UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UKRAINE 2017 PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT

“We carry our tragedy inside”

The 2017 Participatory Assessment Report for refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons in Ukraine.

Acknowledgements

This report is based on dialogues with refugees asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and persons at risk of displacement conducted in Ukraine between February and March 2017. UNHCR is grateful for the extensive involvement and support of UNHCR's partners, local authorities, free legal aid centres, civil society, and international organizations. Finally, UNHCR would like to acknowledge the refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and persons at risk of displacement whose participation demonstrates a commitment to engage pro-actively in decision-making concerning their protection and finding solutions to their needs despite the challenges and difficulties faced in their current situation.

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH:
A UNHCR Protection Associate assesses the needs of a family in a frontline village in Luhansk region. Photo: UNHCR/Petr Shelomovskiy

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Liudmyla Khomenko walks away from her destroyed home near Mariupol, Ukraine, on 27 February 2015. A rocket hit the home, but thankfully, Liudmyla, her husband, daughter, and granddaughter were not there at the time. The family is now staying in a local sanatorium. "I comfort myself with the thought that maybe God directed the shell to hit our empty house," says Liudmyla. "So our house somehow saved our neighbours because they had a child at home. We will live here. There will be peace and everybody will come back," she says with a smile. "Peace will be here and this house will be peace and happiness as before. Everything will be here. We will come back". Photo: UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

Executive Summary

The 2017 Ukraine participatory assessment involved 167 focus group discussions conducted by UNHCR and its partners across the country, supported by local authorities, free legal aid centres, civil society and international organizations, with women, men, girls and boys of different ages and backgrounds. This report presents the specific protection risks and their underlying causes faced by refugees, internally displaced persons (IDP), and persons at risk of displacement. It provides details of their capacities, and their proposed solutions. The previous participatory assessment exercise in Ukraine took place in 2015.

The overarching concerns of participants from all target groups relate to discrimination, administrative and bureaucratic obstacles to the exercise of their rights, and housing. All target groups called for assistance from the Government, international organizations, civil

society, and local communities, to support their integration in a tolerant and inclusive society.

Specific concerns of refugee and asylum seeker participants relate to xenophobia, challenges in accessing asylum procedures and flaws in these procedures, as well as lack of local integration prospects, and a preoccupation with identifying durable solutions. Many feel a sense of hopelessness and exclusion despite having spent years in Ukraine, and a belief that there are few opportunities for resettlement. For those granted refugee status or complementary protection, concerns focus on possibilities for naturalisation and a more stable presence in Ukraine.

For IDPs and persons at risk of displacement, concerns include high rents, lack of employment prospects, and difficulty accessing state subsidies to offset high utility costs in the context of adapting to the challenges of life since displacement, and the realisation that return to their prior place of residence is increasingly unlikely in the near future. They perceive administrative and procedural barriers as the main underlying causes of their problems, together with a lack of political will, coordination and understanding from the authorities. Many IDPs feel discriminated against by Ukrainian society and conclude that the authorities do not make sufficient efforts to ensure that they have full access to their rights.

The participatory assessment presents recommendations for each target group, and by rights group. The findings will influence the design of UNHCR's programmatic responses in Ukraine.

Methodology

The participatory assessment process aims to gather accurate information on specific protection risks faced by refugees, internally displaced persons, and persons at risk of displacement, to analyze the risks jointly with them, to understand their capacities, and to hear their proposed solutions through structured dialogue. The principles of age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming, a rights-based, and a community-based approach guide the process. Participatory assessment ensures that refugees and IDPs are at the centre of decision-making concerning their protection and welfare. Listening directly to the concerns of refugees and IDPs upholds their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives and provides a better understanding of the protection problems they face, enabling a more effective response. The process facilitates meaningful participation through separate discussions with women, men, girls and boys of concern of different ages and backgrounds. It helps mobilize communities to take collective action to enhance their own protection and forms the basis for the implementation of a rights and community-based approach. Participatory assessment is one phase of a comprehensive situation analysis.

The 2017 Ukraine participatory assessment utilized focus group discussions with refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and persons at risk of displacement to listen, gather information, and conduct interactive analysis. Each focus group discussion meeting typically lasted 2-3 hours; facilitators asked participants to give their views on thematic points, with follow up questions directing the flow of conversation to elicit relevant information. The underlying approach encouraged the persons of concern to speak freely, ensuring the prioritisation of qualitative information, allowing an initial analysis of protection risks faced by different groups, as well as identification of capacities and resources within communities to enhance their protection. UNHCR's partners and community leaders identified discussion participants who took part in the assessment voluntarily.

