

## General information

Nearly 13.5 million people are currently affected by war displacement in Ukraine; more than one-third of Ukrainians have been forced from their homes. Within Ukraine, more than 5.3 million people remain displaced by the war, having moved from the worst-affected eastern regions towards the central and western regions, with significant shelter needs. More than 8 million refugees are currently hosted in the region, with the largest population in the neighbouring countries.

Habitat has been active in the Central and Eastern Europe region (CEE) since the 90's, where national offices in Poland, Romania, Hungary, and the regional office in Slovakia have led efforts on influencing adequate and affordable housing. Since February'22, Habitat has been responding to the urgent and medium-term housing needs of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Germany and Poland.

## 1. Gender, Age, Disability, Roma, LGBTIQ++ in the Ukraine Crisis

Pre-existing gender and identity inequalities are being compounded by the Ukraine crisis – affecting the risks and impacts of the war, the patterns of displacement, and access to humanitarian aid. Vulnerabilities due to longstanding gender inequality intersect with several other aspects of identity diversity within Ukraine, that have traditionally resulted in discrimination and inequities including: people with disabilities, the elderly (17.4% of the population), those from the Roma population, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning, asexual + (LGBTQIA+) communities.

Particularly within this crisis, which has unique patterns of demographic movements and implications, it is crucial to understand the gendered dynamics and how it is interacting with aid distribution, access, and reconstruction efforts. Due to the sex-selected marital law which forbids men and boys 18-60 (with some exceptions) from fleeing, 90% of those who have fled Ukraine are women and children, and 60% of IDPs are female.

**Women & girls are disproportionately impacted by the crisis.** For example, Women-headed IDP households are more likely to report extreme needs. Women IDPs also report relying more on assistance than men, having less reliance on regular wages as the main source of income (25% vs 38%).

Pre-crisis, there was an estimated **400,000 Roma community** in Ukraine – a group facing significant discrimination that impacted their access to livelihoods, services, accommodation, education & human rights. **60% of Roma women & children do not have documentation**, impacting their access to services and mobility.

The **LGBTQIA+ community** face specific protection risks of abuse, exploitation & exclusion that obstruct their equal access to rights, services & humanitarian assistance, including housing & livelihood opportunities due to pre-existing discrimination.

**There is an immense diversity in the Ukraine community. The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing gender and identity-based inequities, putting already vulnerable communities at increasing risk. Women and girls are disproportionately and differently impacted. For reconstruction efforts to effectively meet the diverse needs, risks and vulnerabilities of the population, and to take up the opportunity to 'build back better', it is crucial that reconstruction efforts pay particular attention to not only intentionally ensure the inclusion of these groups within reconstruction processes, but also to address the barriers to these diverse groups' inclusion and leadership.**

## 2. Gender and Winterisation

The war in Ukraine has caused widespread destruction, displacement, and critical damage to infrastructure, including heating systems. With the onset of winter, nearly half of Ukraine's population, or 18 million people, need assistance. The Winter Response Plan 2023-2024 targets 1.3 million people in need of winterization activities. Vulnerable and at-risk communities, particularly those in displacement centres and living in front-line areas, are at particular risk of the effects of extreme winter conditions, with temperatures dropping below -20 degrees Celsius.

Approximately 1.4 million homes have been damaged or destroyed since February 2022, with front-line areas being particularly affected. The disruption of water, electricity, and gas networks is worsening the situation for those affected.

Displacement sites housing many of the 5.1 million IDPs, 60% of which are female, are ill-equipped for winter conditions. Many IDPs also live in poorly insulated rented homes, and rising living costs, coupled with income loss, force them to make difficult choices between winterization necessities - struggling to afford warm clothing and heating. The war's impact on livelihoods pushes vulnerable populations to the brink, potentially leading to reduced food consumption and an increased risk of exploitation and gender-based violence. The attacks on energy infrastructure, water, and gas systems pose additional risks, with a risk of energy crisis, as occurred in late 2022.

These risks are expected to significantly exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities, posing serious protection concerns. Energy poverty disproportionately affects women and girls, and households led by women are more likely to experience food insecurity. There is an **increased risk of Gender Based Violence (GBV) & exploitation** for IDPs forcibly displaced & fleeing during winter due to the lack of safe, suitable, accessible accommodation and crowded living conditions in shelters without sex-disaggregated facilities. There is also a likelihood of disrupted access to health & GBV services due to transportation and weather-related issues. GBV and protection issues are expected to worsen during winter due to the exacerbation of pressures and mental health concerns as a result of the financial pressures of winterization demands and inability to meet them. To access increasingly scarce fuel, rural populations must travel distances and often queue for increasing periods of time, increasing protection risk for women and girls.

