

ACTION BRIEF



RAPID ASSESSMENT: IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON WOMEN'S CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Results from a UN Women Survey conducted between March 4th and 10th 2022

Photo: Oleksandr Ratushnyak / UNDP Ukraine

Introduction

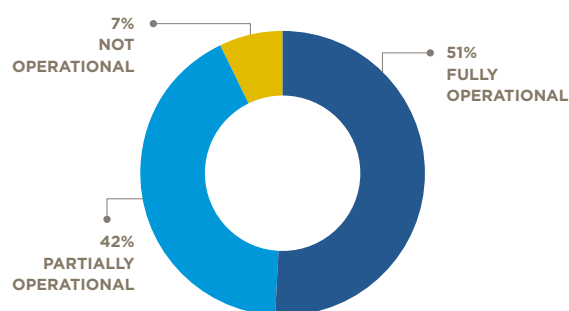
Since the beginning of the Russian military invasion, Ukraine is rapidly emerging as one of the world's most complex emergencies with over 2.8 million refugees¹ already fleeing the country and with steadily growing humanitarian needs. Women's groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been quick to react to the immediate priorities of their communities, but face many challenges as they attempt to provide support to large numbers of internally displaced people, host-communities and those directly affected by violence and insecurity.

To better understand the situation for women's CSOs, UN Women has conducted a rapid survey to help inform the decision-making of national and international stakeholders, and advocate for the support of civil society during the war. The survey was distributed online through UN Women networks², between March 4th and March 10th and received responses from 67 civil society organizations from across the country. The information in this report also includes findings from group consultations organized between UN Women and women CSOs with participation of the national gender machinery.

A Snapshot of Women's CSOs in Ukraine

- Out of the 67 survey respondents, 93% are legally registered as non-profit organizations and the remaining consist of informal women's groups and associations.
- 42% of CSOs rely entirely on volunteers. Others have over 100 employees and cover large geographical areas.
- Overall half of survey respondents reported that their CSO is fully operational, even during this time of crisis. Only 7% of respondents mentioned that they were forced to suspend CSO activities.
- CSOs cover all regions of Ukraine, but there is an uneven distribution. Some areas have a much higher number of CSOs present, such as regions in the Eastern part of Ukraine including in Donetsk and Luhansk. The regions among the worst affected by heavy shelling and bombing (such as Donetsk, Luhansk, Sumy and Kharkiv), have higher rates of non-operational CSOs.³

GRAPH 1. OPERATIONAL STATUS OF CSOs



"Right now, we are focused on solving the immediate humanitarian problems. Our activists help the evacuees and cooperate with the centers of temporary stay, where the crisis is acute. But part of our team now also comprises of evacuees, and they have been forced to leave their homes. Our people work on a voluntary basis, without pay, almost around the clock, because this is our struggle for victory. But personal problems, and the financial instability of our organization and our families, can hinder the effectiveness of our work." – Representative from local CSO

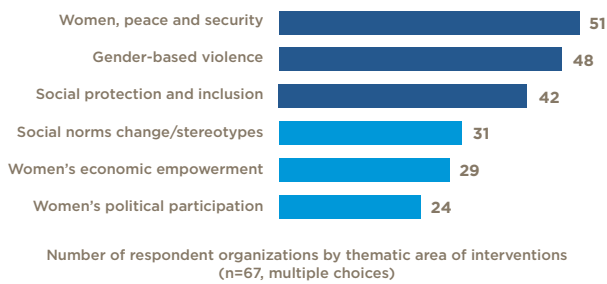
- The most common thematic areas that CSOs work on relating to gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) relates to the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda – 51 (76%), preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV) – 48 (63%) and providing social support and inclusion – 42 (62%). Every second CSO operates in more than 3 thematic areas.

² The survey was distributed to UN Women's list of CSOs with over 150 contacts, shared through social media and forwarded through various partner's networks.

