... Getting home, you realise you could have died... It took me about a month and a half, just mental trauma.”

Further research needs

This project offers rich data for understanding the forced migration journey of Black African students in Ukraine, and the vulnerabilities of minorities in crisis situations. Yet those early stages of displacement are only part of a larger story that is becoming increasingly fragmented. Longitudinal data on displaced international students could uncover the consequences of their forced displacement in the years to follow, possibly in comparison with the experiences of displaced Ukrainian nationals.

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Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: reflections from the first year of the emergency

Caroline Dulin Brass, Manuela Moy and Yoko Iwasa

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is an integral part of the Ukraine refugee response. A number of policy implications, innovations and lessons for the ongoing response and for future crises have emerged.

Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine nearly one-third of the Ukrainian population have been forced from their homes, and 6.3 million Ukrainians are now refugees.¹ The risks of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are high, given that women and children represent 87% of those displaced and many are separated from their families.² Moreover, a wide range of actors are involved in the response, including volunteers, informal networks, and others with limited humanitarian experience. As the emergency continues, these risk factors are expected to be compounded by increasing socio-economic vulnerabilities, difficulties in finding safe long-term accommodation, and potential fatigue among hosting communities.

UNHCR deployed PSEA (Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse) experts in neighbouring countries from the onset of the crisis, and then recruited dedicated PSEA Coordinators at country and regional level. These staff members provided essential technical support, capacity building and coordination throughout the first year of the emergency.

National PSEA Networks are in place in the main response countries, spearheading and supporting collective PSEA efforts. There is also a Regional PSEA and Safeguarding Network in place to ensure coherence and exchange of practices across the different countries.³ To promote localisation and sustainability, each of these PSEA Networks is co-chaired with national actors or NGOs – VOICE in Hungary, Plan International in Moldova, Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę and Plan International in Poland, Terre des Hommes in Romania, and the National Centre for Human Rights in Slovakia – and bring together more than 170 members across the five countries, including

national and local NGOs, refugee-led and women-led organisations.

The networks engage with refugees, jointly finding ways to communicate risks in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways. In Slovakia, for example, the refugee-led organisation Sme Spolu ('We are together') found that traditional descriptions of SEA alienated and created fear among refugees. They therefore adapted the messages by avoiding "PSEA" terminology and using formulated positive messages, such as "you will not be blamed" and "you will be listened to". These were packaged into broader messages about how to stay safe in their country of asylum, and integrated into broader dialogues with refugees about safety.⁴ Around 11,600 refugees were reached through this project.⁵

National PSEA Networks have also played a key role in enhancing the capacity of other actors. At the time of writing, more than 5,000 frontline workers in the neighbouring countries have been trained in PSEA by UNHCR and its partners. Training has also been provided to reception centre staff, volunteers, call centre agents, border guards and police.

Barriers to reporting

Despite the early investment in PSEA, very few allegations have been made to date. While under-reporting of sexual exploitation and abuse is a global challenge, in the Ukraine response cultural sensitivities around gender and gender roles have exacerbated the issue. The nature of the war in Ukraine and of refugees' experiences of flight and arrival in host countries may also have impacted their willingness to raise concerns.

Many refugees express a strong sense of gratitude for being welcomed in neighbouring countries and hesitate to provide any negative

feedback for fear of being considered ungrateful. Widespread messages around Ukrainian resilience, unity and strength against the Russian invasion, as well as feelings of guilt or responsibility for family members left behind, may also influence people's willingness to come forward with concerns. This may be further aggravated by gaps in information and accessibility of complaints mechanisms, and by language and diversity barriers.

From experience in other emergencies, we know that it may take time for allegations of SEA to come forward. We can therefore expect a potential increase in reporting as the response continues, and as our mechanisms for reporting and our engagement with the community are strengthened.

Engagement with non-traditional actors

The Ukraine response has been characterised by a vast array of volunteers and private citizens getting involved. Examples include students staying at reception centres at night-time to receive new arrivals, pensioners translating for border guards, and Ukrainian diaspora and church groups handing out food and toys at assistance hubs in neighbouring

countries. Individuals and companies from across Europe drove buses and minivans to the border areas to offer transport, and in border towns many local residents offered Ukrainians free housing or help to find work.

This exceptional outflow of solidarity has been accompanied by challenges. Many refugee women have expressed difficulty in distinguishing between actors on the ground, and in assessing what offers of support are legitimate and whom to trust. Will I be safe with this family offering me shelter? Is this bus taking me where the driver says he is going? How can I make sure this offer of work does not end up being exploitative?

With a multiplication of actors on the ground and limited oversight by the authorities, there is a risk that individuals with predatory intentions will gain access to vulnerable, and often traumatised, individuals. In some reception centres, refugee women and children have been left at the hands of whoever was guarding the centre at night, and at several transit points they felt sufficiently uneasy that they risked jumping on the first bus, hoping it would take them where they wanted to go. UNHCR and other humanitarian actors therefore advocated



Refugees from Ukraine wait to register for cash assistance in Warsaw, Poland, March 2022. Credit: UNHCR/Maciej Moskwa

with local and central authorities for stronger oversight, information for both volunteers and refugees, and safe complaints and feedback mechanisms.

It has proved challenging to reinforce traditional notions of PSEA in a context where those delivering assistance did not consider themselves to be humanitarian workers or to be bound by global standards. Many volunteers and non-traditional actors had limited knowledge of the safeguards needed to protect refugees. There was also a widespread perception that SEA concepts were foreign, difficult to understand, not consistent with national laws, or not applicable in the context of volunteerism.

Training materials and resources

Considerable effort was put into building basic awareness of standards of conduct from the early days of the response in all response countries. UNHCR developed a 'Dos and Don'ts' leaflet for volunteers⁶ and offered PSEA briefings. The Regional Protection Working Group issued Guidance on Vetting and Registration of Volunteers and Volunteer Organizations,⁷ which outlines concrete and practical recommendations for host States, such as the requirement for all volunteers to carry a visible ID and receive regular briefings and training, and the need for background checks on volunteers, plus oversight and reporting mechanisms. The PSEA Task Force in Hungary drafted and translated a suite of tools: a Volunteer Undertaking, a basic Code of Conduct for volunteers to sign, and a leaflet with 11 Key Safeguarding Messages.⁸

The integration of minimum safeguards in contingency and preparedness planning – involving the full range of actors on the ground – is paramount to prevent the occurrence of SEA in similar emergencies.

Threats in the digital space

Risks posed by the digital space have also been evident. A vast array of digital communities and channels (including on Facebook, Telegram, Viber and WhatsApp) and matching platforms offer to connect refugees with information and offers of transportation, accommodation and employment. While mostly driven by the best intentions, such

initiatives – and more generally, the online space – have provided a fertile ground for criminals and offenders to prey on vulnerable people, especially as these platforms have minimal to non-existent content moderation and reporting features.

From social media monitoring and consultations with Ukrainian women and children, UNHCR has gathered information on instances of gender-based violence as well as risks related to: online grooming and recruitment; exploitation and trafficking; personal identity theft, and scams. This included instances of humanitarian staff and volunteers approaching adolescent refugee girls online. In response, UNHCR launched a pilot project on digital safety in Hungary in mid-2022 to conduct tailored awareness sessions for refugees and to identify solutions for strengthening safeguards which could be adopted by individuals who administer and monitor social media groups.⁹ Through the regional 'Stay safe' campaign, UNHCR has also reached 4.2 million people with information in Ukrainian and Russian on how to reduce risks of trafficking, SEA and other types of gender-based violence.¹⁰

Safeguarding in the context of localisation

In line with the localisation agenda and the Global Compact on Refugees, meaningful engagement with local and national actors has been emphasised throughout the Ukraine response. National NGOs and refugee-led organisations constitute 63% of partners in the Regional Refugee Response Plan. In addition, 48 grant agreements for refugee-led and community-based organisations were funded by UNHCR in Europe in 2022.

Local organisations have brought a wealth of experience, capacity and local knowledge which has been crucial to the overall response. However, although their closeness to communities has been a great advantage, it has also presented specific challenges in terms of PSEA, as most actors were new to humanitarian work. Some local organisations hesitated to acknowledge the risk of SEA, considering it an 'external threat' or an isolated occurrence. Even some women's rights organisations reportedly showed reluctance to introduce

policies on PSEA, as they did not perceive that risks could also come from within their own organisations.

Fostering an environment conducive to preventing SEA and strengthening organisational capacities are processes which require time and resources, and it was at times challenging to reconcile the overall aim of increased localisation with the need for all partners to adhere to global PSEA standards. For UNHCR and its partners, capacity building and training for the full range of actors on the ground have been a priority.

Reflections and recommendations

Faced with the prospect of a protracted war in Ukraine, dwindling resources and support over time, and a potential increase in SEA allegations coming forward, the humanitarian community needs to maintain its attention to PSEA as an essential part of the Ukraine refugee response. At the same time, the response so far has given rise to a number of policy implications, innovations and lessons to be taken on board for future emergencies.

Firstly, the Ukraine refugee response has underscored the importance of proactively providing dedicated PSEA capacity from the start of an emergency as an integral part of the overall response.

Secondly, the response has validated the importance of a comprehensive approach to PSEA which reflects and includes the diversity of actors involved in a response. It calls for global guidance and tools to engage with volunteers and other non-traditional actors who do not always operate under contractual obligations or commitments to PSEA. This requires increased investment in capacity and system building for national and local partners from donors and UN agencies, notably through dedicated funding for their PSEA work. This is particularly relevant for women-led and refugee-led organisations, which are the most trusted by refugee communities.

In addition, the Ukraine response underlines the importance of engagement with government authorities in ensuring compliance with PSEA standards within its own structures and in providing oversight of volunteers and other non-traditional actors on the ground.

Engagement with regional organisations and institutions could also be considered.

Thirdly, a call for stronger commitments from online platforms, technology companies and State authorities is urgently needed to ensure preventive and risk-mitigating measures in the digital space. Concrete action should include better curation, more transparent and accessible reporting features in social media communities, and proactive monitoring for exploitative or harmful material by administrators or moderators. It also requires effective responses to concerns, such as expeditious content removal and enforcement mechanisms for failure of platforms to comply with existing standards.

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Ukrainian internally displaced women at risk of sexual and gender-based violence

Sandra Pertek, Irina Kuznetsova and Iuliia Tsarevska

Internal displacement in Ukraine brings with it increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Recent research findings offer recommendations to reduce risks in transit and to support internally displaced women with housing, access to work and mental health support.

Russia's war on Ukraine has given rise to mass population displacement, primarily of women and children (as few men between 18 and 60 are permitted to leave the country). Mass population displacement has continued since 2014 when over 1.5 million people from Eastern Ukraine and Crimea fled to other regions of the country. The new phase of aggression, initiated on 24th February 2022, has displaced over 5.4 million people internally.¹ Returnees from international displacement add to the IDP population, with over 4.7 million Ukrainians who had fled to Poland being recorded crossing the border back into Ukraine by August 2022.² Many are unable to return to their homes and are therefore internally displaced.

