



OCHA POLICY AND STUDIES SERIES

# BREAKING THE IMPASSE

REDUCING PROTRACTED INTERNAL  
DISPLACEMENT AS A COLLECTIVE OUTCOME

CASE STUDY: UKRAINE



OCHA

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## Ukraine<sup>1</sup>

Internal displacement in Ukraine is primarily due to the armed conflict in the country's eastern Donbass region that started in April/May 2014. Presently, more than 1.7 million people are officially registered as IDPs,<sup>2</sup> amounting to 4 per cent of Ukraine's overall population of 42.5 million but not including those displaced inside non-Government controlled areas. Displacement first occurred in 2014 and is ongoing. Since the beginning of 2016, another 106,000 IDPs were registered as such, although some of them might have been displaced earlier but were unable to register at the time of their displacement.<sup>3</sup> The number of people displaced inside the non-Government-controlled areas is unknown. A much smaller number of IDPs originate from Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in March 2014.

The majority of IDPs remain close to their original homes, with 55 per cent of all IDPs located in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts<sup>4</sup> and a significant number (almost 200,000) in neighbouring Kharkiv Oblast. The capital, Kiev, hosts more than 100,000 IDPs, with the remaining IDPs living in other locations across the country. Many people who are registered as IDPs in the Government-controlled areas of the eastern oblasts move back and forth between the so-called contact line (which separates the parties to the conflict) to access social payments and markets and keep family ties.<sup>5</sup>

While displacement in Ukraine is relatively

recent, there is wide-spread consensus among national and international actors that in the absence of any progress in the peace process, Ukraine will need to face the challenge of protracted internal displacement. Some IDPs have already successfully found regular jobs or reestablished their businesses in new locations, helping them to lead relatively normal lives. But the majority of IDPs face a multitude of difficulties. Some even returned in precarious, often unsafe, conditions when their coping mechanisms were exhausted.

## 1. Causes

In addition to the ongoing conflict, insufficient Government attention to addressing displacement as a matter of priority, linked to the absence of a comprehensive and operational solutions strategy or action plan, is a major problem. Inconsistencies or contradictions between provisions of several legal instruments in different policy areas exacerbate the situation, as do inadequate human and financial resources, particularly at local government levels.<sup>6</sup> Besides the overall economic downturn of Ukraine in recent years, IDPs' ability to rebuild their lives and integrate into communities is also undermined by structural problems, such as widespread poverty, the overall high degree of unemployment, very low salaries in many economic sectors, the fact that many IDPs lack marketable skills, unfriendly business environments for starting a small business

*Liudila Khomenko walks away from her home near Mariupol, Ukraine, which was destroyed by a rocket on January 24, 2015.*

Credit: UNICEF



and increasing social tensions. The fact that the registration of IDPs has consequences tantamount to a legal status may further complicate efforts to find durable solutions, because in many cases deregistration triggers a loss of other social benefits linked to registration, such as pension rights.

## 2. Impacts

Overall, IDPs in Ukraine's Government-controlled areas were well received by host communities when they arrived,<sup>7</sup> with emergency humanitarian assistance provided by civil society and, to some extent, the Government, particularly including local authorities and the international community. Some IDPs had sufficient means to help themselves, at least at the beginning of the crisis. Due to these concerted efforts, the scale of a humanitarian emergency was mitigated.

Many problems faced by IDPs are structural in nature and also affect non-displaced Ukrainians. Nevertheless, key problems faced by many IDPs include a lack of livelihood opportunities and uncertain housing prospects. Regarding livelihoods, while poverty affects many Ukrainians, IDPs are in a particularly precarious situation. In 2014 and 2015, while 8.6 per cent of the general population was living at or below the national poverty line,<sup>8</sup> some 81 per cent of IDPs fell within that category.<sup>9</sup> A large percentage of IDPs are pensioners, but unemployment among economically active IDPs is also significantly higher than among non-displaced people.<sup>10</sup> IDP women reportedly risk engaging in informal, unregulated employment or becoming victims of human trafficking.<sup>11</sup> Many IDP households are led by women, who lack

supportive social networks and face particular problems finding employment.<sup>12</sup>

