

UKRAINE

REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

October 2016



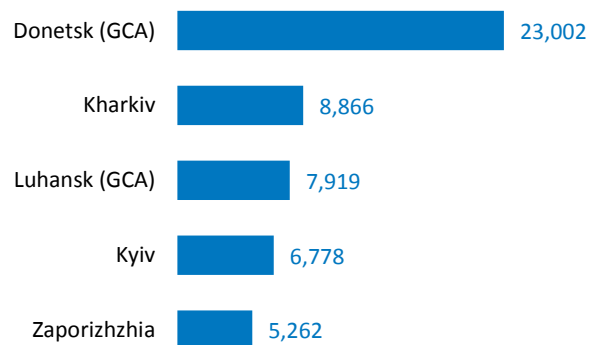
OVERVIEW

According to the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, disabilities and long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, as well as social barriers, may hinder the full, equal and effective participation of disabled people in society. During humanitarian crises, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) with disabilities face heightened risks besides compound barriers to accessing basic services, including education, health care and employment. While humanitarian assistance serves to alleviate the needs of persons with disabilities affected by conflict and displacement, longer-term development investments are also required during times of crises, particularly protracted ones, and during the transitional period leading to recovery.¹

In Ukraine, the latest data from the Ministry of Social Policy (MoSP) indicates that there are some 66,434 registered IDPs with disabilities, comprising 4 per cent of the internally displaced population. This statistic is significantly lower than the WHO estimate of 15 per cent.² It is likely that the number of disabled IDPs in Ukraine is underestimated.

The majority of disabled registered IDPs are living in the government-controlled areas (GCA) of Donetsk and Luhansk regions as well as in Kharkiv region, where some 64 per cent of the total registered IDP population remain, in relatively

Disabled IDPs (top 5 regions) | Sept. 2016



Source: Ministry of Social Policy

¹ Realization of internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities and progress made in the implementation of the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities. UN General Assembly A/71/214 (New York, UN, July 2016)

² The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 15 per cent of any population are persons with disabilities, with potentially higher proportions in communities that have fled conflicts or natural disasters. *World Report on Disability* (Geneva: WHO, 2011)

close proximity to their places of origin. At present, no official data is available on the number of disabled IDPs residing in the non-government controlled areas (NGCA). As of September 2016, there are 17,720 IDPs with disabilities living in central and western Ukraine.

The total number of **refugees with disabilities** residing in Ukraine is unknown. Nevertheless, as of second quarter of 2016, the number of disabled recognized refugees and asylum seekers assisted by UNHCR and its implementing partners is 40 people. Majority of them live in Kyiv and Odesa.

KEY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

In April 2016, UNHCR in Ukraine, with support from UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva, conducted consultations with disabled refugees and IDPs as well as organizations working on disability issues in Ukraine. The consultations were aimed at understanding the protection concerns of disabled refugees and IDPs and identifying areas for improvement. Consultations were carried out in Kyiv, Odesa, Dnipro, Sievierodonetsk, Slovyansk and Svyatohirsk, involving a total of 114 refugees and IDPs. Meetings were also held with Ukrainian NGOs and international organizations as well as with government agencies. The process produced a rich body of information about the concerns of refugees and IDPs with disabilities and their proposals for change. Overall, the key protection concerns of people with disabilities are the same those of other IDPs (financial concerns, access to social payments, access to medical assistance, housing and accommodation, employment, access to social services and relations with host communities). The main differences relate to the additional burden of disability and the lack of infrastructure allowing access basic government services.

Specific protection concerns were identified for two main groups: **persons living in institutions** and **older persons without family support**. It is known globally that persons with disabilities who are living in institutions are particularly at risk of violence. While there are a number of state services in place to support single older persons who do not have children, older persons with children do not receive any state support. This system may place older persons who are separated or estranged from their family and living in institutions at risk, while others may remain in abusive situations due to forced dependence on family members. The situation of persons with disabilities living in institutions in the NGCAs is not known with any degree of accuracy. It is likely that family separation is a particular concern for this group where family members have displaced to other parts of the country.

A key concern raised by disabled refugees and IDPs in all locations is **access to disability benefits**. Eligibility for state assistance generally needs to be verified on an annual basis and involves numerous medical consultations. The lack of an appointment system for the required medical consultations means that there are often long waiting times and sometimes a need to return several times to receive a consultation. Travel to and waiting for consultations can be particularly difficult for those with disabilities. Furthermore, IDPs who became disabled after displacement and are not in possession of their medical records must go through an initial verification process.

While the persons holding recognized refugee and complimentary protection status in Ukraine are eligible for state disability benefits and generally have an access to state services, the situation of asylum seekers is much more restrictive, as they do not have free of charge access to these services. Nonetheless, there are cases where beneficiaries of complementary protection status and recognized refugee status have received state disability benefits, as well as free-of cost medicines from the state-run hospitals for serious disabilities.