Displacement experience is gendered. Between 2014 and 2021 a greater military presence in some areas of Ukraine was associated with increased reports of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) incidents at checkpoints.³ While SGBV is widely defined as "any harmful act that is perpetrated against one person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females",⁴ there are different types of SGBV, including sexual, physical and psychological violence.

This study, drawing on the SEREDA project⁵, conceptualises that SGBV manifests across a continuum from pre-displacement, conflict and transit, to places of refuge.⁶ The paper draws on research conducted by the University of Birmingham with a Ukrainian NGO (Convictus) and community-based researchers between May and June 2022. It included 15 semi-structured interviews with female IDPs in Western Ukraine and discussions with multiple stakeholders, in addition to 17 interviews with Ukrainian women in Poland, some of whom were previously displaced in

their homeland.⁷ Convictus is specialised in SGBV response and their daily experience of working with survivors in Ukraine is reflected in this article.

Violence in conflict and in transit

Extensive evidence indicates that internal displacement increases the risk of violence along forced displacement routes. Our study corroborates existing evidence and reveals how the risk of SGBV increases along internal transit routes in Ukraine and even upon arrival in places of refuge in Western Ukraine. This occurs for multiple reasons, from loss of resources and economic destitution to trauma and shock, which all affect IDPs' vulnerability to exploitation.

While some respondents revealed single incidents of violence or talked about their acquaintances' experiences of violence, others experienced different types of violence from pre-displacement through conflict, transit and refuge. All respondents were subjected to and witnessed armed violence and life-threatening events in their hometowns and during displacement. In several accounts, women did not want to leave their husbands behind as they valued them as their protectors. Living in and fleeing occupied territories was described as a terrifying experience. Many recalled being confined to basements and shelters for days and weeks during airstrikes.

Many women were afraid of becoming victims of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Several respondents shared indirect information (which they heard from family, colleagues and social media) about the rape of Ukrainian women and children by the Russian army:

"We had girls from a neighbouring village who had been taken to the hospital as the

result of violence...I have a friend who works at the hospital, she was on duty for 42 days non-stop... she saw them all after the operation. One doctor said – I couldn't see where to sew up the wound. It was terrible." (Oksana⁸)

Gendered violence during transit was widespread, including sexual harassment and physical and emotional violence. In particular, women and transgender women and men on buses and trains were subjected to insulting comments and sexual harassment by drunk militia. Risks of trafficking were described as high, with some recounting stories of women and men who disappeared during their journeys by train and road.

Some women tried to appear less attractive by wearing loose clothes and cutting their hair. Some said that men at roadblocks harassed young women and did not let them pass, for example saying: "We are not going to let you leave. Pretty women mustn't leave Kherson."

SGBV in the labour market

Most IDPs in Ukraine faced destitution and depended on friends, relatives and civil society. Some did not know how to apply for state benefits (which were, in any case, insufficient to meet IDPs' basic needs). Some continued their jobs online. However, most became unemployed, which increased their vulnerability to exploitation in the informal labour market. For example, a 20-year-old female IDP in Western Ukraine worked in two chain restaurants for two weeks each on probation without payment. Many considered labour exploitation as discrimination against IDPs. Some IDPs explained that employers did not want to hire them due to their lack of permanent residency.

Women were also targeted through apparent job offers on social media. Some were offered sex work disguised under vacancies within the hospitality sector. For example, after advertising her cleaning services, a young female participant started receiving messages from men requesting the inclusion of sex services. Another young participant disclosed how, during an ordinary job interview, she and her partner were offered work in the pornography industry.

Few received any information about the risks of SGBV or how to seek support. The Ukrainian police were described as insensitive to emotional and economic violence among IDPs, with a tendency to blame victims.

SGBV in accommodation

Safe housing is essential for preventing SGBV and helping victims to cope with trauma. There was a shortage of available accommodation for IDPs in Ukraine, and landlords were easily able to manipulate rent costs, providing minimal living conditions for vastly inflated rents. Some locations lacked basic amenities and safety checks. Many IDPs lived in overcrowded accommodation with other people in distress, which reinforced their trauma. For example, one woman who lived in a hostel with eight people in one room said:

"This situation affects your mental condition when you come together with people like you... we are enclosed in the same room, people who share the same grief, who locked up their houses and left... This makes your worries three times worse." (Nyura)

Despite the kindness of many private hosts who offered IDPs accommodation without charge or with reduced rents, SGBV incidents occurred. For example, one woman received an accommodation offer from men targeting women of specific age groups, while another reported being offered accommodation in Lviv in exchange for sex.

Having personal space contributes to survival and healing from SGBV. Though often impossible to create separate rooms, some measures were put in place in shelters to mitigate loud noises and possible conflicts. For instance, a shelter in Chernivtsi introduced measures such as prohibiting alcohol indoors. In shelters, female IDPs used various active coping tactics including sharing cleaning, cooking and childcare to help manage stress.

Responses to SGBV in internal displacement

In Ukraine, multiple international and local organisations work on SGBV-related issues but domestic violence (DV) and exploitation of IDPs in the labour market remain overlooked. The number of conflict-affected people in

need exceeded the capacities of staff from civil society organisations and local institutions whose staff were themselves often having to cope with personal displacement and loss. The shelter in Chernivtsi designed for 30 women who had experienced SGBV was hosting over 300 people. The state welfare system in Ukraine was unprepared for the massive scale of internal displacement and the welfare payments system was initially chaotic and could not reach everyone in need. Risk of exploitation and human trafficking of IDPs increased as people were desperately looking for work in unfamiliar locations and under stress.

Some organisations working on SGBV had to relocate to safer areas and some lost a significant number of volunteers and staff because of displacement. Financially, the first half of 2022 was extremely challenging as some donors left or suspended funding while new donors conducted time-consuming needs assessments. However, some donors that were funding Ukrainian NGOs before 2022 allowed the NGOs to redirect funds towards humanitarian needs, expanding their eligibility criteria to include distributing material aid to victims of violence and evacuating existing SGBV shelters out of conflict zones.

From late 2022 to early 2023, many donors started focusing specifically on helping victims of SGBV. While this has been a great opportunity to help the State address what had previously been an underfunded and deprioritised sector, a rapidly increased pool of SGBV providers can negatively impact the effectiveness of services offered. Firstly, new initiatives can duplicate services, which can lead to competition over clients. Secondly, most donors have low or non-existent requirements governing SGBV service provision. Poor quality services can be particularly harmful to DV victims and can undermine their safety. For example, unqualified personnel with poor skills and processes relating to confidentiality and information management can put survivors at risk and generate distrust in service providers. Some highly distressed victims mentioned that a psychologist recommended they drink camomile tea while offering no sustained support. Thirdly, while CRSV receives attention, DV is often sidelined; DV must be

recognised as it often intersects with displacement, post-traumatic stress and broader war impacts.

Way forward: SGBV prevention and response

Inter-sectoral capacities and coordination need to be strengthened to mainstream the protection of IDPs from SGBV. Our recommendations are based on discussions with IDPs and stakeholders in Ukraine and on analysis of current policies and practices.

Training for service providers: Service providers (including social welfare, health care and police) need to be trained to embed gender- and trauma-sensitive approaches in their daily practices. They need to screen their clients for specific protection concerns and medical needs that result from SGBV, and develop referral pathways. A certification system for professionals offering mental health and SGBV support should be developed and the quality of existing SGBV services should be assessed.

Mitigating SGBV risks in transit: Verification of private drivers and tracking of the journeys and safe arrivals of IDPs should be put in place to mitigate SGBV risks in transit.

Raising awareness among IDPs: Raising awareness among IDPs about SGBV in general and rape in war as a war crime is important to help survivors access their rights. Continued work on DV prevention should draw on the Istanbul Convention (on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence), and new SGBV service providers should ensure that their work supports the implementation of the Convention and the inclusion of much needed DV services.

Reducing SGBV risks in accommodation: Longer-term, sex-segregated accommodation facilities and centralised coordination of private hosts would ensure that women are not housed with unfamiliar male private hosts. The rental market should be regulated, rental costs subsidised for the most vulnerable groups and private landlords encouraged to rent to women

with children who are on minimal pay. Such regulations would enable women to rent privately and avoid dependency on private hosts with the accompanying risks of exploitation.

Creating economic independence: Childcare arrangements are key to allowing parents to make a living. Female-headed IDP households should be supported to register children in pre-school childcare to enable them to work outside the home.

Mental health support: Mental health impacts can increase SGBV vulnerability. Free voluntary mental health screening should be provided, with referrals to mental health professionals trained to work with SGBV survivors and war trauma.

Coordinated funding: Funders should consider supporting flexible services for mobile, newly arrived and returning populations, and develop protection programmes and infrastructure to cater for the specific needs of IDPs and returnees. New SGBV funding streams should be implemented in a coordinated fashion, avoiding duplication of services while ensuring equitable geographical distribution across Ukraine.

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Human trafficking in times of conflict: the case of Ukraine

Heather Komenda

With many risk factors for trafficking present in the Ukraine conflict, why does there appear not to have been – as yet – a surge in cases of trafficking?

It has become generally accepted that displaced persons and refugees are at increased risk of trafficking and that conflict will introduce new risks of trafficking and/or exacerbate pre-existing risks. The crisis in Ukraine seemingly provided a high number of risk factors for a human trafficking crisis: pre-existing trafficking networks, massive population displacement, and large numbers of women and children travelling on their own. To date,

however, this expectation has not been realised: there is not yet any evidence of a spike in the numbers of trafficked persons identified or in the number of investigations and prosecutions of the crime.

This apparent gap between expectations and reality has prompted anti-trafficking practitioners to question the assumptions underlying the expectations that conflict and crisis will inevitably lead to trafficking in persons, and to

analyse what we know about human trafficking following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

As co-chair of the anti-trafficking task force in the regional refugee response, I have been working with task-force members and other anti-trafficking experts and practitioners to improve our understanding of this situation. In particular, we have been considering the hypothesised risk factors that increase individuals' vulnerability to trafficking generally, the risk factors that increase individuals' vulnerability to trafficking specifically in the context of crisis or conflict, and the extent to which these risk factors are present in the Ukraine crisis. We have also been considering the impact that responses to the crisis may have had on mitigating the potential risks of trafficking to date, and the potential for future increases in human trafficking within the context of the war.¹

Vulnerability and the risk of trafficking in crises and conflicts

Evidence collected over recent decades has clearly demonstrated that there is a range of intersecting factors that increase the risk of people being targeted by traffickers. These include poverty, marginalisation, financial

exclusion, irregular migration status, low educational background, disability, and dysfunctional family environments.²

Crisis and conflict are thought to increase vulnerabilities to trafficking for a number of reasons, whether directly when parties to the conflict traffic people to serve in armed groups, either as combatants or in ancillary services, or indirectly, such as when traffickers target victims who are in a vulnerable social and/or economic situation as a result of the conflict. Furthermore, crisis and conflict erode the rule of law and the capacities of State institutions, which can generate an environment in which traffickers can act with impunity.³

In our analysis of why this is the case, we have considered four key risk factors hypothesised to drive trafficking in conflict settings: 1) State collapse, deteriorating rule of law, and impunity; 2) forced displacement; 3) humanitarian need and socio-economic stress; and 4) social fragmentation and family breakdown. Importantly, we have found that many, but not all, of these conditions are in place in the Ukraine conflict.

