



GPC Protection Messages  
**UKRAINE**  
Updated 24 April 2022

The following messages reflect priority protection issues and gaps in Ukraine, based on monitoring and analysis conducted by the Ukraine Protection Cluster and its regular [Protection Snapshots](#). Additional contributions were made by the Global Protection Cluster's Advocacy and Human Rights Engagement Task Teams. This document will be regularly updated to reflect rapidly developing protection risks in the country.

### **Key Protection Issues**

1. Civilian casualties across Ukraine continue to rise, as does the damage to critical infrastructure, triggering severe protection consequences. The use of explosive weapons and landmines in populated areas with indiscriminate, wide-area effects must cease, as should any killing of civilians and violence, including conflict-related sexual violence and grave violations committed against children.
2. Hostilities are driving massive internal displacement and restrictions on movements are hindering people's access to services and assistance, as well as their ability to flee to safer areas. The displaced face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence as well as family separation. Children who are unaccompanied or separated are at increased risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation. As coping strategies diminish, the risk of human trafficking is escalating.
3. Protection risks and rights violations are on the rise for different groups of the population stranded inside the country including women and girls, children, persons with disabilities and older people, minority groups and persons with serious medical conditions. Without a scaled up and comprehensive protection-focused response inside the country, people, particularly those facing intersectional vulnerabilities, will continue to face high levels of insecurity, violence and abuse.

### **Urgent Actions Needed**

1. The protection of civilians in Ukraine must be a priority across humanitarian, diplomatic and political efforts. This should include the strong integration of protection and human rights considerations at the core of the humanitarian response and a focus on ways to reduce civilian harm by diplomatic and political actors.
2. Protection partners are scaling up the delivery of protection and life-saving assistance to support people in need in Ukraine. Support to authorities and national organizations for scaling-up specialized and gender-responsive protection response to IDPs and other vulnerable groups is essential. This should include support for robust protection monitoring and human rights reporting, the mainstreaming of protection across WASH, food, shelter, and other humanitarian sectors, as well as stand-alone protection services and interventions.
3. Adequate and timely funding is urgently needed, especially for national organizations. The recently updated Flash Appeal, which asks for \$2.24 billion USD to assist 15 million people inside Ukraine for an initial six-month period, including 218 million USD for emergency protection responses, should be fully supported, and used to meet the needs of the most vulnerable population groups.

## Key Protection Issues

**1. Civilian casualties across Ukraine continue to rise, as does the damage to critical infrastructure, triggering severe protection consequences. The use of explosive weapons and landmines in populated areas with indiscriminate, wide-area effects must cease, as should any killing of civilians and violence, including conflict-related sexual violence and grave violations committed against children.**

- From 24 February to 21 April, **5,381 civilian casualties** were recorded including **2,435 people killed**, and **2,946 people injured**<sup>1</sup>. Most of these casualties were caused by the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area being used in populated areas, including shelling from heavy artillery, multiple launch rocket systems, missiles and air strikes.
- **The number of airstrikes affecting civilians and civilian infrastructure has significantly increased with targeted attacks on schools and health centers reported.** More than 100 attacks on health care facilities were reported since 24 February. The attacks so far have claimed 73 lives and injured 51. Most attacks involved the use of heavy weapons against health care facilities, personnel, and patients. Medical and emergency workers report being unable to access people in some areas of Popasna and Rubizhne (Luhansk oblast); Mariupol (Donetsk oblast) and continue to be blocked and subjected to artillery attacks and air strikes. A total of 1,499 education institutions have suffered bombing and shelling, 102 of which have been destroyed completely.<sup>2</sup>
- Between 24 February and 22 March, more than 651 **residential buildings have been completely destroyed across Ukraine**, while around 3,780 have suffered varying degrees of damage, according to the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU). The extent of damages is likely more considerable, as insecurity prevents a complete assessment.<sup>3</sup>
- With the escalation of intense clashes and direct shelling of infrastructure, **mine/explosive remnants of war (ERW) related incidents continue to pose alarming threats to civilians**, for people remaining/hiding in their homes and for those fleeing the conflict. Shelling by cluster munitions and the use of booby traps in the form of backpacks, electronics and even toys have been reported.<sup>4</sup>

**2. Hostilities are driving massive internal displacement and restrictions on movements are hindering people's access to services and assistance, as well as their ability to flee to safer areas. The displaced face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence as well as family separation. Children who are unaccompanied or separated are at increased risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation. As coping strategies diminish, the risk of human trafficking is escalating.**

- The military offensive has triggered massive displacement within and outside the country. **7.7 million persons are internally displaced** in Ukraine, a number that will likely increase as constant

---

<sup>1</sup> [Ukraine: Civilian casualties as of 21 April 2022](#)

<sup>2</sup> <http://saveschools.in.ua/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-impact-situation-report-1200-pm-eet-23-march-2022>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/04/ukraine-cluster-munitions-launched-kharkiv-neighborhoods>

violence and destruction force more people to flee for safety<sup>5</sup>. **More than 2/3 of the children in Ukraine have been displaced.**<sup>6</sup>