Refugees and asylum seekers

Focus groups: 44 focus group discussions took place during a three-week period in partnership with legal and social partners, as well as relevant government and civil society actors whenever possible. Discussion meetings were structured according to rights group: asylum seekers in the state asylum system; asylum seekers who had

exhausted state procedures; and recognised refugees and complementary protection holders. Discussion groups included male, female, child, mixed gender, and mixed nationality groups; each group structured by theme.

Themes: Dialogues with refugees and asylum seekers facilitated the gathering of qualitative data regarding protection concerns, community resources, decision-making processes, community mobilization, access to procedure, discrimination, social issues, local integration, change in resettlement activities, voluntary repatriation, employment, freedom of movement, and education.

Geographical coverage: UNHCR, together with partners, organised discussion meetings in regions where the majority of persons of concern reside: Kyiv (12), Kharkiv (9), Odesa (14), Zakarpattya (9).

IDPs and persons at risk of displacement

Focus groups: In total, 123 focus group discussions took place, with participants grouped by age, gender, diversity and vulnerability criteria, including persons with disabilities, serious medical conditions, single mothers, orphans, LGBTI, and those living in collective centres. The majority of participants originated from the Donbas, with a small number from Crimea.

Themes: Dialogues with IDPs and persons at risk of displacement facilitated the gathering of qualitative data regarding registration, social payments, documentation, accommodation, employment, freedom of movement, basic needs, peaceful co-existence, participation in decision-making, intentions, access to information, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Geographical coverage: UNHCR, together with partners, organised discussion meetings in 10 regions of Ukraine: Dnipro, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kirovohrad, Kyiv, Odesa, Poltava, and Zaporizhzhia, as well as the government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Lawyers from a UNHCR partner NGO conduct an interview with a refugee from Angola. Photo: UNHCR Ukraine/Veronika Ergasheva

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Protection environment

Law and policy: A number of persons of concern, particularly complementary protection holders, complained about the lack of recognition given to their legal status. In their experience, complementary protection is regarded as a 'second-class' status and does not confer the same rights as refugee recognition, particularly when trying to secure employment or engaging in complicated administrative procedures. Furthermore, the lack of collaboration and communication between different state institutions and bodies exacerbates the challenges for holders of complementary protection to enjoy their rights.

"We don't have problems with integration, can you understand? With people, we don't have problems. We are accepted and we accept. There is a problem with the certainty of our legal status and bureaucracy."

Iraqi man with complementary protection status, Kyiv

Administrative institutions and practice: Many participants expressed concerns regarding documentation, corruption, and long waiting times, sometimes several years, to secure some kind of legal status in Ukraine.

While awaiting decisions from the State Migration Service (SMS), participants informed that they are unable to work legally. Several stated that surrendering identity documents to the SMS during the decision-making procedure was troublesome due to the constant necessity to prove their identity to access services and engage in economic activity.

The asylum seeker certificate, or *dovidka,* issued by the SMS is not an identity-establishing document, meaning that asylum seekers are unable to access basic rights such as registering a birth or buying train tickets. This creates a great deal of stress and acts as a push factor to consider onward displacement.

For complementary protection holders, the renewal of their status is uncertain after the initial five-year validity period. This affects their ability to plan, to establish and maintain relationships in Ukraine and with family abroad, access long-term employment, or look for other employment opportunities elsewhere in the country due to restrictive residency registration requirements.

"Applying for Ukrainian citizenship; it's a very long procedure, with corruption."

Male discussion participant, Odesa

"Being here we are ready to share the same troubles that Ukrainian people face at the present time. We aren't afraid of the hardships. But we are nothing without the document"

Discussion participant, Odesa

"If we have refugee status or complementary protection, we can work and earn much more. 80 per cent of Afghans will solve their problems if they have 'normal' documents!"

Afghan man, Odesa

Protection processes and documentation

Access to and quality of status determination procedures: Regarding asylum procedures, the participants noted particular challenges in securing interpretation support for their dealings with the SMS. A number of participants raised the problem of bribe payments to receive refugee status and, to a lesser extent, for the asylum seeker *dovidka*. Participants suggested the refusal or inability to pay bribes as an explanation for high rejection rates for persons of concern coming from countries with protracted conflicts, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria.

