

Gender Analysis of the Situation in Ukraine

April 2022

- **The conflict in Ukraine is disproportionately affecting women and girls, especially women from marginalized groups.** The gendered impact of the conflict in Ukraine is influenced by the unique demographic profile of the country, which includes large numbers of older women, women and girls with disabilities, internally displaced women and girls, women-headed households, stateless women and girls, and women living with HIV. Ukraine has the largest percentage of older persons affected by conflict in a single country, the majority of whom (close to five million) are women.ⁱ Ukraine also has a large population of persons with disabilities, of whom more than one million are women.ⁱⁱ Prior to the current crisis, Ukraine had the largest stateless population in Europe. Of this population, an estimated 60% of Roma women and children do not have documentation, and more than 60% of children born in conflict-affected areas do not have a birth certificate.ⁱⁱⁱ Nearly 1% of Ukraine's population lives with HIV, one of the largest epidemics in the region; nearly half of adults living with HIV are women, with sex workers, LGBTIQ+ individuals and women who inject drugs particularly vulnerable.^{iv} Transgender women, who face obstacles in accessing healthcare and legal documentation, are marginalized based on their gender identity.^v
- **The current conflict undermines the right of women and girls to access healthcare.** The destruction caused by the conflict, particularly the use of explosive weapons in populated areas targeting hospitals and health facilities, as well as the presence of landmines and explosive remnants of war may amount to war crimes. At least 83 attacks on health facilities, health workers and ambulances have been identified so far, and there is considerable evidence that civilian objects, such as schools and houses, have been targeted (data as of 31 March 2022, for updated numbers, see cited sources).^{vi} The destruction of healthcare facilities results in a clear barrier for women and girls in need of healthcare and, in particular, can mean a near total loss of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare.^{vii} Pregnant women are directly impacted by explosive weapons, with an increased risk of pregnancy-related complications or maternal mortality.^{viii} Over the next three months, an estimated 80,000 women will give birth in Ukraine and may not be able to do so safely without access to medical care.^{ix} Women and girls living with ongoing medical conditions, such as HIV, have reported losing access to lifesaving services and antiretroviral therapy, which for the majority of individuals living with HIV in Ukraine, needs to be taken daily.^x Transgender people who rely on hormone replacement therapy have reported losing access to the medication they rely on.^{xi} Women and girls with disabilities, including psychiatric disabilities, may lose access to assistive devices and support persons, thereby impacting their mobility and access to basic services.^{xii}
- **Women-headed households and women in care-giving roles face unique burdens as a result of the conflict.** Women head 93% of all single-headed households in Ukraine, and have been predominantly affected by the conflict in areas such as eastern Ukraine.^{xiii} Women in Ukraine generally bear the primary burden for taking care of children and other dependents, and as a result, this role has factored heavily into decisions surrounding evacuation.^{xiv} Women who are choosing to leave are often doing so to ensure the safety of their children, impacting, for example, the ability of women journalists to continue carrying out their work.^{xv} Meanwhile, expectations that women will care for older parents mean that other groups of women are remaining inside Ukraine. One of the most concerning protection risks reported thus far is family separation, which for girls can increase potential for sexual exploitation and trafficking.^{xvi} In addition, women-headed households comprise the vast majority of groups at highest risk for poverty and food insecurity, including single parents with multiple children or children with disabilities, or who are caring for elderly family members.^{xvii} Women also comprise 80% of all health and social care workers in Ukraine, and may