³ It should be noted that UN Women has more contacts in the East of Ukraine and the response rate in Donetsk and Luhansk is likely higher for this reason. A more detailed analysis of the geographic distribution of all CSOs and to what extent they are operational, would be very helpful for further review and planning.

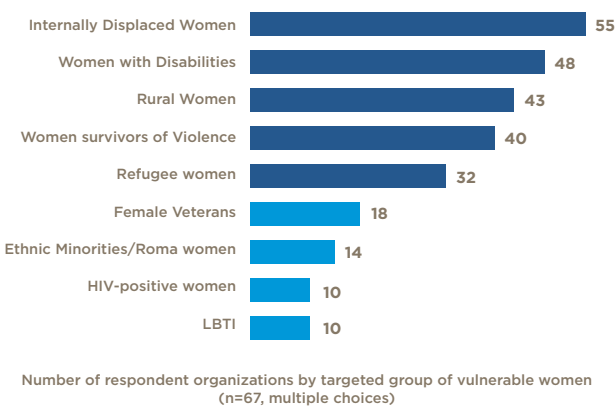
¹ Figure as of March 14th, OCHA.

GRAPH 2. NUMBER OF CSOs WORKING ON DIFFERENT THEMATIC AREAS



- CSOs are working with women that face a variety of intersecting vulnerabilities and have a large focus on internally displaced women (82%), women with disabilities (72%) and rural women (64%). Groups of women supported to a lesser extent by CSOs include female veterans, women from ethnic minorities such as Roma, LGBTI and HIV-positive women.

GRAPH 3. NUMBER OF CSOs WORKING WITH DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF VULNERABLE WOMEN



Main Challenges Faced by CSOs

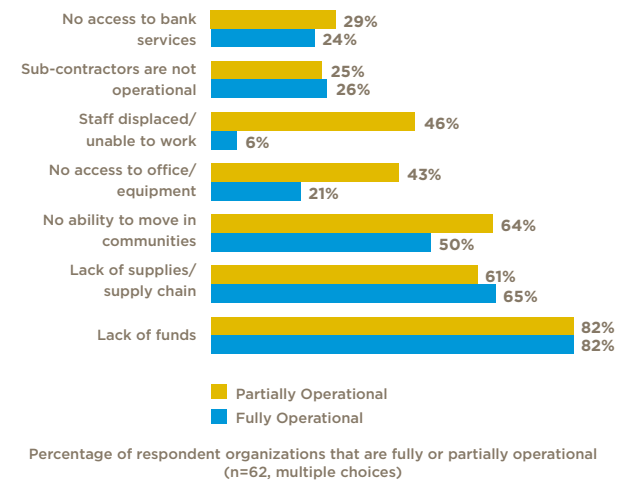
Regardless of the current operational status, the majority of CSOs are facing a variety of challenges including a lack of funds, supply chain issues and an inability to move around in communities as needed to support their beneficiaries.

Notably the partially operational CSOs are struggling much more with staff being displaced or unable to work, and limited access to their offices/equipment. Every fourth CSO disrupted their activity due to the fact that sub-contractors had to suspend their activity.

The inability to move around in communities is due to several different reasons, including security issues, certain communities now being under Russian occupation and inaccessibility to public infrastructure such as means of transport.

“There is a lack of funds to support the viability of the organization (preservation of the office, payment for communication and internet, development of new activities in connection with martial law, paying minimum wage, ensuring the security of employees, and providing psychological support of the team) due to suspension of funding for current projects. It is important to assess the needs of women and girls affected by the war in Ukraine and secure the means to quickly respond to those needs.” – Representative from local CSO