Lack of accessible and affordable transport was another concern raised by most refugees and IDPs with disabilities. Inaccessible transport is a barrier to accessing employment opportunities, medical services and out of school activities for children. In addition to transport being physically inaccessible, persons with disabilities spoke about being forced off buses by other passengers and a lack of regular transport availability in rural areas. Disabled persons wishing to cross the line of contact between the government



*The pedestrian checkpoint at Stanitsya Luhanska
Photo: UNHCR/O. Litvinenko*

controlled areas (GCA) and the NGCAs face particularly difficult conditions, with lack of disabled facilities and long waiting times. The pedestrian crossing point at Stanitsya Luhanska, the only open crossing point on the line of contact in Luhansk region, comprises of a makeshift wooden bridge that can be challenging even for able-bodied persons to cross. Difficulties crossing the line of contact affect family and social networks as well as access to civil documentation and state assistance.

STRATEGY

In order to enhance the protection of disabled internally displaced persons and refugees in Ukraine, UNHCR has elaborated a set of actions at both national and local level. It has also developed a local action plan for areas with the most IDPs and refugees with disabilities.

Nationwide:

- Raise awareness on the skills and capacities of persons with disabilities, including dissemination of success stories.
- Creation of a network bringing together persons with disabilities, employers, employees and NGOs.
- Work with the Government of Ukraine to improve access to information for IDPs. This includes support to develop a website for IDPs with built-in accessibility features.

Odesa and Kyiv:

- Establishment of ‘buddy system’ between youth with and without disabilities to accompany each other to local youth activities.
- Strengthen local social support networks through small-scale, neighborhood-level social activities (depending on cultural preferences) such as hosting tea sessions, games, discussion groups or meals in the homes of more isolated refugees and IDPs with disabilities.
- Work with a specialist partner to support community-based rehabilitation.
- Modification of public buses to improve accessibility.
- Upgrade the education center at the summer camp in Kyiv to function as a resource centre reinforcing inclusive education in Ukraine (provision of additional learning support to children with disabilities attending the summer camp and training for teachers).

Eastern Ukraine:

- Grants to support small businesses established by persons with disabilities.
- Upgrade and equip sports centres to provide sports activities for persons with disabilities.
- Establish a ‘buddy system’ between youth with and without disabilities to participate in sports activities at sports centres. Awareness raising of sportspersons with disabilities.
- Camping events for people with disabilities and their families by procuring a generator to increase types of activities and provide backup power for planned events.
- Support a local children’s rehabilitation centre by installing a projector and a screen and provide toys for children with special needs affected by the conflict. The Center has a medical purpose, assisting children with both psychological and physical rehabilitation (Slovyansk city, Donetsk region).
- Support the existing ‘invataxi’ transport services operated by local authorities by procuring a specialized vehicle. ‘Invataxi’ is a social transport service accessible to physically disabled persons. Upon registration, the service is available free of charge for up to six round trips per month.
- Support social rehabilitation units for children with specific needs at territorial social service centres by providing rehabilitation equipment.



Photo: UNHCR/M. Yurenev

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

- Protection monitoring by UNHCR and its partners collects information relating to the respect of human rights of IDPs, humanitarian standards and Ukrainian legislation. Monitoring aims to identify existing gaps in legislation as well as executive and judicial practice and prepare recommendations for further advocacy activities by UNHCR, its partners, national and international NGOs and government agencies.
- UNHCR and its partners advocate for the amendment of relevant legislation to meet the needs of disabled persons.
- UNHCR and its partners provide legal counseling and assistance to people of concern.
- As a response mechanism, UNHCR provides assistance to individual protection cases based on standardized assessment. UNHCR has assisted 93 cases through the Individual Protection Assistance (IPA) scheme. The majority of these cases required urgent medical assistance, including treatment of acute medical conditions and provision of medicines.
- Provision of assistance to persons with disabilities and serious medical conditions, particularly assistance in accessing necessary services, such as medical services and social assistance. UNHCR's partners are also providing access assistance to medicines and medical treatment for the most vulnerable people of concern.
- UNHCR implements its cash assistance programme through regional social welfare networks (Departments of Social Protection acting as UNHCR partners) in Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia. It assists 1,372 IDP families of newly arrived IDPs from at-risk profiles including disabled persons. The programme also assists as large and single headed families and pregnant women and is complementary to public welfare schemes.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2014 and 2015, UNHCR distributed multipurpose stabilization cash grants for IDPs in 12 regions, including regions in eastern Ukraine. Of the 4,481 households assisted, 2,014 households included persons with disabilities. Post distribution monitoring showed that the vast majority of assisted households spent the money provided on medical expenses and housing.

In 2015, UNHCR supported the Rehabilitation Center for Blind Persons and Olshanitsa Psycho-Neurological Institute with repairs and improvements of living conditions. This project contributed to increasing the capacity of hosting IDPs with visual and mental disabilities and ensuring dignified living conditions.

UNHCR continues to assist recognized refugees, persons with complementary protection status and asylum seekers with disabilities, particularly in terms of ensuring their access to necessary services.



Photo: UNHCR/M. Yurenev

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

UNHCR works in cooperation with international organizations, the Government of Ukraine, local and international NGOs. Our partners working with IDPs and refugees with disabilities are *Rokada*, Faith Hope Love, NEEKA, World, CrimeaSOS, *Stantsia Kharkiv*, *Dopomoha Dnipro*, *Desyataya Kvitnya*, *Krasniy Mak*, *Lebedushka* and *Rizni ta Rivni*.

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