



Olga (above), 70, a former participant of a CARE-supported community centre in Donetsk, reflecting on the support she and her granddaughter received (below). Photo: CARE/Sarah Easter.

“Since coming here [the community centre], I feel much better. I don’t take as many sedatives anymore. It is like a breath of fresh air, and we remember how to live again. Darya can let out her energy and she can be a child again, even if it is only for an hour. This helps us to continue.”

CARE submission to Inquiry into Australian support for Ukraine

Introduction

Following a rocket attack on the night of 27 to 28 February this year, the community centre Olga and her 9 year-old granddaughter attended, sustained serious damage. This forced CARE and our local partner Avalyst to suspend operations. Every day we witness civilians suffering due to the ongoing conflict. Intensified attacks have resulted in restrictions on humanitarian activities and limited access to those in need. CARE Ukraine has been on the ground since March 2022, in order to meet growing humanitarian needs within the country following Russian invasion. CARE operates in Ukraine from Odeska oblast (South) and Dnipropetrovska oblast (East), with satellite offices in Kharkivska, Slovianska, Zaporizhzhiska, and Mykolaivska, in addition to Kyivska oblast. Since the scale up of CARE’s response, we have worked with 32 national and international partners to reach over 1.2 million vulnerable people across Ukraine. This was achieved in part through financial support provided through our fundraising efforts with the Australian public.

As CARE Australia, we note that Australian government military assistance provided to Ukraine has dwarfed its financial contribution to the humanitarian response. As such we urge the [Australian government to consider launching a multi-year humanitarian and resilience package for Ukraine](#) amidst this protracted crisis. Such donorship would provide humanitarian actors with greater certainty in order to sustain local partnerships, drive resilience-focussed outcomes and consolidate crucial sectoral progress. Based on our experience developed over the past 2 years on the ground, CARE urges consideration of the following critical factors in designing a more comprehensive Australian-supported response, which includes renewed aid to the Ukrainian people.

a) Australian Aid should consider the gendered impacts of the ongoing crisis in shaping future support, including around dedicated food security and protection programming.

The impacts of the war in Ukraine are not gender neutral. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, women and men have played distinct and specific roles. As the humanitarian crisis ensues, a general trend has emerged: women are often providing alone for their families while facing loss of income, family separation, and massive disruptions in the provision of essential services. Whilst many men are engaged in more direct war efforts on the frontlines, exposing themselves to potential death, severe injuries and mental distress. The pressures on women for basic survival are compounded amidst displacement. A lack of civil status documentation, ethnic-based marginalisation, language barriers and illiteracy exacerbate difficulties for women and girls from Roma communities. Generally, CARE's research on the ground has shown that the highest protection needs are for services around gender-based violence, mental health/psychosocial support and legal advice.

Few work opportunities and high food insecurity

The war has had far-reaching impacts on women and girls. Women have carried out a greater amount of domestic and unpaid care work since the full-scale invasion. These increased domestic and care responsibilities are mainly due to family separation, a lack of childcare facilities, school closures, and reduced access to other social services. Adolescent girls have taken on more unpaid care work to support women in coping with the increased responsibility of care for children and family members.

Approximately 7.3 million Ukrainians are in need of food security and livelihood supportⁱ. High inflation and a lack of employment opportunities have left many people struggling to meet basic needs, reflected disproportionately in women, particularly those over 60.ⁱⁱ Women have lower wages and less secure employment compared to men, while many women hold part-time employment to allow them time to perform unpaid care work. In addition, women over 60 are allocated a smaller pension compared to men.

Increased risks of gender-based violence

The conflict and the ensuing humanitarian crisis have increased gender-based violence (GBV) risks for women and men of all ages and diverse backgrounds, while services are disrupted and support networks dismantled. The ongoing war has heightened risks of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and intimate partner violence (IPV) for adolescent girls and women, while men in areas under Russian military control face increased protection risks due to conflict-related violence, such as forcible disappearance, extra-judicial killing, torture and sexual violence. Shifting priorities in relation to the war have led to a reduction in GBV services, including shelters, referrals and legal and police support.

Massive displacement has led to an increase in single women head of households, with women and girls making up the majority (57.3%) of displaced people.ⁱⁱⁱ Protection remains a high priority with a large percentage of women feeling threatened or experiencing GBV in collective shelters.^{iv} Additionally, women and girls in Russian-occupied areas of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine are more vulnerable to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), and risks of human trafficking and domestic violence remain high overall.