Violence and exploitation

Protection from crime: Many participants recounted security incidents linked to xenophobia; they reported threats, beatings, harassment, intimidation and lack of protection from the authorities, particularly the police. Participants described their impressions that as foreigners they are unable to access protection or assistance, consequently they do not bother to report harassment or violent incidents. Such underreporting to the authorities conceals the real extent and severity of many acts of aggression towards asylum seekers and refugees.

"I was harassed by a Ukrainian in Troyeshchina, but even if I called to police, what would it solve? It won`t help. We are neglected here."

Refugee woman, Kyiv

"I was working hard for three weeks, but they did not pay me and I could do nothing."

Refugee woman, Kyiv

Basic needs and essential services

Female participants highlighted their dependence on financial assistance from UNHCR to meet basic monthly needs for families. They mentioned having to prioritise between covering the costs of rent, food and education, as there is rarely enough money to meet all minimum needs. Most identified rent as the greatest cost burden and complained about the lack of state rental assistance.

Access to healthcare: Some groups highlighted language barriers and opportunistic behaviour by medical practitioners who conduct unnecessary medical interventions to levy additional and unnecessary charges. Others mentioned illicit charges by medical practitioners for services and care that should be free of charge, impeding access to healthcare.

Access to education: A number of participants complained of corruption in schools, as well as discrimination towards their children, both from staff and students. Youths face difficulties with guidance counselling and access to higher education because of limited options: only technical or professional colleges with a limited number of specialties are available to them. Most child participants said that their families do not have enough money to enable them to attend extra-curricular activities or join school trips, while some young participants complained of the lack of access to basic secondary education. Several mentioned facing racist abuse at school and feelings of isolation and stress.

"I am often called "nigger" or "churka", but I pretend that I do not hear that. There is no one to help me. That's why I don't want to go to school".

Boy, aged 9, Kyiv

Community empowerment and self-reliance

Community mobilisation: Language barriers are a challenge for many participants. The lack of language ability leads to isolation from the local community, and limits awareness of their rights and ability to access services, particularly among female participants. Women also highlighted difficulties attending language classes due to family responsibilities at times when classes are held. In some cases, they cannot reach teaching centres because they live too far away, or for cultural or security reasons they need to be accompanied by a male relative. Some reported that it is more practical for them to learn Russian instead of Ukrainian; however, many recognized the need and confirmed their willingness to learn Ukrainian given that it is the official language.

Peaceful coexistence with local communities: One group observed that their physical, religious and cultural differences made acceptance of them by the local community difficult amid preconceptions of Muslims as religious extremists, of having few skills or education to offer, and being prone to criminality. Participants from non-CIS countries were the most prone to facing overt discrimination and harassment.

Self-reliance and livelihoods: Self-reliance and access to livelihood opportunities has proven extremely complicated for persons who have exhausted national asylum procedures. They depend on irregular work to survive, placing them at risk of extortion from the police and abuse of their rights by employers. Due to lack of security, many are compelled to work in menial positions despite having education, skills, and experience that could give them access better opportunities if granted recognition.

A number of participants mentioned that employers frequently withhold payment due to the unregulated nature of their employment and their inability to approach the authorities to report employers, furthering their vulnerability to exploitation. Typically, the type of work available is physically demanding, poorly paid, and unpredictable. The underlying economic situation in Ukraine has affected employment prospects; few jobs and high competition for positions means wages are low, and employers offer unfavourable conditions.

While feedback from many discussions on livelihoods described various difficulties and negative experiences, there were a few positive experiences. One female participant with complementary protection status has been able to open her own business, register with the authorities as a private entrepreneur, and obtain a driving licence. However, her case remained an exception to the rule.

"Here we feel ourselves like we are not welcomed. We can't make friends. It is so difficult".

Somali man, Bila Tserkva

"I've lived here and would be able to integrate here in Ukraine, but when I am walking around with my 3-year-old son and young mothers say to their children: 'look what a black boy', I want to cry, because I understand that my child will always face discrimination and will be offended. He does not have future here."

Female Sudanese asylum seeker, Odesa

"I have a bachelor's degree in mathematics and physics, I would like to continue, but I need to support my family, as my parents are very sick and my younger brothers and sisters need a breadwinner. So, I have to work instead of studying."

Afghan woman, aged 25, Kyive

Durable solutions

Comprehensive solutions strategy: For those who have exhausted national asylum procedures but still feel they have a claim for refugee status, or good reason to remain in Ukraine, the situation is particularly difficult. They have restricted access to medical care due to lack of identity papers and are unable to open bank accounts. Furthermore, their prospects for regularising their status in Ukraine are slight, as SMS regularly rejects cases from applicants with *sur place* claims, despite ongoing conflicts in countries of origin. Asylum seekers and refugees identified resettlement as the most suitable durable solution, particularly for those originating from Africa, who face acute discrimination and racism.