- It is also estimated that **13 million people living in affected areas are stranded, unwilling or unable to leave** due to ongoing clashes, destruction of bridges and roads, and a lack of resources or information on where to find safety and accommodation. These people are among the most vulnerable, directly exposed to heightened insecurity and cut off from basic supplies, including food, water, and medicine.
- **Exposure to shelling, family separation and severe restrictions on freedom of movement** are the main reported protection risks to which the population is currently exposed. Women and children, older people, persons with disability and minority groups comprise the majority of those displaced. Children who are unaccompanied and separated from their parents / caregivers are at a heightened risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. The displaced, and those considering fleeing outside of the country, are at heightened risk of trafficking in persons.

**3. Protection risks and rights violations are on the rise for different groups of the population stranded inside the country including women and girls, children, persons with disabilities and older people, minority groups and persons with serious medical conditions. Without a scaled up and comprehensive protection-focused response inside the country, people, particularly those facing intersectional vulnerabilities, will continue to face high levels of insecurity, violence, and abuse.**

- There are particular concerns for the **5 million children**<sup>7</sup> remaining in Ukraine with reports of 184 children killed in the fighting<sup>8</sup>, children abducted by parties to the conflict, and schools being bombed across the country<sup>9</sup>. All conflict-affected children face increased protection risks including abuse, exploitation, and trafficking with heightened risk to unaccompanied and separated children. Among the most vulnerable are the approximately 100,000 children in Ukraine residing in institutional care – up to half of whom have disabilities<sup>10</sup>.
- **Persons with disabilities and older people**, including a significant number in institutional care, are facing compounded protection threats which have directly increased their risk of abandonment, neglect, emotional abuse, violence, injury and death. The Technical Working on Age and Disability, under the auspices of the Protection Cluster, is engaged in advocacy efforts with regional and local authorities, to ensure protection approaches to address their needs.
- **Women and girls are at risk of gender-based violence and human trafficking** amidst displacement and increased military presence in Ukraine. GBV actors report that although specialized services - including GBV hotlines - remain partially functional, access to services is extremely difficult for survivors due to ongoing conflict and movement restrictions, which also limit the ability of service providers to reach those in need. Difficulties in accessing basic goods

---

<sup>5</sup><https://displacement.iom.int/reports/ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-3-11-17-april-2022>. IOM conducted a representative survey of the general population in Ukraine to gather initial insights into internal displacement and mobility flows. The methodology and results of the survey were reviewed by the Protection Cluster, OCHA, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and REACH, and the group agreed that IOM's survey currently provide a credible population figure for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine.

<sup>6</sup>[Almost 400 children killed or injured with two-thirds fleeing their homes \(savethechildren.org.uk\)](https://savethechildren.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> Out of the 7.5 million children in Ukraine, 2.6 million found refuge in neighboring countries. [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/situation-ukraine-refugee-situation)

<sup>8</sup> [Ukraine: Civilian casualties as of 21 April 2022](https://www.unhcr.org/ukraine-civilian-casualties-as-of-21-april-2022)

<sup>9</sup> [Almost 400 children killed or injured with two-thirds fleeing their homes \(savethechildren.org.uk\)](https://savethechildren.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> [http://hopeandhomes.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ILluZIIa-ANH-do-druku-v-Ukr\\_compressed.pdf?msclkid=4be1996bc4a511ec8b495d39aabc1c7](http://hopeandhomes.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ILluZIIa-ANH-do-druku-v-Ukr_compressed.pdf?msclkid=4be1996bc4a511ec8b495d39aabc1c7)

and services and lack of access to safe shelter render women and girls extremely vulnerable to violence, exploitation and trafficking.

- **Men aged 18-60** not allowed to leave the country as a result of martial law face specific protection risks including family separation and restrictions to freedom of movement and men who choose to leave Ukraine, often attempting to do so undetected, are at risk of trafficking and labour exploitation in neighboring countries.
- High levels of **serious psychosocial distress** among the displaced population are reported due to exposure to life-threatening events, displacement, loss of family members or friends, family separation, and lack of access to health, education and livelihoods. Mental health and psychosocial support needs are particularly acute for those displaced across the country and psychological first aid provided by experts in Ukraine and in neighboring countries is much needed.