A mental health crisis amidst the broader crisis

People face destruction of homes and a depressed economy, with the most vulnerable people, including LGBTQIA+, Roma, and people with HIV, at most risk. A prevailing lack of security and

ongoing conflict are having a direct negative psychological impact on people. Reaching out or accessing mental health support remains a significant challenge amid social stigma and a lack of awareness, with all genders affected differently.^v In the hardest-hit areas, critical resources such as psychological well-being, safe and comfortable living conditions, basic hygiene items, and means to stay warm are becoming increasingly scarce.

Women are on the frontline of the humanitarian response

Women comprise the majority of frontline workers, volunteers and first responders who support conflict-affected populations, either through formal and informal associations or ad-hoc support groups. Yet the large presence of women at local and grassroots levels supporting vulnerable populations has yet to translate into more political decision-making or donor support. The redirection of human and financial resources towards the war effort has reduced the focus on social and economic issues, making women's participation and civic engagement more challenging.

CARE Ukraine has closely collaborated with local Ukrainian partner organisations for two years. At present our operations in Ukraine, maintain 19 active partner organisations who are essential to program implementation across the country (see [Annex One](#) for current list of active local partners). Women Led Organizations (WLOs)/Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) and women community members are essential to the humanitarian response. This has contributed to more flexible gender roles, including an increase in women's control of resources and responsibility for informal and community decision-making roles, as well as men's involvement in areas such as community-based provision of psychosocial support (PSS). Despite some positive shifts, CARE's research in February 2023 found that many women have left local government and administrative positions, leaving very few women in decision-making spheres, particularly around humanitarian aid and responding to community needs.^{vi}

) Ukrainian women and girls face significant obstacles in accessing the sexual and reproductive health services they need.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) needs in Ukraine are particularly high. Due to the lack of access to SRH services, the rate of unsafe abortion practices and obstetric complications increases. Within the context of armed conflict, the risk of sexual gender-based violence is higher within affected communities, which also leads to higher rates of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. The gap in family planning services is immense, with 7% of women wanting to avoid pregnancy not using contraception, increasing to 9% among those married^{vii}. Across Ukraine in general, the availability of SRH services varies. SRH services are 87% available across the country with maternal and newborn services 86% available. Such SRH maternal and newborn services are less available in conflict-affected oblasts like Donetsk and Kherson where they are only 48% and 63% available respectively.^{viii}

Ongoing stigma and discrimination make access to information and services difficult, particularly for adolescent girls. Previously SRH information was most often shared in schools, and with the closure of many educational facilities this resource has vanished. Ongoing hostilities have damaged clinics and restricted access to midwives and other SRH specialists, and the rate of Cesarean and premature births have increased.^{ix} Various groups have a heightened protection risk and face exclusion and discrimination, and many of these people report a lack of safe services for GBV and SRH needs. This includes Roma communities, LGBTQIA+ people, people with

disabilities, older women and men, pregnant and lactating women, women and men from rural areas, unaccompanied adolescent girls, and separated children and children from institutional care, etc.

Ukraine has the highest rates of people living with HIV in Europe, and while good progress was being made before the war with an increased number of people receiving antiretroviral treatment, this progress has been disrupted with more than 30 medical institutions providing HIV services stopping their operations, because of destruction or occupation and broken logistics.^x Women living with HIV are particularly at risk and struggle the most in receiving SRH and other health related care, with 39.2% of women living with HIV across Ukraine reporting no or limited access to medical services (71% of these also said they had no access to social services).^{xi}

Conclusion

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has led to massive humanitarian needs, driven by mass displacement and destruction of critical infrastructure. Life is a daily struggle for ordinary Ukrainians seeking safety and the basics of life. Similar to its approach to the Syrian crisis, we urge the Australia government to consider a [multi-year humanitarian and resilience package for Ukraine](#). This model is in line with other donors' approaches to protracted crises (such as FCDO/USAID etc). More broadly, this will allow DFAT to effectively coordinate responsibility sharing with peer donors engaged on this humanitarian response. A strong civil society and women's movement in Ukraine are the best advocates of their needs and have told us what they need. Practically, we ask the Australian government to:

[Provide better access to quality protection, SRH and GBV services for women, girls and marginalised groups, whilst promoting more sustainable approaches to food security and livelihoods.](#)

Australia should increase funding for protection and SRH services, in addition to GBV prevention and response interventions. Further, Australia should seek to increase its support to Ukrainian NGOs working in protection/GBV and food security, which will improve aid access for women, girls and marginalised groups in Ukraine.

