

Ukraine crisis: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights are non-negotiable and lifesaving

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine on 24th February 2022, humanitarian needs have been increasing by the hour. Millions of people across Ukraine are fighting for their lives.

As of 6th April, more than **4.3 million people** have fled Ukraine, seeking a safe haven into neighbouring countries. At least **7.1 million people** are estimated to be internally displaced within the country, especially in the western part.¹ While the scale and scope of displacement are not yet clear, it is estimated that the current numbers might further escalate. The majority of displaced people and refugees are women and children.²



WHY IS SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (SRH) ESSENTIAL IN RESPONDING TO THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN UKRAINE?

Anyone who has been forced to flee or who lives in an area of active fighting is particularly vulnerable, even more so women and girls. People's access to health services may be suspended or the quality may be low, and they will not have access to lifesaving reproductive health care. They are in a dire state of emergency and further exposed to risk of sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections including HIV and unintended pregnancies. **Amid the terrifying devastation experienced through a humanitarian crisis, people need first and foremost safety and protection. Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services can save lives and prevent further suffering.**

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) needs in Ukraine are particularly high. **9.4 million women** are of reproductive age, and many of them have been or will be forced to flee by the conflict. According to official figures, **4,311 babies** were born since 24th February. There were an estimated **265,000 pregnant women** at the start of the crisis, some 80,000 of whom expected to deliver over the coming three months.³ Although maternity health facilities might remain operational in several cities throughout the country, with their basements transformed into bomb shelters and nurseries, they urgently need reproductive health medical supplies to properly function⁴ and their lifesaving services remain at high risk of being interrupted due to the escalation of the conflict.⁵ Moreover, **reports of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)** in areas of active fighting, but also for people crossing the borders, are increasing by the day.⁶

The country is also home to **260,000 adults and children living with HIV**⁷, whose lifesaving treatment is jeopardized by the lack of availability of retroviral supplies in a war context. Finally, pre-existing shortages of hormones for trans and intersex people are exacerbated by the conflict, causing interruptions to vital therapies.⁸

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WHAT DOES SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH MEAN IN A CRISIS?

SRH in crisis is access to safe delivery and new-born care, access to contraceptives to prevent unintended pregnancies which could further endanger the life of the woman and her family. It also includes other key elements like prevention, detection and treatment for SGBV, access to safe abortion, comprehensive sexuality education for youth, prevention and treatment of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and protection for people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities. SRH is an essential component of the universal right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, protection from violence and the right to safety and essentially the right to life enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Like all other human rights, it applies to refugees, internally displaced persons and anyone living in humanitarian settings. Prioritizing the needs of women and adolescent girls in emergencies is therefore a human rights imperative and should be at the heart of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.



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02. PRIORITISE FUNDING FOR LIFESAVING SRHR CARE, BOTH IN UKRAINE AND IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION

SRHR needs are often overlooked during a humanitarian crisis, while they are of the utmost importance. Sexual and reproductive health is a fundamental part of healthcare provision and an essential element of Universal Health Coverage. Babies continue to be born, pregnancies keep happening, the need for contraception continues to exist during conflicts, as well as the necessity for basic and menstrual hygiene products. However, such needs are increasingly unmet as health systems and public services often collapse during humanitarian crises, reducing access to the full range of SRHR. Furthermore, women and girls and other marginalised people are disproportionately affected by the crisis, as emergencies exacerbate existing gender inequalities and risks of SGBV, increasing their vulnerability while either remaining in the country, or during the journey to flee it.

COUNTDOWN 2030 EUROPE CALLS ON EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE EU TO:

→ Allocate sufficient funding for comprehensive and non-discriminatory SRH services. The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP)⁹ for Sexual and Reproductive Health in crisis situations must be a critical component of all European humanitarian response in Ukraine, including by sending a number of dignity and reproductive health kits in humanitarian packages and convoys to Ukraine and to the neighbouring transit or refugee host countries. The EU and European countries should also ensure to invest in supply chain and logistics for the lifesaving SRH supplies required to fully implement the MISP. In particular, Member States should request the inclusion of SRH commodities¹⁰ in the Union Civil Protection Mechanism response;

→ Remind all stakeholders that the full MISP is a non-negotiable international standard of care that should be implemented at the onset of every emergency, including in the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict in Ukraine, both in Ukraine itself, but also in neighbouring transit and refugee host countries;

→ Recognise that services to support SGBV survivors are essential and ensure, including through funding and advocacy, that they are accessible in Ukraine and in the neighbouring transit and refugee host countries. This should also encompass essential SRHR services for SGBV survivors, including access to lifesaving safe abortion care and post-abortion care.