Potential for integration: Recognised refugees stated that there is limited access to citizenship in practice. For other persons of concern, there is uncertainty regarding the renewal of their complementary protection status at the end of its five-year validity, as well as lack of access to Ukrainian citizenship. Some participants also highlighted difficulties related to residency registration. Despite these challenges, some groups of Afghan and Syrian refugees explained that they were able to find work and support themselves and their families. Nonetheless, procedures to regularise their status and participate in the formal economy are bureaucratic; information is hard to come by and they face language barriers, which in turn diminish their resolve to seek local integration. Those with complementary protection status, and those who had established families and lasting connections in Ukraine, were frustrated by the bureaucratic process preventing them from applying for a more durable legal status. The requirement to renounce their complementary protection, leave the country, reapply for entry, and to then request citizenship, based on uncertain outcomes, was most often cited as a significant impediment to considering local integration as a durable solution.

"What will happen when the document will expire? They will take the status from me, or again will consider my case for more than one year and then maybe even rejected in the end? How can I start any business now? I do not have a right to apply for citizenship."

Iraqi man with complementary protection status, Kyiv

Recommendations for refugees and asylum seekers

- to the Government of Ukraine:

1. Ensure access to a quality interpretation at all stages of the asylum procedure;
2. Remove fines imposed for delays renewing the documentation of asylum seekers or persons granted protection, or replace it with a different sanction that will not prevent them from approaching the SMS in order to regularize their migration status;
3. Provide asylum seekers with documentation enabling them to properly register their children born in Ukraine;
4. Ensure that state service providers and the banking sector are sensitized about asylum documents issued by the SMS and the legal rights of document holders;
5. Provide access to Ukrainian language classes from the moment an asylum seeker registers with the SMS;
6. Establish a conversion system enabling recognition of refugee's qualifications obtained outside Ukraine;
7. Introduce simplified procedures and quotas for children with refugee or complementary protection status to pass Ukrainian state entry/exit exams (ZNO).

- to UNHCR and NGO partners:

8. Reintroduce the small business grants program, provide alternative locations and times for language classes, and enhance methodological materials;
9. Assist persons, in particular those who have proper legal status in Ukraine, through capacity building to enable them to play a role in advocacy (e.g. developing advocacy tools, such as road maps), and fundraising (including crowdfunding from compatriots living in the European Union or United States, and private donors);
10. Support the SMS in the creation and functioning of integration centres facilitating meetings, information exchange, sharing of common concerns, and help finding work and becoming economically self-sufficient; municipal authorities should be involved in the process;
11. Launch inclusive initiatives open to both Ukrainians and refugees, e.g. vocational courses, combined English/Russian language classes, cafeterias where refugees can cook with a common eating space for Ukrainians and refugees, and other working platforms or open spaces available for both refugees and Ukrainians;
12. Establish community mobilisation and liaison channels to better represent and work with the authorities, the police, and the SMS improving refugees and asylum seekers access to their rights. This is based on observations during the participatory

assessment of some highly organised groups that are well-structured and prepared for discussions;

13. Together with other international stakeholders, to advocate for inclusion of tolerance lessons in methodological and educational materials in kindergartens and schools;
14. Review the possibilities to re-introduce the “Dafi” scholarship program in support of higher education for refugees.

A UNHCR staff member interviews a young mother in the village of Heorhiivka in the non-governmental area of Luhansk region, heavily damaged by fighting in 2014. UNHCR helped repair hundreds of damaged buildings in the region. Photo: UNHCR/Petr Shelomovskiy

IDPs and Persons at Risk of Displacement

Protection environment

Administrative institutions and practice: Regarding pensions and social assistance, participants raised the unpredictability of verification exercises undertaken by the authorities as a particular challenge. Verification takes place during working hours, which is inconvenient for working IDPs, especially since the procedure requires the presence of all family members. Some stopped receiving the IDP allowance due to verification, or reported delays of up to 6 months. In addition, they expressed frustration at the lack of harmonisation between different verification offices, leading to difficulties with re-registration, delays in receiving social assistance payments, refusal by certain authorities to register IDP children born in displacement, and regional inconsistencies in procedures and physical verification. Participants felt that changes over the years to the registration

process, as well as the process of issuing social assistance and pension payments, have had a negative impact on IDPs. The situation of vulnerable persons is not adequately considered, and there is a lack of cultural sensitivity in considering the needs of minority groups such as Roma.

