

EaP CSF Recommendations on humanitarian aid to Ukraine

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Over a month since the beginning of the war, more than 4 million Ukrainians have fled to neighbouring countries, leading to one of the worst refugee crisis over the past 60-plus years, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of United Nations data.¹ More and more people are fleeing daily to Ukraine's western regions of Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Zakarpatska, trying to survive from Russian bombs and unliveable conditions in their cities and villages.

Civil society organisations have been at the forefront of the humanitarian emergency, organising shelters, fundraising for the people in need, coordinating CSOs, youth initiative groups, local and IDPs volunteers, monitoring the situation, working tirelessly and adapting to an ever-evolving and increasingly demanding situation. Working directly on the field, **EaP CSF member CSOs have taken note of a number of problems that EU institutions, EU Member states and the Ukrainian authorities should address urgently.**

EU-funded humanitarian assistance is delivered through UN humanitarian agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and non-governmental organisations. However, problems have been flagged on the operations of key actors:

1. **Slow response of UN agencies.**

Ukrainian CSOs have reported problems or difficulties while cooperating with UN agencies. At the beginning of the conflict, there was a high expectation on UN agencies for the provision of fast humanitarian relief and aid. Such expectations have been disappointed as UN agencies in Ukraine were seemingly caught unprepared by the war, and spent the first weeks evacuating their personnel. Reports point to the fact that staff did not have humanitarian, operational expertise and while this seems to have been addressed, UN staff is now coordinating operations from Romania and Poland and lacks direct experience in Ukraine. Over 40 days after the beginning of the conflict, UN agencies' support is still picking up speed. The problem seems to be connected to

¹ After a month of war, Ukrainian refugee crisis ranks among the world's worst in recent history, PEW Research Centre, 25 March 2022 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/25/after-a-month-of-war-ukrainian-refugee-crisis-ranks-among-the-worlds-worst-in-recent-history/>

two issues: first, UN agencies' bureaucracy chains and heavy-regulated procedures, which hinder their swift response. Several CSOs reported receiving no response after a first initial email exchange with a UN counterpart. There may be several reasons for these delays, including an overwhelming amount of requests to agencies, which would point to the need of redirecting resources to units dealing with Ukraine. It is also plausible that things are moving within UN agencies internally, but this has not been visible to CSOs partners that are working tirelessly and are waiting for an answer. Secondly, UN agencies have been pointing to lack of access as a key problem preventing them from delivering aid. Several CSOs have reportedly been more effective in pushing convoys through, given the same situation on the ground. Local and foreign CSOs are possibly taking bigger risks than UN agencies can afford to do. While this is a delicate subject, to be assessed under the duty of care that each organisation must have towards its staff, it is a fact whose implications should be explored further. As recipients of EU humanitarian aid, UN agencies need to pick up speed as soon as possible. To improve their cooperation with CSOs, UN agencies should:

1. Limit requirements regarding application and reporting, including conditions that could prevent much needed help from being given altogether, such as stringent GDPR requirements. Calls by UN agencies require extensive reporting procedures for successful applicants which put a drain on their already limited workforce and resources. Calls for applications for Ukrainian CSOs should be operated and administered with lighter requirements for both application and reporting, procedures should be reviewed for a swifter and more efficient aid.
2. Provide core support instead of project or action support. The situation is evolving so rapidly and the needs are so great that CSOs on the frontline should not be spending their time writing projects that may become irrelevant in a few weeks as the needs evolve.
3. Be flexible with regard to repurposing project funds fast for the sake of increasing efficiency.
4. Enlarge the number of UN staff or affiliates on the ground, especially in the North, Centre, South, and East of Ukraine. Ensure that requests are timely tended to.
5. Limit the number of forms and documents that need to be filled for and after each action.
6. Review procedures for a swifter and more efficient aid, including making it possible to work with CSOs that did not go through due diligence, to enlarge the pool of partners.

