

Key Advocacy Messages:

Internal Displacement in Ukraine

- **All Ukrainian citizens should have equal access to pensions regardless of their place of residence or registration as internally displaced persons (IDPs).** Currently, citizens of non-government-controlled areas (NGCA) are required to register as IDPs in order to continue to access their rightful benefits. This creates unnecessary movements. Pensions are an acquired right of all citizens of Ukraine and should not be linked to IDP registration. Persons who have paid into the pension system for years deserve their pensions to be paid irrespective of their place of residence or registration. After the lifting of COVID-related movement restrictions, most pensioners will be able to travel to government-controlled areas (GCA) to receive their pension through Ukrainian banks. By simplifying these procedures, the authorities will facilitate older persons' easier and safer access to their pensions once the movement restrictions across the contact line are lifted. After simplifying the payment of pensions to those who can cross the contact line, a next, more challenging step is to develop a mechanism to pay pensions to persons who cannot cross the contact line due to impaired mobility.
- **The checkpoints must facilitate movement across the contact line in safety and dignity.** This movement promotes social cohesion and protects people's rights: people cross the contact line to visit relatives, go to banks and markets, and to access public services. Before the pandemic, the checkpoints were busy: during 2019, there was a monthly average of 1.2 mn crossings through the five checkpoints in the east and additional 223,000 through the checkpoints at the administrative boundary with Crimea. The authorities upgraded conditions at these checkpoints in 2019. With COVID-19 outbreak, there is a need to build on that progress. Further steps are necessary to maintain infrastructure and to ensure physical distancing, adequate waiting areas, queue management, sanitary conditions and the provision of emergency medical assistance. Based on the epidemiological situation, authorities may restrict movement across the checkpoints; however, it is important to ensure that crossings on humanitarian grounds (such as family unification, death of a close relative or a medical emergency) are possible. If requirements such as self-isolation or observation must be imposed, the authorities should ensure that compliance is practical, rather than burdensome, for people with low incomes, older models of telephones (which do not allow people to download the self-isolation application) and low digital literacy.
- **Civilians living near the contact line deserve protection.** The ceasefire in late July has reduced risks to civilians' life and property along the contact line. Nevertheless, instances of shelling continue to pose risks to them and to vital civilian infrastructure like water, electricity and heating systems. Mines and unexploded ordnance pose a long-term danger, and may inhibit economic recovery. The military has occupied civilian property, and in many cases, these civilian residents do not have documentation regarding the requisition of their property. To address these issues, it is critical to separate military positions from civilian areas. Furthermore, it is recommended to implement legislation on humanitarian mine action and to clarify and communicate the framework for military requisition of civilian property, which would include compensation for utilities and any damage, where this is necessary and proportionate.
- **Civilians living near the contact line need access to public services.** Currently many communities, especially those within five kilometers of the contact line, lack access to electricity, water and fuel supply, safe road access and public buses.

Emergency services, such as the fire brigade and ambulance, do not reach them. These critical public services should reach all communities.

- **Civilians should receive restitution or compensation for housing damaged or destroyed due to the conflict.** In 2019, the Government adopted a resolution regarding compensation for housing. This resolution covers an important, but relatively narrow set of circumstances: houses that were destroyed (not damaged) in government-controlled areas in cases where the home-owner continues to live within the community where his/her destroyed home was located. Implementation is expected to start in late 2020, and to promote a transparent and fair procedure, it is recommended to include civil society as observers in the selection committee and to organize the queue on a “first come, first serve” basis. The State Budget should allocate financial resources for continuing this compensation in 2021. Also, it will be important to build on this foundation by extending restitution or compensation to all persons whose housing has been damaged or destroyed as a result of the conflict.
- **The Government should adopt a procedure for birth registration** that is responsive to the specific needs of families in NGCA, as well as Crimea. Without birth registration, children born in NGCA are at risk of statelessness. At present, parents can obtain registration of their child’s birth only after a court proceeding. While courts accelerate consideration of these cases, the procedure imposes additional cost and waiting time for new parents. Furthermore, since the crossing points have been closed for several months, parents in NGCA have not been able to access Ukrainian birth registration. Unless the process is simplified, a backlog of cases is likely to form once the crossing points re-open. This will place additional pressure on the judicial system.
- **Vulnerable IDPs must have access to temporary or social housing.** Housing needs for IDPs are becoming increasingly acute because of the protracted displacement. The Government should gradually resettle IDPs residing in collective centers with undignified living conditions and provide reasonable alternatives. IDPs with disabilities and other specific needs should receive priority for temporary and social housing. It is possible to expand temporary and social housing options through assessment of available stocks and allocation of available premises to vulnerable IDPs.
- **Durable housing solutions will help end displacement.** Many IDPs say that permanent housing is the top priority for their integration. Due to COVID, the government reprogrammed funds initially allocated for affordable housing programs. Some successful pilot programs (such as low interest rate loans for IDPs) implemented in late 2019 were not extended. It is important that affordable housing options and financial instruments (low interest rate, leasing, rent-to-buy etc.) are available to facilitate integration and ultimately end displacement.
- **Many IDPs have been displaced for six years and want to find a durable solution.** The Ministry for Reintegration jointly with international organizations and NGOs is elaborating a new IDP Durable Solutions Strategy and Action Plan. The Strategy should mirror the eight integration criteria provided for in the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions (e.g., security, non-discrimination, access to housing and livelihoods, participation in public life, etc.). Implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan should be time-bound and measurable through concrete indicators, as well as linked to budgetary resources.

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