Inconsistencies in the application of relevant laws and by-laws by region creates confusion and restricts access to services. IDPs living in villages in Mariinsky district, Donetsk region, stated that they were unable to register as displaced persons, as technically they remain within the boundaries of their villages. Similarly, some persons displaced from settlements not listed under Cabinet of Ministers Order no.1085-r are unable to claim assistance, since the authorities consider that their place of origin is outside the conflict-affected area.

"I can compare our current lives with the life in a deportation settlement back in the Soviet Union, as on a monthly basis we have to appear in front of authorities to confirm we are still here. We are being treated as the prisoners of Ukraine."

Man, aged 65, displaced to Kharkiv from Donetsk

Access to legal assistance and legal remedies: There is generally a low level of awareness among IDPs about their rights and entitlements. Many IDPs express interest in accessing free legal aid and assistance on a range of issues including suspension of pensions and social assistance, targeted assistance for IDPs, inheritance, and housing, land and property. Due to various amendments to the legal framework on internal displacement, there is considerable confusion on where to seek information and how to understand entitlements and procedures for reinstating pensions and social assistance. Discussions highlighted the lack of clear information on procedures on the part of the Department of Social Protection, Oschadbank and the state pension fund, as well as the lack of coordination between different government agencies.

"It is written in the Constitution that the state should protect us as its citizens, but we feel like nobody needs us here. Though who else if not the state should provide us with compensation for destroyed houses due to the military actions?"

Man, aged 53, from Stanytsia Luhanska

"Every Department of Social Policy functions as per its own rules, no system, everywhere is a mess."

IDP living in Kyiv

Protection processes and documentation

Civil registration and civil status documentation: Certain categories of persons of concern have restricted access to civil documentation. Besides IDPs from Crimea, this concern particularly affects Roma IDPs who experience discrimination when they try to reach out the state services. When they perceive bias, they prefer to give up on resolving their problems.

Violence and exploitation

Protection from the effects of armed conflict: IDPs and persons at risk of internal displacement living near the line of contact complain about the lack of access to reliable information. Information is shared through interactions with friends, neighbours, social media, TV, NGOs, volunteers, and the Department of Social Protection. Some Roma IDPs cannot read or write, limiting their access to information. Both IDPs and host communities living near the line of contact have difficulty accessing government services, such as medical assistance, and livelihoods, continuing to depend on social payments, pensions, and humanitarian assistance. The major concern of those living near the line of contact remains safety and security. They also cite psychological pressure caused by the continued state of uncertainty.

Participants mentioned the worrying tendency of civilian homes used for military purposes. During use by the military, either fighting or the occupying military personnel inflict damage to the property. The stationing of military personnel and weapons in residential areas and within civilian homes places the civilian population at risk during fighting. Participants also informed that they lack remedies for receiving compensation for utility costs incurred by the military during occupation of their homes. While some communities mobilize themselves against the military presence, it is not possible in all areas.

Crossing checkpoints is a long and expensive journey during which corruption is prevalent, including on the government-controlled side of the line of contact. The conditions at checkpoints are unsatisfactory and the treatment of civilians by border and customs officials has raised as concerns. Participants mentioned questioning by the State

Security Service (SBU) on their reasons for leaving Donbas, on military interventions, or on their personal connections with de facto authorities. One group noted that the situation did improve with the presence of staff from international organizations, such as UNHCR or OSCE. It is notably more difficult for men and adolescent boys to cross checkpoints.

"There is no hope to return … but even if we did, all the territory is mined, we are afraid for our children to return, we cannot risk their lives."

Woman, aged 25, displaced from Makiivka to Kharkiv

Risk of SGBV: The level of engagement on the topic varied; many women indicate acceptance of violence, including SGBV, as "normal", indicating acquired helplessness in the face of SGBV. SGBV remains a sensitive topic for discussion, with participants of some groups refusing to discuss the issue altogether. Victim-blaming attitudes prevail among communities. Women from settlements near the line of contact informed that they are unaware of where to seek help in situations of domestic or sexual violence. Participants reported incidents of verbal and physical harassment of women and aggressive behaviour towards children by military personnel. Women and children residing in areas near the line of contact adhere to self-imposed curfews.