URGENT ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN BY EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN DONORS AND ACTORS

01. CALL FOR UNHINDERED HUMANITARIAN ACCESS TO UKRAINE

It is absolutely vital that NGOs get access to Ukraine, including through providing direct support to local actors, and not just support at the border from neighbouring countries. Currently, humanitarian access into Ukraine is incredibly limited. Conversely, the humanitarian needs of the Ukrainian population are massive and absolutely urgent, especially due to the lack of food and basic healthcare supplies including medicine and toiletries, as well as blood products and birth kits. Local and national actors, particularly women's rights organisations, are best placed to respond to the population needs (including SRHR), but will require significant and quick financial support and additional logistical help where local capacity is overwhelmed. Moreover, keeping intact the local civilian infrastructure is paramount to ensure a smooth reception of humanitarian aid.

COUNTDOWN 2030 EUROPE CALLS ON EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) TO:

→ Urge parties to the conflict, especially Russia, to allow the safe and unhindered passage of humanitarian aid within Ukraine, and its safe reception by local actors;

→ Urge parties to the conflict to unconditionally refrain from attacking essential healthcare and other civilian infrastructure, which are critical to ensuring sustained access to healthcare and humanitarian aid.

03. PROTECT AND SUPPORT THE MOST MARGINALISED AND UNDERSERVED

Emergencies have a disproportional effect on the poorest and most marginalized or underserved members of a community: women, children and adolescents, as well as the elderly; people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics; and those with a migrant background or from refugee communities. Their vulnerabilities are compounded, and they face multiple forms of discrimination, as existing inequalities are magnified in times of crises. **It is vital that the international community upholds the principle of 'leaving no one behind' also within humanitarian contexts.**

COUNTDOWN 2030 EUROPE CALLS ON EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE EU TO:

- Prioritise, in their humanitarian response, including through funding, the protection of the most marginalised and underserved people, responding to their basic needs and leaving no one behind.
- Ensure access to humanitarian aid and health services, including SRHR services, is guaranteed to all free from discrimination.



04. ENSURE EFFICIENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE EUROPEAN RESPONSE

Many humanitarian actors are present in Ukraine and in the neighbouring countries, bringing much needed support to the population: NGOs, the United Nations and major humanitarian donors such as the EU and other European countries. **To be efficient and sustainable, the humanitarian response to the conflict in Ukraine must be coordinated** among all donors and humanitarian actors. It must also **take into account the key role of Ukrainian local actors and women rights organisations**, which can enhance efficiency, accountability and sustainability of humanitarian interventions. They have long been part of the national infrastructure of providing socioeconomic and health services and support to especially the most marginalised communities at national and local level, they know deeply the needs of the people and are trusted by them. As such, supporting local and women-led organisations is part of a human rights-based approach of securing participation of the affected population and inclusion of the most vulnerable ones.

COUNTDOWN 2030 EUROPE CALLS ON EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE EU TO:

- Scale up funding to local and women rights organisations and enhance funding streams that are either flexible or tailored to enable locally grounded effective interventions and to foster complementarity with multilateral and governmental initiatives;
- Proactively involve local women-led organisations in the coordination of emergency operations among all humanitarian actors operating around the Ukrainian crisis and build up the capacity of women, young people and girls to access and influence decision makers in the near future.

1. [UNHCR and Ukraine Flash Appeal 2022.](#)
2. [IDPs \[58.6% women as of 05.03.22\]; Refugees \[90% women and children as of 22.03.22\].](#)
- 3, 4, 6 [UNFPA Ukraine Emergency Situation Report #4.](#)
5. A maternity and children's hospital in the city of Mariupol has been hit by a Russian air strike on 9th March, causing several deaths, injuries and catastrophic damages to the buildings and medical equipment.
7. [UNAIDS](#)
8. [ILGA Europe.](#)
9. The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for Sexual and Reproductive Health in crisis situations is a series of crucial, lifesaving activities required to respond to the sexual and reproductive health needs of affected populations. It includes a full package of SRHR services, including family planning, maternal and newborn health, contraception, abortion, etc.
10. Including contraception and emergency contraception and STI and HIV treatment, commodities necessary for safe-abortion and post-abortion care services and obstetric and delivery kits for women giving birth, etc.



Countdown 2030 Europe (C2030E) is a Consortium of 15 leading European non-governmental organizations advocating towards European donors for increased funding and support to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), including Family Planning (FP), in international development cooperation. Consult C2030E website and join us on twitter for more information on SRHR in EU policies, including the latest figures on European donor support to SRHR.

 **JOIN THE CONVERSATION**
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