



GPC Protection Messages
UKRAINE
March 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 adapted while reflecting rapidly developing protection risks.

Key Protection Issues

1. The number of civilian casualties, including the killing and maiming of children, are growing, as is the damage to critical infrastructures, triggering severe humanitarian consequences. The volatile security poses risks to civilians and humanitarian actors alike. The unlawful use of wide-spread explosive weapons in populated areas and landmines must cease.
2. Hostilities are driving massive internal displacement and restriction on movements is hindering people's access to services and assistance. Establishing pathways for their safe passage and the delivery of critical humanitarian aid is an urgent priority to protect lives. Ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers is also critical to enable the delivery of protection to those in need.
3. Protection risks are on the high for different groups of the population stranded inside the country. The current tensions are further exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Urgent Actions Needed

1. The protection of civilians must be a priority. International humanitarian, human rights, and refugee laws must be upheld.
2. All humanitarian actors need rapid, safe, unhindered access to conflict-affected areas.
3. Protection partners are committed to staying and delivering, to support people in need in Ukraine. Support to authorities to scaling-up reception capacities for IDPs and response to vulnerable groups are needed.
4. We urge all donors to support the recently launched Flash Appeal, which asks for \$1.1 billion to assist 6 million people inside Ukraine for an initial three-month period, including 218 million USD for emergency protection responses.

Key Protection Issues

1. The number of civilian casualties, including the killing and maiming of children, are growing, as is the damage to critical infrastructures, triggering severe humanitarian consequences. The volatile security poses risks to civilians and humanitarian actors alike. The unlawful use of wide-spread explosive weapons in populated areas and landmines must cease.

- From 24 Feb to 7 March, the OHCHR recorded **1,123 civilian casualties** including **364 persons killed**, among of which **35 children** and **759 injured people**. Most of these casualties were caused by the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area, including shelling from heavy artillery, multiple launch rocket system (MLRS), and air strikes.
- **Attacks on schools and grave violations against children are reported.** The risk of other grave violations, especially the recruitment of children under 18 years is of concern. Both Russia and Ukraine have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and should uphold their obligations.
- 24 incidents where **explosive weapons damaged hospitals** were reported between 24 February-02 March 2022¹. The conflict has also affected supply of drugs and other key medical supplies with crucial shortages for patients with long-term care needs.
- With the escalation of intense clashes, and direct shelling of infrastructures, **mine/ERW related incidents** pose alarming two-folded threats to civilians, for the ones who decided to stay in their homes hiding and for those fleeing the conflict. Media and human rights groups report shelling by cluster munitions² and the use of booby traps in the form of backpacks, electronics and even toys. There are reported explosions of anti-tank mines involving civilian vehicles.

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- The military offensive has triggered massive displacement within and outside the country, adding to the already existing 850,000 IDPs within Ukraine. The Protection Cluster estimates that over **1 million persons have been newly displaced** inside Ukraine, a number that will likely increase as constant violence and destruction force more people to flee for safety. It is projected that over the next few months, over 6.7 million people may become internally displaced³.
- It is also estimated that **12 million people living in affected areas are stranded, unwilling or unable to leave** due to the military action and heightened security risks, destruction of bridges and roads, as well as lack of resources or information on where to find safety and accommodation.
- The Protection Cluster launched its **Protection Monitoring Tool for Emergency** to identify affected locations and host communities for IDPs, profiles with specific needs, key protection risks, as well as access and availability of services, assistance and accommodation. Preliminary data collected

¹ <http://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Violence-Against-or-Obstruction-of-Health-Care-in-Ukraine-24-February-02-March-2022.pdf>

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/04/ukraine-cluster-munitions-launched-kharkiv-neighborhoods>

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/protection-cluster-ukraine-crisis-protection-snapshot-25-february-1-march-2022>

showed over **72,000 new IDP arrivals in 14 locations**, mostly in the Western region, but also to a smaller extent in Kyiv and central regions. The majority of **IDPs come from Kharkiv, Donetsk, Kherson, Odesa, Mykolaivska, and Dnipro oblasts**, but also from Zaporizhyya, Sumy, Chernihiv and Kyiv. In the first 24 hours of monitoring, at least **30%** of the new IDP arrivals indicated the **intention to continue moving** – one week later, 21% still reported this intention.⁴

- The main reported **protection risks** to which the population is currently exposed include **exposure to shelling and contamination by landmines, restrictions on freedom of movement and family separation**. Women and children, persons with disabilities and/or serious medical conditions, as well as older persons and minority groups are also increasingly facing barriers in accessing critical services such as transportation, food, medication and emergency health care in impacted areas.

3. Protection risks are on the high for different groups of the population stranded inside the country. The current tensions are further exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities.