2. Loss of trust in the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The ICRC itself has the only possible mandate to help Ukrainians with evacuation but an appeal signed by over 3500 CSOs representatives[2] found ICRC lacking in a number of areas, such as full-scale support of green corridors from the occupied and combat zones, territories with humanitarian catastrophes; assistance in logistics of humanitarian aid; the prevention of kidnapping of children from orphanages and their forced deportation to Russia, and, in general, closer cooperation with Ukrainian volunteers and greater transparency in operational activities of ICRC. Most importantly, the ICRC mission left Mariupol as attacks intensified, leaving the local population in untenable conditions. All this resulted in the authorities and civil society losing trust in ICRC, even as more convoys have been pushed through. There have been calls to donate to the Ukrainian Red Cross instead of to the international one as the latter has been perceived as politicised and pro-Russian. **Trust must be regained and the reputational damage repaired, as the ICRC remains a key actor in providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine and its people.**

The Ukrainian government and local and regional public administration have had to reorganise themselves to redistribute aid, organise the flows and reception of internally displaced people (IDPs) and tend to the needs of the most vulnerable. The CSOs are reporting over-centralisation tendencies, lack of oversight and corruption cases that are hindering these efforts.

1. Lack of coordination between actors. Local administrations and regional governments have been trying to centralise humanitarian aid, army support, and the work run by CSOs, using non-transparent and counterproductive practices. Western oblasts have been complaining that all aid is going eastward, while their resources are stretched supporting IDPs. The regional government of Zakarpatska resorted to confiscating all humanitarian aid, arguing that CSOs would use it in a wrong way. CSOs were required to bring humanitarian cargos they received to a regional storage, although the administration does not have yet a plan on how to use it. The measures taken by the national government on March 27 should make the procedure for receiving humanitarian less bureaucratic, but consistent oversight is needed. CSOs reported that the local police came to their offices to control the humanitarian cargo they received. While it is understandable that the government is trying to centralise the process, CSOs are very afraid that corruption could hinder their work. The cargos they received are tailored to their beneficiaries and their needs and should not be used for other purposes.

2. **Lack of governmental oversight, leading to ineffective help and abuse.** There are currently no statistics or accurate estimates of the number of IDPs in the Ivano-Frankivsk region. There have been reports of school directors and sanatorium administration asking for money from IDPs coming to their shelters.
3. **Absence of adequate support for IDPs.** Hundreds of thousands of people, including children, have been fleeing to Ukraine's western regions without any plan. People are finding shelters everywhere, including nightclubs and offices after losing their homes, their jobs, and all social capital. Their psychological conditions are precarious and at present very little attention is dedicated to providing adequate support, including psychological assistance but also through activities that could keep them busy and give them a sense of purpose. Options for more decent temporary housing – such as refurbishing old dormitories or setting up mobile homes - should be explored.
4. **Discrimination cases during evacuation and support, leading to human rights violations.** CSOs have recorded and tried to address cases of discrimination at all levels - access to evacuation trains, on the roads, in host communities, in local administrations, in the shelters, hostels, and hotels, on the border. LGBT+, national minorities, older people, youth, students from Africa and Asia were denied food or transports. LGBTIQ+ individuals, particularly transgender ones, have found it difficult to find safe spaces to stay as they move westwards or try to leave the country.

Recommendations

Support should be provided at different levels: immediate emergency support (short-term) and long-term support.

1. **The EU should allocate funds for CSOs to support Ukrainian CSOs in Ukraine and abroad. Core support should be a top priority.** Amid the ongoing Russian aggression, many CSOs lost their offices and equipment, and many of them had to relocate to Western Ukraine or abroad. Rents in Western Ukraine went up 30 times and CSOs cannot afford to pay for office space on top of everything else. Local CSOs are also reacting rapidly to ever changing needs: project or activity-based support prevents them from

quickly redirecting their funds where they would be best spent, on top of imposing the extra burden of writing projects on their staff.

2. Ukrainian CSOs need EU support more than ever, not only in financial terms but also in declared **moral support** whenever possible. This would include simple appreciation of their work in these difficult circumstances. They also need **funding to ensure the security of their employees, as well as to protect their mental health and prevent severe burnout and psychological trauma** as a result of ongoing work in combat zones and with refugees.
3. **Support should also entail the provision of communications equipment, such as mobile phones, satellite devices and laptops.** In several cases, Russian soldiers confiscated mobile phones from Ukrainian civilians, blocking mobile communication. While the occupation continues to prevent access to workplaces, computers and phones are of vital importance to restore and maintain lines of communication and carry out important work.
4. **Assistance should be provided in building distribution infrastructure for emergency humanitarian aid,** based on local communities, CSOs and grassroots initiatives. We know from information on the ground that poor centralisation efforts, lack of management and hidden corruption can lead to bad coordination of humanitarian aid in some places. The creation of a special info-platform where Ukrainian CSOs could see the streams of humanitarian aid available and the institutions providing it could help match supply and demand efficiently.
5. **Emergency financial support to CSOs in neighbouring countries helping Ukrainian refugees should be provided.** CSOs in neighbouring countries - both EU and EaP, are taking over most of the work, but their capacities are limited. Emergency financial support should be complemented by the preparation of programmes for providing long-term financial assistance. Particular attention should be paid to supporting CSOs in those neighbouring countries where governments are not eager to help with the conflict for various reasons, such as Georgia.
6. **Support activities aimed at tackling discrimination** against LGBT+, national minorities, older people, youth and students from Africa and Asia, **in evacuation trains, on the roads, in host communities, in local administrations and in shelters or hostels.** There are CSOs on both sides of the border working on the issue and they need

