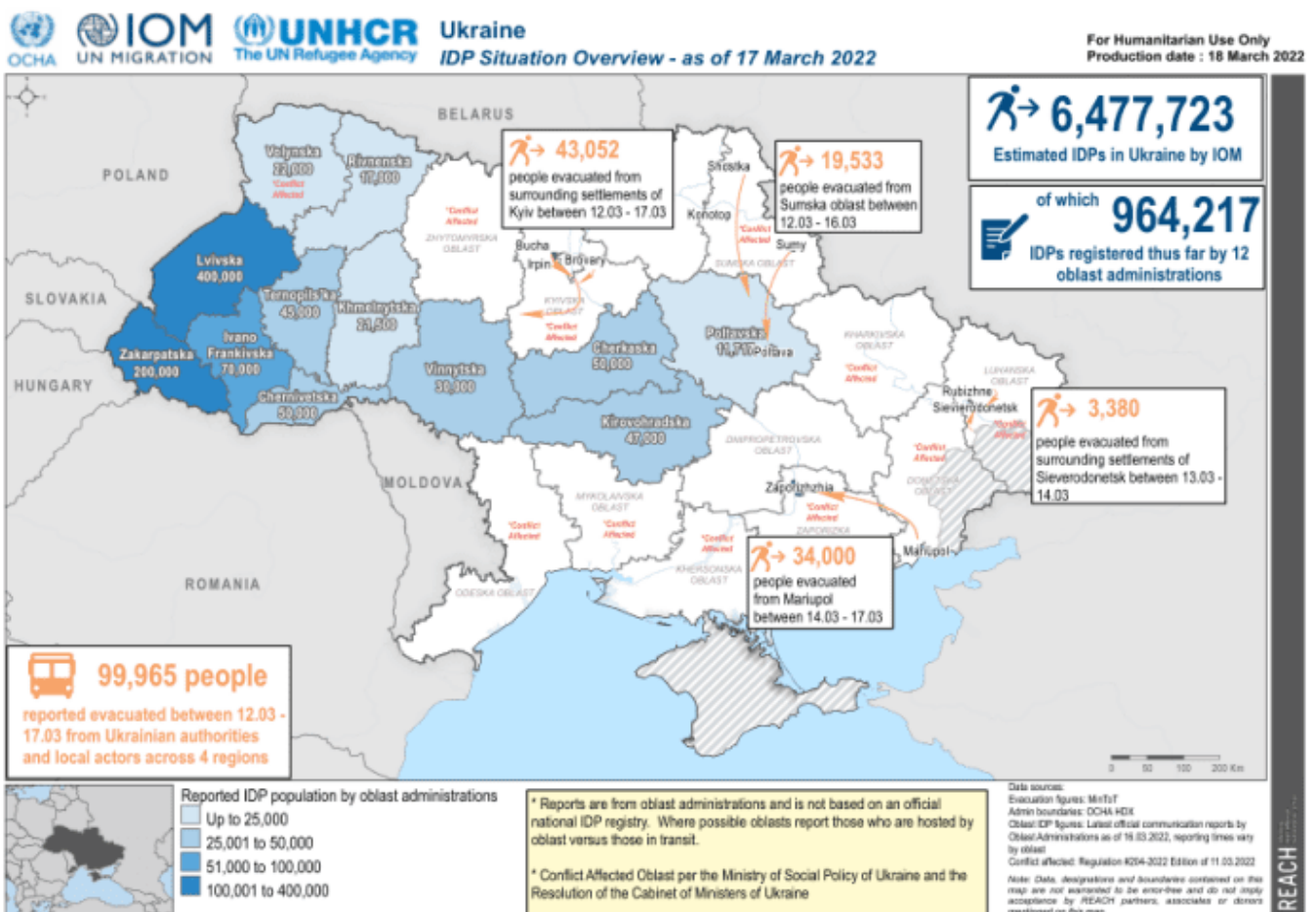


Briefing to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs on the conflict in Ukraine

Current Context

- Ukraine has a population of just over 43 million people of which one quarter namely women and children are now on the move;
- Over 3.5 million people have left Ukraine, including 127,000 third country nationals, seeking safety either in a neighbouring country or beyond;
- Inside Ukraine, the scale of the conflict and the number of attacks in urban areas has resulted in 6.5 million people internally displaced, with numbers expected to rise to 8 million by end of March;
- 12 million people are stranded unable to leave due to security risks, destruction of bridges & roads, lack of resources or lack of information on where to find safety & accommodation;
- Cross-border movement has slowed with numbers coming out of Ukraine down from approximately 100,000/day to around 45,000/day;



Key Messages

The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure (hospitals, shops, schools) must be priority number one – not just for humanitarians but for political and military actors also. Getting humanitarian assistance to those who need it urgently is a necessity. In order to do so, international humanitarian law must be upheld, guaranteeing civilians and humanitarian agencies the safety they need to distribute and receive assistance.