There are also marked differences between IDPs and non-displaced people regarding housing. Some 89 per cent of the local population in eastern Ukraine (Donesk and Luhansk oblasts) live in houses and apartments that they own. In comparison, 61 per cent of IDPs rent accommodation, 23 per cent live with host families and 4 per cent stay in collective shelters.<sup>13</sup> Even then, only 17 per cent of IDPs in rental accommodation, as opposed to 90 per cent of non-displaced tenants, have Government-recognized rental contracts, exposing the large majority to the risk of arbitrary rent increases or evictions.<sup>14</sup> In addition, many IDPs do not know how much longer they will be able to pay rent once their savings are depleted, and some are even returning to their place of origin for this reason.<sup>15</sup> IDPs living in collective centres may also risk evictions, for instance, when owners want to use their buildings for other purposes or sell them.

Problems related to documentation and registration issues make IDPs more vulnerable over time. For instance, remnants of the Soviet-era *propiska*-system [internal migration management system] make it difficult for IDPs (as well as for non-displaced Ukrainians) to become regular residents with full rights at their present location.<sup>16</sup> One consequence is that most IDPs are not registered as residents and therefore cannot take part in local elections.

Regarding the future, the fact that the contact line has become a de facto border has a negative economic and social impact on people living in non-Government-controlled areas, which may trigger further displacement.

With respect to host communities, areas with a particularly large influx of IDPs (Donetsk, Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts) have reportedly experienced additional strains on already limited local services, as well as increases in rental and food prices,<sup>17</sup> and downward pressure on wages and employment opportunities.<sup>18</sup> On the positive side, some localities benefited from the arrival of IDPs, particularly in areas that received institutions and businesses that relocated from non-Government- to Government-controlled areas. Due to the arrival of new families, some villages were also able to avert the risk of having their schools or other services closed due to a previous decline in population.<sup>19</sup>

At the national level, protracted displacement is likely to undermine certain policy reforms, for instance, efforts to combat poverty or alleviate the overburdened and outdated pension system. Also, Ukraine has experienced a strong decline of its population in recent decades, which, inter alia, is due to large-scale emigration. Not taking measures to improve IDPs' situation risks undermining Ukraine's efforts to address this demographic challenge if IDPs opt for emigration once their coping mechanisms are exhausted and they lose hope for a better future in their home country.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding conflict dynamics, the fact that many IDPs maintain contact with families and friends who remain in non-Government-controlled areas, travelling back and forth across the contact line is an opportunity for them to contribute to confidence-building across communities on opposing sides of the conflict.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, unless the risk of protracted displacement is addressed in ways responding to legitimate demands of IDPs and their host communities, social cohesion may be undermined and tensions between displaced people and hosts

increase, creating additional challenges of finding peace and stability in Ukraine.

### 3. Prospects for collective outcomes to address protracted displacement

Now that IDPs' immediate humanitarian needs have largely been addressed, it is important to help the remaining number of IDPs find solutions for themselves before they become even more vulnerable, and thus potentially relapse into the category of people who need long-term humanitarian assistance. Action is needed to avoid creating long-term burdens on host communities, weakening social cohesion and undermining governmental policies in areas such as poverty alleviation or pension reform. Action is also needed to avoid premature, unsafe returns, which were already observed in 2016. Therefore, it is important to look at internal displacement not only as a humanitarian challenge but also a development challenge. However, some voices within the Government and the international community feel that, with the exception of particularly vulnerable people with continuing humanitarian needs, no specific interventions are needed, because it is assumed that IDPs will be able to fend for themselves in the way that many other poor Ukrainians do. Nonetheless, others emphasize that specific efforts by development actors in particular are necessary because many IDPs have depleted their own resources and yet no longer can count on continuing humanitarian assistance. Thus, they risk becoming more vulnerable over time, placing increasing levels of burden on their host communities, as described above.