- There are particularly concerns for the **7.5 million children** in Ukraine with reports of up to 19 children killed in the fighting and schools being bombed across the country⁵. Children with disabilities confined in public institutions face increased protection risks including abuse, exploitation and trafficking. The eighth-year armed conflict took a heavy toll especially on more than 510,000 children living in Donetsk and Luhansk regions⁶.
- According to the Protection Monitoring Tool for Emergency most **vulnerable profiles among IDPs** identified so far include children, women and girls, minority groups, persons with disabilities and older people. **Persons with disabilities**, including children, are facing surmounting challenges to access shelter and are at high risk of abandonment and family separation.
- **Gender based violence** is not only a risk but a pressing reality for IDP women and girls amidst displacement and increased military presence in a country with an existing high prevalence of 1 in 5 women between 15-49 years having experienced at least one form of GBV in their lifetime. GBV actors on the ground report that although specialized services - including GBV hotlines - remain partially functional, access is extremely difficult for both staff and survivors due to ongoing conflict and movement restrictions. Difficulties in accessing basic goods and services, and lack of access to safe shelter, render women and girls extremely vulnerable to violence and exploitation.
- **Men aged 18-60** not allowed to leave the country face particular risks in relation to abduction, conscription and the right to seek asylum. As a result, family separation and restrictions in freedom of movement are already noted.
- There are concerns for the sizeable stateless population and **population at risk of statelessness** in Ukraine, which UNHCR estimates to exceed 35,000 persons⁷ and to be amongst the largest in Europe. This already vulnerable population, with precarious legal status and lack of documents, is now also facing displacement and attempting to seek safety in neighboring countries⁸.

⁴ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2022_protection_cluster_snapshot_2-5_march_eng.pdf

⁵ <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/ukraine-attacks-schools-endangering-children-s-lives-and-futures>

⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Ukraine%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20-%202024%20February%202022.pdf>

⁷ [Stateless Persons – UNHCR Ukraine](#)

⁸ Stateless people and those at risk of statelessness are unlikely to have passports or other documents, as a direct consequence of their statelessness or unclear nationality status. The lack of documentation or residence status should not impede their ability to access State services, accommodation and assistance in host communities, reception center and collective centers for IDPs.

Urgent Actions Needed

1. The protection of civilians must be a priority. International humanitarian, human rights, and refugee laws must be upheld.

- Parties to the conflict in Ukraine must adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law and disarmament treaties to ensure the protection of the civilian population and refrain from unlawful attacks.
- All precautions must be taken to ensure protection of critical infrastructures such as homes, schools and health facilities, as well as water, gas, electricity and internet networks.
- 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 is crucial. Mine action teams need staff and equipment. Victims of incidents with mines/ERW must be provided assistance including psychosocial support.
- The UN Security Council must call for an immediate cessation of grave violations against children. Reports of their occurrences must be investigated, and appropriate prevention and response actions taken. All efforts must be made to prevent the separation of children from their caregivers and to ensure immediate family tracing and reunification where separation occurs.

2. All humanitarian actors need rapid, safe, unhindered access to conflict-affected areas.

- Millions trapped in the country need safe passage, humanitarian assistance and protection.
- All parties to the conflict must ensure evacuations and safe passages 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 organizing 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.
- Humanitarian access is essential for assisting and protecting civilians. Protection and humanitarian actors should have safe, unhindered and sustained access to all areas affected by the military offensive to deliver goods and critical medical supplies.

3. Protection partners are committed to staying and delivering, to support people in need in Ukraine. Support to authorities to scaling-up reception capacities for IDPs and response to vulnerable groups are needed.

- Protection monitoring is in place in Ukraine to systematically collect, age, gender and disability disaggregated information to identify trends and patterns of violations of rights and protection risks for populations of concern. It is crucial that it is supported to continue to be used for the purpose of an effective response and advocacy. Protection Monitoring needs to be complemented by communication of protection messages and referrals.
- This conflict has put women and children at significant risk of violence. It is essential to support multi-sectoral programs for child protection and GBV responses. Measures to protect women and children regardless of age, ethnicity, immigration status, and sexuality are to be implemented in

all reception and arrival areas during population movements. Procedures must be in place to identify and provide gender and age support for survivors of violence, abuse and exploitation.

- Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) are a vital intervention for people affected by the conflict, particularly children, elderly and persons with disabilities. Safe spaces for all children and young people are needed, including those which respond to the needs of girls and young women.
- Communication with communities, protection monitoring, and analysis are key to disseminate information about emergency contacts and available support and allow for risk mitigation.
- Services adapted to PWDs are critical. Basic needs for those remaining in their residences should be provided through mobile outreach teams. To the persons displaced, shelters must be accessible with basic measures such as portable ramps and proximity to toileting spaces. Targeted assistance is urgent to families consisting exclusively of people in need of external personal care.
- 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. It is an essential response modality that should be supported by donors.

4. We urge all donors to support the recently launched Flash Appeal, which asks for \$1.1 billion to assist 6 million people inside Ukraine for an initial three-month period, including 218 million USD for emergency protection responses.

- Adequate and timely funding is urgently needed. Already before the start of the military offensive, the 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan for Ukraine (to reach 1.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance) – in Government and non-Government-controlled areas of Ukraine – was just 9% funded: \$17.6 million out of \$190.3 million.
- Unearmarked funding for protection activities as early as possible is critical for protection actors to be ready to support, as capacities of existing protection services may continue to become increasingly overstretched in a high volatile environment.
- Donors should provide flexible funding to prioritize the growing and changing needs of the most affected populations at all times – allowing to adapt existing projects and ensuring quick and direct funding to NGOs. The Protection Cluster in Ukraine can count on 72 partners, including 39 LNGOs engaged in protection work with IDP communities in the country, who should receive the necessary support.
- 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.