## **Urgent Actions Needed**

**1. The protection of civilians in Ukraine must be a priority across humanitarian, diplomatic and political efforts. This should include the strong integration of protection and human rights considerations at the core of the humanitarian response and a focus on ways to reduce civilian harm by diplomatic and political actors.**

- All precautions must be taken to ensure the protection of critical infrastructure such as homes, schools and health facilities, as well as the provision of water, gas, electricity and internet networks. It is crucial to closely monitor and attempt to verify reports of human rights violations, including civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects, including critical infrastructure.
- The use of weapons with wide area effects should not be tolerated in populated areas, as they can inflict massive and often indiscriminate destruction, impacting civilians and civilian objects, increasing mass displacement inside and outside the country. Surveying and mapping of dangerous areas, identifying explosive items and providing explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) as well as victim assistance, including psychosocial support is crucial.
- Millions of people trapped in conflict-affected areas need humanitarian assistance and protection. Establishing pathways for the delivery of critical humanitarian aid is an urgent priority to protect the lives of people under siege and without access to basic services. Safe, unhindered and sustained access of humanitarian actors to conflict-affected areas needs to be guaranteed.
- All parties to the conflict must ensure safe passages to enable civilian evacuations are organized in a manner that allows for safety, dignity and protection of civilians. Parties should ensure the involvement of ICRC and the UN to assist in negotiations to secure safe passage and voluntary evacuation of civilians from cities affected by the conflict. If, and when, parties agree to organize movement of civilians for their safety, people must be moved, in a safe and dignified manner, to a location where humanitarian assistance can be delivered, and shelter is available upon arrival. The Protection Cluster issued a [Recommendation Note on Humanitarian Evacuations of Civilians in Ukraine](#). The note intends to provide protection actors currently engaged in the humanitarian response with the guiding principles, minimum standards and parameters to follow prior, during and after engaging in humanitarian evacuations.

**2. Protection partners are scaling up the delivery of protection and life-saving assistance to support people in need in Ukraine. Support to authorities and national organizations for scaling-up specialized and gender-responsive protection response to IDPs and other vulnerable groups is essential. This should include support for robust protection monitoring and human rights reporting,**

**the mainstreaming of protection across WASH, food, shelter, and other humanitarian sectors, as well as stand-alone protection services and interventions.**

- Currently, the protection response strategy is implemented in (1) conflict-affected areas (South, East, Central) through humanitarian access negotiation and life-saving assistance; (2) transit points (Central, West) through information dissemination, protection counseling, identification and referral of people at heightened risk, (3) host communities and reception centers through all protection services and enhanced engagement with authorities, (4) border areas and crossing points through information dissemination, protection counseling, identification/referral of people at heightened risk.
- Protection monitoring with data disaggregated by age and gender is in place in Ukraine to systematically identify trends and patterns of violations of rights and protection risks for populations of concern. It is crucial that it continues to be supported as well as complemented by human rights reporting mechanisms, communication with communities and referrals of individual cases to protection partners.
- Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) are a vital intervention for people affected by the conflict, particularly children, elderly and persons with disabilities. Intensifying comprehensive MHPSS response capacities in the country is essential to provide much needed life-saving support to conflict-affected populations, including health workers.
- Support to multi-sectoral programs for child protection, GBV and disability-inclusive responses is essential to provide comprehensive support to survivors of violence, abuse and exploitation.
  - All efforts must be made to prevent the separation of children from their caregivers and to ensure immediate family tracing and reunification when in the best interests of the child if separation occurs.
  - Conducting gendered and intersectional analyses of the impacts of the conflict and displacement as well as ensuring gender-responsive services and assistance remain critical.
  - For survivors of conflict related sexual violence to seek support and find services, a well-funded and functional GBV response is needed, including referral pathways, up-to-date information, and access to the full range of GBV prevention and response services that humanitarians are able to provide.
  - Services adapted to persons with disabilities and older people are critical. Basic needs for those remaining in their residences should be provided through mobile outreach teams and targeted assistance (assistive devices, hygiene kits, home-based care activities). Shelters must be accessible with basic measures such as portable ramps and proximity to toileting spaces.
- Multi-purpose cash-based interventions with a protection lens are a flexible and cost-effective mechanism for delivery of assistance to help vulnerable populations meet their most pressing needs and reduce negative coping mechanisms, including resorting to or becoming victims of human trafficking. It is an essential response modality that should be supported by donors.

**3. Adequate and timely funding is urgently needed, especially for national organizations. The recently updated Flash Appeal, which asks for \$2.24 billion USD to assist 15 million people inside Ukraine for an initial six-month period, including 218 million USD for emergency protection responses, should be fully supported and used to meet the needs of the most vulnerable population groups.**

- Unearmarked and flexible funding for protection activities is critical for protection actors to be ready to support, as capacities of existing protection services may continue to become increasingly overstretched in a highly volatile environment.

- The Protection Cluster in Ukraine is comprised of 79 partners, including 56 national NGOs, engaged in protection work with displaced and conflict affected communities across the country. These protection partners need sustained and flexible funding support to ensure scaled up response efforts in which they can continue to play a leading role as well as risk management and digital and physical security considerations needed to support staff and operational safety amidst volatile operating environments. The lifting of bureaucratic restrictions and barriers to funding of national NGOs, especially around vetting requirements and funding ceilings, is also critical.
- Given the potential for a protracted crisis affecting the country, Member States should commit to multi-year predictable funding levels from the emergency phase onwards to ensure continuum of effective protection interventions in the interests of the population in need.