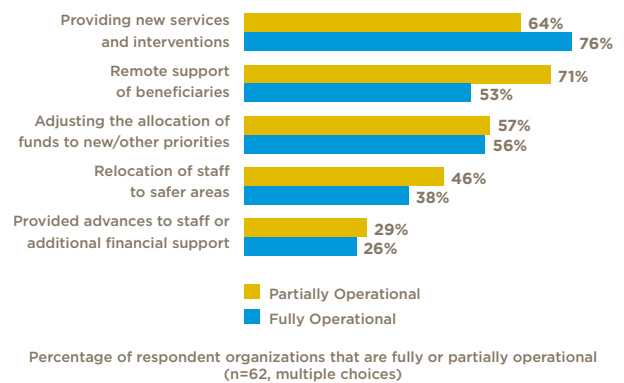
GRAPH 4. MAIN CHALLENGES FACED BY CSOs



- CSOs have had to make significant adjustments to their programmes and operations in response to the crisis. 66% of surveyed CSOs are now providing services and interventions that they have not worked on before, 57% have been providing remote support to beneficiaries and over 52% of surveyed CSOs are re-allocating funds to new/ different priorities.

- Despite the operational challenges faced by CSOs that are not working at full capacity, 64% continue to provide services and interventions and 71% are supporting beneficiaries remotely.

GRAPH 5. ADJUSTMENTS MADE BY CSOs IN RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS



“As a professional emergency response and assistance team, we see that many volunteer groups and organizations have never worked with the affected population and do not understand the standards of such assistance. We already see human rights violations, and a wave of discrimination. We need to immediately disseminate standards and train assisting groups, supervise them, provide professional support and prevent burnout.” – Representative from local CSO

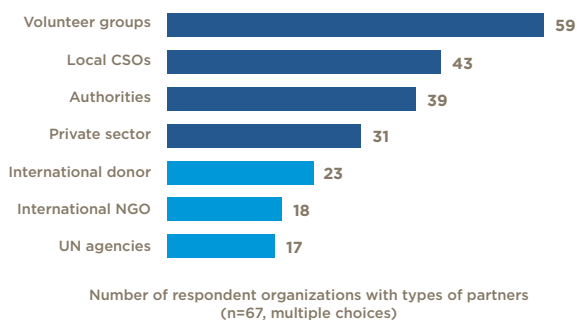
- 88% of surveyed CSOs are currently working closely with volunteer groups, 64% are partnering with local CSOs and 58% with national authorities. Meanwhile, much fewer organizations are collaborating with international donors, INGOs and UN agencies.



Yana fled the war in Ukraine to Poland with her little daughter Olha who will soon need her 2nd dose of vaccine for diphtheria. Photo: WHO / Agata Grzybowska

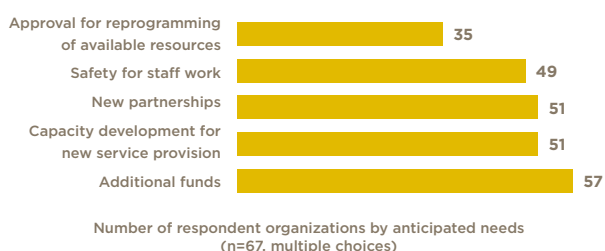
- CSOs are working with women that face a variety of intersecting vulnerabilities and have a large focus on internally displaced women (82%), women with disabilities (72%) and rural women (64%). Groups of women supported to a lesser extent by CSOs include female veterans, women from ethnic minorities such as Roma, LGBTI and HIV-positive women.

GRAPH 6. CSO's CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS



- In terms of engaging in any coordination mechanism/ group on crisis response, less than half of the CSO respondents participate in any form of coordination activities.
- CSOs reported the need for additional funds (85%) in the coming next 3 months along with urgent needs to establish new partnerships (76%) and strengthening capacity for re-programming and providing new services (76%) in the context of current humanitarian crisis.

GRAPH 7. CSO's ANTICIPATED NEEDS IN THE NEXT 3 MONTHS



"There is a critical lack of funding to help vulnerable groups of women!" – Representative from local CSO

Key Issues for Women and Girls in Ukraine Now – as described by CSOs

1. Threat of Safety

Women and men, boys and girls across the country are facing unprecedented threats to their lives. Some people have fled their homes in search of safety and are struggling to find a roof over their heads and basic needs for their families. Others have no way to leave their communities due to a lack of transport, proximity of military violence, or physical mobility, among many other things. Many are seeking protection in nearby bomb shelters, while others are unable to leave their home.