With regard to the first – state collapse – the fact that the Ukrainian State has remained united and its institutions have not collapsed



School 6 in Uzhhorod, Ukraine, is one of many that have been repurposed as temporary shelters for displaced people. Credit: IOM / Gema Cortes 2022

and are instead supporting activities aimed at protecting the population – including specific actions against human trafficking – is almost certainly having a profoundly preventative impact.

In terms of displacement, not only has forced displacement occurred but it has occurred on a massive scale. Furthermore, much of this displacement is becoming protracted. Over eight million refugees have been recorded across Europe since 24 February 2022. As of 25 May 2023, IOM estimates that 5.1 million people remain displaced within Ukraine, and that 60% of all IDPs in the country report being displaced for one year or longer.⁴ Conditions for a safe and dignified return to Ukraine are not yet in place given the continued armed conflict. However, the majority of EU and surrounding countries have taken measures to facilitate safe and regular entry and stay for people fleeing Ukraine, and to facilitate their access to labour markets, education and social protection.

Humanitarian need and socio-economic stress are certainly present in this conflict. In addition to loss of life, injuries, mass movement and displacement, and severe destruction and damage to civilian infrastructure and housing, public services are under severe pressure, and access to health care is limited. Several million jobs have been lost inside Ukraine, and many households both inside and outside Ukraine are unemployed and/or are dependent on social assistance.⁵

Finally, one of the defining characteristics of this conflict is its profound impact on the social fabric – both public and private. Public life has been shattered and family separation has been widespread. In some instances, men were required to stay in Ukraine to contribute to national defence. Families had to make hard decisions about who would stay behind and who would flee. Many older persons and men between the ages of 18 and 65 stayed, while other family members fled to other parts of Ukraine or outside the country. Families who sought refuge abroad might have split again, some of them staying in the place of refuge and others returning to Ukraine, not always to the place of community of origin. Immediately after the invasion it was estimated that more

than 90% of those who fled Ukraine were women and children.

Why does it appear that trafficking has not increased?

In sum, the initial expectation that trafficking would increase was well founded, given the presence of a number of serious risk factors. Why then, has there not been a surge in confirmed cases of trafficking in persons? There are a range of possible answers to be considered.

Absence of State collapse: There is the possibility that theoretical models that predict vulnerability to trafficking in times of conflict are based on situations in which all the key risk factors – State collapse, displacement, humanitarian need, socio-economic stress, social fragmentation and family breakdown – are present. Additional work and research are needed to better understand the weighting and interaction of these factors, and if the absence of some – such as the absence of State collapse in this case – are sufficient to override other risk factors.

Large, effective and coordinated response:

Safe and regular access to territory was granted to most (though not all) people fleeing Ukraine. Efforts were made to ensure people's safety as they were fleeing the conflict – for example, the humanitarian corridor through Moldova which facilitated movement of refugees to EU countries. The Government of Ukraine has spearheaded evacuations of civilians to safety inside the country, coordinating between ministerial and local authorities to prepare humanitarian aid for the arrivals. Social security payments and cash distributions are being made within Ukraine, and Ukrainian refugees reaching surrounding and EU countries are entitled to social assistance. Law enforcement actors had a relatively high baseline capacity and awareness of human trafficking issues, and there were anti-trafficking programmes in place that were re-purposed for awareness raising and outreach, for example through awareness raising at transport hubs and at border crossing points, and protection

monitoring and response through mobile outreach teams.

Risks may increase over time: As the war continues people's savings are depleted and the coping capacities of displaced persons, refugees and those hosting them are being stretched. As people take stock of their options, there are longer-term issues to be considered, such as how to educate their children and how to earn an adequate income.

Despite a relatively high skill set, many Ukrainians lack the language skills to gain access to higher-paid and skill-appropriate employment. Many women may need to balance childcare against employment, and are under pressure to earn and remit cash to support those who stayed behind in Ukraine. Some may not earn enough to be able to afford quality childcare; this creates risks both for the women and their children, as women may accept poorer or riskier working conditions in order to generate more income, and children may be in poor quality, unsafe and/or unregulated child-care settings.

Many Ukrainians have returned or are considering return to Ukraine; given the conditions and uncertainty in Ukraine, this is a clear indicator that they are facing constrained circumstances in their host countries. All this, together with research findings that indicate that demand for sexual services and exploitative labour from Ukrainian refugees exists, means there is clearly a pool of people with remaining vulnerability.

Some trafficking cases may be going undetected or unreported: Detection of human trafficking and identification of trafficked persons is a well-documented obstacle in anti-trafficking responses around the world, regardless of setting. According to UNODC global data, the most common way in which victims of trafficking are identified is self-referral, demonstrating that anti-trafficking responses are falling short.⁶ In the Ukraine crisis, it is likely that numerous cases of trafficking in persons are going undetected or unreported. Media monitoring has picked up on many instances of trafficking in persons, sexual violence and labour exploitation.⁷

Research efforts focused on gathering information on the actual experiences of women and girl refugees indicate significant exposure to risks of sexual exploitation. Many risk factors – including widespread displacement, family separation, socio-economic vulnerability and social disruption – remain in place. The response to the crisis has almost certainly reduced vulnerability to trafficking but it is unlikely to have completely eliminated the risk. Given this, it is reasonable to conclude that trafficking is occurring but is not being detected, and to recommend improvements to proactive identification measures.

Conclusion

There needs to be continued robust research into the intersection of vulnerabilities and their impact on vulnerability to trafficking in displacement contexts. We see promising practices emerge: responses that address these risk factors do seem to be effective in preventing trafficking, and what has worked in this conflict should be implemented in other conflicts, but we need to remain vigilant. Vulnerability factors, coping strategies and mobility patterns will shift over time and require flexible responses. People's coping capacities will continue to be stretched. When they reach breaking point, protections must still be in place in order to prevent the predicted trafficking crisis.

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Realising the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement in Ukraine

Siobhan Simojoki

The UN and its partners are grappling with ways to support the Government of Ukraine in promoting solutions to internal displacement, in line with the Action Agenda.

As of June 2023, slightly over five million Ukrainians were internally displaced¹ and over eight million had sought refuge in neighbouring countries and beyond.² At the same time, 4.7 million people had returned to their areas of origin, 20% of whom had returned from abroad.³

Alongside high rates of spontaneous return, small but significant numbers of people are seeking to integrate in their locations of displacement. As of June 2023, 15% of IDPs planned to integrate locally, with higher percentages in urban centres and among certain population groups (for example, men and women between the ages of 18 and 34). IOM data also suggests that those displaced due to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent onset of conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014 are significantly more likely to pursue solutions through local integration.

Some self-supported return and local integration is already taking place, but many households require assistance to overcome displacement-related vulnerabilities. For example, the returnee population is thought to include some of Ukraine's most vulnerable households, whose decision to return was due, at least in part, to no longer being able to meet the costs of displacement. Despite their physical return taking place, on average, more than 168 days (almost six months) ago, more than 40 per cent report continued barriers to durable solutions – including damage or destruction of their primary residence, insufficient financial resources, breakdown of public systems and services, and lack of employment.

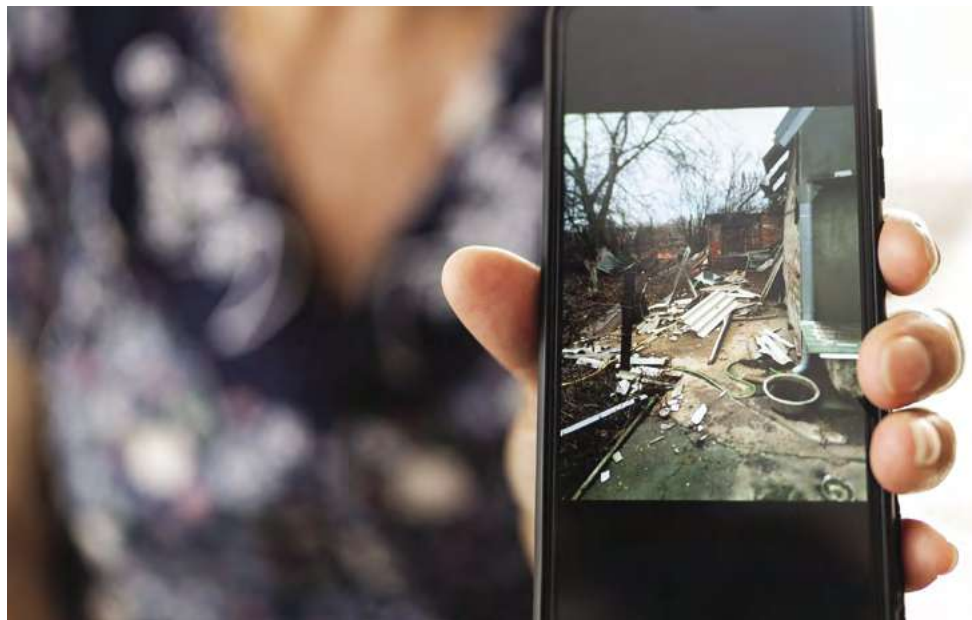
Fulfilling UN commitments set out in the Action Agenda

In 2022, the UN Secretary-General appointed a Special Advisor on Solutions to Internal Displacement and tasked the UN system with

developing an Action Agenda to take forward the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. Launched in June 2022, the Action Agenda sets out 31 UN commitments to better address, resolve and prevent internal displacement crises. Some of these commitments represent longstanding best practices in the provision of aid and highlight work that the UN should already be doing, while others demand new ways of thinking and working.⁴

From the onset of the crisis, in line with lessons learned during the 2014 crisis in Ukraine and priorities that the Government of Ukraine has shared at different levels, the UN and other partners have recognised that durable solutions must be central to the response. In June 2022, the UN launched the Durable Solutions from the Start initiative, with coordination and leadership arrangements later formalized through the Durable Solutions Steering Committee (DSSC) and, most recently, folded into the broader Community Planning and Recovery Steering Committee. Under the leadership of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), the Community Planning and Recovery Steering Committee (and the DSSC as its forerunner) have supported evidence-based geographical targeting and designed and overseen pilot interagency durable solutions projects, with the aim of identifying scalable models to support different types of solutions.