Psychological trauma, inactivity, unemployment, and uncertainty engendered by the conflict are triggers for alcohol abuse among military and civilians, often resulting in increased domestic violence, as mentioned by female participants.

Child protection: Residents living near the line of contact underlined that their children have limited access to education due to the security situation and damaged school buildings. For instance, a school in Krasnohorivka hosts children and teaching staff of four other schools due to severe damage sustained by the other schools. Some participants complained about bullying of their children due to their displacement, or place of origin. Many Roma children did not go to kindergarten or school for fear of beatings, lack of resources to buy clothing, or other school expenses. Participants reported that local kindergartens in Kyiv lack places for IDP children.

"There are children and youngsters who need to grow up not knowing what the war is about. But for us, it is already entrenched in our souls, in our bodies, we live it. We carry our tragedy inside."

Woman, aged 50, displaced from Luhansk to Kharkiv

Basic needs and essential services

Access to reproductive health and HIV services: Participants stated that there has been a "dramatic" rise in sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy among adolescents. Participants informed that having "relations with the military" could improve their security.

Services for persons with specific needs: IDPs with disabilities or of Roma, or Crimean Tatar origin complained of experiencing discrimination based on their disability, ethnic, or religious background. Displaced LGBTI persons say that aggression and assaults are more prevalent in their home regions, especially in Crimea. They feel safer in Kyiv. A transgender couple complained about the inability to change their names in any documents in accordance with their gender identity, thereby exposing them to significant protection risks.

Persons with specific needs and elderly participants described difficulties experienced in accessing financial services, explaining that they have to rely on others to withdraw money on their behalf. IDPs from Crimea indicated that, in some instances, they are considered non-resident in their place of displacement and have limited access to government or banking services.

"We are constantly being told that we are given more assistance than any other group in Ukraine, that the government and the NGOs are constantly providing us with humanitarian aid, but where is it? Until quite recently my children had to skip school because they had nothing to wear. Only thanks to UNHCR they now have winter jackets and boots and can continue their education. I am illiterate, but I want a future for my children. This is why we left and came here: to raise our children in peace and give them opportunities in life."

Roma woman, aged 35, displaced from Donetsk to Merefa

Shelter and infrastructure: Participants indicated that rented homes are often overcrowded, with little or no housing available for large families, and utility costs are high. Bureaucratic obstacles combined with lack of cooperation from property owners complicates access to subsidies. Participants mentioned that, in addition, property owners are often unhappy with verification visits. Roma IDPs experience discrimination in finding housing; many live in dilapidated shelters in rural areas with no facilities, and remain at the mercy of the few property owners willing to rent to them.

The lack of sustainable solutions for IDPs living in collective centres was highlighted, many expressing fears of eviction. Conditions in collective centres are generally poor. Discussion participants in Schastia and Stanytsia Luhanska complained that rents are higher for IDPs than for locals, while no mortgages or loans are available, and there are no state social housing programmes.

"We meet potential landlords for renting an apartment; landlords look into the passport to see a propiska and if it is from Donbas, they won't rent. Some landlords don't want us to even bother, they write ads that say: 'we don't rent out our apartments to separatists.'"

IDPs from Donetsk

Access to healthcare: Residents living near the line of contact have limited access to medical services due to damage to medical infrastructure and lack of pharmacies. Elderly IDPs and others with serious medical conditions explained that they must travel long distances to attend medical appointments and to buy medication. IDPs with disabilities said that discounted medicine is not effective and that medication was their second priority after housing. IDPs in Mariupol stated that they lost their disability status because they could not undergo the required medical examinations in time.

"Before the conflict I got seriously sick. During the past three years, I have twice had surgery in hospital and now I have to undergo regular check-ups with the doctor who treated me. Unfortunately, I cannot be examined in Stanytsia Hospital as they do not possess the required equipment nor specialized doctors. The hospital had to move to the town of Kreminna where I cannot go, as it is too far and too expensive for me. So I have to live cutting all my expenses just to buy the medicine."

Woman, aged 65, from Stanytsia Luhanska

Access to education: Inability of IDPs to contribute to school needs, allowing children to participate in school life and excursions, leads to tensions between IDPs and locals. Some children expressed difficulties adapting, while others complained of bullying. Parents noted that children suffer the consequences of the conflict and need psychological counselling. To mitigate these challenges, parents try to avoid changing their place of residence so as not to increase children's stress levels. School certificates issued by the de facto authorities are not recognised in Kyiv. Participants mentioned the transfer of students from Crimea, and the provision of resources for students displaced from Donbas and Crimea as positive developments.