[Through increased donorship, promote more gender equality and inclusivity in the humanitarian response](#)

Donors and the UN have only marginally increased quality funding to WLOs/WROs in 2024. Through increased aid support, Australia can increase meaningful participation and leadership of women, girls and marginalised groups in humanitarian coordination and decision-making. Increased funding and participation ensure that the response better addresses the specific needs of women, girls and marginalised groups. Further this will strengthen participatory, gender-just and human-centred reconstruction and recovery.

Submitted in May 2024 to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

Annex One: CARE and our local Ukrainian Partners

About CARE

CARE Australia supports women around the globe to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. We work in partnership with local communities to provide equal opportunities for women that they have long been denied: the ability to earn an income, gain access to their fair share of resources, to lead and participate in decisions that affect their lives, and to be able to withstand the increasing impacts of climate disasters and other crises. As part of the global CARE confederation, outlined below are maps indicating our current CARE programme footprint in Ukraine.

CARE presence in Ukraine and programme reach.

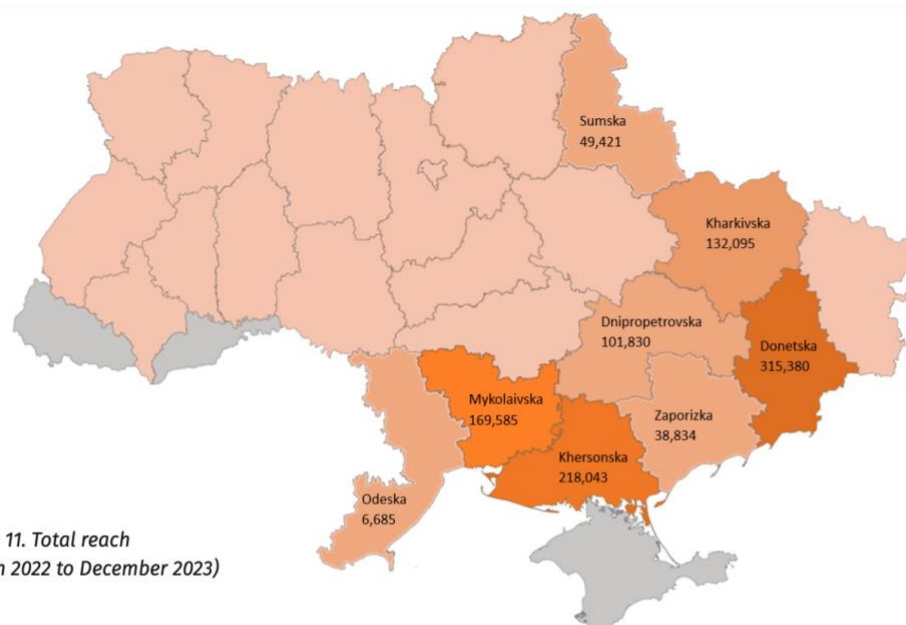
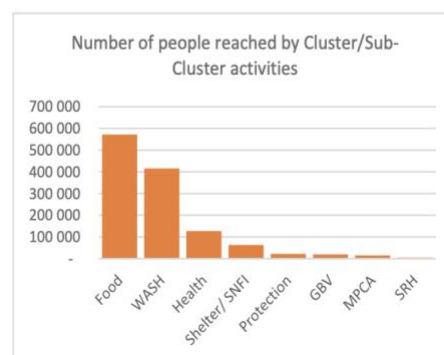


Figure 11. Total reach
(March 2022 to December 2023)

The breakdown of reach by sector/sub-sectors is as follows:

Sector	Reach
Food Security Livelihoods	571,929
WASH	415,909
Health	127,637
Shelter/ NFI	63,021
Protection	22,267
GBV	20,207
MPCA modality	15,197
SRH	4,883
TOTAL	1,241,050



Of this total, 825,937 were adults and 415,113 were children. 486,268 were male (39%) and 754,782 female (61%).