"A large number of women and girls are at the epicenter of the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding in many regions as a result of the aggression of the Russian Federation. Their lives and health are in danger, they are threatened by violence, hunger, and they are scared for their children" – Representative from local CSO

"Bomb shelters are not adapted to people from less mobile populations. Going down to them several times a day is an impossible task. It is also difficult for people from less mobile groups to arrange shelter in their own homes. The same goes for people who are bedridden." – Representative from local CSO

2. A Lack of Basic Necessities

Most mentioned by CSOs is the acute need for basic life-sustaining support. This includes a specific call for **food** (especially baby food), **medicine**/medical services and **hygiene** and sanitation items (such as diapers). It is clear from requests by women's CSOs, that women are highly concerned for their children and are highlighting needs for them to be cared for.

Some areas report a lack of access to **water** and limited/no **power supply** or backup generators. This is particularly true for the people staying in temporary sleeping arrangements, such as schools or ad-hoc shelters. There is a large lack of **accommodation**, as many people have been displaced and are on the move to safer locations.

“The situation is life threatening. There is limited or no access to medicine, food, hygiene products, water and warm clothes. There has been forced relocation to other regions where there are no contacts and resources, including housing. For women with children there is a challenge to meet the vital needs of the child, especially minors and newborns.” – Representative from local CSO

“Part of the community is disconnected from the power supply. Additional generators, gasoline and diesel fuel are needed to refuel them to charge lanterns, mobile phones, use pumps for water wells. There is a need for baby food, diapers, hygiene, and sanitation. Help is needed to deliver people to medical facilities from remote villages.” – Representative from local CSO

3. Loss of Livelihood and Income

Women’s CSOs are also reporting the rapid loss of income. Not only is the access to cash limited or suspended (through for example ATMs), but people are not able to work and earn their livelihoods. In some cases, those reliant on pensions or other social support, have not been able to access their funds. At the same time prices are quickly increasing, as goods become increasingly unavailable and supply chains are halted.

“Many institutions, establishments and enterprises in which mostly women and girls worked have ceased their activities, leaving women and girls without means of subsistence. Self-employed people also do not

have the opportunity to work today.” – Representative from local CSO

4. Fear and Psychological Impact of War

Many CSOs highlight the constant fear that women are under for themselves and their families. The psychological impact of threat, insecurity and instability is already taking a heavy toll on people, as they navigate the rapidly changing environment.

“People feel constant fear for their children, helplessness and fear for their lives” – Representative from local CSO

“Young people deserve special attention now, especially teenage girls, who find it psychologically difficult to cope with what is happening around them, and also do not have the opportunity to be alone in equipped shelters, or, conversely, find it difficult to find peers to communicate” – Representative from local CSO

5. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Public and Private Spaces

Several CSOs report concerns related to domestic violence and gender-based violence and claim that they are seeing an increase of violence. Prevention efforts and protection services are currently on hold, posing a great threat to women and girls. Some CSOs also highlight the heightened risk of human trafficking along the borders, as many people in vulnerable situations are internally displaced or becoming refugees.



Assistance to Ukrainians in Lviv – March 2022. Photo: WHO / Kasia Strek



Ukrainian refugees at the Rzeszow train station in Poland, March 2022. Photo: WHO



A family seeking shelter in Kyiv underground. Photo: Oleksandr Ratushnyak/UNDP Ukraine

“There is no reaction from the police to cases of domestic violence, we called – the application was not accepted.” – Representative from local CSO

“The work of the police is now reoriented, so cases of gender – based violence remain out of focus.” – Representative from local CSO

“There is a risk of being sexually enslaved while moving across the border.” – Representative from local CSO

“Domestic violence has intensified. Another challenge related to the war is also the intensification of traffickers on the borders and outside of Ukraine.” – Representative from local CSO

6. Lack of Communication, Information, and Social Services

CSOs are also drawing attention to the lack of information and poor communication lines. Women do not have access to the information they need to make informed decisions and internet/ phone connections in some locations are intermittent. This includes information on legal aid, and how to navigate new complex systems of migration and access to social and protection services. CSOs also highlight major gaps in service provision, including the lack of childcare and education for children, which causes disruptions for adults and children alike. Many CSOs emphasize how the suspension of social services, disproportionately affects different groups such as elderly women, women with disabilities or single mothers.