Despite the absence of concerted and operational governmental programmes,

there are key elements that could help move towards collective outcomes to prevent internal displacement becoming protracted in Ukraine:

- i. The recent adoption of the Targeted State Program for Recovery and Peacebuilding in the Eastern Regions of Ukraine aims at restoration of critical infrastructure and key social services in these areas, economic recovery, and improvement of social stability, peacebuilding and public safety.<sup>22</sup> IDPs are not explicitly mentioned as part of these activity areas, but the programme explicitly recognizes that without proper interventions, internal displacement will increasingly burden host communities.<sup>23</sup>
- ii. The recently created Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons is tasked with implementing the Targeted State Program and with assisting IDPs in finding durable solutions. While institutionally still weak, the Ministry can act as a driver of and focal point for activities aimed at finding durable solutions for IDPs, as long as it is fully and explicitly empowered by the Government to do so.
- iii. The creation of the National Council for Recovery and Peacebuilding (chaired by Deputy Prime Minister), entrusted with the coordination of programmes and activities of relevant ministries pertaining to the implementation of the Targeted State Program, provides a mechanism to coordinate Government-wide activities.
- iv. The creation of the United Nations/World Bank Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) on peacebuilding and recovery to support the Ministry in implementing the Targeted State Program provides some initial, albeit

limited, funding and may attract further resources.

In addition, efforts to move towards collective outcomes to prevent protracted internal displacement will need to be supported by: i) the Government developing a strategy or action plan on durable solutions and adopting a clear whole-of-Government engagement that brings together all State institutions dealing with IDPs; ii) the UN Country Team defining the UN's contribution to achieve these goals as part of its HRP and UNDAF; (iii) a systematic and thorough engagement with the civil society, as most of the support has been provided and continues to be provided through local initiatives; and iv) multilateral development banks and bilateral donors rallying behind such efforts.

## 4. Recommendations

Based on this analysis and in line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations to address protracted displacement and prevent recent displacement becoming protracted are made:

► To the **Government of Ukraine:**

- Recognize in all actions that IDPs, regardless of whether they live in Government- or non-Government-controlled areas, are citizens or part of the regular population of Ukraine with the same rights as non-displaced Ukrainians, but as victims of conflict, they have specific needs and vulnerabilities.
- Recognize internal displacement not only as a humanitarian challenge but also a development challenge.

- Adopt a whole-of-Government approach, and review and revise policies and normative frameworks that create obstacles for IDPs to move towards durable solutions, such as by:
    - removing legal and administrative impediments for IDPs to regain self-sufficiency, such as obstacles to opening a business.
    - addressing inconsistencies or contradictions between different policies and legal instruments, as identified by the Council of Europe, that exacerbate the situation of IDPs.
    - avoiding policies that undermine IDPs' resilience, such as linking the loss of IDP status with the loss of pension rights.
  - Prioritize the development of an action plan, based on the Targeted State Program for Recovery and Peacebuilding in the Eastern Regions of Ukraine, to address and prevent protracted displacement across the country, that:
    - is elaborated in close cooperation with the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons with relevant line ministries through a collaborative process that brings together humanitarian, development and protection actors, civil society and donors.
    - defines strategic, clear, quantifiable, measurable and achievable out-comes.
    - focuses on displacement-affected communities (IDPs and host communities), rather than IDPs as individuals.
    - fosters and facilitates local solutions using community-based approaches, which include the strong participation of IDPs and their hosts, and build on partnerships between authorities, civil society and the business community.
    - ensures that local governments have sufficient capacity and resources to facilitate local integration of IDPs.
    - emphasizes generating livelihood opportunities to help IDPs move out of poverty and temporary housing solutions.
- To **all parties to the conflict**:
- Ensure that humanitarian assistance in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence can reach people in need wherever they are.
- To **international humanitarian and development actors**:
- Foster synergies between humanitarian and development actors to facilitate working across silos.
  - Foster community-based initiatives, and engage systematically and thoroughly with civil society to ensure sustainability of efforts, particularly at local levels.
  - Systematically integrate displacement-affected communities into relevant development programmes and projects, including for longer-term interventions close to the contact line, in order to mitigate negative



socioeconomic impacts that might trigger additional displacement.

- Agree as the UNCT/HCT on collective outcomes as the UN's contribution to governmental efforts to prevent internal displacement in Ukraine from becoming protracted, and to integrate such outcomes into the forthcoming UNDAF and other relevant planning tools, including a possible multi-year humanitarian plan.

► To **donors:**

- In addition to resources needed for ongoing humanitarian assistance, provide generous multi-year flexible funding, particularly to the existing United Nations/World Bank Multi-Partner Trust Fund on peacebuilding and recovery to support strategic, clear, quantifiable, measurable and achievable outcomes on protracted internal displacement.
- Ensure synergies between humanitarian and development donors.