**Gender responsive winterization solutions are required that sustainably address the gendered impacts of the crisis and the specific needs of women, girls and vulnerable groups in winter – with a particular focus on mitigating the increased protection and GBV risks for these groups.**

## 3. Gender and Shelter

The Ukraine crisis has resulted in mass flight and forced displacement, with 5.1 million IDPs in Ukraine, and more than 5.8 million Ukrainian refugees in Europe. 60% of IDPs are female. Intensified fighting is continuing to contribute to forced displacement, and attacks have been increasing in areas outside the front-line, causing significant damage to infrastructure and homes. Displaced women and communities with pre-existing vulnerabilities face compounding challenges in securing safe, adequate shelter and necessities.

Those staying in collective centres are among the most vulnerable: 64% are women, 25% children, 17% older people and 15% people with disabilities.

The collective centres being used for shelters are often ill-equipped to provide safe and dignified long-term accommodation. Many shelters lack family- and sex-segregated facilities. **Displaced women and children often relying on informal sources of shelter** increasing protection risks and exposure to exploitation, exponentially so during winter when the pressure for shelter becomes imminent. **Displaced men experiencing challenges in securing shelter** and there are accounts of discrimination of not being accepted as tenants as they are not prioritized. **LGBTQIA+ and Roma community facing discrimination in accessing shelter** and are exposed to protection risks within shelter options.

## 4. Gender and Housing

The World Bank estimated, in their 2023 recovery and reconstruction needs assessment, US\$135 billion in direct damage to buildings and infrastructure with the housing sector most affected (38 percent). The report estimates 1.4 million residential units were damaged, including 135,000 single-family houses. Over one-third of the damaged housing units are destroyed (499,056 units), while two-thirds are partially damaged requiring light to medium repair to be habitable. The most significant numbers of damaged residential units are in frontline regions of the war: Donetsk, Kharkivska, Luhanska, Kyivska, and Mykolaivska oblasts.

The vulnerability of war-affected populations in Ukraine is exacerbated by the pre-war lack of adequate housing with close to no affordable rental options. Approximately 80% of the national housing stock within the country is estimated to be in sub-standard and energy inefficient conditions requiring upgrading and refurbishment. There is a high level of homeownership in Ukraine (estimated at 90%) as a result of privatization, yet this housing stock is significantly substandard and energy inefficient. The significant increase in energy prices caused by the war has only exacerbated the vulnerabilities of populations already experiencing energy poverty.

Energy poverty disproportionately affects women and girls, and households led by women are more likely to experience food insecurity. 60% of IDPs are female, and as a result of the demographic movements of the conflict and conscription, there is an increasing proportion of female-headed households.

**Providing adequate and safe housing for the affected population, of which 60% of IDPs are female, is one of the most significant challenges in the reconstruction process in Ukraine and is reliant on the inclusion of diverse voices to ensure their needs and vulnerabilities are integrated into the design and response.**

## 5. Gender and Reconstruction

The war in Ukraine has entailed widespread damage, with an estimated recovery and reconstruction cost of \$411 billion. Despite the disproportionate effect of the crisis on women, and their crucial leadership role in the response, the participation of women and girls and other marginalized and vulnerable groups has been largely absent within recovery planning processes, and minimal focus has been on the crucial role of how reconstruction efforts can either promote equality, or further contribute to exacerbating and deepening inequities.

In Lugano in 2022, the Ukraine Recovery Conference resulted in a document with guiding principles for the recovery process, including one on Gender Equality and Inclusion stating that recovery has to be inclusive, benefit all, and disparities need to be displaced. The 2023 Conference in London had a significant focus on mobilising private sector investment for reconstruction. In 2024, Germany will host the follow-up conference.

**Gender responsiveness is a crucial element to successful reconstruction process in Ukraine, with the war exposing and exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. The war has disproportionately affected women and girls, and their participating and leadership will ensure reconstruction efforts promotes sustainable development that meets their specific needs and vulnerabilities. Additional to the impacts of long-standing gender inequality, 90% of the refugee population which fled Ukraine are women and children, and it is therefore highly likely that men will be overrepresented in the reconstruction process.**

## **6. Working in partnership with civil society organisations inside Ukraine**

Despite women and Women's Rights Organisations (WRO) taking on a leading and crucial role in the response as both volunteers and first responders, it has not translated into their increased participation, inclusion, or leadership in humanitarian planning and decision making. Significant barriers to their participation are persistent, and there is a lack of representation of WRO, LGBTQIA+, disability and Roma civil society groups in formal decision-making spaces.

**As women continue to bear a significant burden and are differently and disproportionately affected by the crisis, their representation in all decision-making is critical to sustainable solutions for both the response and the long-term recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine for the entire population.**