“In addition to humanitarian needs and a safe place, women need informational and legal support, such as registration of births, border crossings, refugee status or temporary asylum, protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence, protection of labor rights, in particular issues related to the payment of wages, forced leave without pay, forced to dismiss at will, etc.” – Representative from local CSO

7. Being Excluded from Planning and Decision-Making

Women are also reporting that they are being excluded from important decision-making processes at all levels, whilst at the same time being forced to play a critical role in the humanitarian response.

*“The war, started on February 24, 2022 and once again it showed how much **women are ignored** at the level of coordination and making decisions. Their suggestions and needs are ignored, and instead priority is given to the needs of Teroborona (voluntary local defense group), mostly represented by men, who dictate what to do and how to behave. At the same time when it comes to humanitarian needs of IDPs, locals, and households – **women do most of the work** – they drive, provide hospitals and locals with medication and food, they care about their disabled relatives and children. And this all remains unnoticed again and again.” – Representative from local CSO*



6a Lobanovskoho Street, Kyiv, 25 February 2022. Photo: Oleksandr Ratushnyak / UNDP Ukraine

Call for Action

“CSOs on the ground quickly responded, they know the real needs best, and they need to continue to be supported.” – Representative from local CSO

- **Prioritize funding for women’s CSO** to stay operational, as they are providing vital support to their communities. Where possible allow for flexible use of existing funds, adapted reporting mechanisms to a humanitarian setting and additional funds for institutional support and new emerging priorities.
- Ensure that women’s CSOs, especially those representing marginalized groups, are **included and meaningfully participate in coordination** mechanisms and **decision-making processes** at all levels, to make sure that their priorities are included in humanitarian response and peace and security efforts, and they can benefit from incoming support. This may include facilitating dialogue platforms for women’s CSOs and women human rights defenders to voice their experiences and suggested solutions to challenges they face.
- Provide requested support for CSOs to be able to adapt to the changing context and provision of new services/interventions. This may include **capacity development** support on how to operate in a humanitarian context, safety and security related trainings for CSO staff, and facilitating the establishment of new **partnerships**.
- Ensure that the **priorities highlighted by women’s CSOs** on the key issues for women and girls in Ukraine right now, are considered and incorporated into ongoing humanitarian support and planning of next steps. This includes the following main priorities:
 - Addressing immediate safety concerns, such as lack of access to shelters

- Providing immediate basic necessities, such as food, medicine and hygiene articles, as well as access to power and connectivity
- Considering the loss of livelihood and income, and focus on income generating support for those in urgent need
- Providing psychological support
- Preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in public and private space
- Addressing the lack of communication, information, and social services, such a providing legal support.

UN Women in Ukraine

UN Women, grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, works for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls; the empowerment of women and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security. Placing women’s rights at the center of all its efforts, UN Women leads and coordinates United Nations system efforts to ensure that commitments on gender equality and gender mainstreaming translate into action throughout the world.

In Ukraine, UN Women will continue to prioritize the needs of women and girls during the crisis caused by war in close cooperation with women’s civil society organizations and other partners. Through several upcoming rapid gender analyses, UN Women will seek to inform the humanitarian response and will advocate for the priorities of all, including those from the most vulnerable groups.

For more information about women’s civil society organizations in Ukraine operating during the crisis, and how you can support them, please get in touch with unwomen.ukraine@unwomen.org



Vital health and other supplies for refugees from Ukraine – Poland March 2022. Photo: WHO / Uka Borregaard