therefore choose not to evacuate.^{xxviii}

- The majority of refugees are women and girls, resulting in gendered protection risks and the need for gender to be prioritized in humanitarian response.** Refugees and asylum seekers include groups of women and girls who face additional risk, such as LGBTIQ+ people, Roma women, older women, and ethnic and religious minorities.^{xxix} The scale and pace of the outflow of refugees has resulted in a range of challenges that have had a particular impact on women and girls, including, for instance, the absence in the first two weeks of the crisis of registration and screening that would allow for proper identification of vulnerable and marginalized people, such as unaccompanied and separated children, and the lack of vetting and monitoring in the multiple accommodation platforms and initiatives.^{xxx} There are particular challenges related to ensuring those leaving Ukraine can access essential and time-sensitive sexual and reproductive healthcare in border countries.^{xxxi} Further, some groups of refugees have faced additional barriers to reaching safety. For example, there are reports of Roma women and children being forced to wait in longer lines until all ethnic Ukrainians are processed, and segregation in poor conditions upon arrival in destination countries. Further, discrimination towards Roma people has resulted in Roma women and children generally having fewer economic resources and lacking basic legal documentation, which compounds the challenges they face when seeking to cross the border and limits the options available to them upon arrival in a neighboring country. Lack of documentation is likely to pose an additional barrier when seeking to return to Ukraine in the future.^{xxxii}
- Initial reports of incidents of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls are starting to emerge while the overall risk of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual exploitation and abuse and trafficking, increases as the crisis continues.** Although complete data is not yet available, increasing reports of incidents of GBV, including rape, have been reported by Ukrainian women over the past several weeks, including in Kharkiv region.^{xxxiii} It is anticipated that the risk of GBV will continue to increase as a result of ongoing displacement, military presence and the worsening humanitarian situation.^{xxxiv} In areas occupied by Russian military forces, women who have chosen not to evacuate or were unable to evacuate, due to disability, caregiving obligations or preference, face particular risk of sexual violence, as recent reports have indicated.^{xxxv} Displaced women and girls in Ukraine and neighboring countries, including those displaced prior to the current crisis, have historically reported three times more incidents of GBV than the rest of the population, with trafficking and other forms of exploitation a particular concern.^{xxxvi} While the risk of GBV increases, there is a significant decrease in accessible services and support, including healthcare, as well as GBV-specific services, such as shelters, which have largely shut down, whether destroyed by attacks on infrastructure or paused by organizations shifting their focus to other aspects of the humanitarian response.^{xxxvii} Survivors who have travelled to neighboring countries are facing further challenges accessing basic sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), due to preexisting legal and policy restrictions, and cost barriers in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.^{xxxviii} Many transgender women with male identity documents have been barred from leaving Ukraine under the emergency order requiring men 18-60 to stay in the country and register for the draft, even though Ukrainian law provides a medical exemption from military service to transgender people.^{xxxix} Transgender men — including those with female identity documents or documentation that they are unfit for military service — have reported difficulty crossing the border, including invasive body searches by Ukrainian border guards and other degrading treatment.
- There is little evidence that the inclusion of women as leaders and participants in formal and informal peace processes is being prioritized.** The failure of the current processes to leverage the diverse knowledge and experience of women politicians, civil society leaders, activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders already active in policymaking at all levels within Ukraine's society is a considerable gap, particularly given the strong community of women's groups that has been contributing to and providing oversight of the implementation of Ukraine's National Action Plan on 1325 (2000), as well as strengthening the capacity of local communities in eastern Ukraine to peacefully resolve conflict and mediate disputes since 2014.^{xxx} This exclusion is reflective of trends in negotiations between Ukraine and Russia from 2014–2019, during which only two women were sent from Ukraine out of 12 total delegates and no women were sent by Russia.^{xxxxi}

An additional factor influencing the exclusion of women at the local level from peace efforts is the shift in focus by organizations previously promoting women’s meaningful participation to the immediate humanitarian response and addressing the current urgent needs of local communities. Women in civil society in Ukraine have reported concerns that this redirecting of efforts to providing basic services has meant that women are not being included in discussions related to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.^{xxxii} Further, although prioritization of women’s rights in the outcome of a peace process is the responsibility of all participants, the absence of women leaders, negotiators and women civil society in the meetings currently taking place is likely to have a negative impact on the inclusion of gender and human rights concerns in both the process and outcomes, as has been seen in other contexts.^{xxxiii}

- **Women journalists, media workers, civil society representatives and human rights defenders continue to carry out their work, despite threats to their safety and security and often without access to resources.** Drawing on the expertise developed over the past decade, particularly in response to the conflict in eastern Ukraine that began in 2014, women’s civil society networks have significantly expanded their operations and ability to respond to the crisis, including by leveraging digital tools.^{xxxiv} An example of this responsiveness is the shift by most women’s groups to focus on direct services or documentation of war crimes, away from their previous area of work.^{xxxv} This is particularly evident in areas on either side of Ukraine’s border with neighboring countries, where the main actors addressing the specific needs of displaced women and girls are local women’s rights groups, SRHR organizations, and women civil society actors and human rights defenders.^{xxxvi}