The experience has shed light on some of the challenges associated with supporting durable solutions in practice. This article explores durable solutions efforts in Ukraine in relation to two of the commitments set out in the Action Agenda: Commitment #12 on the collection, management and use of internal displacement data, and Commitment #31 on leveraging the humanitarian response earlier.



A displaced woman shows a photo of the damage to her home in Bakhmut from a rocket attack. Donetsk. Photo: IOM/Raber Aziz 2023

It also considers the role and implications of a stepped-up, earlier and more predictable engagement of development actors.

The collection, management and use of internal displacement data

The Action Agenda sets out UN commitments to supporting States to “collect, manage and use internal displacement data” (Commitment #12).

The critical importance of data appears to be well recognised in the context of Ukraine. The Ukrainian Government’s IDP registration system, plus the tools and products of humanitarian and recovery actors, provide significant amounts of data on the numbers, locations, needs and preferences of IDPs, their movement intentions (including timeframes), and the principal barriers to their return, local integration and resettlement. The Ukrainian Government has historically acted as a leader in pursuing more effective, standardised data approaches to displacement; however, wartime pressures have challenged pre-existing IDP data systems, and differences in the approaches taken by the Government

and humanitarian and recovery actors have not been comprehensively discussed.⁵ UN agencies and partners have a responsibility to work with the Ukrainian Government to align data efforts and steps are now being taken to address these issues.

On 30-31 March 2022, under the leadership of the Government of Ukraine and the RC/HC, an IOM-organised symposium in Kyiv looked at challenges around the coordination and harmonisation of data for solutions. Charting a path toward common methodologies and tools for planning, delivering and measuring progress towards solutions, however, means first ensuring a common understanding of fundamental concepts. Who is an IDP? How do we measure progress toward solutions (or along ‘solutions pathways’ – a term which is increasingly common in the discourse on solutions but remains vague)? How can we determine when solutions have been attained? These questions are important and the answers are complex.

The IASC Framework identifies a durable solution as having been achieved “when IDPs no longer have specific assistance and

protection needs that are linked to their displacement and... can enjoy their human rights without discrimination resulting from their displacement.” It puts forward eight criteria for measuring whether a durable solution has been achieved.⁶ Until recently however, it has remained unclear which benchmarks should be used to measure progress against these criteria, and decide when they have been met adequately.

The International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) and the more recent proposal of the interagency Data on Solutions to International Displacement (DSID) Task Force suggest that comparisons be drawn with non-displaced communities, such that when IDPs reach parity with non-displaced communities, solutions can be considered to have been achieved.⁷ This makes sense in many contexts but in certain parts of Ukraine it presents issues. For example, where population influxes have placed essential services under strain, both IDP and host communities often suffer diminished access. In such cases, equally diminished access to services does not represent a solution, and our goal should be to scale up services to meet the needs of the increased population.

Clearly, there are challenges to applying existing durable solutions concepts and frameworks during an active conflict to the extent that it could be argued that “interim solutions” is a more relevant and appropriate objective.⁸ With continued discussion and agreement on these issues needed to inform broader “data for solutions” efforts, a dedicated workstream has been set up under the interagency Data Task Force.

Humanitarian response and durable solutions

The Action Agenda establishes UN commitments to “take steps to lay the foundations for solutions earlier in responses” through the incorporation of “pathways to solutions” into Humanitarian Response Plans, the prioritisation of “solutions-enabling” programming, and the mitigation of future displacement risks.

In Ukraine, the 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), launched shortly prior

to the beginning of full-scale war, reflected the intent to “phase out” humanitarian assistance in Government-Controlled Areas and to “transition” to durable solutions by the end of 2023. The 2023 HRP, launched in February 2023, states that Russia’s invasion brings “uncertainty to the timeline of transitioning affected populations from humanitarian aid to durable solutions”. The unpredictable trajectory and deep impact of the war make resolving displacement to any extent difficult and at scale impossible. But, the notion of ‘transitioning’ from one form of assistance to another runs somewhat contrary to the idea that humanitarian action can and should be delivered in a manner which promotes self-reliance and enables IDPs to take their first steps toward solutions. Indeed, the HRP itself goes on to both identify and prioritise multiple ways in which humanitarian action can do so.

The HRP recognises the “strong ecosystem” of active local governments and civil society organisations in Ukraine and that, in most parts of the country (in line with commitments set out in the Action Agenda) the UN can “work with and through local systems, local authorities and local civil-society actors as much as possible”. For example, within the WASH sector, water trucking and bottled water delivery are seen as short-term measures, which should be accompanied by exit strategies focusing on more sustainable solutions, such as developing more water sources or extending existing networks. In fact, emergency water supply and distributions comprise only 55% of the sector’s estimated budget requirement, with the remaining 45% targeted towards the restoration, maintenance and upgrade of infrastructure.

Even after the Kakhovka Dam was breached on 6 June 2023, leading to massive flooding, the focus of the sector response has shifted relatively quickly from provision of short-term humanitarian assistance to evacuees and other flood-affected populations, with WASH actors now supporting the recovery of the water supply system and the utilisation of alternative water sources to ensure that communities formerly reliant on the Kakhovka Reservoir have sustainable, reliable, sufficient and safe access to water.

That said, “sustainable interventions” and support to durable solutions are distinct concepts which often, but not always, overlap in practice, and many actors are struggling to pinpoint what constitutes a durable solutions activity. For now, the answer lies in the eight IASC Criteria. For example, where the restoration, maintenance and upgrade of WASH infrastructure support IDPs who are pursuing local integration to attain an “adequate standard of living”, they can be regarded as contributing to durable solutions. In the vast majority of cases, these activities alone will not lead to the achievement of solutions: their effectiveness will depend on how, under the Government’s leadership, the UN and its partners are working collectively to address multiple needs progressively and over time.

This goes beyond the humanitarian sector. Development partner support is already crucial to keeping government capabilities and functions intact and preventing and addressing internal displacement; with Ukraine’s reconstruction and recovery needs estimated at \$411 billion, such support will remain critical, together with private investment, in the post-war context.⁹ There is no prescribed interface between humanitarian and development responses, and coordination and coherence are a challenge in many contexts. In Ukraine, however, clear efforts have been made both to ensure that the 2023 HRP and the Transitional Framework speak to one another, and to establish area-based (that is, rather than sector- or target-based) coordination mechanisms which bridge the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. With the 2024 HRP expected to include a dedicated nexus section or chapter and the Transitional Framework being extended and revised to include a stronger nexus component,

it appears that these efforts will be both continued and strengthened.

Conclusion

Despite the volatile and uncertain context, and the significant operational and financial constraints, the UN and its partners are attempting to support the Government of Ukraine to promote durable solutions to internal displacement, in line with commitments under the SG’s Action Agenda. While the ongoing conflict is testing existing concepts of durable solutions – and, indeed, ‘interim solutions’ may be a more relevant and appropriate concept to apply in Ukraine at present – the Government’s will to prioritise solutions together with the political engagement of displaced populations creates opportunities to deliver a stronger, more solutions-oriented response.

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Breaking the cycle: localising humanitarian aid in Ukraine

Nicholas Noe and Hardin Lang

Localising the humanitarian response in Ukraine would improve the sustainability and reach of the overall response – and set a valuable precedent. Addressing barriers to localisation and Ukrainians demanding reform are key.

Following the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, Ukrainian civil society launched a successful, countrywide relief effort. However, aid agencies subsequently ramped up the traditional international aid architecture and donors channeled billions of dollars through the United Nations and international NGOs. These moves bypassed a large set of Ukrainian responders while turning others into sub-implementing partners for their foreign counterparts.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), by early 2023 the number of aid organisations working in Ukraine had increased five-fold since the beginning of the invasion. More than 60% of these organisations are Ukrainian. Yet less than 1% of the \$3.9 billion tracked by the UN in 2022 went directly to local actors.¹

These trends are particularly unfortunate because Ukraine offers an ideal context to move the global localisation movement forward while simultaneously improving the efficiency of the response itself. The country benefits from a high degree of political support from donor states and an exceptionally generous amount of funding. Ukrainian civil society, volunteer networks, and local officials have demonstrated a high capacity for effectively responding to their fellow citizens. In fact, most of the aid delivered over the year and a half of the conflict, especially to front-line and Temporarily Occupied Territories, was accomplished by Ukrainian NGOs and networks.

International promises and pledges

Soon after the invasion, Ukrainian and international organisations began warning that the failure to give Ukrainians greater control over international humanitarian aid was undercutting the effectiveness of the relief effort. In the months that followed, however, little progress was made.

UN agencies conducted an extensive localisation review in Ukraine in late 2022 with Ukrainian partners and international NGOs. The result was a commitment to concrete improvements across the board, specifically in cluster coordination, although no timetable

or detailed strategy was forthcoming. The UN's country-based pool fund – the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF) – did simultaneously launch a \$20 million 'envelope' (funding call) specifically earmarked for "enabling actors to partner with national and local partners." A preliminary round of 13 Ukrainian and international organisations received direct funding and more than 300 smaller Ukrainian organisations received funding as sub-grantees. By the end of the year, however, it was unclear whether and how this effort to drive more funds to Ukrainian organisations would be expanded and sustained.

Then in November, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) released a draft global report calling for a major effort to localise aid in line with the 2016 Grand Bargain.² The report and subsequent statements committed USAID to use its money and influence to drive change across the global aid ecosystem. At the December 2022 Effective Development Cooperation Summit in Geneva, several of the largest donors to the Ukrainian response, including the US Government, promised to "shift and share power to ensure local actors have ownership over and can meaningfully and equitably engage" in relief and recovery efforts. Nevertheless, by early 2023, USAID had still not directly funded any Ukrainian humanitarian NGO.

Ukrainians demand change

Although overwhelmed by the needs of the response itself, Ukrainian NGOs, civil society organisations and volunteer networks came together to formulate and express their own visions of reform. This led to a National Workshop on Localisation held in Kyiv in February 2023 that included hundreds of Ukrainian NGOs, donor representatives, UN officials and INGO leaders.³ Ukrainians identified five specific areas that required immediate action: 1) expanded priority funding for Ukrainian NGOs; 2) harmonising of verification processes; 3) support for capacity expansion; 4) enforcement of equitable partnerships and ethical hiring practices; and 5) tailoring of international coordination mechanisms to those used by Ukrainian civil society organisations. In addition, Ukrainians

also called for new, flexible pool funds specifically for Ukrainian NGOs and led by Ukrainians.

This growing Ukrainian awareness and assertiveness, combined with the international localisation pledges, seemingly tipped the balance to jumpstart real progress. Shortly after the National Workshop, Ukrainian NGOs Vostok SOS and the NGO Resource Center were elected to an expanded board of the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (the largest UN country-based pool fund in the world). The move helped to address one major demand of greater Ukrainian representation at international decision-making tables.