further support. The EU should also coordinate with local authorities in Ukraine to make sure that any kind of discrimination is prevented.

7. **Support the relocation and long-term functioning of CSOs from Ukraine.** Ukrainian CSOs need flexibility in the financial aid they receive from the EU. This is to ensure rapid reallocation and that they are able to cover their ad hoc needs. Constant communication with grantees should be maintained and further instruction updates should be communicated to grant managers to ensure flexibility. **Early warning mechanisms for the disappearance of civil society leaders and activists should be set up and funded.**
8. **Coordinate with Ukrainian CSOs, local authorities and municipalities** to collect information about the situation on the ground in order to better allocate humanitarian aid where necessary. **Support local authorities in setting up a system of collecting statistics on IDPs.**
9. **Allocate more funds to support programmes that provide psychological help** to Ukrainian refugees, especially when this pertains to post-war trauma. This is a repeated recommendation but cannot be underlined enough. Refugees need access to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) specialists and child psychologists. In particular, many children and young people have been affected and will need long-term support and therapy. There should be emergency funding provided and long-term programmes set up to prevent lifelong damage.
10. **Support education and integration activities.** The EU should cooperate with, and support, CSOs in EU and EaP member states, as well as governments, to make sure that substantial resources are allocated to the inclusion of Ukrainian people into local communities. **Activities aiming at integrating newcomers in western regions of Ukraine should be also supported.**
11. **Coordinate and support EU member states efforts**, including **supporting the deployment of humanitarian workers and humanitarian crises experts.** This should be offered even if the concerned, neighbouring EU member states, are not actively asking for it. **Support and fund the provision of expertise and further measures on preventing human trafficking.** Ukrainian refugees are mostly women and children, crossing borders without protection. EU and Ukrainian CSOs should be trained further to recognise and prevent these appalling activities. **Coordinate the provision of medicines, medical material for surgeries and lifesaving equipment.** CSOs

can hardly step in for this task, as many countries have special regulations. Lastly, **encourage EU member states to clarify the legal status of all Ukrainian nationals on their territory.** Some EU countries granted the right to live and work only to Ukrainian refugees that arrived on their territory after the beginning of the war, leaving in a legal grey area Ukrainians who arrived before but have no home to return to.

12. **Allocate special funds for investigative journalism**, focusing on Russian oligarchs who engage in money laundering as well as the politicians who are involved in these activities.
13. **Strengthen strategic communication within the EU.** Currently, European societies are very enthusiastic in their support of Ukraine. Evidence has already emerged of disinformation campaigns aimed at breeding negative sentiment towards Ukrainian refugees. Countering fake news and disinformation from Russia should be a priority. Activities such as promoting evidence-based media campaigns should be funded more extensively. The fight against disinformation should be maximised at the EU level via respective regulations (including social media) and through sanctions, such as the removal of media licences.
14. **Support human rights organisations to document war crimes committed by Russian armed forces in Ukraine.** Activities aimed at collecting information by interviewing witnesses in host countries through local CSOs should be funded and coordinated with the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, which will be supported by the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR).
15. **There is a need for long-term thinking beyond the 2022 horizon. An assessment of the effect of the war on civil society in Ukraine and the EaP region at large should be conducted.** The process of developing long-term priorities should be coordinated with civil society and other donors. Ukrainian civil society will need to be supported on an ongoing basis and with a long-term perspective. Flexible approaches to supporting a major section of Ukrainian civil society no longer residing in Ukraine should be prepared, similar to the approaches that are being developed to support those representatives of Belarusian civil society that find themselves in exile.