Recommendations

- Demand an immediate cessation of hostilities, an end to civilian harm, and respect for international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Underline the obligation of all Member States to settle disputes in a peaceful manner; reinforce that all negotiations and dialogue processes must include the full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse women.
- Condemn all attacks that target civilians and civilian infrastructure, including water and sanitation facilities, hospitals and medical facilities, schools and places of worship. The protection of civilians must be the number one priority, in line with international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Ensure that all investigations of alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law, including the investigation by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council, fully encompass and address the gendered and intersectional elements of these crimes.
- Ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all areas in Ukraine. A pause in the fighting is essential to allow for the safe passage of civilians caught in conflict to leave on a voluntary basis in the direction they choose, and to ensure life-saving humanitarian supplies can move into the country for those who remain.
- Ensure the humanitarian response and all further updates from humanitarian agencies and organizations, including on protection, migration, cash and voucher assistance, healthcare and food security, are grounded in age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability-responsive data and analysis, and that such data is collected from internally displaced persons and refugees in order to inform the response. The systematic registration — with disaggregated data — of people crossing the border will support planning exercises. It will also support tracing and reunification efforts related to unaccompanied and separated children and older people, as well as victims of trafficking.
- International actors must accelerate efforts to develop an assistance support infrastructure in Ukraine and prioritize aid through local organizations, including diverse women’s rights,

humanitarian, peacebuilding and LGBTIQ+ groups. In particular, provide rapid financial support to gender equality, SRHR and women's rights organizations, and diverse women and LGBTIQ+ human rights defenders, who are providing frontline support to refugees in host and transit countries and populations in Ukraine, including internally displaced persons. Ensure that financial assistance reaches local organizations providing GBV services, legal advice, mental health and psychosocial support, and healthcare to women, girls and marginalized populations. Verify that financial assistance is not provided to anti-SRHR and anti-equality organizations and actors, particularly in Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia or Ukraine.

- Ensure an inclusive, non-discriminatory and effective application of temporary protection for all people fleeing Ukraine, including for non-Ukrainian nationals and other marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, members of the Roma community and LGBTIQ+ individuals. In the context of this response, immediately facilitate cross-border access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, including maternal, newborn and child health and GBV response services, where necessary to overcome national legal barriers and severe restrictions in host countries. In particular, take swift and effective measures to facilitate and support urgent access to early medical abortion for refugee populations, including by supporting cross-border and telemedical service provision.
- Address the current conditions at border crossings and reception centers, which create an ideal environment for human traffickers to operate. Such measures include controlling access to all border crossing areas and reception centers, and identifying and registering the names and other relevant details of those accessing them and of the volunteers assisting them. While this would be a start to addressing the physical presence of human traffickers at these sites, more also needs to be done to address the online presence and actions of human traffickers targeting Ukrainian women and children.
- Ensure that members of local draft boards and border guards are trained on Ukraine's exemption from military service for transgender people, that the standards are consistently and respectfully applied, and that transgender women, with or without legal documentation attesting to their gender, are able to leave the country. Ensure that border guards do not conduct strip searches or intrusive pat-downs in order to ascertain the sex or gender of individuals leaving the country.
- Promote and protect civil society space and ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society, journalists, peacebuilders and all human rights defenders, in both Ukraine and Russia, in order to fulfill obligations under international human rights law, and actively push back against disinformation, stigmatization and persecution of civil society actors engaged in criticizing warring parties, providing and disseminating information, defending human rights, providing basic services, promoting dialogue, and peacebuilding.
- Support women's dialogue platforms across the region to identify ways to stop the war, prevent further escalation of conflict and address the long-term impact of conflict and violence. Further, take deliberate measures to ensure the inclusive participation of women from diverse communities at all decision-making levels, at all levels of the humanitarian response, and liaise, partner and consult with diverse women leaders, women's rights and peacebuilding groups, and representatives of marginalized communities, such as persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, stateless people and the Roma community, to understand the needs identified by them, respect their rights, and increase their influence in humanitarian decision-making in and for their communities.

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