Our local Ukrainian Partners

Name	Who are they	Logo
CFSSS	Stabilization Support Services is a Ukrainian charity foundation. It has been working to support displaced people in Ukraine since 2016. https://sss-ua.org/	
East SOS	East-SOS started as a volunteer civil initiative and a hotline in May 2014 by human rights and supports conflict affected people and Displaced people. www.east-sos.org	
AVALYST	Avalyst is a public non-profit organization, which carries out activities for the satisfaction, protection, realization of social, economic, creative and other common rights and interests of the members of the organization. https://www.avalyst.org.ua/	
NGO Girls/ Divchata	Girls is a public organization engaged in the education of teenage girls. The team has an extensive network of experts, including psychologists, sociologists, lawyers, doctors, communicators, logisticians, teachers, social workers and teachers, and more. www.divchata.org	
Centre for Women's Perspectives	Centre for Women's Perspectives works for women's rights and supporting equal rights and possibilities of women and men in all areas of life. www.women.lviv.ua	
Right to Protection (R2P)	R2P is dedicated to protecting the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, stateless and undocumented people, as well as internally displaced and conflict affected people. www.r2p.org.ua	
Tvoja Opора (Your Support)	Tvoja Opора restores, strengthens and creates systems that guarantee social and humanitarian support to those who need it. https://tvoja-opora.org/	
Woman Health & Family Planning	Woman Health & Family Planning Charity Foundation / WHFP has worked for 20 years in the field of reproductive health strengthening and protection of reproductive rights of Ukrainian people. http://www.womanhealth.org.ua/	
Relief Coordination Centre (RCC)	RCC is engaged in the coordination of humanitarian missions of NGOs at the DOT (de-occupation territories) to provide people with basic needs: food, medicine, hygiene, tools, and shelter. The organization also conducts SSA (Sustainable Settlement Assessment) to collect data on problems and needs at the settlement level. https://rcc-ua.org/	
Posmishka UA	Posmishka UA works with children for protection as well as parents, adults and professionals of public services who have to ensure the protection of the child. https://www.posmishka.org.ua/	
Vinnytsia «Information and Educational Center «VIS»	The org«niz»tion's main work is related to combating violence, combating discrimination, promoting gender equality. https://www.facebook.com/volonterstvo.by.axis/	

Name	Who are they	Logo
Promin Dnipro	Main spheres of activities: Protection Sectors, GBV, gender equality, women's voice and leadership, and inclusion. Main program participants: women, Displaced people, survivors of domestic violence, exploitation and human trafficking, social service providers, teachers, education seekers. https://www.facebook.com/ngopromin/	
Safe Space	Main activities: Protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens, promotion of the ideas of equality and non-violence, community policing. https://www.facebook.com/prostir.zp/	
Zhiva-Ya	Zhiva-Ya is grassroots women's organisation. Main program participants are women who face intersectional discrimination, including survivors of GBV, rural women, women with large number of children, LBT+ women, HIV+ women, youth.	
Greenlandiya	GreenLandiya provides humanitarian and psychosocial assistance to people living in the territories affected by hostilities, improves the conditions of temporary stay of evacuated residents in transit and receiving regions. https://www.facebook.com/greenlandiya.go	
Faith. Hope. Love	The mission of the organization is assisting in the development of civil society, economic, political and social reforms in Ukraine, influence on the formation of policies, protection of rights and freedoms, improving the quality of human life, in particular children and youth by combining the efforts of the community and the state. www.fhl.org.ua	
Health Solutions for Open Society Foundation (HSF)	Health Solutions for Open Society Foundation is an analytical and dialog platform which brings together people with transformation expertise in different spheres: healthcare, culture, education, communications, economy, management, etc. https://healthsolutions.ngo/eng	
Successful women	The organization works in spheres of Protection, WASH, Shelter/ NFI, Health, Education CASH, GBV, and Child Protection. Program participants include at risk groups including women, children, youth, Displaced people, etc. https://www.facebook.com/uspishnajinka	
Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association «JurFem»	The aim of the organization is to become a platform for the exchange of experience, development and support of women in the legal profession and since Feb 2022 supports survivors of sexual violence and all kinds of gender discrimination. https://jurfem.com.ua/	

NOTES

ⁱ Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024. OCHA. Dec 2023.

ⁱⁱ CARE. Rapid Gender Analysis – Ukraine. October 2023.

ⁱⁱⁱ IOM. Ukraine Internal Displacement Report. (Oct 14, 2023).

^{iv} Nexus Research and Consulting. Ukraine Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment. May 2023.

^v HIAS. Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs Assessment. August 2023.

^{vi} CARE. Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation (RGA-P). February 2023.

^{vii} UNFPA 2023 World Population Dashboard.

^{viii} WHO. HeRAMS Ukraine Status Update Report May-October 2023. 2023. Available at:

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/herams-ukraine-status-update-report-may-to-october-2023-ua>

^{ix} CARE. RGA Ukraine. October 2023.

^x UNDP. AIDS and War: How Ukraine is Combating HIV. 2022. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/news/aids-and-war-how-ukraine-combatting-hiv/aids-2022>.

^{xi} HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND RESPONSE PLAN 2024 SHELTER CLUSTER UKRAINE. Available at:

<https://sheltercluster.org/ukraine/documents/annexed-document-narrative-summary-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024>