As a result of the Ukrainian NGOs' leadership from within, strong donor support, and the commitments by the UN leadership, the UHF launched a second \$70 million call for proposals in March based in its entirety on localisation principles. The preliminary results are impressive: Nearly half of the allocations (almost \$35 million) will go to Ukrainian NGOs, up from a meagre 18% last year. No UN agencies will receive funding, whereas they were previously awarded almost one-third of funding.

In April, USAID finally approved direct funding for two Ukrainian humanitarian NGOs (R2P and Vostok SOS) and is now fast-tracking several other NGOs (with a 6-8 week approval cycle), in a coordinated effort to more quickly deliver funds to Ukrainian responders rather than routing the financing through international agencies. Furthermore, the UN's Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is now poised to bring on more Ukrainian NGOs to its decision-making board (only Caritas Ukraine and R2P currently sit on the HCT).

By June, two other recommendations repeatedly outlined by Ukrainians also saw movement. First, Philanthropy in Ukraine (PhilinUA) soft-launched a new, Ukrainian-run vetting platform that effectively connects verified organisations with each other and donors, promotes transparency and trust, and fosters collaboration and knowledge-sharing within the charitable and philanthropic community. Second, the UK's Disaster Emergency Committee, together with START Network,

announced a new country-based pool fund for Ukrainian organisations only.

The Ukraine Locally Led Response Alliance

Buoyed by these advances, leading Ukrainian NGOs, smaller civil society organisations and supportive international NGOs coalesced to form the Ukraine Locally Led Response Alliance.⁴ Members of the Alliance understand that international agencies face substantial internal challenges in changing their own processes and that the only way deep, sustained reforms will be realised is by Ukrainians coming together at a local and a national level to coherently and continuously insist on a new direction. The mandate of the Alliance is therefore to convene a diverse array of Ukrainian CSOs, volunteer networks and established NGOs to more effectively coordinate and advocate for themselves and the communities they serve.

Addressing further barriers to localisation

Although the creation of a national Alliance fills an important gap, there are other structural barriers that are blocking aid localisation.

Firstly, most Ukrainian relief groups cannot meet donor and aid agency reporting requirements. However, another way to look at the problem would be that donors lack the capacity to accommodate local aid groups. Donors are not staffed to manage more grants of smaller values, which is what is needed by Ukrainian civil society.

Secondly, most large bilateral donor agencies and their legislative oversight bodies repeatedly emphasise concerns over potential aid diversion and corruption. These concerns are a common donor excuse for the lack of localisation, but this rationale should be harder to sustain in Ukraine than in other countries, given that most of these same donors are accepting high risks in providing aid to Ukraine's war effort.

Thirdly, in Ukraine there is a high degree of mixing of military and civilian aid. The most powerful donors, INGOs and UN agencies in Ukraine are guided by core humanitarian principles of independence,

neutrality and impartiality. Many Ukrainian groups, however, view their relief efforts as part of a whole-of-society resistance to the Russian invasion and, for them, the distinction between aid for soldiers versus civilians does not carry the same significance.

These barriers are real but not insurmountable. One way forward would be for donors to invest substantially in both the UHF and the emerging START hub in support of specific funding calls or “envelopes” that would directly address the barriers. For example, these funds could support Ukrainian organisations to hire key positions generally viewed as crucial for any humanitarian organisation to grow and sustain itself. These include a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) officer, a partnership officer, and a grants officer. This would help local groups to better manage international partnerships and become prime grantees and/or UHF recipients. As a result, Ukrainian organisations could become more sustainable.

A second envelope could support anti-corruption systems embedded inside Ukrainian organisations as well as partnerships between Ukrainians and internationals to engage in joint third-party monitoring of aid. Funding anti-corruption systems within the Ukrainian NGO civil society landscape would strengthen internal capacities. It could also have a positive multiplier effect by further fortifying Ukrainian society against aid diversion and corruption generally.

Corruption in Ukraine is widely regarded as emanating from the public sector – and especially the judiciary – usually impacting and involving private sector enterprises. In contrast, the country has incubated a strong set of local anti-corruption organisations in the NGO sphere that have a deep experience in, and have been leading the fight against, corruption. Reports of aid diversion have so far been few in number and small in scale, bolstering confidence that enhancing humanitarian anti-corruption systems could significantly reduce the chance of aid diversion becoming systematic.

A third envelope could provide support for Ukrainian organisations willing to separate humanitarian operations from the military

effort. A significant number of Ukrainian civil society groups remain adamant that they will never separate or end their support for the military. However, other Ukrainian relief organisations have expressed a willingness to do so if the marginal costs and technical challenges associated with creating a firewall for their activities could be covered. There is, however, no guarantee that donors and international humanitarian agencies would accept firewalling as a solution.

For localisation reforms to continue funding calls that address the main barriers head on will be vital. Billions of dollars more in humanitarian funding are likely to make their way to Ukraine in the coming months and years. Marshaling them in service of the deeper localisation reforms sought by Ukrainians could significantly improve the sustainability and reach of the overall response. If successful, this would also set a strong precedent for change that could be leveraged globally.

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2. The Grand Bargain is a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action.

3. A National Workshop on Localizing Humanitarian Aid in Ukraine: bit.ly/workshop-localisation

4. The Interim Steering Committee of the Alliance is composed of more than a dozen Ukrainian NGOs, including Helping To Leave, The NGO Resource Center, the National Network of Local Philanthropy Development, the Ukrainian Red Cross, R2P, Caritas Ukraine, Ednannia Foundation, Zagoriy Foundation, Vostok SOS and several other organizations and INGOs, with the latter serving in an observer capacity.

Rethinking forced migrants' well-being: lessons from Ukraine

Reo Morimitsu and Supriya Akerkar

Five years after their initial displacement, Ukrainian IDPs show relatively high levels of posttraumatic growth; their experiences offer insights for practitioners seeking to promote psychosocial well-being among displaced populations.

The experience of forced displacement is often referred to as traumatic, and numerous case studies show that forced migrants are vulnerable to poor mental health and well-being. However, new research suggests that some forced migrants experience positive changes over the course of time despite their extremely difficult life experiences.¹

This article draws on our study examining levels of positive changes and their predictors among conflict-affected Ukrainian internally displaced persons (IDPs) in which we focused on 'post-traumatic growth' (PTG), a phenomenon described as "positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances".²

Study participants had undergone five years of internal displacement after fleeing from Donetsk (79 persons), Luhansk (53 persons) and Crimea (three persons) to other parts of Ukraine following the start of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. An online quantitative questionnaire was developed by the authors of this article and disseminated through the Ukrainian Red Cross to various locations in Ukraine. The questionnaire was completed by 15 men and 120 women. The first author of this article, Reo Morimitsu, conducted further in-depth qualitative interviews in Ukraine with three men and eight women, all aged between 18 and 65. All the data was collected between July and August 2019.

Common forms of growth

The people involved in this study had experienced extreme hardship during their displacement, such as multiple relocations, family separation, exposure to violence and loss of financial resources, and had suffered significant losses, including loss of loved

ones, jobs, property and a sense of normality. However, the findings from our study indicate that, after approximately five years, they commonly reported positive changes in themselves: 61% reported a small or moderate degree and 20% reported a high degree of post traumatic growth.

The most common forms of such changes – 86% of participant IDPs – were in worldview and priorities. For example, a 65-year-old female IDP from Luhansk said: "My perception of the world has changed. Now I have learned that everything in our life is so fragile." Others mentioned that children became their highest priority in life and some found themselves paying more attention to beauty in nature. This perception of the fragility of life is unsurprising given the intense conflict and sudden violence they experienced.

The experience of forced migration requires people to engage in continuous problem-solving. IDPs reported experiencing positive changes in their self-view through their individual coping and problem-solving experiences, which led to an increased sense of self-reliance and personal strength. A woman originally living near Donetsk airport had to flee with her young children; she described how hard it was to re-establish their lives but also highlighted her family's achievements:

"We have changed so much... Previously, I spent my life on spontaneous shopping and entertainment, but now I am down-to-earth. I use money in a planned manner. I have become a more practical person... We asked for help and we tried to communicate with local people and explained that we were normal and suffering... I am proud that we are maintaining a normal life despite the



A programme run by an NGO in the host community created a space for IDPs to engage in master class activities, including painting, 2017.
Credit: Reo Morimitsu

extremely difficult circumstances, without ending up suicidal or alcoholic.”

Positive changes occurred on an interpersonal and spiritual level as well:

“My attitude toward children changed a lot. When I was living in comfortable circumstances [prior to the conflict], I did not pay much attention to my children. Here we have tried to create an atmosphere of love and caring for our children... It was a great help because it helped to understand each other well and such a warm atmosphere has helped us cope with the situation.” 45-year-old male IDP from Donetsk.

“I learned that praying and reading the Bible was helpful... I got to know many IDPs here in this community who have trust in God. With religious belief, I have been able to manage.” 33-year-old female IDP from Donetsk.

These narratives suggest that coping strategies, such as religious practice and establishing stronger family bonds, may reduce the impacts of stressful situations caused by displacement

and contribute to positive change. Religious practices also helped IDPs establish social networks in their new communities.

The power of meaning-making and social support

Two predictors for growth were found in this study: reframing of experience and social support during displacement. The study results highlighted that IDPs who could reinterpret their experiences – reflectively making sense of stressful situations – and who had access to social support were in the best position to develop positive changes following displacement.

Reframing³ (also known as positive reinterpretation) refers to the process of shifting attention to something good in a given situation. The following example illustrates this process:

“I miss my house in Donetsk. I used to have a comfortable house near a lake, where I didn’t have to think about issues and difficulties,

and where I could enjoy gardening... But now I don't have anything like that. I have tried to switch my attention to nature... Kyiv is a very beautiful city with parks, forests, lakes and rivers." 62-year-old female IDP who had lost both her parents.

IDPs frequently reported an awareness of the 'bright sides' of their displacement situation such as resources, opportunities, values, achievements and/or new life roles. When they highlighted these positive sides, we noticed they engaged in 'meaning-making': trying to make sense of and make something good come out of the challenging situation. For example, one woman mentioned that her children now had access to more resources and opportunities for growth:

"I had a lot of fear and concerns about resettlement. But I've noticed now there are more new opportunities for my children... [here] in a big city, children have public transportation such as a bus. They learn to use it by themselves and that makes children develop self-responsibility more." 34-year-old female IDP from Donetsk.

A young IDP who has just graduated from university explained that she has decided to work towards building a better society:

"I started to express my opinion more openly... [and] became more active... I joined a lot of initiatives as a volunteer. And now I'm looking for a job in civil society because I think it's very important for me now to do something which is valuable for society." 21-year-old female IDP from Donetsk.

Perceived social support was a significant predictor of PTG. We heard many stories about receiving kindness from others and how the experience of being supported by others not only contributes to emotional health but can also lead to positive shifts in attitudes. Kindness and wishing well for others can be contagious.