## REFERENCES

- 1 This case study draws on the author's field visit to Ukraine from 18 to 26 September 2016. The visit included a series of bilateral meetings in Kiev with the Government at the ministerial and technical levels, the RC/HC and members of the Humanitarian and UN Country Teams, donors, development banks (World Bank and KFW) and civil society. Roundtables with Government, UN, INGO and civil-society representatives were held in Kramatorsk and Kiev. The author also visited a collective shelter and met IDPs in the Kramatorsk region. He presented his conclusions at a lecture hosted by the Embassy of Switzerland at the Taras Shevchenko National University Kiev.
- 2 IDMC, "Internal Displacement Update January – August 2016", p. 6. The number is insofar inaccurate, as some IDPs did not want or were unable to register, whereas some who are registered are not IDPs or have in the meantime returned or left the country. The Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine is presently undertaking a verification exercise that is likely to result in a somewhat lower number of IDPs.
- 3 Ibid., p. 1.
- 4 UNHCR, "Ukraine Factsheet May 2016", p. 1.
- 5 According to one assessment, a quarter of IDP households mentioned such movements. Reasons include the wish to secure their former property, contact with non-displaced family members and, in a few cases, continuing employment or business activities at the former place of habitual residence. In some cases, families have split, with men returning and women and children remaining at the displacement site. See Shelter Cluster Ukraine, "Shelter & NFI Needs Assessment Report", Ukraine, August 2015, p. 16.
- 6 Council of Europe, "Enhancing the National Legal Framework in Ukraine for Protecting the Human Right of Internally Displaced Persons", June 2016, p. 4.
- 7 During the course of the visit to Ukraine, it was not possible for the authors to study the situation in the non-Government-controlled areas.
- 8 Data provided by the World Bank available from [data.worldbank.org/country/ukraine](http://data.worldbank.org/country/ukraine).
- 9 Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine and Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons, "National Monitoring System of the Situation with Internally Displaced Persons", March – June 2016, p. 11.
- 10 Ibid., p. 7. Unemployment for working-age IDPs is estimated at about 20 per cent, more than double than the reported national percentage of 9.3 per cent in July 2016. See also [www.tradingeconomics.com/ukraine/unemploymentrate](http://www.tradingeconomics.com/ukraine/unemploymentrate). According to the World Bank, the unemployment rate of IDPs is 69.5 per cent (World Bank Group, "Ukraine Peacebuilding and Recovery Programmatic Approach, Policy Brief 1: The Development Impacts and Policy Implications of Forced Displacement in Ukraine", Working Draft for Consultation, February 2016, p. 6), but this number seems to include pensioners. ILO, "Employment Needs Assessment and Employability of Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine – Summary of Survey Findings and Recommendations", 2016, p. xi, reported an "estimated unemployment rate among IDPs [of] 34.1 percent of all economically active IDPs" for the second half of 2015.
- 11 OSCE, "Conflict-related Displacement in Ukraine: Increased Vulnerabilities of Affected Populations and Triggers of Tension within Communities", July 2016, p. 14.
- 12 Ibid., p. 10.
- 13 Ukraine Humanitarian Country Team, "Inter-Agency Vulnerability Assessment in Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts", November 2016, p. 37.
- 14 Ibid., p. 44.
- 15 Ibid., p. 54.
- 16 Council of Europe, p. 48.
- 17 OSCE, "Conflict-related Displacement in Ukraine", p. 11. See also p. 13, highlighting that "IDPs are perceived by the host communities as the reason for increased rental prices and for creating a competing demand for available accommodation" (Ibid., p. 13).
- 18 World Bank Group, "Ukraine Peacebuilding and Recovery Programmatic Approach", p. 12.
- 19 A well-known example is the relocation of Donetsk National University to Vinnytsia in Western Ukraine.
- 20 The World Bank found that "[o]n average, outflows of forcibly displaced persons peak 4.1 years after they start." The World Bank Group, *Forcibly displaced*, p. xlv.
- 21 Some 700,000 to 1 million people cross the contact line each month, among them many IDPs.
- 22 Targeted State Program for Recovery and Peacebuilding in the Eastern Regions of Ukraine.
- 23 Ibid., p. 2.
- 24 Council of Europe.