

KEY MESSAGES ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

March 2017

- **UNHCR calls on the Government of Ukraine to ensure that internally displaced persons (IDPs) enjoy full access to their pensions and social benefits.** Currently the authorities re-verify IDPs' continuing eligibility for pensions and social benefits twice per year by conducting home visits. Other Ukrainian citizens are not subject to this level of scrutiny. The procedures for issuing benefits for IDPs should be simplified, so that IDPs do not face a discriminatory burden in accessing support. Even more than other citizens, IDPs who have lost homes and jobs must rely on this support to cover their basic needs. Furthermore, UNHCR calls on Ukraine to adopt all possible measures to facilitate the protection of persons living in non-government controlled areas. This includes de-linking the payment of pensions and social assistance from IDP registration, as recommended in draft law no. 4257. Pensions are an acquired right of all citizens of Ukraine and should not be linked to IDP registration; social assistance is linked to an individual's vulnerability and not the fact of displacement. Currently, citizens of non-government controlled areas are required to register as IDPs in order to continue to access their rightful benefits.
- **Crossing the checkpoints along the contact line involves waiting in long lines exposed to the elements and undergoing multiple screening procedures.** The checkpoints lack the capacity to process the large numbers of people who cross (more than 8.5 mn crossings in 2016) and basic facilities for those who wait. This creates particular hardship for those with specific needs, especially older persons making the journey. Risks are compounded by the danger of mines in the surrounding area. It is important to increase freedom of movement for civilians to alleviate suffering and to maintain the longer-term potential for peaceful co-existence and reconciliation. The government has begun working on a comprehensive approach to improve processing speed and conditions at the checkpoints, and this initiative deserves encouragement.
- **Civilians living along the contact line deserve protection.** Fighting continues to affect many communities along the contact line. Civilians suffer death, injury and property damage. Fighting damages vital civilian infrastructure like water, electricity and heating systems, causing great hardship. Mines and unexploded ordnance pose a daily 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. Many displaced persons from areas along the contact line cannot register as IDPs because their villages are not on the official list of conflict-affected communities. To address these issues, it is critical to separate military positions from civilian areas. Furthermore, it is recommended to adopt legislation on humanitarian mine action and to clarify and communicate the framework for military requisition of civilian property, where this is necessary and proportionate. The authorities should update the list of villages from which people are displaced so that these persons can register as IDPs and access assistance.
- **The Government should adopt an administrative procedure to register the births of children born in the non-government controlled areas.** Without birth registration, children are at risk of statelessness. Currently 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.
- **Vulnerable IDPs must have access to social housing.** Housing needs for IDPs are becoming increasingly acute as prolonged displacement outlasts available assistance and individual savings. The Government should protect IDPs against forced evictions from collective centers and provide reasonable alternatives. IDPs with disabilities and with other specific needs should receive priority for social housing.
- **It is time for Ukraine to adopt and implement a comprehensive IDP strategy with a focus on solutions.** This strategy would include measures to promote long-term legal, economic and social integration for IDPs. Links to development and recovery programs will be critical. To ensure the possibility of voluntary returns, the authorities should adopt legislation to protect IDPs' property rights and to introduce a long-term program for compensation of damaged housing, land and property.
- **IDPs must have the right to vote in both national and local elections.** Currently IDPs cannot exercise their right to vote in local elections. To integrate in new communities, IDPs must have a voice regarding their future. The parliament should adopt legislation to guarantee IDPs' right to vote.

UNHCR stands ready to support the Ukrainian authorities and civil society partners with the implementation of these recommendations.

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