"I met lots of good people ... It impressed me very much. The kindness at the pharmacy was totally unexpected.... The owner of the pharmacy shop gave me everything we needed in advance without paying anything... I definitely think I have changed a lot before and after my displacement experience. I wasn't a bad person before, but I didn't appreciate people's help...

Now I do not wish any bad things for anyone." 31-year-old female IDP from Donetsk.

Lessons and recommendations

Post traumatic growth (PTG) is associated with well-being. This research highlights the potential positive aspects of displacement in contrast to studies focused on the negative psychological consequences of forced migration. PTG was commonly reported among the IDPs five years after their initial displacement, that is the time when the data was collected. This growth involved change across many different areas: their worldview, priorities in life, child-caring behaviour, perception of themselves, their interpersonal relationships, and religious belief and practice. The greater the degree of positive changes IDPs experience after displacement the better their sense of well-being. This could be a useful guide for humanitarian practitioners, particularly when developing aid programmes. By focusing on factors associated with PTG, humanitarian practice can better support the well-being of a displaced population.

Coping through problem-solving provides displaced people with an increased sense of self-reliance and an increased sense of personal capacity. Humanitarian assistance should prioritise providing forced migrants with practical support to help them to handle their situation. It is important to note that agency does matter. Practitioners need to keep in mind that people are empowered when supported to tackle their own issues in ways that contribute to their sense of self-efficacy. Another implication from the findings is that connecting IDPs with new resources, opportunities and social roles in the host community is likely to lead to greater long-term well-being. Being aware of new roles and opportunities can foster a meaning-making process that helps transform their mental picture of a given situation.

Social support and networks – experiencing kindness, concern, help and understanding of their situation – was a strong predictor of PTG. This seems to be extremely important, particularly from a humanitarian practitioner's point of view as it underpins mid or long-term

psychosocial support with a strong focus on strengthening social networks for forced migrants. Moreover, the role of the non-governmental humanitarian community or faith-based organisations seems to be critical in building social networks at community level, particularly when local government shows limited ability to support people in need on the ground. Lastly, the study suggests that it would be helpful if practitioners were able to create spaces for displaced individuals to promote reframing of their experiences, to reflect and find meaning, as well as providing practical support, to promote their psychosocial well-being.

We recognise that some of our study participants may now have undergone new displacements after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and their PTG experiences may have changed. We do not know what their current situations are. But, this research indicates that helping re-displaced people

remember how they coped previously, and that they already have relevant experience and knowledge, could support their psychological well-being.

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The role of media and information in supporting internally displaced women in Ukraine

Sally Gowland

Providing accessible and practical advice through digital platforms could support female IDPs dealing with the economic, psychosocial and health impacts of the war.

BBC Media Action conducted a large-scale research study between December 2022 and January 2023 to understand female audiences in Ukraine. The aim was to generate a comprehensive understanding of issues related to women's information and communication needs within the current conflict, to support the work of media partners and NGOs.

The data collected consisted of a nationally representative telephone survey of 1,500 women (and 500 men), 200 online interviews with women living in non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs), and eight focus group discussions with women and four with men, from both host communities and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In-depth interviews were conducted with women from more

vulnerable groups (such as those with disabilities, Roma communities and those living on or near the front lines). This data was gathered by the Ukrainian research agency InfoSapiens. Key informant interviews were also conducted with female NGO leaders, these were carried out by a Ukrainian research consultant, commissioned by BBC Media Action.

As of May 2023, there were over 5 million IDPs across Ukraine.¹ In BBC Media Action's nationally representative sample of women across Ukraine 14% were IDPs. In comparison with the other women, they were more commonly living in the south and east of the country and a large proportion were young women (38% of female IDPs were 18–34 compared with 23% of the overall sample). More

of them had children under 18 (43% compared with 31%); they were also more likely to speak Russian (23% compared with 15%). In the sample of 200 women in NGCAs 32% of women were IDPs.

Key issues affecting internally displaced women's lives

The war, safety and security were the top concerns for 62% of women in their daily lives. The most reported negative impact of the war was on women's mental and physical health – 38% said the war had affected their mental and physical health. Female IDPs were significantly more likely to say they were impacted by mental and physical health issues compared with women who remained in their homes (48% compared with 36%).

In focus group discussions, internally displaced women expressed anxiety about the men they knew who were fighting. One woman reflected: "I have many acquaintances who went to the front, and we always talk about them in the family, and with friends." They also expressed concerns around their own safety and security, living with uncertainty and the inability to plan for the future, having to cope with sole responsibility for their children or dependents, and being away from family, friends and their own homes. They mentioned challenges settling into a new community and living in someone else's home (even if it was a member of their own family or a friend).

Women who lead NGOs also stressed the importance of supporting IDPs to cope with the psychological impacts of war and build mental resilience. Some IDPs may have been re-traumatised by the full-scale invasion after experiencing conflict already in the East since 2014 or may face specific challenges around violence in shelters where they are staying.

Over half the internally displaced women reported impacts on their income and employment compared with 31% of women who were not IDPs. In focus groups, female IDPs discussed challenges finding housing and jobs, and concerns about rising prices and the cost of rent, household items and new clothing. Older women with children voiced more concern about access to education services for their

children. Younger women were concerned about education for themselves; including challenges with their universities and distance learning.

Internally displaced women were significantly more likely to say they had difficulty accessing social and health services (20% compared with 14% of women who were not IDPs), sanitation (9% and 5%), and safety and security (36% and 22%). Women who were living in NGCAs were feeling the impacts of war much more acutely – especially if they were IDPs. For example, Female IDPs in NGCAs were significantly more likely to report impacts on their food and nutrition (55%) compared to women in NGCAs who were not IDPs (38%).

Women who had moved to new parts of Ukraine also discussed some of the challenges of integrating into a new community. They felt communities were taken aback by the influx of Russian speakers. They also felt there were different perceptions of male and female IDPs and their integration with local communities, with women and children sometimes more welcome. They felt male IDPs were sometimes judged negatively as their new communities would question why they were not fighting.

Use of media and communication

Women who were IDPs more commonly reported using the internet compared with those who were not IDPs in the nationally representative survey (89% compared with 81%) and also messenger services (86% v 71%) and social media (82% v 73%). In contrast, displaced women were much less likely to use TV (58% v 74%), print media (31% v 42%) and radio (25% v 39%) compared to women who were not IDPs. Female IDPs' use of media reflects how they have been a transient population with less access to traditional media and also that they are more likely to be young women – who are, in turn, more likely to use digital than traditional media platforms.

Among all women who used social media, Facebook and Telegram were used at almost equal levels but women were much more reliant on Telegram for news than Facebook. Younger women were significantly more likely to use Telegram for news – 68% of those aged 18-34 compared with 53% of those aged 35-54

and 32% of those 55 and over. IDPs were also significantly more likely to use Telegram for news (65%) compared with women who were not IDPs (49%). Across all news sources listed, Telegram was the most trusted by women (28% named it as their most trusted source of information). Women talked about Telegram as their key source of news and information online because news was provided in a concise way, and they could also get information from local Telegram groups. TikTok and Instagram were used more for entertainment rather than news and information.

Overall, women talked about engaging in much more content on news and current affairs since the onset of the full-scale invasion. They were interested in updates on how the war was affecting their local areas (and where they used to live), and information on blackouts, progress at the front and what support Ukraine was getting from foreign countries.

Sometimes, consuming lots of news and information about the war had a negative impact. Young female IDPs talked about how endless scrolling through social media affected them and how they managed this:

“Sensitive visual content in social media groups. Sad news from any part of Ukraine – not just the South but also the East because I have a lot of friends there... Eventually, I unfollowed most Telegram channels and left just the ones I go to every day. When the war started, you could scroll through all day long.” (Female IDP, aged 25-41)

“I now like Kharkiv Life [Telegram channel] because the information is reliable and very fast. And the summary for a day, too, is short but understandable.” (Female IDP)

Qualitative data also revealed that female IDPs wanted practical survival skills information such as how to pack and what to pack in an emergency, how to avoid missiles and hide safely and how to cope with impacts on their mental and physical health. Women also talked about needing practical information such as how to deal with blackouts and handle generators, and appreciated information presented as ‘life hacks’ – simple, clever techniques to deal with everyday issues – such as how to work effectively remotely or how to save energy.

Recommendations

Based on these insights, there are several opportunities for media partners and NGOs to more effectively serve female IDPs inside Ukraine, communicating with content that reflects their experiences and meets their needs.

Practical ‘life hacks’ content: Digital media is the most effective way to reach female IDPs. Therefore, media and communications content needs to cut through the noise and clutter of social media. Clearly branded content providing practical information in a helpful and engaging way could perform well with female audiences. Sharing stories of women’s resilience and action in everyday life can help other women deal with challenges.

Support related to economic impacts and mental and physical health: Media and communications should aim to support female IDPs around economic impacts and mental and physical health – for example, providing information on health issues, income generation/saving money, how best to support their children’s education and dealing with the psychosocial impacts of war.

Adapt communications to changing needs: It is important to monitor changing needs, especially for groups experiencing more barriers to information. Female IDPs’ needs and concerns will also continue to change as they contemplate moving back home.

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The use of digital technologies in the Hungarian refugee response

Zita Lengyel-Wang

A well-managed Facebook group can mobilise hundreds of thousands of people to maximise peer-to-peer aid, be an effective real-time communication channel between organisations and volunteers, and serve as the focal point of an online refugee aid ecosystem.

Three decades after the Yugoslav wars, Hungary is once again neighbour to a country in armed conflict. But much has changed in the intervening years. NGOs and charities now play a key role in providing aid and social support, the country has become a major regional hub for business services and information technology innovation, and digital technology has opened up unprecedented opportunities to help Ukrainian refugees in Hungary.

In the first months of the war, many social media-based and digital initiatives were created, but many of these platforms and applications are no longer in use due to a lack of adoption, maintenance and change management. However, some online platforms have become well known and widely used by refugees, humanitarian actors and volunteers.

A Facebook group that meets the needs of refugees

On 24th February 2022, Hungary received its first refugees as Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, and by 14th March 2023, over 2,350,000 people had crossed the Ukraine-Hungary border. Coordination was challenging, despite an outpouring of support from civilians, NGOs and local communities. One Facebook group, *Segítségnyújtás Ukrajna, Kárpátalja* (Hungary Refugee Help Digital Network: Ukraine, Zakarpattia), quickly became the primary online platform for refugees, volunteers and aid organisations. Within a week, the group had over 100,000 members and was receiving thousands of posts daily. The news of the large support community spread quickly among refugees and QR codes to the group were included in food packages distributed at train stations and border crossing points.

The Refugee Help Digital Network (RHDN) team running the group established a complex moderation protocol to ensure the content was safe, relevant, reliable, timely and accessible. Every post submitted is reviewed and approved by an administrator (using a 60-page moderation guidebook) who ensures that no sensitive information is shared and evaluates all proposed applications, content and programmes. RHDN volunteers from various professions – such as knowledge management, legal, medical, IT, risk, communication, user experience, logistics and project management – created processes and procedures in response to refugees' needs.