"My life now passes in a straight line: from my university to the apartment I rent. The soldiers live nearby; I try to avoid them. I have no internet, no money to pay for it. The only entertainment is my guitar. I am learning to play on my own, cannot afford a teacher. There is nowhere to go out here except the park."

Student, aged 19, displaced from Luhansk to Starobilsk University

Community empowerment and self-reliance

Community mobilisation: Many participants noted that local authorities rarely include IDPs in decision-making processes, particularly in larger towns.

Peaceful co-existence with local communities: Some participants complained of marginalization or isolation from host communities and expressed fear of being blamed for the conflict.

"Local children hate our kids because their relatives had been mobilized to the Army and were wounded or killed.

"We used to tell others that we are from Dagestan so that others talk to us as normal people. Since they know that we are Roma from Donetsk, I am afraid to walk with my children freely outside in the yard. Local children call my children with bad words and beat them; they call us 'dirty refugees'".

Roma IDP from Donetsk living in Kyiv

Self-reliance and livelihoods: Some participants reported discrimination when searching for work because of their IDP status. Some residents of towns in Donetsk region became unemployed following damage to a gas pipeline in 2014, leading to the closure of local businesses. The conflict has left factories destroyed or idle. Farming and gardening are an option for many IDPs; however, the presence of explosive remnants of war (ERW) greatly restricts these activities. Residents of some villages near the line contact stated that they could not travel for work due to self-imposed curfews. Self-employed IDPs in Kherson and Kropivnitskiy explained the difficulties in launching a new business or finding jobs corresponding to their previous work experience and education. IDPs also informed that it is difficult to find employment, as many employers consider them as temporary residents, preferring to give jobs to locals. Roma IDPs experience discrimination when seeking employment.

Women with children have particular difficulty working due to lack of childcare facilities or family networks. Women complained that they are confined to housekeeping and child caring.

"Employment is the greatest challenge; young girls with higher education work as cleaning ladies here. We are ready for any job, but to find a job here at my age is not possible."

Woman, aged 53, Schastia

Durable solutions

To date, the Government has still not adopted a comprehensive durable solutions strategy for IDPs. All participants commented on the state of uncertainty about their future, causing a great deal of stress three years after the start of the conflict. Even though some expressed a will to integrate locally, the lack of initiatives from the Government in support of integration creates tensions with local communities who consider the presence of IDPs as temporary. This particularly affects IDP's access to housing, employment, and education.

"We appreciate any help we are given; we cannot survive now without it. You have no idea how hard it is to ask for something when not so long ago you had it all: house, job, family… all we have left now are our memories and hopes. Lately it has become very difficult to live here as many organizations think the needy ones are only in Donetsk and Luhansk regions"

Woman, aged 44, displaced from Luhansk to Synelnykove, Dnipropetrovsk region

Recommendations for internally displaced persons and persons at risk of displacement

- to the Government of Ukraine:

1. Adopt a pragmatic and dynamic approach for the inclusion of conflict-affected settlements in the list of settlements identified in decree no. 1085-r, establishing a definition and clear criteria for inclusion, and adding the possibility to provide different forms of evidence proving that the conflict affects specific locations. There should be a possibility to revise the list without amending the decree itself;
2. Ensure the protection of civilians and civilian settlements from the consequences of fighting, shelling, and other conflict-related hazards by restricting the use of civilian homes for military purposes and locating military personnel and equipment away from residential areas and public spaces. In parallel, a mechanism must be established to identify places that have been expropriated for military purposes, including the right to compensation for damage caused by and utility costs incurred during military occupation, adding the possibility of providing different types of evidence in support of claims;
3. Establish an effective complaint mechanism to address allegations of misbehaviour by military personnel near the line of contact;
4. Clearly and urgently mark all areas contaminated with explosive remnants of war and advocate with local civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) units for the removal of ERW and organize training on personal security for residents of contaminated areas (including training on mine awareness for children and adults);
5. Remove limitations on transporting goods and personal belongings across the line of contact;
6. Restore bus and train connections to and from the non-government controlled areas; improve public transport connections between settlements near the line of contact;
7. Resume the payment of pensions to residents of the non-government controlled areas by introducing a mechanism allowing them to receive pensions in the non-government controlled areas without the need for IDP registration, de-linking pension payments from IDP registration by amending Cabinet of Ministers Resolution nos. 365, 505, 637, and any other relevant normative acts;
8. Ensure full access to pensions for IDPs who choose to integrate and give up their IDP status;