Safe, unimpeded access to all areas is a necessity to reach vulnerable civilians trapped without services. 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 in for those who remain.

The compassion, generosity and solidarity of Ukraine's neighbours who are taking in those seeking safety is notable. It is important that this solidarity is extended without any discrimination. All people, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or culture must be afforded the same treatment and protection.

Further politicisation of humanitarian assistance must be avoided. This is a very complex context, with governments, public, media and private sector, all taking public and strong side in the war. This has/will have an impact on how humanitarian agencies operate and/or are perceived to operate as neutral or non-neutral actors.

The EU will have to mobilise major resources to assist these member countries in coping with a very different type of refugee, with very different and enhanced humanitarian needs, especially in the neighbouring EU countries – Poland, Romania, Hungary, Moldova and Slovakia.

The Ukraine crisis is very dynamic, uncertain and fast moving. Humanitarian operations and funding needs to be flexible in order to be able to shift operations to different activities, sectors and/or geographic areas within Ukraine as well as into the EU and Moldova, as needed.

One month into this crisis and the conflict has set back the country economically, socially and infrastructural by at least 20 to 30 years. Government of Ukraine estimates suggest that at least \$100 billion worth of infrastructure, buildings, roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, and other physical assets have been destroyed. The war has caused 50% of Ukrainian businesses to shut down completely, while the other half is forced to operate well below its capacity. If the war deepens and protracts further, up to 90% of the population of Ukraine could be facing poverty and vulnerability to poverty.

The impact of this crisis goes far beyond Ukraine and will impact on those already dependent on humanitarian assistance and those struggling in extreme poverty and hunger across the world. Everything possible must be done to avert a catastrophic hunger crisis and the collapse of the global food system.

We cannot however think of the Ukraine crisis as a unique and separate event. The conflict in Ukraine brings unprecedented political, economic, social and humanitarian consequences for Europe. However, the global collective response cannot be Ukraine 'instead of' but 'as well as....' the many other crises like Afghanistan, Syria and the Horn of Africa, which require urgent and sustained political and humanitarian attention.

The humanitarian response inside Ukraine – what we know

Collective Centres

Inside Ukraine, internally displaced people (IDPs) are being supported through locally civil and administrative efforts at town and city level in collective centres already established throughout central and western Ukraine. These collective centres are located in community halls, kindergarten schools, elementary schools, clinics and warehouses. The collective centres can accommodate anything from 20 people up to 500, depending on location and available resources.

What is clear is that up to recently, IDPs were passing through these collective centres en route to somewhere else, spending no more than a night or two and this is now changing. Fewer Ukrainians are currently crossing borders or heading to border areas and are now more inclined to stop and take refuge where they can and hope they don't have

to go too far west as they want to return to the east as soon as practically possible. As such, these collective centres are taking on a less transit profile and more permanent in nature, thus requiring significant support and assistance, in the short and medium term. Up to now the collective centres are relying on the generosity of local business, volunteered and locally arranged self-help groups, who are poorly resourced, poorly organised, poorly coordinated and made up of volunteers, in their entirety, so difficult to see how this can be sustained and maintained in its present guise.

As the situation continues to evolve, humanitarian assistance inside Ukraine is badly needed, to reach those who do not have the means to move and who are fully dependent on available support.

Supporting civil society movements and local community organisations is essential. These self-help groups need training and support to increase capacity, extend their reach and scale and ensure they are included in coordination systems.

Authorities local, regional and national in Ukraine – local, regional and national also require training and sensitization around humanitarian principles and practice. There is a risk of confusion between military and humanitarian roles and operations, and a very real threat of “diversion of humanitarian aid” as Ukraine is on a full war footing and under martial law.