From the first days of the war, RHDN was aware of the enormous need for accurate information. Therefore, the team created an information centre to gather daily news updates and details of people's requirements through phone and instant message contact from more than 50 locations where aid provision was being coordinated – from mayors of rural towns, aid organisations and volunteer coordinators at train stations and airports. RHDN then published multilingual announcements about the donations needed, distribution points, shelters and so on, summarising key information using simple terminology.

The RHDN team also publishes posts about how to access legal and social rights, psychological and medical assistance, accommodation, employment and education, plus information tailored to the specific needs of more vulnerable groups such as women, people with disabilities, children, people in need of medical and psychological aid, LGBTQIA+ refugees, and Roma. These posts reach hundreds of thousands of people and provide critical information as there is no official government website for refugees in



QR codes for the Facebook group were included in food packages distributed at border crossing and train stations, so refugees could immediately reach hundreds of thousands of local helpers. Photo credit: Segítségnyújtás MOST / Refugee Help Digital Network

Hungary,¹ and NGOs often lack the capacity to investigate, process and share information.

The Facebook group now has over 130,000 members. It provides vital information firsthand to refugees and serves as a reliable platform for coordination and communication for civilians and humanitarian actors.

Digital risks and safety measures

Online platforms bring valuable benefits, but they can also pose risks that refugees and volunteers need to be aware of. The majority of refugees arriving in Hungary are women with children who have varying levels of digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness, and who may therefore be vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. To increase their safety, RHDN implements various security measures such as removing sensitive information (exact addresses, phone numbers, photos of children and passport details) from posts before they are published and also educating refugees on potential risks. RHDN highlights potential safety risks for those looking for accommodation or employment, and issues warnings about phishing attempts, hackers and unethical working conditions.

Community rules, reporting mechanisms and keyword alerts are essential to prevent hate speech and discrimination. Digital platforms can also expose volunteers to psychological challenges such as vicarious trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue. Having a constant online presence increases these risks, so the RHDN Facebook group is supported with professional psychological supervision.

Best practices and Web3 principles

While there is no universally accepted definition of 'Web3', it generally refers to a new era in internet usage that involves structured data and advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain to create a more secure and personalised web. In traditional humanitarian aid, information is centralised in the hands of authorities and a relatively small number of large agencies (and mostly used for one-way communication). RHDN has implemented Web3 principles, driven by data and insights, to improve aid and information provision.

Recent case studies on refugees' information-seeking behaviour show that they rely more on social media than government or

NGO websites.² RHDN publishes information packages and creates databases to store information on organisations, services and refugee rights, trying to tackle the many barriers faced by refugees to accessing information – barriers such as lack of digital literacy, not knowing the local language, the inaccuracy of news on social media, and government websites that are not mobile-friendly.

The need for decentralisation also applies to digital products. A platform that tries to cover all aspects of humanitarian assistance is unlikely to succeed because of the very wide-ranging needs it has to address. Mutual referral is critical for both aid organisations and digital platforms. Facebook groups and Telegram channels are suitable information channels, and useful places to ask for donated goods and to address ad hoc needs. However, accommodation, transport and cash assistance requests, for example, can be managed better and more safely using designated platforms.

As the primary online space for Hungarian refugee aid activities, RHDN shares all relevant applications and websites through its Facebook group to reach as many users as possible. Before approving any posts promoting digital products, subject matter experts review the content, while the IT working group evaluates the application from a digital perspective, focusing for example on the product's accessibility, data collection practices, data storage protocol, functionality, risks and controls, change management and maintenance processes.

Other digital platforms serving refugees in Hungary

Since the migration and refugee 'crisis' in Europe in 2015, we have learned about the problems of 'digital litter'³, where hundreds of apps and websites were designed for refugees but eventually abandoned due to a lack of maintenance, resulting in outdated and misleading information. During the first months of the Ukraine crisis, RHDN facilitated discussions between developers of digital tools in order to synchronise efforts and avoid the spread of abandoned digital products. Successful approaches were often created by volunteers with digital knowledge backgrounds, despite

their lack of experience in assisting refugees. Their initiatives were driven by seeing specific gaps in refugee assistance that their solutions could fill.

ShelterUKR is the largest Hungarian platform focusing on accommodation. It was developed in less than a week by a tech company that wanted to create a peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation app tailored to the specific needs of refugees. More than 10,000 refugees were hosted through the platform in the first month of the crisis, largely thanks to the developers' technical expertise, customised filters for refugees, optimised mobile experiences, and wide promotion on social media. Since then, the team has developed additional features to assist local NGOs' requests.

HunHelp, a platform where refugees can apply for food vouchers, was created by a group of Russian-speaking migrants to address the needs of refugees in remote areas – such as in small towns without aid distribution points. Hunhelp is run by a group of volunteers who manage crowdfunding, application management and distribution without any organisational support; to date, nearly 6,000 displaced people have received aid through this platform.

P2P initiatives are an important enabler of Web3 and humanitarian aid as well. Through RHDN's Facebook community an estimated 60,000 people have received help with issues such as accommodation, health care, psychological support and education. One of the reasons for this remarkable solidarity is the P2P aspect of social media: people want to help not just by donating to trusted aid organisations but also by responding to an individual refugee's request, whom they can contact directly.

Another advantage of shared digital spaces is that they can complement formal structures by simplifying the engagement between local NGOs, authorities and civilians. Even small NGOs, who do not have the capacity or foreign language skills to participate in the UNHCR-led Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), are quick to respond to a comment where their coordinator is tagged to help a family in their region. While formal frameworks such as the RCF are an important mechanism for reporting

and high-level coordination, a shared digital space can instantly connect hundreds of NGOs and thousands of volunteers to assist refugees. RHDN has been an active member of the Hungarian RCF since its inception and has supported UNHCR's mapping efforts with a database of more than 100 local relief organisations working with RHDN.

Further potential with AI and data

As RHDN is run by a small group of volunteers, it has limited capacity to analyse the large amount of data that has been collected through the Facebook group. However, reports can be provided upon request, as the text of every written request is labelled according to a three-level taxonomy that classifies the theme of posts. An analysis of requests for accommodation revealed the changing trends from requests for short-term shelter to long-term accommodation, the percentage of successful housing, and whether the solution was provided by a P2P initiative, government or aid organisation. This analysis played an important role in helping NGOs shift their attention to long-term housing solutions.

In addition, NLP (Natural Language Processing) can be used to process this labelled text and provide valuable insights into the evolving needs of refugees, adding to the more limited picture provided by surveys conducted at border crossing points and shelters.

Conclusion

Digital methods and a Web3 approach can enhance humanitarian aid by enabling aid organisations to reach affected populations and local volunteers more effectively, while also increasing safety and preventing exploitation.

Our experience in Hungary shows that local NGOs often lack the capacity (time, expertise, staff) to create digital tools to support humanitarian efforts. Grassroots initiatives driven by individuals with technical knowledge can be a fast and efficient way to build digital tools to support humanitarian efforts. Collaboration between digital actors, NGOs, governments, communities and international agencies is key to success, avoiding duplication and creating a sustainable digital product.

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Boosting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees from Ukraine

Susanne Klink and Alex Mundt

With many Ukrainian refugees¹ facing prolonged stays in host countries, they require effective access to decent work, education, and social and financial services.

The EU's decision to activate the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) provided the necessary framework for Ukrainians arriving in Europe to enjoy access to basic rights, and paved the way for inclusion in host communities and national social protection systems. In spite of this, a range of challenges are impeding the socio-economic inclusion of Ukrainian refugees.

Socio-economic inclusion enables refugees to live with normalcy and dignity, to contribute to host communities, and to avoid reliance on negative or harmful coping mechanisms. However, representative data on the socio-economic profiles of refugees and the current state of inclusion remains limited. The results of UNHCR's Intention surveys,² feedback from regional refugee response plan partners,³



Before the war, Ekaterina was a wedding photographer. In Romania she has found work at a a bookstore and shared working space, January 2023. Credit: UK for UNHCR/Ioana Epure

and exchanges with refugees and specialised stakeholders have therefore assumed a heightened importance. This data provides insight into the challenges faced by, and opportunities open to, national social protection systems, and reveals the current status of refugees' access to services, decent work, financial inclusion, education and housing.

What do we mean by socio-economic inclusion?⁴

In a refugee context, inclusion is the practice of ensuring that forcibly displaced people have de jure and de facto access to government systems and services on a par with nationals. This includes freedom of movement, entrepreneurship, upskilling and skills recognition, and access to land, documentation, decent work, education, health, social protection and social care services, housing, finance and wider economic opportunities.

While de jure access has been facilitated largely via rights accorded under the TPD or similar national instruments in non-EU

Member States, a series of administrative and practical barriers have emerged. Some are related to specific areas, such as difficulties in obtaining skills recognition for professional qualifications, while others affect socio-economic inclusion as a whole. Language barriers may be the most common but overstretched systems and services, limited technical capacity of service providers, lack of awareness among stakeholders regarding refugees' rights and entitlements, coordination gaps, and inadequate information channels for refugees regarding how to access services also impede inclusion. The lack of systematic monitoring of refugees' effective access to socio-economic rights and services by the host authorities is also a barrier to identifying and addressing challenges as they occur.

Participatory approaches are a fundamental element of inclusion, giving refugees a voice in the co-development and adaptation of systems, services and programmes so that they cater for refugees' actual needs, take into consideration the potential of refugees as net socio-economic

contributors, and address existing access barriers. Inclusion often entails a 'whole-of-society' approach, adapting and improving government services for refugees at local and national levels, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

Status of inclusion of refugees from Ukraine

The vast majority of refugees from Ukraine are women and children, with a large proportion of female caregivers acting as primary breadwinners as a result of military service requirements in Ukraine and the subsequent high levels of family separation. Many have completed tertiary studies and were economically active before they fled.

Temporary protection arrangements throughout Europe grant refugees from Ukraine the right to work, but a range of legal and de facto impediments hinder access to labour markets and decent work. Moreover, States within the EU have interpreted or applied the TPD differently, impacting the options available to refugees – such as the right to own a business, which for instance is not yet granted for beneficiaries of temporary protection in Slovakia. The duration of the temporary protection or residence status in host countries also creates uncertainties for the private sector, often adversely impacting their interest in investing in hiring, upskilling and offering financial services to refugees.⁵

While over a third of refugees from Ukraine interviewed for UNHCR's fourth intentions survey are currently working, the majority – and more so for women than men – are employed at a lower level than they were in Ukraine; many are working in low-skilled jobs and a small but considerable percentage (8%) are working in the informal sector. Around one fifth of refugees are unemployed and actively looking for work. Although childcare and difficulties in enrolling children in schools have been identified as barriers for accessing employment, limited knowledge of the local language, skills mismatches, difficulties in skills recognition and lack of decent work opportunities are more prevalent obstacles. Remote work in Ukraine plays a much more important role in Romania and Moldova than

in the rest of the region with around 25% of Ukrainian refugees in these countries engaged in remote work. While 11% of all the refugees surveyed had a business back in Ukraine, only 2% are currently self-employed.

