



Ukraine crisis: six months on the impacts of war continue to devastate lives



Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine more than 6 million people fled the country to seek protection in Europe, leaving behind family and friends, their houses and safe lives. More than 800.000 took the Medyka border crossing into Poland. Photo: Tineke Dhaese/Oxfam

It is six months since, on 24 February, the Russian Federation started a military offensive in Ukraine, massively escalating conflict in the country. The humanitarian crisis caused by the war has mobilized overwhelming solidarity for those affected from people from across the world. Still, the impacts of the war continue to devastate people's lives - and the situation is getting more dire as the crisis continues and winter approaches.

According to the UN, almost 13,000 civilians are confirmed to have been killed or injured by the fighting in Ukraine -and they acknowledge that the real numbers are likely much higher. Many people have lost jobs, homes and property, while at the same time vital infrastructure – providing water, transportation, healthcare, education – has been damaged or destroyed.



Valentina, a 75-year-old Ukrainian refugee from Mykolaiv at the Center for Humanitarian and Social Aid, Romania. A former English professor, Valentina arrived in Romania on April 23rd. "I came here alone. I have only one son and he is now in the army. I feel, well, you know how you feel when you are alone and your only relative is in danger. We write to each other every day." Photo: Ioana Moldovan/Oxfam

As a result, **an estimated 17.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance within Ukraine**, including 6.6 million who have had to flee their homes and are now staying in other parts of the country. Many suffer from trauma, while the war continues to shatter lives.

Millions of others have left Ukraine to find safety in neighbouring countries – 6.4 million people have sought protection in Europe alone. Most people who have fled are women, children and the elderly, while capable men are required to remain in the country to support the military.

“When we first started seeing the influx of refugees, we realised that these are people with compound vulnerabilities, who are not only escaping war, but that they can easily fall prey to exploiters.”

Ioana Bauer, President of eLiberare, one of Oxfam’s partners in Romania

The impacts of the crisis have also been felt well beyond the region. Globally, the crisis is having grave effects on food security - with increased food prices worsening famine-like conditions in countries like

Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria – and driving an energy crisis that is threatening to [push more people into poverty](#).

The most vulnerable have been hardest hit

Poor, disabled, sick or elderly people have found it harder to flee for safety. Women and girls are facing higher rates of gender-based violence, including sexual violence perpetrated by soldiers – and when they flee, they often find they have limited access to the healthcare and psychosocial support they need. Children, especially those travelling unaccompanied, are particularly at risk of trafficking and exploitation.

Some groups have faced barriers when they have tried to access shelter, food, information and other services – due to a lack of specialised services that fit their needs, discrimination, language barriers or legal constraints – including LGBTQI+ refugees, third country nationals, people of colour, and people from the Roma minority.

“We can’t tell now how the war will impact the LGBTQI+ community in Ukraine, what the results will be in the end. But we know that this was a community that was discriminated against before the war, and they will be discriminated against even more after the war.”

Anna Leonova, Executive Director, Gay Alliance Ukraine (GAU), one of Oxfam’s Partners in Ukraine

As the war drags on, people are worried about the future

The response of neighbouring countries to refugees fleeing the crisis has been inspiring, marking a turning point in European migration policy – [an approach which needs to be extended to other refugees](#). EU countries, and other neighbouring countries like Moldova, were swift to pass laws giving Ukrainians the ability to live and work and access services like national healthcare systems. At the same time, many volunteers and communities at the grassroots level have come out to help make sure refugees have access to basic necessities like housing and food.

But as the war drags on, Ukrainians who have fled their homes - and the communities that host and support them - are starting to look towards the future with concern, and wondering if they can count on continued support and solidarity.



A Refugee Accommodation Centre (RAC) in Moldova. This building used to be a school and was empty before being turned into refugee accommodation. Now whole families are sleeping in abandoned classrooms lined with beds. Most of the families housed here are people of the minority Roma ethnicity who have fled Ukraine. In Moldova, Roma refugees have often been directed to different reception centres – usually offering a lower standard of service – from other refugees from Ukraine. They can also face challenges due to language barriers. Photo: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

Many refugees are staying in private accommodation – either with a host family sharing their own home, or using their savings to pay rent – but inflation, staggering housing prices and rising energy costs are leading hosts and refugees alike to wonder if they can keep this up. At the same time, support for volunteers accommodating Ukrainians is in many places decreasing - In Poland, for instance, on 1 July the government largely ended its housing assistance scheme, which had been providing 40 zloty (roughly 9 USD) per day to families hosting refugees.

While many refugees and people displaced in Ukraine are relieved to have escaped the falling bombs, they are also beginning to face new worries about continuing their lives away from home – finding money to pay for essentials like food and medication, providing schooling for their children when the new school year starts in September, keeping warm when the winter comes.

“Another tough challenge that we face is the uncertainty. People don't know what will happen in the future. Some of them were thinking that maybe they will just stay for one month here until things settle in Ukraine and they will be able

to go back home. Some of them went back home just to realise that they don't have a home anymore.”

Simona Srebrov, Project Manager at FFCR (Romanian Federation of Community Foundations), one of Oxfam’s local partners in Romania

Local organisations are also struggling

Local organisations and volunteers have been at the forefront of the response to this crisis from day one, and they continue to provide the lion’s share of support to refugees. But they have needed to scale up massively to cope with the huge increase in need, and few had any experience of working as humanitarian aid organisations before. Many local organisations have also relied on volunteers, who also have work and family responsibilities, and so can’t necessarily keep up this high level of support indefinitely.

As the war stretches on, we need a more structured approach to respond to this prolonged crisis. The local organisations that Oxfam partners with have told us that they need governments and the international community to better coordinate the response, providing long term solutions. Local organisations, volunteers and affected communities, especially women, - who have shouldered most of the work of responding to the crisis – should be involved in shaping this response and require continued support.

“We had never experienced activities of humanitarian assistance before in our organisation. We deliver services in usual times for people with extreme vulnerabilities but never in a context of war, trauma, or emergencies of this kind.”

Diana Chiriacescu, National Director of FONSS (the Federation of Non-Governmental Organisations for Services), Romania

Oxfam calls for sustained solidarity with people affected by the war, as they begin to feel the impacts of exhaustion, inflation, and the energy crisis. We also call on those involved in the response - in the first instance national governments - to ensure that all people affected by the war, and those fleeing other crises, receive the protection and support they need, – which requires special attention for groups that have particular needs or face discrimination. It is equally crucial that the host communities and civil society receive the necessary support for the generous contribution they are making.

Finally, continued funding needs to be provided by donor communities to support these efforts in the countries that are carrying the bulk of responsibility and costs for the response. This funding should however not come at the cost of other crises in the world, as inequality, climate change impacts and conflicts put unprecedented numbers of people at risk of deep poverty and violence.

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