The changing profile of those in need of humanitarian assistance

The majority of those who have left Ukraine so far have some resources and connections, in either that neighbouring country or in a country close by. This will not be the same with subsequent movements of people as the conflict evolves. Those who have stayed up to now are those without the means to move quickly. They will have few resources to look after themselves, will have no travel documents, and unlikely to have been out of the country before, will be typically much older in profile and will not want to travel far from the border they cross. This will bring significantly hardship and stress on the receiving countries capacity to facilitate them, house them, feed them and take care of them.

Especially in the neighbouring EU countries – Poland, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, the EU will have to mobilise major resources to assist these member countries in coping with a very different type of refugee, with very different and enhanced humanitarian needs. Moldova, as one of Europe’s poorest countries, requires extensive support to assist Ukrainians seeking safety.

There remains great uncertainty in terms of what happens next and how this will affect the flow of aid into Ukraine and the friendly neighbouring countries. To date all neighbouring countries receiving refugees have been doing so in a major spirit of comradeship, solidarity, humanity, cooperation and kinship. However, they are working round the clock and supported by both state apparatus – civil defence, police, fire brigade, medical teams, as well as a volunteer corps drawn from the public, local businesses, churches, schools and universities. This can only be maintained and sustained for a short while, as long as there are not major spikes in numbers, which would easily overwhelm the system.

The protection of people inside and outside the country

Children

The suffering of 7.5 million children in Ukraine is inexcusable. They must be protected from harm. Under no circumstances should children be recruited or used in armed conflict, but this is a real risk where there is a narrative encouraging children and youth taking weapon and acting as defenders of the "freedom". A Ukrainian child has become a refugee almost every single second of the war. More than 1.5 million children have now fled Ukraine. Unaccompanied and separated children must be prioritised and specialist services funded and prioritised. Children without parental care are at a heightened risk of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Women and Girls

The consequences of the conflict are visible on our screens as we witness the upheaval to the lives and livelihoods of Ukraine’s women and girls. The conflict puts women and girls at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, especially those who are refugees or otherwise displaced from their homes. NGO and lobby groups have warned that Ukrainian citizens fleeing the conflict in their country are at “acute risk of exploitation” by human traffickers. This risk requires mitigation and protection measures at all host borders and in host countries, including the central registration and vetting of all civilian volunteer first line responders.

The collapse of the health system, as well as the fear associated with targeting of hospitals, water systems and food supplies, has created a crisis within a crisis. It is essential that the health, rights and dignity of women and girls be safeguarded. This includes their right to give birth safely and to live free from violence.

Why this conflict will affect food supplies globally

The conflict in Ukraine is a game changer, a catastrophe that is already having visceral effects across the world. The global ramifications have unfolded rapidly and will be amplified each day that the war continues, but perhaps the most immediate impact of the war, outside of Ukraine itself, is on the world's food security. The conflict will have consequences on food security for many countries, especially for low-income food import dependent countries. Ukraine is a vital source of grains.

Ukraine and Russia account for 30% of global wheat exports, 20% of global maize exports, and 76% of sunflower oil supplies, so any disruption in production or supply could drive prices up, affecting millions already hard-hit by high food inflation in their own countries. The conflict has brought shipments from Ukraine to a halt and paused Russian grain deals, amidst uncertainty around sanctions. An estimated 13.5 million tons of wheat and 16 million tons of maize are frozen in the two countries – 23 and 43 percent of their expected exports in 2021/22.

World Food Programme buys more than half its wheat from Ukraine. WFP had already warned that 2022 would be a year of catastrophic hunger, with 44 million people in 38 countries teetering on the edge of famine. Ukraine, which was the source of half of the entire wheat stocks for the World Food Programme last year, has now announced a ban on the export of grains, along with sugar, salt, and meat. As well as exporting a significant proportion of the world's wheat, over the past ten years Ukraine has become WFP's biggest supplier of foods such as sunflower oil.

Russia, which has now announced a ban on the export of fertiliser, normally supplies 13% of the world's fertilisers and produces an even greater amount of the critical inputs for them; without fertilisers, the yields for some crops could immediately drop by 50%.

For millions of people who are still stuck in Ukraine, the prospect of critical food insecurity - something that was completely unheard of in what was the breadbasket of Europe - is now a very real threat. It has never been so important to recognise the fragility of our food systems, and to proactively mitigate against the worsening food security crisis.