9. Ensure common approaches in the verification process for IDPs and other citizens benefiting from different types of social assistance; personal data protection issues should be taken into account;
10. Introduce administrative procedures allowing residents of Crimea and the non-government controlled areas to receive civil documentation, including those who are unable to travel to government-controlled areas;
11. Ensure that IDPs and residents of Crimea and the non-government controlled areas have equal and non-discriminatory access to biometric passports;
12. Ensure that IDPs have access to subsidies for utility charges;
13. Provide access to free legal aid in remote locations and settlements near the line of contact, and at checkpoints on the line of contact;
14. Create more places in kindergartens and schools in locations with large IDP communities and allocate money for IDP children from local budgets;
15. Extend the right to vote in local elections to IDPs;
16. Adopt and implement a comprehensive solutions strategy for IDPs.

- to International organizations and NGOs:

17. Pursue awareness-raising efforts on SGBV and its consequences on women, men, and their communities, and the need to address psychological trauma of those who continuously experience violence. A specific emphasis should be placed on school and college students, teenage girls and boys, as well as military personnel near the line of contact;
18. Pursue advocacy efforts with the Ministry of Social Policy, with Oschadbank, with the pension fund for improved and speedy processing of the (re-)registration processes, equal interpretation and application of the relevant law, and improved IDP reception conditions, especially those with specific needs;
19. Advocate for Roma mediators to work with regional social services, to ensure access to social assistance and pension payments, and civil documentation by providing information on how and where to apply;
20. Advocate with the Government to establish housing policies addressing the major concerns of IDPs, including social housing for vulnerable IDPs, and compensation for destroyed and damaged homes;
21. Pursue advocacy efforts for improved access to civil documentation, and regularizing housing, land and property documentation for IDPs;
22. Improve dissemination of useful information for IDPs at checkpoints on the line of contact, especially on legal and other types of assistance, changes to legislation affecting their lives in displacement, and public transportation schedules;

23. Advocate with international and national financial institutions to create affordable loan programs for vulnerable persons, including IDPs in need of permanent housing;
24. Continue capacity-building of free legal aid centres across through training and technical assistance;
25. Advocate for improved access to medical services, including support for mobile medical teams with specialized doctors, in locations near the line of contact;
26. Promote tolerance and diversity by creating conditions conducive for social cohesion, including through opening community centres and holding social events aimed at the local population and IDPs.

Halyna, 79, signs paperwork to receive coal in the village of Luhanske, Donetsk region. In mid-January 2017, UNHCR visited villages near the line of contact in eastern Ukraine to deliver coal to people trying to get through winter with no money or heating and few winter clothes. Many towns are portraits of desolation, with desperate people relying on fuel handouts to survive the long harsh winter. Photo: UNHCR/Evgeny Maloletka

Conclusions

Refugees and asylum seekers and seek recognition of their legal status and documentation in order to allow them to enjoy their rights and engage in local integration. Providing legal support is a critical aspect of the process, as is continued advocacy with the authorities to address xenophobia, the underlying cause of many of the problems faced by participants. Opportunities exist to mobilise communities, encourage self-reliance, and support persons of concern in developing livelihood strategies. IDPs perceive administrative and procedural barriers as the main underlying causes of their problems, together with a lack of political will, coordination and understanding from the authorities. While IDPs face many of the same problems as their host communities, those communities also often discriminate against them. Three years since the beginning of the conflict, most IDPs who participated in the focus group discussions consider themselves to have settled in their places of displacement. Nevertheless, IDPs describe the feeling of stability as superficial; they face ongoing challenges to find durable livelihood and housing solutions, access government services, and to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Our Work

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

A world where every person forced to flee can build a better future.

OUR FUNDAMENTAL FOCUS

Everything we do helps protect people forced to flee their homes.

WHO WE ARE

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

WHAT WE DO

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, leads international action to protect people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. We deliver life-saving assistance like shelter, food and water, help safeguard fundamental human rights, and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place to call home where they can build a better future. We also work to ensure that stateless people are granted a nationality.

WHY WE MATTER

Every year, millions of men, women and children are forced to flee their homes to escape conflict and persecution. We are the world's leading organisation dedicated to supporting people forced to flee and those deprived of a nationality. We are in the field in over 125 countries, using our expertise to protect and care for nearly 64 million people.

UKRAINE
2017 PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT

The 2017 Participatory Assessment Report for refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons in Ukraine.

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