Although the primary income source for almost half the refugee households is a salary, social assistance by host countries also supports around half, and over three quarters of older people receive a pension from Ukraine. Other income sources include humanitarian assistance, remittances and savings. However, the majority of Ukrainian refugees still struggle to meet basic needs. A range of access barriers identified by UNHCR during the COVID-19 pandemic remain;⁶ in addition, the sheer scale of the new arrivals has strained systems to breaking point and has forced host governments to make difficult decisions regarding the quality of services and pace of including new arrivals in mainstream social protection schemes.

Finally, the level of inclusion varies considerably depending on household composition. The most vulnerable group consists of households with one or more older persons. They are much less likely to be able to afford rental accommodation and to meet their basic needs. Likewise, one fifth of surveyed households have at least one person with care needs due to long-term illness or disability, which hinders prospects for socio-economic inclusion and achieving self-reliance.

Emerging good practice

Generating an evidence base through regular monitoring, gathering socio-economic data and mapping relevant stakeholders and their roles, responsibilities and interests at the local, national and regional level would provide a sound basis for enhancing inclusion across sectors. Far more effort should be invested in bringing together key actors, raising awareness, building capacity and establishing coordination mechanisms to promote inclusion and harness the potential of refugees to contribute to the economies of host countries.

Financial inclusion is a necessary first step, particularly for refugee entrepreneurs and potential small business owners. Like everyone, refugees require bank accounts and access

to credit and other services. Authorities, NGOs, financial and business development service providers, regulatory bodies and refugees all have a role to play in developing sequenced, joined-up approaches to ensure such access.

Further work needs to be done to connect companies interested in hiring refugees with public employment offices, integration services and refugees, as the experience of the past year suggests significant potential in this area. Various job-matching platforms have been set up by the private sector and NGOs in several host countries and the lessons are instructive. Platforms that included robust information for refugees, legal orientation and guidance for companies, vetting mechanisms and coordination with socio-economic inclusion stakeholders achieved promising results. Platforms with no such additional services or information tended to achieve more limited results. In several countries, promising platforms are currently being further developed in coordination with UNHCR to establish business models that can support employment of refugees of all nationalities.⁷

Despite the high digital literacy of Ukrainian refugees, in-person information provision and assistance have remained important gateways to inclusion. Multiple national and local governments have set up one-stop shops to enable refugees from Ukraine to receive legal orientation, apply for temporary protection, register for social assistance and socio-economic inclusion services, open a bank account and obtain accommodation. The concept of 'one-stop shops' providing a range of services could be adapted to different contexts to address the remaining barriers in accessing services.

Conclusion

The arrival of millions of Ukrainian refugees in a matter of weeks was a shock to national protection systems and host economies across Europe. Over time, the benefits of inclusion have become increasingly apparent but more work is required. Further strengthening the evidence base through systematic data collection and monitoring of socio-economic inclusion will enable targeted approaches to tackle the inclusion barriers faced by more vulnerable groups, and strengthen efforts to

advocate effectively on behalf of refugees. A review of existing data suggests that further investments are also needed in offering relevant language courses, addressing skills mismatches, supporting refugee entrepreneurs, expanding access to childcare, and facilitating coordination among stakeholders.

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Integration support for temporary protection holders

Emiliya Bratanova van Harten

The Temporary Protection Directive does not contribute to an effective integration process. Measures to facilitate refugee integration need to be put in place even if return is the preferred durable solution.

The EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which regulates the status of Ukrainian refugees in Europe, does not require host countries to provide – or work towards providing – the option of local integration.¹ Local integration is one of the three durable solutions² but in the TPD the only durable solution envisaged is return (whether voluntary or enforced).

Of the more than six million Ukrainians forcibly displaced since the start of the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, almost half have benefited from temporary protection status in EU Member States. However, given that the maximum length of temporary protection provided under the TPD is three years, and given the protracted nature of the conflict in Ukraine, questions arise as to the need for long-term integration support for these temporary protection holders.

Even though the majority of Ukrainian refugees say they intend to return to their home country once the situation improves, there is absolutely no clarity as to when return will be possible. Moreover, a significant number state that they do not envisage returning at all.³ While the situation in the home country is a major consideration for the viability of return (push factors), the services and livelihoods opportunities available in the host country also play a role in the decision whether to return or not (pull factors).

The TPD obliges Member States to issue residence permits; to authorise access to employment, vocational training and social security systems; and to ensure access to suitable accommodation, social welfare, medical care (emergency care and essential treatment as a minimum and especially for vulnerable individuals), education for children, and family reunification. These provisions mean that despite the temporary character of protection under the TPD, some integration provisions are in place. However,

compared with the rights of refugees and subsidiary protection holders as contained in the EU's Qualification Directive (QD),⁴ temporary protection holders may be subject to lower protection standards (especially in the areas of employment and health care) and to limited access to integration programmes as, unlike the QD, the TPD does not contain such provisions.

Article 34 of the QD imposes an obligation on EU Member States to “ensure access to integration programmes” for refugees and subsidiary protection holders, clarifying in its preamble that this access may include “language training and the provision of information concerning individual rights and obligations relating to their protection status in the Member State concerned”.

It may be justified to provide temporary protection holders with a lower level of integration support compared with refugees, given the anticipated transience of their situation, but the question remains as to what minimum level of support is acceptable.

Temporary protection on the ground: Poland, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria

The TPD introduces minimum protection standards, but Member States can offer more favourable conditions for temporary protection holders. To gauge the level of actual protection provided, it is necessary to observe how the reception of Ukrainian refugees is regulated in some host countries. Three national cases have been selected to illustrate the availability of integration support for temporary protection holders: Poland, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria (the countries in Central and Eastern Europe which have received the highest number of Ukrainian refugees).

In all these countries special legislation has been adopted which deals with the reception of Ukrainian refugees and their



Ukrainian Refugees waiting at the Ukrainian-Romanian border checkpoint Porubne-Siret, March 2022. Credit: Nikolay Stoykov

rights.⁵ Therefore, temporary protection holders cannot automatically benefit from the rights of refugees and subsidiary protection holders and may not be able to access tailored integration programmes, where these exist. Despite the fact that in general Ukrainian refugees get better treatment compared with non-Ukrainian refugees,⁶ a closer look at the integration-related provisions in each of these three countries reveals the complexity of the issues at stake.⁷

All three countries offer immediate access to the labour market for Ukrainian refugees. In fact, as Ukrainians have had a history of economic migration to many of the Central and Eastern European countries, especially Poland, it was expected that they would meet many of the domestic labour market needs.

Given the demographic profile of TPD holders, with – according to Eurostat data – 42.3% adult female, 34.7% children and 5.8% over 65 years old, it is worth noting that all countries have provided access to their national education systems and some access to health and social care.⁸ Access to State medical assistance ranges from being equal to that enjoyed by nationals in the case of Poland, to

health insurance for the first 150 days only coverage in the Czech Republic and the first 90 days in Bulgaria (with exceptions for vulnerable individuals). Targeted social assistance benefits (financial support) are available to varying degrees, with Poland offering a wide range, whereas in the Czech Republic the available benefits are reduced over time and in Bulgaria they amount to one-off payments.

As regards accommodation, in Bulgaria, until mid-November 2022, the State provided accommodation and meals for a small proportion of Ukrainian refugees in hotels and State-owned resort buildings; however, this was implemented on a diminishing sliding scale, and after a certain period only the most needy Ukrainian refugees could benefit from accommodation provision. The discontinuation of meals was successfully challenged before the Supreme Administrative Court but accommodation support remained minimal. In the Czech Republic, Ukrainian refugees may be offered accommodation by a regional assistance centre or by private entities or businesses. Those who are offered accommodation by the State are not eligible for humanitarian assistance (which has anyway been further

reduced in 2023). In Poland, although temporary support with accommodation can be provided by reception centres, refugees are increasingly expected to find their own housing. Moreover, both Poland and the Czech Republic now require payment for longer stays in reception facilities (starting from 120 days in Poland and 150 days in the Czech Republic).

A trend towards diminishing State support for Ukrainian refugees is noticeable in all three countries studied. It is not known if Ukrainian temporary protection holders will eventually be expected to have sufficiently integrated and therefore no longer require any support.

The future of integration and the TPD

Despite the initial warm welcome for Ukrainian refugees, when it comes to integration there is an over-reliance on civil society efforts and diminishing State support. There also seems to be an assumption that Ukrainians will be able to secure employment, combined with a disregard for the need for regulated, coordinated and affordable access to housing. In addition, in Poland and in Bulgaria, there is limited or no targeted state integration support mechanism – offering free language classes and social orientation, for example – that Ukrainian refugees could benefit from. One main reason for such an omission is the lack of integration provisions in the TPD and the expectation that Ukrainians will return to their country. Another reason is the legacy of poor integration systems (especially in Poland and Bulgaria) for non-Ukrainian refugees.

The above findings suggest that ensuring access to the main socio-economic rights of refugees is not sufficient for their integration. If the EU would like to avoid a future scenario where Ukrainian refugees are blamed for their failure to integrate, it should introduce

a provision in the TPD guaranteeing their access to integration programmes. This would also serve to build a coordinated, long-term approach towards ensuring a responsible reception of people fleeing future conflicts.

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FMR News

New team:

Our team has seen many changes in the past year. In March we said a fond farewell to former Deputy Editor Olivia Berthon. Catherine Meredith, our new Deputy Editor, joined in May. Managing Editor Alice Philip welcomed a new baby in June and soon after Emily Arnold-Fernández joined us as Managing Editor (maternity cover). We wish Alice all the best for her maternity leave.

Future plans:

Over the coming year, the FMR team will expand on our core vision of inclusion and impact, bringing together diverse voices to inform policy and practice addressing forced migration and displacement. We'll also launch a new logo and website, so please watch this space – it may look different in the future!

Forthcoming - Issue 73: Digital disruption and displacement (2024)

The rapid development and pervasive diffusion of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, biometric identification, machine learning and predictive analytics among others, have far-reaching impacts, both positive and negative. This issue will explore the double-sided nature of digital technologies and their implications for displaced people across the globe. Proposals for articles are solicited by 15 October 2023.

New Director of the Refugee Studies Centre:

Professor Tom Scott-Smith became Director of the Refugee Studies Centre, where FMR is housed, in September 2023. We are very grateful to Professor Alexander Betts, the outgoing Director, for his support of FMR and we look forward to working with Professor Scott-Smith as we take FMR forward.

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Credit: UNHCR/Valerio Muscella

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